

*Of Fowls and Frogs:
The Ironic Design of Gordimer's July's
People*

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الملخص باللغة العربية
حكاية الدواجن والضفادع:
تخطيط المفارقة الساخرة في رواية

ناس چولاي لنادين جورديمر
تسعى هذه الدراسة إلى إثبات أن رواية ناس
چولاي عمل سردي يفرض المفارقة
الساخرة طريقة لقراءته ، فكلمة "تخطيط" في
العنوان تعني في الإنجليزية - وربما في العربية -
القصد والرسم. وهذان المعنيان يمثلان خطي
التحليل النصي والنقدي، الذين تتبعهما استنادا
إلى التعريفات المستقرة لمصطلح المفارقة الساخرة
و أفكار سيمور تشانمان و دوريت كوهن
كمرجعية نقدية تحليلية لطريقة بناء مواقف
المفارقة الساخرة وتوليد المعنى في الرواية. وقد
تبين من البحث أن الرواية يحكمها خطان رئيسان
من المفارقة ينطلقان من إسقاط صورة الدواجن
على الشخصيات الجنوب أفريقية البيض وصورة
الضفادع على الشخصيات الجنوب أفريقية
السود. من هذين الخطين تخرج خطوط أدق
بدرجات من نفس اللونين تتجلى في مواقف
روائية حاضرة أو مستدعاة من الماضي أو
حوارات أو جوانب من الحيز المكاني أو الجو
النفسي للرواية. وتتجلى كذلك في اختيار الكاتبة
لتتابع المشاهد أو الحوارات؛ إذ تنتج علاقة
التجاور ألوأنا ودرجات من المفارقة الساخرة.
وإمعاناً من الكاتبة في توضيح هذا التخطيط المبني
على تقابل صورتَي الدواجن والضفادع، فإنها
تضع إشارة بعد أخرى إلى ارتباط كل طرف
بالصورة المسقطه عليه. إن الطرح المفارقي هو
فيما نرى الأقدار على التعبير عن العلاقة الجديدة
بين البيض والسود في ظل ثورة متخيلة حيث لا
يمكن أن يظل الأبيض جاهلاً بتبعيته للأسود في
الماضي والحاضر، ولا أن يكتنم الأسود معرفته بأن
مكانته بالأمس واليوم هي مكانة "الأمير
الضفدع".

Abstract
Of Fowls and Frogs:
The Ironic Design of
Gordimer's July's People
Nadine Gordimer's July's People is a narrative work which almost imposes its mode of reading on readers, the ironic, as this study argues. Used in both senses of intention and arrangement to denote the integration of manner and matter, the design of July's People depends heavily on irony of all forms. A method not a mere device, irony enfolds the entire world of Gordimer's work. Drawing on Seymour Chatman and Dorrit Cohn, this study investigates how Gordimer manipulates narrative elements to produce irony and how these elements are regulated into a text-wide ironic structure to promote a very special vision of South African society as it is experiencing an imaginary racial revolution.

Gordimer uses a host of narrative strategies to generate irony beginning with a title whose ambiguity is sustained to the last line of the novel. Juxtaposition of scenes, variation of method of narration in the same scene, contradiction of word and (f)act are some of these strategies. But the major irony-generating and thematically significant strategy is the creation of two lines of extended imagery: fowls and frogs to symbolically refer to the two 'kinds' of July's people, blacks and whites. The two lines parallel and intersect to create the basic ironic design of the novel, which at once proceeds from and expresses Gordimer's vision of black-white relationships in a South Africa which is no longer white and not yet black.

In the context of his argument for the organic unity of a literary work, Cleanth Brooks, in "Irony as a Principle of Structure", examines the relationship between the parts of a work, especially those which bear the mark of metaphor, and its general effect, meaning, or theme. A writer, he states, "does not select an abstract theme and then embellish it with concrete details. On the contrary...[t]he meaning must issue from the particulars; it must not seem to be arbitrarily forced upon the particulars" (758). Brooks likens the elements of a literary piece to a growing plant, not to "the blossoms juxtaposed in a bouquet" (759). "The context," he explains, endows the particular word or image or statement with significance. Images so changed become symbols, statements so charged become dramatic utterances." The "obvious warping of a statement" – and by extension, a novelistic dialogue, situation or an element of setting, plot, or a figurative use of language – Brooks characterizes as "ironical."

By 'ironical' Brooks means, not simply the reversal of meaning that sarcasm, as the simplest form of irony, effects. He rather means that the particular image, statement, or situation "Grows properly out of a

context...acknowledges the pressures of the context," otherwise the proper descriptions would rather be "callow, glib, and sentimental"(962). It is not the intention of the forthcoming investigation of Nadine Gordimer's *July's people* (1981) [henceforth *JP*] to lend a late-day support to Brooks's argument for organic structure, it is rather to use the insights of this master of textual analysis to shed light on that we argue to be the main principle or strategy for the generation of meaning in Gordimer's prophetic work. We cannot unscrupulously argue that the novel under study contains "no superfluous parts, no dead or empty details" as Brooks does as he concludes his analysis of Randall Jarrel's poem "Eighth Air Force" (764). But we can illustrate that statements, images, situations, and other novelistic elements in *JP* readily acknowledge "the pressures of context". In this sense irony is the principle of design and the major strategy for the generation of meaning in Gordimer's book.

Early in the narrative, which depicts a black household hosting their ex-employers before an imagined black revolution break out, July, the protagonist who gives his name to the novel, is annoyed at his mother's grumbling about one or another

household affair that has not been properly executed, he asks his wife, "What is it she wants?" The wife answers "You killed the wrong fowl" (*July's People* 19). This domestic detail acquires a totally different significance when it is put in its immediate and overall narrative context. The mother protests that July "should have taken the white one with the broken foot" because the wrongly killed fowl "would still have given eggs." The son answers that "the one with bad foot is a young one. It will lay well next year". Applying Brooks's insight about the ironic quality of a work of literature, one has to ask how such a domestic detail and its likes acknowledge the pressures of their context, before we proceed to a question about the total effect, theme, or meaning of the whole work. This 'passing' exchange is part of a chapter-long conversation in which the mother and the wife reject the presence of the white family and only July approves of it.

This disagreement is highlighted and the association between the white folk – especially Maureen - and the white fowl with "the bad foot" which lays no eggs is confirmed as the scene humorously takes on the atmosphere of a tribal trial. When July is in the company of women, as reported by Gordimer's

omniscient narrator, "it was like being in the chief's court, where elders sitting in judgment wander in and out and the discussion of evidence is taken up." The image of an elderly judge is projected on the mother as she "went out to pluck" the chicken July has killed. The mother-judge displays the eggs in the chicken's belly as evidence of July's offence. Now July has to defend the case of the white fowl and that of the white folk in one breath. As the narrative progresses, details which project the white family as the wrong fowls to keep accumulate. This makes the ironic intention of the extended image explicit and therefore the pressures of the narrative context obvious.

'Frogness' and 'fowlness' are the two main ironic lines spanning the whole work. Other lines proceed from them, which ironically project black-white relationships, common history, and obviously disparate assumptions about their life before the revolution. These lines parallel and intersect to create an ironic grid which holds together most of the details of both narrative and narration in Nadine Gordimer's prophetic novel. The frogness line is also early started in the novel with a detail that both projects the white image of the black servant-host and hints at the way the

novel should (not) be read. It is the description of July by the Smales as frog-prince in the scene the man appears as a true host and protector. In a figural moment of speculation, Maureen, July's ex-employer, briefly reviews the circumstances of their flight to July's place and concludes that the "male servant, living in their yard...turned out to be... frog prince, Saviour"(8).

"In various and different circumstances," Maureen explains, certain objects and individuals are going to turn out to be vital. The wager of survival cannot, by its nature, reveal which, in advance of events. . . .The circumstances are incalculable in the manner in which they come about, even if apocalyptically or politically foreseen, and the identity of the vital individuals and objects is hidden by their humble or frivolous role in an habitual set of circumstances" (6).

