

Gisela von Arnim

Writer

Born in Berlin, August 30th, 1827;

Died in Florence, April 4th, 1889

The youngest of Achim and Bettina von Arnim's seven children, Gisela, was christened Gisela Ottilia Beata.

"Gisela was only four years old when her father died and from there on lived together with her mother, and it is said Bettina spoilt her daughter and apparently favourite child with attendance and care to such an extent that Gisela developed spiritually far above her age. Even before the age of six years she took great delight in being read Shakespeare and only learned to read and write very fast herself to not to be dependent on others anymore. 'Gisela was highly talented, understood everything, knew a lot, but did not want to learn,' lamented Maxe, who taught her younger sister, apart from spelling (...), also arithmetic, geography and French.



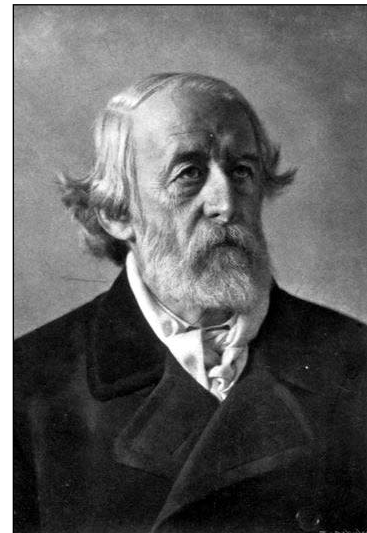
Gisela Grimm, née von Arnim
(1827 – 1889)

Of the three sisters (Maxe, Armgart, Gisela) she was the most gifted and most witty. Besides her intelligence she was beautiful with finely chiselled features, a noble brow and eyes full of expression. As a child, being very charming to look at, she took part in the "Living Tableaus", ("Lebende Bilder" = a play that was composed of living statues and little dramatic scenes arranged by young ladies and dames of the "Kaffeter" Circle¹ and organized for the Berlin society circles), but as a young girl she did not take part at the festivities at [royal] court because of her democratic conviction. She could paint and draw, write poems and stories and also compose, but she squandered her time with her various interests too much to become a really famous artist. Yet her nature was kind and generous to boot, however, also moody and changeable with a delight in criticising others vehemently.

When she was 16 years old she wrote her first fairy tales, stories and poems. With her fairy tale 'From the papers of a sparrow'

(German: 'Aus den Papieren eines Spatzens') she became a member of the Kaffeter circle (see annotation²), subsequently being nicknamed 'The Sparrow of Sparrowhouse' (German: 'Spatz von Spatzenheim'). Her intimate closeness with her mother Bettina made them write fairy tales together. (...)

Only after Bettina's death she married. Gisela and her old friend from childhood days, Herman Grimm, married secretly on October 25th, 1859, imitating the romantic marriage of her parents. Hermann Grimm was the son of Wilhelm Grimm, one of the 'Seven of Göttingen'" (German: 'Göttinger Sieben', a group of seven professors who had protested against the revocation of the Basic State Law in 1833 by King Ernst August of Hanover; all seven professors were dismissed from their offices). Wilhelm Grimm had been appointed an office in Berlin 1841 by the King [of Prussia] due to Bettina's negotiation. Since then Herman Grimm [later professor for art history and privy councillor] had been welcomed in the Arnim household like its own children, and immediately joined Gisela who was of the same age in a warm friendship that never wavered, became closer and closer and finally led to their marriage [which remained childless] (...). Gisela died on a journey in Florence on April 4th, 1889."²



Herman Grimm (1828 – 1901)

Selected works of Gisela von Arnim:

Mondkönigs Tochter, fairy tale

Aus den Papieren eines Spatzen, fairy tale

Das Leben der Hochgräfin Gritta von Rattenuhausbeius, fairy tale together with Bettina von Arnim

Das Licht, fairy tale in dramatic form

Die gelbe Haube, fairy tale in dramatic form

Dramatische Werke

Annotations:

¹ The “Kaffeter” was a group of young ladies, among them the Arnim sisters and their friends, who came together regularly to paint, to draw and read each other their little works or compositions. They also arranged little dramatic scenes which they performed in society.

² From: „Das Geschlecht von Arnim, Geschichte der Familie. Der Hauptstamm Gerswalde, 3. Zweig Blankensee“; bearbeitet von Achim von Arnim Zernikow, Dietlof von Arnim Wiepersdorf und Christel von Arnim Wiepersdorf, Selbstverlag, 1993.