

Annette von Droste-Hülshoff to Elise Rüdiger in Münster

Abbenburg, July 24th 1843, Monday

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[an incomplete letter, part of which exists as a handwritten copy]

I have just come back from Wehren, my dearest heart, whence we had already driven on the thirteenth; for two days as we thought. Instead of that, today is the eleventh day on which we have felt little less than the floor of the coach beneath us. That is how things go here. One starts off and then the visits string out like the pluck from a calf and I am also just as tired of it. How your obituary notice meanwhile weighed heavily upon my mind, you will easily understand, but it lay in my desk and it was no good to me that I had the keys with me.

You are not satisfied with your essay? I think, it is exactly as it should be, not leaving out anything that can honour our dear Ittchen and please the reader and yet quite without that fine, eccentric hue which so easily reveals the hand of someone closely connected. Everyone will see the author in the mind's eye – a serious, quiet friend of one's youth, completely objective and heated only involuntarily by the value of the subject. And is this not the alpha and omega, the only right note of a commendation that one wishes to be effective? Altogether, dearest, your public style is as much masculine as you yourself are feminine. I never read anything of yours in print without laughing a little, when I think of your meek, shy, childlike little face bent over these resolute lines. I would, meanwhile, not agree to anything more to the sheet's editorship, for why should one be content with praise in these *pauvre* times when one can get money? You can now receive money everywhere.

In addition to that, the paper even seems to me to be inferior, at least no longer good enough for you. Did you read, in the last issue of the *Morgenblatt*, the three 'Liebesgedichte' by Levin Schücking? To me, the title (*the copy displays a gap in MS*) the right mood for his young wife (*the copy displays a gap in MS*).

Oeyenhausen has travelled to Pyrmont and we visited him in his Grävenburg just as he had left a few days before. I was, therefore, unable to pass on your greetings. Grävenburg was always an interesting place to stay, because of its antiquity and is now a very pleasant abode, since the large garden full of flowers and fruit is excellently kept and many of the rooms are comfortably and elegantly furnished. This, together with his studies and neighbourly visits, is the poor joker's only joy in life, who year in, year out spends his days in a threesome with his totally mad sister and her admittedly alert but ageing and almost deaf companion. One has to be, like him, a philosopher, to bear that so amiably; yet he complained bitterly to me about his domestic isolation. I would advise him to marry if he had not barricaded this way out by too great a noble-mindedness. He

is, namely, the older of twin brothers, consequently sole inheritor of the none too profitable estate. The sister was provided for through a religious benefaction and had no further claims, but as soon as his brother marries, who is employed in mining and should poor Friederike's madness become so much worse that it would incur greater expenses, doctors, supervision, etc., he has continued to share strictly with them his income that he has raised somewhat by dint of the most untiring diligence in farming, such that only one third remains for him, from which he can scarcely exist himself, let alone with wife and children. The good man now bears all the trouble alone and is yet the poorest of the three, since Friederike has her benefaction and Carl his good employment apart from that.

He could, of course, lease out Grävenberg and seek employment himself but he prefers to keep the poor mad woman company and by means of efforts in farming which are completely withering his poor little body . . .

. . . the highest possible amount for his . . . [*end of copy*]

[*Die Droste then quotes (part of) a passage from a previous letter from Elise Rüdiger*]

“. . . outwardly and inwardly, so much altered in her, for which she knew not where to find the point of contact with me, in our former life together, that a personal get-together were downright necessary in order not to confuse the old love and to put us in the clear again towards each other”. Do you understand, Elise, that a little shudder passes over me at such solemnity? – over me who while I daily pray to God to moderate my faults and guide my weaknesses, but cannot soar to these religious heights on which I must now assume Malchen to be. God only protect me from insincerity in such a holy matter. I feel that, out of shyness, I could easily get halfway into hurting such an over delicate soul. I implore you; be as still as the grave in this matter, above all towards your dear Mother and Aunt Minna. It is highly probable that Malchen's sister, Hanne, will come into close contact with them; she belongs to the same close circle in Cassel, in which your dear Mother will move and I really would worry a lot if one word about Malchen spoken by me could reach there. I owe Malen full loyalty and deepest silence and it is already wrong that I am not keeping my mouth shut to you, my darling, about my secret sentiments.

You will, by the way, shortly meet Hanne Hassenpflug; she will visit us at Rüschaus and arrive almost at the same time as we. You can then decide whether she is suitable for closer association with your adored Mother. She is as jolly as Male is serious, of an exterior just as round and well proportioned; beautiful like that one, gloomy and ascetic, is very intelligent and entertaining, very honest, very careless in speaking (this as a preliminary warning) and knows how to (without intention, I believe, and only to enliven the conversation) interrogate a person before one realises it. Also, she is a strict Protestant and only too gladly gets into theological discourses. You will see for yourself and perhaps you will like her a lot, since she has much praiseworthy about her, particularly a keen mind, is of a good humour and a cheerful nature and only one serious fault, the lack of reticence that, while I do not like to call it gossiping, since she, as I think, chatters harmlessly only in order, as an elderly spinster, to make herself pleasant by

being amusing. Here, too, I must ask you to be careful with what has been said, for Hanne sets great store by the opinion of others and will not rest in Cassel until she finds out minutely what is being said about her in Münster. I have seldom seen two so dissimilar sisters.

