

Annette von Droste-Hülshoff to Christoph Bernhard Schlüter in Münster

Eppishausen, November 19th 1835, Thursday

Eppishausen the 22nd

October

Had I been able to write to you earlier, dearest of my friends, I would have done so, but I cannot just write at any time, particularly to you and you may, in any case, regard yourself as special when I say that no time has been suitable for you. Meanwhile I have been rushing around with all sorts of activity; many excursions in the district, many visits out of home and many visitors to us, alternating between being the charming guest and the joyful, willingly serving hostess, by turns out of bustling and into relaxation, out of relaxation again into distraction. Believe me, it takes a lot before one has let everybody have his or her dues, and has withstood all the pleasure to which one is predestined. But now, God willing, I am now moved into settled quarters and truly, the little place is not bad, especially that which I am occupying at the moment; do you want to make its acquaintance? It is the window of an antiquated building on a mountain, but not very high. The spire of the village's church below could steal the wine from our cellar. If it had not been brought up in such a Christian manner, who knows what would happen. Right – the village just below the window – almost immediately abutting is a second, then a third, fourth, up to a seventh. All so close that I can count the houses (with a lorgnete, of course) and our good old castle within, like little Vienna among its big suburbs, *sans comparaison*. Right through the middle of the valley a highway along which one rattles and clatters worse than on the best in all Westphalia, for you should know that, here, enough food to half satisfy one's hunger and elbowing through the poor are, by far, not such infallible signs of poverty as having only water to drink and travelling on foot. Rather go without bread than without wine, and that would have to be someone forsaken by fate, for whom neither Heaven has created a Rozinante nor the carriage maker a poste chaise. Whoever does not know this and is, moreover, short sighted as I am, thinks that all the people are rich. But, not to lose the thread: farther, out beyond the highway, loveliest mountains covered with deciduous woods and, as it goes in the song, 'On every peak a little castle, a little village out of every gorge' (*Auf jedem Gipfel ein Schlöbchen, ein Dörfchen aus jeder Schlucht*). From this window I can see thirty of them – I have not counted them and also have no desire to do so. But reliable people say it is lovely, it is beautiful to look at. Above all in the sunshine; indeed, even storm and fog cannot dissipate so much life and joyfulness, which is why, in a bright, sociable mood I would rather be in this room than anywhere else, which, as such, is so light and bright and filled with the most delicate things, shells, carvings in wood, ivory, sectioned stones, coins, etc. When I see how my family has assembled all this around me, that makes me glad and entertains me, I scarce doubt that all these villages and shiny little castles were built for my benefit and this play of humanity on the highway occurs only for my entertainment, just close enough to be able to make out by the naked eye, far enough away not to be disturbing. But there is a place that I like even more and winter has to

be very severe to keep me from visiting it every day, at least once! Until now I have spent most of the stolen time there. Listen; next to the house there is glorious wood with walks that have borrowed just enough from art to remove what would be uncomfortable. Lots of old beeches, a wonderfully high leafy vault with birds of all colours and voices, here and there lumps of rock to rest on, a lot of lively springs which gather to form well behaved ponds on which, as if that were not enough, white water lilies float such as we have to cultivate so carefully at home. All that makes an incalculable whole, i.e. incalculable for us who stroll about so willingly but unwillingly gallop down the mountain. This wood is separated from the house by only a beautiful and deep gorge over which a bridge leads, which truly does not look bad. You are thinking, this is the beloved place – not at all – I am describing its advantages only in order to break its neck with that much greater aplomb. If I add that I have wished it beneath the earth a hundred times, consigning it to the old mouldy trunks that lie near Zielschlatt in the Torfmoor, it is because what it hides is more preferable to me than what it can give. Ah, rather no wood, no walks other than the main road and down below the fruit trees which are all over the valley and in place of that, my dear Alps, my Sentis, my Glärnisch, my Tirolean mountains and my beautiful clear lake with its sails. You see, we would have all that if the woods did not deprive us of it. Of course, I do also see it as well, but not as often as I want, for example not right now, where I would give five groats for it. I see it only at the little place about which I have been talking for so long and have not yet led you to it. It is a little garden house at the highest point of the woods, where the view into the valley opens up. There are two paths up to there; one steep and thorny, like that of youth and I usually walk that or rather climb it, for it gets me up there in three minutes, panting and half dead may be. The other is like sin, wide and comfortable, which is why I also avoid it, seeing that it has the property of taking a quarter of an hour. You may have chosen whichever you want; we are now at the top anyway, my dear, dear friend. This is the place where I always have you in mind and you are present. I believe that I can truthfully say that I have never been over there without you in mind. It is a solitary patch of ground, very attractive and very magnificent. Only when the air is very raw do I sit inside the little arbour, otherwise in front of it beneath a large weeping willow, quite hidden by the vines with which the hillside is occupied right down into the valley, the valley itself narrow and empty, the mountains opposite very close and covered with conifers which make them look black and rigid, thus mountain after mountain, one colossal amphitheatre and finally the heads of the Alps with their eternal snow. Left, the length of the valley closed by Lake Constance (that is, the perspective. The lake itself is two hours away from here) its mirror dazzling me in the sunshine. Actually the lake with its moving pennants and friendly little towns on its shores, shines across like daylight in the entrance to a grotto. It is unusual, how the clarity of atmosphere brings every object closer. I need only a good lorgnette here in order to see miles and others manage the same with the naked eye.

