

Book-Dress, bearskin, and wings: Queer bodies and sideways growth in Das Leben der  
Hochgräfin von Rattenzuhausbeiuns

by

Hannah Marie Elizabeth Rogers

B.A., Kansas State University, 2015

A REPORT

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of Modern Languages  
College of Arts and Sciences

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY  
Manhattan, Kansas

2018

Approved by:

Major Professor  
Dr. Sara Luly

# **Copyright**

© Hannah Rogers 2018.

## Abstract

In *Das Leben der Hochgräfin von Rattenzuhausbeiuns*, written by Bettina von Arnim and Gisela von Arnim Grimm, the material used to dress the bodies of young girls is unexpected and non-traditional. There are characters clothed in dresses made from the pages of books, bearskin coats, butterfly wings, onion root wigs, and many other bizarre materials. The main protagonist, Gritta, experiences, what Katheryn B. Stockton conceptualizes as “sideways growth,” or a non-linear, non-heteronormative childhood. The initial book-dress foreshadows the developmental possibilities for the protagonist Gritta. In this paper I argue that the text uses clothing made of non-traditional materials to construct queer girlhood for the female characters, and in doing so provides possible paths of “sideways growth.”

## Table of Contents

Acknowledgements .....	v
Dedication .....	vi
Literary Analysis .....	1
1. Introduction .....	1
2. <i>Gritta</i> , an Overview: .....	3
3. Bodies and Clothes .....	5
4. Conclusion .....	22
References .....	23

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank the Modern Language department at Kansas State University for all the opportunities and skills they have given me, not only in the past two years as a graduate student, but also as an undergraduate. I have truly enjoyed my time at K-State and hope to contribute as an Alumnus in the future. I would also like to thank the German department at K-State. Without your guidance and support this past year, I would not have been able to make it. Thank you. I would finally like to thank my parents, who have helped and supported me throughout my education.

## **Dedication**

I would like to dedicate this work to my mother.

# Literary Analysis

## 1. Introduction

In the fairytale *Das Leben der Hochfürstin Gritta von Rattenzuhausbeiuns* (1844-1848), co-authored by Bettina von Arnim and Gisela von Arnim Grimm, the bodies of girls are clothed in peculiar fashions. In one instance, the pigskin covers of a book with bright, curlicue script engraved thereon are sewn together to create a dress, and in another, an onion-root serves as a wig; girls' bodies in the text are consistently clothed by unexpected and non-traditional materials. To date, little attention has been paid to the material aspects of the text, and the clothing, especially that of the book-dress, has been overlooked.

In her bizarre book-dress, we see references to heteronormative “growing up” as well as queer potentials for “growing sideways.” The book-dress also foreshadows the developmental possibilities for the protagonist Gritta. In this paper I argue that the text uses clothing made of non-traditional materials to construct queer girlhood for the female characters, and in doing so provides possible paths of “sideways growth.” I begin by investigating how the pigskin book-dress establishes Gritta's queer “sideways growth,” I then follow by looking at two cautionary tales informing Gritta of the consequences of a refusal to “grow up.” Finally, the paper will conclude by examining how Gritta uses clothing to both accept and subvert heteronormative expectations as she maintains a longing for the potential of the queer body.

In discussing queer development, I make use of the concept “sideways growth” from Kathryn Bond Stockton in *Growing Sideways, or Versions of the Queer Child*.<sup>1</sup> Stockton defines “sideways growth” as the non-linear alternative to the idea of “growing up.” The act of “growing

---

<sup>1</sup> I am using an approach similar to that of Joy Brooke Fairfield in “Becoming-Mouse, Becoming-Man.”

up,” according to Stockton, is the expected progression and development from child to adult, where the ultimate ending of upward growth is the loss of childishness and the gaining of heteronormative sexual maturity (Stockton, *Growing Sideways* 279). Following heteronormative reproductive patterns, a child progresses from child to teenager to work, then marriage, and ends with reproducing children of their own (Stockton, *The Queer Child* 4). “Sideways growth,” however, is a kind of queer growth, growth that does not have a vertical trajectory, but expands in many directions, even backward. The queer child experiencing “sideways growth” is expanding and growing in many directions. “Sideways growth” allows for other possible experiences than heteronormativity, and confronts the idea of linear growth with the possibility of a “homosexual” or “not-yet-straight” change (Stockton, *Growing Sideways* 282-283).

The materiality of the human body as constructed by clothing plays a substantial role in the depiction of Gritta’s queer body in the text. In “The Body as Inscriptive Surface,” Elizabeth Grosz argues that through material that modifies or changes the body, the body becomes a readable surface (141). In *Transgender History*, Susan Stryker also argues “all bodies are modified bodies” and can be modified through clothing (9-10). Grosz continues with the argument that women’s bodies in particular are marked by the prevailing social expectations and demands of patriarchal society through clothing: “through clothing [...] the body is more or less marked, constituted as an appropriate, or, as the case may be, an inappropriate body [...]” (142). Through adornment, such as clothing, bodies become “inscribed surfaces” by which society can read their level of conformity to heteronormative expectations. Through the non-traditional material modifying female figures throughout *Gritta*, their queer bodies become “inscribed surfaces” and their clothing portrays their “sideways growth.”



