
Helga Königsdorf's Identity as a Citizen: Redefining the Meaning of *Heimat* in the Post-Unification Years

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The speed and the degree of change represented by the unification of the two Germanies left the Eastern German writer Helga Königsdorf in an identity vacuum. This resulted from the fact that suddenly her identity could no longer be "East German" and was not yet "German." During this phase of confusion and disorientation, she found herself reconsidering the meaning of important concepts such as that of *Heimat* and of belonging. The latter are among her main concerns in her post-1989 non-fiction writings,¹ some of which are closely analyzed in this article, as well as in her first novels published after the *Wende*: *Gleich neben Afrika* and *Im Schatten des Regenbogens*.² In order to illustrate what provoked Königsdorf's identity crisis following the collapse of the GDR and how she reacted to it, I will retrace the evolution of her identity as a citizen in its three main phases of development: during the GDR, the *Wende* and the first post-unification years. The examination of Königsdorf's relationship to the GDR will help me to explain the nature of her identity crisis during the *Wende*, including the strategies she adopted in the attempt to resolve this crisis and to redefine the meaning of *Heimat*. The last part of my analysis will deal with how Königsdorf has been trying to build her relationship with the new post-1989 German society.

With regard to Königsdorf's identity as a citizen during the GDR era, I will take into account her Jewish background and her social origins. I consider those to be the elements which made her different. These elements thereby strengthened her desire to belong to the GDR and to actively contribute to the building of the country. Such desire is also demonstrated by the fact that she was a member of the Party which indeed became her *Heimat*. Subsequently, once the SED regime disappeared during the *Wende*, she had to try to find new meaning in the notion of *Heimat*. She sought this in her native region, Thüringen (Thuringia), but also briefly



in the PDS, the successor party of the SED. However, as she realized that these were attempts to establish a continuity with her GDR identity, in the post-*Wende* years she started treasuring her experience and exploring other concepts. These alternated between ideas of internationalism and sporadic suggestions that society should be decentralized as a means of facilitating the process of identification with the area where one lives.

Despite Königsdorf's strong desire to feel part of the GDR—a theme she began discussing only in her post-*Wende* writings—her relationship to it was by no means uncomplicated. In fact, although she grew up in the GDR, there were two elements in her background which represented a threat to her sense of belonging to the country and her identification with it: her Jewish background and her social origins as the descendant of a family of *Großbauern*.

In order to explain how Königsdorf's Jewish background created in her a very strong need to belong, I will refer to *Respektloser Umgang*³ and in particular to the figure of the Jewish grandmother who resembles Königsdorf's own grandmother, because they were both Jewish and both called Rena.⁴ The grandmother is portrayed as a typical assimilationist German Jewess of the period before 1933. She is described as a woman who is proud of her Jewish heritage—for instance, she claims to be a descendant of King David—and yet strives to be part of German society, in which she tries to integrate herself by assimilating its culture. Her desire to belong to the German society is so strong that for a period she even refuses to acknowledge the racist attitudes which characterized Germany during the Nazi years. She justifies the situation through the recurrent use of scapegoats, even if this means accusing other Jews:

Man fühlte sich dem umgebenden Kulturkreis so verbunden, daß für alles, was dann geschah, außerhalb liegende Gründe gefunden werden mußten. Die Juden im Osten etwa, denen nachgesagt wurde, sie brächten die Rasse in Verruf. (*Umgang* 16)

In *Respektloser Umgang*, the introduction of Jewish characters also highlights the manner in which the experience of the Second World War affects Königsdorf's generation. For instance, it shows how, after the war, the humiliations suffered during the Nazi period increase the desire of the family to be integrated into society and to prove that the Jews had been

unjustly classified as inferior. Subsequently, they put a lot of pressure on their children, who are ascribed the task of rebuilding the family's sense of self-worth.⁵ For this reason, the autobiographical protagonist of *Respektloser Umgang* is expected to excel in everything she undertakes: "Es wurde einfach stillschweigend vorausgesetzt, daß ich überall die Erste war. Dabei darf nicht vergessen werden, meine Entstehung war die Antwort meiner Eltern auf ihre Abstempelung zu Untermenschen" (*Umgang* 91-92).

