

Once Upon an Author: A Children's Book on Gisela von Arnim

Annotations

Naya Tadavarthy
University of Notre Dame
Glynn Family Honors Program
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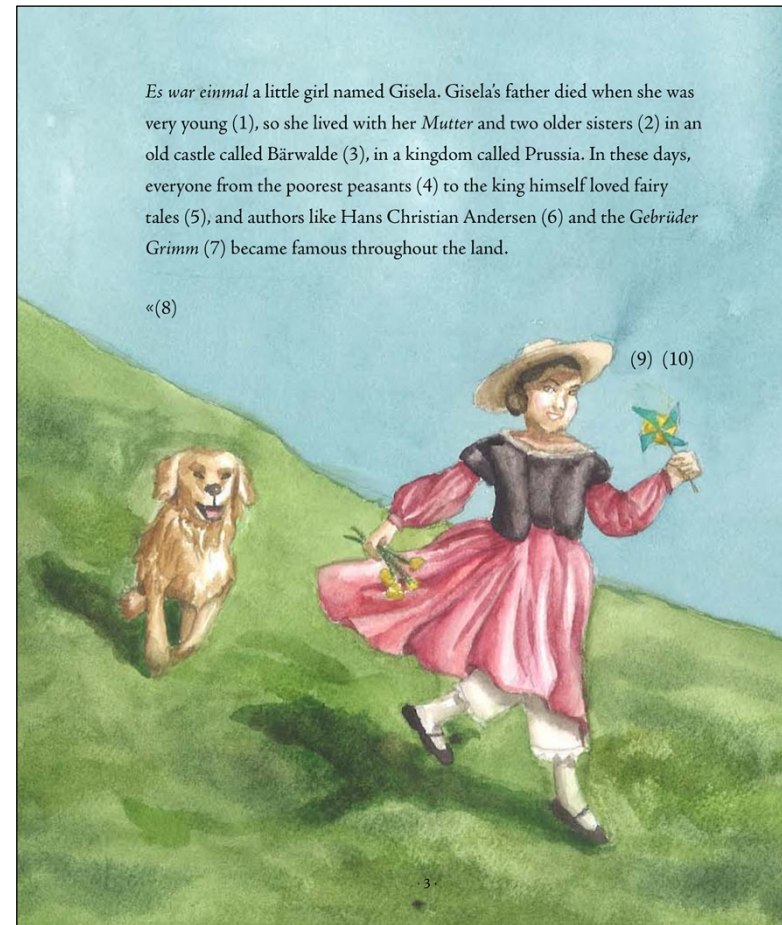
Denise M. Della Rossa
Teaching Professor of German
Department of German and Russian

Fr. Martin Lam Nguyen, C.S.C.
Associate Professor, Painting & Drawing
Department of Art, Art History & Design

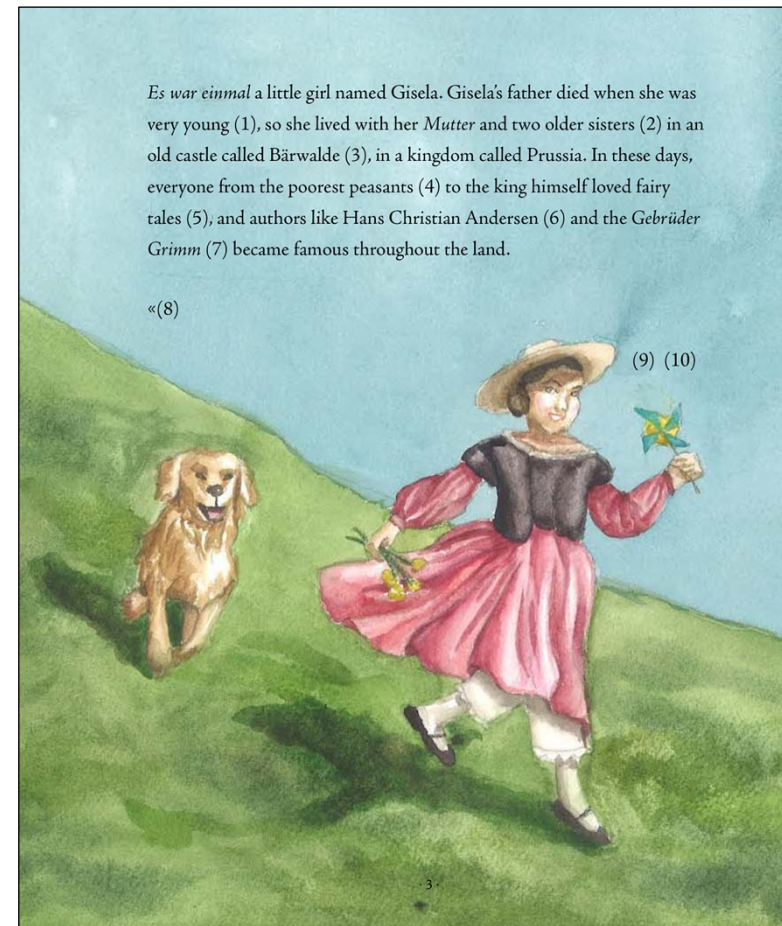
A Note on the Annotations: Feminist theory holds that scholars should refer to female authors and other historical actors by their last names, as their surname grants them a level of professionalism often denied them at the time they produced their work. However, the fact that the four most-mentioned characters in my story all come from the same family and hence all have the same last name complicates this practice. Thus, I have decided to refer to Gisela, Bettina, Maximiliane (Maxe), and Armgart von Arnim, as well as Herman, Jacob, and Wilhelm, among other characters, on a first-name basis in these annotations. These labels will also align with the way I refer to the characters in the story. I hope that this compromise for the sake of clarity does not belie the respect I feel that these figures deserve.

Annotation Format: (page number.note number)

- (3.1) Achim von Arnim (1781-1831) passed away unexpectedly when his youngest daughter, Gisela, was only four years old (Mey 17). A dead, negligent, or missing father is also a common trope in fairy tales with female heroines. As Maria Tatar notes, “fathers in the Grimms’ tales either absent themselves from home or are so passive as to be superfluous” (151-152). For instance, in “Snow White” (*KHM* #53) and “Cinderella” (*KHM* #21), the Grimm Brothers never explicitly mention the father’s demise, but he never appears again after the first few paragraphs. In “Little Red Cap” (*KHM* #26), the authors do not include a father at all.
- (3.2) In addition to her two older sisters, Gisela also had four older brothers, who had mostly moved out of the house or passed away by the time she was a teenager (Mey 196-201). I chose to focus on only the three sisters in this tale to simplify the number of characters, reflect Gisela’s own experience in a mostly female home, and emulate the three sisters model common in fairy tales. For more information on my subversion of this literary trope, please see section V.1 of my analysis, “The Evil [Step]sisters.”
- (3.3) Gisela’s grandfather, Joachim Erdman von Arnim, purchased the property of Bärwalde and the “palatial” manor house on it in 1780 (Schloss Wiepersdorf Cultural Foundation). It is in the small village of Wiepersdorf in Brandenburg, south of Berlin (Stich).
- (3.4) Popular belief holds that the Brothers Grimm collected most of their famous fairy tales from peasants they interviewed in the countryside. However, middle- to upper-class women served as most of their sources, who reported stories they had heard from caretakers and servants (Zipes, “Introduction,” xxix).



