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Bettina von Arnim and Civil Action: How to Defy Oppression by Championing Others

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Abstract

Children, cooking and church: Like most of the European world before 1900, these were “the three Cs” designated by society for women in Germany. However, some women broke through these expectations and pursued a fourth “C”: Civil action. Such a woman was Bettina von Arnim (1785-1859). A writer, activist, feminist, and intellectual, von Arnim was politically active during a time when women were delegated to domestic duties and expected to be completely subservient to their husbands. She lived during a tumultuous era of French, Prussian, and Austrian occupation of Germany during the early 19th century. Instead of being a mild-mannered bourgeois widow, von Arnim interacted with many well-known German cultural figures, such as the Grimm Brothers, Goethe, and Beethoven. Like the politically active men in her life, von Arnim took action in an oppressive society, fearlessly voicing her own opinions while supporting other oppressed groups such as Jewish people, the poverty-stricken, and revolutionaries. While not well-known outside of German-speaking circles, von Arnim’s contributions serve as an example of active citizenship despite being a member of “the weaker sex.” Therefore, Bettina von Arnim is not only an important woman in German history, rather, an important person in *world history*.

Introduction

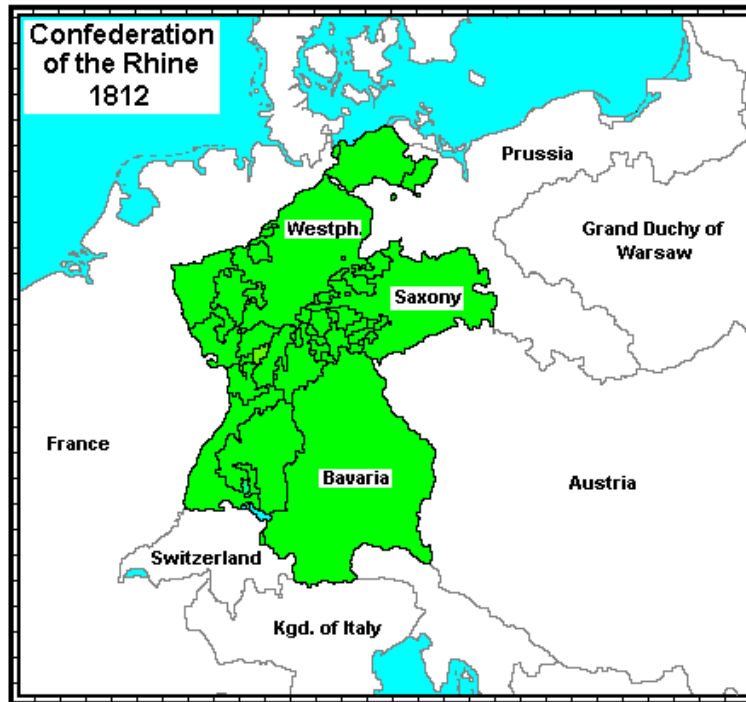
“I know of no task which saps the mind more than doing and experiencing nothing” – Bettine von Arnim (Fredriksen, Goodman, et al. 41)

Scholars call her “the first modern woman in Germany,” “a model of public activity,” and a founder of the women’s movement (Fredriksen, Goodman, et al. 373-374). For some, these labels might conjure up many historical women, and for others it might only remind them of a few. Still others have blank thoughts as they try to remember the names, faces, and actions of women who have made history. The two latter groups are common, and that is exactly why I decided to research a little-known yet influential woman known as Bettina Brentano von Arnim. Von Arnim was a woman who was almost lost to history, even though she created history by being a champion for the ignored and underrepresented. She strategically used her femininity and cleverness to gain entrance into the world of men, granting herself political and social power unheard of during the mid-1800s. I would like to introduce Bettine von Arnim, in hopes that her legacy as a political, social, and creative role model is remembered, and our society continues to unearth other women buried in the dust of history who deserve recognition and respect.

