World Authorship as a Struggle for Consecration: Christa Wolf and Der geteilte Himmel in the English-speaking world

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Whilst many writers from the former GDR are unfamiliar to readers outside the German-speaking world, Christa Wolf is an author with a “world” presence, whose work can be read in more than thirty different languages. This international profile was established by the publication and translation of Wolf’s Nachdenken über Christa T. (1968; The Quest for Christa T., 1970), a text that impressed one American reviewer with its “earned rather than fashionable” ambiguities and its “disdain of politics” (Pawel), seeming to rise above the political tensions of its context; Wolf’s popularity increased during the 1980s following the publication of Kassandra. Voraussetzungen einer Erzählung (1983), which acquired what Anna Kuhn describes as “almost cultish popularity” (191) through English translation in 1984, before the context of her authorship was dramatically altered by German Reunification. Her standing within Germany was profoundly affected by the subsequent Literaturstreit that surrounded the troubled publication of her autobiographical narrative Was bleibt, as well as her 1993 revelation that from 1959-62 she had operated as an Inoffizielle Mitarbeiterin.

However, since Reunification, and regardless of these controversies that have (re)positioned her as embedded in a specific literary context, translations of Wolf’s writing have continued to emerge and to circulate, making her one of the most important intellectual ambassadors of the GDR both before and since its collapse: responses to her death in 2011 demonstrated the extent to which she was mourned by readers and critics all over the world as an author of international importance. Wolf’s considerable international success, in spite of the obstacles that may have been posed by her identity as an East German writer, raises questions about how this identity has been mediated and managed alongside the translation of her texts for an international audience.

Wolf’s established position in what might be described in Bourdieuian terms as an international literary field belies the fact that she did not experience immediate success in translation into English, the dominant language in that field. Her first translated text was not Christa T. but her 1963 narrative Der geteilte Himmel (GH), which appeared in English in 1965. Attracting little response at the time, Divided Heaven (DH) has continued to be overlooked in accounts of Wolf’s writing but in fact reflects significant tension at the heart of her international authorship: while English-language reviews and marketing consistently suggest that Wolf’s appeal to world literature develops through her engagement with
“universal” experience despite the limitations of her cultural context, her writing repeatedly identifies a “tiefe Wurzel der Übereinstimmung” (1966: 33) between “real” literature and specifically socialist society. This connection, explored repeatedly and in detail by Wolf but often marginalised by her English-language translators, editors and reviewers, problematizes the mediation of Wolf’s East German authorship for an international audience. The East German identity Wolf wishes to embody (that of the self-critical but committed socialist and humanist writer) is not compatible with images of East German-ness that have dominated at various times in the target literary field, and has frequently been subject to mediation. This tension is clearly visible in the translations of Der geteilte Himmel – texts that serve as much to mediate a certain image of the author as they do to render her texts in English.

Published at an early stage in Wolf’s authorial career, Der geteilte Himmel combines the author’s critical engagement with socialist realism and the developing subjective-authentic narrative style that would characterise her later, more successful translated texts such as Christa T. The text’s explicit engagement with its political context subverts the habitus of an international literary field dominated by Anglophone literary cultures, and has failed to find acceptance, or consecration (Bourdieu e.g. 1993; Casanova), in translation. The 2013 retranslation of the text, They Divided the Sky (DS), addresses many criticisms of the earlier version but also reflects Wolf’s continuing submission to a compromise between political engagement and world renown that is inherent in what is described here as “world authorship”. A comparison of the two translations against the background of the largely unacknowledged, contradictory practices underpinning world authorship reveals how Wolf’s East German identity has been differently mediated by agents in the English-speaking literary field as her identity as an author of global significance has been formed and consolidated, itself ultimately becoming influential on translations of her writing.

The international literary field and the politically engaged writer

Post-structuralist concepts of authorship and translation consistently understand the author’s identity as subject to reframing and reinterpretation as writer and text enter a new cultural space. Within a Bourdieusian understanding of the cultural field as a social space in which agents seek to gain capital and engage with existing power relationships through their practice or habitus, the literary field exists as a specialised, inherently competitive environment in which actions are motivated by interest both in the specific stakes of the field and in more general economic stakes (Bourdieu: 87-88). This is as relevant to an understanding of the powerful literary fields that act beyond national boundaries as arbiters of international taste as it is in the context of literary traditions with a more explicit link to national political institutions as stakeholders, as in the GDR. Two adaptations of this Bourdieusian model for an understanding of literature in translation offer some useful insights into the mediation of Wolf’s translated text: firstly, Gisèle Sapiro’s exploration of the relationship between politicisation and heteronomy in the literary field; and secondly, Pascale Casanova’s model of the power dynamics of world literature and cultural exchange. While both models are problematic in their identification of relationships between the concepts they
define, the concepts themselves are useful tools for reflection on the institutionalised power relations that have influenced the translation of Wolf’s writing and the mediation of her East German identity.

