

УНИВЕРЗИТЕТ У БАЊОЈ ЛУЦИ  
ФИЛОЛОШКИ ФАКУЛТЕТ

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# A NOVEL PERSPECTIVE ON AN OLD (SHORT) STORY: NADINE GORDIMER'S "THE TRAIN FROM RHODESIA" AT THE THEORETICAL CROSSROADS

**Abstract:** *Nadine Gordimer, at almost eighty-eight, is the prolific grande-dame of South African literature, the author of a substantial oeuvre, and the winner of a Nobel Prize for Literature (1991). Gordimer has been writing for more than sixty years, and one short story, "The Train from Rhodesia" (1947), shows that, even as a young writer, she understood and was poised to reflect an understanding of the important cultural, intellectual, and political impulses that manifested locally and globally in the late 1940s.*

*This paper rereads Gordimer's early publication by examining it through the lenses of Freudian psychoanalytic, Marxist, feminist, and post-colonial theory. It argues that "The Train" sits at an important theoretical crossroad and that engaging the story through the four bodies of theory crystallizes complex theoretical concerns and exposes nexuses between major critical approaches. This recognition offers a novel perspective on an old (short) story by a thoroughly contemporary writer.*

*The study draws on general and applied theory and literary criticism in tandem with close reading of the fictional text. It contributes to the body of scholarship on Gordimer and her work by taking as its subject a petite, pithy, but under-discussed publication that was almost precocious given the author's age and experience—while the study may be of interest to a variety of literary scholars and contemporary critical theorists, it would be of special use to those seeking to begin a retrospective of Gordimer's work.*

**Key words:** *Nadine Gordimer, Rhodesia, literary theory, psychoanalytic theory, Marxist theory, post-colonial theory, feminist theory, colonialism, trains*

## Introduction

In "Dreaming of the Dead," a short story by Nadine Gordimer, a Gordimer persona recounts dreaming that she dines with Edward Said (d. 2003), Susan Sontag (d. 2004), and Anthony Sampson (d. 2004).<sup>1</sup> This narrator, who had enjoyed a

friendship with each of these people while they were alive, is awed by the physical beauty and intellectual prowess of her dinner partners, but she nevertheless partakes in animated discussions about "interpretations of political events, international power-mongering, national religious and secular conflicts, the obsessional scaffolding of human existence on earth" (28-29),

<sup>1</sup> Edward Said, a founder of post-colonial theory and criticism, was a political activist, cultural critic, and literary theorist, as was Susan Sontag, who also wrote fiction. Anthony Sampson, a journalist, was active in British politics, but is best known in South African for having edited *Drum*

magazine during the 1950s—this influential publication promoted the work of black writers. Sampson was also Nelson Mandela's biographer.

as well as “political conflict and scandals, policies and ideologies, corrupt governments, tyrant fundamentalists, home-grown in the Middle East and Eastern Europe, and those created by the hubris of the West” (28-29). Further topics of conversation include globalization, Sontag’s post-feminist pronouncements that raise issues about the positions of Moslem women and gay men in contemporary society, and, finally, the non-Western origins of psychotherapy.

This story suggests that Gordimer imagines a place for herself at the table with some of the most remarkable intellectuals of the late twentieth century. This is not surprising—Gordimer, at eighty-five is the prolific *grande-dame* of South African literature, the author of a substantial oeuvre, and the winner of a Nobel Prize for Literature (1991). Gordimer has been writing for more than a half century, and one short story, “The Train from Rhodesia” (1947), shows that even as a young writer, she understood and was poised to reflect an understanding of the important cultural, intellectual, and political impulses that manifested locally and globally in the late 1940s.<sup>2</sup> In South Africa in 1948, the Afrikaner-led Nationalist Party won the general election and implemented apartheid, a complex and intransigent political, economic, and social system that secured white racial privilege. White Afrikaner rule, which had been years in the planning, would last until apartheid’s dismantling in 1994 and deeply scar the country in ways reflected in its literature by writers like Alan Paton, J.M. Coetzee, and Gordimer herself. Elsewhere in the world, changes were afoot to identify and replace the structures of oppression installed by European imperialism and colonialism. In 1948,

2 According to Colette Guldimmann, Gordimer published her first short story, “Come Again Tomorrow,” in *Forum* in 1937 (making her fourteen at the time). “The Train from Rhodesia” appeared in *Trek* 11 (21) in 1947.

India gained independence from Britain, ushering in an era in which shifting paradigms of power provoked thought about the colonial past and the post-colonial future. Contemporary feminism is also held to have started around that time—in 1949, Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* was published, infusing women with more insight into, and energy to respond to, the structures of male oppression of females; Beauvoir’s work is held to be a post-war feminist manifesto. The movements that would become post-colonialism and feminism, like Freudian psychoanalysis and Marxism before them, have since been codified and modified into philosophical and theoretical approaches that facilitate an approach to and an understanding of literary works.

But just as theory can clarify and offer perspective on literature, so a literary text can crystallize complicated theoretical concerns and offer perspectives on these — such is the case with “The Train from Rhodesia” (1947). Taking advantage of the time perspective that sixty years that have lapsed since the publication of this text and drawing on the complexity of contemporary critical theory, this paper offers a novel view of a now-revered writer’s early work.

This short story, deceptively simple, reflects the intellectual and cultural impulses of four critical approaches especially: Freudian psychoanalytic, Marxist, feminist, and post-colonial theory. Further, it exposes nexuses between approaches. This paper briefly revisits the tenets of these bodies of thought and then reads the text using each as a lens; it then discusses some of the ways in which they apply to the story, relate to each other, and productively update our reading of it.

Each of these theoretical movements purports to explain power arrangements in society, whether based on class, family structure, sex and gender, or imperialism. While these theoretical approaches often

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ignore, invalidate, or take issue with the central concepts of the other(s), they may also, paradoxically, be complementary, as they are in "The Train from Rhodesia."

Just five pages long, this text describes a situation that unfolds over a few minutes: an unnamed young couple, implicitly white, is returning by train from honeymoon somewhere in southern Africa. When the train stops at a dusty station, the wife sees and covets a curio—a carved wooden lion with a ruff of fur around its neck—that is proffered by an old black artist/vendor. Unwilling to pay the price he tenders, the woman relinquishes the curio, but her groom secures it for her just as the train leaves the station; he pays less than half the amount that the artist/vendor had requested. The young man's presentation of the trophy to his wife provokes an emotional crisis for her that causes a schism in their relationship

***Background to "The Train from Rhodesia"***

Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) is the former name of one of South Africa's landlocked neighbors, and once comprised both the countries now known as Zambia (Northern Rhodesia) and Zimbabwe (Southern Rhodesia). While the former became a British protectorate in 1924, the latter became a self-governing British colony in 1923. Because this was the status quo when Gordimer published "The Train from Rhodesia," it is uncertain exactly where the train of the title left from or to where it was headed—all the reader knows is that it "came out of the [afternoon] red horizon" (171).

