

KAROLINE VON GÜNDERRODE: WRITING HER DESIRE

BY

ERICA ENS

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## ABSTRACT

In this study the life and writing of Karoline von Günderrode (1780-1806) is presented to the reader. As she is relatively obscure, a substantial chapter is devoted to her biography and to her letters. A selection of her published and unpublished manuscripts is discussed with the concepts of desire and fragmentation as their main focus. The concepts of the *Fragment*, the dialogue and the idea of a *progressive Universalpoesie* outlined by the early German Romantics is presented briefly, and applied, insofar as possible, to the treatment of Karoline von Günderrode's works. Her social and familial context, and most importantly her gender, are considered as important factors affecting her thought and writing. These are referred to in the discussion of her works.

The theme of desire is seen as the central energy informing Karoline von Günderrode's writing. She names this desire and emphasizes its necessity in many ways. Her texts are discussed with the focus on the kinds of desire she names: desire for communication, for insight (*Erkenntnis*), for autonomy, erotic desire, desire for a return to origin, for wholeness and for love.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

All literary works ... are 'rewritten', if only unconsciously, by the societies which read them; indeed there is no reading of a work which is not also a 're-writing'. (Eagleton 12)

It is this active interplay between text and reader, text and society, which makes literature alive, vibrant, significant and necessary throughout generations of readers. Approximately two hundred years ago, the young poet and writer Karoline von Günderrode expressed a similar thought in a short text entitled "Die Manen. Ein Fragment." In it, a scholar who is mourning the death of a great man, says:

So lebt und wirkt aber ein großer Mensch nicht nach seiner Weise in mir fort, sondern nach meiner, nach der Art wie ich ihn aufnehme, wie ich mich und ob ich mich seiner erinnern will. (Werke I 31)

Whether or not a writer will remain "alive" depends on the reader's desire and willingness to "reread" his works, and this in turn will be done not in a vacuum, but with the reader's own manner of reception bringing the writer's words and thoughts to life again.

However, one problem that is posed to the reader is that of access to literary material. Readers, in their attempt to "relive" the lives and ideas of people from the past, are at the mercy of other readers, readers with power: publishers, literary experts, and readers within the institutions of society, government, church and university, who decide what will be available to the public. The choice of books deemed worthy of



publication and republication by these readers will reflect their own interests and values. This exclusion of works that have not met certain criteria presents a problem for the reader who may not be content with this pre-selection of available literature.

Eighteenth-century Germany boasted many brilliant writers, among them, of course, the literary giant Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. Research and criticism in the area of German literature of this period has centered around Goethe and the phenomenal effect his writing had on German literature, a literature that had suddenly attracted the attention of the rest of Europe. Measured against a writer as prolific and brilliant as Goethe, other writers of his time were easily overshadowed.

One group of writers which was particularly neglected was a handful of emerging women writers. Since education and even literacy were considered unnecessary for the female gender, although a small measure of interest in the arts was tolerated in the women of the nobility, it is not surprising that few women were active in the literary world. Until recently, only a handful of women writers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were considered worthy of republication and study. Annette von Droste-Hülshoff is probably the only female writer prior to the twentieth century known to the average German reader.

However, in the last three decades of our century, the literature of the past has undergone renewed scrutiny by feminist literary critics and writers. Gisela Brinker-Gabler, who edited and published the seminal two-volume collection of critical

essays entitled *Deutsche Literatur von Frauen* in 1988, and many other scholars have discovered that there were other women who wrote during this time, and that they were also read with a good deal of interest. Yet the works by these writers were rarely reprinted in anthologies and new editions, an indication that they were not considered to be worthy of serious consideration and simply inferior. Thus they were excluded from the canon of literature available to the modern reader.

The concern of feminist literary scholars has been two-fold: to reclaim and resurrect female writers from the past, and to "reread" their works from an alternative point of view. Christa Wolf, a leading feminist writer and critic in modern Germany, has given this new approach an interesting name. In an essay entitled "Vierte Vorlesung. Ein Brief über Eindeutigkeit und Mehrdeutigkeit, Bestimmtheit und Unbestimmtheit; über sehr alte Zustände und neue Seh-Raster; über Objektivität" in *Voraussetzungen einer Erzählung: Cassandra*,<sup>1</sup> she calls this approach "ein neues Seh-Raster." This term implies both a new perspective on literature and an entirely new set of criteria, one which is not only concerned with the brilliance of content, or the perfection of form, but with the authenticity of women's narrative. Convinced that the version of history which has been adopted and perpetuated by male historians and writers is not the only one to be taken into consideration, feminists seek to reread women's narratives as a version of history that records human

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<sup>1</sup> Darmstadt und Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1983, 126-155.

experience with a validity equal to the documents that have been given the stamp of authenticity by leading male literary historians.

The result of this searching, reading and writing, has been an impressive body of material. Biographies, anthologies, essays, literary studies have been published recently that indicate that women in eighteenth-century Germany were not all silent. Of the small percentage of the female population that was given the opportunity to learn to read and write, many were eager to express their views in letters, poetry, fiction and other forms. Not surprisingly, most of these women were members of the nobility, women who were privileged to have private tutors, and were given the opportunity to meet and read male writers and artists in the social circles in which they moved. They were also the only women who had the time and leisure to dedicate to the activities of writing and reading, having the luxury of servants and housekeepers to look after their domestic duties.

One of these writers, a woman of the nobility who did not dabble in literature as a pastime but took her writing and reading very seriously, was Karoline von Günderode (1780 - 1806). She was a close friend and correspondent of three men who enjoyed considerable popularity and prestige during their lifetimes and are still quite well known to scholars of the period: the Romantic poet Clemens Brentano, the esteemed professor of law Karl von Savigny, and the philologist and mythologist Friedrich Creuzer. Yet, after her early death in

1806, Günderrode was very soon forgotten by her contemporaries, even though she had published two manuscripts, with a third one on the brink of publication, and had been an active correspondent of all three men as well as Bettine von Arnim. It is most probably due to Bettine von Arnim that Karoline von Günderrode was not forgotten altogether. In 1840, almost 50 years after Günderrode's death, Bettine published an epistolary novel entitled *Die Günderrode*, which consisted of the correspondence between the two women, and included a number of poems and stories Günderrode had evidently sent her before they were published, asking Bettine for her comments on them. It was another woman writer, Christa Wolf, who drew her contemporary readers' attention to Günderrode and her writing, by publishing a lengthy essay, excerpts of letters and a selection of creative works in an easily available paperback collection called *Der Schatten eines Traumes* in 1978.

The most important publication to date, however, has been the three-volume critical edition of Günderrode's creative works by Walter Morgenthaler, which was completed in 1991.<sup>2</sup> It includes all of her published material and her unpublished manuscripts, as well as her *Studienbuch*. This edition is a valuable source for scholars and general readers, since until now the only texts available were of poor quality and extremely limited circulation.

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<sup>2</sup> Karoline von Günderrode, *Sämtliche Werke und ausgewählte Studien*. ed. Walther Morgenthaler. 3 vols. Frankfurt am Main: Stroemfeld/Roter Stern, 1990. All references to this source will be made to this edition and will be indicated in parentheses in the main body of the thesis.

It is to be expected that this publication will generate renewed interest in G nderrode's works.

It is the purpose of this thesis to adopt the aims of the feminists of the twentieth century in an attempt to "reread" the work and life of Karoline von G nderrode and to introduce her to the readers of today as a significant writer of her period. Feminist theory has developed a complex array of scholarly approaches since its first appearance in the academic world. However, a feminist approach to literature can be summed up in a general way by the questions it asks of a literary text. Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore spell out the task of a feminist reader very simply in the introduction to their book *The Feminist Reader: Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism*:

To interpret a work is always to address, whether explicitly or implicitly, certain kinds of issues about what it says. The feminist reader might ask, among other questions, how the text represents women, what it says about gender relations, how it defines sexual difference.

... A feminist does not necessarily read in order to praise or to blame, to judge or to censor. More commonly she sets out to assess how the text invites its readers, as members of a specific culture, to understand what it means to be a woman or a man, and so encourages them to reaffirm or to challenge existing cultural norms. (1)

The specific questions that will be asked in this discussion of Karoline von G nderrode's texts will be informed by these more general questions regarding gender difference and the way its interpretation in nineteenth-century Germany affected the life and writing of Karoline von G nderrode.

Since she is still relatively unknown, the first chapter will concentrate on biographical information about Karoline von

Günderrode. This information will provide a necessary introduction to her works since it establishes her activity as a writer within her social and familial context. Günderrode was a prolific letter writer as well, and her letters will be given special attention in this chapter and in the main body of the thesis, both as historical documents and as literary texts complementing her published manuscripts.

The attention Karoline von Günderrode has received until recently has had as its primary concern her life and its tragic ending. Her contemporaries were understandably overwhelmed by her outrageous and shocking act of suicide and tended either to eulogize her sentimentally as the paradigmatic romantic victim of pure love, or to condemn her as a strange and dark figure who had acted against the laws of nature. Her work, however, was almost entirely ignored. Until Christa Wolf's essay in 1978, little was known about her work. Recently, feminist scholars have included her work and life story in their anthologies, and have dedicated the occasional article or chapter to her life and the general tenor of her writing. There are two comprehensive dissertations available on Günderrode's work. One was published before Wolf's book by Annelore Naumann in 1957.<sup>3</sup> Margarethe Lazarowicz published her dissertation in 1986.<sup>4</sup> Both scholars were the first scholars to treat Günderrode's individual texts with the

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<sup>3</sup> Annelore Naumann, *Caroline von Günderrode*. Berlin: Freie Universität, 1957.

<sup>4</sup> Margarete Lazarowicz, *Karoline von Günderrode. Portrait einer Fremden*. Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Peter Lang, 1986.

thoroughness they deserve. Both discuss every text in considerable detail in chronological order of their appearance in her published volumes.

This relative lack of secondary literature on Günderrode's works invites further investigation and discussion of her creative texts. Although the discussion of her life and her relations to people who were influential for her is necessary and serves as a means to "reread" her works, the main intent of this study is to present the reader with a selection of Günderrode's creative texts. Central to Günderrode's works are the concepts of desire and fragmentation. These shall provide a framework with which to read both the content and the form of her body of work. This premise will be described in Chapter Three, and discussed with reference to specific texts in the main body of the thesis.

As a primary source for her published creative texts and those remaining in her *Nachlass*, Walther Morgenthaler's critical edition will be used. He has retained Günderrode's original spelling and punctuation, which shall be reproduced in this text. Similarly, Günderrode's unique orthography will be retained in the citation of excerpts of her letters appearing in various collections.

There is some question as to the validity of citing Günderrode's letters from Bettine von Arnim's epistolary novel *Die Günderrode* as her own writing. It is true that Bettina did not always reproduce Günderrode's letters verbatim in this book. However, Bettine's rendition of Karoline's letters was based on

Günderrode's original letters. Certainly she did not change the basic content and expression of the letters (Wolf 49). These letters, then, will be cited as Karoline's own.

In literary scholarship it is common to use only the surname of an author when referring to him or her. However, because there is such a paucity of female writers of the earlier centuries, and because it was quite common for the women who moved in literary circles or who were writers themselves to be married to writers, confusion can occur when referring to women who used their husband's surnames. When the names *Brentano* or *Arnim*, for example, occur in any text, an automatic response from the reader is to think of Clemens Brentano or Achim von Arnim, rather than of Bettine, who used both surnames in her lifetime. Women were always seen in relation to their husbands or fathers. Goethe once wrote to Auguste Stolberg:

Meine Teure - ich will Ihnen keinen Nahmen geben, denn was sind die Nahmen Freundinn Schwester, Geliebte, Braut, Gattin, oder ein Wort das einen Complex von all denen Nahmen begriffe, gegen das unmittelbare Gefühl, zu dem--ich kann nicht weiter schreiben... (cit in Brinker-Gabler 15)

All of these "names" infer a relationship to a man. In order to avoid confusion, and to call attention to the autonomy of the author, Karoline von Günderrode, Bettine von Arnim (née Brentano) and Gunda von Savigny (née Brentano) will be referred to by their given names.



## CHAPTER TWO: KAROLINE VON GÜNDERRODE'S LIFE

So habe ich immer Biographien mit eigener Freude gelesen, und es ist mir dabei stets vorgekommen als könne man keinen vollständigen Menschen erdichten, man erfindet immer nur eine Seite und die Complicirtheit des menschlichen Daseins bleibt stets unerreicht... (Günderrode cit. in Arnim 527)

Biographical data on Karoline von Günderrode is not abundant, yet we do have material that gives us some information on the life of this writer. The main primary sources are letters which have survived. Although many of the letters she wrote were destroyed, a number have been preserved, along with a number of letters which were written to her. The surviving letters not only testify to the fact that Karoline considered letter writing to be a crucial vehicle for self-expression and literary discourse, but they also provide clues to the circumstances under which she lived. Some of these letters were published in 1920-22 by Leopold Hirschberg in his four-volume edition entitled *Gesammelte Werke*. The first critically annotated collection of a series of letters was published by Max Preitz in two volumes of the series *Jahrbuch des Freien Deutschen Hochstifts*. Together with Doris Hopp he also published a third article on Karoline's life and studies in the series. These three articles provide biographical information in addition to the letters. Another valuable source which scholars have used for information on Karoline's life and social background is the article by Karl Schwartz called "Geschichte der

Familie von Günderrode," appearing in the *Ersch und Grubers Allgemeiner Encyklopädie der Wissenschaften und Künste*, published in 1878. Two other important documents are *Karoline von Günderrode und ihre Freunde* by Ludwig Geiger, published in 1895, and *Die Liebe der Günderrode* by Karl Preisendanz published in 1912. Subsequent biographies and dissertations generally rely on these early sources.<sup>1</sup> In 1992 Birgit Weißenborn edited a volume of Karoline's correspondence entitled *Ich sende Dir ein zärtliches Pfand*. She has changed spelling and punctuation of the original letters, and has suggested dates for some of them that can not be corroborated. However, she is careful to state her sources for each letter, many of which are directly from Karoline's manuscripts. When possible, letters will be cited from critically annotated editions.

Karoline von Günderrode was born in Karlsruhe, Baden, on February 11th, 1780, into an aristocratic family that could trace its nobility back to the 15th century. The family had been a supporter of and contributor to the arts for several generations. Karoline's grandfather, Johann Maximilian Freiherr von Günderrode, wrote historical and legal articles, and more importantly, established a fairly comprehensive private library,

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<sup>1</sup> See for example Frederik Hetmann's book *Drei Frauen zum Beispiel. Die Lebensgeschichte der Simone Weil, Isabel Burton und Karoline von Günderrode*, Bernhard Gajek's chapter "'das rechte Verhältnis der Selbständigkeit zur Hingebung.' Über Karoline von Günderrode (1780-1806)" in the book *Frankfurt aber ist der Nabel dieser Erde. Das Schicksal einer Generation der Goethezeit*, and Gisela Brinker-Gabler's *Lexikon deutschsprachiger Schriftstellerinnen 1800-1945*.

which he also opened to the public. Both parents were also patrons of the arts. So, although the age into which Karoline was born was one in which the arts were a male domain, Karoline did enjoy the advantage of being born into a family in which writing and publication were held in high esteem.

Karoline's father, Hektor Wilhelm von Günderröde, was well educated; he wrote and published several historical and biographical essays as well as some poetry. He was not a brilliant writer, something which he acknowledged himself, pronouncing his own works mediocre and flawed. Although several of his articles were published during his lifetime, he never enjoyed great prominence. However, the fact that he was interested in writing and held that writing deserved high standards of excellence, may have subtly influenced Karoline in her artistic endeavours, even though she never mentions her father in any of her writing.

What did affect Karoline's life in a much more obvious and direct way was her father's death. He died at the age of 31, leaving his wife and six children behind. Karoline, the eldest child, was only six years old at the time. As a result, the family moved to Hanau, where they lived on a small estate. It has been assumed that the move was prompted by a sudden loss of financial security, but Hektor von Günderröde did leave his wife and children a substantial inheritance, which was to become the cause for a great deal of strife between Karoline and her mother in Karoline's adulthood. The early death of her father left

Karoline at the mercy of a widow who had suddenly lost social status, if not financial security, and who seemed incapable of managing the family finances in a fair way.

Karoline's mother, Louise von Günderrode, was a relatively well educated woman who was interested in intellectual and literary pursuits. She too wrote some poems and essays. Yet there is no evidence that she encouraged Karoline to pursue her literary interests. What we can read in letters is that there was a fair amount of hostility between mother and daughter, especially with regard to Karoline's inheritance, which her mother refused to part with. Tension arose to such an extent that in 1803, when Karoline was 23, she helped her sister Wilhelmine "flee" from her mother's house to an aunt's residence in Giessen, an action deemed necessary for the sisters in order to prepare themselves to take their mother to court and demand their share of the inheritance.

When Karoline was 17 years old her mother put her into a Protestant home for gentlewomen called "Das Cronstetten-Hynspergische Adelige Damenstift" in Frankfurt, which was to become Karoline's main place of residence for the rest of her life. Karoline was deeply unhappy with this living arrangement. The abrupt separation from her siblings, to whom she was close, and from the social circles she seemed to enjoy, made her feel isolated and lonely. Her only way of escape was to become financially secure through marriage or financially independent through inheritance. Perhaps she also wished to earn money

through her writing, although it seems that Karoline herself did not see this as a viable solution.

For encouragement and support for her writing, Karoline had to look outside her family. This is somewhat surprising when one considers the degree to which both parents were interested in the arts and actively participated in the artistic scene of the time. Karoline never refers to her childhood and adolescence in her letters to her friends, nor do we have any other primary sources telling of this time of her life. We do, however, have evidence for the fact that even as a child Karoline was interested in reading and in educating herself. One of her notebooks that has survived dates back to 1791, when Karoline would have been 11 years old. This notebook, and several others which have been preserved as part of Karoline's *Nachlass*, contain long handwritten passages of poets, philosophers, scientists and mythologists Karoline read and studied.

Karoline also speaks very warmly of her sisters, especially her sister Charlotte. In a letter to her friend Karoline von Barkhaus in 1799 from Hanau, where Karoline von Günderrode is visiting her family, she writes:

Der Umgang mit meinen Schwestern macht mir viel Freude; doch bemerke ich täglich mehr, daß ich mit Lottchen am meisten harmoniere; noch nie fand ich eine Seele, die in den wichtigsten Gegenständen so sehr einerlei Meinung mit mir war: ich möchte so gern etwas für sie sein, aber ich weiß nicht, wie ich ihr nützlich werden kann. (Hirschberg II 234)

When Karoline was a mere 21 years of age, Charlotte, only 19, died. Karoline looked after this her favourite sister for three months before she died. Her sister Louise had died when Karoline

was fourteen, and a year after Charlotte's death, Karoline lost another sister, Amalie. This frequent experience with the death of family members must have had a strong impact on Karoline's sensitive nature. As the eldest of the family, Karoline seems also to have taken considerable responsibility for her younger siblings, as is evident in the role she played in helping her sister Wilhelmine "escape" from her dominating mother and taking the lead in protesting their mother's control over the family finances. When Karoline returned to her parental home on frequent visits from Frankfurt, her feelings seem to have been mixed. Although we sense from her letters that she is delighted to see old friends and her sisters again, and that she is relieved to be able to escape the stifling atmosphere of the Stift, there often seems to be a sense of reluctance on her part to go home, and a desire to leave again after a while. In August of 1801, when Karoline returned to Hanau to look after Charlotte, she begins her letter to Gunda Brentano like this:

Wie sonderbar sind doch die ersten Tage des Aufenthalts an einem fremden Orte, die Bande die uns an den vohrigen Aufenthalt knüpften sind aufgelöst für die Gegenwart, sie treten gleichsam in den Hintergrund der Empfindung, und der Zustand bis man sich wieder an seine neue Umgebung angeknüpft hat ist durchaus unangenehm; er ist eine Leere die man aus sich verdrängen möchte; so ist mirs wenigstens.  
(Preitz II 167)

Although this statement is a rather general expression on the experience of coming back to a familiar place after a long absence, it seems significant that she would write this after returning to her home. Much as Karoline loathed living in the Stift, she experienced a certain amount of freedom there to

develop herself without parental and familial pressures.

The move to the Damenstift was for the most part an unhappy one for Karoline. She was not a particularly pious woman, and, although she was given a considerable amount of freedom to travel and pursue her own interests, Karoline found the rigid atmosphere of the institution cold and stifling. Max Preitz describes the Stift as a place which had changed drastically from its former rigidity. Women like Karoline were not forced to wear a uniform at all times, were allowed to receive visitors, to go to the theatre, and were free to travel for longer periods of time.

Still, Preitz says:

Die Realität bestand für die Günderrode eben doch darin, daß sie den überwiegenden Teil ihrer Zeit im Stift zu verbringen hatte, wo der Tag wenn auch nicht in völlig starren, so doch ziemlich genau vorgeschriebenen Bahnen verlief; und Karoline empfand die Abhängigkeit von äußeren Umständen häufig als Einschränkung. (Preitz III 225)

She frequently mentions her unhappiness in letters to her friends. In a letter to Karoline von Barkhaus just after she had returned to Frankfurt after having visited her friend in Lengfeld, she refers to her room as a lonely cell, lamenting the fact that she must return to it again after spending a delightful time at her friends' estate in Lengfeld:

Da sitze ich wieder in meiner einsamen Zelle und die vergangnen schönen Tage scheinen mir ein Traum der ein dumpfes schmerzliches Gefühl des verflossenen angenehmen, und des augenblicklich schmerzlichen entbehrens zurück läßt. (Preitz II 162)

Moreover, the social stigma that accompanied a resident of such an institution was not easy to bear. This was a home reserved for

gentlewomen who seemed to have no other place to go, and would remain there for the rest of their lives as *alte Jungfern*, the German equivalent to the equally derogatory "old maids" (Lazarowicz 24). Although Karoline never explicitly states that it is her dream to marry a suitable man, it seems that she would have welcomed a marriage to a man who would not only provide for financial security, but also encourage her in her writing and studies. In order to meet men whom she might marry, she had to leave the Stift. She welcomed lengthy outings to her friends' estates and other parties and travels. But given her lack of financial independence, she remained very dependent on her mother's wishes, and was not free to go and come as she pleased.

Her residence here did, however, allow her a considerable amount of free time. There is no evidence that she was asked to perform any domestic duties at all when she was staying at the Stift. Karoline used this free time to pursue her studies. A number of notebooks have survived from this time, from which it is evident that Karoline worked her way through and painstakingly copied excerpts of writings by writers such as Novalis, Schleiermacher, Fichte, and Hemsterhuis, as well as lengthy other treatises on physics, natural philosophy, and poetics. In the letters she wrote during this time she often comments on authors whose books she was reading, such as Herder, Jean Paul, Schelling and Schiller, among others. Her correspondence with her various friends shows that these women would sit down together during their visits and work their way through difficult passages,



encouraging each other to read authors they thought were important.

Karoline formed important friendships, especially with women, during her time in the Stift. In her first year there (1797), she learned to know Lisette Mettingh, who also lived in the Stift and was, like Karoline, keenly interested in literature, history and philosophy. These two formed a friendship that was to last for most of Karoline's life, continuing and after Lisette's marriage to Christian Nees von Esenbeck and her move to Franken. It was also during this time that she met Susanne von Heyden, Lisette's half-sister, who was also interested in philosophy and classical languages. Later she was to play an important role as confidante to both Karoline and Friedrich Creuzer during their troubled relationship between 1804 and 1806. Two years later, in 1799, Karoline began to correspond with another important friend, Karoline von Barkhaus, née Leonhardi. Her parents owned an elegant large house in Frankfurt as well as an estate in Lengfeld, where they gave many gala parties to which Karoline was invited and where she met educated and interesting young people of the most prominent social circles (Preitz III 216).

In the spring of 1799, while visiting the Leonhardi family at Lengfeld, Karoline met Karl von Savigny, a young lawyer, who was to become a very significant figure in her life. Karoline, a charming, beautiful and striking young woman, and Savigny, bright, promising and attractive, were instantly attracted to

each other. In July of the same year Karoline confessed her love for Savigny in a letter to her friend Karoline von Barkhaus. Savigny was taken with Karoline's intelligence and beauty and Karoline dared to hope that he would eventually propose marriage. Savigny, always the rational man, even wrote a letter to his friends Leonhard and Friedrich Creuzer asking about Karoline's status and wealth. Shortly thereafter he wrote again to Leonhard Creuzer:

...kennen Sie vielleicht die G(ünderode)? ich weiß nicht, ob ich über diese Mädchen dem Gerücht glauben soll, nach welchem sie kokett oder prüd oder ein starker männlicher Geist seyn müste, oder ihren blauen Augen, in denen viel sanfte Weiblichkeit wohnt. (cit. in Lazarowicz 28)

The marriage proposal was never made. Christa Wolf surmises that his reluctance to marry Karoline was probably due to the fact that, although he was fascinated by her, he could not picture her as his wife, simply because what he expected in a wife was not a spirited and independent thinker, his intellectual equal, but rather someone who could take care of his household and be subservient in all things (19). He found this partner in Gunda Brentano several years later, whom he married in 1803. The fact that his interest in Karoline remained strong is corroborated by the intensive correspondence Karoline had both with him and with Gunda in 1803 and until her death in 1806. It has been suggested that perhaps Karoline was not interested in marrying Savigny, wishing instead to live a life outside the parameters of a conventional marriage arrangement (Weißenborn 22). It is true that Karoline never explicitly stated that she considered

conventional marriage to be the ideal state. Yet in a letter to Savigny some time after his marriage to Gunda, Karoline subtly refers to the fact that he never asked her to marry him:

Vor einigen Jahren stand ich mit einem gewissen jungen Menschen in dem Leonhardischen Garten auf dem Balkon, wir waren allein, und ich hätte gerne mit ihm gesprochen aber eine gewisse Beklemmung vielleicht gar Herzklopfen hielt mich zurück, der junge Mensch war auch eine Weile still, endlich mochte er wohl das lange Schweigen für unschicklich halten, er fragte mich "Wie geht es Ihrem Bruder? ist er noch in Hanau?"--Diese Frage machte mir einen äusserst unangenehmen Eindruck, ich hatte allerlei Empfindungen dabei die ich nicht leiden kann. Sagen Sie selber hätte der junge Mensch nicht etwas viel ordentlicheres fragen können? ich bin ihm immer ein wenig böse darüber gewesen, fast so böse, als ich Ihnen sein könnte, weil Sie mich auffordern, ein Mittler zwieschen Ihnen und dem Gundelchen zu werden. Wie boshaft! wie jronisch! wie abscheulich!  
(Preitz II 197)

In this letter there is a tone of irony and a playful reference to herself and to her addressee almost as though they were characters in a story, a game the two would play throughout their correspondence. After Savigny's marriage to Gunda, Karoline adopted the persona "der Freund" when referring to herself in her letters to Savigny. On the surface this was a device to distance herself emotionally from him, to firmly establish the parameters of their relationship. But however many doubts Karoline had about marriage, she was definitely disappointed in Savigny's rejection of her as a marriage partner.

Karoline spent the summer and fall of 1799 in Hanau with her mother. During this time she wrote frequent letters to Karoline von Barkhaus in which she speaks of her passionate but, as she senses, hopeless love for Savigny. These letters contain many examples of Karoline's love for words and poetic use of language.

In one letter she expresses her love to Savigny like this:

Wenn Sie etwas von S. hören darf ich Sie dann bitten es mir zu schreiben, verargen Sie mir diese Bitte nicht, es ist ia das Einzige was ich von ihm haben kann, der Schatten eines Traumes. (Pretitz II 166)

There is also evidence in these letters of how subservient Karoline had to be to her mother's wishes, and how carefully she must shield her mother from information she would not approve of.

Ich bin nicht krank aber doch kränklich, alle behaupten ich sehe blas und niedergeschlagen aus, unserer hiesiger Arzt glaubt eine Badekur würde mir helfen, die Mutter wünscht ich möchte während dieser Kur noch bei ihr bleiben; ich stellte ihr zwar vor wie gut u nöthig es wäre ietzt wieder nach Frankfurt zu gehn, umsonst, sie glaubt ich würde dort meine Gesundheit vernachlässigen, ich muß also versprechen noch 14 Tage in Hanau zu bleiben, um die geheime Sehnsucht welche mich dahin zieht wo ich von ihm hören kann zu verbergen willigte ich ein, denn meine Mutter darf und soll es nicht wissen. (Pretitz II 165)

We also know that Karoline was writing poetry during this time. Morgenthaler is only certain of two poems that were written before 1800. However, a number of other poems seems to have been created in these early years. It is fair to assume that Karoline was certainly experimenting with her own writing, even though her first publication appeared several years later.

In December of 1799 Karoline's grandmother Louise v. Günderrode died. As a result, Karoline moved to her grandfather's house in Butzbach in January of 1800, where she looked after him for several months. She was lonely in Butzbach and longed for stimulating company. She wrote frequent letters to Karoline von Barkhaus, in which she laments the fact that she cannot seem to find friends who are interested in the same things she is. She wrote:

Wie ich lebe? Oft unzufrieden mit mir selbst; von denen, die mich hier näher umgeben (zürnen Sie mir nicht deswegen) kann ich keinen eigentlich lieben. Ich kann mir keine Liebe ohne Harmonie der Gesinnungen denken; diese ist hier unmöglich. Und oft, ich kann es einer Freundin wie Sie nicht leugnen, oft fühle ich Bitterkeit gegen diese Menschen, wenn ich sehe, daß sie so gar kein Gefühl haben für das, was mich interessirt. Wenn der erste Sturm der gereizten Empfindung vorüber ist, dann sehe ich wohl ein, wie unmöglich es der ganzen Lage der Sache nach ist, daß diese Menschen so denken und fühlen wie ich; es schmerzt mich tief, aber ich begehe das Unrecht von neuem; denn der Empfindung kann ich nicht gebieten. Ich sage mir tausendmal: es ist egoistisch, nur Menschen von gleicher Empfindung zu lieben, und doch bleibt es wie vorher. Ich resignire auf Mitgefühl, nur lieben kann ich diese fremdartigen Geschöpfe nicht. (Hirschberg II 243)

It is obvious that Karoline's desire for satisfying communication with people who had interests similar to hers was very great. The way she berates herself for having these demands also shows that her unhappiness in Butzbach stemmed not from a kind of arrogant snobbery, but that her isolation was something she found exceedingly painful. In another letter she indicates that she was using the time on the lonely estate in Butzbach to further her reading:

Meine Zeit gedenke ich noch so ziemlich zuzubringen; von Hanau werde ich viele Bücher bekommen, und zwar sehr ernstliche, die Zeit und Nachdenken erfordern, und das paßt jetzt gut für meine Lage. (Hirschberg II 237)

The authors she studied during this time were Schiller, Hölderlin, Goethe and Tieck (Morgenthaler III 378).

It was in early February of 1801 that Karoline met Gunda and Bettine Brentano. Although it soon became evident that Gunda Brentano would marry Karl von Savigny, the man who had disappointed Karoline's own hopes for marriage, Karoline welcomed this friendship eagerly. She wrote Gunda frequently, expressing

her innermost thoughts and aspirations. Karoline opens herself up to Gunda in these letters, hoping for a reciprocal exchange. However, she was disappointed, as Gunda lacked Karoline's passion for literature and philosophy, nor could Gunda keep up with Karoline's need and ability to examine and analyze the intricacies of psychological and social phenomena she encountered daily. These letters reveal a lot about Karoline's inner make-up, and will be discussed at another point.

Somewhat later in the same year Karoline met Bettine Brentano, Gunda's sister. In Bettine Karoline found the soul-mate she had been looking for. Bettine was also an eager reader and poet, and the two women engaged in an exchange of letters that is passionate and inspiring. Whereas Lisette and Christian Nees von Esenbeck, and later Clemens Brentano and Friedrich Creuzer all commented on Karoline's literary activity, they often did so from a somewhat patronizing perspective. Even when they praised her, it was as though they were praising a precocious child, someone who was remarkable but not to be taken seriously. Bettine, however, adored Karoline, saw her as her mentor and teacher, but also questioned her writing, commenting on it with enthusiasm, praise, puzzlement or sometimes even anger; but she took every word Karoline wrote seriously. Karoline did sometimes play the role of the older sister, admonishing Bettine to be more disciplined and methodical in her studies. But when she did so it was in a lighthearted manner. It is clear that she also liked Bettine with her flamboyant manner of defying social convention

and irrepressible excitement at being alive and young and keen to discover the world of ideas.

Karoline and Bettine's friendship remained intense and extremely important to both women. This period of her life (after 1801) was a very productive time for Karoline. It can be assumed that Bettine's inspiration and constant support was what made it possible for Karoline not only to write more, but to dare to present her work to others. This friendship remained strong and important throughout Karoline's life. Unfortunately, however, in 1806, a few months before Karoline's death, under pressure from Friedrich Creuzer who was jealous and irrationally angry at Bettine, Karoline told Bettine that she could not see her anymore. Although Bettine was very hurt and felt betrayed by Karoline, her epistolary novel *Die Günderrode*, which she published in 1840, testifies to Bettine's unvaried respect and admiration for Karoline. This novel celebrates a unique and life-affirming correspondence between these two writers.

