

**Tribhuvan University**

**Portrayal of an Antihero in Nadine Gordimer's *The Conservationist***

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**By**

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This thesis entitled "**Portrayal of an Antihero in Nadine Gordimer's *The Conservationist***" submitted to the Central Department of English Tribhuvan University by Mr. Gobinda Prasad Timilshina has been approved by the undersigned members of the research committee.

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### Abstract

Mehring, a South African industrialist and the farm owner, is the protagonist of Nadine Gordimer's *The Conservationist*. Though he is presented as the conservationist of the farm, ironically, he is its exploiter. He purchased the farm not to conserve the resources of the land and nor for the betterment of the country people but to conserve his own power, possessions and his way of life i.e. the apartheid system. The farm is his heaven for seduction, tax deduction and escape from the stress of daily work in city. He defines and constructs his own truth and value which depends upon random and unsuitable sexual encounters, unlimited meditation upon death and alienation from his family. The misery he has created finally becomes unbearable and leads to his destruction he has to be destroyed. His leaving of the farm symbolizes decolonization in South Africa. By portraying antiheroic traits of Mehring, a representative of the Whites who founded apartheid system, the writer tries to vail out the real depth of apartheid.

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## Chapter I

### Concept of Hero and Antihero

#### Hero

"The chief character in a plot, on whom our interest centres is called the protagonist (or alternatively, the hero or heroine)" (Abrams 224). A personality, who constructs or deconstructs or challenges order, is traditionally known as the hero. He, socially, challenges the decrepit tradition and devotes himself for the establishment of the new one; politically he does his best to popularize his party; in context of literature he is the central character around whom the main story of the work revolves. He is the focal-point of the mass who leads the people towards salvation, hope, betterment or towards crisis and death. Reed defines hero as "that singular and energetic individual whose character contains his fate" (qtd. in Lamont 6).

The hero is first and foremost a symbolic representation of the person who is experiencing the story while reading or watching. The relevance of the hero to the individual relies a great deal on how much similarity there is between the two. To appeal to a wide range of individuals, the hero often is relegated to a 'type' of person which everyone already is or wishes themselves to be: a good person; a brave and self-sacrificing person. By his sacrifice, the hero attempts to shape events.

According to Adams, "[Though we believe that] Greek invented . . . the concept of heroism but surely heroes and the heroic have existed since the first humans" (32). Mythological heroes were to be very brave and powerful as a superman. They could do unexpected deeds and even speak and sometimes challenge the gods. "Moses speaks to

God mouth to mouth" (Lamont 1). Jehovah, the god, addresses the man Moses as speaking with a friend. The Lord may tell Moses what to do. The heroes were more supernatural than mankind. Raglan writes, "The god is the hero as he appears in ritual, the hero is the god as he appears in myth; . . . the hero and the god, are two different aspects of the same super-human being" (qtd. in Lamont 5).

Every hero has to encounter marvellous and adverse forces and get victory over them. Tracing this mythological adventure of the hero Campbell says "hero ventures forth from the world of the common day into a region of supernatural wonder. Fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from his mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man" (30). In Campbell's analysis, the first duty of the individual is to play his given role, as the sun and moon do, without resistance, without thought. In such a society, the historical heroes are mythologized, absorbed by the archetype.

However, the modern hero is more to represent the mankind rather than the supernatural elements. Nietzsche's hero is though above the common people but not the superman. He says, "Verily, a polluted stream is man. One must be a sea, to receive a polluted stream with becoming impure. Lo, I teach you the superman; he is that se[a]; in him can your great contempt be submerged" (qtd. in Reed 4).

After studying the various classical plays, Aristotle, in his *Poetics*, has developed the concept of 'ideal tragic hero' that is; the hero has been raised above the trivial and accidental by virtue of a universal element which answers to the true idea of the object and it transcends the limitation of the individual. The tragic hero is like us having infirmities and virtues, tilted more to the side of good. He is neither a blameless character

nor a notorious villain. He is a character in a work of fiction who exhibits a tragic flaw which eventually leads to his/her demise or defeat. The death of the hero who leads a forlorn-home of the benefactor of mankind, who bears suffering with unbinding fortitude and through suffering he achieves moral victory which fills us with emotions of wonder and admiration for him.

Aristotle emphasizes physical active involvement of hero. There is a high valuation of the body which is more directly reflected in the wide spread classical Greek; appreciation for the human body as expressed athletic prowess, personal beauty or artistic creation. The hero has self-assertive energy, single direction, goodness, friendship and at the same time, he is unselfish. The hero must have nobleness (noble birth) or wisdom by virtue of birth. All the chief figures in the Greek tragedies were kings, princes etc to have required qualification to be a hero. The ordinary people had no chance for hero or heroine but for comic purposes. 'Hamartia' ('tragic flaw', somewhat related to 'hubris') is another characteristic of Aristotle's hero. Through Hamartia, that the protagonist commits, the audience experiences catharsis. The audience feels pity for hero because he does not deserve his downfall. As the hero is similar to the audience, the audience feels fear that the same situation might come upon them too. There should be a reversal of fortune brought about because of the hero's tragic flaw; the discovery that the reversal was brought about by the hero's own actions. He must suffer more than he deserves. He must be doomed from the beginning but bear no responsibility for possessing his flaw. He must have discovered his fate by his own actions, not by things happening to him. The story should arouse fear and empathy. He must be spiritually and physically wounded by



his experiences, often resulting in his death. He must be intelligent so he may learn from his mistakes. Analysing Aristotle's idea of hero Butcher says:

Aristotle's hero is rich and full in humanity, composed of elements which other men possess, but blended more harmoniously or more potent quality.

So much human nature must there in him that we are able to sense some of identification ourselves with him, to make his misfortunes our own. At the same time, he is raised above us in external dignity and station. He is a prince or famous man, who falls from the height of greatness. (277)

The heroes of Shakespearian tragedies are of high social and political status as in Greek tradition. "A Shakespearean tragedy as so far considered may be called a story of exceptional calamity leading to the death of a man in high estate" (Bradley 11).

Shakespeare seems to be highly influenced by the Aristotelian concept of the hero. In *Hamlet*, Shakespeare created the hero of indecisive (procrastinating) nature. Though Hamlet, the prince is of noble birth, gentle, thoughtful; his indecisive nature, that he cannot express his venom and anger, causes tragedy. As Machiavelli believes a ruler had to be cruel, violent and uncompromising; his hero is also guided by his own will not by conscience and ready to do anything just for wealth and power.

Thus, hero, though a single character, has many roles and selves, "Like the deities, heroes travel through time wearing various disguises, manifold masks" (Lamont 2). There is not any particular role and function of the hero so that Campbell's hero has thousand faces. Othello is not only a brave military person but a jealous husband, a gullible and romantic as well. Many significant attempts to determine the definition of hero have been done. But we could not stamp on a fixed one; only, one definition paves

the way for another. The changing concept of hero with the change of time and circumstances opens the possibility of multi-meanings of the term.

### **Antihero**

An antihero refers to a protagonist of a work whose actions and motives are questionable. He is ineffectual and hapless, rather than resolute and determined, whether his motives are good or bad. He can be awkward, obnoxious, passive, pitiful or obtuse but he, always, is flawed or failed hero. He lives by the guidance of his own moral compass, either striving to define and construe his own values as opposed to these recognized by the society in which he lives. Abrams defines antihero as "[t]he chief person in a modern novel or play whose character is widely discrepant from that which we associate with the traditional protagonist or hero of a serious literary work. Instead of manifesting largeness, dignity, power, or heroism, the antihero is petty, ignominious, passive, ineffectual, or dishonest" (11).

Antihero is the principal character of modern literary or dramatic work who lacks the attributes of the traditional protagonist or hero. But many critics find the seeds of the antihero in the heroic tradition. In Lamont's words, "the true Greek hero raises the standards of his own excellence so high that he is no longer appropriate to life" (10). Odysseus who escapes from the danger of war by craft and above all, a belief in survival, is the first anti-hero, a hero who reborn without dying. Criticising the heroic tradition of the past, Lamont further says, "The wanderings of Dionysus, a divinity in search of his own and the city's salvation, are a parody of the heroic voyage. Aristophanes shows his audience not merely a human anti-hero, but an anti-heroic god" (16). According to

Adams, normally, nonheroic or anti-heroic qualities are found nearly in every ancient hero. He writes:

Jason Loved and left Media after using her to attain worldly success. Odysseus the boaster dallied far too long with Calypso, weakly shedding tears over his fate before being aroused to action by Hermes. Aeneas dwdled with Dido, broke her heart, and brought her to suicide. The Hebrew David hid in caves and lived to have his Bathsheba. In the *Volsungasaga* Sigurd saved Brynhild and then forsook her for another woman. In fact, it has been shown how few flawless Hectors and Beowulf's together there were and how often the great heroes were willing to employ magic, deceit, stratagem, disguise, spying in order to attain their ends. (34)

The antihero's lack of courage, honesty or grace, his weaknesses and confusion, often reflect modern man's ambivalence toward traditional moral and social virtues. Antiheroes are 97% better off than most people in the world, they are good guys, but they are not stupid, and they actually give a damn about money.

