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# Helga Königsdorf: Über die unverzügliche Rettung der Welt. Essays

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verwurzelt und können, bzw. wollen nicht über ihren Schatten springen, ebenso wenig wie der spanische Historiker Marañón, der alles durch die Brille eines strengen mediterranen Katholizismus sieht. Erst eine Frau, Marion Giebel, durchschaut die Hofpropaganda und erkennt, daß für die diversen Verbannungen und Tötungen keine sittlichen, sondern politische Gründe vorlagen, eine Verschwörung also.

Hochhuths Buch rückt die Augustuszeit, insbesondere die Figuren des Augustus selbst und seiner dritten Frau Livia, ins rechte Licht. Gleichzeitig rechnet er mit der Geschichtsschreibung ab und zeigt, wie die Werke der "Großen" (Mommsen, Kornemann, Ranke usw.) als sakrosankt angesehen und ihre Erkenntnisse gedanken- und kritiklos abgekupfert wurden.

Hochhuths Buch ist gleichzeitig Historiographie und eine Kritik derselben und liest sich streckenweise wie ein Krimi. Das Ganze ist im munteren Essayton gehalten, der häufig in aphorismusähnlichen Statements gipfelt: "Je größer das Erbe—je häufiger der Betrug." Hochhuth hat, wie schon im *Stellvertreter* und den *Wessis in Weimar* ein heißes Eisen angefaßt. Die Lektüre wirkt erfrischend und stimmt nachdenklich.

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Königsdorf, Helga. *Über die unverzügliche Rettung der Welt. Essays*. Berlin: Aufbau, 1994. 125pp. ISBN 3-351-02421-5

When the Berlin Wall fell, Helga Königsdorf aligned herself with those who refused to consider capitalism a viable alternative to socialism, but rather openly and adamantly sought the revolutionary renewal of socialism in the German Democratic Republic. The possibility of a "third way" quickly faded to a chimera, however, and many of Königsdorf's literary and non-literary publications since 1989, e.g. *Aus dem Dilemma eine Chance machen. Reden und Aufsätze* (1990), have articulated in a personal and frank manner her own hopes, anxieties, fears and disappointments resulting from the rapid and dramatic changes ushered in by the *Wende*. *Über die unverzügliche Rettung der Welt*, a collection of fifteen essays and one poem written between 1992 and 1994, presents Königsdorf's more recent

ruminations. The majority of these essays were previously published in newspapers; the poem prefacing the volume and the title essay represent the only original contributions, although the essays have been reworked slightly for this publication. In this thin volume each essay is prefaced by a citation from one of Königsdorf's previously published texts, *Meine ungehörigen Träume* (1978), *Respektloser Umgang* (1986), *Lichtverhältnisse* (1988), *Ungelegener Befund* (1990) and *1989 oder Ein Moment Schönheit* (1990), making explicit the links to the reflections she offers here. Yet rather than lead the reader to insights which could enrich the understanding of these earlier texts or perhaps reveal previously unseen connections, the essays offer little that is new. Stripped of the satire and irony that characterize many of the cited literary works and often lacking the personal quality of previous essays, the overgeneralizations, sententiousness and redundancy of this collection significantly undercut the seriousness and immediacy it seeks to articulate.

The introductory poem prefigures the text's somber assessment of the state of humankind, compiling and juxtaposing themes and sentiments recurrent in the essays: the growing division between rich and poor, famine, the exploitation of nature, individual perseverance coupled with a lack of hope, increasing alienation, loneliness, a sense of inefficaciousness and the resultant desire for a "starken Mann." The current political scene is assessed as follows: "In dieser Zeit verlor / der Sozialismus das Beiwort 'real', / die Marktwirtschaft das Beiwort 'sozial', / die Kultur das Beiwort 'kritisch'" (5). In summary the poem concludes: "In dieser Zeit / lief der Weltuntergang auf Hochtouren. / Und alle sahen zu" (5). Given this apocalyptic vision of society's self-destructive course, Königsdorf repeatedly stresses the need to recognize immediate dangers and threats, to assume personal responsibility and collectively to mobilize humanity in order to create a livable future. Thus strongly echoing the "Auftrag" taken on by the narrator in *Respektloser Umgang*, Königsdorf lays bare her continued pessimism and raises ethical questions regarding the current state of humanity and its future.