Building on Bourdieu’s recognition of homology between a writer’s position in the cultural field and her political stance, Gisèle Sapiro uses the example of the French literary field to explore the significant link between the writer’s conception of authorship and the nature of her engagement with the political sphere. Most important in this concept of authorship is the writer’s perceived autonomy or heteronomy within the field:

Discourse [...] tends to be increasingly euphemistic and depoliticized as one moves from the dominated pole to the dominant pole, morals and aesthetics being two forms of euphemistic discourse. [...] literary judgment tends to neglect content and to concentrate on style and form as one moves from the pole of greater heteronomy to that of greater autonomy, with moralism being replaced by aestheticism. (Sapiro 2003: 642)

In this model, authors toward the autonomous pole of the literary field are less strongly guided by political allegiances, while heteronomous authors demonstrate these more explicitly. In the context of the East German literary field, the same tendency can be seen: writers who failed to demonstrate commitment to socialism risked losing the endorsement of the political and cultural institution, leading to the possible censure of authors who approached autonomy by adopting a more ambivalent or oppositional position. The same tendency towards a politicised heteronomous pole can be seen, then, in two literary fields contextualised by very different political constellations (and therefore very different definitions of the heteronomous political stance). Thus far, Sapiro’s binary is convincing; however, as she points out in the title of her article, her model is strongly focused on the French literary field and her conclusions are not universally applicable. In the USA, for example, a shift away from politicised literature after the Second World War resulted in a different trend: while French intellectuals explicitly engaged with highly nationalised forms of conservatism, their American counterparts moved strongly away from political engagement (Welty; Sapiro 2010a). This general tendency, along with specific rejection of Communist art, is supported for example by Pawel’s comments on The Quest for Christa T., which he identifies as good quality literature because of its refusal to engage in politics. In the American context, in opposition to the trend Sapiro identifies in the French literary field, the heteronomous norm was represented by writing that eschewed enlistment by political agendas in favour of aesthetic and moral concerns, and the autonomous (i.e. subversive) writer was who engaged more directly with politics, against the dominant habitus of the field.

Looking beyond the individual literary field, Sapiro draws a negative correlation between politicised discourse and global renown, identifying depoliticised writing as a prerequisite for truly “international” authorship and arguing that a writer must leave nationally specific political allegiances behind in order to become a contributor to “world” literature. Pascale Casanova also establishes this connection, explaining that “the writers who claim a (more) autonomous position are those who know the law of the world literary field, and who use it to struggle within their national field and to subvert dominant norms”
This is particularly true for writers whose texts originate in less powerful, or “dominated”, literary field. However, this description fails to account for authors like Wolf: whilst enjoying a certain amount of autonomy within the GDR, Wolf was not engaged in a struggle primarily bound to the laws of the world field but rather one deeply embedded in engagement with the norms of the particular field in which she was writing. While the idea of leaving behind the writer’s national specificity in order to secure world renown undermines this authorial project, it has strongly influenced Wolf’s accumulation of capital since *Christa T.*, in an international literary field in which the English language occupies what Sapiro calls a “hyper-central” position (2010b: 420), dominating the habitus of agents and institutions. The depoliticising practices of the American field in particular constituted a potentially hostile target culture for Wolf, making her critical socialism equally problematic in a new receiving context in which politics were to be divorced from art. As a result, her identity has been mediated in relation to new standards of autonomy and heteronomy in the Anglophone-dominated international literary field. These have shaped the mediation of Wolf’s authorship in translation, a process that has also been informed by the balance of power in the relationship between the text and the target literary field.

Again following Bourdieu, Sapiro describes characteristics of a literary field as typical of the cultural field more broadly:

> The principle that the newcomers challenge the literary orthodoxy and assert themselves against their elders - as opposed to other professions, for example, the academic field, where newcomers must pledge allegiance to their elders - was one way by which the literary field fought the potential routinization of the charismatic figure of the writer. (Sapiro 2003: 640)

By this measure, not just the translated text but also the accompanying “charismatic” image of the writer represents the potential for productive disruption and change in the target-culture literary field. However, the “elders” of the literary field are a complex set of agents, including not only other writers in the target language but more importantly translators, publishers, editors and reviewers as possible gate-keepers for the institution, and even writers previously translated into the target language. The newly translated author, lacking cultural capital and often also a physical presence in the target culture, is often not in a position to challenge these more powerful institutionalised figures. What is more, as Casanova has shown, the dynamic between new and established agents in the translation of literature is not one of equality. Each translational process is a transfer of capital between two unequal cultures, in which translation into a dominating linguistic culture such as English may also function “as a kind of right to international existence” (296), by “consecrating” a dominated (and in this case a newcomer) source culture such as the GDR as a literary producer. A culture may also “accumulate” cultural capital by appropriating texts and authors from dominant cultures through translation. Either exchange demands that text and author conform to new values and behaviour.

While Sapiro’s exploration of the French case offers specific conclusions that do not apply to all literary fields, Casanova’s model stands accused of being too general to be usefully applied on a detailed level (Prendergast; Thomsen). Particularly, her critics have
noted her reliance on a simplistic concept of nationhood as an a priori factor in the emergence of literature (Prendergast; Beecroft), which is problematic when considering a writer such as Wolf who might be assigned to a nationally defined East German as well as a linguistically defined German literary field. However, there is flexibility in the generalised nature of Casanova’s model, which can be used in conjunction with Sapiro’s more specific findings. Significantly for this exploration of Wolf’s text in translation, both models show how the symbolic value of text and author is renegotiated by translation; especially in a transfer from a dominated to a dominating literary culture, text and author may not be able to “challenge the literary orthodoxy” so much as find themselves subject to orientation towards the heteronomous pole of a new literary field. In Wolf’s case, this has resulted in intervention by agents both in the East German and in the American literary field to reframe the relationship between her text and its political context.

Critical socialism and subjective authenticity: *Der geteilte Himmel*

One has to know the background of the whole development of writing in my society to explain that this is not just a narcissistic occupation, my writing. I’m a person who is very strongly rooted in the society in which I live, and what I usually write about are the conflicts between individuals and the societies in which they live – and the society is always shown as a very strong factor in the individual’s life. (Wolf 1993: 272)

Although it predates Wolf’s later, more internationally successful writing, *Der geteilte Himmel* can be seen to form a coherent body with these later texts through its central concern with a critically reflective form of socialism. The text explores tensions in the life of its protagonist, Rita, as she develops in emotional and political maturity. Her eventual collapse, which sends her to the hospital in which we find her at the start of the book, is brought about by the increasing pressures of her situation and the disintegration of her relationship with Manfred, whose pessimism leads him to defect from East to West Germany just before the building of the Berlin Wall. Through Rita’s character development and her choice to stay in the GDR, the text engages critically with the position of the individual in socialist society, depicting the dogmatic implementation of socialist principles by characters such as the ominous Mangold, undermining moralistic depictions of the working classes, and exposing the emotional as well as rational motivation of the protagonist.