- (3.5) King Friedrich Wilhelm IV of Prussia (r. 1740-1861) enjoyed Romantic literature, including fairy tales, and helped revive Berlin's *salon* culture (Dramaliewa 14-15).
- (3.6) The von Arnim family much admired Hans Christian Andersen. As a joke, Herman Grimm once convinced the attendees at a *Kaffeterkreis* meeting that a fairy tale he wrote was actually by the Danish author (Werner 184). Andersen himself also attended a gathering of the *Kaffeterkreis* (Schultz 22).
- (3.7) The von Arnim and Grimm families shared a close relationship. Bettina von Arnim secured teaching positions for Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm in Berlin after they were fired from the University of Göttingen for protesting the Hanoverian king's constitutional amendments (Koehler 120). Although political disagreements sometimes caused strife, the families provided each other with creative inspiration and intellectual friendship (Mey 30). The famous brothers even dedicated seven editions of their famous *Kinder und Hausmärchen* to Bettina (Koehler 29-30).
- (3.8) The image of Bärwalde (on the facing page) is based on an 1831 drawing by Wilhelm Stier (Hahn and Stich)
- (3.9) An anonymous 1836 poem describes Gisela at nine years old, wearing a pink skirt and a black velvet bodice, scampering through nature and looking like she came from a fairy castle (Mey 19-20).
- (3.10) Maxe von Arnim reported that Gisela once went alone over the mountains in the morning with her "Windspiel" and came back red at sunset, with her skirt gathered up, a straw hat filled with wildflowers, and a jumping golden dog in front of her (Mey 22).



- (4.1) On summer evenings at Bärwalde, Bettina would read aloud to her children and tell them stories about her own life (Koehler 132). As Maxe described, the evenings belonged to the four of them (Mey 22).
- (4.2) Scholars have noticed elements from Bettina's own life story in Gisela's most famous novel, *Das Leben der Hochgräfin Gritta von Rattenzuhausbeiuns*. For instance, Bettina attended a convent school, or *Klosterschule*, for some time as a child, just like the main character, Gritta (Konrad 223). Some researchers like Gustav Konrad even use this biographical information to claim that Bettina is "zweifellos" (doubtlessly) the main author of the text (225).
- (4.3) Bettina's grandmother was Sophie von la Roche, whom Jeannine Blackwell characterizes as "the first and most renowned woman novelist of the Age of Goethe" ("Laying the Rod to Rest," 25).
- (4.4) Hidden in the castle stones are illustrations from Gisela's *Das Leben der Hochgräfin Gritta von Rattenzuhausbeiuns* and *Märchenbriefe von Achim*, a series of illustrated fairy tale letters she sent to her nephew in the 1850s.

But Gisela's favorite stories came from her *Mutter*, Bettina. On summer evenings (1), Bettina told her three daughters about her childhood in a *Klosterschule* (2) and growing up with her grandmother, a famous writer (3). The candlelight cast shadows on Bärwalde's stone walls, and to little Gisela, it looked like the castle was alive.



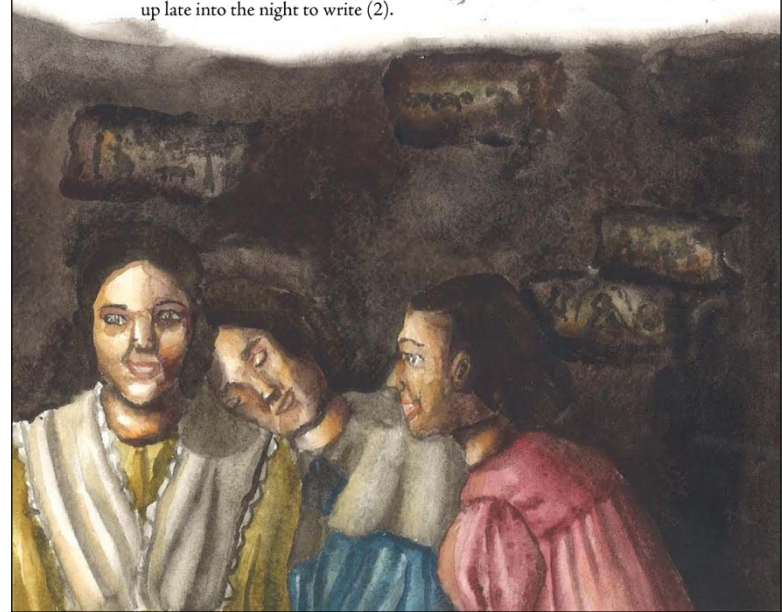
- (5.1) In crediting main authorship of *Gritta* to Gisela instead of Bettina, Shawn Jarvis cites the mice in the walls of Bärwalde as an element of Gisela's own life experience in the text. Gisela hid from these vermin in her sisters' bed every night (Jarvis, "Nachwort," 214).
- (5.2) As a mother and author, Bettina would spend time with her children during the day and finish writing books like *Goethes Briefwechsel mit einem Kind* at night (Mey 18).

"Silly girl," said Maxe, the eldest. "You're imagining things."

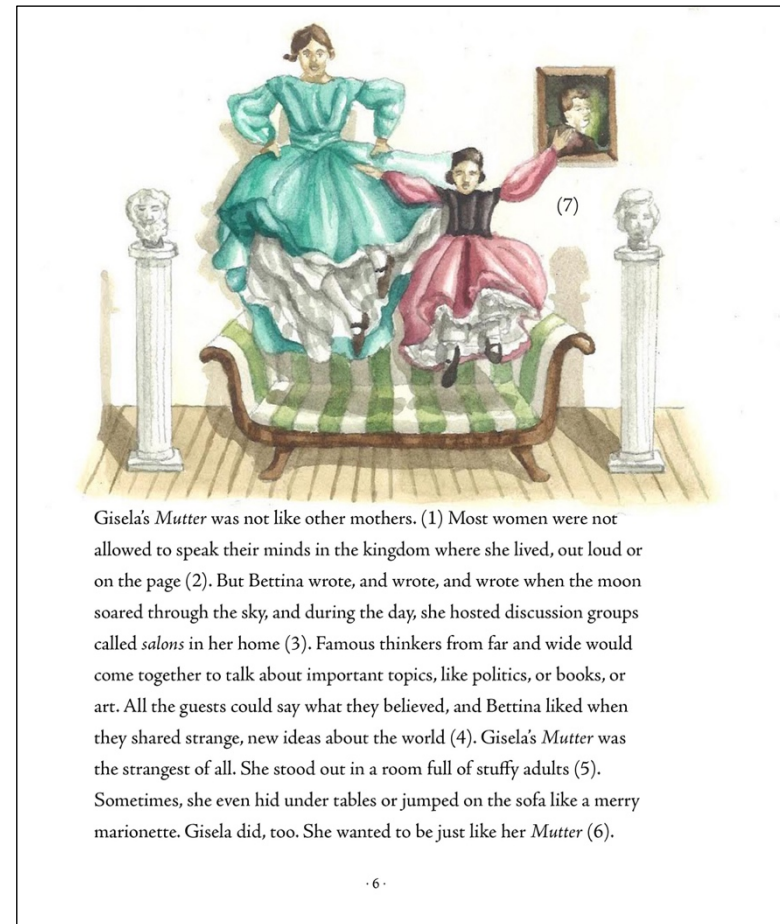
"Those are just the mice scurrying around the stones," Armgart, the second sister, added.

But Bettina looked down at her youngest daughter lovingly. "Your imagination is your greatest gift," she said.