Apart from the humiliating history of exclusion experienced by her family and as described in the novel, the other elements which endangered Königsdorf's sense of belonging were her "wrong" social origins as the descendant of a family of *Großbauern*.⁶ Königsdorf says she experienced this as a "Makel," which influenced her entire life in the sense that she felt different and therefore worked even harder so as to identify with the GDR, the socialist *Arbeiter- und Bauernstaat* (*Dilemma* 37).

However, Königsdorf did find a way to overcome these difficulties and counterbalance her sense of being different by finding full acceptance within the SED. In fact, the Party offered its members, regardless of their social background or personal weaknesses, a sense of *Heimat*,⁷ the warmth of a community and the feeling that they were contributing to the development of an evolving society. The comfort of belonging together, strengthened by the supposed existence of common interests and a common goal, allowed people to hide their sense of being different. This helped them to fulfill their need for belonging and acceptance, but at the same time also contributed to the suppression of their individuality.⁸

Wie nach einem Strohalm griff der Mensch nach dem Angebot eines Wir, um sein ungeliebtes Ich zu bergen. Er brauchte eine Heimat, einen Sinn, eine kollektive Idee, der er sich unterordnen, in deren Dienst er sich hervortun konnte, ohne daß es auf sein Ich angekommen wäre. (*Schatten* 20)

Königsdorf's writing activity can be seen as a further confirmation of her desire to contribute to the development of the country. Her constant involvement with what happened in East Germany also shows that by the time she started writing (at the age of 40, in 1978) in line with her definition of *Heimat* as the place "wo man sich einmischen darf," she felt completely at home within the structure of the GDR society (*Dilemma* 51). This is also confirmed by the critical tone she assumed towards the devel-

opment of East Germany in her pre-*Wende* writings, which would have not been possible had she still felt insecure about her sense of belonging to the GDR.

Although at first her critical attitude as a writer would seem to contradict her identity as a citizen and member of the SED who saw the GDR as the site of her utopian longing, this is not the case. Quite the contrary, the hope nourished by many East German intellectuals of the *mittlere Generation*, to which Königsdorf belonged, that their criticism of the SED's version of socialism would contribute to a socialist utopia made the coexistence of her two identities, that of the citizen and that of the writer, possible. The GDR's shortcomings almost increased the intellectuals' sense of belonging and their desire to actively participate in society's progress. Königsdorf herself compared her relationship to the GDR "zu einem steinigen Stück Land [. . .], das man unter großen Mühen zu bessern versucht" (*Dilemma* 31). Therefore, it should not come as a surprise if Königsdorf's identification with East Germany never became a theme in and of itself in her pre-*Wende* works but only recognizable in the nature of her criticism of the GDR's social hypocrisy.

The extent to which she identified with the Party and her readiness to accept compromises in order to protect her sense of belonging only become apparent in her *Wende* writings. Following the demise of the GDR, she states: "Mit Erstaunen habe ich festgestellt, daß diese Partei mir so etwas wie Heimat war. Die einzige Zugehörigkeit in meinem Leben, die nie in Frage gestellt wurde. Dafür war ich zu allzu vielen Kompromissen bereit" (*Schönheit* 119-20). The feeling of acceptance she enjoyed within the SED is probably one of the main reasons why she presented herself as a candidate of the PDS in the 1990 elections. I would see this as her attempt to keep alive her sense of belonging to society and be able to contribute to it through her membership in a political party. As this new experience ends in failure, Königsdorf has to accept the fact that she has to find other ways to fill the gap.