Bettina’s Beginnings and Background

Bettina von Arnim’s charisma, power, and integrity was influenced by equally extraordinary people in her life. The strongest influence that led von Arnim to a life of outspokenness and support was most likely her grandmother, Sophie von La Roche. La Roche raised von Arnim after both of von Arnim’s parents died and when La Roche was already a force in the salon and literary scenes (Blackwell and Zantop 445-447). Salons were a place for anyone with ideas or opinions on politics, literature, art, and other subjects, could gather and create discourse with others (Pohl 141). Salons were usually run by literary women in their homes, and often salon members would also correspond via writing letters, which were often published both before and after an author’s death (Pohl 140). Von Arnim’s grandmother La Roche owned a salon, and therefore introduced her granddaughter at an early age to a safe environment for

discussion and encouraged von Arnim to write and talk about current events (Fredriksen and Goodman et al. 129). Not only did La Roche introduce von Arnim to intellectual and artistic circles, but also to Goethe and his mother, known as “Frau Rat,” whom von Arnim based the character on in her essay, “Mrs. Rat’s Dialogue” (“Sokratie der Frau Rat,”) (Dischner 51). Von Arnim’s brother, Clemens Bretano, most likely helped in her artistic development due to his affiliation with a circle of poets, writers, artists, and musicians (Blackwell and Zantop 445). In this circle von Arnim would meet her future husband, but she would not publish any of her writing until after his death, with her first book appearing in 1835 when she was 50 years old (Blackwell and Zantop 445-447). Finally, von Arnim’s early friendship with the writer Katharine von Günderrode and her adult friendship with salon owners such as Rahel Varnhagen fueled von Arnim’s passion for intellectual and literary discussion. She would open her own salon in the mid-1830s, creating a space where aggressive censorship by the French and Prussian governments could not reach. (Pohl 151). Her charisma and staunch belief in freedom of speech earned von Arnim friends in high places, such as the Grimm Brothers, Beethoven, Karl Marx, and Prussian King Friedrich Wilhelm IV (Ezekiel). Most of von Arnim’s epistolary writings, that is, fictitious novels taking heavy inspiration from real letters, were written when she was a young adult. She started writing political texts in response to events of the 1830s, 40s, and 50s in Germany.



Map of French, Austrian, and Prussian Empires. The green part represents the Confederation of the Rhine, which is what parts of Germany were under Napoleon's rule (Ganse).

To understand Bettina von Arnim's political works requires understanding the place that she lived in, the area we now call Germany. In 1804, all of Germany was ruled by outside forces: France, Prussia, and Austria, although the French had the largest control over German land (Brose 51-60). After Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo in 1815, talks among German princes, Austria, and Prussia about what a unified Germany would look like were unproductive, and Germany was left fragmented into some states with Austria and Prussia each controlling their own territories (Brose 82-94). Tensions between Protestants and Catholics, combined with the Enlightenment and citizens upset over Germany being occupied, created a tenuous society in Germany (Brose 22). Antisemitism and sexism, wherein women were considered objects owned by their husbands, added to the motley of social problems facing Germany and its citizens (Brose 128). In 1830, King Charles X of France introduced many censorship laws to remain in control of France (Brose 153). When the French formed angry mobs in result, Charles fled to England,

sparkling revolutions not only in France but in and around France's territories, which included Germany. With the highest power in France gone, citizens of occupied territories felt that the time was right to rebel. Italians, Silesians, Polish people, and Germans living under Austrian and Prussian rule all revolted against their respective authorities (Brose 151). Despite most citizens wanting their country back, the Austrian and Prussian governments won back control, and Germany was back to being occupied and fractured, and would remain so until the Second Reich in 1871 (Brose 159). This ever-changing political climate prompted a response from political citizens like Bettina von Arnim. And respond she did.