What is clear, however, is the link between "Rhodesia," empire, and rail—few African signifiers denote capitalist imperialism and colonialism more sharply. The region was named for Cecil John Rhodes (1853-1902) who was, as historian Leonard Thompson recounts, the "son of an English country parson, who went to Natal for his

health in 1869 at age 16 and then alternated between Kimberley and Oxford University, where he imbibed grandiose visions of imperial expansion and graduated in 1881, already a multimillionaire" (Thompson 114).<sup>3</sup> Rhodes would, by 1890, own ninety per cent of the world's diamond production. He became active in South African politics and was responsible for British expansion into southern Africa through the 1884 annexation of Bechuanaland (now Botswana) and the development of Rhodesia. Prime Minister of the Cape Colony from 1890-96, Rhodes was, according to Thompson, "the most powerful man in the diamond- and gold-mining industries" (112). Rhodes famously dreamed of consolidating British rule in Africa by creating a railway line that would run from Cape-to-Cairo. As such, it is difficult not to think of both imperialism and railway lines whenever "Rhodesia" is mentioned, and this association is reinforced in the title of Gordimer's story by her reference to "the train." As a corollary, the train in this context is unequivocally associated with imperialism and colonialism, as is its attendant infrastructure, which includes the railway line, the station, the station master, and his wife.

***Some Serious Sympathies and Post-Structuralism***

Two important points regarding this story must be made before any further discussion. First, Gordimer's sympathies in this text are unequivocal. She portrays the white passengers of the train as imperious and imperialist, comfortable with and committed to exploiting and dehumanizing the vending and begging blacks. The text makes this patent: for example, the woman's hand "command[s]" the vendor (172). But this distasteful relationship is

<sup>3</sup> Rhodes's will established the famous scholarship system that facilitates an elite selection of students from certain countries to study at his own alma mater, Oxford University.

most clear, perhaps unsubtly so, when Gordimer writes that the passengers of the train, contemplating the beggars outside, think of offering them chocolate that “wasn’t very nice” (173). As indictingly, the husband, amused, tells his wife that in securing the curio, he had only “argu[ed, bargained] with the artist/vendor for fun” (174). Gordimer’s almost blanket disapproval of the white passengers, and the resulting clarity of her sympathies in this story, governs the ethos of her work.

Second, Gordimer significantly does not employ certain words in this story that are unavoidable in my discussion. While the word “native” (implying indigeneity, blackness, and subaltern status in this context) is used to describe the artist/vendors, the word “European” is never used to describe the whites, nor are the terms “white” or “black” ever used here to describe people; the closest use of such description is synecdochic—the arms that form an arch between those negotiating from inside the train and the artist/vendors on the platform “are grey-black and white” (172). Through such oblique and scarce references to skin color, through use of the vernacular in speech, the interactions between the characters, and evocative vocabulary in the narrative—“piccanin” (171, 173, 174) for the black children and “children” for the offspring of the stationmaster (171,172), for example—race in this text is suggested rather than stated.<sup>4</sup> Nor are the words “colonizer” and “colonized” used, although the latter is implied in “native.” The effect of the writer’s restraint in word choice is to evoke contrasts without herself constructing rigid binaries—this early and instinctive rejection of structuralism has facilitated the comfort with poststructuralism and postmodernism evinced in her later

<sup>4</sup> Preferred terminology has changed over sixty years, and the terms “white” and “black” are currently used more often than “European” and “native,” which were favored at the time Gordimer wrote this story.

work, and suggests perhaps suggests her instinctive anticipation of the cultural turn.

Strangely, another word that the author never uses in this text is “curio,” which so well signifies the object of barter that is the focus of the story.

### ***Curio(ser) and Curios(er): Sex in the Station***

The curio in this story is a portmanteau of multiple symbolisms and is a key to reading this story from a psychoanalytic, Marxist, feminist, and/or post-colonial theoretical approach. But what is a curio? More art than bric-a-brac, more sentimental knick-knack than treasured art, a curio is usually a souvenir (that is, an object acquired to provoke or maintain memory), often an inexpensive one, from a locale perceived as exotic, with the exoticism embodied in the style of the object itself. The object of barter in “The Train from Rhodesia” is surely such an item. It is introduced in the text’s second paragraph — prime literary real estate in even a short story — which says that “the face of a carved wooden animal, eternally surprised, stuck out of a sack” (171) on the station platform. On the second page, the object, as seen by the female protagonist, is

a lion, carved out of soft dry wood that looked like spongecake; heraldic, black and white, with impressionistic detail burnt in... Between its vandyke teeth, in a mouth opened in an endless roar too terrible to be heard, it had a black tongue... round the neck of the thing, a piece of fur (rat? rabbit? meerkat?); a real mane, majestic, telling you somehow that the artist had delight in the lion. (172)

This is not the only curio for sale — wooden buck, more lions, and carved indigenous warriors are also described, but more briefly.

These careful descriptions of the curio(s) are a clue to the sexual trope that supports all four approaches to this story.

"The Train from Rhodesia" may be read as a realistic narrative describing a literal journey, but Gordimer's vocabulary and her use of an array of literary devices nudge the reader also to recognize in the text a figurative sexual encounter between the train, and the people and physical space of the station. The station stands in the reflection of "the flushed and perspiring west" (171), a personification that may suggest sexual arousal. There, while they await the train's entry, "a stir of preparedness ripple[s] through" the artist/vendors — this is as "the train... b[ears] down towards them." Soon there are "rhythmical cups of shadow," and, as "the train call[s] out I'm coming... I'm coming," its "engine flare[s] out... big, whisking a dwindling body behind it; the track flare[s] out to let it in... Creaking, jerking, jostling, gasping, the train fill[s] the station."<sup>5</sup> As the train prepares to depart the station after its occupation of that space, "[there is] a grunt. The train jerk[s]" (173). As the train leaves, its "blind end [is] being pulled helplessly out of the station" (174). By the end of the story, "[t]he train had cast the station like a skin" (175). In view of the parallel between sexual intercourse and the train's penetration of the station, another line of this story may be read as ambivalent: the young woman asks her husband why he didn't "take [the curio] decently [rather than underpaying for it]" (174) — here, the word "take," which means primarily "to appropriate," also means to possess sexually.<sup>6</sup> Further, the woman's feelings that result from her husband's insulting of the artist/vendor causes a response similar to the remorse one might feel after illicit or undesired sex — "the heat of shame mount[s] through her legs and her body..." (175).

5 "To come" is a colloquial verb that means to achieve an orgasm. It is used in this sense as early as 1650 in "Walking in a Meadowe Greene" in a folio of "loose songs" collected by Bishop Percy.

