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# **Liminality, Transience, and the Destabilisation of “Home” in Nadine Gordimer’s *Jump and Other Stories***

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Nadine Gordimer’s *Jump and Other Stories* (1991) stands out for many reasons in her overall oeuvre, not least of which the fact that it was published a year after Nelson Mandela was released from prison and negotiations for the transition to democracy began. However, the collection also stands out for its emphasis on what we might call liminal spaces: hotels, planes, airports, cars, fine lines dividing suburbs and townships, holiday trips, legal and clandestine movement over international borders all loom large in *Jump*. Admittedly, there are also several stories dealing with the notion of “home” (including the story bearing that very title), but even that domestic and intimate space is regularly rendered complex and problematic, as, of course, is the whole question of “homeland” and its apartheid connotations.

The adjective liminal is etymologically linked to the notion of threshold (from the Latin *limen*), but in anthropological terms, liminality is frequently considered as a transitional or initial stage of a process, or the transitional phase of a particular rite of passage. Liminality is also associated with notions of marginality and with possibilities for subversion and change due to the necessary ambivalence and ambiguity which accompanies it. Several critics have investigated the subversive potential of liminality, particularly Homi Bhabha in *The Location of Culture* (1994). Bhabha in fact takes Nadine Gordimer’s *My Son’s Story*, published a year before *Jump*, as one of two novels which form the basis of the development of his concept of a “third space”. Bhabha reads Gordimer’s novel as presenting

an intimacy that questions binary divisions through which [...] spheres of social experience are often spatially opposed. These spheres of life are linked through an ‘in-between’ temporality that takes the measure of dwelling at home, while producing an image of the world of history. This is the moment of aesthetic distance that provides the narrative with a double edge which,

like the coloured South African subject, represents a hybridity, a difference 'within', a subject that inhabits the rim of an 'in-between' reality. (Bhabha 19)

He goes on to claim that "Aila as coloured woman defines a boundary that is at once inside and outside, the insider's outsidedness" (Bhabha 20). One might therefore be tempted to pursue this line of thinking with *Jump* in mind and consider the ways in which "the insider's outsidedness" is also highlighted therein. This concept of an "in-between reality" has nevertheless been scornfully dismissed by South African writer and critic Zoë Wicomb in her essay 'Shame and Identity' where she takes issue with what she sees as an implied return to notions of racial purity:

Here, surely, are echoes of the tragic mode where lived experience is displaced by an aesthetics of theory. How, one is tempted to ask, do people who live in communities inhabit, spookily and precariously, a rim of inbetween reality? Symbolically, of course, and therefore, according to Gordimer, in silence, the shame of it all encoded in the word *taboo*. Surely relegation to such a space relies on an essentialist view which posits a 'pure' reality that is experienced in the space inhabited by the racially pure. (Wicomb 102-3)

Although I take Wicomb's point and understand her evident frustration with Gordimer's representation of black women in particular, we might not want for all that to completely reject Bhabha's "third space", but we can perhaps add some nuance to it. Moving away from the question of race, it is quite possible to interrogate the ways in which Gordimer investigates "the insider's outsidedness" through an emphasis on liminality.

I align myself with Sorchá Gunne who, writing in *Space, Place, and Gendered Violence in South African Writing*, states that "liminality is not a third space or a neat hybrid, but a state of transformation. It is the moment where, in the process of changing from one thing to another, both old and new states are experienced simultaneously" (32). It is not only the date of publication of Gordimer's *Jump and Other Stories* that positions it as a text which can fruitfully be analysed through the prism of liminality. Although the collection was published in 1991, the year after which apartheid began to visibly crumble and the transition began, most of the stories had been published prior to this in various literary journals

and magazines. Indeed, Gordimer had clearly been interested in the politics of liminality at least from as early as 1981 when *July's People* was published, or 1982 when she delivered her lecture 'Living in the Interregnum' at the New York Institute of the Humanities (later published in *The Essential Gesture* in 1988). Her evident affinity with the prison writings of Antonio Gramsci, gestured to in the epigraph to *July's People*, arguably led her to interrogate the dying days of apartheid long before the government was even fully aware of the scale of imminent change. Stephen Clingman has written extensively on the particularly liminal space of "the boundary" of which he explores both the "horizontal and vertical dimensions" (Clingman 1037). In his article 'Gordimer's Pathologies', he retraces the presence of the boundary as "a kind of undefined or no-man's land [...] on the edge of the known" (Clingman 1037) in Gordimer's work from the very beginning and right through to her last years, and links this to the notions of horizontality and verticality.

