
Epistolary Romantics

A fabulatory excerpt from the forthcoming *Last year at Betty and Bob's An Actual Occasion*

Sher Doruff

"Bettina," she called to me at the door, "remember this story; it is certainly remarkable!"
Goethe's Correspondence with a Child

It's not classical, not Romantic either. It's Bettincal, her own charming genre somewhere in between. Christa Wolf, "Your Next Life Begins Today: A Letter to Bettina"

< In what follows - all items marked as such are direct quotations >

Letter from Walter Benjamin to Gretel Karplus

10 April 1926

Dearest Felizitas,

Today I awoke and jotted my adventure from last evening. Goethe was omnipresent as I entered a house to hang my hat, chat a bit and dine as guests do. This is what I jotted in my notebook. Perhaps you will find something of interest in it. Here's my rendition of the events.

*<Vestibule. A visit to Goethe's house. I cannot recall having seen rooms in a dream. It was a perspective of whitewashed corridors like those in a school. Two elderly English lady visitors and a curator are the dream extras. The curator requests us to sign the visitor's book lying open on a desk at the farthest end of the passage. On reaching it I find as I turn the pages my name already entered in big unruly childish letters.>**

I'm reminded of an adolescent piece I wrote on Schiller and Goethe that imagined a magical forest of literary tropes. Did I ever read that trifle to you? Or the bit where I'm wandering through a sea of ash trees, to find Balzac "sitting at a table smoking a cigar and writing one of his novels" under an arbor so green, so vividly leafy as to mesmerize. We have often spoken together of our shared interest in that "contradictory and mobile whole" we wade through in the convergence of our waking and dreaming lives.

You know how anathema working towards a book format is to me at this time. I can only whole-heartedly assent to literary production in the form of leaflets, essays, brochures, banners, placards. These forms are vital now. A book is so impaired of the vitality of the moment.

Nonetheless, I'm working on a new book I'm thinking to call "One Way Street." Honestly, I'm not at all sure why this is the title that occurs to me but for now I will stick with it. I may include the Goethe dream.

Curious what you think of this adventure.

Yours,

Walter

* < all items marked as such are from Walter Benjamin: One Way Street and Other Writings, NLB, 1979>

Correspondence of Goethe's mother and Bettina Brentano

TO GOETHE'S MOTHER

Frau Rat! It is with such pleasure that I write you today. *<I am not at home, but when I write to you, then I feel that I have a home.>** And this feeling I so enjoy. Learning of your interests, your peeves, your son's brilliant imaginings and his everyday doings, all this I glean through our frequent missives to each other.

You know by now quite well that my love of your son *<is confined to that little white-walled room, where I first saw him, where he sits on the straw-hassock and holds me in his arms...>* For one such as myself, this girl child desirous of his love, his attentiveness is bliss. I know it appears as though I come on too strong. That I take the role of a blatant vamp. But do not think me too forward Frau Rat as you know more than any other of his wisdom and charms and of my delirious expectations that he may take a moment or two or three between his color experiments and his poetry to read my very long, very quotidian yet earnest letters.

Farewell and write to him of me.

Bettina

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GOETHE'S MOTHER TO BETTINA

Frankfort, May 12th 1806

Dear Bettina.

< Thy letters give me joy, and Miss Betty who recognizes them on the address, says: "Frau Rat, the postman brings you a pleasure." Don't however be too mad about my son, everything must be done in order.> The wallpaper pattern you chose for the brown room is now installed and the color blends beautifully with the shimmering light of morning and twilight.

<Write much, even if it were every day.
Thy affectionate friend>

Elizabeth Goethe

.....

TO GOETHE'S MOTHER

Frau Rat,

The sky is so blue, so clear, the sunshine golden beyond measure. Sitting here I imagine that in the evening, if your son ever does think kindly of me and would come perhaps to visit, <if I waited all day and the sunlight hours rolled by, and the hour of shade with the silver-crescent moon and the stars, should bring the friend, he would find me on the mountain-verge, running to his open arms.> He would surely feel my love for him! I live for this possibility!

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TO BETTINA

Frankfort, May 25th

<Hey! Child, though art bewitched!>

I must remind you again, please please, *<everything in order, and write connected letters in which there is something to read. Stuff!>*

Tell us about everything that happens in your day but in an orderly way. Please. Tell us small daily trifles. Who you meet with, if you like them at all, how they dress, how the weather blows. Stuff. Like that.

<My son has begged me again, to tell thee to write to him. But pray in an orderly fashion or thou wilt ruin the whole affair. >

Frau Rat

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TO BETTINA

September 21st

My son would so like to have the story of G nderode from your pen, from your heart. You can send it him directly in Weimar. He'll take care of your words, preserve them and won't bother you any more about it so as not to cause you further distress.

<Man is buried in consecrated earth: - even thus should we bury great and rare occurrences in a beautiful tomb of remembrance, to which each one may approach and celebrate the memory thereof.>

Wolfgang wrote these lines you might recall, when he created Werther. Please, do write your love story. Tell it honestly and hold nothing back. We so want to understand what drew her to death.

I have written to him about you and he takes comfort in knowing you persevere in this tragedy and write to me.

Thy friend,

E. GOETHE

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TO GOETHE'S MOTHER

<You have not dealt well with me this time, Frau Rat. Why did you not send me Goethe's letter? Since the 13th August I have had nothing from him, and it is now the end of September. >

You have asked me, subtly though with little earnest pressure, to speak of G nderode's story and my own. It is so very difficult for me to write anything yet of G nderode and her death on the Rhine. You know I'm sensitive but I'm not *that* sensitive. The thing is I'm not yet far enough removed from grief and anger to tell it. But I will say that yesterday I did go down to that spot where she did it, where, so full of despair, she plunged that damn dagger into her breast. She had this thought, this plan, I dare say, for some time. I will tell you and your son about everything but right now, I simply cannot pull the threads together. *<No! it distresses me and I reproach her, as I used to do in my dreams, that she has left this beautiful earth...Yes! She used me ill! She fled from me in the moment when I would have imparted to her every enjoyment. >*

Now that I am writing to you that I cannot write about G nderode, I feel the words swelling up in me. I will continue unravelling my story as long as I can manage my emotions. It is not easy for me now. But I will begin, I'll try to convey something of my grief.

