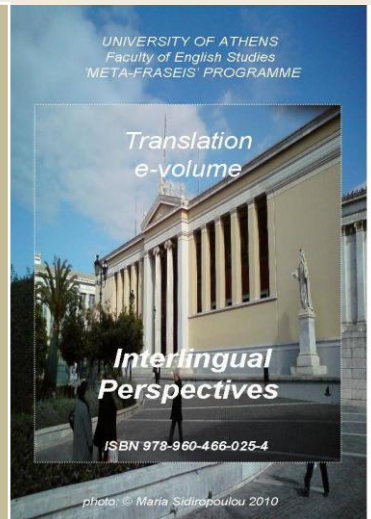


Niove Olympiou 2015

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*The Conservationist*



## CONFLICT AND RACIAL AWARENESS IN GORDIMER'S *THE CONSERVATIONIST*

Niove Olympiou

### Abstract

This paper examines variation in the way sociopolitical elements are registered in two translations (1992, 2010) of Gordimer's *The Conservationist* (1974). Themes include the description of geographical space and delimitation, the relationship between black and white people, the representation of black people and the way white people relate to each other. The aim is to trace shifts in the way the Greek translations construct these themes. The results suggest that there is a difference, namely, a tendency of the second translation to bring to the surface issues of power and inequality to a greater extent than the first one. The study raises issues of power relations in a society and their contribution in shaping identity construction since the fall of Apartheid, in South Africa.

### Key words

Gordimer, South Africa, Apartheid, social hierarchy, relations between blacks-whites, the state, interpersonal proximity

### 1. The novel and the realities of the Apartheid era

The story unfolds in South Africa during the 1970's, a country under the system of Apartheid, isolated internationally and burdened by economic sanctions. The story begins with the discovery of an anonymous, black person found dead on Mering's farm. Mering is a white, wealthy South African, an exponent of the status quo, used to getting whatever he wants either through money or simply by virtue of the colour of his skin (by virtue of being white). He bought this farm as a weekend getaway from the city, hoping to use it as a

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meeting place for himself and his white, leftist lover (Ogungbesan online). This woman is the complete opposite of Mering, a fighter against the country's status quo, who believes that radical changes are necessary. Her ideas come in sharp contrast with Mering's perception of things, who views the present social differences as acceptable and the racial inequalities as natural. For him change is undesirable and perhaps incomprehensible. He wishes to conserve everything, from the political situation to the smallest guinea fowl eggs that some small, black kids are found to be playing with on his farm (Ogungbesan online). Therefore, Mering is slowly isolated not only from his lover, who is forced to leave the county to escape arrest, but also from his ex-wife who has abandoned him and lives in the States with her new family, and even from his son, who although under Mering's custody finally chooses to go and live with his mother. The son leaves the country to escape military service but also because he is part of the seventies generation, a young rebel, open to new and revolutionary ideas and totally against what his father stands for, the old South Africa. Finally, he becomes isolated from everyone, including his rich, white friends in the city and ends up alone. Gordimer puts the readers straight inside Mering's heads and through monologues and successive flashbacks that he experiences we are presented with his character in relation to the people and the surrounding environment (Jordison 2008, Hill 2011). We can view the story as an allegory (Ogungbesan online:111-112). The farm represents the country as an object of dispute between blacks and whites and the various characters represent the conflicting forces of the time: Mering the white middle class, his lover the left resistance, his son the new, revolutionary generation and the black foreman of the farm represents the people who will inherit the land.

The book was published in 1974 in South Africa, winning two Booker prizes in the same year. This paper studies two Greek translations produced eighteen years apart, assuming that within this time frame there have been changes in the target culture which are registered in the translated texts. The examples for this paper are taken from the first two chapters and another two intermediate chapters.

The first translation was done in 1992 by Yianna Myrat and the second in 2010 by Tonia Kovalenko.