In July of 1801 Karoline also met Clemens Brentano, who was already at that time an active and successful writer. Karoline was excited to make his acquaintance, and delighted in writing to him about poetry and ideas. She was very impressed with his writing, and even dedicated a poem to him. Clemens went through a brief period of infatuation with Karoline. In one undated letter published in Ludwig Geiger's book *Karoline von Günderrode und ihre Freunde*, he expresses his sexual desire for her in an extremely explicit and even shocking way. The letter is undated,

but it is assumed that it was written fairly early on in their acquaintance, for the letters dated in 1804 have none of this sexual energy in them, and revolve mainly around her writing. He begins the letter like this:

Gute Nacht! Du lieber Engel! Ach, bist Du es, bist Du es nicht, so öffne alle Adern Deines weißen Leibes, daß das heiße schäumende Blut aus tausend wonnigen Springbrunnen spritze, so will ich Dich sehen und trinken aus den tausend Quellen, trinken, bis ich berauscht bin und Deinen Tod mit jauchzender Raserei beweinen kann, weinen wieder in Dich all mein Blut und das meine in Thränen, bis sich Dein Herz wieder hebt und Du mir vertraust, weil das meinige in Deinem Puls lebt....und lägst Du nur eine Nacht in meinen Armen, so solltest Du dir meine Liebe an Deinen warmen Brüsten ausbrühen,... (Geiger 108-109)

The letter continues in much the same vein for several pages. It can be assumed that the following text is Karoline's response to this letter:

Es war mir ganz wunderbarlich zu Mut, als ich Ihren Brief gelesen hatte; doch war ich mehr denkend als empfindend dabei; denn es war mir und ist mir noch so, als ob dieser Brief gar nicht für mich geschrieben sei....

Ja, ich verstehe den Augenblick, in dem Sie mir geschrieben haben, ich bin überhaupt nie weitergekommen als Ihre Augenblicke ein wenig zu verstehen. Von ihrem Zusammenhang und Grundton weiß ich gar nichts. Es kömmt mir oft vor, als hätten Sie viele Seelen, wenn ich nun anfangen, einer dieser Seelen gut zu sein, so geht sie fort und eine andere tritt an ihre Stelle, die ich nicht kenne und die ich nur überrascht anstarre. Aber ich mag nicht einmal an alle Ihre Seelen denken, denn eine davon hat mein Zutrauen, das nur ein furchtsames Kind ist, auf die Straße gestoßen; das Kind ist nun noch viel blöder geworden und wird nicht wieder umkehren. Darum kann ich Ihnen auch nicht eigentlich von mir schreiben. (Weißenborn 88)

This letter shows quite clearly that Karoline understands Clemens' extreme moods and split personality and recognizes that he is capable of writing to her without really addressing her, but rather his own momentary idea of her. Karoline's ability to



see various "selves" in others is obvious in her reference to Clemens' "many souls." She chose to develop a friendship with him that was not intimate, but one that she cherished because she could engage in literary discourse with him; she wished to communicate with Clemens' literary persona. Shortly after the publication of her first book in 1804, Clemens and Karoline began a serious correspondence with each other in which writing and art in general became the main subject, and personal matters were not touched upon. Karoline very clearly articulates her expectations of their friendship in the following letter:

... meine Beziehung zu Ihnen ist nicht Freundschaft, nicht Liebe, meine Empfindung bedarf daher keines Verhältnisses, sie gleicht vielmehr dem Interesse daß man an einem Kunstwerk haben kann, aber verworrene mißverständene Verhältnisse könnten mir dies Interesse trüben.  
(Hirschberg II 258)

In the spring of 1804 Karoline had her first volume of poetry published. It was called *Gedichte und Phantasien* and was published under the pseudonym of "Tian." Although the critics were not altogether damning, Karoline was not happy with the reception of the book. Her friends, however, were quite congratulatory. Bettine and Clemens Brentano praised her work highly. Clemens was overwhelmed by the high quality of her writing, and seemed hurt that she had not revealed her talent to him earlier. He writes:

Ich habe gehört die Lieder und Erzählungen, welche unter dem Namen Tian erschienen sind, seyen von Ihnen...ich habe sie mit Entzücken gelesen, es scheint mir möglich, daß sie von Ihnen seyen, aber ich kann dann wieder nicht begreifen, daß ich eine solche Vollendung in Ihrem Gemüt nicht sollte verstanden haben, liebe Karoline, zwei Stunden sind es kaum daß ich Ihre Lieder gelesen, die Idee, daß sie von Ihnen

sein könnten, hat mich durch Berg und Thal gejagt, ich habe weinen müssen über das wunderbare Geschick meiner Empfindungen, und nun weiß ich doch nicht mehr als vorher, ob die Lieder von Ihnen sind, weiß ich nicht, aber daß das, was ich in diesem Augenblick fühle, Ihnen gehört, das weiß ich. (Preitz I 227)

In fact, this renewed interest in her writing made it possible for them to change the tenor of their friendship. Karoline was delighted with his praise of her writing, and responded to his comments immediately:

Die Gedichte von Tian sind von mir, ich wollte es allen Menschen verbergen, ein Zufall hat es vereitelt, aber noch hat mich kein Beifall so erfreut wie der Ihrige, und mehr wird es keiner. (Preitz I 230)

She expresses this sense of disappointment and annoyance at the revelation of her identity as Tian in several other letters. It is obviously a male pseudonym, and it is quite possible that one reason why she did not want to be identified was that she was afraid that her writing might not be taken as seriously if it were known that she was a woman. Women were certainly allowed to write and publish poetry, but what seemed to perplex and threaten Clemens and other critics was the content of Karoline's writing. Women wrote letters and lyrical love poetry, but the area of philosophical thought was still considered a male domain. Karoline was interested in ideas, and many of her early stories and poems express the quest of a philosopher seeking knowledge, seeking connections, exploring new ways of thinking. In a subsequent letter to her, Clemens addressed her writing more specifically. He was full of mixed admiration and advice:

Doch glaube ich, Sie müssen einen eigentümlichen Weg einschlagen, um nicht auf dem Punkte stehenzubleiben, Sie

müssen sich bemühen, von der grauen Reflexion zur bunten lebendigen Darstellung überzugehen, um sich Ihrer Anlage zu entreißen und zur eigentlichen Macht zu gelangen. ... Das einzige, was man der ganzen Sammlung Böses vorwerfen könnte, wäre, daß sie zwischen dem Männlichen und Weiblichen schwebt, und hier und da nicht genug Gedichten, sondern sehr gelungen aufgegebenen Exerzitien oder Ausarbeitungen gleicht, dieses erscheint besonders durch einen hie und da hervorblickenden kleinen gelehrten Anstrich, der oft nicht im Gleichgewicht mit dem Ganzen steht, zum Beispiel Worte wie Adept, Apokalyptisch und so weiter als Titel. Es ist nicht gerade, als hätte jemand eine Perücke auf, der noch jung ist und eigenes schönes Haar hat, es ist auch nicht, als trage Amor als Perückenmacherjunge eine solche in der Hand, denn ihre Gedichte sind nicht jung mit langen Locken, und nicht Liebesgötter, aber es ist, als hätte ein moderner Weiser ein paar antike weissagende Tauben gefunden, ihnen die Augen ausgestochen und sie in seine Perücke gesetzt, denn Ihre Lieder sind lauter tiefsinnige, weissagende Turteltauben. (Geiger 95)

The metaphor Clemens uses is striking in that it points to the heart of his criticism. He accuses her of being an imposter of sorts. He does not criticize her poems themselves, and says they are deep and prophetic, but takes exception to the fact that she has appropriated the ideas expressed in them from an ancient source, claiming them to be her own. He sees them as being anachronistic. Then too, he is perplexed by the fact that they do not fit into his preconceived categories of "male" and "female" writing. Karoline responds quite vehemently:

Ehe ich zur ernstlichen Behandlung Ihrer ernstlichen Fragen komme, muß ich Sie recht dringend bitten mir die fatale Perücke abzunehmen die Sie mir aufgezwängt haben, die ich eigentlich nicht trage weil sie mich sehr beengen würde; also gleich am Eingang meines Briefs, hinweg mit ihr, daß ich mich frei bewegen kann. (Hirschberg II 257)

Whereas Clemens thinks she is clothing herself with stolen and appropriated goods, Karoline perceives him as forcing her into a costume that is not her own and is thus stifling and estranging.

In the same letter she also defends herself against his accusation that she is too reflective in her writing:

Sagen Sie nicht ferner, mein Wesen sei Reflexion, oder gar, ich sei mistrauisch, das Mistrauen ist eine Harpye die sich gierig über das Göttermal der Begeisterung wirft u es besudelt mit unreiner Erfahrung u gemeiner Klugheit, die ich stets jedem Würdigen gegenüber verschmählt habe.  
(Hirschberg II 258)

It almost seems as if she is very subtly accusing Clemens of being the suspicious one: after all, he is suspecting her of appropriation and dishonesty, and, in the process, attempting to squelch the enthusiasm with which she has written her poems.

Karoline was quite aware of Clemens' two-faced nature, and she may have been expressing this sentiment in the above letter as well. Four months later, after she and Friedrich Creuzer had become close friends, Creuzer wrote a letter to her in which he refers to a line Goethe had written in response to her poetry and the review of her book. Goethe, whose praise was highly sought after, had written: "Diese Gedichte sind wirklich eine seltsame Erscheinung und die Recension brauchbar" (Morgenthaler III 67).

Creuzer writes to Karoline:

Wie sehr ich schon gewohnt bin Deine Herrlichkeit mir zuzueignen schließe aus der Art wie ich heute beflissen war, das Göthesche Urtheil über Dich zu verbreiten. Ich hatte nicht eher Ruhe, bis es Savigny und Clem [Clemens Brentano] wußten, wie wenn ich Antheil an Deiner Glorie hätte. -- Beide nahmen es auf ihre Weise auf. Sav [Savigny] klar und freundlich: "das werde Dich ja recht freuen" --Clem: "das habe Göthe nur ironisch meinen können"  
Da er es nachher der Mereau erzählte, meinte diese: "das sei eine Artigkeit von Göthe, die er z.B. auch gegen die Imhof gemacht habe" Dies führte zu einer Erörterung über den Werth deiner Poesie. Clemens Urtheil lief darauf hinaus: "Du habest gar keine Poesie." Die Mereau meinte "Du seiest zwar nicht fähig Originales hervorzubringen, wohl aber die großen Ideen unserer Zeit, die Dich begeistert, gebildet

auszusprechen"-- (Morgenthaler III 67)

There are other sources, too, that point to the fact that Karoline had much greater reason to be distrustful of Clemens Brentano than the other way around. He was noted to have praised her poetry to her face, but to speak ill of it behind her back. He seemed to be torn between great and sincere admiration for Karoline's talent and an inexplicable jealousy and utter puzzlement.

Despite the fact that Karoline was disappointed in the reception of her book, she continued to write after its publication. She writes to Savigny:

Ich habe so viel Gutes zu thun, daß ich fast zum Besten, Ihnen zu schreiben, nicht kommen kann; ich lasse mir Müllers Geschichte der Schweiz vorlesen, ich studiere den Schelling mit großem Fleiß und arbeite an einem neuen Drama. Mein Leben ist jetzt durch diese Dinge erfüllt, und ich bin zufrieden. (Pretz II 202)

It is clear that writing and reading to her were not an idle pastime, but a necessity and a passion. She shared her enthusiasm not only with her literate friends; during a brief visit to Trages, Karoline wrote a letter to Claudine Piautaz, the beloved housekeeper and nanny of the Brentano household which Karoline frequented. She comments on her own process of writing:

Die Gegend ist so so schön, so abenteuerlich, aber mein Dichtungsquell ist vertrocknet; ich dachte hier recht viel Stoff zu finden. Es ist sonderbar, daß die Phantasie am meisten hervorbringt, wenn sie keine äußern Gegenstände findet, sie erschafft sich dann selbst Gegenstände und bildet sie um so sorgfältiger, da es keine fremden Stoffe, sondern ihre eignen Kinder sind. (Weißborn 125)

Upon Clemens' urgent question as to why she wants to write and have her works published, Karoline answers eloquently:

Wie ich auf den Gedanken gekommen bin meine Gedichte drucken zu lassen, wollen Sie wissen? Ich habe stets eine dunkle Neigung dazu gehabt, warum? und wozu? frage ich mich selten; ich freute mich sehr als sich jemand fand der es übernahm mich bei dem Buchhändler zu vertreten, leicht u unwissend was ich tat, habe ich so die Schranke zerbrochen, die mein innerstes Gemüt von der Welt schied; u noch hab ich es nicht bereut, denn immer neu u lebendig ist die Sehnsucht in mir mein Leben in einer bleibenden Form auszusprechen, in einer Gestalt die würdig sei zu den vortreflichsten hinzuzutreten sie zu grüßen u Gemeinschaft mit ihnen zu haben. Ja, nach dieser Gemeinschaft hat mir stets gelüstet, dies ist die Kirche, nach der mein Geist stets wallfahrtet auf Erden. (Hirschberg II 257)

This is a powerful statement of Karoline's central drive: to write and be heard, to have communion with other writers. In this letter she uses the words *Sehnsucht* and *Vortreflichkeit* which she repeats time and again in her writing to name the longing she saw as informing her life and thought. The religious metaphor is also fitting. Karoline's concern with writing was as fervent as religious faith.

During the year of 1804, Karoline's friendship with Bettine Brentano flourished. Bettine visited her in the Stift almost daily, and the two women read, wrote and discussed their writing with great intensity. Gunda Brentano and Savigny were married in the spring, and Karoline settled into an intimate but platonic friendship with both of them. Her friend Lisette Mettingh also married in 1804. Karoline seemed to have given up her struggle to leave the Stift and lead an independent life, especially after having lost the court case for her share of the family inheritance in 1803, and concentrated wholly on her writing.

In August of 1804 Karoline met Friedrich Creuzer. Creuzer was a scholar of antiquity and mythology, and had been given a

position as professor at the university in Heidelberg. He was a good friend of Karl von Savigny, who had financed his studies for several years. He had married Sophie Leske, a widow twelve years his senior. This marriage was one of convenience, as Sophie's late husband had also contributed substantially to Creuzer's education.

Karoline and Creuzer met at a party in Heidelberg. The two were immediately attracted to each other and presumably began corresponding quite intimately shortly afterwards. The first surviving letter we have is written by Creuzer, dated October 4 1806, only two short months after they had met. The letter is bursting with passion and impatience. It seems that this is not the first time the two have declared their love to each other, for Creuzer writes:

Sie werden nun wieder sagen: "Ich liebe Sie nicht ruhig genug--Sie könnten mir soviel nicht geben, als dieser Ton zu fordern schiene u.s.w."--Aber, mein Gott, ich soll doch wahr seyn? Ich soll doch nicht weniger sagen, als mein Herz empfindet?--Was Sie mir geben können, soll Ihnen Ihr Herz auch sagen. (Preisendanz 15)

His letters followed one after another almost daily for the rest of the month. Unfortunately very few letters Karoline wrote have survived. Most of them were destroyed on her request shortly after Creuzer had received them. However, from Creuzer's letters during this period we can discern that he was the one who was instigating the relationship, insisting on its absolute necessity. In the same month he wrote that he had confessed to his wife that he could no longer be regarded as her husband and would move his bed into another room. His wife had said she was

willing to resign herself to the situation and to see herself as an older friend. She had spoken to their friend Schwarz, who thought the best idea was that their household continue as it was, and that Karoline move in with the married couple. Creuzer wrote to Karoline:

Jetzt ist es an Dir zu *wollen*. Sieh, bisher verstandest Du nicht zu *wollen*; dies machte *Dein* Unglück. Solltest du es auch jetzt nicht lernen, so wisse, daß Du *mein* Unglück machst. Du *sollst* *wollen*. Siehe dies Wort an als den Anfang meines von Dir gewünschten Herrschens über Dich. Ich habe Talent zum Herrschen. (Preisendanz 19)

Two days later he wrote again, saying that his wife had changed her mind. She would leave him, which Creuzer says would be equivalent to committing suicide. He was probably referring to the fact that if she should leave him voluntarily, she would not receive his financial support, nor would she be eligible for his pension after his death. His vision had been that Karoline live in their house as his lover, and Sophie, his wife, function as the housekeeper. However, Sophie did not want to accept this arrangement, and he could not see himself sending her to her death. Schwarz was also on Sophie's side now. Again two days later Creuzer wrote, saying that things has settled down quite comfortably in his household, he had even managed to be gentle with his wife. Karoline should not blame herself for anything, even if she were at fault, she should stop feeling guilty because after all, she was making him happy. Creuzer recognized that, much as he liked to think himself not bound by the conventions of bourgeois life, he could not actually free himself from them, for he writes in this letter, "ich müßte schnell alle bürgerlichen



Bande sprengen, wenn ich auch äußerlich frei werden wollte."

(Preisendanz 24)

Even in this short time it became clear to Karoline that although Creuzer's love for her was deep and sincere, he was unwilling and unable to take the steps he himself suggested for an open and acceptable living arrangement. He was always the one to set the rules Karoline must play by. His prophetic "Ich habe Talent zum Herrschen" was evident throughout the two years of their turbulent relationship. His talent was one of manipulation. When she criticized him for considering only his own selfish interests with respect to their relationship, he responded not with anger but with self-pity.

Wie tief verwundet mich Ihr Brief! "Ich hätte Ihr Gemüt mißverstanden, ich hätte Sie auf *meine* (d.h. auf eine von der Ihrigen an sich verschiedenen Weise glücklich machen wollen?"--Ich verzeihe Ihnen diesen mich sehr demüthigenden Gedanken.

... Nein, nicht innere Kleinherzigkeit--: das harte Gebot äußerer Umstände führte mich zu jener Überlegung.--Niemals ist mein Gemüt durch eigne Bewegung drauf verfallen dem Weltlichen Gehör zu geben--Wie gern möchte mein Geist alle Bedingungen der Wirklichkeit vergessend, selig durch den Besitz der Vortrefflichsten, frei emporschweben über der drückenden Erdenluft--Verschuldete er es, daß ein neidischer Gott ihn herabzog?

Ach nein--Du konntest mich nicht mißverstehen. Wie hättest Du sonst schreiben können: "Ich bleibe Dir ja doch und wenn alle dich verraten und mißverstehen und verlassen, so traue auf mich, ich bleibe treu"? An diesem Wort will ich halten.  
(Preisendanz 26)

He always managed to paint a picture of himself as the suffering martyr and Karoline as the holy one, the goddess, the unselfish loving one. Elevating her to sainthood, he could very craftily read whatever pleased him into her words. Even when he criticized her he did so in a patronizing way, cleverly switching the more

distancing and accusing "Sie" to an intimate "Du" after he has "forgiven" her.

Although Karoline had shown signs of reluctance to respond to his passionate advances at first, she very quickly fell in love with this man, who could offer her what she had longed for all of her young life: intense love and friendship, as well as encouragement and sage advice for her writing career. Yet she was far too wise to imagine that her dream to live with Creuzer would be realized. This painful truth wore constantly at her. But her need was equally strong. Time and time again the two came to a decision to stop writing and seeing one another, only to resume communication days later, more passionately than ever. At the end of November, for instance, Karoline said she was writing him her last letter. She was uncomfortable with the secretive nature of their communication. She writes:

Es ist hier nichts Verdammliches, es ist nur schlimm, daß Sie sich nicht eingestehen wollen, daß Sie eigentlich Ihrer Frau in vielem Sinn angehören; und warum sollte das auch nicht sein, sie ist gut und liebt Sie, und tadellos ist niemand. Kehren Sie ganz und mit Bewußtsein zu ihr zurück. Dann haben Sie doch etwas für Ihre Opfer, wenn Sie aber ihr zuliebe immer das Liebste aufgeben und sie doch dafür nicht besitzen und festhalten mögen, so verarmen Sie unausbleiblich. Sie haben Ihre Frau zu Ihrem Schicksal heranwachsen lassen, aber man soll sich kein Schicksal geben oder es ehren und nicht dawider murren. (Weißenborn 184)

Creuzer could not handle such directness. His response was extremely self-defensive. Again he begins by telling her how much she has hurt him, how hard she has judged him, how he cannot live without her letters. He tries to justify his actions, saying "ich fordere nur Gerechtigkeit." Then, exceedingly sensitive to

Karoline's other passion, her writing, he says:

Ich wollte Ihnen schreiben, wie ich mich bemühe, Ihnen Mahomed und andere Poesien in derselben Buchhandlung erscheinen zu sehen, woraus Goethes Sachen hervorgegangen ...wollte Dir (Verzeihung! Ihnen. Es war wahrlich unabsichtlich.) eine lange Übersetzung schicken von Plotinos, für Sie und Frau von Heyden, wollte Ihnen sagen, daß ich etwas davon werde drucken lassen in einem Journal das nun sicher erscheinen wird herausgegeben von Daub und mir, wollte fragen, ob Sie bis gegen Februar hin etwas dichten wollen (oder etwas in Prosa schreiben) für diese Schrift, wollte Sie endlich bitten, wenn Sie unter fremder Adresse nicht an mich schreiben wollten, unter der *meinigen* mir zu schreiben.--Das ist alles aber nun vorbei. Sie haben mir viel gegeben, um mir viel zu nehmen. Leben Sie wohl. (Preisendanz 46)

Creuzer was a man with power. He had connections to the publishing houses, to writers, poets and editors. He himself always praised her writing highly. Small wonder, then, that Karoline could not resist a man who offered her so much of what she had hoped for, in spite of her knowledge of his weakness and selfishness. She remained sure of her decision to remain uninvolved emotionally for a while, but she did write him again. Creuzer called her letter proud (*stolz*) then resorted to his favourite ploy, playing the martyr. He writes in mid-December:

Wie unrichtig übrigens Ihre Behauptung ist, daß ich in jedem Collisionsfall immer *Sie* aufgabe, davon könnten Sie sich nur überzeugen, wenn Sie mein Leben hier einmal selbst beobachtet hätten. (Preisendanz 48)

Karoline must have also suggested that he share her letters with his wife. It seems she wished to insist on a friendship which would not be subject to gossip and be based on dishonesty. But Creuzer did not like this idea either. He adds:

Dagegen konnte mich keineswegs die hinzugefügte Erlaubnis erfreuen: Ihre künftigen Briefe immer meiner Frau mittheilen zu dürfen. Es wäre doch traurig, wenn Sie mir nichts mehr zu

sagen hätten, als was Jedermann wissen darf. Oder soll ich Ihre künftigen Briefe als Preisstücke rhetorischer Gewantheit, als Musterbilder des sich klug aussprechenden Verstandes ansehen lernen, in denen ich sonst nur *Sie selber* zu finden gewohnt war? Alsdann wäre ja nicht einmal *Freundschaft* zwischen uns, die mir doch das sonst so ungütige Schicksal noch zu gönnen schien. Denn Freundschaft will vertraute und folglich individuelle Mittheilung. (Preisendanz 48)

Creuzer had more than one trick up his sleeve. He could praise her poetry, call her "Die Poesie," place her writing on a pedestal, but if he wanted to, he could also resort to subtle sarcasm in order to make his point. Obviously Creuzer wanted the relationship to be clandestine. The secretiveness of it made it safe. If their real feelings for each other were not known to others, he could pretend that they did not exist, and thus shy away from any unpleasant consequences or responsibilities.

The remainder of the correspondence between Creuzer and Karoline will not be analyzed in this detailed way. However, the pattern of their relationship, which would repeat itself in slight variations for the next two years, was firmly established in these first few months of their acquaintance. Creuzer remained infatuated with Karoline, heaping her with adoration, calling her his saint, his angel, his life. He continually bemoaned his sad lot, regretted having married Sophie, but refused to see a way out.

Karoline became increasingly depressive. Unfortunately almost all of her letters have been destroyed. Yet from Creuzer's response to her letters and from the few that remain it is obvious that even though she was quite aware of the fact that

Creuzer would never give up his convenient life with Sophie and enter into a financially insecure and disreputable liaison with Karoline, she found it impossible to carry through any resolve to leave him. Every time she tried either to withdraw or ask for more openness, Creuzer responded by accusing her of rejection. As a result she fell into a state of growing dependence on his affection and an agonizing realization that her hopes to live with him in openness and harmony would never be realized in the given circumstances of her life. Early in 1805 Creuzer wrote in several letters that he was concerned about her health. Karoline had suffered from intense headaches and problems with her eyes for years; all her friends were aware of her health problems. But Creuzer explicitly stated that he was worried that she might commit suicide. In one of the only surviving letters of Karoline to Creuzer, it becomes obvious that what is clearly a play with metaphor and fantasy to Creuzer is taken seriously by Karoline. She writes to him:

Den vorigen Sonntag war ich den ganzen Tag allein zu Hause, abends hatte ich etwas Brustschmerzen, und nicht nur war ich sehr ruhig darüber, ich möchte fast sagen innig froh, ich dachte an alle mich umgebenden drückenden Verhältnisse und da war mir der Gedanke, ihrer vielleicht bald entfesselt zu sein, sehr erwünscht.

...

Ihr Brief, den ich kürzlich erhielt, hat mich so fremd angesehen, und ich konnte weder seine Sprache noch seine Blicke recht verstehen, er ist so vernünftig, so voll nützlicher Tatlust und gefällt sich im Leben, ich aber habe schon viele Tage im Orkus gelebt und nur darauf gedacht, bald und ohne Schmerz, nicht allein in Gedanken, nein, ganz und gar hinunterzuwallen, auch Sie wollt ich dort finden, aber Sie denken andre Dinge, Sie richten sich eben jetzt recht ein im Leben, und wie Sie selber sagen, soll der Sinn unseres Bundes sein, "daß wir gerne gehen wollen, wenn die Natur uns abrufen wird", welches wir auch wohl getan hätten,

ohne uns zu kennen. Ich meinte es sehr anders, und wenn Sie weiter nichts meinten, so sind Sie ganz irre an mir und ich an Ihnen, denn alsdann sind Sie gar nicht der, den ich meine, erklären Sie sich also darüber, damit ich wisse, was ich von Ihnen zu hoffen habe. Die Freundschaft, wie ich Sie mit Ihnen meinte, war ein Bund auf Leben und Tod. Ist Ihnen das zu ernsthaft? Oder zu unvernünftig? Einst schien Ihnen der Gedanke sehr wert, mit mir zu sterben, und mich, wenn Sie früher stürben, zu sich hinunterzureißen, jetzt aber haben Sie viel wichtigere Dinge zu bedenken, ich könnte ja noch irgend nützlich in der Welt werden, da wäre es doch schade, wenn Sie die Ursache meines frühern Todes sein sollten. Ich muß nun Ihrem Beispiel folgen und ebenso über Sie denken, ich verstehe diese Vernünftigkeit nicht.  
(Weißenborn 205)

Whenever Karoline implied that she was thinking about killing herself, Creuzer became upset and tried to talk her into a state of calm and resignation, but at the same time he perpetuated her dependence upon him by continuing to insist upon his need for her.

Although their correspondence seems to revolve around their mutual admiration and passionate love, it is also quite obvious that Creuzer had taken over the role as mentor in both her studies and her writing. He frequently commented on the poems she sent him, and encouraged her to revise and publish her poetry. In 1805 he was instrumental in the publication of her second volume, *Poetische Fragmente*, and upon her death in July of 1806 the entire manuscript *Melete* was in his hands. He encouraged her to study mythology, and it is obvious from her writing during this time that she did immerse herself in the fields he was interested in. He taught her Latin and Greek, both because he thought it was important for her to know these languages, and because the two could encode parts of their letters to each other in Greek, so

that they would not be understood by anyone who might read them. But most significantly to her, he praised her writing. Although she had also received praise and encouragement from her female friends, Creuzer was the first person with considerable influence who unfailingly saw her as a talented writer. Certainly he was also encouraged by her praise of his work. Their working relationship was reciprocal.

Creuzer was sincere in his praise, although he was also aware of the fact that his interest in her work would keep her dependent upon him. His comments to her in his letters indicate that he certainly read her work carefully. He writes, for example:

Dichten Sie, was der Geist Ihnen eingibt, philosophieren Sie aus der Tiefe Ihres Gemütes und tun Sie, als ob keine Literatur Zeitung, kein Nees, ja, selbst kein Goethe in der Welt wäre. Sie haben wahrlich nicht nötig, um das Urteil der Kritiker zu werben. (Preisendanz 155)

Yet even into this complimentary comment one can read both praise and exclusivity. He wanted to remain her only critic.

During this time Karoline still actively participated in intense friendships with Bettine von Arnim, Lisette Nees von Esenbeck and Susanne Heyden. Bettine visited her in the Stift almost daily, and Lisette wrote her long intimate letters about her marriage, her experience in childbirth, always including information about her current studies and recommending books to Karoline. Creuzer tolerated her friendship with Lisette, and even wrote several highly flattering letters to Lisette, wishing to be seen in a good light, since he knew Lisette was aware of his

relationship with Karoline. However, he became increasingly suspicious of Bettine, continually putting her and the other Brentanos down and demanding that Karoline cease to be friends with the Brentano household. Shortly before her death in July of 1806, Karoline gave in to Creuzer's demands, and broke off the friendship to Bettine without any explanation. Creuzer wanted his muse to become his exclusive and private property.

As their correspondence intensified, Creuzer and Karoline developed an intriguing array of pseudonyms for each other. Karoline often referred to herself as "der Freund," Creuzer calls himself "der Fromme" and referred to his wife as "die Gutmütige." Partly, this was another way to make their letters difficult for others to understand, but it also served Karoline as an excellent device to name the split that she recognized in herself, the fragments that made up her complex personality. In one of her few surviving letters, Karoline writes:

Der Freund war eben hier, er sagte, oft schon hätte er Ihnen schreiben wollen, aber es sei ihm so unbehaglich, da er das, worum es ihm eigentlich zu tun sei, doch nicht schreiben könne. Ich versichere, er ist Ihnen ganz ergeben. Sagen Sie mir, wie haben Sie ihn so gewonnen? Was sein übriges Leben betrifft, so merke ich immer mehr, daß seine heroische Seele sich immer mehr in Liebesweichheit und Liebessehnen aufgelöst hat, dieser Zustand ist nicht gut für einen Menschen, der doch für sich alleine stehn muß und der wohl nimmermehr mit dem Gegenstand seiner Liebe vereint wird; er kann die Resignation nicht lange ins Auge fassen, er täuscht sich oft darüber, zeigen Sie ihm die Unmöglichkeit, unterstützen Sie mich, Ihre Zuredungen werden am besten wirken. Es ist sonderbar, aber in Gedanken besitzt er seinen geliebten Gegenstand so ganz, daß es viele Augenblicke gibt, in denen er meint, man könne nur so gewiß und ausführlich denken, was einmal so wirklich würde, wie man es dächte. Wenn solcher Paroxysmus vorüber ist, wird er immer schrecklich traurig, sagen Sie mir, wie soll ich mich zu ihm verhalten? (Weißborn 216)



In this amazingly astute letter, Karoline is able to look at herself and the situation she is in, by objectifying herself as "der Freund." The "ich" voice of the letter is rational, calm, and able to analyze the irrationality of the view of "der Freund"; yet the lucidity of this voice is immediately overshadowed by the fact that these two voices essentially come from the same speaker. Creuzer, however, did not have the strength to support the "Freund" in "his" realization that there was no hope for their union. Instead, he once again planned elaborate steps for a separation from his wife, soliciting advice from his friends Savigny and Daub. These expressed their fears that Karoline would not be able to handle the domestic aspect of being a "wife" and encouraged him to stay with Sophie. In the midst of these plans, Sophie threw a temper tantrum and left him abruptly for one day. Creuzer realized that he was totally incompetent and whined to Karoline that he could not possibly live apart from his wife, since he had no skills in handling their money or any domestic responsibilities. Karoline was desperate. She declared herself willing to disguise herself as a man and accompany Creuzer to Russia should he be called to go there:

Der Freund hat mir gesagt, wenn dieser Krieg ihm und seinen Wünschen gefährlich werden sollte, so wollte er Dir bewußt Kleidung anziehn, entlaufen und bei Ihnen Bedienter werden, weggagen können Sie ihn doch nicht, und er wollte sich so fein verstellen, daß man ihn nicht erkennen sollte, das wollte er Ihnen gelegentlich alles begreiflich machen, wollen Sie ihn aber alsdann der öffentlichen Meinung wegen nicht aufnehmen, so wolle er den Tod suchen...  
(Weißborn 240)

But this plan was never carried out.

For the remainder of Karoline's life their correspondence continued in its old patterns. They made plans to meet secretly, and sent passionate letters to one another. Creuzer settled into his busy schedule at the university and gradually accepted the fact that he could not maintain the pressures of the relationship with Karoline. In the summer of 1806 Creuzer became seriously ill and his friends convinced him to give Karoline up entirely. He did not write her himself, but his friend Daub wrote to Susanne von Heyden, asking her to break the news gently to Karoline. Susanne was incredulous, and pleaded with Daub for time; she was very concerned about Karoline's reaction to this final decision and wished to convey the message to her in person. However, since it was impossible for Susanne von Heyden to travel to Winkel, where Karoline was visiting friends, she sent her Daub's letter, hoping that Karoline's friends would read the letter and tell Karoline of its contents. Karoline, however, received the letters herself. After having read them, she told her friends she was going for a walk along the Rhein. Ironically, her friends thought she was meeting Creuzer for a secret rendezvous. The next morning a farmer found Karoline's body on the shores of the Rhein. She had stabbed herself, and weighted her dress down with stones, anticipating that the river would carry her with it. As a departing letter, Karoline had left the following verse:

Erde du meine Mutter u du mein Ernährer der Lufthauch  
 Heiliges Feuer mir Freund und du o Bruder der Bergstrom  
 Und mein Vater der Äther ich sage euch allen mit Ehrfurcht  
 Freundlichen Dank mit euch hab ich hienieden gelebt

Und ich gehe zur andern Welt, euch gerne verlassend  
 Lebt wohl denn Bruder u Freund Vater und Mutter lebt wohl  
 (Werke I 472)

Her death was a shock to the community, even though everyone who knew her was aware of her extremely precarious emotional state. Earlier in the month she had written to Lisette:

Nach mir fragst Du? Ich bin eigentlich lebensmüde, ich fühle daß meine Zeit aus ist, und daß ich nur fortlebe durch einen Irrthum der Natur; dies Gefühl ist zuweilen lebhafter in mir, zuweilen blässer. Das ist mein Lebenslauf.  
 (Preitz I 281)

The devastating letter telling her that Creuzer wished to break with her was naturally seen as the cause and motivation for her act, and the gossip which had previously thrived and festered behind backs was now fully vented. Creuzer's friends gathered around him, protecting him as best possible against slander and accusations, burning her letters, hiding her manuscript. Creuzer joined with the conspiracy, and never mentioned her name again. He lived to the ripe age of 87, having married a second time soon after his wife Sophie died. The literary community expressed its devastation; even Goethe remarked on the death of this "merkwürdige Gestalt." But her poetry and prose was soon forgotten, evaporating under the flames of gossip surrounding her tragic death.