When she first sought me out, I being five years younger than her eighteen, we met every day. *<With her I learned to read my first books, with understanding. She wanted to teach me History, but soon saw that I was too busy with the present, to be held long by the past.>* She taught me Philosophy, insisting I write about what I had comprehended. She delighted in my essays though I doubt they came close to expressing concepts as she understood them. She was so very clever. I could not bear to miss a day spending time with her. She was tall and too thin, a mere wisp of a timid flowing thing. Chasing prominence in societal circles would never be a game she could play well. She could not, would not, excel at party parlay for recognition's sake. Together we read Werther and of course we discussed the idea of love triangles and suicide, those ideas your son instilled in that fine novel. I remember G saying to me in enthralled tones: *<"To learn much, to comprehend much and then die early! I would not survive when youth had left me.">*

Your son, my dear Frau Rat, knows so well the enchantment of a ray of light. The sheer beauty of the color's spirit. How it can overtake one much as the scent of a flower or a sweet Madalein-Keks. He is well aware, indeed perceives that *<semblance is no semblance, but truth itself.>*

For myself, I saw my dreams and pursued them. I can never distinguish well between sleeping and waking. I am always so convinced of my ability to fly and slowly float one maybe two meters above the ground, bouncing, touching earth and then -whew! - flying off again as would a tiny Red-flanked Bluetail. When I wake in the morning I am fully convinced that I can fly. I would write to G nderode of these things. I would sometimes believe them so thoroughly I would bring them to life. Enact my awakenings. Like the times I would climb, as if possessed, the silver poplar in her garden to read a book. *< At each chapter, I clambered one bough higher and thus read down to her – she stood at the window and listened, speaking to me above; every now and then she would say “Bettina don’t fall.” >*

But my flying and floating did not move her from the track of her destiny. When I next saw her she said excitedly: *<“Yesterday I spoke with a surgeon, who told me it was very easy to make away with one’s self.”>* Then, and I kid you not about this Frau Rat, she unbuttoned her dress and pointed to a spot beneath her gorgeous breast. “Right here, right here is the vulnerable place.” She was so excited, so delighted that I felt afraid for her. *<“Well” I asked, “and what shall I do when thou art dead?” “O”, she said, “ere then, thou wilt not care for me anymore. We shall not remain so intimate till then, I will first quarrel with thee.”>* Frau Rat, can you understand this? I cannot. Will not.

This is now becoming a very long letter to you dearest mother of my friend. You asked for this. I hope you can handle the truth of it.

<After I had observed her awhile, I could no longer control myself. I broke out into loud crying, I fell on her neck, tore her down to a seat, and sat upon her knee and wept many tears and for the first time, kissed her on her mouth, and tore open her dress and kissed her on the spot, where she had learned to reach the heart. And I implored her with tears of anguish, to have mercy upon me, and fell again on her neck, and kissed her hands which were cold and trembling, and her lips were convulsed, and she was quite cold, stiff and deadly pale, and could not raise her voice. She said slowly, “Bettina don’t break my heart.”>

* < all items marked as such are from Goethe's Correspondence with a Child, e-text [Bruce G Charlton](#), University of Newcastle upon Tyne, UK, 2004 >

Letter from Goethe to Bettina

TO BETTINE

Apologies my dear for my often slow, shallow responses to your lengthy letters. Though verbose they fill me with information of the world as experienced through the eyes of its youth. Though I daresay you are in no way typical of Europe's youth at large. In this regard you remain an inspiration to me.

*<It is still a question, dearest Bettina, whether one can with better reason call you odd, or wonderful; neither dare one reflect; one considers at last only, how to ensure himself safely against the rapid flood of thy thoughts. Be therefore content, if I do not minutely soothe, satisfy, answer and evade, thy complaints, thy demands, thy questions and thy accusations; but in all heartily thank thee, that thou hast again so richly endowed me. >**

Now, I know my dear mother has relayed this request to you on other occasions but I must again restate it so as to make our correspondence attain the peak of its potential. *<A little more arrangement in your views might be useful to us both. Thus are your thoughts like costly pearls, not all equally polished, strung upon a loose thread, which easily breaks, and then they may roll to all corners and many might be lost.>* I beseech you this as you well know I am soon to publish my extensive research developing a fresh, revolutionary Theory of Color. I am refuting Newton's established optical theories. This gesture may be seen by some as arrogant. But his spectrum, as I have long observed, is wrongly situated. I will propose to the world visual events everyone may experience with the aid of a glass prism aimed at white and black surfaces. Boundary colors my dear, boundary colors! This is how we may best understand the magnificence of light and its progeny.

That said dear Bettina, I offer you my grateful thanks for the diversions and little gems you regularly send through the post. *<Be well assured that I willingly take what you offer to me, and that thus the tie between us will not easily be loosened.>*

GOETHE

**< all items marked as such are from Goethe's Correspondence with a Child, e-text [Bruce G Charlton](#), University of Newcastle upon Tyne, UK, 2004 >*

Footnote

Friends and family of Bettina Brentano von Arnim

Goethe acolyte. Beethoven muse. Proto-feminist, social activist, communist, writer, composer, artist. Ballsy, self-conscious, queer, motherly, generous, radical (in every sense of the term).