This piece of Maureen's mind can provide ironic significance for almost every aspect of the novel, but what concerns us now is, first, the white perception of the black servant – and later of his folk. Essentially a frog, the man's role has been “humble or frivolous”. Second, a high-sounding expression characteristic of

fairy tales such as “the wager of survival” is an early tone signal warning readers against a 'serious' reading, especially of what is focalized by Maureen. As Rita Barnard insightfully observes, the novel "seems to ironize certain potential modes of its own reception" (65). As the narrative unfolds, it is revealed that most of what Maureen thinks of is "undermined by its context" generating irony (Baldick 130). The essential 'frogness' of July and his people in the whites' view and the essential 'fowlness' of the whites in the blacks' eyes are two main threads in this subtly spun ironic design of Gordimer's novel. In "a conversation with Nadine Gordimer," she says that the whites in South Africa "have been brought up on so many lies" and that "they must undergo a long process of shedding illusions in order to fully understand the basis for staying in a new non-racial South Africa of the future" (Sidney viii). Within an ironic reading of *JP*, black 'frogness' is a too dearly held illusion to shed, and white 'fowlness' is a too hard reality for the whites to accept.

In an interview with Suzan Gardner about *Burger's Daughter*, Nadine Gordimer states that irony for her is a "method," not a mere device. "I find irony very attractive in other writers," she says, "and I find

life full of irony, my own life and everybody else's; somehow one of the secret locks of the personality lies in what is ironic in us" (qtd in Mazhar 29). Gordimer explicitly describes her approach as a short story writer as "ironical" (28). In her award ceremony speech, the Nobel Prize for Literature laureate notes that "Irony does not need any prompting" In other words, the world Gordimer chooses to depict or that which presents itself to her comes with its rich ironies to mould into fiction, long and short.

In his illuminating study "Ironic Perspective: Conrad's *Secret Agent*", Seymour Chatman quotes Conrad's prefatory note that "the novel's purely artistic purpose" was to apply "an ironic method" to a story of political intrigue, in the belief that that irony "alone would enable" the novelist to say what he had to say in "scorn as well as in pity". The balance in this particular case, Chatman argues, "falls more heavily on" scorn (120). Chatman's study restricts itself to the verbal irony in the characters' inner view, "as revealed by perspective" or "their filter, that is the screened report of thoughts and feelings usually known only to the characters themselves" (120-121). Yet it provides insights, discriminations, and illustrations of novelistic

ironic treatment that are essential to our investigation of the three levels of irony in *JP*: the verbal, the situational and the structural. Dorrit Cohn's classic *Transparent Minds: Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness in Fiction* (1978) also informs the study in various ways, especially her designation of "mock figural narrative situations," the 'ironic narrator', and the 'ironic center'"(120). The last particularly fits the main focalizer of the novel, Maureen Smales. But unlike Chatman and Cohn, we do not tackle this aspect of *JP* for purely or primarily technical reasons, or in the context of a case study, but rather as part of our pursuit to better understand the world Gordimer has created, the vision underpinning it, as well as the narrative method that is both dictated by and gives shape to that vision.

Used in both senses of intention and arrangement, the 'design' of *JP* depends heavily on irony in all forms, from simple sarcasm to "the most sustained structural irony," which involves one or more "deluded" or "unreliable" focalizer "whose view of the world differs widely from the true circumstances recognized by the author and readers", (Baldick 130). The ironic mantle enfolds the entire world of *JP*. By this we mean the life

portrayed and the text portraying it. This includes what characters say, do and think the way situations are structured, the narrative pace, and arrangement of scenes, the interplay of the narrative and the reflective, the details and events highlighted or eliminated, and the authorial commentary of all forms. In other words, our concern is to investigate how narrative elements are used to produce irony and how they are regulated into a text-wide ironic structure, the ultimate purpose of the investigation being how this design promotes Gordimer's vision of a society experiencing or envisioning a racial revolution.

To do this I take as major lines of discussion what I identify as landmarks of the ironic design. These are figural or authorial statements, factually or figuratively taken, which are (con)textually charged with irony such as the use of fowls and frogs to refer to whites and blacks at two early points of the narrative development. Each ironic landmark selected is relevant to one or more domain of an authorial ironic attack, bearing in mind that these domains largely overlap. As their descriptive name suggests, these ironic landmarks are carefully chosen, phrased, and placed so as to lead us to the main lines of *JP*'s ironic plan. Doubting both "the

depth of human relationships" and "the depth of personalities," (Purdy 86), Gordimer's ironic stance is meant to expose the characters' self-images, specifically those of the whites' images of the other, perceptions of the surrounding network of human relationships and the assumptions underlying or shaping them.

To create a context which helps readers to tune in with her ironic intention, Gordimer uses a number of narrative strategies beginning with a highly ambiguous title. An "element of the absurd and the paradoxical" (Cuddon 460) marks the title because it refers both to blacks and whites, and simultaneously carries senses of attachment and detachment. The 'neatness' of the title, to use Tamar Jacopy's expression (705), derives from the fact that it, first, comfortably accommodates opposite senses of the word 'people' whose opposition is not now as clear as it was before the imagined revolution that makes the background to the novel and creates its new code of relations . Second, it captures what the text describes as "the explosion of roles" (JP104), which makes up the thematic core of the narrative and on which centers all ambiguities and ironies.

"The grammatical ambiguity at the heart of the novel's title," as Robert Green observes, "gracefully embodies" the revolutionarily altered relationships, where "July's owners" are transformed into "his impotent guests and the villagers' creatures" (561). The answer to the question 'who are July's People?,' as André Brink argues, "fits in perfectly with the problem of having and being" (177), which he and a number of other critics and reviewers take as the central thematic concern of the novel. Jeffrey J. Folks argues that the title of the novel means to suggest "a play on possession in several senses" (116). Sheila Roberts also points "the implications of 'possession' in the book's title" (84). Like Robert Green, Judith Chettle is concerned with the painful transformation of the white people from being "the dispensers of patronage" to being "the dependents of July and his family" (1561). Gordimer thus uses the novel's title as a blinking signal pointing the instability of meaning and therefore the ironic mode of reading as the most appropriate for her text. It has also to be noted that the theme of transformation is initiated in/by the title and sustained, as I argue, in the whole narrative by the images of fowls and frogs.

Keen on making her ironic intention known, Gordimer goes so far as to exceed the limits of realistic presentation to those of 'fabulation' (Roberts 83). By the introduction of an imagined revolution, which upsets the power structure determining roles and relationships, the referential confusion initiated by the title is sustained and extended to encompass every element of the narrative. Such elements include characters' social circle, the objects they are allowed to have or what Roberts describes as 'reduced setting', which, she maintains, "facilitates the breakdown of female protagonists" (83), Maureen in our case. There is also an element of the 'comedy of errors' or 'mistaken identities', common to most ironic situations. The presumably 'comic' effect, however, sometimes turns too bitter to be called humorous. The narrative of *JP* is simply Gordimer's fictional answer to the hypothetical question 'what if a revolution breaks out in apartheid South Africa?' "Undertaking this critique in a hypothetical revolutionary context," Stephen Clingman writes, "is possibly the novel's own deepest cultural contribution," the aim in view being to help define and construct "a new social and political identity to come" (198).

Quite aware that there has never been an armed revolution in South Africa, the reader has to judge the hypothetical situation against the actual state of affairs, defamiliarizing what the female protagonist describes as "an habitual set of circumstances" (6). The hypothetical situation allows both characters and readers to view the two kinds of people and two types of life depicted in the narrative in totally different lights. What is/seems outrageous in 'normal' apartheid conditions, soon turns natural, and what is/seems 'essential' turns extremely silly, if not absurd. The strategy of the imagined event, as will soon be substantiated, is used within the larger narrative to review past situations and foreshadow the unfolded ones. Ironically charged details are primarily concerned with the Smales and especially Maureen, who is unmistakably the 'ironic center' of *JP*, as Maisie is the ironic center of James's *What Maisie Knew* in Cohn's insightful study (47).

A structural device that confirms the ironic intention is that the narrative begins in the middle and hardly keeps a straight course. This does not only "betray the fragmentary character of any narrative" as preserved Smith observes (23), but also makes readers

unable to decide their alliances and accordingly form their judgments. To recall Rimmon-Kenan, "Texts can encourage the reader's tendency to comply with the primacy effect" then "induce" them "to modify or replace the original conjectures" (120). Irony is a certain product of the opposition between the "powers" of the primacy effect and those of the "recency effect" (Perry qtd in Kenan 120). By deliberately "delaying various bits of information" about the lives of characters before narrative time, readers can be misled and this "may cause [them] to construct meanings which will have to be revised at a later stage" (121). This re-view of an old piece of information in the light of a new one produces what can be described as ironic disillusionment. This is a distinctive feature of the reading experience of *JP*.

