

Faculty of Arts
Department of English Language and Literature
Text Analysis
Fourth Year

Third Lecture
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Chapter Five

Theme: The Past in the present

- ▶ Gordimer invokes memories of the past to rebuke a racially disturbing present.
- ▶ The Smales are forced to face an environment that does feel like post-apartheid South Africa.
- ▶ Facing a confused present and not believing what is happening, Maureen Smales turns to her past roles as the daughter of a shift boss who owns a grand house and the wife of a bourgeois architect to reassure herself.

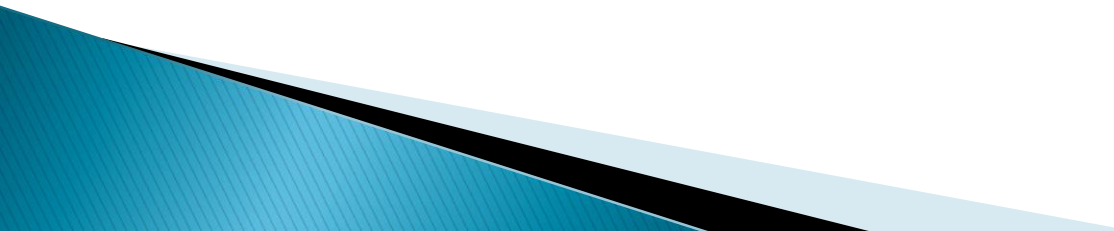
Maureen relies on material objects as a source of power. She feels that life in the past will never be the same again.



The Past in the Present

- ▶ The past continues to haunt the Smales' everyday life, especially Maureen.
- ▶ The assumed black revolution has disturbed the luxurious life of the white, deprived them of their former power which is presented in their vehicle and their gun.
- ▶ Not only does the outbreak of the black revolution deprive them of their material objects, but it also reveals the hypocrisy and false innocence of the whites who have always been claiming that they are liberals in their treatment of the slaves.


The past in the present II

- ▶ Maureen flashbacks reveal that there is an outright war between the forces of the prestigious past and those of the endangered present, with considerable ambiguity about which is to be considered good and which bad.
 - ▶ Believing herself a liberal white, Maureen claims that she is satisfied that she has always been kind and merciful to the black.
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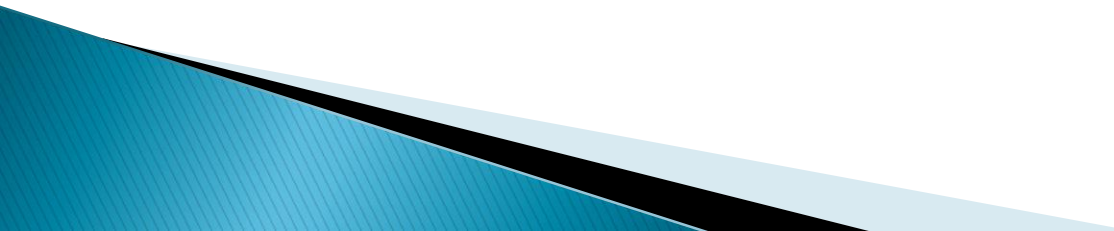
White/black relationship in Apartheid South African society

- ▶ Maureen's Early Childhood with Lydia, the Family Black Maid (See p.28& p.29)
- ▶ Maureen remembers how she used to walk home from school accompanied by Lydia and how they talk and laugh just as normal friends do. However Lydia used to carry Maureen's case on her head.
- ▶ “One afternoon a photographer took a picture of Maureen and Lydia. They saw him dancing about on bent legs to get them in focus. When he had taken his photographs he came up and asked them if they minded. Lydia was in command; she put her hands on her hips, without disturbing the balance of the burden on her head—but you must send us a picture...

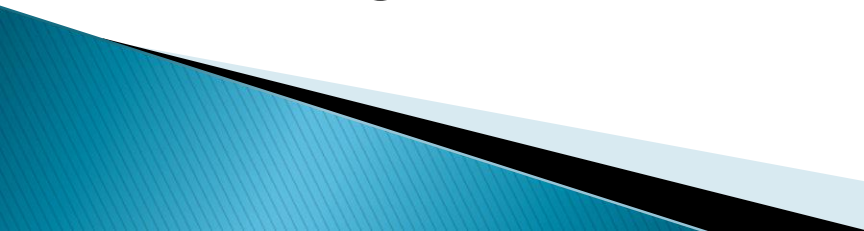
White/black relationship in Apartheid South African society

