Chapter-I

The Realization

Nadine Gordimer’s first novel, *The Lying Days* has been acknowledged as her only autobiographical fictional work, which extracts elements from Gordimer’s childhood in the mining town of Springs and also explores her profound relationship with her mother. Gordimer could rightly connect with her protagonist in the novel, Helen Shaw, as both were a white subject at the fringe of a euro-centric culture that witnessed the growing tension and violence between blacks and whites. The novel is buildsroman in its appeal in which the protagonist, Helen Shaw tries to break free from the familial, societal, cultural, and political confinement by challenging the prevailing political dominance. A close scrutiny of this novel, however, shows Gordimer’s conventional novelistic form in playing off the ascendancy of South African politics in the 1950s. The writing of *The Lying Days* came before the prominent events of the 1950s, which included the Defiance Campaign itself and the massive Treason Trial of 1956. There were statutes that defined the South African government’s agenda of racial discrimination which included The Group Areas Act (1950), which legalized the forceful separation of different ethnic groups and the Bantu Education Act (1953), which constituted separate and nonequivalent educational system based on colour.

During this decade the ‘Liberal Novel’ had succeeded in finding its place in resistance to the legal and accustomed condition of detachment that governed the association between people throughout the country. A fictional discourse was opened in Alan Paton’s *Cry the Beloved Country*, which raised the voice against division and alienation. The liberal novel in a conscious effort assumed the charge not only of a white fear but of the establishment of a redeeming cognizance as well. This intent was seen in the works of Paton, Dan Jacobson, Gordimer, Jack Cope, and other white writers, which gave this form of the genre its intensiveness.
The novelist showed sensibility in drafting the maturation of Helen Shaw towards perceiving the growth of the society in which she lived and the harsh racialist policies which affected the every single soul of the society. The novel provides a picture of the artlessly materialistic world of Johannesburg.

*The Lying Days* also experienced liberal humanistic values, which formed a reaction against the atrocious policy of apartheid. However, there were certain sections in the South African society, which came openly in favour of apartheid. In 1939 the racial sequestration was made a church dogma, which said:

The application of segregation will furthermore lead to the creation of separate healthy cities for the non-whites where they will be in a position to develop along with their own lives, establish their own institutions and later on govern themselves under the guardianship of the whites. (Elphick & Davenport n. pag.)

Helen’s story in *The Lying Days* is synchronic with political make up of South African history of the time quickly before and after 1948. The fast application of apartheid by the nationalist government in 1948 witnessed a massive urbanization followed by more stringent activity by the African National Congress fearing the growth of a classless society. It is the clash of these antagonistic forces that prompted the large scale handling of race issue by various South African writers. Paton called that it is a ‘bridge building’ between the whites and blacks that are in an act of defiance against each other.

*The Lying Days* describes the awakening of a young white South African girl, Helen Shaw who knows nothing of the outside world except the mine where she grows up in some sort of fantastical world. The novel has its title from the melancholic verse of “The Coming of Wisdom with Time” by W. B. Yeats

Though leaves are many, the root is one;  
Through all the lying days of my youth  
I swayed my leaves and flowers in the sun,  
Now I may wither into the truth. (76)
The entire action in *The Lying Days* develops in three parts, ‘The Mine,’ ‘The Sea,’ and ‘The City,’ each acquainting the reader with a distinct setting which acts as a background to different stages of Helen’s political awakening: part one ‘The Mine,’ constitutes the industrial state of affairs where Helen’s initial political consciousness is taking shape, while part two, ‘The Sea’ presents the outlook of an apolitical white girl’s escape, expressed through young Helen’s sexual awakening with Ludi Koch. The final and the lengthiest part is ‘The City’ where Helen’s actual political knowledge sets out. The city contains the seeds of real and difficult relations in an already tensed country of South Africa, providing insight into the intellectual emergence of a young girl in a profoundly divided society. The novel opens in Atherton, a small mining town outside Johannesburg, South Africa, which represented a world based economically on mining and a culture malleable of colonial and immigrant past. *The Lying Days* presents a white girl who aspires to cast off her colonialist mentality as she encounters the current realities of her society. Helen being a member of the white race realizes her position of being a white outsider through her interaction with the society. Right from her childhood, she is made to believe, as Frantz Fanon did that, “This world divided into compartments, this world cut in two is uninhabited by two different species” (30) where one is white and the other is black and coloured. Through this novel, Gordimer makes an extensive observation of a chaotic society where she is a denizen.

There is growth of self-knowledge and the germination of independent attitudes and ideas. Helen attains the extensive cultural awareness, and a social and political consciousness. She experiences a gradual change in looking upon the black Africans as fellow human beings that her parents and other whites will never do. There is an act of rebellion in Helen’s nature as she rejects the superficiality of life, which the white people of her society flaunt and are proud off. Her references to Africans are important, especially her knowledge that “a little girl must not be left alone because there are native boys about” (4). With absence of any friendly relation being given to her by her parents, Helen’s rebellion against her parents and the society of the mine becomes evident as the novel proceeds.

The novel gives us an incomparable and unparalleled penetration into historical and political experience in the time in which it has been written. Survival is a very
personal and powerful incentive for a white woman like Helen, in a black majority nation, which is also fighting for its own survival. Gordimer, like her protagonist, Helen, is also a white that is confused initially whether to stay in South Africa or go into exile. Gordimer explains that, “I discovered I was only a European there, just like any other white person. I took that very hard. At least in South Africa, even if I get my throat cut, I’m an African” (Bazin and Seymour 93).

Helen’s endeavor to explore Atherton mine outside her white community in Johannesburg alone for the first time introduces her to a politically divided regimented colonial society where she comes face to face with the great barrier created between the people of her class and the lower working class comprised of the poor black and coloured. The mine gives shape to the social cognizance of Helen’s life, in which the colonial mindset delineates and weakens the interpersonal relationships. In the tainted conservatism of the mining town the brisk, elevated thinking of Helen Shaw has to hold back its bonafide impulses. Even Frantz Fanon asserts:

The originality of the colonial context is that economic reality, inequality, and the immense difference of ways of life never come to mask the human realities. When you examine at close quarters the colonial context, it is evident that what parcels out the world is to begin with the fact of belonging to or not belonging to a given race, a given species. In the colonies the economic substructure is also a superstructure. The cause is the consequence, you are rich because you are white, you are white because you are rich. (40)

It is the abstract entity of the white world that gives a shape to Helen’s awareness of this racial divide. The people whom she comes across are extrinsic to that of her world, and resultantly misapprehended. The conspicuous reality that the black nursemaids are taking care of the white children on the mind produces an irrefutable effect on her.