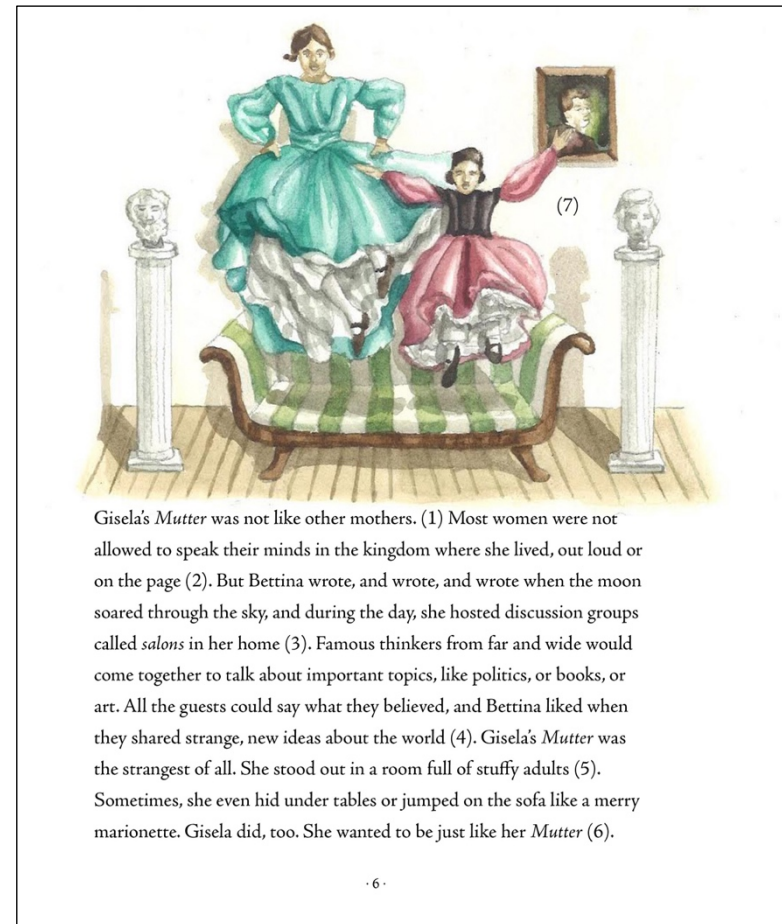
Even so, Gisela hid in Maxe's bed from the mice (1), when Bettina stayed up late into the night to write (2).



- (6.1) Edith Waldstein lauds Bettina as “one of the most important women in the early nineteenth century to whom the beginning of a female literary tradition can be traced” (91).
- (6.2) For a discussion of the obstacles facing female writers in nineteenth-century Germany, please see section II.1 of my analysis.
- (6.3) Bettina led a *salon* during the revival of these intellectual social gatherings in 1840s Berlin (Wilhelmy 152). Her liberal, political discussion circle abandoned many of the conventions of other salons, such as regular meeting times, and made a special effort to bring young people into the group (154-157).
- (6.4) Bettina enjoyed bringing together *salon* participants who held vastly different opinions for discussion and debate (Wilhelmy 159).
- (6.5) Bettina’s unique personality combined her intellectual prowess, fantastical tendencies, and maternal practicality. Her own children sometimes shook their heads at her in wonder (Wilhelmy 154). Ruth-Ellen Boetcher Joeres argues that Bettina’s eccentricity in fact served as a mask for her radicality, and the childlike nature she assumed gave her more freedom to act outside the bounds of society (100-102).
- (6.6) Bettina’s unconventional behavior included “hiding under tables, leaping onto furniture, carrying on long after middle age in startlingly spontaneous ways, indeed serving as model for her youngest child, Gisela, who was to emulate her mother by becoming a writer, supporting republican causes - and also jumping about like a merry puppet” (Joeres, *Respectability...*, 102).



- (6.7) The decor combines multiple rooms described in the von Arnims' various homes. The study in their Berlin house included a portrait of Achim von Arnim (based here on an 1803 painting by Peter Edward Stroehling) and a plaster cast of Jupiter's head (Mey 26). In the front hall of their Wiepersdorf home, the von Arnims also had green and white striped divans (Mey 56).



Gisela's *Mutter* was not like other mothers. (1) Most women were not allowed to speak their minds in the kingdom where she lived, out loud or on the page (2). But Bettina wrote, and wrote, and wrote when the moon soared through the sky, and during the day, she hosted discussion groups called *salons* in her home (3). Famous thinkers from far and wide would come together to talk about important topics, like politics, or books, or art. All the guests could say what they believed, and Bettina liked when they shared strange, new ideas about the world (4). Gisela's *Mutter* was the strangest of all. She stood out in a room full of stuffy adults (5). Sometimes, she even hid under tables or jumped on the sofa like a merry marionette. Gisela did, too. She wanted to be just like her *Mutter* (6).

- (7.1) Bettina did not believe in forcing schooling on her children (Joeres, “Gisela von Arnim,” 214-215). This philosophy combined with financial limitations after Achim’s death and nineteenth-century gender expectations, so that Gisela did not attend a traditional educational institution (Mey 17). She had no formal education until Maxe and Armgart von Arnim returned from Frankfurt in 1834, where they had been attending school (18). Bettina directed Armgart to teach her younger sister how to write, but the stubborn Gisela resisted learning anything in which she had no interest. Her sisters only convinced her to learn when they told her that if she ever wanted to be an author, an early childhood dream, she had to write properly (18-19). Like many home-taught women of her era, Gisela never really employed proper spelling or grammar throughout her writing career (Joeres, “Gisela von Arnim,” 215).
- (7.2) Maxe reported in 1839 that she had had trouble teaching arithmetic, geography, and French to her younger sister, though she had started to produce little stories and fairy tales as soon as she had learned to write (Mey 20).
- (7.3) I have attempted here and at other points in my text to emulate the descriptive, Romantic writing style Gisela employs in her tales.



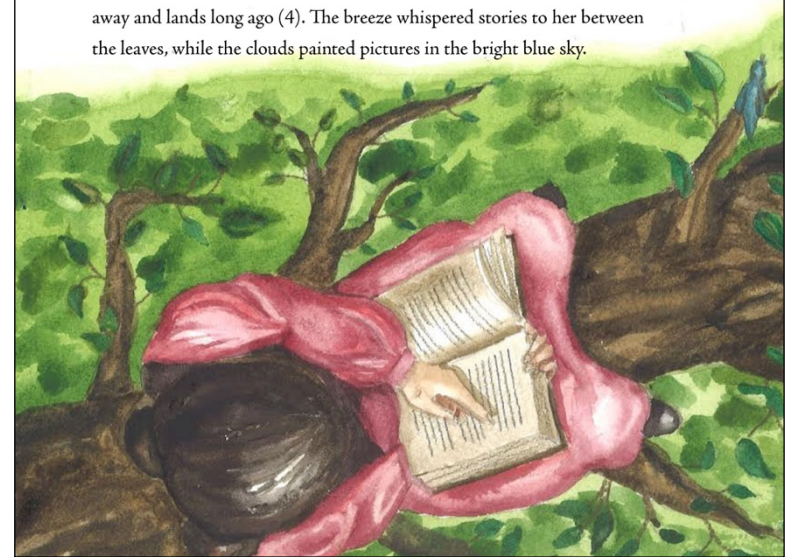
More than anything, Gisela dreamed of writing. Armgart tried to teach her younger sister about grammar, spelling, and punctuation. But Gisela didn’t care about all of the endless rules (1). Maxe had even less luck with math, geography, and French (2). Gisela was smart, but she could hardly sit still. Instead, she ran out of the high stone walls of Bärwalde to the forest, where she built little villages out of stone and moss, as the birds sang from the treetops and the sun shone down from above (3).



- (8.1) Gisela read sitting in a tree at Bärwalde as a child (Mey 20)
- (8.2) Some of the first books Gisela read were the Brothers' Grimm's *Kinder und Hausmärchen* (Mey 20).
- (8.3) For more information on female representation and suppression in fairy tales, please see section II.3 of my analysis.
- (8.4) Some of Gisela's works with proto-feminist heroines include "The Rose Cloud" (as analyzed by Shawn Jarvis), "The Nasty Little Pea" (as analyzed by Bernadette Hyner) and *Das Leben der Hochgräfin Gritta von Rattenzuhausbeiuns* (as analyzed by Shawn Jarvis, John Griffith Urang, Edith Waldstein, Jeannine Blackwell, and Julie Koehler, among others).