One friend, Lisette Nees von Esenbeck, saw beyond the immediate cause that had triggered Karoline's death. In a letter to Susanne von Heyden shortly after the suicide, she writes:

Sie fiel, ein Opfer der Zeit, mächtiger in ihr wirkender Ideen, frühzeitig schlaff gewordener sittlicher Grundsätze: eine unglückliche Liebe war nur die Form unter der dies alles zur Erscheinung kam, die Feuerprobe die sie

verherrlichen oder verzehren mußte. (Preitz I 282)

Although she is certainly judging Karoline for not having respected the rules of propriety, she can also see that Karoline's unhappiness did not only stem from her unhappiness in love. It is impossible to interpret Karoline's death without a careful consideration of the conditions she was born into: a talented woman with few options to shape her life into an acceptable form that would enable her to live out her passions with freedom and self-determination. Subject to an extremely sensitive and complex nature, often misunderstood and seldom appreciated, she chose death as an alternative to the "non-life" she was doomed to live.

## KAROLINE VON GÜNDERRODE'S LETTERS

In a letter to Karoline von Barkhaus, the young Karoline writes:

Ungern verlies ich Sie gestern, und im heftigen Kampfe mit mir selbst ob ich Ihnen die Laage meines Herzens entdeken sollte oder nicht, ich sehnte mich nach dem Trost mein Herz in das Ihrige ausschütten zu können, und doch hielt mich eine geheime Furcht deren Ursache ich mir nicht erklären konte zurück. Schriftlich dachte ich wird es leichter sein mich zu entdeken, dieser Gedanke ward Entschlus, welcher noch ietzt in meiner Seele haftet. (Preitz II, 163)

The word "entdeken" or entdecken is used in this passage in its literal meaning: to bare. Yet its extended meaning, "to discover," can also be read into its use here as well. To write was for Karoline a way of both making herself vulnerable and discovering herself. The small number of Karoline's letters that have been preserved in their original state testify to the fact that she did use writing, particularly letter writing, as a means to explore her reality. It is her analytical ability to question and explore her own complex nature that has attracted contemporary scholars to study and discuss her letters quite extensively.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> In his book, *Der Romantische Brief: Die Entstehung ästhetischer Subjektivität*, Karl Heinz Bohrer analyzes her letters as important texts in German literature in their treatment of the idea of aesthetic subjectivity. He discusses her letters alongside those of Clemens Brentano and Heinrich von Kleist, comparing them as to their literary and philosophical perspective. A recent dissertation by Katrin Zimmermann, *Die polyfunktionale Bedeutung dialogischer Sprechformen um 1800* also deals with Günderrode's letters and compares them with the letters of Bettina von Arnim and Rahel Varnhagen. Katja Behrens also chose Karoline von Günderrode as one of three female authors

From the abundance of letters addressed to Karoline by various people, we can assume that her main correspondents were Karoline Barkhaus, Lisette Nees, Gunda and Bettine and Clemens Brentano, Karl von Savigny, and Friedrich Creuzer. However, most of the letters written by her which have survived are letters addressed to Gunda and Bettine Brentano and Karl von Savigny. Rather than treating the individual correspondences in depth, only excerpts of Karoline's own letters will be looked at here.

There are two general topics addressed in her letters that are of interest in the context of the discussion of Karoline von Günderrode as person and writer, and in the larger context of the thesis which has as its focus the theme of desire. These are the topics of writing as a need for communication or *Mitteilung*, both artistic and social or personal, and the concept of the self as a fragmented entity in need of coherence, growth and self-knowledge.

Karoline's intense preoccupation with the inner workings of her own psyche, her frustration at the limitations she discovers within herself and others, and her need to make sense out of her self and her relation to others, are particularly pronounced in her correspondence with Gunda Brentano. In the following letter, Karoline expresses her own self-reflection in the context of this new friendship. Using various images, she tries to explain to Gunda how she perceives herself and how she desires to form a

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whose letters she was interested in publishing in a collection called *Frauenbriefe der Romantik*.

reciprocal and honest friendship with others:

Jedes interessante Wissen, wen[n] es der andere noch nicht mit mir theilt, Empfindung und Erfahrung ist mir ein Berg der mich von dem, mit dem ich mich vereinigen mögte, trent. Dir gegenüber war es mir oft so; aber ich wuste nicht ob ich den Berg zwischen uns wegzuschaffen ersuchen sollte; denn ich dachte oft es könnte Dir nur gleichgültig sein mich zu sehen wie ich bin. Du weist wie schwer es der Eigenliebe wird einem *andern* etwas gemeines an sich selbst zu zeigen. (Pretiz II 167)

To Karoline, the basis of a friendship is formed by a mutual exchange of ideas, and this exchange must bridge the gap that exists between the separate entities. The bridging of this gap, or, to use Karoline's metaphor, the removal of the mountain that separates the two, is not always an easy process, but demands energy and mutual interest. A prerequisite for this communication is a desire on both parts for this communication and a willingness to look at each other with honesty and integrity.

In the same letter, Karoline uses the image of a mirror to describe their friendship:

Ich war Dir schon mehrmals ein (ich schmeichle es mir) treuer Spiegel, in dem Du Dich beschauen kontest; ia ich warf Dir das empfangne Bild mit groser Aufrichtigkeit zurück; niemals aber habe ich mich noch in Dir beschaut, sage wie komt das? ich zeige mich nicht immer gern, (ich habe es schon vorhin gesagt) doch wenn ich mich gezeigt habe, so liebe ich es unmäßig mich wieder in andern zu erblikken; denn ich hoffe der Andere wird mich ein schöneres Gemählde sehen lassen als ich selber erblikke. Oder vielmehr ich habe zuweilen gar keine Meinung von mir, so schwankend sind meine Selbstbeobachtungen. Überhaupt ist mirs ganz unbegreiflich daß wir kein anders Bewustsein haben, als Wahrnehmung von Wirkungen, nirgends von Ursachen. Alles andere Wissen scheint mir (sobald ich dies bedenke) nicht wissenswürdig, solange ich des Wissens Ursache, mein Wissensvermögen, nicht kenne. Diese Unwissenheit ist mir der unerträglichste Mangel, der gröste Widerspruch. Und ich meine wenn wir die Gränze eines zweiten Lebens wirklich betreten, so müste es eine unsrer ersten innern Erscheinungen sein, daß sich unser Bewustsein vergrößere und verdeutlichere; den es wäre

unerträglich, diese Schranke in ein zweites Leben zu schleppen. (Preitz II 168)

Karoline recognizes that she cannot truly see herself, and expresses this frustration. Her friends, therefore, must play the role of the mirror. In her need to know more about herself and others, Karoline rails against the limitations placed on her that allow her to see results but never the origin of phenomena. It is this desire for knowledge, or *Erkenntnis*, that becomes the driving force for many of her creative texts as well. There is in them, as in this letter, always a sense of frustration with the limitations of human perception and human relations, of a need to see more clearly, to make sense out of that which she does see.

But in this passage there is also a sense of a need for approval, for reassurance, for sustenance. Karoline is willing to be a "mirror" to Gunda, to reflect with honesty that which she loves and that which disturbs her, but she needs this to be reciprocated as well. Karoline perceives herself as being fragmented, and she looks inside herself for a possible way to become coherent and whole; but equally strong is her need for others to aid her in this process.

Karoline also addresses the dichotomy between the outer and the inner circumstances of her life in a further letter to Gunda. It is obvious that Karoline perceives herself as complex and composed of various parts that often do not form a harmonious whole but whose disharmony produces either a restlessness and frustration, or a state of terrifying apathy:

Es war mir gestern so traurig, hätte ich Dir geschrieben,



Gunda, es hätte einige Seiten voll lauter Jammerns gegeben. Ich fühlte mich so beschränkt im äußern so verstimmt im Innern. Ich habe so gar keine Zeit für mich, kann nicht sagen ietzt will ich das thun, dann das; ich muß alle meine Augenblicke erlauschen sie erwuchren; und wenn sie dann da sind so habe ich keinen Genus von ihnen; es freut mich nichts, es schmerzt mich nichts bestimmt, ich bin in dem elendesten Zustand, dem des Nichtsfühlens, des dumpfen kalten Dahinschleppens. In diesem Zustand hasse ich mich selbst. Es gehört zu dem Leben meiner Seele daß mich irgend eine Idee begeistre; es ist auch oft der Fall; doch muß es immer etwas neues sein, denn ich trinke so unmäßig an dem Nektarbecher bis ich ihn in mich geschlürft habe; und wenn er denn leer ist, das ist unerträglich. (Pretitz II 169)

This passage also shows how great Karoline's need for intellectual stimulation was. The image of drinking or *schlürfen* is one that is echoed in her poetry as a metaphor for desire. It is a powerful image, for it suggests that the exchange of ideas is to her an almost physical need. In the same letter, she gives an example of this need being fulfilled in a moment of her lonely life in Hanau:

Meine Schwester liest mir zuweilen einzle Stellen aus Godwi vor, und so gefällt es mir besser als zuvor. Es ist wunderbar daß alle geistige Genüsse fast durch Mittheilung vermehrt werden; da bei Materiellen doch das Gegentheil statt findet. Geben und reicher werden durch geben! es ist höchst wunderbar, ia ich meine es enthält eine Wiederlegung gegen den Materialismus. (Pretitz II 169)

Reading and writing: communication, *Mitteilung*, these are needs that inform Karoline's life, and she pursues them relentlessly.

At the same time, however, Karoline recognizes that the pursuit of knowledge, the exploration of ideas, the excitement that is generated by a work of art, cannot fulfil her entirely.

In further letters to Gunda she laments this fact:

Vor einiger Zeit gelang es mir mich in eine erhabne Phantasie Welt zu schwingen, in Ossians halbdunkle Zauberwelt; aber die seligen Träume zerfließen; sie kommen

mir vor wie Liebestränke, sie betäuben exaltieren und verrauchen dann, das ist das Elend und die Erbärmlichkeit aller unserer Gefühle; mit den Gedanken ist nicht besser, man überdenkt auch leicht eine Sache bis zur Schalheit.--Ein pigmäisches Zeitalter, ein pigmäisches Geschlecht spielt ietzt, recht gut nach seine Art.-- (Preitz II 173)

In this passage Karoline addresses the dichotomy between thinking and feeling which surfaces in many of her creative texts.

Throughout her poetry she makes the claim that neither must outweigh the other in a human's need to understand himself and the world around him. But in this letter she laments the fact that both modes of perception cannot always bring fulfilment.

Similarly, in another letter to Gunda, she writes:

Mein Leben ist so leer, ich habe so viel Langeweile und unausgefüllte Stunden. Gunda, ist es nur die Liebe die in diese dumpfe Leerheit Leben und Empfindung giebt? oder giebt es noch andere Empfindungen die dies thun? Es ist hier eine Lücke in meiner Seele; umsonst such ich sie zu erfüllen, umsonst sie weg zu raisonniren die Kunst kann nur durch die Natur, mit der Natur wuchren, ohne sie kann sie nichts. Ich empfand früh, ich fürchte früh hab ich mein Empfindungsvermögen aufgezehrt; nur der Maasstaab des Vohrigen blieb mir, und das Ideal, ich stehe zwieschen beiden, und kann keines erlangen. Und selbst ietzt, da ich Dir diesen Zustand beschreibe, fühle ich ihn minder als ich ihn einsehe. (Preitz II 174)

The sentiments she expresses seem odd for the twenty-one-year-old writer. This is a powerful expression of her desire for a fuller life, for greater understanding, a desire which consumed her. In the last sentence Karoline shows her characteristic ability to speak about herself as though she were speaking about someone else.

Karoline repeats this kind of insight in many of her letters. Although she has asked Gunda to be a mirror to her, claiming that she has difficulty in seeing herself as a whole,

she herself seems to provide this mirror for herself on other occasions. Long before the concept of a "split personality" had become popular, Karoline recognizes a kind of fragmentation or split within her, is puzzled by it and comments on it to her friends. She describes this phenomenon in various ways. To Karl von Savigny she writes:

Ich trage meistens ein stilles Kämmerlein in meinem Gemüthe herum in diesem lebe ich ein eignes, abgesondertes, glückliches Leben in dem Interesse und der Liebe zu irgend einem Menschen, einer Idee, einer Wissenschaft, oder einer Kunst und weil ich mich dann gar zu viel in diesem traulichen Winkelchen aufhalte, bin ich blöd und fremd mit der Welt und den Menschen, und bleibe immer zu ungeschickt sie zu behandeln wie man sollte; und wenn sich mir das Kämmerlein einige Zeit verschließt, wenn ich es gar nicht finden und darin wohnen kann, dann bin ich sehr unglücklich; (Preitz II 195)

The space Karoline must create for herself within herself is the space that allows her to live. When she cannot find that space, she feels a terrifying fear. In a letter to Friedrich Creuzer she compares the lack of this space as a frightening dream. She writes:

Ich habe diese Nacht einen wunderbaren Traum gehabt, den ich nicht vergessen kann, mir war, ich läg zu Bette, ein Löwe lag zu meiner Rechten, eine Wölfin zur Linken und ein Bär zu Füßen, alle halb über mich her und in tiefem Schlaf, da dachte ich, wenn diese Tiere erwachten, würden sie gegeneinander ergrimmen und sich und mich zerreißen, es ward mir fürchterlich bange und ich zog mich leise unter ihnen hervor und entrann. Der Traum erscheint allegorisch, was denken Sie davon?...es ist mir innerlich unruhig und alles fremd. Sie selbst sind mir fremd, nicht der Empfindung, sondern der Kluft nach, die ich zwischen Ihnen und mir weiß und *deutlicher* einsah, ich bin wie ausgestoßen aus meiner süßen Heimat, und bin unter meinen eigenen Gedanken so wenig an meinem Platz wie diese Nacht unter den Raubtieren, die der seltsame Traum mir zu Genossen gab. (Weißborn 215).

One of the most fascinating instances in which Karoline

names this split she sees in herself occurs in a letter to Clemens Brentano. Here, as in the letter to Gunda cited above, she combines her self-observation with the act of writing. The writing takes place at a particular moment in time, but is then fixed in time, whereas she sees her self, the self which perceived something, then put it into words, as having changed and continuing to change. In this way writing, although a necessary "mirror" in some ways, is also false, because it remains fixed in time:

Ich weiß nicht, ob ich so reden würde, wie Sie meinen Brief in dem Ihrigen reden lassen; aber es kommt mir sonderbar vor, daß ich zuhöre wie ich spreche und meine eignen Worte kommen mir fast fremder vor als fremde. Auch die wahrsten Briefe sind meiner Ansicht nach nur Leichen, sie bezeichnen ein ihnen einwohnend gewesenes Leben und ob sie gleich dem Lebendigen ähnlich sehen, so ist doch der Moment ihres Lebens schon dahin; deswegen kömmt es mir aber vor (wenn ich lese, was ich vor einiger Zeit geschrieben habe) als sähe ich mich im Sarg liegen und meine beiden Ichs starren sich ganz verwundert an. (Wolf 36)

Not only does Karoline name the duplicate nature of her own perception of herself by naming her two "ichs," but this passage also contains a tribute to the power of language. The letters she has written are so essentially herself that they become a metaphor for a human body itself; at the same time they are also powerfully not herself, because the element of time has passed and destroyed their veracity. So the image of the letter or the word becomes that of a dead body. This paradoxical statement is typical of Karoline's thought. Nothing is ever simple, nothing can ever be fixed, language is always only an approximation, a vibrant replica, subject to constant change.

Another way in which Karoline's sense of double or triple personality manifests itself is Karoline's adoption of the term "der Freund" to refer to herself when corresponding with both Karl von Savigny and Friedrich Creuzer. In either case there are obvious reasons for this: in the relationship with Savigny referring to herself as "der Freund" is a way of defining their friendship as a platonic and therefore safe in the light of his recent marriage to her friend Gunda. In Creuzer's case it is one of the many devices the two lovers employ in order to give the semblance of a normal friendship to the outside world. However, it is striking that Karoline would insist on this term, and it is remarkable how easily she refers to herself in the third person. In the case of her relationship with Creuzer, she deliberately speaks in these two voices when she writes to him, sometimes switching from "er" to "ich" within one letter. It is an intriguing device of naming the different and disparate voices within her. One such example has been cited earlier. The following is a similar example:

Der Freund ist in großer Unruhe, wie Sie die Einsicht in das Unmögliche, die Ihnen die letzten Briefe zeigen, ertragen werden. Sie haben gehofft, er selbst hat es dunkel geahnt und jetzt ist es auf einmal aus auf immer, das holde Licht verlischt auf den letzten Strahl. Wie werden Sie das empfinden? Werden Sie sich nicht wegwenden von einer Aussicht, die sich in trübe Nacht verliert?

Ich fasse die Änderung Deiner Gesinnung nicht, wie oft hast du mir gesagt, meine Liebe erhelle, erhebe Dein ganzes Leben, und nun findest du unser Verhältnis schädlich. Wie viel hättest Du ehemals gegeben, Dir dies Schädliche zu erringen. Aber so seid Ihr, das Errungene hat Euch immer Mängel. (Weißborn 246)

Presumably the letter is a response to one of Creuzer's letters

in which he proposes that the relationship end or continue to be kept secret. In the first paragraph of the letter Karoline addresses Creuzer with the polite form "Sie" and refers to herself as "der Freund." Although these devices give the illusion of a distancing between speaker and subject, the language is intensely emotional, poetic, elegiac. In the second paragraph there is an abrupt shift both in tone and in form of address. Now Karoline addresses Creuzer with "Du" and refers to herself as "ich." The language is much more direct, the content pragmatic, rational. Whereas in the first paragraph love is spoken of in symbolic terms, in this paragraph Karoline challenges Creuzer with a very logical argument.

It is hard to believe that Karoline referred to herself in these various ways only as a game, to keep her male friends either amused or at bay. Surely her continuous reiteration of these names, her use of two male pseudonyms in her published manuscripts, and her frequent references to herself as being "verwirrt und uneins mit mir selber" are clues to a very complex person who perceived herself as fragmented and felt restricted in her need to discover all of her selves and somehow to bring them into a whole.

Only one of her contemporaries and friends, Lisette Nees, commented seriously and analytically about Karoline and her tendency to describe herself as various personae. Fairly shortly after Karoline's death, she wrote to Susanne von Heyden:

In diesem Spiel, dass Lina oft sich und ihre Zustände als die eines dritten schildert, liegt mir ein tiefer Sinn: es

giebt uns die Spaltung in ihrer Seele, das immer thätige Vermögen der Reflexion, sich von sich selbst zu trennen im Bilde wieder. Ihre Darstellung ihrer drey Seelen ist sehr wahr. Die Einheit dieser drey Gewalten wäre die Liebe gewesen.-- (Pretitz I 281)

Perhaps Lisette was the only one who saw the seriousness of Karoline's fragmentation, and could see, at least to some extent, Karoline's intense desire for wholeness.

## CHAPTER THREE: WRITING HER DESIRE

Die Vortreflichkeit ist ein Ganzes wir haben sie nicht, sie ist gleichsam wie die Bläue des Himels über uns, u unsere Vortreflichkeit, ist nur ein Streben zu ihr, eine Ansicht von ihr; drum ist keine Persönliche Liebe, nur Liebe zum Vortreflichen (Morgenthaler I 436)

This statement appears in Karoline von Günderrode's unpublished manuscripts as the first of a series of loosely connected utterances of philosophical thought. Both the thought expressed in this short statement and the form she chooses to express it in can be seen as fundamental to Karoline's understanding of poetry and of her view of the world.

The form of this individual statement can be called a *Fragment*. Before the eighteenth century, the term *Fragment* had been used in the context of German literature to imply that the respective literary work had originally been whole but that it had not survived in its entirety. It was not considered to be a genre, but rather a sign to the reader that the text had been altered in the course of time, and did not contain all of its original parts. However, in the second half of the eighteenth century, the literary term *Fragment* came to mean something different. Writers as prominent as Herder wrote and published texts they called *Fragmente*. By doing so they were implying that a piece of art need not be "complete" and "perfect" yet could still have validity, even though it could be added to or amended in some way at a later date. The notion that a work of art is



static and complete, which had been the aesthetic ideal of the classical age, was being challenged (Ueding 125).

Towards the end of the century, however, the form of the *Fragment* gained even greater importance. It was especially Friedrich Schlegel who introduced and theorized on this form, publishing several series of *Fragmente* in the periodical *Lyceum der schönen Künste* (1797) and in the *Athenäum*, (1798 - 1800) a literary journal edited by him and his brother August Wilhelm Schlegel. "Viele Werke der Alten sind Fragmente geworden. Viele Werke der Neuen sind es gleich bei der Entstehung" (Schlegel 169), was one of the statements he made. Central to his concept of the *Fragment* as an art form was the idea of a *progressive Universalpoesie*, which he saw as being the unique mandate of Romantic poetry, an idea which was taken up and shared by the small group of early Romantic poets of the Jena circle. This poetry was to claim all human experience and natural phenomena as its province, and to create poetry that would harmonize the various separate disciplines and art forms available to humankind into a poetry that was free from all restraints. The essential characteristic of this poetry was not only its inclusiveness but also the fact that it acknowledges its content to be subject to constant revision and addition. That is to say, this poetry insisted upon fluidity and incompleteness, rather than on perfection and stasis.

Perhaps the most famous Romantic *Fragment* is Friedrich Schlegel's comment on the nature of Romantic art:

Die romantische Poesie ist eine progressive Universalpoesie. Ihre Bestimmung ist nicht bloß, alle getrennte Gattungen der Poesie wieder zu vereinigen, und die Poesie mit der Philosophie und Rhetorik in Berührung zu setzen. Sie will, und soll auch Poesie und Prosa, Genialität und Kritik, Kunstpoesie und Naturpoesie bald mischen, bald verschmelzen, die Poesie lebendig und gesellig, und das Leben und die Gesellschaft poetisch machen, den Witz poetisieren, und die Formen der Kunst mit gediegnem Bildungstoff jeder Art anfüllen und sättigen, und durch die Schwingungen des Humors beseelen. Sie umfaßt alles, was nur poetisch ist, vom größten wieder mehre Systeme in sich enthaltenden Systeme der Kunst, bis zu dem Seufzer, dem Kuß, den das dichtende Kind aushaucht in kunstlosem Gesang. Sie kann sich so in das Dargestellte verlieren, daß man glauben möchte, poetische Individuen jeder Art zu charakterisieren, sei ihr Eins und Alles; und doch gibt es noch keine Form, die so dazu gemacht wäre, den Geist des Autors vollständig auszudrücken: so daß manche Künstler, die nur auch einen Roman schreiben wollten, von ungefähr sich selbst dargestellt haben. Nur sie kann gleich dem Epos ein Spiegel der ganzen umgebenden Welt, ein Bild des Zeitalters werden. Und doch kann auch sie am meisten zwischen dem Dargestellten und dem Darstellenden, frei von allem realen und idealen Interesse auf den Flügeln der poetischen Reflexion in der Mitte schweben, diese Reflexion immer wieder potenzieren und wie in einer endlosen Reihe von Spiegeln vervielfachen. Sie ist der höchsten und der allseitigsten Bildung fähig; nicht bloß von innen heraus, sondern auch von außen hinein; indem sie jedem, was ein Ganzes in ihren Producten sein soll, alle Teile ähnlich organisiert, wodurch ihr die Aussicht auf eine grenzenlos wachsende Klassizität eröffnet wird. Die romantische Poesie ist unter den Künsten was der Witz der Philosophie, und die Gesellschaft, Umgang, Freundschaft und Liebe im Leben ist. Andre Dichtarten sind fertig, und können nun vollständig zergliedert werden. Die romantische Dichtart ist noch im Werden; ja das ist ihr eigentliches Wesen, daß sie ewig nur werden, nie vollendet sein kann. Sie kann durch keine Theorie erschöpft werden, und nur eine divinatorische Kritik dürfte es wagen, ihr Ideal charakterisieren zu wollen. Sie allein ist unendlich, wie sie allein frei ist, und das als ihr erstes Gesetz anerkennt, daß die Willkür des Dichters kein Gesetz über sich leide. Die romantische Dichtart ist die einzige, die mehr als Art, und gleichsam die Dichtkunst selbst ist: denn in einem gewissen Sinn ist oder soll alle Poesie romantisch sein. (Schlegel 182)

The poet Novalis, who joined the circle of the Jena Romantics, agreed with this thinking, insisting that the idea of *das Ganze* must always be present in the creation of art, and must be

striven for, even though it is unattainable. He writes "Die Idee eines Ganzen muß *durchaus* ein ästhetisches Werk beherrschen und es modificieren" (Novalis 277). The Romantics certainly believed in "truth," but maintained that it could only be arrived at in pieces, fragments, which will always point towards an unattainable goal.

Although Friedrich Schlegel saw this *progressive Universalpoesie* as not restricted to any one form of expression, he regarded the form of the *Fragment* as a fitting shape to express his idea on this poetry, because it does not pretend to be complete and therefore unalterable, but rather figures as a comment, a note in the margins, so to speak.

A. Fragmente, sagen Sie, wären die eigentliche Form der Universalphilosophie. An der Form liegt nichts. Was können aber solche Fragmente für die größten und ernsthafteste Angelegenheit der Menschheit, für die Vervollkommnung der Wissenschaft, leisten und sein?--B. Nichts als ...  
Randglossen zu dem Text des Zeitalters. (Schlegel II 209)

The form of Friedrich Schlegel's *Kritische Fragmente* is indeed extremely loosely defined and therefore contains infinite possibilities. The length of the individual *Fragmente* is indeterminate. They can either be short, one-sentence pithy statements, or short essays, a page in length. Some are in the form of a question and answer, and obviously refer to specific statements other contemporary poets and thinkers have made. In this way the element of conversation or dialogue is ever present and contributes to the sense of a text that is not finished but exists in a relationship to a former text, anticipating a new one. Some of the *Fragmente* were evidently written by his brother

August Wilhelm, Friedrich Scheiermacher and Novalis. In this way they also put into practice the notion of collective writing. The subjects of the *Fragmente* are also wide in scope, dealing with Schlegel's views on philosophy, poetry, art, society, and religion.

Shortly after the publication of Schlegel's *Fragmente*, the poet Novalis took up writing in this form and published his collection of *Fragmente* called *Blüthenstaub* in 1798 in the *Athenäum*. Similar to Schlegel's texts, these texts contained aphorisms and short essays, and articulated his views on the dialectical relationship between the sciences and art (Zmegac 157). Like Friedrich Schlegel, he also liked the form of dialogue or *Gespräch* as a means to convey his philosophical ideas, and published a series of *Dialoge*, similar in style to Schlegel's *Gespräche*.

Karoline was fond of Novalis' writing and was well acquainted with Friedrich Schlegel's literary theories. A number of Schlegel's *Kritische Fragmente* can be found copied out in her *Nachlass*. It is also obvious from the statement cited above that she was quite familiar with the *Fragment* as a literary form and basic idea. Although she did not publish voluminous *Fragmente* of a similar content and style, the series of statements appearing in her *Nachlass*, of which the above cited statement is the first, has many striking resemblances to those of Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis. The thoughts she expresses in these statements are also cryptic articulations on art, religion, poetry and philosophy.

Although there is a connection between them, they are not systematically arranged so that the connection is always somewhat ambiguous.

There are several further texts in the *Nachlass* which bear a resemblance to those of Schlegel and Novalis in content and style. However, in the works she chose to publish, she mainly used the more traditional forms of poems, sonnets, short narratives and plays. Yet a cursory glance at the titles or subtitles of many of her texts immediately reveals that she was very comfortable with the term *Fragment*. Her second volume of poetry is called *Poetische Fragmente*. Many of her individual poems and prose pieces are often subtitled *Fragment*, for example the texts "Die Manen. Ein Fragment," and "Ein Apokalyptisches Fragment." Some critics suggested that this was an apologetic gesture on her part, that she was implying that her works were imperfect and needed revising. It is true that she was quite conscious of the imperfections of her style and was eager to improve her skills as a writer. But there is enough evidence in the content of her work to suggest that her extensive use of the word *Fragment* was not accidental or merely apologetic. By naming her creations thus, she quite consciously was giving the reader clues as to how she understood the nature of these texts and how she wished them to be read.

The form of the *Fragment* was a suitable vehicle for Karoline, because it gave her permission to express her experience as a female writer. Banned because of her gender from

any formal institution that might have given her the tools to create the "perfect" work of art demanded in the classical period, this new form allowed her to create poetry that made no claim of completeness, but that carried credibility by its mere act of creation and "striving."

Karoline did not frequently talk about the forms she chose for her writing, but in one of the letters Bettine von Arnim published in her novel *Die GÜnderode*, Karoline went to some length to articulate her views on the essence of poetry. She writes the following:

... ein Gedicht ist doch wohl nur dann lebendig wirkend, wenn es das Innerste in lebendiger Gestalt hervortreten macht; je reiner, je entscheidender dies innere Leben sich ausspricht, je tiefer ist der Eindruck, die Gewalt des Gedichts. Auf die Gewalt kommt alles an, sie wirft alle Kritik zu Boden und tut das ihre. Was liegt *dann* dran, ob es so gebaut sei, wie es die angenommene Kunstverfassung nicht verletze? – Gewalt schafft höhere Gesetze, die keiner vielleicht früher ahnte oder auszusprechen vermochte; höhere Gesetze stoßen allemal die alten um, und – wir sind doch noch nicht am End! – Wenn doch der Spielplatz, wo sich die Kräfte jetzt nach hergebrachten Grundsätzen üben, freigegeben wäre, um der Natur leichter zu machen, ihre Gesetze zu wandeln. Ich will nicht, daß Du auf meine Produkte in der Poesie anwendest, was ich hier sage; ich habe mich auch zusammengenommen und gehorchen lernen; und es war gut, denn es sammelte meinen Stoff in meinem Geist, der mir vielleicht als Inhalt nicht genügt haben würde, wenn mir die Form, die ich der Anmut zu verweben strebte, nicht den Wert dazu geliehen hätte, ich glaube, daß nichts wesentlicher in der Poesie sei, als daß ihr Keim aus dem Inneren entspringe; ein Funke, aus der Natur des Geistes sich erzeugend, ist Begeisterung, sei es aus welchem tiefen Grund der Gefühle es wolle, sei er noch so gering scheinend. Das Wichtige an der Poesie ist, was an der Rede es auch ist, nämlich die wahrhaftige, unmittelbare Empfindung, die wirklich in der Seele vorgeht; sollte die Seele einfach klar empfinden, und man wollte ihre Empfindung steigern, so würde dadurch ihre geistige Wirkung verlorengehen. – Der größte Meister in der Poesie ist gewiß der, der die einfachsten, äußeren Formen bedarf, um das innerlich Empfangne zu gebären, ja, dem die Formen sich zugleich mit erzeugen im

Gefühl innerer Übereinstimmung.

...Ich mußte selbst oft die Kargheit der Bilder, in die ich meine poetischen Stimmungen auffaßte, anerkennen, ich dachte mir manchmal, daß ja dicht nebenan üppigere Formen, schönere Gewande bereit liegen, auch daß ich leicht einen bedeutenderen Stoff zur Hand habe, nur war er nicht als erste Stimmung in der Seele entstanden, und so hab ich es immer zurückgewiesen und hab mich an das gehalten, was am wenigsten abschweift von dem, was in mir wirklich Regung war; daher kam es auch, daß ich wagte, sie drucken zu lassen; sie hatten jenen Wert für mich, jenen heiligen der geprägten Wahrheit, alle kleine Fragmente sind mir in diesem Sinn Gedicht. (Arnim 408-409)

The great variety of poetic forms that Karoline used in her writing is evidence for the seriousness with which she took the art of writing. But to her, perfection of expression was not as important as the life of a poem or a narrative, be it ever so fragmentary.

In her study of the dialogical discourse of the letters written by three female writers of the nineteenth century, the critic Karin Zimmermann elaborates on the idea that the concept of "the fragmentary" plays a role that goes beyond that of a literary form. She sees it as a concept that is at the heart of a view of life and art embraced by artists of the early Romantic period, characterized by a constant tension between fragmentation and totality. She says:

Der Begriff des Fragmentarischen in der frühromantischen Terminologie ersetzt ... keinen Gattungsbegriff, sondern bezeichnet viel eher ein Verfahren, eine Denkstruktur, die sich im Spannungsfeld von Fragment und Totalität bewegt. (Zimmermann 47)

As such it also forms the basis of the dialogue, both written and spoken. The two literary critics Friedrich Schlegel and Schleiermacher saw letters and dialogues as important literary

forms, mainly because both forms are by their very nature most direct in their insistence upon communication between two voices, which, incomplete in themselves, can approach a discourse that is greater than the mere sum of its parts. In his essay "The Position of Friedrich Schlegel's Dialogue on Poetry within the Romantic Movement," the critic Ernst Behler says:

The dialogue form enables him [the author] to range over a wide intellectual field in a few pages, and to deal with the most disparate topics, without obliging him to establish a systematic order between them or to argue his case in detail...Moreover, the dialogue form allows the author to present his previous philosophical and critical positions, even if they stand in opposition to his later points of view. (12)

Schlegel sees the fragment, the dialogue and the letter combined as follows: "Ein Dialog ist eine Kette, oder ein Kranz von Fragmenten. Ein Briefwechsel ist ein Dialog" (Schlegel II 167).