The term antihero does not, however, mean that the central character stands in opposition to an actual hero in the story or novel. Rather it means that the central character stands in opposition to the traditional idea of a hero. "[T]hey evolve from the traditional hero with a new code of ethics"(Brombert 168). Brombert takes the traditional ideal of the literary hero as not only alien but dangerous to the cultural health. He says, "[T]he appeal of the antihero resides in his "human all too human" character, his virtues often amounting to pointed inversions or ironic twists of the heroic ideal, [. . .] that the

aesthetic effectiveness of the antihero depends on the very absence, or negative presence, of the heroic paragons of tradition" (qtd. in McCort 259).

Sometimes, an antihero is an ordinary man who completely lacks any particular heroic aspects, and also features one or two highly negative personality traits as greed, selfishness, cowardice or laziness that enforce his break from the code of the traditional hero. His motivation is selfish because he feels the need to live against society's code for his own will, "a person who acts for himself and takes responsibility for everything that he does" (Hegel 248). We can categorize the antiheroes into many categories; one of them is a person who has the same end goals as the traditional hero and popular in comic books; the next one is the character, constantly moves from one disappointment to the next, without end, with only occasional and fleeting success. He/she often keeps a deep seated optimism that one day he/she will succeed but in the end, meets the failure; the another type of antihero feels helpless, distrusts conventional values and is often unable to commit to any ideals but accepts and often relishes his/her status as outsider; the next type of antihero starts the story with a few unlikeable traits as prejudices, self-centeredness, immaturity, or a single minded focus on things as wealth, status or revenge. But through the course of events, as we get to know the characters, they grew and change and become popular.

Picaresque, a literary genre, is often defined as the first great antihero of western literature, born in sixteenth century from the social soil of Renaissance and inquisitorial-Spain, and flourishing through the Spanish "Golden Age"(Siglo de Oro, in Spanish, is a period of flourishing in arts and literature which lasted from about 1580 to 1680) . It is taken as the Spanish distinct contribution to the world literature. "The words typically

used in English translation, 'rogue,' 'picaroon', 'knave', etc., do not have the same connotations as the Spanish 'pícaro'" (Willis 64). Goldberg sees the end of picaresque novel as a genre as "the picaresque novel was the mainstream of fiction form 1550, when the double nature of the picaroon offered a new, broader perspective to the narrative art [ . . .] to 1750, when new techniques of fiction were becoming available and the picaresque novel as a living genre was passing" (356).

The picaresque story that aims to be fresh and captivating, uses the language of Marranos (oppressed minorities), is narrated in the first person as a fictional autobiography or ironic confession by someone of base or dishonourable origins. The narrator, born into the lower echelons of the social order, conducts his life on the fringes of society or outright among the underworld.

The Spanish picaresque works reveal a hidden, officially forbidden universe that people of good standard are not supposed to know or have any dealings with. With astounding realism for the period, the reader is led into a world of rogues, beggars, servants, prostitutes and petty criminals; we are introduced to their lingo, customs, values and forms of social intercourse and to their unsavoury, forbidden, yet alluring stories. In fact the picaresque works give importance to the "material level of existence" and most importantly the "psycho-sociological situation in which a young man/woman of low class origin tries to rise rapidly in the economic hierarchy. With the economical perspective Rodriguez-Luis opines, "If we look back at the original *pícaro* Lazarillo de Tormes, it becomes clear that the *pícaro*'s interest in money is a very natural desire on the part of one who is destitute to improve himself economically" (37).

The typical picaresque situation is created by the tension between such drives as to tear the masks that shields reality and to use other masks in doing such. What it primarily seeks to expose is not the reality but the social masks separating the two worlds (outside world and the world under the masks) and their ironic duality. It does not mean that the real world under the masks is the authentic one, because it too is corrupted. Both worlds are inauthentic in their different ways, and truth is elusive, the only undeniable truth is the duality. "The picaresque novel had to imitate reality" (Rodriguez - Luis, 33).

Lopez de Ubeda published *La picara Justina* in 1605 which is one of the earliest picaresque novels and the first to have a female protagonist Justina who neither repents of her bad deeds nor does she stop to sermonize or even to reflect in depth on the evils of the world. In *La hija de Celestina* (1612) by Jeronimo de Salas Barbadillo, Helena, the protagonist becomes the narrator only for one section of the novel, in which she recounts her birth and her initiation into evil. The novel is concerned with a particular case of fraud, to which the author attaches an epilogue describing the outcome for the criminals. Alonso de Castillo Solorzano in his novel *La garduna de Sevilla y anzueto de las bolsas* (1642), employs an episodic structure to narrate the whoring and thievery of its more scandalous protagonist Rufina whose adventures consists mainly of trickery and deceitful marriages. *Die Landstortzerin Courasche* (1670), is another truly interesting picaresque novel by Grimmelshausen, is in a first person narrative, tells the story of Courasche's life, a succession of marriages and rapes interwoven with the repeated acquisition and loss of considerable wealth. She is no mere whore or thief, but the victim of unfortunate circumstances and of the Thirty Years' War which forces her to become a camp follower and to acquire a real liking for that way of life. *Teresa de Manzanares*, of

La nina de los embustes is probably the best drawn of all Spanish *picaras*. She is exaggerated and implausible. She is never punished but left to continue her career of endless marriages or unending sexual urge.

The other picaresque novels like Miguel de Cervant's *Don Quixote de la Mancha* (1605), Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders* (1722) and *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), Henry Fielding's *Tom Jones* and many other are very popular for antiheroic characters. *Moll Flanders* is episodic in structure. The colourful female protagonist Moll is twelve years a whore, five times a wife, twelve years a thief, eight years a transported felon in Virginia. She says, " I was more confounded with the money then I was before with love"(Defoe 13). Adams analyzes the character Moll as:

Moll, of even lower birth, receives a genteel education, is seduced, and then, in what she considers self-defence, goes through a series of husbands and gains a supreme knowledge of the London underworld – prostitution, thievery, Newgate – before finally, perhaps unconvincingly, achieving a kind of peace in old age. (42)

The great quasi-picaresque narrative *Don Quixote* was the single most important progenitor of the modern novel; in it, an engaging madman who tries to live by the ideals of chivalric romance in the everyday world is used to explore the relations of illusion and reality in human life. Gies evaluates Don as "[b]eset by scoundrels, overwhelmed by delusion, attacked by thieves, deceivers, rascals, wizards, and fakery of every turn, the noble Knight of the Mancha nevertheless remains eternally optimistic, virtuous, honourable, and consistent in his nutty vision" (260). Likewise, analysing the characterization of Cervantes, Flores writes, "Don Duixote of Spain [. . .] would in a

Spanish novel, lack the mystery of the unknown. Neither too restrictive nor too encompassing, neither too much nor too little" (211). In other words Don is the, "imaginative soul whose approach to life is more idealistic than practical" (Preston 3).

With the help of its unique style, picaresque is able to work upwards and laugh quietly, simply indicating the hypocrisy and false pretension. It brings together many loose ends and blends different sections of the narrative which strictly presents moral decay of the characters. The picaresque is not a social reformer. He is not linked to the hero because he has neither the time, nor the temperament for reflections.

The Romantic Age is not less important for the transgression in the concept of the hero. Though the Romantic Period still wanted a hero, what it actually got was something of a hybrid with features of both hero and antihero. Thus the Romantic hero stands unhappily betwixt and between. Furst studies the Romantic hero as:

[T]hough the Romantic hero is undeniably "the hero" of the works portraying him, it is, so to speak, for the wrong reasons. His overwhelming presence is the expression of that total self-absorption that makes his universe-and that of the work in which he appears - pivot entirely on his idiosyncratic eye. In such egocentric self-assertion lies, to my mind, one of the crucial turning-points from hero to anti-hero. (56)

This very age is often, taken as the last great age of heroes but their dominant position, stand already well on the way to the modern antihero. The obvious example is of course Byronic hero, so named because it evolved primarily due to Lord Byron's writing in nineteenth century.



A Byronic hero shows several characteristic traits. He does not possess heroic virtue in the usual sense; but he has many dark qualities. With regard to his intellectual capacity, self-respect, and hypersensitivity, he is "larger than life" and with the loss of his titanic passions, his pride, and his certainty of self-identity, he loses also his status as hero. Janssen says, "The Byronic Hero is, at least according to Byron's template, a disabled man" (219).

Byron's dark and troubled heroes are found in the protagonists of the Gothic terror novels of the later nineteenth century, Kruger views the dark hero as "Dark heroes shows evidence of dominance traits, such as a piercing and aggressive gaze, unsmiling countenance, freedom and ease of doidly movements, and a threatening self- confidence" (309).

The Byronic hero rejects the values and moral codes of society and because of this he is, often unrepentant by society's standards. He is usually isolated from society as a wanderer or is in exile of some kind. Often he is characterized by a guilty memory of some unnamed sexual crime. Due to these characteristics, the Byronic hero is often a figure of repulsion, as well as fascination. He is moody by nature or passionate about a particular issue. He has emotional and intellectual capacities, which are superior to the average man. These heightened abilities force the hero to be arrogant, confident, abnormally sensitive, and extremely conscious of him. It is no doubt Byron came at the crest of a great heroic tradition in literature. It is only fair to enjoin that he went over that crest too, and on down towards the anti-heroic. "Byron, whose constant sardonic commentary in his titular hero's bubble and cuts his character to size-to anti-heroic size" (Furst 64).