The red dust path turning off to the stores was somewhere I had never been. There were children on the mine, little children in pushcarts whose mothers let the nursegirls take them anywhere they liked; go down to the filthy kaffir stores to gossip with the boys and let those poor little babies they’re supposed to be taking
care of breathe in heaven knows what dirt and disease, my mother often condemned. (8)

As Helen explores this side of the world which was unfamiliar she questers that there is an absolute demarcation of this world with that of her own which is clean and eminent:

There were dozens of natives along the path. Some lay on the burned grass, rolled in their blankets, face down, as if they were dead in the sun. Others squatted and stood about shouting … Orange peels and pith were thrown about, and a persistent fly kept settling on my lip…. I went past feeling very close to the dirty battered pavement, almost as if I were crawling along it like an insect under the noise and the press of natives. The air had a thick smell of sweat and strange pigment and herbs, and as I came to the door of the eating house, a crescendo of heavy, sweet nauseating blood-smell, the clamour of entrails stewing richly, assailed me like a sudden startling noise. I drew in a breath of shock and saw in the dark interior wooden benches and trestles and dark faces and flies … Sawdust on the floor showed pocked like sand and spilled out onto the pavement, shaking into the cracks and fissures, mixing with the dust and torn paper, clogged here and there with blood. (9-10)

This kind of description of the peculiar place is an underlying comprehension of that world and culture of the black and the coloured, which is misconceived and despised by the people of her world. This scornful attitude of the white towards the ‘other’ leads to chaos. As Stephen Clingman states:

There have been the original wars of conquest and resistance, internal class and nationalist conflicts between the settler polities, the oppression and exploitation of the colonized and later proletarianized masses, the modern elaboration of apartheid and, throughout, a moving record of resistance. To mention all this is to give only the broadest and crudest features of South African history. (3)
The narrator’s foremost incursion into the mysterious black world will later be compared to her first step into the world of love with Ludi and her ingress into the immense world of books and inspiration with Joel. This is a retrospection of the endless journeys taken by various other Europeans into the continent of Africa. As she observes in the novel:

I looked at these dark brown faces - the town natives were somehow lighter - dark as teak and dark as mahogany, shining with the warm grease of their own liveness lighting up their skin; wondering, receptive, unthinking, taking in with their eyes as earth takes water; close-eyed, sullen with the defensive sullenness of the defenseless; noisy and merry with the glee of the innocent. And to me, in my kilts and my hand-knitted socks and my hair tied with neat ribbon, they were something to look at with a half-smile, as I had watched the chameleon in the window. (14)

This infracts adventure to the unacquainted, buzzing black world of the mineworker’s concession stores or an area stinking with odour of stale urine of a mine boy invoked a social consciousness within her:

I saw a little stream of water curving from him. Not shock but a sudden press of knowledge, hot and unwanted, came upon me. A question that had waited inside me but had never risen into words or thoughts because there were no words for it. (15)

It came as a shock for a young, innocent girl of the upper middle class English family that there are a section of people in this world who are even devoid of basic facilities like proper sanitation which people of her class and status enjoy. This social injustice, which exists in her society on the basis of class and race, indicates the plight of various mineworkers who works day and night for there masters and in return get nothing. A frisson of shock runs through Helen and she runs back to the security of her parents at the tennis club.
The novel contains the seeds of the writer’s invariant fixation with the ongoing struggle between the blacks and the whites on all levels whether political, social, or cultural. Here, Gordimer places herself in place of her protagonist, Helen, and makes an attempt to analyze the reason behind the ever-broadening crack between the whites, the blacks, and the coloured. A white man’s death in the mine would hit the newspaper’s headings:

When a white man was killed, the papers recorded the tragedy, giving his name and occupation and details of the family he left. If no white man was affected, there was an item headed: “FATAL FALL OF HANGING.” There was a fall of hanging at the East Shaft of Basilton levels, East Rand, at 2 p.m. yesterday. Two natives were killed, and three others escaped with minor injuries. (23)

Through this novel Gordimer tries to show that both white and black characters in the apartheid-stricken country have been shown as victims of racial intolerance because of the divisive policies. Helen also comes face to face with the colonial mentality of her mother who insists that these “gentle novels of English family life” (31) are the actual materials to which Helen’s reaction is “I don’t believe a girl should grow up not knowing what life is like” (32). She is brought up in a South African life that is devoid of the ill feeling of a mine. She found the “stories of children living the ordinary domestic adventures of the upper-middle-class English family” as “weird and exotic” (11). As she never read a book in which she herself “was recognizable; in which there was a “girl” like Anna who did the housework and the cooking and called the mother and father Missus and Baas” (11) who after a long years of working for them is given the status of “almost like a white person” (159), implies a social and political connection between the bourgeois leisure and the deprivation of the proletariat. This is an evidence of the complicated white master – black servant relationship, and scales the racial subjugation and cruel treatment suffered by black Africans. It is seen that the people are also faced with economic exploitation as workers in mining areas, domestic households, and various other work places.
A constant and intense critic of apartheid, Gordimer through her literature seem to have anticipated the baseness of the society divided on the ground of race and status. In this respect Stephen Clingman posits, “This all sounds very surprising in the South African context; it also seems surprising in the light of Gordimer’s often stated and demonstrated personal antipathy to apartheid” (11). The novel establishes a deep-rooted racist mentality created by families and communities. It also establishes a searing aloofness between narrators, Helen and young character - Helen. The young Helen unconsciously accepts racism that is unacceptable to the more politically mellow eye of the narrator Helen who sees intolerance in her father when he is budged by the black children for pennies. Her father’s comments are distinctive of the racist attitudes of upper middle class whites who are full of scorn for the poor blacks, “Something should be done about it,” he often said, “little loafers and thieves, they should chase them off the streets” (20).

The episodes following this incident help enlarging her field of knowledge but only to bring her back to the place she embarked on. Helen’s attempt to liberate herself from the clutches of the middle class white racist parental world is compared with the general movement of the blacks in South African society towards confinement. Barbara Temple- Thurston remarks that, “Given the stage of political awakening that Helen has reached by the time she turns narrator, however, we grasp her implied criticism of what was an accepted expression of the white community” (14).

At a very young stage of her career, Gordimer, being a white South African, found herself writing against the repressive political system of the country and also its effects within white community. She also accepted that a white man can never experience the blackness as it is conversely true for a black man. The Lying Days demonstrates South Africa’s apartheid policies of excluding blacks and favoring “whites-only.” In a journal called “English-language literature and politics in South Africa,” Gordimer has explained the “cultural upheaval of blacks under conquest” along with the “cultural isolation of whites that left their Europe” leads to the “compartmentalization of society” (131). The relations between black and white on the mine were strained one. The mine is reiterated in every facet of the social, economic, and political lives of the people. It is ruled by a
strict hierarchy, which has governed the cycle of the entire existence of the blacks. It is a place where all human relationships were seen as social rather than personal. Helen as a young girl became a witness to one such incident where she along with her father had gathered one Sunday at Mrs. Ockert’s house where for the first time she hears the word “strike” as the poor black mine boys had gathered to protest against the low quality food served to them at the mine, however the issue is solved without any trouble, “Well, yes, it was, really. They didn’t refuse to work, but they wouldn’t eat; that’s a strike, too” (30). Gramsci believed that:

\[ T \]he workers are no longer helpless particles of dust in the chaos of capitalist society…. In place of their pain and suffering they now have a lucid awareness of their rights, and their humility and resignation of just a short time ago has become a will to fight. (Selections from Political Writings 10)

It showed that the policies related to development are always promoted by a minority of powerful whites rather then the majority of powerless blacks. The miners do not have the exemption to either accept or reject the new economic condition those policies produced. The “strike” incidence reminded her father of 1922 strike of white miners which was more violent and destructive in its nature “when there were shots in the streets of Atherton, and my grandmother, his mother, had stayed shut up in her little house for days, until the commando of burghers came riding in to restore order” (30). Stephen Clingman traces the strike as “the largest single stoppage in South African history up to that time, involving 50,000 men, closing down nine mines and partially paralyzing twelve others” (29-30).

