

## **Discourse analysis of social discrimination in short story "once upon a time" by Nadine gordimer**

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### **ABSTRACT**

"Fairclough,s three dimensional model of discourse have been identified by Fairclough (1992,1995)a".The model visualize discourse as text, written or spoken as discourse practice and as social practice. Fairclough framework focus not only the text itself but also take into account its production and interpretation within a larger social context. Therefore, any discourse 'event is simultaneously a three – dimensional phenomenon; it is a piece of spoken or written text, an instance of discourse practice and an instance of social practice. According to this model, close linguistics analysis of the text through three – dimensional discourse model helps understand the text. The short story "once upon a time" is analyzed applying three – dimensional model of discourse the purpose of analysis is to mark the social effects of the discourse modes that may contribute to the better and proper understanding of the text, specifically from a social point of view.

**Keywords:** Discourse model, fore grounded, back grounded, social discrimination, changing situation entities.

### **Objectives o f the work:**

1. racial discrimination, between Black and White.
2. Insecurity in society.

3. The impact of fairy tale on children.
4. People make themselves their own destruction.

## INTRODUCTION

“Once Upon A Time” is a short story, written by Nadine Gordimer. This story was published in 1989 and is one of many stories in author Nadine Gordimer’s short story collection. Nadine Gordimer is a political activist as well as an author who was born and raised in South Africa. She is eighty-nine years old and still actively writing and performing charity work. In “Once Upon A Time” Nadine Gordimer suggests that the true pitfall emanates from within a community that is reflected in “Once Upon a Time” brilliantly. A fairy tale of suburban life set in the era of President P. W. Botha’s “total onslaught” it points up the paradox of security, how an obsession with protecting a style of life eventually becomes a surrogate lifestyle, displacing or eroding the very comforts it was intended to secure. The most vocal inhabitants of the story’s Johannesburg suburb are the robber alarms, communing so incessantly in their “electronic harpies’ discourse” that no one pays any heed, so thieves and housebreakers can proceed unchecked. The man and his wife encircle their property in a coil of zigzag blades. “pure concentration on the style, no decoration, evident potency.” But the only intruder whom they torture is their son: playacting the valiant prince who revives Sleeping Beauty, he gets sliced to bits in a copsis of metal thorn.

## ONCE UPON A TIME

This fairy-tale is from a collected works titled *jump and other stories*, written by Nadine Gordimer. It is written in the conditions of apartheid in South Africa. This story has been preferred because it poses extensive problems in terms of style and content for students to think about and discover.

Its view of community order, gives us a glimpse into her world. This influence manifests itself all over the story by the characters’ motivations based on their racist beliefs and Gordimer’s improvement of an impending fear. To this reader, a fellow novelist symbolizes Gordimer’s contempt for apartheid. This condescension sets the dark tone of racism that flows from “Once Upon a Time” and becomes the key element that binds the story’s frame of mind of unknown fear. Gordimer introduces the reader to the dark tone and terrified mood of South Africa’s apartheid system through images of the goldmines under her house as well as Chopin and Tsonga workers who may have been entombed there. She draws the person who reads into the dark side of fear, describing barely audible images of murder and the basic fear of intruders. She then follows with images of a delineate on a Neighbourhood Watch sign, and

describes it as a wearing a veil and unidentifiable thief. In the introduction, existing as a first person account of her thoughts, Gordimer creates a tremendously dark and moody tone based on the fear of the unknown. This darkness looms over the reader as Gordimer tells of a night of impatience following a novelist's submission that she writes a children's book. Her portrayal of this restlessness as a subconscious echo begins a chilling tale. Following her beginning, Gordimer describes an onslaught of belief that come only when one is woken from sleep, keeping us in bed like children scared of the boogie man. She proceeds to paint a picture of murder, death, and men entombed under her house. Her foreboding message, "I was neither endangered nor spared", suggests Gordimer faces no real danger but is faced with writing the child's story she had refused to write, leaving the imprudent and scared reader to peruse this bedtime story.

The disappointed and scared reader is placed in the carve home and forced to except a perfect family in a magnificent neighbourhood. Already perplexed by duality of terror and idealism, the reader's fears are again realized when a word of warning from a witch and the placement of a Neighbourhood Watch sign shatters the perfection of this scene of happiness. Gordimer plants the seed of racism here by the rhythmic use of the sign's assertion, "you have been warned," and the unidentified thief silhouette on the Neighbourhood Watch sign. Though that alone is hardly reproofing, she chooses to point out that the silhouette is masked; neither black nor white, proving the property holder is not racist. She then backs the family's racism by describing fears of riots outside the city in areas of other colours causing the family to draw away from the social order.

