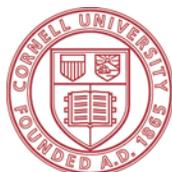


**New Student Reading Project
Fall 2007
Student Essay Winners**

**Adrienne Finucane
Helen Havlak
Alyssa Henning
Kaye Kirschner
Holly Lau**

**Seok Min Moon
Nicole Novak
Mira Patel
Chris Vaillancourt
Joel Wald**



Cornell University

Do Julie and Abdu (Ibrahim) genuinely love each other, or should we conclude that one or both of them has purely instrumental designs on the relationship?

Adrienne Finucane

Global Romance, or Why It's Okay that We All Use Each Other

I am not entirely sure if it was meant to, but the climax of *The Pickup* came as no surprise to me. For many years, I was involved with a volunteer program through which adventure-inclined teenagers from the US were sent to spend summers living and working in the poorest, most remote corners of Latin America. Every year, of the students who went, at least a handful would fall so desperately, inexplicably in love with the lifestyle of impoverished farmers that they would change their names, return engaged at seventeen, or never return at all. Parents of such young folks, all in a tizzy, wondered what could possibly have been so bad about the privileged lives of their children that they felt the need to run so—physically and culturally—far away. Others just laughed and called it a phase. I never thought it was quite so simple.

Falling in love can be as much about the romanticized world the other represents, and the access to that world that a relationship might allow, as it is about the true traits – perhaps unknowable— of the loved one. Any story about love is not simply about what attracts us to one another, but also about identity, and the way in which identity is both determined by background and past, and shaped by conscious choice. Julie and Ibrahim, *The Pickup's* protagonists, are young but not that young, and dissatisfied. Both of them are straddling several worlds simultaneously, and hoping for change. Their interest in one another springs more from the desire to define their identities more concretely than from any conventional impetus for romance.

In their world, our world, of colliding worlds—of extreme lifestyles brought together out of necessity, out of desire, out of force— Ibrahim and Julie are for each other more archetypes than individuals. At first, this is inevitable. There exists for each a twin idealization of the other's life as born-into, as well as a mutual disdain. Ibrahim sees Julie with a mixture of desire (personal and practical) and condescension. To him, her life is one of glamour and security, of freedom and irresponsibility. He can't understand the yearning that arises from the peculiar agony of Too Much Choice. Similarly, Julie falls in love with the dignity of a life of communal obligation, in the eternal, unchanging desert. The world from which Ibrahim comes, for Julie, has an exotic completeness and respectability; his financially similar life as the immigrant on the next block, however, is one of indignity, shame, false dreams. He does not see the difference between the two—both are beneath him, beneath anyone. The lovers underestimate one another, have a hard time shaking loose their assumptions even in the face of hard evidence to the contrary. Physical closeness and even genuine love, particularly where cultural differences and language barriers exist, are no guarantee of mutual understanding.

Julie knows, as a child of apartheid South Africa, that the wealthy countries of the world are no haven for the poor. Citizenship and legal freedom are not guarantees of a fair or decent life, and neither are painful decades of hard work, far from home. Apartheid, like the end of slavery in America, came and went without enough change to the lives of many people on both sides of the socioeconomic train tracks. A person born to poverty, especially a person of color, faces obstacles far beyond what a constitution does or does not permit. Julie sees Ibrahim's desire to become a citizen

of the so-called West for the far-fetched dream that it is, in the same way that Ibrahim sees Julie's fascination with him and his culture as a silly adventure.

However, throughout the course of the novel, Julie also learns something deeper. She learns, because she sees the difference firsthand, that what one may gain in salary in the famous Developed World one may lose tenfold in safety, in community, in a sense of purpose. Her choice to stay, like the choice of my young colleagues to stay in South America, may seem radical, but it should not come as a surprise. Julie willingly becomes caught up in her sense of love as a commitment to share Ibrahim's struggles because she feels the sting of the modern lack of meaning that has been the subject of basically every Western book, poem, movie in the last three centuries. Amongst Ibrahim's family, Julie falls in love with the sense of obligation and dependence that is a woman's lot in his culture, because it gives her purpose and identity outside of being one of those dubiously lucky few who have the world at their feet and don't know what to do with it.

Those colleagues of mine in high school who fell in love with Latin Americans were almost always confronted quickly with a surprising miscommunication. Their new spouses assumed marriage meant the most sought-after thing of all-- a one-way ticket into the US. Who wouldn't prefer the US, with all its opportunities? How startled they were to discover that these strange privileged youth never meant to return at all. Their marriage to Latin Americans constituted a permanent marriage to a lifestyle of communal poverty. If one were to take a black and white view, whether the love was true or not, many were using their new spouses as a means to gain citizenship in a culture in exactly the same way their spouses hoped to use them for citizenship in a country. As with Julie, there was logic to my colleagues' decisions beyond simply the romance of iconoclasm, beyond the proverbial grass always being greener.

