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An "East" and "West" translation of two short stories by Nadine Gordimer: text and context

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Chapter 1
Literary Context of the Source System and the Target Systems

> *For everything one writes is part of the whole story, so far as any individual writer attempts to build the pattern of his own perception out of the chaos. To make sense of life: that story, in which everything, novels, false starts, the half-completed, the abandoned, has its meaningful place, will be complete with the last sentence written before one dies...*
>
> (Gordimer 1988:93)

One common consensus within the often rather diverse approaches of DTS is the emphasis on "context", on "cultural systems". Every aspect of the translational process ought to be described and discussed in terms of the 'Author - Reader - System' as well as the 'translational system' (Lambert & van Gorp 1985:51). The systematic combination and connection of the factors relating to the author/translator, source/target readers and source/target systems aims toward a 'systemic nature' of the analysis, moving away from a normative, 'atomistic' approach to translation (Lambert & van Gorp 1985:51). For the analysis of Gordimer's short stories in translation, it becomes necessary to examine the position of the writer within the respective systems, here termed "literary systems". In this specific context, the term refers to a rather general overview of the status of Nadine Gordimer and her work, the respective readerships and the reception (newspaper reviews, literary criticism) of her work.

Thus the term "literary system" does not refer to a comprehensive analysis of the various literatures in a specific system (e.g. West Germany). Such a task would be impossible to accomplish in this context, where the very notion of "literature" is difficult to define. The following discussion regarding publishing strategies, the status of Gordimer and her writing and the readership is specifically aimed at providing a background against which the texts are analysed on a macro- and micro-level. The information given can only be selective in nature and is thus open to criticism.

The "freedom" of the critic to choose his or her own framework, the basis upon the analysis is conducted, be it the choice of background information or the theories applied, could be likened to the freedom or "power" of the publisher who selects texts for translation and publication. Even-Zohar, whose theories on the hierarchy of literary systems have greatly influenced DTS, notes that

> the very principles of selecting the work to be translated are determined by the situation governing the polysystem: the texts are picked according to their compatibility with the new approaches and the supposedly innovative role they may assume within the target literature.
>
> (Even-Zohar 1978:121)

Texts that are chosen for translation and publication are not selected at random, the selection conforms to specific "rules". These may be market-oriented as for instance in a mixed-market economy where the main motivation is profit, or an "ideology-based" motivation such as in a state-governed socialist/communist system. Even-Zohar maintains that a constant struggle exists between the dominant and secondary discourses or literary systems within a polysystem. The power to decide which texts are "compatible" within a given system is vested in the publisher who chooses to publish a text. Their choice is based on certain assumptions or "ideology", as

> [i]deologies are closely linked to language, because using language is the commonest form of social behaviour, and the form of social behaviour where we rely most on "common sense assumptions".
>
> (Fairclough 1989:2)

Although Fairclough refers to language in general, "literary language" is not free from ideology. As in other language uses, literary language forms part of a continuum of

language use. The difference between literary and other language is only in degree, not in kind. It is not a 'polarised dichotomy, but ... a spectrum that admits blends and overlappings (Snell-Hornby 1988:51). Any notion of autonomy in discourse is a fallacy and proves the hidden power of language and ideology (cf. chapter 2).

The notion of ideology is not limited to political ideology in the narrow sense, but covers the entire spectrum of humans' perception of "reality", of "truth" which Fairclough terms *MRs* or *Member's Resources* (Fairclough 1989:25). If all writing constitutes discourse (i.e. language in social context), a translation of that discourse will be an interpretation of an interpretation - a new discourse, language in a new context where the source text's context will make up a part of the new context. Once a text is translated, it will be continually "processed" (interpreted) by the target readership which in itself is likewise not stable. This continuous process is beyond the "control" of the translator and that which he or she may have intended to achieve. This uncertainty of the text's interpretation is experienced by any writer; yet a critic, whether he or she interprets a text or a translation thereof, will be forced to make assumptions which ought to be regarded not as absolute truths or even conditional truths, but as a mirror of the critic's own stance, as "truth" only within the critic's framework.

