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Narrative and Fragment

The Social Self in Karoline von Günderrode

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ABSTRACT

This paper argues that Karoline von Günderrode's unique account of the socially constructed self provides a model for satisfying relationships and a stable self on the basis of a fragmented and untransparent subjectivity. Günderrode views experience as a discontinuous series of moments out of which a self can be constructed in two ways, both involving interactions with others. One of these is narrative; the other is a form of immediate experience, including experiencing together with others, that precedes narrative accounts of identity. For Günderrode, the most important ways of interacting with others involve sharing thoughts, feelings and experiences without attempting to integrate these into a more holistic image of, or story about, the person with whom one is interacting. The result is a model for relationships between transitory, opaque selves that creates a basis for social interaction and the construction of identity that can survive and flourish without a stable self that is completely known to itself and others.

Keywords: Karoline von Günderrode, fragment, narrative, self, friendship, historical women philosophers

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

In diesem Beitrag wird argumentiert, dass Karoline von Günderrodes einzigartige Darstellung des sozial konstruierten Selbst ein Modell für befriedigende Beziehungen und ein stabiles Selbst auf der Grundlage einer fragmentierten und undurchsichtigen Subjektivität bietet. Günderrode betrachtet Erfahrung als eine diskontinuierliche Abfolge von Momenten, aus denen das Selbst auf zwei Weisen konstruiert werden kann, wobei die beiden Interaktionen mit anderen beinhalten. Eine davon ist narrativ; die andere stellt eine Form der unmittelbaren Erfahrung dar, die das gemeinsame Erleben mit anderen einschließt und der narrativen Darstellung von Identität vorausgeht. Für Günderrode bestehen die wichtigsten Möglichkeiten der Interaktion mit anderen darin, Gedanken, Gefühle und Erfahrungen auszutauschen, ohne zu versuchen, diese in ein ganzheitlicheres Bild oder eine Geschichte über die Person, mit der man interagiert, zu integrieren. Das Ergebnis ist ein Modell für Beziehungen zwischen vergänglichen, undurchsichtigen Subjekten, das eine Grundlage für soziale Interaktion und die Konstruktion von Identität schafft, die ohne ein stabiles Selbst, das sich selbst und anderen vollständig bekannt ist, überleben und gedeihen kann.

Stichwörter: Karoline von Günderrode, Fragment, Erzählung, Selbst, Freundschaft, historische Philosophinnen

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1. Introduction

The reputation of Karoline von Günderrode (1780–1806) as, supposedly, a paradigmatically tragic Romantic has ensured her a small but consistent following.[1] Her suicide at the age of 26 immediately fostered public fascination with her life and death and, partly in consequence, her writings have often been interpreted in relation to the "Günderrode mythos" of an ill-fated, death-obsessed and mystical poet. However, there are other sides to Günderrode's work. A dedicated autodidact, Günderrode studied Fichte, Schelling, Kant, Herder, Novalis and Friedrich Schlegel, among others, as well as ideas from ancient Greece, Persia, Egypt and India. Her reflections on philosophy, religion and mythology are evident not only in her literary works, which include poems, dramas, short stories, and dialogues,[2] but also in more analytic form in unpublished fragments and essays, letters, and notes on her philosophical studies.[3]

A number of scholars have considered Günderrode's contributions to Early German Romanticism, as well as the relationship of her work to that of Schelling and Fichte,[4] although there is still much to do in these areas. Also relevant to this article is Günderrode's status as a bridge between Early German Romanticism and Heidelberg Romanticism. Günderrode was a friend of the Brentano family, including Clemens and Bettina, both of whom

[1] Research for this paper was partly funded by an "Émilie du Châtelet Award" from the American Society for Eighteenth Century Studies.

[2] Günderrode published two collections, *Gedichte und Phantasien* (1804) and *Poetische Fragmente* (1805) in her lifetime and had sent a third, *Melete*, to the publishers when she died; she also published separately three plays and a short story.

[3] The critical edition of Günderrode's works includes notes on philosophy, chemistry, Latin, ancient history and eastern religions, among other topics: *Sämtliche Werke und ausgewählte Studien. Historisch-Kritische Ausgabe*, 3 vols., ed. Walther Morgenthaler (Basel: Stroemfeld/Roter Stern, 1990–1991) (hereafter "SW"). The most complete edition of Günderrode's letters is Birgit Weißenborn, ed., *Ich sende Dir ein zärtliches Pfand. Die Briefe der Karoline von Günderrode* (Frankfurt: Insel, 1992).

[4] On Günderrode, Schelling and Fichte, see Ruth Christmann, *Zwischen Identitätsgewinn und Bewußtseinsverlust. Das philosophisch-literarische Werk der Karoline von Günderrode (1780–1806)* (Frankfurt: Lang, 2005), 95f; Helga Dormann, *Die Kunst des inneren Sinns. Mythisierung der inneren und äusseren Natur im Werk Karoline von Günderrodes* (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 2004); Dalia Nassar, "The Human Vocation and the Question of the Earth: Karoline von Günderrode's Reading of Fichte," *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* (forthcoming). On Günderrode and Early German Romanticism, see Gesa Dane, "Women Writers and Romanticism," in *The Cambridge Companion to German Romanticism*, ed. Nicholas Saul (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Anna Ezekiel, "Women, Women Writers, and Early German Romanticism," in *The Palgrave Handbook of German Romantic Philosophy*, ed. Elizabeth Millán (London: Palgrave Macmillan, forthcoming 2021); Sabine Gölz, "Günderrode Mines Novalis," in *"The Spirit of Poesy": Essays on Jewish and German Literature and Thought in Honor of Géza von Molnár*, ed. Richard Block and Peter Fenves (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2000), 89–130.

were later part of the Heidelberger Kreis.[5] She was a strong influence on Bettina, who published an edited version of their correspondence, *Die Günderode*, in 1840.[6] And, as is discussed below, there are similarities between Clemens' and Günderrode's understandings of the self; Günderrode's letters show that she discussed her ideas on selfhood with Clemens, and may therefore have exerted a direct influence on him. Günderrode also corresponded on philosophy and ancient history, languages and religions with the influential Heidelberg philologist Georg Friedrich Creuzer, with whom she had an affair, and who published two of Günderrode's pieces in his journal, *Studien*.

While Günderrode's impact on nineteenth century European and American thought has yet to be investigated in depth, over the last 20 years her work has begun to receive serious attention for its philosophical concerns. In particular, there is a growing body of scholarship on Günderrode's contributions to ideas about gender, agency and the construction of identity.[7] Günderrode's consideration of the role of social relations in enabling agency and creating identity, her agnosticism regarding social, political and moral progress, and her insistence on a monistic view of the universe underlie a model of the self and its relation to society and the natural world that seems decidedly modern. This paper explores one aspect of Günderrode's unique understanding of the human condition: her articulation of possibilities for creating satisfying relationships and ways of understanding one's own selfhood in the context of a fragmented and untransparent subjectivity. I argue that Günderrode views this discontinuous self as constructed in two ways, both of which involve interactions with others. One of these is narrative; the other is a form of immediate experience, including experiencing things together with others, that precedes narrative accounts of identity and is, for Günderrode, the real site of potentially fulfilling relationships.

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[5] In 1811 Bettina Brentano married another Heidelberger Romantic, Achim von Arnim, whose 1812 novel *Melück Maria Blainville, die Hausprophetin aus Arabien* is supposedly based on Günderrode.

[6] This text was itself an influence on American Transcendentalism, translated into English by Margaret Fuller, who also based her account of friendship on Brentano-von Arnim's portrayal of her relationship with Günderrode (Fuller, "Bettine Brentano und Günderode," *The Dial* 2 [1842]: 313–57).