It stands to reason that the small group of female writers emerging in 18th century Germany, including Karoline von Günderrode and Bettine von Arnim, not only welcomed the legitimization of the forms of communication they had access to as art forms, but also understood their possibilities intrinsically. No amount of formal silencing through gender restriction on higher education and artistic freedom could stop women from speaking to each other and writing letters to each other. They understood only too well that a deeper understanding of the workings of human nature and history and art can only be arrived at in small tentative stages. They understood as well that in order to achieve a greater appreciation for art and to participate actively in its creation, they must break their



isolation and speak and write to each other, seizing every opportunity warranted them. Communication, *Mitteilung* on a very basic, everyday level was for them a passionate need, and thus a very natural and necessary first step to the possibility of creating art.

Both content and form of the surviving letters of Karoline von Günderrode show how seriously Karoline took the form of letter writing and how she saw it as much more than just as a vehicle for exchanging trivial gossip or making necessary social arrangements. Her letters almost always contain discussions on matters she has been thinking and reading about. She never only describes an experience or a feeling, but always interprets it, comments on it, questions it, analyses her experience and thought. Her careful use of language in her letters also shows that she regards it as a literary form, deserving of as precise articulation as possible.

It is not only in her letters that Karoline's belief in the necessity of dialogue is evident. In her literary texts the prominence of conversation or dialogue is striking. The individual poems and stories almost always are either written dialogues or contain dialogues or elements of speech. She also liked the form of the drama because of its insistence on speech. Her "dramas" have been severely criticized by both her contemporaries and critics of today for their lack of dramatic action. This criticism is justified to a large extent if one thinks of staging them. However, it is not the dramatic action

and movement of the characters on stage that interests Karoline, but their voices. What she wants to explore in these pieces is the action contained within the dialogue itself. She is interested in the act of speaking, of using language as a vehicle to explore the reality of the "other." Her prose pieces also have a very strong dialogical element in them. She makes much use of direct speech within these stories. The short piece "Die Manen. Ein Fragment" consists entirely of a dialogue between two people, so that it is set up on the page like a play. At times a story will begin in prose form, but very quickly develop into a dialogue, so that it becomes a mixture of prose and drama, as in the story "Die Erscheinung" (Werke I 63). Her poems are often a conversation between two or more voices, as in the poem "Des Wandrers Niederfahrt" (Werke I 69). In many other narrative poems the characters speak to each other, so that the poems become a conversation between characters, narrator, the gods and sometimes even natural elements such as the wind or the sun, as in, for example "Darthula nach Ossian." One of Karoline's favourite themes is the story of the quest. "Geschichte eines Braminen" (Werke I 303) for example, is the story a young man tells of his search for fulfilment. In this story the conversation consists of the young man and a listener, who only very seldom interrupts the story, and, since the narrator tells the story in the first person, the reader very readily identifies with the silent listener. Even in her lyrical poetry there is often the sense of dialogue. Various voices, whether they are characters or ideas,

"speak" to one another. There is often a very keen sense of a narrator speaking to the reader, or addressing an absent reader, or an abstract notion.

Thus, the structure of the poems and stories Karoline writes is essentially one of conversation. Separate elements, individual voices reach out to each other through the use of words and images, driven by the longing, the *Streben* to gain a glimpse of wholeness and excellence: *das Ganze, das Vortreffliche*.

If one considers the physical arrangement of her poems in her published volumes, one also gets a sense that Karoline embraces the idea that the poems and stories are incomplete in themselves and in need of speaking, as it were, to each other. She often places two texts with contradictory sentiments next to each other. Another common device she uses is to set two opposing ideas against each other within one poem without synthesizing them into a conclusive statement. The idea of *das Ganze* is then, as Novalis stated, one that inspires the poet, but it is left as an ideal outside the poem.

In her third volume of poetry and prose, called *Melete*, Karoline also includes a three-part text called "Briefe zweier Freunde" (Werke I 350-362). It consists of a sonnet entitled "An Eusebio," a letter also entitled "An Eusebio" and another letter called "Fragment aus Eusebios Antwort." This is the only instance in which Karoline actually includes letters in a manuscript meant for publication. Eusebio was the "code name" for Friedrich Creuzer which he and Karoline used in their private

correspondence. We have evidence that the final letter was not originally penned by Creuzer, but that Karoline wrote it herself (Morgenthaler III 204). Thus she kept the actual correspondence separate from the material she intended to publish.<sup>1</sup> Yet the inclusion of this series shows that Karoline also saw the letter as a form that lends itself naturally to the kind of immediate relay of thoughts and ideas between readers and writers which she considered to be valid artistic discourse.

Communication, then, both spoken and written, is the action that, according to Karoline, results from the desire to become a part of a larger whole, even though it is not ultimately attainable. The utterances remain fragments, inconclusive and elusive, but it is the act of writing and speaking that is central to artistic creation. It is this act that constitutes the striving, *das Streben*, which is the only perfection the artist can possibly achieve.

The statement cited at the beginning of this chapter in its form not only exemplifies Karoline's understanding of the concept and function of the *Fragment*, but its content also expresses Karoline's fundamental belief in the act of writing and loving. Her use of the word *Vortrefflichkeit* is in itself interesting. This word is rarely used as a noun in modern German, although the adjective *vortrefflich* is in common use. Karoline and her

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<sup>1</sup> The book had been accepted for publication, but after Gunderrode's sudden death, the book was withdrawn, presumably by Creuzer, who had first dealt with the publishers (Werke III 165).

contemporaries, however, used it in the noun form to express the abstract concept of excellence. They did not define it as an absolute, a state of perfection, but rather as an approximation of greatness. Thus within the word itself there is a certain tension, for that which is *vortreflich* has not achieved the absolute state of perfection; it is outstanding, but not static, constantly moving towards improvement, towards a greater and fuller state of excellence. To Karoline, what is essential in the individual is the desire for *die Vortreflichkeit*. This desire is articulated in language, in fragmentary and incomplete utterances, and in the act of love. Writing and loving are acts, the motion, the energy, the force which embody the desire for *das Ganze*.

The concept of desire has become central to several critical theories of literature. Julia Kristeva and Roland Barthes, for example, have written extensively about desire and how it functions within a literary text and its readers. In this thesis, however, Karoline's own concept of desire as she describes it in this *Fragment* and throughout her writing will be used as a key to the interpretation of her texts. Thus the discussion of her work will remain grounded by her own theory of desire expressed in her creative work and her letters. The circumstances of her life and how she perceived herself in her social context, as well as how others perceived her, will also serve as a means to understand her work.

Desire, however, must not only be seen as implicit in the

structure of Karoline's writing and as constituting its *raison d'être*. Desire, in its many-faceted manifestations, is also the explicit subject of her body of work. The selection of her published and unpublished manuscripts considered in this thesis will be presented with a focus on both the way in which she expresses this desire and what she says about it in her creative texts and in her letters.

CHAPTER FOUR: DESIRE AS THE PATH TOWARDS *VERBINDUNG*  
"DIE MANEN. EIN FRAGMENT."

One of the first prose pieces in *Gedichte und Phantasien von Tian*, "Die Manen. Ein Fragment" (Werke I 30), is a significant text to consider as a starting point for the investigation of the extent to which desire and fragmentation are present in Karoline von Günderrode's writing. Its tone is an abrupt break from the passionate love tales that precede it in Karoline's first published collection of verse. Whereas these texts fall into the category of fairy tales and epic poems, this dry exchange between teacher and pupil has a tone that some critics have considered hopelessly didactic (Lazarowicz 89). It certainly lacks the poetic flair that characterizes many of her more lyrical works, and it does seem to function to some extent as a guide to the reader of her tales. However, the tone is not arrogant or insistent; rather, in the light of the lack of self-confidence Karoline often displays when she talks about her own writing, it seems to be more of an attempt to articulate her theory of desire for communication between like-minded souls as clearly and as rationally as possible.

Set up as a dialogue between a teacher and a pupil, "Die Manen" consists mainly of a series of questions the pupil poses to the teacher, and the teacher's answers, which are designed to lead the pupil to ask further questions and draw conclusions. The pupil begins by telling the teacher of his having visited the

catacombs of the Swedish kings the day before the dialogue occurs. Since he had read the story of one of the kings, Gustav Adolph, on the previous day, he found himself curiously moved at the sight of his grave, mourning the death of a man, as though he had died on that very day instead of two hundred years before. The pupil is not only astonished by his own capacity for such grief, he also expresses his desolation at the thought of the transitory nature of human life and endeavour. He deplores the fact that his own time seems empty and superficial when he compares it to the time in which the great masters lived. In fact, he expresses the desire to have lived and died with these heroes of the past rather than to have to exist during this present time, during which the greatness of the heroes of history is lost.

The teacher's response is that nothing has been lost; it is only the contemplation thereof that is often neglected. He says it is easy to overlook the infinite chain of cause and effect that has brought us to this point in history and which links us with the past. However, the mere fact that the life of this man has affected the young pupil so strongly shows indeed that the pupil is conscious of this connecting link, and so the character who lived in the past is not lost, but lives on in the mind and thoughts of someone today.

Aber wenn du auch dieses nicht bedenken willst, so kannst du doch das nicht verlohren und dahin nennen, was dich selbst so stark bewegt, und so mächtig auf dich wirkt. Schon lange kenne ich dich, und mich däucht, dein eignes Schicksal und die Gegenwart haben dich kaum so heftig bewegt, als das Andenken dieses großen Königs. Lebt er nicht jetzt noch in



dir? oder nennst du nur Leben, was im Fleisch und in dem Sichtbaren fortlebt? und ist dir das dahin und verlohren, was noch in Gedanken wirkt, und da ist? (Werke I 31)

In response to the young man's question as to whether this means that the life remembered from the past is more real than the actual life of today, the teacher explains that everything we experience almost instantly belongs to the past. Thus time cannot determine the categories of "the real and the unreal."

Die positive Gegenwart ist der kleinste und flüchtigste Punkt; indem du die Gegenwart gewahr wirst, ist sie schon vorüber, das Bewußtsein des Genusses liegt immer in der Erinnerung. (Werke I 31)

What does determine the reality of the connection between two people is not whether they are living at the same time, but whether they have something in common, are somehow like-minded, and, more importantly, whether there is within them a desire, a will, a need to make a connection. The pupil says:

So lebt und wirkt aber ein großer Mensch nicht nach seiner Weise in mir fort, sondern nach meiner, nach der Art wie ich ihn aufnehme, wie ich mich und ob ich mich seiner erinnern will. (Werke I 31)

The teacher responds:

Freilich lebt er nur fort in dir, in sofern du Sinn für ihn hast, in so fern deine Anlage dich fähig macht ihn zu empfangen in deinem Innern, in so fern du etwas mit ihm Homogenes hast, das Fremdartige in dir tritt mit ihm in keine Verbindung, und er kann nicht auf es wirken, und nur mit dieser Einschränkung wirken alle Dinge. Das, wofür du keinen Sinn hast, geht für dich verlohren, wie die Farbenwelt dem Blinden. (Werke I 32)

Thus it is the pupil's desire, his will, his need which makes him capable of hearing and reliving the voice of the dead man. The pupil himself plays an active role in the connection.

The teacher goes on to explain how this connection takes place. He says that in order to be able to perceive this world of the spirits and the past, one must rely not on the usual senses but on an "inner sense." This inner sense is not developed in most people, since they pay attention only to the superficial manifestation of life. These people consider those who have developed this inner sense as foolish.

Es kommt nur darauf an, diese Verbindung gewahr zu werden. Bloss geistige Kräfte können unsern äussern Sinnen nicht offenbar werden; sie wirken nicht durch Augen und Ohren auf uns, sondern durch das Organ, durch das allein eine Verbindung mit ihnen möglich ist, durch den innern Sinn, auf ihn wirken sie unmittelbar. Dieser innere Sinn, das tiefste und feinste Seelenorgan, ist bei fast allen Menschen gänzlich unentwickelt und nur dem Keim nach da; das Geräusch der Welt, das Getreibe der Geschäfte, die Gewohnheit nur *auf* der Oberfläche, und nur *die* Oberfläche zu betrachten, lassen es zu keiner Ausbildung, zu keinem deutlichen Bewußtseyn kommen, und so wird es nicht allgemein anerkannt, und was sich hier und da zu allen Zeiten in ihm offenbahret hat, hat immer so viele Zweifler und Schmäher gefunden; und bis jetzt ist sein Empfangen und Wirken in äußerst seltnen Menschen die seltenste Individualität.  
(Werke I 34)

Karoline experienced similar mockery from her contemporaries when she spoke about this "inner sense" that to her was extremely real. Karl von Savigny, for example, often patronized her and made it sound as if she were slightly mad when she would talk about her "inner life" as intense and real. To Karoline, the denial of the existence of things beyond the rational and tangible world was a kind of death, whereas the process the body goes through when it "dies" was to her only a chemical process, "eine Scheidung der Kräfte." To her, the kind of connection she speaks of here is the desire for communication with like-minded

souls, a communication which to her is a necessity and without which she cannot live.

The dialogue form is a well chosen one to express the idea of communication and its necessity. In a way the conversation takes place on various levels. The dialogue provides a vehicle for the two speakers to express their ideas and listen to one another. The impetus for the conversation has come from another sort of communication, an emotional reaction by the pupil to something he has read. Thus language, written and spoken, provides the vehicle for both the discussion of abstract ideas and for a powerful emotional connection that is astounding in its immediacy. On another level, the writer of the dialogue is also using written language as a vehicle to communicate with her readers, both those who will read the published manuscript during her time, and those who may, after her death, make a connection with the writer by reading it and taking it seriously as literary discourse.

Much more immediate is another reader, Bettine von Arnim. "Die Manen. Ein Fragment." is one of the many creative works that appear in Bettine's epistolary novel *Die Gundersode*. Karoline included this text in one of her letters to Bettine. This fact alone is evidence for Karoline's need to share her creations with an intelligent reader. It shows how strongly connected she saw her creative writing and her direct communication with the reader, who in this case is not an anonymous person finding her story in a manuscript, but her friend Bettine, who, she knows,

will read it carefully and respond to it.

She begins the letter that includes "Die Manen" by saying:

Ich habe die Zeit über recht oft an Dich gedacht, liebe Bettine. Vor einigen Nächten träumte mir, Du seist gestorben, ich weinte sehr darüber und hatte den ganzen Tag einen traurigen Nachklang davon in meiner Seele. Als ich den Abend nach Hause kam, fand ich Deinen Brief; ich freute mich und wunderte mich, weil ich glaubte, einen gewissen Zusammenhang zwischen meinen Träumen und Deinen Gedanken zu finden. (Arnim 13)

Although the connection is subtle, there is also in this short passage a reiteration of the subject of the dialogue she is sending her. The idea that a dream about Bettine is so vivid as to cause her great anxiety is similar to the pupil's palpable sorrow caused by his having read about the death of the great Swedish king. Both dreaming and remembering by reading are acts that take place in spaces or dimensions which the "rational man" would consider to be outside the realm of actual or real occurrence, and that thus lose credibility. But Karoline frequently speaks of dreams and unconsciousness as a necessary state for revelation and understanding. It is not only the fact that she has dreamed about Bettine that is important to her. She has dreamed that Bettine is dead. Though it is certainly an unsettling and somewhat macabre dream to write about chattily, her mention of this dream echoes the subject of death discussed in "Die Manen," in which the teacher explains that death is merely another state rather than the end of being. Just as the young pupil in the story communicates with the Swedish king even though the king is dead, because the two share similar thoughts and aspirations, so Karoline says she sees a connection between

Bettine's thoughts and her own dreams.

In a postscript to the letter, Karoline briefly introduces "Die Manen," apologizing for its language and its unpolished state.

Auf meiner Heimreise von Hanau hab ich das Gespräch gedichtet; es ist ein bißchen vom Zaun gebrochen. - Ich wollt, die Prosa wäre edler, das heißt: ich wollt, sie wär musikalischer; es enthält viel, was wir im Gespräch berührt haben. Du schreibst mit mehr Musik Deine Briefe; ich wollt, ich könnt das lernen. (Arnim 14)

Karoline's critical evaluation of her writing is an example of how seriously she took writing as a craft. She frequently made similar comments about the imperfection of her work. The act of writing to her was also a "striving," since she recognized her own shortcomings and constantly tried to improve her form of expression. But more importantly, in this brief introductory comment she indicates that the topic which has become the subject of "Die Manen" has already been discussed by Bettine and Karoline, in other words, that a similar dialogue has taken place between the two women. Bettine's response to the "Die Manen" reinforces this. She begins her response by saying:

Die Menschen sind gut, ich bin es ihnen von Herzen, aber wie das kommt, daß ich mit niemand sprechen kann?—Das hat nun Gott gewollt , daß ich nur mit Dir zu Haus bin. - Die Manen les ich immer wieder, sie wecken mich recht zum Nachdenken. (Arnim 20)

and later in the letter she says:

Nun ja! wenn es auch die ganze heutige Welt nicht faßt, was Du da aussprichst, wie ich gewiß glaub, daß es umsonst der Welt gesagt ist, so bin ich aber der Schüler, dessen ganze Seele strebt, sich das Gehörte zum Eigentum zu machen - und aus dieser Lehre wird mein künftig Glück erblühn, nicht weil ich's gelernt hab, aber weil ich's empfind; es ist ein Keim in mir geworden und wurzelt tief, ja, ich muß sagen, es

spricht meine Natur aus, oder vielmehr, es ist das heilige Wort "Es werde", was du über mich aussprichst.  
(Arnim 23)

In Karoline's comment it seems that their conversation about mortality preceded her writing "Die Manen," and Bettine's direct identification with the pupil in "Die Manen" and the way she continues to refer to and quote from the text itself are a beautiful example of the idea Karoline was expressing in the first place: communication between harmonious "souls" will take place beyond the confines of time, immediacy and physical proximity, provided there is a desire for this communication. Bettine, in her exuberance, likens Karoline to a creator, citing the instantly recognizable words of creation from the book of Genesis. The language of Christian religion is a vehicle Karoline and Bettine frequently use in their correspondence during this time when they speak about their own writing and the perception of "das Unsichtbare." Here God becomes a metaphor for the artist. However, Bettine sees Karoline's work of creation as not restricted to the actual work of art she has created, in this instance the prose piece "Die Manen," but rather, Bettine sees her as having created her, as "the reader" with the ability to hear and to sense (*empfinden*) and to "become." The German verb *werden* is not a static word like the verb "to be" which is used in the Creation story in English. "Sein" and "Werden" are two concepts which are favourite subjects of conjecture by the early Romantics. This statement then fits in very well with Karoline's concept of desire. The artist and reader are in a constant state

of striving toward something greater than their own fragmentary existences.

Karoline responds to Bettine in her following letter:

Es kömmt mir bald zu närrisch vor, liebe Bettine, daß Du Dich so feierlich für meinen Schüler erklärst, ebenso könnte ich mich für den Deinen halten wollen; doch macht es mir viele Freude, und es ist auch etwas Wahres daran, wenn ein Lehrer durch den Schüler angeregt wird, so kann ich mit Fug mich den Deinen nennen. Gar viele Ansichten strömen mir aus Deinen Behauptungen zu und aus Deinen Ahnungen, denen ich vertraue, und wenn Du so herzlich bist, mein Schüler sein zu wollen, so werd ich mich einst wundern, was ich da für einen Vogel ausgebrütet habe. (Arnim 24)

One of the most striking features of this short passage is the delightful humour and grace with which Karoline responds to Bettine's proclamation that she is Karoline's pupil. Karoline's male correspondents, Clemens Brentano and Friedrich Creuzer, wished to be seen as Karoline's "teacher" and the tone with which they chastise and even praise her is often patronizing.<sup>1</sup> There was always an assumption that they indeed were the teachers, and that she was their pupil. In this exchange Karoline expresses her amusement at Bettine's suggestion. In her eyes the exchange between the two is entirely reciprocal; the two women constantly stimulate each other's thoughts and verbal exchanges. It is refreshing to hear Karoline sound so confident, rather than having to defend herself against those who think of her as too highly strung or *überspannt*. In a few sentences, Karoline dispels the intimidating hierarchy that Bettine has constructed by humbly aligning herself with the character of the student, and rather

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Clemens Brentano's letter cited in Chapter Two, p. 26, regarding the subject of her poetry.

emphasizes the essence of the dialogue: the willingness of both speakers to "receive" the other, to listen and to respond.

Although "Die Manen" is certainly not one of Karoline's best pieces of writing, it is significant because of the ideas it expresses.<sup>2</sup> One of her earlier works, first published in 1804, but probably written some time between 1802 and 1804 (Werke III 77), it is placed near the beginning of *Gedichte und Phantasien*, following the narrative poem "Darthula nach Ossian," a short fairy tale "Timur" and a narrative poem "Don Juan." All three of these preceding texts are set in the realm of myth. All three are accounts of passionate love and have a touch of "the unreal." It seems that Karoline deliberately placed "Die Manen" with its prosaic language and nonexistent plot next to these pieces, for in it she attempts to validate both the act of the retelling of these old tales in her own voice and of the "irrational" elements that characterize those stories. Equally valid, however, is the prosaic dialogue "Die Manen," which articulates the legitimization of the importance of past voices in the life of a voice speaking in the present.

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<sup>2</sup> Karin Zimmermann devotes a substantial section of her investigation of dialogical forms to "Die Manen," in which she sees this text as important evidence for Karoline's understanding of communication through the written text. See pp. 147-163.



## CHAPTER FIVE: NAMING HER DESIRE

Placed at the end of the volume *Gedichte und Phantasien* is the fairly short narrative poem "Der Franke in Egypten" (Werke I 81). It is one of a number of narratives Karoline wrote in which the speaker tells the story of his quest for happiness and fulfilment. The poem is fairly simple and straightforward, but what links it to the ideas expressed in "Die Manen" and thus to Karoline's central concern in her poetry, is the theme of desire.

Speaking in first person singular, the narrator, a native of Franconia, begins his tale by describing his restlessness and his longing for something greater than that which fills his life:

Wie der Unmuth mir den Busen drücket,  
 Wie das Glück mich hämisch lächelnd flieht.  
 Ist denn Nichts was meine Seele stillet?  
 Nichts, was dieses Lebens bange Leere füllet?--  
 (Werke I 81)

He names the sources from which he thinks his restlessness stems: first he believes it is the distant past, "die Heroenzeit," which he needs to connect with, and he travels to Egypt, a civilization he deems much more ancient and therefore more desirable than his own Europe. His initial euphoria, however, dissipates after a short time, and his communication is restricted to the realm of the dead, he himself does not actively participate in life. He seeks action first in war, then in the study of scientific thought. But, although he has new insights, he finds he is neglecting his emotions and feelings.

Ich dachte, forschte nur, vergaß daß ich empfand.  
 Doch ach! die alte Sehnsucht ist erwacht,  
 Aufs neue fühl ich suchend ihre Macht,  
 Was geb ich ihr? Wohin soll ich mich stürzen?  
 (Werke I 82)

The dichotomy between thinking and feeling (*Denken* and *Empfinden*) is one which is frequently expressed in Karoline's poetry and narratives, and is developed with greater complexity in other texts. It is a preoccupation which she shared with other early Romantics. They were protesting the ideas they had inherited from the Enlightenment, which elevated the power and importance of rational thought above any other kind of human perception. At this point in the poem the narrator realizes that his lack of fulfilment in the area of emotional life has left him empty despite his many searches.

Up to this point the speaker has been speaking in the past tense, as though he were narrating his story to an unidentified listener, describing something that could have happened in the distant past. But the tense abruptly changes to the present. He continues addressing the listener for several short lines:

Ha! Sieh, ein Mädchen! wie voll Anmuth,  
 Wie lieblich hold erscheint sie mir!  
 Soll ich dem Zuge widerstehen?  
 Doch nein! ich rede kühn zu ihr.  
 (Werke I 82)

The rest of the poem consists of a dialogue between the speaker and the girl he has just met. It is as though the listener who was being addressed thus far had vanished and the action had shifted to the present interaction between the speaker and the young girl. This formal shift in the narrative context and

structure underlines the central theme of the poem, which is that fulfillment can only be found in active, vibrant communication between like-minded people.

Lastrata, the young girl, tells the wanderer about her father, who longs for the home he left behind in Italy, and how she too cannot be happy here, but longs for the distant shores of Europe. Lazarowicz points out that the wanderer recognizes the irony of the situation: they are both unhappy with their present time and place, and long for that which the other has escaped

(133). Lastrata asks:

Erkranket ruht mein Geist auf jener blauen Ferne,  
 Und schöne Träume tragen mich dahin.  
 Sag', wogt nicht schöner dort der Strom des Lebens?  
 Sehnt dort die kranke Brust sich auch vergebens?

...

Fremdling! kannst du diese Sehnsucht deuten?  
 Fühlst du dieses unbestimmte Leiden?  
 Dieses Wünschen ohne Wunsch?  
 (Werke I 83 and 84)

Similar to the wanderer, she lives in a constant state of longing. Although she says she longs for the shores of her fatherland, Lastrata recognizes that it may not be the answer. What she does know is that she has a desire, but she cannot name its object: "Dieses Wünschen ohne Wunsch." In a way, Lastrata, though only a young woman, is more sceptical than the speaker. She has not had the opportunity to go on a quest like the male character, seeking fulfilment in travel, war and in the pursuit of knowledge, yet she seems to know the futility of such action without having tested it.

The conclusion of the poem is straightforward: the wanderer

sees that none of his searches could possibly have brought him any sense of fulfilment. It is here, in the present, in love, communicating with a vibrant person with similar longings, that he can find fulfilment:

Ja ich fühl ein Sehnen, fühl ein Leiden.  
 Doch jetzt kann ich diese Wünsche deuten,  
 Und ich weiß, was dieses Streben will.  
 Nicht an fernen Ufern, nicht in Schlachten!  
 Nicht im bunten Land der Phantasien!  
 Wohnt des durst'gen Herzens Sättigung.  
 Liebe muß dem müden Pilger winken,  
 Myrthen keimen in dem Lorbeerkrantz,  
 Liebe muß zu Heldenschatten führen  
 Muß uns reden aus der Geisterwelt. --  
 Mächt'ger Strom! ich fühlte deine Wogen,  
 Unbewußt fühl' ich mich hingezogen,  
 Nur wohin! wohin! das wußt' ich nicht.  
 Wohl mir! dich und mich hab' ich gefunden.  
 Liebe hat dem Chaos sich entwunden.  
 (Werke I 84)

Love is a theme that runs through almost all of Karoline's texts, especially her lyrical poetry. However, it seldom remains as sparsely defined as it does in "Der Franke in Egypten." It is only in the context of the rest of Karoline's work that its presence in this poem can be understood as more than a partial solution to life's quests. In a short poem almost immediately preceding "Der Franke in Egypten", love is characterized by a series of paradoxical statements:

Liebe

O reiche Armuth! Gebend, seliges Empfangen!  
 In Zagheit Muth! in Freiheit doch gefangen.  
     In Stummheit Sprache,  
     Schüchtern bei Tage,  
     Siegend mit zaghaftem Bangen.

Lebendiger Tod, im Einen sel'ges Leben,  
 Schwelgend in Noth, im Widerstand ergeben,  
     Genießend schmachten,

Nie satt betrachten  
 Leben im Traum und doppelt Leben.  
 (Werke I 79)

The poet's juxtaposition of a series of opposites gives the poem an intrinsic tension. Love is not static, but essentially a force which depends upon active reciprocal interaction. This poem is remarkable in its ability to express this abstract concept not with images or metaphors, but with further abstract concepts. It is a very sophisticated construction of dialectical thought, yet the subject matter is entirely in the realm of feeling.

Zimmermann says: "Die Liebe bezeichnet einen Zustand jenseits dieser Dualismen, der sprachlich nur in deren Nennung sichtbar wird" (99). The opposing concepts are built into an exact symmetry with the use of rhyme and rhythm. It is the formal construction of the poem that holds, so to speak, the opposing concepts in perfect balance, and constitutes a kind of synthesis that is not static, but, similar to the bed of the "Strom des Lebens" mentioned in "Der Franke in Egypten," serves to give a fluid shape to the constant tension of the power of love.

Love and the participation in the "Strom des Lebens" is also the main concern of another one of Karoline's early poems, "Wandel und Treue." The form of this poem is also one of dialogue. The two "speakers" in this case are not human characters, but rather personified flowers, Narziß and Violetta. Though both have common names of flowers, the voice speaking for Narziß certainly echoes the Greek god-figure. Because of this seemingly obvious reference to an established mythological

figure, it seems natural to regard Narziß as male, and Violetta as female. The corresponding pronouns will be used in this discussion. However, it must be pointed out that Karoline does not make this gender distinction. We can assume that these figures were androgynous in her imagination.

In Karoline's poem, Narziß does not seek his own reflection, but like the Greek mythological figure, he is in love with the idea of beauty, and seeks only that which is beautiful. Thus he is continuously changing from one object of desire to another. The voice speaking for Violetta does not have as obvious a counterpart in any mythology; in this poem she seems to have been the object of the love of Narziß, and complains to him of his unfaithfulness. She accuses him of loving someone for only a brief period of time, until the flower has wilted and its beauty faded. Narziß defends himself: he says he is not being unfaithful at all; he is being faithful to himself, to his own nature, which commands him to love only that which is beautiful.

#### Narziß

Es hat Natur mich also lieben lehren:  
 Dem Schönen werd' ich immer angehören  
 Und nimmer weich ich von der Schönheit Bahn.  
 (Werke I 36)

In response to Violetta's concern for the lover who is left behind, Narziß explains that the flower who was loved and abandoned will also find new love, new beauty somewhere else. Sun and stars, day and night will become its lovers, leaving and returning again, seeking its beauty. To Violetta's question: "Was ist denn Liebe, hat sie kein Bestehen?" (Werke I 37), Narziß

answers:

Die Liebe will nur wandlen, nicht vergehen;  
 Betrachten will sie alles Trefliche.  
 Hat sie dies Licht in einem Bild erkannt,  
 Eilt sie zu Andern, wo es schöner brennet,  
 Erjagen will sie das Vortrefliche.  
 (Werke I 37)

This short stanza echoes the *Fragment* "Die Vortreflichkeit ist ein Ganzes" (Werke I 436) cited earlier, in which Karoline expresses her key ideas about love and desire. In this dialogue, Narziß argues that it is not the object of desire or love that is important, but the act of loving to which he is true. Were he to deny his true nature and remain with one object of love, his love would stagnate, and then he would be unfaithful to his own nature and to the nature of love. For pure love cannot stand still, it is constantly moving and changing. Those who calculate and measure their love in a cold, conscious state are the ones who are being unfaithful, and their judgement of the one who loves passionately for the moment is unfair.

Drum laß mich, wie mich der Moment gebohren.  
 In ew'gen Kreisen drehen sich die Horen;  
 Der Bach enteilt der Quelle, kehrt nicht wieder  
 Der Strom des Lebens woget auf und nieder  
 Und reisset mich in seinen Wirbeln fort.  
 Sieh alles Leben! es ist kein Bestehen,  
 Es ist ein ew'ges Wandern, Kommen, Gehen,  
 Lebend'ger Wandel! buntes, reges Streben!  
 O Strom! in dich ergießt sich all mein Leben!  
 Dir stürz ich zu! vergesse Land und Port!  
 (Werke I 38)

Similar to the dialogue in "Die Manen," "Wandel und Treue" also operates as a dialogue on several levels. For one, the text contains sentiments expressed in several other poems. The idea of the speaker wanting to participate actively in the fullness of

life is expressed with the same metaphor "der Strom des Lebens" used in "Der Franke in Egypten." This image of a river, its constant motion and energy, its ever-changing destination and constant flux, is a suitable one for Karoline's concept of desire. The resemblance to Karoline's *Fragment* "Die Vortreflichkeit ist ein Ganzes" (Werke I 436) has already been referred to. The line "drum ist keine Persöhnliche Liebe, nur Liebe zum Vortreflichen" is echoed almost verbatim in "Wandel und Treue," when Narziß says, "Ich liebe Menschen nicht, und nicht die Dinge/ Ihr Schönes nur und bin mir so getreu" (Werke I 38). Whereas the *Fragment* uses only abstract terms, both poems clothe these ideas in characters and voices that operate on a metaphoric and more immediate level.

