Chapter-III

Freedom as Treason

Nadine Gordimer, whose narratives diminishes the boundaries of history and fiction has carved out a panoptic and immense work, which is her lengthiest and most complex novel till date. The novel, *A Guest of Honour*, published in 1970, is evocative of a definite realist novel, which brings out an elaborate sense of political existence. Though, she does not claim herself to be a political writer, still her narrative fiction display a clear form of political argument. Political conflict forms the centre of *A Guest of Honour*. “The writing of *A Guest of Honour* had a technically liberating effect on Gordimer” (Blamires 99). K Venkata Reddy says that, “*A Guest of Honour* is a novel of total immersions- physical, moral, social, and political. It teems with human life, with landscapes of the map and of the mind, with events and insights” (71).

According to him, “The novelist has woven an intricate tapestry whose treads are love, friendship, idealism, freedom, and betrayal” (Reddy 71). *A Guest of Honour* is of an epic proportion, for which Gordimer said that she has put everything she knew into this book. She gives voice to the future of South Africa in a foreshadowing tone as she foresees the difficulties consequent on the transference of power from the whites to the blacks. The pernicious increase of labour agitation, strikes, which take the shape of a fiery riots, vehement political unrest, and tribal in fighting, are well pictured in this novel. The political movements created an upheaval in a country, threatening to destabilize it completely. For most of her writing career under the shadow of apartheid, Gordimer repugned the overriding nature of South African reality, and that repugnance had a political importance. Gordimer avers, “I tried to write a political novel treating the political theme as personally as a love story. I tried to put flesh on what have come to be known as the dry bones of political life” (Bazin & Seymour 57).

Gordimer has given a realistic touch to this novel with a political analysis of the era. She talks of the form of the novel, “the dimension that makes it possible for us to
know all, if the novelist chooses to tell us, about the minds and souls of the people in the novel, that extra dimension that gives us, in fact, the freedom of the city of the writer’s imagination” (Nazareth 128). The novel is prepared in such a manner that it presents the writer’s imaginative feelings. *A Guest of Honour*, with such a rich and powerful theme acts as a landmark in her handling of native black Africans. It acquaints the reader with a world of extremist and revolutionary situations, interpreting the intensive tension of present day Africa. The novel points towards the fall of liberalism during the 1960s in South Africa.

The novel has its setting in some fictional republic that has just gained independence from long colonial rule having strong affinity with Central Africa, especially Zambia. It is the first time Gordimer has shifted her location outside South Africa. Her understanding of the people of the ‘Dark Continent’ is remarkable. It is her sympathy with the Africans that has made her write African novels all through her writing journey.

Moreover, *A Guest of Honour* reflects her South African political consciousness in general during the time when it was written. The novel showcased many challenges and opportunities, which came in the path to achieve political independence in the fictional country. South African critic Stephen Gray called the novel “A very powerful tour de force…. A landmark in our (South Africa’s) fictional affair” (67). He professes that “Gordimer comes out with a new kind of muscle and authority,” that “The story is an archetype of so much recent African history that it is not only riveting as a documentary in its own right, but hugely informative and relevant” (Bazin and Seymour 67-68).

The novel brings in many areas of concern, such as knowingness that the government by the blacks in the autonomous Africa has failed to provide social and political justice, that a more civilized and democratic rule should come that completely destroys the role of the white racialists in Africa. However, various principles, such as interracial marriages and friendship become irrelevant as black leaders seek to come up with their own ideology on power and try to exploit it accordingly. The novel indicates the rising force in South Africa to move beyond liberalism towards an extremist political
activity. Gordimer in a very adroit way deals with such issues in this novel and foresees the adaptation needed by the white liberal to survive in black Africa.

Through this novel she could see that the current political, social, and economic culture lacks potentiality of any kind of improvement for which more immoderate step was required to take. In this work she was trying to reach for affirmative values. Gordimer unravels the reason for choosing an English man as the protagonist:

Traveling round in Africa, I’ve become interested in white people like Bray. I think that people don’t realize how many there are; a very original and perhaps off-beat kind of white man who really survives in Africa. But it’s never the sort of person who ‘goes native’, who ‘loves’ the African; it is somebody who’s ceased to see Africans except as people whom he lives amongst who are full of the same faults as anybody else. So often, looking at people, I see circumstances becoming choice. By that I mean they become committed … they … realize that their only reality lies here in that life. And in order to live again, he accepts coming back to Africa and working here … But then he comes up against his particular liberal dilemma-how far are you to go in standing aside, in not interfering now that the people have their destiny in their own hands? When it’s no longer a business of black against white, when … there is an ideological struggle then it would seem honest for him to make a choice…. (Bazin & Seymour 69)

The basic idea of this novel is to present that a white liberal could also play an important role in the freedom struggle of a country where his companions are ruling with a heavy hand. James Bray, a European character narrates the whole story from his point of view till he meets his death and after his death it is his lover Rebecca Edwards who share his thoughts. Only the last page unwraps the point of view of other characters. In A Guest of Honour, the central figures are political men. The novel tells the story of an unspecified, newly independent African nation’s tumultuous events as visualized through the eyes of an erstwhile Colonial official, Evelyn James Bray who was expatriated from the country ten years before by the Colonial government for encouraging the ascent and emergence of the People’s Independent Party which then was insurgent. People’s
Independent Party, which is now in power, invites James Bray to be a part of the independence celebrations of the country in which he once served as Colonial administrator. Bray, as a staunch supporter of the movement for Independence believed that the country belonged to Africans and did not adopt the Colonial line of thinking that the African race is inferior. During the struggle for independence he worked with Adamson Mweta, now President, and Edward Shinza, a trade unionist. He returns to Africa for the Independence celebration of the country he helped to free as a guest of honour as “the white stranger … in a modest place of honour” (27).

The action in A Guest of Honour takes place through the final year of Bray’s life when he is invited by Mweta to be a part of the celebrations and help in the developmental task of the newly created African nation. In Africa, Bray is reconnected with the white community he left ten years before: those who welcomed freedom from British Colonial rule like Roly Dando now Attorney General, the Wentzes, proprietors of the silver rhino hotel and pub, and the Neil Bayley, principal of the University. However, Shinza is neither included in the committee of the cabinet of government ministers nor invited for the independent celebrations because of his serious differences with Mweta over what method should be adopted “to build a nation” (118). Mweta’s methods for running the government are those, which were used by his white Colonial officials. John Cooke asserts that, “Gordimer proves surprisingly deft in introducing … the large cast of characters” (134).

