

Annette von Droste-Hülshoff's Covert Call: A Challenge to Woman as Author

Gertrud Bauer Pickar
University of Houston

For many critics and readers, the artistic dilemma of Annette von Droste-Hülshoff (1797-1848) is identified with the lines from her poem "Am Thurme": "Wäre ich ein Mann doch mindestens nur" (HKA I,1:78). The fact that she often attributed a male identity to the poetic personae or poetic voice in her poetry and cast the narrative voice in her epics and prose in the masculine form appears to substantiate the view that Droste indeed perceived serious authorial activity to be innately, and appropriately, male, and has led critics to suggest that when Droste herself wrote, she consequently assumed a surrogate masculine identity.

Droste's early works can be cited to support the view that Droste was ambivalent toward (if not directly critical of) women who indulged their fantasy and strove for artistic expression. Both *Bertha* (1813) and *Ledwina* (1819-1825) exhibit a critical stance toward women who seek artistic expression or who demonstrate a strong proclivity toward fantasy or fantasizing. The theme is stylized and repeated in Droste's later work *Bei uns zu Lande auf dem Lande* (1841), where, reminiscent of E.T.A. Hoffmann's *Rat Krespel*, singing for the semi-autobiographical figure Sophie is presented as life-threatening. In these works, Droste appears to reflect the stance of family and society, warning of the dangers to body, mind, and soul inherent in an over-active fantasy and of the dire consequences of pursuing that penchant in artistic expression. The perception of Droste as a conservative is supported by the fact that not only in her creative writings, but also in letters to family members and friends Droste seemed to support the societal values of her day, including those dealing with the appropriate place and role for women. Her portrayal of women figures and her own words, particularly in letters, tend to echo the attitudes of the day and the value placed on women who were modest and unassuming, never assertive or unnecessarily verbal, women who saw their role as fulfilled in quiet and differential service to others. Artistic expression, especially for

women, found acceptance as a social accomplishment, a facet of gracious living;¹ and writing, in the form of letter-writing, was valued as an important means of communication between family members and friends. For those around Droste, poetic efforts were judged a pleasant and harmless means of passing time—and not recognized as a serious mode of intense personal expression, a means of self-fulfillment.² Droste's letter to a friend, the much younger Philippa Pearsall, in which Droste admonishes the young woman to continue to pursue her artistic activities—but as a hobby, a diversion—articulates this traditional view: "Sie wissen selbst noch nicht, welche Grundlage zukünftigen friedlichen Glückes Sie an ihren Talenten besitzen, und wie sie Ihnen Ihre späteren Jahre erheitern werden!" Droste, citing personal experience, emphasizes "was es wert ist, eine Beschäftigung zu lieben, die den Geist ausfüllt und uns weder die Freuden der Jugend noch das Konversationsgeschwätz entbehren läßt" (Br.II: 328-29).³ Although Droste herself persisted in pursuing her own artistic expression in a mode far different from that accepted by her society—and her family—the impact of societal thinking upon Droste herself cannot be ignored, for not just her family and her associates were imbued with the Biedermeier thinking of the day, but also Droste herself. Such thinking contributed substantially to the ambiguity toward her own desire for literary self-expression that persisted throughout much of her life and that affected her own evolution into a woman-of-letters, and it provides the context for much of Droste's writing that deals with women in the role of the poet.

Droste's overt adherence to traditional views and values has made it difficult for readers and critics to reconcile her personal statements with her own life and with the highly individualized nature and orientation of her writings, writings whose highly personal style was often judged willful and inappropriate in her day. The contrast between these stances illuminates the dilemma Droste faced in reconciling her desire for literary expression in her own unique literary mode with societal views and accentuates the difficulties she encountered in maintaining her literary independence in interaction with family and friends who shared the perception of that day. Throughout her life Droste had to contend personally with contemporary views of appropriate writing for women, a writing very different from her own; and in her evolution as poet, Droste not only had to come to terms with engrained attitudes toward the appropriate role for women, as well as the role and function of art—and artist—in society, but she also had to overcome her own suspicion toward any deviation from accepted norms.