So here is the truth that a reconciled world might someday realize: a good life is more than money, more than love. True security is neither simply financial nor simply familial. Julie's choice is naïve—she cannot possibly understand in such a short period of time the ugliness of poverty, the dark side of gender oppression, the terror of having no choice at all. Still, she has found a solution to the anchorless emptiness and guilt of a lifestyle of total individualism in its various forms (The Table, The Suburbs). Human nature tends toward sociability and group survival in a way that Western culture too readily sacrifices in its pursuit of other goals. That loss of togetherness, that imbalance, is precisely what drives the radical return to religious and/or ideological extremes within the West, just as poverty and chaos drive the same phenomenon elsewhere. The sooner we abandon the hubris of total individualism, the sooner we will recognize that other ways of life have the potential to fill an emptiness we have all experienced at some point. As humanity faces problems of an increasingly global and interconnected nature, it would do us all well to learn what Julie learns—that individual survival and success are certainly great, but they are meaningless alone.

What should we make of the fact that that Julie's day-to-day life in Ibrahim's homeland seems to be profoundly shaped by, and intertwined with, religious commitments that she does not seem ready to make?

Helen Havlak

Julie Vs. Religion in *The Pickup*

Those who live in cultures or societies dominated by religions other than their own must choose either to live in relative isolation or to accept all or part of the customs and beliefs by which they are surrounded. In Nadine Gordimer's novel *The Pickup*, the protagonist, Julie, chooses the latter course when she finds herself surrounded by Islam after traveling to her husband Ibrahim's homeland. Although she had been raised without allegiance to any particular faith, and at first is unprepared to assume the subordinate role that is a woman's in Muslim culture, she eventually conforms to many of the religious and cultural practices of her husband's family. In fact, she refuses the opportunity to travel to America, a country where independence, equality and full rights are given to her sex. Instead, she remains in the unnamed, impoverished African country of her husband's family because she feels that a sense of community is more important than total intellectual and physical freedom.

The first compromise that Julie has to make involves her freedom of movement and dress. In South Africa and, because of her wealth, in most first-world countries, Julie can go and wear wherever she pleases. In Ibrahim's country it is different, and at first she is ignorant of that difference. In Ibrahim's words: "Independent. That is the way she is accustomed to living, pleasing herself. Again. But that's impossible, here. He has to be with her, some member of the family... has to accompany her everywhere beyond a few neighborhood streets" (123). Julie, however, does not seem to mind as she begins to assimilate into Ibrahim's family and to learn the language. Independently of Ibrahim and his family, she begins to cover her face occasionally when she goes in public. And while at first her concessions are involved with fitting into Ibrahim's world and not with the actual religion of his family, they soon evolve to include some of the religious ideas as well.

Julie reactions to Islam at first seem contradictory. She keeps fast during Ramadan in order to assimilate more readily into her husband's family, but she and Ibrahim both break Ramadan by having sex between sunup and sundown. And while she does not attend prayers with Ibrahim, she does obtain a copy of the Koran in English, and begins to study especially those passages that are important to Ibrahim's mother. None of this is forced upon her, and yet she seeks employment with the other women in the kitchen and does not object when she never eats the evening meal with her husband. While Julie does not necessarily subscribe to the religion of Islam, she subscribes to the public aspects of it and even some of its spirituality in her drive to fit in and become part of the community. She is willing to make as many of the religious commitments as are necessary to gain her a new family, one that operates very differently from her own. Religion for her is perhaps less spiritual than "the containment of life in a society"; it is about a common thread that can help her to be a part of something meaningful: a family (124).

Julie is, in fact, willing to make as many religious commitments as are necessary to gain her acceptance to Ibrahim's world. For the first time in her life, she belongs to something, and she is willing to sacrifice many of her freedoms for that belonging. She will put on a head scarf, pin her blouses closed, and never go very far from the house without a male escort for the simple reason

that those actions will tie her more securely to the people around her. No one can blame Julie for wanting to be a part of something, but when people find that the need to belong and to be a part of a community is more important than having freedom and independence, the society as a whole suffers and a democratic government is difficult to achieve.

Ibrahim seems to care very deeply about his mother. Does his resistance to so many of the cultural practices that his mother values, or his determination to immigrate (legally) to a wealthy Western country, call into question the genuineness of his love for his mother?

Alyssa Henning

Ibrahim and his Mother

According to Ibrahim Ibn Musa, there are two kinds of people: those who have choice, and those who have none. Enveloped in prayer on her mat in her secluded corner or boiling water on a paraffin stove, Ibrahim's mother, the "presence" of the family, has no alternative to married life except the solace that the Koran provides—of maternal love for a child, the healing presence of family, and perseverance in the face of time. Out of devotion to his mother, Ibrahim selflessly travels to the alluring West to bring freedom and opportunity back to her—until he meets Julie Summers, whose fierce independence embodies the individuality that Ibrahim craves but cannot pursue in his communal desert culture. Although Ibrahim branches from the family in pursuit of wealth and cultivates a flowering relationship with Julie, he remains firmly attached to his mother and reciprocates her love with tenderness and devotion.

When Ibrahim labors in the South African car garage as a lowly "grease monkey," he wistfully thinks of his mother, who holds a special place in his heart that no photograph can duplicate. He, like his mother, senses between them "a biological presence [...] that (circulates) in (the) blood, pumps through the heart (152)," and cements a bond as strong as that of Mary and her holy son in their peaceful sanctuary (145). His mother's values are ingrained so firmly in Ibrahim's conscience that drinking and dancing at a nightclub with Julie and The Table are foreign to his reserved nature and akin to "reverse discipline." The internal, spiritual conflict within Ibrahim is outwardly manifested when he "swallows" alcohol so forcefully and determinedly that Julie's poet friend labels his capitulation as a "survival technique" to satisfy a yearning for individual expression prohibited in his desert culture (30).