Sometimes, Gisela even perched like a bird on her own branch and read from one of the many books in her *Mutter's* library (1). Her favorites were stories of queens, kings, and knights, tales of fairies, magic spells, and talking animals written by Bettina's friends, the *Gebrüder Grimm* (2). Gisela wondered about the princesses in these stories, though. They didn't seem much like her, her mother, or even her sisters. They didn't seem to do or say much of anything at all, except wait for a brave young man to come and save them (3).

So Gisela imagined her own tales of courageous little girls in places far away and lands long ago (4). The breeze whispered stories to her between the leaves, while the clouds painted pictures in the bright blue sky.



(9.1) Maxe described that Gisela once climbed to the top of a tall oak tree in front of their door like a squirrel. Maxe said she would die if Gisela fell, and Gisela would not come down until her older sister promised she would stay alive, because she did not want to live without her (Mey 22).

"Come down from that tree!" called Maxe from below, shaking her finger at her little sister. "You'll fall and break your neck if you keep dreaming up there"(1).

"I'm busy with my stories!" Gisela yelled back, "like Mutter or the Gebrüder Grimm!"

"Come back to your lessons!" Armgart added, with her hands on her hips. "You'll never be able to write a fairy tale if you can't even spell."



- (10.1) Although Gisela was especially close to her mother, Bettina was often busy writing. Since she had no playmates her own age, she learned to entertain herself (Mey 18). She wrote in an 1858 letter that she felt she had grown up mostly alone (146).
- (10.2) Maxe described her younger sister's close connection with animals. Six grey cats followed her around in the rain, and she adopted a small white orphaned chick, which she named Molli (Mey 23).
- (10.3) Eva Mey contends that Bettina may have exaggerated a story of a crane that her daughter tamed, which injured itself when scared by some quartered soldiers' trumpets. Gisela nursed the bird back to health, and they went walking daily. The sometimes fantastical Bettina even described that the bird ate the bookworms out of the tomes in the library and the fleas out of the skirts of the farm women (Mey 36).
- (10.4) The orange and white cat here may not look like the ones that followed Gisela, but he does resemble my own cat, Oliver.



So Gisela learned to write. The characters in her stories kept her company, because Maxe, Armgart, and Bettina were all very busy (1). The animals at Bärwalde also befriended her. Six grey cats followed her home one day, and she cared for a little white chick who was lonely like her (2). One day, she came across an injured crane, who had taken quite a fright at the trumpet blast of some soldiers nearby and flown right into a fence. Gisela nursed the crane back to health, and they became best friends. The bird and the girl went on daily walks together. He even followed her into the library to eat the worms out of the old books that lined the tall shelves, as Gisela wrote her own stories (3).

- (11.1) Gisela described herself as a “Märchenkind” or “fairy tale child” (Jarvis, “Trivial Pursuit?,” 106).
- (11.2) Gisela met Herman Grimm at age thirteen, when his family moved to Berlin. Herman was Gisela’s first same-age playmate, and he brought joy, humor, and companionship to her life (Mey 25-26). He came to the von Arnim house every day, where he found more opportunities for happiness, stimulation, and free thought than his own home (Mey 25-26). Herman soon became like part of the family (Dramaliewa 23).
- (11.3) Herman enjoyed reading and painting with the von Arnim sisters (Mey 56). Although he spent most of his time at the von Arnim home, a visitor to the Grimm household did once describe in shock how Gisela appeared there on stilts and ran around the tea table (25).
- (11.4) Herman regarded Gisela as his intellectual equal (Dramaliewa 89). Later in life, he would always seek her approval, before publishing any of his writing (Mey 212). For more insights on Herman’s character as a model for male allyship, please see section V.3 of my analysis, “The Marriage Conclusion.”
- (11.5) Bettina was a friend and great admirer of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, about whom she wrote her *Goethes Briechwechsel mit einem Kinde*. She designed a memorial to him, which sat in the middle of the hall in the von Arnims’ Berlin home (Dramaliewa 52-53, Mey 80). The bust on the bookshelf here features the famous author’s visage.



Gisela grew up with the animals as her playmates, fairy tales as her teachers, and the forest just as much her home as the stone walls of Bärwalde (1). She also found a friend in Herman, Wilhelm Grimm’s young son (2). Gisela and Herman wrote together, drew together, read together, and even once ran around the tea table on stilts (3). At this time, many people believed that girls were not as good at reading, writing, or drawing as boys. But Herman never thought that way about Gisela (4). And Gisela did not think that way about herself, either.

- (12.1) Fifteen years is the age of many female characters in fairy stories, such as Sleeping Beauty in the tale of the same name (*KHM #50*). It was also Gisela's age when she co-founded the *Kaffeterkreis* with her sisters.
- (12.2) Although Bettina and Gisela did not participate as much in Prussian court life, Maxe and Armgart received regular invitations to balls at the palace (*Dramaliewa 14-15*).
- (12.3) Bettina was sharply critical of the Prussian political system. Her liberal salon gave people the opportunity to discuss controversial ideas that they could not write down in a climate of censorship (*Wilhelmy 157*). She herself kept a correspondence with Crown Prince Friedrich Wilhelm IV, beginning when she intervened on behalf of Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm's firing from the University of Göttingen. Based on this exchange but set in the early 1800s, Bettina published her critical *Dies Buch gehört dem König* (This Book Belongs to the King) in 1843, with suggestions for improvements upon the monarch (*Koehler 120*). Jonathan Urang notes, though, that Bettina and Gisela were liberal royalists rather than radical democrats, who wanted to incorporate the common people into a broader but still hierarchical political structure (174). For further details on the inclusion of the von Arnims' political views in *Gritta*, please see section V.2 of my analysis, "The Handsome Savior Prince."
- (12.4) Armgart and Maxe held more conservative political views than Bettina, Gisela, and older brother Friedmund, who hoped for a more democratic outcome to the revolution of 1848. The liberal side of the family gathered their friends together in one room in their Berlin apartment to discuss these tumultuous political times, while the conventional elder sisters brought their more aristocratic friends together in another one (*Mey 65*).

When Gisela was fifteen years old, an invitation from the palace arrived in the post (1).

"We are going to a ball in the capital city!" cried Armgart (2).

"I wonder if the *Kronprinz* will be there," mused Maxe. "I've heard he's the proudest and most handsome man in the land!"

"I would give anything to dance with him," sighed Armgart.

Maxe laughed. "Why would the prince waltz with you, Armgart? He could win the hand of any *Mädchen* he asked!"

Sharply, Bettina looked up from the book she was reading. "That seems like a lot of power for just one young man" (3).

"But *Mutter*," said Armgart, "he will someday rule the whole kingdom. So nobody can say no to the *Kronprinz*" (4).



- (13.1) As a landed family, the von Arnims were members of Prussia's petite aristocracy (Joeres, *Respectability and Deviance*, 88). In contrast, the Grimm family was just as famous because of Jacob's and Wilhelm's *Kinder und Hausmärchen*, but they had no title. Herman felt that he needed to reassure Gisela's brother Freimund that this class difference did not matter, when he and Gisela wed secretly in 1859 (Mey 152). Another brother, Siegmund, opposed the union, and Maxe and Armgart, who were both married at this point, realized the Grimms' lack of noble blood would bring the sisters' social circles further apart (154).
- (13.2) Armgart described how the family moved between Bärwalde in the summer months and their Berlin home in the winter, returning to the city like many prominent Prussian families (Dramaliewa 7-8).
- (13.3) The emblem on the carriage is the von Arnim family crest (Hahn and Stich).