## 2. *Gritta*, an Overview:

*Das Leben der Hochfgräfin Gritta von Rattenzuhausbeiuns* is a fairytale that remained incomplete and hidden in obscurity for well over a hundred years (Ohm xv). It was first prepared for publication in 1845. However it is believed that the *Gritta* text was stopped before publication by the censor of the time, because it openly criticizes the structure of the monarchy and corruption within the church (Urang 165; Ohm xiii). The text was later rediscovered and published in 1925 but with no title page and the last twenty pages of the conclusion missing (Blackwell 25). With the literary-historical research done by Shawn Jarvis and Roland Sprech Jarvis, the complete text was rediscovered in 1986, well over a hundred years after it was originally prepared for publication (Urang 166). Before this discovery, the incomplete text was considered to have been authored by only Bettina von Arnim. It was only after the work done by Jarvis and Jarvis that the substantial influence of her daughter, Gisela von Arnim Grimm, was acknowledged. Gisela von Arnim Grimm was only a young teenager at the time the story was written in 1840 (Urang 165).

Due to the relative obscurity of *Gritta*, I will provide a brief summary of the fairytale. The text follows the life of a little girl named Gritta von Rattenzuhausbeiuns, who lives with her erratic and inattentive father in a decrepit, rat-infested castle. Her father meets and marries a young, entitled countess who sends Gritta away to live in a monastery. In the monastery Gritta is strictly controlled by the nuns, and becomes an integral part of a community of little girls. Unwittingly, Gritta overhears Mater Sequestra and Pater Pecavi plotting to steal her fortune. Gritta hatches a plan to escape, find her old nanny, and return the little girls to their families. After their escape from the monastery, Gritta leads the company of little girls through an array of adventures, inadvertently boarding a ship for on an extended voyage to a new land. The boat

shipwrecks during a violent storm, and Gritta and the other girls arrive in an unknown land, isolated and surrounded by nature. Here, Gritta establishes a new matriarchal society in the woods where they live off the land and become self-sufficient.

After some time, a local Prince named Bonus finds Gritta. The Prince asks for Gritta's help in exposing the evil Count Pecavus. Pecavus has been deceiving and controlling the nearby King so that he instates steep taxes on the peasants. Gritta helps Prince Bonus expose Count Pecavus to the King with the help of the fairy Queen who writes a letter explaining the whole plot. After saving the King and country from Count Pecavus, Gritta and Prince Bonus are engaged to be married. At the same time Gritta is reunited with the little girls, who have built and established a monastery of their own in her absence, where each girl plays a specific and necessary role in order to support the community. Gritta and Prince Bonus are married in the nature cloister. In the end, they all live so happily, that God returns the land of Sumbona to heaven and has since never been found again.

Due to the text's controversial and exceptional history, *Das Leben der Hochgräfin Gritta von Rattenzuhausbeiuns* remains relatively obscure in the German canon and has received limited critical consideration. Much of the scholarship that exists focuses chiefly on female authorship and a consideration of genre.<sup>2</sup> More recently, many convincing arguments have been made about the use of a female protagonist and the unusual way in which Gritta and the other female characters in the text subvert patriarchal expectations and instead create female community. In her text "Romantic Revolution and Female Collectivity," Waldstein focuses on the unity in the text through the use of an independent, female protagonist and the rise of a

---

<sup>2</sup> Mallon, who published the first incomplete edition in 1925, considered the text a "literary fairy tale" and "a true, epic novel" (259). Others have called the text a Bildungsroman, a Kunstmärchen, and a fairy-tale novel (Ohm xxii; Waldstein 91; Urang 166; Blackwell 25; Jarvis 77).

utopian-like matriarchal society. Waldstein establishes how female collectivity functions as a subversive role against patriarchal expectations in *Gritta* (91, 97). Blackwell argues in “Laying the Rod to Rest” that *Gritta* uses pre-existing fairytale structures and themes from traditional male authorship to include women’s voices, such that male characters fade into the background and female characters are established as more than just objects but as the key focus of the story (41).<sup>3</sup> In “The ‘Old Wheelworks’ and Its Revolutions,” Urang argues that *Gritta* offers a scathing challenge to the monarchy of the time through the portrayal of buffoonish male characters set in contrast to strong, autonomous female characters. In particular, Urang argues that the conclusion of the text provides Gritta with both “agency and compromise” as she ascends to the highest political power but gives in to patriarchal expectations of marriage (183). What has been overlooked is Gritta’s development as a queer child experiencing “sideways growth” and how Gritta’s body is modified by the use of non-traditional materials used as clothing throughout the text.

### 3. Bodies and Clothes

In *Das Leben der Hochgräfin Gritta von Rattenzuhausbeiuns*, Gritta's body is first described through her relationship to a man and in the diminutive. She is introduced as the “Töchterchen” of a nobleman (12) and is described as small: “Hier saß die kleine Hochgräfin Gritta, der emsig das Rädchen den feinen Faden aus den Fingern zog [...]”(13).<sup>4</sup> The text depicts Gritta as both *-chen*, a diminutive form that communicates a small size, and the adjective *klein*.