6 It is used as such in D.H. Lawrence's *The Rainbow* (1915).

A subtext of sexual congress is not surprising in a 1940s story about a couple on honeymoon. But Gordimer also skillfully communicates an ambivalent, even ambiguous, nature to this metaphorical meeting that foreshadows the apparent failure of the marriage. The train, as has been discussed earlier, is both a product and a tool of imperialism and colonialism; in this story, everything associated with it — the railway, the station, the stationmaster, and his wife, for example — is also, by association, part of the infrastructure of imperialism/colonialism. But, cleaving to these are images of sordidness, rot, and sterility that permeate the story. The stationmaster's wife is first described as sitting under "the hunk of a [dangling] sheep's carcass" (171); later, the dead animal at her side is "the darkening hunk of meat" (174). The train itself "breathe[s] out the smell of meat cooking with onion" (172), further conveying the ideas of debauchery and death. To reinforce the lifelessness and morbidity associated with the railway, the station is described as comprising "one dusty platform... one tin house... empty sand" (173); on the other side of the train, "there [is] nothing; sand and bush; a thorn tree" (173). In the train's dining car, a "uniform railway vase" (172) contains a "pale dead flower" — the stationmaster, himself in "uniform," is thus related to the lifeless flower, and in the garden outside his "grey tin house" (171) "nothing grew" (172). This, then, is a place without vitality, an objective correlative for a marriage that almost any reading of the story suggests may be figuratively and metaphorically sterile.

But at the beginning of the story, this is not a space spared of virility. The wood curios are, at the beginning of the story, unequivocally upright. The lion "stuck out of a sack" (171), it "stand[s] erect" (172), and is accompanied on display by "elongated [wooden] warriors who clutched spears." Further, the curios are twice described as "stiff" (172), and those already acquired

“bulk” (173) out of their packaging. At the beginning of the story, the train is represented as alive and energetic — it “bore down towards them over the single track” (171), and in the station, the engine is “steaming” (172); this image is soon reinforced when the train is described as emitting “a twirl of steam.” But after the train’s penetration of the station and departure from it, the images related to sex become ambivalent, suggesting postcoital lassitude, but also/instead erectile dysfunction and impotence. Before the train leaves the station, the stationmaster’s green flag is “rolled in readiness” (173), but then, “There [is] a shout. The [stationmaster’s green] flag droop[s] out” (174). Now, “[t]he blind end of the train [is] being pulled helplessly out of the station.”

This subtext of emergent phallic flimsiness, with its associations of sexual disappointment, is, as yet, tentative. But it is confirmed when, after the husband’s exploitative transaction with the artist/vendor, the word “impotence” itself is used (174) — the wife experiences “the shrill impotence of anger.” The wife thus experiences this slackness as emotional and transfers it to the young man when she hurls the lion at him, but careful attention to the description also suggests a literal lack of sexual fulfillment that is concomitant with emotional disappointment:

[H]er face slump[s] in her hands... A weariness, a tastelessness, *the discovery of a void* ma[kes] her hands slacken their grip, atrophy *emptily*, as if the hour [is] not worth their grasp

... Her back remain[s] turned against the young man sitting with his hands *drooping* between his sprawled legs, and the lion, *fallen* on its side in the corner. (175 emphasis added)

In terms of the sexual trope in this story, it is interesting that while the train is in the station, the noisy, steaming engine of the train is described as “resting beast” (172). Because the other “beast” in this story is the lion, a subtle and unexpected as-

sociation between the train and the lion is established, so that when the lion falls at the end of the story, the train’s lack of tumescence is reinforced.

Representations of penis-like objects that experience erection or lose their largeness are often interesting to literary theorists of any ilk, but few scholars have a more potent or enduring fascination with them than those who use Freudian psychoanalytic theory.

### *Freudian Psychoanalytic Theory*

“If you repress your feelings, you will get cooties. That’s Freud in a nutshell,” says psychologist, Mark Weiss. Based on psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud’s method of identifying and treating impairments of the human mind, psychoanalytic theory gives literary study a mode of entry into a text by creating a paradigm for understanding an author, characters and plot, as well as audience responses to a text.

Freud’s work posits the existence of an unconscious along with the conscious and pre-conscious minds. The unconscious is a repository of those feelings and thoughts that are latent, but it is capable of expression and manifests itself in such forms as linguistic choices, mistakes, and especially in dreams — it is thus, paradoxically, both barred and accessible. The unconscious facilitates repression, a process that defensively barricades thoughts and feelings from the conscious mind. Much of what is repressed is guilt that is in some way related to death and to sex. One of Freud’s central ideas is the Oedipus complex; named for and explained by Sophocles’ play based on Theban legend. This simplistically, refers to a boy’s purported desire to kill his father and to have sex with his mother. Related to the Oedipus complex is the castration complex, the fear of castration by the father as retribution for the child’s coveting of his mother’s sexual attention.

The castration complex is important to Freud’s explanation of “fetishism,” a pe-

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cularly masculine trait. A Freudian fetish, he explains, is often a foot, shoe, or furry object evocative maternal pubic hair. This functions as a substitute "for a particular and quite special penis that had been important [to the subject] since early childhood but had later been lost" (953) after the child perceives the mother's apparent castration — this, Freud holds, is the anxiety-provoking evidence of the danger to the child's own treasured organ. In certain men, the "horror of castration" (954) establishes "a memorial to itself in the creation of this substitute" (955). The fetish, according to Patricia Wright, "is a curious and fascinating compromise formation between the horrified recognition of female castration, and its vehement denial or disavowal. More precisely, the fetish commemorates the last percept prior to the little boy's illusions regarding maternal anatomy, power and identity" (114).

Such principles of psychoanalysis, paradoxically both widely accepted as truths and even clichéd, but also rejected and viewed as passé, have endured in part through their usefulness to literature; psychoanalysis and literary writing and criticism have had a reciprocally validating and inspiring relationship. Psychoanalytic literary critics, Peter Barry says, "give central importance, in literary interpretation, to the distinction between the conscious and the unconscious mind" (105) and they look closely at the unconscious impulses and emotions of the writer and characters in a literary text. They "identify a 'psychic' context for the literary work, at the expense of social or historical context, privileging the individual 'psycho-drama' above the 'social drama' of class conflict" (105). With these concepts and complexes in mind, a psychoanalytic reading of this story is possible.

*A psychoanalytic reading of this story*

A newly married young woman, who has repressed unfulfilled sexual desires and concomitant loneliness, is optimistic

that her psychic pain will be healed with marriage. She sustains this illusion during her honeymoon and feels smug in her new domestic coziness and sexual experience. But then she sees and covets an unusually compelling carved curio that exhibits characteristics of the human genitalia. The husband acquires the curio, apparently in order to please his partner, but, at an unconscious level, he may desire it as a fetish. When the wife finds out that her husband paid much below the artist/vendor's asking price for the curio, a repressed recognition emerges from her unconscious: she is sexually and emotionally disappointed in this relationship and she feels sordid for her complicity in it. This realization exposes her instinct to reject her husband, but she quickly attempts to repress this acknowledgment and to prevent it recurring in her consciousness.