Gordimer continues telling of the family's isolationism from the humanity of other colour through home security. As with most process of security, such as home alarms, self-satisfaction drives a need for a growing level of isolation, which Gordimer reinforces by reiterating the witch's warning of a danger from the outside. The family is asked to take heed and implement constant upgrades in security measures for fear of being shut in a cabinet. Providing almost constant horror of the paragraphs to come, Gordimer's alliteration of the witch, the sign, the words take heed, and the idea of being shut in cupboard compounds nervousness with fear. In contrast to this terror, a fairy story is interjected in the form of a book given to the boy. That night the boy sleeps with belief of Sleeping Beauty and knights in shiny protective covering racing through his head. In trying to replicate his hero, the boy breaches security and the reader is dealt a mortal twist. This leaves the innocent child not a victim of the feared stranger but of the family's own security razor barrier. With the dead boy, the

perfect family retreats to the perfect home at the back

### **CONTENT:**

In order to understand the literary text, we have to know its culture, situation, and times in which it is written. I found evidence of racial discrimination in South African history .It has deep rooted in the real world. Studying the story according to its culture help us to see the world from outside perspective and therefore share human feeling. It can thus be viewed in relative to general cognitive improvement of the students.

### **Title**

The title is always important in giving the significant meaning of the text whether directly, indirectly or by allegation. The title explains that it is a fairy tale. But the content says something else 'Once Upon a Time 'also suggests that it is about some past incidence when it is written to portray contemporary situation in South Africa. Though written in a simple narrative style of a fairy tale, the author narrates the fairy-tale to herself and not to any child.

### **The title of the story consciously triggers expectations in the reader.**

- use of European Fairy Tale elements
- situations based on fantasy notion of existing reality
- themes reflecting notions of good opposed to evil
- > recognizable figures of complete good and absolute evil: hero and villain
- > which result in a "happily-ever-after" ending for the "good characters," honor, detection
- > punishment for the wicked; committing violent crimes equates brutal end payment for dishonorable or immoral actions
- light reading rather than a heavy diagnostic discourser
- > recognizable voyage formula
- > hero must perform tasks to win title of central character
- villain must carry out crimes to confirm title of antagonist.

### **Gordimer follows and transforms fairy tale notions by:**

- showing in the main framework story the psychological nature of this genre
- > in a sense, the outer story defends the need for frightening stories
- > the narrator creates the worst instance of "**children's story**" she can imagine in reaction to the faceless, nameless critic
- interior narrative starts in reverse; the characters are already "**living happily after**" (128), yet the story ends in disaster, with a death

- duplication of key phrases : **“YOU HAVE BEEN WARNED”** (128)
- mention typical fairy tale concepts with modern twists, new definitions:  
“ wise old witch” (128)  
“ **electronic harpies ‘ discourse”** (129)

## Genre

Although it look strange to start with genre as it is understandable but different style of writing associated with different genre it is easy to begin with genre study..

## Tone

The tone of the transcript is closely related to the purpose of the text. It is harsh and angry, sarcastic, melodramatic, subtle and sarcastic or matter of fact.

## Style

Is the style aggressive, descriptive, analytical, direct or symbolic?

## Commercial style

The commercial style of fiction frequently displays one or more central protagonists with whom the reader can relate; however, this story presents no such character. All of the people in Once Upon a Time stay nameless, and for the most part, the text provides very little feature as to the personalities and traits of the characters. Even in the beginning, the author of the story is very enigmatic about himself. With such mysterious and vague characters without names, reader’s great attempt to join with the characters.

Commercial writers employ more dramatic, audacious, and exciting plotlines. However, the text does not present any of these elements of the plot. Commercial fiction has a happy ending, where the characters triumph over the hardships and attain the goal they originally set out to do. However, the exact contradictory occurs in Once Upon a Time. At the end of the story, the little boy is mangled in the metal mesh and most probably dies. The reader walks away from the end of the story more sensitive, not content and entertained as they might be in commercial fiction.

## Narrative Style

There is a change in the narrative style. The writer in the first part of the story explains her state of mind, which is in the grips of fear. It is to relieve that she starts telling herself a story. The first part is written in first person and the story to pursue is contextualized in an atmosphere of fear. But asking the following questions can produce a discussion on style.

- How are the two parts associated?
- Can we do gone with the first part?

- Would the story be less efficient and clear without the explanation of the first part? If so how?