Droste's personal and conscious deviance in her own literary expression from accepted norms for women's writing, nevertheless, was noted even in her day, and not surprisingly, resulted already in her day in her work being perceived, and judged, as masculine in nature; and in subsequent years the term "masculine" in a non-pejorative sense has been frequently associated with her works. Schlüter, her friend and early mentor, spoke of her "männliche Seele" (Nettesheim 69); and Schücking, in his *Lebensbild* of Droste and his introduction to her works, projected the image of Droste as a writer who combined "männlicher Gestaltungswille" and "weibliches Seinsgefühl"⁴ and insisted that her writing at its best displayed masculine characteristics.⁵ Subsequent critics have repeated such views with remarkable regularity. Franz Heyden (1929), for example, speaks of Droste's "leidenschaftlich männlich[e] Kraft und weibliches Sehnen" (208); Joachim Müller (1941) finds that the unique place in German literature accorded her lies "in ihrer herben und strengen Form, in ihrer harten und männlichen Grundhaltung" (1); and even the critic most responsible for the attention given Droste in the middle of this century, Clemens Heselhaus, speaks of her as "diese männlich begabte Frau" and notes "[d]en männlichen Gestaltungswillen, dem wir die formstraffen und knappen Dichtungen verdanken" (1943,45;125). Comparisons with masculine writing continue to mark even more recent Droste scholarship. Thus Lotte Köhler, writing in 1969, praises Droste's *Die Schlacht im Loener Bruch* in such terms, noting: "Die mit leidenschaftlichem Pathos durchgeführte Schilderung des Kampfgetümmels bleibt Staunen erregend auch im Vergleich mit Ähnlichem aus männlicher Feder" (231). Droste's unwillingness to follow the mode and subject matter perceived in her day as suitable for a woman's pen, and her growing resistance to altering her texts to suit the tastes of others—whether those of her protégé, intimate friend, and public champion Levin Schücking; members of her family; friends; or the readership of her day—seem to support this portrait of an unfeminine Droste.⁶

Perhaps as a consequence, Droste was not among those adopted for critical attention during the first wave of interest in German women writers. She appeared too indoctrinated by the male-dominated thought of her day to be of interest for feminist study, and even her inclusion in the male-based canon worked to her detriment. (Droste, was, after all, the first German woman author to be included in 1961 in the prestigious British series, *German Men of Letters* [Schatzky].) Neither traditional nor feminist critics expected to find in her writings any independent or progressive views on the subject of women's writing. Fortunately, however, the last decades have seen renewed interest

in Droste, and recent scholarship has focused new light on Droste and her writings, resulting in a greater understanding of her as a woman and author and new recognition of the dimension of her literary stature.⁷ Attention has been directed to aspects of her writing and works long ignored by literary critics—witness the recent interest in her letters (Arend [*Monatshefte*], Gödden, Gössmann [1985]), in her early works (Frederiksen and Shafi), and in her relationships to other writers, particularly other women writers (cf. Belemann, Treder, and the recent exhibit and catalog *Annette von Droste-Hülshoff und ihr literarisches Umfeld*). Individual works have been read with new awareness and reinterpreted with insight born of feminist analysis;⁸ and various aspects of Droste's life and literary production have been targets of such reexamination (cf. Arend [GG], Bianchi, Erb, Friedrichsmeyer, Peucker, Roebing, and Stuby).⁹ Resulting from the reinvestigation of Droste's writings is a recognition of her stature that extends the traditional evaluation of Droste as a significant author appropriately incorporated into the canon; indeed Droste is slowly gaining rightful recognition as a woman author who articulated women's concerns with a woman's voice¹⁰ even while she maintained in her personal life the appearance of acceptance of the status quo.¹¹

Ironically, one aspect on which little attention has been focused is Droste's own gradually evolving view of woman as author, one which culminated in her rejection of contemporary standards for literary expression by women—not only for her personally, but for other women writers. Two works are particularly pertinent to this discussion: Droste's only completed drama, *Perdu! oder Dichter, Verleger, und Blaustrümpfe. Lustspiel in einem Akte* (HKA VI,1:1-60), and her late, polemic poem "An die Schriftstellerinnen in Deutschland und Frankreich" (HKA I,1:17-19). These works are indicative of the insight Droste gained into the situation of women writers of her day; they reveal the final stages of her thinking on the issues involved and document the position she ultimately came to espouse.

In *Perdu*, written in 1840, Droste turned her attention to the literary circle in Münster which she frequented and, assuming the perspective of an outsider, presented the group as it was perceived and judged by her family and their friends—though the humorous treatment masks her own critical perceptions. The aspiring women poets are essentially depicted as such "literary women" were generally viewed—as petty, often pretentious amateurs, enamoured with their own simpering literary efforts. Only Frau von Thiel, for whom Droste herself stood model, is an exception and is presented as a serious writer. Thielen is portrayed as talented and self-assured in her literary expression; she al-

lows neither her aspirations nor her works to be constrained by the perimeters apparently accepted by the others. Yet her very unwillingness to compromise and her refusal to alter her writings to make them more accessible to contemporary readers cause her to be judged arrogant and wilful, and ultimately hinder the publication of her works.¹² While the play unquestionably reveals the male-domination of the publication world in her day and its consequences for woman authors—the restricted nature of tolerated modes of literary expression, the hostility which non-conforming works encountered, and the deprecating manner in which women poets were personally treated—the work itself indicates no solution. When Frau von Thiel¹³ recognizes the nature of the negotiations, she retrieves her manuscript and leaves—her integrity intact, her writing unpublished.¹⁴

