

"TOO MANLY IS YOUR SPIRIT":
ANNETTE VON DROSTE-HÜLSHOFF

by Gertrud Bauer Pickar

In 1961, Annette von Droste-Hülshoff (1797-1848) was included in the first volume of *German Men of Letters*, an honor which in the series' subsequent five volumes has been accorded only two other women.¹ It is rightfully bestowed upon her as the author of some of the finest poetry and narrative prose of the nineteenth century and as the first woman of literary stature in modern German literature. There is, moreover, an ironic justice in the inclusion among those "men of letters" of a woman who lamented in one of her best known and highly personal poems, "Wär ich ein Mann doch mindestens nur" ("If I were at least a man!"),² and who as a seventeen-year-old wrote the following lines in the thinly veiled autobiographical epic fragment *Berta*, criticizing her own temperament:

Zu männlich ist dein Geist, strebt viel zu hoch
Hinauf, wo dir kein Weiberauge folgt;
Das ist's, was ängstlich dir den Busen engt
Und dir die jugendliche Wange bleicht.
Wenn Weiber über ihre Sphäre steigen,
Entfliehn sie ihrem eignen bessern Selbst.³

In the process of achieving literary acclaim, Annette von Droste-Hülshoff has been assessed on varying bases and from widely divergent points of view. She has been classified a realist, a romantic, a pre-Impressionist, and a forerunner of *Heimatkunst* and of naturalism; she has been categorized both as typical and as atypical of the Biedermeier art of her day.⁴ She has been proclaimed and accused of being a political conservative and of affiliation with the *Jung Deutschen*.⁵ Her works have been probed for their social criticism, their folklore, their Catholic, Protestant, or pietistic biases, their traditional religious attitudes or their expression of personal faith (or the loss

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thereof); she has even been ranked among the "great religious men" of her time.⁶ Critics have pronounced her to be "totally Germanic,"⁷ typically nordic,⁸ and representative of the inherently Germanic tension between the "nordic" and "phälian" characteristics of her heritage.⁹ She has been proclaimed a natural scientist, worthy to be ranked with Goethe.¹⁰ Even her health and physical characteristics have been given literary significance. She has been described as having "a psychic constitution, which is typical for the tubercular";¹¹ her detailed nature studies have been attributed to her myopia,¹² and her sensitivity to her regional environs has been explained by her possession of "an extraordinary equipment for sensory perception, a hypersensitive ear, an all but prehensile eye, a skin-sense that reacted to subtle variations of atmosphere," and a "tactile sense" which was "exceptionally acute."¹³

On the other hand, although there has been no thorough examination of her works as the product of a woman author *per se*, there has been a persistent tendency through the years to discuss her works and their literary merit in terms of masculine and feminine features. Literary appraisals of her works, not just during her own lifetime, but also up into the most recent secondary literature, have continued to show far more frequently than one would suspect a clear feminine bias. As early as 1844, a critic in the *Allgemeine Zeitung* noted that her poems were "completely feminine in their innermost center, in their essence, and yet at the same time paired with the most masculine power of expression" and commented upon the absence of any coquetry of feeling and the fact that everything was "internally healthy."¹⁴ A few years later, Landois, who referred to her as "this true daughter of Westphalia," described her as a "gracious, benevolent fairy," who scattered the richest treasures on the modest fields of her homeland, even though she often disturbed the reader by enticing him in "feminine caprice" into dark and mystifying enigmas.¹⁵ Frequently the judgment is expressed in comparative terms that reveal the social and sexual values of their source. Thus Friedrich Engels's own conservatism on the women's issue comes clearly to the fore in his essentially positive review of her poetry: "Aber wenn der Pietismus den Mann . . . lächerlich macht, so steht der kindliche Glaube dem Fräulein von Droste gut. Es ist eine mißliche Sache um die religiöse Freisinnigkeit der Frauen. Die George Sands, die Mistreß Shelleys sind selten; nur zu leicht zernagt der Zweifel das weibliche Gemüt und erhebt den Verstand zu einer Macht, der es bei keinem Weibe haben darf."¹⁶ Nearly a century later, Friedrich Gundolf noted that Droste combined "the purity of a priestly nature with the linguistic power of an extremely highly educated woman" and commented that she, because of "her honest character and her binding faith," was protected from "the dangers of trying to please by literary accommodation and those of cultural-political ambition, to which Bettina von Arnim succumbed," a statement which clearly indicates the role perceived as proper for a woman author.¹⁷

A related and persistent phenomenon is the perception of male and female characteristics in style and content in her works. Joachim Müller ascribed to Droste a unique place in German literature "in her austere and disciplined form, in her hard and masculine posture"¹⁸ and Walter Silz spoke of her "feminine affection for what is small and 'heimlich.'"¹⁹ Heinz Kindermann, in discussing her early literary dependency upon "the masculine model of Stolberg," concludes at one point that the last lines of "Unruhe," a poem he finds similar to Stolberg's "Ozeans Unendlichkeit," already indicate Droste's "entire poetic profile," which he perceives as deriving "its total strength of spiritual mastery of the world from her femininity."²⁰ Similarly, Franz Heyden, in discussing Droste in his volume on German poetry, speaks of "the bonds of origin, of blood, of unfulfilled femininity" and sees her works as uniting "masculine and feminine yearning."²¹ Rudolf Ibel, in trying to summarize the bases of Droste's unique creativity, determined its deepest source to be "her virginity," concluding that her virginity allowed her "dimensions of experience beyond the limits of a man, which could scarcely be granted a woman who had the physical fulfillment and physical and spiritual balance found in motherhood."²² In his early work, even the acknowledged Droste scholar Clemens Heselhaus wrote of "this woman who was talented like a man" ("diese männlich begabte Frau") and assessed her conservatism as a reflection of the concern with preservation inherent in her own "great maternalism."²³ Droste is described in quite similar terms in the popular Rowohlt monograph published in 1967. There Peter Berglar noted that her response to the pressure of time and environment was "a totally feminine reaction" and asserted that she threw herself, a "maelstrom of feminine creative power," against the barriers and structures of a world dominated by men and fathers, breaking through them, in a fashion "until then unheard of and never before given poetic expression."²⁴ Berglar also continues uncritically the tradition of attributing to Droste's encounter with Levin Schücking her literary achievement, while preserving essentially intact the socially acceptable image of her as friend and mother-surrogate for this younger man: "It was this horrible thorn of knowledge of the hopelessness of her love, at times accepted heroically and at other times painfully suppressed, which enabled Droste to attain the ultimate in art."²⁵ Berglar leaves it, however, to Emil Staiger to project from his own personal perspective the discomfort that Schücking might have experienced in such a situation:

Wie sollte er der alternden Frau begegnen, wenn sie, verwirrt von seiner Nähe, die Tonart der Liebe sacht vertauschte, ihre Würde vergass und sich zum schwärmenden Mädchen machte, als meinte sie das Leben von neuem beginnen zu können?²⁶

In all fairness to the critics, it must be noted that the designation of male and female characteristics was one with which Annette herself was familiar. Her friend and mentor Schlüter referred to her "masculine soul" in a letter to

her (March 27, 1835), and Levin Schücking described her in just such terms in his correspondence to her:

Sie dagegen haben zu weiblicher Beobachtungsgabe einen männlich klaren, ordnenden Verstand bekommen; einen Geist, der mit dem weiblichen Interesse für das Einzelne, Geringe, die Miscelle par.-männlichen Aufschwung von diesem Einzelnen zum Ganzen, von der Miscelle zum System möchte ich sagen, verbindet.²⁷

It is in a sense appropriate that the criticism the young Droste directed toward her semi-autobiographical figure Berta—who exhibited features and desires better suited to a man and clearly inappropriate for a woman—should be reflected in the critical attitudes toward Droste's own literary production. Ironically the term "masculine" is frequently used in the positive assessment of certain features of the literature which she created in part out of her own drive for self-expression and self-realization in the otherwise highly structured and regulated existence she led as a proper member of the landed gentry. It focuses anew upon the interrelationship between her life and her poetry with all the correlative sex-role implications, and indicates the resolution of a problem which in varying form was to remain with her throughout her life. It is only fitting that the charge of masculinity in a non-pejorative sense should come to be associated with her works—with that part of her life which, as will be shown later, was to provide a surrogate existence for her, a realm of freedom and vicarious experience, which in turn permitted her to maintain outwardly a life of appropriate decorum.

The difficulties that faced Droste are clearly in evidence in biographies of her life, and although Annette von Droste-Hülshoff's literary place is assured now on the basis of the literary value of the works themselves, that recognition was not easily gained. Despite her statement in 1843 to her friend Elise Rüdiger that she sought fame only in the following century²⁸—a remark which can be understood in part as a rejection of the popularity-seeking she perceived in other writers she knew and in part as a hope that proper acclaim for her own works could yet be forthcoming—she showed herself throughout her life to be sensitive to the reactions of others and deeply concerned with the reception of her work, as well as with her own literary development. She had to struggle hard and long both for the publication of her works and for literary recognition.

Writing in 1815 to her mentor Matthias Sprickmann, himself earlier affiliated with the Göttinger Hainbund, Droste commented that she felt her skill improving; she noted the favorable reaction she received when reading her works to friends at the request of her mother, but added her concern that "these people understand so little about it, for they are usually women, from whom I have seen little proof of pure and sound taste."²⁹ On another occasion she mentioned the unwelcome praise and criticism from those whose judgment she did not respect, commenting that she often did not know

whether she was more disturbed by their praise or their criticism, and adding, "As for the praise, I have had to lean hard upon my own judgment, not to strike out some insignificant and just passable passages, which have become completely repugnant to me because of inappropriate praise."³⁰

Although her poetic talent was recognized early in the family—her uncle is reported to have announced when Annette was seven that a second Sappho was budding in her³¹—their pride in her accomplishments waned as her interest in literary expression continued and as her works strayed from subjects and forms they considered suitable. When Droste's first book was published under the name of Anna Elisabeth v. D.... H...., she ruefully recorded the reaction of her family, the condemnation of the work as "pure rubbish, . . . unintelligible, confused," and their questioning, "how a seemingly sensible person could have written such stuff." "Now they all open their mouths up wide and can't comprehend how I could so embarrass myself," she related to her sister. Of even greater concern to her was the fact that only a limited number of copies were sold and that her poetry received almost no critical notice.³² In a subsequent letter she reports having read only two of the reviews, those of Levin Schücking and Henriette von Hohenhausen, commenting, "both of them were brilliant enough, of course, but they won't do the job, since one is by a female, the other by an acquaintance."³³ These concerns were to remain with her. Writing to her sister two years later (June 30, 1841), she reported, "I receive one excellent review after another; this one is already the sixth and some of the others are even more favorable than this one, and yet, despite it all, the book is selling so poorly. . . ."³⁴ She also mentioned the remarks of a certain "Engel" who commented favorably upon her work³⁵—it was Friedrich Engels, who also took the opportunity in his commentary to chastise the German reading public for not taking the time to appreciate poetry such as hers.³⁶