It will be my contention in this article that Nadine Gordimer's 1991 collection of stories develops a poetics of liminality which is characterised not only by spatial and temporal in-betweenness, but by an aesthetics built, precariously, on a "place of shifting ground" ('Living in the Interregnum' np.). The stories in *Jump* deftly interweave elements of realism and postmodernism, extreme violence and tenderness, along with political critique and aesthetic liberties. Sometimes heavy-handed, sometimes full of finesse, these stories present "liminal circumstances" which "provide a potential platform for social cohesiveness" (Gunne 36) even as they destabilise important signifiers such as "home". I will argue that the short story genre is particularly apt for this focus on the margins, that its brevity brings into relief the central question of transition and transformation, and that the collective dimension provides so many facets of liminality. My trajectory will take me from a discussion on liminality and homeland, to an exploration of transit and transience, and finally back to the domestic sphere of "home".

### **Transit and transitions**

As Jochen Achilles and Ina Bergmann point out, "[i]nscripting liminality in its aesthetic structures, the short story turns into a forum of crisis and change" (8). Indeed, one might well make a case for the short story being the genre most associated with liminality ever since the publication of Frank O'Connor's seminal essay on 'The Lonely Voice' in

1963. Most of the stories in Gordimer's 1991 collection feature these moments or states of transformation where the "old and new states are experienced simultaneously" (Gunne 32) and in many cases there is an attempt to weave together spatial, temporal, and narratological forms of liminality. Several stories revolve around a moment of transit or transition: 'Jump', the title story, for instance, is set in the liminal space of an empty shell of a hotel. For Graham Riach, the transition to democracy in South Africa is a period marked by stasis in literature. The proof for him of this is to be found in the hotel in 'Jump' and the anaphora "waiting" at the end of 'Amnesty', the two stories which frame the collection.

But Gunne's idea of "old and new states [...] experienced simultaneously" is also very relevant to the opening story where the whole narrative shifts between past and present (and a very uncertain future symbolised by the desire to jump at the end). The controlled jump of parachute is not the same as a jump out of hotel window. This flirtation with a leap into nothing is highly symbolic of Gordimer's refusal to give in to the temptation of too much optimism at the approach of the new dispensation. For the focaliser of 'Jump', Mozambique (which is where we must assume the story is set) is never referred to as "home" in his long internal monologue-type moments of introspection: it is merely "the country where he was born" (9), "this country" (16), "for the first time he saw it was so: he lives here" (18). Neither is it ever home for his parents, settler colonists who move there from Europe "to find a better life where it was warm and there were opportunities" (7), only to move back to Europe when the civil war breaks out and their comfortable lives are threatened.

That "home", in terms of nation, is undergoing transition is very obvious in the opening paragraph of 'Jump' (3) in the description of the hotel (from the point of view of a prisoner of sorts). The agency of this unnamed man is erased (the passive constructions throughout the first paragraph testify to this, as does the fact that spatial representation comes before "he was brought in", his deferred entrance suggesting his relative lack of importance). His erstwhile status as important person (either as white before independence or as counter-revolutionary during the civil war) is now declining, as the plastic chairs, formica table, "stranded" chairs, "empty halls" and the empty shell of what was once a hive of (white) activity all suggest. In his own opinion the hotel is perfect for "transients" (4), but it is very hard not to hear a reference to a more general state of "transience" here. In that sense, it is the perfect place for

he who does not feel at home and, literally, has no home. The show is now over and he is of no significance, as the drawing of the curtains seems to indicate, and yet he is imprisoned in this liminal space, condemned to relive his confession over and over again.

Towards the end of the story, this transformation of what "home" or nation as liminal space might represent is symbolised quite strongly by the "one frail, floating thread of root" (19) from the houseplant the "girl" has given him. Clearly suggestive of his unbelonging and uprootedness, in this sense it is particularly significant that the single root should be floating in water and not embedded in soil. Read also in the light of what Elleke Boehmer has called "South African fiction in transition", this story, strategically positioned at the beginning of this collection, appears to correspond to much writing at this period. For Boehmer, "the ending of the 1980s novel did indeed involve a tailing-off, an unwillingness or an inability to comment on what might follow" (50). She goes on, "[s]uspension, the zero ending, the dying fall, a closing down of options: in these ways recent South African writers have fallen back into silence" (50). Poised as it is at the beginning of *Jump*, this story admittedly conforms to type, resonating particularly strongly with the "dying fall" image, but it also ushers in a series of other stories which might be described in Boehmer's words as "not so much fictions which imagine the future in detail, but narrative structures that embrace choice or, if you will, stories that juggle and mix generic options" (51). We are thus invited to read the metaphorical "jump" as a transitional passageway leading into a mix of "generic options" all of which engage with liminal time-spaces even when situated in a recognisably South African setting.