Wolf’s critique of socialism is also evident in *Der geteilte Himmel* in the first signs of her aesthetic concern with “subjective authenticity”, an aesthetic that challenges the authority of a single, unified narrator, disrupting the positivist norms of Socialist Realism. In Wolf’s subjective-authentic prose, a subjective narrative “dimension” (1968: 487) works to involve and engage the reader, introducing varying and often openly unreliable perspectives on events rather than recounting them in a seemingly objective, realist style. This aesthetic resonates with a Bakhtinian identification of the literary text as a site of competition between various “languages”, which contest the possibility of an authoritative narrative voice by revealing different worlds of social reality outside the text. Bakhtin describes this as “dialogised heteroglossia” (273) and argues that, as the reliability of the narrative voice is displaced by this heteroglossia, its power to engage the reader is increased. The heteroglot
narrative voice is “internally persuasive” because it internalises the languages and subjectivities of others, rather than imposing on them the authoritative force of a unitary language (342). It is not difficult to see why this destabilising and disunited narrative voice positioned Wolf as autonomously in relation to Socialist Realist norms.

Der geteilte Himmel experienced a mixed response from critics in the East German literary field. Although Wolf was awarded the Heinrich Mann Prize for the text in its year of publication and it clearly demonstrates features of Socialist Realism (see e.g. Smith 32-41), it was criticised by those who felt its literary style departed too far from this model. The book’s ambivalent depiction of socialism was considered testament to a “dekadente Lebensauffassung” (Alpert and Wetzel), and some commentators were unsettled by Wolf’s subjective authenticity: “die überschauende Erzählfunktion [verschwimmt] in der Erlebniswelt Ritas ... Dies legt der Objektivierung der Figuren Grenzen auf” (Schlenstedt 102). Despite (and because of) these reservations, Der geteilte Himmel exercised a lasting effect on GDR literature by provoking debate and change, challenging the orthodoxy of existing Socialist Realist models and helping to shape a new way of reading and writing socialist literature (Stephan 31-38). Following the argument that autonomy within a domestic literary field correlates with appeal to the international field, the East German response to Der geteilte Himmel seems to forecast success for the text in translation. However, the 1965 English translation, contextualised by the translation and publishing strategies of the American literary field, substantially reframes Wolf’s political and aesthetic intervention. The translation failed to achieve much recognition and has been repeatedly criticised and rejected by those familiar with the German text, particularly since the establishment and consolidation of Wolf’s international profile.

Divided Heaven (1965)

The first English translation of Wolf’s writing, Joan Becker’s Divided Heaven was published by the GDR state-owned publisher Seven Seas in 1965. Little is known about Becker, except that, like other Seven Seas translators, she also wrote for the Democratic German Report, a fortnightly periodical edited by the English left-wing journalist John Peet, which aimed to promote the cultural life of the GDR to an English-speaking audience (Wallace 401-3). Research into Seven Seas, a branch of Volk und Welt, has outlined the extent to which its catalogue and practices were informed by the desire to uphold official policy on literary and cultural matters, publishing texts by authors from English-speaking countries in the original English, as well as English translations of mainly East German texts, all primarily to be exported (Jany). Jany suggests that this programme attempted to “impose SSP’s, i.e. the GDR’s own, norms on other literary systems” (9), referring to statements by Gertrude Gelbin (wife of Stefan Heym and founder of Seven Seas) that the series should represent “a propaganda project on an international scale” and “prove that German culture, which died under the Nazis, knows a renaissance under Socialism” (25). This mission is also reflected in Seven Seas’ publishing activities: in 1961, it recorded sales to thirty capitalist countries and nine socialist countries (20). The heteronomous positions of the publisher and translator of
Divided Heaven in the source-culture literary field strongly suggest that the translation was motivated by a desire to secure consecration of a fundamentally politicized East German literature by the international literary field through English translation.

However, these hopes were to be disappointed. Not long before the appearance of Divided Heaven, the German source text had received mixed coverage in Anglophone literary supplements: Hans Mayer in the TLS (1965) described Wolf’s prose as “rather dry and schoolmistressy”, attributing this to Wolf’s limited talent and her respect for East German “ideological taboos”, although Rudolf Walter Leonhardt claimed in the Chicago Tribune that it was the only novel he could think of that contradicted the observation that East German prose is “out of date” and “out of touch” (1965). When it reached the Anglophone readership, Becker’s translation then failed to attract much critical or popular interest, leaving apparently its only reviewer unimpressed by its “fatigued traditionalism of style and structure” in 1967 (Caute). Following this failure to achieve consecration, in 1979 Becker’s translation was republished by Adler’s Foreign Books, an American publisher specialising in French, German, Italian and Spanish literature. Adler’s reproduced exactly the text of Becker’s translation, but the bibliographic features of the new edition framed the text differently from the Seven Seas version and, rather than contributing to its consecration, decisively located the text in a marginalised position in the American (and therefore international) literary field. Since the publication of the Adler’s edition and perhaps particularly in view of Wolf’s established international profile following the translation of later texts, Becker’s translation has been subject to further attacks, this time from academic readers anxious to defend the quality of Wolf’s writing (Koerner; von Ankum). A closer examination of the text and translation reveals the causes of their concern.

