Week 8- Der Hof im Spiegel

Group C: Themes

Follow through in the story each of the following themes. What significance do they have in the story? How are the themes represented in respect of the characters, their interrelations and the locations?

* The experience of **migration**
* Location/dislocation- post- colonial reading?
* Death (and life)
* Memory and associations with the past

This is a collection of short stories and texts, dedicated to Özdamar’s father, and to the writer John Berger and the poet Can Yücel.

The title story, ‘Der Hof im Spiegel’; ‘The Courtyard in the Mirror’, describes the narrator’s life in Düsseldorf, her telephone conversations with her mother in Istanbul, as well as her mother’s funeral and her attempts to come to terms with her mother’s death. The narrator has installed three large mirrors in her apartment which reflect the courtyard and the flats opposite**. This has made her home seem more like an Oriental apartment block, in which neighbors live extremely close to one another, ‘nose to nose’ (pp. 25-26).** In the flat opposite there is an old nun who leaves breadcrumbs on her window sill for the birds, and who reads Alice in Wonderland. The old nun’s light is reflected in the narrator’s kitchen mirror. The narrator looks into her kitchen mirror when she is on the telephone, **and she tells us that all the dead people she knows now live in this mirror (p. 24). The mirror serves as a memorial place for her, as a mnemonic device: it makes her happy because it enables her to live in several places at once, thereby connecting the past with the present (p. 31).** When her mother dies she realizes that her mother was an orphan who was raised by a stepmother. For a time she speaks to herself in her mother’s voice which has become the voice of a stepmother (p. 31), but then she has a dream which enables her to ‘normalize’ her mother’s voice (p. 32). After her mother’s death she starts phoning the poet Can Yücel, her friend who lives in Istanbul**. She tells him that she is living in the mirror now (p. 42). The narrator’s kitchen mirror, which reflects both the people who have died and her actual neighbors, exemplifies the way in which past and present coexist for her.**

The second text in the collection recalls the production of Özdamar’s play Schwarzauge in Deutschland; Black Eye in Germany in Frankfurt in 1986. The text is introduced with a quotation**: ‘Ein Arbeiter hat keine Heimat, wo die Arbeit ist, da ist die Heimat’;** ‘a worker has no homeland; where the work is, that is the homeland’ (p. 47).

The third text describes Özdamar’s second move to Berlin in 1976, where she sometimes visits the grave of Bertolt Brecht.

The eighth text in this collection is entitled ‘Die neuen Friedhöfe in Deutschland’; **‘The New Cemeteries in Germany’**. This begins with a quotation which draws attention to the contradictory character of the word ‘Gastarbeiter’ (‘guest worker’):

‘Ich liebe das Wort Gastarbeiter, ich sehe immer zwei Personen vor mir. Einer ist Gast und sitzt da, der andere arbeitet.’ (p. 117).

‘I love the word “Gastarbeiter”, I always see two different people in front of me. One of them is a guest and sits there, and the other one works.’

**This text reflects on the difficulties faced by Turks who want to travel with a Turkish passport, but also on some German prejudices about Turks**. The text concludes with a quotation from a cleaning lady, pointing out that in the end we are all foreign guests in this world, and so perhaps there should be just one form of passport for everyone in the world (p. 124).

The ninth and final text in this collection is a speech paying tribute to some of the German writers whom Özdamar admires, including J. M. R. Lenz, Heinrich von Kleist, Georg Büchner, Adelbert von Chamisso, Heinrich Heine and Bertolt Brecht.

