

**Karoline von Günderrode: Family, friendship and the impact of nature on German  
Literature**

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## **Introduction:**

The purpose of this project report is to establish the interactions between Karoline von Günderode and her family members. During my initial conversation with Dr Joanna Raisbeck I learnt that Günderode was actually a representative of the Frankfurt patrician class and also that she was a free woman who often travelled and explored Frankfurt. Tragically, after a relationship with Friedrich Creuzer, she committed suicide, however, the main focus of this paper will be the interactions with her family members.

I came across the figures of Elisabeth and also Susanne von Heyden who were very close friends of hers. These friends discussed striking interpretations of nature with her. Bettina von Arnim and Clemens Brentano were also significant figures for Karoline von Günderode. The apocalyptic fragment reveals that the droughts and the flood of rain as well as the lack of fruit of the plants and crops were as a result of some divine force. Her friend Elisabetha Nees von Esenbeck seems to be dissatisfied with her current state of life as it is very lonely to her and also, she needs to take care of her husband and to be with her husband. As a result, she reveals that she cannot come to visit Karoline in Frankfurt as often as she would have liked to.

Karoline also reveals that she is a very bold and daring young woman in one of her letters, she confronts one of the men who makes accusations about a woman she knows.

Günderode replies that she does not believe that the accusations are true and says slyly that the source of the information cannot be false because the information was gathered from the man who accused her himself. There seems to also be an affection towards Susanne von Heyden from Karoline von Günderode's perspective as Elisabeth mentions this affection but stresses that she does not enjoy the company of Susanne as much as Karoline prefers to be in her company. I aim to argue that Karoline's interactions with her family members and her friends demonstrates that she is a tenacious pioneer who protected her family, maintained strong bonds with her friends and was an innovative literary practitioner who ultimately developed a lively portrayal of nature and its role in our world.

The Romanticists believed in the right to protect nature instead of letting nature to be exploited by the dominance of mankind. G nderrode herself in the Ideas on the Earth according to the article by Nassar, encourages humans to think about our existing role in the world and she also postulates that humanity should do more to coexist and nurture nature to help nature reach its full potential. She feels that we as humans have a duty to protect nature and to use our role in the world to help nature thrive. The German Romanticists often applied philosophical aspects to the environment which can be seen in the above perspective of Karoline von G nderrode. Goethe himself was inspired by the Persian poet Hafiz and wrote a written response to Hafiz and he also wrote the Persian inspired anthology of poems of the ‘West- stlichen Divan’. Karoline von G nderrode wrote a short narrative called *Geschichte eines Braminen* based on the protagonist of Almor who embarks on a search for his identity through being a follower of the three major world religions including Christianity, Islam and then afterwards, Hinduism. Instead of criticising the outlook that Almor wishes to achieve, G nderrode maintains a tolerant stance towards other beliefs and cultures, particularly towards the customs and beliefs of India at the time. This perspective is representative of the strong inclination towards viewing India as a centre of knowledge. Even in Schwetzingen Palace there is a mosque which although now a museum demonstrates the toleration and the strong intercultural understanding that developed between scholars at the time.

### **Nature and its relation to mankind:**

During my encounter with G nderrode’s philosophical engagements I was especially struck by the constant reference to nature in relation to mankind. In one of her poems, Narcissus is seen observing and standing over his reflection in the water and yet according to the speaker of the poem the cliffs and the rest of nature around him do not share a satisfaction with life. The speaker in fact stresses that “Narzissus neigt sein sch nes Angesicht und trennte sich von eignen Bilde nicht“ (Freies Deutsches Hochstift, Hs-20369) and that instead „mit solcher Freude sehn sich nicht die Felsen and stresses that „Sie staunen ob den eigenen Riesengipfel und borstiger heben sie die Wipfel als graute ihnen vor dem eigenen Bild“. (Freies Deutsches Hochstift, Hs-20369). Here, G nderrode creates a sinister and somber atmosphere that resonates with the reader since G nderrode holds a pessimistic view

towards the desolate nature of living in the countryside. Günderrode indeed stresses that the reality would erode her imagination and states, “Die Wirklichkeit tötet den Traum” (Freies Deutsches Hochstift, Hs-20369) and she underscores the importance of time even further and mentions that one cannot have a perspective without being able to acknowledge time. She says, “In der Logik lassen sich keine Anschauungen der äussern Sinne ohne die Merkmale Zeit und Raum zu gedenken und keine Anschauungen des innern Sinnes ohne das Merkmal Zeit” (Freies Deutsches Hochstift, Hs-20369) which suggests that one depends on both the sense of space and on the role of time in order to achieve a perspective of the world from the inside and the outside.