## **Comparative Study of Hero and Antihero**

Though traditional heroes have abilities far better than any other human, they use their individuality to fulfil social roles and society forces them to live by a perfect moral code. The moral code they receive to uphold from birth because there is always a rumour that their birth is from some form of nobility that is blessed by the gods or are part gods themselves. Being brave, honorable, and physically fit, traditional heroes desire to display their abilities publicly. On the other hand antiheroes are the paradoxical character who are within the context of a story, heroes but in another context could easily be seen as villains or simply as unsinkable. Antiheroes' motivations are not inherently evil and sometimes even good. The birth of antiheroes stems from the need for reason, the rebel against history and to change the society that is in place. They fight evil by denouncing the heroic code of war, violence, and the cult of manliness, because the mind is more powerful than muscles.

A hero sacrifices himself for power, wealth and pleasure. His actions are motivated and influenced by a higher nature which links him to the creative energies that seek to overcome negative states and search higher states of being. It inspires him/her to seize the day, to be creative and virtuous, courageous and just. It is the source of great power and it motivates him to make sacrifices and to do great things. But the actions of the antihero are motivated by a lower, primordial nature that links him/her to the physical, animal side of his/her nature. It is the earth bound self that pursues earthly things. Hidden in the matrix of its seductive energies are the libido and id which are the sources of our most basic instincts, drives and appetites, which control hunger, aggression and sex. Personal sacrifice is the hallmark of hero. He personifies the positive unselfish side of the ego, and their journey reveals the upside of the passage. Here, the hero resists temptation and goes up the ladder. But the antihero, who is drowned in the antisocial acts, personifies the negative selfish side of the ego and his journey reveals the

dark or downside of the cycle where he gives in to temptation and goes down the ladder. Hero is that part of us which recognizes problems and accepts responsibility. However the antihero is the will to power and unfinishing greed, the materialistic, power hungry, tyrannical side of our natures. The upside of the ladder leads us to the happiness, strength, love, unity, humanity, generosity, compassion, celebration, and the paradise. In contrast, the downside passage of the ladder leads us to the dark forces, weakness, lust, polarity, tyranny, uncontrolled greed, hatred, loathing, orgies, and the living hell. The stages for the upside passage are separation, initiation, integration and rebirth. And the stories which focused on upside, focus on the character of the hero. These stories are about the transformation of the hero's character and show the hero being brought back to a heroic frame of mind and returning to the fight. But for the downside, attachment, regression, alienation and death are the stages. And the stories focused in this side focus on the corruption. To liberate an entity like a family, a country or a galaxy from the tyranny and corruption that caused a state of misfortune and create a new unified whole, is the goal of hero. But the antihero's goal is to take possession of an entity and redirect it towards goals that fulfil its own desires and needs which are to accumulate, control and enjoy everything it needs to satisfy its insatiable cravings for sense objects, security, wealth and territory. Psychologically, these are the appetites and desires of the lower self taking possession of the conscious self and redirecting its goals.

On the upside of the heroic passage, good is aggressive and evil is on the defensive but it is vice versa on the downside. The stories which end on the upside end happily and those which end on the downside end tragically. The demise of the antihero is more often than not connected to his overreach, his uncontrolled passions. The misery that antihero creates finally becomes unbearable and then he/she has to be destroyed.

## Chapter II

### Apartheid as a Literary Mechanism

#### Apartheid and South Africa

This very term 'apartheid' is an Afrikaans (language developed by Dutch descent) word which means being apart or separateness. It was first used by Jan Christiaan Smuts in 1917 who became the prime minister of South Africa in 1919. It is a system designed to form a legal framework for continued economic and political domination by people of European descent. Funke, Nortje and others view apartheid as "a term used by the National Party in South Africa during the 1940s to gain votes for the national election to be held in 1948. Once in power, the National Party government put apartheid into action under the banner of separate development" (14). The word apartheid brings within itself the bitter history of racial segregation in South Africa from 1948 to 1994. What makes South Africa's apartheid era different to other segregation policies in the world is the systematic way in which the apartheid government tried to formalize its policies through laws.

Though South Africa became independent from British imperialism in 1931, it was still governed by a white minority - most of British and Afrikaner descent. And the practice of apartheid can be visualized as a continuation, magnification and extension of the segregationist policies of previous white colonial administrations. At the time, when other countries were dismantling discriminatory legislation and becoming more liberal on the issue of race, South Africa was continuing to construct a labyrinth of racial legislation.

In the election of 1948, the National Party (NP) defeated Simut's United Party and formed a coalition government with the Afrikaner Party (AP) under Cleric Daniel Franceis Malan's leadership, and then it put apartheid into action; a broad set of policies was developed to enforce racial segregation.

The apartheid system was implemented by the laws. As written by Farah and Karls "[a]partheid laws defined whom blacks could marry and where they could travel, eat, and go to school. Blacks could not vote or own property. To enforce separation of the races, the government moved thousands of blacks to desolate rural areas that it called homelands, where jobs and food were scare" (934).

The government activated The Population Registration Act in 1950 by which, all the citizens had to be registered under four categories such as white, black (Bantu), colored and Asians. A white is a person with the white appearance and is from British descent as well. A black or Bantu is a person who is generally accepted as a member of any aboriginal race or tribe of Africa, for example Xhosa, Zulu or Tswana descent. A colored is the one who is not a white or a black, often referred to the mixed one. And Asian referred to, primarily, Indians or Pakistani descent. But it was a constant dilemma for the apartheid government to categorize those who do not physically belong to any of these four groups. The Chinese South Africans were classified as Indians i.e. non whites. The immigrated people from Taiwan, Japan, and South Korea etc. were considered as 'honorary white.' Sometimes, even blacks were granted an honorary white status, based on the government's belief that they were civilized and possessed western values. The different members of the same family found themselves in different groups so wives were to separate from their husbands and children from parents. In some cases, even a single

person came to be categorized into different groups. Rochman presents an interesting example of Sandra Laing:

In 1966 in South Africa, Sandra Laing, 10 was reclassified as 'coloured' and expelled from her white boarding school and taken home by police to her white, pro-apartheid family. She told herself that it happened because she punched her classmates who tormented her for her light brown skin and frizzy hair. Her family was able to have her reclassified again as white, but at 16 she eloped with a black man [. . .] and was reclassified once more as black. [. . .] Her case has received national and international news coverage over the years, including in a documentary film. (47)

In 1949 the government passed The Amendment to the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act and The Immorality Act in 1950. These acts prohibited miscegenation; sex and marriage between the races were checked. A white person was not allowed to have any sexual relation with a person of different race. Even a white driver was not allowed to have a black in the front of the car if the person was of different sex. Abortion and sex education were also restricted but abortion was legal in case of rape and if the mother's life was threatened. The Group Areas Act of 1950 was designed to geographically separate the racial groups. This act became the heart of apartheid system and was the basis upon which political and social separation were to be constructed. The blacks were restricted to rural reservations called 'homelands' where life was very difficult. In Miller's words, "There is no water, no toilets, no playgrounds for children and a lot of crime" (123). Addai-Sebo says, "Alienating Africans from their lands is to condemn them to death through calculated disempowerment" (97).

Blacks were not allowed on to the streets of town without pass. Pass laws not only restricted the movement of blacks into town areas but also prohibited their movement from one district to another without the pass document. McCusker writes:

A primary concern in the apartheid era was physically separating black from white people whilst keeping the black populations close enough to places where their labour was needed so that it could be mobilized when necessary. When considered unnecessary, black labourers could be 'endorsed out' or expelled to more distant reserves. (56)

A pass was issued only to a black with approved work. Spouses and children had to remain behind in homelands. Without valid pass, the black was the subject to immediate arrest and summary trial. Police vans patrolled the white areas to round up the illegal blacks. "Under the repressive police state, blacks could be jailed indefinitely without cause" (Farah and Karls 934).

When The Reservation of Separate Amenities Act was passed in 1953, people of different races were stopped from using the same public amenities. The public beaches, buses, swimming pools, libraries, parks, grave lands, churches, schools, universities, public toilets, pedestrian crossing, restrooms, hospitals, ambulances, drinking fountains and so on were racially segregated. The Bantu Education Act (1953) brought all black schooling under government control. The Extension of University Education Act (1959) separated universities for different races. The buses for black (Green buses) stopped at black's bus stops and white buses at white's ones. The first and second class of carriages (train) were for whites however the third class of carriages was left for blacks. Black

people could not employ a white. Black police was not to arrest a white person. Blacks were not to buy hard liquor.

The Separate Representation of Voters Act (1956), Prevention of Illegal Squatting Act (1951), Native Building Workers Act and Native Services Levy (1951), Bantu Urban Areas Act (1954), Black Homeland Citizenship Act (1970) and many other acts and laws, more than 27 in total, were passed to make the system of segregation strong and effective in each sector of life.