It is clear that exploitative practices in every domain were dominant in South Africa. The trade unions were given political expression, which bore the burden of the internal aggression. The novel indicates the class categorization as intrinsic to the white that is interconnected with racism. The mine in the novel is owned by the white class and the whites are distinctively in place of control whereas poor Afrikaners work as their subordinates. The novel represents the phase of social and cultural change; a world based economically on mining and culturally became a symbol of colonial rule and immigrant
settlement led to the growth of industrial economy, which in turn dispersed a sophisticated social and cultural practice. The lowest among the race charts are the Jews who run the concession stores or as Helen’s mother puts it, “someone brought up among all the dirt and the kaffirs” (192). In the words of Stephen Clingman, “Gordimer gives us a valuable insight into some of the daily realities of labour relations on the Witwatersrand in the 1930s and 1940s” (30).

Helen’s entry into University life exposes her to another side of life, where:

[T]he university was the one place in all Johannesburg and one of the few places in all South Africa where a black girl could wash her hands in the same place as a white girl, and this fact, so much more intelligently than the pronouncement that there was no colour bar, took some getting used to for both the African students and the white. (99-100)

Within the novel is a strong engrossment on a local Jewish world. Nadine Gordimer herself belonged to a Jewish background. It is Helen’s interaction with Joel Aaron that she gets to know of another world, a world entirely different from hers in terms of race and culture. It is in the middle-class world of her parents, she comes across the fact that how Jews are looked down upon, by Christians. Her mother tries to maintain a distance from Joel, and her father’s attitude towards him is someone who comes from a different background, which is completely opposite to their culture. In his conversation with Joel he use phrases like “your people” and “the customs of your people” to show that he treats him (Joel) as an outsider (115). These words are enough to make Joel conscious of his individuality as a Jew, however, his reply showed him as the “cultured native” (115).

It is this very difference of nationality and culture that existed between the minds of Helen and Joel. Likewise, in an effort to germinate a healthy friendship with Mary Seswayo, a black African, Helen wishes her to be “less harassed and flattened” (168) in their communication with each other. Nevertheless, for Mary, going through the racial biasness in Helen’s English society is too stark to brush off as emotions are denied to her. The black people of her community are often equated with cannibals as they are “used to
There has been no change in their ideas of diet, like Mary. Everywhere in the white society Mary is made conscious of her position as a black person who can never be treated at par with the people of the white society. The novel exhibits the racist ideology of the government, which maintained that in order to receive education the black Africans will have to discard their native life and language in order to get the status of civilized people. Both Joel and Mary are facing the hostility of the white race because of their dissimilar culture. Kate A. F. Crehan remarks that even Antonio Gramsci believes that it is the unjustifiable notion of superiority on the part of one class over the other:

Culture is something quite different. It is organization, disciplining of one’s inner self, a coming to terms with one’s own personality; it is the attainment of a higher awareness, with the aid of which one succeeds in understanding one’s own historical value, one’s own function in life, one’s own rights and obligations. (74)

Gordimer’s delineation of the Aaron family has a sense of fullness and strangeness where Helen herself discover the contrast between ungroomed, average furnishings of Aaron’s home with the neat, speckles atmosphere of her own home which reflects a good deal of her mother’s housekeeping skills. She says about Joel Aaron’s home:

It was not spring inside the Aaron’s house. The air of a matured distilled indoor season, an air that had been folded away in cupboards with old newsprint and heavy linen, cooked in ten-year’s pots of favourite foods, burned with the candles of ten-years’ Friday nights, rested in the room with its own sure permeance, reaching every corner of the ceiling, passing into the dimness of passages with the persistence of a faint, perpetual smoke. (108)

Helen at once realizes the distinction between the two different religious worlds. It is her familiarity with Joel Aaron that brings her to realize her own aligning as a white in Africa in the true view. People from her race that have ruled South Africa without having any cultural roots; feel the need of returning back to their place. This dilemma which is mutual to both Gordimer and Helen as a white comes from the recognition that
“I don’t know why it should be, for people like us, really: no roots in the real Africa - you can’t belong to the commercial crust thrown up by the gold mines” (143) taking birth, “on the superimposed Africa, this rickety thing, everybody’s makeshift Europe. These Reef towns are hardly more than putting up a shack and making it look like home in some other country” (143), as Aaron says, identifying this cultural alienation that Atherton is just a makeshift Europe or America which has no South African identity at all. “I think about it often. It comes up whenever I think of going away, and coming back to Africa … I correct myself; not Africa, 129 Fourth Street, Atherton” (144).

Helen’s intimacy with Joel does not last long, making the wall of their relationship collapse before the time could take its toll. The current and tenacious engrossment of Nadine Gordimer with the South African society is clearly discernable in *The Lying Days*. According to Dominic Head, this includes, “first, her own micropolitics, or politics of the body in which trans-racial relationships challenge the fundamental principle of apartheid: and, second … an extended fictional deliberation on the geopolitics of apartheid and its policies of spatial control” (XII). It has a clear attestation in Helen’s relation with a black Afrikaner, Mary Seswayo. Helen’s first interaction with Mary Seswayo takes place in the cloakroom at Johannesburg railway station where a black girl can sit with the white. Helen even shares her feelings with Joel that, “I want to talk to her as I might want to talk to any other student. I don’t see why I should be debarred by my white skin?” (119). For Gordimer, like Helen, “a contact between a white and a black simply as human beings - nothing else” (120).

Getting to know Mary Seswayo through the days at the University was like blandishing a small timid animal to come forward into the hand. Though, both Helen and Mary were associates of the same English tutorial class, still both remained aloof from each other. There was muddiness in Helen as she puts in her words, “We were afraid of each other, she of the lion-mask of white mastery that she saw superimposed on my face, I of the mouse-mask of black submission with which I obscured hers” (123).

