

Analysing The Effective Use of Symbols in Nadine Gordimer's The Conservationist

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Abstract

In south Africa, most of the writers in the twenty first century made silent revolution through their writings particularly against the Whites who are known for suppression. One among such writer is Nadine Gordimer who raised her voice against the Whites through her novels. She also says that conservative attitudes in South Africa maintain a world that is divided against itself, where different racial groups are radically separated; where sexuality expressed freely and that must be controlled, where all attempts to change the system became dangerous. Nadine Gordimer is known for using symbols and imagery in her writings to enrich her points. The novel *The Conservationist* begins with a image “Pale freckled eggs” of the guinea fowls in the farm. Again, there is also a macabre image i.e., the dead body of an unknown black who was mercilessly murdered on Mehring’s farm and mercilessly buried by the heartless Boer police. Actually, the burial of the body has been haunting him for about ten years, though he has tried to forget it. The murdered man is the image of the black’s claim to their land. Christopher Heywood (1983:32) states: “The Conservationist explores its theme of sterility and renewal through the imagery of landscape and physiology...” Mehring is allowed to live in a world of dream and also reflection. The narrative which takes us through his dreams is fascinating. Mehring is unable to communicate with both the living and the dead. Therefore, this paper mainly focuses on how symbols have been used by the author to enrich her

narration of apartheid system in South Africa.

Keywords: Conservationist, Family Dispute, Symbolism, Separation, and Industrialization.

In *The Conservationist*, Gordimer portrays how nature changes, things die and born again due to some inexplicable reasons. It implies that individuals must also change accordingly and that societies too must change and heal themselves from within. Under the existing apartheid system, even white people are not happy for various reasons. For instance, Gordimer through her novel *The Conservationist* narrates how the conservative white industrialist and his family members developed misunderstanding among themselves due to apartheid system that paved way for the depart of family members from one another.

Nadine Gordimer’s *The Conservationist* is about Mehring, a white businessman who hates his life later for no reasons. During the practice of apartheid system in South Africa, Mehring is a white businessman, having capitalist attitudes. Gordimer suggests that conservative attitudes in South Africa maintain a world that is divided against itself, where different racial groups are radically separated.

There is a power in Mehring's voices which he ignores to his downfall, just as there is a power in the voices which are ignored in the South

African political situation, particularly the voices of the twenty million Black people who have no right to vote, but also of those White dissidents whose voices are suppressed by censorship and banning. Actually, tremendous energy goes into maintaining the boundaries between people that constitute the caste system, and the laws enforcing these boundaries intrude in all aspects of life.

The novel, *The Conservationist* is the natural and unsustainable racist policy of the short life narrative of the industrialist, Mehring. The protagonist, Mehring, is ignorant of the happenings around him. The White industrialist has no idea and concern of the Black men on his farm, and he is unaware of the strong Black men who manipulate themselves mercilessly by hiding their higher intelligence when his boss is around him. Anticipating something negative incidents, Mehring's White wife and son take flight from South Africa as the apartheid has collapsed, and the White rule has come down. The novel is like prose and poem, and it explains the reality social life system. In this novel, the novelist explores the omnipresent horror of death (Ogungbesan 34).

The novel, *The Conservationist*, is about the living condition of white and black people in the apartheid South Africa. The characters in the novel have also been strongly locked in South African culture. The farm is the reality of the factor, and it always occupies the mind of the Conservationist, Mehring. Mehring, the protagonist, has a desire to make contact with the land; he is not a farmer indeed, but the blood is on the farming land. However, the leading character is afraid because it is genuinely a collective farm with the earth that makes his feeling of death later. He returns to his land after spending a week in Japan. He kisses the land and realizes the horror later. His lips are filled with and all of a sudden, he could not identify what is happening around him. Some inhabitants already take place in the land of the White farmer.

On a particular day he shouts at his people because they make him feel the immortality of his

life. He tells, "It's fatal to fall asleep in the afternoon." He talks to himself that "that curious awakening down at the reeds," which had taken him out of "the ordinary plane of existence" (TC 45). The awakening leads him to land outside the existence. He fears that he wants to make real contact with the earth rather than exploiting them as he does with everyone around him.

Actually, in this novel a Black man is found dead on the farm. Therefore, the White farmer follows proper procedure extending his co-operation to the police and talks about the burial system in that place. On the contrary to the expectation, Mehring refuses at first. Then he accepts the unknown intruder to be handed over to the proper authority. The police authorities bury the body of the Black man in a shallow grave.

Mehring starts to think that the dead man would be a sharer of his land and he has nightmare that the dead man is seeking his share. The problems that the farm undergoes are linked with the dead man. The farm is burnt with fire, and he returns to his sharer: "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; you can be sure it was done carelessly) when a fire like this one comes over." (TC 104)

The farm is recovered out of the fire and the farmer sows new seeds in the land. When the plants are grown and ready to be plucked, the White farmer imagines that the dead man would physically pull the plants by walking over the farm. The farmer is satisfied by the harvest yielded by the people. While walking through the farm, his legs get stuck in the hole. Besides, he could find him out of the hole he felt that so Mehring left the farm as the body came to float through the flood. The other characters in the novel mainly concentrate on the haunting death of Mehring.