For the casual reader, and perhaps for her family circle, Droste's programmatic poem "An die Schriftstellerinnen in Deutschland und Frankreich" (1844), particularly with its original title "An die Blaustrümpfe," may also appear to be espousing the thinking of her day.¹⁵ It, too, seems to promulgate conventional wisdom and to deprecate women writers, echoing the stance taken in *Perdu*. Indeed, in the concerns it expresses and the advice it proffers, "An die Schriftstellerinnen" clearly embodies elements of the Biedermeier ethos: the rejection of the search for recognition and the emphasis on the natural and authentic, rather than the contrived. Combined and interwoven with these is a reverence for the authorial profession, and for its tool, the word, and recognition of the price that dedication to art extols from the artist. The mood appears cautious, and much of Droste's advice could even be seen as designed to preserve the conventional roles for women; to endorse traditional, nigh instinctual principles which may even be nurtured by societal mores, as phrases, sentiments, and exhortations (such as "der Länder fromme Sitte," "umgeben wie mit Heil'genscheine." "Euch nahte die Natur mit reinem Schritte," "pflegt das anvertraute . . . heilige Gut," or "Kniert vor des Blutes gnadenvoller Spende") seem to indicate. The language—and direction—of Droste's recommendation appears both hesitant and conservative: "Singt, aber zitternd, wie vom Weih' die Tauben." The language and imagery of the poem, while presenting at least in part Droste's own attitudes, also serve to camouflage the covert message that diametrically opposed the dominant thinking of her day and conflicted with her society's views about women writers.¹⁶

Indeed, a close reading of the work reveals that Droste had come to terms, not only with her own form of artistic expression and life as

woman poet in the true sense of the term. The poem not only incorporates basic premises of Droste's view of art in general and consciously affirms the route she herself pursued, but it articulates her attitude toward women as poets and toward their writing.¹⁷ "An die Schriftstellerinnen" is indeed a manifesto for the women writers of her day, a covert call for them to seek and follow their own, female mode of literary expression.¹⁸ With an earnestness and specificity unusual in her programmatic writings, Droste exhorts women to find—and use—the potential with which they are endowed. Women should not settle for the kind of literature deemed appropriate for them by the male-dominated world, the simpering, lifeless sentimental trivia familiar from the popular poetry albums of the day or from collections such as those parodied in *Perdu*, efforts deemed suitable for publication in a *Damenzeitung*.¹⁹ With explicit condescension Droste addresses followers of the widely supported guidelines for women and for women's poetry: "Ihr steht so nüchtern da gleich Kräuterbeeten - / . . . / Haucht wie des Hauches Hauch in Syrinxflöten - / . . . / Der kann ein Schattenbild die Wangen röthen -."

Yet Droste equally denounces the path taken by women tempted by the new freedom offered by the liberal thinking of the day, those who seek to follow the route it outlines, accepting the easy emancipation to be found by adopting the mode of male radicals (the *Jungdeutschen*). The women who follow this second route Droste similarly decries: ". . . ihr gleich Fichten die zerspelt von Wettern- / . . . / Laßt wie Dragonen die Trompeten schmettern; / . . . / . . . wirft den Handschuh Zeus und allen Göttern." The criticism of this approach is not intended as a anti-*Jung Deutschland* stance *per se*—although some readers might indeed interpret it as such and Droste may well have intended for her family to perceive it so—but rather as a call to women to find their own, authentic voice.²⁰

Droste exhorts women to accept neither of the routes deprecated in the opening strophe, for neither was truly theirs.²¹ The first, societally-endorsed paradigm, the one deemed appropriate for women, postures women's writing as a distinct mode, separate from that of the men—and innately second best. It offered women a highly restricted mode of expression, resulting in sentimental, lifeless poetry that warranted the pejorative judgment such efforts traditionally met. The second alternative, touted by the rebellious who equated expression with the literary forms of their male colleagues, clearly advocated a different, more dramatic mode of expression. Yet it also failed to proffer women the freedom of self-expression. Rather than an invitation for women to find their own voice, this route allowed them to emulate the

males in the new, extravagant, and more emotional voice they had recently adopted. Thus, while offering the lure of equality and freedom, this mode denied the potential differentness of women's literature.

Neither choice, Droste postulates, speaks to the authentic voice within, woman's true voice still awaiting discovery. Droste, far in advance of her time, articulates a belief in women's inner ability and power, and posits the challenge to women writers provocatively with the rhetorical question with which the first strophe concludes: "Ward denn der Führer euch nicht angeboren / In eigener Brust, daß ihr den Pfad verloren?" In the endeavor to awaken women to self-realization, the poetic voice emphatically commands: "Schaut auf!" to the followers of both modes and then presents more detailed descriptions of the two types of poetic expression practiced in her day, descriptions which unmistakably reveal her rejection and deprecation of both.

In the second strophe Droste emphasizes the inevitable trivializing of woman's voice that results from adherence to the socially endorsed path for women writers and decries the insipid verses of her contemporaries—the path they take "durch Thränengründe, / Mondscheinalleen und blasse Nebeldecken, / Wo einsam die veraltete Selinde / Zur Luna mag die Lilienarme strecken." "Längst überfloß der Sehnsucht Thränenbecken," she notes, and the corrective image presented in the strophe's concluding lines is rife with irony: "An eurem Hügel mag die Hirtin klagen, / Und seufzend drauf ein Gänseblümchen tragen."