Far more compelling, however, is the way in which the actual dialogue of Karoline's letters to two of her female friends, Gunda and Bettine Brentano echo and elucidate "Wandel und Treue." Karoline did not separate her philosophical and poetic discourse from her personal correspondence. In a letter to Gunda, Karoline writes:

...und ich mögte Dich lieben ob ich gleich sonst nicht die Person sondern nur die Vortreflichkeit liebe; ... Sieh so lange es so bleibt kann ich Dich nicht allen Andern vorziehen, es ist unmöglich, ich muß immer das Bessere mehr lieben als Dich.  
(Preitz II 176)

Obviously the love Karoline has spoken of in her poems is not restricted to erotic passion. Karoline also sees the love two friends have toward each other as love for "die Vortreflichkeit." In her imagination everything is fragmentary, friendship between



people is not a harmonious whole, but an attraction that is not permanent. The love is not directed at the person herself, but at separate elements or characteristics of the person. This concept is contrary to the common perception of love as an emotion that disregards difference. It certainly does not correspond with the Christian notion of selfless love. Both the poem and the *Fragment* make this love sound not only realistic, but also healthy and positive. However, Karoline also expressed frustration and sorrow at her inability to accept her friends and loved ones as they were. In another letter to Gunda she writes:

Auch die Freundschaft versagt mir ihre glücklichen Täuschungen. Menschen die mir Sinn und Liebe für interessante Gegenstände, und ein gewisses Streben darnach zeigten, wurden oft meine Freunde, weil mir Mittheilung Bedürfnis ist. Bald aber hatte ich das Interesse daß ich mit ihnen theilte erschöpft, und fand daß ich sie selbst erschöpft hatte; sie hatten nur die Kraft das schon Gedachte, schon Empfundene, mit zu denken mit zu empfinden; aber das Eigne, und Besondere diesem Allgemeinen anzuschließen, die neue Ansicht der Dinge in sich zu erschaffen, diesen immer quellenden Reichthum des Geistes versagte ihnen die Natur. In solchem Falle muß man ermüden, oder dem Andern immer so viel geben, daß man nicht gewahr wird wie wenig man empfängt. Das letztere konnte ich nicht; ich wurde oft kalt gegen meine Freunde und weder ihre Liebe, noch ihre sonstigen Vollkommenheiten konnten mich diesen Mangel vergessen machen. Und allzu oft vermiste ich auch die Geduld und Kraft an ihnen, mich zu ertragen, wie ich bin. So brachten mir freundschaftliche Verhältnisse meistens mehr Schmerz als Freude. Und fände ich auch den Freund, der alles wäre, was ich wünschte, so würde ich mich seiner unwert finden; und die Seeligkeit selbst hätte Dornen für mich.  
(Pretz II 174)

Although the content of the letter is very similar to the voice of Narziß in the poem, the tone is much different. Whereas the poem "Wandel und Treue" celebrates the passion and exuberance of a love that seeks only beauty, this letter voices a sense of

anxiety and self-recrimination. Clearly Karoline struggled seriously with her restless nature and used both her letters and poems as vehicles for an honest expression of the way she perceived friendship and love.

In one of her letters to Bettine, Karoline very directly identifies with the voice of Narziß. The opening line of the letter is a delightful mixture of the image of the flowers that are the subjects of the poem, the poem and her identification with it.

Melonen, Ananas, Feigen, Trauben und Pfirsich und die Fülle südlicher Blüten, die eben in Eurem Hause sorglich verpackt werden, haben mir Lust gemacht, Dir das *Violen- und Narzissensträußchen* (Wandel und Treue) beizulegen, ich hätte mich gern selbst mit hineingelegt. (Arnim 40)

The playful tone, however, changes to a more serious contemplation of the thoughts expressed in the poem:

Daß ich als Narziß mich gegen Dich verschanze, besser wie im Gespräch, wo Du immer recht behältst, mußt Du Dir gefallen lassen, so mein ich's, und so hab ich recht und Du unrecht; und ich meine, Du könntest immer zufrieden sein damit, so empfunden zu sein durch Deine eigne frische Natur, daß Du meiner sicher bist. Wer im ganzen etwas sein kann, der wird sich auch fühlbar zu machen wissen, und so wird der *Wandel* nirgend anders als bei der *Treue* heimkehren, denn sie ist die Heimat. Du bist ja auch heute nicht, was Du gestern gewesen, und doch bist du eine ewige Folge Deiner selbst. Mir scheint es noch außerdem höchst verkehrt, durch selbstisches Bestehen auf dem, was nur wie Sonnenschein vorübergehendes Geschenk der Götter ist, dem Geist die Freiheit zu verkümmern. *Treue* wächst in dem Geist auf, der liebt; gedeiht sie zu einem starken Baum, so wird kein Eisen so scharf sein, ihn auszurotten, aber ehe die *Treue* von selbst stark geworden, kann man ihr nichts zumuten; sie würde nur bei einer Anforderung ihr aufkeimendes Leben einbüßen; wenn sie aber einmal vollkommen ausgebildet ist, dann ist sie kein Verdienst mehr, dann ist sie Bedürfnis geworden, Lebensatem;--sie hat keine Rechte mehr zu befriedigen, weil sie ganz organisches Leben geworden ist.-- Das sei unsre Sorge, daß jede Lebensregung eigentümliches, organisches Leben werde, das sei unsre Fundamentaltreue,

durch die wir in allem Erhabenen mit den Göttern uns vermählen. Bis dahin laß uns einander treffen in ihrem Tempel; die Gewohnheit, uns da zu finden, einander die Hand zu bieten in gleicher Absicht, die wird den Baum der Treue in uns pflegen, daß er als selbständiges Leben von uns beiden ausgehe und stark werde. (Arnim 40-41)

Some critics have suggested that the relationship between Bettine and Karoline was an erotic one. There is little to substantiate this claim, apart from the passionate language that they frequently use to address one another. However, it was a common practice for both female and male writers of this early Romantic period to use the words of love and passion in quite another fashion than we do today. Yet every intimate friendship, no matter how platonic, contains a potential for possessiveness, betrayal, jealousy, unfaithfulness. Bettine saw Karoline as her mentor, her older sister so to speak, and frequently expressed anxiety when she sensed Karoline did not love her or depend on her as much as Bettine depended on Karoline. It seems that in this letter accompanying her poem, Karoline is reassuring Bettine of her love for her. Bettine's exuberance, her passionate moodiness, her frenzied preoccupation with art and poetry and philosophical thought, created a character that was constantly changing, never static, a character the restless Karoline could love and be true to. Unlike Gunda, whose character was stable and predictable, and who had no difficulty at all in obeying the rules of convention and propriety, Bettine had a nature that was ever changing, vibrant and therefore lovable to Karoline.

It is interesting too that in the letter Karoline actually carries the notions of change and faithfulness (*Wandel* and *Treue*)

further than she does in the poem. Whereas in the poem they are set up as contrary to each other, and remain so until Narziß has explained that by loving *Wandel* he is being *treu*, in this letter their synthesis is expressed in a more complex and organic way. Narziß in the poem gives the illusion of being very unstable and flighty, but the tree described in the letter that becomes the metaphor for the joining of *Wandel* and *Treue* gives the impression of being whole, and though changing, permanent in its growth.

Though quite varied in content and form, the voices of all three texts, "Der Franke in Egypten," "Liebe" and "Wandel und Treue" attempt to name the desire which Karoline saw as so central to life. Though tentative and fragmentary, the texts gain greater significance in their dialogue with one another and with other texts and voices outside their parameters on the page.

CHAPTER SIX: DESIRE FOR *ERKENNTNIS*

Although "Der Franke in Egypten" can be called a "quest story," it is not nearly as complex and poetically sophisticated as numerous other "quest stories" Karoline wrote. In three of these: "Des Wandrers Niederfahrt," "Geschichte eines Braminen" and "Ein apokalyptisches Fragment" the central character is seeking for *Erkenntnis*, or wisdom, knowledge, insight into the essence of human existence. Karoline shared an interest in this topic with many of her contemporaries. Schelling, Herder, Fichte were some of the authors whose work dealing with this question Karoline had read and cherished (Kastinger Riley 95). But for Karoline the contemplation of these questions was much more than an intellectual or philosophical exercise; the search for greater knowledge and insight was a burning passion which consumed the young poet whose opportunities for study and discourse with intellectuals were so severely thwarted. The limitations placed on women of her time who were interested in intellectual pursuits have already been mentioned, as well as Karoline's reaction to this dearth of opportunity: self-education. It is small wonder then, that Karoline often chose this topic for her creative texts.

One of her favourite ways of dealing with this topic was to create an individual human character who embarks on a journey which usually involves spacial, temporal and cultural dimensions. This is the case with the first two texts mentioned above.

The two texts are varied in formal structure: "Des Wandrers Niederfahrt" is a conversation in verse form between the central character, his guide and the earth spirits. "Geschichte eines Braminen" is a narrative in prose told from the point of view of the central character, interspersed with a few short questions from the person to whom he is telling his story. Both stories contain the element of dialogue, giving immediacy and vibrancy to the stories, and also implying the inconclusiveness of the discussion.

Although both characters are male, the fact that Karoline chose to give the voice of a live, human character to the question of the riddle of existence, rather than dealing with the question in an abstract essay, underlines how closely Karoline identified with the subjects of her stories. Her careful selection of a pseudonym which would not betray her sex is evidence for her understanding that it was not an acceptable thing for a woman to enter into the domain of philosophical discourse. It stands to reason then, that she would give the protagonists in these stories a male identity in order to make herself heard (Lazarowicz 111).

A further question with which both protagonists are concerned is the individual's relationship to the world he finds himself in, to "the other." In each case the individual makes the journey alone and comes to his conclusions alone. Being alone and lonely was a natural state for the poet Karoline. She did have several close friends and correspondents, and her communication

with them was something she consciously sought out. But a sense of despair pervades many of her letters. It is a despair born not only of the circumstances of her actual everyday life in a stifling institution; her "inner" life was also fraught with loneliness. She recognized that she was dependent on the approval of others, yet resented this dependence, knowing full well that what she needed was often more than what her friends and acquaintances were capable of giving her. On a deeper level too Karoline was concerned with the question of the connection between the subject and the "other." In order to explore this question, her protagonists force themselves to encounter their world in an honest way.

"Geschichte eines Braminen" (Werke I 303) is an early text. Some sources state that Karoline sent it to Sophie Laroche as early as 1799, although it was only published in 1803 (Morgenthaler III 159). This story is told in a more traditional narrative way than "Des Wandrers Niederfahrt," and "Ein apokalyptisches Fragment." The author describes the journey on which the protagonist embarks in detailed, concrete terms, and also explains its symbolic significance. The protagonist is named, the reader is told about his family background, his nationality, the geographic location of his journey. The various religions Almor, the protagonist, encounters and deals with, are identified. The protagonist in "Des Wandrers Niederfahrt" is simply called "Wandrer," thereby taking on a more symbolic role. But in "Geschichte eines Braminen" the author is speaking about a

specific individual and his particular history.

The listener in this text is a pupil, Lubar, who only interrupts Almor's story once in order to ask a question. His presence, however, is important because he serves as the motivation for Almor to tell his life story in such detail and to include many explanatory comments throughout. The presence of Lubar gives the text a greater didactic quality, too. As is the case with "Die Manen," there is a sense here also of the listener or reader being directly addressed, giving the text a purpose: the narrator is communicating with someone; he feels not only a desire to tell his story, but a necessity to do so.

Almor tells his story in chronological fashion, describing the various stages of his life and analyzing both the situation he finds himself in and his own thoughts and questions at every phase of development. He begins by speaking about his childhood and youth. Born in Smyrna to the son of a French merchant, Almor's childhood consists of an upbringing in which bourgeois ideals are upheld. He is taught that religion is a useful political institution, but not necessary for the enlightened individual. He emphasizes the tremendous influence parents can have on the formation of children's characters. "Durch die Eltern spricht die Natur zuerst zu den Kindern. Wehe den armen Geschöpfen, wenn diese erste Sprache kalt und lieblos ist!" (Werke I 303)

At the age of sixteen, Almor is sent to Europe to become a merchant. He is, however, not impressed with the novelty of this



country, because he says, "ich betrachtete die Dinge mehr mit den Augen, als mit dem Geiste" (Werke I 304). He fills his time performing his business transactions, and the rest of the time he spends in idle pleasure with the young people who come his way. It is only after his father dies and Almor realizes that he feels nothing, no trace of sorrow, no emotion whatsoever, that he begins to search for a deeper meaning to life.

Ich war schon lange auf Erden, jetzt fing ich an zu leben, und die Flügel meines Geistes wagten den ersten Flug. Die mir bisher unsichtbare moralische Welt enthüllte sich mir, ich sah eine Gemeinschaft der Geister, ein Reich von Wirkung und Gegenwirkung, eine unsichtbare Harmonie, einen Zweck des menschlichen Strebens und ein wahres Gut. Verloren war ich für meine Berufsarbeiten seit dem Augenblick, da ich dies schöne Land gefunden hatte, ich gab sie auf, denn erst wollte ich wissen, wer ich sey? was ich seyn solle?... (Werke I 304)

Almor's concern in life has now shifted from a preoccupation with the pragmatic and self-serving interests of the career of a businessman to a concern with the welfare of all people. In an effort to serve this greater community of all people, Almor strives to achieve complete control over his "human" desires and holds virtue and reason as his highest ideals. However, in spite of the joy he has found in discovering this dimension of life, Almor remains unsatisfied. For if he is constantly denying his own individual nature in favour of virtuous selfless interest in the whole of humanity, how will he ever be able to know himself? How can one separate the forces of conditioning from one's own true nature?

Wie kann ich wissen ... was zu der eigentlichen Natur und Harmonie meines Wesens gehört, und was durch Erziehung und Verhältnisse Fremdes in mich übertragen wurde? Vielleicht,

wenn mein Gemüth noch unvermischt von fremdem Zusatz wäre, vielleicht gäbe es dann in mir kein *Sollen*, keine Ertödtung des *Einen*, damit das *Andre* besser gedeihe. (Werke I 306)

Almor decides to leave Europe, return to Asia, and live in solitude, in order to return to his individual nature. He says, "dort wollte ich in stiller Betrachtung meine Seele reinigen von allem Fremden, und wieder ganz Ich selbst werden" (Werke I 306).

It is at this point that Lubar, the pupil, interjects a comment. He condemns this deliberate isolation from all of society as equal to suicide. Almor's response is that he is not recommending this step to all people; each individual is unique, and many people can find fulfilment in obeying the established laws that govern human behaviour. But he himself, as an individual, although he has tried to live in this way, has discovered a longing for something beyond what the world offered him:

Schon lange war es mir klar geworden, daß das Recht der Grund der bürgerlichen, und die Sittlichkeit der Grund der menschlichen Gesellschaft seyen. Diese beyden Beziehungen hatten mir ehemals genügt; ich hatte gesucht, alle Punkte meines Gemüthes mit ihnen in Berührung zu bringen; jetzt entdeckte ich Anlagen in mir, denen diese endlichen Beziehungen nicht mehr genügen wollten, mein Verstand wollte immer mehr und unersättlich wissen, meine Einbildungskraft suchte ein weiteres Feld für ihre Schöpfungen, meine Begierde einen unendlichen Gegenstand ihres Strebens, und mein innerer Sinn ahndete eine unsichtbare und geheimnißvolle Verbindung mit Etwas, das ich noch nicht kannte, und dem ich gerne Gestalt und Namen gegeben hätte. ... In dieser Sehnsucht, in dieser Liebe sprach der Naturgeist zu mir, ich hörte seine Stimme wohl, aber ich wußte noch nicht, wo sie herkäme; je mehr ich aber darauf lauschte, desto deutlicher war es mir, daß es eine Grundkraft gäbe, in welcher Alle, Sichtbare und Unsichtbare, verbunden seyen. Ich nannte diese Kraft das Urleben, und suchte mein Bewußtseyn in Verbindung mit ihr zu bringen, ... ich suchte allerley Pfade, zu ihr aufzusteigen, von dem

Irdischen zum Himmlischen; die Religion schien mir endlich dieser Pfad zu seyn. (Werke I 307-308)

These words echo many of the central ideas Karoline repeatedly addresses in her writing. The individual finds himself consumed with a longing for something he senses within himself that is connected to a greater entity. The words *Sehnsucht* and *Liebe* appear as synonymous in this passage, evidence for Karoline's broad use of the word *Liebe* as desire not limited only to erotic desire, or even love between human beings. Other key words such as *Begierde*, *innerer Sinn*, *Verbindung* are all concepts central to the energy that Karoline saw as fundamental to the human condition and addressed time and again in a myriad of contexts and forms in her creative writing.

Almor then studies various religions, beginning with Islam. At first he is inspired by Mohammed's teachings, but eventually is disappointed to learn that Mohammed, in his attempt to convey his "holy teachings" to a people that is not receptive to them, resorts to threatening his followers with damnation if they reject his ideals, in order to gain and maintain followers. Almor is disappointed in this corruption and moves on to explore the writings of Zoroaster, Confucius, Moses and Christ, Egyptian priests, and Hinduism. In all religions he finds a common truth, symbolized in the form of the goddess Isis at Sais, a truth that he will reveal to Lubar. Lubar must, however, be ready to accept the revelation of Isis, or she will not reveal herself to him. This is reminiscent of the teacher's explanation to the pupil in "Die Manen," that in order to commune with the spirits of the

past, one must have the willingness and a sense of perception that lies beyond the outer human perceptions, which Karoline calls *der innere Sinn*.

Doch will ich versuchen, die heilige Bildsäule der Isis zu Sais, (unter der die Worte: "Ich bin, was da ist, was war und seyn wird" standen,) vor dir zu entschleiern; so dir aber der innere Sinn nicht aufgeht für diese Göttin, so wirst du sie nicht schauen, weder durch deine Vernunft, noch durch dein Wissen. (Werke 309)

The goddess Isis at Sais was a subject that preoccupied other writers of Karoline's time, notably Novalis, who wrote a collection of *Fragmente* called "Die Lehrlinge zu Sais." In Barbara Walker's thoroughly documented encyclopedia of world myths, she says the following about the goddess Isis:

Egyptian scriptures said, "In the beginning there was Isis, Oldest of the Old. She was the Goddess from whom all becoming arose." As the Creatress, she gave birth to the sun "when he rose upon this earth for the first time."...

In her Roman mysteries, Isis was addressed as "the One Who is All." ...

Another devout Roman Isis-worshipper, Apuleius, quoted her response to him, when he addressed her under several other Goddessnames:

"I am Nature, the parent of things, the sovereign of the elements, the primary progeny of time, the most exalted of the deities, the first of the heavenly gods and goddesses, the queen of the dead, the uniform countenance, manifested alone and under one form....At my will the planets of the sky, the wholesome winds of the seas, and the mournful silences of hell are disposed; my name, my divinity is adored throughout the world, in divers manners, in variable customs, and by many names.

For the Phrygians that are the first of all men call me the Mother of the gods of Pessinus; the Athenians, which are sprung from their own soil, Cecropian Minerva; the Cyprians, which are girt about by the sea, Paphian Venus; the Cretans, which bear arrows, Dictynian Diana; the Sicilians, which speak three tongues, infernal Proserpine; the Eleusinians, their ancient goddess Ceres; some Juno, others Bellona, others Hecate, others Ramnusie...the Egyptians, skilled in ancient lore, worship me with proper ceremonies, and call me by my true name, Queen Isis." (Walker 453)

In this description, Isis takes on the characteristics of an all-encompassing goddess, and therefore is a very suitable name or symbol for the idea Almor wants to express by saying all religions, in their pure form, are essentially similar in that they constitute the worship of *das Ganze*, or, as Isis' title cited above, "The One Who is All." Almor also puts this idea into his own words, in which the metaphor of the *Strom des Lebens* so often repeated in Karoline's poetry, figures as a central image as containing the whole of life's energies. He tells Lubar:

Es ist eine unendliche Kraft, ein ewiges Leben, das da Alles ist, was ist, was war und werden wird, das sich selbst auf geheimnißvolle Weise erzeugt, ewig bleibt bey allem Wandeln und Sterben. Es ist zugleich der Grund aller Dinge, und die Dinge selbst, die Bedingung und das Bedingte, der Schöpfer und das Geschöpf, und es theilt und sondert sich in mancherley Gestalten, wird Sonne, Mond, Gestirne, Pflanzen, Thier und Mensch zugleich, und durchfließt sich selber in frischen Lebensströmen und betrachtet sich selber im Menschen in heiliger Demuth. Diese Anschauung der Dinge, die Anschauung ihres Urgrundes, ist die innerste Seele der Religionen, verschieden individualisirt in jedem Individuum; aber durchgehe sie selbst die Religionssysteme alle, in allen wirst du finden ein Unendliches, Unsichtbares, aus dem das Endliche und Sichtbare hervorging, ein Göttliches, das Mensch wurde, ein Uebergehen aus dem zeitlichen Leben in das ewige. (Werke I 309-310)

It is this understanding of religion that serves Almor as a path toward that which he is seeking: a deeper understanding of himself and his relation to the world around him. He goes to India where he meets a brahmin, who acts as a mediator between Almor and the divine (Werke I 312). It is through the brahmin's teachings that Almor also comes to a greater and clearer understanding of the relationship between the individual and *das Ganze*:

Er lehrte mich wie in jedem Theile des unendlichen Naturgeistes die Anlage zu ewiger Vervollkommnung läge, wie die Kräfte wanderten durch alle Formen hindurch, bis sich Bewußtseyn und Gedanke im Menschen entwickelten; wie von dem Menschen an, eine unendliche Reihe von Wanderungen, die immer zu höherer Vollkommenheit führten, der Seelen warteten; wie sie endlich auf geheimnißvolle Weise sich alle vereinigten mit der Urkraft, von der sie ausgegangen, und Eins mit ihr würden, und doch zugleich sie selbst blieben, und so die Göttlichkeit und Universalität des Schöpfers mit der Individualität des Geschöpfes vereinigten. Er lehrte mich, wie eine Gemeinschaft bestehe zwischen den Menschen, denen der innere Sinn aufgegangen sey, und dem Weltgeiste. (Werke I 312)

Through the brahmin's teachings, Almor has come to the understanding that it is within the individual himself that one can find traces of the whole of creation, and it is in seeking a connection to that which constitutes this "whole" or "the other," that the individual can find a kind of satisfaction that can only remain if it continues to be striven for. The search for *Erkenntnis* therefore is not synonymous with the accumulation of knowledge, but with a particular insight into the self and "the other."

The poem "Des Wandrers Niederfahrt" is similar in theme, but its narrative takes place in a less concrete and analytical realm than "Geschichte eines Braminen." The Wanderer, as the protagonist is named, is interested in finding wholeness, *das Ganze*, the same concept that Karoline refers to in her *Fragment* "Die Vortreflichkeit ist ein Ganzes." Unlike Almor, who tells his listener how it is only gradually that he learns to recognize a desire in himself for something greater than the life he finds himself in, the Wanderer describes himself as being bound by an awareness of the dichotomies that divide human reality at the

beginning of the poem. The overriding metaphor in the poem for these dichotomies is that of darkness or night and light or day. Darkness is the realm of dream, light the realm of the consciousness. Darkness is the seat of origin; light is that which the darkness has brought forth. Light represents rational thought, darkness the irrational, unknown, primeval. The Wanderer wishes to move beyond these limitations and to experience perfect harmony and oneness. He wishes to leave the realm of his present existence, that of "false" light and to descend to the origin of life in the realm of midnight. He seeks out a guide, the Führer to show him the way. The Führer is only vaguely identified in the poem. He incorporates opposites: born of both night and day, neither human nor god, he has the knowledge of both realms, and can show him the way. The Wanderer pleads:

O führe mich! du kennest wohl die Pfade  
 Ins alte Reich der dunklen Mitternacht;  
 Hinab will ich ans finstere Gestade  
 Wo nie der Morgen, nie der Mittag lacht.  
 Entsagen will ich jedem Tagesschimmer  
 Der ungern nur der Erde sich vermählt,  
 Geblendet hat mich, trüg'risch, nur der Flimmer,  
 Der Ird'sches nie zur Heimath sich erwählt.  
 Vergebens wollt' den Flüchtigen ich fassen,  
 Er kann doch nie vom steten Wandel lassen.  
 Drum führe mich zum Kreis der stillen Mächte,  
 In deren tiefem Schoos das Chaos schlief,  
 Eh, aus dem Dunkel ew'ger Mitternächte,  
 Der Lichtgeist es herauf zum Leben rief.  
 Dort, wo der Erde Schoos noch unbezwungen  
 In dunkle Schleier züchtig sich verhüllt,  
 Wo er, vom frechen Lichte nicht durchdrungen,  
 Noch nicht erzeugt dies schwankende Gebild  
 Der Dinge Ordnung, dies Geschlecht der Erde!  
 Dem Schmerz und Jrrsal ewig bleibt Gefährte.  
 (Werke I 70)

The Wanderer is disillusioned with the so-called brilliance and

order that he is subject to as a child of the light. The Führer takes him to the gods who sustain the earth, but he will not accompany the Wandrer, and disappears into the darkness.

Alone, the Wandrer sets out on an unsettling journey: around him the laws that govern the world as he knows it are no longer valid. Opposite principles, which are by definition irreconcilable, join: water mixes with fire, East and West embrace, south and north court each other, enemies are friends. In other words, the elements that he has come to know as separate are not separate here, even time and space are no longer forces that can divide.

The voices he now communicates with are called earth spirits (*Erdgeister*). They ask him whether he has come to seek light, to which he replies:

Nicht jenes Licht das auf der Erde gastet  
 Und trügerisch dem Forscher nur entflieht,  
 Nein, jenes Urseyn das hier unten rastet  
 Und rein nur in der Lebensquelle glüht.  
 Die unvermischten Schätze wollt' ich heben  
 Die nicht der Schein der Oberwelt berührt  
 Die Urkraft, die, der Perle gleich, vom Leben  
 Des Daseyns Meer in seinen Tiefen führt.  
 Das Leben, in dem Schoos des Lebens schauen,  
 Wie es sich kindlich an die Mutter schlingt  
 In ihrer Werkstadt die Natur erschauen,  
 Sehn, wie die Schöpfung ihr am Busen liegt.  
 (Werke I 72)

The Wandrer wishes to deny his existence as he perceives it, and become a citizen of this primeval land in which rational thought has not yet set up order and division. The metaphors for this realm are female: womb, mother, breast. In his attempt to go as far back into the distant past as possible, the Wandrer descends



to the place of origin, which is maternal. He pleads with the earth spirits to take him back into an unborn state, so that he can forget and become new again.

The earth spirits, however, do not grant him his wish. They say it is impossible for him to return to this realm because he has already been born to the daylight.

Dem Werden können wir, und nicht dem Seyn gebieten  
 Und du bist schon vom Mutterschoos geschieden  
 Durch dein Bewußtseyn schon vom Traum getrennt.  
 Doch schau hinab, in deiner Seele Gründen  
 Was du hier suchest wirst du dorten finden,  
 Des Weltalls seh'nder Spiegel bist du nur.  
 Auch dort sind Mitternächte die einst tagen,  
 Auch dort sind Kräfte die vom Schlaf erwachen  
 Auch dort ist eine Werkstatt der Natur.  
 (Werke I 73-74).

What the Wanderer learns is that he too, as one part of nature, contains elements of the universe within him. In a way the Wanderer receives an answer to this question. But that is where the poem ends. He does not experience the harmony he is seeking, the way Almor tells Lubar he has.

The desire for this connection is the concept at the basis of almost all of Karoline's writing, but the description of the process of the quest itself and of the speaker actually experiencing a sense of connection with the "other" is most clearly seen in one of Karoline's most intriguing texts, "Ein apokalyptisches Fragment" (Werke I 52). In this text the process of the individual gaining insight into this question is described.

The form of this text is, as indicated in the title, a *Fragment* similar in style to the *Fragmente* published by

Karoline's contemporaries Novalis and Friedrich Schlegel. The text is composed of fifteen numbered fragments, consisting of one or two sentences of prose each. The event is narrated from the perspective of the first person singular, in the past tense. The narrative perspective is therefore similar to that of "Geschichte eines Braminen," which is also told from the perspective of the present. However, whereas the "ich" identifiable in "Geschichte eines Braminen" is named and located as to its geographic, social, and temporal location, the "ich" in this text is extremely elusive. There is no indication of its gender, its social background, the particular or general time of its existence. Thus it represents, in its individuality, a universality by virtue of its undefined existence. Because of its lack of gender, it is difficult to find an appropriate pronoun to refer to the narrating voice of this text. Within this discussion, therefore, the pronoun "it" will be used, in order to suggest the idea of neutrality of gender.

The first fragment locates the "I" in a fairly specific geographic location, and sounds like the beginning of any common, "realistic" narrative. "Ich stand auf einem hohen Fels im Mittelmeer" (Werke I 52). But as soon as the story continues in Fragment #2 and 3, the text takes on a surrealist dimension, demanding that the reader also shift into an imaginative space in which the central focus of the narrative is not plot or character, but where the action is carried by an exploration of an idea. The narrating voice finds itself in a space in which the

"normal" laws of nature are not being obeyed, thus playing havoc with the concept of time as it is normally experienced, yet the voice itself exists outside of this curious phenomenon.

...und Morgen, Mittag, Abend und Nacht, jagten sich, in schwindelnder Eile, um den Bogen des Himmels.

3. Erstaunt sah ich sie sich drehen in wilden Kreisen; mein Puls floh nicht schneller, meine Gedanken bewegten sich nicht rascher, und die Zeit in mir gieng den gewohnten Gang, indes sie ausser mir, sich nach neuem Gesetz bewegte.  
(Werke I 52)

The subject experiences a crucial and frightening separation from its surrounding reality and desires to become a part of this reality, and join in its mad pace.

4. Ich wollte mich hinstürzen in das Morgenroth, oder mich tauchen in die Schatten der Nacht, um mit in ihre Eile gezogen zu werden, und nicht so langsam zu leben; da ich sie aber immer betrachtete, war ich sehr müde und entschlief.  
(Werke I 52)

Again we encounter the poet's recurring idea of the importance of dream and sleep as states of consciousness that allow a kind of perception needed in order to gain insights only realizable with one's "innerer Sinn." Zimmermann says:

Karoline von Günderrode stellt das Bewußtsein, das Seyn, dem Traum und Werden gegenüber. Der Traum bzw. der Schlaf gewährt dabei ähnlich wie die Liebe die Aufhebung des Bewußtseins...Die Auflösung der Bewußtheit steht immer wieder im Mittelpunkt. (100).

In this dream-like state, the narrator experiences space in an unusual way. The sea it sees now is no longer the Mediterranean Sea identified earlier, but a body of water with infinite dimensions:

5. Da sah ich ein weites Meer vor mir, das von keinem Ufer umgeben war, weder im Ost noch Süd noch West, noch Nord: kein Windstoß bewegte die Wellen, aber die unermessliche See bewegte sich doch in ihren Tiefen, wie von

innern Gährungen bewegt.

6. Und mancherlei Gestalten stiegen herauf, aus dem Schoos des tiefen Meeres, und Nebel stiegen empor und wurden Wolken, und die Wolken senkten sich, und berührten in zuckenden Blitzen die gebährenden Wogen.

7. Und immer manichfaltigere Gestalten entstiegen der Tiefe, aber mich ergriffen Schwindel und eine sonderbare Bangigkeit, und meine Gedanken wurden hie hin und dort hin getrieben, wie eine Fackel vom Sturmwind, bis meine Erinnerung erlosch. (Werke I 52)

In this text, the *Strom des Lebens*, so prevalent an image in Karoline's poetry, takes on a vastness both in spacial dimension and in metaphoric significance, not only as the *Urkraft* that constitutes the timeless energy of life, but as the place of origin for all living things. Yet at this point the "I" is still separated from that which it sees. This sense of disconnection engenders anxiety in it. From this state of sleep the narrator enters yet a deeper state of unconsciousness. When the narrator "awakes" again, a change has taken place. Whereas in its earlier state it saw itself as outside the sense of time followed in the environment it observed, it now has also entered an alternative dimension of time and also of being.

8. Da ich aber wieder erwachte, und von mir zu wissen anfieng, wußte ich nicht, wie lange ich geschlafen hatte, ob es Jahrhunderte oder Minuten waren; denn ob ich gleich dumpfe und verworrene Träume gehabt hatte, so war mir doch nichts begegnet, was mich an die Zeit erinnert hätte.

9. Aber es war ein dunkles Gefühl in mir, als habe ich geruht im Schoose diese Meeres und sey ihm entstiegen, wie die andern Gestalten. Und ich schien mir ein Tropfen Tau, und bewegte mich lustig hin und wieder in der Luft, und freute mich, daß die Sonne sich in mir spiegle, und die Sterne mich beschauten. (Werke I 53)

The "I" is, at this point in the narrative, still seeing itself as separate from "the other," even though it feels as though it has emerged from the sea just as the shapes and beings

it has observed emerging from it. But it is still observing itself, along with the other objects in its view: "und ich *schien* mir ein Tropfen Tau" (emphasis added). At the same time, it describes itself and its movements from the perspective of the drop of dew. The narrator is both observing and analyzing itself from the outside and describing its essence from the inside.

10. Ich ließ mich von den Lüften in raschen Zügen dahin tragen, ich gesellte mich zum Abendroth, und zu des Regenbogens siebenfarbigen Tropfen, ich reihte mich mit meinen Gespielen um den Mond wenn er sich bergen wollte, und begleitete seine Bahn.

11. Die Vergangenheit war mir dahin! ich gehörte nur der Gegenwart. Aber eine Sehnsucht war in mir, die ihren Gegenstand nicht kannte, ich suchte immer, aber jedes Gefundene war nicht das Gesuchte, und sehnd trieb ich mich umher im Unendlichen. (Werke I 53)

The longing or *Sehnsucht* the narrator identifies in these words is the characteristic longing so many of Karoline's protagonists express. It is a fierce longing, whose existence is real and powerful, but whose object is elusive. It is not only a longing that the narrator senses periodically; in the last sentence the concept is not expressed as a noun or a subject, but as an adverb describing a state the narrator is in, "und sehnd trieb ich mich umher." In the following three fragments, the narrator names this longing.

12. Einst ward ich gewahr, daß alle die Wesen, die aus dem Meere gestiegen waren, wieder zu ihm zurückkehrten, und sich in wechselnden Formen wieder erzeugten. Mich befremdete diese Erscheinung; denn ich hatte von keinem Ende gewußt. Da dachte ich, meine Sehnsucht sey auch, zurück zu kehren, zu der Quelle des Lebens.

13. Und da ich dies dachte, und fast lebendiger fühlte, als all mein Bewußtseyn, ward plötzlich mein Gemüth wie mit betäubenden Nebeln umgeben. Aber sie schwanden bald, ich schien mir nicht mehr ich, und doch mehr als sonst ich, meine Gränzen konnte ich nicht mehr finden, mein Bewußtsein

hatte sie überschritten, es war größer, anders und doch fühlte ich mich in ihm.