Julie provides Ibrahim freedom from the tenets of Islam at a price: his beloved and revered mother's disapproval. Upon Ibrahim's arrival from South Africa, a spiritual barrier has grown between his mother and him, which—although they eagerly and lovingly meet like adjacent seas caressing a common shore—they "overpass not" (146). Fear that Julie would not tolerate her new subordinate position in his culture and then leave him with her elegant suitcase packed opposes Ibrahim's devotion and religious obligations to his mother, whose religious customs he "sharply (resists)...with pain (151)" because of the countless years that she has spent in loving servitude to her family—boiling water, cooking the daily meal, and passionately praying to hold her family together (137). Such "currents of love and resentment" (114) flood Ibrahim during Ramadan, when he succumbs to indulgent and forbidden love with Julie despite his futile attempt to resist carnal desire and then shamefully washes her off of himself to purify his corrupted body (156). Ibrahim's private meetings with his mother, in which there is "hardly (a) need for words (154)" to seek consolation and understanding and which continue to occur even after his egregious disobedience during Ramadan, signifies the healing strength of forgiveness and devotion in their relationship.

Immigration and assimilation fail to tarnish Ibrahim's loving bond with his mother. Although the lure of Western consumerism, consumption, and freedom of choice conflicts with his mother's

religious values, Ibrahim remains genuinely devoted to her and retains a hallowed place for her in his heart wherever his travels lead him.

What, if anything, does Julie's relationship with Ibrahim's mother tell us about the cultural role of women in Ibrahim's homeland?

Kaye Kirschner

In Nadine Gordimer's *The Pickup*, Julie Summers is introduced as a person who is unable to feel a sense of belonging. She has been raised in a wealthy, influential family, and now finds it hard to relate to this Julie of her past. She wants to be strong and independent – or so she thinks. Julie meets a man, Ibrahim, who understands what it feels like to be a social pariah. When Ibrahim is deported, Julie returns with him to his homeland to continue the life that he left behind. Ibrahim has no sense of belonging in this place he no longer considers home, while Julie adopts his land as her own, feeling at home for the first time in her life. She can relate to the women of the village, especially to Ibrahim's mother. Family has been a foreign concept to Julie for so long, but finally she feels like she has found a place where she belongs and people to whom she can relate.

The strong influence that Ibrahim's mother has behind the scenes of her own household inspires Julie to exert her own power in her relationship with Ibrahim. Ibrahim's mother overcomes the fact that she lives in a patriarchal society and manages to retain a powerful place in the family. In Ibrahim's village, men and women have very defined roles in the culture. As the head female, Ibrahim's mother sets the tone for the household through her religious devotion and her interaction with all of the family members. Julie learns how to conduct herself like the women of Ibrahim's culture by emulating the behavior of Ibrahim's mother as well as that of the other women in the household. Both Julie and Ibrahim's mother are silent, but influential, in their own ways. Julie's decision to stay behind when Ibrahim goes to America shows the same kind of quiet power over her small family that Ibrahim's mother exerts over her larger one. Julie retains and emulates the examples set by Ibrahim's mother fluidly.

Julie gravitates towards the mother and grows progressively closer to her as she becomes more comfortable in Ibrahim's family. The idea of belonging to a family is something that Julie knows little about. Julie explains, "You must understand, I've never lived in a family before, just made substitutes out of other people, ties, I suppose – though I didn't realize that, either, then. There are... things... between people here, that are important, no, necessary to them..." (187). The version of family that Ibrahim's mother is presenting is one that Julie wishes she had earlier in her life. A true family, not just "substitutes," is what Julie needs to fill her emotional void. This new sense of family is something that Julie cannot let go of.

Julie's acculturation is facilitated because she has the mother's example to follow. Although she may not embrace all of the religious practices of Ibrahim's homeland, Julie does embrace the cultural aspects. Embracing the culture shows her respect for Ibrahim's mother and the home-life she's established for her family. Julie does not see the patriarchal society as limiting her, but rather adopts the attitude and mores of Ibrahim's mother's in order to put forth her own power. The order that women give to the family is something that Julie appreciates and loves. Even the separation of men from women in Ibrahim's culture gives Julie a comfortable feeling because it allows her to form invaluable relationships with other women in the household. These relationships are closer and more binding than any other relationships she has known previously in her life – they are the type of relationship that Julie was truly missing in her life.

When Julie arrives in Ibrahim's country, her initial encounters with his family and other local citizens lead her to feel "somehow as strange to herself as she was to them" (p. 117). How does Julie become able, in this "strange" land, to let go of the sense of alienation and separateness that she felt at home?

Holly Lau

As a new arrival in Ibrahim's country, Julie encounters the same feelings of alienation that she had felt while residing in her own country. Born in privilege, her contempt for the manners of the high class, who "stamp on one another's heads to make [success]" (p. 45), had driven her to reject and flee from her origins. Her rejection of her father's lifestyle had led Julie to live the way of life of a lower class, yet she still had projected the image of "a denizen from another world, affluence as distance as space" (p. 8). This feeling of alienation compels Julie to hide her old life from Ibrahim, and it also perpetuates "the shame of being ashamed of [the rich]; the shame of him seeing what she was, is" (p. 45) once Ibrahim discovers Julie's origins. However, Julie releases the sense of alienation and separateness of she had felt at home by embracing and assimilating to the cultural traditions, social relationships, and ancestral environment of her new country.