- ▶ Why had Lydia carried her case?
 - ▶ Did the photographer know what he saw, when they crossed the road like that, together? Did the book, placing the pair in its context, give the reason she and Lydia, in their affection and ignorance, didn't know?"
 - ▶ Though they are unequal, they shouldn't have walked hand in hand in the street. That is why that moment is unique for the photographer, and it needs to be registered.
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Questions

- ▶ What does Maureen observe about the Africans' way of life? Read pp.21–25
 - ▶ Why does Maureen remember her childhood?
 - ▶ Was black/white relationship in apartheid South African society quite exactly the same as in the incident of Maureen and Lydia?!
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Maureen's encounters with her ex-servant, July

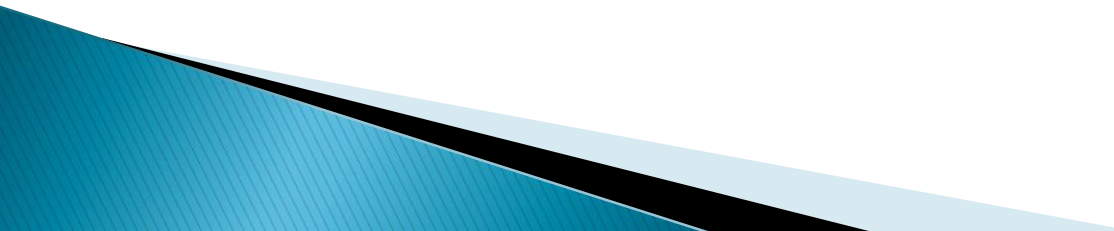
- ▶ Though she tries hard to show that she has always treated July well, and that she is a liberal white South African citizen, Maureen proves that her liberal ideas are only a mask she constantly puts on.
 - ▶ Maureen's encounters with July indicates the illusion of the Smales' past roles as white masters
 - ❑ Even though July is now her host, Maureen tries to humiliate him by sending him oral messages asking him to come to her hut.
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pp. 38 –39

The illusion of white innocence

- ▶ Brought up in a racist society, Maureen become infuriated knowing that her ex-servant, July, has taken the keys of their Bakkie, a symbol of their former power.
- ▶ Gordimer describes Maureen's feelings after missing the vehicle: "She couldn't stifle a feeling of agonizing alterness. The day ending. She watched the bush; her scale pathetic, a cat at a mouse-hole, before that immensity"

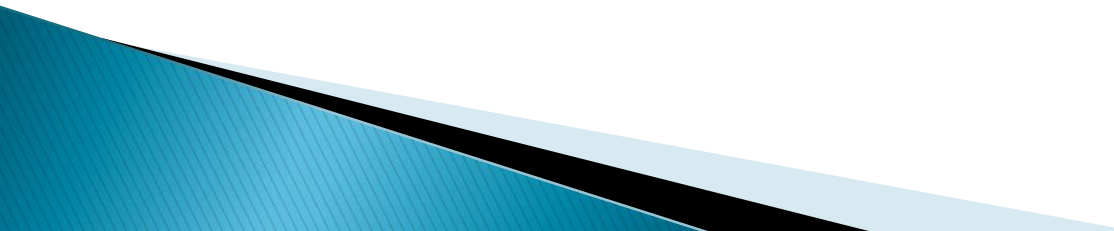
Questions

- ▶ Describe the incident in the previous quote.
 - ▶ Figure out the images employed by Gordimer.
 - ▶ What more do you learn of Maureen's feelings for July?
 - ▶ What is the significance of Maureen standing in the rain? Read p.43
 - ▶ How do Maureen and Bam Smales feel about the missing bakki?
 - ▶ Why do you think July has taken it?
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Assumed power reversal

- ▶ Since July cannot drive, Maurren warns him that he would be caught without a license. Yet, he confidently laughs hinting at the reversal of power and the issue of the **pass book**:
- ▶ “Who’s going to catch me? The white policeman is run away [sic] when the black soldiers come that time. Sometimes they take him, I don’t know...No one there can ask me, where is my license. Even my pass, no one can ask any more. It’s finished.” read p. 53

Questions

- ▶ What is mean by pass book?
 - ▶ What is the significance of mentioning it in the quote?
 - ▶ Why don't Maureen and Bam demand the keys from July ?
 - ▶ How does July feel about the bakkie? Do Bam and Maureen object?
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The illusion of white innocence