Bettina's Political Texts: The King's Book and The Book of the Poor

Bettina von Arnim's first political work was The King's Book (Dieses Buch gehört dem König) in 1843, and it contained ideas radical for the 19th century audience. At the time, Prussia (and the German lands it had control over) was ruled by King Friedrich Wilhelm IV (Dischner 47-59). Although it was a book available to the public, von Arnim made it clear that The King's Book was addressed to King Wilhelm, and therefore wanted to provoke a response. Among von Arnim's controversial demands were to cease arresting political dissenters, better pay and working conditions for factory workers, abolition of the death penalty, and a total rehaul of the justice system (Dischner 52). In "Mrs. Rat's Dialogue," which was included in The King's Book, she argued in favor of rehabilitation rather than punishment for criminals. Expressing herself through the voice of Mrs. Rat, a nickname Goethe's mom earned for her sound advice ("Rat" in German translates to "advice"), she claimed that the government was responsible for its citizens, including any increase in crime—the more authoritarian a government is, the less control citizens have over themselves, and the more criminals are bred to bypass the authoritarian system (Dischner 52). Mrs. Rat's solution to this problem was access to education of all types for

criminals: not just practical education but spiritual and empathetic education that would turn their destructive energy into constructive energy (Dischner 53-57).

Von Arnim's empathy for others spawned an idea that current US citizens debate over, an idea that offers each individual a chance to change for the better and realize their worth, rather than the punishment of being thrown into a concrete prison. Not only that, but Von Arnim's main mode of protest, which was writing letters to the highest powers in the land, further illustrated her empathy and strong belief that citizens *could and should* have the power to change their government. Rather than incite revolution or riot, events that often lead to hurting innocent people caught in the crossfire, she opted to use the channels allowed to her by her government to incite change consensually. Although the monarchy reigned on and Germany would still be in pieces for decades into the future, von Arnim's attempts at nonviolent protest were precursors to modern, prominent nonviolent protests such as The Civil Rights marches of the 1960s, Women's Marches throughout history, and the 2018 National School Walk-Out. Her letters to the King mirror the letters that citizens write to their representatives today. Therefore, in the 1800s Bettina von Arnim was using strategies for change that we currently value in our democracy, further cementing her as a modern activist. I think she would be pleased to hear that decades after her lifetime, writing letters to express political opinions in a nonviolent way still holds some power for active citizens.

Perhaps the most important subject she advocated for was a constitutional monarchy in which the King would consider and validate the opinions of his people (Dischner 47-59). This idea of "validation" by the King is something she especially fought for, since in the early 1800s women were invalidated in nearly every facet of their lives. Women were not taken seriously or listened to by men, and any attempt for their voices to be heard was met with scoffs, yawns, and

lecturing. Von Arnim wanting to change this reaction into a positive one that would apply to every citizen under King Wilhelm, so that every citizen felt that they could approach the King without fear of being mocked, insulted, or ignored by him, but have his respectful attention. Ironically, this call for validation was completely lost on King Wilhelm. His response did nothing but praise von Arnim's beautiful language, making it obvious that he only skimmed her book (Fredriksen and Goodman et al. 47). Von Arnim, determined to be authentically heard by King Wilhelm, would write to him many times throughout his reign for various efforts, such as freeing various political dissenters from prison, or in 1839 when her letter helped the Grimm Brothers secure jobs after they were fired from the University of Göttingen for speaking out against the government (Fredriksen, Goodman, et al. 54). In many of these instances, King Wilhelm (and his male advisors) would invalidate von Arnim's claims as "emotional" and "feminine," thereby excluding women's political opinions through characterizing "real" political opinions as inherently masculine (Fredriksen and Goodman et al. 74-75).

This invalidation of women's opinions has been common for hundreds of years, and mid-1800s Germany was no exception. Many women who could have been trailblazers were limited by their domestic chains, imprisoning them from birth to death. Husbands often deterred their wives from participating in society, sometimes without knowing it, such as how lack of birth control led to most women spending a significant portion of their lives pregnant. The fact that von Arnim started publishing in her 50s, after her husband had passed and after all six of her children were grown is significant. Her domestic duties with her children filled her schedule, with no time or energy to think about politics, much less write about them. When death parted her from her husband, von Arnim took advantage of her newfound freedom by a surge of writing, publishing, and activism. This is one of the many reasons that Bettina von Arnim is so

exceptional to me. Even after a lifetime of exhaustive domesticity, even after the King ignored her considerations, she never stopped *doing*. If she had given up at any point and been victim to the all-too-common fate of a female historical figure lost to time, scholars and students like me would have never been captivated by her today.