- ST Nadine Gordimer, *The Conservationist*, Great Britain: Jonathan Cape editions 1974
- TT1 Ναντίν Γκόρντιμερ, *Ο Συντηρητής*, οντοπίες ενός ρεαλιστή, Αθήνα: Εκδόσεις Νεφέλη 1992 (Μετάφραση Γιάννας Μυράτ)
- TT2 Ναντίν Γκόρντιμερ, *Ο Συντηρητής*, Αθήνα: Εκδόσεις Καστανιώτη 2010 (Μετάφραση Tonia Kovalenko)

## 2. Ownership, delimitation of boundaries and conflict

The two translated texts seem to differ considerably in their construction of the concepts of property and boundaries, especially when describing natural and geographical places. In rendering certain phrases and terms, TT1 seems to adopt a more neutral position on the issue by using words that do not convey the concept of entrenchment intensely. In contrast, TT2 shows a particular preference for phrases and terms that emphasize the limits and boundaries, the idea of private property and by extension its encroachment, by employing military terms such as *stronghold*, *conquered*, *intruder*.

In examples 1-3 the second translator seems to opt for options which clearly define boundaries and their entrenchment, such as TT2 item *αδύναμο οχυρό* (*weakened stronghold*) vs. TT1 item *αδυνατισμένες ρίζες* (*weakened roots*), TT2 item *φυσικό φράχτη* (*natural fence*) vs. TT1 item *η γη κάποιου άλλου* (*the land of someone else*), TT2 item *όρια του φράχτη* (*boundaries of the fence*) vs. TT1 item *συρματόπλεγμα* (*wire fence*).

### Example1

- ST the river is extraordinarily strong...already it seems to be making the new paths possible for it through the *weakened foothold* of destroyed reeds (p. 95).
- TT1 το ποτάμι είναι εξαιρετικά δυνατό...φαίνεται ότι έχει κιόλας αρχίσει να φτιάχνει τα καινούρια του περάσματα μέσα από τις *αδυνατισμένες ρίζες* των κατεστραμμένων καλαμιών (p. 113)  
*the river is extraordinarily strong...it seems that it has already started to make the new passages through the weakened roots of*

*destroyed reeds*

- TT2 το ποτάμι έχει μια εκπληκτική δύναμη...μοιάζει κιόλας να προετοιμάζει τις καινούριες διόδους του μέσα από το αδύναμο οχυρό των κατεστραμμένων καλαμιών (p. 110)  
*the river has an amazing power...it seems already to be preparing its new gateways through the weakened stronghold of destroyed reeds*

### Example 2

- ST ...which is the rise of the ground again and *someone else's land* (p. 14)
- TT1 το έδαφος ανηφορίζει ξανά κι αρχίζει η γη κάποιου άλλου (p. 16)  
*the ground steepens again and begins the land of someone else*
- TT2 όπου δημιουργούν ένα φυσικό φράχτη (p.18)  
*where they create a natural fence*

### Example 3

- ST the row of houses were not yet built to the *boundary* (p. 24)
- TT1 τα σπίτια...δεν έφταναν μέχρι το *συρματοπλέγμα* (p. 28)  
*the houses... did not go as far as the wire fence*
- TT2 οι γραμμές των σπιτιών δεν είχαν αγγίξει ακόμα τα *όρια του φράχτη* (p. 30)  
*the rows of houses hadn't touched yet the boundaries of the fence*

Likewise, in example 4 where Mering goes with Jacobus, his black foreman, to look at the dead body that is lying near the river, we can discern in TT2 a more intensely negative perception of the body than in TT1. TT2 item *εισβολέας (intruder)* perceives the dead man as a threat and encroachment of a private land, in contrast with TT1 item *παρειοακτος (the outsider)* which refers to someone perhaps passively annoying where he does not belong.