---

<sup>3</sup> Shawn Jarvis agrees with Blackwell in “Spare the Rod and Spoil the Child” over the use of fairytale motifs and a reverse in gender expectations in order to criticize existing patriarchal structures. However, this work was published before he and Roland Sprech Jarvis found the completed text in 1986.

<sup>4</sup> “[...] here sat the little High Countess Gritta looking on dreamily as she turned the spinning wheel and pulled the fine threads through her fingers” (Arnim trans. Ohm 2-3).

The object she uses to spin thread is also small and fragile in her hands as she spins on a minute wheel with fine threads. Her body takes up no space and the world around her must be constructed to fit her size. The emphasis on her small size, something that is often repeated throughout the text, marks her body as being different.

Her male caretaker, Müffort, compares Gritta's small body to “ein Blümchen das blüht [...]” (13),<sup>5</sup> a small flower that is blooming. According to Stockton, the use of metaphor “helps to convey a queer take on growth” (279). It places people and things next to each other in comparisons that expand or “grow sideways.” When Müffort conceives of Gritta's body as a *Blümchen*<sup>6</sup>, he is placing her body next to the image of a small, white wildflower and Gritta's body “grows sideways” in order to encompass the new definition. Stockton argues that in the time it takes for the mind to consider the material body and place it adjacent to the item it is being compared to, or in this instance Gritta's body as a *Blümchen*, and transmit some new image or meaning to the reader, the meaning is moving and growing (Stockton, *Growing Sideways* 279-280). Within the metaphor of Gritta's body as a *Blümchen*, her body is seen as unassuming and passive, something to be admired. The *Blümchen blüht*<sup>7</sup>, or blooms—in other words, Gritta's body is in the process of blooming or flowering. As a *Blümchen*, her body expands in an uncontrolled and unregulated space, but is also depicted as an innocent and pure body that is opening up and expanding in many directions, like a flower in bloom. She is a body in transition or a body in the act of becoming, a body that is experiencing “sideways growth.”

---

<sup>5</sup> “A flower in bloom [...]” (Arnim trans. Ohm 3).

<sup>6</sup> flower, in the diminutive (Arnim trans. Ohm 3)

<sup>7</sup> a flower that blooms (Arnim trans. Ohm 3)

Gritta, who is initially isolated and to this point has only encountered men, comes into contact with a young countess. The countess appears to be only a few years older than her and is pursuing Gritta's father for marriage. When introduced to Gritta, the newly arrived countess observes the material clothing Gritta's body.

“[...] ein kleines Lächeln überflog die Züge der jungen Dame, als sie vom Grafen geleitet hinüberging und die kleine Gritta im Schweinslederröckchen erblickte. [...] die Gräfin gab ihr einen fröhlichen Kuß und wendete sie hin und her. Das Wunderbare, was ihre Aufmerksamkeit erregte, war, daß aus den Falten hier und da gepreßte, oder goldne Schrift in bunten Schnirkeln hervorsah; auf der linken Seite guckte aus den Falten »Das Leben und die Taten des hochedlen Herrn Ritter Kunz von Schweinichen, ihm nacherzählt —«; hier versteckte sich die Schrift in die Falten. Auf dem Magen stand »Christliches Paradiesgärtlein zum Herumspazieren für christliche Lämmer von Johannes«. – Nach hinten »Das Leben der christlichen Jungfrau Anna Maria Schweidnitzer« und links »Das Buch, was da handelt von den Hexen und denen, so aus ihnen gefahren«, ein ganzes gedrucktes Kapitel [...]” (von Arnim 21-22).<sup>8</sup>

Gritta is again set apart by her smallness, emphasized by the diminutive *Schweinslederröckchen*<sup>9</sup>.

Once again the material around her must be shaped to fit and define the smallness of her body.

The *Schweinslederröckchen* is specifically made of the pigskin that was previously used as book bindings and covers for the texts from the castle library. Sewn together, the titles of the books create a mishmash of *bunten Schnirkeln*<sup>10</sup>. The letters and script engraved into the pigskin leather clothing is so similar to her own skin, it's as if the titles have been tattooed on her body. Through the inscription of the book-dress, her queer body is identifiable to those around her as an

---

<sup>8</sup> “An amused smile flickered across the young lady's face when she caught sight of little Gritta in her pigskin dress. [...] The countess gave Gritta a friendly kiss and turned her first to the right and then to the left. Here and there engraved letters or golden script with fancy swirls billowed out of the folds of Gritta's dress. On the left side the countess read, *The Life and Deeds of the Most Noble Knight Kunz von Swiney, related according to him* – the rest was hidden in a fold. On Gritta's belly stood the words, *Little Garden of Christian Paradise for Strolls Taken by the Christian Lambs of John*; on the back, *The Life of the Christian Maiden Anna Maria Schweiddnitzer*; and on the left an entire chapter of *The Book That Deals with Witches and Those Exorcised of Them*” (Arnim trans. Ohm 13-14).