Von Arnim's later political work, The Book of the Poor (Das Armenbuch), was an unpublished set of case studies and observations about the impoverished populations in German society (Dischner 153-159). Von Arnim gave readers a description of impoverished workers trying to build a railroad between Leipzig and Hof by alluding to their "spider fingers" and "bones like a skeleton" (Dischner 153). She used these observations to claim that the wealthy were allowed to ignore the poor since the financial system favors them, thus the wealthy see the poor as lesser (Dischner 157). She included the voices of impoverished people who explained that if the merchant's license that the government required to sell goods was not so expensive, then they would be able to earn a decent living (Frederickson, Goodman, et al. 189). This revealed not only another excuse that the aristocracy could pin on the impoverished ("If they would just get a merchant's license..."), but also the government acting directly against its people rather than claiming responsibility for them and supporting them. Von Arnim also mentioned the Silesian weavers in this book, a group of fabric workers from Silesia that had awful working conditions and even worse wages (Ezekiel). Her solutions for poverty included generosity and acknowledgment of the poor from aristocratic households, and for the laws preventing the poor from upward mobility to be abolished (Dischner 156-159). Some scholars have connected von Arnim's communist beliefs to her circle potentially citing communism as a solution to poverty. But because of how taboo communism was at the time (and still is) she kept these to herself and her circle (Fredriksen and Goodman 47).

The goal of The Book of the Poor was to spread awareness for those in poverty among all classes, and hopefully inspire change in the way people thought about the poor. Of course, this idea was radical for its anti-classist and socialist undertones. When the Silesians revolted in 1844, government officials held von Arnim partially responsible due to her research and support for the weavers. (Ezekiel). Due to this accusation and threat of imprisonment, she never published The Book of the Poor in her lifetime. The unfinished notes from the book were published posthumously in 1962. Her methods of investigative journaling, such as word for word interviews and observation notes, were another facet of her writing that was ahead of its time. It is easy to imagine Bettina von Arnim as a time traveler, going to the past to try and fix the problems with Germany's government with ideas that were unheard of for her peers, and with methods that were often shot down or ignored. Yet both her ideas and methods are completely sensible to people living in contemporary democracies, including Germany. The Book of the Poor showed Bettina von Arnim as a person who had no problem engaging with people of different classes, religions, or ethnicities. She maintained this perspective both inside and outside of her salon, always being authentic with people who needed help. Dischner describes von Arnim as someone who "...went away from these class barriers and fought on all levels against the prejudices that they allowed" (Dischner 164). It is easy to agree with Dischner; Bettina von Arnim brought much needed attention to the unfair treatment of the impoverished, Jewish people, factory workers, prisoners, and her fellow German citizens.

Her Epistolary Works: "The Butterfly and the Kiss" from Die Günderröde

Bettina von Arnim's epistolaries, or letter novels, also contained matters regarding social justice, although they tackled this issue much more subtly. This was for good reason, as her novels discussed the most personal issue of her lifetime: women's rights. Von Arnim embedded

social justice into her letters to her friends from the salon, but especially in her novel Die G nderrode, a fictionalized exchange based on letters between her younger self and her childhood friend, Katherine von G nderrode. However, readers might miss von Arnim’s subversive protest against patriarchy. According to Dischner: “Bettina very rarely spoke about the ‘Women’s Question’ directly...Rather, Bettina belongs to the group of independently political women such as George Sand or Flora Tristan¹” (12). Indeed, von Arnim rarely, if ever, mentioned women’s rights (especially in the political sense) in Die G nderrode. But her messages were clear to her recipients and are still being discussed among scholars today.

As an example, in “The Butterfly and the Kiss” (“Der Schmetterling und der Kuss”), a chapter from Die G nderrode, von Arnim did not mention the patriarchy or the domestic role that men assign to women at all (Joeres 50). One would think that being cooped up in a house all day, all 19th century women would write about would be their domestic duties, their children, or other topics assigned to their sphere of society. This was not the case with the letters exchanged among salon women in the 1800s. Von Arnim’s letters were no exception—she wrote to her friend about climbing trees and being inspired by nature, her opinions on philosophy and art, and other colorful thoughts from von Arnim’s vast imagination. Most importantly, she discussed the controversial subject of the female genius, refuting the common notion that only men can possess genius (Roetzel 110). Von Arnim described her version of genius as: “The whole person must be in harmony; namely heart and head and hand and mouth” (von Arnim, Goodman 73). At the end of the novel, she dedicated her work to university students, a deliberately political act as the Prussian monarchy saw education on democratic republican systems to be a direct threat to