If the white counter-insurgent of 'Jump' is trapped in a static, never-ending performance of his confession, which Riach reads as being indebted to Beckett (Riach 1085), other stories are set in the spatial inbetween of a journey. The story 'A Journey' for instance partially concerns a plane trip and 'What Were You Dreaming?' a hitchhike in a car; 'My Father Leaves Home' superimposes a journey back to the narrator's father's Eastern European country of origin onto the father's emigration in the opposite direction to South Africa; 'Safe Houses' charts the constant movement of an anti-apartheid militant on the run, while 'The Ultimate Safari' describes through the voice of a young Mozambican girl her family's ordeal as refugees attempting to cross into South Africa to escape the civil war at home. All these stories deal in various ways with "the insider's outsidedness" but 'A Journey' and 'What Were You Dreaming?' in particular expose the subversive

potential of transit and movement, in the state of being neither here nor there. They reinforce this by incorporating a fluctuating narrative voice which moves Gordimer into new aesthetic territory, poised somewhere between realism and postmodernism, and which enables her to “juggle and mix generic options” (Boehmer 51).

Both stories stand out in the collection (along with ‘Once Upon a Time’) as those which feature either an avatar of Gordimer herself or, at the very least, a deliberate blurring of the limits between author, narrator, and focaliser (Lazar 789-90). ‘A Journey’ is more similar to the parodic fairy tale in that it begins with a narrator describing a scene and then deliberately giving way to an embedded story, the fictional nature of which is firmly foregrounded (“They exist only in the alternate lives I invent” [145]). ‘What Were You Dreaming?’ on the other hand is constructed differently with the first person narrative by a young coloured man subsequently displaced by that of a narrator who shifts the focus to the thoughts of the “lady with grey hair” (214), the description of whom is remarkably similar to the presumed narrator (and author) of the embedded story in ‘A Journey’ (“a lady with grey hair” [149]). It is no coincidence that this fluctuating narrative stance should accompany these stories which are themselves set in the liminal spaces of an airplane and airport on the one hand and on the edge of a road and in a car on the other. Both become moments and spaces of transformation, although the transformation is arguably more complete in ‘A Journey’ in its rewriting of the Oedipal myth and the somewhat heavy-handed reminder in the very last sentence that a rite of passage has just occurred: “But the boy is looking at him with the face of a man, and turns back to the woman as if she is his woman, and the baby is his begetting” (158), a description to which I will shortly return.

Points of view shift constantly in this story, from the observant narrator on the plane, to the thirteen-year-old boy, and finally to the father in the final pages, and the fact that the boy’s focalisation is sandwiched between the narrator’s and then the father’s emphasises his liminal state as adolescent and boy on the cusp of manhood. His growing sensual and sexual attraction to his mother is tentatively disguised in the matter-of-fact, factual tone with which he describes his mother’s breasts changing during pregnancy (“I thought of a chameleon slowly blotching from one colour to another” [147]) and his wet dreams (“the dream would become one of those it’s normal for boys to have (my mother and father explained before I began to have them). There’s nothing to be ashamed of, you should enjoy those dreams” [148]). However, the choice

of chameleon is itself quite significant since it suggests not just the physical changes in the mother, but his own gradual metamorphosis into sexual maturity as he morphs into "a man" as the father sees it. The boy's rational explanation for his sexual response, quoted above and replete with ostensible parental approval, neglects to take into account the source of the arousal, his mother, and his attempts to dissimulate his Oedipal attraction begin to fracture when he enthusiastically and repeatedly affirms that he "was the first to see the baby" and "was there before anyone" (148). It is I think significant that the baby should at all points remain genderless and constantly referred to as "the baby" or "it" as in this way it is presented as completely unthreatening, almost a mere object to be contemplated, a literal appendix to the mother.