The form that our trip to Switzerland will take on cannot be determined until we are again at Rüschnhaus, yet I certainly hope that we still get away in September. We can daily expect my Aunt Arnswaldt and she stays only a week, so I think we are back home at least by about mid August and have time left for resting and packing. The worst trick could be played on us by the weather, that is to say, on you, while for us who regard the route as a necessary evil, it matters little whether we see castles and rocks this time in their halos or nightcaps, whereas you, dear heart, would be shamefully treated, robbed of enjoyment and memories and I could weep tears of blood over it. However, I think as does Herr Wilmsen, in the end, the clouds must rain themselves empty" and September will surely try to rescue its 5000-year-old good reputation.

That one hears nothing of Frau Bornstedt is, indeed, convenient on the one hand, but frightening on the other. But it seems to me as though, on my departure, bells had chimed somewhere, she will go to Tante Bismarck. That would be believable, then as the aunt has occupied herself so much with the bride story and more or less made Luise's honour her own, methinks she can now scarcely avoid taking her away from those who are deriding her, by welcoming her with open arms and this must now also seem like a delightful sanctuary to Frau Bornstedt. The time for choice is up, but then you see, Elise, we shall experience a second conversion, a glaring backward step at the altar as with the pen. Ludgerus and Catharina will live an anxious life in the library, while their successors rummage about in order to tear off the medals, as from nobles at their execution.

Call that a farce or a tragedy if you will. It would, incidentally, be all the same to me if it turns out like that; she can go through almost all the religions without blaspheming particularly. She has no conviction, only fantasy and she must follow that even against her will.

We receive a lot of journals here – the fashion paper, the *Morgenblatt*, the *Telegraph*, *Vaterland*, *Ausland*, *Königsberger Litteraturblätter*. When I see how everything crawls around at sixes and sevens to become famous, my fingers begin to itch; patience, patience! But when I then see how one of them hardly gets his head above water than another pops up an inch higher and ducks him down – like Heine, already quite missing, Freiligrath and Gutzkow outmoded – in short, how celebrities gobble up one another and regenerate themselves like aphids, then it seems to me better to stretch out my legs on the sofa and dream, with half-closed eyes, of things eternal. A solid citizen is, to me, more distinguished than an ex-king covered in mud and I can think of nothing more deplorable than a once famous poet with every mangy cur snapping at his heels. You will not believe how it annoys me, to hear Freiligrath so often described as 'An ephemerally brilliant figure', 'A burst soap-bubble', and so on and yet these voices are raised from all quarters and it is the present vogue to distance oneself from him, the poor Winter King

who had indeed believed that he would fall asleep at eighty, wearing his dictator's mantle. Ah, Elise, all is but vanity. What good is it to me that the booksellers also intend to apply me briefly to the public like a blistering-plaster, only to throw me aside later like a used Spanish fly. The *Abendblatt* has made me quite advantageous offers; 'the usual fee is two, at most three Louis d'or per sheet, but I can demand as much above that as I wish, the conditions are left to me' etc. and further 'I should not resent it if the public temporarily dares to regard me as an employee and only a definite order from me could prevent it'. I have so far had neither the time nor the inclination to reply to the letter. Twenty years ago it would have turned my head, now I see in proper perspective the moment when they would refuse my contributions or reduce them to the minimum price. Thus my resolve is firmer than ever, never to work for effect, no popular style, to follow no guide through the twists and turns of the human heart, other than eternally true Nature and to turn my back completely upon our blasé times and affairs. I should not like and do not want to become famous now, but I should like to be read in a hundred years and perhaps I may achieve it, since it is as easy as Columbus's trick with the egg and demands only resolute sacrifice of the present.

Let us leave that for now and come back to the ordinary – but one more thing: you know that Menzel, who deals off-handedly with Freiligrath and ignores Schücking, praises – whom? – Ludwig Wiese's *Märchenwald* and Beda Weber (Schlüter threw him into the stove). Full stop.

Tony Galieris wrote recently, she is still without a position, but still thinks she needs only to stretch out her hand and quite calmly writes 'if I take up a position this autumn'. That is a firm faith in Israel, if you like, and I hope that it will move mountains, otherwise I see no way out with so many refined requirements and yet doing nothing for them.

Dear heart, do not believe that I have touched little upon the content of your last letter for lack of interest. Whatever affects you is like a drop of my heart's blood but I am, as you know, somewhat cautious with ink and paper and dare only to expose myself who is protected by a (relatively) free position and fairly thick hide. That pious woman's chatter appears to me to be almost malicious; I take her as not stupid enough for such great incautiousness and I am itching a bit to unsaddle her. But be satisfied with your letter, it was very good, but you belong to those over-scrupulous people who, in hindsight, regret everything that they have written, apart from when they can no longer remember it exactly, and I am certain, if one were to oblige you to let every letter lie for a week, none would be posted. But that you are suffering, my one and only little heart, God knows that hurts me more than if it happened to me and if you yearn for me, then I do so in double measure for you and me at the same time. Patience, a couple of weeks soon pass and let us then be glad in your or my little room. Dear Lies, you well know that you are next to me in bed every evening? That is my main Elise-time; when I have put out the lamp and half closed my eyes, your good little face often becomes as clear as a vision and I tell you everything that has plagued me during the day, complain, scold, laugh, whatever it was. A room mate would take me for mad and I often think no better of myself. *Adieu*, my one

and only; but come as soon as we are at Rüschaus. We shall hardly stop off in Münster on the return journey, so near to home, but I shall quicken Frau Bücken with a silver groat next day.

Your true Nette.

[*postscript*] Luischen and Nanny 1000 greetings. Schlüters the same and much love from Mama to you, the wording of which I no longer know, but still that her manner was very tender.