¹ George Sand (1804-1876) was a French writer who wore men’s clothing in public when it was illegal without a permit in France. Flora Tristan (1803-1844) was a French socialist writer and women’s rights activist.

the power of the crown (Roetzel 121). After this reference to students, von Arnim offered another interpretation of feminine genius, one that asks for *actions* from women in the limited spaces where they *could* act (Roetzel 121). Von Arnim named art as a method for protest and advocacy, specifically women's art, since art and writing were some of the only channels available to them (Roetzel 121). Thus, by lifting up others who want change, von Arnim incited change herself in a subtle yet powerful way, by claiming that every person has genius and political power.

It is also in Die Gunderode where von Arnim explained in depth her concept of spirituality in nature. Instead of being a Catholic or Protestant, von Arnim pursued a spiritual relationship with nature, or as she called it, a "Naturvergotterung" (Dischner 49). This ideology was present in both her political and her epistolary writing, and the fact that she rejected organized religion in favor of engaging with nature is noteworthy given the hostility between Catholics and Protestants. She illustrated the relationship between the soul and nature: Nature both nourishes the soul, and *is nourished* by the soul, since without souls to nourish nature would not have a purpose (von Arnim, Goodman 76). Therefore, people who do not engage with nature are not truly living (von Arnim, Goodman 75). In The King's Book she took her argument a step further to be directly political. She argued for "free souls," that is, souls free from governmental *and* religious influence (Dischner 49). She stated defiantly that the souls of a country's citizens shall be independent from the institutional powers that claim they are "above" their subjects (Dischner 49). Von Arnim's hope for a separation between church and state was incredibly modern for mid-1800s politics, where many countries were defined solely based off the religion of their people or rulers. Her love of nature also aligned her with famous transcendentalist writers, such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau. Like the transcendentalists in

the past hoped for, nature has remained a large part of peoples' lives in the 21st Century. I have no doubt von Arnim would fit in with those who identify with nature, who do yoga in parks, who photograph sunrises in the early hours of the morning, who acknowledge both the beauty and grotesqueness of nature. Without nature, we would not exist, and this fact encompassed not only von Arnim's engagement with nature, but her philosophy on life itself.

Critical Reception of her Works

Both her epistolaries and political writings gained wide attention, as von Arnim gained a loyal fanbase and an equally vocal group of critics. (Diethé 40). Roetzel states that her emotional and flowery writing, often depicting herself in her novels as a lover of discovery and nature, led to critics calling von Arnim a child, sprite, and even a goblin, mostly to insult her (123). McAlpin corroborates this criticism, explaining how male critics often saw von Arnim's epistolary novels to be devoid of *true* emotion, since they were a mixture of fictional and real correspondence, and lacking stylistic value since she used the letters of "superior" writers, such as Goethe, in her novels (299). Her first book, Goethe's Correspondence with a Child (Goethe's Briefwechsel mit einem Kind), was subject to harsh criticism from male authors, who interpreted her admiration of Goethe as idolatry of genius, going against contemporary religious principles (Frederickson, Goodman, et al. 146). It seems that von Arnim could not do anything to win these critics over; Using Goethe's letters while stylistically altering them, was either an insult to Goethe or an insult to God. However, McAlpin continues that those who criticized von Arnim were in the minority, as many critics of both sexes praised her epistolaries, equating her with a "fairy" or a "priestess," for her strong command of flowery and adventurous language, and declaring her ability to see the world through the eyes of a child as positive (297, 300). It is interesting to note that critics often used fantasy creatures to describe von Arnim. Her wonder of

nature and eccentric personality were otherworldly for those who spoke to her. Unfortunately, this otherworldliness added to the myth of the duality of women still present in society today. Women are either beautiful, unsoiled, angelic creatures, or repulsive, promiscuous, monsters. In this way, all critics who used words like “imp” or “fairy,” even when they meant it as a compliment, condensed von Arnim’s writing and personality into one label, giving her no room to express the many nuances of her writing and personality.

