

ISSN: 0976-8165

The Criterion

An International Journal in English

Vol. 7, Issue- 4 [August 2016]

The Criterion 

7th Year of Open Access

Editor-In-Chief: Dr. Vishwanath Bite

www.the-criterion.com

About Us: <http://www.the-criterion.com/about/>

Archive: <http://www.the-criterion.com/archive/>

Contact Us: <http://www.the-criterion.com/contact/>

Editorial Board: <http://www.the-criterion.com/editorial-board/>

Submission: <http://www.the-criterion.com/submission/>

FAQ: <http://www.the-criterion.com/fa/>



ISSN 2278-9529

Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal

www.galaxyimrj.com

Use of Transtextuality in Nadine Gordimer's *The Conservationist*

Dr. Pradnya Ghorpade

Associate Professor,
KRP Kanya Mahavidyalaya,
Islampur, Sangli,
Maharashtra, India.

The novel has been historically viewed as formless, because it has no classical sanction like other literary forms such as the epic or the tragedy. There should be form, design & composition in a novel as in any other work of art. According to Percy Lubbock(1965:45), "Form in fiction is something to be put in or left out of a novel according to the taste of the author". The novelist narrates his/her ideas or experiences in the way he/she likes.

Nadine Gordimer was recognized as a potentially major artist, a talented, serious & careful writer who treated important contemporary issues. The mixture of the British fictional tradition, with its liberalism, individualism, social detail, and the European literary tradition of ideas & revolutionary demands in her novels required new forms, new techniques, a new consciousness. She uses a variety of styles to suggest the often ironic relationships between the self & other, the individual & society.

The extension of narrative possibilities in Gordimer's novels is a crucial aspect of her quest for a literary form appropriate to her situation, because the cultivation of narrative relativity, of a plurality of voices is a way of conveying the complexity of the historical situation. As Dominic Head (1994:16) argues, "It is also a way of deconstructing the authoritative monologic perspective sometimes associated with colonial literature". Her novel *The Conservationist* reads as if it had to be written. The narrative strategy of the novel is complex and involves an equivocal treatment of the prediction of political change, the nature of a benighted white consciousness and the idea of conservation. These issues are examined through a sophisticated use of transtextuality – involving allegory, prophecy & the modernist technique of stream of consciousness.

The sub-text of Zulu mythology consists of ten prose quotations in italics are dealing with Unkulunkulu, or the Tradition of Creation, Amatonga, or Ancestor worship; Izinyanga Zolukula, or Divination; and Abatakato, or Medical magic and Witchcraft. The quotations are the organizing points for a sub-text which slowly comes into the foreground. The story appears to be that of Mehring, and of the white in South Africa, but reveals itself as that of the blacks. Each quotation introduces an event in the novel. The quotations begin with prayers for corn (39) and for children and the continuation of life (61), to be expected in what is the fourth or fifth year of drought. For example: "I pray for corn, that many people may come to this village of yours and make a noise, and glorify you." (39), "... I ask also for children, that this village may have a

large population, and that your name may never come to an end.” (61) it really easy-slept the New York in, believe it or not, in bed at ten o’clock more or less- And then? A silence while distance is something audible if not palpable: that faint supersonic ringing in the ears, of long distance lines, those wavering under-sea voices that are always there, forlorn sirens of other conversations thinly tangled across millions of miles, Can you hear me?”(220).

A further series of quotations (83, 93, 113) is taken from a dream of one of Callaway’s informants about the capture of an antelope. Later quotations introduce the image of the ‘Amatongo’, the ancestors who are beneath the earth (163, 193), linked to the dead man buried in the third pasture, the question of material possession of African(213), and the bringing of rain and floods by a rainmaker (231) which precedes torrential rain and floods in modern South Africa. The final quotation (247) widens the historical perspective to suggest the enduring occupation of the land by the blacks. As Judie Newman (1988:59) argues:

“Through Zulu myth Gordimer gives formal gives formal shape to the novel, articulating a very different consciousness from that of the public rhetoric of South Africa”.