Gisela didn't much care for princes or fancy parties. "Can Herman come, too?" she asked.

Since Herman did not live in a castle like the sisters, though, he was not invited (1). Gisela protested, because she wanted to stay home, too. But Armgart and Maxe said she had no choice. She could not turn down the chance to attend a palace dance. So the three sisters traveled to their house in the city, where they stayed in the winter months, far away from beautiful Bärwalde (2).

(14.1) During the 1847 *Vereinigte Landtag*, a meeting of the Prussian state parliament, Gisela attended a party at the home of her uncle, Minister of Justice Friedrich Karl von Savigny. She recalled that she was in a sour mood all evening, because to increase her unending beauty, as she sarcastically described, Maxe had violently combed up her hair. With this hairstyle, decency and femininity overcame her, and she felt like a tamed animal (Mey 52).

It took all day to prepare for the ball. Maxe and Armgart primped and preened. They adorned themselves with their daintiest dancing slippers and their most gorgeous gowns.

"I'll help you comb your hair, Gisela," Maxe offered.

"Ouch, you're pulling!" Gisela yelled.

"You look beautiful," Armgart comforted, "so schön."

"I feel like a tamed animal," Gisela retorted, pulling at her heavy necklace.

"Like you fixed a long chain around my favorite crane" (1).



- (15.1) Gisela enjoyed the company of intellectually stimulating, close friends but did not appreciate having to interact with people who did not know and understand her (Mey 70). She had no aspirations about striving in court society (Mey 82)
- (15.2) On an outing to the island of Pichelswerder, Maxe described how the Prince of Prussia decided to participate in the dancing at the last minute. The party needed one more woman to even out the pairs of dancers, so someone called Gisela onto the floor and placed her opposite the prince. She looked lovely and danced all the steps gracefully, but with her back to him the whole time, either from a sudden mood or because it was against her democratic sensibilities to dance with a prince (Mey 35).



At the ball, there were many women in long dresses, wearing jewels that sparkled and shone. They were escorted around the room by men with their chins held high. Maxe and Armgart disappeared into the crowd, but Gisela stood alone on the side (1). Suddenly, the musicians started playing a lively tune, and a young man appeared next to her. He bowed deeply. "I have just decided to dance," he announced, "and it seems I do not have a partner. Would you care to join me, *bitte?*" (2).

He raised his head, and Gisela could not believe her eyes. It was the *Kronprinz!* She remembered what her sisters had said. She could not say no. And so she nodded, reluctantly.

- (16.1) Gisela von Arnim had tutors for drawing and music, both of which she enjoyed (Joeres, "Gisela von Arnim," 215). These pastimes were considered acceptable for society women, especially as part of a Romantic ideal, and Gisela and her sisters often painted and performed together (Kölsch 8). Maxe characterized her younger sister as quite gifted at these artistic pursuits, as well (Mey 199).




Gisela and the prince began to waltz across the floor. Everyone watched. When he whirled her around, Gisela thought she could see Maxe and Armgart looking from the crowd, full of jealousy.

The *Kronprinz* peered down his proud nose at Gisela. "What talents would a beautiful young lady like you have?" he asked.

"I draw, and I sing, but most of all, I like to write," Gisela answered, thinking Herman would never look down at her like that (1).



- (17.1) Please see section V.2 of my analysis for further information on Gisela's politics and the subversion of the handsome savior prince trope.
- (17.2) Gisela described in a letter how she spent one evening during the 1847 *Vereinigte Landtag* at the Savignys' house. She and Armgart began to debate with Prince Waldemar, who was also at the social gathering. At one point in the argument, with the thought she would be the only one to tell the truth, Gisela retorted, "Wenn man denn auf einer Seite steht, so ist es doch jedenfalls ehrenvoller, auf der Seite des Volks zu stehn; überhaupt bin ich an und für mich revolutionär," which translates to: If one were to take a side, it is in any case more honorable to stand on the side of the people. Anyways, I myself am a revolutionary (Mey 53).




The prince raised his eyebrows and scoffed, "What would a girl like you have to write about?"

"Fairy tales," said Gisela, thinking the princes in the books she read were much more charming than the one here. "And what do you have to write about?" she asked angrily.

"I am learning to write proclamations and laws, so I can rule over the people," the *Kronprinz* responded (1).

"Well, I've never much liked rules and laws, and I think I'm on the side of the people!" Gisela retorted. Shocked with her own boldness, she turned and ran (2).



· 17 ·

- (18.1) I have alluded to the fairy tale Cinderella (*KHM #21*) in my text and my images, through details like the dancing slipper, staircase, and clock striking midnight, in order to highlight the prince's not-so-charming nature and Gisela's defiance. These character traits contrast the male savior role and the lack of female agency in the original story.
- (18.2) On the aforementioned evening on the island of Pinchelswerder (see note 15.2), during which Gisela danced with her back to the Prince of Prussia the whole time, Maxe commented wryly that her sister's punishment for this deed followed. In high spirits, Gisela jumped over a railing and tore off half of her dress. She had to spend the rest of the evening in the carriage (*Mey 35*).

Gisela pushed through the well-dressed men and women and rushed down the palace steps. The clock struck midnight, and the heel of her dainty dancing slipper caught in the back of her dress (1). She tripped and fell. Rip!


When she stood back up, she saw to her horror that her skirt had torn from ankle to hip. She hurried to her carriage, where she sat alone, full of anger and shame (2).




- (19.1) The following series of questions that Gisela asks herself all refer to elements in *Das Leben der Hochgräfin Gritta von Rattenzuhausbeiuns*. Please see section V.2 of my analysis for an examination of the prince's haplessness and Gritta's role as a heroine in the text.
- (19.2) Gritta forms a friendship with eleven other girls, who build a collective life together. Please see section V.1 of my analysis for a discussion of female collaboration in *Gritta* and Gisela's own life.

As she waited for her sisters in the dark, Gisela's mind began to wander.

"That prince certainly didn't rescue me," she considered, "but what if he needed saving instead?" (1).



"Armgart and Maxe have left me all by myself," she mused, "but what if I had a whole group of girls my age, as sisters and as friends?" (2).



· 19 ·

(20.1) Talking and personified animals are common characters in many fairy tales, including “The Frog King, or Iron Heinrich” (*KHM #1*), “The Golden Bird,” (*KHM #57*), and “Puss in Boots,” (omitted in the Grimms’ original publications but included in the Zipes edition as *KHM #216*). In *Gritta*, the talking rats “swear a rat’s oath on all that was holy and dear” to protect the young countess (9). Gritta herself expresses doubt about the unrealistic nature of this trope, just like Gisela in my story, as the old servant Muffert does not hear the rats and Gritta thinks she is dreaming when she notices their conversations (trans. Ohm 9; 27). Urang interprets the rats as a symbol of mob rule in his political interpretation of *Gritta* (171). In contrast, Blackwell divides different groups of rat characters into matriarchal and patriarchal roles (“Laying the Rod to Rest,” 34).



She thought she saw a movement in the corner of the carriage and nearly jumped with fear. What if it was a mouse? But then she decided she felt braver than when she was a little girl, hiding in her sisters’ beds. She had just stood up to a prince.

“Who are you, and why are you here?” she called into the darkness.

Silence.

“Silly Gisela, mice can’t talk,” she told herself. “But what if all of my animal friends could speak?” And with that, she fell asleep and began to dream (1).