In the novel, the White wife appears only once; they are the descent of the White farmer. Mehring's wife is a protest liberal against political

inequalities. She has a different political approach. She also brings her political and personnel life together in the novel. The author portrays her unwillingness to corrupt and confronts Mehring's money. It has been used to escape from the country to protest against violence. Besides, there is also a portrayal in the novel of how the liberal White has become ineffective in the challenge system. The novel portrays the relationship between the conservationist and his mistress. The relationship between the White man and White woman has been portrayed along with the opposition of the liberal. In the novel *The Conservationist*, Mehring and his wife are not considered just as Man and Woman, instead Man and Woman whose characters represent the truth and competitive attitude towards the Black. The stress felt by them clearly shows the situation in South Africa how they are facing the effect of the apartheid in the society as liberals. The author spells out the White man's political issues and his historical destiny. In this novel, Mehring is more cautious about his son's growth and mentality towards the happenings in the segregated society. The seventeen-year-old boy is disturbed by the attitude and he has not got any interest due to the system followed in politics. He neither has interest in his father's possession of the farm nor in any of the activity; he is barren of any interest. The White man to bond the scene "The farm who else is a farm for, but a son doesn't interest him"(TC 94).

In this novel, Terry, son of Mehring, symbolizes the White's intents to rule a dynasty. He says to his son, "I notice on the phone you always leave out—avoid using—any form of address that establishes your relationship to me. You don't call me anything. But that doesn't change who you are" (TC 209). Terry, Mehring's son, never talks to him or reveals any relationship with him. Though Terry behaves in an abnormal way, Mehring calls Terry that he is his son. Terry avoids his father because the White man is selfish and he thinks only about him.

The novel portrays Mehring's farm and how he gives importance to his farm. The White man has a keen interest in his farm, and he mainly thinks how to be successful farmer. To justify its existence and that of those who work on it, must be a going concern. These are the facts (TC 76). In this quote, the White tells himself to justify the concern about the farm. Furthermore, the people who work in the farm also have a significant role in the novel. In this novel, Gordimer portrays the sexuality of Mervin as the capability of exploitation. The farm is hiding out place of Mehring and he brings his mistress to the farm for hangouts. His view of personnel life is also materialistic. The White woman condemns the attitude of Mehring. She is always against the exploitation of Mehring and so she opposes his attitude. The most aggressive nature of Mehring is shown in the plane when he attacks the Portuguese girl on the flight. Mehring, somewhat imaginative of the happenings in the plane was continuously haunted by the girl.

Mehring is self-conscious about his weakness and the relationship between the Black and White is self-felt. The stress cannot be equalised with the relationship. The novel opens like this as 'Pale Freckled Eggs'. The owner of the farm enters the farm where he finds children around the eggs. The eggs look like diamonds. The farmer has pride in his eggs. A cross-legged one stands nearby and is the leader of the farm. The children are allowed to take the eggs only when the cross-legged one gives permission. The White man questions the cross-legged. The children laugh at the question and he asks again to the children but they could not understand his language. He conveys his view through gestures. The cross-legged puts the hand in the egg and passes it on one by one. "Eleven pale freckled eggs. A whole clutch of guinea fowl eggs "(TC 8).

The egg story symbolizes the safeguarding of the land and the post of Mehring as a conservationist. The distress that the White man

finds with the Black children when toying with the eggs makes him attached to the Black children. He thinks that the land, ocean, sky, and the houses have to be safeguarded. The White man makes his mind to safeguard the land from the Black and he acts as a perfect conservationist of the land from the Black. Mehring self-appoints himself as a preserver of land and property from Blacks who are considered as ravages.

The land is the theme of the novel to strengthen power and construction. The colonialism is a symbol of power and the existence of suffering and resistance. The novel *The Conservationist* describes the power of the Black people over the land. The farm leader Jacobus mentions in a comment about Mehring that "He certainly has a sense of attachment to the place"(TC 145). The Blacks own the land and they maintain it with all kinds of repairs in the absence of the master. The land symbolizes the reverse power of the Black on White in the novel (Clingman 23). That is why the White man is disturbed by the improper burial of the Black man who is buried improperly in the land (Mitras 4). The workers claim the body on the farm for a proper burial. This symbolises that the Africans have owned the land for themselves. Mehring is disturbed by the attitude, and it depicts the end of White power, and the Black body symbolises the Black power in the land.

According to Mehring's imagination, the world is in the shape of an egg. The autumn is considered "a complete and perfect contained as an egg" (TC 12). In every part of the story, the egg symbolizes every situation. The son of Mehring goes to Namibia and returns with a stone in the shape of an egg. The shape of an egg is the symbol of the son's rejection towards the parents in life. The farm symbolizes the escape of the death of

Mehring. He always goes to the farm to relieve his stress. The White man spends most of his weekend on the farm as he gets relaxed on the farm and relieves his stress. The story progresses with Mehring's continuous visit to the farm after office hours. At the end of the story, he goes out of the country to escape from the funeral of his close friend. He spends his time on the farm to remain isolated. During Christmas and eve of the New Year, he spends time on the farm. The Blacks celebrate rebirth, but Mehring remains on the farm and remains isolated from them.

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