Bray’s stay is extended as he is “drawn helplessly and not unenjoyably into everything” (27) around him and he yields to the pressure from his long time political friend, Adamson Mweta, into accepting the “newly created post” of special educational advisor (70) in the northern district of Gala where he was posted antecedently. There he is reunited with the influential and intelligent Shinza who is living in rural banishment. Bray learns that independence, instead of bringing the two men closer, has only widened the gap between them. Bray aligns himself with the revolutionary motives of the expelled Shinza as he gets acquainted with the neo-colonialist nature of Mweta’s rule, which hoodwinks the real idea of independence. He thought that he has come back not to help “to build a nation” (118) but to witness “the symbolic attainment of something he had
believed in, willed and worked for, for a good stretch of his life” (21). Finally, Bray decides to stay on. Stephen Clingman points out that:

[T]he white man in Africa has had no image for himself other than as mentor- but soon he has to search for a new image and attempt to define new grounds for his role. For Bray finds himself confronted with a more advanced form of the same kind of dilemma he experienced as a colonial administrator; under Mweta he finds the country in the grip of a thoroughgoing neo colonialism, and he is once again faced with the prospect of historical choice. (118)

It is engrossing to find how Bray had made his earlier decision:

I understood perfectly what I was doing … when Shinza and Mweta started PIP it was something I believed in the apparent contradiction between my position as a colonial civil servant and this belief wasn’t really a contradiction at all, because to me it was the contradiction inherent in the colonial system-the contradiction that was the live thing in it, dialectically speaking, its transcendent element, that would split it open by opposing it, and let the future out-the future of colonialism was its own overthrow and the emergence of Africans into their own responsibility. I simply anticipated the end of my job. (246-47)

The novel also analyzes the worthlessness of colonial educational system that Bray comes across as an educational advisor. He noticed that the native children were sent to the colonial schools where the learning process is centered on learning of foreign cultures that did not really belong to them and created a barrier between them and their culture. He comes across a schoolteacher preparing for Cambridge O-level exams that he will most probably never pass. Teacher’s qualification is significantly worse in Africa. The questions that are given to him are completely beyond the ambit of his cultural experience, and unknown to the requirements of his social situations. Bray, then decides to bring certain reforms in the education system. The Education Department has worked towards abolishing the various woodworking and shoemaking workshops so that
everyone is able to get proper education, “the black man was no longer to be trained just sufficiently to do the white man’s odd jobs for him” (107).

He visits every length and breadth of the country; here the highly sophisticated nature of his political analysis is revealed. The political, social, and economic structures of the country are elaborated with a continuous and remarkable lucidity. Shinza shows Bray the real picture of Mweta’s democracy where political independence is granted, but economic domination continues to prevail as:

**PIP** has become a typical conservative party-hanging on wherever he can to ties with the old colonial power, western oriented, and particularist. It’s a textbook example. His democracy turns out to be the kind that guards the rights of the old corporate interests more than anyone else’s- the chiefs, religious organizations, pre colonial nations. Foreign interests. All that lot. In seven months you show which way you’re going. Its right from the start or it’ll be never. (257)

Three metropolitan based concessionaire-mining companies formed the economy of the country and with independence certain of their working strata was ‘Africanized’ which promoted Africans into positions earlier occupied only by whites. The price of this favour is the continued erosion of a major share of their profits overseas. Shinza fiercely resisted the policies of Mweta for which he has been moved out of power. “We move up into the seats of the expatriate whites, and go on earning dividends for them when they go back ‘home’ to retire … We’re exporting our iron ore at their price and buying back their steel at their price” (256).

Various agreements are made with international companies, class stratification within the so called ‘independent’ country is both build and strengthened; a local elite is created, usually with strong governmental links, however, the masses continue to remain oppressed and exploited. Within this basic division there is regional differentiation. The paradoxes and pitfalls of African leadership are brought into light through an interrogation of the escalating practice of mistreatment in newly independent countries. There is industrial unrest among workers as there was political dissatisfaction, which led to strikes and disputes. The poor working conditions and accidental deaths, which was
the straight repercussion of the colonial inheritance, created flurry among the black population of the country. The trade unions are at conflict with Mweta’s government as there is no successful opposition because the country is yet to reach a certain level of industrialization. The bourgeois, despite its efforts of reconciliation, is not strong enough to bring any considerable change:

Sociologically, the bourgeoisie did everything in its power to eradicate the fact of class conflict from the consciousness of society, even though class conflict had only emerged in its purity and became established as an historical fact with the advent of capitalism. (Lukacs 62)

It is Shinza who instigates the workers to show their antagonism against the government’s policies. Mweta admits that the government instead of inheriting them has created some of the problems and “the needs of economic development, at this stage, must prevail over all others” (309). He tries to assure the country that his government is committed to the welfare of its people and would not bargain with the demands of the mineworkers, which affects the economy of a developing nation. The novelist brings out the confusion of a newly formed government and the individuals who are ever ready to take advantage of this confusion. A Preventive Detention Bill is introduced to put the country on its feet but is not delivering favorable results.

Labour agitation burst forth, which is savagely suppressed as it tried to stand against the capitalist government. Shinza who supported the rights of the workers criticized the state’s domination. Bray who comes to work with Mweta starts supporting Shinza’s movement whose religious texts are Fanon and Nyerere, which holds that a ‘social revolution’, a major redistribution of wealth and chance must follow the political revolution of independence. Shinza enunciates, “make new lives for all those people running about not understanding where they are going” (255-56). He states that, “power [isn’t] going to be a matter of multiplying the emancipated, while the rest of the people remained a class of affranchised slaves” (258).

Gordimer gives us images of a polity whose indigenous leadership is completely disrupted by acute ideological discord. The lack of efficient cooperation between
president Mweta and his one-time ally in the independence struggle, Edward Shinza, is the major impediment to the development of the country. The root cause of this rivalry is the determined competitive power struggle over which neither of the two contestants is inclined to give ground to the other, which poses enormous peril to the survival of the polity. Mweta’s government widely employed autocratic plan of action; repressive state laws, and overnight proclamations are used to jape opponents. Mweta chooses to go with the capitalist path of development, as socialism did not appeal him much for the simple reason that he thinks that the country is not steady enough. As the country’s industry and economy is not strong enough to support socialism, he establishes that “meanwhile, subordination of the interest of the welfare of the workers to the demands of state” is for him the path to choose (373). However, Shinza wants to reveal the regime’s “false meaning of democracy that sees it in the sense of guarding the rights of the great corporate interest and the preferential retainment of ties with the former colonial power” (375). If Mweta personifies the ‘power of personality’, Shinza’s state is a ‘power of ideology’, which is the reason for the disturbance between the two. Shinza’s speech reflects his ideological conviction:

The People’s Independence Party grew from bush villages and locations in white people’s towns where villagers came to work. It grew from the workers’ movements in the mines, where the mineworkers were also people from the bush…. If we were a classless people, we are now creating a dispossessed peasant proletariat of our own. (342-43)

