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Angela Krauß: Die Überfliegerin. Erzählung

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GDR BULLETIN

in a city park in a distant metropolis (referred to only as “die Stadt B.”).

In this text, Königsdorf draws on techniques familiar to her longtime readers: her narrator/observer is curious, but *not prurient; interested, but not identifying; sympathetic, but not pitying*. Between the impassioned engagement of her essays and the biting satire of her early short stories, this small novel forces open a space for critical reflection upon a society that is capable of alienating all of its members equally. For despite the horror of the familial act, none is condemned, nor is anyone idealized. (Far from offering a martyr figure, Oma herself led the way in the search for social status, manipulating her daughter and son-in-law to her own benefit.) Herr Schrader fears losing his new job as a sales clerk (for which he is vastly overqualified after 30 years as a plumber), while Frau Schrader’s dissatisfaction with her life as wife and mother mounts as she enumerates missed chances. From the isolation—and security—of his upstairs bedroom, their grown son Thomas conducts a successful albeit stifled career in mathematical cyberspace; daughter Franziska rebels against all expectations by leaving home abruptly and going in search of a job just months before the *Abitur*.

While the themes are in some sense new, the shape and texture of this novel is not, as it harkens back to Königsdorf’s early short stories. The return of the “old” Königsdorf is signaled by an act of self-quotation, when she refers tongue-in-cheek to “das dritte Kurzsche Problem,” the subject of much difficulty in the short story “Lemma 1” (in *Meine ungehörigen Träume*, 1978). In that tale a promising young mathematician, Johanna Bock, thinks that she has solved the Kurzsche problem, but when it becomes clear that one of her theorems is incorrect, the scientific community around her—in the interest of institutional fame—is concerned only with the repression of that fact. Thomas finally discovers a correct proof for the century-old mathematical problem, but he is compelled to hide his knowledge for fear of attracting media attention to a family whose grandmother has so mysteriously disappeared. The double repression of scientific knowledge (a mathematical proof) and juridical/moral knowledge (of the crime/sin of ditching the grandmother) creates its own explosive force that drives Thomas to dig, literally, for the truth in the front garden (where he suspects Oma to lie buried). Here, Königsdorf blends the satirical aspect of her early writings with the more earnest moral discourse that first finds expression in *Respektloser Umgang* (1986).

An additional structural indicator of this expansion upon the satirical mode is offered in the vision of an alternate world. While the individual family members suffer separately their own private worlds of unfulfillment, a counterpoint is offered by periodic reports from the distant city, where a loosely-knit community of warm souls, outsiders all, care for the stray cats that roam the streets. The

fact that they are more successful in tending the cats than in caring for the old woman who crosses their path unexpectedly deepens the note of sadness that permeates the entire tale. The insularity of the distressed, suburban nuclear family—too concrete to be read simply as an allegorical construct—is oppressive; the urban reduction of humanity to a problem of pest removal (or, as the title suggests, waste disposal) is chilling. The novel leaves its reader with the “Katzenfütterin” and her latest new adoptee, altogether a more intact affective relationship than the now disbanded Schrader family. With this new text, Helga Königsdorf persuasively claims a spot for herself as a post-unification German writer in the age of industrial downsizing and the dismantling of social programs. One can only hope that her compatriots, East and West alike, take note.

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Krauß, Angela. *Die Überfliegerin. Erzählung*. Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1995. 124pp.

überfliegen=to fly over, overfly; to skim, as in reading

Angela Krauß’s recent work continues her impressionistic excursion through the realm of objects and people we call life. Her time frame is post-unification. In three chronologically related stories, the first-person narrator of *Die Überfliegerin* deconstructs her Leipzig milieu, transcends the socialist umbilical cord to the early twentieth century (symbolized in the railroad yard beneath her window) and takes to the sky to visit the United States and Russia.

Krauß’s *Überfliegerin* is a distant literary cousin to Monika Maron’s *Überläuferin*. Like Maron’s character, this *Überfliegerin* experiences her life in bursts of surrealistic impressions. Like Maron’s character, she appears solitary, perhaps even sedentary, until one day she realizes, “alle um mich herum handeln längst. Sie überholen mich alle.” Her concern is not really keeping up with the new *Hopp-Hopp-Menschen*; she experiences them from a distance. Rather, she realizes that the time has come for deeds. Unlike Maron’s character, however, the impressions of Krauß’s character are instigated not by her imagination, but by her own actions in the world. Krauß’s world is one of objects and people who are very much present, if only in memory. Thus, her narrator’s first act takes the form of a deconstruction of the objects of her everyday life. Strip by strip, layer by layer, the wallpaper comes off the walls, the wallpaper a certain Party Secretary refused to change, allowing history to pass him by. As the layers come down, so too do memories and images of socialist lives. From the protagonist’s window comes the bump and grind of the fading Industrial Revolution. While the narrator is detached

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as she dismantles her previous world, she is not without sympathy for the memories she conjures up of her grandmother or the Russian children who once lived in her midst.

