Spring 2012 English 2120

Discussion Questions

Nadine Gordimer: “The Moment before the Gun Went Off”

1) Whose point of view is represented by the narrative voice in “The Moment before the Gun Went off”? How is the narrator’s attitude different from Marais Van der Vyver’s? Might this narrative voice also indirectly accent the silence of those who are given no voice of their own, such as black South Africans?

2) Describe the relationship between the father, Marais Van der Vyver, and son, Lucas. Does the disclosure of the father-son connection create more sympathy or disquiet in your view of Marais? Why does Gordimer reiterate the fact that communications take place between father and son in a setting that features the “black man outside the white man inside”?

3) What do you make of the fact that Lucas’s mother is the daughter of parents who worked for the elder Van der Vyver? Although the story does not give us the details of the intimate relationship between the mother and Marais Van der Vyver, how might she describe it?

4) To what extent is the theme of paternal inheritance important in this story? Is there any significance in the fact that it is the grandfather’s gun (Willem Van der Vyver’s) that kills the grandson, Lucas?