### Example 4

- ST his determined back in the blue overalls, collar standing away

- from slightly bent neck, is leading to the *intruder* (p. 13)
- TT1 η αποφασιστική πλάτη του με τη μπλε φόρμα, το κολάρο να στέκεται μακριά απ' τον ελαφρά κυρτό λαιμό, τον οδηγεί προς τον *παρείσακτο* (p. 14)  
*his determined back with the blue overalls, the collar standing away from a slightly bent neck, is leading him to the outsider*
- TT2 η αποφασιστική πλάτη του μες στη μπλε φόρμα, με το κολάρο να προεξέχει λίγο απ' τον σκυφό λαιμό, οδηγεί προς τον *εισβολέα* (p. 16)  
*his determined back in the blue overalls, with the collar sticking out of the stooping neck, is leading to the intruder*

Another shift concerns the manipulative power of discourse in favour of the apartheid. The following example is from a commercial that is heard. TT2 seems to display a tendency to raise a voice of resistance against injustice as well as of malevolent intentions. This is manifested through TT2 item *παρπλανητικά πειστική φωνή* (*misleadingly persuasive voice*) which creates the implication of resistance to the dominant ideology more explicit, vs. TT1 item *προτρεπτική φωνή* (*hortatory voice*) which a closer rendition of the ST item *coolly persuasive voice*.

### Example 5

- ST a *coolly persuasive voice* blaring a commercial jingle is coming out of the sky (p. 13)
- TT1 Μέσ' απ' τον ουρανό, απ' την κατεύθυνση του περιβόλου, έρχεται μια κάπως *προτρεπτική φωνή* που αναγγέλλει μια διαφήμιση... (p. 15)  
*through the sky, from the direction of the enclosure, comes a somewhat hortatory voice that announces a commercial...*
- TT2 Από τη μεριά του καταυλισμού, μια *παρπλανητικά πειστική φωνή*, που λες και έρχεται από τον ουρανό, διαλαλεί εκκωφαντικά (p. 17)  
*from the direction of the reservation, a misleadingly persuasive voice, that you think comes from the sky, blaring deafeningly*

Likewise, awareness of injustice seems to be more prominent in the second version of the next example. Mering is talking to a police officer of the precinct and informs him of the existence of a dead man on his farm, demanding that someone be sent there for the necessary procedures. However, the police officer is alone in the police station and cannot leave. Καλοπροαίρετη απόγνωση (good-natured *despair*) in TT1 vs. TT2 item καλοπροαίρετη αγανάκτηση (good-natured *indignation*) which entails justified anger.

### Example 6

- ST there is a blowing noise, abrupt, at the other end, air is expelled in *good-natured exasperation* (p. 17)
- TT1 Απ' την άλλη άκρη της γραμμής ακούγεται ένα ξεφύσημα, απότομο, αέρας που αποβάλλεται από καλοπροαίρετη απόγνωση. (p. 19)  
*From the other end of the line is heard a puff, abrupt, air that is exhaled from good-natured despair*
- TT2 Από την άλλη άκρη της γραμμής ακούγεται ένα κοφτό φύσημα- ένα στόμα που ξεφυσά με καλοπροαίρετη αγανάκτηση. (p. 21)  
*from the other end of the line is heard an abrupt puff- a mouth that huffs with good-natured indignation*

Another example which constructs the identity of Mering is manifested in the following example. Mering upon arriving at the farm sees Jacobus. TT2 item *χαιρέκακο ανυπόμονο γελάκι* (*malicious, impatient chuckle*) shapes a mean intention on his part, while TT1 item *αμήχανο γελάκι* (*embarrassed chuckle*) is a closer rendition of ST item *embarrassed snigger*.

### Example 7

- ST the farmer gives himself a little impatient, almost *embarrassed snigger* (p. 11)
- TT1 ο ιδιοκτήτης της φάρμας σκάει ένα ανυπόμονο, σχεδόν αμήχανο γελάκι και συνεχίζει να προχωρεί... (p. 12)  
*the owner of the farm gives an impatient, almost embarrassed chu-*

*ckle and walks on...*

- TT2 ο κτηματίας βγάξει ένα χαιρέκακο ανυπόμονο γελάκι - και συνεχίζει... (p. 14)  
*the farmer gives a malicious, impatient chuckle - and continues*

TT2 seems to be more aware of the forces of resistance to the dominant ideology in South African society, thus attempting to enforce the communicative potential of the text in the target environment.