Dodging Danger

Coming back to her political letter writing, it is important to note that though Arnim fell out of favor with King Wilhelm because of her incessant letters, he never considered her a significant political threat, and therefore she mostly avoided the harsher consequences that would befall a woman without connections, public recognition, or less wit (Fredriksen and Goodman et al. 71). After her rise to fame for publishing Goethe’s Correspondence with a Child, the police and censors kept their eyes on her, but did not make any moves since her writing was immensely popular with the German public (Fredriksen, Goodman, et al. 219-220). However, she was never truly safe. In a 1993 essay by Christa Wolf, the author explains that von Arnim was often subject to threats of imprisonment, censorship, and was surveilled by spy organizations for the radical discussions of communism and civil rights inside her salon (Fredriksen, Goodman, et al. 45). When The King’s Book was published, government officials started filing secret reports on her in case she overstepped the freedoms she gained by her popularity (Frederickson, Goodman, et al. 72).

But von Arnim knew how to game the publishing system to limit the amount of censorship her books received (Fredriksen, Goodman, et al. 45). This included publishing a booklet under the male pseudonym “Leberecht Fromm,” denouncing The King’s Book and the

author herself, as someone who did not understand politics and is idealistic (Dischner 47-50). By seemingly discrediting her own book, she made it possible for it to be published since “Leberecht Fromm” (a pun on the German phrase “live very piously,” perhaps pointing out the self-righteousness of men who criticized her intelligence) had assured censors that her book was harmless to anyone who could form a political thought. When the censors started to bother her with her later works, she opened her own publishing firm (Fredriksen, Goodman, et al. 49). When a Prussian magistrate threatened to close her publishing firm and sentence her to three months in prison for “tax evasion,” her brother-in-law, Friedrich Carl von Savigny, bailed her out (Fredriksen, Goodman, et al. 51). Before being excused, she defended her publishing firm to the court, saying that she would rather “have the approval of the people,” than be of noble birth (Fredriksen, Goodman, et al. 51).

Von Arnim also used stereotypes assigned to women to leverage her place among powerful men. When writing to King Wilhelm, she would often downplay her strong qualities in hopes of appearing more feminine, and therefore, less of a threat to the patriarchy. Fredriksen and Goodman et al. cite examples of this strategy, including von Arnim claiming that she has “by nature no ambition—no none at all!” (79), and that she lacks “human wisdom, which has no voice in a woman” (71). By self-deprecating within her letters, von Arnim directed attention away from her political actions by qualifying them as something she did not understand or was incapable of doing.

Additionally, Diethe notes that von Arnim’s flirtatious correspondences with the men in her life, such as Goethe and the writer Fürst Pückler-Muskau, gained her entry into male circles without the men ever realizing that she had overstepped her male-assigned boundaries (44-45). Von Arnim was not necessarily looking for a love affair, rather, for a way to acquaint herself

with powerful men such as she did with King Wilhelm and Goethe (much to the dismay of Goethe's wife). It is remarkable that she emitted such confidence as she wrote to men since she was in her fifties. Yet, she wrote letters teeming with flirtatious compliments, captivating her recipients with her magical aura, and when seeing them in person, taking them on long walks in nature (despite the dirty looks she received from their wives) (Diethel 44). Many women lost their sense of sexuality or attractiveness after they had their first child, due to the permeating messages of having sex only to birth children and the ideal woman being "pure" and "innocent," messages that Christianity forced onto the women born into its societies (Diethel 44). Von Arnim retained her sexuality throughout her literary career, giving herself freedom and power over men.

Even the epistolical nature of von Arnim's writing suggested femininity. Joeres states that the letter-form, "...was instead viewed as the successful carrying-out of what it is that women, given their make-up, are capable of. The lack of desire, the passionlessness that are assumed to be part and parcel of the domestic sphere..." (45). Men were not threatened when women wrote letters to them—after all, they considered letters to be the most juvenile and least literary form of writing, so of course they associated it with women. Therefore, von Arnim used this form to express herself freely and mitigate any anger by affirming the stereotypes about women that men subscribed to. Joeres further interprets this choice as von Arnim and her female correspondents' way that they created their own private, literary space, shielded from the patriarchy (47). By corresponding through letters, women could take advantage of the privacy and personal nature of the letter through expressing themselves more deeply than in a spoken exchange and embedding social justice in the place where men would never care to look.