Three more points of plot structure serve to set the stage for an ironic performance: the total separation of the white family from their white relations, which unrealistically leaves them without a person or place in the world to resort to, but their black servant (this is what Roberts deems an element of fabulation), the elimination of the journey time from the main narrative, and finally making the family housekeeper a

male not a female. The first structural decision makes the white family move to July's place and thus they turn their servant into a host. This is a major source of irony with regard to their 'personal' relationship, the revision of their past life style, the perception of normal black life style, and the transformations that take place in their perception and mode of life.

The treatment of the three hard days of journeying together in the face of death as almost a narrative ellipsis helps delay the explosion of roles to its most convenient setting. To bring such potentially rich narrative material to focus is to technically abort the main story. No sense of human fellowship or comradeship should be allowed to develop between the two kinds of people before the appointed time and place. The opposition resulting from the entrenchment of each kind in their assigned place is a guarantee of the generation of the strong ironies released in the place of July's black people. Moreover, part of "the order they left behind" (Jacopy 705) has to be maintained by July himself, with a totally different significance.

"In a county where domestic servants are overwhelmingly female", Barbara Temple-Thurston observes, "Gordimer deliberately shifts gender. That

July is male intensifies the cultural collision in the novel" (96). Feminist readings argue that this choice "imbricate[s] the already uneasy master/servant cathexis with dissonance of gender" (Roberts 74). I explain the choice on the basis of the best material to generate irony. A male servant is more likely to create conflicts that take the form of highly ironic encounters between July and the Smales, as it is not usual for an African man to have a woman as a boss, as July's women folk state it later. Expatriation is central to the swap of guest-host roles. A female housekeeper, like Lydia or July's city woman, has to be either a resident in the city or an inhabitant of a neighbouring black settlement. This inhibits the potential of the journey to the other life of the black servant. Furthermore, a woman's status in this black rural setting, as depicted in the novel, does not guarantee the contrast of images and roles that July seems to create in relation to both Maureen and Bam. A reproduction of the Lydia-Maureen relationship is not likely to create the shocking recognition that Maureen slowly comes to. Finally, a female servant would probably reproduce the traditional image of the colonized land as a female body. The irony here is that the colonizer is a female

who, at a certain point, hints at offering herself up to her ex-wage slave, while he is preoccupied by the attempt to repossess himself and assert his selfhood.

Cohn's concept of the ironic center imposes itself on our discussion of how Gordimer manipulates narrative perspective in her ironic spin. One can hardly disagree with most critics and reviewers that Maureen Smales is the "consciousness that [focuses] the events from the beginning" (Plummer 70), or even that "it is but a small shift to becoming an organizing consciousness" (Brink 167). But it is not possible to accept the argument that "the story is presented as perceived by Maureen and a narrator who shares her angle of vision, if not her values" (Greenstein qtd in Madden 13). Such an argument overlooks the obvious ironic distance Gordimer is keen to create between the narrator and the main focalizer. It also overlooks the obvious mobility of narrative perspective.

As Horn rightly observes, "the stance of the narrator" in *JP* "varies from social witness to anthropological description" (100), two jobs that Maureen cannot alone handle. Jan Mohamed writes about "an omniscient narrator (who has complete access to the minds of white characters, and limited

access to those of blacks)" (140). The reason for this, I believe, is that the whites, not the blacks, are Gordimer's ironic targets. Carolyn K. Plummer finds that "the narrative voice of the work is curiously objective" and that it "shifts fluidly in the course of the novel" (70). This "shifting point of view, "as Rita Barnard argues, "allows the reader to be privy to the thoughts of villagers – notably July's wife, Martha" (59). The total effect of this 'objective', 'shifting' perspective is the evolvment of "a communal and decentralized point of view" (Folks 121) that takes the character of Maureen Smales as a baseline, but not a governing consciousness. Though the viewer is the self, the voice, as Jeanitte Treiber contends, is still that of a narrator" who "incorporates the view of the other" (147).

Maureen's strong focalizing presence has to be viewed within Gordimer's narrative plan, which, I argue, means to put Maureen as viewer under the scrutiny of the narrator, reader, and other characters who view events in apparently different lights. This is how the main focalizer is turned into an ironic center. The ready access to the consciousness of the white folk, especially Maureen's, would lose its ironic effect if it is

not contrasted to a black consciousness or to some facts that readers can see for themselves. There is almost no case where Maureen says, does, or thinks of something which is not followed by an authorial, figural, or setting commentary which casts it into irony. What Gordimer means to offer is simply "the understanding of multiple tense-perspectives" (14). Maureen's narratorial agency is given in an authorial and figural sea of irony-generating commentary. This establishes the female ex-employer's focality as an ironic center rather than a reliable narrator/focalizer.

To speak of an ironic center is also to speak of an "explicitly ironic narrator." Such narrators, Cohn contends, "play easier games with the narrated monologue than those who pretend sympathy for their characters...creating what might be called mock-figural narrative situations" (120). This kind of narration, she writes at another point, "throw[s] into ironic relief all false notes struck by a figural mind" (117). Always in the range of authorial ironic shelling, the perceptions, assumptions, recollections, judgments, and actions of our ironic center, Maureen (and to a lesser degree those of her husband Bam), constitute the major domains of our ironic reading. The white family's perception of the

'help' their man July presently offers is the first domain of ironic depiction. But it has to be borne in mind that the Smales, as Ann Tyler writes, are not created "racists who finally see the light, while roughing it with the natives,". Instead, "they are from the outset sensitive and politically aware". This sensitiveness and political awareness attracts most of Gordimer's ironic attention. The main 'false note' ironized in this respect is the claim that their servant-host does what he does out of gratitude, and that the whites are simply being paid back for their previous goodness to their black dependant. A whole history of black 'help' and white 'generosity' is present in Maureen's thought that

*The decently-paid and contented male servant, living in their yard since they had married, clothed by them in two sets of uniforms, khaki pants for rough housework, white drill for waiting at table, given Wednesdays and alternative Sundays free, allowed to have his friends visit him and his town woman sleep with him in his room – turned out to be the chosen one in whose hand their lives were to be held; frog prince, saviour.*¹ (JP 8)

The acuteness and thematic range of this first ironic landmark will be better recognized if it is related to its immediate and larger context. The facts that July can by no means be described as "well-paid" and "contented" and that the Smales are not in the least generous are not the only "covert message" (Chatman 119) encoded by the ironic narrator, it is also the white perception of the male servant as a 'frog' in pre-revolution time. One of the ironies in Conrad's work, Chatman observes, "turns on a couple's profound misunderstanding of each other...The whole denouement depends on Verloc's colossal and ultimately fatal incomprehension of his wife's feelings" (121). What is being ironized in Gordimer's case and consequently "laughably dwarfed" (123) is not only the claim of goodness/ generosity, but also their method of reasoning and the premises informing it. The white ex-employers' case also depends on "a colossal and ultimately fatal incomprehension" of their ex-employee's feelings and thought.

The details separating the subject of the statement, "male servant", and its main verb, "turned out", and its complements represent the white perception of their city part of life with July as a history of favours and

goodness on their part. The discrepancy on which the irony turns is that every 'favour' recounted, every act of 'goodness' reminisced reveals an aspect of the beneficiary's hard life. The element of the paradoxical and the absurd that Cuddon speaks of as always present in irony (460) is that July's problem was how to survive his masters' favours. For July "seems to have seen through these illusions all along, but was never empowered enough to point them out until after the revolution" (Madden 27). The phrasing of Maureen's mental reminiscence ably reveals the life in confinement that the black expatriate has survived. Other elements of this life are revealed at other points of the narrative also by way of white self-justification or self-congratulation.

July's small room adjoining the garage is close enough for him to give his employers ready service, but not too close to breach their privacy or be an observable part of their life. The two sets of uniforms are strictly functional: the first reveals the rough part of the job, when July is mostly invisible; the second is for the visible part of July's multifaceted job. He has to be presentable as he serves meals to the typically bourgeois family. His decent uniform caters for their eyes, as the

smell of Lifebuoy soap he has to wash hands with caters for their sophisticated sense of smell and cleanliness. We later know that July's outside job clothes mostly consist in Bam's cast offs. The passive verb forms "paid," "clothed," "given," "allowed," and the implicit 'housed' render July a perfect dependant and beneficiary. It is therefore only natural that the grateful frog-servant would turn into a frog prince. What I call frogness is thus made a function or expression of dependency. On the contrary, the host is the prince.