From the beginning of her stay in Ibrahim's country, Julie desires to adapt to the cultural traditions of the land by adopting its clothing, language, and religious rituals. Julie wears the head scarf, common among women of the country, not only to protect her face from the sand but also to become more like the people of the area. "She is wrapped up with a robe round her head like any village woman in the street" (p. 163), which is a sign that she feels comfortable enough to look like local citizens. In addition, Julie begins to learn the language of Ibrahim's people because "she is lonely without [their] language" (p. 151). Julie feels "always the foreigner where she ate from the communal dish..." and sitting as a "deaf-mute" (p. 143) among his people, which reminds her of the distance from other people she had felt back home. In order to gain intimacy with Ibrahim's people, Julie assimilates to the culture by learning the language. Finally, Julie adamantly follows the rules and traditions of Ramadan with regards to the abstinence of food and water between sunrise and sunset. She suffers through the entire course of Ramadan though she does not believe in the religion, which gains her respect among the people of the country.

Additionally, Julie develops relationships with many people in the village, thereby easing her feelings of alienation. Firstly, she befriends Maryam, Ibrahim's sister, and learns about the language, culture, and news from her. Also, she engages in household chores and duties with the other women in the house in order to take part in the common lifestyle of the country. She assists in the cooking and cleaning under the direction of Ibrahim's mother and as a result develops a connection with the other women that she works with. Moreover, Julie begins teaching English to the children and women of the village, which fills her with a sense of belonging and usefulness. Employing her skills of English, Julie is able to find meaning in her life in Ibrahim's country. At this point in the story, Julie "was fully occupied now. Strange; she had never worked like this before, without reservation of self, always had been merely trying out this and that, always conscious that she could move on, any time, to something else, not expecting satisfaction..." (p. 195). These relationships that Julie develops relieve the burden of alienation that she had had to endure in her past life.

To assimilate completely in her new world, Julie also discovers and explores the landscape of Ibrahim's birth. Captivated by the desert that surrounds the village, Julie passes much of her time in the country watching the desert constantly change and reform. Although the desert continually

reshapes, Julie believes that it is “beyond the colour and time of growth” (p. 174). “There is no last time, for the desert. The desert is always” (p. 246), and provides for Julie a contrast to her turbulent, shifting emotions. For Julie, her affinity for the desert grows as “she dreams green” (p. 174), which indicates her awareness that the desert can provide new beginnings and hope for its people. In contrast, Ibrahim “shuns the desert. It is the denial of everything he years for, for him” (p. 262), yet Julie embraces the desert because it offers her everything that she did not have back home. The desert, as her oasis of renewal, hope and stability, guides her from the isolation of her old life.

In short, Julie is able to recover from feelings of alienation and separateness by accepting the culture of the new land, creating flourishing relationships with the people, and finding comfort in the desert, the central feature of the country. Julie follows cultural traditions and gains acceptance from the citizens of the village. She also bonds with the villagers, which helps her feel closer and less isolated than she had felt in South Africa. Finally, Julie feels a sense of belonging with the country as she spends time in the desert and appreciates the magnitude of its being. By the end of the novel, Julie is completely at home with her new country with all feelings of isolation gone.

*The desert sometimes seems to attain the status of an additional character in **The Pickup**. How do the main characters' experiences of, and interactions with, the desert influence the events of the novel?*

Seok Min Moon

“So when you see the two together, the water field of rice growing, and it’s in the desert – there’s a span of life right there – like ours – and there’s an existence beyond any span. You know?”

In *The Pickup*, the desert not only acts as a catalyst to fuel the plot, but also plays contradictory roles in characterizing Abdu and Julie. From Abdu’s perspective, the desert represents despair: “It is the denial of everything that he yearns for.” The desert seems to obliterate Abdu’s dreams, and its destructiveness is reflected on his yearning to escape from his own country buried in the desert. On the other hand, for Julie, the desert is a symbol of hope – a source of a new beginning. Julie courageously enters the desert, explores it, and strives to rejuvenate its desiccated circumstances by hoping to construct the water source in the desert. Furthermore, Julie’s willingness to embrace the desert undeniably parallels her uncanny attraction to Abdu. In fact, Gordimer’s anthropomorphic characterizations of the desert – her vivid descriptions of the desert’s countenance, enormity, and subtle dynamics – encourages readers (like me) to assume that the desert is Abdu’s persona. Therefore, Julie’s experiences of the desert catalyze the central plot in the novel, and simultaneously shift it to more hopeful and promising ending, just as her interactions with Abdu gradually change and revive their lives.

Unquestionably, Abdu’s precarious status as an illegal immigrant is tantamount to the very characteristics of the sand: “Nothing imprint[s] on the desert.” In a foreign country, he doesn’t exist as a human-being; he is just as amorphous, silent, and transient as the sand in the desert. He is frequently referred as “a grease monkey”, and even his dark-caramelized skin laden with dirt and sweat reflects the desert’s countenance. Given the presumption that the desert is indeed Abdu’s persona, Abdu not only despises the desert itself, but also despises his own self for that reason. In *The Sickness Unto Death*, Kierkegaard contends that there are two forms of despair: *despair not to will to be oneself* and *despair to will to be oneself*. From an existentialist’s perspective, Abdu is in the former form of despair because his desire to escape from his country of origin is intertwined with his antipathy towards the desert and ultimately his own self. In short, Abdu is in *despair not to will to be himself*, and his inability to become someone else (who is socially, politically, or financially better off) keeps him as nonentity.