14. Erlöset war ich von den engen Schranken meines Wesens, und kein einzler Tropfen mehr, ich war allem wiedergegeben, und alles gehörte mir mit an, ich dachte, und fühlte, wogte im Meer, glänzte in der Sonne, kreiste mit den Sternen; ich fühlte mich in allem, und genos alles in mir. (Werke 53-54)

The longing the narrator has sensed is similar to the longing the Wanderer felt: a longing to go back to the origin of all life and to merge with this life. Whereas the Wanderer is simply told that he cannot deny his present existence and become another being, but must find everything within himself, in this narrative the speaker actually experiences this advice. It is through a merging of both the rational and the irrational, through conscious thought and unconscious dream, that the narrator achieves a glimpse of *das Ganze* within itself.

It is only at this point that the narrative voice shifts in tone. Although the reader's presence has been assumed throughout the narrative, here he or she is addressed very directly and in the imperative mode. The introduction to the final fragment seems extremely didactic, citing a figure of speech Jesus used when he addressed his followers before holding his sermons. It is a curious and unusual device for Karoline to use, and because of its clash with the tone of the rest of the fragments, draws attention to itself in a harsh way. Yet it is perhaps precisely this that Karoline wants to do, awaken her readers to alert them to the idea she holds to be integral to an understanding of life and literature:

15. Drum, wer Ohren hat zu hören, der höre! Es ist

nicht zwei, nicht drei, nicht tausende, es ist Eins und alles; es ist nicht Körper und Geist geschieden, daß das eine der Zeit, das andere der Ewigkeit angehöre, es ist Eins, gehört sich selbst, und ist Zeit und Ewigkeit zugleich, und sichtbar, und unsichtbar, bleibend im Wandel, ein unendliches Leben. (Werke I 54)

In this narrative the protagonist achieves *Erkenntnis* or a kind of insight not through rational or religious thought, but through experience. Helene Kastinger Riley says:

Kein Mittler belehrt dieses Ich, keine Methode oder Theorie gewährt ihm Anleitung. Die Erfahrung selbst bringt die Erkenntnis. (104-105)

The insight however, is not static. Consistent with Karoline's understanding that harmony can only be achieved through constant striving, the narrating voice of this text also recognizes that the one and all, *das Eins und Alles*, is constant in its change.

## CHAPTER SEVEN: WOMAN'S DESIRE

Many of Karoline's protagonists are either male or, in a few cases such as "Ein apokalyptisches Fragment," neither distinctly male nor female, but Karoline also wrote several texts in which a woman figures not only as a character, but as the central character. Although we can assume that Karoline identified with her male protagonists, and used them to express many of her own questions, it is interesting to look at these texts with a particular focus on the fact that Karoline chooses women as their subjects. The narrative texts that will be discussed in this section all fall into the category of myth or fairy tale. They do not, however, belong to the same set of Germanic fairy tales that Karoline's contemporaries Jakob and Wilhelm Grimm were busy collecting and publishing. Many of the women in the tales the brothers Grimm collected fit into the stereotypic pattern of the passive female awaiting her fate. Often the Grimm brothers also modified the stories they had collected, eliminating erotic elements, and cast their female protagonists into roles that corresponded with the dominant patriarchal code of their time (Zipes xxviii). Do Karoline's heroines also fit into this stereotypic pattern? If not, has Karoline's choice of story and character been deliberate? Is there a conscious decision on Karoline's part to address the issue of gender? Is the desire that is explored in these texts a particularly female desire? In other words, what is significant about the fact that Karoline



chose female characters as subjects for these texts?

The first two texts which will be discussed in this chapter are "Darthula" (Werke I 11) and "Mora" (Werke I 55) which were first published in *Gedichte und Phantasien*. Neither of these texts is explicitly called a *Fragment*, and both have elements of a classical story: background, action, and end. However, they function as fragments in the more archaic sense of the word: remnants from the myths of ancient mythology; these stories echo a much larger body of literature of which they are a part, a body of literature that had not survived in its entirety. The primary source for both "Darthula" and "Mora" is Ossian, a body of poetry based on Celtic lore that had recently been "discovered" in the highlands of Scotland and "translated" into English by James MacPherson. This literature was subject to a great deal of conjecture and controversy because of its nebulous origins and dubious authenticity, but many of Karoline's contemporaries and predecessors like Goethe and Herder were delighted with these texts of Nordic mythology and defended their authenticity with great tenacity. In their movement away from the intense preoccupation with classical mythology, the early Romantic poets seized on these texts as evidence for myth that was closer to their own ethnic origin than classical mythology. The inclusion of this raw material into their writing corresponded with the Romantic ideal of the validation of all art forms and the idea of a *progressive Universalpoesie*. Karoline's interest in this concept of poetry, and her preoccupation with characters of the

past can well explain her use of the Ossian material in these short texts. They exhibit the characteristics of a *Fragment* because they are short excerpts of a larger whole, retold in a voice of the present.

The two tales also follow Karoline's favourite structure of the dialogue. "Darthula" is a narrative poem in rhyming four-line stanzas, which are spoken by various voices. Beginning with the voice of the omniscient narrator, the tale continues, spoken by several of the main characters. "Mora" is a conversation between several characters. Although it is not called a drama, the various speakers involved in the story speak directly to each other, without any narrator connecting the dialogue. Thus the reader gains insight into the story and the characters via the voices of the characters themselves. The dialogical element serves as a narrative tool for Karoline to bring immediacy to the story. It also underlines once again her concept of the possibility of language and poetry to function as a vehicle of connection between the distant, here even mythological, past and the present.

How directly Karoline herself was influenced by these myths, and how she connected what she read with her life and imagination, is evident in a letter she wrote to Gunda Brentano on August 29th, 1801:

Es ist ein häßlicher Fehler von mir dass ich so leicht in einen Zustand des Nichtempfindens verfallen kann, und ich freue mich über iede Sache die mich aus demselben reist. Gestern las ich Ossians Darthula, und es wirkte so angenehm auf mich; der alte Wunsch einen Heldentod zu sterben ergrif mich mit groser heftigkeit; unleidlich war es mir noch zu

leben, unleidlicher ruhig und gemein zu sterben. Schon oft hatte ich den unweiblichen Wunsch mich in ein wildes Schlachtgetümmel zu werfen, zu sterben, Warum ward ich kein Mann! ich habe keinen Sinn für weibliche Tugenden, für Weiberglückseeligkeit. Nur das Wilde Grose, Glänzende gefällt mir. Es ist ein unseliges aber unverbesserliches Misverhältnis in meiner Seele: und es wird und muß so bleiben, denn ich bin ein Weib, und habe Begierden wie ein Mann, ohne Männerkraft. Darum bin ich so wechselnd, und so uneins mit mir. (Preitz II 170).

It is obvious from her letter to Gunda that the story of Darthula occupied Karoline's thoughts. It is not only the subject of heroism and heroic death in general that ignited her imagination. She also makes it quite clear that she is linking her own story with that of the heroine. In her letter she rages about the fact that she was born a woman and cannot partake in the adventures of war and heroic action herself; as an artist she gives poetic expression to this desire. Her clear articulation of the distinction between male and female desires shows how deliberately she chose a female character as the protagonist of the story "Darthula."

In Bettine von Arnim's epistolary novel *Die Gänderode*, Bettine also refers at length to this poem and how it came to be. She remembers vividly how Karoline created it while the two women were braiding each other's hair in the darkness. Karoline would recite a verse, and Bettine would memorize it.

Weißt Du noch, wie ichs Dir still nachsang, was Du so schauerlich mir vorsagtest, und weißt Du wohl, daß da mein Herz ganz voll Thränen war, mehr wie einmal, und heimlich stritt ich mit mir, daß ich stark sein wollt und meine Schmerzen bezwingen?--Ich wollt Dirs nicht zeigen, wie tief das in mich ging:

Denn mein Schwert umgiebt wie Blizes Flügel  
Dich du liebliche, du schönes Licht.  
Wie oft hab ich das gesungen für mich, und war ein Held.

....Ich kann mir unter Collas Tochter immer nur Dich denken;  
(Arnim 91)

This account is interesting for several reasons. In it, the process of the creation of the poem is described. The poem is not being born in a private corner, in an isolated moment; by listening and memorizing, Bettine, as a "reader," is a part of the creative process. The dialogue then takes place not only within the story itself, but between its author and its reader at the moment of its creation. By recalling it at a later time, and identifying with its hero, Bettine continues to partake in the dialogue between the poem and the reader. Furthermore, Bettine not only claims the voice of the heroine and poet for herself, she also reads Karoline into the character of the poem. "Ich kann mir unter Collas Tochter immer nur Dich denken." The story has been "retold" by Karoline, thus the dialogue takes place between original text, retold text, reader, and author. In this way, the text clearly functions as a fragment in what Schlegel would have called a *progressive Universalpoesie*.

Both letters also demonstrate the seriousness with which both Karoline and Bettine took their art. Writing poems was not only an idle activity to fill up their leisure time. Writing and reading to them was a means to discover and name their desires. The natural way in which they include their readings and poetic creations in their letters and conversations, shows how these worlds were linked for them. It is obvious that Karoline's choice of material for her creations was not arbitrary but carefully thought through.

Karoline's sources for the story of Darthula are most likely either Edmund von Harold's *Die Gedichte Ossian's eines alten celtischen Helden und Barden* published in 1775 or Michael Denis' *Ossians und Sineds Lieder* published in 1784 (Morgenthaler III 69). Both are translations of the material published by James MacPherson which he claimed to have discovered in the highlands of Scotland as original fragments of ancient Celtic poetry. Karoline follows these translations both in content and to a certain extent in narrative structure. The translation is a prose narrative; Karoline puts it into verse, but the narrative voices remain true to her sources.

The first few stanzas are spoken in a narrator's voice, which we assume to be the voice of the bard Ossian. The first stanza sets the scene *in medias res*. Nathos and his brothers have set their sails in flight from their enemy Caibar. The second stanza is still spoken by the omniscient bard, but the various characters in the scene are addressed directly. This is how Darthula is introduced to the reader:

Wer? o Nathos! ist an deiner Seite!  
 Traurig seufzt im Wind ihr braunes Haar  
 Lieblich ist sie, wie der Geist der Lüfte,  
 Eingehüllt in leichte Nebeldüfte;  
 Schön vor allen Collas Tochter war. (Werke I 11)

The heroine enters the story in a passive way: she is spoken about, we are told she is beautiful, desired, and is sitting at her lover's side. Both are fleeing their enemy Caibar, who has fallen in love with Darthula, his captured prize. However, Darthula does not remain passive. The narrator allows her to tell

her own story. In the midst of this terrifying voyage, the narrator tells the wind:

Aber schweiget noch ein wenig Winde!  
 Ueberbraust Darthulas Stimme nicht! (Werke I 12)

These two lines are Karoline's own insertion into the narrative. In MacPherson's text Darthula tells her story too, but these two lines preceding her monologue are missing in his translation (MacPherson 345) and most likely in the version Karoline was following. There is a sense of anxiety in these lines, a fear that the heroine will not be heard, that her voice will be drowned in the noisy action around her. It is a similar anxiety to the one with which Karoline lived daily. "Mitteilung ist mir Bedürfnis" she wrote to Clemens Brentano, when he questioned her about her having had her poems published, and at countless other times she expressed this desire to speak, to create, and to be heard. In the letter to Gunda cited above, there is also a strong sense of anxiety, an intense frustration with the restrictions and limitations her society placed on her gender.

In her monologue (lines 51-100) Darthula tells Nathos of how she came to meet him. It is an unusual story to the ears of a twentieth century Western woman and even more so for a lady of the eighteenth century. Darthula tells of the battle in her homeland, how her father, mourning the loss of his sons and warriors, saw Darthula as his last hope. Darthula does not assume that this means she will have to marry someone powerful in order to restore her father's status. She offers to go to war for him. Her words reveal not only a sense of duty or desperation or

filial love, there is also a sense of delight and pride in her desire to wield a weapon.

O! so schütze mich der Jagden Bogen  
Glücklich oftmahls meine Pfeile flogen,  
Tödlich für das dunkelbraune Wild. (Werke I 13)

And her father's response is not one of horror at such a suggestion, rather he is excited and proud:

Freud umstrahlt den Greisen. Ja Darthula!  
Deine Seele brennt in Truthils Glut,  
Geh', ergreif das Schwerdt vergangner Schlachten!  
(Werke I 13)

Karoline does not make her characters' actions and responses fit in with the stereotypic responses of her social contemporaries. The joy with which Darthula's father celebrates his daughter's desire to become a hero was a response Karoline could only dream of as a response by a senior male member of her society's to her own desire to defy convention and take an active (and thus male) role in her own life. Even while he is praising her first book of poetry, Clemens Brentano complains that Karoline's poetry is too "androgynous" to be any good. It perplexes and therefore disturbs him. On one occasion Karoline declared herself willing to disguise herself as a man so she could accompany Creuzer on his travels to Russia. The few friends to whom she revealed this plan wrote the idea off as absurd and absolutely unthinkable.

Darthula continues her tale. Her father is defeated in spite of her efforts. Stunned by the sight of her dying father, she pauses in battle, lets her guard down, as it were. And then her sex betrays her.

Ach! umsonst bedeckt von meinem Schilde,

Sank der Vater mir im Schlachtgefilde,  
Und in heißen Thränen schwamm mein Blick.

Treulos zeigte da des Mädchens Busen,  
Caibar mein zerissenes Gewand;  
Freundlich naht er, sprach der Liebe  
Führte mich zu meiner Väter Pforte,  
Aber Trauer meine Stirn umwand. (Werke I 14)

Her torn gown reveals her gender and immediately she becomes someone who can be desired and possessed. Caibar falls in love with her and wants to take her prisoner. But she does not become completely powerless. She meets Nathos, they fall in love with each other and together they flee Caibar's wrath.

If the daring courage of a woman to go to war for her people comes as a surprise to a "modern" female reader, the betrayal does not. As long as her outer appearance is disguised, or hidden in some way, a woman can follow her "masculine" inclinations without criticism or danger. But when a woman's gender is established, she is immediately locked into an identity which dictates passive behaviour. In this story, the female body acts as a signifier of difference. Karoline's careful choice of a pseudonym that would not reveal her gender was a similarly fruitless attempt to keep readers' prejudgment at bay. The first review of her book was full of veiled and direct comments more preoccupied with the gender of the author than with the content of the book.

Unter den stillverhallenden Tönen mögen manche zarte, reine, das Gemüth innig ansprechende seyn, die unter dem Lärmen und Getreibe des gemeinen Lebens nicht laut werden können!-- Solche sind es, welche jetzt schüchtern, und doch mit stillem Ernste und ruhig, in *Tians Gedichten und Phantasien* den Deutschen aufbewahrt werden. -- Ein schönes, zartes, weibliches Gemüth offenbaret sich darin, und erregt



Erwartungen für die Zukunft, wenn es sich nicht in Mystik und Modepoesie verfitzt.

Eine etwas alberne Anpreisung in einem öffentlichen Blatte, welches ein Fräulein von Güntherode als Verfasserin nannte, machte mich aufmerksam auf das Büchelchen, ohne eben sonderliche Erwartungen zu erregen.

...Möchte die Verfasserin doch die Bitte eins ihr unbekanntes Freundes hören...möchte sie in Zukunft nur dem Guten und Schönen huldigen, herrlich, frei und fessellos in eigener Schönheit wandeln, und die Schnürbrust wie die Hanswurstensjacke verschmähen; möge sie sich nie gewaltsam heben, nie in die Tiefen einer finstern Mystik versinken, und lieber in der ihr eignen Sphäre des innigen Gefühls, der schönen und zarten Darstellung bleiben: sie wird desto reizender dichten, je freier sie es thut.  
(Morgenthaler III 61-62)

Karoline was not at all pleased with the review; it was especially the fact that her identity had been revealed that bothered her. She wrote to her friend Karl von Savigny:

Man ist hier ganz fest überzeugt ich sei Tian, und alles läugnen will nichts helfen. Im Freimüthigen steht eine Rezension die ich Euch hir, der Schlechtigkeit wegen, mitschikke, ein gewisser Herr Englemann Hofmeister allhier ist deren Verfasser. Daß der gute Mann Hofmeister ist habe ich gleich gemerkt, seine Amtsmine sieht sehr durch das grobe Gewebe hindurch. (Preitz II 200)

The reviewer has definite ideas of what a woman should write about and is quite direct in his accusation that she has overstepped her boundaries by writing about subjects that do not fit into the "sphere of the tender and beautiful."

When Darthula has finished telling her story, Nathos' responding words bring the story back to the present time of narration. He tells her:

Meine Seele glänzte in Gefahren  
Eh' ich dich, du schönes Licht! gesehn.  
Aber unsre Segel sind betrogen,  
Und du wirst in ihrer Nacht vergehn. (Werke I 14)

Nathos is losing hope and courage. It is once more Darthula who

inspires her lover to act by hurling herself into the scene of action herself. The thought of being Caibar's possession is more horrible than death.

Nathos! reiche mir das Schwerdt der Tapfern,  
 Vater! ich will deiner würdig seyn,  
 In des Stahles Treffen werd' ich gehen,  
 Nimmer Caibars düstre Hallen sehen,  
 Nein! ihr Geister meiner Liebe! nein! (Werke I 15)

This time she does not disguise herself, but enters the war at Nathos' side and challenges Caibar and his men. Nathos regains his strength and courage. However, it is a short battle; Nathos and his brothers are felled like trees. Speechless, Darthula gazes at her beautiful lover who is dead. Caibar mocks her:

Ha! entrannst du auch des Sturmes Flügel,  
 Ueber Selma hätte meine Schlacht gebrüllt.

Caibar sprach. Da rauscht ein Pfeil, getroffen  
 Sinkt sie, und ihr Schild stürzt vor sie hin. (Werke I 16)

Darthula is not victorious. Although she has temporarily stepped outside her gender and assumed an identity that allows her to act, she is nevertheless defeated. It almost seems as though, by telling this story, Karoline is subscribing to the master narrative that dictates inevitable defeat to the woman who attempts to defy its structure. But Darthula's death need not be interpreted as defeat. What makes Darthula a hero is the fact that she chooses what she will fight for, and acts upon her choice. Karoline's concern is the recreation of a powerful female character who followed her desire and was willing to fight and die rather than to live as a captured prisoner.

The poem ends with a beautiful lament to the finality of

death sung by Caibar's bards to Darthula:.

Collas Tochter sank zum Schlafe nieder  
O! wann grüßest du den Morgen wieder?  
Schöngelockte! wirst du lange ruhn?

Weit entfernet ist dein Morgen, nimmer!  
Stehst du mehr in deiner Schönheit auf;  
Ach! die Sonne tritt nicht an dein Bette,  
Sprich, erwach aus deiner Ruhestätte!  
Collas schöne Tochter! steig herauf!

Junges Grün entkeimet schon dem Hügel,  
Frühlingslüfte fliegen drüber her.  
Sonne birg in Wolken deinen Schimmer!  
Denn sie schläft, der Frauen Erste! nimmer  
Kehret sie in ihrer Schönheit mehr.  
(Werke I 17)

The finality of Darthula's death is juxtaposed with the cyclical recurrence of life in nature. It is a bleak view of death; although the meadows are greening again, there seems to be no hope for Darthula ever to return to life. Yet Darthula's death signifies a certain kind of triumph. Both Christa Wolf (51) and Margarethe Lazarowicz (80) point out the distinction that Karoline makes between death and non-life. For Darthula, death is better than a life of bondage and subservience to someone she does not love. To Karoline, death is preferred to a life in which she is not allowed to give artistic expression to her desires, a life in which she is constantly put in her place. Karoline did not stop writing even after she was received with criticism and told she must stay within the boundaries dictated to her as a member of the female gender. It was the act of honest writing she was concerned with, for to deny this desire would be admitting defeat, would be living a "non-life".

It is significant that "Darthula" appears as the first poem

in the first anthology of poetry Karoline published. The circumstances of the editing process are not known to us, but one can guess that the author would have had some say in the selection of the order of the poems. It is precisely this story that Karoline wants to tell: of a woman, consumed with passion, who does not succumb to paralyzing inactivity, but who acts. It is a story that she tells several times in various ways. In a way, it is the story of her own life. Karoline did not take up arms and go to war, but she took her pen and wrote. It was a daring act for a woman of her time to give artistic shape to her fears, her dreams, her nightmares, to have these works published and to demand that they be taken seriously by her readers. The act of writing, even if, as in the case of "Darthula," a tale is being retold, is a courageous and a significant act.

Another narrative with a similar heroic character in *Gedichte und Phantasien* is the short drama entitled "Mora" (Werke I 55). The source for this story is not as explicitly Ossian, although Naumann points out that many of its elements are reminiscent of the Ossian stories (35-37). The names Carul, Frothal and Karmor all appear in various of Ossian's songs, the content is also similar to a specific song, and some instances of metaphoric language are also Ossian's (Naumann 35-36). However, it seems that although Karoline used Ossian as her inspiration, here she has created an original text based on various fragments of the myths of Ossian. What is of interest is that once again Karoline tells the story of a strong heroic female character.

The play begins with the song of the bards Carul and Thormod. Carul praises the forces of spring and light; Thormod counters his song with an eerie description of the forces of darkness, which, even in this season filled with light and life, return every night and silence the singing of the birds. Thormod's description of night is an example of Karoline's ability to evoke a powerful atmosphere with the use of visual images and verbs and adjectives that are resonant with sound and feeling. The mystery of night and the fear and uncanniness it inspires is vivid in this paragraph. It also contains the characteristic of a dialogue, in that the echo and the owl are involved in a mysterious kind of conversation.

Sahst du den Abend herabsteigen ... langsam sind seine Schritte, dunkel sein Gewand von Wolken. Er steigt herauf über die Wälder und Berge, wie die Geister der Verstorbenen aus ihren Gräbern. Da verstummen die Vögel, kühle Schauer durchzucken alles Leben, feuchte Nebeldünste versammeln sich. Nur der Wiederhall seufzt durch die Nacht, nur die Unke des Sumpfs, und die krächzende Eule unterreden sich mit ihm. (Werke I 55)

But Carul counters this song praising the moon, the stars, the life that belongs to the night:

Aber die Sterne kommen und lächeln freundlich, und die glänzenden Locken des Mondes, seine grünlichen Strahlen erleuchten die Erde. Nicht alles Leben verstummt in der Nacht, die Lüfte des Abends säuseln, der Wasserfall murmelt melodisch; und das Land der Träume öffnet seine Thore, und die lieblichen Kinder der Gedanken flattern herauf, und küssen die Stirnen der Schlummernden. (Werke I 56)

Karoline plays with the dichotomy of day and night in much of her writing, using it as a metaphor for various opposing concepts. In this story the association is vague, but it can be seen as a way to introduce the subject of male and female principles. In almost

all ancient religions, the moon is associated with the female principle because of its link with the female menstrual cycle (Walker 669). In Greek and Roman mythology the moon goddess Diana, or Artemis, was known as the triple goddess: Lunar Virgin, Mother of Creatures and the Huntress (Walker 233). Even though this tale is not based on one identifiable mythology, the poet's song of praise to the moon and its territory is a fitting way to introduce the story of a female warrior. In this passage, the poet dispels the claim that night is only mysterious and dangerous, but celebrates its mysterious charm and life-giving energy.

In "Darthula" Karoline also incorporates the forces of nature into her tale. There the winds and the waves are an integral part of the story, to the extent that the narrator addresses them in the same way she addresses the characters. In this tale too, the natural world functions not only as backdrop to the action, but propels the story forward. It is the stormy night that causes Frothal to lose his way in the forest, and brings him to Mora's light and love.

Sieh! durch die Nacht sendet ein freundliches Licht den bleichen Schimmer, es ist das Licht von Mora, der schönen Tochter von Torlat. Ihre gastliche Hütte empfängt den irrenden Wand'rer, und ihre Schönheit umfängt das Herz des Königs. Da war Frothal nicht verirrt, als er irrte zu dem lieblichen Mädchen. (Werke I 56)

Night, the territory of dreams and subconscious perception, is the state which brings Frothal, lost and searching, to Mora's shimmering light. Mora, the heroine of the story, embraces him with her light and warmth. The poet's delightful play with the

words "empfangen" and "umfangen" give Mora an erotic energy, and the understated description of Frothal's response to this layered embrace is equally playful: "Da war Frothal nicht verirrt."

Mora's eroticism corresponds with one of the characteristics of the moon goddess. As the story unfolds, Mora also plays the role of the seer, and hunter. Woman as prophetess is also a recurring theme in many ancient mythologies. In a dream, Mora is warned that Frothal will be killed. When Frothal asks her to go hunting with him, she is hesitant, because she believes in the power of her dream. Frothal does not heed her warning. His response is typical of the set of values we associate with male heroes. He boasts that love and honour are all he asks of life, an honourable death is not a death at all. Mora's response is: "Stirbst du mit Ruhm und Liebe, so starbst du doch Frothal für mich" (Werke I 57). At this moment the circumstances of his death are immaterial to her. They will not change the result: his absence in her life. Mora demonstrates a kind of wisdom and insight that contrasts with Frothal's youthful optimism and spontaneity.

Frothal does not ponder Mora's words. He insists she go with him. The natural assumption, that the hunt is something she enjoys and excels in, is evident in his words:

Komm zur muntern Jagd, nimm die Waffen der Könige  
Scandiaviens daß du glänzt im Stahle der Helden, und  
folge mir Mädchen. (Werke 57)

It is as if Karoline also accepts the possibility that a woman might be as adept at the hunt as anything else; she does not try

to squeeze her female hero into a "feminine" figure acceptable to her contemporary social norms as some of her contemporaries did, notably popular mythologists.

The next scene begins with a sense of foreboding. Frothal is asleep, but Mora is awake, worried and alone. Mora says:

Die Nacht ist verbraust auf den waldigen Höhen, und Frothal schlummert so süß in der Höhle des Felsen. Ach! mir gab die Jagd nicht Freude, die Ermüdung nicht Schlummer. Meine Seele ist traurig, mein Herz klopft ängstlicher und Frothal schlummert so süß. (Werke I 56)

Naumann points out that Karoline is expressing her own experience of the utter loneliness one senses at the side of a sleeping lover (39). It is indeed a vivid image of the terrifying proximity of the act of love, the ultimate experience of intimacy between two people, and the loneliness that it cannot conquer. The scene also has a more immediate function: to foreshadow the final sleep that will forever sever the two lovers from each other.

While Frothal is sleeping, Karmor appears at the mouth of the cave in which the lovers are resting. He cannot see the two lovers, as he is outside the cave, and challenges Frothal to a duel. He claims he loves Mora and wishes to fight for her. Mora does not react with panic, nor does she waken her lover. Rather, she answers him in a calm, rational way. "Sie wählt ihn, und nicht dich. Was nutzt dir der Kampf? was hilft dir der Sieg?" (Werke I 57) But, similar to Frothal earlier, Karmor is fixated on his immediate desires, and is not capable of reflection. It does not seem to matter to him that Mora will not love him any



more whether Frothal is dead or not. To him Mora is a prize to be fought for. It is the fight that excites him, it is the only way he can express his desire. Mora does not continue to argue. But instead of waking Frothal, she puts on his shield, and disguised as Frothal, she takes on Karmor in a duel. Her last words are:

Komm, mich dürstet nach Kampf, mein Muth jauchzt der Gefahr entgegen, komm! (Werke I 58)

There is a curious ambiguity in these words. Mora speaks them, yet she is assuming Frothal's voice. The words are certainly in character with Frothal's earlier excitement about going to hunt. Yet there is a sense of bitter mockery here too: he has not grasped the seriousness of death itself, whereas she has a much deeper fear and understanding of its finality. There is also the possibility of reading her words literally. Perhaps there is also in Mora a desire to be the hero, perhaps she senses a true delight in hurling herself into the action, not unlike the sense of delight in the challenge of war Karoline expresses in her letter to Gunda.

The result is that Mora falls in battle; a dumbfounded Frothal awakens to the awful truth that his love is asleep forever. Mora's prophetic statement: "Stirbst du mit Ruhm und Liebe, so starbst du doch Frothal für mich" is echoed in the ironic twist of the ending. It is Mora who dies for Frothal, and even more poignantly, it is Mora who fights and dies for herself.

Death and love are almost always partners in Karoline's works. But again, as in "Darthula," the heroine does not die a death of resignation. She does not welcome death; she does not

desire to die; she does not give in to a sense of powerlessness in its face. But neither does she succumb to a paralyzing fear of its power. Mora faces it with dread, but with courage. Rather than sit back and watch others determine the outcome of her life, she steps into the action and becomes a vital force in the story of her own fate.

The poem ends not with a song of praise for the courage of this woman, but with a song of lament for the finality of death, a place from which one cannot return.

Schön ists zu wandeln, im Lichte des Lebens, aber eng ist  
das Grab und finster, ewig der Schlummer, darum weinet um  
Mora, denn sie kehrt nicht wieder zum Lichte. (Werke I 59)

Karoline's own suicide was subject to a great deal of conjecture. Some critics seemed to think that her preoccupation with death was naive and melodramatic, a Romantic impulse she acted upon without much consideration; that she did not really understand the finality of her act of suicide. But this young writer, who at the time of writing this poem had not even met Creuzer, is well aware of the narrowness of the grave, of the finality of the sleep of death. Even though they look death squarely in the eye, knowing and respecting its power, Karoline's heroines do not flee into the security of inertia, passively witnessing the unfolding of events around them.

Another one of Karoline's early works dealing with a female protagonist is the short mythical tale entitled "Timur" (Werke I 18). It appears as the second piece in *Gedichte und Phantasien*, following "Darthula," and thus belongs to the same set of

narratives that was inspired by Karoline's reading of Ossian. However, the sources for this story are not as obviously Ossian. Naumann sees elements of various mythological roots here: only one name appears in Ossian, the landscape is somewhat nordic, yet the castle and other mythical elements, (a black horse, a prophetess with a mirror) seem to be taken from a variety of fairly separate mythical territories (40). We can assume, then, that Karoline created this story to suit her own fancy, retaining the form of fairy tale.

As in the previously discussed narratives, a female figure is also at the heart of the action in this story. She too determines the unravelling of the plot, first by convincing her father to free Timur, his prisoner, whom she has fallen in love with, and then by avenging her father's murder by killing Timur and herself.

What is particularly fascinating about this story, however, is not so much the plot itself, nor only the theme of female heroic action. The dreamlike quality the story attains both in the narration itself and in the various magical phenomena that occur invite a reading that goes beyond mere plot and character. Veils, mirrors, locked rooms, unfound doors, dreams, smoke, unseen powers, shimmering shades of light, sensual music pervade the story. There is a constant sense of the blurring between appearance and reality. Erotic desire and its lack of fulfilment is the driving force in this mysterious story. It seems that Karoline, although preoccupied with heroic action, finds herself

exploring female eroticism in a much more concentrated, if veiled way than in the stories of Mora and Darthula.

One of the first characters the reader meets is the prophetess who lives in a cave "at the entrance of the earth." Naumann says the prophetess resembles one of the nordic "Nornen"; the mirror seems to derive from Egyptian mythology (40). Recent research maintains that almost all pre-patriarchal religions saw the earth as female and in many religions the presence of female holy women and prophetesses who possessed the gift of seeing into the future abounded. It does not matter so much to know in which specific tales Karoline found these elements, but it is important to see that she was definitely interested in female figures, not only heroic mortals, but also deities and powerful women who were the keepers of wisdom, knowledge and secrets. It is in the character of the prophetess that the reader of *Gedichte und Phantasien* first sees a representation of Karoline's other great longing for wisdom, knowledge, understanding. It is significant that this character is female and that the only mortal the prophetess reveals her secrets to is also female, Thia, the heroine of the story. In Karoline's world there were few female role models young female aspiring writers could look up to or learn from. There were certainly no female professors, even the idea of a woman becoming a student at a place of higher learning was unheard of. Thus it seems natural that Karoline must look beyond her immediate culture and even beyond the patriarchal master narratives that inform it if she is to find a space from

which to write her tales of powerful women. Pre-patriarchal mythology and religion allows her a space in which she can include its elements, yet spin her individual tale with authenticity.

Although the prophetess and her knowledge of the deep secrets of the universe is an interesting part of the story, she is not at the centre of it. She leads Thia on the path of erotic desire, but she is soon abandoned as Thia, once infected, follows her ecstatic vision until her death. It is in the magic mirror of the prophetess that Thia first sees Timur, the prince her father has captured and imprisoned after having usurped his father's throne. Thia's first reaction to the sight of Timur is sensual: "Thia konnte ihre Augen nicht sättigen an dem Anblik des Gefangnen" (Werke I 18), and after this glimpse she follows the command of her hungry eyes distractedly. Karoline depicts Thia's passionate unfulfilled desire by creating vivid graphic images of Thia scrambling around the steep cliffs surrounding the castle, searching for hidden doors, stretching her body to invisible arms. Thia searches for an entrance in vain; the prison bars are hidden behind brambles and thickets. The layers separating Thia from the fulfilment of her desire are as restricting and frustrating as the rigidity of the rules and codes of social behaviour containing any corsetted *Stiftsfräulein* of nineteenth-century Germany. Erotic desire is also suggested in the image of Thia drenched in dew and enveloped by the night wind as she sits, mesmerized with longing, at the window of Timur's cell. Karoline

even names the time of Thia's daily visits in erotic terms: in the morning before people awake, and in the evening when dusk hides the acts of love within her veiled cloak.