Triptychs abound in this story: narratologically, with the triple shift in point of view, visually, as when the narrator perceives mother, boy, and baby as "a trinity" (144), and discursively both when the boy reminisces about the idealised time before his father's affair ("The three of us" [146]), and when the father muses over the love triangle he created and in which he found himself in the middle. In each case, there is a sense of the "insider's outsidedness" (Bhabha 20) and a constant reshuffling of roles, right up until the final lines of the story, quoted above, which express in such primal terms the father's moment of shock: the use of definite articles ("the boy", "the woman", "the baby") in this last sentence and the biblical vocabulary ("the baby his begetting"[158]) all suggest an archetypal configuration from which the man is ultimately excluded. There is some irony in this since his own perception is that he is the one who has been on a journey off the beaten track and has just come back home. In this reverie, the boy has even been replaced by the new baby: "The end of a journey he took, away from her, and the end of her journey, now, will meet and they'll be whole again" (157). The stark and primeval vocabulary of the final sentence reveals his shock at having missed the real journey, that of his son's passage from boyhood to manhood, and his own exclusion from the newly configured family cell.

However, this usurpation has in fact already been encoded into the text prior to this moment when he walks towards the airport situated in this unnamed African country which has recently seen a civil war. The hallmarks of the violence of war time are juxtaposed to the trees and flowers which continue to bloom and he consciously connects the two as evidence of his path ("the way") "towards something that is both old and new" (153), his marriage and not just the country having survived, it is implied, "an attempted coup" (153). The real "coup" is of course yet to



come, as we know, having read part two of the triptych, and the irony continues as he privately extolls the virtues of the “decayed airport” and “how appropriately inappropriate definitive places are” (153). However, there is ultimately nothing definitive about this airport as it will be the liminal space, a literal place for “transients” (‘Jump’ 4)/transience, in which an unexpected transformation takes place, and the “something that is both old and new” is the playing out of the Oedipal scenario (old) in front of him (for whom it is new and unexpected). Heavy in symbolism, this final part of the story has the man imagining himself “alone in the perspective of a de Chirico painting” and in “the surreal vacuum of the hall” (154), noticing the “split in the seat beneath him where the stuffing spills like guts” (156). The visceral image of the seat splitting and spilling out its entrails recalls the end of the part focalised through the boy and foretells the second, and final, version of the ending when the “stuffing” of the family is reconfigured. The allusion to “a de Chirico painting” is also ironic in its indication that the man imagines himself in a “surreal” environment out of time and out of space, a liminal space as it were, where the limits or borders between inside and outside, between enclosure and exposure, are blurred. Rather like the protagonist of ‘Jump’ who sees himself cinematographically, this man sees himself in slow motion. And yet, if we bear in mind how eerie and strange the few characters and the setting in de Chirico’s paintings are, it is impossible to miss the ironic suggestion that he is paradoxically trapped in this liminal space of transit, trapped in a fantasy of happy families which will shortly be dashed and from which he will find himself excluded.

The painter de Chirico also espoused the idea that art should be free of ideology and exist out of time, history, and space so as to focus on metaphysical questions. Without going so far as to suggest that Gordimer is flirting with metaphysics here, it is possible, I think, to perceive this story as the beginning of a response to Boehmer’s interrogations regarding literature at the end of apartheid and the prevalence of “[s]uspension, the zero ending, the dying fall, a closing down of options” (Boehmer 50). Rather than reading this as yet another suspended ending, it might be more judicious to read the allusion to de Chirico as a postmodern comment by Gordimer on her fictional attempt to move beyond apartheid South Africa and push back the frontiers of the short story in order to accommodate this shift. Playing with multiple, overlapping, and conflicting points of view, and foregrounding the fictionality of the Oedipal story, she steers us away from usual Gordimer territory and into a “place of shifting ground” (‘Interregnum’ np.).