In their *Synthetic Scheme for Translation Description*, Lambert and van Gorp (Lambert & van Gorp 1985:52) propose the description of the systemic context of the texts at the end of the analysis. However, a description of the literary contexts of the texts in question that precedes the macro- and micro-analysis seems more useful so as to account for translational strategies that may or may not have been adopted. I would like to emphasise again, however, that the description of the literary contexts does not aim to render a complete overview, nor does it necessarily represent the latest

research. The secondary literature regarding the German translations was chosen according to its availability and accessibility[1].

Since 1947 Nadine Gordimer has published seven volumes of short stories and various novels and her work has been translated into more than twenty languages[2] (Clingman in Gordimer 1988:1). The volume of short stories *Six Feet of the Country* was published in 1956 by Victor Gollancz. The two short stories analysed in the present study, 'Six Feet of the Country' and 'The Smell of Death and Flowers' were published in various anthologies of short stories and by a number of publishers. The edition referred to in the study is *Some Monday for Sure* (Heinemann, 1991).

Gordimer is regarded as depicting the 'process of alienation and social severance experienced by the English community, especially during the fifties and sixties' (Trump 1989:184). Her writing, especially her short fiction, becomes the chronicle of her times, highly detailed and sensitive portraits of apartheid society. Yet she herself is an object caught up in history and origin, her consciousness of a white, female, middle- to

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[1] Dr. B. Herting, lecturer in the Linguistic Department of the *Universität Leipzig* kindly researched the literature on translational strategies of publishing houses as well as literature on the semantic differences of East and West German and literature on state politics regarding translation. However, no research seems to have been carried out in the above fields, at least no East German publications appear to be available. I contacted both the East and West German translators and received no reply. I am also corresponding with both Verlag Volk und Welt and Fischer Verlag. Neither of the publishers would comment on their guidelines for translations and translators or their criteria for the choice of texts to be translated. Dr. Arnulf Conradi, director of Fischer Verlag, comments in a letter (27.7.1993) why Gordimer was already translated in the fifties:

> die Entdeckung der Gordimer lief über ihren großen Roman THE LYING DAYS, auf deutsch DIE ENTZAUBERUNG. Der Roman war dem damaligen Verlagsleiter über Agenten angeboten worden.

[2] The *translationum index* shows that Gordimer is the South African writer whose work has been most extensively translated in both East and West Germany. Especially during the mid-eighties the *index* shows an increase in new editions of Gordimer's work published in West Germany, exclusively by Fischer Verlag.

upper-class writer and interpreter of the South African society is bound to be kaleidoscopic, changing, contradicting earlier writing. Thus her writing is far from being "objective"; Gordimer's perspective is historical as she 'chronicles her time, delivering fictional judgements of her time' (Clingman 1986:12). Her writing becomes part of the historical process, uniquely bound to the South African context:

> Nadine Gordimer's work cannot be understood fully without seeing it in relation to its South African context, her work is not, as critics maintain, universal...
>
> (Clingman 1986:18)

Gordimer acknowledges the development of her own writing which in turn reflects social changes. South African society is an illustrative example of the way power, language and hence ideology are linked: *white*, *black*, *coloured* and *Indian* are words that categorise humans with social, political and economic implications which are legitimized by the racial and sexist laws of the country. The power to speak rests with the white man exclusively, excluding women of his own skin colour as well as the remaining majority of the population. Language is a mirror of control and forms part of the prime medium of control in South Africa (Fairclough 1989:3). Gordimer, with regard to the shifts experienced in the South African society, states:

> Even the language changes from book to book: "native" becomes first "African" then "Black", because these usages have been adopted, over three decades, by South Africans of various opinions, often at different stages ... . For English speaking whites the use of the term "African" is now general, no longer even indicating, as it would have ten years ago, that the speaker was showing his political colours as liberal if not leftist...
>
> (Gordimer 1988:96)

The development of a language that is highly charged with connotations, with emotions and political realities has a profound effect on translation strategies adopted at various stages; the term *black* may be "neutral" at a certain time in South Africa, yet highly derogatory in another language, in another context. The translator is, in this sense, "empowered" to alter the text according to his or her ideology - a process which inevitably takes place with any writing, but especially translation.