Gedankenvoll eilte Thia zurück zu der väterlichen Burg, und suchte allenthalben nach einer Thüre die zu Timurs Kerker führen möchte. Im Nord war die Burg von rauhen Felsen umgeben, die bis zum Meere hinabreichte, in diesen Felsen entdeckte Thia, zwischen Gesträuch und Nebeln versteckt, ein Gitter, das eine dunkle Tiefe verschloß; dies Gitter hatte sie in dem Zauberspiegel gesehen; und jeden Morgen ehe die Bewohner des Schlosses erwachten, und jeden Abend wenn die milde Dämmerung die Thaten der Liebe in ihre Schleyer verbarg, gieng sie dahin, setzte sich trauernd neben das Gitter, und seufzte: Timur! Timur! und ihr war als kämen liebe unsichtbare Arme aus dem Gitter herauf und hielten sie umschlungen, daß sie die Stelle nicht verlassen konnte, und es nicht achtete daß der rauhe Nachtwind sie umwehte, und der Thau des Himmels sie benetzte. (Werke I 19)

This is a full portrait of female erotic desire; the female lover is the actor, the pursuer. There is a direct reversal of roles found in the traditional fairy tales: it is not beautiful, powerless Rapunzel captured impassively in a tower waiting to be freed by the active heroic Prince. It is the man who is desired, the woman who has the power to walk around freely and plot a way to free him from his imprisonment.

Timur has been in prison for two years, and seems to have approached a state of hallucination or semi-consciousness, in which he no longer can determine what is real and what is imagined. Just as he has given up dreaming of escape and freedom, he begins to hear a sweet voice murmuring his name, he senses kisses which disappear when he awakes in the morning.

Aber wenn er erwachte vergingen die rosigten Wangen in Kerkernacht, die hellen Locken erbleichten, die Küsse verglühten, doch die süße Stimme flüsterte fort, und er wußte nicht, ob der Traum wirklich, oder das wirklich

Scheinende, Traum sey. (Werke I 19)

In a way Timur also represents repressed erotic desire in general. Not only is Thia prohibited from actually kissing and loving the object of her desire, her desire itself is in a state of imprisonment, buried underneath impenetrable circumstances. Even after Thia has found that she has sexual desires, she cannot release them, nor does the desire itself know whether it is real or imagined.

At this point the narrative continues in a less dreamlike state. Thia decides to act. She approaches her father Ermar, and tells him of Timur's thoughts of revenge. Her father is unmoved, Timur powers are bound and imprisoned, he says, how can he possibly act? But Thia insists that the prophetess has foreseen danger for Ermar, and that by freeing Timur and allowing her to marry him, Ermar will ensure his own prosperity, and peace for the land. She even goes so far as to threaten her own father, should he persist in keeping Timur from her. Finally she promises that, should Timur turn against her father, she will seduce him and kill him.

The story returns to Timur's cell, where he is inspired by a voice to avenge his father's murder. And so, the moment he is freed and sees Ermar, he lunges for him and hurls him from the cliff, "daß sein Blut hinunter rauchte bis zur See" (Werke I 20). The people are jubilant, and celebrate him as their rightful ruler.

The rest of the tale tells of Thia's revenge. It is not

instant, but it is mysterious, veiled, calculated. She first appears to Timur at night, and identifies herself as the woman who came to see him in his prison cell, who is responsible for his freedom and who will now punish him for his betrayal. Then she disappears and remains absent for a long time. Timur is troubled, a strange sadness envelops his days. Karoline's poetic skills are evident in the passage where she blends the vivid description of the sounds, sights and atmosphere of a raw northern winter landscape with the state of Timur's spirit:

...einsam stand er auf seinen Felsen, und sahe, und vernahm nichts als die Schrecken des nahenden Winters. Der Himmel war mit schweren Wolken bedeckt, eisigte Regen fielen herab, der Nordwind zerwühlte den Wald und trieb die Falben blätter in wilden Wirblen umher, die Brandung brauste an der Küste, und der krächzende Rabe unterredete sich mit dem Wiederhall. Monde vergingen so, und immer fielen kalte Regen und Schnee und der Himmel blieb dunkel wie die Seele von Timur...  
(Werke I 21)

Finally Timur's friends convince him to turn his thoughts to war and conquest. Timur is persuaded and spends months in the noise of war, the wild celebrations of conquest surrounded by fire, music, sexual delights. Then one night he is visited by a silent figure, she embraces him, covers him with passionate kisses, but disappears again. This happens three nights in a row. In the final night he tries to hold her, swearing he will not release her until he has discovered her identity and married her, but she tells him to let her go, and to follow a black horse at night which will bring him to a place where all will be revealed.

Timur obeys and the story once again takes on the characteristic of a dream or a fairy tale. The black horse takes



Timur to a brilliantly lit palace, where Timur is led into a large hall illuminated dimly by a halfmoon. The description of the light in this room is charged with erotic splendour:

Eine milde Dämmerung herrschte, denn nur ein Halbmond über einem Becken in das sich duftendes balsamisches Wasser stürzte erleuchtete das Zimmer mit wechselndem Schimmer, bald glänzte der Mond in dunklem Purpur, dann in blassem Rosenroth, dann wieder blau wie der Bogen des Himmels, dann endlich wie der grüne Schmelz der Wiesen. (Werke I 22)

But the description that follows is even more powerfully erotic. Timur finds himself surrounded by beautiful, exotic women with flowers in their hair, perfume in their breath, satin revealing voluptuous bodies. He is dazzled by them but he knows the woman he desires is not among them.

In this passage, Karoline pulls out all the stops, as it were. This is no longer a subtle suggestion of the power of erotic desire, veiled or suggestive. The language is heavy with blatant sexual images, sounds, smells, the syntax loaded with sexual energy. There is a sense of orgasmic motion in the description of the music which swells in waves surrounding the young man.

Plötzlich glänzte das Wasser wie die Sonne und goß breite Lichtströme durch den Saal; eine Musik, wie Orgeltöne, ließ sich hören, eine liebliche Stimme begleitete die rauschenden Harmonien und schwebte über ihnen, wie eine leichte Frühlingsluft schwebt über dem brausenden Meer, aber die Töne wurden stärker und stärker, und verschlangen die Stimme in Wogen von Wohllaut. Die Mädchen umgaben den Jüngling, sprachen ihm freundlich zu, und jede sandte ihm heiße Blicke, als sey jede die Geliebte der Nacht gewesen. (Werke I 22)

Next, Timur is led into a huge banquet hall filled with beautiful women sitting at tables laden with food and wine, who entice him

with their eyes and rosy lips. But Timur has eyes only for the single figure sitting in the corner of the hall. She is dressed in black, and her body is heavily veiled. When the meal has finally ended and the women have gone, he finds himself alone with this mysterious black figure. The lights dim, the woman beckons him and he follows her through the strange labyrinth of underground passages, up to a cliff illuminated by the full moon. Timur recognizes the place: it is the same spot from which he threw Ermar on the day of his escape. The dark figure removes her veil and he sees that she is Thia. She embraces him, calling out to the spirit of her father, and throws herself and him down the cliff, "daß ihr Blut sich mischte, und hinab rauchte zur wogenden See" (Werke I 23). The curious and powerful use of the image of "smoking blood" is repeated to recall the death of Ermar.

That is the end of this story. It is a story of erotic desire and betrayal. Thia is betrayed on the one level by her lover, but on a far deeper level she is betrayed by her own sexuality. It is a sexuality that is repressed and hidden, and the only way it can manifest itself is by killing her. This is a bleak reading of the story, but it is not surprising when one considers the rules of propriety which governed the author's life. In 1797 Karoline's grandmother wrote to her:

Ich zweifle gar nicht, daß du liebes Megden dein Betragen so einrichten würdest, daß du uns alle Ehre magst und dir hierin die größte. Auch immer so dein Vertrauen zeigst, sowohl der Fräulein Pröbstin wie Fräulein Gredel, was schicklich oder nicht Schicklich ist. Disis sind vernünftige Menschen. Daß Nächtliche laufen bringt keine Ehre, weil sich alsdann hier und da Etwas anfedelt, wo durch ich nichts gewönne nein, vielmehr meine Ehre, Wo doch ein Medgen, und Jeder

Vernünftige alles aufsetzen mus ins Spiel setzen. Ach gott regiere dich mit dem heiligen Geist, werde und Sey eine recht Schaftene Christin, so würst du dich auch bestreben eine Tugendhafte Person Zusein und daß gehet über alles. Hast du noch Liebe vor mich, so verwürf meine Ermahnung nicht und denke daran, wenn ich schon lange Erkald bin, Gott Seegene dich. (von Dülmen, ed. 171)

Karoline lived in a country and century in which women were expected to be wives, mothers and housekeepers. Von Dülman's *Frauenleben im 18. Jahrhundert* contains a vast collection of excerpts of letters, essays, and various handbooks regarding the life of women in Germany in the 18th century. Among others, the topics are: marriage, motherhood, education, old age. Again and again we read how women are expected to be loyal to their husbands, hard working, virtuous, proper. But nowhere do these authors touch upon the issue of female sexuality, unless it is in a negative way: women who are adulterous or promiscuous are chastised for their "unnatural" and wicked behaviour. Reading this book, one gets the impression that women have no sexual desire at all. Even today, the topic of sexuality in literature is still regarded as sensitive in the world of publishing. How much more difficult for a writer, especially a female unmarried writer, to write about this taboo topic in 1804 in Germany.

It is indeed a significant story for Karoline to write. Not only is the topic of sexuality explored, but it is a specifically female sexuality that is addressed here. Karoline's words to Gunda: "nur das Wilde, Glänzende gefällt mir" receive an added dimension after having read this story. Perhaps the "Begierden wie ein Mann" she speaks about also include the desire

to live out her sexual desires like a man who is allowed by society freely to pursue the object of his desires.

All three heroines discussed above are central to the stories and their actions determine the outcome of their lives. However, all three take only tentative steps towards autonomy. In the drama "Hildgund" (Werke I 87), published in Karoline's second volume, *Poetische Fragmente*, the poet creates a powerful female figure who not only acts, but articulates her desire to step out of the confines her society has subjected her to because of her female gender. It is this drama that demonstrates clearly Karoline's specific preoccupation with the issue of gender roles.

In the review of *Poetische Fragmente* which appeared in the journal *Der Freimüthige oder Ernst und Scherz*, shortly after the book's publication in May of 1805, the reviewer addresses the fact that the title of the book contains the word *Fragmente* in his critical discussion of the drama "Hildgund."

Der erste Artikel heißt Hildegund und besteht aus einigen ziemlich nachlässig versificirten Scenen ohne Anfang und Ende - und Inhalt. Eine Burgundische Prinzessin ist mit ihrem Liebhaber von Attila's Hofe (wie sie dahin kam, erfährt man nicht,) nach Hause entflohn. Attila ... fordert sie zurück, um sie zu heirathen. Sie willigt ein, aber mit dem Vorsatz, ihn zu erstechen, und - da ist das poetische Gemachsel zu Ende. "Aber der Titel verspricht ja nur Fragmente." Freilich, aber ein Fragment, das man dem Publikum mittheilt, muß, wenn auch nur ein *Theil* eines *größern* Ganzen, doch auch für sich eine Art von Vollendung haben, wenigstens die Situation ganz begränzen, die sein Inhalt ist. Fragmente, bei denen das nicht der Fall ist, herausgeben, ist unbescheiden, wenn sie nicht etwa zu dem Nachlaß eines großen Dichters gehören und ausgezeichneten poetischen Werth haben, was bei diesem gar nicht der Fall ist. (Morgenthaler III, 110)

The reviewer's concept of the term *Fragment* conforms with the

older understanding that it is literally an unfinished text which belongs to a greater body of literature. If this is not the case, it must nevertheless be a "finished" and "whole" text, even though it is called a *Fragment*. The reviewer's use of this term does not correspond with Schlegel and Novalis' much more loosely defined concept of what a *Fragment* can contain. According to their definition, "Hildgund" can be called a *Fragment* not only because of its unconventional ending, but also because of its intertextuality.

Karoline uses various sources for this tale. According to the critic Regen, she has retold parts of a novel called *Attila, König der Hunnen* by Ignaz Aurelius Feßler published in 1794 (Morgenthaler III 116). This novel in turn is based on both the legends of Attila and Waltharius. This is more likely one of the reasons Karoline called this and the other texts in this collection *Fragmente*. Her notion of entering into the community of artists by publishing her works included the idea of listening and responding to previously written texts. As far as the reviews' claims regarding the imperfection of form are concerned, one must remember Karoline's central concept of striving towards perfection articulated in her *Fragment* "Die Vortreflichkeit ist ein Ganzes, wir haben sie nicht..."

The reviewer's principle claims against this text are its "lack of an ending," presumably because the play ends with Hildgund's intention to kill Attila, but the reader never finds out whether or not she actually commits this murder. The reviewer

is locked into the view that a narrative's primary purpose is to unravel a plot, and thereby to fulfil the reader's expectation of finding out "what happens." However, if one considers the intention of the story to be an investigation of gender roles and the question of the responsibility of individuals to their society, then the focus is shifted away from the actual deed itself, and to the conflict that takes place in the decision making process. The desire inscribed in this text, *das Streben*, consists of the conflict within the heroine who, finding herself in a difficult situation, must and wishes to make important decisions that will greatly affect her own life and the lives of her loved ones. Hildgund comes to a decision, and in that way the play has indeed ended for the reader who is interested in how she will arrive at this decision. Whether or not her resolve fails or succeeds, is of secondary importance.

What is striking about this drama is the fact that Hildgund's central function as the active hero is established immediately. Whereas all three heroines discussed earlier gradually assume the position of the "actor," Hildgund's first appearance on the stage unequivocally celebrates her as not only the main character, the subject of the story, but establishes her as the carrier of knowledge and therefore of power. She is, however, not a kind of "holy woman," seer, or prophetess, and therefore operating in an "unrealistic" mythological or metaphoric dimension. The text presents her as fully human, the prized daughter of Herrich, the leader of her people, the

Burgundians, and the claimed lover of Walther. But she is also a diplomat of sorts, and a thinker, with the ability not only to inform her father of important political events occurring that will have an effect on his kingdom, but also to analyze them according to her own understanding of what is best for him and for his kingdom.

The drama begins with Hildgund returning from war, where she was a captured prisoner. It is not clear whether she actually fought in the war, but there are numerous suggestions that she did. She greets her father and her country with a typical speech of a heroic warrior returning home:

Seyd mir gegrüßt, ihr längst ersehnte Fluren,  
 Und du Burgund, mein väterliches Land!  
 Mein Blick der Waffen müd', und des Getümmels  
 Weilt in der Heimath stillen Hallen gern.  
 Mein Ohr, gewöhnt an rauhe Männertritt' und Waffenklirre,  
 Vernimmt der Liebe süße Stimme nun,  
 Nur wo mir Gatte, Vater winket, und mein Erbe.  
 Wo Sitte herrschet und nicht rohe Macht.  
 Nur hier ist Glück, und Fried', und süße Ruhe.  
 (Werke I 87)

Her father welcomes her, and asks her to report on what she has experienced at war. She tells him of their enemy Attila's ferocity, success and insatiable desire for further conquest, a desire that has not been quenched even though he has already conquered massive territories. She tells him of Attila's wife Ospiru, and how she and Ospiru became friends in spite of their political animosity and difference in rank.

Beim ersten Blick ward sie mir schon gewogen,  
 Und ihres Ranges Glanz verwehrt ihr Freundschaft nicht,  
 Die Königin vergaß wer sie und wer ich wäre,  
 Und daß der Hunnen Volk dem meinen feindlich sey,  
 durch Treue knüpfte ich der Eintracht zarte Bande

Und meiner Freundschaft Werth empfand die Königin.  
(Werke I 89)

It is through the friendship of these two women that King Attila trusts Hildgund almost as a guest, even though she is his captive prisoner. Although both women are in subservient roles to the men who have power over them, they do not allow their positions to dictate their behaviour. It is as though they follow a set of morals that exists outside the morals of war and conquest. However, in spite of Hildgund's relatively painless captivity in which her duty is that of guarding Attila's treasures, Hildgund reports to have been restless and unhappy, for she is still a captive and not allowed to live freely:

Verhast ward mir der Hunne Uebermuth,  
Verhast der Tag, der in der Knechtschaft mich erblickte,  
Und meine Seele sann auf eine sichere Flucht.  
(Werke I 90)

Karoline's texts have numerous references to captivity. Even though in most texts these images have a literal function, as in this play, Karoline's preoccupation with this image is significant in that she also expressed her own existence as a kind of captivity in her social circumstances. Walther, who has been fighting against Attila's men, comes to her one night and tells her to steal some of the king's treasures and flee the palace with him. Hildgund describes the event with great detail and flair. The king is impressed with their escape, and asks:

Und wie entkamet ihr der Szyten wilde Horden,  
Hat dich der Götter Hülff', hast du dich selbst befreit?  
(Werke I 91)

Hildgund's answer is shrewd and confident.



Der Gott, der mich befreit, wohnt in dem eigenen Herzen,  
Wer seine Stimme traut, dem ist die Rettung nah;  
(Werke I 91)

Hildgund will not give any credit to forces outside herself. She has relied on herself, on her own strength, and this has brought her salvation. She recognizes the deity as a part of herself. In Karoline's letter to Gunda cited earlier, she expresses this desire: to be able to rely on herself, to act independently. These words might not seem shocking if they were to come from the mouth of a male hero. But for a woman not only to act shrewdly and courageously, but to give herself the credit for it, was a highly untypical act.

In the following scenes, the plot is complicated. Attila is angry at Hildgund for having betrayed his trust, yet he has fallen in love with her. He sends Herrich a message saying that he will forgive Hildgund and make peace with Herrich and his kingdom if she will come to live with him in his palace as his wife. If, however, she rejects his offer, Attila will declare brutal war on Herrich and his people. Walther and Hildgund are both present when Herrich receives the message. Their reactions to this news are quite different. Walther does not even entertain the thought of Hildgund accepting the offer. To him it is clear that his honour and love are at stake, and the only answer is to meet Attila's challenge, even if this should mean certain death. Herrich is torn: he has just promised Walther, who has rescued his daughter, Hildgund in marriage. Yet he is afraid for the consequences of Attila's wrath. It is not only Walther who will

surely suffer defeat given the strength of Attila's army; he himself, his daughter and his entire nation will experience incredible loss and suffering. Herrich is not as eager to sacrifice his people's lives by opposing a king's whim. He lets Hildgund decide the outcome.

If one considers Karoline's own life, and the utter lack of autonomy she enjoyed when it came to making decisions of much narrower consequence, it stands to reason that what she would have longed for was the kind of trust and autonomy given to Hildgund in this drama. By creating the character of Hildgund, she expresses this desire.

Hildgund does not falter in making her decision. Although it is not a joyful decision, she decides to join Attila.

Ich bin entschieden; nur in feigen Busen kämpfet  
 Der größere mit dem kleineren Entschluß,  
 Ich bin Attilas. Du, o Walther, fliehe,  
 Wenn du mich liebst! Die Scheidende wills so.  
 (Werke I 96)

The reactions of both men again are varied. Herrich instantly recognizes that Hildgund has considered much more than only her own happiness, and praises her for it. Walther, however, is appalled. Utterly misunderstanding her courage and her intention to save both him, herself, her father and her nation, he rages at her, saying she and her entire gender are betraying him, who saved her, for gold and glory:

So hängt auch deine Treu von Gold und Hoheit ab?  
 Unseliges Geschlecht! Weh' dem, der dir vertrauet!  
 Ja, Großmut nennest du, was Wankelmuth nur ist,  
 Der Seele stolzer Wunsch geht nach Attilas Throne,  
 Und seines Namens Ruhm giebt dich so leicht ihm hin,  
 Wirst du, wer dich befreit, auf einen Thron noch denken,

Wenn goldener Hoheit Rausch die Seele dir bethört?  
(Werke I 97)

Hildgund immediately understands his ignorance of her intentions, and is not stymied by his cruel accusation, but rather defends herself and her gender:

O lästere den Entschluß, den kluge Vorsicht heischet,  
Zu frühe nicht! Du weist nicht was ich will.  
In meines Herzens tiefsten Gründen reifet  
Die größte That, die je ein Weib gethan.  
(Werke I 97)

Walther will not accept her decision and counters that he will save her by confronting Attila in war; all she has to do is trust in him. In her frustration with his incomprehension of her sacrifice, she exclaims with bitterness:

Wie herrlich ist der Mann, sein Schicksal bildet er,  
Nur eigener Kräfte Maas ist sein Gesetz am Ziele,  
Des Weibes Schicksal, ach! ruht nicht in eigner Hand!  
Bald folget sie der Noth, bald strenger Sitte Wille,  
Kann man sich dem entziehn, was Uebermacht befiehlt?  
(Werke I 98)

Although Hildgund is stating that a woman's only choice in life is to obey those in power above her, the tone with which she says it is not resignation but irony, anger and frustration. It is similar to Karoline's tone in her letter to Gunda in which she deplores being born a woman. Like Hildgund, Karoline also made valiant attempts at making her own choices, shaping her life into one to suit her needs. Yet the structures within which she was forced to live left her little freedom to follow her impulses. It is ironic that her friend Lisette Nees von Esenbeck, a bright, thinking woman who was also well aware of the limitations placed on women in her society, would write to Karoline:

Ich freue mich, daß Du an Creuzer einen Freund gefunden hast...aber mich dünkt, aus Deiner eignen Kraft könntest Du Deinem äußern Leben in der Freiheit das immer geben; ohne es zu wollen, hast Du durch Herausgabe Deiner Gedichte Dir somit ein leichtes Spiel gemacht. Die Ansprüche, welche die Welt an die äußern Burschen und gewöhnlichen Weiber macht, wird sie jetzt nimmer an Dich machen. Hierüber bist Du schon hinweg. Warum willst Du nicht vor einem kleinen Kreis von Menschen, die Dich kennen, Dein inneres Leben aber so ungescheut aussprechen, wie Du es vor der ganzen Welt getan? Es ist wahrlich Zeit, daß Du vor jedem, der der Höhern erkennt und ergriffen, mit Kraft und Geist bestehst; wenn Du dies nicht wagst, wer sollte es tun? Da so viele Weiber in Deiner Nähe ihre Untergeordnetheit fühlen und du noch immer nicht wagst, gegen das Gemeine Dich frei und ohne Rücksicht zu erklären, wie sollten sonst die Bessern, die Dich umgeben, es wagen? Ich mußte Dir das so recht dringend ans Herz legen und fühle meine Unfähigkeit dazu...  
(Preitz I 250)

Lisette herself has capitulated to live a life of subservience to her husband. She understands the limitations of society, but she enjoys its security. Yet she almost faults Karoline for being overwhelmed by the same limitations she herself has given in to. Hildgund is frustrated with her role in society, but even when she attempts to step outside herself and make her own decision within the limits which she is given to act, she is criticized for her betrayal.

After Walther leaves Hildgund with desperate curses and Hildgund is alone, she articulates her plan to kill Attila. Her confidence both in her ability to perform this act and in the seriousness with which she takes on this responsibility are strongly expressed:

Mord! Ha der Name nur entsetzet,  
Die That ist recht, und kühn und groß,  
Der Völker Schicksal ruht in meinem Busen,  
Ich werde sie, ich werde mich befrein.  
Verbannt sey Furcht und kindisch Zagen,  
Ein kühner Kämpfer nur ersiegt ein großes Ziel.

(Werke I 21)

In these lines Hildgund also articulates her sense of responsibility for her people and for herself as an individual. In a subsequent soliloquy, after having arrived at Attila's palace, she goes further in claiming this responsibility not only as an individual, but as a woman.

Schon zuckt mein Dolch, bald wird das große Opfer bluten,  
 Das, Herrscher einer Welt, ein schwaches Weib besiegt.  
 Die starke Kette reißt, die Millionen bindet,  
 Die mächtige Feder springt, die einen Erdball drückt,  
 Italien zage nicht! ich werde dich befreien,  
 Der Völker Geisel fällt durch Hildegundens Hand.  
 (Werke I 101)

The drama ends with Attila leaving the room after inviting Hildgund to the evening meal, and Hildgund whispering: "Ha feire nur, Tirann,/ Des letzten Tages schnell entflohne Stunden." The reader is not told whether Hildgund actually carries out her plan or not, nor whether Hildgund attains the freedom for herself and for her people that has motivated her to act. Although the drama is left open-ended, the story of a woman who, conscious of the power structures of her world and her inferior position in this hierarchy, chooses to rely on her own inner strength and courage to attempt to resist the structure, has been told. Helene Kastinger Riley says in her discussion of this and several other of Karoline's dramas:

Die offene Form der Dramen ist deshalb von zweifacher Notwendigkeit: erstens, um die Stücke auf einer positiven, nicht-tragischen Note enden zu lassen; und zweitens, um darzustellen, daß mit dem Erreichen des Ziels zwar ein Höhepunkt, doch kein Abschluß erreicht wird. Der Sieg über das Schicksal muß ein sich immer wieder vollziehender Akt im Leben des Einzelnen sein. (199)

Karoline's understanding of the need for constant striving, of the human condition of constant flux is demonstrated by her portrayal of Hildgund's determination to effect change in her world. Whether or not she will be successful in achieving this change is of secondary importance to the author.

These four texts dealing with female protagonists are another expression of Karoline's central view of "die Liebe zum Vortrefflichen," a desire which acts as a constant force of tension constituting the essence of human existence. In these texts, however, there is a particular emphasis on the desire of a woman to take charge of her life, to express erotic desire, and even to choose death as an alternative to a life of captivity and stagnation. Karoline's response to the captivity she experienced as a creative woman in a society which did not allow her much freedom, was to write this desire.

As Susanne Kord points out in her article on several of Karoline's texts in *Ein Blick hinter die Kulissen: Deutschsprachige Dramatikerinnen im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert*, Karoline also wrote several dramatic pieces in which female characters play a secondary role, and where, although they express their criticism against a system in which they are dependent on men, they still remain subservient to it (115). One cannot call Karoline von Günderrode a champion of feminist ideals. Yet in the texts discussed above, it is clear that Karoline addressed the question of gender, and explored its manifestations in a courageous, if tentative, way.

## CHAPTER EIGHT: MNEMONIC DESIRE: RETURN TO ORIGIN

In the previous chapter, the presence of powerful female characters in four of Karoline's narrative texts has been discussed. The dichotomy between the female and male principles is explored in various other texts, both narrative and lyrical, in Karoline's works. In "Wandrer's Niederfahrt" for example, the protagonist, in his desire to return to the state of the unborn, describes the realm of darkness with primarily female metaphors. Although Karoline was always interested in myth, rewriting it so to speak in her Ossian stories in *Gedichte und Phantasien*, it seems that during her friendship with Creuzer, the mythologist, she increased her interest in the mythology of many cultures outside the European boundaries (Lazarowicz 216). In her "Studienbuch" we find only cryptic notes recording her readings. However, from the content of her writing in her third volume of poetry, *Melete*, it is evident that her interest in pre-patriarchal religions of the Middle East and the Orient had increased, since many of her poems refer to these various mythologies. It is in this set of texts that one also finds a greater preoccupation with female deities and their function as powerful life-giving and loving forces, frequently pitted against the male gods who represent the phenomenon of enlightened, rational thought. To what extent do these and other similar texts fit with Karoline's central concern of poetry being the expression of desire for harmony and connection with the "other"?

The direct confrontation between the male and female principles is dramatically told in the poem "Eine persische Erzählung" (Werke I 331). Although Karoline is not always consistent in naming the gods or myths she is writing about, in this narrative poem she very specifically locates her narrative in its geographical and mythological location, ancient Persia, and also names the gods Ormuzd and Mithra as characters in the poem.

Barbara Walker explains Mithra as follows:

Mithra, Persian savior, whose cult was the leading rival of Christianity in Rome, and more successful than Christianity for the first four centuries of the "Christian" era...Mithra was born on the 25th of December, called "Birthday of the Unconquered Sun," which was finally taken over by Christians in the 4th century A.D. as the birthday of Christ. ...

Like early Christianity, Mithraism was an ascetic, anti-female religion. Its priesthood consisted of celibate men only. Women were forbidden to enter Mithraic temples. The women of Mithraic families had nothing to do with the men's cult, but attended services of the Great Mother in their own temples of Isis, Diana, or Juno.

To eliminate the female principle from their creation myth, Mithraists replaced the Mother of All Living in the primal garden of paradise (Pairidaeza) with the bull named Sole-Created. Instead of Eve, this bull was the partner of the first man. ... (665)

Ormazd is described in the same book as:

Variant name of Ahura Mazda, the Persian sun god who opposed his twin brother Ahriman, the Serpent of Darkness. Hormazd, Hormizd, and Ormuzd are further common variations. Persian Manicheans of the early Christian era gave the name Ormuzd to a being called Primal Man, "an emanation of the highest God," who contributed to the Gnostic idea that man and God are identical, since Adam was God's essential self "made flesh." (774-5)

"Eine Persische Erzählung" tells the story of a young Persian priest who worships Ormuzd, symbolized by the sun and



Mithra, or the male deity, and is afraid of night and darkness, the female principle. He has prayed fervently all day that the sun should not set, working himself into a frenzied state in which he believes with certainty that the sun has conquered night. Yet, despite his faith, he must witness night enveloping the world. In the poet's lyrical description of the onset of night, darkness is given a sense of power that is not threatening, but rather timid and only gradually victorious. The moon, female symbol and ruler of night, is given the Latin name "Luna," thus allowing the pronoun "sie" which emphasizes its female nature.

Dunkel kam heran geschritten,  
 Zagend streift es, blaß und ängstlich,  
 Muthig ward's dann, dehnt sich mächtig.  
 Wuchs und deckt mit Riesengliedern  
 Siegreich bald die niedren Thäler,  
 Reiht sich um den Stern des Tages,  
 Drängt ihn hastig hin zum Weste.

...

Glänzend aus der Fluthen Spiegel  
 Luna kam heraufgeschritten  
 Feucht ihr Haar, vom Meer noch träuflend,  
 Thaubeglänzet ihre Wange,  
 Blickte sie zur Erde nieder.  
 (Werke I 331)

The priest, in a desperate act of madness, resorts to his warrior instincts, and aims his bow and arrow at the moon "dem Herz der Nächte," in order to destroy its powers and establish day and sunlight as victor. But he is thrown off balance by the action of his bow, loses his footing on the rocky shore, and is thrown into the sea. Mithra, the sun-god, is sympathetic, but powerless. However, darkness, the power the priest so wished to

obliterate, does not punish him, but embraces him and heals him from his illness.

Mitleidsvoll ihm Mitra lächlet;  
Aber gütig nimmt das Dunkel  
Auf in seinem heil'gen Schooße  
Freundlich den verirrten Kranken,  
Daß im Arm der Mitternächte  
Schweren Wahnsinns er geneset.  
(Werke I 332)

The female characteristics are quite explicit in the description of darkness. Although Karoline cannot get around the use of the neuter possessive pronoun *seinem* when referring to *das Dunkel*, the term *Schooß* or womb, which belongs to the darkness, is undeniably female. The art of healing has always been associated with the female principle as well. Barbara Walker writes:

Up to the 15th century, women's "charms and spells" were virtually the only repository of practical medicine. Churchmen avoided doctoring, on the ground that all sickness came from demonic possession, and the only permissible cure was exorcism.

Europe's traditional witch doctors were women: clan mothers, priestesses of healing shrines, midwives, nurses, vilas. In pre-Christian Gaul and Scandinavia, medicine was entirely in the hands of women. Even in the Christian era, the village wise-woman was still every peasant's family doctor. (1082)

The poem then is quite explicitly a celebration of the presence of the female principle. However, the story does not celebrate the supremacy of either the female nor the male principle: night does not conquer daylight, nor is daylight victorious. Rather, the two are in perfect balance, one complementing the other. It is only the male priest who is misguided into thinking that one has supremacy over the other. In the poem "Wandrer's Niederfahrt" the protagonist seeks to make

contact with the realm of darkness which is associated with *Empfinden* rather than rational thought that orders and divides; in this poem it is possible to apply the same analogy and read the poem as another way of the poet's pleading with the necessity for both means of perception. The notion of constant flux is also evident in this poem. The priest's fervent faith cannot effect any change in the laws of nature. He does not have the power to stop the sun, to deny the moon's presence. The cyclical and therefore infinite chain of events is not threatened by the interference of the individual. In this way, the poem restates Karoline's central idea of the individual's place in the universe which remains "bleibend im Wandel."

It is also possible to read this text as an indication of Karoline's need to explore ancient myth as another path towards insight into the human condition, a path that is distinct from philosophy and Judeo-Christian religion. The poem demonstrates Karoline's need to go back to the oldest stories she can find, to pre-patriarchal cultures, in search of an *Urkraft* that is not all male. Uta Treder says:

Als Eroberung einer geistigen Heimat, die aus der Diskrepanz zur Wirklichkeit herrührt und sich aus ihr nährt, ist auch die Beschäftigung der Günderrode mit den Mythen zu erklären. Ihrer Belebung griechischer, altpersischer, altindischer und mongolischer Mythen liegt die Überzeugung zugrunde, der Weg, in die "Vorwelt", der Weg in den "Mutterschoos" könne die verlorene Einheit mit der Natur wiederherstellen, der Blick in die Vergangenheit, die Vision der Zukunft freilegen. (Brinker-Gabler 33)

Another set of poems in *Melete* which expresses Karoline's fundamental concern of desire and which uses fragments of

mythological material as a metaphor for desire, are the two poems "Aegypten" (Werke I 329) and "Der Nil" (Werke I 330). The two poems, placed next to each other, and immediately preceding "Eine Persische Erzählung," do not tell a story with plot and character. However, they still contain the dialogical and narrative element because their subjects speak from the first person perspective. The narrator in either case corresponds with the title of the poem; they are Egypt, and the Nile River.