What the white benefactors miss is that July is aware of the dehumanizing, manipulative character of their assumed privileges. He is aware that they do not think of him as a grown man or even a person. In the same reflection Maureen associates between man (July) and object (the bakkie). The vehicles are literally his next door and better-kept/kempt neighbours. When he later gives "a laugh like a cry" (62) as he lists white favours, he makes Maureen conscious of the oppressive context of their generous acts. The servant's statement that "she pay fine for me when I'm getting arrested, when I'm sick one time she call the doctor", points more a life of confinement and deprivation. The "laugh like a cry" seems to be July's unstated protest: 'why must I

carry a passbook that has to be renewed and signed by a white person?' And 'why would an ordinary act as calling a doctor for a sick person be deemed a favour that shows generosity and calls for gratitude?' To recall the fairy tale the image of the frog price is taken from, another unstated protest has to do with July's secret wish then "to eat from the whites' golden plates and sleep in their clean beds" in return for a lifelong service, not just for saving the golden ball, signifying the Smales's lives in Bazin's opinion (179). I therefore do not find it a coincidence that the bakkie which saved their lives is yellow like the golden ball in Grimm's tale of the frog-prince. Another significance of Grimm's tale is that the princess was forced to keep her promise but kept calling the ball restorer "nasty frog" (Grimm 137).

The irony of "a laugh like a cry" is a perfect response to the manipulateness of which the Smales like to believe they are innocent. This is what the immediate context of our ironic landmark tries to communicate. The apartheid "government", we are told "continued to *compose* concessions...exquisitely worded to conceal exactly concomitant restrictions"(JP 6). The irony proceeds from the Smales's doggedly held belief that they are not white in the apartheid sense of

the word, whereas all their 'concessions' are typically "exquisitely worded" to conceal their austerity as employers. One such case is Maureen's deflated retort "I've never made you do anything you didn't think it was your job to do" (63). The assumption here is that the black servant sets the conditions of the contract or makes his own job description. This discrepancy between word and (f)act is what promotes July's protesting laugh.

Two other frogs in Maureen's life who are assumed to have been 'well paid' and contented are 'Our Jim' who used to clean the shoes of the shift boss's daughter and Lydia who shares with her a memorable photograph. The superficial confusion between Master Jim or "my Jim" and "Our Jim" is a function of the ironic contrast between word and fact, exquisitely worded concessions and actual restrictions. The case of Our Jim is a crude case of irony, but that of Lydia is much more sophisticated. The irony in Maureen-Lydia relationship has to do with what a stranger sees in a photograph of them that, only to Maureen, shows their sincere attachment and friendship. The photographer's answer to the question "Why had Lydia carried her case?" is plainly "white herrenvolk attitudes and life

styles", but even adult Maureen explains it on basis of "affection and ignorance" (*JP* 28-29). Unlike the exquisitely worded restrictions of the apartheid government, the book of photographs containing the Lydia-Maureen photograph has no use for words. It only contains silent shots. Unable "to decode the photographs as a representation of racial oppression" (Treiber 139) Maureen rejects the contextually suggested representation of herself as a schoolgirl whose shoes were cleaned by Our Jim and case carried by 'my' Lydia.

The false assumption of contentment impairs the vision of black servants and white employers as enactors of the apartheid code governing the black-white relationship. But even adult Maureen is unable to relate Lydia's fluctuating mood to this code. The context of her reminiscence, however, provides a clue that she has failed to read or trace. The servant's "mood is turned on the girl" and consequently she digs up her "buried misdemeanours" (*JP* 20) as Lydia complains of the violation of "the ethics of the 'club' to which she belongs" (27). Explaining the black servant community sense of club, Maureen recollects that "each member pays part of her wages every month", so that

each in turn may have a bonus month when she is the recipient of the sum of all others' contributions." The clue to the fluctuating mood is thus purely economic and this reveals how well-paid and contented black servants were.

The claim of friendship and genuine affection is undermined by an outrageous state of inequality between the positions and roles of the assumed friends. Maureen's acts of goodness imply more keenness on the preservation of apartheid restrictions than she can admit or recognize. July and his black folk are, by contrast, quite aware of this fact. The monthly pay July receives, however scanty it is, is a permanent reminder that "in the dynamics of black-white relationship...notions of property take precedence over human relationship and interaction" as Cole puts it (48). The two visits Maureen makes to July's world are cases of such contrasting perceptions. Bitterly recalled by the ex-servant, the first visit portrays Maureen as a thoughtful caretaker of one dependant of hers. The second visit takes place only in Maureen's imaginary world of generous masters and contented servants. The two cases are also two sites where our second ironic

landmark overlaps with the first as much as self-images affect perceptions of the others.

The Smales's belief that their July is well paid and contented is predicated on the assumption that they are qualitatively different from other white employers and that , in their house, July does not live "like the others" (JP 58). Maureen's visit to sick July reveals that she is a 'vigilante' of racial and economic borders. Before she goes into her sick servant's room, the thoughtful employer "waved at his friends, his brothers who were *eternally* visiting." The displeasure with which she views July's social life shimmers through the repetition in "friends" and "brothers" and the over-statement in "eternally". The displeasure develops into protest that dictates an action in "couldn't be expected to allow for the reception of half-a-dozen friends" (59). We are parenthetically informed that the visiting friends are "accommodated somehow on up-ended boxes [and] an old table", for she provided only "one decent chair for her servant's comfort." It is July who came up with this kind of accommodation. This simply means that the friends are unwelcome and that this aspect of the servant's 'frogness' is not tolerated. It is Maureen's self-righteousness and condescension which are in the ironic

focus. The apartheid visitation restrictions are revealed while Maureen attempts to recall her magnanimity. It has to be noted that at the narrating time Maureen herself is a guest in a company making almost half a dozen visitors. What July nevertheless recognizes is that "there was nothing motherly or womanly in her ministrations – they were simply actions of a caring employer" (Brink 171). Maureen herself, as Plummer rightly observes, "knows the hypocrisy contained in treating a man with dignity and at the same time reinforcing his inferior status as servant (72).

This hypocrisy, however, is less detaching than the messages encoded to alert July against any misinterpretation of the generous acts, even at a time of a universal human condition such as sickness. The irony is generated by the stark contradiction between Maureen's mental statement of belief concerning universal human needs and what she actually does. Maureen's mental discourse is composed of such grand words as the "human creed," and "the absolute nature of intimate relationships between human beings" regardless of race and class, leading to her declaration of human equality: "If people don't all experience emotional satisfaction and deprivation in the same way,

what claim can there be for equality of need" (*JP* 57). Maureen's actual practices prove that she does not believe in "equality of need."

Within the same meditative state Maureen expresses her aversion to attempts to base racial discrimination on false scientific experimentation, recalling the Nazi "brain-weighers" and colonial "claimants of divine authority," who "distinguish powers of moral discernment from the degree of frizz in hair and conceptual ability from the relative thickness of lips" (*JP* 57). The allusion to Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* is obvious here, specifically the contradiction between what Kurtz says about the "different complexion" and the "slightly flatter noses" as false basis of racial discrimination and what he actually does (Conrad 53). The humane theorization is suddenly shoveled aside as the shift boss's daughter chooses place in the economy – which is imposed by the apartheid power structure – as the arbiter of the "balance between desire and duty". Such balance, as the architect's wife speculates, "is – has to be – maintained quite differently in accordance with place in the economy" (*JP* 57). In other words, Maureen rejects racial discrimination and comfortably settles for

economic Darwinism. This contradiction between the premise of "the absolute nature" of human needs (implying equality) and the conclusion of inevitable inequality governs Maureen's review of her history of goodness to the less fortunate fellow creatures.

To go back to the claim of contentment, the Smales still absurdly believe that in their relationship with July they managed to achieve "A balance. In spite of all inequalities"(52). In the same breath, they do not see that everything that July has done for them, including saving their lives, can "weigh against the keys of the vehicle". In one confrontation between Maureen and July the ex-employer recasts her idea of 'balance' in an equally reductionist terms: "You worked for me every day. I got on your nerves. So what. You got on mine. That's how people are" (63). But July does not accept this fair business interpretation. Protected by his linguistic incapability, he shows that there was no balance and that it was all inequalities: "Same like always. You make too much trouble for me...trouble, trouble from you"(134). Maureen has failed to understand why July is "always a moody bastard" (57), as she failed to understand Lydia's "chastising critical mood" (57). She is still unable to see the stark falsehood

of the claim of decent pay and contentment of their black help.