### 3. Racial inequality awareness and relations of blacks and whites

Another theme which seems to be constructed differently relates to the notion of hierarchy and the relations between blacks and whites. This is manifested through rendition of the term 'baas' (boss in Afrikaans) that the black workers use to address Mering in the ST. In TT1 item *αφεντικό* (*boss*) is preferred, implying a person who owns a business and employs workers or employees. It therefore refers to a professional relationship between Mering and the blacks who work on the farm. TT2 item *αφέντη* (*master*) denotes a person who has absolute power or a person who has servants or slaves at his service. Thus, TT2 probably places more emphasis on the socio-political dimensions of the relationship, stressing the level of inequality.

#### Example 8

- ST *the man is there. You can see, still there, master, come I show you where is it.* (p. 13)
- TT1 Ο άντρας είναι εκεί. Μπορείς δεις, αφεντικό, έλα να σου δείξω που. (p. 14)  
*the man is there. Can see, boss, come to show you where*
- TT2 *εκεί είναι ο πεθαμένος. Τον δεις, αφέντη, εκεί είναι ακόμα, έλα, σου δείξω που.* (p. 16)  
*there is the dead. See him, **master**, he is still there, come, show you where.*

The next example comes from the thoughts of Mering himself concerning the blacks who work in the area without a permit. While TT1 uses the item *άνθρωποι* (*people*), TT2 opts for the expression *από δαύ-*



τους (*of their sort*) which connotes a derogatory perception and a greater power distance.

### Example 9

- ST a hundred and fifty *thousand of them* living there (p. 28)  
TT1 κάπου εκατόν πενήντα χιλιάδες *άνθρωποι* ζουν εκεί πέρα (p. 32)  
*around a hundred and fifty thousand people live there*  
TT2 εκατόν πενήντα χιλιάδες *από δαύτους* ζουν εκεί πέρα (p. 34)  
*a hundred and fifty thousand of their sort live there.*

In the next example, TT1 items *άντρας* (*man*), *πιστός φιλαράκος* (*loyal chap*), connote a closer and more friendly relation between the farm owner and the workers, while TT2 items *εργάτης* (*worker*) and *πιστός υποτακτικός* (*loyal subordinate*) focus more on the professional relationship with the master and their socially inferior capacity.

### Example 10

- ST how could the *man* know already he is wanted? (p. 11)  
TT1 είναι δυνατόν ο *άντρας* να έχει κιόλας πληροφορηθεί (p. 12)  
*how is it possible that the man has already been informed?*  
TT2 πώς είναι δυνατόν να ξέρει ο *εργάτης*; (p. 14)  
*how is it possible that the worker knows?*

### Example 11

- ST Jacobus, looking down from it, always vigilant in his own interest no matter what a *loyal old devil* he seems to be, turns his attention (p. 144)  
TT1 Ο Ιάκωβος, έχοντας πάντα το νου του στα θέματα που αφορούν το δικό του συμφέρον, άσχετα με το πόσο *πιστός φιλαράκος* μπορεί να είναι, αλλάζει κουβέντα (p. 170)  
*Jacobus, always his mind on issues that concern his own interest, regardless of what a loyal chap he can be, changes the topic of the conversation.*  
TT2 Ο Ιάκωβος εποπτεύει, μονίμως σε εγρήγορση, για το δικό του συμφέρον, όσο κι αν δίνει την εντύπωση πόσο *πιστός υποτακτι-*

κός είναι και στρέφει τη συζήτηση εκεί όπου θέλει. (p. 166)  
*Jacobus is inspecting, constantly alert, for his own interest, regardless of the impression of the **loyal subordinate** that he gives, and turns the conversation where he wants*

Despite all the above there seem to be some counter examples in both versions, which do not however, negate the general tendency exhibited by the two translated texts. For instance, in TT1 there is the phrase *my boys* (followed by a footnote explaining that this is the word used to refer to their workers). In TT2, on the other hand, the phrase *my people* is used which is less derogatory and does not refer to a hierarchy. Likewise there is the use of the item *boy* in TT1 vs. *man* in TT2, both pertaining to the abovementioned framework. These examples seem nevertheless to be isolated.