Along with a new political awakening Bray’s sexual awakening is also taking shape. Bray had left his wife Olivia back in Wiltshire in England. Despite their understanding that she would subsequently join him, she doesn’t, therefore, she represents the life of stagnation he has left behind. Bray’s daily encounters, and relationship with Rebecca Edwards, secretary to Mr. Aleke, the new provincial officer, represents the growth of a personal verve along with the public vitality of Bray’s rising political involvement. This intense affair with Rebecca untangles in a seamlessly natural way the complexities, contradictions, and absurdities that interlace the political and private worlds.
The novel depicts the story of a man struggling between personal and political demands. Thurston observes:

[T]he everyday behavior of her characters carries quite invisibly some of the weightiest political issues and concepts of the contemporary world is one of Gordimer’s major achievements in the novel, and it grants the novel the narrative muscle to which Bray alludes. (52)

Through this novel Nadine Gordimer is back to profoundly South African issues, but at a higher level of consideration. According, to Stephen Clingman, “A Guest of Honour is a deeply meditational novel, one that arose in circumstances requiring its form of meditation” (114). Since the hysteria of the early 1960s has come to an end, circumstances required an exhaustive revaluation of the legitimate grounds and the legitimate expectations of any renewed historical commitment. Such a kind of: Revaluation is partly what A Guest of Honour’s move into an unspecified African country is about…. Gordimer’s novels are in some sense social hypothesis: attempts, within a fictional domain, to formulate the structures and forces of social reality and their implications for personal life. (Clingman 114)

Stephen Clingman remarks that the novel’s method is not only meditational but it too is theoretical. It sets up an abstract model at a level of the typical where both social forces and subjective implication can be explored in something approaching which may be termed as ‘ideal’ conditions. It is a post-apartheid novel, which posits that history does not stop with independence, various problems and commitments will continue.

Gordimer, in this African novel, is dealing again with one of her predominant South African concerns, as Bray is a ‘White African’ like the novelist; his position becomes critical in political picture of the country. Stephen Clingman expresses that “South Africa was methodically being broken up into an interlocking system of classes and sub-classes, and dispersed and centralized elites, all in the fundamental interests of white profit and white power” (116). The façade of political independence sealed the reality of continued exploitation. Bray thought that for blacks, white men are responsible for manipulating power in a continent that they never evicted, whereas, the whites
believed that it is the tribalism and the interference of the east and the west that is to be blamed.

In search for a feasible solution to the problem of national unity, where a state of emergency has been announced by president Mweta in order to come hard on the mine workers who have gone on strike in support of their demands, Bray moves over to Shinza’s corner when his activist friend Dando admonishes him to rise out of slumber of ignorance. Nevertheless, though James Bray’s figure retrieves Kurtz’s character in Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, James Bray is no wanderer looking for a place of hideaway in the tropic woods. Where Kurtz is a representation of an isolated, swellhead coaster, an organization of authority that declines freedom to the poor natives over whom he has established his rule, Bray is on the contrary warmhearted to both the classes of the society, showing that he truly yearns the friendship he initiates with Africans. Bray can successfully carry out political allegiance along with his romance with Rebecca Edwards, whereas Kurtz in a similar situation merely shrinks back from his obligations.

Bray’s insubordination of Mweta’s orders to raise support from overseas does not testify absence of political commitment on his part. By turning down the order, he merely remains true to his mission of not being a part of any form of showdown; “I’ll be back later if I can dig up a car. If I’m not here, say eleven don’t count on it” (430). To underscore his dedication to peace and unity, Bray takes longer than requisite to get hold of a car, precisely so that he can postpone the action as armed rebellion appears to him no longer a suitable means of conflict settlement appropriate of civilized behavior. Ironically, he himself becomes victim to the very ferocity he desires to forefend. By the time he gets the car, it is too late to escape as Shinza’s forces, which mistake Bray for one of the white mercenaries who have been assisting Mweta, attack him. Bray is savagely beaten to death while Rebecca cringes in a roadside ditch. Returning to where the burned car and Bray’s body lie, Rebecca gradually becomes conscious of the heat and the passage of time. She begins to group the import of Bray’s death and of her own existence, “Then for the first time she began to weep. She had begun to live on. Desolation beat down red upon her eyelids with the sun and the tears streamed from her eyes and nose over her earth-stained hand” (475).
Gordimer emphasizes the importance of the relationship between Rebecca and Bray in order to show how Rebecca’s presence has not only influenced Bray’s experience but has also given a shape to his political and personal discernment. The writer best describes the complicated relationship between the sphere of the personal and political. The relationship which constitutes the personal and the political form these structures of feeling, which are portrayed clearly in literature. As Rebecca draws Bray into physical immediacy of Africa, though her whiteness distinctly takes her away from the political world of Shinza and Mweta. She is aware of her political ignorance. Bray unambiguously associates Olivia and Mweta, and places them in opposition to the pair of Shinza and Rebecca:

It made [Bray] uneasy, though, that [Olivia] and Mweta should be linked at some level in his mind. Of course, there was an obvious link; the past. But a line between the stolid walk down the car park to lobby for Shinza … and the presence of the girl - always on him, the impress of a touch that doesn’t wash off- could only be guilt-traced. (377)

Bray’s death retreats Rebecca into absolute seclusion in her mourning. After Bray’s having been “killed like a chicken, a snake hacked in the road, a bug mashed on the wall” (498), she visits Europe alone only to detect in the lines of his note providing details of a Swiss bank account proof that Bray loved her, and to deal with “the deprivation, the loss, the silence, the emptiness, and the finality” (500) of his absence. For Rebecca, London, the home country of Bray, is “full of faces … that [Bray] had chosen not to be” (519). Bray is different from his fellow countrymen because he has “something to do with life itself … Bray lived not as an adversary but as a participant” (497).

Being mistaken for somebody else, Bray becomes a target of his political foes. Bray’s untimely and unintended death in an ambush presents Gordimer’s true narrative genius, namely, the ability to frame a sensitive picture of the disastrous consequences of third world’s political upheavals and manipulations. It is Bray’s affectionateness, insight, and the ability to analyze the serious problems, which a new country is facing; he decides
to become the main source through which the developmental task taken by the newly elected government can be accomplished. However, his tragic death comes as a blow to everyone in the country. Even in death, an atmosphere of mystery continues to hover around Evelyn James Bray:

No one could say for certain whether, when Bray was killed on the way to the capital, he was going to Mweta or to buy arms for Shinza. To some, as his friend Dando had predicted, he was a martyr to savages to others, one of those madmen … who had only got what he deserved…. [A] man who had “passed over from the scepticism and resignation of empirical liberalism to become one of those who are so haunted by the stupidities and evils in human affairs that they are prepared to accept apocalyptic solutions, wade through blood if need be, to bring real change.” (503)

Above and beyond the colour of his skin, therefore, Bray becomes a symbol of a new ‘everyman’ in Africa; probing for new grounds of association in new historical condition. Being a white man in Africa, it is only through his political commitment towards this country that has won him a place, Bray’s educational recommendations, rescued from his wrecked car, and is produced afterwards by Mweta in the form of The Bray Report. However, the revolution to which Bray has given his commitment fails as Mweta calls in British troops to restore peace and Shinza decide to flee. Stephen Clingman remarks that, “The white who has become politically engaged cannot expect glory or pre-eminence; he must be prepared to accept a secondary and supportive role, which may never necessarily be recognized or come to fruition” (130).