In Hülshoff I have never seen the mirror surface of a large pond clearer, not five minutes away (from my room) than here at the vine-clad summer-house, the lake one mile away, on

which I can count every sail, and even differentiate between individual buildings in the little town of Lindau on the opposite shore. The Alpine peaks even, where there is not much more air left than none at all, often seem so near that one could just go up there. I make out every mountain cleft on the Sentis so exactly that I think if a chamois hunter appeared I must be able to see him and yet it is a good six hours, uphill and downhill to the foot of this old gentleman and its peak; I am not sure. But I do know that, a few weeks ago, an Englishman whose headstrong fiancée had demanded a lump of ice from the peak of the Sentis in return for her heart, almost came to grief in the process. Difficulties drove him back thrice; on the fourth time he did not give up and set foot ever forwards. Happily he had left friends behind in the valley – alpine rescuers were alerted and our hero returned on a stretcher, unconscious. Whether the lady gave up her demand, or he the lady, Heaven knows. I am sure that I do not know.

You will gather by now that my darling and *vis a vis* is no joke and does not like having his beard pulled, like the erstwhile Sultan of Babylon of Oberon-like memory. Anyway, to come out of the regions of ice again: from my seat under the willow, I am looking around every gorge, climbing every cliff, indeed only in my mind, but one already has enough of what seems so near and clear and thinks that there is nothing more to be had by approaching. Here I often dream long, come back properly frustrated, for the evenings are gradually becoming fresh, but over here is my homeland. Everything passes before me, that I have been able to carry in my heart – a lot, a lot! – if I have been fed with other notions all day. Here, my dear friend, I open my own treasure casket and stretch out my hand from here, across many a town, many a hill and the broad Rhine. Throughout the day there is life in the valley, but when dusk falls – when the depth becomes so deep at one o'clock and the height so high at one o'clock, the pine forest there stands like an actual eclipse and only the white, cold masses over there shine down like ghosts. Believe, me, Schlüter, flat country has no term for the solitude of those moments – desolate and mighty – Death in its most enormous form.

The 3rd of November. More or less a week has passed, during which I have had to put aside my own concept of life, in order to follow that of others. That is so often my lot and I bear it more impatiently than equitably, for who would not find it otherwise, and more often, indeed. Few have more free time and more considerate housemates, that is why I am like *Gais* in Kampen's children's library, for whom life was too comfortable in the stable, and when a brief period occurs which lets me realise that one cannot take for granted the joys of sociable circumstances without bearing part of the cost; truly, Schlüter, then I am so insufferable that you would not know me. For example, there are some very amenable people here, a family of the Counts of Thurn. The count, an old man, fundamentally honest, good natured beyond measure; his unmarried sister, completely of the same stamp; and of both, the sole object of devoted care, a beautiful, good, clever and very sensitive daughter of about twenty-five years. They dwell two hours away from here in one of the most beautiful points of the country and various circumstances brought us into relationships with them, which are almost equal to