**Location/ dislocation- use perspectives from post- colonial theories to analyse works of minority literature.**

* in order to expose latent xenophobia, challenge cultural essentialism, and examine the concept of 'cultural transfer'.
* However, an ahistorical postcolonial reading is controversial, with some critics warning that by disregarding historical accuracy we may homogenise the individualism of the postcolonial experience.
* In so doing, Özdamar creates a site in which her German and Turkish worlds can seemingly coexist- Der Hof im Spiegel
* Narrators use of triad of **mirrors** to manipulate her living space into a hybrid of her German immediate environment and her long-distance Turkish relationships**. Mirrors simultaneously respect and penetrate the closed curtains of her neighbours**, but also act as a site in which **the narrator can recede into an imaginative hybrid world.**
* **The imaginative migration** into the self that is commonplace in diaspora literature is often echoed in traditional postcolonial works**, leading us to the conclusion that imaginative migration into transcendent realms is an internalisation of the trauma** associated with physical relocation, such as the separation of the family unit: 'Ich stand in einem Zugkorridor, und neben diesem Zug fuhr ein anderer Zug in die Gegenrichtung' (Özdamar, 2001: 32) [I stood in a train corridor, and next to this train another train travelled in the opposite direction].
* The 'multiple, transnational imaginaries and localities inherited by those in the diaspora' (Mandel, 2008: 232) create an **ideological, multicultural realm, unaffected by geographical or social constraints of reality**, **or the ultimate separation of death**: 'Meine Mutter und sechs Nonnen und ein Pfarrer, alle wohnten wir zusammen [im Spiegel]' (Özdamar, 2001: 31) [my mother and six nuns and a priest, we all lived together [in the mirror.
* **the state of existing between cultures brings simultaneous trauma and contentment**: 'Ich war glücklich im Spiegel, weil ich so an mehreren Orten zur gleichen Zeit war' (31) [I was happy in the mirror, because I was in multiple places at once]. Mandel (2008: 233) suggests that a certain degree of self-conceptualisation is associated with such fantasies: 'the anxiety arising from living across national boundaries generates fantastic projections in which desires, dreams and obsessions find an outlet into new narratives of the self'.
* ‘Gastarbeiter’- disaggregated by worker into a guest who watches someone else work. Deconstruction inverts the roles of the Turk as the worker who no longer in any sense is a ‘guest’ and the person benefitting is intended to be German**. Image of the guest worker is transformed into one of economic exploitation.**
* ‘Ein Arbeiter hat keine Heimat, wo die Arbeit ist, da ist die Heimat‘. P.47: looks beyond view of worker as the labour element in a process of production surplus value: worker is doubly estranged from the product of his labours through the additional process of geographical displacement. Idea of home becomes a subordinated function of the need to find labour and points to the loss of belonging resulting from the capitalist embodied in the Gastarbeiter contradiction.
* System of rotational labour migration as an exploitive one for all participating nationalities: commonality us underlined by the intentional pluralization of the characteristics of the passengers: all the Turks have lost their children, all the Yugoslavians have harmed themselves to spend time at home.