- (21.1) These details are all plot points in *Das Leben der Hochgräfin Gritta von Rattenzuhausbeiuns*.
- (21.2) Gisela described in a letter to Herman how she used to sit at the window in the evenings, as a break from her strange plans, drawing, or embroidery, and become enraptured by the melancholy poetry of the landscape (Mey 24). She also included an image of a child sitting at a window and gazing down over a town in her fairy tale “Mondkönigs Tochter” (Konrad, 197).



Finally, Maxe and Armgart came back to the carriage, and the three sisters returned home. The two older ones went right to bed, but Gisela did not. Instead, she grabbed a pen and began to write about a little girl in a castle full of talking rats, who finds twelve friends and saves a prince in a faraway land (1). Just like her *Mutter*, Gisela wrote all through the night, until she could see the sun rising over the treetops and houses of the big city, signaling the break of dawn.

Gisela worked and worked on her fairy tale, and the characters came alive in her mind.

- (22.1) Gisela clearly trusted Herman as one of her first readers, because in their shared diary in December 1844, she wrote to him asking that he promise to not show her fairy tale to anyone else (Mey 37).
- (22.2) See note (15.1) about Gisela's shy personality.

"This is really good," said Herman, when he read the book Gisela had written. "You should show this to more people" (1).

But Gisela did not know when or where or how to share her story. Sometimes, she joined Bettina's *salons* and listened to all the famous people talk about important topics, but Gisela did not say much herself. In the midst of these strangers, she was quiet and shy (2).



- (23.1) Gisela and her sisters were inspired to found the *Kaffeterkreis* based on a description of the *Maikäferbund*, an all-male literary circle in Bonn, in a letter from their former music teacher, Johanna Matthieux. As Maxe read the letter aloud, Gisela exclaimed “Das könnten wir eigentlich hier machen!” which translates to: We could do that here! (Mey 33). Blackwell characterizes Gisela as “the main force behind the *Kaffeterkreis*” (“Laying the Rod to Rest,” 25)
- (23.2) As Patricia Heminghouse explains, most German women writers worked in isolation, because there were few social structures or public meeting opportunities in place. She mentions the *Kaffeterkreis* as one of the few literary clubs formed by women, though she argues that it did not have as much influence as the male dominated “Tunnel over the Spree,” for instance (90). Some women did participate in intellectual discussions in *salons* like Bettina’s, but Wilhelmy considers the *Kaffeterkreis* only on the very fringes of the definition of a *salon* (183). The group was more of a literary circle or *Literaturkränzchen*, according to Wilhelmy’s definitions, because it had set constraints for membership and a formalized program (30). Moreover, it was not formed around one specific woman and did not take place on a set day of the week (25). Thus, the *Kaffeterkreis* represents a unique forum for German female artistic and literary achievement.

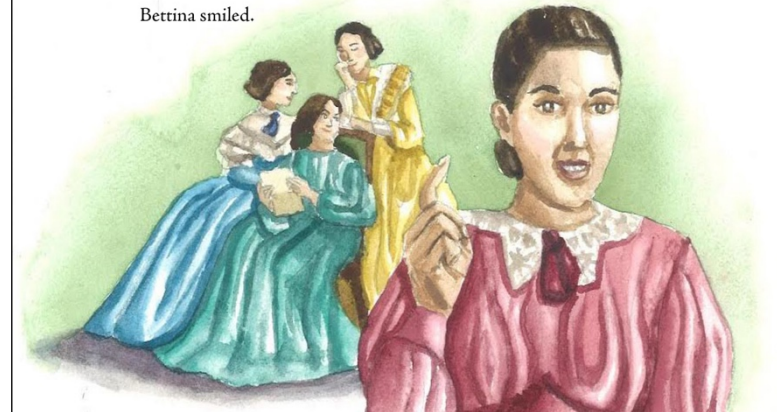
One day, when the rain cascaded down so hard that not even Herman had dared to venture to Gisela’s house, Bettina read a letter aloud to the three sisters. From a friend in a far-off town on the River Rhein, the letter described a group of men who called themselves the *Maikäferbund* and came together to read stories that they wrote. Gisela thought of her own tale. “We could do that here!” she exclaimed (1).

Gisela expected her sisters to laugh at her. A group of girls and women had never gathered to read and write in their kingdom before (2). But Maxe said, “That sounds like a *wunderbare* idea! What fun!”

“We can invite all of our friends here in the city!” Armgart added.

Maybe her sisters were interested in more than princes, parties, and spelling lessons after all, Gisela realized.

Bettina smiled.



- (24.1) The first meeting of the *Kaffeterkreis* took place on March 30, 1843 (Werner 177).
- (24.2) The founding members of the *Kaffeterkreis* were Maxe, Gisela, and Armgart von Arnim and Carolina and Minne Bardua (Jarvis, “Trivial Pursuit?,” 103-106). Otilie von Graefe and Marie Lichtenstein rounded out the original group (Werner 177). Members who joined later included Valeska von Grabow, Pauline and Anna von Wolzogen, Nina, Marie, and Hedwig von Olfers, Louise Bardua, Amalia von Herder, and Fernanda von Pappenheim. Other possible women of the *Kaffeterkreis* are unidentifiable because the *Kaffeterzeitung* only mentions their nicknames. Marie von Guatia from Frankfurt am Main, Johanna Matthieux from Bonn, and Mathilde Krummacher from Elberfeld joined via correspondence (Werner 178-179). The youngest original member of the group was Gisela von Arnim, at fifteen (Koehler 132). The oldest was Carolina Bardua, at sixty-one (Werner 177).
- (24.3) According to Jarvis, the members of the *Kaffeterkreis* wore “pointed brown paper hats with pink veils to hide their blushes when words of praise overwhelmed them or if their forays into a public sphere rendered them meek” (“Trivial Pursuit?,” 102).
- (24.4) The original rules of the *Kaffeterkreis* dictated that members could only drink coffee and eat rolls and orange salad at the end of their meetings, so that worldly pleasures did not distract their intellectual pursuits. Soon, though, the rotating hosts began to serve hot chocolate, cakes, and tortes. As everyone began to eat and drink, Maxe would start the meeting by waving her scepter of white wood, wound with pink ribbon and decorated with flowers (Werner 181).



The three sisters worked together to plan the first meeting of their literary society. Finally, the big day came (1). The room was filled with women and girls, old and young, who all liked to write (2). The members of the *Kaffeterkreis*, as they called their new group, wore pointy brown hats with pink veils (3). As they drank coffee and ate oranges and rolls, Maxe waved a white wand, decorated with pink ribbons and flowers, and called the meeting to order (4). “I am Präsident Maiblümchen,” she proclaimed, “and these are my sisters Lord Armgart and Herr Giseloff” (5).

Maxe explained how each member would receive a nickname and submit a story, a drawing, or a song each week, to share with the whole group. The others could shake rattles if they didn’t like it or blow on little trumpets to applaud (6). Then, they would gather the contributions together in the *Kaffeterzeitung*, their own newspaper (7).

- (24.5) All of the members of the *Kaffeterkreis* originally had to be unmarried women, but they took male pseudonyms (Jarvis, “Trivial Pursuit?,” 103). As their leader, the group named Maxe “Präsident Maiblümchen” (President Mayflower). For her imperious nature, they called Armgart “Lord Armgart.” Gisela was at first known as “Herr Giseloff” (Mr. Giseloff) and then after she wrote the story “Aus den Papieren eines Spatzen” (“From the Papers of a Sparrow”) she became “Spaß von Spaßenheim” (Werner 177)
- (24.6) For every meeting, each member of the *Kaffeterkreis* brought something creative to share (Dramaliewa 19). Women would read aloud a story they had written, show off an artwork they had painted or drawn, or play or sing a musical composition. The other members would criticize the piece by shaking a children’s rattle or praise it by blowing on a trumpet (Werner 181).
- (24.7) The meeting protocol was known as the *Kaffeterzeitung* (Kaffeter Newspaper) (Jarvis, “Trivial Pursuit?,” 103). Although Johannes Werner analyzed some of this text in his biographies of Maxe and the Bardua sisters, most of the literature from the *Kaffeterkreis* was lost between World War I and II (106).