Bettina Brentano von Arnim

Bettina Brentano von Arnim is best known for her first book, published in 1837, when she was well into mid-life. *Goethe's Correspondence with a Child* was admired and hated, analyzed, problematized and doubtless misconstrued by literary critics and the public, then and now. In these pages she openly fabulates her correspondence with J.W. Goethe and his interlocutor mother Frau Rat. These letters depict the epistolary style of the time, stimulated by Goethe's first novel *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, published in 1774. In *Correspondence*, Bettina unfolds a girl crush on a famous man that was remarkably (blushingly, infuriatingly) uninhibited. Though a platonic affair (we are told), the depiction raises all manner of questions regarding what women could say and how they could say it in that tumultuous era. Close reading reveals the girl's gradual influence on Goethe regarding resistance to the anti-semitic politics of the day and the beauty of music.

From Bruce G. Charleton's introduction to the online version of *Correspondence*:

My interpretation is that in terms of factuality, there is a blend of accuracy and invention: but perhaps the most striking aspect of *Correspondence* is its 'psychological truthfulness' – its impression of being an extraordinarily candid and self-revealing document – indeed, almost frighteningly so. According to *The Oxford Companion*, this emotional openness disturbed the book's early readers – but it is precisely this quality which gives the book its appeal to a modern readership.



Frau Rat and her son J.W. Goethe

By all accounts, Bettina Brentano was a live-wire. Quantum leap her era to 21C and her twitter feed would number in the hundreds of thousands. She'd rival the Kardashians with daring feats of social ambiguity. She'd produce a youtube channel. Possibly, she'd be a comparative lit Prof or a sonic arts composer.

Schumann, Liszt and Brahms figured in her pantheon of admirers. She got around. Made herself known and available to important folks. Her off-the-grid politics and instinctive feminism were unusual in her era. Maximiliane von La Roche, her mother, attracted Goethe's colorful affections when he was twenty-four and she sixteen. He wrote in his autobiography:

It is a very pleasant feeling when a new passion starts in us before the old has quite lapsed – as at sunset when we see the moon rising opposite and enjoy the double radiance of both heavenly lights. - Goethe, Poetry and Truth

He would further immortalize Maximiliane in the composite character of the unobtainable Charlotte in his tragic drama *Young Werther*. This was the viral read of its day. Romantic suicide made cool.

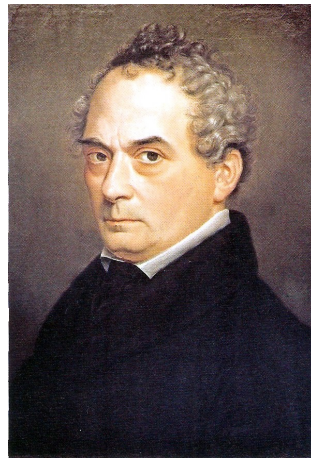


Maximiliane von La Roche

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Bettina's brother Clemens (1778-1842) was a famous romantic poet with a crazy streak.

At one point he painted his room (floor to ceiling), the carpet, the curtains and his own face blue. He wrote plays and fairy tales and, with his friend Achim von Arnim (and with help from Bettina), gathered the folk poems for the epochal collection *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*, a touchstone of German Romanticism. As a lyric poet, Clemens rivalled Goethe. – Jan Swafford, "A Virtuoso Muse", *The Guardian* (23 August 2003)



Clemens Brentano

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Gisela von Arnim, one of Bettina's many daughters, married a Grimm and wrote fairy tales. Her first, co-authored at age twelve with her mother, was *Das Leben der Hochgräfin: Gritta von Rattenzuhausbeiuns* (*The Life of high Countess Gritta von Ratsinourhouse*).



Gisela von Arnim

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And of course there was her bestie, her love, poet Karoline Günderode. Her friend famously stabbed herself in the heart on the banks of the Rhine in 1806. Following the Werther tradition.



Karoline Günderode

Correspondence of Karoline Günderode and Bettina Brentano

Doruff, Sher. "Epistolary Romantics. A fabulatory excerpt from the forthcoming *Last Year at Betty and Bob's An Actual Occasion*." *Inflexions* 11 "popfab", (2019)

TO GÜNDERODE

Dearest, please permit my rambling, just a little, on the importance of the night sky in my young life. I know as I write this that the stars I gaze upon and that gaze upon me are the same stars you see tonight. That knowledge gives me profound pleasure.

<I have a great love of the stars, and believe all the instructive thoughts that come into my soul are sent me by them. I would not miss going to my tower a single night; it would seem like breaking a vow I made to them to keep them waiting for me in vain. What men have ever wanted to teach me, I would not believe; but what enters my thoughts up there in nightly solitude I must believe. Shall I not listen to the voice speaking down to me from heaven? Do I not feel its breath streaming upon me from all sides? That is because I confide wholly to them in the lonely night. I climb a path that terrifies me, in order to be with them. I come to the tower and my heart trembles within me as I anxiously mount, and not until I reach the topmost round, where I must rest my hand to raise myself up, do I feel relieved. There, all the stars shine down upon me, and whom I love I commit to their care – thee first of all. If I were cheated out of thee, it were all over with them. I write thy name in the snow that still lies on the tower, that they may guard thee, which they will certainly do.... 272 >*

TO BETTINA

My dear, as always your antics terrify me. Your total disregard for your safety and my peace of mind. *<Thou wilt not feel hurt if I am a little afraid of thee? Thou even makest me afraid of myself! I am anxious about thee, and beg thou wilt, for Heaven's sake, take care not to fall. 278>*

Please my dearest, take care not to fall.