Günderrode goes on further to postulate that out of necessity and a desire for imagination one can sometimes have a tendency towards imagining areas for yourself as a source of pleasure and as a fantasy. She personifies these “Gegenstände” (Freies Deutsches Hochstift, Hs-20369) as being comparable to her own child, “Kind” (Freies Deutsches Hochstift, Hs-20369). She even underscores the notion that there is a constant yearning within ourselves to experience another life instead of the ones that we are currently living in. For instance, she states in a quotation, “Es ist sonderbar daß die Fantasie am meisten hervorbringt, wenn Sie äussern Gegenstände findet, sie erschafft sich dann selbst Gegenstände und bildet sie um so sorgfältiger da es keine Fremde Stoffe, sondern ihre eigne Kind sind” (Freies Deutsches Hochstift, Hs-20369). What is most striking about her ideas is that Günderrode distinguishes between two worlds. One world is the world of the living where people can enjoy the sunlight and the other world contains only shadows. She separates “die Unterwelt” (Freies Deutsches Hochstift, Hs-20369) from the “Oberwelt” (Freies Deutsches Hochstift, Hs-20369). This notion is evident in the quotation, „Das Leben lässt sich nicht theilen: man kann nicht in der Unterwelt mit den Schatten wandeln und zugleich auf der Oberwelt unter der Sonne und mit den Menschen. Ich habe auch oft darüber nachgedacht, aber ich glaube nicht daß man zwei Zustände haben kann“ (Freies Deutsches Hochstift, Hs-20369).

### **Günderrode's mother and Amalie:**

Günderrode's mother is depicted as being a lonely figure especially when she is without her daughter and says, "Wie einsam, wie Elend es jetzt im Haus ist kann ich Dir kaum sagen, aber es muss denn doch so fort gelebt sein" (Freies Deutsches Hochstift, Hs-8282) and she also mentions a „Concert“ (Freies Deutsches Hochstift, Hs-8282) which suggests that the family were outgoing and sociable with the rest of the members of society. With regards to her sister Amalie, Amalie is very much attached to her sister, Karoline and says, "denkst du nicht an deine Schwester; aber sie denkt an Dich: sie erfreut dich mit der Nachricht daß dein längst gesuchter Werther sich plötzlich ungesucht gefunden (Freies Deutsches Hochstift, Sign. Hs-8282) hat. Henriette Touissant hat ihn uns eben geschickt. Wir haben die Zeit Heliodora oder die Lautschlägerin von Griechenland gelesen in der Thatt ein gottlos stark romantischer Roman". (Freies Deutsches Hochstift, Sign. Hs-8282) She is also quite critical of the book as she mentions her opinion, „Nur finde ich der Verfasser des letzteren kann das Essen und trinken bei weitem besser und lebendiger mahlen“ (Freies Deutsches Hochstift, Sign. Hs-8282). Amalie exhibits a curious nature when she asks the question "Sage doch was macht Lisette?" (Freies Deutsches Hochstift, Sign. Hs-8282). Karoline on the other hand, is depicted as an audacious and bold young woman who maintains her strong belief and trust in other members and does what she feels is right in order to defend the image of the honour and the dignity of the Günderrode family.