A similar aesthetics is in place in 'What Were You Dreaming?', the oldest story in the collection, first published in 1985 in *Granta*, where two viewpoints are interweaved. The first half of the story is narrated by a young 'Cape Coloured' (218) who is begging on the roadside and who is picked up by an elderly white South African lady and a younger English friend who is unfamiliar with the nuances of the country. The second part of the story shifts to a third person narrator, but the focaliser is the elderly lady. For all its narrative shifting, and its setting in the liminal space of a car, this story is less sophisticated than the previous one, and it sometimes reads as a guide for foreign readers to the complexity of race relations in South Africa, as for instance when the narrative includes "another of the little history lessons she has been giving" her friend as they travel (219). However, Gordimer cleverly exposes, in almost anthropological detail, the pitfalls of white liberalism and the interstitial space of the "insider's outsidedness" (in this case both the white lady and the coloured boy: "They can go on talking about him as he has always been discussed, there and yet not there" [222]). No answer is ever provided to the rhetorical question in the title and reiterated in the story (224) and the implied meaning of this is that for all that Gordimer foregrounds the young man's voice in the beginning, and has the white lady reiterate the recent history of Cape Coloureds, including forced removals, we can never know what he is dreaming. In fact, as Stephen Clingman has suggested, we might even read the title of the story as an incredulous question levelled at the reader: if we expected Gordimer's fiction to give us an insight into the life of impoverished coloured people, what, indeed, were we thinking/dreaming?<sup>1</sup> The very specific liminal chronotope, that moment between sleeping and awakening, for this coloured character in the liminal space of the car, cannot be charted by the narrator/Gordimer. This is not so much a failure of the imagination as a political and poetic gesture by Gordimer, showing deep awareness of the questions of legitimacy when writing about subaltern groups. The confiscation of his voice during the story is an aesthetic tool in order to expose what must remain unknown.

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<sup>1</sup> This suggestion was made by Stephen Clingman during the conference held at the ENS de Lyon on October 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup>, 2018, organised by Vanessa Guignery and Christian Gutleben.

### **“Home” as paradoxically liminal space**

I would now like to shift the focus away from these obvious liminal spaces of transit to a space which is less obviously associated with liminality: “home”. In the story bearing that same name, the shift which occurs as the diegesis unfolds is framed by the warmth of the opening sentence, “Lighted window: cutouts of home in the night” (121), and the alienation of the final one, “her country to which he did not belong” (140). We might however already notice something of the fragility (or lack of authenticity) of home in the opening sentence which, filtered through the point of view of Teresa’s Swedish husband (as is the whole story), is highly reliant on cliché. There are no articles, suggesting an archetypal space, and “home” is only presented partially, as “cutouts”, and indeed potentially violently (since Teresa’s mother and brother will literally be “cut out” of family home and imprisoned, and Nils too will be cut out of Teresa’s life). In fact, there are several other references to “cutting” in the story (127, 129), and the excessive use of dashes and suspension points (aposiopeses) throughout also suggests a cutting or inconsistency of thought and language. So the potentially warm and comforting image of lights of home shining out of the house into the dark night is already on shaky ground.

‘Home’ then is, ostensibly, a story about the warmth and intimacy of a couple, the construction of their life together, and the ways in which political tensions and generalised forms of oppression and discrimination impact on that life, destabilising any certainties about what “home” might represent. As in other stories, “home” is simultaneously the hearth, the larger family/community, and the nation. So although the story appears to home in on the politics of the couple, the final sentence is potent with its several layers of meaning: “He saw it was true that she had left him, but it was for them, that house, the dark family of which he was not a member, her country to which he did not belong” (140). These last lines suggest that the family of origin will, in moments of crisis, always trump the relationship with a foreigner, and indicate that although Nils may try to ignore race, the reference to “the dark family of which he was not a member” underlines his inability to understand the situation of coloureds (and blacks) in South Africa. It is not just her shady, in the background (“dark”) family, but the community of dark-skinned people that he is apart from. And finally, it is of course a country to which he will, as a foreigner, never fully belong.

The gradual disintegration of the couple’s relationship is inscribed in a reversal of stereotypical gender roles, which reveals that the story is

as much about sexual politics as the repressive apartheid regime or resistance to it. From the opening paragraph, Teresa is presented, through Nils' eyes, as a quintessentially fragile, indeed almost hysterical woman needing a strong masculine presence for comfort: he notes her "terribly vivid face", the way her "feet clutched the floorboards", and the detail of "her cotton nightgown" (121). This first impression of Teresa is also highly sexualised, as Nils, notwithstanding the adverb "tenderly" and the sacral reference to "the curtain of her body", inappropriately focuses his attention not on her distress but on his sexual attraction towards her in her distressed state.