In literary matters, the otherwise docile and compliant Droste could be adamant about her intentions and desires; she opposed Levin Schücking's well-intended improvements and alterations with a decisiveness not sufficiently appreciated by critics, who prefer to see her as "oddly deferent to the opinions of others about her works."³⁷ On one such occasion in a letter to Schücking, she requested in unequivocal terms that he not alter her texts:

Levin, I would gladly do anything I can for you; now give me a promise in return, and indeed a serious, inviolable one, your word of honor, as you would give it and keep it to a man, that you will not arbitrarily change even one syllable of my poems. On this point I am infinitely more sensitive than you yet know and would especially now, after having warned you so urgently, at most try to compose myself outwardly, but I would never forgive you and could not forestall an inner cooling toward you.³⁸

The added emphasis that he give and keep his word as if to a man indicates the seriousness of her demand and implies as well her perception that a promise

made to a woman was considered less binding. In the same letter, she commented further, "It may occasionally harm me, that I go my own way so inflexibly and do not permit the smallest peacock feather in my crow's pelt, but nevertheless I wish this would be recognized."³⁹ Although she would on occasion offer alternative versions for him to choose, the words were to be hers at any expense.

The publication of Droste's novella *Judenbuche* in the Cotta journal *Morgenblatt* in 1842 represented a major breakthrough for recognition of her as a significant author. Even here, though, her pleasure was diminished by the suggestion that the work had been written by Schücking. She requests in her letter to Levin that the alternative passages she had mailed him be shown in *her* handwriting to end such rumors.⁴⁰ With the publication of her second volume by Cotta in 1844, however, her reputation was assured.

If one were to review her life, it is clear that the greatest problem she had to overcome in her development as an author was one she quite literally inherited, for the impact of her sex, her upbringing, her religion, and her social and economic status is undeniable. Critics have long pointed to these restraints upon her freedom and upon her poetic development and have described these factors as handicaps to her poetic calling.⁴¹ Even some of the friends permitted her, such as Schlüter, have been judged to have exerted a harmful influence upon her artistic growth.⁴²

The facts are irrefutable—she was indeed at the beck and call of her mother throughout her entire life and had to give her an accounting of her behavior even when she was away. Extensive demands on her time, her energy, and her health, which was frail at best, were made by her family, whose membership was extensive—there were over eighty relatives on her mother's side alone. Her letters document both her allegiance to family and its control over her life and her activities. A few examples should suffice: she had to ask her father's permission to enter into correspondence with a woman to whom she had been introduced;⁴³ her mother forbade her contact with Ferdinand Freiligrath in person or by mail (and Annette apparently never challenged that decision); at forty, she still needed her mother's permission to publish her first poems semi-anonymously; when Schlüter wanted to publish some of her religious poetry, she had to ask her mother first,⁴⁴ and she subsequently requested a minor change in them in response to family discomfort.⁴⁵ She wrote August von Haxthausen in 1841 she would take up her work on *Bei uns zu Lande auf dem Lande* again, only if her mother, to whom she intended to read the finished portions, approved of those pages and of her continuing with the project. She was concerned that her family was so clearly identifiable in the character descriptions and in fact never did complete the work.⁴⁶ The family was upset with her work *Die Schlacht im Loener Bruch*, because it was too sympathetic toward the historical figure Christian von Braunschweig and did not clearly enough side with the Catholics. Against her better judgment she yielded to

family pressures and attempted to write a comedy⁴⁷ which was never judged successful and brought her only the ire of the literary circle in Münster which she had satirized.⁴⁸

Droste was always acutely aware of her family's feelings and of any discomfiture her relatives experienced as a result of her literary activities. From remarks her mother addressed to her sister Jenny, Droste readily perceived how it pained "the members of her class, 'that a girl of nobility expose herself so to public opinion.'"⁴⁹ There is no doubt that her position as an unmarried woman of the upper class was expected to be one of seclusion, which, as Ronald Schneider has pointed out, included also the avoidance of literary publicity.⁵⁰

Droste, however, had another reason for trying to avoid arousing the family's displeasure—not only did she dislike any disharmony in the house,⁵¹ she also sought to project jealously the degree of literary and mental freedom she had managed to wrest from the social commitments of family and position. She wanted to jeopardize neither her work's poetic integrity nor the time she could devote to writing. On one occasion she expressed her concern that Münster gossip about her and Levin Schücking might necessitate her giving up that relationship. She attempted to forestall such gossip not only because the relationship was so important to her but also because it could cost her "the freedom gained only through struggle, so slowly and with such effort . . . (inasmuch as I can call the passive indulgence of my family toward my way of life freedom)."⁵²

Fortunately, her family as a whole also remained ignorant of her "Westphälischen Schilderungen aus einer westphälischen Feder" ("Westphalian descriptions from a Westphalian pen") which appeared anonymously in Guido Görres's publication *Historisch-politischen Blättern* in 1845 and which predictably caused quite a stir at the time. She did feel the full hostility of her family, however, after Schücking's novel *Die Ritterbürtigen* appeared in 1846. It was critical of the Westphalian nobility and she was suspected of having betrayed her heritage and her class by having told "in-house" stories to her friend. Her reaction was vehement and directed not against the family but against Levin Schücking. She referred to his work as "Giftmischereien" ("mixtures of poisons") and stated, "Schücking has treated me like my most gruesome mortal enemy," and she condemned all those who sought rapid success—"O God, how far can authorial vanity and the mania to create an effect in the world lead!"⁵³