family or a friendship of many years. However, they are understandably the only people to whom we owe consideration of that kind. When other visitors come I can act as I please, appear, stay away; everything as it comes to mind, amusement and solitude just as I like. A real life of Riley mentally; indeed in vogue only the last few weeks, but long enough to spoil me to the core, for I soon acquire bad habits. At Rüschaus I have received the visitors day after day, listened to reports by messengers and personally answered my Mother's repeated calls. In fact, I was so used to it that I did not grumble at having to break off in the middle of a verse that had cost me a lot of thought and many a rhyme just discovered. Yes, I was well behaved in those days; but now? My dear, considerate friend, I believe all your patience would have been exhausted, had you heard me lamenting in such an unfriendly and inhospitable way as, for example, a week ago, when the good family Thurn came with such kind intention to fetch me to the grape harvest on their beautiful estate. Previously, I would have grasped the suggestion with both hands; and now? The day before yesterday it would have been quite alright, yesterday too; tomorrow again, but just today I wanted to finish this letter and I had to pull myself together, in order not to seem like a sulking child.

The ninth, no!

It is too bad, the way in which I treat you, my pious, beloved friend, but I will tell you how it went in the meantime, then my excuse is done. First of all was at Thurns' for a week (already been back six days) then; ah, there you will have to wait a while – a couple of nice incidents occurred to me there. What I otherwise have yet to say to my own advantage will follow. On this estate (hill) I spent most of the time at the window. One sees the Alps as on our vine covered hill. There I saw first the Alpine glow, this burning in the dark rose red at sunrise and sunset, which makes the Alps like red-hot iron and, however often poets cast about, happens only at the seldom well-timed union of certain cloud layers and type of atmosphere. A darkly brooding mass of cloud in which the sun's rays refract, is part of it, but also much more.

Listen, now; I saw that a hefty rain bank was standing in the northwest and disregarding that, kept my dear Alps in view, which still near enough to touch, lay before me. The sun, ready for sunset, was standing near the clouds and giving a strangely refracted yet attractive light. I looked at the mountains which shone quite light but white as usual as when the sun otherwise shines on the snow. I suspected nothing out of gradually livelier, yellowing then reddening colouring until it suddenly began to heighten, rose-red, dark red, blue-red, ever faster, ever deeper. I was beside myself and could have sunk to my knees. I was alone and did not want to call anybody, for fear of missing something, now the clouds drew towards the mountains, the fiery islands floated in a black ocean; now the clouds climbed, everything became sombre. I closed my window, buried my head in the sofa's upholstery and wanted neither to see nor hear anything else for the time being. Another time I saw a snow cloud floating across the Alps while we had bright sunshine. It dragged itself like a trailing garment from peak to peak, took each mountain under its coat separately and left it behind, white down to the foot. It covered many miles with unbelievable speed; it looked splendid. You see, Nature in Switzerland does the honours of its country in fine style and performs delightful

national plays for strangers at windows. Now another nice little adventure from Castle Mountain, of a quite different sort, in which I almost had a feeling, pleasant and hair-raising at once, in connection with a really well written ghost novel, *Der Überzählige* (The Supernumerary) that I had read only a few days before and in which a similar scene takes place. Well; the bell tolled midnight! – no, it was not that late, but still about half-past ten. We were sitting together after supper, old count Thurn, his sister, Emilie, his daughter, Emma and I. Before us on the table lay all manner of old things that the good Papa Thurn had just given me as presents; an Order of Calatrava, a copy of which appeared on a family oil painting of more than a hundred years; a stirrup bag with a lock and chain strong enough to hold a young bullock, the bag itself of sheer silk, woven into it the oldest Thurn coat-of-arms in gold. This coat-of-arms dated from the time when they went by the name of *Della Torre*, ruling over Milan, before they had to give way to the Viscontis; a very beautifully painted miniature and more other things of a similar nature. Everything came out of drawers which had, perhaps, not been opened for sixty years. The musty smell permeated the whole room and I felt almost as though I were touching the magically preserved limbs of the dead. The old count held a plain ivory casket in his hand, from which all manner of things still came to light. Finally, it was empty.