The fairy tale mode of the story gives the whole story an ironical shift. The visible clash between the subject matter and the style of writing further emphasizes the bitterness and sadness inherent in the situation. The uncertainty of manner and content portrays the confusion and chaos common in the South African political situation. In her Nobel Prize reception speech, Gordimer said,

**‘This aesthetic ventures of ours becomes subversive when the shameful secrets of our times are explored deeply, with artist’s rebellious integrity to the state of being manifest in life around her or him, the writer’s theme and characters inevitably are formed by the pressures and distortions of that society’.**

### **Research questions:**

- 1: what is social discrimination?
- 2: what is the impact of fairy tale on children’s?
- 3: why we feel insecure in our society?
- 4: How our own destructions create the problem in our life?

### **Literature review:**

#### ***By Emily Hines***

**Author’s Note: “If you have not read this short story, you need to. As the following essay portrays, it is an extremely shocking bit of literature. Since I did not go into detail of plot line here, if you have any questions you can ask me and I will certainly find the answer to give you.”**

In Nadine Gordimer’s “Once Upon a Time”, the most important aspect is its theme. The entire story is set about telling its readers that human beings are responsible for their own destruction. The setting of the two parts of the story is important as well as the ironic composition created. Suspense and tone are also added to the final effect. All this is brought together to make readers shocked, ready to refocus to the importance of elements around their own lives.

The story starts with the author presenting a scene in which great fear is there. She hears noise and is afraid of a burglar or murderer inside her home. However, she soon realizes that her fear was not something real, but that the noise responsible for her fear was really just the shifting of the earth. The setting is important here in creating a situation of dread which

each human has experienced at one time in their life. If the terror had ensued at a time during the day instead of the night, then it might have produced a more amusing affect as conflicting to the fright shared with the audience. It pulls the reader into the story so that when the second part starts, the reader is completely occupied in the author's mocking telling of a fairy tale.

This fairy tale in itself is ironic as it is obvious through the very first paragraph of story in which the author has refused to write a story for children. Another situation of irony can be seen in that the only thing relating the author's tale to that of a children's story is the setting. A happy family in an ideal little suburb makes it look like a story for children, but by the time the story finds its end readers are left completely stunned.

Irony adds to this final affect is that everything the parents do to shield their home becomes worthless. The gate speaker is used by the boy as a walkie-talkie. The alarm is set off but no one cares. The high wall is mocked by the cat jumping through it. The ultimate damage is obvious when the boy is killed by the barbed wire. All these precautionary things the characters thought they would die without, instead bring on unseen loss.

This death added to by the person vs. self conflict and ironic tone of the author creates the theme of the entire section. This theme's impact is even more immense and shocking upon a second reading of the story. The repetition of "YOU HAVE BEEN WARNED" stands to tell readers that this story is in fact warning them that with each move they make they build their own prison and bring on their own demolition.

Laura Riazi has literally analyzed this work of Nadine Gordimer. "Once Upon a Time" is a reverse fantasy tale written by Nadine Gordimer. The reverse fantasy is a tale that normally ends happily ever after but has a plot twist where the ending scene is cruel. The story begins as the writer describes that they are asked to contribute to a collection of children's literature. The next moment while lying in bed they are abruptly awakened by a disturbing noise in his house which rests upon a hollow base. In order to make himself peaceful he begins to create a bed time story in his mind. Although the first part of the short story does not yet seems to fit into the artistic harmony of the plot, it is essential for understanding the theme of the entire work.

The second half of the story starts with the details of a family living "happily ever after" in a suburb. The second story quickly presents the protagonists, who are the husband, wife, and their little boy. Although having a large sign that reads "YOU HAVE BEEN WARNED" the wife particularly is very fearful about keeping their house safe and secure from the looming drunkards and riots, which are common in their region. The trusted house maid continues to give her advice about how to keep their possessions and lives robber-free. The plot moves on to explain that the husband's mother or "*The wise old witch*" buys a metallic coil with shards encircling it to top their fence which lines the entire perimeter of the family's home. Left to wonder what will happen to the cat which often comes as goes

as he pleases the story describes that even the cat rests just within the walls and does not try to challenge the wall. Quickly the ending of this plot becomes an unhappy as well as surprise ending when the little boy wants to play make believe after listening to Sleeping and tries to brave the jagged coils. He falls into the mess of metal and heavily bleeds while the gardener and housemaid attempt to rescue him while his parents are anxious. In some ways the ending of "Once Upon a Time" is vague because the story gives no exact evidence of the following events of the boy like if he lives or dies. Although left with a sort of cliff hanger the artistic unity of the plot leads to a full understanding of the stories and the relationship between them.