[7] Liesl Allingham, "Countermemory in Karoline von Günderrode's 'Darthula nach Ossian': A Female Warrior, Her Unruly Breast, and the Construction of Her Myth," *Goethe Yearbook* 21 (July 2014): 39–56; Ezekiel, "Metamorphosis, Personhood, and Power in Karoline von Günderrode," *European Romantic Review* 25.6 (2014): 773–91; Patricia Anne Simpson, "The Essential Duel: Karoline von Günderrode on the Margins of War," in *The Erotics of War in German Romanticism* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2006), 104–127.

Sections 2 and 3 of this article clarify the conception of selfhood that emerges in Günderrode's letters and published works and respond to interpretations that present Günderrode's conception of the self as reflecting primarily her own, supposedly pathological sense of self. Section 4 relates Günderrode's model to Early German Romantic ideas about narrative self-construction and its limitations, and explains the role of others in this process, according to Günderrode. Section 5 argues that, for Günderrode, narrative is not the only or even primary means by which individuals construct identities together; rather, she regards the most important ways of interacting with others as involving the sharing of thoughts, feelings and experiences without necessarily attempting to integrate these into a more holistic image of, or story about, the person with whom one is interacting. The result, as I argue in the last section, is a model for relationships between transitory, opaque selves which creates a basis for social interaction and the construction of identity that can survive and flourish without a stable self that is completely known to itself and to others.

2. The Fragmented Self

As I have argued elsewhere,[8] scholarly understanding of Günderrode's account of the self has been hindered by a tendency to focus on her biography when interpreting her writings. As a result, where Günderrode makes claims about the self, or about the nature of identity, these have tended to be read as claims about her own, supposedly conflicted, morbid and alienated self,[9] rather than as articulations of a philosophical position. This is especially true for readings of Günderrode's letters, where she makes some of her clearest claims about the nature of the self. By contrast, ideas about identity or selfhood reflected in Günderrode's published works and drafts have either received little

[8] Anna Ezekiel, "Sincerity, Idealization and Writing with the Body: Karoline von Günderrode and Her Reception," in *Aufrichtigkeitseffekte. Signale, soziale Interaktionen und Medien im Zeitalter der Aufklärung*, ed. Simon Bunke and Katerina Mihaylova (Freiburg: Rombach, 2016), 275–90.

[9] E.g., Barbara Becker-Cantarino, "Karoline von Günderrode: Dichtung—Mythologie—Geschlecht," in *Schriftstellerinnen der Romantik: Epoche, Werke, Wirkung* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2000), 204; Christa Bürger, "'Aber eine Sehnsucht war in mir, die ihren Gegenstand nicht kannte…'. Ein Versuch über Karoline von Günderrode," *Metis* 2 (1995): 27; Roswitha Burwick, "Liebe und Tod in Leben und Werk der Günderode," *German Studies Review* 3.2 (1980): 209; Rüdiger Görner, "Das 'heimliche Ächzen des gemißhandelten Herzens...' Karoline von Günderrodes Grenzgang," in *Grenzgänger. Dichter und Denker im Dazwischen* (Tübingen: Klöpfer und Meyer, 1996), 73–74.

attention or are presented as further evidence of the pathological self-image that commentators derive from Günderrode's letters.[10]

A notable exception to this lack of serious consideration of Günderrode's ideas about the nature of the self is Karl Heinz Bohrer, although he, too, ultimately views Günderrode's conception of identity as a problematic and damaging model, stemming from and perhaps contributing to her own unhappiness. According to Bohrer, Günderrode understands the self as radically disjunctive, changing from moment to moment, and similar in this respect to the "momentary" or "catastrophic" self found in the writings of Clemens Brentano and Heinrich von Kleist.[11] Bohrer argues that these writers all view the true site of the self as the individual's subjective experience of ever-changing emotions, as opposed to what they see as a false image of a stable identity that is imposed by social roles and that can be communicated to others.[12] In this respect, these accounts of the self prefigure modern and post-modern ideas about selfhood and anxieties about authenticity, for example as expressed in the work of Nietzsche, Kierkegaard and existentialism.

Bohrer claims that Günderrode "shares with both [Brentano and Kleist] the discovery of the autonomous 'I' that can only find itself in its subjectivity."[13] But he argues that, to a greater extent than Brentano or Kleist, Günderrode emphasises the radical discontinuity between the moments of the I, questioning whether and how the self could be seen as the same self in its different moments.[14] He claims: "It is the 'moment,' the ever new and different, that Günderrode turns against the demand for continuity of knowledge and the social."[15] A problematic outcome of this view, according to Bohrer, is that "the non-communicable identity of the creative moments implies a deceptive communication with the other."[16] Consequently, relationships with others are necessarily insincere and disappointing.

Bohrer is justified in claiming that Günderrode questions the possibility of full or consistent knowledge of the self, and that she replaces the traditional idea of a stable, continuous subject with a model of a radically changeable

[10] E.g., Bürger, "Aber eine Sehnsucht," 38, 41; Ingeborg Drewitz, "Karoline von Günderode (1780–1806)," in *Letzte Tage. Sterbegeschichten aus zwei Jahrtausenden*, ed. Hans Jürgen Schultz (Berlin: Kreuz-Verlag, 1983), 89.
[11] Karl Heinz Bohrer, "Identität als Selbstverlust. Zum romantischen Subjektbegriff," *Merkur* 38.4 (1984): 367–69; *Der romantische Brief. Die Entstehung ästhetischer Subjektivität* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1989).
[12] Bohrer, "Identität als Selbstverlust," 377; see also *Der romantische Brief*, 76.
[13] Bohrer, *Der romantische Brief*, 76. All translations are my own unless stated otherwise.
[14] Bohrer, *Der romantische Brief*, 78–79.
[15] Bohrer, "Identität als Selbstverlust," 368.
[16] Bohrer, *Der romantische Brief*, 120.

self. On the other hand, I dispute his claim that this position undermines the claims of social roles and relations upon an individual, or the possibility of fulfilling relationships. Instead, Günderrode demanded that social roles and relationships between individuals should be fulfilled on a different basis from how they are traditionally understood and engaged in. Rather than throwing the discontinuous self back upon itself in order to achieve self-knowledge and subjecthood in isolation with its "singularity of feeling,"[17] I argue that Günderrode's self is constituted and stabilised in relationships with others, and that fulfilling relationships enable this in a way that is playful, joyful, and stimulating. While Günderrode experienced disappointments in some of her friendships, this is not a necessary consequence of her conception of the self or her ideal for fulfilling relationships; on the contrary, recognising the changeable nature of the self and its lack of transparency can foster improved relationships with others.

There is ample evidence for Bohrer's claim that Günderrode imagined the self as a discontinuous progression of ever-changing individuals, different from moment to moment. This model is frequently referenced in her letters, and consistent with her view of nature and the human-nature relationship as presented in her published works. In a letter to Clemens Brentano, Günderrode writes:

> Yes, I understand the moment in which you wrote to me; in general I never get further than understanding your moments a little. Of their connection and basic tone I know nothing at all. It often seems to me as if you had many souls; if I begin to know one of these souls well, then it departs and another steps into its place that I do not know and that I only stare at, surprised.[18]

And in another letter, also to Clemens:

> [I]t seems to me, oddly, that I listen to how I speak and my own words seem almost stranger to me than those of strangers. Even the truest letters are, in my opinion, only corpses: they describe a life that inhabited them and, whether or not they are like the living, the moment of their life is already past. But for that reason, it seems to me (when I read what I wrote a while ago) as if I saw myself lying in my coffin and my two Is stare at each other in amazement.

