

無家可歸和不和諧在阿諾蓋格和海爾格·柯尼希斯多夫的當代德國癡呆小說中

**Homelessness and unhomeliness in contemporary German-language
dementia-novels by Arno Geiger and Helga Königsdorf**

蔡莫妮

政治大學歐洲語文學系副教授

Abstract

In recent years, more and more contemporary German language novels emerged that seem to belong to a new form of domestic novel and could be called ‘nursing home novels’¹ or ‘dementia novels.’¹ This genre is concerned about the topic of dementia and the many issues that this severe decline in mental ability raises. For example, among others, in 2011, Austrian author Arno Geiger’s bestseller novel *The old king in his exile* (*Der alte König in seinem Exil*,² translated to English in January 2017) was published. It tells the story of a slow and problematic farewell to the father. Paradoxically, being in his own house, the father does not recognize anymore that he is at home, and the home becomes an “unhomely”³ (Bhabha) exile. Already in 1997, this leading motif of homelessness can also be found in German female author Helga Königsdorf’s satirical novel *The disposal of the grandmother* (*Die Entsorgung der Großmutter*).⁴ The character of the grandmother becomes a burden for the Schrader family presumably through the onset of Alzheimer’s disease, and she disappears without a trace. Intriguingly, the loss of her presence turns to ghostly memories of the homeless grandmother that haunt the family members until the family is divided and dispersed.

¹ Brunnhuber, Petra Ilse: “Der Pflegeheimroman: Ein Resultat des demagogischen Wandels.” Abstract in the handout book Abstract. Germanistik zwischen Tradition und Innovation. XIII. Kongress der Internationalen Vereinigung für Germanistik. 23.08.2015 – 30.08.2015 (German Studies between tradition and innovation. 13th IVG Congress) Shanghai 2015, p. 203.

² Wetzstein, Verena. “Von Erdbeeren, Schnecken und Schildkröten“ [About strawberries, snails, and turtles]. Bettina von Jagow, Florian Steger (Eds.): *Jahrbuch Literatur und Medizin* [Yearbook Literature and Medicine]. Vol. 4, Heidelberg, 2010, pp. 169-184; here p. 172.

³ Geiger, Arno. *Der alte König in seinem Exil*. Munich: Hanser, 2011 (Restless Books, New York, will publish a tran January 17, 2017: Geiger, Arno. *The old king in his exile*).

³ Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. (1994) With a preface by the author. New York: Routledge, 2004.

⁴ Königsdorf, Helga. *Die Entsorgung der Großmutter*. Aufbau-Verlag: Berlin, 1997.

In 'dementia novels,' memory becomes an uncanny heterotopia. The concept of home cannot be attributed to a single place on earth anymore. Its concept has changed to a different place beyond what is occupied with feelings.

Keywords: homelessness, unhomeliness, dementia novel, Arno Geiger, Helga Königsdorf