**The experience of migration**

* Through language: Latent prejudice towards uneducated ‘Gastarbeiter’ during interaction in the pet shop. ‘Wie viele Sprachen sphricht ihr Papagei?’, ‘Wir sprechen Deutsch‘. (17). Abrupt reply establishes boundaries and conversational limits. Use of ‘Wir’ establishes boundaries and conversational limits. Also refers collectively to German speakers and excludes the Turkish customer. Parrot can be considered as a metaphor for colonial linguistic domination: as it carries connotations of mimicry, repeating only the dominant language at the expense of an indigenous language.
* However, arguably defies such strict dualisms, favouring an amalgamation of languages and literary references to enrich the text. Ozdamar frequently leaves phrases in the vernacular and in doing so creates a text in which cultural variety is celebrated and preserved while emphasising the universal nature of imagination and the value of great literature regardless of the language of communication or the cultural origin of the author.
* Extent to which a colonizer attempts to impart their beliefs upon the colonized. Jehovah’s witness visits narrator- lack of interest in discovering the narrator;s personal beliefs highlights an inherent desire to ‘enlighten’ the masses irrespective of personal difference- resemble to colonial Christian missions.
* While German cultural curtain rises, tentatively introducing Turkey into the intellectual sphere, the curtain to the German private sphere remains tightly closed. **Dusseldorf courtyard becomes a microcosm for Germany’s protection of domestic privacy**, through the repeated imagery of closed curtains: 'die Vorhänge waren dort immer zugezogen' (Özdamar, 2001: 26) [The curtains there were always closed]. This deliberate physical and metaphorical barricading of the domestic space is juxtaposed against the welcoming 'Wohnästhetik des Orients' [aesthetic of the Orient], as we encounter open curtains in Istanbul 'bewegten sich oben an ihrem Fenster die Vorhänge durch den Wind' (Özdamar, 2001: 13) [the curtains up on her window were moving because of the wind] and an extended social living space 'bis zu Gassen' (25)
* The narrator's changing depictions of the 'self' in the mirror do indicate that identity is a fluid, evolving concept, but not that this re-imagining is imposed onto her by others**.** **Instead, these manipulated self-reflections mirror her integration into German society**, literally and metaphorically, becoming more infrequent as she loses ties with Turkey and begins to establish roots in Germany: 'Als meine Mutter starb … hatte [ich] den Hof im Spiegel etwas vernachlässigt' (Özdamar, 2001: 31-32) [when my mother died … I had somewhat abandoned the courtyard in the mirror]. Whether solipsistic or not**, the mirror becomes a mode of existence** which enables Sevgi to remain on the 'Brücke' [bridge] itself, as opposed to a constant process of running 'über sie [die Brücke] zur anderen Seite der Stadt hinüber' (21) [over the bridge to the other side of town].
* **Relationship between belonging and citizenship**, inadequacy of singular citizenship or nationality to describe identity affiliations in cities and countries whose past and present have been characterized by migration, colonialism and intercultural contact.
* This suggests a complex argument whereby the process of German economic power functioning as the attractor for guest workers could be seen as an inverted imperialism, under which the exploitation of the quasi-colonial Other takes place within the borders of the nation state. On this view, and expressed in terms of postcolonial theory, the native German population and its institutions become the centre in a process of internal colonization which removes the guest workers as the colonial Other to the social and economic margins, a parallel to the colonial periphery

**Memory and associations with the past**

* The narrator looks into her kitchen mirror when she is on the telephone, and she tells us that all the dead people she knows now live in this mirror (p. 24). The mirror serves as a memorial place for her, as a mnemonic device: it makes her happy because it enables her to live in several places at once, thereby connecting the past with the present (p. 31).
* She tells him that she is living in the mirror now (p. 42). The narrator’s kitchen mirror, which reflects both the people who have died and her actual neighbors, exemplifies the way in which past and present coexist for her.

**Death and life**

* ‘Mein Istanbul’- genuine empathy expressed by narrator, he comments that the winter flights to Istanbul are normally initiated by family deaths while the passengers are in their country of migration. Death becomes the ultimate leveler of socially, religiously and historically constituted identities. Balanced by national, religious and ethnic belonging dissolve down to the level of individual human beings and then to caricature by continuing the list into the animal kingdom.

**GERMAN STUDIES.LIB.WARWICK.AC.UK**

**MLA**

**WEEK 8 SEMINAR**

**Group A**

* Kitchen and mirror,
* Punctuated by flashbacks, punctuated by people, by death
* Living in migration whose life was stable, mother dies whilst she’s in migration, father dies, goes through period of instability, attempts to reconstruct and regain stability, despite nun dying.
* Istanbul- believes her mother lives there, connects through telephone and tries to translate her experiences in Germany to Istanbul.
* Dusseldorf-
* Cultural connections follow international connections and cross connections, ‘web’ like.

**Group B**

* Distances and time zones
* Mirror provides temporal continuity, storing the dead creates a temporal stability. ‘home’ becomes frozen in time.
* Migration is a dislocating experience as you leave a ‘frozen’ home and move somewhere else.
* Attempts to make sense of how she can fit into her surroundings. Uses the mirrors as practice before stepping out before interacting in a more spontaneous way outside.
* Substitute for interaction.
* Jan advises her to speak to 10 people,

Group C

* Attempt at assimilation, role playing in a sense.
* Association with her mother sowing.
* Subjective experience of migration, bringing your past and roots.
* Migration doesn’t define the narrator

NARRATIVE