The ‘Long Perspective’ is seen explicitly and ultimately on another level of the novel’s action. In the moment of his decision to help Shinza, although, Bray significantly realizes his duty on both empirical and historical levels at once:

His mind was calm. It was not that he had no doubts about what he was doing, going to do; it seemed to him he had come to understand that one could never hope to be free of doubt, of contradictions within, that this was the state in which one lived-the state of life itself - and no action could be free of it. There was no
finality, while one lived, and when one died it would always be, in a sense, an interruption. (464-65)

This passage indicates that Bray’s death should not be seen as an ‘end’ but, incisively, an interruption. Life moves on and Rebecca lives on. Even Bray’s recommendation on education survives. Bray’s honour dwells in the fact that he has willingly accepted the challenges of bringing a change in a politically disturbed country of Africa. *A Guest of Honour* is apparently fashioned to be an ‘African’ novel. Its standard concern has been to demystify politics and to evaluate their possible implications for subjective life. *A Guest of Honour* is precipitously differentiated from Gordimer’s earlier novels. In *The Lying Days* the world was divided into two; the division was much representative as logical. Here the novel “has been deeply concerned to account for the smallest details of political and social interaction, to understand their every gradation and intersection” (Clingman 121).

In this novel Bray’s meditations concern one of the most powerful of political thinkers within the African context, Frantz Fanon. Bray’s interest in Fanon is seen when he gets up in the middle of the night to check a reference in full:

The people find out that the iniquitous fact of exploitation can wear a black face, or an Arab one; and they raise the cry of ‘Treason!’ But the cry is mistaken; and the mistake must be corrected. The treason is not national, it is social. The people must be taught to cry ‘Stop thief!’ (292)

The idea behind writing this novel is to create a serious political novel, which will support the prerequisites of Lukac’s ideas on class-conflict. Gordimer relates her novel with the path-breaking book of Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*. *A Guest of Honour* is a revolution of the greatest importance, touching the entire way in which one comprehends the realities of the country and suggests a plan of action for change. No longer have the novel signified ‘National’ or ‘Race’ oppression, but class relations become a basic element to be practiced.
Gordimer’s *A Guest of Honour* followed Fanon’s ideology that unity in Africa can be accomplished only through a strong movement led by the people, which will ultimately put an end to the selfish interests of the bourgeoisie. Fanon believed that the native people should exercise their class aggression in order to take control over the power and wealth, which at one time was accumulated by foreigners for exploitative purposes. The uncompromising political order can be challenged only through violence without which the struggle for independence will appear like a dream. Bray reads a passage from a book by Frantz Fanon, “everything seemed so simple before: the bad people were on one side, and the good on the other. The clear, the unreal, the idyllic light of the beginning is followed by semi-darkness that bewilders the senses” (292).

Judie Newman while recognizing the political and historical achievements of the novel, questions the political narrative of the journey undertaken by Bray to active commitment when it is his physical relationship with Rebecca that becomes an emblematic sanction to his new life. Newman considers that there are various crucial issues related to political and social change that neither Bray and Mweta, nor Shinza address clearly in their battle for change. Wilhelm Reich, whose Marxist ideas were popular in the 1960s, “believed that all revolutions based only on the political and economic would automatically fail if they did not conquer the repressive morality-established through an authoritarian patriarchy-that is endemic to family life as well” (Thurston61). Admitting that Bray’s affair with Rebecca comes out as a rejection of the repressive institution of marriage as a capitalist prop, Newman nonetheless challenges Bray’s relationship with Rebecca as a symbol of replenishment and vigor. Bray’s impersonal commitments to his ideological principles are compromised by his personal caretaking of Rebecca, while her attachments to Bray are the personal. Barbara Temple-Thurston states, “It is no surprise that Africa claims Bray from her in death, no surprise that Rebecca ends up alone in England, for she is not ready for the impersonal political commitment Gordimer valorizes” (62).

Bray’s tragedy now becomes Rebecca’s tragedy: the novel comes to conclusion in the distress of Rebecca’s attempts to pick up the pieces of her shattered life, while Bray’s
activities have become an integral part of the history of the new country’s political process. Head remarks in his observation of the novel:

Ultimately, all of the ambivalences and contradictions do contribute to a coherent overall design, because the texture of the novel replicates the progression of Bray towards an impersonal revolutionary political commitment, and a simultaneous acceptance of the complex and contradictory nature of political reality. (98)

Bray realized during his stay in Africa that the poor black natives were fed up of the oppressive politics and wanted peace to come in their lives. Mweta’s political party’s capitalist ideas have not gone well with the general public. Even Antonio Gramsci believed that,

[Power is not imposed from above, but the operations of power depend upon consent from below-power is produced and reproduced in the everyday interaction of life-power is ubiquitous. Control of state power without hegemony in civil society is an insecure basis for a socialist programme. (Mallick 162)]

Gramsci advocates that, “Party is an educational institution, which offers a counter culture, whose aim is to gain ascendancy in most aspects of civil society as opposed to directly political institution before gaining State power” (Mallick 162). Gordimer, through A Guest of Honour has revealed the hypocrisy, avarice, and racial personality of the new government. She has looked profoundly into the demeanor of the white colonial settler’s impact on Mweta’s autocratic rule in her country and exhibited well in her novel. She witnesses the complete situation of Africa politically, in the light of the colonial and economic exploitation. The people are misleading with the independence celebrations in order to conceal the real intentions of Mweta’s colonial plans.

There had been a sports rally, and a police band and massed school choirs concert as well as the rather peculiar historical pageant that had gone on for hour at the stadium. Tribal dancing and praise-songs alternated with tableaux of sun dreary whiskered white men showing chunks of gold-ore to splendidly got-up chiefs; it
had all to be kept vague in order not to offend the tribal descendants of Osebe Zuna II with a reminder that the old man had given away the mineral rights of the territory to the white man for the price of a carriage and pair like the Great white Queen’s and a promise of two hundred pounds a year, and in order not to offend the British by reminding them that, at the price, they had got the whole country thrown in. Schoolgirls bobbing under gym frocks and helmeted miners epitomized the present on much safer ground. (40)

The above statement makes it evident that the real meaning of Independence does not only mean the ending of economic exploitation of a country. At the Independence party, Sir Reginald Harvey, the chairman of the gold-mining companies in Africa, delivers a speech in which he talks of mining industry bringing development to Africa, after the centuries-long debasement and inactivity of the slave trade, and of the mining companies and the company proceeding together.