One incident, however, which has been cited to indicate the strength of her family ties and the control of the family over her, deserves special attention because of the light it sheds upon the manner in which she met the demands of her position as an accommodating and dutiful daughter of the house, sensitive to the pressures of family, position, and social expectations, while maintaining a degree of independence and not sacrificing what was important to her as a

publishing author. In the autumn of 1845, her brother Werner requested that she no longer contribute to the literary supplement of the *Kölnische Zeitung* since it was attacking Catholicism. It was his duty to inform her of the situation, he wrote, because it was now a matter of honor for her to desist from further interaction with that paper. In her response, Droste promised to submit no further materials, but added that she would prefer not to break officially with the paper. If pressed for more contributions, she would simply reply that she was working on a larger project which permitted her no time for other items. In addition, she indicated the possibility that poems submitted earlier to Schücking might yet appear in that paper. These, however, she assured her brother four times, were quite proper—she referred twice to them as “very moral” (once with the additional comment that two poems even had religious content), remarked that they were “for me in any case, thoroughly honorable poems,” and concluded by noting that even their mother agreed in this appraisal of the poems.⁵⁴

Droste further suggested discontinuing her contributions to all the papers, taking as her own position her brother's view that since most of them had taken a turn for the worse, the association with them in the future promised little honor, and adding a reason for ceasing to publish in the “good ones” as well, an argument she knew he would find convincing: they demanded greater learning and rhetorical skills than she possessed and often led to feuds, in which it would be improper for a woman to be entangled. As one reads further, her own reasons become clearer—she wished to retrieve the poems quietly, rather than to inform the publishers of her decision, to avoid their ire. She did not wish to risk antagonizing them and drawing thereby “a few dozen sharp, satirical pens to my throat . . . , who will certainly be clever enough to attack me not from the Catholic side, but from the purely poetic side, in order to ruin if possible my literary reputation.”⁵⁵ Indirectly her own concern, one quite different from her brother's, emerges: it was not the anti-Catholic bias of the paper that bothered her, but her own reputation as author. She wanted the poems back because she was not satisfied with their quality: “they were made in too great a hurry and while I was in physically poor health and are complete failures, and . . . a poor poem can do more harm to one's reputation than twenty excellent ones can repair.”⁵⁶ She complied with Werner's request, but in her own manner and for her own reasons.⁵⁷

Thus Annette von Droste-Hülshoff maintained her position as dutiful and loving daughter, sister, aunt, cousin, and friend, collecting seals and other small items, tending the family sick, attending to house chores, visiting back and forth, and maintaining a voluminous and gossipy correspondence with family and friends—and eking out moments and hours for herself and her inner life of fantasizing and of writing, two activities so intimately interrelated in their purpose and function for Droste. Hers was to be an inner emancipation, a compromise situation not so unlike the inner emigration that was an

alternative for those who chose a passive route in face of restrictive political rule.⁵⁸

Her own literary works attest to the fact that the resolution was not quickly nor easily attained. The sentiment expressed in the passage from *Berta* cited in the opening paragraph of this paper is reaffirmed in additional passages in that work and finds poetic expression in her poem "Unruhe," written around her nineteenth birthday. She clearly identifies the attitudes and frustrations expressed in it as hers in a letter to Sprickmann, where she wrote of the poem, "it depicts completely the real condition of my soul, at that time and now as well, even though this almost feverish disquietude has diminished somewhat with the disappearance of my indisposition."⁵⁹

The poem is characterized by a conscious desire for adventure, for freedom:

O, ich möchte wie ein Vogel fliehen,
Mit den hellen Wimpeln möcht' ich ziehen,
Weit, o weit, wo noch kein Fußtritt schallte,
Keines Menschen Stimme widerhallte,
Noch kein Schiff durchschnitt die flücht'ge Bahn.⁶⁰

and for escape from the confines of the life she is assigned to live:

Rastlos treibt's mich um im engen Leben,
Und zu Boden drücken Raum und Zeit.⁶¹

The conflict between expectation and yearnings is most poignantly expressed in the lines:

Fesseln will man uns am eig'nen Herde,
Uns're Sehnsucht nennt man Wahn und Traum.⁶²

Resignation, however, is the only alternative she sees to the pains of frustration:

Stille, stille, mein törichtes Herz!
Willst du denn ewig vergebens dich sehnen,
Mit der Unmöglichkeit hadernde Tränen
Ewig vergießen in fruchtlosem Schmerz?⁶³

The words "törichtes Herz," "ewig vergebens," "Unmöglichkeit," and "fruchtlosem Schmerz" indicate clearly her incipient acceptance of the hopelessness of pursuing her aspirations and desires for a different life. She must be satisfied with the small pleasures about her and leave to the sea the powerful images of freedom which can never be hers: "Sei ruhig, Herz und lerne dich bescheiden," she tells herself.⁶⁴

The form the resolution of the conflict was ultimately to take was one tenuously supplied already in *Berta*, where the heroine finds relief and release in playing the harp:

Ja, meine Harfe ist mir jetzt mein alles,
In Lust und Trauer treue Freundin mir.