Gordimer discusses the problem of communication in the novel. In this connection Judie Newman (1988:55) states:

“*The Conservationist* offers the reader another form of articulated consciousness, simultaneously addressing the problems of South African politics and of mimetic realism as a literary mode, by registering the impact of colonialism in terms of language”.

The point has special importance in the South African context. To write in South Africa is to use only one of many languages, each of them inextricably bound to a class, caste, or race. In the novel, Gordimer presents the problem of communication in relationship between father(Mehring) and son (Terry). Father and son appear to speak different languages: ‘Were they referring to the same things when they talked together? (128) Neither engages with the real subject, Terry’s impending military service. The conversation begins beside a sign in three languages, ‘NO THROUGH-FARE GEEN TOEGANG AKUNANDLELA LAPHA’(134) and progresses only as far as dead end in the fields. At one point, Mehring considers Terry’s use of the term ‘Namibia’. ‘Why that and not another invention expressive of a certain attitude towards the place’?(132). Terry favours Namibia as a neutral term, which will not suggest that the land belongs to any of the peoples occupying it. Language attempts to say nothing here, to be neutral, an impossible task. Terry’s conversation with his father also remains a neutral surface.

In the context of Mehring’s perceptions, certain key words, phrases, clauses, lexical patterns recur throughout the novel, in prominent positions. For example, Mehring’s mind moves into the event through his perceptions of the land below him, which he sees as ‘soft lap after lap’ of sand and desert. The opening phrase ‘Golden reclining nudes of the desert’ (120) refers as

much to the dunes as to any sunning tourist. The body of the girl becomes the land, as Mehring locates it, explores, explicitly compares its flesh to water in the desert, experiences the 'grain' of the skin, and moves over the terrain, exploring the ridges of her anatomy. Beneath him the desert sand becomes 'an infinite progression of petrified sound waves' (125), which he watches while caressing the girl, equally soundless, echoing back to him his own activity. Sexual activity is described here as linguistic, as a monologue, delicate phrasing, and finally entry into the 'soundless O of the little mouth' (124). The key words, phrases and sentences express the assumptions of particular characters. For instance, the most prominent single word, given in italics, is 'trouble'(79). It applies, with varying nuances or intonation, to Jacobus's problems on the farm, Mehring's problems with dealing with the dead man, etc. The key recurring phrase is "in a good year" (39). The key sentences includes include: "Why not just buy it and leave it as it is?"(44), "If it were as simple as that!" (49), "Change the word but keep bits of it the way I like it for myself" (56), "Is this all that survives is left?" (94) and clearly related to the last of these: "Soon there will be nothing left"(254). Such words, phrases and sentences are applied in varying ways.

Gordimer uses very illuminating metaphors in the novel. For example, the corpse of the obscure black is used as metaphor. The corpse occupies a central position in Mehring's reflections. It haunts him, "A dead man, but he doesn't speak the same language. He feels the stirring of the shameful curiosity, like imagining what goes on behind a bathroom door, About what happens under a covering of earth..." (225). He is interrupted in his various moods – disgust, anger & joy.

Gordimer here presents Mehring's capitalist point of view. His conviction that only a productive farm can be beautiful is a mercenary view, but also one of efficient husbandry. Through a sophisticated use of transtextuality which dominates the narrative of the novel, Mehring's life and his psyche are presented. Gordimer presents the varied experiences of Mehring as he mixes with the urban crowd of fellow whites & his interaction with the black workers on his farm. However, Mehring cannot be reduced to all allegorization of the failure of the Afrikaners to reform themselves through modernization and the pressures of economic development.

Works Cited:

- 1) Head, Dominic: *Nadine Gordimer*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994.
- 2) Lubbock, Percy: *The Craft of Fiction*, London, Jonathan Cape, 1965.
- 3) Newman, Judie: *Nadine Gordimer*, London, Routledge, 1988.