However, Gordimer's position as a writer chronicling her times, is not an unchallenged one. She is 'literally caught in a split historical position' (Trump 1986:342). She identifies herself with the causes of the black people, yet she is 'legally and socially cut off from any form of expression of this commitment other than her writing' (Trump 1986:342).

Despite the much publicised "new South Africa", Gordimer is still to some degree 'legally and socially' isolated from the black community, as a harmonious multiracial society without any racial discrimination is still very much part of a South African utopia. She is a white woman inevitably living in privilege in South Africa, she is celebrated internationally and yet espouses the causes of the deprived black majority population of South Africa, most of whom are illiterate: 'The ideological implications of her work are populist, and yet their form and mode of expression are elitist' (Trump 1989:185). Gordimer's readership is a privileged minority in South Africa as well as an international audience[3]. According to Achmat Dangor's distinction between *privileged* and *ghetto* writing in South Africa, Gordimer belongs to the former (Dangor in Trump 1986:343).

[3] In many short stories Gordimer provides explanations which are clearly aimed at an international audience. Cf. chapters 2 and 3.

Newspaper reviews of Gordimer's work do not raise the issue of the inherent paradox in her work, moreover she is depicted as a writer who, although portraying the South African realities ('murder, sex, bush warfare, injustice, dramatic situations... are intricately interwoven throughout the various plots'), is also entertaining to read ('she is also master of the unexpected') (The Star 27.7.83). The rift between black and white is upheld by the critic: 'Miss (sic) Gordimer's vivid powers of description bring home to the reader facets of other existences which possibly were never thought of.' (The Star 27.7.83). It is clear that a white reader is envisaged to whom "black experiences" are so distant that they do not even form part of the imagination.

In a review by the same paper from February 2, 1983, the reader is depicted as typically reading short fiction, the general taste being averse to lengthy, strenuous novels. Texts are assessed according to the laws of consumerism:

> It is as a short story writer that Nadine Gordimer excels. The short story provides an ideal opportunity for extra reading. It is short in length ... and most people read in short spurts, and the whole story can be read in one sitting.
>
> (The Star 4.2.83)

This particular selection of reviews suggests that Gordimer is "fun to read" because of the intrigue of the plots and the compactness of the texts.

The translations of Nadine Gordimer's short stories were first published in 1959 in West Germany. Fischer Verlag, one of the major publishing houses of West Germany, appears to have exclusive rights regarding the publications of Gordimer's work[4]. The

[4] Since 1959 Fischer Verlag has published Gordimer's work in German under various titles and in various editions, in hard cover as well as in paperback. Professor Neubert from the linguistics department, *Universität Leipzig*, suggested that the reason for the East German translation of Gordimer's work which was only published in the eighties,

Fischer Verlag catalogue for 1992-1993 includes ten new editions of novels and short stories by Nadine Gordimer and features a short biography as well as a recent photograph of the author.

In various essays and reviews on Gordimer and other white South African writers, the former is seen as a writer of the "modernist" tradition, with the typical characteristics of the *Moderne*:

> für die dringend notwendige Kompromisse von Altem und Neuem, für die der unumgängliche Dialog immer schwieriger, wenn nicht gar unmöglich wird, deren Zerrissenheit ständig zunimmt und deren Zukunft belastet ist mit Ungewißheit und Ängsten.
>
> (Reckwitz 1990:226)

Gordimer's "literary mission" is to show the alienation of white South Africans, the identity crisis brought about by apartheid which destroys both ways, both black and white (Arnold 1987:131). *Six Feet of the Country* is an overview, a panorama of human existence in the various social spheres which 'immer wieder aufs neue den lastenden Druck, die Enge, das Festgegurtsein im rassistischen System und die Unfähigkeit... eigener Verwirklichung vor Augen führt' (Arnold 1987:131). Yet Arnold, acknowledging Gordimer's unambiguous literature that rejects apartheid, identifies her limitations that 'bis jetzt jedenfalls diese Autorin vom Hauptstrom des Anti-Apartheid-Kampfes in Südafrika ferngehalten haben' (Arnold 1987:132). Despite her *engagement*, her political commitment, Gordimer remains a writer and not a propagandist, it is her synthesis of artistic, literary subjectivism, and more generally

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may be due to Fischer Verlag's copyright over the translations. The copyright seems to have lapsed at that time, permitting new translations. All publications of Gordimer's work before that time were West German translations published under license.

social concerns which prevent her work from slipping into politically programmed novels.