[17] Bohrer, *Der romantische Brief*, 119.
[18] Günderrode, letter to Clemens Brentano, 19th May 1803, in Weißenborn, ed., *Ich sende Dir*, 89. Translations of Günderrode's letters are my own, taken from *Philosophical Fragments* (New York: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

> [....] I know few people, and perhaps none completely accurately, for I'm very clumsy at observing others. Thus if I understand you in one moment, I can't conclude anything from this about all the others [19]

To her friend Carl Friedrich von Savigny, she writes "I believe my essence is uncertain, full of fleeting phenomena that come and go changeably and without enduring, inner warmth[,]"[20] and, to Kunigunde (Gunda) Brentano (Clemens' sister, and Savigny's future wife): "sometimes I have no opinion of myself at all, my self-observations are so fluctuating."[21]

The last letter, to Gunda, immediately continues by describing what Günderrode views as the essential unknowability of the self:

> [...] In general it is totally incomprehensible to me that we have no other consciousness than perceptions of effects, never of causes. All other knowledge seems to me (when I think of this) not worthy of knowledge, as long as I do not know the cause of the knowledge, my faculty of knowledge. To me, this ignorance is the most unbearable lack, the greatest contradiction.[22]

These claims suggest that Günderrode views any substrate underlying and linking our experiences, which make up the moments of the self, as unknowable—if such a substrate exists at all. Our experiences of perceptions and feelings change constantly, undermining the grounds for continuity of identity. As a result, on Günderrode's account, past interactions with an individual do not provide a firm basis for expectations regarding that person in future. Furthermore, even obtaining a stable self-image is made difficult by these experiences of the self as fluctuating.

3. A Pathological Self

The above statements from Günderrode's letters have often been interpreted as indicating a dangerously fragmented self-image. In particular, several commentators have pointed to the passage quoted above in which Günderrode describes her "two Is" staring at each other as indicating self-

[19] Günderrode, letter to Clemens Brentano, 1803, in Christa Wolf, ed., *Karoline von Günderrode. Der Schatten eines Traumes. Gedichte, Prosa, Briefe, Zeugnisse von Zeitgenossen* (Munich: Luchterhand, 1997), 211–12.
[20] Günderrode, letter to Carl Friedrich von Savigny, 26th February 1804, in Weißenborn, ed., *Ich sende Dir*, 120; see also 285.
[21] Günderrode, letter to Kunigunde (Gunda) Brentano, 11th August 1801, in Weißenborn, ed., *Ich sende Dir*, 75.
[22] Günderrode, letter to Kunigunde (Gunda) Brentano, 11th August 1801, in Weißenborn, ed., *Ich sende Dir*, 75-76.

alienation.[23] However, as the statements cited above show, Günderrode applied this understanding of selfhood to others, not just herself. It seems clear that Günderrode is articulating a general idea about personhood, that is, about the lack of continuity and transparency of the self, rather than describing a pathology peculiar to herself and her self-image.

However, it could still be the case that this view provides an unhealthy or problematic view of human nature in general, that it is untenable or miserable to live according to this model. Bohrer suggests as much in his account of Günderrode's friendships, which he describes as breaking down in the face of her insistence on the incommunicability of the irreducible moments of the self.[24]

The idea that the kind of momentary self presented in Günderrode's writings is a damaged or incomplete non-functioning self is emphasised by Dieter von Burdorf in his remarks on Bohrer's interpretation of Günderrode. According to Burdorf, Bohrer's account underplays the alienation and solipsism that, Burdorf claims, result from such an idea of the self.[25] This is mainly a question of emphasis, but Burdorf's claims are worth noting since they spell out the accusations of morbidity that are often levelled at Günderrode—including by Bohrer—with respect to her sense of self. According to Burdorf,

> Karoline von Günderrode's I, oriented to ideals and ideas and incessantly seeking itself, finds neither an equivalent opposite nor a place and stopping point in the world. This I can rather only orient itself to union with the All of nature [...]. But unity with nature means at the same time the cancelling out of individuation, the dissolution of the I. The idea of death is therefore omnipresent in Günderrode's intellectual world; and from this perspective suicide can appear as the *ultima ratio* in the aporetic situation of the I.[26]

The claim that Günderrode lacked a coherent sense of self and that this contributed to her suicide is echoed in numerous accounts of Günderrode's

[23] For example Eva Horn, *Trauer schreiben: Die Toten im Text der Goethezeit* (Munich: Fink, 1998), 192; Christian Schärf, "Artistische Ironie und Fremdheit der Seele. Zur ästhetischen Disposition in der Frühromantik bei Friedrich Schlegel und Karoline von Günderrode," *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte* 72.3 (1998): 457–58; Christa Wolf, "Karoline von Günderode—ein Entwurf," in *Der Schatten eines Traumes*, 5–60, esp. 58.

[24] Bohrer, *Der romantische Brief*, 78–79, 118–121.

[25] Dieter von Burdorf, "'Diese Sehnsucht ist ein Gedanke, der ins Unendliche starrt.' Über Karoline von Günderrode—aus Anlaß neuer Ausgaben ihrer Werke und Briefe," *Wirkendes Wort* 43.1 (1993): 53.

[26] Von Burdorf, "'Diese Sehnsucht ist ein Gedanke, der ins Unendliche starrt.'," 53.

writing and her death. Christa Bürger writes that Günderrode "has no image of herself; she cannot give herself her own form-figure […]. She has only the will to form, but not the power to create her own[.]"[27] Bürger argues that this failing led Günderrode to throw herself (and the characters she created in her writings) into oblivion.[28] Similarly, Carola Hilmes claims that "[t]he pervasive ambivalences in Günderrode's life and writing culminated in her spectacular suicide."[29] These interpretations present Günderrode's fragmented self as too unstable and/or narcissistic to form adequate relationships with others. Without these connections, its only option for overcoming its fragmentation is to destroy its individuality in death, representing union with the whole of nature and the universe.

Eva Horn provides a separate argument for viewing Günderrode's conception of the self as entailing suicide, claiming that Günderrode's idea of the momentary self leaves a gulf between sign and signified that can only be removed by death, connecting the momentary self that is left in letters like a corpse ("in my coffin") with the real corpse of the writer:

> Günderrode, it shows itself clearly in her exchange of letters, is no player with language […]—she takes the insight into the deadness of writing deadly seriously. Where words are dead letters, bodies without soul, where they only reflect the "pastness" of their "life that inhabits them," there is only one possibility of giving writing back its truth: to lay under the dead writing one's own dead body as referent.[30]

On Horn's account, the lack of correspondence between sign and signified—the impossibility of being consistently true to one's self or presenting this self truthfully to others—is drastic enough to require suicide in order to be resolved. Aside from the question of whether it is plausible to view the impossibility of sincerity and authentic self-relation as cause for Günderrode's suicide, Horn's account does not fit well with the relationship Günderrode describes between her letters and her later self that reads them. Günderrode's past, "dead" selves, which left their signs in her letters, were living selves, now past and gone, "dead," as it were, and it is these lost, living

[27] Bürger, "Aber eine Sehnsucht," 37.
[28] Bürger, "Aber eine Sehnsucht," 36–38.
[29] Carola Hilmes, "Welch ein Trost, daß man nicht leben muß." Karoline von Günderrodes Inszenierung eines unweiblichen Heldentodes," in *Ökonomie des Opfers. Literatur im Zeichen des Suizids*, ed. Günter Blamberger and Sebastian Goth with Christine Thewes (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2013), 169; see also Barbara Becker-Cantarino, "The 'New Mythology': Myth and Death in Karoline von Günderrode's Literary Work," in *Women and Death 3: Women's Representations of Death in German Culture since 1500*, ed. Clare Bielby and Anna Richards (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2010), 52, 68.
[30] Horn, *Trauer schreiben*, 192.

moments that are represented in the letters, not a dead self as such. Those momentary selves are gone, whether the present self is alive or dead. In other words, the death of the current or future self cannot retrieve the referent of these letters; the letters have never and can never refer to a current, present dead self, but refer to living selves of the past.