In the following strophe, Droste effectively satirizes and condemns as inappropriate the slavish imitation of contemporary male models, which leads the women poets "durch Winkelgassen, / Wo tückisch nur die Diebslaternen blinken, / Mit wildem Druck euch rohe Hände fassen, / Und Smollis Wüstling euch und Schwelger trinken, / Der Sinne Bachanale, wo die blassen / Betäubten Opfer in die Rosen sinken." Droste believed strongly that the price for breaking with tradition and gaining literary recognition in this fashion resulted in both a loss of integrity and selfhood for women. The fate for such poets she presents as a dire one, predicting their funeral wreaths would be "die Kränze der Hetäre." The exclamatory lines with which the following strophe open reveal the intensity with which Droste condemns this route and the desire for fame she identifies as the motivation for its practitioners: "O dunkles Loos! o Preis mit Schmach gewonnen, / Wenn Ruhmes Staffel wird der Ehre Bahre!"²²

In contrast to the extremes just presented, the solution Droste offers is simple and direct—women need to follow the path to the inner self, to the well-spring of creativity that lies within. The path is straight and the images Droste chooses to illustrate that path—a ray

of sunlight, a flame rising from an altar, a horse homing in on life-giving water in the midst of a desert—evoke traditional emblematic imagery to indicate the aspects of illumination, warmth, and natural instinct with which she identifies the uniqueness of woman's voice.

Grad', grade geht der Pfad, wie Strahl der Sonnen,
Grad', wie die Flamme lodert vom Altare,
Grad', wie Natur das Berberoß zum Bronnen
Treibt mitten durch die Wirbel der Sahare!

The similes Droste chooses to describe the route to woman's true voice emphasize that the path is both straight and true and evoke the life-giving power of the sun—an established symbol for the illuminating power of the mind, as well; the sacred flame with its implication of both searing truth and sustaining warmth; and the intuitive, internal sense inherent in every living creature. This last image, that of the *Berberoß*, to which two lines are devoted, is perhaps most interesting because of the environmental aspect it incorporates through the reference to the desert and the emphasis on the life-sustaining power of water in that context. For even in a world of aridity—such as the world that was hers and that of women in general in her society—Droste offers the assurance, even the guarantee, of success if this path is indeed taken: "Ihr könnt nicht fehlen, er, so mild umlichtet, / Der Führer ward in euch nicht hingerichtet." The message to women writers articulated in these lines is unequivocal and resonates in part through the juxtaposition of the words "hingerichtet" and "umlichtet." The violence inherent in the word "hingerichtet" with its subtle suggestion of societally sanctioned destruction is not to be ignored, nor is the positive force of "umlichtet" with its almost hallowed implications, which appears to sanctify the promise given here—despite societal efforts to stifle the inner voice and to deny the internally based sense of direction. Indeed success appears guaranteed, for it is an inner voice that draws upon an internally posited sense of direction; the path lies within and hence cannot be obliterated.

Within this covert call to women who have taken up the stylus, Droste endorses two options. The first—built upon reverence for the word and sensitivity to the authentic and natural and graced by a modesty in the use of self-expression—she recommends to the women of the first group whom she addresses in the fifth strophe. These are women sheltered by "der Länder fromme Sitte" and protected in their experiences, women who lead lives untouched by "die freche Liebesbitte" of their day and close to a still unspoiled nature.²³ For such women timid

in their aspirations—those who would prefer to remain within the socially approved thematic and stylistic bounds—Droste encourages a writing that is no longer steeped in the worn and trite accepted modes of expression and bound to established patterns, but rather is freed from the over-sentimentality and artificiality of expression that too often characterized the amateur efforts of her contemporaries. Though Droste herself did not focus her energies on this accepted mode of literary expression—the women whom Schücking had described as “der Schaar der deutschen schriftstellernden Damen” (1878,32)—Droste goes beyond simply criticizing their sentimental, empty verses (as she had so effectively done in *Perdu*) and seeks to provide women writers interested in traditional “women’s literature” with guidelines for more effective and suitable expression within the expected and permitted perimeters. Addressing these women, Droste recommends that they too seek an authenticity of literary expression. She exhorts a writing that adheres to the “natural” and subsequently can indeed constitute an authentic expression of self. For women desiring societal acceptance and publication in the male-dominated world, this mode indeed could provide a means of achieving such goals while still incorporating an authenticity of expression which was for Droste fundamental to legitimate literature. Thus while the form of writing she endorses for such women writers remains acceptable to societal thinking articulated by her family and their circle, it also reflects and adheres to her own insistence on serious, and authentic, artistic expression.