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- (25.1) As one of the secretaries of the *Kaffeterkreis*, Minne Bardua (1789-1865) served as the editor of the *Kaffeterzeitung* (Dramaliewa 18). She recorded the minutes of the meetings and read them aloud at the beginning of the next one (Werner 181). Werner writes that Minne, nicknamed “Minus,” was the “eigentliche Seele” or “true soul” of the group (176). Although she was much older than many other members, she had a youthful spirit and easily befriended the younger women and girls (177).
- (25.2) As a co-secretary for the *Kaffeterkreis* and an artist, Carolina Bardua (1781-18640) drew a title page for each issue of the *Kaffeterzeitung* (Werner 177). She was the oldest member of the group and received the nickname “Altmeister Bardolio” or “Old Master Bardolio” (177).
- (25.3) Beauty the dog attended all of the sessions of the *Kaffeterkreis*, even when lady-in-waiting Valeska von Grabow hosted the literary circle at the royal palace. Gisela once submitted a letter from his point of view to the *Kaffeterzeitung*, in which he humorously complained about his degraded position after a move to a new house (Werner 180).
- (25.4) As a talented painter, Otilie von Gräfe (1816-1898) drew portraits for the *Kaffeterkreis* members (Dramaliewa 18). Nicknamed “Sir Odillon,” she also possessed a beautiful alto voice (Werner 177). Her likeness in this image is based on a title page produced for an 1847 issue of the *Kaffeterzeitung* by Carolina Bardua, when Otilie had to relinquish her position in the literary circle upon her marriage to Hermann von Thile (Eshbach, “The Kaffeter”).

Soon, all the women began to volunteer their talents.


Old Minne Bardua, nicknamed Minus, said she could record everything that happened at their meetings for the paper (1).




Her sister Carolina drew the title pages for the *Kaffeterzeitung* and was soon called Altmeister Bardolio (2). Even their dog, Beauty, became an honorary member (3).



Otilie von Gräfe, or Sir Odillon, painted portraits of the members (4).



And Marie, Nina, and Hedwig von Olfers - or Mario, Ninus, and Hektor - wrote and directed plays for the group to perform (5).




· 25 ·


(25.5) The von Olfers home was a center for upper class culture in Berlin, and as close family friends, the von Olfers and von Arnim sisters came together almost every night to read and socialize (Dramaliewa 15-16; 19). The three von Olfers daughters, Nina (“Ninus”) (1824-1901), Marie (“Mario”) (1826-1924), and Hedwig (“Hektor”) (1829-1919) were also active participants in the *Kaffeterkreis* (Jarvis, “Trivial Pursuit,” 103). Their mother, also named Hedwig von Olfers (1799-1891) was an author and salon host in Berlin, who wrote fairy tales herself and often helped the *Kaffeterkreis* rehearse plays (Dramaliewa 19). In 1853, Hedwig and Marie wrote a fairy tale play called *Ohne Herz*, in which Gisela played a character named Fürstin Salamandra. When Gisela forgot to make her costume, Bettina constructed one out of their fire-colored curtains (Dramaliewa 41-42). Gisela was draped in a purple cloak and donned a gold foil crown, as one of the von Olfers sisters wears in this image (Mey 34).

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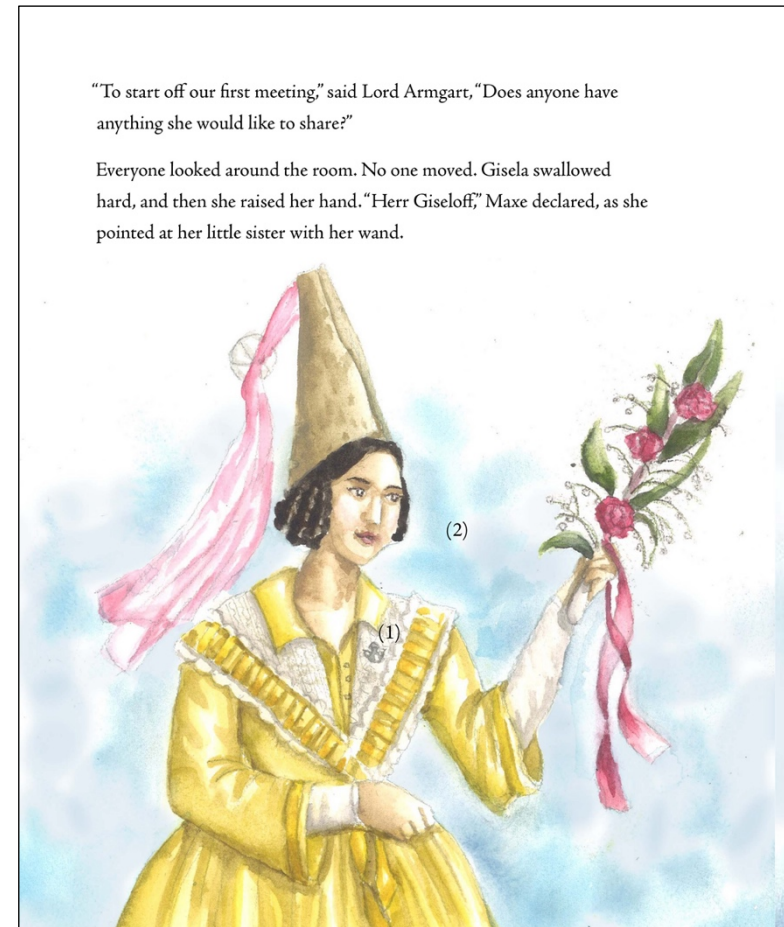


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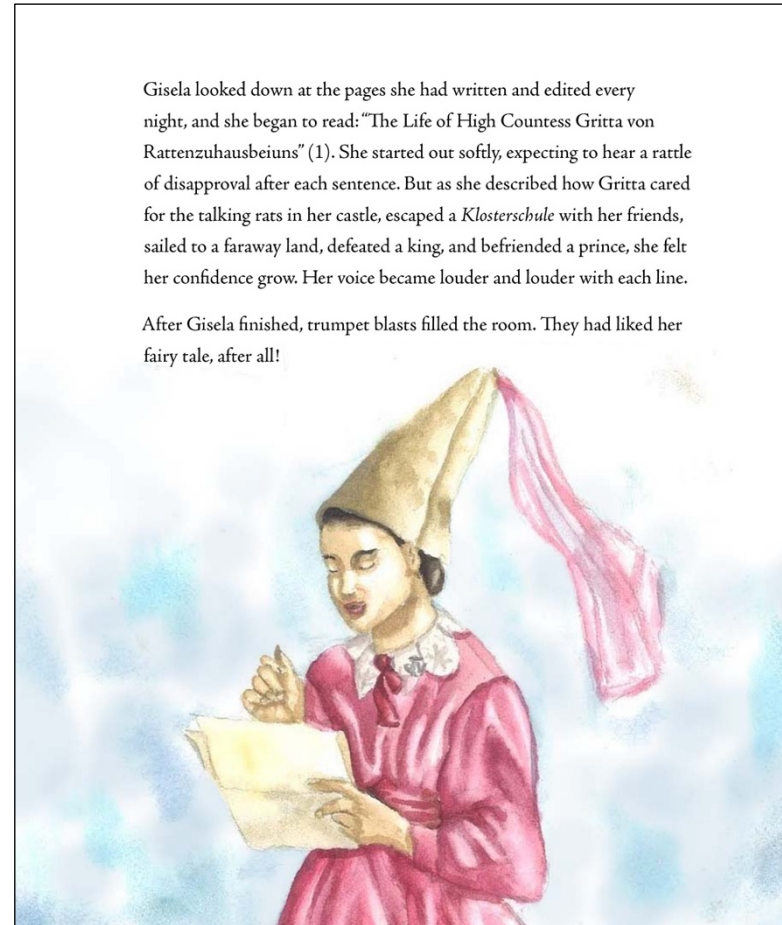
- (26.1) The *Kaffeterkreis* named its founding members the “Order of the Golden Coffeepot,” and secondary members were in the “Order of the Silver Coffeepot” (Werner 181). I have represented this distinction with coffeepot-shaped pins on Maxe’s and Gisela’s collars.
- (26.2) The image of Maxe as Präsident Maiblümchen is based on a drawing by Otilie von Gräfe, published in Werner’s text (n.p.).