However, Julie’s romantic relationship with Abdu rejuvenates their lives just as her interactions with the desert herald hopeful changes in Abdu’s country. Undoubtedly, her physical interactions with Abdu ignited their deep and truthful relationship, but it was mainly Julie’s compassion, love for Abdu, and yearning for true freedom that motivated her to leave her own country and (absurdly enough) start a new life in the desert. Initially, Abdu was completely dissatisfied with Julie’s decision to come to his country: “Madness. Madness to think she could stick it out ... he was angry – with this house, this village, these his people – to have to tell her other unacceptable things ...” Abdu tells her in despair, “You don’t want to be here for that, believe me.” But Julie reassures him as she laughs with a hopeful smile, “We are here.” When Julie comes to the desert, she does not avoid it, but rather begins to “make for it and there [is] yet another element

entered; the chill of the desert, night cooled sand sifting through the straps of the sandals to lave her feet.” Despite the desert’s coldness, immensity, and cruelty, Julie continues to approach and explore the desert with dogged perseverance, as she continues to meet and interact with Abdu despite his precarious status. The desert has “no seasons of bloom and decay: Just the endless turn of night and day.” But Julie is “gazing – not over it, taken into it, for it has no measure of space, features that mark distance from here to there.” Her observations of the bleak desert (which has no measure of space and time) are comparable to her relationship with Abdu (who has also no identity in a foreign country). Julie continues to “walk through night-cooled sands into the desert,” and she has “no fear of getting lost” because she “[can] always return herself from the desert.” When Julie finally realizes that she can construct the water source to revive the desert with money and time, she exclaims with exuberance, “Water’s – water is change; and the desert doesn’t. So when you see the two together, and it’s in the desert – there’s a span of life right there – like ours – and there’s an existence beyond any span.” Julie finds hope and true freedom in her experiences with the desert, as she finds happiness and true meaning in her life when she interacts with Abdu and his family. Ultimately, her decision to stay at the end was not so much her selfish desire to fulfill her own comfort and freedom, but rather was her sincere yearning to find new meaning in her life by taking responsibility of her role in Abdu’s family. For true freedom can only be obtained with responsibility, and Abdu and the desert (alike) continuously offered Julie a sense of responsibility.

When Julie arrives in Ibrahim's country, her initial encounters with his family and other local citizens lead her to feel "somehow as strange to herself as she was to them" (p. 117). How does Julie become able, in this "strange" land, to let go of the sense of alienation and separateness that she felt at home?

Nicole Novak

Julie Summers defines home as a place where she loses a "kind of consciousness of self" (117). When she follows Ibrahim to his home country, newly married, she feels that she cannot sink into the anonymity of a crowd. The people around her are curious of her different skin color, language, style of dress, and attitude. Julie feels alienated from the world she has thrust herself into, with strange ideas about wealth, water, women, food, and religion. Fortunately, Julie's adventurous spirit allows her to adapt to her strange situation at a time when most would have given into loneliness or given up entirely. She actively seeks to learn about the family's culture, meets new friends, and even pursues work opportunities as ways to mend the separation from her new environment.

Culture barriers are some of the first obstacles Julie encounters as she attempts to create a new life in her husband's country. After a failed attempt at conversation with Ibrahim's sister, Maryam, Julie makes an immediate decision: "I have to learn the language" (121). Julie makes simple sacrifices in her life to be accepted by her new family, from pinning her shirt to respect modest dress traditions, to joining in family-style meals and volunteering to help with cooking and cleaning. She learns to appreciate the scarcity of water on the desert, sacrificing her hot baths to carry a small tub of water. Julie even insists to partake in the fasting during the holy month of Ramadan, despite the fact that she is not Muslim. In these ways, Julie earns respect and acceptance. She becomes more than a tourist or guest – she is a member of the family. Julie has never felt this sort of family connection in her homeland.

Julie connects herself to the network of family and friends more than Khadija, although the latter was married into Ibrahim's family far earlier. The reason is simple. Khadija looks down on her family-in-law and socially isolates herself from her sisters-in-law. She always complains and sighs about her unfortunate situation, regretting that her husband left her at home to seek the oil fields. Julie, on the other hand, appears respectful and agreeable to her new family. Although she was born into a far wealthier family, Julie treats the residents of Ibrahim's home as her equals or, on occasion, her respected superiors. She joins a conversational circle of neighborhood ladies to improve her speaking abilities in the foreign tongue, as well as to share her knowledge of the English language. Julie even goes as far as to engage the children of the family in friendship, teaching them games from her childhood and exploring the neighborhood with small Leila. Even Khadija, who rarely associates with the other family members, is drawn out of her shell by Julie's warmth: "she, who never touched anyone but her own children, embraced Julie" (193). Although a newcomer to this strange land, Julie is able to make herself at home when she welcomes the strangers around her into her heart. These people are so much dearer to her than the superficial bonding of "The Table."