The Smales's imagined visit to July's settlement is a snapshot which perfectly fits into the *Life* book of photographs representing "white herrenvolk attitudes and life styles" (28-29). It can also be viewed as a scene prepared by Maureen's theatrical imagination. Like the real one, the stated purpose of this visit is to show that there is friendship, not just a business relation between the white employers and their servant, but it fails to establish even the minimal level of true human fellowship between the visitors and their hosts. As rendered by Maureen, the imagined visit would certainly effect exactly the opposite of what the Smales in their "herrenvolk" mode of thinking would expect.

Though their claim is to "see where he lived", the Smales themselves occupy center stage in the scene. They are ceremonially received by faceless natives clapping grateful hands for the 'presents' in view. The whole thing is a fancy, "the sort of thing that sounds fun" (33). Being a hunt for fun, it is combined it with "a shooting trip... [with] all the camping stuff. " As in the real visit to the sick servant, the servant's people are meant to be honoured by this visit. They "all lined up...

in greeting," recalling July's "attendant friends" who stood up respectfully for her and – in both cases – immediately disappeared from the scene. It is Maureen – with a tray of light food in the first and with piles of presents in the second – who is in the spotlight. The net product of each visit is not a development of the relationship with the person visited but a story to tell to fellow whites about how good an employer she is. The greatest fun lies in "telling everybody at home we actually drove him all the way to the bundu, visited him as a friend" (33).

"The need to use the word 'seems' rather than 'it is'," as Cuddon observes, "is a product of the inherent ambiguousness of the whole concept" of irony (260). When Maureen tells her fellow white employers "we actually...visited him as a friend", they would most probably understand "as a friend" to mean "as if he were a friend", and in her own metaphoric terms, 'as if he were not a nasty frog'. This tolerance of black people's 'frogness' is what sets the Smales apart from people of their own kind. It is what prompts Maureen to make a statement in question form, which we take as our second ironic landmark. The ironies of this statement also turn on the Smales's belief that they are

unquestionably different from their own folk. The white couple are thus presented as "deluded characters", and as focalizers who are ironically distanced from an implied, omniscient author.

At a time of resentment of fellow whites who are not as good to the blacks as her family is, Maureen Smales wonders, "*Why is it the whites who speak their languages are never people like us, they are always the ones who have no doubt that whites are superior*" (JP 39). The statement is part of a dialogue with Bam at a juncture of the narrative where all relationships are recast, histories reviewed and self-images rethought. This white revisionism is the target of Gordimer's "heavy irony", as Susan Pearsall puts it (102). "Gordimer's novels," she rightly observes, "embody a tension between a celebration of psychic multiplicity – dishonesty and inconsistency of character – and a longing for authenticity". Called into question in this ironically charged atmosphere are "characters' sacrifices and motivations" (102). The dialogue making the immediate context of the ironic statement under analysis means to blow up the liberal humane veneer of the two white characters and to reveal their lifelong inauthenticity.

In an angry reply to what Maureen describes as outrageous "rearrangement of facts," (*JP* 41) Bam points theatricality as the mark of their lives and relationships: "Don't pose, Maureen. You don't have to invent yourself. That's what you accuse me of doing. You don't have to stage yourself in some 'situation' to sell to the papers when it is over". Like all other privileged whites, the Smales realize that only the apartheid power structure can guarantee a white family to move in a range of relations with blacks whose highest point for the servants still falls far short of equality with their masters. For both parties realize that "any activity or state that does not fit" into this pattern, as Ashcroft observes, "will become subject to repression" (24). They also realize that the Smales are outraged by the racism of apartheid "as long as July was obedient and vulnerable, but, as soon as his relationship with them entails material equality, they resent him" (Erritouni 71). Unable and unwilling to upset this structure, the liberal couple, with the forced consent of their fellow actors, the blacks, simply decide to perform the roles of equal humans who are only bound by the requirements of their jobs and the conditions of their contractual relationship. But the

black seconds, barred by their linguistic incapacity and the marginality of their roles in the white show, realize that they cannot offer more than their moodiness to point the distance between what is and what is claimed concerning their assigned roles of dependants and beneficiaries. The whites, on the other hand, are continuously 'molested' by their fictionality as Edward Said would have put it (88-89).

Aware of their "dishonesty and inconsistency" though "longing for authenticity" (Pearsall 102), the white man and wife deal with their lives as roles to perform even among themselves. An early hint at the theatricality of white African life is in the comparison between the real round mud hut the Smales occupy in July's settlement and the ones "adapted by Bam's ancestors" (*JP* 1), with all the theatrical implications of 'adaptation'. This form of adapted life has what might be called the 'as if mark' that accompanies them in their excursions into the theatrical wild of their camping trips. Only the external appearance of African life has to be kept, not the way Africans actually live. The whites come to the 'wild' with their props and when the performance is over they pack and leave.

The way Maureen and, to a lesser degree, Bam behave is an expression of what I see as a tourist attitude, the most hateful pose to natives, as Jamaica Kincaid suggests in *A Small Place*. A tourist, she writes, is “an ugly, empty thing, a stupid thing, a piece of rubbish pausing here and there to gaze at this and that...the people who inhabit the place” which he /she visits “cannot stand [him/her]” (17). As in the case of theatrical performance, the parties in a tourist situation are actors par excellence. The ambiguity involved in the word 'guest' carries a large part of this inauthentic, tourist air. The opening scene of the novel depicting July in the confusing roles of servant-host depicts the Smales in the confusing roles which the two senses of guest suggests: 1- a person invited to visit someone's home 2- a person staying at a hotel or boarding house. The elements of parody in this scene include a knock which never took place on a door that didn't exist and a bend at the doorway out of necessity not reverence – for the sack replacing the door was half drawn. The 'special' breakfast and the secure "no milk for me" (*JP* 1), the hotel guest observation that the milk tin was "jaggedly-opened" are also in the domain of parody, because the whole scene is given against the recollected

image of "governors' residences, commercial rooms *en suite*" (10). It has also to be remembered that this theatricality was the mark of Maureen's visits to July's place discussed above. Before Maureen visits July she "rehearsed her arrival at the door of his domain" (58). The imagined visit is wholly a mental rehearsal. The very idea of a visit, Rita Barnard argues, "already equips one in a certain way with the comfort of a tourist's interpretive framework." one characteristic of this framework is "the patronizing and self-congratulatory tolerance of difference" (60).

The theatricality of the Smales's tourist's attitude is a source of irony in all white-black encounters. One such subtle case is when the Smales try to behave like self-reliant people. Though her words themselves meant to be "The guest protesting at giving trouble" to their host, Maureen (or July himself, because there is a high probability that this part is from July's perspective), "caught the echo of those visitors who came to stay in her house and tipped him [July] when they left" (*JP* 9). The sense that 'guest' suggests is that of a house guest, but the air they 'caught' shifts it to that of a hotel guest who pays for his/ her stay and tips attendants. This gives a totally different sense to the concept of

'hospitality', and consequently shifts the sense of host from its friendly sense of receiving and entertaining visitors to the business sense of entertaining clients or official visitors. Another element of irony which Gordimer weaves into the situation is the ambiguity in the word 'caught'. If the observation is purely or primarily authorial, it would mean 'assumed' and the irony would be externally imposed. If it is figural, it also means that the code of service and decent pay is still at work. If it is from July's perspective, it would involve stingy irony, as the white refugees would look pathetically condescending.

The Smales can probably differentiate between "the bearing of service" and servil[ity]" (9), but they fail to distinguish between paid service and real home hospitality. Maureen in particular cannot see that July's understanding of "their needs and likings" and his "allying himself discreetly with their standards" is a true expression of a host's thoughtfulness. It grieves the man that they look down upon his behavior now as part of his disciplined service not as genuine hospitality which emanates from a belief in "the absolute nature of the human need," to recall Maureen's words. Introducing his third child to them and informing them

that he is of the same age as their Victor, July confirms the air of family welcome that he is trying to create for his guests. Yet no word of welcome or greeting is heard from the white family. July does not mention his son's name and they never inquire. Worse, we are informed that the "white children," not their parents, "had seen the servant's photograph of his children, in his wallet along with his pass-book, back there." The association of the pass-book and the black children's photograph 'back there' and the collective look "at the black child as at an imposter" illustrate a typical apartheid master's attitude. It not only undermines the Smales's assertion of difference from those who deal with blacks "across a counter," but also suggests that what they call professional detachment or 'correctness' is mere 'imposture'.