<sup>9</sup> small pig skin dress (Arnim trans. Ohm 13)

<sup>10</sup> bright swirls (Arnim trans. Ohm 14)

inappropriate body, and the book-dress becomes an etching that the society around her can read off her body. The folds of her dress reveal some titles, while it obscures others, revealed only momentarily through the physical movement of her body *hin und her*. Her body is moved by the wishes of the observers around her, controlled and turned like the open pages of a book. Gritta herself has no choice but to passively allow the young countess to move her body first to one side and then the other as the young countess reads the titles off the skin, the pages of the books, she is clothed in.

The young countess is presented as the ideal and acceptable embodiment of girlhood. As she attempts to capture the interest of Gritta's father and continue in the expected heterosexual development of "growing up," she is described as wearing "[einen] grünen Kleide mit silberbesponnenen Knöpfen" (20).<sup>11</sup> The young countess's body is clothed appropriately, as a young woman's body should be, and she is the only other young woman present at this juncture of the story. Being of the same rank and similar age as Gritta, the young countess is therefore automatically a body set in comparison to Gritta's body. She also recognizes the vast differences between her own body and Gritta's. When she is first confronted with the smaller girl, she expresses a kind of condescending amusement and assumes a position of authority and power over Gritta's body immediately upon their meeting. The young countess recognizes the strangeness of Gritta's body through the material it is clothed in. The pigskin book-dress automatically sets Gritta against the young countess and designates her queer body as an inappropriate body. Gritta is made to feel ashamed of her body through the amusement of the young countess and her party, the heteronormative body both drawing attention to and condemning Gritta's queer body.

---

<sup>11</sup> "[...] a green costume with spun-silver buttons [...]" (Arnim trans. Ohm 11).

The book titles visible to the young countess are a confounding and eclectic collection, that seem to have no similarities between them. The titles themselves frame and circle Gritta's body, with one of the four titles being before, behind, or to each side of her. When we examine them more carefully, and read them in relationship to each other, we see that the titles foreshadow possibilities and provide a glimpse at a possible “sideways growth.”

The first title, “Das Leben und die Taten des hochedlen Herrn Ritter Kunz von Schweinichen, ihm nacherzählt –”<sup>12</sup> is the life and deeds of a knight as retold by himself. However, the title is cut off and incomplete, as if suggesting the tale should be allotted no more attention than it has already received. It is the only title that is explicitly said to be written by a man. It could suggest that the words and deeds of this man, or any man, leave an imprint of patriarchal control on the body, something that is soon to be left behind and forgotten in the folds of Gritta's own story, as she leaves her father behind. It could also be interpreted as the first stage of Gritta's story, her body under the control of a neglectful father more concerned with his own deeds than the life of his daughter.

The other titles are more curious. On her belly and on her back are two religious texts written about and for young women. ““Christliches Paradiesgärtlein zum Herumspazieren für christliche Lämmer von Johannes””<sup>13</sup> and ““Das Leben der christlichen Jungfrau Anna Maria Schweidnitzer””<sup>14</sup> are meant to be examples of the ideal, heteronormative, and respectable bodies

---

<sup>12</sup> “*The Life and Deeds of the Most Noble Knight Kunz von Swiney, related according to him* –“ (Arnim trans. Ohm 13-14).

<sup>13</sup> “*Christian Paradise for Strolls Taken by the Christian Lambs of John*” (Arnim trans. Ohm 13-14).

<sup>14</sup> “*The Life of the Christian Maiden Anna Maria Schweiddnitzer*” (Arnim trans. Ohm 13-14).

of young unmarried, un-sexed, girls (von Arnim 21-22). The titles' locations suggest that as Gritta moves forward, the expected linear "growing up," Gritta will follow the heteronormative examples as written on her body. However, on her side is one final title, "Das Buch, was da handelt von den Hexen und denen, so aus ihnen gefahren." Witches, as compared to the *christliche Lämmer* and *christlichen Jungfrau* of the titles of the texts placed before her and behind her, are women that exist outside the heteronormative body. Witches are unmarried, autonomous, queer bodies that exist outside of patriarchal control. They symbolize an existence without religion, a return to nature, and a refusal of heteronormative expectations of marriage and motherhood. Like Gritta, they are "inappropriate bodies" that experience "sideways growth." It is curious that this title is not on the front of her dress, but rather on the side. Gritta's queer body as it experiences "sideways growth," grows to encompass the idea of the queer witch on her side. The juxtaposition of the *christliche Lämmer* and *christlichen Jungfrau* and the *Hexe* mark Gritta with two possibilities. Her body is marked with the choice of either heteronormative or queer potential, leaving the ultimate choice unclear.

While clothing functions as a medium in which the body is inscribed on, modified by, and expanded on or limited by, the clothing itself may only be considered queer in relationship to Gritta's body. Grosz fittingly argues, that "[...] it is problematic to see the body as a blank, passive page, a neutral "medium" or signifier for the inscription of a text. [...The] materiality of the 'page'/body must be taken into account [...]" (156). It is the interaction between the body and the book-dress that makes them queer. The relationship is circular, as it is the relationship between the two that allows the material of the book-dress to mark her body, and enables her body to be expressed and exposed to those observing her through the material that clothes it.