The final step in Julie's transformation from alien to loved family member is the pursuit of work, encouraged by this new network of friends. Julie utilizes her natural talents with children and begins to teach English at a local school. Although the pay is little and desperately needed by the newlywed couple, money is not the real significance of Julie's job. It helps her develop a routine to settle comfortably in her new life. Julie has had many jobs in the past, but for the first time, she feels

dedicated to a purpose in teaching: “she thinks it’s the first time that expensive education has been put to use” (170). Furthermore, this career pushes Julie out into the community, rather than rereading the books she packed in the “elegant suitcase” while Ibrahim disappears during the day. She rids herself of the feeling of separation when she becomes involved with other people of the village.

As Julie develops her purposes, goals, and connections in this strange land, she begins to change as a person. She is “strange to herself” upon entering the country because she begins to analyze herself in the way that the inhabitants of the strange country would see her. She realizes she must take appropriate actions and the attitude of openness to change in order to make herself comfortable and connected in her new home. Julie’s adventurous spirit, the same that Ibrahim criticizes as rash and spoiled, gives her the strength to seek a different life. She succeeds. In the end, it is Ibrahim, the son, the should-have-been uncle’s heir, who seeks to flee from the country in which he is born, while Julie, the newcomer, the “foreign wife,” is the one who adopts a family, seeks friendships, builds a meaningful career, and finds a home in the desert.

Ibrahim seems to retain a conception of himself as a “penniless illegal” (p. 173) long after he and Julie have arrived in his home country. Does this element of his self-conception affect his capacity to behave responsibly towards Julie?

Mira Patel

“A journey is a person in itself; no two are alike...We find that after years of struggle we do not take a trip; a trip takes us.” John Steinbeck’s words could not describe Julie and Ibrahim’s travels more perfectly, whose journeys serve a greater purpose than transport; they bring the characters closer to self-identification. With relocation and its journey comes the hope to attain, in accordance with Gordimer’s definition, “a possession of self” (48). The characters’ journeys are not limited to the physical but become metaphorical representations of their spiritual journeys, their quests to ‘possess themselves,’ destination: personal fulfillment. Their actual travels parallel the progression of their individual fulfillment; an end to the physical travel implies that the character has found contentment. As Julie and Ibrahim relocate to Ibrahim’s homeland, Julie discovers that she may have found the fulfillment she seeks, while Ibrahim continues to search for his own.

Ibrahim’s ongoing emigrations and deportations illustrate his lack of success in seeking contentment. He associates his self-worth with his legal status and success in modern society; until his aspirations are achieved, he cannot view himself as anything more than a “penniless illegal” (173). For Ibrahim, satisfaction comes from fulfilling his role as a man, a concept borne of his religion and culture in which manliness is equated with power, wealth, high status and the ability to support and provide for dependents. Ibrahim is aware that he does not possess any of these qualities or characteristics, but believes that he can attain them with access to a modernized nation, hence his ongoing application for visas in his home country. Ibrahim protects his pride with incomprehensible ferocity; like the ragged dog that accompanies Julie to the desert, “that was all [he] had, in [his] hunger, the dignity that can’t be understood” (242). His downtrodden sense of self worth mixed with his blind ambition to secure his place in society, thereby providing for Julie, produces an attitude of total irresponsibility for Julie as his lover and as a human being.

Julie finds peace in the desert. She is able to objectively observe her past life, and understands that she was “playing at reality; it was a doll’s house, the cottage; a game, the EL-AY Café” (163). In his wild pursuit of leaving his country, Ibrahim does not see Julie shedding everything that she was; he continues to view her as an ignorant heiress and misconstrues her attempts at settling into his country as being petty adventures that she will soon forget. This attitude paired with his forced suppression of love for Julie—stemming from his belief that “love is a luxury not for him,” but for the privileged—blinds Ibrahim to Julie’s complexity as a human being (261). For him, she is the outdated tool of no use, the object “who could be a way to fulfill a need—a destiny” (128). “Her purpose in his life was ended,” yet he feels responsible for her, fears her elegant suitcase packed, and tries with everything he, and she, has to escape his country, in a final attempt to confirm his self-worth and fulfill his role as provider. In his absorption with attaining worldly success, he cannot see that Julie is no longer “accompanied by what was always with her, part of herself, back wherever the past was,” that she isn’t the ignorant girl she once was (198). Julie has found permanence in the desert, and her travels, both real and metaphorical, have ended.

With Julie’s declaration of remaining in Ibrahim’s home while he emigrates to America comes what Ibrahim views as “the stigma on [his] manhood;” he does not understand what she has become, and she realizes that he never really knew her: “I thought we were close enough for you to

understand, even if it was something you—didn't expect..." (255, 262). To Ibrahim, love is a weakness; from the time he first meets Julie he "resists residue feelings of tenderness for [her]," while she surrenders herself completely to him (28). He does not know her, doesn't understand her, won't even allow himself to love her, so how could he be expected to treat her responsibly, to respect her? After all, she is just the pickup, something to prove to his family that his emigration was not a complete mistake. He views her as a child, nothing more.

Nevertheless, that child meets in Ibrahim's homeland a contentment that she did not know in her home, so she stays. Her travels take her to fulfillment, she has allowed the 'trip [to] take her,' while Ibrahim continues to plan his own travels, searching the nations of the world to find his own.