A “fatal change in style”: Becker’s translation

Divided Heaven was, for a long time, the only English translation of Wolf’s writing to have received detailed academic scrutiny, and this has been uncompromising in its criticism. Charlotte Koerner’s article of 1984 and Katharina von Ankum’s 1993 analysis both offer damning verdicts of the translation shifts identifiable in Divided Heaven: whilst the German text had come under fire for its political ambivalence and ambiguous character portrayal, Becker’s translation has been described as “the most obvious attempt to adjust Wolf’s text to the masculine aesthetics of Socialist Realism” (von Ankum 229). Drawing on their own knowledge of Wolf’s writing and in part also on her (by this point) established international reputation, both Koerner and von Ankum make it clear that they do not believe Becker’s translation to be an accurate reflection of the creative talent, nor of the nuanced political insight of the book’s author. Perhaps the most serious accusation levelled against Becker’s text is that it fails “to render the book’s unmistakable internal awareness that […] ideological ‘truth’ has neither absolute nor eternal validity but rather represents an individually chosen commitment” (Koerner 214), in other words it moves away from the subjective authenticity that is so important in Wolf’s writing. Koerner’s and von Ankum’s comments reflect the fact that considerable changes were made to the text by the translator and publisher in order to render it a more accurate sample of the socialist literature intended for export by Seven Seas, bringing it closer to the heteronomous pole of the literary source culture.
A significant contributing factor to this shift, identified by Koerner as a “fatal change in style” (216), is the simplification of perspective in Wolf’s narrative voice. Becker’s translation, for example, renders all action in the past tense rather than adopting the mixture of past and present used by Wolf. Rita’s time in the sanatorium, interspersed with her flashbacks, is narrated by Wolf in the present tense, emphasising the immediacy of her experience and the ongoing (rather than completed) status of her recovery; by using the past tense, Becker’s translation distances this experience from the reader, who consequently loses some understanding and empathy for the protagonist. Another significant stylistic change is the merging of “ich” and “man” perspectives into the third-person “she”, consolidating an otherwise porous boundary between the narrator and Rita. The changed pronouns consistently distance the reader and narrator from the action so that the narrator is able to maintain a seemingly objective, omniscient view of Rita’s experience. Furthermore, the narrative also loses the dialogised heteroglossia in Wolf’s narrative voice, as interjections by the voices or thoughts of characters are unified within the omniscient, objective voice of the narrator:


[1b] It did not worry them that the party was drawing to a close, for they were sure that there would be other parties. (DH 88)


[2b] “Passed over? You mean they’re not going to use your improved spinning-jenny?”

Manfred thought of all the months of hard work Martin had put into designing the new gadget for drawing off waste gases. (DH 116)

In both these examples, the voices of the characters are removed from the translated narrator’s perspective by a third-person reporting structure, effecting a shift back towards the authoritative, unitary narrative voice Wolf sought to avoid. These three types of shift are discussed in detail by Koerner (219-24) and von Ankum (231-3).

A final observation worth making here is that, as well as making consistent changes to the style of the text to conform to a Socialist Realist model, the translation explicitly returns the text to a heteronomous position in relation to contemporary GDR politics. For example, Becker’s translation places new emphasis on positive events by reframing moments in the narrative:

[4a] Am größten vielleicht war sie an dem Tag, nach dem im Werk die große Unruhe losbrach. (GH 53)

[4b] Her biggest day was perhaps the one on which they celebrated the five thousandth wagon built in the works since the war. (DH 52)

The translation also lessens the ambiguity about the depiction of the working classes, for which the German text had been criticised, instead strengthening the positive value of complex characters such as Rita’s mentor Rolf Meternagel:
[5a] Immer öfter fing sie Blicke zwischen Ermisch und Rolf Meternagel auf, spöttische Blicke Meternagels, die er wie Versuchssonenden in unbekannte Luftschichten losschickte. Ermisch erwiderte sie zuerst abweisend, dann unsicher, fragend. (GH 61)

[5b] … that Ermisch and Meternagel were eyeing each other speculatively, and that Ermisch had started it. (DH 59)

Elsewhere, the translation uses more neutral terms in English where the German text reveals the troubled nature of language encoded with moral or political connotations, as in this example where Manfred’s reflections using the term “regieren” (echoing “Regierung”) are transformed to reflect instead on his own apparent lack of self-control and his failure to conquer the emotional with the rational:


[6b] Very occasionally he had time to wonder whether he was really directing events or whether events where driving him. (DH 63)

There is plenty more that could be said about shifts in style and narrative voice in Becker’s translation, which are also discussed by Koerner and von Ankum, but it is also important to consider how the cover material and notes in the translated volume act to frame the text for consecration in the target literary field. It is to these spaces in the text, or paratexts, that we now turn.

**Divided strategies: paratexts to Becker’s translation**

Genette explains the paratext as a “threshold […] that offers the world at large the possibility of either stepping inside [the text] or turning back” (2), and it is clear that the paratextual material in both editions of Becker’s translation contributes significantly to the interpretive framing of Wolf’s text. For Genette, the paratext is “the most socialised side of the practice of literature” (14) and can therefore reveal much about the intentions of the publisher for the text’s engagement with its reader. In translation, where institutionalised agents in the target culture are often responsible for the presentation of the “other” identity of the author or source culture, paratexts can provide a powerful site of consecration (or otherwise) for authors and their texts: Keith Harvey has described the bindings of translated texts as occupying “a crucial – indeed revelatory – position at the interface of the domestic and the foreign” (50). A comparison of the paratexts to the two editions of *Divided Heaven* reveals some significant differences between the editions.
The front cover of the 1965 Seven Seas edition shows a black-and-white photograph of a residential street, in which two rows of houses extend back into the distance and away from the viewer. There is nothing explicitly “German” about this image, and the eye is drawn to the title positioned in the blank area denoting the sky, highlighting the space that arches over both sides of the street. The 1979 Adler’s front cover, on the other hand, shows a German-language map marking the division of the two German states, emphasising immediately the narrative of divided Germany as the context for the story. Wolf’s German text was criticised in the GDR for portraying the division of Germany as the source of problems in the text (Stephan 33): while Seven Seas seeks to move away from this perspective, it is emphasised by Adler’s. Where the Seven Seas cover uses a motif that is not nationally specific, asserting commonality in a search for consecration, the Adler’s edition explicitly identifies the book as “other” and draws attention to the localised conflict that contextualises it, reducing its chances of consecration by the international field.