Droste, however, also offers instruction to the more emancipated women authors of her day, women exposed to the changing world of the day and eager to accept the freedom it now offered, women who consciously reject the “womanly” writing preferred by the first group. Recognizing the dramatic changes in the world, Droste notes both the dangers it harbors and the potential for greater freedom and for greater personal responsibility it offers: “Die Zeit hat jede Schranke aufgeschlossen, / An allen Wegen hauchen Naphtablüthen, / Ein reizend scharfer Duft hat sich ergossen, / Und Jeder mag die eignen Sinne hüten.” In the face of this changing, often violent world—“Das Leben stürmt auf abgehetzten Rossen, / Die noch zusammenbrechend haun und wüthen”—Droste does not take a reactionary position and exhort flight or fear, but she does reiterate her belief in the innate sanctity of all literary expression. Indeed she boldly asserts: “Ich will den Griffel eurer Hand nicht rauben”—a stylus it should be noted not before in the hands of women²⁴—exhorting only “Singt, aber zitternd, wie vom Weih die Tauben.”

For those women who reject conventional modes of writing either in

the search for personal artistic self-expression—as Droste herself had—or from a desire to participate more freely in the issues of the day, another option is available. Stemming from her recognition that the turbulent times have changed women’s lives—“Ihr wart die Zeugen wild bewegter Zeiten, / Was ihr erlebt, das läßt sich nicht erschlagen”—and that such experiences now call for new, more audacious expression, she unequivocally endorses the desire for a different, more radical voice: “Ja, treibt der Geist euch, laßt Standarten ragen!” While Droste acknowledges the role for women in these militant times—albeit she also chooses military imagery in which women are essentially ministrants and not direct participants: “Feldbind’ und Helmzier mag ein Weib bereiten”—she also warns of the dangers and temptations awaiting those who would accept this challenge and seek expression in new, and unconventional forms and with new themes. It is, however, of singular importance that Droste not only openly acknowledges the changes that now free such women to choose a more dramatic, dynamic voice, to experiment with the possibility of more forceful forms of articulation than those traditionally tolerated; but that Droste furthermore, in the most dramatic statement of approval of that choice to be found anywhere in her writings, proclaims their right to pursue that route.

There is, however, nothing imprudent in her position, for Droste also warns of the consequences for the individual woman who chooses this new voice, this controversial mode of self-expression, and specifically admonishes self-examination and realistic appraisal of both ability and aim: “Doch seht euch vor, wie hoch die Schwingen tragen, / Stellt nicht das Ziel in ungemessene Weiten . . .” Drawing no doubt from her own experience, she warns of the dangers of the heights and cautions further that such a decision inevitably results in personal isolation. The decision to enter the discipline of serious writing must not be made lightly and only with full awareness of the consequences which the decision entails²⁵ and the willingness to forgo all for the solitary existence that true dedication demands: “Der kecke Falk is überall zu finden, / Doch einsam steigt der Aar aus Alpengründen.”

It is fitting that Droste, consciously or unconsciously, returns in this polemic work to the warning expressed much earlier in *Bertha*, drawing again upon the image of the eagle that Cordelia uses to epitomize women who aspire—inappropriately in her eyes and those of society—beyond their sphere; and reiterating the loneliness such aspirations signify: “Sie möchten aufwärts sich zur Sonne schwingen / Und mit dem Aar durch duftige Wolken dringen / Und stehn allein im nebelichten Thal” (HKA VI,1:68).²⁶ Now, however, it is a self-assured, mature Droste who chooses the image as one appropriate for her own life,

for the choice she had consciously made, and for the second, emancipated route she now publically endorses and presents as a call to other women seeking to find their own voice.

Echoing the challenge articulated earlier, "Ja, treibt der Geist euch, laßt Standarten ragen," Droste challenges these women to seize the opportunity now theirs: "Frischauf!" she calls. For such women Droste makes no promises of external recognition, of literary success. Indeed she addresses the likely absence of such accolades directly: "und will den Lorbeer man versagen." Echoing the earlier sentiment in "Der Abend": "Suche das Glück in dir selbst, der Zufriedenheit, such's bei den Musen! / Dem, der's im Busen nicht trägt, gibt es das Irdische nicht!" (SW 19), the poetic voice laments "O arm Gefühl, das sich nicht selbst kann lohnen!" and concludes in good Biedermeier fashion with the admonishment: "Mehr ist ein Segen als zehntausend Kronen." Droste with new resolution proclaims the reward in terms of personal satisfaction: "O Glückliche mit unbekränzter Stirne!"—a position clearly designed to contrast with the "Kränze der Hetäre" she predicts for those misled by the accolades of the day bought at the price of personal and literary integrity.

Droste's interest in presenting her views about the women's need to forge their own path in their pursuit of creative literary expression may in part be attributable to her recognition of the role another woman writer, Katharine Schücking, had played in her own life. In "Katharine Schücking"²⁷ (HKA I,1:102-03), Droste acknowledges a personal debt to the poet who had touched her life and from whom she as a young girl had drawn inspiration. Referring to herself as "fromme Schülerin," Droste gives tribute to the support she found in this relationship: "Aus deinem Blick Genesung ich getrunken, / Daß deines Mundes Laute damals mir / Wie Naphtha in die Seele sind gesunken." Droste attaches symbolic as well as sentimental significance to the older woman's attention and to the hand Schücking had extended to her, a hand she treasured "wie ein Götterpfand. . . ein köstlich Kleinod." The encouragement, even challenge, that Schücking brought her—"Ein jedes Wort, durchsichtig wie Krystall / Und kräftig gleich dem edelsten der Weine, / Schien mir zu rufen: "Auf! der Launen Ball, / Steh auf! erhebe dich"—has now taken new form, as Droste in turn addresses the women poets of her day with an intensity born of her own experience. Appropriate, too, in the poem to Katharine Schücking, the poetic voice, noting that in recognition of her literary accomplishment a laurel wreath had been buried with her, chooses instead "den Epheu und die dornenvollste Rose" as tributes to her memory—symbols of eternal life and of beauty created with pain which were in Droste's eyes tokens

more befitting the pioneering woman poet than the traditional accolade of success.