In 1949, the African National Congress (ANC) advocated open resistance in the form of strikes, acts of public disobedience, and protest marches. In 1960 a group of disenchanted ANC members formed the more militant Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) whose first agenda was a series of nationwide demonstrations against the pass laws. On 21 March 1960, in Sharpeville, a crowd of more than 5,000 demonstrators converged on the local police station, singing and offering themselves up for arrest for not bringing their pass books. In response, police opened fire on them, killing 69 black people. Most of them were shot on the back. This event is known as Sharpeville Massacre in South African history. Then ANC decided to take up armed resistance against the government. From 1961, the organization adopted terrorist tactics as bombing, murder, sabotage and intimidation. Government banned both parties; ANC and PAC. The Prime Minister Hendrik Frensch Verwoerd gave security forces the right to detain people without trial, declaring the state of emergency. More than 18,000 people were arrested; Nelson Mandela and other arrested leaders of ANC were tried for treason at the widely publicised Rivonia-Trial. In June 1964, Mandela and other seven leaders were sentenced to life imprisonment for terrorism. Thus, South Africa entered its most troubled time as



the parties were banned, leaders were in jail or exile, many states were declared emergency, crime had increased, apartheid legislation was enforced and the gap between the races was made wider.

In 1970s, the South African Students' Organization came to be the main force behind the growth of Black Consciousness Movement, under the leadership of Steve Biko. It stressed on the need for psychological liberation, and non violent opposition to apartheid. On 30 April 1976, the students of Orlando West Junior School in Soweto went on strike, refusing to go to school. Later, this rebellion spread to other schools in Soweto. A mass rally of the students was organized on 16 June which turned into violent, police killed more than 23 people but most of them were children such as Hector Piterson of 12. This incident triggered widespread violence throughout the country. Biko was arrested and beaten to death on September 1977. Thus a generation of young blacks committed themselves to a revolutionary struggle against apartheid.

On the other hand ANC forced the residents to stop paying for services and attacking town councillors and their families with petrol bombs to make black townships ungovernable. Any black, who resisted this tactics was murdered by placing a burning tyre around his/her neck; known as a 'necklacing' process. And the consumers were forced to eat soap powder and drink kerosene if they were alleged to have bought from white's shops. About 100 people per month were died because of such black-on-black violence.

After the Soweto riots, the government began to impose more formal measures of censorship. The government censor monitored the press and media. Though, the government claimed the news media was free, the independent media was forbidden from

reporting on the state of emergency. The South African broadcasting corporation (SABC) which violated the citizen's rights to information and free speech; provided daily propaganda in support of the government. Graybill views as "[t]he SABC [. . .] served as the official mouthpiece of the ruling National Party from 1948 until democratic election brought Nelson Mandela and the African National Congress (ANC) to power in 1994" (227). The English-Language press was thoroughly infiltrated by government agents to disseminate propaganda and disinformation and to spy on their colleagues. The reporters had to discuss with defence force and police service about what should and what should not be reported. Thus, because of the vague laws and severe penalties, journalists were intimidated into degrees of self-censorship. Graybill says. "[T]he black independent press sought to counter the main-stream press's view of the resistance as 'terrorist' or 'communist inspired'. The black press stood alone in exposing security service and hit squad activities" (229). He further says that "black reporters were under pressure from activists to report in a manner helpful to the movement, and were threatened for non-compliance" (229).

Whites also played a significant role in opposing apartheid through the United Democratic Front (UDF), led by Archbishop Desmond Tutu and Reverend Allan Boesak. In parliamentary elections of 1970s and 80s, about 20% whites voted in opposition to apartheid. "[A] small number of whites who put careers and families aside and threw themselves into opposition politics" (Gerhart 178). A white backlash aroused giving rise to number of neo-Nazi paramilitary groups, such as the Afrikaner Weerstand Beweging (AWB) led by Eugene Terre Blanche. Many whites fled the country as refugees while South African security situation continued to deteriorate.

During the last years of apartheid in South Africa, the country was more or less in a constant state of emergency. The president P.W. Botha declared a state of emergency in 36 states. By 1988 about 30,000 people were detained without trial and thousands tortured. The government amended the Public Security Act, expanding its powers to include the right to declare certain places 'unrest areas'. Recognizing the inevitability of change, in 1984 some reforms were introduced; many of the apartheid laws were repealed along with the pass laws. But many blacks as well as the international community felt that the changes were only cosmetic.

The apartheid system of South Africa was condemned internationally as unjust and racist. The Rome statute defined apartheid as one of the eleven crimes against humanity. On May 1961, South Africa was withdrawn from the commonwealth. On 6 November 1962, the United Nation's general assembly passed Resolution 1761, condemning South African apartheid policies. The UN Security Council established a voluntary arms embargo against South Africa. Following the Soweto uprising in 1976 and its brutal suppression by the apartheid regime, the arms embargo was made mandatory by the UN Security Council on 4 November 1977. The UN passed resolutions condemning South Africa including the World Conference against Racism in 1978 and 1983. South African sports teams were banned from participation in international events. Sweden's Prime Minister Olof Plam said, "Apartheid can not be reformed; it has to be eliminated." South African culture and tourism were boycotted. The Nordic countries (sometimes also the Nordic region, make up a region in Northern Europe consisting of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden and their associated territories.) provided both moral and financial support for ANC. According to Dale:

The AAM [Anti-Apartheid Movement], which began in 1959 with the assistance of South African exiles in the African National Congress, was essentially a large, somewhat catholic, big-tent type of organization with a tight focus on ridding South Africa of its noxious policy of apartheid by bringing attention to the issue, mobilizing supporters, raising funds, launching campaigns (such as consumer boycotts), and exerting whatever leverage it could muster to influence British attitudes and policies. (148)

He further says, "IDAF's [International Defence and Aid Fund] and AAM's political, financial and legal contribution to the struggle against apartheid, and their works will have an established place in the Africanist popular and research literature" (149). The US and UK too were promoting the solution of a negotiated settlement with the black majority.

As Botha's government was in the international pressure, he resigned on 13 February 1989 and Fw de Klerk came to be the prime minister. Cooper compares Botha with de Klerk as "Botha shifted responsibility for foreign affairs to the military during his presidential term, and de Klerk turned to the foreign affairs professionals to lay the foundation for the dismantling of apartheid and make the transition to a nonracial democracy" (137). In February 1990, de Klerk announced to repeal discriminatory laws and to lift the ban on ANC, PAC, UDF and SACP, media restrictions were lifted, and the political prisoners were released. On 11 February 1990, Nelson Mandela, after 27 years in prison, walked out of the Victor Verster prison, as a free man and South Africa was announced as independent country on 21 March 1990. In 1993 de Klerk and Mandela were jointly awarded the Noble Peace Prize. The first democratic election was held in

1994. Thus, in the long run, the segregation system came to be end. In the analysis of Bunting:

What defeated apartheid and brought about the installation of a non-racial democratic government was not just the ANC, but the triple alliance of the ANC with the South African Communist Party and the Congress of South African Trade Unions which made it possible to mobilise the majority of the people for the huge success. (1477)

At midnight on 26-27 April 1994, the old flag (from 1928-1994) which had defined South Africa as inherently white nation, recognizing the country's British and Dutch ethnic roots but not any symbolic recognition of black majority, was lowered with the singing of old national anthem followed by the rising of the new rainbow flag with the singing of new anthem. Since then the 27<sup>th</sup> of April has been celebrating as a Freedom Day.

### **South African Literature, Apartheid and Antiheroic Traits**

Because of the complex history of colonization and fragmentation of South Africa into segregated areas under apartheid system, the South African literature has been a fragmented and divided subject matter categorized by race, language, ethnicity and geography.

With the foundation of the Dutch Cape Colony by Jan Van Riebeeck in 1652 (when Dutch East India Company established its settlement in Cape Town ), the settlers have been involved in an active struggle for possession of the land and its resources, and their literature has explored the South African land as arid, unyielding, harsh, sterile and

impotent antagonist. They have conveyed their feelings of estrangement, and the impenetrable awe that they experienced while encountering the African landscape. However, the black writers were recording their feelings of disorientation and loss. What they should do when their own country has been stolen. They felt imprisonment in their own house (country). Though the literature of indigenous culture like Zulu and Xhosa was traditionally oral, some blacks who had been educated in missionary schools began to write in both English and their own languages. For example; Thomas Pringle's *After in the Desert* (1834) which has been taken as one of the most perfect lyrical poems in English literature; Thomas Mofolo's epic *Chaka* (1925); Tiyo Soga's translation of John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress into Xhosa*; Sol T. Plaatje's translation of William Shakespeare into Setswana and Setswana folk tails into English and Olive Schreiner's *The Story of An African Farm*. And Miriam Tlati's *Amandla!* (1981), Mongane Wally Serote's *To Every Birth its Blood* (1981) Mbulelo Mzamane's *The Children of Soweto* (1982) etc. are some of other black protest fictions flourished in apartheid era. These works relies on a naturalist form to portray the profound suffering of black Africans.

The literary protest against colonization dates back to the poem *Your Cattle is Gone* (1892) by Citashe and continues into the early 20<sup>th</sup> century with Sol T. Plaatje's *Native Life in South Africa* (1916), Peter Abrahams' *Mine Boy* (1946) in which he depicted a Marxist sensibility into the black miners to demonstrate the economic injustices inherent in South Africa. Thus Plaatje and Abrahams provided the foundation for protest writing that would burgeon during the apartheid era. The apartheid period produced a flood of writing in prose and poetry designed to critique and challenge the South African racism. Many writers such as Schreiner, Sarah Gertrude Millin, Paulin

Smith, Alna Paton, Fugard, Nadine Gordimer, Bessie Head, J.M. Coetzee, Breytenbach, Wilbur Smith and so on, tried, in their writings, to be real to present the contemporary segregated society that was beaten by apartheid system. They dramatized the history of South Africa; the violence of the racist regime. The issues of master-servant relations, politics, social satire, irony, love, immorality, a self confirmation, search for identify, wish to belong and exist and spiritual and sexual paranoiacs of colonialism and racism are some of the major themes in their works. Their characters deal with exile, selfishness, compromise, alienation, illicit sex, rape, adultery, exploitation and problem of belonging in a segregated society which are some of the striking stand points of antihero.