### **Günderrode: An assertive and strong-willed woman**

Karoline is not only assertive, she is a very strong willed woman. Günderrode defends Sophie from the administrator when she states, "Sophie hat nie von unserer Mutter zu entfernen gesucht, welches wir nur allein wissen können, bei uns immer mit Liebe und Achtung mit ihr gesprochen" (Freies Deutsches Hochstift, Sign. Hs-8326). Ich hätte Zusammenkünfte bei ihr gehabt? Das ist wie ich auch am besten wissen muss, nicht wahr!" (Freies Deutsches Hochstift, Sign. Hs-8326) and she goes further to defend Sophie, „Was Sie von Sofies Gesinnungen gegen ihren Mann sagen, übergehe ich mit Stillschweigen. Der Gegenstand scheint mir so delikate, so ganz ausser der Sphäre eines Dritten, das er nie zur Unterhaltung eines Fremden dienen kann“ (Freies Deutsches Hochstift, Sign. Hs-8326).

Günderrode strengthens her case by saying that „Sofie ihr selbst aus Gründen sagten. Erfunden haben wir es nicht, denn wenn ich nicht irre waren, Sie Herr von Hohim, die Quelle aus der wir es erfahren haben“ (Freies Deutsches Hochstift, Sign. Hs-8326)

Here, Günderrode establishes her sense of authority as the relative of Sophie and is determined to prove to the administrator that it was in fact Herr Hohim himself who accused her erroneously.

### **Ein Apokalyptisches Fragment:**

In her article, Dr. Joanna Raisbeck suggests that in Günderrode's "Ein apokalyptisches Fragment" there is a fusion between being conscious and unconscious which would lead to the recognition of essentially a higher consciousness. This recognition also stresses the interaction between being unconscious and being conscious. According to Joanna Raisbeck, the text is actually a series of scripted verses about the apocalypse. The apocalypse was understood to be a revelation to discover a hidden truth instead of a "golden age" (Raisbeck, p. 141) that had been long awaited. The speaker essentially sheds their individuality in order to realise the "interconnected" (Raisbeck, p. 141) nature of the universe. The opening of the apocalyptic fragment begins as follows, "Ich stand auf einem hohen Fels im Mittel Meer und vor mir war der Ost, und hinter mir der West, und der Wind ruhete auf der See." The speaker seems to linger a while over the cliff as though they are admiring the beauty of nature and has a yearning to embark on an adventure that occurs between their consciousness and their unconsciousness, a state that has a dream-like quality. Joanna Raisbeck adopts the view that the speaker seeks to be united with the "totality" (Raisbeck, p. 137) and also that "the only means to resolve this frustrating separation is through dream-cognition" (Raisbeck, p. 141). The speaker has a yearning to understand nature "Ich wollte mich hinstürzen in das Morgenroth, oder mich tauchen in die Schatten der Nacht". In addition, regarding the company that her family kept, she criticizes the people who she describes as "wüthende Aristokraten" (Freies Deutsches Hochstift, Sign. Hs-7121) and does not share their views. She states indignantly, "Wie ich lebe? Oft unzufrieden mit mir selbst von denen die mich hier näher umgeben, kann ich keines eigentlich lieben. Ich kann mir keine Liebe ohne Harmonie der Gesinnungen denken, diese ist hier unmöglich" (Freies Deutsches Hochstift, Sign. Hs-7121). She goes further to convey

her emotions: „Oft fühle ich Bitterkeit gegen diese Menschen, wenn ich sehe, daß sie sogar kein Gefühl haben für das was mich interessiert“ (Freies Deutsches Hochstift, Sign. Hs-7121).

Furthermore she justifies her opinion when she says, „Ich sage mir es tausendmal es ist egoistisch nur Menschen von gleicher Empfindung zu lieben; und doch bleibts vorher. Ich resigniere auf Mitgefühl, nur lieben kann ich diese fremdartigen Geschöpfen nicht“ (Freies Deutsches Hochstift, Sign. Hs-7121). Immediately, here we see Karoline as an independent and strong-willed woman who distances herself from those she does not identify with.

### **The power of nature explored through letters:**

In addition, within her letters she is frequently poetic in her expression. For instance, in a letter to Friedrich Fritz, she declines to go to a ball which she would like to have attended. She states „Sie wissen wohl wie sehr es die voreiligen unruhigen Sterblichen martert, wenn sie ihrem Schicksal geruhig zusehen“ (Freies Deutsches Hochstift, Sign. Hs-12221).