The arguments Droste articulates so polemically and yet so covertly in "An die Schriftstellerinnen" and the triumphant note that resounds in its concluding lines, are reiterated in other, more lyrical poems of this final period of her life in which her affirmation of her own choice finds clear and personal expression. Thus Droste, through the poetic voice in "Im Grase" (also published in 1844), proclaims she needs from life nothing but the free reign of her imagination: ". . . für das Lied / Jedes freien Vogels im Blau / Eine Seele, die mit ihm zieht, / . . . / Und für jedes Glück meinen Traum." (HKA I,1:328). Again, in "Lebt wohl" (1844), Droste, against a background of presumed loss, triumphantly reaffirms the choice that had been hers, for despite external appearances her lot is far from solitary. Drawing her strength from her chosen life as poet, Droste — "Allein mit meinem Zauberwort / Dem Alpengeist und meinem Ich" — extolls her existence with passion in lines that still have not lost their ring: "Verlassen, aber einsam nicht, / Erschüttert, aber nicht zerdrückt," —

So lange noch der Arm sich frei
Und waltend mir zum Aether streckt,
Und jedes wilden Geiers Schrei
In mir die wilde Muse weckt. (HKA I,1:325)

The conflict between social expectations and personal commitment to artistic expression with which Droste had so long struggled was resolved; she herself had come to embody and epitomize the emancipation and the fulfillment to be found in the life of the pen — the challenge and the promise she articulated in her missive "An die Schriftstellerinnen in Deutschland und Frankreich" in her covert call to other women poets.

● NOTES

¹ Cf. Wehinger: "Im 19. Jahrhundert galt es als Zeichen vornehmer Weiblichkeit, Piano zu spielen und zu feierlichen Anlässen im Freundes- und Familienkreis selbstgedichtete Verse zu verschenken" (219).

² These views also contributed to the severe infractions upon time and energy which Droste experienced throughout her life, severely restricting the time she had to pursue her writing.

³ While Droste's poems often indicate her concerns, even ambivalences toward her own writing, the position she assumes in her correspondence seems more congruent with societal guidelines, no doubt because her correspondents shared those conservative views themselves. Here, as throughout Droste's correspondence, the context in which a letter was written—and particularly the circle of readers, beyond the individual addressed, whom the letter would reach—plays a role in determining the stance Droste assumed. Cf. recent literature dealing with Droste as letter-writer and with the subterfuge in her correspondence to which she often felt compelled.

⁴ Cf. Heselhaus 1943, 125.

⁵ Schücking, who tended to decry the writing of women contemporaries, unequivocally articulated his admiration of the masculine qualities Droste's writing displayed, noting that she revealed a talent "für die Darstellung gewalt-samer und kriegerischer Scenen mit Farben, wie sie sonst nur dem Manne zu Gebote stehen" (1878, 13) and complimenting her directly:

Sie . . . haben zu weiblicher Beobachtungsgabe einen männlich klaren, ordnenden Verstand bekommen; einen Geist, der mit dem weiblichen Interesse für das Einzelne, Geringe . . . männlichen Aufschwung von diesem Einzelnen zum Ganzen, von der Miscelle zum System (Theo Schücking, 21)

Concomitantly critics have also attributed perceived literary shortcomings to her sex. Carl Busse notes for example: "Man wird das weibliche Talent gerade an ihren künstlerischen und kompositionellen Mängeln . . . erkennen" (191).

⁶ After her death, in his introduction to her work, Schücking himself was careful to emphasize the feminine qualities of Droste, stating "sie war der reinste, schönste, rührendste Typus ächter Weiblichkeit. Sie war ganz und völlig Weib, mit ihrem innersten Empfinden" and concluding that she was "alles in allem genommen, die Verkörperung edelster und reinsten Frauennatur" (1878, 49; 50).

Nevertheless critics, beginning with Busse in 1909, have tended to view Droste's authorial activity as compensatory for her lack of fulfillment as a woman. Thus Busse could pronounce:

. . . sie hätte alle geheimen Kräfte gern für ein wenig fräuliches Glück hingegeben. . . . Es blieb ihr versagt. Von der höchsten Lebenserfüllung des Weibes war sie ausgeschlossen: sie hat für keinen Mann sorgen, sie hat kein Kind wiegen dürfen. (2)

Such views were articulated not only in the nineteenth century; Rudolf Ibel in

1948, for example, identifies the source of Droste's unique creativity as her "Jungfräulichkeit" (331).