The claim of evenness implicates the Smales in imposture. One revealing instance is Maureen's protesting that she must pay for washing her family's clothes by July's women relatives. July points the irony involved by giving "a short laugh." The subject of irony is Maureen's assumption that paying would make her less of a burden and less indebted, or that it would retain the business sense of guest or client – ironically

one archaic sense of client is 'a dependant or a hanger on'. Herself accounting for July's ironic laugh, Maureen explains that "Bundles of notes were bits of paper, in this place" (24). Maureen's imposture is highlighted as she justifies her taking advantage of July's people: "But its meaning was not dissociated, for July's villagers." What she describes as mere bits of paper" are her means to remain an employer, or at least a 'client'.

At a later stage of action Gordimer gives readers access to July's consciousness to reveal that the man is fully aware that the Smales's money cannot create a balance. Even July's hard won money from work and gambling has come to the same disastrous end. The idea of saving money in a bank is viewed by July now not as an act of gambling, but of white imposture. "They had told him," July recalls, "his money was safe, written down in those books. But now that they had run away, those books were just bits of paper" (121-2). The 'comforts' he provided for years were thus practically free, which makes him a host even before he knew it. This fact makes the fifteen years of life with the white people, as Brink puts it "fifteen years of symbiosis" (166), relying on the sense of 'host' and 'parasite' J. Hillis Miller "has brought to the terms" (166). Hillis

Miller, Brink explains, "examines the host/ guest as both eater and eaten", as "both a friendly visitor in the house and at the same time an alien presence" (Note 10, 178).

Three facts have to be borne in mind as we examine judgments of imposture, inauthenticity, and theatricality as domains of irony in Gordimer's ironic design. First, both July and his white people are aware of the specifications; and controlling conditions of their respective roles. Second, the revolution has to mean the end of the show or the radical change of role specifications. Finally, it is the whites' past and present inauthenticity (theatricality, or imposture) that is under authorial ironic cross-examination. Gordimer shows how the refugee family under the present condition tend to project their own inauthenticity on their hosts and benefactors. The exposure of this deep rooted inauthenticity is the purpose of some of the acutest ironical remarks and situations in the whole narrative. One of these makes our third ironic landmark.

It is an interpretation by Maureen of July's 'transformation': "*Pride, comfort of possession was making him forget by whose losses possession had come about*" (JP 84). Of course, the source of irony is that

Maureen's remark accurately explains the Smales's and every white family's case under the apartheid system. Though they express their gratitude for what July is doing for them, Bam and Maureen receive it with suspicion. Fully aware that the bakkie is as valueless as their banknotes are mere bits of paper without July, they nevertheless attribute value to the things themselves. Projecting their 'vanity fair' vision of life on July, the Smales view their host as enacting the role of the new master. This implies a reductionist view of what goes on as simply a turn of fortune that, as the dramatic tradition dictates, has produced a reversal of roles. A series of what might seem under a different structure passing remarks culminate in the ironic landmark under study.

What Bam recalls from July's invitation to a local drink with 'fellow' men is that he "stayed as long as was polite" and that he "pretended admiration" of "their liquor" (30). Pretending "good natured participation," Bam cannot overlook what he views as July's bossy behavior in his presence: "July strode about declaiming proprietarily an anecdote that obviously referred to this man who had been his employer, the guest and stranger." The element of performing in 'declaiming'

and of ownership in 'proprietary' are strangely combined in the white man's mental remark, capturing the main lines of his 'liberal' existence before and during the revolution. His rejection of the friendly sense of 'guest' and the implication of temporal powerlessness in 'stranger' are also present in the remark.

A persistent feature of 'liberal' existence is the concept of honesty or correctness. In a moment of quiet reflection Maureen reconsiders her understanding of the concept in the light of her discovery that her perfectly honest ex-servant 'flinched' some gadgets that used to be hers. The liberal revisionist comes to the enlightened conclusion that "honesty is how much you know about anybody, that's all" (31). Maureen's piece of wisdom tends to view past life, as Bam mockingly puts it, as "delusions and lies," (39-40). Honesty is a matter of pretension, because it has to do only with the missing of the things 'flinched'. Again pretension and proprietorship are the subjects of the white woman's remark.

The Smales in the same terms approach the conflict with July about the emblematic article of contention in the whole novel i.e., the vehicle. Maureen keeps her knowledge of the return of the bakkie "as a

possession to which she was curiously *entitled*, had no *incumbency* to reveal" (46). July is denied control of the vehicle, though he is the only one entitled to decide when and where it should move. The host-servant, who has been repeatedly instructed "to drop the 'master'", as he addresses Bam, "for the ubiquitously respectful 'sir' " is now, in his own place, required to "give a satisfactory account of himself" (47). The difference between 'master' and 'sir' soon loses significance, as Bam without greeting starts cross-examining his servant. As for July, he obviously "began at once to lay a hearth-fire." What the master in a flash sees is not his hospitable host but the familiar figure of his man July "bending about some task, khaki trousers backside higher than *felted black head*" (47). The racial implications of the italicized part are obvious. For it is not just the job that marks the man, or even his typical clothes, but the colour and fiber of his hair. This probably recalls Maureen's early observation about the foolishness of 'brain weighers', and their like.

Another 'familiar' sight which blows to sky the Smales's image of July as the new proud master in his ill-got wealth is "the old, sardonic, controlled challenge of the *patron* "on the white man's face". The use of

patron here is also highly significant. One of 'patron's' denotations according to O.E.D is "a customer of restaurant, hotel etc. especially a regular one," which recalls the implications of the business sense of guest discussed earlier. A more significant sense of 'patron' for the understanding of the ironic structure of the situation under analysis is "the former owner of a freed slave." Several irony-generating contradictions result from this confusion/ explosion of roles. The house guest acts as a 'patron' in the two senses given, denies that he does, and projects his own condescension and self-dramatization on the one truly entitled to patronage under the circumstances, though far from assuming it. What accentuates the ironic effect is the readers' and the characters' recognition that the white family are July's creatures. Another aspect of irony in the situation is the stark contrast between the concerns of the characters involved. The host-servant is concerned about the needs and the welfare of his guests, as his actions and inquiries show and the ex-patrons are "very worried" about the vehicle, but claim to be concerned about their man.

The Smales's theatricality is ironically exposed in the way they perceive such simple acts of July as waving

to them or providing them with items insignificant in normal conditions but so dear under present circumstances. Under scrutiny, I believe, are the terms in which the act is viewed, not the act itself or the actor. July is forced into a dramatic scene as he happily "tossed up in his palm and presented to her [Maureen] two small radio batteries" (*JP* 49). What Maureen sees is not July but her white friends bringing her "flowers or chocolates". Even their affected response to her equally affected: "Oh how marvelous. How clever to remember", is projected on him: "he grinned and swayed a little as they did". Maureen fails to see a difference between visitors whom she used to entertain and who used to give her the kind of impersonal presents she recalls and a host who takes a life risk to bring her what he assumed to be of real value to her. She takes his last gesture to be "the small flourish of his exit." Maureen's theatrical terms are used to ironically depict July's genuine act of thoughtfulness. What is ironized here is Maureen's inability to see things outside her bourgeois outlook. Exposed also is Maureen's failure to differentiate between 'the explosion of roles' and the much simpler 'reversal of roles' or sudden turn of fortune. Even the dramatic tradition she is affiliated

to comes short of reality. The scene is overcharged with irony for two other reasons: it parodies Maureen's past life and relationships and exposes its/ their artificiality. More importantly, both the Smales and July know that the only news" that they like to hear is that "the white regime has overcome the rebels" (Tamar 706).

Another gesture interpreted in theatrical terms as an effect of the confusion of roles has to do with July's attempt to learn how to drive independently of the 'real' owners of the vehicle. Coming back exalted after a successful driving session, July "waved jubilantly when he was near enough to recognize and be recognized" by the Smales (*JP* 51). Bam decides that what July is doing contradicts his past correctness. Only when the ex-servant comes carrying "their supply of wood" do the Smales admit that the man's 'wave' was "innocent" (52). The Smales's discrimination between what is 'innocent' and what is not has to do with the roles assigned in the collapsed structure to which they still adhere. Again, the source of irony is the contradiction between the significance assigned to the same act by the players involved. The Smales interpret as acts of pride and possessiveness gestures that only mean to gain their recognition of their man's personhood.