In fact, apartheid system became not only the hindrance for the non whites but also the headache for the whites themselves who founded it. The same ditch that the whites made for non-white people did not leave them too out. "Political conflict often increased the scale of violence by flooding the townships with weapons and forcing people into rival camps" (Kynoch 494). Because of this violence, millions of whites fled the country, thousands of them were killed. Thus the apartheid system came to be failure to promote the life of South African people. The literary works which were created during this time are the storeroom of such violence, murder, rape, domination, segregation and such other bitter happenings. This worst condition of the country has affected the characters in literary works developed by the contemporary writers. In other words, the concept of antihero became the main mean to express the evil effects of apartheid.

In 1964, Wilbur Addison Smith published his first novel *When the Lions Feeds*. The novel is full of sexual exploitation, exile, alienation, violence, immorality,

selfishness and many other antiheroic traits, with which the writer tries to explore the contemporary history of South Africa. When Sean, the protagonist, after many years, returns home, he finds that his brother Garrick has already married his girlfriend and has brought up his son as his own. Then Sean places himself in self - exile. He eventually meets a Boer family and marries the daughter but later, she becomes ill and commits suicide after giving birth to a boy Dirk. In second part of the same novel which is named as *The Sound of Thunder*, Sean falls in love with Ruth and they conceive a daughter, Strom, during a thunderstorm. But Ruth returns to her husband, Saul, fighting in the Boer war. Saul is killed in battle and Ruth marries with Sean. In the third part named as *A Sparrow Falls*, Sean and Dirk (father and son) clash and Dirk swears to kill Sean. Mark, a young soldier, falls in love with Strom. Dirk brutally kills both of Sean and Ruth but he is also killed by Mark. Then Mark lives with Storm. Alan Paton, in 1948, published *Cry, The Beloved Country*. In this novel, Stephen Kumalo, one of the major characters, is a black who is failed in his fatherhood. His sister is busy in prostitution in town; his son Absalom is lost in criminal activities. The lady whom Absalom loves and has impregnated, is immoral as she had married with more than three people already and when Kumalo, just to check, proposes her, she immediately agrees to marry with that old chap. Kumalo could save his son neither from going to the city nor from the death sentence. The white main character James Jarvis, though has lost his son, Arthur, who was killed by Absalom, neither has any thought of revenge nor has any other heroic acts but leaves his own village. *In the Heart of the Country* (1977), a novel by Coetzee, deals with the complex relationships of colonizer and colonized. Here, a European woman clash with her father when he takes an African Mistress. But later, she also engages with many Africans. Vengeance, violence are other important themes in this novel. Coetzee's



another novel. *Waiting for the Barbarian* (1980) is about the town's magistrate. Because of the rumours that some barbarians are preparing to attack the town, the magistrate captured some of the so called barbarians and killed some of them. But the magistrate himself involved with a barbarian girl and then his plight begins. *Master Harold . . . and the Boys*, a drama by Athol Fugard which was banned by S. African government. It is a story of a psychologically weak white boy of 17, Hally and two African servants, Sam and Willie. The main character Hally is just like a pendulum hanging/swinging between his own tyrannical father and friendly black servant, Sam. Hally's immaturity is clearly seen in the play. Though he is tied to his father by family, heritage and history, he hates his crippled (symbol for the evil impact of racism) father for his inability to serve as a parent, however he loves Sam as a father figure for his guidance and companionship. He is in between of the decision that whether to follow his own father who behaves him as a servant or to go with Sam who is helpful, friendly but a black man. In Nadine Gordimer's novel *Occasion for Loving* (1963), the immoral protagonist Ann Davis, a white woman who is a wife of gentle Jew but involves with a black artist. *A Sport of Nature*, her another novel traces the life of a beautiful white woman, Hilleal, who has inherited rich sexual energy from her mother and uses that sexual power with black men. She gets pleasure by playing with the 'basuto' (African word for black) penis and for her, conceiving from a black is the progeny of the union of colours. Some other famous works by those 'global' South African authors are: *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* by Fugard, *A Dry White Season* by Andre Brink, *When Rain Clouds Gather* and *A Question of Power* by Bessie Head, *Daughters of the Twilight* by Farida Karodia and more importantly Nadine Gordimer's *The Conservationist*.

In this way, although the authors, literary genres, angles of writing etc. vary from one to another, most of works seem to focus on the main issue of racial segregation under apartheid system and show the failure, meaninglessness, and bad impacts of the system with the vehicle of antiheroic concept.

## Chapter III

### Mehring as an Antihero

#### Mehring as a Colonialist not a Conservationist

Mehring, a dominating South African industrialist, is neither English nor Boer but German descent and he is ironically established as a conservationist of the farm which symbolizes the whole country. The conservationist who seems to preserve nature's variety but is in fact its exploiter; nor does the nature return to his sentimental love. The farm is as barren as his own life.

Mehring is at the centre of all his deeds. Anything he does is not for the society but to satisfy his own greed for women and wealth. He has not gone to the country to change the low economical standard of the local people by investing his capital. But by purchasing the farm, on one hand he wants to conform to a fashionable practice among those in his class who acquired farms as tax break and places for entertainment, and on the other hand he wants to preserve his power, status, possession, his privileged way of life; entirely the apartheid system. Thus the farm is only the other side of his business. His "hankering to make contact with the land [. . .] seems to be bred of making money in industry" (22).

Mehring as a conservationist does not believe in the preservation of nature but believes in the wise and sustainable cultivation of the earth's resources. The conservationist approach is essentially uninterested in the intrinsic qualities of the environment but interested in the potentiality of the environment to serve human purposes. His environmentalism asks a question of what human purposes the nature is being conserved for and on whose behalf. "A farm is not beautiful unless it is productive.

Reasonable productivity prevailed" (23). Here, the difference between preservationist and conservationist is manifested. The land for him is beautiful not as land, but as a farm that is used productively. The relationship between preservation and violation extends throughout the novel far beyond his attempt to conserve the guinea fowls on his farm. The paradigm of preservation is established in some complex sense inextricably tied to inflections of generation and violation. The key emblem within the paradigm is language itself which is closely related to sexuality, especially Mehring's sexual violation. His sexual activities with a young Portuguese girl in the aeroplane is one of the examples. The sexual incursion is described as a perverted communication possible only "when interruption can not really disturb the deep level of preoccupation at which it has been established" (128). Mehring's finger engaging the girl's vagina is a monologue in sterility. "His finger [. . .] roamed amid the curly hair in no hurry" (129), "Oh God Knows how long it went on - the finger was able to enter, many times" (130). This monologue explicitly identified with the sterile desert over which the plane is passing. Thus, his fundamental notion of preservation finally extends no further than self preservation, and the book emphasizes this as a masculine notion by connecting his colonialist exploitation of the land to the exploitation of women.

Mehring purchases rather than inherits the farm, boasts that he has no need to cultivate it, and can rarely persuade his son, the sole remnant of his divorce, even to visit it. To support the image of himself as a predatory adventurer, he initially asserts that he buys the farm as a place of assignation. As the narrative unfolds, he marshals a whole arsenal of pathologically over determined reasons for his purchase; that the farm is an escape from city life, a status symbol and a place of retreat. He scolds Jacobus for allowing the African children on the farm to collect and play with the eggs of the guinea

fowls. But their play with the eggs seems to show as a mean of announcing their claim to the land. He decides to plant chestnut trees imported from Europe, and refers to the farm in English vocabulary as a "[f]air and lovely" (184) place which is a gesture of European conquest remaking the native landscape. The trees would mark both an affiliation with Europe and rooting in Africa. Now it comes to be clear that why Mehring is so often associated with European colonial heritage. Like a colonialist "he had to keep half an eye (all he could spare) on everything, all the time [. . .] to pick up a working knowledge of husbandry, animal and crop, so that he could not easily be hoodwinked by his people there and could plan farming operations with some authority" (23). These and many other attitudes of Mehring reflect the confidence of someone who possesses the whole.

He tries to know the land in a different way as a conservationist but he has no curiosity about the original inhabitants of the land. His deep inner pride of ownership, his self-sufficiency on his farm and the coherence of his mediations are shattered when the dead body of the unknown African is found on his farm. The fire blackens his field; it follows the centres on the third pasture "[s]ame thing every year but since he has had the farm; but this time the reeds are destroyed, never before" (94). Fire is followed by the account of the feast celebrating the initiation of Phineas's wife as a spirit medium. She rejects many different foods. She has been touched by genuine visitations of the old faith. She calls herself 'isalukuzana' "the lizard that is the itongo of an old woman" (166). She "feels the amantongo in her shoulders" (169) means she feels pain between the shoulder blades. She is haunted by the dream involving animals as ancestors, "snakes that are men" (166). She is nevertheless perceived as a "poor creature" (166), a nuisance to everyone" (168). During her initiation dance "people got restless and began to shift and

talk. They simply found their way out to go about other things" (166). She experiences those symptoms and is also described as coming from Pondoland (the out of spirit possession is believed to originate north of the Pongola River). The underlying idea in her initiation is that ancestors are tormenting the subject complaining that he/she is no longer true to their culture. She conjures up the vision of flood, "in her sleep there were also elephants and hyenas and lions and full rivers, all coming near to kill her" (166). Her initiation precedes the flood which is quietly presented as a feminine revolution. One of those cyclones "given female names" (232) sweeps from the Mozambique channel symbolizes the anti-colonialist revolution and precedes the torrential rains that wash the corpse out of its shallow grave,

The flood sucks him into a swamp and holds him in a "soft cold black hand" (228). When the corpse resurfaces in the flood, it travels down stream, polluting the plane of the farm on which most of Mehring's gaze has focused. The body functions as the symbol of black consciousness and the threat of a revolution that would delegitimize the white presence completely.