Wenn dann der Schmerz die Seele mir durchzittert,
 Dann spielt mein Finger in der Harfe Saiten,
 Und ihr entschwebt ein klagender Gesang.⁶⁵

From her mother she had learned both needlework, for Droste the traditional "appropriate" womanly activity,⁶⁶ and music—which she tellingly refers to as "das Reich der Töne," a description which in itself contains the promise of autonomy, of flight into another domain, another realm. For Berta, the latter proved to be the compelling force in her life:

Durch sie [die Musik] ward mir der Harfe süßer Trost,
 Die leise Sprache meiner Silbersaiten,
 Die bald mit ihrer sanften Harmonie
 mich ganz hinwegzog von dem hellen Rahmen.⁶⁷

Music provided her with an escape from the restricting confines of the reality about her:

Mit süßem Zauber meinen Geist einführend
 Der kalten Wirklichkeit beengten Schranken
 Ins helle Reich der goldnen Phantasie
 Und dorthin, wo uns ewiger Lichterglanz glühet.⁶⁸

"Am Turme,"⁶⁹ written in the winter of 1842-43 and perhaps Droste's best known poem, restates in a controlled and succinct poetic form the conflict between personal longings and social conventions, expressed earlier in "Unruhe" and *Berta*, both indicating the continuing presence of the problem for Droste and clearly linking it to the sex-roles of her day. Written in the first person, it vividly expresses the personal yearnings of a young woman, who is standing high in a tower, overlooking the water, and letting the wind toss her hair:

O wilder Geselle, o toller Fant,
 Ich möchte dich kräftig umschlingen,
 Und, Sehne an Sehne, zwei Schritte vom Rand
 Auf Tod und Leben dann ringen!⁷⁰

Looking at the waves below, she wishes she could spring into the surf, "Und jagen durch den korallinen Wald / Das Walroß, die lustige Beute!"⁷¹ Spying a boat, she wishes she could be on a battling ship, "Das Steuerruder ergreifen / Und zischend über das brandende Riff / Wie eine Seemöve streifen."⁷² In the last stanza, she mentions yet other active lives she wishes she could pursue: "Wär ich ein Jäger auf freier Flur, / Ein Stück nur von einem Soldaten, / Wär ich ein Mann doch mindestens nur."⁷³ The poem concludes with a poignant description of the contrasting fate allowed her:

Nun muß ich sitzen so fein und klar,
 Gleich einem artigen Kind,
 Und darf nur heimlich lösen mein Haar
 Und lassen es flattern im Winde!⁷⁴

The yearning for freedom and adventure expressed earlier in "Unruhe," is linked here far more clearly to a series of male activities—hunting, fishing, fighting, and sailing—which are unequivocally associated, even in the poem, with being a man, hence the impossibility of her partaking in any such active life. Her role as a woman—to remain docile and childlike—is clearly understood; only in private, only in secret, can she dream of a different existence and feel the fury of the wind in her hair. She can only imagine the life of a man, filled with excitement and activity—but in that imagination lies the potential of the vicarious experience, and this indeed appears to have been the solution Annette found, one which for her was bound intimately to literary creation. In writing her poetry, she was able to create worlds filled with battle, boar hunts, shipwrecks, feuds, assassinations, conquests, and rescues, to move at will into the past or to faraway lands; there she could evoke the demonic forces of nature or witness supernatural apparitions and incidents, as well as capture quieter moments of lyrical nature description or of introspection.

That poetry had indeed become for her the source of comfort, of release, and vicarious life, and the means for reconciling external expectations and inner drives, is clearly expressed in the poem "Lebt wohl,"⁷⁵ written in 1844 after she had said farewell to Schücking and his bride. It is one of the last and most expressive testimonies to the power of her fantasy and the relief it offered her, and it repeats and reaffirms the thoughts expressed in "Am Turme." Although she may be deserted, she will not be alone as long as the poetic vision and the means of poetic expression are hers—

So lange noch der Arm sich frei
Und waltend mir zum Äther streckt
Und jedes wilden Geiers Schrei
In mir die wilde Muse weckt⁷⁶

she states triumphantly. As long as she can write, and in writing soar above the world, the expanses of territory and all the experiences it can offer are hers. The drive for freedom, for adventure, for self-expression had thus become sublimated in her artistic production in a manner which proved to be decisive for her, both in her life and in her literary works, and which permitted her to live in an uneasy peace with the social structures of her day.

Substantiation of this solution can be found in her works, where, not surprisingly, the role accorded female figures is essentially passive. The acceptable behavior ranges from submission and acquiescence to verbal intercession, since the only action permitted a woman in keeping with her role is a verbal one—she may pass on information to someone who can act: a man. (The latter course of action, however, may be totally ineffective and can on occasion lead to serious repercussions for the woman.)

Indicating her belief in Berta's statement, "Nur wenige sind ihres Schicksals Herr, / Das Weib wohl nie und selten nur der Mann,"⁷⁷ Droste's works

indicate that the range of options for the woman in such situations is limited—she can retreat as did Cordelia's nun, first into the private rooms of her home and then ultimately to the convent; she may find release through death—either violently as did the wife in "Der Graf von Thal" or as an answer to prayer, as Theatilde did; or she may continue to suffer, preferably in silence. (Judging from the texts, one of the most desirable characteristics in a woman, especially a wife, seems to be her silence.)

A woman who exhibits any behavioral pattern except acquiescence or any action beyond verbal communication is clearly treated as a negative figure, and, not surprisingly, exceedingly few such figures appear in Droste's works. One notes only Helene in the ballad "Die Schwestern," who leaves the innocence of the country for the city; Laurette in *Berta*, spoiled by life at the court; Theodora of "Des Arztes Vermächtnis," who chose to follow her passion, and not the husband selected by the family; and Cäcilia in *Walter*. The latter, self-conscious and self-confident, motivated by the desire for wealth and power, governed by her mind and not her heart, cool, composed, and scheming in her behavior, and experienced in love, is proud, capable, and calculating, and presents by far the most detailed portrayal of an evil woman in Droste's works. Incidentally, not just those women who are aggressive by nature are singled out for criticism, but also those who become independent by accident. Thus widows, too, are perceived as losing some of their femininity, since dealing directly with the world tends to harden them—"Das Regieren tut überall keinem Weibe gut" ("Governing has never become a woman"), one of the figures in *Ledwina* states unequivocally.⁷⁸