In the introduction to their collection of essays, Niethammer and Belemann correctly note: "Die Droste schreibt wie ein Mann, so lautete das allgemeine Diktum in der Mitte des letzten Jahrhunderts" (7)—it is a view, however, that is echoed among critics all too often in the twentieth century, as well.

⁷ Cf. Frederiksen's analysis of Droste reception in the USA in Niethammer/Belemann.

⁸ This is particularly true of particular poems, including "Am Thurme," "Das Spiegelbild," and "Das Fräulein von Rodenschild," and "Ledwina," a work which has been translated and included in the anthology of women's literature *Bitter Healing. German Women Writers* (Lincoln: U Nebraska P, 1990).

⁹ Other contributions beyond the focus of the discussion here worth citing from *Ein Gitter aus Musik und Sprache* include those by Freia Hoffmann and Eva Rieger which deal with Droste as musician, and Rita Rosen's interpretation of the Droste mother-daughter relationship.

¹⁰ Cf. in particular the most recent work by Monika Salmen.

¹¹ I would contend that even the flat assertion with which the Niethammer/Belemann collection of essays opens—"Annette von Droste-Hülshoff ist keine deutsche George Sand, keine Skandalfrau des 19. Jahrhunderts, keine frühe Feministin" (7)—might well need be amended to recognize an incipient feminism both in Droste's quiet yet revealing depiction of the deplorable status of woman in her day and in her albeit covert articulation of a challenge for woman to discover and use her own unique and innate voice.

¹² For a discussion of these aspects of the work, see. Pickar.

¹³ It is worth noting that Frau von Thiel is the only woman of apparent independent means in Droste's oeuvre and the only assertive woman presented there who is not negatively treated.

¹⁴ Woesler, in his discussion of the difficulties Droste encountered in her efforts to publish her first volume of poetry, indicates the prejudice against women's poetry at the time and the reluctance toward accepting manuscripts of relatively unknown women authors, as well as factors specific to her case (60).

¹⁵ Even Schücking promulgated an interpretation of the poem that would have pleased Droste's family: "Trotz aller männlichen Kraft bleibt sie streng innerhalb der Schranken der Weiblichkeit, und des Frauenberufs, die Sitte zu hüten, eingedenk; in diese Beziehung enthält das schöne Gedicht: 'An die Schriftstellerinnen in Deutschland und Frankreich' ihr treu befolgtes Glaubensbekenntnis." 1942, 98.

¹⁶ It is perhaps not surprising that critics have been troubled by the work. Heselhaus in 1962 commented: "Die Dunkelheit, die man der Droste oft vorgeworfen hat, ist in dieser Mahnrede an die Blaustrümpfe wirklich vorhanden (93); in 1973 he speaks even more deprecatingly of the work, with statements

such as "Das Peinlichste ist die Folgerung aus solchem literarischem Potpourri . . ." or "Die letzte Zeile mag unübersetzbar sein" (229). He even queries: "Ist es eine künstliche Dunkelheit oder eine prosaische Redeweise? Oder liegt es daran, daß sich die literarische Bildungssprache der Zeit nicht in die Erfahrungen der Hülshoff, die wesentlich auf die Natur beschränkt sind, übertragen läßt?" (228)

Although Gössmann states that with this poem Droste entered "auf die ihr eigene Art auf den Weg der Frauenemanzipation" (1970,105), he does not find that the work presents her own position and disparagingly notes that in the work she "grübelt über die Bestimmung der Frau als Schriftstellerin nach . . ." (1970,119). Six years later, Gössmann comments on the context addressed by Droste in both *Perdu* and this poem, noting that in these writings:

sich Annette [sic] mit den Ambitionen der dichtenden Frauen ihrer Zeit auseinandergesetzt [hat]. Dabei wird mehr als deutlich, in welch fataler Lage sich damals noch die Frauenemanzipation befand. Die Droste argumentiert hier zwischen modern und traditionell, wechselt ihre Position, um nicht einer modischen Oberflächlichkeit zu verfallen aber auch nicht einem biedereren Frauenbild. (1976,129)

Cf. also Treder, who, following the lead of earlier critics, minimalizes the work by stating that in this poem Droste "eindringlich vor Blaustrümpfen und George Sands gewarnt hatte" (170).

¹⁷ Until this work, Droste's advice—whether in her prose writings (where advice to writers and views on writing were also attributed to male figures) or her letters (particularly either to or with regard to Levin Schücking)—was generally directed toward male writers. A notable exception are her letters to Elisa Rüdiger.

Factors that played a role in this apparent reticence were no doubt the attitudes toward women writers that Droste experienced in her family and their circle, her recognition that the majority of serious writers were indeed men, a consequence of the reality of her day in which women faced far greater obstacles in finding their way into print, a situation in which both historical, entrenched traditions and their societally-structured position were significant factors.