Despite their differences, the two editions use the same text on the back cover:

This prize-winning novel by a new East German author is a story of two young people, deeply in love, and their divided country – and the choice they must make. It is a story which depicts the urgency of life East of the Elbe – and the pull of the unknown that lies west of the Wall. Readers will find Divided Heaven a welcome addition to our translated-from-the-German titles.

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Here, the reader is invited to read a text by an author credited as “new” and “prize-winning”, and the focus of the text is identified as “two young people” and their love story, maintaining the appeal to universal themes. The text claims to be a realistic depiction of life “East of the Elbe”: this euphemistic frame of reference reinforces textual shifts already noted above, whilst supporting the translated text as part of the Seven Seas mission to bring socialist German literature to a wider audience. Contextualised differently by the 1979 cover, it also corresponds to the apparent motives for the Adler’s edition, which was targeted as a “document of East German culture of the 1960s” for school and college students (Koerner 214).

A final significant difference between the volumes is the naming of Jack Zipes on the 1979 cover as the author of the introduction and bibliography. Zipes, at the time a Professor of German at the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee, is what Casanova describes as an “institutional consecrator” (300), or an agent who belongs to the academic establishment and may contribute to the consecration of the text. In Bourdieusian terms, he is able to “commit the force (the capital) that he has acquired through previous struggles to the strategies that depend for their general direction on his position in the power struggle” (Bourdieu 1990:143). Zipes is more powerful than Becker, whose “invisible” status in the target culture and on the cover of the text categorises her as an “ordinary mediator” (Casanova 299) with the potential to facilitate consecration through translation but no individual power of consecration. However, Zipes is not a truly “consecrating” figure: whilst his institutional authority may seem to act in the text’s favour, the nature of his involvement with the translation is such that the text is framed as “other” and consecrated for a specifically academic audience, rather than integrated into the literary field of the target culture. This is apparent in the differences between the accompanying material in the two volumes.

The Seven Seas edition includes a brief note about the text inside the front cover, and one about the author inside the back cover. These emphasise aspects of the text already highlighted on the back cover, such as the love theme and Wolf’s receipt of the Heinrich Mann prize. The front cover’s emphasis on unity and shared ideals is also repeated in the claim that “it is a book that brings hope for the day when people unite for a better future”, and the realist but not nationally limited credentials of Wolf’s text are reinforced by the note on the author, which claims that “in plot and people, the novel reflects life on both sides of the Elbe”. This emphasis on realism and on the book’s apparent claim to reflect commonalities of life in all of Germany (rather than just life in the GDR) is underscored by the subtitle added to the translation on an internal title page: “A novel of Germany today”.

The Adler’s edition, on the other hand, includes an extensive foreword by Zipes, entitled “Moralist as Marxist”. As the title suggests, Zipes outlines a narrative of Marxist moralists to which Wolf’s socialism can be related, giving an overview of her texts to date (i.e. up to 1979) and discussing how she includes and develops socialist ideas in her writing, as well as offering some insight into the text and its context. The bibliography following the translation lists secondary literature on Wolf and her writing, including Anglophone reviews of her published texts. Heavy with explanatory material, Zipes’ commentary provides a detailed reading of the moralist intentions of Wolf and her text, targeting a readership who
will view *Divided Heaven* as a cultural artefact to be studied rather than consecrating it for wider circulation in the target-culture literary field. Explicitly emphasising political context and otherness, Zipes in his position as institutional consecrator in fact marginalises Becker’s translation rather than assimilating it into the American literary field.

While Becker’s translation represents an attempt by Seven Seas Publishing to establish East German literature in the international literary field in order to gain capital, it was largely unsuccessful in this endeavour because of its lack of consecrating agency and its attempt to return Wolf’s text to the heteronomous socialist realist model of the source literary field. The fate of the text was then sealed by the Adler’s edition and by Zipes as institutional consecrator. In both cases, the consecration of the text fails as it is reframed in order to fit institutionalised expectations of East German literature, and the approach taken by the Adler’s edition suggests that, even while Wolf’s position in the Anglophone literary field was being stabilised following the publication of *Christa T.*, *Divided Heaven* was not considered deserving of wider circulation.

In contrast to *Divided Heaven*, text and paratexts for *The Quest for Christa T.*, in print from 1970, framed Wolf’s text in isolation from the politics that informed her writing and founded an emerging authorial identity based on ostensibly universal and humanist (rather than party-political) values. The translator of *Christa T.* was the poet Christopher Middleton, a powerful “consecrated consecrator” (Casanova 300) able to confer his own capital on the text; the publisher was Farrar Straus Giroux (FSG), who also occupied a powerful position in the American literary field (Saunders 242). FSG wielded enough economic and cultural capital to consecrate Wolf as a translated author compatible with the political and cultural interests of the American general readership, and the relationship also brought with it personal endorsement by influential consecrating figures such as the company’s chairman, Roger Straus.² Wolf’s position in the international literary field subsequently drew strongly on the capital accrued by the translation of *Christa T.*, resulting in the depoliticised, humanist (and later, feminist) understanding of her writing that contributed to Anglophone support for her during her period of crisis in the early 1990s. This established, successful authorial identity contextualises the criticism expressed by Koerner and von Ankum in the 1980s and 1990s, and was also a motivating factor behind the 2013 translation of *Der geteilte Himmel*.