It is at this point that Königsdorf's search for the meaning of *Heimat* and identity begins. Consequently, her first post-1989 non-fiction writings and novels attempt to come to terms with the "Schmerz, heimatlos geworden zu sein" (*Schatten* 80). At this time she is trapped between resigning herself to nostalgic feelings and experimenting with the new situation in order to win back a sense of belonging. On the one hand, she

misses the GDR, although this does not mean that she wants to go back to the past. As she remarks in the case of Alice, one of the main characters in *Im Schatten des Regenbogens* who suffers from *Heimweh*: "Und dagegen half auch nicht, daß sie sich das Vergangene um nichts in der Welt zurückwünschte. Dadurch wurde der Schmerz nur größer" (85). On the other hand, she reacts to her loss of *Heimat* by trying to replace it with a new one: she returns to Thüringen.

Königsdorf first moved to Jena and then to Berlin, where she still lives. Her decision to visit Thüringen in 1990 is motivated by her desire to regain that sense of belonging which the *Wende* had swept away; it is not her intention to move there permanently. Given the speed and extent of the changes of 1989-90, Königsdorf believes that the best way to understand the Western world is to proceed step by step, starting from small units: "Wir sind nicht reif für die Idee von Europa. [. . .] Wir müssen uns erst einrichten, und dazu brauchen wir überschaubare Räume. Am einfachsten ist es jetzt für uns mit Thüringen, Mecklenburg und den anderen Ländern" (*Dilemma* 47).

Königsdorf discusses her journey back to Thüringen in the essay "Thüringen, du mein lieb Heimatland" from the collection *Aus dem Dilemma eine Chance nutzen*,⁹ but she also fictionalizes it in the novel *Gleich neben Afrika*.¹⁰ The reasons behind this trip as well as the conclusion on its outcome are essentially the same in all of her writings. Nevertheless, since fiction gives her the opportunity to introduce characters and situations which help her to better illustrate the emotions she experienced during her stay, I will mainly refer here to the novel.

In *Gleich neben Afrika*, the main character's decision to return to Thüringen is, as in Königsdorf's own case, motivated by her hope to find a place to which she can relate. She believes this could help her to find some clarity and understanding of what has just happened: "[. . .] in dieser Zeit, in der es keinen festen Punkt mehr gab, in der man von den Strudeln um und um gerissen wurde, brauchte man einen Ort, der zu einem gehört" (28). While this is an attempt to regain the feeling of home, she nevertheless very soon realizes that it is unrealistic to expect this from Thüringen for two main reasons. Since the region used to border with Bavaria, the demise of the GDR completely changed its topography and the attitude of the people. Not only could one now wander into Bavaria without even realizing it, but the removal of the border also had an impact on the locals. Before 1989 there were some people living in the

area who smuggled persons or valuables into West Germany. Those who wanted to flee from the GDR often brought with them their precious possessions, others smuggled art works and the like into the West. Sometimes it happened that people or valuables never made it to the other side (*Afrika* 88). This provoked a climate of mistrust, which has now been replaced by cheerfulness (*Afrika* 29). Although Königsdorf views these changes as positive, they nevertheless make it more difficult for her to recognize her home region: the present image of Thüringen does not match her memories.

However, if on the one hand this difficulty prevents her from feeling completely at home, on the other hand she has the impression of being "einheimischer als die Ortsansässigen" (*Afrika* 29). Since she had not been there for a long time, she remembers the region exactly as it was when she left. For example, she knows country paths which have been abandoned or forgotten for many years. This indicates that she is experiencing Thüringen in a different time frame than the locals. While she is still immersed in the past and remembers things as they were before she went away, they live only in the present: "Während bei ihnen die Gegenwart alles überdeckte, erlebte ich eine seltsame Gleichzeitigkeit der Ereignisse" (*Afrika* 29).