*Discussion*

Earlier discussion recognizes the curio as a linchpin in understanding this story, and argues for recognition of the text's latent sexual trope. For the purposes of a psychoanalytic reading, further elaboration of these ideas is necessary.

First, the representation of the curio suggests the human genitalia. The lion, a male one because it has a mane, reminds the reader of a tumescent penis — it "st[icks] out of a sack" (171), "stand[s] erect" (172), and it is twice described as "stiff" (172). There is an unequivocal link in the protagonist's thought trajectory between the curio(s) and her new husband:

[S]he thought of the lion and smiled. That bit of fur round the neck. But the wooden buck, the hippos, the elephants... How will they look at home? Where will you put them? What will they mean away from the places you found them? Away from the unreality of the last few weeks? The young man outside. But he is not part of the unreality; he is for good now. (173).



As this paragraph reveals, the author's technique in this story is what Michael King, apropos of another Gordimer story, terms "psycho-narration — the narrator informing the reader what [the young woman]... is thinking" (224). While the narrative offers psychic intimacy with the young woman, Gordimer tenders less information about the young man's mental processes. But a psychoanalytic approach might offer a clue to his actions.

The narrator says that the protagonist thinks fondly of the "bit of fur round the [lion's] neck" (173); later the young woman sees "the wonderful ruff of fur" (174); she then "lift[s] her fingers and touche[s] the mane where it was joined to the wood." At the end of the story, she evaluates the price, wondering at the paucity her husband paid for "the mane round the neck" (175). Few psychoanalysts or the literary critics of psychoanalysis would gloss over these references to the curio's fur mane: in view of these descriptions, they might argue, the curio may be read as a fetish. As explained above, Freud says this is often a foot or shoe, but he also says that "fur and velvet... are a fixation of the sight of the [maternal] pubic hair" (Leitch 954) under which the appalled male child finds no penis. For Freud, the fetishist is always repulsed by the real female genitals; they are "*a stigma indelibile*" (954) of his repression. As such, fetishists cannot enjoy sexual relations with a woman without the aid of a fetish; some respond by becoming homosexual. If the postulation that the curio is a fetish is acceptable, it follows that there is a possibility that without it, the young man is incapable of functional sexual relations with his wife — he acquires it in order to redress his sexual dysfunction in their marriage. This is supported by the cumulative images of erectile dysfunction/impotence offered by the story, with the resulting fruitlessness of the new marriage suggested by the text's images of sterility.

But, in this story, the notions of sterility and morbidity are associated with the

agents and infrastructure of imperialism and colonialism. How might a reader make sense of this connection between the microcosm of the marriage and the macrocosm of the political system? This involves a theoretical leap, for which the ideas of Jacques Lacan function as the bridge.

Freudian theory is endorsed and modified by Lacan's approach. Lacan's work does not limit itself to the idea of a physical penis, but rather of a conceptual one, the phallus — his complex and sometimes esoteric work offers the opportunity to reread Freud and to consider the penis not as merely the physical organ that defines masculinity, but as "an emblem of social power and the advantages which go with it" (Barry 131). In the light of this idea, the story's young man might be read as metonymic of imperialism and colonialism, and his impotence and sterility represents the repressed or as yet unrecognized recognition of the fragility of male social power and its attendant privilege. This idea will emerge during later feminist and post-colonial readings of this story.

Freudian psychoanalysis, then, describes the mechanisms of mind function, which are, according to Freud, inevitable and inescapable; this story, "in a nutshell" (Weiss), exposes the metaphorical "cooties" caused by repression of facts and their resulting feelings in the micro- and macrocosms. Other figurative fleas provoke the discomfort that spurs feminism, post-colonialism, and also Marxism.

### **Marxist Theory**

A school of thought named for Karl Marx (1818-1883), this movement reflects his own philosophy as well as that developed in collaboration with Friedrich Engels (1820-1895); it has subsequently informed the work of many thinkers whose work has been important to literature and literary criticism, like Louis Althusser and Michel Foucault. Marxism propounds that the political and economic structures of

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modern industrial capitalist society are based on the existence of different social classes (like the working class, or proletariat, and the ruling class or bourgeoisie) that compete for power; the class with advantage rules because it exploits other classes. The system is based on commodification. Commodities *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism* explains, "are goods or services produced primarily for monetary exchange and profit" (14). "Commodification," in this system, "names this whole accelerating phenomenon of producing goods and services not for their use value but their exchange value..." (15). The worker, dehumanized, is a mere tool in the capitalist enterprise, and is alienated from the products on which he/she labors, distanced from them by a system that fragments the labor process. The system is entrenched by ideology, "the ideas, beliefs, forms, and values of the ruling class that circulate through all cultural spheres" (14), and gives rise to hegemony, omniscient ideological domination by the ruling class that results not only from brute state power, but from the co-opting of powerful institutions that appear to function outside of the mechanisms of state power, like families, educational, and religious institutions. Marxism is teleological, holding that inevitably, class conflict will inevitably lead to revolution that will liberate the working classes from exploitation and result in an equitable society.

According to the *Norton*, "From a Marxist perspective, artistic works often present fugitive, alternative, and counter-hegemonic images sometimes suggesting liberatory possibilities and lending them a socially critical undertone" (14). Through the lens of Marxism, Gordimer's text is a latent reproach of her society.

*A Marxist reading of this story*

A young woman, a member of the bourgeoisie, desires a curio, a commodity which has exchange value but no use value.

She does not buy it because she will not succumb to paying the apparently high arbitrary price requested by the artist/vendor and implicitly the crafter of the curio, who is thus a member of the working class. Her new husband is callowly confident of his class status and thus his hegemony over the laboring class; he secures the curio for his wife at below the original price. This provokes the young woman's epiphany of the workings of class: she is now able to see her privilege and to recognize the workings of capitalism sufficiently to understand that despite the curio's lack of use value, the amount for which the item was exchanged does not reflect appreciation for the artistry it necessitated, and that the artist/vendor has been demeaned economically and psychologically by the exchange. She realizes that because her husband was acting as her agent, she is complicit in the abuses inherent in the class system and the moral and ethical problems it precipitates, including dehumanization of the worker. She feels an urgent need to resist capitalism and imperialism by dissociating herself from her husband and to find refuge from the hegemonic mainstream of white, bourgeois society.

*Discussion*

While the sexual trope identified above is dominant, the story is also replete with vocabulary and images related to economic exchange. The tin shed in the station is "marked 'Goods'" (171), "goods" being a simile for commodities — this suggests that the prime purpose of the encounter between the train and the station is exchange. The young woman is the "customer" (172), and the passengers ask the artist/vendors "How much [money]... How much?" The begging children, with "nothing to sell," request a "penny," but there is also "bargaining" and "the exchange of money"; buyers "fetch money" and consult on their purchases. The artist/vendor names a price for his lion: "three [shillings]-

and-six [pence]" (173, repeated three times), but this is rejected as "too expensive." The young man buys it for "one-and-six" (reiterated nine times on pp.174-175), but the young woman asks "Why didn't you *pay* for it? Why didn't you take it decently [at the higher price]?" (174 emphasis added).