TO GÜNDERODE

I am thinking today of my dead parents. I am thinking about the grief and sorrow that may overcome one when in a lonely place like the Carmelite convent. But I have never found fear in lonely places or in sad people. I say this to assure you that you can freely

share your sadness with me. I'm a worthy listener to all that troubles you should you want to tell. I can be quite still and attentive given such an occasion.

Though yesterday, if I'm honest, < *I longed for evening all day because I was so restless. Had I only a line from thee about thee! I have nothing but half thoughts that rise from the depth of my bosom, but I dare test them. If thou wouldst only write me this, "Bettina, I love thee," it would suffice.* 318>

You know I would gladly sacrifice my life for you and you alone. But if it's too too difficult for you to share your confidences with me I will stop asking. And anyway, every feeling with you is so plainly seen on your brow. I am reading you with every breath. I write and write too much of my own spilling feelings.

I was so tired from writing this letter last evening that I fell asleep and did not climb the tower as I have every evening this past week. I rushed there this morning to find your name still engraved in the snow.

TO BETTINA

Please forgive me for not writing sooner. Family responsibilities have interfered with my ability to respond quickly. I'm not neglecting you dear Bettina. It is often true that you are freer and able to act spontaneously when I am as always so timid and constrained. This is a difference between us. <*If thou wilt wander thy road of life with me, thy heart and soul to my hesitation, or rather to my incapacity, for I do not know how I could manage to follow thee; wings have not grown for that purpose. I beg of thee to consider this in time, and to regard me as a being who might leave much untried to which though art impelled.* 325>

* < *all items as such are direct quotations from Correspondence of Fräulein Günderode and Bettina von Arnim, Forgotten Books, 2018* >

Correspondence of Bettene Vermine and WildRed

27 April

My dear Rode,

It's very hot here, hasn't rained in weeks. 36° is just too much for strenuous walking but I haul my sweaty ass up the hills anyway. Haven't seen another human on the trail. I thought of you, caught a little glimpse of the magic that is your everyday. Love the breath-taking silence but for the soft rush of clear water over rock.

Enclosed in this envelope are the dried leaves of a fern I found in a recent hike on the Schwarzwaldsteig. I can't identify it. Perhaps you know it? I only took a tiny sample. Feels like plundering to snip more. I look forward to another master class from you on the indigenous plant life of south central Europe. I've been musing lately over the philosophical efficacy of vegetal existentialism. I admit to feeling that critical theory focus on non-human objects (have accepted the rock *and* the hard place ;) and animals is deficient somehow. I find discourse on plant, fungal and microbial networks far more challenging these days. You were always way ahead of the curve on this. Do you remember that talk from Rinpoche (what was his name)? When we went to the meditation center in France five years ago and you asked him why plants aren't considered sentient beings? And he simply said because they are not. We were both disappointed by the canonical answer. I wonder if I'll ever find a spiritual path as enlightening as a panoramic footpath? Do you think they might be the same thing? Is it that way for you?

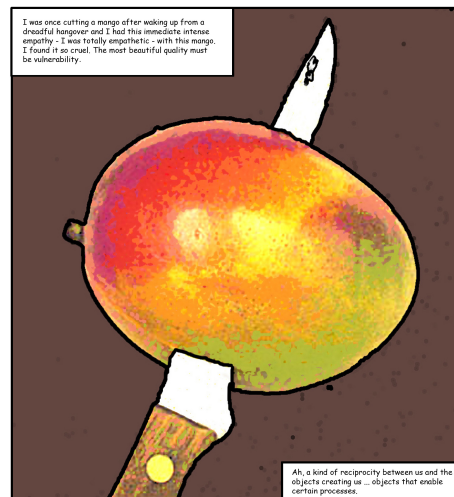
Did I ever tell you my ggggrandmother's story? It was passed down from her to my great grandma Elizabeth to grandma Betty to my mom. Greatgreat grandma was in college in the 1960's chopping broccoli florets for dinner and her then boyfriend (who btw was later murdered, run over by a pick-up truck in a drug deal gone wrong) started screaming at her to pay attention to the living being she was dismembering. Grabbed the chef knife from her hands and cut the remaining broccoli heads in a rage. Freaked her out, my ggg, and all subsequent daughters and sons who have heard the story. My family has never been able to slice vegetables without fear and shame. Well, yeah, I've been thinking of that story lately and I'm pretty sure I've inherited the genetic memory. Gives pause to that Whitehead remark - "a vegetable is a democracy." Chop chop.

I'm using the PO box address you gave me last summer. I hope this letter finds you or you find it. I have this idea of joining you with the other Grittass later this summer high up in the Dolomiti where the air is cooler (maybe). Be great to get us together on a mountaintop sans wifi and make something all of us. Anything. Music. Field recordings with natural echo. Dinner. Love. You up for it? Could you recommend a location?

yours,

BV

Ps. Enclosed a printout page from a graphic novel that my gggrandma would identify with. You too probably.



10 May

Ciao Bettene,

Thank you so much for the beautiful wood fern, a *Polystichum braunii* I'm pretty sure. We call it a Felce di Braun. It's not uncommon where you're walking now but nonetheless a real gem. Not your typical *Dryopteris*.

There are more than two hundred species in the *Polystichum* genus but only about four are indigenous to central Europe. Most are in Asia, FYI. Did you notice that the shape of the leaflet base, the auricle, is larger on one side? The *P. braunii* rhizome is short and the fronds are arranged in a circle which can be over a meter long and hoorah, it's green yearlong. *P. braunii* LOVES the shallow soil of those rocky, shady forests where you are now, where I am most of the time, sliding on mossy rocks next to waterfalls. Glorious

no? Don't you just adore those extraordinary logarithmic spores? Did you see them? I love this about ferns, these delicious spirals of lipids and protein.