Mehring's anxiety is with the loss of his own visibility from the farm. From the visibility comes the assurance of his white power which echoes with white's anxiety about democracy. He remembers Antonia's words, "[t]hat four hundred acres is not going to be handed down to your kids and your children's children [. . .]. That bit of paper you bought yourself from the deeds office is not going to be [. . .] worth about as much as those our grandfathers gave the blacks when they took the land from them" (177). His treasured desire to lie there after his death is gradually corroded by the insistent corpse. Dissolution of the colonizer is the main focus of the book. The black body which assumes a symbolic significance as Mehring's 'Other' eventually resurfaces because of the storm,

displacing Mehring in a gesture of symbolic decolonization. The black body is associated with racial struggle, disinterred by the rains that were metaphor for revolution in the protest against the colonialism.

The flood dissolves the paths and ways of the society washing out both social domination and a way of seeing "[t]he sense of perspective was changed" (233). Mehring flees the farm after seeing the dead body wash up, thinking to himself that "[n]othing has happened" (252). He will return to his usual preoccupation or to "one of those countries white people go to" (266). And all the emotional intensity of his experience on his farm, unshared and unseen, can simply be denied and become nothing. He is saying himself, "[t]hey can have it, the whole four hundred acres" (264) because "[t]hey have been there all the time and they will continue to be there. They have nothing and they have, nothing to lose" (260). His misunderstanding of the indigenous population who are the natural owners of the land, results the disastrous result for him. Thus he is more self destructive.

The Africans claim the dead body and establish an affiliation with their brother whom previously they saw merely as a trespasser. They accept the responsibility for the dead body's burial. The burial of the corpse here is an attempt to restore the connection to the ancestors. The dead body represents change and is therefore spiritualized and controlled by the blacks. "The one whom the farm received had no name. He had no family but their women wept a little for him. There was no child of his present but their children were there to live after him. They had put him away to rest, at last, he had come back. He took possession of this earth, theirs; one of them" (267).

Thus the blacks conserve their beliefs and their beliefs conserve and regenerate the land and its people. Now, the fundamental questions of the novel like who shall inherit Africa and how shall it be conserved are come to be clear.

### **Mehring and Exploitation**

Why has Mehring bought the farm? It is sure that he has not bought it for economical and racial transformation; not for the welfare of the country people. In fact, he has bought it with the hope that it would be a convenient nest to share with his leftist mistress; "if he were to buy the place, bring her there. It was perhaps then, exactly, that the purpose of buying had come to him" (70). His purpose for purchasing the land, originally, is for the seduction of Antonia; a sexually attractive woman who accompanies him from the city. Thus the farm is no more than a good "place to bring a woman" (47). It is like a brothel for Mehring where he can entertain the extramarital sexual encounters without hindrance of other. His conservationism is thus an emblem of wider patterns of exploitation - especially sexual and land exploitation of a colonialist.

The whole plot of *The Conservationist* is mainly used to generate an ambiguous set of markers on Mehring's unstable sexuality. No woman is safe from his hands and eyes. His friend's daughter "whom he used to fetch to play with his son a few years ago" (31) is now of sixteen or seventeen and when she gives him a good-night kiss as the relic of childhood politeness, his sexuality comes to the surface and "he made a discovery. It was she, among the females present, whom he wanted to meet and undress in a hotel room" (31). Though he likes to be seen as a country gentleman, sexually he is a colonialist. He remembers an incident with his leftist mistress; celebrating his farm (as he has just bought it). They were drinking and laughing at everything. "A funny thing, the



simple pretty ones disintegrate when they drink, the clever handsome ones become more beautiful, their sex comes to the surface" (72). "He drew her tongue into his mouth" (73) and they engage in sexual activities. Thus he has inaugurated his purpose of purchasing the farm. Once, when he flies back to Johannesburg from a business trip, the focus is on his intimate exploration of the underaged Portuguese immigrant girl in the next seat. The ideal form of his relationship to women and land is shown in this incident. The description of character is often merged with the land. During the night he engages in sexual play with his neighbour. His sexual fascism comes to be clear here. "It was his left hand, which had been farthest away from him and closest to the other being" (128). He is exploring her body; "the feel of flesh is experienced anew, as the taste of water is recognized anew in the desert" (128), "all the fingers trailed back and forth over the mound of one thigh" (129). He is feeling "the different texture of the skin, a sudden grain- less, smoothness, silky and hot" (129). He is busy in experiencing her tacky and damp vagina, "the finger was able to enter, many times" (130), he is feeling extreme intimacy as "his hand, finger still inside the body beside him" (130). His mind moves into the event through the perceptions of the land below him, which he sees as "soft lap after lap" (126) of sand and desert. 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, guesses his location, and moves over the terrain exploring the ridges of her anatomy. The feminization of the landscape from the plane anticipates the sexual encounter in the plane. The plane, an enclosed world outside time and place, veiled in sound storms, allows Mehring to ignore social, sexual and class taboos. He fondles the girl illicitly saying, "she need not to be afraid of wanting what was happening because it was happening no where" (129). The closed world of the plane communicates an

impression of consciousness operating in a void, dissociated from the world beneath, annihilating reality. Beneath him the desert sand becomes "an infinite progression of petrified sound waves" (131) which he watches in caressing the girl equally soundless, echoing back to him his own sexual activities. They are utterly separate though enjoying a close intimacy. Their relation is "not without tenderness, but who is ever to know that is part of the scandal" (132) - just as Mehring's relation to land and his boys is not without tenderness but none the less of scandal.

In the novel, Africa and women are so identified that rejection of one implies the rejection of the other. Female exploitation and exploitation of the land are linked. In the last part of the novel when Mehring is leaving his farm with empty mind, his head comes to be a vacuum; he does not understand even the meaning of green light on the road. But when he sees "a young woman is standing there, and the eyes claim him [. . .], she's raised a hand, not too high, a gesture that detains" (152), his sexual interest from the unconscious level comes to the surface and he picks up her to the old mine - dumps for sex. Her sexual invitation reveals his vacuous inner core. They engage in sexual intercourse while stopping at an out - of - the way spot to eat. In her person she sums up all the women in the novel with whom Mehring has involved. "She babbles like a school girl" (254) reminds him of his mistress; she has the accent of a bilingual country, which suggests "she is Afrikaans-speaking" (262). And she "could be Portuguese" (262). She may even be black. "That hair's been straightened and that sallowness isn't sunburn" (261). She is not a paradise conserved but an ecological disaster. Her face is a cyanide dump. "The grain of the skin is gigantic, muddy and coarse, a moon surface. Gray brown with layers of much that don't cover the blemishes" (260). Thus she symbolizes Africa and Mehring's abandonment of her prefigures the abandonment of Africa.

As a white south African male, Mehring can have relations to women only as a form of slumming -even without crossing the race or class lines. His activities then give him back only his own image. His sight and activities are thus oriented towards sensuality as if he has been made for seduction and exploitation. There are so many elements present in the novel which are flooding around Mehring's unstable sexuality. He seems to be interested to preserve the guinea fowl but it is not for the conservation of the bird but for his daily meal so that his sexual power remains strong. He looks all female not as human but as beautiful flowers of sex and he is always in hurry to explore, exploit and experience them. All things of the farm, for him, are made for sexual purpose. The medicinal value of the plants is thus subordinate to their functions as a tool for seduction. So, "Jacobus ought to be told that medicine or no medicine, these bulbs must not be taken" (175) because "any women would go crazy over the multiple - headed lilies" (174). Within his sensualist conception of the world, he wilds the same reductive power over every landscape, interpreting desert dunes as "golden reclining nudes" (103). He describes the weather as "of the temperature and softness that will bring out women in flimsy dresses"(203). His description of the irrigation jets as they "ejaculate tirelessly over the lucerne" (155). Thus Mehring is sexually corrupted and he exploits the female as well as the land of Africa.

### **Mehring as a Mentally Distorted Character**

Mehring, a wealthy white tycoon, though tries to give the impression that he is strong willed, he is suffered from many internal doubts. He worries about his mortality. He does not want to be finished from his farm, from the world. The comment of Antonia—"[n]o one'll even remember where you're buried" (194) – returns regularly in

his mind as a threatening refrain. His confrontation with the dead body of an unknown black man on his property reinforces his fear.