At an important moment in the novel, Julie quotes a richly suggestive passage from South African poet William Plomer: "Let us go to another country / not yours or mine / and start again." (p. 88). How does the looming presence of Julie's "beautiful suitcase" and Ibrahim's "canvas bag standing ready" (p. 218) affect the couple's chances of really "starting again"?

Chris Vaillancourt

"Packing for a Dream"

Ibrahim is an illegal immigrant in South Africa, forced to return to his homeland after being deported and once again seeking asylum in another country. Julie is a dissatisfied member of the upper class, seeking a life of her own outside the shadow of her father's affluence. Together, in Gordimer's *The Pickup*, they travel to Ibrahim's country, both determined to start again in a country that belongs to neither of them. But as time passes, this goal begins to seem increasingly unrealistic. Some explanation for the deterioration of their dream can be found in their luggage -- an elegant suitcase and a canvas bag -- which both serve as representatives of their owners and their individual needs. The presence of both Julie's elegant suitcase and Ibrahim's canvas bag suggests that their personal desires are too different for them to start again as a couple.

Julie's elegant suitcase reflects her struggle to escape from the wealthy life provided by her father. One immediately gets the sense that she is unhappy with that life because it was chosen for her, not by her. The "elegant suitcase with its wheels and document pouches and combination lock" represents the luxuries afforded by her father's riches; upon her departure for Ibrahim's country, it is revealed that the suitcase was "chosen by Danielle for her father to give to [Julie] two years ago" (105). Julie's distance from the suitcase shows her distance from her father's way of life, implying that she has no real attachment to either. In contrast, after living with Ibrahim's family for several months, her suitcase "had not gone from where [she] pushed it under the bed" (152). Whereas it stood ready to leave in South Africa, it stays put in her new residence, suggesting that she has acclimated rather well to her new chosen lifestyle. Ibrahim fails to see her disdain for the life of her father which he envies. His fears of finding "the elegant suitcase packed for ... the beautiful terrace of her father's house" if he cannot get a visa ring hollow because "she [does not] care to call that home" (138). This misunderstanding highlights the impossibility of their starting again together. As he prepares for his move to America, Julie purchases a simple suitcase at the market with Marayam, one "with tin locks instead of the digital combination on her elegant suitcase" (246). She has chosen her own suitcase, and correspondingly, her own way of life her desire to escape the lavish lifestyle of her father is now fulfilled.

Likewise, Ibrahim's canvas bag represents his goal of immigrating to another industrialized nation. He keeps the recommendation letters from Julie's aunt in his "canvas bag standing ready, that carried his life from country to country" (218). With this, his bag comes to symbolize his constant drifting, suggesting that he is always running away from his country of origin. This point is strengthened by the canvas bag's presence when he is seeking residence in Australia. As he goes "rummaging in the canvas bag" for immigration documents, it is revealed that "he had never completely unpacked" it, but instead kept the bag "ready for departure . . . month after month" (148). His refusal to unpack evinces a true distaste for his homeland; by leaving it packed, he can avoid thinking of his home as anything more than a hub stop on his way to another country. Just as Ibrahim does not understand Julie's motivations, she also cannot understand his. After Julie suggests

that they live in his country and support themselves by growing rice, Ibrahim "[rolls] away from her," rejecting her and the notion of living in his homeland for his "canvas bag [and] his folder of papers," or the life of a professional nomad (217). Through its juxtaposition with Julie, the canvas bag represents a life which is mutually exclusive to the one desired by Julie. It becomes clear that, when given the choice between life with Julie and life in another country, Ibrahim will choose the latter. Arriving at the airport, it should come as no surprise that Ibrahim watches his "canvas bag [get] borne away on a moving belt" by itself, with no elegant suitcase to accompany it (267). Like Julie, he chased his desire as part of a couple and realized it alone.

Although Ibrahim and Julie picked each other up hoping to start over as a couple, they eventually found themselves starting over, but as individuals. It may seem as if their original dream had collapsed, but that may not be the case. In a way, they did start over as a couple; had Julie not met Ibrahim, and vice versa, they may not have been able to satisfy their individual desires. Even if their relationship did not survive, one cannot discount the benefits it reaped for both parties involved.

*The desert sometimes seems to attain the status of an additional character in **The Pickup**. How do the main characters' experiences of, and interactions with, the desert influence the events of the novel?*

Joel Wald

The Desert: A Force that Makes Julie and Ibrahim's Separation Inevitable

Julie and Ibrahim's attitudes toward the desert reflect their personal ideologies and desires. When Julie first encounters the desert, she is shocked that the streets do not continue, and she instantly notices its stillness. She also observes that "there was no demarcation between what was the thoroughfare and the shacks where goats were tethered." (p.132) Julie has never been exposed to this sort of "nothingness" before. Ibrahim takes in these surroundings quite differently. He accelerates his car in an attempt to flee from the desert and to prevent Julie from seeing "his country, his people, what he comes from, what he really is." (p.133)

The desert is a place of constancy: growth does not occur and time is not a factor. There is no horizon, and the sky is indistinguishable from the air. These facts lead Julie to embrace the desert, but they simultaneously drive Ibrahim to shun it. Julie hates Western life as well as her wealthy background, and she loves the consistency of the desert. Unlike the corporate ladder that she detests, the desert, without demarcations, does not carry the stigma of higher and lower social classes and human beings. The desert simply exists without a hierarchy, and it provides a way of escaping from her background. Meanwhile, the desert is a mocking symbol of permanent stagnation for Ibrahim. It is a constant reminder that he cannot change his status or who he is. Ibrahim longs for improvement and self-advancement, and neither can be granted in an infinity of sand. It is fitting that *The Pickup* begins with Julie's car battery dying and with Ibrahim working to get it up and running. Ibrahim is a man who desires movement and progress, while Julie merely wants to find her place (which clearly is not at The Table or with her family), settle there, and avoid the Western life which, to quote her wealthy father, demands that she "make something of herself."