Black cheeks gleamed, the blood rose animatedly in white faces while in the minds of each lay unaffected and undisturbed the awareness that what the industrialist had said was, “You’ll use our money—but on our own terms,” and what the chairman of the gold-mining group had said was, “We don’t intend to reopen the Mondo-Mondo mine because our shareholders overseas want big dividends from mines that are in production, not expansion that will create employment but take five or six years before it begins to pay off.” The director of the cold-storage company, whose butcher shops all over the country had served Africans through a hatch segregated from white customers until a PIP boycott three years before had forced a change, charmingly insisted that the black guest across the table from him accept a cigar. (193-94)

Though in political terms the country has gained independence, however, economic exploitation is continuing with the support of the local black bourgeoisie who believe in selling out everything to earn big profit. Bray through increased involvement in the politics, brings two factors to light, first is that the country wasn’t free of outside political domination and it hadn’t reached a certain level of industrialization. The
unstable territory is struggling between apartheid’s internal domination and exacerbating regional estrangement. The novel traces the newly independent nation’s menacing failure, despite the ceremony of independence. Gordimer’s scrutiny of the crossover between personal and authoritarian pattern of government has proved to be of discerning nature. Her farsightedness is exposed in the novel believing in the principles of African socialism with a spell of disclosing the enormous impediments acting as hurdle in their applications.

The novel reveals Gordimer’s vision that liberal values alone will not be able to stand up against political evils in South Africa. In order to escape his death in the ambush, James Bray felt, “Inside him was an experience exactly the reverse of emptiness, the sense of all forces disengaged and fallen apart, that he had been having all day” (457-58). He realizes “the paradox that playing safe was dangerous” (391).

The use of quotations in the beginning of the novel, one by Ivan Sergeevich Turgenev: “An honorable man will end by not knowing where to live” and the second quotation by Ernesto “Che” Guevara, “Many will call me an adventurer-and that I am, only of a different sort- one of those who risks his skin to prove his platitudes” (n. pag.), aptly brings into focus James Bray’s plight. Despite being considered a “conciliator” (504) by Mweta, James could not bridge the gap between the government and the blacks that are fighting for the newly gained power and independence. At one point in time, he can’t help saying, “every nation has its own private violence … after a while one can feel at home and sheltered between almost any borders-you grow accustomed to anything” (187).

The novel shows that a dirty politics cannot only create barriers between the people of different nations but also between the people of the same country with similar colour as well. It insinuates that even the black rule in independent Africa has not led to social and political justice. A further revolution is required to bring humanity and welfare in black Africa. According to, Christopher Heywood, A Guest of Honour “explores the consequences of independence in a Central African country which combines Zambian settings with issues related to the problems of Katanga” (26). Heywood’s analysis of the
novel discovers Fanon’s intake in the opposing radical socialism. Shinza is acquainted with the concrete problem, that is, extreme poverty encircling the blacks:

To keep the sort of status quo the European call stability – the stability of overseas investment … but we want an instability, James, we want an instability in the poverty and backwardness of their country, we want the people at the top to be a bit poorer for a few years now, so that the real, traditional, rock-bottom poverty, the good old kind that ‘never changes’ in Africa, can be broken up out of its famous stability at last, at long, long last, dragged up from the shit-. (260)

Through these lines, Gordimer points at the genuine African problems, the poverty and the corrupt governance which must be eradicated if the native Africans have to rise and come at par with the rest of the world in future. However, the novel also reveals that certain principles such as individual freedom and friendship between different races are inapplicable in front of the Pan-African prospective who believed in creating their own version of an egalitarian society, by putting an end to the role of the white progressive in Africa.

According to Heywood, the novel also “stakes a claim for the contribution of white activist’s working”. James Bray “remains an outsider, who experienced ‘the growing unwelcomeness of the white man in Africa’ as Gordimer expressed the problem in her essay, Where Do Whites fit in?” (26). The novel brings out “the failure of the knowledge of human sciences to make people more humane” (335). In her presentation of Hjalmar Wentz, the German owner of a night club during the time of upheaval, Gordimer explains a certain feature of the late 1960s era - Hjalmar is not happy with the fact that his son, Stephen is “a natural colonial-the adaptable kind who enjoys the sort of popularity you get when you run a bar and everybody calls you Steve” (331). He comprehends it “as a solution to the problem of survival in a country like South Africa” (331). In her interview with Nesta Wyn Ellis, Gordimer describes A Guest of Honour:

It’s about someone who tries to justify his presence in Africa beyond the colour of his skin…you have to accept that you are a victim of history. Here is the end of
colonial period, and what you may stand for as an individual-no matter what you do or have done-will be swamped in the general whiteness. In South Africa one wears one’s skin like a uniform. White equals guilt. Victims have hitherto been black in South Africa. (93-94)

From the novel’s outset, environment plays a substantial role. It is not simply something that can be observed; rather, it implements a kind of life. During the independence celebrations Bray gives detailed descriptions of the town’s buildings, such as the Great Lakes Hotel and the silver Rhino bar, which, as their names connote, personify the colonial era, which Bray anticipates, will soon become a thing of the past. Bray also finds colonial remnant at Mweta’s new house:

It was neo-classical, with a long double row of white pillars holding up a portico before a great block of local terracotta brick and mica-tinseled stone, row upon a row of identical windows like a barracks. The new coat-of-arms was in a place on the façade. The other side, looking down upon the park as if capability Brown had been expected but somehow failed to provide the appropriate sweep of landscaped lawn, artificial lake, pavilion, and deer, was not so bad. The park itself, simply the leafier trees of the bush thinned out over seven or eight acres of rough grass, was-as he remembered it-full of hoopoes and chameleons who had been there to begin with, anyway. (56)

The mansion and grounds have more of English than as African aspect. As Bray leaves for Gala in order to serve an educational advisor, the pattern he comprehends in the landscape is the same envisioned by Helen Shaw in The Lying Days - The city, then the encircling gold mines, and finally the mine properties. On entering the town of Gala, Bray sees a history in the landscape, which cast the shadow of the British colonial settlement.