There is, then, a profusion of vocabulary here related to exchange; this alerts the reader to the relevance of Marxist theory to this story. But there is also another Marxist concept alluded to in this story, that of "fantasy" and its associated idea of the fetishism of the commodity.

A nexus between Marxism and psychoanalysis is apparent in the unpacking of the word "fantasy." Fantasy, which Jean Laplanche and Jean-Baptiste Pontalis (qtd. in Wright 84) call the "fundamental object of psychoanalysis" is rooted in a "transactional" space, according to Victor Burgin's contribution to Wright's text; it is constructed in the liminal space between the private and public spaces of our minds that psychoanalysis terms the unconscious. In this story, the word "fantasy" (172) is used to describe the collection of curios exhibited on the railway platform in the station—through Gordimer's choice of vocabulary, the curios are clearly associated with the irresistible attraction that taps into a level of desire beyond the conscious mind. But in view of the psychoanalytic reading of the story offered earlier, the word "fantasy" is one of the signifiers that is a clue to a nexus between psychoanalytic theory and Marxist theory.

Another nexus between psychoanalysis and Marxism is apparent in the common importance of the word "fetish"; in Marxism, this is part of the concept of the fetishism of the commodity. The *Norton* editors, in their discussion of the fetishism of the commodity, state that that the term refers to "both our fascination as we stand before a glistening array of products in a store and our forgetting the paid labor of

workers that went into its products. This displacement of use value from the commodity — its transformation into cash exchange — results in the alienation of workers from their own labor.. " (14-15). As Leitch and his colleagues explain, "the logic of denial and displacement" (917) that underlies the Marxist idea of commodity fetishism is the same one that undergirds the Freudian theory of the fetish — it is the "gleam" of both that evokes desire, "as if the fetish contained the values that it represents." Leitch *et al.* hold that "Marxist critics complain that commodification promotes *reification*, the tendency to view people and human relations as things or objects with price tags... commodification *leads artists to hawk their works anxiously in order to gain profit in an impersonal competitive market...*" (15 emphasis added). This explains not only the artist/vendor's tension and pressures to sell his work, but also why, when showing the woman the curio, he "was smiling, not from the heart, but at the customer" (172) — the relationship is not based on the possibility of personal connection, but on his hope of transaction.

Contemporary Marxist scholars, the *Norton* editors also explain, ask whether hegemony is opposable. Gordimer's story suggests that it may be. While the trajectory or extent of this is not clear in this short text, a point made by Barbara Eckstein in her discussion of Gordimer's work is useful: a prerequisite for political activism is sentience. In a discussion of another Gordimer story, Eckstein points out that the female protagonist moves from "feel[ing] nothing" (as qtd. in Eckstein 344) to awareness, "And she felt suddenly, not *nothing*" (italics presumably in Gordimer's original); "feeling something" is necessary for any kind of social criticism and hegemony-busting. The protagonist of "The Train from Rhodesia" is shown as suddenly sentient too.

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In this story, it is the young woman's appreciation for the artistry manifest in the lion that releases both her repressed feelings and her new awareness of the lack of appreciation of the capitalist for the work of the laborer. Her husband sarcastically responds to the sight of curio by expressing his disbelief at the creation, saying "Look... if you don't mind!" (172), but she thinks it is "majestic," and realizes that "the artist had real delight in the lion"; she sees the animal's neck ruff as "wonderful" (174). Her first outward expression of her appreciation appears at the end of the story, when she defiantly tells her husband that the lion is "a beautiful piece of work" (175), and she is described as protective towards it.

Marxism and a Marxist critical perspective are supported by the sexual trope that infuses this story. The moment of allegorical sexual climax is the economic climax too — this is the moment of transaction. The husband secures the curio just as the "flag droop[s]" and the train pulls out of the station. In terms of this reading, the young woman's language equates underpayment for a commodity with dishonorable sexual possession. She asks "[W]hy didn't you pay for it? Why didn't you take it decently?" This question is asked with "the shrill impotence of anger" in her voice — in the light of a Marxist reading of this paper, there is a link between the young woman's recognition of the economic abuse of the laborer-artist/vendor by her and her husband, members of the capitalist class, and her rejection of him, especially her recognition of sexual dysfunction in their marriage. In Marxist terms, the images of rot and sterility associated with imperialism and colonialism would be associated with capitalism and thus be a critique of its corruption, and an anticipation of its inevitable inability to perpetuate itself.

Gordimer's story, though microcosmic, lays bear the workings of capitalist hegemony, but also exposes it both as virile

and vulnerable. A feminist reading of the text reveals that it does the same with regard to male hegemony.

### *Feminist Theory*

Feminist literature and criticism promotes and reflects the movement, inevitably a political one, which aims to identify and eradicate the inequalities between men and women, and to rectify the oppression of females by males in patriarchal society. Patriarchy, a central concept in feminism is defined by Heidi Hartmann as "relations between men, which have a material base, and which, though hierarchical, establish or create interdependence and solidarity among men that enable them to dominate women" (as qtd in Sedgwick 3).<sup>7</sup>

Hartmann's definition was extracted by Eve Kosofsky-Sedgwick from a text that examines the problematic relationship between Marxism and feminism, but also areas of possible productivity. There is also a troubled relationship between Freudian psychoanalysis, which has been an important informer of feminism, and the latter. This is partly because a central Freudian tenet is that femininity is constructed around a girl's (by definition unfulfillable) desire to be like a man anatomically, and her need to find psychological mechanisms for coping with her lack. This belief is problematic for feminist theorists because it consigns females to an identity that is constituted by missing-ness, woundedness, and diminution. However, one way of accommodating Freud's ideas within feminism is to consider the penis not as merely the physical organ that defines masculinity, but, as Lacan did, as the phallus, "an emblem of social power and the advantages which go with it" (Barry 131)

<sup>7</sup> This definition originally appeared in "The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Toward a More Progressive Union" in *Women and Revolution: A Discussion of the Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism*, edited by Linda Sargent (Boston: South End Press, 1981).

— in this light, patriarchy and phallic power are almost indistinguishable.

Patriarchy and phallic power have long been concerns of feminist writers and critics. Among the many aims of feminist critics (and implicitly authors), Barry says, are “to revalue women’s experience” and to “examine power relationships which obtain in texts and in life, with a view to breaking them down, seeing reading as a political act, and showing the extent of patriarchy” (134). In its reassessment of the protagonist’s experience and its exposure of the scope of patriarchal and phallic power, this text does just that.