Though not as obvious as the character portrayals and the depiction of situations and problems faced by women, the ramifications of Droste's views and her resolution of her conflicts are visible in the structural and stylistic characteristics of her works. While more subtle in nature, they are of singular importance. The frequent identification of the narrative or lyrical ego as masculine has been noted by critics, as has the usual identification of narrative perspective with a male figure and the preponderance of masculine characters in her works. The association between these features and Droste's own identification of all activity, including artistic creation, with the male, has not been clearly stated. They are, however, clearly related, not only to her identification of herself with the male figures in her works, but also to her own perception of her creative talent and its artistic expression as essentially masculine. Her own ambivalent attitude toward women writers and critics, her struggle to define and defend the role of the poet (or author), and on some occasions, even of the woman poet, and toward the writing profession in its entirety are similarly related to these concepts. For her, however, the form of her artistic expression and the personal release it provided represented the solution to what had appeared to be an irreconcilable inner tension, and one which ultimately brought her fulfillment, and even the recognition she sought.

NOTES

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1. Brigitte E. Schatzky, "Annette von Droste-Hülshoff," pp. 81-97, in *German Men of Letters*, ed. by Alex Natan (London: Oswald Wolff, 1961). In the second volume (1963) Gertrud von le Fort was included, in the fourth (1966), Ingeborg Bachmann.

2. The line occurs in the poem "Am Turme," Annette von Droste-Hülshoff, *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. by Karl Schulte Kemminghausen (München: Georg Müller, 1925), vol. I, p. 71.

3. "Too manly is your spirit, striving far too high into heights where no woman's eye can follow. It's this that constricts your breast with such anxiety and makes your youthful cheeks grow pale. If women climb beyond their sphere, they flee their own, better selves." *Werke*, vol. IV, p. 201. *Berta. Trauerspiel in swei Aufzügen* was not completed, although notes indicate a third act was planned. This passage, which also appeared in Schatzky's article, is frequently cited as an example of the young Droste's anguished desire for freedom. Such passages cannot be dismissed as simply as Emil Staiger wishes by viewing them as the expression of a fleeting concern and deprecating their significance by noting their frequent citation in earlier literature, "especially by representatives of women's emancipation." Emil Staiger, *Annette von Droste-Hülshoff*, third ed. (Frauenfeld: Huber, 1967), p. 20. Droste's works give indication of her continuing concern with the conflict between personal inclination and prescribed behavior in direct statement, depicted situation, and attempts at alleviating the problem.

4. Friedrich Sengle, "Zum geschichtlichen Ort Annettes von Droste-Hülshoff (1797-1848)," in *Sprache und Bekenntnis. Hermann Kunisch zum 70. Geburtstag* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1971), pp. 235-247. For the most succinct introduction to the discussion of the literature on Droste, see Ronald Schneider, *Annette von Droste-Hülshoff* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1977) (Sammlung Metzler, no. 153). Cf. also Clemens Heselhaus, "Statt einer Wirkungsgeschichte, Die Aufnahme der postumen Werke der Droste," *Jahrbuch der Droste-Gesellschaft* 5 (1972): 23-40, and Günter Häntzschel, "Annette von Droste-Hülshoff," in Jost Hermand and Manfred Windfuhr, eds., *Zur Literatur der Restaurationsepoche 1815-1848* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1970), pp. 151-201.

5. Cf. Clemens Heselhaus, "Die Zeitbilder der Droste," *Jahrbuch der Droste-Gesellschaft* 4 (1962): 79-104; Wilhelm Gössmann, "Das politische Zeitbewusstsein der Droste," *Jahrbuch der Droste-Gesellschaft* 5 (1970): 102-122; Wilhelm Gössmann, "Konservativ oder liberal? Heine und die Droste," *Heine-Jahrbuch* 15 (1976): 115-139; and Artur Brall, *Vergangenheit und Vergänglichkeit. Zur Zeiterfahrung und Zeitdeutung im Werk Annettes von Droste-Hülshoff* (Marburg: N. G. Elwer, 1975).

6. Cf. Klemens Möllenbrock, "Die religiöse Existenz Annetens von Droste im theologischen Gesamtbild der Zeit," *Deutsche Vierteljahresschrift* 14 (1936): 441.

7. Adolf Bartels, as quoted in Karl Schulte Kemminghausen, "Der Weg zur Droste. Eine Rückschau," *Westfalen* 23 (1938): 135.

8. Josef Karp, "Das Droste-Problem," *Der Gral* 21 (1926-27): 588.

9. Joachim Müller, *Natur und Wirklichkeit in der Dichtung der Annette von Droste-Hülshoff* (Münster: Aschendorfsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1941). In his introduction he announces his intention to show how "racial presuppositions are poetically realized" by penetrating "into the center of Droste's poetic nature." He claims thereby that "the nature of the feeling for nature and the image of the world" found in her poetry would also "reilluminate the racial potential within the Phalic-Nordic type," p. 8.

10. H. Landois, *Annette Freiin von Droste-Hülshoff als Naturforscherin* (Paderborn:

Schöningh, 1890), p. 10. Cf. Josefine Nettesheim, "Wissen und Dichtung in der ersten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts am Beispiel der geistigen Welt Annettes von Droste-Hülshoff," *Deutsche Vierteljahresschrift* 32 (1958): 521.

11. Peter Berglar, *Annette von Droste-Hülshoff in Selbstzeugnissen und Bilddokumenten* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1967), p. 82.