Funny you bringing up that Buddhist teaching we went to. I think it was Amsterdam not Fontainebleu. But anyway, that one raised a quandary. I remember it messed us up for a while though the meditation sessions were wonderful and that's what we were really there for. Nothing like attending to breathing through the skin in ensemble like plants breathe through their leaves. I tend to think spiritual paths convolve with materiality like nature entangles culture. But what do I know?

LOL over your gggrandmother's broccoli PTSD! Have to admit I have a similar reaction sometimes.

YES YES! Let's all meet in the mountains. I know just the place. We can stay in an abandoned house in this exquisitely empty village. Getting daily provisions is a task but I will, you know, gather most of the ingredients with some help from bobbob and Arefeh. Will send the cartographic details and phone numbers tmw. Can I just ask that you do all the negotiating with Roberta, the café owner qua reference librarian who keeps the keys? I love her, really, but prefer to stay outside her establishment. The last time I entered I had a mild seizure. You'll see what I mean.

Let me know what you decide. The postal address is correct as I'm in City for a while. I'm gonna practice skidding. Always wanted to try it with my funny feet. (Thank you kindly Indira and Gregor). I'm certainly steady on wet, algae covered rocks and mountain ice. I am curious to see if my hooves provide too much traction on the Path.

Love,

WR

Email from Bettene to Grittas

Date: 19 May 11:34

From: bettenevermine@

To: boobob900@, Arefeh628@

Re: sabbatical prep

Dears,

WildRed recommended a perfect location for our getting together. It's quite near her childhood home. I do hope you can all manage the August dates coming from wherever you are in the world. You need to find a means of getting to Lavenone by 9 August. We'll meet there at a rendezvous point (will send details in a follow-up) and travel by bus to our destination.

Bit of homework – I suggest we all read some Benjamin before we go. Fodder for our PhiloNight discussions. *One Way Street*, browse *The Arcades Project*. Maybe divert and dip into *Geontologies* and matusake mushrooms. WR also recommended we bring at least one copy of *Wildflowers of the Dolomites* which makes sense of course.

So, you up for it? Any other suggestions welcome but let's not overwhelm ourselves with the written word this time.

It may be very hot so bring light clothing for daytime and something warm and snuggly for the evenings.

Any questions (I'm sure there will be) pass them through me.

xbv

Email thread between WR and BV

Date: 15 April 17:40

From: günderode435@

To: bettenevermine@

Re: ancestral inheritance

Dearest B,

Following up: Of course, the politics of genetic modification is paramount these days, among MANY other concerns. You know my feelings about CRSPR culture quite well. You know I'm not a fan of germline tinkering though I can modestly support soma engineering. We've been over this. And over this. And will again go over this.

I would like to tread really trivial waters today. Remark on the name of the rose so to speak. What the fuck's in a name? A rose is a rose is rose. A brand by any other name would smell as tainted. I'm thinking about the taxonification of persona. Now I know parents are growing "theybies" these days, little gender neutral peeps. But can we talk about their naming choices? OK, so I'm more traumatized than others perhaps but still, poor Dweezil set the bar really low.

Best,
WildRed Günderode

Date: 15 April 18:10
From: bettenevermine@
To: günderode435@
Re: ancestral inheritance

The Gen Z's steamrolled through all their burdens and ironies with monikers like "Ode Mountain" and "Rocket Zot." Btw - Why did Gen X succeed the boomers? Do we owe the end game fate to Douglas Coupland? That's a laugh. Who named us Gen Alpha anyway? It's about time to embrace a non-western alphabet don't you think? (bobbob would opt for Ge'ez, I'm partial to Inuktitut).

Date:15 April 19:02
From: günderode435@
To: bettenevermine@
Re: ancestral inheritance

Yeah I know. Names.

But after all, why DID you choose that pesky little "Vermine?" Were you taking one baby step away from your parent's authority and/or whim? I appreciate your desire to set out on your own terms. More than you might know. Gregor told me he was reading this obscure romantic poet when mom went into labor. OMG, here comes Günderode!

Now there was a smarty-pants NB before her time. I can get down with her intellect, her politics and her wild wantings but whoa, she took a confused turn with that knife don't you think. And btw, it was NOT over that married creep Kreutzer and some kind of Werther complex. I looked into it. Well, there might have been a bit of Werther in the deed but certainly, certainly, it was smothered potentiality. No wilding future in sight.

Date: 16 April 8:10

From: bettenevermine@

To: günderode435@

Re: ancestral inheritance

Dear Goo,

She became a kind of icon to some No? A feminist hero like her pal Bettina ;-), that changeling who got away with radical activism by feigning girlish naïveté. She was given a long leash to live between the lines. But Poor Bettina never got over that trauma of her first love leaving like that as far as I understand it. For me, the most intense drama of the romantic period.

Date: 16 April 12:16

From: günderode435@

To: bettenevermine@

Re: ancestral inheritance

I find this particular sentiment revealing. It's on her Wikipedia page of all places. Kind of advanced for the early 19C:

I have no feeling for feminine virtues, for a woman's happiness. Only that which is wild, great, shining appeals to me. There is an unfortunate but unalterable imbalance in my soul; and it will and must remain so, since I am a woman and have desires like a man without a man's strength. That's why I'm so vacillating and so out of harmony with myself.... – Karoline Günderode

See what I mean about her non-binary potential. For sure she didn't jam that dagger over a suitor gone wrong. Goethe be damned. She was desperate.

Date:16 April 19:02
From: bettenevermine@
To: günderode435@
Re: ancestral inheritance

I see what you mean. Remarkable.
And babycakes, this is your anthroponomous inheritance.
Onomastics...look it up.