#### *A Feminist reading of this story*

A young woman senses that she occupies a subaltern status in society, but, interpellated by patriarchal ideology, erroneously believes that this is due to her single status and that her pain will be relieved by marriage. Her recognition of her subservience to her husband is made manifest when the man, without being requested to do so, purchases a curio on her behalf, confidently commanding it at less than the price she had tendered for it. At this moment, she realizes that, within marriage, she has no independent voice and has surrendered economic agency. However, the woman’s ability to transfer her own anger to wound her husband emotionally emasculates him and leaves him literally or figuratively impotent, or else confirms suspicions of his earlier impotence.

#### *Discussion*

The feminism that manifests in this story is neither complex nor esoteric — the young man, with whom the author has allowed the reader to establish no sympathy, assumes license to act on his wife’s behalf and in doing so, makes her complicit in the abuse and dehumanization of the black artist/vendor in the process. The woman, now aware that she is morally tainted, is

sickened by her association with her husband, who, she realizes does not value her either — she has been “take[n]” (174) by him as “[in]decently” as he “took” the curio. But interestingly, in this text, while Gordimer depicts the power relationships between men and women that constitute patriarchy, she also subverts them by showing male — and phallic — vulnerability.

Despite the feminist impulses that are apparent in this story, many wonder if Nadine Gordimer herself is/was a feminist. This question has frustrated South African feminist critics, partly because of the cultural importance of Gordimer and her work, but also because the question is important in a macrocosmic feminist context. Karen Lazar explains: “Given that patriarchy has always relegated questions concerning women to secondary status relative to questions of ‘greater’ public urgency (such as race and class), it is small wonder that Gordimer’s apparent insistence on the primacy of race has provoked the concern of some feminist critics” (218). Gordimer’s privileging of the concerns of race and class has been unequivocal, and, for feminists, disturbing: in 1980, she stated that “the woman issue withers in comparison with the issue of the voteless, powerless state of South African blacks, irrespective of sex” (1980, as qtd in Lazar 214), and that white women’s issues, compared to those of disenfranchised blacks were, by then, “*piffling*” (emphasis added). She reiterated this position in 1984.<sup>8</sup>

Nevertheless, Lazar argues that in Gordimer’s later fiction, she exhibits a “complex grasp of social nexuses” (221) — she finds a group of Gordimer’s stories in which “authorial exposure of and critique of sexual oppression are explicitly clear” (222); she also notes that “one of the author’s persistent concerns is to depict the strange and changing bases of power in

8 In “A Conversation with Nadine Gordimer,” an interview with Robert Boyers *et al.*, which is quoted by Lazar (214).

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human relationships" (222).<sup>9</sup> Further, Lazar asserts that Gordimer, "perhaps unwittingly" (215), endorses "materialist feminism" (215), which L. Vogel sees as the claim "that the key oppressions of sex, race, and class are interrelated and that the struggles against them must be co-ordinated" (as qtd. in Lazar 215). These arguments are relevant to "The Train from Rhodesia."

While Gordimer was writing and publishing this story, Beauvoir was exploring her own ideas regarding the complexity of sexual oppression, and its difference from the mechanisms of racial tyranny. In *The Second Sex* (1949), she discusses the relationship between "the American Negroes" (297) who are "an inferior caste" that suffers "definitive inferiority... accursed alterity," and the little (white) girl who will become woman, who is always, in Beauvoir's worldview, "born on the wrong side of the [railway?] line" (298). But, Beauvoir argues, "There is a great difference: the Negroes submit with a feeling of revolt, no privileges compensating for their hard lot, whereas woman is offered *inducements to complicity*" (298 emphasis added). In "Othering the Self: Nadine Gordimer's Colonial Heroines," Robin Visel, writing about the work of female African authors (including Gordimer), explores Beauvoir's idea that it is the privileged place of white females in the hierarchy which tempts them to collude in their own exploitation. As she explores the manifestation of this idea in colonial literature, its application to "The Train from Rhodesia" becomes apparent.

Visel sees a trend in Gordimer's work of the white African colonial heroine

who is intellectually and emotionally alienated from white colonial society and at the same time physically barred from black Africa. Through her

<sup>9</sup> Lazar's work was done in the early 1990s; by "later" work she seems to mean that written and published between the 1970s-1990s. Because Gordimer is still prolific in 2008, "later" might not be the best term for that period of her work if Lazar were writing now.

rebellion against the patriarchal order as she struggles to define herself, the heroine uncovers the connection between patriarchy and racism under colonialism. She begins to identify with black Africans in their oppression and their struggle for autonomy, but she cannot shed her inheritance of privilege and guilt... Ultimately she is shut out from the vibrant life of black people, rich — as it seems to her — with pain and possibility. (33-34)

Visel holds that "In Gordimer's fiction... the ambiguous, self-divided figure of the white [female] is the site of a hesitant, fraught rapprochement of black and white. She is the site of connection while she is made to recognize [its] impossibility" (35). In her concluding paragraphs, she says that while

[T]he interplay between the processes of dichotomization and identification is complex in the [work of] male writers [like Joseph Conrad and J.M. Coetzee], it approaches the paradoxical in white female writers. The imaginary opposition... that the male colonist draws between white and black is modeled upon the primary opposition between male and female. In the male mind, male and female are dichotomized as self/other, subject/object, conscious/unconscious, light/dark, rational/irrational, culture/nature, and good/evil. As woman, the colonial heroine is other, object, unconsciousness, while as white, she is self, subject, consciousness. The fiction of white African women writers from [Olive] Schreiner to Gordimer dramatizes the scenario of the urge to rebel versus 'inducements to complicity.' The white African heroine is victimized by her sex, but privileged by her skin color; her role as victim, rebel, or even revolutionary only obscures her collusion in the power structure by virtue of her skin in a society in which "race" is the determining factor. (40-41)

Visel's work exposes a further dilemma for the white colonial woman, a frequently occurring character in Gordimer's work, who feels the impulse to relate towards oppressed blacks and show solidarity; "her efforts are [often] well-meaning, but misdirected" (40). One word functions esoterically but powerfully to suggest that this is the situation for the heroine of this

early short story. On the text's last page, the narrator says, "[s]muts" (175, which have "[blown] in grittily" coat her hands. "Smuts" are bits of coal debris, here presumably discharged by the train's engine. But (Jan Christian) Smuts was also South African prime minister at the time this story was published. His relatively liberal tenure ended when he lost the 1948 election to more extreme segregationist forces; the election campaigns, with all their attendant rhetoric, would have been waged at the time Gordimer was writing this story. The possibility that the word "smuts" here may refer to both coal grit and the politician is supported by the capital letter on which Gordimer's syntax insists. Hands, in this story and in literature in general, are metonymic of the body and mind — for example, Lady Macbeth's blood-stained hands are a symbol of her murderous guilt. As such, a secondary reading of the smuts on the protagonist's hands at the end of the story may be realistic, but may also suggest that the young woman is now gloved in an effete liberalism. This is born out by Gordimer's subsequent work, discussed by Visel, and especially her novels, which, King says, reveal "the failure of liberalism; its inadequacy in the face of historical developments, and its inability to act satisfactorily as a means of perceiving the South African reality" (224). King's observation is consistent with those made by scholars like Jean Marquard, who identifies "the failure of decent values in South African society" (36) as a "supplementary theme" of this story.