Like Horn and the other scholars mentioned above, Bohrer connects the "catastrophic" self to suicide. But rather than claiming that, for Günderrode, death overcomes the alienation of the individual by merging the individual with the whole or allowing a correspondence between self-descriptions and the self, Bohrer argues that death provides a form of narrative closure for the fragmented self. Bohrer contrasts the subjective and changeable models of the self of Günderrode, Brentano and Kleist with a traditional or *bürgerlich* conception of the self as stable, relatively transparent, and reliable, capable of happily engaging in productive relationships with others. By contrast, he claims, on Günderrode's, Brentano's and Kleist's accounts, the self is fragmented and incoherent, and this unhappy isolation and emotional confusion requires some kind of reconciliation. Options for this reconciliation include developing a connection with nature, as Bohrer argues Brentano does, or suicide, as he argues occurs in the cases of Kleist and Günderrode.[31] On Bohrer's interpretation, Kleist used his death to give a form of narrative coherence to the disarrayed emotional and experiential history of the subject: "in his motif of suicide, prepared for years, Kleist found his way back to the teleological projection of his I. As with Günderrode, too, suicide was not merely an expression of catastrophic momentaneity, but mediated natural-philosophically and culturally: in suicide he was finally able to convert discontinuity into continuity."[32]

The idea that Günderrode's conception of selfhood was morbidly unstable informs many readings of her work and letters, especially in relation to her own self-image. As described above, it is frequently asserted that Günderrode failed to construct a consistent or coherent self-identity, and that this contributed to her suicide. It seems to be more-or-less assumed by many commentators on her writings that a stable sense of self is necessary not only to enable rewarding relationships with others, but even to survive.

To be fair, Günderrode sometimes described herself as internally conflicted and unhappy. For example, she claims to have

> a deplorable but incorrigible discrepancy in my soul; and it will and must remain so, for I am a woman, and have desires like a man, without

[31] Bohrer, "Identität als Selbstverlust," 372, 375, 378, 379; *Der romantische Brief*, 76.
[32] Bohrer, "Identität als Selbstverlust," 375.

> manly strength. That's why I'm so changeable, and so at odds with myself.[33]

Similarly, Günderrode sometimes made claims that have been taken to support the argument that she hoped to construct a coherent, continuous identity in her writing, allowing commentators to propose that she failed in this attempt. In particular, in an often-quoted letter to Clemens, who had asked why she had chosen to publish her work, Günderrode wrote,

> not knowing what I did, I thus broke the barriers that separated my innermost mind from the world; and I haven't yet regretted it, for the longing is always new and vivid in me to express my life in an enduring form, in a figure that would be worthy of joining the most excellent, greeting them and being in community with them.[34]

Along the same lines, in "Letters of Two Friends" in Günderrode's collection *Melete* (i.e., a piece intended for publication), Günderrode has her narrator say of their poetry: "I behold myself most happily in something my spirit has produced, and I only have true consciousness through this begotten thing[.]"[35]

However, on a close reading it does not seem that Günderrode meant these claims to suggest that she hoped to use her writing to construct or record a single, unconflicted, enduring self. The statement that the longing to express herself that she describes is "always new and vivid" immediately suggests that she means this effort to be undertaken repeatedly, rather than accomplished once and for all. As noted above, Günderrode maintained that, although a written record of a particular moment of the self may endure, that moment itself still passes and that self moves into the past. Her later, living self finds itself staring, amazed, at the past self recorded in the text.[36]

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[33] Günderrode, letter to Gunda, 29th August 1801, in Weißenborn, ed., *Ich send Dir*, 79. This kind of statement has been used not only to support the argument that Günderrode's sense of self was fragmented, but also to explore Günderrode's critique of gender roles. See, e.g., Karen F. Daubert, "Karoline von Günderrode's 'Der Gefangene und der Sänger': New Voices in Romanticism's Desire for Cultural Transcendence," *New German Review* 8 (1992): 1–17; Gisela Dischner, "Die Günderode," in *Bettine von Arnim. Eine weibliche Sozialbiographie aus dem 19. Jahrhundert* (Berlin: 1977), 61–148; Elke Frederiksen, "Die Frau als Autorin zur Zeit der Romantik: Anfänge einer weiblichen literarischen Tradition," in *Gestaltet und Gestaltend. Frauen in der deutschen Literatur*, ed. Marianne Burkhard (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1980), 83–108; Lorely French, "'Meine beiden Ichs': Confrontations with Language and Self in Letters by Early Nineteenth-Century Women," *Women in German Yearbook* 5 (1989): 73–89.

[34] Günderrode, letter to Clemens, 10th June 1804, in Weißenborn, ed., *Ich sende Dir*, 151.

[35] SW 3:353.

[36] Günderrode, letter to Clemens, 1803, in Wolf, ed., *Schatten eines Traumes*, 211–12.

Furthermore, Günderrode's claim that she beholds herself "most gladly" in something she has produced, such as a piece of writing, also speaks against interpreting the encounter of her "two Is" as alienating. For Günderrode, the construction of the self through writing is not exhaustive, nor alienating, but a potentially gratifying record of certain aspects of the self at certain moments of its existence. The self that appears in writing is only one of the many selves that exist in a human lifetime—and, as we will see below, only one possible way of creating a sense of self.

Underlying the usual interpretation of Günderrode's claim that she is "at odds" with herself, as well as conclusions regarding the untenability of Günderrode's conception of the self in general as fluctuating and conflicted, is the premise that internal conflict, narrative incoherence, and breaks in continuity regarding one's sense of self are harmful, or at least a sign of damage. Yet these seem to be almost inescapable aspects of our experiences of ourselves and the courses of our lives. On a daily basis, we encounter conflicts, both minor and major, in our emotions, desires, evaluations, goals and principles, which we are aware of with varying degrees of clarity and reconcile with each other with varying degrees of success. Furthermore, our sense of who we are, including the stories we tell ourselves about the events of our lives and their trajectories and motivations, can vary, not only over long periods of time but often between different social situations or in different moods. And, as Günderrode identifies in her letters, each story we tell, or each snapshot we take of ourselves, is a partial image that only captures a few aspects of our identity, which may be more or less enduring over time.

If this is the case, then the construction of a coherent identity can only be provisional, and the construction of multiple identities—including mutually incompatible identities—becomes a possibility, even a desirable possibility. One is reminded of the later claim by Nietzsche that, while one needs a relatively stable view of the world and of oneself in order to function, this view can change to allow different, often conflicting aspects of the self and the world to be displayed and known.[37] According to Günderrode, too, rather than being a sign of incoherence, harmful internal conflict, or even

[37] See, for example, Friedrich Nietzsche, *Jenseits von Gut und Böse. Vorspiel einer Philosophie der Zukunft*, in *Werke. Kritische Gesamtausgabe* (hereafter "KGW"), ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1967–), vol. VI-2, sections 4, 34 and 40; *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, KGW vol. V-2, sections 107 and 290; *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches*, KGW vol. IV-2, section 427.

madness, the radical changeability of the self can be read as the condition of possibility for experimentation, self-expression, and freedom.