The characterization of "Once Upon a Time" is not very profound. Indirectly presented each of the characters is moderately flat and static. The parents stay on the border through the entire story and the child does not change either. Also the housemaid remains faithful and trustworthy. These characters are not complex seeing as all that is known is their terror of the outside world. Even their names are not evident in the plot. The abstractness of the story is used so that it is not related to any other kind of stereotypical children's bed time story. Not being able to relate characters to others that are popular in children's literature leads our minds to accept whatever happens in the tale. The mind does not have any expectation other than it thinks there will be some kind of happy ending which is a frustration.

The aspect that is most important is its plot that is interpreted. The theme of the story is **"fear caused by our own paranoia can lead to bigger problem because paranoia has the capability to consume our mind."** The husband and wife were so consumed by shielding their house that they failed to enjoy what was inside it. They were so preoccupied with its effect from the outside-in that they completely ignored to identify the problem of what is going out. Only temporarily did their mind lie on the fate of their cat. The parents never warned their child of the potential dangers of the fence because



they were so anxious about the possible threats from the outside world. The fear of being robbed consumed the minds of the husband and wife to the point where in a way neglected their child.

Symbols are there in various places in "Once Upon a Time." These symbols lead to the allegorical aspect of fantasy however this story is considered a reverse fantasy. The husband's mother is named "the wise old witch" which is there in a lot of fantasy works. For example the three fairies of *Sleeping Beauty* are clever old witches as well as Glinda from *the Wizard of Oz*. The manifestation of the house and its security features are related to common castles which were protected by different obstacles like moats or curtain walls. The company from which the family purchases the metal coil is named DRAGON'S TEETH. Dragons are very general in literary fantasies. The dragon symbol is significant to this story because the teeth allude to the danger of the fence coil. These dragons represent the dangers within this family's society. In some imaginary tales one or more of the characters has a royal "right hand man" like Rasputin has the bat in *Anastasia*. In relations to "Once Upon a Time" the housekeeper is the trustworthy assistant to the family in the way that she always gives those suggestions of how to better protect their house. The most obvious symbol of the story is an attempted heroic mission in which the child grabs a ladder to fare the jagged coil. In almost any fancy or fairy tale there is a heroine that must put themselves in danger in order to succeed at their set task. A little twist happens in this symbol when the little boy does not succeed like normal protagonists. This symbol of the story is often where it is supposed to be a reverse fantasy.

Another important element of literature in "once Upon a Time" is wit and sarcasm. In the story "happily ever after" is constantly repeated which is rather comic because they live in a criminal society. This family is required to primarily keep their own house and be frightened for their lives yet they are living "happily ever after." This situation would be ironical because of a disconnection of appearance and reality. The fact that the housemaid is the loyal one in the story is also ironic because stereotypically

house workers are dishonest and try to steal their employer's possessions. The biggest irony of "Once Upon a Time" is the child getting hurt by what was to protect him especially since bed time stories are supposed to end happily. Irony carries the significance of the plot.

"Once Upon a Time" is an enjoyable literary fantastic work that incorporates all of the significant parts of a successful and interesting story. The arrangement of the plot makes the theme easy to comprehend while other elements of characterization, symbolism and irony flavor up the story. "Once Upon a Time" by Nadine Gordimer is an incredible literary work.

## **Methodology:**

According to Fairclough three dimensional models we can analyze these three different aspects of story. There are three aspects in setting; they are historical context, geographical context and physical context.

### **1. Historical context**

Historical context is the political, social, artistic, and economic setting for a particular idea or event in order to better understand something in history, this aspect is significant in knowing time and place and which give it its meaning. Situation also makes up the mood in the story. In this way, it can gain, among other things, a sense of how exclusive or ordinary an event or idea seems to be in evaluation to other events and ideas.

### **2. Geographical background**

Geographical context is the terms position and place are used to make out a point or an area on the Earth's surface or elsewhere. The term 'location' generally implies a higher degree

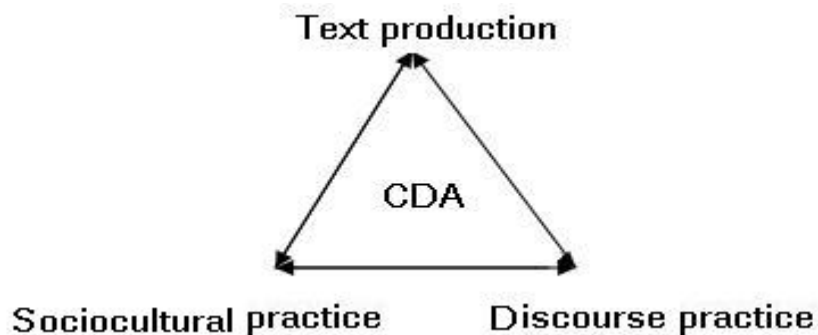
of can certainty than “place” which often has an ambiguous edge relying more on human/social attributes of place identity and intelligence of place than on geometry.