The prevalence of dashes, suspension points, and exclamation marks at the start of the story in both Teresa's words, and in Nils' words and thoughts, underlines the way in which uncertainty and panic are gradually transferred from her to exclusively him. These typographic marks indicate Teresa's move towards greater control and Nils' slide towards loss of control. That change is inevitably already implicitly announced at the beginning of the story: "His wife stood there in the entrance, barring his and her entrance into their home" (122). Here, one observes the distancing effect contained in the lexical choice of "his wife" (even though this is ostensibly a means of indicating the nature of the relationship between them), while the fact that she is on the threshold, and the fact that she is "barring the entrance," all proleptically point to her later estrangement from him as he perceives it: their relationship is indeed on the threshold of major transformation. The choice of the verb "barring" may also recall the bars on cells (intimating that for Nils, Teresa is effectively a prisoner of her family). The thirteen occurrences of "cell" or "prison" in the story emphasise it as an obsessive leitmotif throughout the story. Teresa becomes increasingly obsessed with imagining her mother and her siblings in a cell, and as she does so, effectively becomes co-opted back into family cell. Cell is therefore to be understood as the prison cell, the family cell, and indeed a cell within resistance movement. Teresa increasingly navigates between all three, visiting the prison cell, becoming subsumed into the family cell she had previously more or less rejected, and becoming more and more involved with the Movement. Finally, "home" is already presented as a highly contentious space which excludes as much as it includes, thus rendering it liminal and replete with subversive potential.

Nils in fact has an overly-idealised and slightly clichéd picture of what their relationship represents. A striking example of this is his explanation for their attraction to each other:

[...] her mother, who had stifled her with thick clothing, suffocating servility, smothering religion, was cold. One of the reasons why she loved him – not the reason why she married him – was to rid herself of her mother. To move him, someone from the other side of the world, a world unknown to her mother, was to embrace snow and ice, unknown to her mother. He freed her of the family, fetid sun.

For him, she was the being who melted the hard cold edges of existence, the long black nights that blotted out half the days of childhood, the sheer of ice whose austerity was repeated, by some mimesis of environment, in the cut of his jaw. She came to him out of the houseful, streetful, of people as crowded together as the blood of different races mixed in their arteries. He came to her out of the silent rooms of an only child, with an engraving of Linnaeus, his countryman, in lamplight. (123)

The hyperbolic oppositions (“snow and ice”; “family, fetid sun”), and parallelism (“She came to him”; “He came to her”) indicate that he sees them as two opposites attracted to each other. He sees himself as solitary, cold, austere (and inextricably linked to his country of origin, to the extent that it seems inscribed on his body, “in the cut of his jaw”, while he sees her as a product of a mixed race environment (“blood of different races mixed in [her] arteries”), full of passion (“embrace snow and ice”). He deals almost exclusively in binaries and in clichés, presenting them as postcolonial star-crossed lovers, he (the white European man) embodying austerity, reason, individuality, while she (the coloured South African woman) embodies hot-bloodedness, passion and plurality.

This is compounded by the mention of the Linnaeus engraving. Firstly, this is placed in opposition to the oppressive description of the mother’s religious beliefs (“suffocating servility, smothering religion”), his disdain for which is rendered in the sibilant alliteration. Carl Linnaeus, was an eighteenth-century Swedish scientist who invented taxonomy and who was the first to develop human taxonomy, coming up with four varieties based on the continents: white European, red American, brown (later, in amended version, yellow) Asian, and black African. It is also he who was among the first to introduce phenotypical characteristics for each group based on the medieval four humours. Gordimer is therefore clearly suggesting that Nils, for all his love for

Teresa and the ostensible irrelevance for him of race, carries with him, through the symbol of the engraving, an urge to classify which found one of its most heinous expressions in apartheid. After all, he too is a scientist whose occupation is to classify.

His conclusion that "[t]hey had the special closeness of a couple who belonged to nobody else" (124) smacks of hackneyed cliché and (is subsequently revealed to be) wishful thinking. In fact, what Nils' focalisation reveals is that he is proprietorial and potentially sexist towards Teresa. For instance, "They did not call each other by the endearments used commercially by every patronizing saleswoman and every affected actress – 'love' and 'darling' – but had their own, in his language" (126). It is significant that these "endearments" should be expressed in "his" language, and that the cheapened terms he dismisses are put by him into the mouths of women only. A sense of smugness therefore permeates the beginning of the story, but it unravels as Teresa gains independence.