“Now”, he said, “so that you do not lose the little things, I am also giving you the casket. There is, indeed, nothing either beautiful or remarkable about it. By the way, it may be a couple of hundred years old. At least, I have had it over forty years. When I was child my father had it and I remember that he told me that his grandfather had given it to him, also as an already old casket with I know not what inside it. Thus you can count it among antiques”. At this point he clapped the lid shut so firmly that, afterwards, I could not get it open. I was working away at and pressing on it when it flew open forcefully and two wonderful miniatures lay before me; one in the lid, the other opposite in the base of the casket. Emma and I, remembering the *Supernumerary*, were both so startled that we blanched. Not so much horrified, more surprised, were the old brother and sister who were able to say with certainty that no-one had known of the existence of these pictures for at least 130 years. The old Count to whom the casket previously served as a box for sweets for twenty years, looked as though he believed in witches. It turned out that by my clumsy bodging and breaking I had touched the spring which moved the slide covering the two pictures. The oils represent two completely preserved portraits; a young man and a girl, both at the age of about sixteen, both of great beauty and so similar one to the other that one could take them for brother and sister, if not for twins. Both have round, fine faces, a complexion of unusual delicacy, the most beautiful and largest of deep blue eyes, slightly stubbed noses, then again a mouth and chin of truly ideal loveliness. Were the young man a girl he would be the more beautiful of the two siblings, but these delicate shapes can hardly be excused as youth. The girl is dressed in black, with enormous, loose sleeves from which beautiful, rounded arms and little hands charmingly show forth; then a white apron, a white, gauzy neckerchief and a very clear little bonnet from which a few brown curls peep out. So she sits in a huge armchair upholstered in

dark red velvet, somewhat self satisfied, more than a little apprehensive, just as the poor thing must have sat for the painter, and passing a letter through the open window with one hand while holding a little basket of pretzels on her lap with the other. The young fellow looks just like a Cupid in costume, the way he is just stepping out of the door of his house, with the most droll and yet most graceful impudence and a touch of real dignity which may, later on, have developed quite advantageously.

A tremendous full bottomed wig shows off his little face like a cherub head from the clouds; his delicate, tall figure stretches upwards in an endlessly long gold-embroidered brown waistcoat, ditto the coat. In one hand he holds a tobacco tin, the other planted defiantly at his hip. The colours are as fresh as though just off the paintbrush. I have kept the casket and look at it daily, until now, with the strangest feelings. My goodness; what is time, what is in the olden days, now and once upon a time? (I mean, reckoned in earthly time). The pictures are not exactly that excellently well painted, but they copy life up to the timorous disappointment. I never saw it before; Emma Thurn claims they raise and lower their eyes. One is forced to think that they have only now, with the painter, come out of the door, equally full of the freshest elixir of life and firmest of simple belief in a heaven full of violins. One plainly sees how happy they were with their beauty and their fine clothes, especially the boy with his exquisite wig that the parents, without doubt, had specially made for him for the occasion. And where are their bones? Should one still be able to collect a few fragments together? They remind me of a very charming and quite similar creature, Lichen Dali, whom I saw last year in Belgium – her first excursion since she left the boarding house four weeks before. One cannot think of anything more graceful and fresh. Every free minute was used for a little dance or music practice, for we were already at late summer and she was to make her *début* that coming winter. Her eyes sparkled with expectation; those of her parents no less, but not two months later I received an obituary notice. Typhus had carried her off. Now I should still like to know whether those two fresh flowers were also snapped off, as I see them before me, or whether they first became shrivelled and unrecognisable. For my daydreaming I prefer to dwell upon the first notion; that youthful portrait of an aged original seldom gives me anything other than unpleasant impressions. It is not the decay of outward shape but that of the inner. Whose personality develops and grows such that it would be appealing to the same individual at all times? I do not like to be reminded, in the case of all those people in whom I trust and to whom I owe respect, that there was a time when I would have refused them both. In the case of those who have lost all that was more noble than youth had, it saddens me to see that one may be so well equipped, yet so down at heel at the end. Seldom, seldom dare one think that that is just the blossom that, after the fruit, one had to assume. Reflections you can make for yourself; I do not need to send them out of Switzerland, but dearest friend, I do not know anything better to give you. Politics worry both of us little in equal measure otherwise I could say to you that the free Swiss who do not want to acknowledge rank are the worst slaves to money; that rich farmers represent more absolute masters and worse tyrants in the villages than class difference ever produced.

Elsewhere, connections may effect much; here they do everything – money and nepotism are the only levers. Whoever has neither to show can only sit, folded hands in lap; he is condemned to remain a lifelong tormentor. Just now all the cantons are standing separate and one against the other like cat and dog. The more and meaner hands in which the thousands of threads are held, at the ends of which the fabric of state is dragged back and forth, the more miserable and selfish does it go on. One cannot notice without disgust. However, we learn no more of the matter than they, against our will, fill our ears with. My brother-in-law is not a born Swiss, but a Black Forest man and has, as a foreigner, nothing to do with any of it. Full stop.