Both Helen and Mary’s education is hindered by the want of cultural setting. As a mission African, Mary’s idea of the white world is similar with Helen’s, supported by
“the standard six reader and Galilee nearly two thousand years ago” (130). Helen’s discovery of the poverty of the place where Mary lives is explicitly condescending:

The siding was littered with bitten-out hunks of stale bread swarming with ants, filthy torn papers and rags clung to the boles of the gum trees, and the smell of stale urine, which had been there as long as I could remember, came up from the weeds along the road. (186)

Helen is not able to comprehend the wide distance that exists in the every day living of her and Mary’s life. It even embarrassed her to find Mary’s humble nature towards her. She felt like a “bossy missionary presenting a bible to a little savage who has no shoes and chronic hookworm” (139). Helen remarks:

The life of an African - especially of her generation, pressed into a sort of ghetto vaccum between the tribal life that is forgotten and the white man’s life that is guessed at - it’s the practical narrow life of poverty. All the kinds of poverty there are: money, privacy, ideas. (130)

Helen through her friendship with Mary tries to win her confidence. Both of them speak to each other as equals. Helen strongly condemns her mother’s behaviour for not allowing Mary to enter their house for sometime. Here, a conflicting voice can be heard inside Helen. Her friendship with Mary is seen as a taboo, which ultimately results in ending of their companionship, where a black and a white can never have any correspondence with the changing outlines of living. Helen tries to free herself from the effects of her mother’s ethnocentric and racist attitudes that are hard to digest. The observation about the misery, the subjugation, and the wretched conditions that has enclosed them to a large extent fills Helen with contempt and disrespect towards the whites, the superficiality that has become a part of their lives. Helen is disappointed like many white South Africans who are looking for a revolutionary change, but in veracity there is nothing, which these handful whites could do to ameliorate the pathetic condition of the blacks because of cultural differences and misunderstanding. The people of her race believe that their culture is more superior to that of the blacks. Even Helen can only effectively engage with her own country after “emerging from the trappings of colour-
consciousness that were a ‘natural’” to the white South Africans “as the walls of home and school” (110). South Africa, as Gordimer puts it, has strictly shown political evolution of race and class domination that becomes politically speaking, ‘naturalized’ for most of the people of the white race. Though South Africans may have shown antagonism against the government in power, still they have come to accept their system of politics. Stephen Clingman says, “Thus for most people growing up, and this includes blacks as well as whites, it becomes almost in the natural order of things that whites should rule and be wealthy and that blacks should be poor and be workers” (30).

Helen is overtaken by an invariant hope to give up her own white world to snuggle the other. She does not want to be a part of their ostentatious behaviour, as she herself does not endorse the similar feelings for the blacks. Like Helen, even Joel felt that for people like them, there are no roots in real Africa. They can’t belong to the commercial crust created by the gold mines. Even young Helen, whose ethical motives are still taking shape, strongly disapproves of her mother’s remarks made regarding the poor black maids as “worse than a native” (119). As the novel progresses, Helen develops a rift with her mother on disapproving her love for Joel Aaron, a poor Jewish boy and turning down to accommodate in Mary Seswayo as a paid guest.

In most households separate eating utensils are kept for the black Africans from the common family pool. Helen’s mother would often stop a stranger in their house from using their maid Anna’s utensils. For her blacks are not good enough to be treated as guests. She does not hesitate in comparing Mary with Anna. Helen reprimands Mary by saying that “the fact that you’re both black is irrelevant” (203). Mary, however, does not agree on this and says that, “there are so few of me. We’re still exceptions, not a class. To your mother and Anna, I belong with Anna” (203).

This made Helen realize, that, “Because I was white I continually forgot that Mary was not allowed here” (167). To this Mary says that, “If I am good enough, I’m good enough not to go where I’m not wanted” (202). For Mary, she is an “exception, not a class” (203). To Marx and Engels:
All societies in the history have been class societies, societies composed of contending and conflicting classes from freeman and slave, patrician and plebian, lord and serf, guildmaster and journeyman to bourgeoisie and proletariat in the epoch of capitalism which have stood in constant opposition to one another. (243)

The class struggle has always been an experience for every native South African because of the ‘human’ immaturity of some section of the population. Cruelty and absence of understanding are two characteristics that have passed from a childish mushiness to the most merciless and bestial savagery. Gordimer dwells on apartheid’s violence and exploitation in all its forms. State organized a systematized manner of harassment of black Africans. According to Dominic Head, “Helen’s experiences in the novel do teach her that the individual body is the smallest identifiable site of both political repression and political growth” (39). Amidst the political and cultural instability of the country, Helen developed her first awakening to love, her mother’s widowed friend Mrs. Koch’s son, Ludi Koch. However, her first sexual experience is short lived and the affair fails to live long. Also Helen’s failure in resisting to her mother’s authority over her decisions shows that she has no voice of her own, and is once again trounced:

In between I sat in a kind of listless daze, as if I were not there at all. I kept thinking: I want to go away. But there was no indignation, no strength in the idea anymore. I did not want to be at home, but there was nowhere else I wanted to be, either. (194)

Joel Aaron in the novel acts as a kind of moral conscience for a perplexed Helen, helping to nurture Helen’s evolving political consciousness. In one scene Helen and Joel go on a drive to a beautiful spot known as Macdonald’s kloof and here Helen excogitate on questions of racial conflict, observing that Mary Seswayo “is a girl, the discovery came, like me” (139). Helen’s contact with Joel assists her to explore an advance dimension, which she could not notice in her petty-bourgeois family.

Towards the middle of the novel, Helen after leaving her parent’s house has come to stay with the white liberal Marcuses in Johannesburg. She calls them “our kind of
kind” (209) as she could easily connect with their culture and style of thinking and begins:

[T]o see the natives all around not as furniture, trees, or the casual landmarks of a road through which my life was passing, but as faces; the faces of old men, of girls, of children: ever since they had stepped up all around me, as they do, silently, at some point in the life of every white person who lives in South Africa. (212)

The way Marcuses lived their lives showed that despite the atmosphere of tension, which has engulfed the entire country, has not cast its ill effects on certain lives within the country. It is here that Helen for the first time experiences a change in her outlook towards fellow human beings. According to Helen, every white South African is carrying the burden of an inherited personal culpability, whether the white community accepts or rejects the reality but the truth is they have done wrong to the black community in the country. However, like an obscure pain it is difficult to make confession and the blame of misgiving is always kept at a distance. At the Marcuse’s place Helen meets Paul for the first time and become friends with him. Paul and his parents were an exception, unlike Helen’s parents who made distinction between the people of different races; Paul and his family remained on affectionate terms.

Helen’s friendly acquaintance with Paul Clark, a liberal activist thrust her to a decision of living with him. Slowly, Helen is drawn nearer to Paul and begins to feel for him. Amidst the political imbalances in the country their love for each other begins to bloom as she mentions in the novel that, “I think I started then the strangest of journeys which is never completed, the desire to understand another in his deepest being” (235).