The *Weekly Mail & Guardian* special book supplement on the *German Book Exhibition 1993 Namibia and South Africa* features a lengthy article on Gordimer's success and popularity at the International Book Fair in Frankfurt. Not only was Gordimer 'always a well-known author in [West] Germany, a highly respected voice from South Africa', but the Nobel Prize confirmed her status 'as the greatest living author of the English language [sic]' (Weekly Mail & Guardian 20.8.93). This praise in the superlative is followed by a description of Gordimer's success in West Germany. The development of Gordimer's audience in West Germany had been 'painfully slow'. S. Fischer Verlag which prints all her works in hard and paper back had to be very patient for Gordimer's success. Only after the author had received the Nobel Prize 'which suddenly gave the often difficult and always demanding books of Nadine Gordimer an unexpected best-seller status' was her success established and Fischer Verlag had 'to take extraordinary steps to keep up with the demand' as all her novels in paperback 'were sold in ten thousands' (Weekly Mail & Guardian 20.8.93). Yet Gordimer's success in West Germany cannot be explained by the Nobel Prize alone. The first publication of her work was the translation of *The Lying Days* (*Die Entzauberung*) in 1956. Although reviews were favourable, sales 'remained rather modest' (Weekly Mail & Guardian 20.8.93). However, Francois Bandy, Swiss writer and critic, became her "prophet" in West Germany 'who proclaimed her a literary figure of world-wide importance and who made his influence felt in many ways' (Weekly Mail & Guardian 20.8.93). Gordimer then, even before she received the Nobel Prize, had an established audience in West Germany and 'even the largest rooms for public readings were easily filled' (Weekly Mail & Guardian 20.8.93).

Unlike South African newspaper reviews, West German literature reviews published in papers, especially the major national daily newspapers such as *Frankfurter Allgemeine*

Zeitung or *Süddeutsche Zeitung* are written in an essayist style of lengthy format, frequently by well-known literary critics or writers. In all reviews studied, Gordimer is seen as 'Schriftstellerin von Weltruf' (Bildungsarbeit Nr.1, 1983), her literary mission being the hopeless destruction caused by apartheid (Süddeutsche Zeitung 6.10.82), the depiction of the individual struggle and misery. But far from this 'Monomonie, mit der sie ihr Thema verfolgt' that might possibly annoy the European reader who is far removed from the South African realities, the reader is eager to follow Gordimer in her descriptions of the stupefying suburbs of white Johannesburg, white farms, settlements of poor Indians, black townships and kraals (Frankfurter Allgemeine 13.11.82). The reason for the reader's eagerness is Gordimer's ability to transcend the experiences of the self, to imagine other people's experiences. What makes her short stories so convincing is the psychological plausibility of the characters, the detail of the surroundings. Yet the short stories move beyond the South African context:

> Jede dieser Geschichten überschreitet den einzelnen Fall, jede beleuchtet, was die beste Literatur von jeher tat, allgemeines menschliches Schicksal, ein Verhalten, eine Seelenregung, die jeder nachvollziehen kann.
>
> (Frankfurter Allgemeine 13.11.82)

In contrast to a South African readership that is essentially elitist, a minority, the West German readership is much more complex and can hence be less easily identified or defined. Illiteracy in Germany is one of the lowest in the world. Unlike in South Africa, books are affordable, being charged with half the normal value added tax percentage and book prices are fixed by the state. Public libraries are extensively stocked with the latest literature as well as world classics. Reading is thus not a luxury few people can afford. The number of new publications every year is enormous (cf. the *Frankfurter Buchmesse*). The book production follows the free market principle, publishing houses are profit oriented and books are marketed by representatives (*Handelsvertreter für*

Bücher) of the publishing houses. The position of writers in West Germany is one of "free labour" (*freie Lohnarbeiter*) who have complete freedom in their choice of themes, literary forms and publishers. Yet they are not guaranteed that their "products" are sold (Emmerich 1989:31). The same is true for literary translators who do not enjoy any protection or even appropriate remuneration for their work[5]. The West German context, as far as the production and the marketing of books is concerned, is similar to the South African publishing context. There are, however, marked differences with regard to the readership and state intervention (censorship).