*They Divided the Sky* (2013)

Today, twenty years after its publication, *Der geteilte Himmel* can be understood as part of a larger structure, that is, within the context of the author’s whole work. The continuity of themes, motifs and even narrative strategies is obvious by now, and any translation which neglects or loses track of it has very little value for foreign readers. (Koerner 229-30)

Luise von Flotow’s *They Divided the Sky* was published in 2013, about eighteen months after Wolf’s death in December 2011. Emerging in very different cultural, political and authorial

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² Straus’ enduring interest in Wolf and the extent to which he endeavoured to promote her writing is reflected in his correspondence with her and with others in the publishing industry, which can be found in the Farrar Straus Giroux Archive at New York Public Library.
contexts from those surrounding Becker’s version, the new translation offers a contrast to the earlier one in a number of respects. Most importantly, von Flotow’s translation strategy addresses a number of the stylistic inaccuracies of the Becker translation, for example in the maintenance of a fluid, shifting narrative voice much more similar to that of Wolf’s German text. This seems to have been successful: the only review of von Flotow’s translation to date described it as a “faithful new rendering” to replace “a text that had been badly twisted by a zealous editor who was determined to suppress all straying from the party line” (“Divided Soul”). In her translator’s note, von Flotow itemises some of the ways in which she has rectified the problems of the earlier version and argues that “[my translation] follows and seeks to reproduce every detail and nuance of the source text” (xxiii) whilst recognising, prompted by Roman Jakobson and via Koerner, that “translation and adaptation of literature can only be “creative transposition”“ (xi; see also Koerner 213).

Whilst von Flotow carefully distinguishes her translation from Becker’s, her comment on the importance of cultural context in the shaping of translation acknowledges that hers too is informed by practices of her field. Koerner’s comment in 1984, that the “obvious” continuity of features of Wolf’s writing must inform any translation, indicates the authoritative power of Wolf’s now established position in the Anglophone literary field (whilst also apparently proceeding from the troubling assumption that the author’s identity will remain a static point of reference). Writing almost thirty years before von Flotow’s translation, Koerner identifies the influence of the translated author’s consecration on future translations of her writing. Published late in the narrative of Wolf’s texts in translation, then, von Flotow’s translation is contextualised and in part motivated by Wolf’s accumulated capital in international and Anglophone literary fields, reflected in the obituaries that consistently described her as one of Germany’s best known authors and emphasised her engagement with “universal” themes (see e.g. Binder and Weber; “Christa Wolf”; Leeder; Webb). Added to the author’s established position is the fact that von Flotow, like Zipes and unlike Becker, wields her own cultural capital: she is Professor of Translation Studies at the University of Ottawa and series editor for the series in which her translation was published. Whilst outside the institutions of the literary field in the United States that have been largely responsible for Wolf’s Anglophone and international consecration, alongside her academic credentials von Flotow’s profile as a professional translator (e.g. of Emine Sevgi Özdamar’s Das Leben ist eine Karawanserai) assigns her significant symbolic capital as the translator of Wolf’s text and differentiates her from Zipes, whose capital is more specifically defined by his status in the academy. Whereas Becker’s translation sought to consecrate the author and the source culture through translation of the text, in the case of von Flotow’s translation it is the accumulated capital of the author and translator that helps to justify the translation and to reintroduce the text to the Anglophone literary field.

‘Every nuance and detail of the source text’: von Flotow’s translation

Von Flotow’s translation differs substantially from Becker’s in key areas where the earlier version has been criticised. She returns to the variation of tenses and pronouns used by Wolf, upholding the shifting temporality of the narration that helps to keep the continuing feeling of anxiety and lack of closure in the text. Her translation also more successfully maintains the
variety of voices and registers that create the text’s heteroglossia and destabilise the narrator’s authority, as demonstrated by her rendering of examples discussed above (p. 8):

[1c] But at some point this party will come to an end. Doesn’t matter. We’re going to have lots of parties, aren’t we? (DS 84)

[2c] Refused? Our new spinning jenny with the improved exhaust system has been refused? Just like that? After months of work! If it were only the work… (DS 110)

She thus manages to destabilise the unity of voice in a way that reflects Wolf’s shifting, uncertain narrator and more successfully demonstrates the subjective-authentic aesthetic.

Von Flotow also successfully reflects the internalised perspective of the narrative and the affective nature of events, for example in the personification of the weather at the start of chapter seven:

[7a] In der Nacht entschied sich das Wetter anders. (GH 31)

[7b] The weather changed during the night. (DH 32)

[7c] Overnight the weather changed its mind. (DS 26)

Attention to the detail of Wolf’s source text ensures that von Flotow’s translation more accurately reflects the breakdown of the relationship between Rita and Manfred as all forms of communication disintegrate:

[8a] Rita fragte Manfred nicht, ob er mit ihr einverstanden war, nicht einmal nachträglich, nicht einmal mit Blicken. (GH 134)

[8b] Rita had never spoken to Manfred about this little episode. (DH 121)

[8c] Rita didn’t ask Manfred if he agreed with her, not even later, not even with a glance. (DS 115)

This attention to linguistic detail is also reflected in von Flotow’s treatment of the politically loaded language of the text. Where Becker’s translation omits or weakens comments that are troubling or ambivalent, von Flotow seeks to maintain these and uses language that reflects the problematic nature of the vocabulary in the German text. In one example, the doctor’s role in Rita’s pastoral care comes into conflict with his desire for control over her wellbeing and he insists on having “Aufsicht” over her conversation with Wendland. While Becker opts for a neutral expression, von Flotow’s translation suggests the intrusive nature of the doctor’s interest, maintaining the sense that this figure of authority is both reassuring and repressive:

[9a] Ein kurzes Gespräch unter seiner Aufsicht. (GH 7)

[9b] He stayed with them while they talked for a few minutes. (DH 9)

[9c] A short conversation, under his surveillance. (DS 5)
Elsewhere, the translation reflects the importance of a concept of “Mensch sein” in Wolf’s writing, revealing a problematic relationship between socialist and humanitarian practices.