As part of the attempt to recreate that feeling of *Heimat* which Königsdorf longed for and to reestablish her connection to the region, the protagonist of *Gleich neben Afrika* contacts some old acquaintances. One of these is Fricka, the former head of the *Partei kontrollkommission* who contributed to the forced collectivization of the village farms (70). The fact that she pays Fricka a visit seems to be quite significant, as she expects to find in her a conversation partner nostalgic for the past: someone to whom she does not need to explain past behaviors and convictions and who, like herself, finds it difficult to come to terms with the transformations. Even if Fricka is the one who is really in need of solidarity due to the isolation now surrounding her in the village, the fact that the two women share the same sadness about what happened to their dreams and aspirations gives them both the feeling of still belonging to a community. This mutual understanding is, for instance, exemplified by the fact that during their meeting they refer to socialism as "die Sache" (70). They know they can be honest with each other and that their justifications for how they acted in the past are understood and accepted. More importantly, they can show their pride in past achievements, as demonstrated by

Fricka, who gives her guest a poem she had published in an old newspaper.

However, the main character's encounter with Fricka and her visit to Thüringen in general ultimately lead to many new questions about her past and thus deepen her identity crisis. This new vortex of questions to which the protagonist of *Gleich neben Afrika* is drawn corresponds to Königsdorf's personal experience. In her autobiographical essay "Thüringen, du mein lieb Heimatland" she describes her visit to the cemetery and to old acquaintances as well as her childhood memories all combined with her new impressions of the region. Neither in the novel nor in reality does post-*Wende* Thüringen match nostalgic memories: it cannot be the *Heimat* Königsdorf as well as her character had hoped to find (*Dilemma* 41).

All the same, the journey to Thüringen is important because it convinces Königsdorf that since it is not possible to recreate the same feeling of home she had experienced before 1989, it is high time to acknowledge the *Wende* and move on. Hence, while the protagonist of *Gleich neben Afrika* keeps wandering around in search of a new *Heimat* which she will never find, Königsdorf is able to accept that her new relationship with her homeland is now "vertraut und zugleich fremd" (*Dilemma* 43). The demise of the GDR certainly represents an end, but can also be seen as a new beginning. It is with the optimistic observation "Immer wieder beginnt etwas Neues" (*Dilemma* 43) that Königsdorf concludes her essay about her journey to Thüringen.

Königsdorf's experience in Thüringen also helps her to understand that before looking for identification or a sense of belonging in politics or in a geographical place she has to come to terms with the *Wende* on an individual level. In order to do this, first she must define her relationship to her past. This is why, after trying to fill in the gap left by the loss of the GDR with instant alternatives, she starts formulating concepts of identity in which the focus is on the individual and his/her experiences. This is a very significant stage in her personal evolution since she gains self-confidence and the courage to recognize who she is and where she comes from. Therefore, as she learns to focus more on her independent self, the identity she progressively builds for herself can certainly be influenced by external events but not swept away.

On these grounds, she puts forward a concept of individual identity which has to be flexible, as one should adjust continuously one's rela-

tionship to the outside world. However, this does not imply instability. On the contrary, the essence of identity, which is the individual and his/her store of experiences, is able to renew itself constantly, in a way that through every new experience it reaches a new balance and finds a new stability in an ongoing and enriching process. In Königsdorf's words:

Wir müssen uns ihr [der Welt] stellen, und während wir das tun, begreifen wir zugleich, daß dies der Weg ist, Identität zurückzugewinnen. Während wir tastend unser Verhältnis zur Außenwelt neu bestimmen, finden wir uns wieder und zugleich auch neu. Dann entgegen allen Wunschprognosen bleiben wir und unsere Erfahrungen. Und die bringen wir ein. (*Dilemma* 83)

This politically and culturally independent concept of identity can be viewed as Königsdorf's reaction to the crisis she had suffered because of her former equation of a utopian, socialist Germany with the embodiment of her political values. Therefore, this concept of identity functions as a measure of self-protection she adopts in order to make sure that in the future she will not lose sense of who she is.

