

"The Time That Is Not This," the narrator embarks upon a journey of wishfulness, fantasizing about a time that is diametrically opposed to her depressing reality. That same thought is reiterated in "Moments of Walking in Darkness and Sleep, Conversation and Wakefulness," where the line between fantasy and reality, thought and speech, is intentionally blurred, causing the narrator to conclude that "we do not know which moments of our lives are the happiest or which are the most wretched" (42).

Throughout the stories, Tawfiq distinguishes herself as a feminist author with a unique perception of the world around her. Her works strongly embrace the natural world and are affected by a glorious past wherein solutions to contemporary problems may lie. It is through such contemplation that the quest for an identity, both individual and collective, may be achieved by many who may feel disillusioned with a society that is constantly changing at an incredible pace.

Nadine Gordimer

Writing and Being

Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995. Pp. 176. \$18.95

Reviewed by Tony Eprile

This volume consists of six essays from the Charles Eliot Norton Lectures that Nadine Gordimer presented at Harvard in the fall of 1994. Despite its brevity, the collection covers a broad range and is possibly Gordimer's finest work of nonfiction to date. The introductory and the closing essays are disarmingly open writings by an author who is self-avowedly jealous of her privacy. Gordimer explores—and underscores—how her commitment to breaking through the psychological and physical confines of a "dying colonialism" has provided both the driving force behind her fiction and the ore that she mines so richly in it. The four essays sandwiched in the middle present a critical appreciation of other writers and how they have tackled the question of commitment to historical and socio-political truth in societies that seek to deny both.

The first essay, "Adam's Rib," begins with a somewhat testy complaint about the "prying game" indulged in by those readers who insist on reducing works of the imagination to thinly disguised biography or autobiography. Gordimer's own writing—engaging as it often does with current events in South Africa—has been particularly subject to this kind of speculation, "a game . . . of I Spy that includes as prey the writer her- or himself" (3). Gordimer quickly moves on from irritated complaint to a deeply considered examination of the ways in which living persons encountered by the author are drawn upon to produce, in Joseph Conrad's phrase, "a form of imagined life clearer than reality." Delving

into the question of what it means to be a writer, she seeks a synthesis between two extreme poles of current thinking. One holds a writer's work as limited by his own experience (here represented by Edward Said's study of Conrad); the other treats the text as all, a viewpoint that removes character and a connection to the real world from the equation. Gordimer scrutinizes the moral and creative implications of reductive ways of looking at works of the imagination. At the same time, she wisely does not prescribe an answer but is honest about the practitioners' own uncertainties about the creative process which "leav[es] us half-lying, half-attempting the truth in telling . . . how we think we create" (19).

In an earlier work, *The Black Interpreters*, Gordimer praised the strengths of such African writers as Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Wole Soyinka, while drawing a distinction between the "critical realists" and writers of fiction that functions primarily as testimonial. In the second essay of *Writing and Being*, she enlarges on this distinction with a discussion of the autobiographies of two political activists who were willing to risk their lives to bring down injustice: Ronnie Kasrils, head of military intelligence for the ANC's guerrilla force, Umkhonto we Sizwe; and Carl Niehaus, a devout Christian Afrikaaner who joined the ANC underground and was jailed by the apartheid government. Asking whether "we did not, through failure to end apartheid by other means, send those people out to the barriers?" the usually sharp-eyed and skeptical Gordimer seems reluctant to take a critical stance towards the real revolutionaries in the ANC. I found her too gentle on their particular attempts to "set the record straight" and fill in history's erasures, too willing to accept Ronnie Kasrils at his own inflated estimation. The essay gets back on track when she goes on to demonstrate the transformative power of literature in the poetry of Wally Serote and Jeremy Cronin, who were activists *and* poets. Quoting from these fine writers, Gordimer illustrates that the imagination has a longer reach: "When testimony has been filed, out of date," she writes, "poetry continues to carry the experience from which the narrative has fallen away" (41).

This essay provides a natural segue into an examination of three writers—Naguib Mahfouz, Chinua Achebe, and Amos Oz, respectively—whose novels are politically engaged in the most generous sense. These writers are searching for the truth, "the final destination beyond national boundaries, natal traditions" (45). Gordimer argues that these writers lie outside of the Euro-American mainstream and hence, despite their fame, have been insufficiently the subject of critical study—a lack she begins to redress here. First her attention is on Mahfouz's *Cairo Trilogy*, whose sensual, richly textured post-colonial world comes alive in Gordimer's paraphrasing, as do the characters' sometimes thoughtful, sometimes inadvertant, attempts to find "the Home that is Truth" (69). With skillfully wielded quotations, Gordimer reminds us of the scale of Mahfouz's enterprise and his monumental understanding of human strengths and failings.

The subsequent two essays are close readings of the most recent novels by Achebe and Oz. Achebe's work has too often been relegated to courses in anthropology or social history; Gordimer elucidates not only the complex cultural and political depths of *Anthills of the Savannah*, but underscores its literary achievement as a portrait of the intersection where character and political philosophy meet. The next essay, on Oz's *Fima*, kicks off with a quotation from one of Achebe's characters: "What must a people do to appease an embittered history?" Oz's answer in *Fima* is an exploration of one character's textured interior world as it engages with memory, family, and Israel's daily politics. *Fima's* response to the didactic certainties of his countrymen is simply to think, to mock himself with bitter humor, to fail in a society where success makes an oppressor of those who had historically been the victim. Gordimer helps us see the rightness of Oz's vision that the demands of commitment can be met by a state of mind as well as by action. In her look at this and the other two novels, she performs a task that is sadly lacking in much contemporary criticism: to make us want to read the books again, and with new eyes.

Oz's *Fima* is alienated not out of self-involvement but because it is the wise response to the dissonances in his own culture: "his place does not know him" (111). In her final chapter, Gordimer unsparingly traces her own history of coming to grips with the social milieu that she is both part of and antagonist to. Growing up in a small mining town, she looked toward Europe for enlightenment, shutting her eyes to the land she lived in. (She and Anglican Archbishop Desmond Tutu later discover that they lived in close proximity to each other as children.) Her political consciousness burgeoned not only through her contacts with black South Africans and revolutionary activists, but also through her imaginative writing as she learned to "think outside of the way our society was ordered" (130). Writing became her essential gesture, her primary means of defiance towards South Africa's racist laws and outlook. "I had to become part of the transformation of my place," she writes, "in order for it to know me" (130).

Ricardo Güiraldes

Don Segundo Sombra. Critical Edition

Trans. from the Spanish by Patricia O. Steiner

Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1995. Pp. 302. \$22.95

Reviewed by Evelio Echevarría

Güiraldes's *Don Segundo Sombra* (1926), like Owen Wister's *The Virginian* (1902), is a fictional portrayal of a world which is no more. In his novel, Wister marked the demise of the world of the North American cowboy who had been trampled under by progress: new settlers founded cities, trains reduced distances, and barbed wire transformed the free man of the open ranges into a