What July says and does apparently conflicts with the accusation of pride, possessiveness, and more importantly with the charge of indifference to "those by whose losses possessions had come about" (74). Irony is generated as we see that July has hardly any sense of security, "feeling of deep pleasure, or satisfaction derived from achievements, qualities, or possessions" that create pride in man. Worse, the other sense of pride i.e. "consciousness of one's own dignity or having an excessively high opinion of oneself" (O.E.D.) is the stark opposite of what the ex-servant painfully feels. According to July, Maureen used to tell her friends that she had great trust in her 'boy', but in fact used to "walk behind [him]...looking." He explains that as employer she could not bear to see him at leisure. The man could sense that she wanted more than her money's worth in his time and effort: "you frightened I'm not working enough for you" (63). What is involved here for July, even though he does not have the words to express it, is a form of wage slavery, a total absence of selfhood.

The ex-employer's reply confirms rather than negates her man's understanding: "I've never made you do anything you didn't think it was your job to do" (63).

The absurd assumption underlying the assertion is, again, that black servants are really bound by authentic contractual relationship, and that July is not "forced to play the role of affable servant to survive" (Temple-Thurston 97). Doubting that July might have thought of his career with them as a form of forced labour and hence devoid of human dignity, Maureen remembers that "she had never before used the word dignity to him" but she denies that the absence of the word would mean the absence of the concept in the man's career of servitude. Maureen's linguistic observation reveals the racial and class source of the condescension and detachment that should make the man seek their recognition rather than dispossession. "The term itself," she thinks, "...might be beyond his grasp of the language" (*JP* 64). The white liberal employer does not think it is her fault that she and her servant "have never worked out a mutual vocabulary capable of coping with any kind of conceptual exchanges" (Cronin 208). But Maureen's strong sense that the man's dignity is hurt does not suffer her to see what July is doing for what it is, i.e. managing and taking care of her family as he has always done.

Reviewing fifteen years of 'good servitude and generous reward' (Temple-Thurston 97), Maureen protests "how was she to have known, until she came here, that the special consideration she had shown for his [July's] dignity as a man, while he was by definition a servant, would become his humiliation itself" (*JP* 87-88). Maureen's repeated protest 'how was she to have known' is symptomatic of what Phyllis Barber calls "the avoid-things-while-looking-good syndrome" (2). A relevant "white South African Syndrome," as Clingman puts it, is "Maureen's belief that she and July have a special understanding" It is, therefore, "a matter of sheer horror to her to learn that the very language she had used as a means of conciliation was for July nothing more than the median of his everyday oppression" (200). But Maureen herself provides the clue to resolve this paradox. 'Special consideration' in Maureen's case has to mean at best 'affected', because a servant, she implies, is not entitled to a consideration of his manly or personal dignity as the contrastive 'while' denotes. Maureen finds opposition between 'man' and 'servant', two words that do not belong to one category, unless it is assumed that a servant is not entitled to full manhood because of his economic dependency on his employers.

'Back there', the Smales used to explain July's states of 'annoyance' or "irritation at responsibility" on account of "the inevitable, distorting nature of dependency – his dependency on them" (*JP* 54). This point of dependency is the core of our fourth and last ironic landmark, the one with which I started my paper: the white folk as fowls in July's care – the wrong fowls to keep in his black people's opinion. The association of the spared white fowl with the bad foot and the unwelcome – for July's female relatives – and troublesome – for July himself – presence of whites is confirmed in several ways. It has all the requirements of an extended image designed, I argue, to thematically reveal the truth about the question of dependency and, structurally to counterbalance the whites' image of July, and by extension his people, as frogs. This way there exist two threads of character representation which continuously parallel and intersect to form the ironic grid of *JP*'s narrative structure.

One feature of the fowl keeper image is that it is sustained by the parties involved in the relationship it creates with various degrees of awareness and acknowledgement. It is probable that July's grumpy mother is aware of the ironic potentials of her

protesting statement, but it is the context of grumbling which creates the association. Very early sensing the alien presence of the white family in their place, both mother and wife envision it as "a *visitation* of five faces *floating* in the dark" (16), respectively stressing their ghostliness and utter rootlessness. All their man's persuasions come short of satisfying their protests "why do they come here? Why to us". July's mother wonders "what will the white people do *to* us now", expecting only harm from them. It is no accident that the fowl July wrongly or by choice killed was black. It is no accident either that July's answer to his mother that the white "one with the broken foot is a young one" and that "it will lay well next year" is immediately followed by an account of Martha's first contact with a white woman. This is one of several instances of structural irony. Martha remembers that "a white from the police post bought from her sack of cobs, and cents had dropped from the white hand to hers" (19). The brief transaction involved no real contact and the black woman was not in any way impressed by the white presence. On the contrary, she saw that the white woman did not have a nice face and that her hair was "so funny and ugly...like the tail of a dirty sheep." The

recollection anticipates the aversion she has for Maureen.

Martha's brief flashback suggests that whites are associated with cents that 'drop' in black hands in return for concrete things without skin contact or any degree of recognition, and with no words. The fowl image captures the essence of this relationship. Substantiating July's statement that whites in the settlement "haven't got anything – just like us," narratorial attention is directed to Martha's baby who "picked up fowl *droppings* and successfully conveyed the mess to its mouth" (20). The wife spontaneously takes "the chalky paste" out of her baby's mouth," as we hear that "there'll be no more money coming every month." The juxtaposition suggests that only fowl droppings can be expected from whites. The cents which dropped from the white woman's hand to the wife's hand years ago were also fowl droppings.

The relationship that the image suggests is traceable to the time when there were a big house and a small room adjoining the garage. Immediately before July's mother protests about the wrongly killed fowl, one of the girls asks July if he "had a room for bathing, like the one they [whites] had". When he assures that he

had, and the women disbelievingly laugh, July wonders "how could they visualize his quarters...with in his room the nice square of worn carpet that was once in the master bedroom" (19). July probably realized that his room with all the comforts provided by the Smales was in fact mere (fowl) droppings. His furniture was white refuse. "He must have known," Maureen thinks, "when she handed some new object on to him it was because it was shoddy or ugly, to her and if it were some old object, it was because she no longer valued it" (59). As if in a digestive system, the master bedroom must first wear out the nice square piece of carpet before it drops it to the room adjoining the garage.

It slowly comes to the Smales that neither their money nor their vehicle can change the fact that they are literally kept by their ex-housekeeper. And the ironies here turn on the idea of keeping. In a subtle reference to the new order, we learn that July was "at the wheel" (51), with connotations of gaining and exercising control. Inside the hut provided by July – to recall Maureen's manner of enumerating the comforts that should make a servant contented – the Smales are around a hearth-fire made by July and whose wood provided by July. That hearth-fire "was the centre of

being; children, fowls, dogs, kittens" forming a hierarchy that is determined by closeness to July's fire. They are all in his keeping. It is Maureen who can see their fellowship with the other creatures of this hierarchy of existence and that their unassuming patron is July. When Bam expresses his anger at July's keeping of the car keys and his [July's] apparent design to take possession of the vehicle itself, Maureen could not reply as "Gratitude stuffed her *crop* to choking point" (52). The reference to the bird's pouch, where food is stored or prepared for digestion, pushes the fowl image to the realm of the explicit.

Ironically it is gratitude-choked Maureen who refuses to grant July the position of key keeper. Recognizing the absurdity of Maureen's request to restore the keys to the vehicle, July raises a storm of 'who would do' questions about requirements of keeping a house, for which a car is vital. At this moment the image of July as keeper is plainly contrasted with the Smales's image as creatures which he keeps. In his capacity as sole keeper of the place, July, as Maureen views him, "began to push about the small, crowded, darkened space, dragging and shaking things into a private order" (55). The best the Smales can do is not to

"allow themselves to be driven out along with the fowls, the nuisance of whose droppings was equalized by the benefits of an assiduous scavenging for the insects who shared the hut." The visitors are so conscious of their dependency and parasitism that they can see fowls doing something to justify their presence in the hut, to create 'a balance, in spite of all inequalities,' to recall Bam's remark which is now soaked in irony. They also see themselves as helplessly devoid of will, as July's 'private order' is being created.