That we profited from an earthquake you will have read in the newspapers, but you did not dream that night that I, your very dear friend, your own sweetheart, thought that a murderer lay under my bedstead and was trying just then to slide out from under in order to cut my throat with a shearing knife. Seriously, however, I thought something similar and at the same hour many (thought) with me, for the tremor was very vehement. Windows rattled everywhere and in some places glasses and bottles tipped over. We also heard strange sounds and banging as from cannon shots. I was still half asleep and thought that one of the heavy stones that they lay on the wine press next door, was falling off, or a crop watchman was shooting in the neighbouring vineyards; I was already used to things like that at night. Travel is, indeed, good for something! Where would I have found an earthquake at Rüschaus?

Well then, the good Thurns had brought together so much for my pleasure; an earthquake, an Alpine glow, a highly picturesque snow cloud, two ghostly portraits and also a great quantity of other pleasant objects and presents, friendly words and glances, et cetera. I should have liked to do something kind for them, and there Emma dropped me a hint; nothing would please her Papa more than a poem about his Schloß Berg. Oh dear! That was a hard nut to crack. I never like what I have to do (another bad feature that was unknown to you) nevertheless I put on a good face, but then the outline was set for me. Do you know the song *Mein Herr Mahler will Er wohl, mich abkonterfeyen* (Painter, paint a portrait of me) ? Anyway, in case you do not know it, hear what one can demand of a person. I was even supposed to include twelve cantons, almost as many mountains, almost twice as many main towns, the names of four kingdoms, various waterways and the number of the rest of the places that the view presents. It had been a source of annoyance to the old gentleman for years to read many a poem about the beautiful points of the surrounding district and never one about his dear Berg. Now that it was his turn, he did not want to give away anything to those people, not even a three foot wide rivulet, no hamlet of six houses. But I said, quoting William Tell, “Demand what is human” and made it clear to him that numbers look much better in a calculation than in a poem. He only half understood, relented little and I promised to have the piece of work printed together with *St. Bernhard* and *Arztes Vermächtnis*, consequently it was not without effect for my initial appearance; an awful dilemma! The satisfaction of my dear pious prosaic host was more important to me than my poetic reputation. Nevertheless, it was not entirely all the same to me with regard to this latter and, you see, as ridiculous as it may

seem to you, this caused a large gap in this letter. Every morning I was beset by the consciousness of my difficult and unfulfillable obligation. I could think about nothing else and was disposed to nothing sensible; in short, I would do well to roll off this millstone at any price. Victory! It has happened and the best part is that prose and poetry have reached a fairly good mutual agreement. Provided that Count Thurn turns a blind eye and the public, too, it will work out alright. I am not sending you the hybrid product this time, for in accord with my promise I keep for you what I write – it is not much, but still something – and it makes for a lot of enjoyment working for you. Dear dearest friend, I fear that you think little of me because you have not yet had a letter from me. It would be quite wrong of you, since I think of you so often and sincerely. Speak to my Mother and my Therese occasionally. I am always afraid that I come to a halt on the envelope during my absence.

The type of people here does not, on the whole, suit me at all, although I admit to holding no free judgement, for I am longing for home. A kind, befriended human face is worth more than a thousand mountains and were all the snow on them silver dust and every cake of ice a crystal weighing a hundredweight. I shall not be displeased to see the brown heaths around Münster again, even less so, the good old city of Münster and less still Schlüter. I also often think about Jungmann and how he is getting on with his tiresome story. By the way, since my cousin Asseburg and several others who were with him in the same case are now relieved of all the unpleasantnesses, I hope the same for Jungmann. Give him my sincere regards. Is he writing busily? I mean both letters and poems. There are whole loads of minnesongs and among them several thick volumes with the associated melodies, but not one as lovely as the “*grüne Rock*” (the green coat) or even its fellows, the usual ‘wardrobe’. My brother-in-law lives in none other and now the strange orthography of his letters is becoming clear to me. He has, in fact, in his written style, become partly unaccustomed to our present-day speech forms, involuntarily, I believe and one encounters traces of the *Nibelungenlied*, of *Lohengrin*, the *Eggenlied* etc. everywhere. I read, with emotion, when Lohengrin in his swan-boat floats down the Rhine, the Emperor then *weeping, bellows like a bull as Lohengrin goes away* the knight’s spouse faints and *they broke out her teeth with a block of wood*. Oh yes! Let out a deep sigh, that you have lost all, but truly, were you here, you would be excused no syllable. You would have to share sorrow and joy with me as becomes a true friend, in turn I stand by you. Incidentally, joking aside, my brother-in-law is the best man in the world, his love for my sister is so great and of the type that no inadequate human being can ask, but the heart can still give. And he is also pleasant, intelligent, very scholarly, in short, he lacks nothing, but he has too much, namely too many manuscripts and old prints and too much desire to read them aloud. Towards us, Mother and me, he is attentiveness itself.