Helen, like Gordimer, feels guilty of being a white and takes it as her responsibility of doing something for the black residents of her society. Every white South African writer inherits this guilt. Helen thinks of, “The slow corrosive guilt, a guilt personal and inherited, amorphous as the air and particular as the tone of your own voice, which, admitted or denied, is in all white South Africans” (212).
This slow corrosive guilt, which both Gordimer and Helen feel, is the outcome of the so many kinds of exploitation and suppression of the poor blacks by the people of her race and class. It is evident that these people are denied of their basic rights. Her easy connectivity with the natives makes her feel that she is one of them and not remote from them. As Stephen Clingman states, “Helen claims this guilt appears in all white South Africans” (31).

The backdrop of the novel gives the most sensational spatial envisions which exemplify Helen’s evolving ‘racial consciousness.’ Helen’s engagement with the thought of spatial stipulation as a political issue is definite through her concern for Mary Seswayo. The panorama in which Charles and Helen drive Mary home to the Mariastad location where she is living comes as a culture shock for the two whites. The polluting smoke coming out of shanty houses is a permanent feature, the many voices of the children forming a single shout proposes the disorder. There is a unity of a common experience of repression, and it is clear here of the integrity required for a stringent political action and there should be a unified ‘shout’ against the injustice meted out to the blacks. It is significant that, in counterpoint to this shout, Charles and Helen are both attenuated to silence by the strange experience of the township: they both “stopped talking, as people do when they feel they may have lost their way” (171-72). This incident is suggestive of a guilt stricken conscious, of an implicit awareness of white complicity in the material manifestation of subjugation. As Dominic Head put forward, “Perhaps these images are a little clumsy, especially the suggestion of an emerging black political voice which silences the whites; but the politics of the geography give the scene an extra dimension and importance” (43).

Mary’s disappearance into one of the houses makes Helen imagine the inside position of Mary’s house simply because there is uniformity in the squalor and compression of the entire location of Mariastad. Nonetheless, there is nothing to be afraid of these people; there was no threat in their shouts or their looks. Like their hovels, their bodies were plainly stripped of softness, of reserve and “they only moved or cried out in one need or another, like beasts” (175). Helen was scared of seeing these pathetic figures in their awfulness. After having discovered the condition of the house, in which Mary
lives, Helen is filled with remorse, it is because the white people of her community are responsible for making their lives worse than animals. These people are forced to live like slaves in their own country and serve their vindictive white masters who believe in annihilating the indigenous culture and society.

The people from the white community see these black Africans not only as morally inferior, but also as biologically inferior. They consider Africans as a race, which is suited only to enslavement. The novel explores the drawbacks of racism and oppression. The Africans are not only dark in complexion; there is darkness in their lives also. The white men who hang on to their supremacy address these blacks as “Come on, you bastards!” (337). Helen imagines that, “It is always surprising to find how much darker an African township is at night; far darker than anywhere else where there are houses, and people are living” (330).

By describing the impact which racial discrimination has cast on the lives of her characters, she exhibits an indiscriminate examination of a society where all lives have been overpoweringly affected by the political and culturally supported racial discrimination and subjugation. Antonio Gramsci argues that culture, politics, and economic are organized in a strong relationship of mutual exchange with each other, a perpetually shifting network of influence.

It is not only in spatial sequestration that apartheid encroaches. The overriding arm of state legislation interferes fiercely even in private lives and impinges into bedrooms. The Nationalist’s victory in 1948 had opened the path for the Mixed Marriages Act, which completely banned mixed marriages and considered it a punishable crime for white and black man and woman to live together. Paul describes the arrest of the mixed race couple in bed by the police as morally wrong because he himself has come face to face with such a happening when he along with Helen is disrupted in an attempt to counterfeit a private world of intimacy. This commandment was implemented with a great deal of savagery, an essential component of the new Nationalist policy. Earlier the hard words in Parliament were sufficient to hit the majority of Africans but
now the Nationalist party after coming to power has made every moment of their lives horrendous. After coming to power The Nationalist party made:

[A]partheid in public transport and buildings, the ban on mixed marriages, the suppression of communism bill, the language ordinance separating Afrikaans and English-speaking children in schools, the removal of colored voters from the common electoral roll and the setting aside of the Supreme Court judgment that made this act illegal. (258)

The impact of political change on individual lives is not direct; but it did affect the joy or sorrow of people’s lives. If any change in the policy of government puts a person “into a concentration camp” (258), then the immersion with politics will be equal to one’s own health. This phase saw the end of the erstwhile official thinking of ‘trusteeship,’ where whites acted as the guardians of their uncultured fellow black natives, which is now changed into the more advanced concept of racial superiority, where white man holds the topmost position and a black one is at the lowest place.

With the coming of the ‘Fascist Nationalist’ to power, Helen says:

The moral climate of guilt and fear and oppression chilled through to the bone, almost as if the real climate of the elements had changed, the sun had turned away from South Africa, bringing about actual personality changes that affected even the most intimate conduct of their lives. (258)

In Parliament cabinet ministers speak of the natives as “Kaffirs,” the ministers supported the conservation of the “purity of white races of South Africa” (260). It is considered as the consecrated obligation of the Afrikaner nation to keep itself un tarnished. Every Afrikaner felt cavernous horror of hopelessness that resulted in irate, peculiar, and extraneous gush of rebellion. The Nationalist political party’s schema was to humiliate them. They openly gave tongue to racial purity and white supremacy and “The Africans had always been kept outcaste; now they began to feel it, to feel themselves outcast in their very features and voices” (260). Stephen Clingman postulates that, “The deepest feeling of \textit{The Lying Days} … is responding not only to the Nationalist
government but to the movement for black liberation itself, which, for special reasons, causes it an almost equal unease” (36).

Paul as a welfare officer mostly has seen the blacks in trouble and rarely in delight. Yet in their wretched and uninhabitable lives they never raised their criterion of expectation, they were nothing but human silt, a big waste, which is cast out by the inescapable pressure of urban life and “yet by the city’s guilt and conscience is kept alive” (240). There was severe shortage of housing for Afrikaans as the old locations have already reached the bursting point. Despite their contribution, they are forced to live in destitute, as they do not have houses to live, cannot afford a decent living. The cruel white masters did not value their skills, labour, and could not come above subsistence level. Paul was working for the people who “were not the normal human wastage of a big industrial city, but a whole population, the entire black-skinned population on whose labour the city rested” (240).