Elisabeth her friend seeks solace in describing the effects of the turbulent weather which has destroyed the fruit of the gardens „Erinnerst Du Dich des Abends noch als ich die Nacht bey Dir zubrachte und das Andenken an Nees und meine Liebe zu ihm mein ganzes Wesen auf eine Höhe hob die mich die ~~aber~~ höchsten [S. 4] Beziehungen unsrer unendlichkeit ahnen ließ? Wie da mein heißer Wunsch war an seiner Seite die Größe eines Gewitters zu empfinden und mich mit Wollust in das Rollen des Donners zu stürzen! Das erste Gewitter und zugleich die furchtbargrößte Natur Erscheinung seit undenklichen Jahren zerstörte unsre Weinberge, unsere Saaten und Früchte, zerschmetterte unsere Gärten, unsre Fenster...“ (Freies Deutsches Hochstift, Sign. Hs-8334). Elisabeth emphasises the notion of a powerful force of nature that competes against the force of mankind to represent a disruption of the harmony between nature and man. Nature's power is demonstrated through the following quotation „Was den Menschen in seiner ganzen Ärmlichkeit zeigt als physische Kraft gegen das Auftreten einesr solchen Naturmacht, erhebt ihn aber auch zugleich über sie indem er sie empfinden kan und ihren gewaltiges Wollen versteht“ (Freies Deutsches Hochstift, Sign. Hs-8334). She defines nature as a “Naturmacht” which portrays nature as a formidable force that not even mankind can control. Nature is ultimately a force

of magnificence and a force to be feared in Elisabeth's quotations above describing nature as "die furchtbargrößte Natur Erscheinung" (Freies Deutsches Hochstift, Sign. Hs-8334). The repetition of "unsere" stresses that the notion of the collective and the concept of Gemeinschaft is being challenged by the force of nature which destroys the vineyards as well as the fruits and shatters "our gardens" and "our windows".

She feels as though nature has threatened the very core and existence of society and nature is here much to be feared in contrast to Karoline's admiration of nature. Elisabeth demonstrates the merciless destruction of nature in the following remarks: „Die ganze Erde bot so willig und freudig ihre Schätze...aber es war als wenn plötzlich ein höheres Schicksal Nein gesprochen hätte und in demselben Moment lag [S. 6] alles getödtet (Freies Deutsches Hochstift, Sign. Hs-8334). Here, Elisabeth laments the fact that nature has essentially destroyed the treasures of the earth and brings the role of fate into discussion. We also see Elisabeth's indignation at not being able to visit her friend Karoline in the quotation: „Nach Frankfurth konnte ich damals so wenig wie jetzt. ~~nicht~~ Die Gesundheit meines Mannes ist noch so wenig befestigt, beynah erst wieder im Entstehen daß ein thätiges Leben als Arzt ihn sicher zu Grunde richten müßte. Dabey trifft das gesellschaftliche Leben und der Verkehr mit Menschen in einer Stadt, so gar nicht mit seiner Neigung zur Einsamkeit überein daß wenn es selbst mein Wunsch wäre, was es nicht ist, ich jetzt nicht nach Frankfurt könnte“ (Freies Deutsches Hochstift, Sign. Hs-8334). It is due to her commitment to her husband that she is unable to meet with Günderrode but she still retains warmth towards Karoline as she emphasizes that Karoline would bring her joy in Frankfurt and she would like to visit her but she is not able to at the moment. The reasons are shown through her following justification“ „Auch unsre Öconomische Lage fordert daß wir bleiben. – Auch nur Du bist mir ja eigentlich was mich dort freut, und Dich hoffe ich auch auf andren Wegen [S. 8] um mich zu haben. Deine Liebe zur Heyden freut mich sehr für sie. Du bist ein Edelstein in ihrem Leben. Warum befinde ich mich doch allein nicht gut bey der Heyden da Du und Nees sie doch beyde liebt? In der Ferne denke ich gern an sie aber lange um sie zu seyn ist mir nicht lieb (Freies Deutsches Hochstift, Sign. Hs-8334).

She is unable travel to Frankfurt for economic reasons since she must stay with her husband. Here, she also mentions with much joy that Susanne von Heyden, another friend



of Karoline is very fortunate to have her in her life. Elisabeth states that she thinks of Heyden from afar but she does not enjoy the company of Susanne.