4. Narrative Construction of Identity

Günderrode's emphasis on the incompleteness and selectivity that are necessarily involved in conceptualising the self draws on tensions in ideas about narrative self-construction that were current at the time she was writing, especially in Early German Romanticism. In their novels *Lucinde* (1799) and *Henry of Ofterdingen* (published 1802) Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis emphasise the selectivity of narrative in depicting their main characters and their formation, foregrounding the artificiality of the attempt to create a single, authoritative account of one's life. In *Lucinde*, Schlegel deliberately disrupts the chronology of the narrator's life story, drawing attention to his selectivity in choosing which features of his life to relate and in what order to present them.[38] These interruptions destroy the transparency of the writing and focus attention on the author's choices in how the narrator's life is presented, and therefore how his character is portrayed.[39] Dorothea Veit-Schlegel's novel *Florentin* (1801) pushes the tensions in this form of narrative autopoiesis to the point of critique. The title character spends the book attempting to construct an identity for himself, partly through his search for a homeland and the identity of his parents, and partly through narrative, as he describes his life to friends. However, despite meeting a woman who, it is hinted, is his mother,[40] Florentin fails to recognise his parentage. The novel ends with a line emphasising Florentin's failure in constructing a coherent identity for himself: "Florentin was nowhere to be found."[41] Thus, while the Early German Romantics overtly advocate aesthetic, poetic or narrative self-construction, they also highlight the contingent and created nature of these constructions and, especially in Veit-Schlegel's case, the way these often miss the mark and misrepresent what they attempt to articulate.

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[38] As Peter Firchow notes, "The interruptions, the lack of artful transitions, the chaotic confusion of proper time sequence, all these are not the result of inartistic insensitivity, but carefully planned occurrences" (*Friedrich Schlegel's* Lucinde *and the Fragments* [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971 (1799)], 28; see also 45, 64, 104, 112, 126, 128–30).
[39] Novalis claims explicitly that the novelist "makes a well-ordered, lawlike series" "from his given crowd of accidents and situations" (*Schriften*, 2nd ed., ed. Paul Kluckhohn und Richard Samuel [Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1960–], II:580, no. 242).
[40] Dorothea Veit-Schlegel, *Florentin. Roman. Fragmente. Varianten*, ed. Liliane Weissberg (Berlin: Ullstein, 1987 [1801]), 96–100, 145–47.
[41] Veit-Schlegel, *Florentin*, 153.

Günderrode's model of the self can be read partly as a response to these accounts, which present the work of self-creation as a task that requires effort, skill and selection. This need for creative effort indicates the possibility of alternative constructions of selfhood, as well as of subsequent revisions to any self that has been constructed. Although Novalis' and Schlegel's protagonists (if not Veit-Schlegel's) ultimately succeed in creating a stable self through narrative, these authors nonetheless emphasise the experimentation and exploration of possibilities for the self, the need for selectivity and creativity in producing a story of oneself and one's life, and, therefore, the existence of multiple possible outcomes for how the self emerges.

As we saw above, it has often been claimed that, lacking a traditional, stable conception of the self as given, predictable and transparent, Günderrode's only options were to form a coherent self through writing or, if this failed, to experience life as an individual as irresolvably alienating (and, therefore, to long for annihilation). However, this does not reflect Günderrode's or her contemporaries' understanding of the ways in which self-identity is constructed. Like the Early German Romantics, Günderrode viewed narrative forms of identity construction as allowing multiple possible identities. As she writes to Bettina Brentano:

> I have always read biographies with a peculiar joy, and in doing so it always appeared to me as if one could not invent a complete person, one always only comes up with one side, the complexity of human existence always remains unattained[.][42]

Interpreted in light of this statement, Günderrode's claims about the impossibility of knowing a person on the basis of knowledge of their past "moments" are, as much as anything else, denials of the possibility of viewing any one understanding of an individual as authoritative. Like Clemens Brentano, Kleist, Novalis, Schlegel and Veit-Schlegel, Günderrode recognises the centrality of subjective experience—selectivity, perspective—to one's sense of self, at the same time as acknowledging that this subjectivity undermines the possibility of complete, or completely accurate, self-knowledge and self-representation.

As others have noted,[43] Veit-Schlegel's *Florentin* highlights the ways that the attempt to create an identity founders if it does not take account of others

[42] Günderrode, letter to Bettina Brentano, in Weißenborn, ed., *Ich sende Dir*, 268.
[43] Liesl Allingham, "Revolutionizing Domesticity: Potentialities of Female Self-Definition in Dorothea Schlegel's *Florentin* (1801)," *Women in German Yearbook* 27 (2011): 14–15; Martha Helfer, "Dorothea Veit Schlegel's *Florentin*: Constructing a Feminist Romantic Aesthetic,"

and their experiences. For Günderrode, too, the self does not create itself alone; rather, it is partly constituted through the perspectives of others. Liesl Allingham has explored how others are involved in the narrative construction of identity in Günderrode's writings, focusing on Günderrode's reworking of Ossian's poem "Darthula." As Allingham claims, the characters in Günderrode's version of this piece mythologise themselves and others through storytelling and commemoration. Allingham writes of Darthula's lover, Nathos, that "In order to propagate his own heroic myth, Nathos rewrites […] his life history, selecting only those aspects of his life to be remembered that affirm his heroism."[44] Thus, "Nathos demonstrates the selective process of memory"—its use of "exaggeration, emphasis, and omission[.]"[45] Nathos cannot construct this myth of himself as a hero on his own, however, as Allingham points out: "The establishment of myth also requires witnesses and an audience, voices with the power to disseminate the narrative."[46] These others can contest or amplify a particular myth, or simply maintain it in circulation, contributing to the constitution, evolution and/or maintenance of a mythological self that is based on carefully selected attributes of an individual.

As Allingham notes, like Nathos, Darthula also "creates, picks and chooses" in her account of the events of the poem,[47] as does their enemy Caibar, who, in his version of the events, "selects the aspects of Darthula most important to him[.]"[48] It is Caibar whose characterisation of Darthula will ultimately be preserved: the poem ends with Caibar's bards singing laments for the fallen Darthula. As Allingham writes, "With the power of selection, the victor Caibar determines which Darthula will be remembered by emphasizing her as a desired object instead of acting subject, her beauty instead of her courage."[49] It is Caibar's account that is taken up by others (the bards, and those who hear their songs) to become the authoritative constitution of the character Darthula.

Allingham is interested in the role of myth and memory in maintaining or countering hegemonic discourses, rather than their role in the development of a subject's own sense of self; however, the processes she describes also function, on Günderrode's account, to shape specific identities

German Quarterly 69.2 (1996): 156; Laurie Johnson, "Dorothea Veit's *Florentin* and the Early Romantic Model of Alterity," *Monatshefte* 97.1 (2005): 42, 43.

[44] Allingham, "Countermemory," 48.

[45] Allingham, "Countermemory," 47.

[46] Allingham, "Countermemory," 50.

[47] Allingham, "Countermemory," 51.

[48] Allingham, "Countermemory," 51.