- ▶ Maurren sends July, her ex-servant and now her host, oral messages to come to her hut. The narrator shows Maurren's excuses for this situation: "she was a white woman, someone who had employed him, theirs was a working relationship"(see p.59)
- ▶ "Her little triumph in getting him to come turned over inside her with a throb and showed the meanness of something hidden under a stone. These sudden movements within her often changed her from persecutor to victim".pp.60-61

The **past** in the **present**

- ▶ “You don’t like I must keep the keys. Isn’t it[sic]. I can see all the time. You don’t like that.
- ▶
- ▶ ...But I’m **work for you**[sic]. Me, I’m **your boy**, always. I’m have[sic] the keys of your house. Every night I take that keys with me in my room, when you go away on holiday, I’m lock up everything...it’s me I’ve got the keys for all your things, isn’t it.” p.61

The past in the present

- ▶ Though power has eventually transformed to the black, July still considers himself his former employers' "boy", a derogatory term for calling a black servant. Though July hides the white Smales to protect them from a disaster in his village, he remains their "boy", a contempt term for both. He has been their servant for fifteen years, and now after that bloody revolution he continues to serve them.

The past in the present

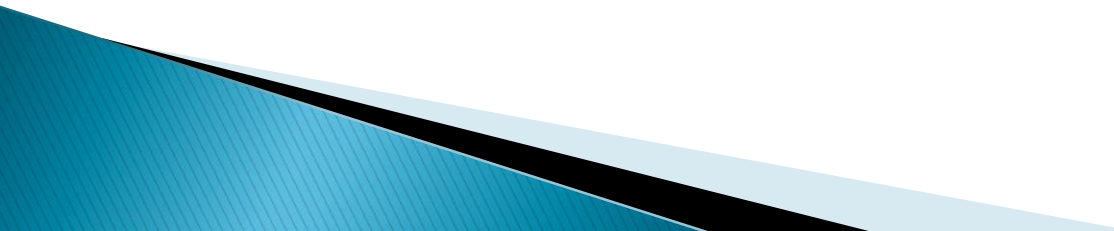
- ▶ Maureen, at first, finds out how humiliating the word boy is for July. Yet, July still considers Bam his master, to this Maureen screams:
- ▶ “The master! Bam’s not your master. Why do you pretend?”
- ▶ How do you interpret July’s previous sentence?

▶ The disappearance of
Bam's GUN

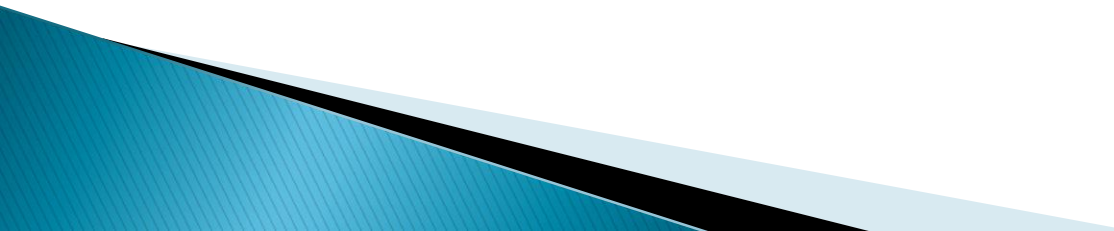
The third& final encounter between Maureen and July


- ▶ In this encounter Maureen goes to July in his hut.. What is the outcome?
- ▶ Maureen reproaches July of filching some of her objects back there in Johannesburg, but he chastises her for not trusting him.
- ▶ “There is town you are trusting your boy for fifteen years”...“ Always you give me those things!
- ▶ Oh no, I gave you...but not those.
- ▶ I don't want your rubbish.
- ▶ Why did you take rubbish?...I said nothing because I was ashamed to think you would do it” p135

The climax of *July's People*

- ▶ July breaks into the eloquence of his native tongue, *Shangan*, giving vent to his suppressed anger as he grows bored and disgusted of the Smales' presence in his village at the end.
 - ▶ Critics describe July's fury as "aching gun barrage" of words. July's words strike deepest. Though his words and his language are unknown and unreachable for Maurreen, she gets every word he utters.
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Think it over!

- ▶ Throughout *July's People*, July speaks in broken English to communicate with the Smales. Yet, in the last encounter he uses his native tongue. What is the significance of July using Shangan at last? Why does he talk in his language?
 - ▶ Who are July's people?
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- ▶ Thank You
 - ▶ All the best
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