In addition, this concept of identity serves to counteract the demonization of the GDR which started at the time of the *Wende*. This is neither one of the last traces of the commitment Königsdorf felt towards the GDR, nor the need to defend a project in which she had invested a lot of energy. It is mainly her fear of the consequences the humiliations inflicted upon Eastern Germans in the process of unification could have that motivates her to stress the significance of every experience. Here, she points out that previous historical examples show how collective humiliations can often lead to the resurgence of feelings of intolerance as a means of compensating for the loss of self-confidence. Hence, as a response to the Western German condemnatory attitude towards the GDR past, Königsdorf recalls the situation of Germany after the Second World War when the country was given a chance to start afresh. Now she encourages reflection on this aspect of German history as she is convinced that the social and political experiment which was carried out during the forty years of the GDR's existence should be viewed as an experience from which both Eastern and Western Germans could learn.

Thus, the importance of an identity based on experience lies in the fact that it guarantees continuity and renewal at the same time. In this

sense, the Eastern Germans need not reject their past; neither as a group nor as individuals. On the contrary, they should learn from it and have the courage to change. Only in this way will the past stop being a burden and become a form of richness:

Ehe er sich versieht, hat der Mensch, der eben noch Kind war, eine Biographie, und nichts ist auslöschar, nichts wiederholbar. Er schleppt alles, was war, wie eine Kette mit sich. Aber es ist nicht nur eine Behinderung, sondern auch der Schatz seiner Erfahrung. (*Dilemma* 84)

Although her definition of identity as based on one's experience helps Königsdorf to define her relationship to her GDR-past and gain new self-confidence, it does not entirely solve the question of her identity and sense of belonging to the new environment in which she lives. In fact, in the post-1989 years, her identity as a citizen does not seem to be more clearly defined than during the *Wende*, as she is still experimenting with different concepts of identity. Nevertheless, what is interesting to note about this period is that her main difficulty now seems to be defining the environment to which she wants to relate, as she constantly alters the parameters of this definition. Indeed, sometimes she places herself in relation to a small community; other times she sees herself as belonging to the world as a whole.

After her experience in Thüringen, Königsdorf shows that she is still convinced of the advantages of a small community. In her opinion, centralization has created enormous bureaucratic organizations where the individual feels degraded to the status of a number. According to Königsdorf, this is also the case of unified Germany, which gives her the impression of being a society marked by the alienation of the citizens from the federal government. She observes that this feeling of alienation is especially experienced by the least fortunate within society, who need to feel a sense of protection that can only be won via a shared identity. In this framework, she proposes that some social services, such as for example the care of the elderly and of children, education or the integration of foreigners should be the responsibility of the local government. By providing a remedy to the people's alienation, Königsdorf also hopes to prevent the resurgence of nationalistic feelings (*Rettung* 120). This explains why in her post-*Wende* non-fiction writings she starts exploring ideas

about decentralization as an attempt to give her fellow citizens a sense of belonging and a sense of tradition. Her suggestion to create smaller communities therefore seems to be a response to the anonymity and lack of transparency which characterize contemporary society:

Meine Vision ist eine demokratische Weltordnung. Eine Demokratie, [. . .] in der dem einzelnen, durch möglichst weitgehende Dezentralisierung der politischen und sozialen Strukturen, wieder überschaubare Zugehörigkeiten angeboten werden, in denen er nicht zur austauschbaren Nummer wird, sondern im Gegenteil, wo es auf ihn ankommt. (*Rettung* 121-22)

At the one end of the spectrum of Königsdorf's attempts to regain a sense of *Heimat* is that of identification with a small community; at the other end is the adoption of an international attitude. Such an attitude is evident in most of the essays in *Über die unerzögliche Rettung der Welt*. Here Königsdorf deals with issues of global relevance, such as environmentalism, and tends to present herself as a citizen of the world rather than one with a specific national identity.

The identity she assumes in these essays is based on universal and humanistic values that underline the importance of human life independent from political, social or cultural differences which divide humankind into groups. The nuclear threat of the 1980s convinced Königsdorf of the necessity of an international effort to put an end to the Cold War, which is the reason why in the novel *Respektloser Umgang* she promotes the "Mobilisierung der Humanität" (94) as the key to saving the world from self-destruction. Similarly, as the ecological threat of the 1990s also endangers the entire globe, she again puts forward the view that it no longer makes sense to keep up political or cultural barriers. In fact, all people across the globe live in the same dangerous situation for which no remedy can be provided unless everybody is ready to cooperate.