Paul knew that the Nationalist government would take no action in providing new houses; even the Africans did not earn enough to afford houses suitable to their income. However, any decision by the government in providing housing facilities to the Africans will ultimately result in an uproar by the whites. Paul who wanted to help the Africans is told to stay out of the internal politics of the country and:

[A]ll day long he [Paul] heard the pleading, argument, cajolery, resentment of thousands of Africans desperate for homes—all quite useless; there were 1,100 houses for 20,000 families…. No new houses for Africans had been built in Johannesburg for seventeen years. The old “locations,” long ago filled to bursting point, simply went on overflowing onto the veld in squatters’ encampments of scrap iron and mud. (298-99)

Every part of the white city, east, west, north, south, would raise garboil at the proposal of a new township for the natives. Helen thinks that the poor blacks can manumit themselves along with making their lives a bit more endurable. For Helen, both University and mine are deceptive places. The world of mine is related to human conflict which is the actual condition of the South African society and the University is a place
where giving respect to someone from a low race is incertitude as “all this remained in one’s hand, like a shining new instrument that has not been put to its purpose” (242). She sees Paul “sitting over books and tracts about the methods of passive resistance that Gandhi and Nehru had used in India” (299). Nadine Gordimer seeks guidance from India in dealing with the ubiquitous situation overriding South Africa. Paul soon realizes that he is becoming a tool of a policy of systematic oppression. As Helen puts it, “He cannot lose, and he cannot win. He scarcely knows any more what to hope for” (300).

Another sensational example of the indecency of the privileged white class in South Africa comes upon the May Day riot occurrence in the novel. The scene comes out as an exemplary interpretation of a bigger racial reality that is difficult to modify by ameliorative efforts to bring wellbeing. Helen becomes apprehensive for Paul’s safety when she comes to know that he is working with a friend from ANC in one of the black townships. Helen along with Laurie, a white friend of Paul set out by car in search of Paul. In the township they come in person with the public violence. Their car gets trapped among troublemakers and horror struck Helen follows the scene that spreads out in her presence. The shooting and killing of a black rioter who ultimately falls to the ground in front of her eyes enervates her completely. Even the state police handled such a critical issue brutally, shooting various rioters whereas the Nationalist government praised them for their courage. It is the “poverty and frustration that gave rise to the riots and which exist, unchanged” (339).

Though, Helen thinks that she is fighting actively in order to bring change, but like Paul she is a mere spectator. “Helen’s unhurt and refuge position inside the car becomes a symbol of her alienation from the world of realism” (Clingman 39). This painful experience ruminates Gordimer’s place as a white writer in her society. Despite Helen’s sympathy with the marginalized natives, her belonging to the class of whites is seen as a symbol of horror. She feels she is omitted from the society to which she belongs and takes the step of parting her place. Also, Helen is not able to wash away the traumatic memory of the rioter’s death that becomes one of the reasons to leave South Africa. Paul goes on his own way leaving Helen with a broken heart. In a sense, he can be rightly called as a mirror image of Helen’s own disturbed mind, which is not able to connect
with the practicality of South African realism. This incident has a striking influence in Helen’s decision to depart from South Africa. The novel showcases Helen and Paul’s relationship, profound and ardent, becoming paralyzed. Barbara Temple-Thurston regards it as, “The unavoidable impact of broad political shifts on the most intimate aspects of our personal lives” (17).

Another novel, which distinctly brings out the issue of race and culture, is Alan Paton’s famous work, *Cry the Beloved Country* (1948). The novel meticulously depicts the unrighteous effects of racial oppression of black people of South African society by the white colonial masters. The whites in the novel are afraid to give up their racial prejudices and the social structure they have grown accustomed to. The writer has shed light to an extremely imperative aspect of apartheid, which is the division of the two races as Helen, in *The Lying Days*, finds disparity in the University. Similarly, Kumalo, the chief protagonist in *Cry the Beloved Country* finds distinction in the court where the whites go from one passage and the blacks go from another passage. However, like Helen and Paul there are some people who are against this practice. In both the novels, the black and the white have different places to live in, with diverse cultures, conditions, and languages. Because of this separation the whites are living with the fear of black crimes and “They talked of criminals, of how white Johannesburg was afraid of black crimes” (51).

There is also love between the two races where priests of both the races pray and eat together. This love can also be seen in *The Lying Days*, where Helen is a friend with a black girl, Mary Seswayo. In *Cry the Beloved Country*, the two protagonists, “went into a room where a table was laid and there he met many priests, both black and white, and they sat down after a prayer and ate together” (49). Also a straight and clear divergence could be seen between the black and the white labour in the mines. The blacks as compared to the whites are paid less. The families of the black worker are poor because of the hegemony of the white to the source of production. The poor black miners because of low payment of salaries go on a strike but the problem is never solved as “The strike has come and gone. It never went beyond the mines” (134). They are not given equal treatment. Even in the letter of Kumalo to a rich white man, James Jarvis, at the end he
writes “Your faithful servant” (319). All these examples prove that there are marked similarities between the two novels. The message is common that the black race is always a follower to the white race.

Likewise, writers like Gordimer and other well-intentioned white liberals became progressively alienated and irreverent in a society plagued with apartheid. Gordimer, in spite of the jeopardy to her identity as a South African writer, decided to stay and carry on with her fight against menace, which is created by the apartheid in the country. Helen later decides that she belongs to South Africa and bidding farewell to her native place like her Jewish friend Joel is not a prudent decision. She hears “some little native minstrels, singing as they padded along in the rain” (376) and at once knows that she is coming back to her land.

The novel has a deep political significance. It shows how a bad political system of a country can upset the entire society thereby affecting the human relationships by dividing them in terms of race and class. Helen’s love affair with Joel Aaron and Paul Clark represents how love proves to be a failure in terms of a solution to the dissonance between races and classes as well as politically. Love is a symbol of integration, but in the case of Helen, it brings in insulation and segregation. Even in its explicit form, between Helen and Paul, love instead of blooming, fades away whereas the sub-plot of the novel grapples with a subdued love affair between Helen and Joel Aaron that never comes to realization. It becomes clear that love cannot be ordained and it comes only from acceptance.

As Helen is never exposed to the African culture, her communication with Mary Seswayo, a black girl whom she met at the university, the house-servant Anna and distinctive African characters takes place only in English, irrespective of their linguistic competence. Helen’s communication with black characters mostly functions at the level of a master-servant discourse due to gravely limited social and cultural contact because of her fear of having no influence of South African languages on her. She suffers from both linguistic and cultural alienation. She is reprobated of being an outsider despite being encircled by autochthonic African languages and cultures. In this novel essential black
voices remain suppressed, which would otherwise have enriched the narratives. As Dominic Head concludes:

This results in an indeterminacy and ambiguity about the stage Helen Shaw reaches at the novel’s end. This air of uncertainty affects the formal effects and devices of the novel itself, indicating that Gordimer is already making headway in her pursuit of appropriate forms to encompass her message of requisite cultural and political change. (36)

_The Lying Days_ indicates that Gordimer’s novels cannot gratifyingly showcase South Africa without taking into consideration the linguistic and cultural beliefs that affect the political status of the country. It is the racial barrier created by the white masters who are preventing the cross-cultural interaction. The principle of acceptance attained by the protagonist in the novel cannot be considered as a superior thing in the race and class context as this principle imply some political ambiguities. The governing nature of apartheid state falls heavy on the principle of acceptance. Helen and Joel’s love affair could not reach its summit because they accepted the reality that both belong to different religions and culture. Joel is a Jew and Helen comes from the Christianity background, their union will not be accepted by the class-ridden society of South Africa.

