

In the Tower

Here I stand on my lofty tower balcony.
A lone starling screams and whirs about me
While I, like one of the ancient Furies,
Let the storm play in my streaming hair.

O unbridled friend! O mad youth!
I wish I could fling my arms about you
And wrestle, sinew to sinew, for life or death,
Two steps from the edge.

On the shore of the lake below I see
The bold waves like great dogs at play
Tumbling, yelping, hissing,
Sending the shining foam flying.

O I would like to plunge
Into the midst of the raging pack
And join in the merry walrus hunt
Through lovely woods of coral.

Looking beyond my lofty aerie
I see a pennant waving
As boldly as any banner
And a ship's keel rising and falling.

O could I but sit in that struggling ship,
Lay hold of the rudder
And streak across the crashing reef
Like a seagull.

If I were a hunter in the open plains,
Or even a lowly soldier,
If I were but a man,
I'd let the gods guide me.

But here I must sit, so fine and pure,
Just like a good little girl,
Only in secret undo my long hair
And let the wind blow through it.

Annette von Droste-Hülshoff*
- translated by C.M. Taylor
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**Annette von Droste-Hülshoff (1797-1848)
Living in the first half of the nineteenth century, out of the mainstream of literary life, circumscribed at every turn by the dictates of family, religion and tradition, Annette von Droste-Hülshoff gave expression to her loneliness and frustration in some of the most vigorous poetry of that male-dominated period. In the poem, "In the Tower" (Am Turme), written in October, 1841, in a castle on the shores of Lake Constance, the reader can feel her enthusiasm for a life of action and her frustration at being denied that life because of her sex and frailty. As in many of her poems, she is very much in tune with the power of nature, (here a storm on Lake Constance) and is able to let her imagination rage with the storm. The final four lines have a poignancy, rare enough for the 19th century, but as genuinely moving to-day as then. Annette von Droste-Hülshoff died in this very castle, of tuberculosis, on the 24th of May, 1848.*