12. Cf. Schatzky, "Annette von Droste-Hülshoff," p. 91.

13. Walter Silz, "The Poetical Character of Annette von Droste-Hülshoff (1797-1848)," *PMLA* 63 (1948): 979.

14. Cf. Berglar, *Annette von Droste-Hülshoff*, p. 167.

15. Landois, *Annette Freiin von Droste-Hülshoff*, pp. 11, 12, and 14.

16. "But whereas Pietism makes a man appear foolish, childlike faith is most suitable for Miss von Droste. Religious free thinking is a precarious matter for women. Those like George Sand and Mistress Shelly are rare; doubt corrodes far too easily the feminine temper and raises reason to a power which it ought never command in a woman." Quoted in Karl Schulte Kemminghausen, "Annette von Droste-Hülshoff und Fr. Engels," *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Friedrich Schiller-Universität Jena* 5 (1955-56): 440.

17. Friedrich Gundolf, *Romantiker*, Neue Folge (Berlin-Wilmersdorf: Heinrich Keller, 1931), pp. 184f.

18. Müller, *Natur und Wirklichkeit*, p. 1.

19. Silz, "Poetical Character," p. 981.

20. Heinz Kindermann, "Die Droste und der Göttinger Hainbund," *Westfalen* 23 (1938): 125.

21. Franz Heyden, *Deutsche Lyrik* (Hamburg, Berlin, Leipzig: Hanseatische Verlagsanstalt, 1929), p. 208.

22. Rudolf Ibel, *Weltschau deutscher Dichter* (Hamburg: Christian Wegner, 1948), p. 331. Perhaps the worst form of such sexist interpretation is found in Willi Fehse's *Von Goethe bis Grass. Biografische Porträts zur Literatur* (Bielfeld: Ernst und Werner Giesecking, 1963), where Grecian hyperboles: "Annette was like Pallas Athene. She guarded the heavenly fire and had, at the same time, as much earthiness in her breast as anyone of her sex" (p. 63) are combined with a personal conviction as to the natural role of woman: "Several times the fulfillment of her natural woman's calling was denied her" (p. 63). In this context his assessment of her works: "Annette's poems are bound to her maidenhood and her womanhood, to her religion and her home" (p. 65), is not surprising.

23. Clemens Heselhaus, *Annette von Droste-Hülshoff. Die Entdeckung des Seins in der Dichtung des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Halle [Saale]: Max Niemeyer, 1943), pp. 45 and 64.

24. Berglar, *Annette von Droste-Hülshoff*, p. 11.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 114.

26. "How was he to interact with this aging woman, when she, confused by his proximity, gradually changed the (musical) key of love, forgetting her dignity and turning into a gushing girl, as if she thought she could begin life anew?" Staiger, *Annette von Droste-Hülshoff*, p. 73.

27. "You on the other hand have received, in addition to the feminine talent for observation, a manlike clear and organizing intellect, a mind, which combines, I would say, the womanly interest for the individual, the insignificant, the miscellaneous, with a manlike movement from the specific to the general, from the particular to the system." (Schücking's letter to Droste, Dec. 20, 1840, *Briefe von Annette von Droste-Hülshoff und Levin Schücking*, ed. by Reinhold Conrad Muschler [Leipzig: Grunow, 1928], p. 20.)

28. "My decision is firmer than ever, never to work for pure effect, to follow no fashionable style, to have no other guide than eternally true nature in the maze of the human heart and to turn my back completely on our blasé time and its conditions. I do not wish and do not want to become famous now, but after a hundred years I would like to be read" (*Briefe* II, p. 191).

In a letter to Schücking, she also spoke of becoming famous posthumously but made no prediction as to her eventual fame: "I wish we could spread out our posthumous fame behind us like the tail of a peacock and gaze upon it; but there would surely be many who would be able to see only a pathetic goosetail or nothing at all!" she noted humorously (*Briefe* II, p. 168).

29. *Briefe* I, 14. Her attitude toward women authors is a highly ambivalent one. She herself appears to accept and even to promulgate the view of women as essentially less apt and less qualified for the role of author, an attitude under which she herself suffered, although some of her remarks do indicate that the social conditioning, rather than any innate deficiency, is responsible. Concerning humorous writing, for example, she writes, "In my opinion humor suits only the fewest and least of all the pen of a woman," and, attributing this in part to the "almost too tight constrictions of social mores," concludes, "nothing is more pathetic than humor in tight shoes" (*Briefe* I, pp. 372f.).

Negative views of woman authors abound in her comedy *Perdu! oder Dichter, Verleger und Blaustrümpfe*, as well, but here it appears as if she were, tongue in cheek, presenting the views others espouse rather than expressing her own views. Thus she has Willibald, whom she designates as a poet of mediocre quality, comment that one must be a man to comprehend poems in their deepest sense (*Werke* III, p. 207). Sonderrath (Freiligrath) voices a complaint about over-educated women, which Droste must have heard frequently herself, "Nun, nun, die überbildeten Damen stehn mir doch auch ellenlang zum Halse hinaus" ("These over-educated ladies are already coming out of my ears") (*Werke* III, p. 254).

30. *Briefe* I, p. 29.

31. Amanda Sonnenfels, *Dichterinnen und Freundinnen unserer grossen Dichter* (Berlin: Arthur Tetzlaff, 19[07]), p. 271.

32. *Briefe* I, p. 337. (Jan. 29, 1839).

33. *Briefe* I, p. 357.

34. *Briefe* I, p. 536.

35. *Briefe* I, p. 548.

36. Schulte Kemminghausen, *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift*, p. 440.

37. Silz, "Poetical Character," pp. 978f.

38. *Briefe* II, p. 259.

39. *Briefe* II, p. 260.

40. Ibid.

41. Silz, "Poetical Character," p. 978.

42. Heselhaus, *Annette von Droste-Hülshoff*, p. 100.

43. *Briefe* I, p. 40.

