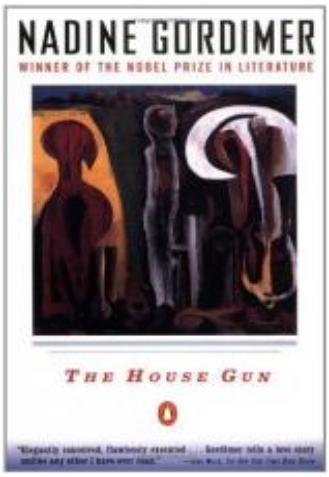
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The House Gun

by Nadine Gordimer



About the Book

The House Gun is Nadine Gordimer's twelfth novel, her second set in post-apartheid South Africa. For Harald and Claudia Lingard, the passively liberal, white couple at the center of the story, not much has changed in the political transition from apartheid to majority rule, from F.W. de Klerk to Nelson Mandela. Harald and Claudia live in comfort and safety until one evening when they discover "something terrible has happened." Their only son, Duncan, has been arrested for killing one of his housemates. There is never a question of his guilt -- he has confessed to the crime -- but Harald and Claudia cannot understand how Duncan could abandon his belief in the sanctity of human life, nor can they believe that the violence that had always affected "other people" has found a way into their world. **The House Gun** records with remarkable precision the psychological transformations that Harald and Claudia undergo as they search for the truth.

In this novel, as in most of Gordimer's books, the personal becomes political. While Duncan's crime was surely one of passion, the repercussions force Harald and Claudia to snap out of their oblivion and face the legacy of South Africa's bloody history: since the end of apartheid the murder rate in South Africa has skyrocketed, and, as a result, guns are "kept for protection" in almost every household. Harald and Claudia also must face their own prejudices as they put their faith in Hamilton Motsamai, the black lawyer Duncan has hired to defend him.

With stunning grace and clarity, Nadine Gordimer seamlessly intertwines the self with society as she tests the boundaries of love and intimacy. Readers will find, like Harald and Claudia, that even within the most complicated frameworks, these boundaries are resilient. The House Gun is a portrait of powerful awakenings -- of a father and mother, a husband and wife, a parent and child, a nation and its citizens. But it is also an affirmation of the will to reconciliation that starts where it must, with individual men and women.

Discussion Guide

1.The narrative of **The House Gun** is divided into two parts. Why do you think Nadine Gordimer chose to do this? Is the narrative style of the two parts different? How? Do you think this is effective?

2.The murder that Duncan commits functions as a prism through which to explore the many types and faces of intimacy: intimacy between husband and wife, parent and child, lovers (hetero and homosexual) and friends -- even attorney and client. Often, we assume that intimacy is inherently good in relationships, but consider Duncan's relationships with both his girlfriend and housemates. While these relationships may have been intimate, they were not necessarily good. Why do you think Duncan chose to stay involved with these individuals? Does Nadine Gordimer judge him for doing so?

3.Throughout the novel, Claudia refers to a note that she and Harald wrote Duncan after one of his classmates committed suicide. It said, "There is nothing that you cannot tell us." But as the novel develops, it becomes apparent that Harald and Claudia really know very little about Duncan's life. Did this strike you as a failure as parents on their part? Why or why not?

4.Think about Harald and Claudia's marriage. What facet of their relationship was transformed the most by the murder? How and why?

5.Do you think that Harald and Claudia's relationship improves during the course of the novel, or just changes?

6.While there are sections in **The House Gun** that give us glimpses into Duncan's perceptions of intimacy, love, and justice, he remains, for the most part, an opaque character. How did you find yourself responding to Duncan: with empathy, with disgust, or with anger?

7.Did you believe Hamilton Motsamai's defense that Carl's murder was a spontaneous act of passion? What are the specific circumstances of the crime that make you believe that it was, or wasn't, premeditated? Is that truth -- whatever it may be -- irrelevant? Why or why not?

8. Duncan, like his father, is an avid reader. Duncan recognizes that writers are "dangerous people" because they know how to murder without picking up a weapon. Do you think that Natalie bears as much of the responsibility for the murder as Duncan? Why or why not?

9. Nadine Gordimer strongly believes in the symbiotic relationship between a novel and the time and place within which it was created. How did she place **The House Gun** in a larger political context?

10."Guns don't shoot people, people shoot people." After reading **The House Gun**, do you agree with this statement? Would Duncan have committed the murder if the gun had not been so readily available?

11. Did Duncan receive a fair sentence? At the end of the novel, was justice served?

Author Bio

Nadine Gordimer (1923?2014), the recipient of the 1991 Nobel Prize in Literature, was born in a small South African town. Her first book, a collection of stories, was published when she was in her early 20s.

Ms. Gordimer was a vice president of PEN International and an executive member of the Congress of South African Writers. She was a fellow of the Royal Society of Literature in Great Britain and an honorary member of both the American Academy of Arts and Letters and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. She was also a Commandeur de?Ordre des Arts et des Lettres (France). She held 14 honorary degrees from universities including Harvard, Yale, Smith College, the New School for Social Research, City College of New York, the University of Leuven in Belgium, Oxford University, and Cambridge University.

Ms. Gordimer won numerous literary awards, including the Booker Prize for THE CONSERVATIONIST, both internationally and in South Africa.

Critical Praise

"**The House Gun** ... is a tense post-apartheid family drama as vital as anything [Gordimer] has ever written. "

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