Her demolition plans take on one final target: a large sofa soaked to the springs with the sweat of previous generations. It is associated with the narrator's grandmother, an early twentieth-century socialist, a woman of strong character and constitution. Like an animal, the sofa is overtaken, conquered, but respectfully, almost mournfully, put to rest.

With deconstruction (not destruction!) of her past life complete, it is time for the *Überfliegerin* to take flight: "Meine Zukunft irrt durch die weite Welt." She wings her way to the United States, to Minneapolis, Madison, and San Francisco. Like flight in a dream, the reader soars, then dives into each of the narrator's impressions of lives and objects that had existed simultaneous with her own life: "Nur sechs Stunden versetzt, lief es seit zwanzig Jahren auf derselben Erdkugel ab, nur an einer anderen Stelle der Krümmung. Nun erfuhr ich das als zufällig." The narrator's experience of the United States is unequivocally freeing. It is permeated with nature as a living force: expansive landscape, cacti that intermingle with the structure of a house, a car decomposing in the mire of a gully. In San Francisco the landscape shifts to a pile of second-hand clothing that envelops her with numerous possible identities: "... in welcher Welt wollte ich wer sein, wenn man schon die Wahl hat?"

Flying further West, the narrator descends into Russia. It is not by accident that memories of home return on this particular voyage. Home is interminably intertwined with Russian history: the end of the GDR is heralded with "Die Russen sind fort!" The narrator experiences the withdrawal of the Russian people from her homeland with melancholy. Her visit to Russia now is at the invitation of a childhood friend with whom she had exchanged letters: "Es waren die achtziger Jahre. Es waren die Jahre des Briefverkehrs." And, indeed, she finds some remnants of that earlier shared time and her attraction to the Russian people. In the 1990s, however, the Russian milieu is dominated by the market. The narrator's childhood friend is married to an entrepreneur, who now is driven by a chauffeur in a limousine, but tomorrow will lose everything. The narrator's friend is consumed with amassing hard currency on the black market, only to exchange it in turn for whatever objects can be had. Whereas in the United States the car is left to slowly decompose as if it were returning to a natural state, in Russia the car in the courtyard is surrounded by men dismantling it for parts.

The narrator's unease with this new Russia is exacerbated further by her confrontation with another grandmother. This grandmother too has a sofa and early twentieth-century notions that the narrator instinctively fears. She takes to the air again, this time fleeing, in flight.

Like a work of high modernism, the literary techniques of montage, interior monologue and stream-of-consciousness, rather than plot, characterize this work. The reader accompanies Krauß on a flight through a dreamscape of impressions of objects, people, and places. In epic-like fashion Krauß constructs scenes which sometimes burst at the seams with thick description, yet always seem light as a haiku. The narration often takes on the function of poetry. *Die Überfliegerin* is a colorful, sensorial excursion that offers the reader an intimate glimpse of an East German's experience of memory and travel following unification. It does not partake of dichotomies; it does not destroy the GDR past and replace it with the Western future. "Ich zerlege alles bis auf das Skelett," says the narrator, "und dann setze ich es fehlerlos wieder zusammen." Krauß views the past and the present with respect; and respectfully, with fear and anticipation, she moves on to the future.

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Papenfuß, Bert. *Tiské*. Ill. by A. R. Penck and CD recordings by O. T. and Novemberclub. Göttingen: Steidl, 1994.

For more than a decade Bert Papenfuß has clearly established his status as the most creative representative of a circle of poets linked to the "unofficial" activities in East Berlin in the 1980s. Whereas many veterans of the now fragmented alternative culture of the former GDR have fallen into silence, Papenfuß has continued to be an extraordinarily prolific writer. His volume *Tiské* gives ample evidence of both the artistic bricolage and the non-conformist political agenda Papenfuß has subscribed to, stubbornly clinging to the anarchist appeal of the hand-made literary journals of the previous decade. *Tiské*—meaning "exit" (spelled backwards) or "German" in Danish—consists of almost fifty poems, interlaced by A. R. Penck's hefty ink drawings and supplemented by sound recordings of readings on a CD. Paradoxically, this ambitious multi-media concept does not yield formal perfection. Penck's archaic pictographs occasionally correspond with the motifs of the poems, but more often these bold brushstrokes literally blacken the poems' densely woven web of puns and corny jokes. Predominantly, *Tiské* is concerned with the political changes of the "Wende." A few poems evoke experiences in a partnership, like teasing a sleepy lover or praising a lost muse. In a love poem entitled "ouroboroid nach hermann von pückler-muskau," the poet uses a circular design, the ouroboros, to underline affinities to the famous aristocratic horticulturist who dedicated s-shaped garden ornaments to his beloved "Schnucke." Papenfuß's quirky idiom has little to do with what critics have superficially denounced as the