44. *Briefe* I, p. 200.

45. *Briefe* I, pp. 291f.

46. *Briefe* I, p. 547.

"It seemed good to me," she wrote, "and yet I lost suddenly all my courage, because I recognized my dear parents in it so clearly. . . . That was really not my intention. I only wanted to borrow a few traits and otherwise hold to the general character of the region. Now, I fear, every-

one will take it as a portrait, and will treat every frailty, every humorous feature, which I expose to the public, as a horrid sacrilege" (*Briefe* I, p. 547).

47. Droste complained that her family tried everything to convince her that her true talent lay in the humorous mode and that each time she heard their comments, she felt both vexed and indecisive. (*Briefe* I, pp. 372f.) Later, lamenting her lack of literary productivity, she confessed, "it is due in part to the fact that I, having tired to the point of nausea of hearing for twenty years repeatedly how I 'mistook my own talent,' have come to a decision, which itself is fundamentally repugnant to me, that is, to undertake a venture into the comical. So I push away every inclination to do something else energetically and still shy away from that intended work, like a child from a switch." (*Briefe* I, p. 406)

48. Her own views of the literary circle expressed in her letters to her sister and her friends were far less harsh than a reading of the play indicates (*Briefe* I, pp. 335ff, for example).

49. Winfried Woesler, "Die Droste und das 'Feuilleton' der 'Kölnischen Zeitung,'" *Kleine Beiträge zur Droste-Forschung 1971*, ed. by W. Woesler (Lahnstein: Nohr; Münster: Stenderhoff in Komm., 1970).

50. Schneider, *Annette von Droste-Hülshoff*, p. 20.

51. Cf. Woesler, "Die Droste und das 'Feuilleton,'" p. 29.

52. *Briefe* I, p. 542.

53. *Briefe* II, p. 473. Doubtless another factor to be acknowledged here was her feeling of having been betrayed on a personal basis in this matter, as well as in others, by Schücking.

54. Woesler, "Die Droste und das 'Feuilleton,'" p. 27.

55. *Ibid.*, p. 26.

56. *Ibid.*, p. 27.

57. Droste was not above such subterfuges in her letters, if the goal was important to her. In Meersburg she wrote her mother two letters that seriously and intentionally misrepresented her role in procuring the position for Schücking in Meersburg, her relationship with him, and the time she spent with him. She indicates when her letters are intended for the addressee; when privacy in correspondence becomes difficult, she reacts accordingly. On one occasion, for example, she requested that Schücking return to the formal *Sie* in addressing her—she would not want to burn all his letters because of the indiscreet *du*'s (*Briefe* II, p. 45).

W. Gössmann pointed out the game-playing in Droste's letters in his article "Konservativ oder liberal?" where he states that anyone who reads her works with a critical eye to her language cannot overlook the high degree of pretense or disguise, of a kind of hide-and-seek, which became practically a habit for her (p. 122).

58. Although he utilizes the term to describe her attitudes toward issues of political involvement, Gössmann is the first to apply the concept of "inner emigration" to Droste and to associate it with the importance of inner independence for her.

59. *Briefe* I, p. 16.

60. Oh, I'd like to flee like a bird,
With bright ship's pennants travel,
Far, oh far, where no footstep has yet echoed,
No man's voice reverberated,
No ship traversed the transitory course.

61. Restlessly it spins me about in my confined life,
And time and space press me to the ground.

62. They want to fetter us to our own hearth,
Our longings they call delusion and dream.

63. Be still, be still, my foolish heart!
Do you want to long in vain forever,
To shed for this impossibility quarrelsome tears
Eternally in fruitless pain?

64. "Be quiet, heart, and learn to acquiesce." *Werke* IV, pp. 48f.

65. Yes, my harp is now everything to me,
A true friend in joy and sorrow.
When my soul trembles in pain,
My fingers play in the harp strings
And from the harp a plaintive song soars.
(*Werke* IV, p. 211)

66. Needlework is a major conversational topic among the girls in *Berta*, and is recommended to Berta as a healthier and more suitable pastime than her harp.

In other works as well, sewing or embroidery is presented as the appropriate domestic occupation for the women figures. In the summary of the opera *Der Galeerensklave* which Droste intended to write, Charlotte is busily sewing when she is first introduced (*Werke* IV, p. 331), and as the fifth scene opens Annette is seated at an embroidery frame (*Werke* IV, p. 338). Similarly the narrator Bernjen, in *Joseph*, reminiscing fondly about his friend Mevrouw van Ginkel, recalls her sitting behind the tea table, "sich mit den Schnökeln eines Stickmusters abmühend" (*Werke* III, p. 184).

67. Through its music the harp became sweet solace for me,
The soft language of my silver strings
Which with their gentle harmony
Drew me away from the bright [embroidery] frame.

68. With sweet magic leading my spirit
From cold reality's restrictive bounds
Into the bright realm of golden fantasy
And there, where eternal brilliance glows.
(*Werke* IV, p. 208)

69. *Werke* IV, pp. 71f.

70. Oh wild companion, oh crazy fool,
I would like to embrace you mightily
And, sinew on sinew, two steps from the brink,
Wrestle to the death.

71. And through coral forests hunt
The walrus, that carefree prey!

72. To grasp the steering rudder
And sweeping above the surging reef
Streak like a sea gull.

73. If only I were a hunter out in the open
A little bit of a soldier
If I were at least a man!

74. Now I must sit so politely and serenely
Just like a well-behaved child
And may only secretly loosen my hair
And let it flutter in the wind!

75. *Werke* I, p. 357.