Walls had fallen down in the village but trees remained; to big to be hacked out of the way of the slave-caravan trail; too strong to be destroyed by fire when British troops were in the process of subduing the population; revered by several generations of colonial ladies, who succeeded in having a local by-law
promulgated to forbid any one chopping them down. There huge grey out crops of root provided stands for bicycles and boots for traders and craftsmen; the shoe maker worked there, and the bicycle and sewing-machine repairer. (89-90)

On first entering into Gala, Bray sees a different history, which he had not seen earlier:

A new generation of naked children moved in troops about the houses, which were a miniature of the traditional materials of mud and grass, and the bricks and corrugated iron of European settlement. Some of the children were playing with an ancient Victorian mangle; Belgian missionaries from the Congo and German missionaries from Tanganyika had waded through the grass all through the last decade of the nineteenth century, dumping old Europe among the long horned cattle. (116)

The use of settings and landscape is a part of Gordimer’s storytelling that shows interconnection of people with their land. Her characters are shown in the particularity of their cultural instant and their geographical aligning. Gordimer brings both the characteristics of the past and the present, the living and the dead, the rural and the urban, and the realistic and the imaginary together in this novel. The novel intersects with the political and social realities of South Africa where the government is blind to the humanity and unreceptive of the civil rights. The government propagated the culture of disgust, which identified their nature of oppression. Bray divulges a more conscious sense of a complex historical pattern when he remarks, “A profound cycle of change was set up here three or four hundred years ago with the first of us foreign invaders. We’re inclined to think it come full stop, full circle, with independence … but that’s not so … it’s still in process-that’s all” (210). Bray can never communicate what this “cycle of change” is; however, he still knows that it is connected with change, not Mweta’s endeavour to thwart it by shoring up colonial structures. According to Stephen Clingman:

Above and beyond the colour of his skin, therefore, Bray is in a sense a new ‘everyman’ in Africa, searching for new grounds of affiliation in new historical conditions. And in so far as he is a white man, it is through his social commitment that he has won his place. (125)
Gordimer’s use of landscape iconography reflects her political and ideological undertaking. She presents the nature and landscape of Africa as a world of complex order, neutral to human matters and completely self-occupied in its own process. The colonial encroachment has not only kept Africa under blockade but has made it unseeable to those who remain cornered in callous political perspectives. Bray describes the fig tree under which he has worked as an intrusion by a foreigner into this ancient world:

[C]oarse and florid shrubs, hibiscus with its big flowers sluttish with pollen and ants and poinsettia oozing milk secretions, bloomed, giving a show of fecundity to the red, poor soil running baked bald under the grass, beaten slimy by the rains under the trees, and friable only where the ants had digested it and made little crusty tunnels. A rich stink of dead animal rose self-dispersed like a gas … it was the smell of growth … the process of decay and regeneration so accelerated, brought so close together that it produced the reek of death-and-life, all at once. (13-14)

The entire novel is rich in symbols, while taking a leave from Gala, Bray leaves behind him ‘the patriarchal fig,’ antique tree which became a symbol of survival, withstanding the wrecks of time, thus becoming an emcee to “teeming parasites whose purpose of existence was to eat it out from within” (458). The tree is “at once gigantic and stunted, in senile fecundity endlessly putting out useless fruit on stumps and in crotches” (458-59). The tree indicates both the African country and itself, earlier encouraging white parasites, now equally threatened by exploitation from these parasites. Bray contemplates that “only for trees is it enough simply to endure; not for human beings” (459). Even the nature of Bray’s death has a deep irony. He is stopped by a roadblock, a huge tree and then attacked by a flock of men, finding himself in the resulting struggle “desperately hampered by the size and strength of his body” (492). He is misunderstood to be a white colonialist symbol. Bruce King states:

In fact, through such images, Gordimer ironically reverses the issue of integration by suggesting that it is the white man who must find a way to meld with Africa and not the black man who must struggle for acceptance in white society. By
implication it is suggested that the process of white interpretation must begin with sensitivity to the land and its unique sensory impact, that is the senses and the emotions must be ‘Africanized’ before the intellect can respond positively to the political and ideological demands Africa makes upon it. (82)

One major concern of the novel is its personal insufficiency to voice the African problems. Gordimer is conscious of a possible incompatibility between literary norms of the west and her exceptional subject. At the independence celebrations every character presents his story of independence and the atmosphere pullulates with anecdotes. Bray finds it rather like being “forced to learn a foreign language by finding oneself alone among people who spoke nothing else: it was assumed that he would pick up family and other relationships merely by being exposed to them” (23).

*A Guest of Honour* is very much in the form of the traditional naturalistic novel, with a realistic detail, with a noticeable plot, and a chronological sequence of events. The novel deals with a basic problem of how the country is to be developed: along the lines of western-style industrialism, or according to the idea of ‘African Socialism.’ The conflict is personified by Mweta, the president and leader of the ruling PIP, and Edward Shinza, an independent fighter, with the former representing capitalist approach and the latter supporting the socialist ideology. In the centre is Bray, through whom we are seeing the struggle between the two opposing sides. One of the important issues which the novel raises is to what extent the liberal principles will be honoured after the country has attained its goal of independence and how new African states are to be developed and the various questions associated with that problem such as economic, social, educational, moral, and legal.

The achievement of Gordimer’s *A Guest of Honour* lies in her character James Bray who searched both the possibilities and restrictions that assisted the call of liberalism. The ideals for which Bray stands and dies can, therefore, be said to approach with severe repercussions. Nadine Gordimer rightly expresses in “The Prison-house of Colonialism:”
The white man who wants to fit in the new Africa must learn a number of hard things … giving up the impulse to advise and interfere and offer to resume responsibility may not be easy as we whites think. Even those of us who don’t want to be boss (or rather baas) have become used to being bossy. We’ve been used to assuming leadership, at least tutorship, even if it’s only been in the liberal campaigns to rescue the rights of the Africans to vote and speak for themselves. Out of our very concern to see Africans make a go of the new Africa, we may indeed, I know we should, be tempted to offer guidance even when we haven’t been consulted. The facts that we are well-meaning and that the advice may be good and badly needed do not count … what counts is the need of Africa to acquire confidence through experience of picking itself up, dusting itself down and starting all over again. (918)

The developments of events in *A Guest of Honour*, ending in the distressingly ironic employment of British troops to restitute peace and order in the country, proposes that it is not only in South Africa that society becomes the playground for the worst political situation but that the situation prevailing in the country may simply be a representation of a highly advanced and oppressive form of a general realism in the modern world. Therefore, Gordimer’s great efforts at writing deserve worldwide concern and attention. Elain Fido establishes how through the character of Bray the “relationship of masculinity to power and therefore to politics” operates (99). The character of Rebecca shows that a white South African woman is in a sense remains outside the boundary of a brutal accord between the master and the slave. She is increasingly prevented by the social and political conditions of apartheid from acting upon her responsibility to participate in the country’s affairs.