Immediately following his marriage to the young countess, Gritta's father sends her away. Her father does not immediately agree until the young countess says, "[...] sie ist ein wildes Ding" (42). Again, the "growing up" of the young countess is brought forward in comparison to Gritta's inappropriate, queer body. The young countess has succeeded in the ultimate goal "growing up" as she reaches what Stockton calls genital maturity and reaches her reproductive goals as a wife and soon to be mother (*Stockton, Growing Sideways* 281). The image of the heteronormative young countess' body automatically identifies Gritta's body as something that exists outside of her own experience and defines her queer body as *ein wildes Ding*. Gritta is something wild, something uncontrollable and undesirable, and because of this is sent away from her home. Gritta is sent to a nunnery, where the young countess expresses her desire that she become a nun. "[...] so soll sie Nonne werden" (42). The young countess, having recently achieved her own sexual maturity, does not even entertain the idea that Gritta could also achieve heteronormative sexual maturity through "growing up" and seeks instead to punish her "sideways growth" by making her leave.

Within the text there are two cautionary tales that Gritta is told. Each tale describes the consequences of a queer body. The first is the story of the first "kleine Gräfin,"<sup>15</sup> an ancestor of Gritta's. It is told to her by Müffort, her caretaker, and tells her that he came across the story in the library as he sewed her little pigskin book-dress (25). Müffort explains that the first small countess, named Countess Bärwalda<sup>16</sup>, was never beaten with a switch because of her noble blood, and due to the lack of discipline. As a result of this lack of discipline, the countess became wild. She would disappear into the forest all night long and return the following morning with

---

<sup>15</sup> "[...] little countess [...]" (Arnim trans. Ohm 18).

<sup>16</sup> *Bärwalda* sounds a lot like the words *Bär*, meaning bear, and *Wald*, meaning Forest.

“wilden Dornenranken, Moos und Nachttau in den fliegenden Haaren [...] ihren tolzen Gliederbau dem Himmel entgegen hob.” (25)<sup>17</sup> Countess Bärwalda’s body is clothed in the nature around her, wild thorn vines and moss in her flying hair, lifting her proud limbs toward heaven, her body expanding to fill the limitless space around her. Countess Bärwalda is no longer depicted as small, but instead growing in multiple directions. Her initial “sideways growth,” supported by a removal from patriarchal control and a communion with nature, are subtle parallels of Gritta’s own experiences to come. She foreshadows the potential of Gritta’s body to expand as well through her own “sideways growth.”

One morning, Countess Bärwalda returned from her nightly excursion in an unexpected manner:

“So kam sie eines Morgens auch mit einem jungen Bären bepackt, der sie im Walde angefallen und den sie mit ihren festen und starken Gliedern erwürgt, gerade als ihr Herr Papa mit einem jungen Manne sprach, den er ihr zum Bräutigam erwählt. Der Bär mit seinem dunklen Fell hing ihr über die weiße Schulter, und das Blut tröpfelte aus einer Wunde, die seine Tatze ihr geschlagen. Ihre Stimme, die wie die des Windes war, der um die Burg des Nachts sang, erschallte [...]” (25-26)<sup>18</sup>

Countess Bärwalda returns with the *Fell*, which can mean fur or coat or skin, of a bear she killed with only her body, her strong limbs. The limbs that she earlier lifted to the heavens in pride are now described as firm and strong, qualities that are unusual descriptors of the female body. Instead, Countess Bärwalda possesses the masculine firmness and strength to kill a wild bear

---

<sup>17</sup> “[...] wild thorn vines, moss, and night dew in her loose flying hair. [...] lifting her body proudly toward the sky [...]” (Arnim trans. Ohm 18).

<sup>18</sup> “One morning she arrived shouldering the carcass of a young bear. It had attacked her in the woods so she had strangled it with her strong firm limbs. Just at that moment her father was speaking with the young man whom he had chosen for her husband. The dark fur of the bear hung over her white shoulder, red blood dripping out of a wound where the bear’s claws had scratched her. Her voice rang out, like that of the wind that howled around the fortress at night” (Arnim trans. Ohm 18-19).

with her own hands and returns wearing its defeated skin over her shoulders. With her body, not only did she defeat the bear with her bare hands, but she skinned it and chose to don its coat. Her body here is depicted as something other, something outside of heteronormative expectations. The masculine descriptors and the bear skin she returns wearing over her shoulders inscribe her body as an inappropriate body. Through this subversion of the heteronormative expectations, it is marked as a queer body.

The man she meets upon her arrival wearing the bear skin is intended to be her future *Bräutigam*. Her father had intended for her to marry and the young man is meant to take Countess Bärwalda's queer body and control it, transitioning it into the heteronormative role of wife and mother. Countess Bärwalda's father believes that her body that has had no limitations or restrictions before, can be made to “grow up” and follow heteronormative expectations of her body's reproductive abilities if she is married. However, the young man and the countess never marry, never even get engaged, but the countess “liebte [...] den Grafen mit Leidenschaft” (26).<sup>19</sup> It is, however, not a sexual love or a heteronormative love, but a platonic love. She is described as being his “Geselle,”<sup>20</sup> his companion and equal (26). Her relationship with the young man does not follow patriarchal expectations, but rather subverts them.