[10a] Der Professor war ein bedeutender Mann; das muss ja nicht heißen, dass er ein bedeutender Mensch war. Um es geradeheraus zu sagen: Er war eitel. (GH 126)

[10b] The professor was an important man and a brilliant chemist […]. But that did not make him interesting. He was in fact self-opinionated […]. (DH 113)

[10c] The professor was an eminent man, which doesn’t mean he was an eminent human being. Or to say it more directly, he was vain. (DS 107)

Von Flotow’s translation reveals a concern about the loss of human values in society that is absent from Becker’s version. In this and other examples, her translation shows greater attentiveness to the layers of meaning encoded within Wolf’s text, as well as to her subjective-authentic narrative voice. To this extent, von Flotow’s translation is strongly guided by the German text in a way that Becker’s is not, ensuring that the text presented for consecration is closely linked to its source in another literary field; reflecting Wolf’s now-established international profile, it attempts to observe the world author’s distinctive voice, rather than reconfiguring the text at the expense of the writer’s characteristic style as in the earlier translation. As a consecrator, then, von Flotow is easily distinguishable from Zipes by the degree to which she wishes to promote Wolf’s authorship and her literary work. The paratexts to the translation, however, demonstrate a different dynamic between translator and text.

_The translator as consecrator: paratexts to von Flotow’s translation_

On the front cover of von Flotow’s translation, a dark photographic image shows East Berlin’s Café Moskau on a night-time city street, with high-rise flats in the background and cars in the foreground. This image recalls the Seven Seas edition by superimposing the book’s title on the sky, together with the names of author and translator; the sense of duality and something shared, though, is lost and replaced with the single image of an iconic location that marks the text as (East) German.
The back cover provides historical context for the book and emphasises the Cold War and the building of the Berlin Wall as the “conflicts of the time”, seen to “permeate the relations between characters in the book on every level” and identified as the cause of Rita’s collapse. This summary, and the link between political context and emotional trauma that it establishes, reflects the relationship that the translation enjoys to the political context of the writing: the “conflicts of the time” are just that, and Cold War tension between source and target culture is now a thing of the past. This contrast with the earlier editions demonstrates the temporal contingency of paratexts identified by Urpo Kovala (135), who observes that the paratextual space “works together with the entire universe of discourse of a certain society at a certain point in time” (my emphasis). The paratexts to the new translation reconfigure the relationship between the dominated source-culture and the dominating target-culture, following the final shift in this relationship that was brought about by the reunification of Germany. Having ceased to exist, the GDR and the political conflicts that contextualised Der geteilte Himmel have been assigned a new, exotic symbolic value and can now be seen to contribute to the appeal of the text.

Rather than being mediated out of the text’s frame of reference or emphasised as a distancing strategy, then, the East German origin of text and author is “safely” foregrounded as a context that is other and interesting, and one that is no longer a political threat. In this light, and especially for the reader with no knowledge of the GDR, the front-cover image of a cult East German location represents a commodification of the book’s context and the author’s East German identity. These representational strategies on the front and back covers of the translation, informed by the contemporary target-culture field, enact what has been described in the context of postcolonial studies as a process of claiming capital through

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3 Image reproduced with kind permission from University of Ottawa Press.
“strategic exoticism” (Huggan); seen in a more negative light, they recall Mohja Kahf’s description of the “haremisation” of Arab memoirs by the American reception environment, as the East German origin of the text is appropriated and reframed as enticingly “other”. As far as engagement with the author’s cultural-political context is concerned, this defused and exoticised portrayal is hardly more effective than the images used on the covers of the earlier translation. While the text of the translation takes its lead primarily from the source text, the paratexts are strongly influenced by contemporary perceptions of the source culture by the target literary field.

The established cultural capital of author and translator also contributes to the paratextual framing of the text. Inside the book, the translation is preceded by a translator’s note documenting von Flotow’s reasons for undertaking the translation as well as her translation strategy. This first-person narrative places emphasis on identifying and unveiling the translator and her credentials. Von Flotow acknowledges her debt to Becker’s translation for some explanation of the details of GDR society, but mostly explains how she has tried to avoid making Becker’s mistakes in her own translation, with explicit reference to Koerner and von Ankum. It is not only for their own sake that she seeks to rectify the mistakes of Becker’s text, but also with an awareness of their significance in the context of how Wolf is now internationally “known”. Koerner and von Ankum have played a significant part in this wider mediating process. The translator’s note thus reveals a decision-making process that takes into account not only the source text and its context but also the earlier translation and its critics, demonstrating how von Flotow’s translation has been shaped by voices in the target literary field. This practice is contingent in the same way as that of Becker and the Seven Seas marketing department in their attempt to reshape Wolf’s text (and frame its author) as a vehicle for source-culture models, or that of Zipes and the Adler’s marketing department, whose framing of Wolf and her text reflects a response to target-culture expectations of East German literature. Von Flotow’s comment that, having become aware (via Koerner’s article) of the politics informing Becker’s translation, “I decided to one day retranslate the book” (vi), reinforces this, suggesting that her desire to translate the book is a response to the discrepancy between Wolf’s established profile as a world author and the “problems” perceived by other Anglophone scholars in the existing translation.