[49] Allingham, "Countermemory," 52.

for individuals. These identities, formed by one's own and others' selective processes of storytelling and characterisation, influence how individuals conceptualise themselves, as well as the kinds of behaviours and personalities they can manifest. In Günderrode's Ossian-inspired pieces, the main characters die and, therefore, this function of myth-making as creating identities for living individuals is not fully realised. However, elsewhere in Günderrode's work, and to an extent even within these pieces, we can see the role of others in the construction of an identity for the self. In "Darthula," the heroine takes up a sword after her father exhorts her "Go, grasp the sword of past battles!"[50] It is her father's interpellation of Darthula as an agent—and a hero—that allows her to become one, despite her construction, according to the mores of the time, as a weak woman. (And, as noted above, this identity as a hero is altered again posthumously by Caibar, who presents Darthula once more according to prevailing models of femininity.) In a similar way, as I have argued elsewhere,[51] Günderrode's character Hildgund must first establish herself as an agent through interactions with her father and her fiancé, before she can take control of her own and her country's destiny.

In these and other[52] examples, the question of gendered power relations is at the forefront, especially the ways in which the agency of women is constrained or promoted by the actions of men. However, within this account is also a model of how one's actions and identity are created in dialogue with others—with their help, or against their resistance, but always in interaction with other individuals and their perceptions of oneself. The self is not constituted by its own creative efforts alone, but always in a social context that creates and forecloses specific possibilities for who each person can be.

5. Stories and Images

The previous section explored the role of narrative in Günderrode's writings as a means of creating identity and the importance of other individuals in this process. But narrative is not the only, or even the primary, process that Günderrode claims is involved in constituting the self. Günderrode's account

[50] SW 1:13.

[51] Ezekiel, "Metamorphosis, Personhood and Power," 773–91.

[52] A similar process occurs in Günderrode's play *Udohla*, where Nerissa can only make decisions about her own future after the Sultan creates the opportunity for her to do so (SW 1:230), and in the short dialogue "Mora." The latter, like "Darthula," features a female title character who performs heroic acts after being addressed as a heroic agent by male characters, but is then reified instead as a beautiful object of desire in bards' laments (SW 1:55–59).

of the radically changeable and momentary self picks up on another Early German Romantic trope: that of the fragment. For Günderrode, the self is, at its inception, a fragmentary self that narrative can only subsequently, and only provisionally, integrate into the relative whole of a continuous self. This position recalls Early German Romantic claims about the fragment, especially its application to the human being, conceived as a finite individual cut off from the whole of nature, the universe, or God, and striving to construct itself through a creative integration of the events of its life. Günderrode also views human beings as individuated through being split off from an original whole; however, as described above, her account emphasises the fragmentation of the self not only in relation to the whole, or to others, but also in relation to past and future moments of its existence. Günderrode's account also differs from more mainstream Romantic claims in two further ways. First, whereas Novalis and Schlegel emphasise the (never conclusively achieved) tendency towards system in both the fragment and human nature,[53] Günderrode's account of the fragmentary self stresses the possibility of not attempting to integrate the moments of the self into a whole. Second, Günderrode denies that this fragmentation entails alienation from others, insisting on the possibility of meaningful relationships in the absence of a narrative or, indeed, any kind of attempt at systematisation.

There are indications of this non-narrative means of constructing selfhood in the above example from "Darthula," in which Darthula's father exhorts her to grasp the sword and enter the battle. In itself, this interaction is not, or not yet, narrative. The moment in which Darthula's father engages her in this way enables a certain kind of action for Darthula, and these events may subsequently be incorporated into a story: the story of Darthula the hero, or the story of Darthula the tragic maiden. But for Günderrode there is something more fundamental happening when individuals interact: something prior to the incorporation of the moment of their interaction into a narrative.

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[53] See, for example, *Athenaeum Fragments* nos. 77, 116, 121, 220, 242, 259, 383 (respectively KFSA II: 176, 182, 185, 200, 205, 209, 236). There is not space here for a detailed investigation of the relationship between fragment and system in Early German Romanticism, or for its application to Early German Romantic accounts of the self. For discussion of these points, see, e.g., Manfred Frank, "Allegorie, Witz, Fragment, Ironie. Friedrich Schlegel und die Idee des zerrissenen Selbst," in *Auswege aus dem deutschen Idealismus* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2007), 117–138; Laurie Johnson, "Reconciliation and Fragmentation: The Early Romantic Memory Model," in *The Art of Recollection in Jena Romanticism: Memory, History, Fiction, and Fragmentation in Texts by Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2002), 9–55; Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Literary Absolute*, trans. Philip Barnard and Cheryl Lester (Albany: SUNY Press, 1988 [1978]).

As described in the first part of this article, for Günderrode the self is most basically a momentary, fluctuating and discontinuous set of thoughts, impressions and emotions. This self is not fully known to itself and has no underlying substrate or necessary connection between its moments—at least, not that the self knows of or could ever know of. Narrative and biography can string these moments together in various ways, but the resulting stories, or identities, are contingent, subjective, incomplete, always subject to revision, and, in particular, do not capture everything about the self in any given moment.

However, rather than throwing the individual back upon itself as a succession of incommunicable moments, as Bohrer argues,[54] for Günderrode this entails the possibility of relationships between individuals that are not based on telling each other stories about themselves. For Günderrode, interactions between individuals at specific moments—that is, between the concurrent momentary selves of two (or more) individuals—contribute to the mutual constitution of their (momentary) selves, regardless of whether a narrative is created about this interaction. Günderrode's claims, cited above, about not knowing a person's present self based on their past selves indicate that she perceived a strong limit to the relevance for the current relationship of information beyond the immediate interaction. On this interpretation, Günderrode's claim that one cannot know a person as they are now on the basis of one's knowledge of them in the past is a statement about the priority of the relationship between two individuals in the immediacy of their engagement with each other. This immediate engagement is more important to Günderrode than the knowledge of a person that can be gained from a story, that is, from a narrative that subsumes this momentary relationship into a greater whole, or a claim that purports to be about a person over a period of time or over their lifetime.

Against Bohrer's claim that Günderrode lost friends because she insisted on the incommunicability of the irreducible moments of the self, Günderrode's letters show that she repeatedly insisted on the communicability of these moments.[55] She wrote to Savigny, for example, that:

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[54] Bohrer, *Der romantische Brief*, 119.

[55] Günderrode's letters to Gunda, excerpted in the next section, often berate Gunda so harshly for not attempting to communicate in this way that one might suspect the opposite to Bohrer's claim: that it was Günderrode's insistence on communicating these moments that drove friends away. But other reasons likely contributed to the disappointing outcomes of some of Günderrode's friendships. Günderrode's relationship with Gunda was strained by their rivalry over Savigny, while Clemens' attitude to Günderrode alternated between

> I usually carry around a quiet little chamber in my mind; in this I live a private, secluded, happy life, interested in or loving some person, an idea, a science, or an art[.][56]

This sounds like a self isolated by its absorption in its own thoughts and feelings; however, Günderrode continues: "if I want to usher someone inside and they won't like it there, that can […] be really painful for me." To Gunda, similarly, she wrote:

> Every interesting piece of knowledge, feeling and experience, if someone else doesn't share it with me, is a mountain that separates me from the person with whom I'd like to join.[57]

The sharing of experiences, and of one's inner life in its momantaneity, was vitally important to Günderrode's understanding of both friendship and identity. This is not to say that Günderrode believed that one's inner experiences could be conveyed perfectly accurately—as we have seen, she claims we cannot even know ourselves fully. Rather, she demanded from her friends that they make an earnest effort to share their experiences. In part, this effort served as a sign of real interest in each other,[58] but, as I argue in the next section, it was also important to Günderrode as a means of constructing identities that were both positive and, while still subject to change, more stable than a self created alone.