Countess Bärwalda lives beside him, experiences life with him, and their relationship encourages her “sideways growth.” In their relationship she is his equal in physical prowess, in artistic creativity, and in intellect as she joins him for his lessons every day in the library, learning beside him and create songs and music together. The young man and the countess are inseparable, to the point that the countess receives the same education as the young man. The

---

<sup>19</sup> “Now she loved the young count passionately” (Arnim trans. Ohm 19).

<sup>20</sup> “[...] companion [...]” (Arnim trans. 19).

countess' father is incredibly concerned about the time she spends with the young man, "[...] er hatte Sorge, dass dies einer jungen Hochgräfin böse Nachrede machen werde [...]" (26).<sup>21</sup> Her father is chiefly concerned with how the countess' body could be interpreted by the patriarchal society they live in. A female body, unmarried and un-sexed, yet spending extended and intimate time with a young man, creates a fear from the father's perspective for his daughter's body's virginity. Countess Bärwalda's queer body, "growing sideways," is unconcerned and resistant to the father's attempts to control her body.

The young man has to leave for war, and the countess, for a while, is obliged to remain in her father's house. Her father, thinking he has her under his control now that the young man has left, expects that Countess Bärwalda will "still zu Hause sitzen" (26).<sup>22</sup> Countess Bärwalda, however "pochte es in alle Gliedern, und wenn sie durch die Schloßfenster hinausschaute auf die blauen Berge, die gleich einer Mauer vor einem tatenkräftigen Leben ihr lagen [...]" (26-27).<sup>23</sup> Countess Bärwalda has a physical reaction against her father attempt at controlling her body. She *pochte in alle Gliedern*. Her forceful reaction is against her father's control, and the obstacles or *Mauer* her father put in her path to a *tatenkräftigen Leben*. The text conceptualizes the heteronormative expectations her father has on her body as physical manifestations, obstacles put in her path in order to keep her from growing sideways.

Countess Bärwalda rebels and hides her queer body from her father's control. "[...] so zog sie schnell die Gardinen ums Bett und steckte sich unter ein großes Federbett, was sie fest um

---

<sup>21</sup> "He was worried that this could cause bad gossip about the young high countess" (Arnim trans. Ohm 19).

<sup>22</sup> "[...] to sit home quietly [...]" (Arnim trans. Ohm 20).

<sup>23</sup> "She trembled in every limb, however, when she looked out the castle window to the blue mountains beyond, which like a wall eparatin her from a life rich in deeds" (Arnim trans. Ohm 20).

sich wickelte” (27).<sup>24</sup> Countess Bärwalda hides her body behind multiple barriers, not to keep her body from view, but in order to protect it from the patriarchal control that her father is seeking to exert on it. The multiple layers of cloth that she tightly wraps herself function as a sort of cocoon that enable not only her escape from her father’s expectations, but also aid in the perpetual “sideways growth” of her queer body. One day after he enters her bedroom and scolds her “Stunden lang”<sup>25</sup> he finds her gone from the cocoon and off to join the army (27). Countess Bärwalda does not wish to leave her situation and location in order to follow the young man she befriended, but instead she leaves to find freedom from patriarchal and heteronormative expectations, the freedom for her queer body to “grow sideways.”

When Countess Bärwalda joins the army, not only are she and the young man reunited, but she becomes accepted as a soldier by the men with whom she fights. It is not explicitly said what she wore during this time, other than a brief mention of “Mänteln”<sup>26</sup> could be considered as something masculine, or something that a girl is not supposed to wear. Countess Bärwalda, in order to join the army and become an accepted soldier amongst her peers, must have been cross-dressing as a man. According to Stryker, the act of cross-dressing can be a “way to resist or move away from an assigned social gender [...]” (18). After emerging from her cocoon and running towards “einem tatenkräftigen Leben,” Countess Bärwalda desires to move away from the patriarchal control of her father and the heteronormative expectations of “growing up” placed on her body. In order to do so, Countess Bärwalda dresses as a man and lives not only as a part of her community of soldiers, but also as a successful and thriving member. As she lives and

---

<sup>24</sup> “[...] she quickly pulled the curtains around the bed and hid under a huge down quilt, winding it tightly around herself” (Arnim trans. Ohm 20).

<sup>25</sup> “[...] hour after hour” (Arnim trans. Ohm 20).

<sup>26</sup> “greatcoat” (Arnim trans. Ohm 21).

fights with young men by her side and as a productive member of a community of soldiers, she chooses her freedom and sideways growth through the material in which she clothes her body.