For Julie, the exploitation that is prevalent in Western Civilization is even worse than its pressures. Gordimer writes, "Yes, she had been there, to America, she had seen how some people lived in the apartment buildings of the affluent. In the basement." (p.224). Julie clearly resents the American notions of superiority and inferiority. Later on, after Ibrahim tells Julie they are going to America, Julie thinks to herself:

The great and terrible USA. Australia, New Zealand – that would have been something better? Anywhere would be. America. The harshest country in the world. The highest buildings to reach up to in the corporate positions (there he is, one of the poor devils, the beloved one, climbing a home-made rope ladder up forty storeys); and to jump off from head-first. (p.230)

Julie cannot stand the fact that men like her father are considered the real men and become wealthy at the expense of others like Ibrahim who do the thankless dirty work (even if they are fully educated and have a degree in Economics). The desert provides an escape to Julie from the coldness of Western civilization. Because the "desert is *always*," there is no frantic movement, and there are no men striving to change their situations by exploiting others.

Julie has always been somewhat of a “stray dog” because she flees from her wealthy background. She surrounds herself with people from the El-Ay café, but eventually realizes that “The table was no more of use to her than the gatherings at Sunday lunch on Nigel Akroyd Summers’ terrace.” (p.108) However, the desert provides a sense of comfort and belonging for Julie. Julie has no fear of getting lost in the desert in a literal sense but also metaphorically: she retains a sense of self while she is in the desert which she did not have in the other settings. There is an actual stray dog in the novel, but it does not accompany Julie if she goes “farther than a few yards into the desert.” (p.200) This signifies that Julie loses her feelings of alienation when she enters into the desert, and at last, the stray dog within her is no longer present. When Julie later learns that only a modest sum of money is necessary to drill a well and harvest rice in the desert, the prospect of living there permanently becomes a very real possibility. Julie repeatedly dreams of “green” or the chance that life is actually possible in this place where she feels at home.

Ibrahim’s attitude towards the desert is the exact opposite. He sees it as a lifeless, oppressive barrier that he must elude. Since water is depicted as a symbol of change in *The Pickup*, Ibrahim loathes the dry desert because it cannot provide the metamorphosis he desires. Ibrahim longs to rid himself of his illegal immigrant status and to become prosperous in America. He believes there is nothing for him in his family’s third-world country. When Ibrahim’s Uncle offers him a relatively good job as a workshop manager, Ibrahim turns him down. Ibrahim knows that accepting the job would mean permanent residence. The last thing that Ibrahim wants is permanence, and this job, like the desert, guarantees it.

Ibrahim is the ultimate “stray dog” in the novel as he is banned from countries, owns essentially nothing, and believes that love is a luxury that men like him cannot afford. When Ibrahim speaks of going to new countries as an immigrant, he states, “You are a stray dog, a rat finding its hole as the way to get in.” (p.227) He goes on to say, “This time I have the chance to move out of all that, finished, forever, do what I want to do, live like I want to live.” (p.227) Like Julie, Ibrahim tries desperately to find his place and create a better life for himself. The difference is that the desert is the solution for Julie, but for Ibrahim, who must move to obtain what he wants, the desert is a motionless, hopeless obstacle.

The desert influences Julie’s final decision to stay with Ibrahim’s family as opposed to going to America. She cannot tell him this because she knows he would never understand love for a place that denies him everything he wants. Yet Ibrahim recognizes, “Like me, like me, she won’t go back to where she belongs. Other people tell her she belongs. She looks for somewhere else. I’m staying here. Here!” This theme of belonging is universal whether a person is an immigrant or not. Although a person may not physically change countries like Ibrahim and Julie, all human beings are immigrants in the sense that they must search and wander in order to find their place in the world. Julie and Ibrahim’s opposite views of the desert prove just how different they desire their final destinations to be. At last, it is the desert that lures Julie in, drives Ibrahim away, and makes their separation inevitable.

Another Country

'Let us go to another country,
Not yours or mine,
And start again.'

To another country? Which?
One without fires, where fever
Lurks under leaves, and water
Is sold to those who thirst?
And carry drugs or papers
In our shoes to save us starving?

'Hope would be our passport;
The rest is understood.'

Deserters of the vein
And true continuousness,
How should we face on landing
The waiting car, in snow or sand,
The alien capital?
Necessity forbids.

(Not that reproachful look!
So might violets
Hurt an old heart.)

This is that other country
We two populate,
Land of a brief and brilliant
Aurora, noon and night,
The stratosphere of love
From which we must descend,

And leaving this rare country
Must each to his own
Return alone.

William Plomer
Collected Poems. London: Jonathan Cape, 1973.