¹⁸ Although French focuses on the writings of Günderröde, Mereau, and Varnhagen, her analysis of the situation which faced these women is relevant for Droste as well:

. . . given the existence of a dominant patriarchal language, the options for the nineteenth-century woman who wished to write were

limited. First, she could remain silent because she either could not or would not use existing language to express her female experience. A second choice would be to write like a man, adopting male tropes, styles, themes, even experiences. Through such imitation, she accepts the male way of writing as the "correct" way while also giving herself the opportunity to earn the recognition of those who determined the literary canon. A third option would be to defy the use of conventional symbolic systems, developing an awareness of herself as the negative, and creating her own language and forms. (77)

French also mentions the possibility of "a fourth option, which combines imitation and defiance, by adopting what Sigrid Weigel calls 'der schielende Blick,' or a 'double-focused' structuring of content and expression" (77).

Treder in turn speaks of "vier Hauptstränge der weiblichen Lyrik des 19. Jahrhunderts": three traditional areas—"die religiöse Lyrik," "die Naturlyrik," and the "Liebeslyrik"—and the newer "politisch engagierte Lyrik that entered in the Vormärz" (160).

¹⁹ Häntzschel, discussing the literature deemed appropriate for women to read, notes that poetry was at the center, but that it was poetry "in einer engen sittlich-moralisch akzentuierten Auswahl, zugeschnitten auf den engen 'weiblichen Lebenszusammenhang' der damaligen Zeit, wie er von den Männern bestimmt und von der Mehrzahl der Frauen akzeptiert wurde" (102). In addressing the link between poetry and women, Häntzschel also notes the fad of *Poesiealben*, "die seit dem 19. Jahrhundert speziell Mädchen und Frauen eifrig betreiben" (97).

With regard to women writers themselves, Treder notes: "Toleranz und Schonung begegnen Schriftstellerinnen nur dann, wenn sie ihre Gedichte als 'Naturerzeugnisse' herausgeben, die so zu Papier gebracht wurden, wie sie aus dem Herzen flossen" (160).

²⁰ What Frederiksen has written about Varnhagen is equally valid for Droste, and the sentiment expressed by Varnhagen echoes that of Droste, as well:

Wie wenige erkannte sie die Schwierigkeit der Authentizität weiblichen Schreibens; sie weigerte sich, sich den traditionellen Ordnungsprinzipien zu unterwerfen; "Ganz in der Art dieser verwerfenden Schmeichelei scheint es mir, wenn eine Frau, indem sie schreibt, für den Druck schreibt—also dann gewiß etwas Gedachtes aufzuzeichnen meint—sich noch immer als ganz untergeordnet gegen einen Mann oder gegen Männer stellt und verstellt. (1990, 21-22)

²¹ That Droste rejected both with equal vehemence is emphasized by her use of alternating lines in addressing the two groups — those who write trite, some-

times sententious poetry (lines 1,3,5) and those whose verses ring loudly with new, often rash political and social audacity (lines 2,4,6).

²² The reference to "Preis mit Schmach gewonnen, / Wenn Ruhmes Staffel wird der Ehre Bahrel" corresponds to her view that recognition and success were not appropriate aims of artistic endeavors. Cf. the poem "Einer wie Viele und Viele wie Einer" (SW I:299-302).

²³ The lines read:

Treu schützte ihn [the internal *Führer*] der Länder fromme Sitte,
Die euch umgeben wie mit Heiligenscheine,
Sie hielt euch fern die freche Liebesbitte,
Und legte Anathem auf das Gemeine.
Euch nahte die Nature mit reinem Schritte,
Kein trunkner Schwelger über Stock und Steine,
Ihr mögt ihr willig jedes Opfer spenden,
Denn Alles nimmt sie, doch aus reinen Händen.

²⁴ The right to self-expression is theirs; the denial of its presence as an ability, just as the prohibition of its exercise, would indeed be the equivalent of "Raub," and the choice of this strong verb of violence gives evidence of the adamancy of Droste's position, a position only overtly modified by the Biedermeier tone of the exhortation: "Singt, aber zitternd, wie vom Weih' die Tauben."

²⁵ Droste in a series of poems dealing with the profession of poet detailed the dangers inherent in such an existence. Cf., for example, "Mein Beruf," "Der Todesengel," "Die todte Lerche," "Poesie," "Gemüth," and "Der Dichter."

²⁶ The words also mirror the contrast in Droste's poem "Noth" (HKA I,1:130), where people live "still im Tal" but "Die dunklen Geyer horsten droben." In other poems, also, the poetic voice that aspires to artistic expression is identified with soaring birds (not only the traditional lark but also the hawk, eagle, and vulture); and the choice, though acknowledged as lonely, is nevertheless triumphantly affirmed.

²⁷ The fact that Droste intended "Mein Beruf," "Meine Todten," and "Katharina Schücking" to open the 1844 edition of her poems indicates the significance Droste attributed to her tribute to her Westphalian predecessor. Cf. Belemann, who refers to the three poems as constituting "[e]ine individuelle, selbst-bewußte Ouvertüre für den Gedichtband einer Frau: wer bin ich bzw. wie definiere ich mich, wo komme ich her, wer hat mich beeinflußt" (103).

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