### Philosophical Studies:

In her philosophical studies, Karoline develops the notion of the moral organ and the ability to become conscious of one's morality. This consciousness to perceive her own sense of morality is depicted in the following quotation: „Das moralische Organ hat zwei Instinkte dem ersten nach ist die Seele durchaus leidend sie empfängt die Eindrücke, Liebe, Haß, Neid, Verlangen, Mitleid, Zorn u sw: dem zweiten nach ist sie thätig, sie urtheilt, verändert, reizt, oder beruhigt die Empfindungen, u bearbeitet sie, wie der Verstand bearbeitet was die Fantasie ihm darbietet“ (Freies Deutsches Hochstift, Hs-8351). Günderrode here, emphasises that there is a moral organ that helps to determine our role in morality and immorality. The Soul gains the emotions of Love, Hate and Jealousy as well as anger and sympathy. We then try to comprehend which fantasies are offered in trying to comprehend these emotions. She warns, however, that if one does not have the ability to comprehend the moral organ and cannot control the balance between morality and immorality then this will be the equivalent to imposing a burden on oneself and combined with intellect the moral organ could be reversed from its original purpose.

Linking back to her letter to her friend Claudine, Karoline reiterates that the nature that surrounds her is magnificent in its display of colour. She states „Das sind schlechte Verse liebe Claudine, aber die Gegenden sind darum doch herlich, besonders die Farben; kein einziges Licht ist weis alle blaugrau, u dies giebt ihnen ein so ernsthaftes Ansehen“ (Freies Deutsches Hochstift, Hs-20369). Here, Günderrode portrays the tranquility of nature in contrast to the pessimistic tone of the previous poem. These quotations above emphasise my argument that Günderrode portrays nature as a lively force. She is enraptured by the beauty of nature and the visual magnificence that it has to offer. The next passage underscores Günderrode's fascination with time and sensory imagery as though to grant the reader access to the aspects of nature that she observes herself. „Ich kehre in mich selbst zurück, u erschaffe mir eine **[S. 4, sichtbar]** andere Welt; leichte Träume umschweben mich, mein Bewusstsein verliert sich in der Betrachtung. So mag es einem Sterbenden sein, das

Bewusstsein wird immer schwächer, u unterbrochener, Träume umhüllen es immer dichter, u vermählen sich mit den Gestalten der Wirklichkeit, bis diese ganz schwinden, u der Träumer zum Traum wird. Das helle Bewusstsein ist drückend, es ist immer mit tausend Schmerzen verbunden, es kann die Zeit nicht vergessen, u knüpft mit unseligen Banden an die Erde u die Zeitlichkeit; darum weis das Bewusstsein von keiner Ewigkeit. Aber in Träumen ist die Ewigkeit, da gelten nicht die Berechnungen der Zeit, im Traum ist Seligkeit, u alle Seligkeit ist nur erträumt – Die Ewigkeit ist das Land der Träume“. (Freies Deutsches Hochstift, Hs-20369).

In the above passage, she reiterates that she is surrounded by dreams and that she seems to view reality which then disappears from her view. What is most striking about this passage is her notion of eternity. She says that the consciousness connects her with much pain and then consciousness connects with time and illustrates that during consciousness the concept of time continues to wane. In comparison, during her dreams there is the presence of eternity because time is not present in eternity. She also conveys the notion that in dreaming there is bliss and serenity and when it comes to eternity that in itself is the place where one can dream.

Here are my interpretations of some selected quotes of Ein Apokalyptisches Fragment:

„Und da ich dies dachte, und fast lebendiger fühlte als all mein Bewusstsein **[S. 6]** ward plötzlich mein Gemüth wie mit betäubenden Nebeln umgeben, aber sie schwanden bald, ich schien mir nicht mehr ich, u doch mehr als sonst ich, meine Gränzen konnte ich nicht mehr finden, mein Bewusstsein hatte sie überschritten, es war gröser, anders, u doch fühlte ich mich in ihm.“ Here, Günderröde emphasises the notion that she cannot find the limitations because her consciousness has overlapped them. She said that what she felt was in fact larger and different and she feels that she is within her consciousness.