The novel brings forth many penetrating observations about various little gestures, subtlety of feeling, and unverbalized communications, which are a part of one’s nature that they normally go disregarded. The humanity lies in the range and profusion of awareness of human values and response which tyrannical political and social forces restrict to achieve. Politics become the main evil, the force, which torture life, thus becoming an uprising, which is forced to become more and more political and violent.
Once the colonial masters have left the country to its own fate its bureaucratic inefficiency and unproductiveness comes to light where, “[I]n most places figures were not analyzed properly, and the frequent ‘unforeseen circumstances’ that caused a high percentage of failures, or the abandonment of modest experimental schemes were never explained” (88). Distinctly, the new nation is not exercising the advice imparted by foreign experts who are on a rescue mission. The country’s poor political system is to be blamed for the poor judgment that has failed to guarantee the good future for its citizens. Mweta’s inelasticity is exposed in the forceful measures he takes to counter opposition. He believes that:

Opposition-especially political opposition-from trade unions can only be allowed when it’s clear the governing class is working to consolidate its own benefits rather than for the development of a progressive economy … when it’s only an attempt to discredit the government, the government has no choice except to break these people ay? - even to use force, probably. (373)

There is much political debate and analysis in the book, which defines the political struggle of a newly independent state. Gordimer, like George Lukacs, advocates that the class consciousness is necessary to challenge the ‘native bourgeoisie’ which “exercises its new class aggressiveness to control the power and wealth formerly accrued by foreigners, and appropriates existing exploitative structures under the guise of a new nationalism” (Head 88). Lukacs advocates:

For a class to be ripe for hegemony means that its interests and consciousness enable it to organise the whole of society in accordance with those interests. The crucial question in every class struggle is this: which class possesses this capacity and this consciousness at the decisive moment? This does not preclude the use of force. It does not mean that the class interests destined to prevail and thus to uphold the interests of society as a whole can be guaranteed and automatic victory. On the contrary, such a transfer of power can often only be brought about by the most ruthless use of force… (52-53)
The novel questions of whether there is any place for ex-colonial ‘guest of honour’ in the present situation. Bray can be seen as an agent of revolutionary awareness in the force of political pressures such as the class based opposition, the revolutionary aggression, and the denunciation of individual self, forms the imperative issues in A Guest of Honour. His efforts in the government creates a path to bring equality in the society where “the black people … the people who have moved up into administrative power, the white-collar people who aren’t somebody’s clerk anymore, and the mine workers who are moving up into the jobs they could have done before and were kept out of because of the white man” (146). The government should make “the policies it has hammered out of the will of our people” (182), as the poor people of this country have a long experience of capitulation where “whiteness was power” (189).

After being free from the white rule, the black Africans have gained confidence and have honored their own people by giving prominent positions to them in the government sector. “Africanization was going ahead” (311) and many Africans were given training in order to take middle-level and senior jobs that were exclusively held by foreigners. Now the blacks are in a commanding status and “It did not matter any more to the Africans whether white people wanted to dine with them or not; they themselves were now the governing elite, and the whites were the ones who had to sue for the pleasures of their company” (191). Despite their rise they are still viewed by the whites as a race of servants. However, with the coming of a black president to the power the countrymen are anticipating a change. However, this change of power after independence makes James Bray a victim:

I was the white man who’d become victim … of the very power I’d served. I was a sort of symbol of something that never happened in Africa: a voluntary relinquishment in friendship and light all round, of white intransigence that can only be met with black intransigence. I represented something that all Africans yearned for - even while they were talking about driving white people into the sea- a situation where they wouldn’t have had to base the dynamic of their power on bitterness. People like me stood for that historically unattainable state-that’s all. (220)
Though Bray accepts violence as the only way out to achieve the end but he still shows his aversion to violence. Politics is an integral part of the novel that creates an opaque imprint of the interrelationship between public and private life of all the characters. There is an unavoidable process of upheaval and modification that is taking place within this fictional country of central Africa. The revolution is seen to be gaining momentum, especially, as the ideals of independence are failing. In the words of Head, “This indicates a period of transition - to a new state - which involves a mismatch between feelings and actions in the interim” (96).

Gordimer for a long period of her career under apartheid contended the controlling nature of South African reality, which had a political relevance. In a world, which was reigned by apartheid for many decades, to stand opposed to it meant to follow a certain line of political ideas that did not go with the ideology of apartheid. There have been conflicts between the classes and nationalists, and oppression and exploitation of the proletarianized masses. Gordimer’s fiction reflects her antipathy to the ruthless political structure of apartheid stricken country. However, here Clingman defends her stand:

This does not mean her writing will be politically reactionary; indeed, as far as she is concerned, no political cause worth supporting has anything to fear from the truth. But it does mean that the taking up of prior political positions is liable to mar the truthful aspect of fiction…. Political questions will not be avoided in her writing; indeed we know the opposite is the case. (11)

Gordimer’s novel has a complex political engagement, which tries to deal in detail with many questions on politics and individual reflections. The fictional country of Africa represents many events, which are similar to the events that took place in South Africa. Head examines, “the avoidance of an actual setting relocates the political investigation at a more theoretical and generalized level” (90). There was an ongoing suppression of political opposition in the country, which made any positive change impossible. The political reference in A Guest of Honour rests upon the broader political development. Bray who is a chief element in the progress of the country understands his social and political responsibility over his personal feelings. According to Gordimer,
political responsibility is a matter of individual choice where an individual lives in a state of negation, restrained by external forces. Bray’s final political allegiance is noticed in his serious admittance of the need for violence:

He was aware … of going against his own nature: something may be worth suffering for as a matter of individual conviction, but nothing is worth bringing about the suffering of others. If people kill in a cause that isn’t mine, there’s no blood on my shoes; therefore stand aside. But he had put aside instead this “own nature.” It was either a tragic mistake or his salvation. He thought, I’ll never know, although other people will tell me for the rest of my life. (465)

The novel deals with the removal of surplus labour force from the towns and only selected ones were offered work in urban areas; it appeared that the entire country is broken into an interlocking system of classes and sub-classes in order to suit the interests of white profit and white power. Bray also realizes that this country no longer belongs to him; it is corrupted with various social vices. Gordimer, through Bray registers her disillusionment with the growing socialist politics of A Guest of Honour and this led her “to declare herself with such force ‘a radical’” (Clingman 146). She represents the reverse side of the Europeans in Africa; Bray is able to win the people through his social commitment. Moreover, the power of nature is also presented in distinctly political terms, as it is the strongest form in all her novels. Bray, “gradually finds that only by lowering the landscape to inhabit him can he sense a role for himself” (Cooke 136). He is certainly not an adventurer but has come for a serious business, which requires the upliftment of the people as one cannot “make a modern working community out of the most backward part of the country, overnight; not by a charter or any other bit of paper”(340). The lives of the people in the rural area are standstill and there is a fast widening-gap between the elite and the general population in the country, which so far has not been bridged even after attaining the independence. Only the few are moving ahead and leaving their dust behind and “we are now creating a dispossessed peasant proletariat of our own” (343).