A further important shift concerns the presentation of the discourse of black people. Given the fact that the black majority in South Africa was illiterate, when having to use a second or foreign language, such as English, to communicate with the whites they made use of a limited vocabulary and their discourse could have grammatical and syntactical mistakes as well as omissions. This weakness in communication, which is found in the ST is also inscribed in TT1, while TT2 constructs an accurate and grammatically correct discourse of blacks.

### Example 12

- ST He's there, there. The white one *send* the native policeman to find me in my house, *he's ask* for a spade. They dig and they put him in, down there, where we *was*, Sunday. *Then they go away. They don't see me, they don't tell me nothing* (p. 27).
- TT1 ο λευκός αστυνομός στέλνει ιθαγενή βρει εμένα σπίτι μου και ζητάει ένα φτυάρι. Σκάβουν και βάζουν εκείνον μέσα, εκεί κάτω, εκεί που εμείς ήμασταν την Κυριακή. Ύστερα αυτοί φεύγουν. Δεν βλέπουν εμένα, δεν λένε εμένα τίποτα (p. 30) .  
*the white policeman sends a native find me my home and ask for a spade. They dig and put him in, down there, where we were on Sunday. Then, they leave. They don't see me, they not tell me*

- nothing*
- TT2 είναι εκεί, εκεί. Ο λευκός έστειλε τον μαύρο αστυνομικό να με βρει στο σπίτι μου- μου ζήτησε φτυάρι. Σκάψανε και τον έβαλαν εκεί, εκεί που τον βρήκαμε την Κυριακή. Μετά φύγανε. Δεν ξαναήρθαν, ούτε είπαν τίποτα (p. 32).  
*He is there, there. The white man sent the black policeman to find me in my house- he asked for a spade. They dug and put him in there, where we found him on Sunday. Then, they left. They didn't come back or said anything*

### Example 13

- ST in the night **he's go** over there to the other farm, the Dutchman's farm, to look for his brother. Somebody *come fetch him* late in the night; I think *more than eleven...*(p. 91)
- TT1 τη νύχτα πηγαίνει εκεί, στην άλλη φάρμα, στη φάρμα του Ολλανδού. Κάποιος έρχεται να τον πάρει...νομίζω αργότερα από έντεκα...ναι (p. 104)  
*the night he goes there, to the other farm, to the Dutchman's farm. Somebody **come fetch** him... I think later than eleven...yes*
- TT2 πήγε βράδυ στην άλλη φάρμα, τη φάρμα του Ολλανδού, να βρει τον αδελφό του. Ήρθαν κάτι τύποι και τον πήραν, νύχτα μετά τις έντεκα ήταν νομιζω (p. 103)  
*the night he goes there, to the other farm, to the Dutchman's farm. Somebody **come fetch** him... I think later than eleven...yes*

Racial inequality awareness seems to be toned down in TT2, which avoids a negative and/or racist image of blacks. Thus, TT2 blurs the power inequality while TT1 highlights it. Mangina (2013:179, this volume) shows a similar treatment of the natives discourse in the colonial context of Conrad's novella *Heart of Darkness*: the two versions, Mangina explains, show an intention of the two versions to empower the representation of the native people in the translation.

### 4. State power and group membership awareness

Another theme which is treated differently in the two target versions is that of the representation of the state and the state mechanism.

TT1, being faithful to the ST, does not make a direct reference to the state mechanism and in cases where it does, it is generally more neutral than TT2. The example below is from a scene where Mering is thinking that he might be asked as a witness in court in relation to the dead man. The TT2 item *καταραμένα πταισματοδικεία τους* (*their damned magistrate's courts*) carries a more negative tone than TT1 item *άθλιες αίθουσες των δικαστηρίων* (*wretched court rooms*) and might suggest contempt for state power.