### 3. Physical context

The physical context is including weather conditions might be exclusively described.

#### DIAGRAM:

with the help of these three perspectives of 3D model we analyze the text.



#### THE ANALYSIS:

An effort has been to make analysis of the short story applying some of the salient features of Discourse Model. The focus is to show some understanding of this model of discourse, a few passages from the story have been selected and analyzed. The passages are analyzed according to temporality, types of entities, subjectivity, patterns of organization in the text etc.

#### Analyzing the story ‘Once Upon a Time’

the setting of this story is community is where the place seemed hazardous and chaotic and the violence could happen anytime. Therefore, the family builds extra-security in case if there is a burglar in their home. Eventually paranoia will lead to the tragedy when their very son got accident.

## 1. Historical context in Once Upon A Time

This story has two historical contents. First is the historical context of the author before she started her bedtime story. Unluckily, we could not find adequate evidence to define the historical context of the first few paragraphs. Second is historical contexts in this story is about the condition of post-colonial era that represents the social life of colonized and the colonizer people. The colonizer (the family) was living in fear. It can be seen from the wife's suspicion. She was afraid of the riots, so the family build additional layer of protections.

**“Someone has written to ask me to contribute to an anthology of stories for children. I reply that I don't write children stories; and he writes back that at a recent congress /book, seminar/fair certain novelist said every writer ought to write at least one story for children..... He was masked; it could not be said if he was black or white, and therefore proved the property owner was no racist”.**

## 2. Geographical context in Once Upon A Time

The first geographical context of this story is a urban area because the writer mentioned in the 7<sup>th</sup> paragraph.

***The creaking was a buckling, an epicenter of stress. I was in it. The house that surrounds me while I sleep is built on undermined ground; my bed, the floor, the house's foundation, the stages and passages of gold mines have hollowed the rock.***

The 7<sup>TH</sup> paragraph is complex, scary, and nearly intolerable. One evening the boy's mother reads him a "fairy story" from the book his grandmother had naively given him for Christmas. However, as the fairy tales encourage him to his mortal battle with the dragon, the grandmother here ironically emerges as the traditionally evil "wicked witch" that, as in "Hansel and Gretel", kills children

the second geographical context in stated in the 9<sup>th</sup> paragraph.

***In a house, a suburb, in a city, there were a man and his wife who loved each other very much and were living happily ever after.***

In this short story, an author is asked to write a children's story, she refuses the appeal saying that she should not have to write something she does not want to, but one night she finds herself awakened by a sound in the house. Unable to fall asleep, she begins telling herself a bedtime story about a family who lives in the periphery. This family lives in a town where everybody thrives for maximum security of the outside world. They seek fortification for the

homeless, thieves, and crooks that roam in the streets. Little did this family know that they would end up ache the one they love the most. Where there was border that separating the family and people of another color.

### 3. Physical context in Once Upon A Time

unluckily, in this story, we could not found any judgment that mention or refer the physical context.

This story “**once upon a time**” presents no such character. All of the people in Once Upon a Time stay nameless, and for the most part, the text provides very little aspect as to the personalities and traits of the characters. Even in the start, the author of the story is very mysterious about himself. With such mysterious and ambiguous characters without names, readers struggle to attach with the characters.

### Conclusion:

The analysis of a text through Fairclough discourse modes is a useful activity as it categorizes the passages according to certain features specific to a particular type of mode. The study of syntactic structures and linguistics features of a text may prove helpful in the understanding of a text. It has been observed that there are several systems working in a piece of narrative, the study of which is extremely helpful in comprehending the text, particularly from teaching and learning point of view. This story has an addictive superiority that makes you not want to put the short story down. It reminds us of our results, you have to exceed tests to get good grades in class. In this book, the family has to pass numerous tests when they go up against the homeless, thieves, and crooks that mosey for the future for their victim.

Finally, this is very important work of Nadine Gordimer and also great work of this genre. Many people’s work on it, in this story author talks about the social discrimination and difference between two cultures and races, how they face the social problems and fear of insecurity in society. So, we decided this work for my research work

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### Brief biographies

- [Nadine Gordimer at British Council](#): Literature
- [LitWeb.net: Nadine Gordimer Biography](#) (2003)
- [Guardian Books "Author Page"](#), with profile and links to further articles.