In accordance with her idea that contemporary problems can only be tackled on an international level, she proposes the introduction of international structures which would facilitate and coordinate the collaboration between various countries. For example, she believes that "Internationale Parlamente, Banken, und Kreditvergabe und ebenso das Aushandeln von Restriktionen, Kostenpflichtigkeit von Umweltnutzung und so weiter müssen sehr schnell wirksam werden" (*Dilemma* 106).¹¹ In

this light, it does not come as a surprise that she is not interested in German internal affairs. On the contrary, Königsdorf's concern is about the role that Germany is going to play as an international actor in the formulation and implementation of possible solutions to global problems:

Ich möchte von den Politikern wissen, welche Vorstellungen sie über den Beitrag unseres Landes zur Korrektur der weltweiten Strukturen, zum Ausbau eines weltweiten politischen Systems haben. Denn es stehen Aufgaben vor der Menschheit, die alle Ländergrenzen überschreiten, die alle im Zusammenhang stehen, die sich nicht voneinander getrennt lösen oder auf ein Territorium eingrenzen lassen. (*Rettung* 14)

Ultimately, the stratagem of adopting such an international identity has a double advantage. On the one hand, it solves her problem of belonging by declaring national feelings to be out of tune with modern times. On the other hand, it enables her to apply her GDR experience to contemporary society. To have an international identity is to engage in a common goal and, through this struggle with the aim of saving the world, to recreate a feeling of belonging—probably similar to the one she had felt earlier when engaged in the struggle for the utopia of socialism. However, this turns out to be another self-deluding experience, because Königsdorf soon has to acknowledge that although she had regarded this as a matter of life or death, the mobilization of citizens towards the same goal was not going to happen.

As discussed above, even though Königsdorf's international attitude plays an important role in how she views herself as a citizen, it is also true that it does not represent the final answer to her identity crisis and her search for *Heimat*. This is reflected in the fact that in the more recent essays included in *Über die unerzögliche Rettung der Welt*,¹² she continues to explore the significance of being a German citizen within unified Germany. At times, her feelings about her national identity appear contradictory. Königsdorf still finds it difficult to define herself as German because of the negative historical associations and because of the way the GDR tried to do away with the concept of Germanness. However, Königsdorf would like to normalize her relationship to her national identity. For instance, she tries to define what it means to be German and what particularly German characteristics are. In this process, she finds herself

admitting to being fairly German: "[m]anchmal weiß man gar nicht, wie sehr man etwas ist, weil man sich nicht von außen sehen kann" (*Rettung* 71). She also becomes aware that she no longer wants to feel embarrassed because of the mistakes Germany made in the past but simply to be German without having to go to the extreme of either being proud or ashamed — the two extremes that have characterized German history in the twentieth century: "Wäre es nicht an der Zeit, wir würden, statt wie ein manisch depressiver Organismus zwischen Nichtigkeit und Größe zu pendeln, versuchen, normal deutsch zu sein?" (*Rettung* 73).

In addition to her effort to start accepting her Germanness, it is also important to note that as time passes she increasingly feels at home within unified Germany. Königsdorf herself observes this in a 1994 interview with Günter Gaus: "Ich habe das Gefühl, ich kann mich hier [in dem vereinigten Land] einmischen, es gehört zu mir" (83). Hence, given her definition of *Heimat* as the place "wo man sich einmischen darf," this statement clearly indicates that Königsdorf is slowly accepting the whole of Germany as her homeland. This new stage in the evolution of her identity as a citizen is also reflected in her fictional works. For instance, in her latest novel, *Die Entsorgung der Großmutter* (1997),¹³ she shows that she has overcome her post-*Wende* identity crisis as she no longer explores issues revolving around the meaning of *Heimat*. This is also the first fictional work in which she drops the Eastern German perspective that had characterized her two previous novels, *Gleich neben Afrika* and *Im Schatten des Regenbogens*. For the first time after the *Wende*, she is able to set the story in a town described as any town in an industrial society and talk about a family which could be any family.