Teresa moves from being hysterical at the opening of the story, to having "the face of a victim" and "her beauty [being] dragged out of shape" (126-7) by distress, and then to an increasing position of control, first established in "her hair [being] drawn away tightly from her cheekbones and ears" (129), until "there were no more tears, no more tremblings" (130), and finally, "[s]he never wore her hair loose now" (135). The effect of this is that it is Nils who becomes hysterical (133-4), almost throwing a tantrum when she suggests going to see her imprisoned family, an emotional outburst expressed once again, ironically, in terms of possession: "*I will not have it*" (134, emphasis in original). Instead of admiring this new-found independence, he regrets it, reducing Teresa to an old-school Hollywood icon of femininity, Greta Garbo (136), judging her once again by her body as opposed to her acts. The focalisation gives way at times to interior monologue (137) where he self-indulgently focuses on his itchy anus as he doubts his ability to physically appeal to her any longer. As a result, the story increasingly reads as a bad Mills and Boon novel, a deliberate ploy by Gordimer, as his desire for her is unmatched: "She, who had always been so love-hungry, passionate" (137) brings us back to the ice/fire dichotomy again, and politics here, in Nils' eyes, becomes a substitute for desire for Teresa.

The doubts about her fidelity, the exclamations ("Oh why did these thoughts come!"), the telephoning of friends to check up on her, the interpretation of friends' tone of voice in a crescendo of rhetorical

questions (“and how had Stella sounded? Hadn’t the voice been constrained? Lying? Covering up? Teresa, Teresa” [137]), all highlight Nils’ loss of control of himself and, significantly, of Teresa. His vague perception of the gendered nature of all of this is present in his thoughts that “she was thrusting him back there, leaving him, she had a lover” (138): here, Teresa is perceived as effectively emasculating Nils through the sexualised vocabulary (“thrusting”). It is impossible for him to read her absences in any other way than sexual: she cannot be a political subject in the eyes of Nils.

“Home” then is problematised because he cannot feel at home in South Africa, but also, and perhaps more significantly, because gender roles are reversed with the man staying at home fretting while the woman goes out into the political sphere. Her new-found renewal with her “home” of origin ironically triggers political commitment and a rejection of the old, gendered configuration of their relationship. As Rosemary Marangoly George has pointed out,

if any common pattern can be traced in the many versions of home that contemporary cultures provide us with, it is one of exclusions. Homes are not about inclusions and wide open arms as much as they are about places carved out of closed doors, closed borders and screening apparatuses. When different groups or individuals jostle each other to establish a space as their own, as an exclusive manifestation of their subjecthood, this struggle can become as urgent as keeping alive. As a result, ‘home’ becomes contested ground in times of political tumult either on the level of power struggles at a national communal stage or at the interpersonal familial level. (18)<sup>2</sup>

It is this power struggle which Gordimer foregrounds in this story in which “home” is the site of a transformation. No longer a stable signifier for warmth, or “an expression of the personality of the ‘woman of the house,’ [standing] in as a metaphor for her body” (Marangoly George 23), the “home” here is exposed as a white heterosexual male fantasy, a liminal space where secluded domesticity is rejected in favour of political commitment. The decision to have Nils, the disgruntled

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<sup>2</sup> This idea expressed by Rosemary Marangoly George also resonates with Stephen Clingman’s analysis of “dwelling” and “closed homes” and “open homes” in this volume.

husband, as main focaliser, indicates that Gordimer is particularly interested in exposing "home" as an unstable signifier and signified.

Sexual politics is also at stake in the final story of the collection, 'Amnesty', which is often paired with 'Jump' because of the position of these two stories which frame the collection and the similarity in content: both represent prisoners of sorts, activists who have fought on opposite sides, one for freedom and resistance against oppression ('Amnesty') and one in the name of white supremacy in the post-independence moment ('Jump'). However, 'Home' and 'Amnesty' also speak to each other in interesting ways, and the latter represents home as just as much a liminal space as the former. The gendered perspective is different in the final story as the narrator is the unnamed woman whose partner is firstly imprisoned and then highly involved in the Movement. The term "home" is mentioned several times in the course of the short story, although just where that is in South Africa is unclear, except that it is far inland. Home, for this narrator, is the place where the family lives and works, and is sometimes synonymous with "house" (252, 254). However, as the story develops, and especially when the narrator's partner comes back having been released from prison as part of an amnesty, what "home" actually signifies becomes increasingly problematised:

[...] look, he said, speaking of my parents', my home, the home that has been waiting for him, with his child: look at this place where the white man owns the ground and lets you squat in mud and tin huts here only as long as you work for him. [...] The farmer owns us, he says.