Date:17 April 10:07
From: günderode435@
To: bettenevermine@
Re: ancestral inheritance

Have you read your para-namesake's letter to Goethe's mom – Frau Rat - about Günderode's suicide? You must have right? It's chilling. Funny we've not yet talked about this. Anyway, I'm attaching it in a doc here in case you were spared this herstory. I'd love to hear your thoughts on Bettina's telling. It's from her first book. That faux letter exchange with the grand old man. Did you ever read it? Or skim through it? That's what I did though there were a few sections that grabbed my attention entirely. She, Bettina, took incredulously brave literary license for that era. Scholars still can't separate the fact from the fiction. Chaff and grain kind of thing. Methinks she the Kathy Acker of her day.

From *Goethe's Correspondence with a Child*. Not sure of the page number as I got this from a website.

A fortnight passed and then Fritz Schlosser came; he asked me for a line to Günderode, as he was going to the Rheingau and wished to make her acquaintance. I said we had quarreled, but begged him to speak of me, and mark what impression it made upon her. "When do you go?" said I. "Tomorrow?" "No, in a week." "Oh do go tomorrow, or

you will find her no more – it is so melancholy on the Rhine” said I jestingly “she may do herself some mischief.” Schlosser looked at me anxiously. “Yes! Yes!” I said petulantly, “she will plunge into the water, or stab herself out of mere caprice.” “Do not libel her” said he; and now I began to do so in right earnest. “Take heed Schlosser– you find her no more if you delay according to your old custom; and I tell you go rather today than tomorrow and save her from her unreasonably melancholy humor;” – and in jest I describe how she would kill herself, in a red gown, with loosened boddice, and close beneath her breast, the wound: this was called wanton wildness in me, but it was unconscious excitement, in which I described the truth with perfect accuracy.

[...]

When we arrived in Mittelheim, where we put up for the night, I lay at the window and looked on the moonlit water. The maid who laid the cloth said: “Yesterday a young and beautiful lady, who had been residing here for six weeks, made away with herself at Winkel: she walked a long time by the Rhine, then ran home and fetched a handkerchief: in the evening she was sought in vain, the next morning she was found on the bank among the willow-trees; she had filled the handkerchief with stones and tied it around her neck, probably because she intended to sink in the Rhine, but as she stabbed herself to the heart, she fell backwards, and a peasant found her thus lying under the willows by the Rhine, in a spot where it is deepest. He pulled the dagger from her breast and flung it full of horror far into the Rhine.”

[...]

“No! It is surely true! For I dreamed, that I saw her and asked: “Günderode, why hast thou done this to me,” and she was silent and sunk her head mournfully and could not answer. Now in bed I reflected on all, and bethought me, that she had formerly said, she would break with me before she completed her purpose; (now our separation was explained)...

Want more? Read Christa Wolf's *Letter to Bettina*.

Date:17 April 18:31

From: bettenevermine@

To: günderode435@

Re: ancestral inheritance

Geez,
Fuck.

Slack AO - # dreaming

dreaming

@ arefeh started this channel 11 June. This is the very beginning of the # dreaming channel.

----- 11 June -----

arefeh 12:10 PM

joined # dreaming along with bobbob

Preface: Haven't connected in a while. Will be great to see you at our little *organizar la fiesta* in Italia. About that...

Have you started the readings yet? I was reluctant when I saw BV's suggestions. You know, I prefer to invest in current critical theory. There's so much buzz and so little time. These crusty canon texts aren't for me. However, I am finding this thinking of Benjamin on the event of "awakening" kinda woke. Bad joke. Sorry.

Do you dream? If so do you remember them? I've had this feeling the last few years that I'm working out discursive problems in my dream adventures. There are all sorts of clues laid bare naked in these stories. You know my guilty pleasure is a good detective story. Don't tell anyone.

Anyway, I'm not talking about dream interpretation. Forget that Freudian shit. It's the narrative situatedness of the dream, the problem-solving. I notice now, as I'm actively scheming to remember nightly details, that theoretical conundrums get actualized in crazy ways during REM sleep. How do I know that? I don't really but I have a sense there's a different quality to my deep sleep dreaming than to my NREM dreams. I've been massaging techniques to help me remember better.

So WB, the too soon dead guy with the glasses that is, lets loose a few dream snippets in *One Way Street*.

Then later on (page 49) he says:

These are days when no one should rely unduly on his "competence". Strength lies in improvisation. All the decisive blows are struck left-handed.

Strange he'd use a boxing ref to underscore decisiveness.

----- 12 June -----

bobbob 5:10 AM

Up early. Or rather, haven't been to bed yet. Started reading and got jagged by the dream bug. Googled "dream science" and got lost in fascinating sea of new theories. You're to blame for my sleepless, dreamless night thank you very much.

Here's some stuff I found out:

Dreams as threat simulation. Found a paper by a Finnish researcher that asserts an evolutionary biological function of dreaming "to simulate threatening events, and to rehearse threat perception and threat avoidance." He or she or they (crazy Finn names) cites two contradictory functions (I'm gonna do some cut/paste here): that 1) "dreaming has a problem-solving function in an intellectual or cognitive sense: The function of dreaming is to find solutions to (or to facilitate the solving of) intellectual problems." And 2) "holds that the function of dreaming is related to emotional adjustment, not to intellectual problems."

There's a whole section with test results on whether or not dreams solve intellectual problems. Their conclusion is -probably not. I'll send the paper link later. I don't really find this thesis convincing. That intellectual problem-solving, stuff generated by reading and writing, is unemotional. This they feel excludes it from rehearsing threats so not part of dreaming. So, yeah, means I can't get down with the conclusion if I'm not convinced by the premise. Here's the concluding statement:

The hypothesis advanced in the present paper states that we dream (i.e., the phenomenal level of organization in the brain is realized in its characteristic ways during REM sleep) because in the ancestral environment the constant nocturnal rehearsing of threat perception and threat-avoidance skills increased the probability of successful threat avoidance in real situations, and thus led to increased reproductive success.