_The Lying Days_ discloses Gordimer’s intuitive sense of the upheaval South Africa experienced in the thirties and forties as an outcome of speedy industrialization and the national party’s ascension to power. Gordimer very deftly shows the kind of political pressures existing in South Africa. Stephen Clingman records her as saying:

Whites among themselves are shaped by their peculiar position, just as black people are by theirs. I write about their private selves; often, even in the most private situations, they are what they are because their lives are regulated and their mores formed by the political situation. You see, in South Africa, society is the political situation. To paraphrase, one might say (too often), ‘politics is character in SA.’ (10)
She attempts to deal with various political questions in her novel. *The Lying Days*, through Helen, establishes Gordimer’s strong personal aversion to apartheid. She herself says as Stephen Clingman quotes, “My novels are anti-apartheid, not because of my personal abhorrence of apartheid, but because the society that is the very stuff of my work reveals itself … If you write honestly about life in South Africa, apartheid damned itself” (12). The racial problems prove too grave in the novel; Helen and her friends try to run from them. Paul Clark is hopeless in his work, the Marcuses shift to some other suburban house, Joel Aaron leaves the country in order to settle in Israel, and Isa Welsh turns to “writing intensely indigenous South African books from the self-imposed exile of England, America or Italy” (158). None of the characters, in short, proceed in their endeavor to counterfeit a new South African Society. John Cooke says that the, “Colonial enclaves like the mine at the novel’s opening become the only inhabitable territory for Helen and her friends” (59).

Helen in an effort to attain political awareness and responsibility and to secure a place in South African society breaks away from the racial and sexual conventional life. She realizes that her problematic relationship with disdainful Paul Clark has merely left her “cooking a man’s breakfast and keeping my mouth shut” (320). When Paul once complains that she is becoming a rotten wife when his meal is late. Helen discovers that her relationship with Paul is coming to an end and decides to leave South Africa and move to Europe. Three days before her departure, she meets Joel who is also leaving for Israel where she tells him:

“I envy you. A new country. Oh, I know it’s poor, hard, but a beginning. Here there’s only the chaos of a disintegration. And where do people like us belong. Not with the whites screaming to hang onto white supremacy. Not with the blacks - they don’t want us. So where? To land up like Paul with a leg and an arm nailed to each side? Oh, I envy you, Joel. And I envy you your Jewishness.” … “Because now I’m homeless and you’re not. The wandering Jew role’s reversed. South Africa’s a battleground; you can’t belong on a battleground. So the accident of your Jewish birth gives you the excuse of belonging somewhere else.” (359)
Joel gives righteous advice to Helen that she must accept her parents for what
they are instead of holding complaints against them. Mary Seswayo also earlier in the
novel, talks about the want for acceptance, when Helen fell into a conflict with her
parents on the issue of providing space for Mary to live. Also, Helen subsequently
accepts Joel for what he is: a Jew; she accepts the various oppositions which life holds.
Thus the novel displays distinctive human traits, not only enduring contradictions but
also celebrating them. With the acceptance of Mary Seswayo, a black girl, as a human
being by Helen, it can be said that Helen has won over apartheid. This credence shows
how one can prevail over the wicked effects of racial segregation that is the primary
subject of the apartheid.

Gordimer in this autobiographical novel has transferred into Joel Aaron the
equivocalness that she herself has faced as a Jew in South Africa. Helen scorns the
middle class background of the mine and the falsity of her friends who consider that
something is being done to right the wrongs. Helen’s society is condemned by this belief:

In a way, it seems right that one shouldn’t be happy in South Africa, the way
things are here. It seems to me to be that as well; a kind of guilt that although you
may come to a compromise with your own personal life, you can’t compromise
about the larger things ringed outside it. It’s like - like having a picnic in a
beautiful graveyard where the people are buried alive under your feet. I always
think locations are like that: dreary, smoking hells out of Dante, peopled with live
men and women. - I can’t stand any more of it. If I can’t be in it, I want to be free
of it. Let it be enough for me to contend with myself. (366)

Helen comes to realize that in contemporary South Africa the chances for
violation of personal liberty are numerous. Against the ascension of racial intolerance
Helen is finally forced to admit that her attempt at tolerance is doomed to go wrong. As
the space for personal existence becomes smaller every liberal like Helen, is forced to
face restriction as a result of which she opts for exile, a resolve that has confronted
Gordimer herself. Helen’s earlier choice of exile proves that in a country like South
Africa there are established and indispensable discriminations made by people with
racialist thoughts. She begins to ponder that her exile from the country would prove to be an act of liberation, an escape from the society inflicted with the disease of racism, which has forced the natives to give up their culture and freedom and lead a life of confinement where no rescue is seen to be arriving from anywhere. However, towards the close of the novel Helen, like Gordimer, decides to stay in South Africa with a hope and sees her present disenchantment as the opening of a new life rather than an end:

My mind was working with great practicalness, and I thought to myself: Now it’s all right. I’m not practicing any sort of self-deception any longer. And I’m not running away from - the risk of love? The guilt of being white? The danger of putting ideals into practice? - I’m not running away from now because I know I’m coming back here. (376)

Gordimer’s fiction is embedded in a racially stereotyped perspective of the world, one that concurs with the period of white command and prerogative. Her fiction bears a witness to several changes and acts as an opposition to apartheid politics. Through Helen, Gordimer speaks the mind of a young white woman struggling in a discriminatory racial and patriarchal society. As Stephen Clingman says:

*The Lying Days* reveals just how ‘exclusive’ white South African racism has been, in so far as it literally excludes blacks from its consciousness; but also it gives an indication of the degree to which ‘racism’ has existed within the white world itself. (28)

Blacks in the novel are seen as an object that create moral or human problems for white as they have no voice of their own so they cannot protect themselves from the allegations imposed on them. Jews also recall their miserable condition in Europe and even in South Africa as they have been through the convulsion of a fascist-capitalist society which is similar to the one in which they are earning their living at present. Here also, the Nationalist party is seen as a replica of the fascist party of Europe. The Jews want to come out of their old bitter memories of concentration camps by “Forgetting one bad memory, they ‘remember’ a worse one: they want the darkness, the instinct to hide
away, to meet secretly and talk in whispers, of their brothers who survived concentration camps” (226).

The novel was written at the time when black averment in the country was reaching its culmination. Black workers were becoming more aware and demanding which led to a sequent of illegal strikes in 1940s. The Nationalist government used all kinds of inhibitory measures to put the rebellion under control.