N.b. my *St. Bernhard* and its companion will present themselves to the critics this year. It is good that other people deal for me. Myself, I know all too little to be able to help myself. First I am shy, then confident and both without reason.

Ambition have I little, lethargy in over abundance. But, listen to how it went. In Bonn at Frau Mertens’s home I hoped to find the only fair copy that was both legible and correct. You will

remember that I had sent this there well over a year ago. It was intended for printing and needed only to be checked by Professor d'Alton, Frau Schopenhauer and Mertens herself (for one becomes numb from re-reading too often). The first note about it from Frau Mertens was more delighted than I could imagine I deserved and since then not another syllable. I already complained to you. What did I find in Bonn? Nothing! Frau Mertens was off to Italy where she intends to spend a whole year, my manuscript had become invisible, either taken with her or lent out, or misplaced. Neither her husband nor her daughter, nor her friends thought other than that it had been in my hands for at least half a year. Both d'Alton and Schopenhauer had written me yard-long letters, complete essays; that from d'Alton supposedly over three pages, but everything was entrusted to Frau Mertens and she had put one with the other God knows where. Thus the comments of these *littératures* were lost to me, for, although I had that furious book with me, I lacked the time to read it through anew together with them and memory only brought snatches of it to mind for them after the elapse of a year. However, their verdict was, on the whole, as favourable as I could wish; they warned me to publish urgently and are daily awaiting the announcement; what could be done! I did not want to approach either d'Alton or Schopenhauer to take care of my business for me, since the former is no author and completely without connections to booksellers, the latter completely at odds with her publisher and herself completely at a loss. I consigned myself to the will of God and already saw my work as only written to occupy my time in the country. There is nothing more discouraging than these long cries of complaint from authors about their present standing with the readership and booksellers along the Rhine. Only few find a publisher, most leave their work lying for the time being or ruin themselves by publishing at their own expense. The enormous advantage from translations is said to be the cause of it all. I well believed that and my self confidence did not gain by it. However, what is to be, will be. I have a publisher, an important one and quite without any of my own doing; not that it was for the sake of my excellence, but it turned out in a way that the thing was offered voluntarily out of personal goodwill, in order to please me, also out of curiosity to learn how the public accepts the verse. I am to set the conditions myself; they will exist only as a few complimentary volumes. The time of publishing depends on my diligence; as soon as I have obtained a fair copy to my requirements the publisher will not lose time. I have certainly let the four first months go by without lifting a hand, but now it is to be the first thing that I attend to, perhaps even tomorrow. Easter time is too late but I think at Michaelmas. They want a few small poems which first introduce the book and later separate the larger pieces. I find that suitable but have scarcely two or three that I want to select for it, so I shall have to saddle up good old Pegasus, in this inclement unpoetic weather where snow lies all around and even my dear vineyard exhibits nothing but withered branches and a wide, soft ocean of fog which, despite the glories that it encloses, has an appearance no better than our heathland mist. However, dear Schlüter, you must not think that it is only the ninth today, but the eighteenth, so often have I been interrupted; even this morning by a poor young person who sees no end to his misfortune because he sees himself as genius and lack of funds forces him to become

an artisan. If I could open another path for him I would not do it. His talent seems to me to be far from adequate. Better to be a well fed artisan than a mediocre, half starved painter or poet and nothing more shocking than to see the path before you sinking away and being unable to turn back. There; that is settled. The matter must remain in its *status quo* but I still feel sorry for the poor rascal. I already said that everywhere here is covered in snow. The first fell on All Saints day, but thawed away again, but we have had a covering lying for ten days, which becomes firmer every night and has, bit by bit, recruited more to reach a depth over one and half shoes. Everything in our good old Münsterland is more moderate, heat and cold; I wager that there is still no snow there today, perhaps still not in a week, when this letter arrives. I have just thought;

I want to set out a very small poem before you that I already laid yesterday before the royal court, to be enlisted as a foundation stone to the two larger. It is called "*die rechte Stunde*" and sounds as follows:

Im muntern Saal, beim Kerzen-Licht, / Wenn alle Lippen sprühen Funken, / Und gar, vom
Sonnen-Scheine trunken, / Wenn jeder Finger Blumen bricht / Und vollends an geliebtem
Munde / Wenn die Natur in Flammen schwimmt / Das ist sie nicht, die rechte Stunde / Die dir
der Genius bestimmt.