Can't be the whole story right? It is worth a read.

Got some errands to run will continue in a follow-up email.

arefeh 10:12 AM

Thanks. Get some sleep.

bobbob 1:43 PM

Yeah, running on empty. Did you have a chance to read that paper yet?

I found this dream research at MIT interesting. They're all about understanding "the link from cellular/subcellular mechanisms of plasticity, to neural ensemble representations and interactions, to learning, memory, behavior, and cognition." The researchers worked with rat dreams! Yep, they found rats have complex dreams. Surprised. Not. Supports the theory that problems are rehearsed in REM cycles. I should send them a link to *Ratsinourhouse*, they'd love the baby rat pillow. Anyway... there's also this summary:

Dreams seem to help us process emotions by encoding and constructing memories of them. What we see and experience in our dreams might not necessarily be real, but the emotions attached to these experiences certainly are. [!!!] Our dream stories essentially try to strip the emotion out of a certain experience by creating a memory of it. This way, the emotion itself is no longer active. [HUH?] In short, dreams help regulate traffic on that fragile bridge which connects our experiences with our emotions and memories.

----- 13 June -----

arefeh 4:17 PM

Not really convinced by either of these theses but admit it's an interesting vector to pursue. My tendencies as you know, stick closer to the poetic fabulative. Found this in *Arcades*.

Is awakening perhaps the synthesis of dream consciousness (as thesis) and waking consciousness (as antithesis)? Then the moment of awakening would be identical with the 'now of recognizability;' in which things put on their true surrealist-face. Thus, in Proust, the importance of staking an entire life on life's supremely dialectical point of rupture: awakening. Proust begins with an evocation of the space of someone waking up.
[N3 a,3] 464

Here's my little piece de resistance for the day. Found it in an essay by Esther Leslie – "Walter Benjamin – The Refugee and Migrant." Dig this and note references to the (in)visible frequency spectrum we've come to know and love through The Bettys:

*Benjamin sees worlds within worlds and times within times. It is a stance that is fundamental to him. In a short piece on Paris for the German Vogue in 1929, he explains that 'There is an ultra-violet and an infra-red knowledge of this city'. Every city has this extra-sensory aspect – its literary or photographic analogue that shadows, brightens, undermines and overwrites the one of daily inhabitation. **This ultraviolet and infrared knowledge would wish to provide other endings and other beginnings for Benjamin:** no death on the border; a completed manuscript rather than the rumour of one; and a city that might not have spat him out to wander on. And yet, there is still more to discover. We do not need to keep writing fantasies of Benjamin's other possible lives. We have discovered him more recently as radio adept, as pedagogue, as writer of short stories and poems and riddles. We add these other facets to Benjamin the collector, the sociologist, the allegorist, the literary critic, the diarist, the father, the mystic, the Marxist, the postmodern, the deconstructionist, the Jew, the flâneur, the student activist and terrorist, the bungler, the victim....*

So, his, Walter's, fragmentary approach to experience, to writing, the undesirability qua impossibility of any whole is touched on by Leslie as the quivering borders of the visible spectrum. Other indeterminate endings and beginning. Felt but not seen. I love this idea!! I wonder if long dead Infrared Betty's legacy has a handle on this. Or UVB's work with eukaryote cell formation in the Martian atmosphere? Don't you find this revelatory? I'm shaking with foma!

----- 29 June -----

bobbob 8:20 AM

I stumbled on something interesting qua dream science (not WB related sorry). There's a study by Cardiff scientists that asserts an interweaving of REM and non-REM sleep as the creative engine in nocturnal problem-solving. I'm gonna paraphrase ... NREM slow wave sleep cycles "abstract rules from learned information." The study indicates that the hippocampus (memory of events and places) pokes the neocortex (memory of facts and concepts) and that engenders thematically related memories. P.A. Lewis calls it a synchronous Greek chorus effect. Different take on dream collectives from Walter's but hey, anyway...

REM is another beastly altogether. Yep. Random, cacophonous novelty!!! Now, iteratively mix these two modes and voila! you get creative thinking. I got a quote here from Lewis on problematizing. In REM sleep, she says:

"the neocortex will replay abstracted, simplified elements [of that problem], but also other things that are randomly activated. It'll then strengthen the commonalities between those things. When you wake up the next day, that slight strengthening might allow you to see what you were working on in a slightly different way. That might just allow you to crack the problem."

Of course this approach, the creative working between two different cycles, makes sense. I think this is rad cool, even though I could care less about actually solving something.

Mindmail from bobbob to Arefeh

2 July

Baku, Azerbaijan

Dearest Wrinkle,

How are you?

Why haven't you written? I'd hoped to receive a bedazzled snailmail post from you before heading east. A missive resplendent with rose petals, bird stickers and kind words.

I was trying out the latest feature on mindmail. 5K Image transmission. Let me know if you receive the data on your headset to decrypt the funky old drawings. I'm not going to bother with touristic landscape shots. These you can easily imagine for yourself.

It's beautiful here on the Caspian Sea. My cultural compass is SO disoriented at the moment. I'm here there and everywhere in time and place. Language makes little sense in translation or otherwise. I wonder what telematic babble you're gonna pick up?

I, my friend, have put myself to the task of reading 19C European lit this summer. No young contempo hot shots this year. I'm also taking a temporary pass on Eritrean poetry, my oh so unfashionable passion.

Anyway, Bettene suggested I read the little epistolary novella that got Goethe going. The Werther thing. Made him a rock star of German kultur. I've read *Faust* of course but it fell flat for me.