East Germany is characterised by an entirely different social and economic situation which was, up to the eighties, diametrically opposite to the West. The controversy between the capitalist west and the socialist east culminated in the foundation of the two German states in 1949. Under Stalin and supported by Honecker, a *real existierender Sozialismus* (real existing socialism) was forced upon East Germany, a regime in which literature was to play a special role.

Literature, in any economic and social system, is part of the history of social order, as the authorities - sometimes to a lesser, sometimes to a larger degree - prescribe its production and reception. Yet the relationship of literature and history is more complex. Structurally speaking, literature reveals the basic characteristics of a society and its concrete historical expression. The East German literature is hence not only outwardly a document of the historical process, but also a document of its internal reality, of the consciousness, life and reality of the people living within this state (Emmerich 1989:17). This is, however, not a mimetic process; literature is always a construct, 'so daß in der detektivischen Ermittlung von Realitätpartikeln in einer Dichtung (im Umgang mit der DDR Literatur ein sehr beliebtes Verfahren) wenig oder

[5] According to Professor Neubert, West German translators of literary works are underpaid and extreme time constraints by publishing houses result in unprofessional working conditions such as translating on sight by dictating on a dictaphone.

nichts geleistet ist' (Emmerich 1989:48). There is thus no simplified one - to - one correspondence of literature and political reality possible which applies to Gordimer's writing and the depiction of the South African "reality" as well.

In contrast to France, for instance, where writers and philosophers are integrated into society, West German literature remains in a ghetto-like inner realm of that of the *schönen Seins* (Emmerich 1989:21). Again, the situation was different for East Germany. The East German state formulated a *Kulturpolitik* (cultural policy) and literature was endowed with a twofold function. Firstly, literature is seen as an act of self-defining of the classes and secondly literature as having an enlightening and utopian function. *Kulturpolitik* was summarised in Becher's 'Formel der Literatur als Organ der Selbstverständigung und Bewußtwerdung des DDR-Volkes' (Becher in Emmerich 1989:22). This *Kulturpolitik*, formulated and enforced by the state, had various profound effects on East German literature. Book production was supervised by preformulated and prescribed principles which defined the content, form, volume and design of the books. Thus, for instance, Kafka and Joyce were not published. All publishing houses were state owned. 6.000 titles with a total volume of 150 million books were published yearly. This amounts to an annual per capita number of copies of 25.000 books which means that besides the former USSR and Japan, East Germany had the highest annual per capita book production. For every East German citizen, eight to nine new books were produced (Emmerich 1989:25). The production of books was frequently delayed as editing offices took longer to edit the scripts. This delay would be impossible in a profit-oriented context such as West Germany. Yet *Kulturpolitik* has not produced a "state of readers", as far as high literature is concerned, most books read are texts of the more trivial kind - adventure and detective novels (Emmerich 1989:27).

A further consequence of *Kulturpolitik* is the status of writers and translators. Writers were usually members of the *Schriftstellerverband* (association of writers) and were

bound to its statutes by their 'schöpferischen Arbeit aktive Mitglieder der entwickelnden sozialistischen Gesellschaft zu sein' (Emmerich 1989:31). This results in a normative, highly schematic literature which is not without a paradox: the writer, according to socialist principles, is required to criticise society, yet is supposed to support and justify the goal reached. The literature is hence simultaneously normative as well as critical (Marxist). Writers were financially supported by the state, however, in return, the production and distribution of the books were governed by the state. Since 1954 the Ministry for Culture had the task of licensing and instructing publishing houses, stipulating themes, checking manuscripts and granting printing rights (Emmerich 1989:34). Thus the state provided generous support, yet effectively suppressed literature where it moved away from the cultural and political guidelines. From the beginning of the eighties, a reformation took place, writers emancipating and distancing themselves from *Kulturpolitik* and the state - either too lethargic or unable to halt this movement - ratified it retrospectively.