But, despite the aporia of her white colonial heroines and their impotent political impulses, Gordimer here also suggests the vulnerability of the patriarchy and the colonialist system. Lazar notices that in Gordimer's work, "female indignation will come out through illicit and marginal discourses" (224). In this story, there is no official mainstream protest to the patriarchy by the protagonist, but "feminist possibility" (Dorothy Driver's term as qtd.

in Lazar 224) is enormous: the text suggests that there is a chance that women's resentment, which here moves from "dismay" (174) to the full "shrill impotence of anger," which is capable of emasculating men as a consequence of their abuse of "others" — as the earlier reading of the trope of sexual union evinces, the wife's rejection of the husband's trophy precipitates slackness and figurative sickness in her, a condition which she transfers to her husband. The penultimate paragraph of the story describes "the young man, sitting with his hands drooping between his sprawled legs, and the lion, fallen on its side in the corner" (175). The figurative castration of the husband, who is metonymic of the patriarchy, by the wife, metonymic of women, functions as an example of the proscribed and liminal discourses to which Lazar refers.

Contemporary feminism postdates psychoanalysis but productively intersects with it, critiques it, and draws on it to expand both schools of theory — a nexus between the two, and an example of a subtle subversive discourse is apparent as the curio is re-examined. With Visel's discussion about the importance of binaries in mind, especially the crucial one of male/female to the patriarchal-colonialist mentality, it is notable that while Gordimer represents the curio as unequivocally manifesting features of the male genitalia, it also, ambiguously, evokes those of the female. The strict categorization of humans as male and female is, as Edward Namisiko Waswa Kisang'ani explains, a Western construct and demand, one of many placed on Africans as part of the European project of enlightenment and civilization; in some African cultures, especially before colonialism, male and female were not perceived as opposites. While it is beyond this paper's scope to elaborate on African perceptions of gender, this study proposes the possibility that Gordimer's African artist character, who represented the characteristics of both sexes in his lion, does not perceive ex-

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clusive gender binaries to the extent that the West does. This is consistent with the thematic concerns of this story and, as discussed above, Gordimer's refusal to use words that endorse rigid distinctions — in the same vein, we should note, the lion is described as racially hybrid, both "black and white" (172).

This is in keeping with a point made by Griselda Pollock in her contribution to Wright's text. Here she states that unlike psychoanalysis, feminism does not psychoanalyze the artist but often uses a Freudian/Lacanian approach to examine the "psychic investments"<sup>(14)</sup> of Western culture in opposition to "the current regime of sexual difference, which is secured around masculinity's castration crises and the anxieties of the phallus."

As Pollock's statement shows, feminism feels contentious towards psychoanalysis, but is enriched by its consideration. Hartmann's work suggests a similar relationship between feminism and Marxism, while Visel's work suggests that feminism in the fiction of African women writers must be discussed in tandem with post-colonial theory and criticism.

### ***Post-Colonial Theory***

Post-colonial theory is identifiable as a distinct school of theory and literary criticism since late in the twentieth century; its impulses are evident in the work of such thinkers as Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, and Gayatri Spivak. While the prefix "post" suggests the period after colonialism, post-colonial theory is more rewardingly read as engaging with the *results* of colonialism — such a reading accounts for anti-colonialist impulses even when imperialism and colonialism were in their earliest phases; it also invites discourse regarding the neo-colonialisms of the twenty-first century. According to Leitch *et al.*, the broad aims of post-colonial studies include "to describe the mechanisms of colonial power, to recover excluded or marginalized 'subaltern'

voices, and to theorize the complexities of colonial and postcolonial identity, national belonging and globalization" (25). Post-colonialism, deeply implicated with post-modernism, challenges metanarratives of European superiority, enlightenment, civilization, and competence, and the concomitant devaluation (but also, paradoxically, frequent exoticization) of that which is not European. These traits are manifest in this post-colonial reading of "The Train from Rhodesia."

### *A post-colonial reading of this story*

A young, newly married, implicitly white couple — thus privileged by the colonial system in significant ways — is traveling from, through, and to British territories in southern Africa, using the equipment and infrastructure of empire, the train and railways, to do so. The wife does not realize that her colonialist lifestyle is problematic until her attempt to buy a curio at a station. First her own, and then her husband's encounter with the artist/vendor, who is a colonial subject, economically disempowered by the colonialist systems of trade, allows her to bear witness to the black artist's humiliation. The young woman quickly identifies with him as subaltern and is both shamed by her complicity in the colonialist system and horrified at her recognition that she, as a married woman within a patriarchy, is also colonized and subject to patriarchal, colonialist hegemony.

### *Discussion*

Barry identifies four characteristics of post-colonial literature: One is an "emphasis on identity as doubled, or hybrid, or unstable" (194) — this is exemplified by the condition of the white colonial heroine, who, as Visel describes her, has an "othered self." Another hallmark is "a stress on 'cross-cultural' interactions" (195), as are "an awareness of representations of the non-European as exotic or immoral 'Oth-



er” (193), and, as in psychoanalysis, a concern with language.

The encounter between the young white artist/vendor is a “cross-cultural interaction” typical of those found by post-colonial critics. In literature, such meetings are usually the result of a journey — an example is Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, in which passage up the Congo River affords Marlow encounters with otherness. In post-colonial texts, there is usually a major artery that facilitates the trip; it may be a river, as in Conrad’s text, but is often also a road, as in Ben Okri’s *The Famished Road* (1991).

“The road,” Margaret Cezair-Thompson notes, has had a long, conspicuous life as a symbol of literature about Africa... ” (33); it facilitated colonial “penetration of the African wilderness” in order to rule and it was “concurrent with the colonialist writer’s attempts at inscribing his or her own definitions upon what was perceived to be a mute continent” (33-34). As a result, “postcolonial writing has tended to reconfigure this symbol — roads and roadmaking — as part of a crippling colonialist legacy” (34). But the artery need not be a road itself; “the railway takes the place of the road” (44) in Sembene Ousmane’s *God’s Bits of Wood*. It functions in the same capacity in “The Train from Rhodesia.”

Another related but more subtle image of the same idea is also suggested in the story. Cezair-Thompson’s idea of different kinds of pathways that transported Europeans into Africa may be more broadly conceived to include the ocean — historically, Europeans crossed the sea in order to “discover,” settle, rule, and exploit their colonies; as such the sea is identified with imperialism. With this in mind, a long sentence in the first paragraph of the story is worth close scrutiny: “The... west cast a reflection... upon the sand, that lapped all around, from sky to sky... so that the sand became the sea and closed over the children’s black feet softly and without imprint” (171).” The word “west,” when un-

capitalized, conveys direction, but, from a post-colonial perspective, it signifies Anglo-European hegemony — this idea is associated with Said who, though his work postdates Gordimer’s here, uses the term “West[ern]” synonymously with “Occident [al]” in his work *Orientalism* (1978). The metaphor of sand morphing into sea and flowing over the black children’s feet is compelling, even surreal, in a story set in a dry, dusty, inland location. It is important, though, because it pithily conveys a key post-colonial concept, which is the literal and figurative eradication of the identity and history of the colonized by the colonizers.