Did you know you pronounce that dude's name like Goethe? Not the way it looks in English, like "further." Surprised this little fop. Sometimes (thinkest I) I should cut a vein (see below) due to my impoverished communicative abilities. Too dramatic? You know I'm ever so the Bernhardtian queen at core.

Sooooo.... Have you read this little gem? You're about to be the innocent recipient of my tangential ponderings. I'm plucking some quotes for you from a sea of yellow highlights in the ebook. Get this (I know how much you like horses so I especially noted it):

MARCH 16

A hundred times have I seized a dagger, to give ease to this oppressed heart. Naturalists tell of a noble race of horses that instinctively open a vein with their teeth, when heated and exhausted by a long course, in order to breathe more freely. I am often tempted to open a vein, to procure for myself everlasting liberty.

I grabbed this quote because it prefigures poor poor Karoline. (Note that we Grittas maintain a fascination with the fabulist Brentano circle in Napoleonic Prussia). Now you see why I wish I read German better. Anyway, it's clear Goethe's little book planted an idea in her heated brain - that would be the original K. Günderode (1790-1806). The "Werther effect" they called it. Desperate love affairs = Suicide. Kitschier versions of Papageno for the forlorn lovelost. The craze even extended to faddish early 19C

costume styling – all blue tailcoats with yellow waistcoats and trousers for the sensitive young man. That would be me then if I wasn't in chains on a cotton farm somewhere in Alabama. The fad even had a name. *Werthertracht*. Must look up Herr G's analysis of yellow and blue color schemes. Clues lie therein.

But anyway, I got stuck on his remark about the horse and did a little research on animal suicide. I did find this term *autothysis* in termites where they open a gland in their neck as a kamikaze military technique. I wondered if horses actually bite their necks? I looked for more info on animal auto-biting but the best reference I could find was on a website for equine health. If you're interested – thehorse.com.

If a horse is taken from a cool climate to a warmer climate, say, to a temperature of around 85°F (29.44°C), then one of the first things that can be noticed is an increase in the rate of breathing at rest. While the horse will additionally open up small blood vessels in the skin in an attempt to lose heat and might sweat slightly, respiratory heat loss is also an important thermoregulatory mechanism for the horse.

Far less histrionic than opening a vein but perhaps this explains the science. I dunno. I found more references (of course I kept clicking) to equine self-mutilation. Disturbing. There's even a medical acronym -ESMS- for it. Apparently, it's not uncommon. Who knew? Goethe's facts might be suspect but then, he penned the piece in a creative flurry in 1774. Science evolves. Facts mutate.

I'm rambling. You love it 😊. (Let me know if you're able pick up emoji's on the headset.)

Meanwhile, young Werther later said this:

AUGUST 22

Now and then the fable of the horse recurs to me. Weary of liberty, he suffered himself to be saddled and bridled, and was ridden to death for his pains. I know not what to determine upon. For is not this anxiety for change the consequence of that restless spirit which would pursue me equally in every situation.

Oh, and here's another bit, maybe the most important letter in the book where Werther explains his rationale for suicide to his nemesis Albert, the soon-to-be-husband of his true love Charlotte. Albert responds to Werther's impassioned justification:

AUGUST 12

"This is another of your extravagant humors," said Albert: "you always exaggerate a case, and in this matter you are undoubtedly wrong; for we were speaking of suicide,

which you compare with great actions, when it is impossible to regard it as anything but a weakness. It is much easier to die than to bear a life of misery with fortitude."

I was on the point of breaking off the conversation, for nothing puts me so completely out of patience as the utterance of a wretched commonplace when I am talking from my inmost heart. (my boldface)

Ha! This guy was touched by queer don't you think!

But seriously... to Albert's conventional point... (and you will honestly tell me please if you find me too self-indulgent). Over the centuries the debate on the efficacy of suicide roils yet now we have - coming soon to a pharm near you - mass distribution of a euthanasia drink- EEBb2.0!! I've heard it euphemistically called E² or "Edges of Eunice." Perversely poetic no? I prefer to call it "Bye-bye." LOL. You insist that one's death is one's own even as one's life is fully convolved. I'm considering geontopower née biopower and its side-effects. We have borne you and I the brunt of critique cast by our comrades such that our neo-romantic explorations exhibit libertarian bullshit but we and they all know, and agree dare I say, that we deserve the right to call it quits. "I'm good to go."

I'm rambling again. I still haven't got the hang of coherent epistolary style. Forgive me. I'm training a forgotten craft. I know we need to have a serious discussion when we're f2f. For now, I take refuge in evading that seriousness.

Whither Werther?

Yours truly,

bobbob

ps. As promised, a quote from Herr G (from his *Theory of Color*) on blue and yellow. Remember thirty-five years before he wrote this, *Werthertracht* was all the rage.

Blue: as yellow is always accompanied with light, so it may be said that blue still brings a principle of darkness with it. This color has a peculiar and almost indescribable effect on the eye. As a hue it is powerful - but it is on the negative side, and in its highest purity is, as it were, a stimulating negation. Its appearance, then, is a kind of contradiction between excitement and repose.

pps. And remember Elliott Smith? How we looped *Between the Bars* for an hour that chilly April Saturday. He pulled a Werther. Literally.



Werther visuals

Footnote

Between the bars

Drink up, baby, stay up all night
With the things you could do, you won't but you might
The potential you'll be that you'll never see
The promises you'll only make
Drink up with me now and forget all about
The pressure of days, do what I say
And I'll make you okay and drive them away
The images stuck in your head
People you've been before that you
Don't want around anymore
That push and shove and won't bend to your will
I'll keep them still
Drink up, baby, look at the stars
I'll kiss you again, between the bars
Where I'm seeing you there, with your hands in the air
Waiting to finally be caught
Drink up...

Elliott Smith

Figures

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