For her freedom from heteronormative expectation and control over her queer body, Countess Bärwalda is punished. Countess Bärwalda, informed that her father lies dying, returns home to be by his side. However, upon her arrival, she finds that her father is already dead and had cursed her on his deathbed:

“[...] der Graf hätte immer zornig über sie geschwiegen; aber in der letzten Stunde habe er gesagt, es sei gesündigt, daß er nicht die Reiser vom Rutenbaum zu ihrer Erziehung gebraucht; darum habe er den Gram erleben müssen, daß sie davon und unter die Soldaten gegangen sei. Er verwünsche sie, daß sie selbst im Grabe keine Ruhe finde, bis der Rutenbaum vertrockne, und der solle nicht eher vertrocknen und mit frischer Kraft fortblühen, bis ein Mädchen aus ihrem Geschlecht so gut sei, daß es nie eine Rute verdiene” (28).<sup>27</sup>

Her father never spoke of Countess Bärwalda until his last moments. His biggest regret is having *gesündigt*<sup>28</sup> by not controlling her by beating her into submission with a switch from a birch tree. Her father sees her body, uncontrolled and unregulated, as a personal failure to enforce heteronormative expectations, and although he understands her “sideways growth” as his own failing, he curses Countess Bärwalda. He curses her with no rest in her grave until a girl from her lineage is so good as not to deserve a beating. She returns to her old way of life and to the forest where she began her “sideways growth” until her death. And it is in Countess Bärwalda’s death where her father succeeds in controlling her inappropriate body. Countess Bärwalda in her death

---

<sup>27</sup> “[...] in his last hour that he had sinned by not using the switch provided by the birch tree in brining her up; for that reason he had had to suffer the affliction of her running away to live among soldiers. He had cursed her and wished her no rest in her grave until the birch tree dried up, and it would not dry up but rather blossom forth with new life until such time as a girl be born among her descendants who was so good that she never deserved a switch” (Arnim trans. Ohm 22).

<sup>28</sup> “sinned” (Arnim trans. Ohm 22).

is cursed to remain on the earth as a ghost of sorts, no longer in possession of her physical body. For her failure to meet heteronormative expectations and marry the man intended for her, Countess Bärwalda is cursed to exist without her body.

A second story told to Gritta on her voyage across the sea is told to her by “Bootsman Thoms.”<sup>29</sup> Thoms claims that the story is a first-hand account of his own experience as a young man. In his story, Thoms arrived on an unknown island after a dangerous storm where they encounter strange people with *Schmetterlingsflügel*<sup>30</sup> on their backs (71). Thoms and the other men are welcomed hesitantly into the community of the butterfly people, where he and the other men are kept separate from the women of the society. One day, he is smuggled before a mysterious butterfly-woman, blindfolded and unaware of where he is being taken. When he arrives she explains that she is the Princess Merkusuli and believes them destined for each other, “ich fühlte, dass Du mir bestimmt seist” (73).<sup>31</sup> Although she is forcibly kept in isolation, Princess Merkusuli’s longing to meet Thoms and her willingness to go against the heteronormative expectations in order to do so introduces her sexuality and desirability. Her beauty strikes Thoms dumb. She possesses “blendender Weiße”<sup>32</sup> and “sanften schwarzen Augen, von samtartigen Wimpern beschattet” (73).<sup>33</sup> To Thoms, this mysterious woman is the epitome of feminine beauty and desirability, including her dazzling *Schmetterlingsflügel*. “[...] [ihre Flügel] waren nicht wie die andern von matter Farbe, sie waren vom feinsten Purpur mit

---

<sup>29</sup> “boatman Thoms” (Arnim trans. Ohm 72).

<sup>30</sup> “[...] butterfly wings [...]” (Arnim trans. Ohm 75).

<sup>31</sup> “I feel that you were meant for me” (Arnim trans. Ohm 78).

<sup>32</sup> “[...] her skin glowed white [...]” (Arnim trans. Ohm 78).

<sup>33</sup> “[...] and her soft black eyes, shadowed by velvety eyelashes, were like pools in her melancholy face” (Arnim trans. Ohm 78).

Gold vermischt” (Arnim 73).<sup>34</sup> Even amongst her own kind she is set apart by her body and found desirable. Her wings, like the book-dress clothing Gritta and the bear skin worn by Countess Bärwalda, establish her body as a body that is set apart, an inappropriate body. On her body and the wings that adorn it, her sexuality and desirability of her body is inscripted. Because of this sexual body she is carefully watched and controlled.

Thoms discovers inadvertently how carefully she is watched and controlled when he leaves Princess Merkusuli and returns to the society of men. While dining with the King of the butterfly people, he is suddenly accused of touching Princess Merkusulis’ wings. “Sein Zorn möge dich vernichten! Wie kommst du, Kot seiner Sohlen, dazu, daß dich der Flügel der Prinzessin Merkusuli streifte?” (74).<sup>35</sup> Her *Flügel*<sup>36</sup> are so carefully monitored by the male society that merely touching them is noticeable. Her body, unlike Countess Bärwalda, is queer in that it is sexualized and articulates her own sexual desire. As a young, unmarried woman, the inscripted sexuality and desirability on her body go against heteronormative expectations of sexual innocence. In the process of “growing up,” heteronormative expectations are first marriage then sex. The act of touching Princess Merkusuli’s wings is equivalent here to sex. Her wings represent her virginity and by her wings being touched, Princess Merkusuli’s body is marked/inscribed as no longer innocent.