Doch wenn so Tag als Lust versank / Dann wirst du schon ein Plätzchen wissen / Vielleicht in
deines Sophas Kissen / Vielleicht auf einer Garten-Bank, / Dann kling't wie halb verstandne
Weise, / Wie halb verwischter Farben Guß / Verinnts um dich, und leise, leise, / Berührt dich
dann dein Genius.

In a lively hall, by candlelight / When every lip is sparkling
Perchance drunk from sunshine; / When every finger plucks flowers
To give to beloved mouth / When Nature floats in flames;
The time is then not right / That genius intends for you.

When sunken both are day and will / Then you will know a little corner
Perhaps in your sofa's cushion / Perchance upon a garden seat;
Then it sounds like a half heard air, / As a shower of near faded colour
Runs off around you and softly, softly / Your genius then touches you.

What do you say to that? Methinks it is neither beautiful nor ugly, but what one calls blameless and therefore a better padding than some others that I erased unwillingly, the individual beauties of which could not outweigh too much crass or weak material. I wish that you were here, Schlüter; that is my sigh, morning, noon and night. I knew in advance that I

should miss you, indeed a lot, but I was counting on a being whose occupation, views and taste generally accorded with mine, but, apart from the Thurn ladies, no female person sets foot in the house; only men of a certain stamp, antiquarians, who want to rummage through my brother-in-law's stuffy manuscripts; very scholarly, indeed very famous people in their subject, but boring as bitter death; mouldy, rusty, prosaic as a horse brush; hardened despisers of all later art and literature. Sometimes it is as if I were wandering among dry bean pods and hear only withered rattling and rustling around me and such fellows cannot reach an end. One has to sit at table with them for four hours and empty straw is threshed without pause. No, Schlüter, I am certainly not unfair and do not despise any knowledge because it is alien to me, but this field is too limited and over grazed; thistle gobbling cannot be avoided. Hang it all! What does it matter whether, three centuries ago, the insignificant abbot of a monastery that never appears in history was called Ottwin or Godwin. Yet I see that things like that make for many grey hairs and bitter hearts.

We have the nineteenth today and this letter will at last go to the Post; it is high time and yet I am sorry, it has been as though I were with you. That is over for the time being, for what I am otherwise writing for you, I know that you will receive it later on. But perhaps it is also a good thing and gives me more inclination for these other scribbles which are, anyway, intended for you; some entirely and alone for you. Today is my Name Day. You are not thinking about it, or rather, do not know it, because they call me Annette. My proper name is, however, Elisabeth; Anna-Elisabet and they made Annette out of the Anna. I wanted you to know this; I am sure that you will pray for me. Remember the agreement we made, for the last hour of the evening? I have not forgotten it. Where can friends better greet each other than before God? There is great joy therein. Listen, best heart; yesterday I was writing very impatiently and ill behavedly about worthy knowledgeable people whose occupations are never harmful and certainly often useful, as many righteous claims may have been brought to light and many an inequity invalidated. Whoever shrinks from searching through the chaff will not find the lost grain within. My coin collecting is just as boring for others and cannot ever usefully reach into the present. N.b. I cannot conceal that my brother-in-law made me a present of some very fine silver coins today. A wonderfully large, mint-condition Greek, from Macedonia and ten Roman consular coins. All in all, my collections have received many a fine addition here, coins, mineral specimens, fossils, a large bag with four hundred Roman copper coins I bought myself, etc.

This sheet of paper has reached its end. Give my respects to your dear family – your father, Uncle Fritz, your dear, dear Mother and my heart's Theresa, two thousand times; and let me, all of you, find your thoughts as favourably disposed towards me as when I left them. Is that not right? We know each other too well to let distance be harmful; is that not so, Schlüter?

Your Annette von Droste-Hülshoff

(in the margin on page four) Mama and Jenny are scolding me for not having written a greeting to you from them. There! Here you are – a whole load!