Before independence Shinza and Mweta started the unions and got the colonial administration to accept that the workers do have rights. From the start of the struggle
against the white colonial power United Trades Union Congress (UTUC) has played an active part in the nationalist political struggle, “with the employer/white-colonial one and the same force against which the worker/black-subject had to arrest his demand rights” (355). Some of the supporters of “Corporate” trade unionism acknowledged that the only way to promote the interest of the workers is to support the new government to achieve its economic goals. Gordimer feels that the social and economic condition of the African worker is the direct outcome of bad political administration of the white masters, which has resulted in the strikes and riots on the mines, the fisheries, and the railways. Bray is aware of the difference between “a radical approach to labour problems and radical opposition to the government. That’s where the confusion comes in” (372-73).

The blacks blame the white men for manipulating power in their country, which they never really left whereas the whites blame their tribalism and ignorance. In A Guest of Honour, Gordimer breaks away from the clichés of interracial love affair. Bray gets involved with a woman who is not black, but white, even though in the youth he did have a relationship with a black woman. Brahimi posits, “Even though Gordimer’s novels do not describe anything out of the ordinary, they are rarely predictable” (11).

Gordimer has written A Guest of Honour with great intensity and propinquity and makes an effort to devote the imaginative political mood of the time in which the novel is placed. It links the various factors, such as, politics, administration, commitment, and romance, thus presenting an entirely different and fresh way of looking the world. With this novel, Gordimer registers her disparagement of the dominant ideas that flourished for past many years in her society. Even the critical eyes of the society continued to judge Bray’s performance thinking that he will give up his work and leave the country soon. At a time when revolution at home and abroad was thought to be the only way out to overthrow the apartheid regime, Bray’s positivity provided a change in human conscience. His friends as well as his foes appreciate his sympathy for the black cause, but he had to face a stronger opposition that he could ever imagine. Bray in order to remain away from the mounting tension buries himself in his work because it is better “to concentrate on such practical matters as the possibility of resuscitating the old woodworking and shoemaking workshop in the town” (107).
The novelist does not approve of president Mweta’s strategy of controlling the country and its people by using force such as when a young man who comes from the faction of Shinza is beaten up and held illicitly by the government machinery. A member of the party is threatened by the youth of the opposing section. Evelyn Bray tries to resolve the differences between the extremist and moderate sections of the black leadership but in return, he loses his life. His support to Shinza is seen by his opponents as an act of treason.

The novel brings out Bray’s positive side of love and forgiveness in his relationship with his former house help, Kalimo. He rejects the master and slave, boss and servant relation, which divided the people into different categories. Bray wants to spread the message of love and compassion on a national level:

“If Mweta would see it. A perfect opening to take Shinza back into the fold without loss of face. Shinza would have taken the step out of ‘retirement’ himself, he would have the one key position outside government; Mweta could simply put out his hand without patronage and without humbling himself in the least, and take him in. And the solution to the labour troubles, the end of the split factions in the union, at the same time. He would have a strong government then, all right.” (323)

In his search for a practicable solution to the existing problem of national integrity, Bray’s formula seems to be too theoretical and far from reality. Despite his failure in bringing his countrymen together, Bray’s efforts can truly be depicted as a task executed in devoted service on behalf of all those who have endured slavery, in order to achieve the goal of equality. Clingman remarks that, “there could now be no guarantee of any kind of ‘return’ on a political or emotional investment, personal commitment also had to be made in principle, since the future had opened out into an indefinite long term” (114). Bray’s desire to help the other human beings, does not provide immunity either to sad discontentment or to the hostile circumstances under which he works. The task of uniting the bitterly divided groups in order to free the young country from the shackles of underdevelopment goes in vain as the existing mood of skepticism and surrender has
engulfed the entire nation. The novel is stimulated with the feelings of incense and annoyance. The novel explores the white guilt as the reader notices the inner turbulence of the white character, Bray, who is filled with remorse by looking at the prevailing situation of the country. This remorse ultimately gives way to psychological trauma. Through this novel Gordimer’s attitude is differentiated from the other noted white expatriate novelists who wrote about white men in the African mission. She describes Bray as the exact opposite of racist bigots who “hadn’t wanted to sit in their drawing-room with Africans” (214). Brutus writes that:

An artist, a writer, is a man who lives in a particular society and takes his images and ideas form the society. He must write about what he sees around him and he must write truthfully about it, or he must come to terms with what is ugly in it and pretend that it is not there or that it is not bad. (94)

Lekan Oyegoke writes in his article:

Renaissance will not come about as dramatically as the first multiracial general election; it will be slower but steadier as old destructive prejudices and passions melt away and get replaced with more humane and civilized attitudes which recognize and respect the right of all human beings to life, dignity and decent treatment. (Renaissance and South African writing)

Through this novel, Gordimer explores deeper and deeper into the minds of her society. She belongs to the culture of the oppressive race and is fighting to save the culture of the oppressed black race through her narratives. There is no more class-ridden society than South Africa with broad distinctions between various classes where lower class always play a subordinate role.

If a class thinks the thoughts imputable to it and which bear upon its interests right through to their logical conclusion and yet fails to strike at the heart of that totality, then such a class is doomed to play only a subordinate role…. Such classes are normally condemned to passivity, to an unstable oscillation between
the ruling and the revolutionary classes, and if perchance they do erupt then such explosions are purely elemental and aimless. (Lukacs 52)

A Guest of Honour extracted consistently high applaud from reviewer and critics, who got amazed by its ‘scope,’ the richness of writing, bringing out again the novelist’s brilliant eye, great sense of timing for details, and her exceptional gift for tolerant and painstaking honesty. The all-encompassing picture of the country of South Africa, the vast range of characters, and treatment of the troubles, which a newly independent African nation is facing on the level of individual effects and politically has placed A Guest of Honour in a class of its own among other African novels. It raises a big question of whether there is any other country where ‘a man of Honour,’ sensible, civilized, dedicated to the work of social justice, and in the quest of happiness of life, can survive any more, finding the struggles of that society making a demand for political action which is unwelcome to his humanistic and tolerant nature. Nadine Gordimer through this work is relentlessly discovering the potentiality for living life to the fullest, and in her search she draws definite conclusions about the signification of life. The novel records the increasing disappointment amongst the people of South Africa who is struggling with the discriminatory policies of the government and is forced to lead a poor quality of life. There is a kind of dichotomy to her approach that steers her to a compassionate delineation of characters, along with an objective investigation of character, experience, and circumstances.