The corpse of an unknown African is found in third pasture, the most remote part of Mehring's farm. It "isn't actually on the earth at all, but held slightly above it on a nest of reeds it has flattened" (15). Jacobus insists, "[n]o body can know this man. Nothing for this man. This is people from there [. . .], the farm's southern boundary" (16). The nameless man is not incorporated into the black community, can fit no inflection in the "grammar of intimacy that [goes] with their language" (35). The corpse of the unknown trespasser silently disputes Mehring's claim to his own clean soil. The decaying body of a so-called city slicker is dumped on Mehring's newly purchased farm to provoke and counterpoint Mehring's mental disintegration.

The corpse that is cursory buried by the police on his land haunts Mehring's landscape. A trespasser without an identity but only a hypothetical story attributed to him, intrudes constantly on Mehring's awareness as he tries to reconcile his enormous feeling for the landscape with his fundamental sense of illegitimacy on the land. The dead body conditions the novel's later events; for example, Solomon is attacked, who is found stripped and unconscious on the veld next morning. It becomes ritualized "the legend had already grown that he was attacked in the night by a spirit" (92).

Mehring is just returned from Japan and he is in his farm. When his eyes open after dozing, he finds himself face down on the ground in a pasture that duplicates the position of the dead man found on his property. "There is sand on his lip. For a moment he does not know where he is-or rather who he is; but this situation in which

he finds himself, staring in to the eye of the earth with earth at his mouth, is strongly familiar to him. It seems to be something already inhabited in imagination" (41). The familiarity he recognizes here forms the basis of his identification with the dead man. In imagination, he has inhabited the same space as the dead body.

While supervising the digging of planting holes for European chestnut tree at the farm house, Mehring is plagued by the "vertigo that goes with pits" (226), and must console himself with the thought that these could not "take him in and conceal him entirely" (226). While retreating from the reeds, he feels "as if he were coming towards himself, about to come face to face with" (227). Something he cannot name—something both him and not him—amid the creaking and rustling of plants near the marshland. "He does not move and the other doesn't move; it's as if each presence (himself and the sound of his own breathing) waits for the other, as concealment" (227). The same dread clutches Mehring when he accidentally steps into the marsh, he becomes subconsciously aware of the black corpse beneath his feet. The muddy surface of the third pasture becomes molten, almost sucking him under in the grip of a "soft cold black hand" (228). His leg might be broken but "he is unhurt. He must get his leg out of the mud, that's all" (228). He tries to be free but "the mud holds him, holds on, hangs on, has him by the leg and won't let him go [. . .] as if someone has both arms tightly round the leg" (228). The corpse's compromise of Mehring's borders is foregrounded when even after he has freed himself, he continues to feel "as if part of him is still buried" (228). The black as image of the subconscious is associated with the melting surface beneath him. He develops a preoccupation with interment—the possibility of being buried or being pulled down into the earth by the anonymous corpse, hounds his thoughts. His phobic response to the corpse is symptomatic of his

failure to suppress the awareness of its existence- it continually floats up " from some obscure corner of experience" (46), becoming a persistent presence in his psyche. He finds it more and more difficult not to acknowledge the absent presence of the body that lies buried.

The rotting corpse planted in his farm is brought up when an earth churning flood regurgitates it. It comes back to plague him from the guilt depths of his own consciousness. All of his life's plans, purposes, and desires are shattered when the corpse resurfaces in the flood. And finally he has to leave his "400 acres of veld" (22) with empty mind as well as empty hands.

Mehring seems to be a psychosis rather than a character. He communicates effectively with no one, in practical. He has narrated his life through the stream of consciousness technique. The chapters on his part are presented through imaginations, monologues, reflections, remembrance and fragments of conversation. The final words of the last chapter are those of other people inside Mehring's head; " come and look; they're all saying what is it ? Who is it? It's Mehiring. It's Mehring down there" (265). In New Years Eve, Mehring imagines conversations that he has with Jacobus. He talks, in his mind, to Jacobus about the dead man. He wants to know from Jacobus what the man looked like when Jacobus found him. He even wishes they could invite the dead man for a drink and promises, "we wouldn't ask any question, eh? Just this one. No harm done" (208). His monologue in aeroplane; his talking and other activities with his mistress are happened not in reality but in his mind, in his imagination.

## Mehring and Alienation

Mehring is an English-speaking South African white; born in Namibia, and bears a German name. He is a wealthy high class business man and landowner who narrate his life throughout internal monologues, reflections and fragments of conversations with the distant son, lover, ex-wife and the workers of his farm which clearly shows the emptiness and loneliness of his life. He is physically as well as emotionally alienated from all his kindred and other people.

Even in his middle age, he is not a family man. He is no longer married because his marriage has failed, his grown son estranged from him and relations with lover are intermittent. That's why he is living alone. The workers in his farm are too not totally under him as he more or less lets them fend for themselves. Thus he fails to meet the standard of a patriarch in relation to his family members and the workers as well.

Though, Mehring is always in fear of alienation and being exiled, not only the people with whom he tries to make some kind of relations but also his farm and even his own actions dramatically alienate him one after another because of his selfishness, egoism, self-destructive actions and immorality. His mistress, Antonia, who travelled around the world on his money, has left the country for political reasons. His wife is already in New York after divorce with Mehring. His son, Terry, has left him to live with his mother in New York. Thus isolated from all relatives Mehring moves to country in search of new relations with the land and its people but his purpose comes to fail while nature develops in his against.

The seven years drought dries up the meadow, lucerne field, source of water, visitation etc. "There was no rain [. . .] the third pasture has patches where a skin of

greenish wet has glazed, dried, lifted, cracked [. . .]. The river's too low to be seen or heard" (14), "there is a whiff in the dry air" (14). The discovery of the black dead body on his farm in a reed bed questions Mehring's ownership of the farm. Then his workman Solomon is attacked who is discovered "lying naked except for a vest, in the veld" (88), increase fear in his heart. The fire devastates his land, blackened his farm, "same thing every year but since he has had the farm; but his time the reeds are destroyed, never before" (94). "The whole farm stinks like a dirty astray" (95). Then a week long downpour not only washes the farming, cattle etc of Mehring but also the roads. And it also resurfaces the black body from its shallow official grave that chases Mehring away from the farm. Mehring's farm workers are isolated by the flood and then they rediscover their traditional African beliefs, as if the tide of colonization had washed over them, cleansing and renewing their original culture. When the road is washed away, Mehring is separated from the farm, and the farm workers have to cope without him - as though he was dead. Jacobus opens cupboards, "as possessions must be sorted after a death, putting objects aside like words of code, or symbols of a life that will never be understood coherently, never explained now" (238). Mehring suffers a double rejection by women and black, and becomes a double prisoner, unable to communicate across the sexual and racial divide an unwilling to accept the mechanical surface communication of Johannesburg society. He is left enclosed in his room, paralyzed beside the telephone answering device, receiving its message but unable to respond; "[t]he machine simply stops listening. Just as he gives no answer" (200).

Because of the race, economic, communication, cultural and class gaps, Mehring has to be alienated from other. In the opening section of the novel, when he sees the black children playing with the guinea fowl eggs:



He asks a question of the cross-legged one and there are giggles. He points down the eggs [. . .] and asks again. The children don't understand the language. He goes in talking with many gestures. The cross-legged child puts its head on one side, smiling as if under the weight of prise, and cups one of he eggs from hand to hand. (9-10)

Here, he is clearly alienated from his own acts of speech. The absolute absence of communication between Mehring and the children clearly amounts to a symbol, the meaning of which prefigures the much larger process that takes place between blacks and white in the novel.

Mehring's first class business trips to Japan and other countries contrast with the uttermost luxuries enjoyed by Jacobus and other workers are to ride around the farm on Mehring's tractor and to wear his son's cast-off fashion sweaters. The worker quarters which are without the least facilities needed for living; no electricity, no water supply, leaking, damp etc. But his own farm house which remains unused during the week, has sanitation, electricity, cooking facilities and furniture. These contracts make a gulf between them and alienates Mehring from the black community and their culture.

The whites in this novel are incapable of making coherent statements neither about the needs of their country nor about the needs of their so-called group. When Mehring visits his son Terry, there is also a problem of communication. An ominous silence echoes beneath the text of the communication. Father and son speak different languages, "were they referring to the same things when they talked together" (134)? The problem of finding a language looms large in the novel with its images of botched contacts, failed communications and empty public rhetorics.

Mehring is alone on his farm even in the New Year's Eve. He has rejected numerous invitations for the evening and the holidays. He has withdrawn to his farm without even replying them. He has invited Jacobus to join him but he misunderstands him and waits for him at the house, instead. Mehring's invitation becomes a joke for Jacobus. Thus he is alienated in his farm from his white mates as well as from black ones i.e. Jacobus.

### **Mehring as a Solipsistic or Egotistic Character**

The whole world of the novel is seen through the eyes of Mehring and that's all for other. His monopoly works everywhere. He prioritizes his own truth. The people, things, farm etc are presented in the novel as Mehring defines them.

The farm for him is "a tax loss" (40), "a good investment" (42), "[a] place to bring a woman" (47). What the farm "really is" (42), is guaranteed by his assumptions and his symbolic structures. The farm serves him for his tax purpose and it also provides conversational currency with which to charm, entertain or impress his business associates. Thus he never lets the farm in its own right. The farm is farm only if it serves him as a place - to get- away-to from the crowded city, from the content of stuffy airports. And "[n]o farm is beautiful unless its productivity" (70). "The farm, to justify its existence and that of those who work in it, must be a going concern. These are the facts" (82).