Although "Eine Persische Erzählung" is also lyrical in form, these two poems are more carefully crafted, the poet making conscious use of both rhyme and rhythm. "Aegypten" consists of four four-line stanzas, each stanza containing two rhyming couplets. The lines each consist of four trochees, thus constituting a steady, even, almost choppy rhythm. This form is an effective device for the expression of the content and more importantly, the mood, which is actually the central guiding principle of the poem. Here, the poet captures a vivid and powerful image of desire and longing, the need for stimulation and nourishment. The narrator, Aegypten, is lamenting its state of unfulfilled desire. The plodding, monotonous rhythm produces the feeling of an almost hypnotic state. The concrete images too: the thirsty sand, the parched rivers, the ravenous sun, create a feeling of intense need, so intense, that the speaker seems to have entered a state of delirium:

Aegypten

Blau ist meines Himmels Bogen,  
Ist vom Regen nie umzogen,

Ist von Wolken nicht umspielt,  
Nie vom Abendthau gekühlt.

Meine Bäche fließen träge  
Oft verschlungen auf dem Wege,  
Von der durst'gen Steppen Sand,  
Bei des langen Mittags Brand.

Meine Sonn' ein gierig Feuer,  
Nie gedämpft durch Nebelschleier,  
Dringt durch Mark mir und Gebein  
In das tiefste Leben ein.

Schwer entschlummert sind die Kräfte,  
Aufgezehrt die Lebenssäfte;  
Eingelullt in Fiebertraum  
Fühl' ich noch mein Dasein kaum.  
(Werke I 329)

This poem is a contrast both in content, form and tone, with the poem succeeding it called "Der Nil:"

Aber ich stürze von Bergen hernieder,  
Wo mich der Regen des Himmels gekühlt,  
Tränke erbarmend die lechzenden Brüder  
Daß sich ihr brennendes Bette erfüllt.

Jauchzend begrüßen mich alle die Quellen;  
Kühlend umpfange ich, Erde, auch dich;  
Leben erschwellt mir die Tropfen, die Wellen,  
Leben dir spendend umarme ich dich.

Theueres Land du! Gebährerin Erde!  
Nimm nun den Sohn auch den liebenden auf,  
Du, die in Klüften gebahr mich und nährte,  
Nimm jetzt, o Mutter! den Sehrenden auf.  
(Werke I 330)

The rhythm is immediately striking: contrasted with the steady plodding rhythm of "Aegypten," the lines of this poem dance lightly and eagerly in dactyls, giving the poem a sense of motion and energy. The rhythm imitates the sound of rapidly running water. The tone of the poem is jubilant, triumphant, satisfied. A sense of relief and replenishment is echoed in the earth's eager reception of the river. The abundance of water is emphasized in

the poet's choice of words: "Leben erschwellt mir die Tropfen, die Wellen"; both the meaning of the words and the sound of the recurring "l" sound connote abundance and motion.

In Karoline's letters to her friends she frequently laments that she finds herself in a state of ennui like that exemplified in the first poem. To Gunda she writes:

Mein Leben ist so leer, ich habe so viel langweilige und unausgefüllte Stunden. Gunda, ist es nur die Liebe die in diese dumpfe Leerheit Leben und Empfindung giebt? oder giebt es noch andere Empfindungen die dies thun? Es ist hier eine Lücke in meiner Seele; umsonst suche ich sie zu erfüllen, umsonst sie weg zu raisonniren: die Kunst kann nur durch die Natur, mit der Natur wuchren, ohne sie kann sie nichts.  
(Preitz II 174)

Karoline indeed attempts to fill her life with art, giving artistic expression to her desire for stimulation and love. Thus the poems serve as an expression of her own sense of longing for a life that is filled with nourishment and motion.

Although Karoline does not name any mythological figures in these poems, the fact that she names its geographical setting indicates that she may be referring to the myth of Isis and Osiris. The significance of Isis as an important goddess in Karoline's work has already been referred to. In these poems, the presence of Osiris, the son and lover of Isis, is alluded to. The speaker in the poem "Der Nil" calls the land "mother" and "lover," as in the Isis myth. There is not, however, a similar exploration of the dichotomy between male and female gods in this poem. Rather, it is more a celebration of their mutual dependence and love. But it is an excellent example of the way Karoline uses nebulous fragments of Egyptian myth and "rewrites" them in order

to express her own desires in artistic form.

The exploration of the dichotomies of the female and the male principles, of *Denken* and *Empfinden*, and the return to pre-patriarchal myth in an attempt to explore a territory in which order and division have not conquered human experience are certainly not the only motives for the poet's use of ancient material in the creation of her poems. Karoline had read and was strongly influenced by Schelling's writings on natural philosophy, in which he held the view that all natural matter is part of a greater whole (Wolf 30). In "Die Manen" the poet elucidates this concept in her discussion of the possibility of a feeling of connection between human beings who are separated in time and space, but communicate in spite of their distance because of a common bond that defies death. Karoline's interest in and exploration of Indian religions reinforced and expanded this view of life. In "Geschichte eines Braminen" she explains this concept through Almor's careful and methodical story. How closely, however, she identified with the idea that all natural matter is somehow part of a greater whole, is evident from the fragment of Indian poetry translated by Herder which Karoline left as a final note before she killed herself. The poem was engraved on her tombstone where it still can be read today:

Erde du meine Mutter u du mein Ernährer der Lufthauch  
 Heiliges Feuer mir Freund und du o Bruder der Bergstrom  
 Und mein Vater der Äther ich sage euch allen mit Ehrfurcht  
 Freundlichen Dank mit euch hab ich hienieden gelebt  
 Und ich gehe zur andern Welt euch gerne verlassend  
 Lebt wohl denn Bruder u Freund Vater und Mutter lebt wohl  
 (Werke I 472)

In this text the elements are also given specific genders: earth is "mother," the river is "brother," sky is "father," references which concur with the poems discussed above. However, the emphasis here lies in the idea that the speaker is intricately connected with these life-giving elements. Whereas in the poems "Aegypten" and "Der Nil" the human voice is only implied, in this poem there is a conscious separation of entities, and since the speaker "ich" addresses father, brother and mother, as "du," the reader easily assumes the voice to be human. The terms that are used to describe the intimacy between subject and objects are ones which we in Western society would reserve only for the bonds between human family members. However, it is the natural world from which the speaker takes farewell. The fact that Karoline left this verse behind as a farewell makes it easy to read the poem as an expression of her own thoughts. It seems then that the connection she feels between her physical and mythological "parents" and "brothers" is more real and more important than the bonds that connect her to her biological family. The great significance her contemporaries and later critics attributed to the tragedy of her thwarted love relationship with Creuzer as motivation for her suicide is undercut by her final words. Instead of addressing her fellow humans, Karoline resorts in her last words to the comfort she derived from the knowledge that a greater harmony connected her with the whole of life than temporal human relationships. Citing a dialogue from antiquity, she engages in a dialogue that spans



the centuries, her own voice echoing ancient voices.

In her attempt to go as far back as possible to the stories of the origin of human life, the poet goes even further than the mythologies of ancient cultures. It has already been pointed out that in both "Wandrer's Niederfahrt" and "Ein Apokaliptisches Fragment" the central narrative voice expresses a desire to return, through a dream-like state, to the realm of origin. In "Wandrer's Niederfahrt" several lines indicate strongly that this realm is female in character. In "Ein Apokaliptisches Fragment" no such gender-specific metaphor is used explicitly. The narration remains firmly rooted in the mode of the present, even though the narrating voice achieves a sense of connection to the whole of creation, both spacial and temporal. Karoline's *Nachlass* contains a poem which bears a striking resemblance to "Ein apokaliptisches Fragment." Since it is untitled, its first line will serve as its working title: "Einstens lebt ich süßes Leben" (Werke I 383). The poem's formal structure, short unrhymed lines flowing together in what could be seamless prose, gives it a kind of modern quality of "stream of consciousness" and sets the stage for the dream-like state Karoline likes to evoke when she wants to appeal to the human perception of feeling.

In this poem, the narrator describes a journey similar in its surrealistic or dream-like nature to that of the "ich" of "Ein Apokaliptisches Fragment." However, here the idea of returning to as far distant a past as possible is central. The first line already establishes the retrospective nature of the

narration: "Einstens lebt ich süßes Leben." Similar to the narrator of "Ein apokalyptisches Fragment," the "ich" in this poem experiences a transformation of the perception of itself, expressing this transformation with the subjunctive mood, which allows it to continue its quest.

Einstens lebt ich süßes Leben  
 Denn mir war als sey ich plötzlich  
 Nur ein duftiges Gewölke.  
 (Werke I 383)

Then follows an account spoken entirely in the past tense. The "ich," no longer perceiving itself as a human subject to the laws of "reality," moves through the cosmos, first perceiving nothing but motion and light as one of its natural elements, "Lustig in des Himmels Lüften/Gaukelt ich den ganzen Tag" (Werke I 383), then moving to a space in which it meets the gods and heroes of antiquity:

Sah jetzt in dem heilig tiefen  
 Unnenbaren Raum der Himmel  
 Wunderseltzame Gebilde  
 Und Gestalten sich bewegen  
 Ewige Götter  
 saßen auf Thronen  
 glänzender Sterne  
 ...  
 Tönende Schilde  
 Klingende Speere  
 huben gewaltige  
 streitende Helden;  
 (Werke I 384)

In the midst of the clash and clamour of war, the "ich" sees a virgin who inspires in it a burning desire to return to its own unborn state, a state from which it once was separated and which shall heal and restore it.

Blühend voll Anmuth

unter den Rohen  
 stand eine Jungfrau  
 Alle beherrschend.  
 Liebliche Kinder  
 spielten in mitten  
 giftigen Schlangen.--  
 Hin zu den Kindern  
 wollt ich nun flattern  
 mit ihnen spielen  
 Und auch der Jungfrau  
 Sohle dan küssen.  
 Und es hielt ein tiefes Sehnen  
 In mir selber mich gefangen  
 Und mir war als hab ich einstens  
 Mich von einem süßen Leibe  
 los gerissen, und nun blute  
 Erst die Wunde alter Schmerzen

Und ich wandte mich zur Erde  
 Wie sie süß im trunknen Schlafe  
 Sich im Arm des Himmels wiegte.  
 Leis erklangen nun die Sterne  
 nicht die schöne Brust zu weken  
 Und des Himmels Lüfte spielten  
 leise um die zarte Brust.  
 Da ward mir als sey ich entsprungen  
 Dem innersten Leben der Mutter,  
 Und habe getaumelt  
 In den Räumen des Aethers  
 Ein irrendes Kind.  
 Ich mußte weinen  
 rinnend in Tränen  
 Sank ich hinab zu dem  
 Schooße der Mutter.  
 Farbige Kelche  
 Duftender Blumen  
 Faßten die Thränen  
 Und ich durchdrang sie  
 Alle die Kelche  
 rieselte Abwärts  
 hin durch die Blumen  
 tiefer und tiefer  
 bis zu dem Schooße  
 hin, der verhülleten  
 Quelle des Lebens.  
 (Werke I 385-86)

The progression in this poem then, is one of remembering as far  
 back as possible, both in the sense of the narrator's own  
 subjective history, and of the history of humanity. Both the

virgin goddess as ruling deity and the earth as primal mother and giver of all life, figure strongly and concretely as power figures establishing and celebrating the female principle as primeval. The virgin goddess, ruling over the warring gods, alludes to pre-patriarchal times in which the female goddesses reigned. Going even farther back in human collective mythological history, the earth as female principle and original source of human, mythological and natural life is encountered and named. In her encyclopedia, Barbara Walker describes the earth's presence as universal female and first deity of almost all peoples, stating that as late as the 12th century many Europeans still recognized Mother Earth as a goddess, and explaining how, especially Christian patriarchy, strove often unsuccessfully to eradicate her presence from popular belief (265). She further addresses the idea of the duality between thinking and feeling as separate modes of perception in Western post-Enlightenment thought, a topic of great concern to Karoline. Walker says:

Latin *Mater* (Mother) became English "matter," of which Plutarch said, "Matter hath the function of mother and nurse...and containeth the elements from which everything is produced."...

Western theology split this former unity into a duality, regarding matter (or flesh) and mind (or spirit) as intrinsically different from, and opposed to, one another. Thus, says Jung, "the word 'matter' remains a dry, inhuman, and purely intellectual concept, without any psychic significance for us. How different was the former image of matter--the Great Mother--that could encompass and express the profound emotional meaning of Mother Earth." (266)

The desire the "ich" expresses in this poem is the desire to identify itself not only as an integral part of the universe, but to identify and name its own origins far beyond the stories of

the inherited notions of origin in Occidental and Judeo-Christian mythology. In her discussion of Karoline and Bettine's exchange of ideas, Christa Wolf states with reference to Bettine's reading of "Wandrer's Niederfahrt":

Bettine nimmt die Gedanken der Freundin gierig auf, befeuert von diesem Rückgriff auf Kräfte, die dem "Mutterschoße" entspringen und nicht, wie Pallas Athene, dem Vaterkopf, nämlich dem Haupte des Zeus - eine Alternative zu den Quellen der Klassik, eine Hinwendung zu archaischen, teilweise matriarchalischen Mustern. Der Mythos wird neu gelesen, und zu dem bisher alleinherrschenden Mythos der Griechen kommen die Vorgeschichte und die Lehren Indiens, Asiens, des Orients. Der Eurozentrismus ist zerbrochen, mit ihm die Alleinherrschaft des Bewußtseins: Unbewußte Kräfte, die in Trieben, Wünschen, Träumen Ausdruck suchen, werden in diesen Briefen wahrgenommen, beschrieben, anerkannt. (31)

Karoline's search for "das Vortreffliche" takes many paths, exploring her reality through all possible means available to her. Perhaps her exclusion from a systematic education in the fields of Western theology and philosophy, though stifling her constant need for intellectual stimulation, also freed her to a certain extent. In a way, Karoline, as well as her friend Bettine, forced to create their own system of study and thought, are able to explore ways of thinking that are alternative to the inherited notions of Western thought, with a freshness that their male contemporaries lack. These, although certainly also fascinated and preoccupied with older religions, still seem more bound to incorporate the notions they encounter here into their own Western way of thinking.

## CHAPTER NINE: THE DILEMMA OF DESIRE: LOVE

So far, the majority of texts discussed have been selected from Karoline's narrative prose and poetry. Yet it is her lyrical poetry, especially her love poetry, that is considered to be her strongest and most successfully crafted work, even though narrative and dramatic texts predominate (Schulz 643). The poetry also deserves attention in the context of this thesis because of the central role love plays in Karoline's texts as the manifestation of the desire that to her constitutes the mainspring of human connection, and whose essence is characterized by a constant tension.

The poem "Liebe" discussed earlier in the context of various texts published in *Gedichte und Phantasien*, has been praised by Christa Wolf as follows:

Eines der ersten vollkommen offenen Liebesgedichte einer Frau in der deutschen Literatur, unverkappt, uneingekleidet. Ein Gedicht, hervorgetrieben vom unlösbaren Widerspruch, gehalten von der Spannung der einander ausschließenden Elemente, Zeugnis dieser Spannung: gebändigte Unmittelbarkeit. (21)

The tension Karoline addresses as the quintessential character of love in this poem is echoed in two later love poems. It is a tension which is expressed exquisitely in her use of paradoxical statements that never seem to come to any resolution but whose balance is maintained by the tension they create. "Die Einzige" (Werke I 326), was published in *Melete*, and the untitled poem beginning with the line "Einer nur und einer dienen" (Werke I 392) was found in the poet's *Nachlass*. Walther Morgenthaler has

discovered that there is a tangible link between these two poems, since her manuscripts suggest that they were originally constructed as one poem (Morgenthaler III 184).

What is immediately perplexing to the reader of "Die Einzige," is the use of the female gender of the lover to whom the poem is addressed. Both Margarete Lazarowicz and Christa Wolf assume that the reason for the use of "Die Einzige" instead of "Der Einzige," is that the poem was addressed to Friedrich Creuzer, and, since the liaison was to be kept secret, Karoline used this pronoun in order to protect herself and him, and also to trick the reader into thinking that the poems were written by a male author (Wolf 39). A letter from Creuzer corroborates the fact that the poem was indeed intended for him. It is assumed that he is referring to "Die Einzige" when he writes:

Nun aber las ichs, und las es wieder das liebe Lied. Es tönt aus dem tiefsten Herzen in mein Herz herüber. Ach vielleicht ist es doch nicht gut, daß Du so singst - wenigstens bedarf meine Sehnsucht solcher Nahrung nicht, da sie mich ohnehin verzehret. O wie bin ich doch ganz Dein Du liebes Mädchen.  
(Morgenthaler III 85)

It was likely written in the spring of 1806, a period in which Karoline and Creuzer were passionately in love and Karoline was suffering under Creuzer's constant promises to make this love realizable, but consistently refused to make any concrete attempts to make the changes necessary for their union. This is indeed a logical and certainly credible explanation for Karoline's use of a female addressee as an attempt to protect his reputation. Yet considered in the greater context of Karoline's writing, other possible reasons may be found.

It has been pointed out that Karoline did not separate her life and thought from her artistic creation, and used her art to express herself, to "write her desire" so to speak. However, the subjects of her writing remain consciously constructed subjects. The range of these subjects is infinite: Narziß, Hildgund, Almor, Wanderer, Aegypten, and many more diverse personae speak Karoline's thoughts, and thus always create a distance between poet and person. The reason, then, for Karoline's choice of the male gender as implied speaker of this poem may simply be an added device to maintain distance in this poem, rather than the mere need for disguise to prevent gossip and infamy.

It may even be possible to read both the "ich" and the "ihr" of this poem as female. Karoline's use of the term "love" is never only restricted to passionate erotic love, as was seen in her close identification with the character Narziß in her correspondence with Bettine. The notion of homosexual love is also one that cannot be entirely excluded from Karoline's concept of love. Passages of letters addressed to Karoline from Lisette Nees contain a strong suggestion of erotic love between the two women,<sup>1</sup> although there is no hard evidence that their relationship was more than a close friendship. In one poem,

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<sup>1</sup> As an example of such a passage, see Lisette's letter probably written in the summer of 1800, in which she writes: "Ich kan Dir kaum sagen wie seltsam mir eben itzt zu Muthe ist: ohnegefähr so als wie an jenem Abend bey Dir als ... du zur Hinterthüre hinausgegangen warst, an welcher ich Dich wieder erwartete, es war da alles so mystisch und mir war als wenn Du mein Geliebter wärest; da dachte ich O mein Carlos wenn wirst Du erscheinen!...o Lüfte tragt Carlos meinen Kuß entgegen. - Doch siehe itz kömst Du und mein Herz pocht stärker!" (Preitz II 214)



"Piedro" (Werke I 103), Karoline writes about erotic love between two men. Although it remains highly doubtful that she is writing about female homosexual love in this poem, it is quite possible that Karoline's need to keep the gender of the subjects ambiguous was deliberate: it is the power of love and how it or its lack manifests itself in the individual, that she wants to write about.

A more daring reading might also suggest that Karoline may be addressing herself in this poem. The ease with which Karoline's called herself "der Freund" and spoke of herself in the third person using a male pronoun in her correspondence with both Karl von Savigny and Friedrich Creuzer, can be seen as a sign of her own perception of herself as not one unified subject but as a person who senses a deep split within herself. Similarly her letter to Gunda, in which she expresses her desire to have been born a man, is evidence of her constant awareness of the way in which social, material and historical circumstances construct our own perception of ourselves so that our own individual natures are no longer discernible. This thought is also echoed by Almor in "Geschichte eines Braminen."

Similar to the poem "Liebe," the poem "Die Einzige" makes use of paradox to express the desire the speaker of the poem is consumed with. The last line of the first stanza contains one of Karoline's most powerful images and can be read as an epitaph on her life and work. The entire stanza reads as follows:

Wie ist ganz mein Sinn befangen,  
Einer, Einer anzuhängen;

Diese Eine zu umfassen  
 Treibt mich einzig nur Verlangen,  
 Freude kann mir nur gewähren,  
 heimlich diesen Wunsch zu nähren,  
 Mich in Sehnen zu verzehren,  
 Was mich tödtet zu gebären.  
 (Werke I 326)

It is easy to interpret this stanza as Karoline's lament for her unfulfilled love for Creuzer. In her letters it becomes evident that, although the affair with Creuzer brought her a great deal of joy and inspiration, her intense desire and the sure knowledge that it would never be fulfilled indeed "devoured" her ("Mich in Sehnen zu verzehren") and that this love was killing her slowly.

The next stanza, which uses as its framework a further listing of paradoxical statements, reinforces the thought that that which is central and most powerful in her life is at the same time that which will ultimately destroy her.

Widerstand will mir nicht frommen,  
 Fliehen muß ich neu zu kommen,  
 Zürnen nur, mich zu versöhnen  
 Kann mich Ihrer nicht entwöhnen,  
 Muß im lauten Jubel stöhnen;  
 (Werke I 326)

The destruction does not happen instantly, but manifests itself in a gradually increasing sense of enervation, listlessness, life-lessness in the speaker. The "ich" begins to feel disconnected from the life around it, separated from reality, sinking into a state of dream-like numbness, a state of delirium similar to that expressed by the voice of the desert in

"Aegypten:"

In den Becher fallen Thränen,  
 Ich versink in träumrisch Wähnen;  
 Höre nicht der Töne Reigen,

Wie sie auf und nieder steigen,  
 Wogend schwellen Well' in Welle;  
 Sehe nicht der Farben Helle  
 Strömen aus des Lichtes Quelle.  
 Mich begrüßen Frühlingslüfte,  
 Küssen leise Blumendüfte,  
 Doch das all ist mir verlohren,  
 Ist für mich wie nicht gebohren,  
 Denn mein Geist ist eng umpfangen  
 Von dem einzigen Verlangen  
 Eine, Eine zu erlangen.  
 (Werke I 326)

Life for the "ich" becomes unbearable, an agonizing state of "non-life" in which it perceives itself as being excluded and abandoned. The metaphor of the meal the speaker cannot partake of in these lines also echoes Aegypten's lament for nourishment and can be read as a metaphor for erotic desire.

Hungrig in der Zahl der Gäste  
 Siz ich bei dem Freudenfeste,  
 Das Natur der Erde spendet;  
 Frage heimlich ob's bald endet?  
 Ob ich aus der Gäste Reigen  
 Dürf' dem eklen Mahl entweichen,  
 Das verschwendrisch Andre nähret:  
 Mir nicht Einen Wunsch gewähret?  
 Eines nur mein Sinn begehret,  
 Eine Sehnsucht mich verzehret;  
 Eng ist meine Welt befangen,  
 Nur vom einzigen Verlangen  
 Was ich liebe zu erlangen.  
 (Werke I 327)

The interpretation of this poem as a song of love for Creuzer is certainly the first and probably most accurate one. Yet in the light of Karoline's life-long struggle with the limitations she found herself subjected to, as a woman who wished to become a successful writer and faced great difficulties in her attempt to have her work taken seriously, a woman whose financial and social position kept her firmly locked into a state in which she had

little room for independent movement, and a person whose sensitive nature was constantly questioning itself and rebelling against its fierce demands, one may also read this poem as an expression of the desire of the speaker for wholeness and fulfilment not only in erotic love but in a fulfilled life in general. For writing, an act that to Karoline was as necessary as breathing and loving, was also a risk that threatened to "kill" her. To write and be loved were the greatest desires of Karoline. Yet she knew that the chance of having both desires fulfilled at the same time were slim.

Another aspect of this poem that is at first perplexing to the reader of her works is the fact that here the narrator elevates the love for a single object, unlike Narziß in "Wandel und Treue," who insists upon the fluctuating and fluid character of love. In this poem the speaker seems to be saying the opposite: this love is directed at a very specific object which cannot be replaced. In the poem "Die eine Klage" (Werke I 328) immediately following "Die Einzige" in *Melete*, this idea is reinforced in elegiac poetry:

Die eine Klage

Wer die tiefste aller Wunden  
 Hat in Geist und Sinn empfunden  
 Bitterer Trennung Schmerz;  
 Wer geliebt was er verlohren,  
 Lassen muß was er erkohren,  
 Das geliebte Herz,

Der versteht in Lust die Thränen  
 Und der Liebe ewig Sehnen  
 Eins in Zwei zu sein,  
 Eins im Andern sich zu finden,  
 Daß der Zweiheit Grenzen schwinden

Und des Daseins Pein.

Wer so ganz in Herz und Sinnen  
 Konnt' ein Wesen lieb gewinnen  
 O! den tröstet's nicht  
 Daß für Freuden, die verlohren,  
 Neue werden neu gebohren:  
 Jene sind's doch nicht.

Das geliebte, süße Leben,  
 Diese Nehmen und dies Geben,  
 Wort und Sinn und Blick,  
 Dieses Suchen und dies Finden,  
 Dieses Denken und Empfinden  
 Giebt kein Gott zurück.  
 (Werke I 328)

Although the poet also makes use of her favourite device, the paradox, to describe the contradictory elements of love (see the last stanza), there is also in this poem a clear message that the person who is loved cannot be replaced by any other person. It is tempting to read this development in Karoline's concept of erotic love as a product of her own experiences. Even though her love for Savigny was profound and its lack of development hurt her deeply, the passion she had for Creuzer was much deeper and all-consuming.

But it has also been proven that the poem "Einer nur und einer dienen" (Werke 392) appearing in Karoline's *Nachlass*, was written at the same time as "Die Einzige" and "Die eine Klage." Here, Karoline constructs a poem in which the idea of faithfulness to the act of loving, rather than to the object of love first articulated in her drama "Wandel und Treue" is reiterated in poetic form.

This untitled poem is divided into two parts. The first part, consisting of six four-line stanzas, echoes the speaker of

"Die Einzige" in narrative structure. Here too, the "ich" is speaking about "Eine," an unnamed female character. But the message of this speaker is in direct contradiction to the speaker in "Die Einzige." Here the speaker rather echoes *Narziß* in "Wandel und Treue"; even the image of flowers is carried over into the poem:

Einer nur u einer dienen  
 Das ermüdet meine Seele.  
 Rosen nur u imer Rosen  
 Andre Blumen blühn noch bunter

Wie die Bienen will ich schwärmen  
 Mich in Traubenglut berauschen  
 Jn der Lilie Weis mich kühlen  
 Ruhen in der Nacht der Büsche

Jn die heitre freie Bläue  
 Jn die Unbegränzte Weite  
 Will ich wandlen will ich wallen  
 Nichts soll meine Schritte feßlen

Leichte Bande sind mir Ketten  
 Und die Heimat wird zum Kerker.  
 Darum fort u fort ins Weite  
 Aus dem engen dumpfen Leben

Reg erfaßt mit regem Sinne  
 Alles Holde alles Schöne  
 Keinem ganz sich hingegen,  
 Keine Gränze dem empfinden.  
 (Werke I 392)

The "ich" in this poem seems to perceive itself a prisoner of a love which is directed only at one person, and rebels against the notion of faithfulness to one "flower" or object of love as *Narziß* did in "Wandel und Treue". In the final stanza of this part of the poem the poet even resorts to her occasionally didactic tone:

Wehe! wer mit engem Sinne  
 Einem nur sich Einem weihet

Schmachvoll rächt sich an dem Armen  
 Alles was er streng verschmäheth.

Yet immediately following this, originally designed to be placed on the right half of the same page, is the second half of the poem, in which the narrative voice switches sides of the argument.<sup>2</sup> The voice itself has also shifted. It does not refer to itself here, but achieves the character of an omniscient third person narrator.

Nicht zur Heimat wird die Weite,  
 Ungestaltet in die Ferne,  
 Aufgelöst in leeres Sehnen  
 Wird der Inhalt so des Lebens.  
 Schön ist was sich gränzt u gnüget,  
 Treu um Eines sich beweget  
 An dem Einen sich erneuet  
 Wie des Pulses rege Schläge  
 Stets sich um das Herz bewegen  
 Stets zum Herzen wiederkehren  
 Stets am Herzen sich erneuen,  
 Sich an seiner Gluth entzünden,  
 Wehe wer von seinem Herzen  
 Abwärts suchend sich verirret,  
 Nicht zur Heimat wird die Weite  
 Ungestaltet bleibt das Leben  
 Ohne Mitte alles Streben.  
 (Werke I 393)

The didactic tone of the ending of the first part of the poem is carried on throughout the second part, but its advice stands in direct opposition to the first part. Here the speaker seems to be taking *Violetta's* side of the argument: faithfulness to one

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<sup>2</sup> Walther Morgenthaler writes, "Das Gedicht besteht aus zwei antithetischen (Teil-)Gedichten (I), (II) aufgeteilt auf Vorder- und Rückseite von Bl. 269. Der enge Schriftduktus von (I) V. 1-12, der die linke Blatthälfte nicht überschreitet, läßt annehmen, daß schon zu Beginn der Niederschrift eine antithetische Komposition beabsichtigt war und auch (in zweispaltiger Darstellung) graphisch sichtbar gemacht werden sollte. Dem entspricht die Gedrängtheit der Vertikale. (Morgenthaler III, 233)

object of love is the better choice, for desire can never be fulfilled if it is not directed at a clearly discernible aim.

These contradictory and constantly conflicting descriptions of love are consistent with Karoline's much earlier definition of desire and love as constituting the central energy of life. The object of one's love is not of the greatest importance: it is the act of loving that keeps the universe in motion, so to speak. In the collection of fragments found in Karoline's *Nachlass*, of which the first has been referred to earlier, are two further fragments which, however complex and obscure, may elucidate Karoline's concept of love and *Streben*. The first *Fragment* shall be cited again, followed by the second and the fifth.

Die Vortreflichkeit ist ein Ganzes wir haben sie nicht, sie ist gleichsam wie die Bläue des Himels über uns, u unsere Vortreflichkeit, ist nur ein Streben zu ihr, eine Ansicht von ihr; drum ist keine Persönliche Liebe, nur Liebe zum Vortreflichen  
(Werke I 436)

Lasse dich leben wie du bist ohne Kunststücke mit dir zu probieren, d h ohne dich zwingen zu wollen Dinge zu lieben die du nicht lieben kanst; dein Klagen daß du nicht liebtest ist eine Sehnsucht nach Liebe\*, diese Sehnsucht, ist ein Gedanke (der weil er keinen Gegenstand hat auf dem er ruhe) ins unendliche starrt; jetzt begegnet mein Gedanke, deinem gestaltlosen hinaufstarren, u bildet es, giebt ihm seine Form\*\* wenn ich nun alle deine Gedanken die noch keine Form haben, mit den Meinigen begegnet bin, u sie geformt habe, dann nehme ich mit meinen Gedanken eine andere Richtung, du glaubst dann ich habe dich verlassen, aber ich müßte hoffärtig sein wollte ich mich zu den Glücklichen drängen die mich nicht bedürfen.

\*

\*\* ihren Grund u Zweck im Bewusstsein  
(Werke I 436)

Es giebt nur zwei Arten recht zu leben irrdisch, oder himlisch; man kann der Welt dienen, u nützen, ein Amt führen Geschäfte treiben, Kinder erziehen, dann lebt man irrdisch. Oder man lebt himlisch in der Betrachtung des Ewigen,



Unendlichen im Streben nach ihm. (eine Art Nonnenstand) wer anders Leben will als eine dieser beiden Arten der verdirbt. (Werke I 437)

In the second *Fragment* the poet elaborates on the first statement which in turn expresses the view *Narziß* holds in "Wandel und Treue," namely that desire in the individual towards an unattainable idea of excellence is the highest we can achieve. In the second *Fragment* she seems to be saying that this desire, or love, is a construct which creates its lover. In order for love to exist, the object of love must also desire to be loved. In this way the lovers create each other so to speak, responding to each other's need.

The fifth *Fragment* does not really belong to this abstract definition of love. However, it functions as a key to Karoline's interpretation of her life as a woman in her times. Her clipped and strict division of the two possibilities open to her fellow-citizens is clear: to live with both feet on the solid ground, making money, raising children; *irrdisch leben* is one way of going through life. The other choice one has is to observe the eternal and infinite *Streben*. The bracketed phrase "(eine Art Nonnenstand)" though modestly inserted into the statement, is the key to the entire passage. Karoline implies here this final choice will naturally exclude any ideas of marriage or sexual love. Her final statement then: "wer anders leben will als eine dieser beiden Arten der verdirbt," gains great significance. She herself wished to live in between these two positions. She rejected the notion of living her life as a wife and mother only,

yet she was not prepared to live like a nun.

Perhaps it is this quintessential dilemma that finds expression in Karoline's perplexing and contradictory poems about love. The only thing she was sure of was that *die Vortreflichkeit* was an ideal that can never be explained or defined in concrete terms; what she does know, feel, think and write is a longing for it, *Liebe, Sehnsucht, Verlangen, Streben*. This profound dilemma informs the poem "Liebe und Schönheit," which shall be cited here in conclusion:

Liebe und Schönheit

Prometheus hatte nun den Mensch vollendet,  
 doch unbeweglich blieb der tode Stoff,  
 Bis er der Sonne Funken hat entwendet;  
 (Ein Tropfe der der Schönheit Meer entroff)  
 Doch dieser Funke, er entflammt im Bilde  
 In das des Künstlers Weisheit ihn verhüllte.

Von Schönheit ist das Leben ausgegangen,  
 Doch es vergißt den hohen Ursprung nicht;  
 Es strebt zu ihm, und Lieb ist dies Verlangen  
 die ewig ringet nach dem Sonnenlicht.  
 Denn Lieb ist Wunsch, Erinnerung des Schönen  
 Die Schönheit schauen will der Liebe Sehnen.

Drum kann die Liebe nimmer selbst sich gnügen,  
 Drum ist sie nimmer reich in ihrem Reich;  
 Drum sucht sie Schönheit sich ihr anzufügen  
 Und bettelt ewig vor der Schönheit Reich.  
 Doch ach! unendlich ist das Reich des Schönen  
 So auch unendlich unserer Liebe Sehnen.  
 (Werke I 377)



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