6. Friendship

Günderrode had numerous rewarding friendships that lasted until her death;[59] however, her most revealing statements about the role of others in constituting the self, and particularly of friends in helping construct a positive self-image, occur in the context of friendships that were fraught or breaking down—in particular, her friendship with Gunda Brentano. Günderrode

overt romantic or sexual interest and chauvinistic put-downs, and she broke off her friendship with Bettina Brentano at Creuzer's urging (Creuzer disliked the Brentanos, especially Clemens). Other important relationships in Günderrode's life, such as those with her sisters and with Elisabetha von Mettingh, Christian Nees von Esenbeck and Susanne von Heyden, lasted until her or their deaths.

[56] Günderrode, letter to Savigny, 3rd August 1804, in Weißenborn, ed., *Ich sende Dir*, 115.

[57] Günderrode, letter to Gunda, 11th August 1801, Weißenborn, *Ich sende Dir*, 75.

[58] In her letters, Günderrode repeatedly refers to the importance of "taking an interest in" or "sympathising with" (*teilnehmen; Anteil nehmen*) one's friends (e.g., letters to Karoline von Barkhaus, 4th July and 10th July 1799; letter to Gunda, 20th October 1801, in, respectively, Weißenborn, *Ich sende Dir*, 49, 51, 81).

[59] See above, footnote 52.

repeatedly complains to Gunda of the latter's failures in responding to her in a way that helps her create an image of herself:

> I was often (I flatter myself) a true mirror to you, in which you could contemplate yourself; yes, I cast the image I received back to you with greater sincerity; but never yet have I contemplated myself in you—tell me, how is that? I don't always like to show myself (I've said so before), but when I have shown myself, then I love inordinately to behold myself again in others; for I hope the other will let me see a more beautiful image than I see myself. Or rather, sometimes I have no opinion of myself at all, my self-observations are so fluctuating.[60]

> You put me in a bad position by not wanting to write to me like a person who has fallen in love with their echo; or, if I were to be really particular about it, much more serious, of course the echo is deaf to all questions, all pleas, but one can still imagine one hears an answer from it; and I can never do that with you. Suggest this to Clemens so he doesn't hold back from writing to me. If you don't, if you continue to keep your pen idle, then I have nothing of you but a memory, which may not look at all like your so-called I (if I see it again) any more, for you are changeable, doubly changeable: out of natural propensity, and out of coquetry, which anyway, as you say, is also natural.[61]

These citations reveal the importance, for Günderrode, of other people for presenting the self to itself. Others should be an echo, a mirror in which you can see yourself. In the first citation, Günderrode indicates that one's own experiences are too changeable to form a stable self-image, but that this stability can be provided by others. As we saw above, for Günderrode we have no knowledge of any substrate underlying our experiences, but here she suggests that seeing ourselves as others see us helps paint a more enduring picture of who we are than what we glean from our own fluctuating experiences. Importantly, this offers an alternative means of creating an identity and a (relatively) stable sense of self to narrative. This echo, or reflection, of the self cannot rely on memory, or on connections between past and present moments of the self. In the second citation, Günderrode adds that her memory may not reflect the way Gunda is any more: as time passes, Gunda changes, but in the absence of new interactions with her, Günderrode's image of her stagnates and becomes false. There is a balance in Günderrode's account between the need for stability and the need for accuracy—while others have more distance from us and less information,

[60] Günderrode, letter to Gunda, 11th August 1801, in Weißenborn, ed., *Ich sende Dir*, 75.
[61] Günderrode, letter to Gunda, 4th September 1801, in Weißenborn, ed., *Ich sende Dir*, 79–80.

allowing a less changeable, more manageable conception of the self to emerge, too much distance can result in a false, reified image of who we are, based on out-of-date information.

Although, as we will see just below, truth, or rather honesty or earnestness, is very important to Günderrode in engaging with others, she does not hold up absolute truth, in the sense of correspondence to facts, as the ideal. Instead, she recognises that the images cast back to us by others are subjective and incomplete, and can be more or less pleasant. In the above letter, she says she "hope[s] the other will let me see a more beautiful image than I see myself." This role of the other, which can allow a loving relationship to the self, can, however, be overplayed, leading to falsification. Günderrode writes:

> to me it seems so sweet to be loved by excellent people; to me it's the most flattering proof of my own value. I'm too weak against these too seductive flattering voices: they can make me unfaithful to myself. Often and in vain I have resisted myself.[62]

These scenarios seem not only plausible, but borne out by everyday experience. We do sometimes encounter people who confront us with an image of ourselves that is less lovely than we would like, as well as those who have images of us that are beguilingly flattering. Our sense of worth and our self-image is often affected by encounters with others' views of us. It is a strength of Günderrode's account that it recognises the variability of others' views of the self as well as their constitutive role in self-understanding.

On the other hand, Günderrode's letters reveal not only the desire to have a positive or flattering self-image, but also a desire to be known truly. She writes to Savigny:

> I've told you before, dear Savigny, how it's almost too much a need for me to express myself, when I'm very merry or sad or gripped by anything else unusual. I'm also often in conflict with myself and doubt myself, and seek another's judgement, someone else's approbation, in order to be happy in myself again. In such cases I then easily let myself be carried away, trusting someone who can't give me what's missing, misunderstands me or handles me clumsily. The state within me that follows such an incident is the most adverse for me. I'd like to change that, would like to always speak with you about such things and write to you about them, can I? Are you not much too busy? I'm afraid you might listen to me and answer out of a kind of generosity that I wouldn't like

[62] Günderrode, letter to Gunda, 24th November 1801, in Weißenborn, ed., *Ich sende Dir*, 83.

> to have, so don't do that; answer your friend without any consideration—that is, really like a friend.[63]

The above passage tells us what marks a true friend, for Günderrode. It is not that someone should view every aspect of the changing feelings and experiences that a person undergoes—that would be impossible, even for the self itself. Rather, with a true friend it should be possible, first, to talk openly about these feelings and experiences, and, second, to trust them to respond honestly and with care. Importantly, this response should not be motivated by "generosity" or characterised by "consideration," while it should also not be "clumsy"—a friend should not lie or flatter, but should know how to respond in a way that is helpful. In places, Günderrode indicates that an important element of this proper response of a friend is simply wanting to engage with the other, and making the effort to respond. She complains:

> I don't know, Gunda, whether I should tell you anything about me, because I can almost certainly assume that you can't take an interest in what I'd like to tell you about me. The onesidedness of our correspondence also stirs up unpleasant feelings in me. I strike tones and always only hear the same monotonous sounds; it makes me almost lose patience that new tones don't alternate with those that have already died away.[64]

It is clear from Günderrode's many letters to Gunda and exhortations for her to write more, and more honestly, that she values Gunda's friendship and would like Gunda to make this effort. In fact, it seems obvious in reading the letters that Günderrode's anger at Gunda is at least partly due to her feeling of rejection from Gunda not making this kind of effort. The letter quoted just above continues:

> You almost become too strange to me to usher you into the most essential [eigentlichsten] parts of my inner world; nonetheless, you're a guest one may not leave standing outside the door. A great quandary. I thought you could be led into a not-too-distant compartment and the actors (thoughts, fantasies, feelings) allowed to perform for you, without letting you come behind the curtains, especially not to see the deepest

[63] Günderrode, letter to Savigny, 25th and 26th December 1803, in Weißenborn, ed., *Ich sende Dir*, 112.
[64] Günderrode, letter to Gunda, 20th September 1801, in Weißenborn, ed., *Ich sende Dir*, 81. See also Günderrode and Gunda, letter to Savigny, 1st and 3rd January 1804, 113–15.