Mehring wilds the language as the guarantor of a world subject to his own control. He interprets desert dunes as "[g]olden reclining nudes" (103), describes weather as "of the temperature and softness that will bring out women in flimsy dresses" (203) which is the "reminder of a nakedness beyond nakedness, a nakedness so complete it

goes beyond flesh right to bone, that some young girls show in a bikini [. . .] that brings the female body to a point" (103). He does not let his overseer Jacobus to use lilies for medical purpose. He insists "medicine or no medicine, these bulbs must not be taken" (175) because of his sensualist concept; "any woman would go crazy over the multiple-headed lilies" (174).

The characters of the novel share the identities as Mehring's object. This argument is supported by his appropriation of the voices of absent characters. The scene with Jacobus at the abandoned outhouse, and his telephone conversation with his ex-wife take place within his imagination. The appropriate voices, whether of Jacobus, Terry or the absent mistress are addressed as 'You' often without differentiation: a device that serves to link these characters together as representative of the foreclosed 'Other.' 'I' and 'You' are strongly distinguished whenever he refers to his mistress or son, and his reference to Antonia's kind which demonstrate the monolithic identity he assign her. The dead man found on his farm, for him, is "[o]ne of them" (15) which is reference to all black people as their collective identity. And when the same body emerges again, he expresses his anxiety as "[a] hundred - and fifty thousand of them practically on the doorstep" (249). He defines the old De Beer's daughter -in-law and his grand daughter as "the same sort of vacant turnip" (52) His sexual activities with the young Portuguese girl in plane are presented as linguistic; as a monologue, delicate questioning, and finally the "soundless 'O' of the little mouth" (130). This act goes on and on in an endless night of solipsistic communication which does not advance but makes him over aware of "the bounds of himself" (130). The girl remains passive and silent to the explorations of Mehring's finger because his hand "took up the thread of communication" (128). The girl's soundlessness conforms that this is his narrative, that the power of speech belongs to him.

Stream of consciousness is the narrative technique in the novel. The chapters recounted from Mehring's point of view are in the stream of consciousness style which captures the solipsism of his ego and highlights his imperialist appropriation of the world. However the words about Jacobus and the Indian family are more detached.

Mehring claims an intimate understanding and knowledge of his workmen, his mistress and son. He arrogates his mistress as entirely predictable "[h]e knew all the answers she could have given, knew them by heart, had heard them mouthed by her kind a hundred times" (70-71). [I]t's easy to plot a graph of the reactions of your kind I know what you are thinking" (155). As he believes, "a man like him is quick to understand what is being said that can't be said" (105). When inwardly, he asks a question to his son Terry he immediately reports "[p]erhaps again the answer is there before the question. I know what you think. I know that you say when you don't speak" (139). His solipsistic nature works again when he misinterprets Jacobus's complain about the discovery of the dead body; with a self assured certainty. Jacobus looks distressed to tell about the corpse but Mehring analyzes his action or condition in terms of his won preoccupation with the conservation of guinea fowl eggs.

The ending scene breaks the familiarity down and Mehring encounters with the dissolution of his fixed structure of means and positions. His reason is shaken as he sits "looking at a green light and not knowing what it means (251). Then he encounters with a hitchhiker. "[A] young woman is standing there, and the eyes claim him [. . .]. No, no. He's not quick enough to accelerate; she's raised a hand not too high a gesture that detains [. . .]. No. The Mercedes rolls to a halt" (252). Though he determined to refuse, he finds himself to pick up that woman. Again, when she suggests to travel down a side-road to a quite place in the mine dumps, Mehring again complies against his will "He has seen it.

No, no [. . .]. He has flipped the indicator to signal" (256). The woman disorients him completely. His privacy is robbed totally. His solipsistic nature is totally collapsed. "I don't want to sit" (258) he says, but he sits. This incident develops into a sexual encounter in a dystopic landscape of industrial pollution and urban decays "a dirty place, an overgrown rubbish dump between mounds of cyanide waste" (258). Thus the homeless Mehring finds himself in a 'no-man's land with a woman whose desires and intentions he cannot understand.

## Chapter IV

### Conclusion

Mehring, the white industrialist of South Africa, is suffering from detachment and problem of belonging. He is no longer a family man as his wife has already divorced him, his son disagrees to follow his footsteps and his mistress has left the country. Thus he is emotionally and physically alienated from his family and then increasingly moves to seek pleasure in casual sex with younger women. His origin is also questionable because he was born in Namibia, lives in Johannesburg, speaks English but bears a German name.

He has purchased four hundred acres of land outside Johannesburg. It is a great irony that he is presented as the conservationist of the farm but in fact he has not bought the farm to save its resources and not to do anything to change the lifestyle of the local people, with the investment. His purpose to buy the land is totally selfish. He is extremely conscious of himself. Because of his greed, he wants to possess everything he desires, for example; women, property, land etc, without limits and control. And by purchasing the land he wants to conserve his power, possession, status, his way of life; to deduct tax; to escape from the business life of the city and more interestingly for seduction of Antonia, a sexually attractive woman with whom he has slept for fifteen years. He is a seducer or a fucker but could not be a lover.

When he was of sixteen, he fucked a married woman of thirty five. "She was what I wanted when I was in bed at night" (158). Once she let him to her mother's house but "wouldn't take off her slacks" (158) though she took off her blouse, because it was not the safe place. But later it happened in an empty beach-house, "all of sixteen years old - I was confident as a man of thirty" (159). The whole plot of the novel is oriented to his

unsuitable, illicit and immoral sexual activities. He has decorated his living room with a calendar with women without clothes. No woman is safe from his hands and eyes. The desire to undress and touch the body of his friend's daughter who is at the age of his son; Terry, comes times and again in his mind. He experiences, explores and exploits a Portuguese immigrant girl in plane. The girl becomes the land, over which the plane is flying, as Mehring locates it. Her flesh is compared with water in the desert; experiencing her skin he guesses the locations. Thus he explores the ridges of her anatomy. The feminization of the land anticipates his sexual encounter in the plane. The exploitations of the women is associated with the exploitation of the land. He picks up a colored girl from the road and brings her to an old mine property for seduction. He experiences her face as a cyanide dump; the grain of her skin is gigantic, muddy and coarse like the moon surface. Here also he compares her with African land.

He defines and constructs his own values. He is guided by his own truth and moral compass. He has created his own symbolic system to see the world which captures his solipsistic nature. The dead African, other characters as well as the objects of his farm are presented in the novel as he assigns his own definition to them. The farm is defined on the basis of its productivity and as it serves him; the desert dunes for him are golden reclining nudes; he likes the temperature of the weather because it brings women in flimsy dresses so that he could imagine their nakedness. He does not let other to pluck the lilies even for medicinal purpose because, he thinks, any woman would go crazy over them. He addresses the characters as 'You' as if they are the secondary and 'Other' people. We can see the clear distance between 'I' and 'You'. The dead man as he addresses is 'one of them' which is the reference to all black people. The daughter -in-law and grand daughter of the old De Beer, for him, are the vacant turnips.

He is mentally distorted though he tries to be seen a strong willed gentleman. The unlimited mediation upon death makes him mentally sick. The shades of an unknown African becomes a threatening refrain and always remains in his psyche. Heroism or bravery is not in his character.

The dead body which is found in his property and cursory buried there by the police not only reinforces his fear but also disputes his claim to his clean soil, Solomon is attacked during the night but he believes he is attacked by the spirit of the dead man. When he steps into the marsh of the third pasture, he feels the black corpse beneath his foot as if its cold black hands are holding his leg tightly. His phobic response to the corpse is the symptomatic of his failure to suppress the awareness of its existence. When the flood resurfaces the corpse, it again comes back to suffer him from the guilt-depth of his consciousness.

He seems to be a psycho more than a character. He suffers from his own uncontrolled thoughts and imaginations. In his imagination he sees the blacks celebrating his death. "Perhaps they thought I was dead" (260), he imagines that they are looking at his dead body as if he is the city-slicker who trespasses his location and dead. The chapters which develop his character are presented through fragments of conversation, imagination, reflections, monologues and remembrance.

Thus, Mehring is portrayed as an antihero with many negative traits like exploitation, selfishness, alienation, greediness, belonginglessness, originlessness, ego-centric, mentally distorted, lack of heroism, sensuality, immorality and many other animalistic natures.



The novel by Nadine Gordimer is written and set in the 1970s when South Africa was still very much under the apartheid social system and this novel is the protest against that system. By portraying Mehring as an antihero she tries to veil out the depth of apartheid system. Here, the farm symbolizes the whole country. Mehring is the representative of the White who founded the apartheid system. The fence, the blacks made to keep the blacks out of the farm is now in its meek condition and there are many holes which symbolize the loopholes of the apartheid system is not functioning. The corpse's haunting of Mehring and his house shows the claim on Africa by those who possess no legal land at all. Children's play with the guinea fowl eggs is a mean of announcing their claim to the land. The Phineas's wife's initiation dance indicates the female revolution. The nature also develops in against him; the seven years draughts, the August wind, the fire and the flood. The blacks take the responsibility for the burial of the dead body which is resurfaced by the flood; shows their attempt to restore their connection to the ancestors.

The misery that Mehring has created finally becomes unbearable and he has to be destroyed. His tragic flow indicates the end of apartheid system in South Africa.

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