#### Example 14

- ST a day or even days wasted hanging about the *bloody* magistrate's court waiting to say he knows nothing (p. 28).
- TT1 μία η ακόμα και περισσότερες μέρες χαμένες μέσα στις *άθλιες* αίθουσες των δικαστηρίων περιμένοντας να πε ότι δεν ξέρει τίποτα (p. 32).  
*one or more days wasted inside the wretched court rooms waiting to say he knows nothing*
- TT2 μια ολόκληρη μέρα, ίσως και παραπάνω μέρες, να περιμένει στα *καταραμένα* πταισματοδικεία τους, μόνο και μόνο για να δηλώσει ότι δεν γνωρίζει τίποτα (p. 34).  
*a whole day, perhaps even more days, waiting in their damned magistrate's courts, just to declare that he knows nothing*

Although not many of these shifts have been traced in the sample of the novel examined, they seem to contribute to the narrative of resistance highlighted in TT2. Group membership awareness is constructed through interpersonal proximity between whites. When Mering is visited by a neighbour and his family, the conversations that follow register a different level of interpersonal proximity in the two versions. TT1 chooses to have the speakers maintaining a distance while TT2 chooses a more personal tone by using the second person singular. The assumption is that two men who are neighbours would not use a second person plural verb ending between them, had they been aware that they are in-groups.

**Example 15**

- ST but what I wanted to ask- you can p'haps do me a favour, you know (p. 53)
- TT1 Θέλω να σας ζητήσω μια χάρη- ίσως μπορούσατε να μου κάνετε μια εξυπηρέτηση (p. 61).  
*I want to ask a favour of you (the 2<sup>nd</sup> plural)- perhaps you could do me a favour*
- TT2 Αυτό όμως που ήθελα να ζητήσω- ίσως μπορείς να κάνεις κάτι για μένα (p. 61)  
*But what I wanted to ask- perhaps you can do something for me (2<sup>nd</sup> singular)*

The two versions seem to differ with respect to the way they construct conflict over ownership and delimitation of boundaries. They also differ in the way they construct racial inequality awareness, attitudes towards state power and group membership. The results are summarized in the following table. "+" shows the version which enforces the relevant theme through linguistic manipulation of relevant items in translation.

Table 1. Theme awareness in the two versions	TT1	TT2
Ownership, delimitation of boundaries and conflict	-	+
Racial inequality	-	+
State power and group membership awareness	-	+

The table shows that TT2 is highly interested in raising awareness of certain themes as dominant in the socio-cultural universe of discourse aiming at enhancing the communicative potential of the text.

**5. Conclusion**

As mentioned, the two versions are eighteen years apart, This is a rather sufficient time period for changes to have taken place both in the Greek and the South African society that perhaps the translators could have taken into consideration or could simply have been reflecting the mood of the times. When the first translation took place, in 1992, it had just been two years since the fall of Apartheid and

Mandela's release from prison. In translating a book originating from a country which was struggling to realize what it had gone through and heal its wounds, the translator somewhat participates in this process of forgiving and forgetting. The characters are generally depicted as more well-disposed and their psychological states are characterized by a feeling of despair. Possibly, the desired effect could have been the least possible negative representation of discriminations and perceptions and avoidance, wherever possible, of the emphasis on boundaries and private property. In the same vein, perhaps the translator avoided terms that refer to subjugation or servility or even to the manifestation of negative feelings such as anger or guile. In the course of almost two decades, and with South Africa having passed this transitional phase, the second translation could have sought to make certain dimensions of the relations more obvious, to emphasize social disparities and inequalities.

The study has detected differences in the way the two versions present issues of power, delimitation, relations between blacks and whites and interpersonal proximity. These differences could be explained by socio-political changes that are shown in the texts and by the norms. However, this assumption necessitates further research.

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