I've been thinking we haven't got a home because there wasn't time to build a house before he came back from the Island; but we haven't got a home at all. Now I've understood that. (254)

Here, her words are supplanted by his, and this process is emphasised by the absence of quotation marks and the framing of the first part of the above quotation with "he said" and "he says", a shift in tense which indicates that these words are often repeated and that their meaning lingers on after the moment of enunciation. Her version of home, couched in possessive terms ("my parents', my home", "his child"), is opposed to his efforts to distance himself from it because of settler colonialism, expressed through the deictic "this" and the deliberately reductive description of their lives on the farm as



impoverished squatters, in other words, those who occupy a liminal space in South Africa.

Although the end of the above quotation appears to suggest at this point that she unequivocally espouses his politicised point of view, the end of the story adds some nuance to this, foregrounding the “insider’s outsidedness”, as does the narrator’s trajectory. Previously scolded by her lover for her ignorance (251), she initially presents her lack of understanding as collective. This is apparent in expressions such as “we didn’t know” (250), “we on the farms don’t know about these things” (251), “we were not sure” (252), “we farm people are very slow” (254). Yet gradually, her voice becomes more assertive and she owns her opinions: “I’m not stupid” (254), “I stay, and listen” (255), “I learn what all these things are: minimum wage, limitation of working hours, the right to strike [...]” (255). It is in some ways ironic that an awareness of collective oppression should be expressed through increased subjectivity and individualism, and yet this is how collective awareness can be reached. If the final page of the story indicates the change/transition in the partner with his growing political awareness and experience of prison through the child’s response to the photograph (“*That’s not him*” [257, emphasis in original]), the final lines pay even more attention to the political change taking place in the narrator. Sitting outside musing over her life, she reiterates her partner’s disparaging description of “the mud and tin huts where the farmers allow us to squat on their land” (256) before articulating her own reappraisal of this analysis:

I sit on a warm stone in the late afternoon, high up, and the whole valley is a path between the hills, leading away from my feet. It’s the Boer’s farm but that’s not true, it belongs to nobody. The cattle don’t know that anyone says he owns it, the sheep – they are grey stones, and then they become a thick snake moving – don’t know. [...]

I am up with the clouds. The sun behind me is changing the colours of the sky and the clouds are changing themselves, slowly, slowly. Some are pink, some are white, swelling like bubbles. Underneath is a bar of grey, not enough to make rain. It gets longer and darker, it grows a thin snout and long body and then the end of it is a tail. There’s a huge grey rat moving across the sky, eating the sky. (256-267)

Gordimer presents the narrator here as being in a state of osmosis with nature, where the boundary between her body and the land dissolves

in a shift of perspective ("the valley is a path [...] leading away from my feet"). The simple truth of Boer ownership of the land, previously conveyed by her partner, is refuted and a different understanding of belonging affirmed in its wake. This feeling of oneness with her environment, more in keeping with several indigenous ontologies than the Marxist analyses of oppression, is reinforced by her perception of weightlessness and the agency attributed to the clouds which are active in their metamorphosis ("changing themselves"). This is not to suggest that Gordimer is privileging one point of view over the other or pitting anti-apartheid activism against pre-colonial ontologies. The metaphor of the enigmatic, voracious, and threatening rat suggests the narrator's awareness of her impoverished conditions due to oppression, but the suggestion is that she is "above" them. It is in this context that the final lines of the story must be understood. "Waiting for him to come back" morphs into "I'm waiting to come back home" (257) and as such, although implying the importance of the politics of personal relationships, also makes space for and gives the final word to *her* expectations. The future is suspended between the ethereal possibilities suggested by the pink and white clouds and the foreboding intimated by the rat-shaped cloud, just as it is also suspended between collective, organised resistance and individual conviction, and between threatening forms of land ownership and pre-colonial epistemologies of belonging. What "home" actually means remains to be defined at this point, but what is certain is that it is a very unstable signifier.

### **Conclusion**

According to Bhabha, "[t]he borderline work of culture demands an encounter with 'newness' that is not part of the continuum of past and present. It creates a sense of the new as an insurgent act of cultural translation. Such art does not merely recall the past as social cause or aesthetic precedent; it renews the past, refiguring it as a contingent 'in-between' space, that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present" (Bhabha 10). Gordimer's *Jump and Other Stories* is, I would suggest, a "borderline work of culture" which, although in many ways firmly anchored in a specific time and place, also reconfigures the dynamics at play as South Africa was poised, "waiting" like the narrator of 'Amnesty', to embark upon a journey towards democracy. *Jump*, as the title suggests, depicts the liminal space as central to the collection and

reads as an imperative to embrace this moment not as a moment of stasis, but as a time of change and transformation.

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