Although Königsdorf has increasingly felt more at ease within unified Germany and learned to recognize the latter as her homeland, she could not reestablish the feeling of belonging she had experienced during the GDR. The engagement for the realization of the common goal of creating a better society and the belief in the possibility to contribute personally towards it, which marked Königsdorf's sense of belonging during the GDR era, seem to be the elements she misses the most within the heterogeneous character of contemporary German society. Hence, it did not take long before she started showing clear signs of frustration with working within unified Germany. As mentioned above, while in *Über die unverzügliche Rettung der Welt* she tries to replace her commitment to socialism with her engagement towards the promotion of human- and environ-

ment-friendly goals in the hope that she can help save the world, as time goes by she feels increasingly disillusioned and embittered about the impact of her intellectual work on society—or rather the lack thereof.

Her frustration as an intellectual combined with her difficulty to build a sense of home for herself within unified Germany are among the elements which mark Königsdorf's experience in the years following the *Wende*. If to this we add the fact that she is an aging writer who is coping with an incurable illness,¹⁴ we can understand why in the new society Königsdorf no longer displays the same enthusiasm that characterized her understanding of the role of the writer and of the citizen during the GDR.

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Notes

¹ The texts here analyzed have mainly been extracted from Königsdorf, *Dilemma*, and Königsdorf, *Rettung*. Other examples of non-fiction writings which Königsdorf published at the time of the *Wende* are: *1989 oder E in Moment Schönheit: Eine Collage aus Briefen, Gedichten, Texten* and the collection of interviews *Adieu DDR: Protokolle eines Abschieds*. This collection was followed by a later one entitled *Unterwegs nach Deutschland. Über die Schwierigkeiten, ein Volk zu sein: Protokolle eines Aufbruchs*. To my knowledge, there are no academic reviews of these works. The only secondary material available consists of three articles which mainly deal with the role Königsdorf played during the *Wende*. See Conacher, Mitman, and Haines.

² See Königsdorf, *Afrika*, and Königsdorf, *Schatten*. To my knowledge, the secondary literature on these two novels is rather limited. Nevertheless, I would like to draw attention to Georgina Paul's article which deals with the theme of lesbianism in *Afrika*, Dennis Tate's and Eva Kaufmann's reviews of *Schatten*, and Kaufmann.

³ See Königsdorf, *Umgang*. This novel deals with different themes. It is a discussion of the role which science should play within modern society; the concepts of resistance and responsibility and female emancipation's issues. It is also the personal account of a female protagonist, who, after discovering to be suffering from a fatal illness, engages in a process of self-reappraisal and changes her perspective on life. With specific regard to the Jewish theme in *Umgang*, see also O'Doherty. For other reviews of *Umgang*, see: Auer, Clausen, Fried, Hammer, Hilzinger, Kaufmann, Lauckner, Melchert, Schlenstedt 44-48, Schmitz-Köster, and Staszak.

⁴ In this novel, there are many parallels between the fictional material and Königsdorf's own life. For instance, like Königsdorf, the main character is a scientist, is divorced and has two children. They also have in common the fact that they suffer from an incurable illness (see note 14). Despite these similarities, according to Philippe Lejeune's discussion of autobiography in *Le pact autobiographique*, it is important to specify that *Respektloser Umgang* cannot be defined as an autobiography. The chief reasons for this are Königsdorf's decision not to identify herself with the main character, which remains unnamed, and the subtitle of the book

which indicates that it is an *Erzählung*, not an autobiography. Hence, it is clear that Königsdorf does not invite the reader to approach this novel as an autobiography: while it might be true that it contains autobiographical elements, it remains a work of fiction. Instead, it can be defined as an autobiographical novel. This is the definition used by Lejeune to indicate those texts in which the reader has reasons to believe that there are similarities between the identity of the author and the main character, even if this has never been made clear by the author. Given this definition, under the classification of autobiographical novel, we can also place personal accounts like *Respektloser Umgang*, in which the narrator coincides with the main character. Furthermore, one should note that an autobiographical novel implies different levels of resemblance, as it would be impossible to state that the author coincides at all times with the main character, as it happens in the case of an autobiography. See Lejeune 13-46.