The Africans had, of course, more to fear from the Nationalists than anybody. But they themselves felt that they had had so little to hope for under the Smuts Government that all the change had done was to substitute a negative despair for a positive one: lack of hope, for fear. (260)

The Nationalists strictly implemented the policy of apartheid, thereby dividing the entire country socially and economically into two races, blacks and whites. The anger among the black Africans was growing, the slogan of non-cooperation with the whites started to gain force. There is a feeling of rebellion against the restriction in the society. Even those Africans who have European friends also came in open support of the movement and politically protested. Various intellectuals from all corners of the country raise the voices that what sort of society we are constructing “where the gaps between the white Haves and the black Have-nots are shamelessly widened everyday?” (338-39). Helen ever since her childhood, witnessed the racial separation and the only way for a man to survive in South Africa is to fight against the oppression of the white Africans.

The blacks did not have any source of leisure activities. “The only pleasure allowed to Africans were old Wild West films (specially chosen as suitable for the primitive mind)” (271) they are addressed as “Filthy beasts” (283) and were tied to the clutches of poverty from which the white master will not set them free:

The poverty of the Africans was a wheel to which they were tied; turn, and it will run its weight over them again…. And if you cut them free of the wheel, that will be the end of white civilization…. Anyway, white civilization is doomed, said others…. (287)
Judie Newman apart from various political pressures examines the increasing weight of the patriarchy on Helen’s development, where a female ambition is controlled by a man. Newman compares Helen’s doubtful nature with the confidence of a young boy who travelled through the African concession stores “with the ease of someone finding his way about his own house, and dodged through the mine boys as if they were the fowls” (12). Paul’s attitude of devaluing Helen is seen when she struggles with an essay on George Eliot—“what’s addling your little brain now?” (242). Paul even ridicules Helen’s encounter with the township riots, which she sees from the car. The white male in Gordimer’s novel loses the respect of the white female, because he is unable to fulfill his role of protecting the white woman leaving her alone to her own rescue. An excessively rigid hierarchy regulates the mine estate on which Helen attains her youth. The mine is representative of the social and economic lives of the people of black and white class. However, relations between black and white on the mine have not been elaborated. For Helen, who had grown up all her life among strangers, the Africans “whose language in my ears had been like the barking of dogs or the cries of birds” (185). It is the absence of social and linguistic touch that reflects Helen’s limited cross-cultural interaction.

Gordimer gives a vivid description of the world in which Helen lives. The mine estate in Atherton has a great deal of autobiographical resonances. The account of life at the mine estate, Helen’s strong predilection for the books that her mother provided from the public library, all have a connection with Gordimer’s own childhood. Helen comes to understand that there existed two worlds, one that belong to the whites and the other comprised of the blacks which was ugly and unfamiliar to her. She even points out that:

Yet now as I stood in this unfamiliar part of my own world knowing and flatly accepting it as the real world because it was ugly and did not exist in books (if this was the beginning of disillusion, it was also the beginning of colonialism: the identification of the unattainable distant with the beautiful, the substitution of “overseas” for “fairyland”) I felt for the first time something of the tingling fascination of the gingerbread house before Hansel and Gretel, anonymous, nobody’s children, in the woods. (11)
Helen is acquainted with the class barrier, which does not allow the blacks to share a common culture with their white counterparts. As Frantz Fanon expresses that, “In order to assimilate and to experience the oppressor’s culture, the native has had to leave certain of his intellectual possessions in pawn” (49). The novel is flooded with picaresque details and lyrical impression. As Helen goes straight into the road she is mesmerized by the nature’s beauty. She feels:

The sun pressed gently warm down on my shoulders as I walked in the road. Drifts of brown pine needles glistened in a wavering wash; sloping toward the sides, they were bedded down firmly, inches deep, beneath my feet. I stepped on an old orange peel, sucked out and dried so long that it crushed like the shell of a beetle. Tiny gray winter birds bounced on the telephone wires, flicked away. From the long gardens of the staff houses, doves sounded continuously like the even breathing of a sleeper. (6)

Gordimer’s description of the Mine Estate, Natal, Macdonald’s Kloof and other places are fascinating, thus bringing out the poet inside her:

In the gum plantation that bordered the Mine property I came to a stop beneath one of the firm trunks and stood patiently peeling off the curling bark. It was tough, fibrous and dry to my tugging, and it came away with a crackle and a tear, leaving a smooth gray surface soothing beneath my palm. The trunk was hard and cool, like the pillars at the library. I sat down on a stone that had a secret cold of its own and began to pull off the scab on my knee. (7)

*The Lying Days*, has an episodic structure and all the events including Helen’s childhood Years at the Mine, her holiday and sexual arousing at Natal, her ever continuing relationship with Joel Aaron, her experience at the University where she meets Mary Seswayo, a black girl, her stay at the Marcuses, her love affair with Paul, various events with the coming of the Nationalist government in 1948, her decision to go on exile to Europe and finally returning back to South Africa reflects the growth of Helen’s consciousness and accretion of wisdom sapience. Stephen Clingman remarks that it is seen as a triumph of her personal life which occurs in the novel’s climax where she
realizes that, “I was twenty-four and my hands were trembling with the strong satisfaction of having accepted disillusion as a beginning rather than an end: the last and most enduring illusion; the phoenix illusion that makes life always possible” (376). But Dominic Head says that the thought of phoenix illusion, nearly the concluding paradigm of the novel gives a realistic perceptive of the limits to what a fictional narrative can attain in contributing to an alternative political future at that distinctive historical occasion. He calls *The Lying Days* as a “Novel of Learning” (48).

*The Lying Days* is a coming-of-age novel. This is where Gordimer’s characters really come to life and discover the world around them. The story is told with much-nuanced strokes, and every minute thought is picked over. All threads of emotion are freed so as to leave every negation clear. The novel does bring out rather magnificently, Gordimer’s extraordinary sensing into the unparalleled moments of various human interactions. The whole book is subtly political in nature where the novelist is exposing to the world the horrors of apartheid. It is seen that the racial superstructure presented a basic contradiction to the idea of liberalism. The apartheid state was able to keep the black population under its grip. Instead almost the entire work concentrates on the impact of apartheid on the lives of all South Africans, irrespective of colour. Even in personal life the novelist identified intimately with the black struggle and in her writing unveils the preconceptions, the tensions and strains of life in the novel and the pestiferous and vitriolic effects of the apartheid system.

Despite various flaws and ambiguities in its purpose, the novel still comes out as an aesthetic and ideological declaration. It establishes Gordimer as a South African novelist, who delves deep into the politics of black and white. She finds her sense of belonging through personal exploration. Her fiction involves author, characters, and readers in a kind of performance. It is also evident that she has a real sympathy for her homeland in the profound sense of the word. This affectively highlights the political maltreatment on the lives of average South Africans that she portrays in *The Lying Days*. Through this fiction, Gordimer urges all the young men and women to fight for their rights. The novel is about transforming a country by a novelist who has evidently transformed her writing and political viewpoint. It is crowded with insight into human
disposition and very deftly brings out the guilty conscience of the white man, the rage and the trepidation of the black man in a petrified land. Through this novel she is able to present, “the state of the liberal consciousness at this early stage in the history of modern South Africa” (Head 36).