But this “train of thought” can be taken ever further and related to concerns about language and voice. In her second description of the lion, Gordimer says that its “black tongue [was] rolling like a wave” (175). This metaphor again evokes the image of the sea, suggesting an association with the imperialist/colonizer, and it reiterates a key point made in the first description, where the lion’s mouth is described as “opened in an endless roar too terrible to be heard, it had a black tongue” (172) — Gordimer has reserved the word “black” for the lion’s tongue. “Blackness” in a colonialist context is usually associated with indigeneity and inferiority, the binary opposites of colonial whiteness and superiority. But this image also communicates the lion’s voicelessness. Because a secondary meaning of the word “tongue” is “language,” Gordimer’s description here may be a succinct representation of the colonizer’s silencing of African voice and language. This representation would be consistent with a broad aim of post-colonial studies, which is to identify when and how subaltern voices are silenced.

Thus Gordimer tenders an ironic parallel in keeping with post-colonial concerns — the lion, the most imperial and “majestic” (172) of African animals, is here rendered as statically silent, while an inanimate machine, the train engine, is a

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"resting beast," which "complains" and "grunt[s]" (173). This juxtaposition reinforces the post-colonial theme of the silencing of the indigenous voice, represented by the lion, in favor of the dominant European/imperialist one, represented by the train.

However, in this story, the silencing of the indigenous voice inhibits imperialism from reflexive communication with it. At both the beginning and end of this story, the train calls, "I'm coming I'm coming" as it bears along the track, but on both occasions, "there[is] no answer" (171, 175) — its proposition of engagement is ignored if not rejected.<sup>10</sup>

A characteristic of post-colonial literature and criticism identified by Barry is "an awareness of representations of the non-European as exotic or immoral 'Other'" (193). One manifestation of this is the figuring of the colonial indigene as animalistic. In this story, this is most obvious in the description of the artists as "walking bent, like performing animals" (172); it is also suggested in the description of the artist/vendor's "skinny toes splaying in the sand" (174). This representation is reinforced by a parallel between the girl on the train, who gives the dogs "the hard kind [of chocolates] that no one liked" (173), and others passengers who give black people chocolate that is not "very nice." This trend is confirmed by several descriptions in which the black adults are consistently represented as physically proximate to the animals — for example, in the first paragraph, "chickens and dogs... [follow] the piccanins down to the track" (171).

But, paradoxically, the white people in the train are also implicitly animal-like — they have "caged faces" (172). This metaphor suggests that the protection offered by the structures of imperialism and colonialism is confining, even morbidly so; the presentation of the stationmaster's wife

seated behind a flyscreen with a rotting animal carcass adds a subtle ominousness to this idea. The theme of imprisonment — being "boxed in, cut off" (172) as a result of economic and racial self-segregation still permeates contemporary South African discourse. In this story, white self-isolation from black in the macrocosm also foreshadows the erection of emotional barriers between husband and wife and the partners' lack of love.

### **Conclusion**

"Exploring hiatus in love" is this story's "primary theme" (36), in Marquard's opinion. In her introduction to *A Century of South African Short Stories* (1978), she says that, "the young wife's response to the African's wood-carved lion detonates in her the recognition of a fundamental incompatibility in her marriage" (35) — "[t]he lion itself symbolizes, with evocative brevity, the levels of impotence laid bare... in this story..." For her, "the impotence of the economically depressed artist/vendor finds an echo in the impotence of the white woman's compassion."

Marquard's comments evocatively and succinctly draw on the story's own vocabulary — most obviously the word "impotence" — to offer a sensitive reading of it. Her statements are, admittedly, limited to the brevity of an introduction to an anthology and, made in the 1970s, they lack the new perspectives that the cultural turn and accompanying developments in contemporary critical theory have afforded recent scholars. Also, in 1978, Marquard obviously did not yet have access to Gordimer's later oeuvre in order to reconsider her opinions. But her description of this short story is now limited and inadequate — this paper shows that Gordimer's "The Train from Rhodesia" occupies nexuses of important theoretical approaches and crystallizes complex concerns. Reading this text in the light of the intellectual and cultural impulses that motivated Freudian

<sup>10</sup> This is a marked contrast to the ongoing mutual engagement of call and response in African drumming.

psychoanalytic, Marxist, feminist theory, and post-colonial theory reveals that it is situated at an important theoretical crossroad, and this recognition offers a novel perspective on an old (short) story.

And, for those interested in this internationally acclaimed writer's development, a retrospective glance at the 1947 story also offers a perspective on Gordimer's own story — "The Train from Rhodesia" shows that, even from the beginning of her career, Gordimer was on track to dining with the dignifiable.

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### NOVI POGLED NA JEDNU STARU (KRATKU) PRIČU: „VOZ IZ RODEZIJE“ NADIN GORDIMER NA TEORIJSKOM RASKRŠĆU

#### Rezime

U svojoj gotovo osamdeset i osmoj godini, Nadin Gordimer plodna je doajenka afričke književnosti, autorka velikog opusa i dobitnica Nobelove nagrade za književnost 1991. godine. Gordimerova piše više od šezdeset godina, a njena pripovijetka, „Voz iz Rodezije“ (1947) pokazuje da je već kao mlada književnica razumjela i bila spremna da iskaže svoje mišljenje o važnim kulturnim, intelektualnim i političkim tendencijama koje su se pojavile u njenoj lokalnoj zajednici ali i širom svijeta krajem četrdesetih godina dvadesetog vijeka. Ovaj rad se ponovo osvrće na njeno rano djelo i preispituje ga kroz prizmu Frojdove psihoanalitičke, te marksističke, feminističke i postkolonijalne teorije. U radu se iznosi mišljenje da se „Voz“ nalazi na važnom teorijskom raskršću, te da se posmatranjem ove priče kroz četiri različite teorije kristalizuju složena teorijska pitanja i otkrivaju veze između najznačajnijih kritičkih pristupa. Ovo otkriće nudi novi pogled na jednu staru (kratku) priču od strane jednog potpuno savremenog pisca. Studija se temelji na opštoj i primijenjenoj teoriji i književnoj kritici uz pažljivo čitanje samog teksta. Ona daje svoj doprinos istraživanju Gordimerove i njenog rada tako što za svoju temu uzima malo, jezgrovito i nedovoljno istraženo djelo koje je, s obzirom na autorkinu starost i iskustvo u to vrijeme, bilo gotovo previše napredno. Studija može biti zanimljiva različitim književnim stručnjacima i savremenim teoretičarima, ali bi od naročite koristi mogla biti svima onima koji nastoje da iznova preispitaju njen rad.