(27.1) As Gisela wrote *Gritta* during the *Kaffeterkreis* era, Blackwell asserts that she could have read selections from the text out loud at meetings (“Laying the Rod to Rest,” 25).

Gisela looked down at the pages she had written and edited every night, and she began to read: “The Life of High Countess Gritta von Rattenzuhausbeiuns” (1). She started out softly, expecting to hear a rattle of disapproval after each sentence. But as she described how Gritta cared for the talking rats in her castle, escaped a *Klosterschule* with her friends, sailed to a faraway land, defeated a king, and befriended a prince, she felt her confidence grow. Her voice became louder and louder with each line.

After Gisela finished, trumpet blasts filled the room. They had liked her fairy tale, after all!



- (28.1) Koehler argues that the *Kaffeterkreis* shaped Gisela's "development as a writer," as she received encouragement and constructive criticism in a collective female environment (115).
- (28.2) Jarvis notes that the illustrations for *Gritta* were drawn by both Gisela and Herman. Herman also probably helped with editing the text ("Nachwort," 225). Some of the drawings appeared in Gisela's and Herman's shared diary from the years 1846-1847, and scholars do not know if they were created before, during, or after Gisela wrote the *Gritta* story (226). Jarvis points out, though, that the illustrations show characteristic styles of different artists, such as Gisela's broad strokes and Herman's measured lines (227).
- (28.3) Herman actually became the first male member of the *Kaffeterkreis*. Gisela wanted to include him as her close friend, but members like Minne Bardua argued against her. When author Cristoph Ernst von Houwald attended multiple *Kaffeterkreis* sessions and the group designated other male fairy-tale writers as honorary members, opposition to men's participation weakened. Upon his admittance to the literary circle, Herman became one of the most eager members of the group, contributing high-spirited stories and pen-and-ink drawings to the *Kaffeterzeitung*. Additional male members included Emanuel Geibel and Gebhard von Alvensleben (Werner 179). Authors Edward Mörike and Hans Christian Andersen gained an honorary position in the group, as well, yet the literary circle remained led by women (Jarvis, "Trivial Pursuit?," 102-103).

The other women showered Gisela with praise, but they also offered suggestions on how she could make her book better. So Gisela wrote some more, and with every word, she improved (1). She even drew pictures to go along with her story, and Herman, who loved art (2), helped (3).

The other members of the *Kaffeterkreis* wrote, drew, and composed, too. Soon, the fame of the group grew. Princesses and duchesses, government ministers and ladies-in-waiting, and even princes began to visit the weekly meetings, to see what these women and girls had to write about, and they were impressed with what they found (4). Each guest had to pay 4 *Groschen* to attend, and Gisela collected the coins at the door (5).

Word of the *Kaffeterkreis*' success spread so far that even the *Kronprinz* wanted to know what all the fuss was about. So one day, he decided to visit the literary circle himself.



- (28.4) Visitors to the *Kaffeterkreis* began as only parents and friends but soon included members of the court, military, and academic circles (Wilhelmy 183). Princes and princesses, government ministers, ladies in waiting, duchesses, intellectuals, lieutenants, artists, and members of the clergy all attended meetings (Werner 182). The group even hosted a party for King Friedrich Wilhelm IV of Prussia in 1845 at the von Savigny's house, which included a highly praised theatrical performance (Wilhelmy 183).
- (28.5) The visitor fee for the *Kaffeterkreis* began as 1.5 *Silbergroschen* and rose to 4 *Gute Groschen* when the literary circle's popularity increased (Werner 181).
- (28.6) This house is based on Armgart's sketch of the von Arnim home at *In den Zelten 5* in Berlin, where the family lived from 1847-1859 (Eshbach, "Joseph Joachims Briefe...").

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(29.1) Out of embarrassment, members never charged princes the entry fee for the *Kaffeterkreis*. They did make all other guests pay, though, including Friedrich Karl von Savigny when they hosted the literary circle in his own home (Werner 181).



Gisela was surprised to see the prince arrive. "4 Groschen, Your Highness" she demanded, reaching out her hand for the money.

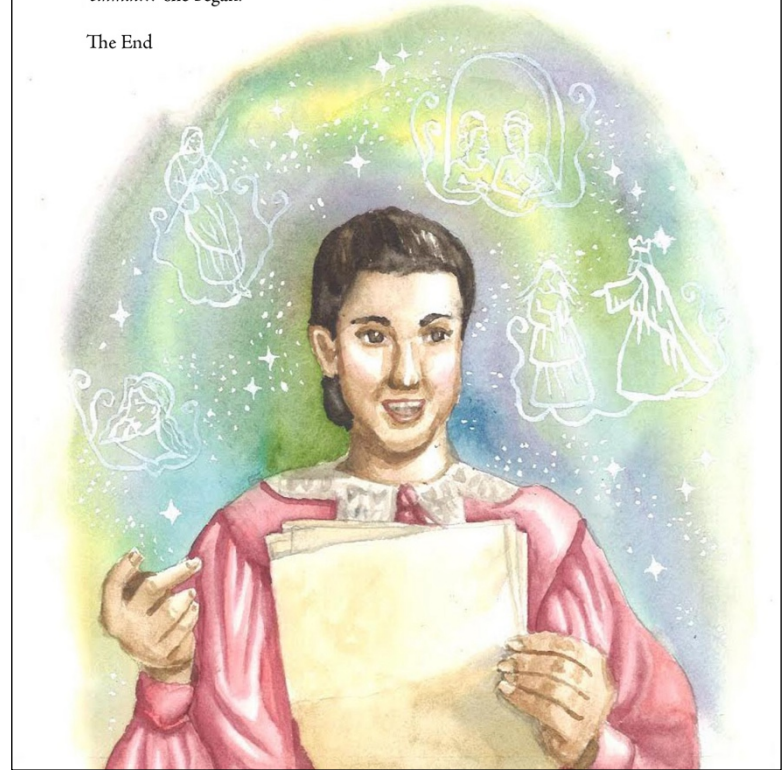
"Gisela!" cried Argmart and Maxe, shocked that she would speak to royalty that way (1).

The *Kronprinz* looked down at his feet. "I'm sorry, but princes never carry any money," he mumbled. "But I have heard of your story about the little countess who saves a kingdom, and I know just as little about the ways of the world as the prince in that tale. I should not have laughed at you at the ball. Now, perhaps you could teach me how to write something besides proclamations, laws, and rules."

(30.1) The Prussian crown prince did become an honorary member of the *Kaffeterkreis* (Jarvis, "Trivial Pursuit," 102-103).

And Gisela reached out her hand again, this time to lead the prince into the room (1). Then, she picked up her fairy tale and started to read. "*Es war einmal...*" she began.

The End



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