The question which suggests itself is whether there are two German literatures, an East and a West German literature. While Mannack still upholds the hypothesis of two literatures, a "socialist world literature" vis-à-vis a "late capitalist or imperialist literature" (Mannack 1977:13), Scharfschwerdt holds that a naive, simple comparison between the two states is not possible (Scharfschwerdt 1982:8):

> Zu untersuchen und im einzelnen zu bestimmen, welchen Grundwerten sich die Literatur der Bundesrepublik verpflichtet sieht und auf der anderen Seite die der DDR, welche Gemeinsamkeiten und welche Unterschiede es zwischen ihnen gibt, führt bei einer literatursoziologisch und literaturästhetisch unterentwickelten Methodik a priori in eine Sackgasse.
>
> (Scharfschwerdt 1982:9)

It is not possible to give a simplified comparison of East German literature which has a socio-political function that is supposed to change the readers' consciousness on the one hand, and West German literature that portrays the paradox of an industrialised state and the torn ego on the other hand. Like the west, East Germany was in the end a huge machine with split labour, hierarchical structures and a massive bureaucracy. Any concept of **the** East German literature is hence a construct (Emmerich 1989:468).

Gordimer's *Six Feet of the Country* was published in 1981 by Verlag Volk und Welt in East Germany.[6] The short stories appear in the *Spektrum* series which was a successful attempt to support the publication of committed literatures of Africa (Sächsisches Tageblatt 3.7.81). Verlag Volk und Welt is regarded as the most important East German publisher for international literature and was especially known for its excellent translations (Fachdienst Germanistik 1992:10).

The newspaper reviews that appeared in East German papers are shorter and rather more formal than the West German counterparts. Again, Gordimer is praised as the most talented and most respected white writer in South Africa who raises her voice for social and political justice in her country (Sonntag 2.5.82). Not only her 'psychological excursions into the diverse South African realities but also the short stories' factual content is considered useful 'wenn bei der Zeitungslektüre und Gespräch die Rede auf diese unmenschliche Form imperialistischer Herrschaft kommt' (Tribüne 6.11.82). Gordimer's stories become a tool for arguing against the capitalist, imperialist regimes that exist in the west (South Africa). Generally, Gordimer is regarded as a highly talented writer who convincingly portrays the harsh South African realities, using 'gripping' and 'clear' language (Thüringer Tageblatt 26.9.81) and who is strong in her cause against the gruesome apartheid regime (Berliner Zeitung 25.9.81).

[6] During the eighties, Verlag Volk und Welt had obtained a license for the anthology of short stories from S. Fischer Verlag which has now reverted back to Fischer Verlag.

Nadine Gordimer is a highly regarded writer in all three literary systems discussed. Her position among authors of world class is highlighted by the fact that she is a Nobel Prize laureate. Yet the reception of her work differs greatly. Her rather complex situation as white, female writer in South Africa is acknowledged by South African critics and the paradox inherent in her literature is stressed. It is a literature which has as its theme the description of the inhumanity and injustice of apartheid, and yet a literature which, at present at least, cannot reach those who are oppressed by the system - simply because of the high illiteracy rate among apartheid's victims. By both East and West German critics Gordimer is praised as an honest, sensitive, talented and courageous writer. The West German critics see her work as depicting universal human fate and suffering, thus including Gordimer's work in the long list of great world literature. The psychological impact of apartheid society on the individual characters of Gordimer's writing is regarded as reflecting the modernist theme of the "torn ego". The East German reviews and criticisms do not generalise Gordimer's literature as general malady of the modern world, but regard it as political writing for a cause: the struggle against an unjust regime. This difference in perception of Gordimer's writing forms the basis of the following macro- and micro-analysis. Theories relating to discourse analysis and text analysis are referred to in order to interpret and explain this shift in perception.