⁵ According to the psychologist Hillel Klein, pressuring children to be successful is one of the characteristics of the family dynamics of those who survived the Holocaust. Other traits typical of these families are the parents' exaggerated protective behavior towards their children or their very strong fears of being separated from them. See Bubis 202.

⁶ Curiously, while Königsdorf deals a great deal with the theme of Jewish identity in her fictional works, this is never treated in her non-fictional writings. By contrast, she talks about her social origins only in her essays, but not in her novels. The only exception is *Gleich neben Afrika*, in which the protagonist's parents are *Großbauern*, who, similarly to Königsdorf's ancestors, own quite a lot of land and a big house in the shape of a castle.

⁷ This is how Königsdorf explained why for many GDR citizens the Party fulfilled a need to belong: "Diese Partei ist uns Heimat gewesen. Wir hatten keine andere. Den meisten von uns war Zugehörigkeit schon einmal in Frage gestellt worden. Sei es als Täter oder Opfer oder als Kinder von Tätern oder Opfern. Weil wir nicht die rechte soziale Herkunft oder die falsche Verwandtschaft hatten" (*Dilemma* 12).

⁸ Königsdorf deals with the mechanisms which led many Party members, including herself, to the loss of dignity in her essay "Was nun?" (*Dilemma* 12-18). This article was first published in *Neues Deutschland*, Feb. 1990.

⁹ See "Thüringen, du mein lieb Heimatland" (Königsdorf, *Dilemma* 35-43).

¹⁰ *Gleich neben Afrika* can be classified as an autobiographical novel in the same sense as *Respektloser Umgang*. See note 4 above.

¹¹ See also "Lieben Sie Schmetterlinge?" (Königsdorf, *Retung* 9-15) (here 15).

¹² Königsdorf discusses her relationship to her being German in essays such as "Ganz normal deutsch" (*Retung* 71-74) and "Es müssen nicht immer Lackbilder sein" (*Retung* 89-91).

¹³ For a review of *Die Entsorgung der Großmutter*, see Kaufmann.

¹⁴ Königsdorf has been suffering from Parkinson's disease since 1974. It has become increasingly debilitating in the past few years.

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Self-Fashioning and Gender Construction in Franziska zu Reventlow's *Amouresken*

Julie Kalani Smith Allen

Autobiography is the art of self-exposure. It involves disrobing in public, inviting judgment, both praise and blame. German women in the early twentieth century were generally hesitant to risk such scrutiny. Many women wrote but did not publish their autobiographies, while others arranged to have them published by men or under pseudonyms. Trying to account for the historical reluctance of women to publish their life histories, Sidonie Smith suggests that, "for women, [...] to take a voice and authorize a public life are to risk loss of reputation" (10). By attempting to assert the legitimacy of her life and experiences in writing, a woman thus runs the risk of social condemnation. Sigrid Weigel agrees with Smith that the decision to enter the male-dominated realm of autobiographical literature has been a difficult and socially dangerous one for women. She explains that

women's reluctance to flaunt themselves on the literary market is a result of their experience in the private sphere. Their exclusion from economics, politics and culture implies that authentic women's literature at first could only give voice to 'merely' personal and subjective feelings and concerns. The publication of women's subjectivity is, however, not equivalent to her liberation, for it has consequences (often unpleasant ones) for her personal happiness. (66)

Fear of negative consequences did not, of course, deter all early twentieth-century women from publishing their autobiographies. Women who did risk such exposure, however, often felt a need to protect themselves by making their self-representations conform to society's standards for an ideal, virtuous woman. As a result, the typical female autobiography, which