In contrast to the pre-*Wende* narrative *Respektloser Umgang*, which indicted socialism as well as capitalism, Königsdorf here frames the negative consequences of scientific-technological progress, reason, and individualism within a critique of capitalism whose deficits became more glaringly

apparent and bitterly felt after socialism's collapse. In "Lieben Sie Schmetterlinge," for example, she defines the inheritance of the next generation as "Disneyland und Giftmüll" (9). In "Läßt uns eine Pyramide bauen" she focuses on the interplay of capital and politics and, while here and elsewhere openly admitting the inviability both of real existing socialism and of her initial belief in capitalism, she ultimately weighs the advantages of socialism—no unemployment, no homelessness, no bankruptcy—over the "free play of power," where power is equated with money and the few who have it. In Königsdorf's view money and materialism rule at the expense of humanistic values, leading to the alienation of the individual and undermining Western democratic institutions. Königsdorf repeatedly relates the stresses of the market economy, the difficulty of learning the rules of a new game, to the emergent longing for a "strong man." In the essay "Überleben wäre eine prima Alternative" she makes explicit the social-psychological factors which give rise to aggression against those who are weaker, and reiterates a cornerstone of the former GDR's socialist ideology, namely that fascism developed out of the conditions of the market economy and a, "wenn auch ungesicherten," democracy (62). She thus firmly grounds the increase in neo-fascist sentiment in Germany since unification in the capitalist system.

Königsdorf's strongest essays are those in which she speaks personally. In "Ein Ausflug am Wochenende," for example, she describes her immediate visceral reactions to Sachsenhausen; and in "Seele auf dem Operationstisch" she relates how Parkinson's disease affects how she lives and relates the illness of over twenty years to her desire to write. The essay "Ein äußerst klärender Vorgang" provides insights into the literary text *Gleich neben Afrika* (1992), the travel and privileges Königsdorf enjoyed as a writer in the GDR and the misrecognition of *Ossis* and *Wessis* after unification. Other essays such as "Ganz normal Deutsch," "Der Mut zu stolzen Tönen" and "Überleben wäre eine prima Alternative" address questions of German national identity and the difficulty many former GDR citizens experience when attempting to form positive identifications with the new system.

The essays become less convincing when Königsdorf casts herself as part of a collective GDR "we," e.g. "Wir haben manchmal das Gefühl, als sitzen wir zu Unrecht auf der Straßbank" (33). While

she elsewhere reveals "Das 'Wir', das ich noch immer gebrauchte, war längst nicht mehr. Es löste sich in vielen Ichs auf," she nonetheless continues: "Aber wir brachten die Erfahrung mit, daß 'Wir' möglich ist" (45). At times attempting to speak for all former GDR citizens, many of whom would no doubt distance themselves from the views expressed here, or for all of humankind, "Wir alle sind längst Mittäter beim größten Verbrechen aller Zeiten" (67), she creates false allegiances which lend many of the essays a didactic and moralizing tone that ultimately weakens their desired impact.

The vivid portraits collected in Königsdorf's *Adieu DDR. Protokolle eines Abschieds* (1990) and the recent follow-up *Unterwegs nach Deutschland. Über die Schwierigkeit, ein Volk zu sein: Protokolle eines Aufbruchs* (1995) document a diverse array of individual reactions to unification. *Über die unverzügliche Rettung der Welt*, however, suffers from the overt attempt to objectivize subjectivity. Königsdorf writes: "Ein Naturwissenschaftler überließe den Weltuntergang nicht den Philosophen. . . . Es bedürfe der Sachlichkeit der Naturwissenschaftler, die Gründe und Gegenstände angeben und die zum Mitdenken einladen" (21-22). For this reviewer such objectivity lastly remains less than inviting.

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Krygier, Martin, ed. *Marxism and Communism: Posthumous Reflections on Politics, Society, and Law. Poznan Studies in the Philosophy of Science and Humanities 36. Amsterdam/Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1994. 237 S.*

There are not many left who consider the reports on the death of Marxism to be exaggerated (courtesy of Mark Twain). The subtitle of this volume is a clear indication of the trend of current thinking. Although most of the authors are Polish, their observations apply to all former Warsaw Pact countries, including the GDR (notwithstanding the special conditions created by the Solidarity movement in Poland). For most of them the year 1989 figures as an *annus mirabilis* and all of them concede that in the meantime political liberalism "faces severe competition from nationalist and religious forces," not to speak of the "painful consequences," i.e. failures, of economic liberalism (7). Yet another