Von Flotow’s comment also reminds the reader of the translator’s powerful position as an agent in the translation process: this authority is emphasised in the paratexts by the fact that her translator biography appears on the front inner of the book cover, whereas Wolf’s author biography is on the rear inner. Wolf’s biography briefly summarises the publication context and response to Der geteilte Himmel; it reflects the temporal context of the new translation by identifying her as an author with an established international reputation, which frames the observation that she “never stopped working toward improving the socialist reality of the GDR” as a harmless relationship with socialism (based on social rather than political motives) posing no threat to consecration. Von Flotow’s own biographical note focuses on her translation credentials (rather than her academic position) and consolidates her status as consecrator. It is notable that, while Wolf’s international career is mentioned, there is no information on previous Wolf translations, meaning that Divided Heaven is explicitly
associated with the series of translated literature at UOP, rather than with a broader narrative of Wolf’s writing in translation. The positioning of the two biographies (translator first, author second) reflects this agenda, again enabling the translator’s capital to be drawn in to consecrate the text.

While von Flotow’s translation positions itself as a long overdue remedy to Becker’s *Divided Heaven* and is in part prompted as an act of justice on behalf of a world author, the paratexts demonstrate the powerful reframing role played by the translator and the exoticized repositioning of the text’s East German origins. While the challenging narrative style of Wolf’s text is restored, the reframing of the context of the writing and intervention by the translator in the consecration process suggest that Wolf’s established position in the international field is not in itself sufficient consecration for her text. Explicit consecration by the translator attempts to rehabilitate *Der geteilte Himmel* into Wolf’s contribution to world literature; however, von Flotow’s translation, published by an academic press and in a series specifically for translated literature, potentially claims Wolf’s text for a scholarly rather than a literary audience and in so doing may continue to isolate it from the rest of her work in translation.

**Conclusion**

Symbolic capital is not acquired – in the case of the writer – essentially by heritage but by recognition, which must be constantly regained through new works published in the literary field. But symbolic capital becomes established and stable once the work of an author achieves the status of a classic; at this point, the author and his or her work acquire enduring, stable symbolic capital that is not susceptible to being questioned over time. (Gouanvic 162-3)

The history of *Der geteilte Himmel* in English translation upholds the connection identified by Sapiro and Casanova between autonomy in the field and international renown, framing Wolf’s progression from unknown and unconsecrated “foreign” writer to established “world” author through the acquisition of capital in the international literary field. Where Becker’s translation, an attempt to consecrate the East German literary field through the textual export of socialist realism, lacked the symbolic capital to make an impression on the Anglophone literary field, Wolf’s international renown since the translation of *Christa T.* has been defined especially by her apparent espousal of values dominant in “world” literature. This established cultural capital, relatively unshaken by the controversies of the early 1990s, contextualises the von Flotow translation, which also benefits from the capital of the translator as institutional consecrator.

As Sapiro and Casanova have pointed out and as Wolf’s example demonstrates, the author who earns the “right” to be translated by enacting autonomy is frequently in need of consecration in the new literary field, which reassigns author and text to a new position, out of the control of the author. The three specific agents discussed here have each acted differently as consecrators within a particular field: Becker’s translation reverts to the heteronomous politicised pole of the source literary field, though its paratexts make a claim for alignment with the apolitical, heteronomous pole of the target culture in an attempt to
export these norms internationally; Zipes frames the text as primarily “moralist” and “Marxist”, aligning it with unfavourable target-culture views on East German literature and thus positioning the text in opposition to the dominant trends in the literary field, appealing only to a specialist (academic) audience; and von Flotow’s paratexts subscribe to an exoticised account of East Germany that defuses the political engagement of the text by aligning it with a now distant and no longer threatening source culture, rather than allowing it to disrupt the apolitical tendencies of the target-culture field. In each case, Wolf’s (East) German identity is mediated by institutionalised interests that compete to control interpretations of text and author, and the positioning of the text in relation to the autonomous and heteronomous poles of the target field has been instrumental to its success.

In its refusal to conform to their accounts of the consecration of the literary text, Wolf’s example reveals areas for further exploration in Sapiro’s and Casanova’s models of the power dynamics that govern translation between literary fields. A significant tension in these models relates to the locatedness of the writer: Sapiro’s and Casanova’s models of exchange presume a transfer between two active fields. However, in Wolf’s case, the text’s source culture first went through a series of internal political changes and then became defunct. This volatile status of one of the fields in question results in considerable variance in how the target literary field accommodates the text, ranging from a deliberate exclusion of otherness to negative and positive “othering” of Wolf’s translated text. While the now absent socio-political context of the GDR no longer presents a challenge to the dominating Anglophone literary field, in particular the paratexts to the 2013 translation suggest a continuing tendency to marginalise and dominate the source culture and the author’s critical engagement with her specific context, in favour of apparently universal themes. Secondly, the “classic” status conferred on Wolf by her obituaries reflects the increased stability of her position in the international field since the first publication of Divided Heaven, but also exposes tensions in the correlation proposed by Sapiro and Casanova between domestic autonomy and international renown. For Wolf, differing relationships between politicised literature and autonomy/heteronomy in source and target fields of cultural production have resulted in her being reframed through translation, resulting in a position that leaves her unable to “challenge the literary orthodoxy” on her own terms.

Whilst contradictory to her declared literary project, Wolf’s identity as a “world author” has been increasingly influential in evaluations of her translated work, as the growing corpus of her work in English has itself established norms against which the author and her work might be judged. This institutionalised account of the author has typically focused on “universal” experience, rather than on the specificities of Wolf’s world-view, revealing the mediated and context-specific nature of world authorship. By becoming a “world” author, then, Wolf has been repeatedly obliged to sacrifice her autonomy to the demands of a new and changing international literary field: this reframing suggests that, for some authors, global consecration comes at an extremely high price.
References