> workings. —But I can't do that Gunda, at least it's too difficult for me. I must either close the theatre altogether or unveil what is deepest too.[65]

Günderrode wants her friends to know her not only in her most overt and public characteristics, but intimately, including the parts normally kept hidden from the world. This requires an effort both from oneself, in revealing these deeper aspects of one's personality, and from the friend, in engaging with them and reflecting them back truly, without flattery but also without clumsiness. It is clear that Günderrode would like Gunda to be closer to her, a better friend, but does not feel Gunda is making this kind of effort.

What Günderrode describes as characteristic of true friendship is an attitude of open-heartedness and care in engaging with others—both in expressing oneself and in reflecting the other. She contrasts this approach with a more superficial interaction with others, which she claims both Gunda and Clemens, in light of their own superficiality, better deserve from her:

> From Gunda one must not expect indulgence, mercy, support, I thought, and it's true: anyone who entrusts their fortunes to you trusts the shifting sea. You're only a spectacle; one must enjoy you, and not more, for you are truly a beautiful multifarious play suited to beholding. Anyone who takes you otherwise doesn't understand you, anyone who wants you otherwise harms the pleasure they could enjoy in viewing you. It's certainly so: with respect to you I will accustom myself more and more to observation.[66]

Similarly, Günderrode writes to Clemens: "it's good to observe you, and pleasant; but one should only want to observe you. It this view true or false?"[67]

Importantly, both Clemens and Gunda, the recipients of these accusations of superficiality, were disappointing and ultimately untrustworthy acquaintances for Günderrode. Among other things, Gunda married Savigny, from whom Günderrode herself was hoping for a proposal. Clemens, meanwhile, wavered between praising Günderrode's work and denigrating it, pressured her romantically, and seems to have tried to sabotage Günderrode's relationships with Savigny and Creuzer.[68] The

[65] Günderrode, letter to Gunda, 20th September 1801, in Weißenborn, ed., *Schatten eines Traumes*, 81.
[66] Günderrode, letter to Gunda, 22nd August 1806, in Weißenborn, ed., *Ich sende Dir*, 170.
[67] Günderrode, letter to Clemens, 1803 (?) in Wolf, ed., *Schatten eines Traumes*, 212.
[68] See letters from Clemens to Günderrode, 1st May and 2nd June 1804 and Günderrode's responses in May and on 10th June in *Weißenborn*, ed., *Ich sende Dir*, 131–36, 142–47, 151. For discussion of Günderrode's relationship with Clemens, and her friendships in general,

changeability of their selves from one moment to another, and the different levels of trust that could be placed in them at different times, were thus not simply theoretical issues for Günderrode. Rather, their variable behaviour highlighted the need for relationships with them to be based on the current interaction, rather than on past associations.

Despite the lack of stability in the self in Günderrode's conception, she does not view the self as inherently lacking possibilities of relating to others in enduring, reliable, rewarding ways. In fact, as we have seen, she draws a strong contrast between fulfilling relationships and those that falter at superficiality. The contrast she describes is not between fleeting appearances and a stable self that underlies them—as we can see from her claims that knowing one of Clemens' "moments" does not equip her to know him at other times and that Gunda may have changed unrecognisably from Günderrode's image of her. Nor is the contrast one between a stable appearance (for example, the stable self that Bohrer sees as provided through social roles, or, alternatively, a self stabilised through the construction of a narrative about its origins and nature) and a changeable set of experiences that lies beneath it, perhaps a set of experiences that are not or cannot be shared (as Bohrer describes in Brentano's and Kleist's accounts). Rather, the contrast that Günderrode sees is one that exists between a changeable, superficial surface that others can relate to only externally, can only watch without trying to understand or go deeper, and a changeable interior existence that can be shared (always only in part) with those one trusts, who also share their own inner lives with you.

On Günderrode's model, this open-hearted sharing of one's interior existence is the way in which a reliable, functioning self can be built, one that has a positive self-image and enjoys fulfilling connections to others. In this relationship, in which one person expresses themselves as openly as they can and the other "echoes" or reflects their expressions back to them, one is not led astray by the judgments—hostile or flattering—of strangers. No self-image provided by one's friends can ever be fully accurate or sufficient to the entirety of one's personhood, but the goal is not complete accuracy of self-knowledge or of knowledge of the other. Rather, the continual sharing and reflecting of experiences creates pairs and groups of always-changing individuals in interaction with each other. In good relationships, these interactions are pleasurable and rewarding, as individuals learn about themselves and others, experience the joy of sharing and of deep and earnest

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see Margarete Lazarowicz, *Karoline von Günderrode. Porträt einer Fremden*, *Europäische Hochschulschriften* I.923 (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1986), esp. 320–33.

communication, and facilitate each other's agency and development. On the other hand, interactions with others can also be unsatisfying or even toxic—sources of self-doubt, insecurity, anxiety, even self-loathing, and relationships that close off possibilities for agency and self-expression rather than help to proliferate them. As noted by one of Günderrode's biographers, Günderrode seems to have several of the latter in her life,[69] but it is a strength of her model of the socially constituted self that it explains both this kind of relationship and the more fruitful and rewarding forms of friendship that she longed for and knew were possible.

7. Conclusion

Günderrode's account of the socially-constituted self and its relationships with others is intuitively plausible. Most of us are fortunate enough to have experienced relationships that bring us pleasure and allow us to be our best selves, as well as unsatisfying or toxic relationships. We also know from experience that we are rarely if ever fully transparent to ourselves, let alone to others; that we change over time; and that our identity depends in part on the ways in which we are reflected in the perceptions of others, both through the stories they tell about us and the ways they interact with us in the moments we spend together. As Bohrer argues, having recognised the self as changeable and untransparent Günderrode needs to provide a new basis for fulfilling and functional relationships with others, an alternative to the kinds of relationships that are mediated by social roles and relatively static identities. What is astonishing is the extent to which Günderrode progressed towards theorising such a basis, in terms of the ways that others stabilise the self, not only through narrative but also by providing images in which one can see oneself, as one is now, reflected in a way that is easier to grasp than one's own, private experiences of oneself. This has largely been missed in readings of Günderrode's work. The positive and productive aspects of Günderrode's philosophical thought have also been masked by her unhappiness and suicide, which have guided commentators to interpret her statements about selfhood as self-descriptions of an unhappy, unhealthy self. Meanwhile, her disappointments in love and friendship have been interpreted as *entailed by* her understanding of the possibilities for interactions of the self with others, rather than only potentially *explained by* this model: as examples of relationships with individuals who were unwilling to share themselves in ways that Günderrode thought essential for rewarding friendships. Günderrode's accounts of self-identity and friendship explain the

[69] Lazarowicz, *Porträt einer Fremden*, 279, 366.

formation of both positive and negative self-image, of both more and less accurate self-image, and of both fulfilling and unfulfilling (and more and less authentic) relationships with others.

For Günderrode, interactions with others can be profound and genuine, despite the impossibility of ever knowing each other fully and with complete accuracy. In other words, the incomplete communication or sharing of experiences does not entail unfulfilling ways of being together. A true friendship is based on mutual effort in sharing aspects of oneself and engaging with the other's effort to share themselves. This effort is intrinsically satisfying, but is also important for creating a functional conception of the self. The stability that Bohrer claims is necessary for a functioning self and that he argues is lacking in Günderrode's account is in fact presented by Günderrode as most importantly mediated by others' stabilising images of oneself, rather than through narrative coherence or homogeneity or continuity of self-experience. Whether this stabilising influence is joyful and liberating, multiplying possibilities for expressing aspects of the self and for agency, or whether it is oppressive and constraining, depends on the actual relationships in which one finds oneself.