Scholarly Misdeeds and Future Recognition

Some might ask themselves what the worth is in learning about women who died ages ago, in a place that has been fundamentally changed for decades. Yes, Germany eventually became a democracy after decades of monarchy and dictatorship. Yes, Bettina von Arnim did not create this democracy in her time, and despite her best efforts the forces of the patriarchy worked against her. Since most institutions were controlled by men, von Arnim had to maneuver around an extra layer of discrimination from her male peers and superiors.

Even after her death von Arnim endured discrimination, this time by male editors omitting her work entirely, mentioning her only briefly in connection to Goethe, or considering her more of a “romantic personality” than a serious author (Frederikson, Goodman, et al. 365). Unfortunately, this is the fate of many female authors, as most editors were male and therefore did not consider women’s works as literature. It took 63 years after von Arnim’s death for a fitting compilation of her work, one that respected her as an author in her own right, to be published by Waldemar Oelhke in 1922. (Frederikson, Goodman, et al. 371). Even then, scholarly work on von Arnim throughout the mid-1900s was riddled with errors, due to the underestimation of her value to German society. It did not help that in 1929 the Brentano family auctioned off von Arnim’s manuscripts when they fell on hard times, making her work that much more difficult to track down (Fredriksen, Goodman, et al. 359). Future biographers (many of them male) continued to libel her knowledge of politics, her epistolaries, and echo the same epithets ascribed to her by her contemporaries, such as “childlike” or “goblin-like” (Frederikson, Goodman, et al. 382). Thankfully the second wave of feminism in the 1970s and 1980s caused a resurgence of interest in von Arnim, and therefore lead to more reputable scholarly work to surface about her (Frederikson, Goodman, et al 382-383), but the scattering of her manuscripts

and disreputable “biographers” have done permanent damage to von Arnim’s dimension of academia.

Despite all these facts, Bettine von Arnim maintains her worth and deserves recognition. She was, and still is, a model for civil action. She fought for equality in all aspects of life and for every person no matter their identity. Her political work inspired activists across Earth’s timeline, such as Margaret Fuller, Fanny Lewald, and Christa Wolf. Every wave of feminism in the United States has seen a rise in popularity of von Arnim, thus her clear, liberating voice echoed decades into the future (Frederikson, Goodman, et al 383, 363). Her epistolary works have garnered admiration from contemporary writers and historians for their beautiful and secretly powerful language (Frederikson, Goodman, et al. 364). Her charisma and intelligence allowed her to traverse a dangerous society in ways that no woman of her time could. She was threatened, insulted, mocked, censored, and ignored, yet like the stalwart activists on the streets of the world, she never stopped *doing*. She once said, “It’s worth the trouble to save a life, no matter whose” (Fredriksen, Goodman, et al. 131).

If only more people than Germanists and scholars would venture into her history, she could inspire even more generations of creative, political minds. What is worse is that there are hundreds, perhaps thousands of women from history that have received the same, or worse treatment by historians and critics. When we dig into history and discover these trailblazers, these women who made history despite the disadvantages forced onto them, we are completing the job that our historians, scholars, and textbooks never finished. When we uncover women of all races, sexual orientations, religions, and gender expressions, we give hope to the youth that never had a historical figure who looked or thought like them. We give hope to those who despair from the unforgiving world around them.

Bettina von Arnim has earned respect from myself and other scholars for being herself, not merely a fairy, muse, or sprite, but a force. She set an excellent example of citizenship, despite her German identity being erased by land-hungry governments. She was, and is, universally relatable, as shown by this quote from a letter she wrote to her brother.

“...I don’t need any support in life, and I don’t wish to be the victim of such foolish prejudices. I know what I need!—I need to keep my freedom. For what?—To undertake and complete the dictates of my inner voice” (Fredriksen, Goodman, et al. 125).

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