The whites are fowls in the wrong place and the best they can do is not more worthy than fowl droppings. The temporary function as a provider of meat", which "settled upon" Bam "as a status" (69), fails to restore for him a glimpse of his past patronage as the putting up of the water tank has failed before that. The old woman's response is decisive in this matter. She makes no comment on the water tank. As for the provision of meat, to her it is "a subject not worth her attention" (72). She compares between what whites take and what they give: "Meat is quickly gone. You eat it, there is nothing again tomorrow. My house has to have a new roof. The rain comes in. And in the

winter it'll be cold" (72). Their money is mere bits of paper and meat mere fowl droppings.

As Bam is working on the slaughtered animals, Maureen with her dirty "calves and feet, below rolled-up jeans" (69) is likened to a "hobo". According to O.E.D., a hobo is "a bird that has strayed from its usual range or migratory route" or a person without home or job". This alien presence is further confirmed by a remark the white refugee makes at a time of temporary upper handedness as she thinks. The remark shows that whatever is given by her has to be given by way of dropping: "Give them the bigger one[wild pig]." This is where some difference is marked between Bam and Maureen. The man took the remark to be some "advice on justice or the protocol of survival." But the wife "murmured in his ear alone" that "The small one will be more tender." The disparity between what readers and Bam first make out of Maureen's generous remark and the less noble figural explanation is a permanent mark of Gordimer's irony.

Gordimer confirms the Smales's alien presence and dependency by the ironic use of the fowl image at almost every phase of the narrative development. Coming back from the visit to the chief, "It was the first

time the Smales had had to come home to" different kinds of possessions: "the iron bed, the Primus, the pink glass cups and saucers in the enamel basin with its sores of rust' (110). Some of their possessions were originally their own droppings and others are directly provided by July. The irony here centers on the fact that the whites at second hand cherish their own droppings, and other articles originally owned by July's people. The difference here has to do with the authentic use of things. In other words, July's things are genuine parts of his people's lives; they are not excesses the disposal of which is a relief. More importantly they are given to the whites with care and respect. They do not simply drop to the white hands as is the case with Martha and the white woman discussed above.

The first thing the white family sees inside the hut after this first homecoming is "a fowl with a bald neck...sitting on the suitcase of their possessions". Bam's immediate response is to chase the fowl. The small event is a carefully spun measure of Gordimer's ironic design. The Smales see the fowl with the bald neck – clearly meant to be different from other fowls as the whites are different from the black ones – as an intruder who would spoil their possessions by her

droppings. This is a case where the white couple temporally takes the perspective of July's black people on themselves. The fowl with the bad foot should have been taken, not the black one who lays eggs and the fowl with the bald neck has to be chased away, even though the land of the hut might be full of insects to scavenge.

Thinking of herself as an unwelcome strange fowl and resenting the image, the white wife heads, as the final scene shows, for the unknown, even if it were somebody who would not spare a white fowl with a broken leg. It is highly significant that in the final scene of the novel the image of fowls and fowl droppings is strongly present. It actually begins with a reference to "the sickly ammoniacal odour of fowl droppings" (139). Later we learn that "fear climbs [Maureen] hand-over-hand to throttle, hold her" (141), reminding us that July simply wrung the neck of the other fowl. On her way to the open fields she passes past "the wattle fowl-cage" (143). Now that Maureen is certain that in July's place she is by necessity a fowl, she flies in rejection of all signs of caging and certainly of 'fowlness'.

Gordimer depicts her ironic center at a moment of more belated incomprehension than anger. Getting out

of the metal bed provided by July, and using July's oil-drum to wash her dirty feet, "with soap supplied by July," she asks Bam: "Was it like this for him?" (JP137). The subject of Maureen's question is obviously her family's present "total dependency" on July, which she wishes to match with what she still thinks of as their servant's total dependency on them before the revolution. To substantiate the "too easy equation", she recalls that July used to come to ask for everything. "An aspirin. Can I use the telephone." Affirming her initial claim that their male black servant was well-paid and contented, Maureen and Bam state it that their man "wasn't *kept* short of anything. When Bam or Maureen – it is not determined – wonders "what would have become of him", if things went on their 'normal' course, it is proudly answered that he "Would have got old with us and been pensioned off" (138).

This last ironic milestone has thus the requirements of a concluding commentary. First, it comes immediately after Maureen's decisive quarrel with July, when she realizes that "she was not... his people" (135). Maureen's dispensation refers readers to the first ironic landmark, the title, resolving part of its ambiguity. It is now recognized that if the possessive in

the title has an element of human attachment, it does not include Maureen. Second, it centers on the major thematic concern of the whole ironic design of the narrative i.e., ‘who is/ has been host and who is/ has been guest/ parasite all along? The Smales’ private conversation, shrewdly placed at the closure of the narrative, explicitly describes the relationship as that of a patron/ keeper and dependents. ‘Hypotheticality’ is also strongly present. If July stayed with them, he would have got old with them and “been pensioned off.” What the white couple see is not only their fairness but their graciousness, totally blind to the fact that the man had a life of his own. If the gracious offer were to be accepted, or came true, the man would have literally rendered his life in service to them. The fair pension, as they deem it, would be the adequate match for most of the man’s life time, recalling the impossible equation between the man’s services during the revolution and the car keys.

The most important part in this last dialogue is Maureen’s regretful, protesting, and self-congratulating statement that “Nothing in that house was his” (137). What Maureen still sees as her last blow at July’s unfair ‘rearrangement of facts’ and her strongest proof of her

graciousness ironically encapsulates “the whole complicated terror contained in the oppression of apartheid”, as Brink bitterly puts it (“Languages of the Novel” 16). Even July could not put his own predicament as lucidly as Maureen has done. The statement also recalls July’s assertion to his wife that the whites “haven’t got anything just like us” (*JP* 20). July’s early assertion more or less carries the same meaning as that of Maureen’s statement, but it acquires its ironic potentials after the whole story is unfolded. The speaker’s attitude is another point of disparity. July says it to convince his black people to give shelter to his white people. By contrast, Maureen simply protests and asserts her deservedness of the man’s present and past services.

At the time Maureen asks if it was like this for July, she shows some awareness of the relationship between total dependency and the loss of a man’s/woman’s personhood. Maureen escapes to the unknown not because she is shocked at the recognition that she is not among July’s people, but because she cannot accept to be caged, ‘kept’ by a man who is originally a frog, but has the power to kill or spare whatever fowls he chooses. Maureen realizes but rejects

the fact that if their man July was a frog who turned to be a prince, they were fowls who have long to be anything other than fowls.

Jedediah S. Purdy begins “Age of Irony” with the observation that “the dictum that historic events occur twice – first as tragedy then as farce – has never been much use except as an insult to alleged second timers” (84). The observation obviously identifies repetition as the element necessary for the generation of irony and makes ‘second timers’, which I understand as imitators, the ironic targets. In *JP*’s case, where irony is a method, an approach, if not an end in itself, the ironic targets, the white family, are put to ridicule as both first timers and second timers. They are caught in their second life trying to reproduce/ reaffirm the assumptions and manner of thought of their first life, bringing both to stingy ridicule. Every act, word, or event that took place before the revolution is now recounted with an “ironic vengeance,” as Clingman cleverly puts it (200), even though or – exactly because– the parties involved are unaware that whatever they say, do, and recollect is part of an authorial design whose *raison d’être* is ironic revelation. The two images constituting the main lines of the ironic design are primarily of their own making.

The Smales are the creators of the frog image and the activators of the fowl image and from their remarks about themselves and their servants emanate most of the novel's ironic effect. This explains the fact that Gordimer 'concludes' her ironic spin in the same manner she starts it, and we follow the ironist's design.

Cleanth Brooks concludes his analysis of 'Eighth Air Force' by enumerating possible meanings of the image involved in the line "Men wash their hand in blood, as best they can", remarking that "None of these meanings cancels out the others. All are relevant, and each meaning contributes to the total meaning. Indeed," he asserts, "there is not a facet of significance which does not receive illumination from the figure" (765). The claim that I can make, following Brooks, is that there is not a 'facet of significance' which does not receive illumination from the figure of whites as fowls and that of blacks as frogs. This is the image or "symbol" that is, as Brooks sums up, "defined and refined by the participating metaphors" or other tropes or novelistic elements to create meaning and make the total effect of Nadine Gordimer's *July's People*.

Notes

1) Emphasis by the use of italics is the author's unless it is otherwise indicated.

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