„ich war allem wiedergegeben und alles gehörte mir mit an, ich dachte, u fühlte, woogte im Meer, glänzte in der Sonne, kreiste mit den Sternen; ich fühlte mich in allem, u genos alles in mir“. These lines above are a striking composition as she states that everything belonged

with her and she thought, she felt and interacted with the sea and shone in the sun and circled with the stars. She feels as though she is united with her consciousness and with nature. Günderrode's deployment of natural imagery provokes a feeling of admiration in the reader and this is heavily immersive and sensory. She glorifies nature and portrays nature again as a lively force and develops a consciousness that she is connected to nature.

“es ist Eins u alles; es ist nicht Körper u Geist geschieden, daß das eine der Zeit, das andere der Ewigkeit angehöre es ist Eins, gehört sich selbst, u ist Zeit u Ewigkeit zugleich, und sichtbar, u unsichtbar, bleibend im Wandel, ein unendliches Leben.“

Finally, Günderrode demonstrates the speaker as someone who comes to terms with the universality of nature and illustrates that nature helps to create harmony rather than disrupt the tranquility of co-existence. She emphasizes the unity of the body and the mind and therefore the unity of perceptions and feelings and imagination. More importantly, the dichotomy of appearance and reality stresses the notion that nature to her is ubiquitous and changes as time develops. The quotation “bleibend im Wandel, ein unendliches Leben” strikes a chord with the reader since we identify with the constant changing nature of the world and this line reflects her yearning for adventure and change in the world for the better as she rejuvenates the power of time and nature across her literary works.

### **Conclusion:**

In conclusion, Karoline von Günderrode is indeed shown to be a tenacious individual who not only protects her family but also seeks to contribute to the wider sphere of literature. She was a brave individual who maintained her beliefs and ultimately portrayed nature as a sublime force and as a force not to be underestimated. Her interactions with her mother and Amalie portray the educated background of her family and a passion for reading literature. The constraints of Protestantism at the time meant that she turned to Indian culture and customs as a source of fascination. What is particularly striking about her literary and philosophical works is her ability to express herself in an articulate fashion. She had a talent for creating vivid and surreal depictions of nature. Her two friends, Susanne von Heyden and Elisabeth Nees von Esenbeck undoubtedly influenced her view of nature and

shaped her future writings. She was not only a representative of Frankfurt but also a representative of the literary sphere which led even Goethe to look favourably upon her works. Reading the apocalyptic fragment indeed made me engage in self-reflection about the role of time and fate in our lives and our interconnectedness with nature. The creativity of Günderröde enables her to transport the reader into a world where nature and mankind can be evaluated in relation to one another. The constant use of questions and the artistic quality of her works provide a sense of continuous introspection which creates a provocation and a realization for the reader. Through her correspondence with Clemens Brentano, Günderröde was able to maintain her connection to Heidelberg. There are similarities with Hölderlin and she departs from Goethe's perspective of Romanticism. Karoline von Günderröde as a literary practitioner has inspired me to write my own poems in the German language which reflect on my visits to Germany and they also include natural imagery. Her unwavering courage to keep writing poetry has inspired me to continue writing my next poems in German. Although she had male mentors who gave her advice, she did not continuously heed their advice which demonstrates her tenacity to give voice to her own opinion and exhibits her rebellious nature.

In refusing to abide by the social rules of courtship and in her pursuit of Friedrich Creuzer, she was adamant, however, her poetry and philosophical studies demonstrate that her very identity was shaped by the nature around her and by her family members as well her interactions with the Heidelberger Romantik sphere. Indeed, her linguistic capability was also profound as she wrote poetry in French too. She clearly had a strong bond of friendship with Bettina von Arnim and even Brentano asked for her to assist him with his work. The apocalyptic fragment ultimately demonstrates her curiosity to understand the two states of consciousness and unconsciousness and she develops an atmosphere that is composed of the sensory elements. Karoline von Günderröde should be relevant to the writers of today because the way in which she perceives nature as an enigmatic, maternal and lively force reaffirms her creativity which continues to inspire me.

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