For touching her wings, Thoms’ punishment is to be hanged. He is rescued at the last moment by a veiled figure and as they sail away, the figure is revealed to be Princess Merkusuli. “[...] sie hatte die Schleier abgelegt, und ich hatte das Glück, sie in ihrer Schönheit zu

---

<sup>34</sup> “These wings were not of a dull color like the others but of finest purple mixed with gold” (Arnim trans. Ohm 79).

<sup>35</sup> “May His anger destroy you! How is it that the wings of Princess Merkusuli have touched you, you piece of filth on His foot?” (Arnim trans. Ohm 80).

<sup>36</sup> “wings” (Arnim trans. Ohm 78).



bewundern. Das Wunderbare war, daß als wir von der Insel uns entfernten, ihre beiden Flügel gleich Rosenblättern abfielen und sie nun wie andre Menschen war” (75).<sup>37</sup> Princess Merkusuli leaves in order to marry Thoms, and by doing so her queer body suddenly becomes appropriate as the wings that set her apart and mark her body as queer fall from her body. By leaving with Thoms, Princess Merkusuli chooses to set aside her “sideways growth” and instead embraces the heteronormative expectations of “growing up.”

Thoms is the only one concerned by the loss of her wings, “Sie lächelte und beruhigte mich, als ich dachte, dieser Verlust könne sie kränken [...]” (75).<sup>38</sup> Princess Merkusuli understands that in order for her body to be accepted and to lose the scrutiny her sexual and desirable body is under, she must marry, and in doing so, must lose the wings that marked her body as queer. The loss of her wings is more than a symbol of the loss of her virginity, but rather a symbol of her completing heteronormative reproductive expectations in the desired order. Her acceptance of the loss of her queer body and compromise to marry the man of her choosing foreshadows the ultimate choice Gritta faces.

The stories of Countess Bärwalda and Princess Merkusuli are both stories of young, unmarried women with queer bodies, and both are held up as cautionary tales to Gritta by men of authority in her life. However, Countess Bärwalda and Princess Merkusuli encounter different consequences. Countess Bärwalda refuses the expectations placed on her uncontrollable body, and in doing so she becomes an outcast in society. By denying her father’s wishes for her to

---

<sup>37</sup> “She pulled her veil aside, and again I had the good fortune to admire her beauty. To my amazement, as we drew away from the island, her two wings fell off like the petals of a rose, making her like other humans” (Arnim trans. Ohm 81).

<sup>38</sup> “She smiled and told me not to worry when I suggested that the loss of her wings might sadden her” (Arnim trans. Ohm 81).

marry, she has refused to take the ultimate step out of childhood and into adulthood by completing her reproductive potential. She continues to “grow sideways” instead of “growing up.” In the end, Countess Bärwalda is cursed to an existence without her body. Princess Merkusuli also refuses to marry the man she is expected to marry. Instead, she chooses to marry Thoms. In doing so, she surrenders her queer body and becomes “wie andre Menschen” (75).<sup>39</sup> The act of “growing up” and continuing the heteronormative trajectory causes her sexualized body suddenly to become appropriate in the advent of her marriage. Countess Bärwalda informs Gritta of the consequences of a refusal to “grow up,” and Princess Merkusuli shows a body in transition from inappropriate “sideways growth” to the expected and appropriate “growing up.”

At the end, Gritta is faced with her own choice: to follow the heteronormative expectations set out in two of the pages of her dress, the *christliche Lämmer* and *christlichen Jungfrau*, or to continue growing sideways like the *Hexe*. Gritta’s father wishes for her to marry Prince Bonus and therefore voices the heteronormative expectations of growing up through marriage. The growing sideways option is represented by an alternative cloister that the community of young girls has established in the woods.<sup>40</sup> Much like the titles inscribed on Gritta’s dress, the alternative cloister is described as being “eingesponnen und eingewebt im Wald” (125)<sup>41</sup>, spun into the very fabric of the forest around them, drawing a connection between this space and the queer possibilities inscribed on the side of Gritta’s body. The community of young women live as the *Hexen*, existing as unmarried, autonomous, queer bodies that exist outside of patriarchal control.

---

<sup>39</sup> “[...] making her like other humans” (Arnim trans. Ohm 81).

<sup>40</sup> The cloister is christened “Zu den zwölf Landstreicherinnen” (von Arnim 126).

<sup>41</sup> “[...] spun and woven ourselves into the forest” (Arnim trans. Ohm 143).

Ultimately Gritta chooses to “grow up” and agrees to marry Prince Bonus, accepting heteronormative expectations. As she is brought to the cloister to marry Prince Bonus, two things happen. First, as she enters the cloister dressed as a bride, “[...] das Brautkrönlein auf ihrem Haupt zitterte, und trippelte in das dunkle Kreuzgängelein hinein” (127).<sup>42</sup> The *Brautkrönlein*, or bridal crown falls off her body and rolls into darkness. It is as if Gritta’s queer body expresses Gritta’s denial of the possibility of “growing up.” The loss of the *Brautkrönlein* to the cloister is a subversive act of Gritta’s queer body to continue “growing sideways.” Her desire to follow the possibility, as demonstrated by the young girls in the cloister, is expressed through the inability of her body to be inscribed upon by the *Brautkrönlein*. Second, as she enters the cloister she encounters a set of doors, leading to rooms for each little girl. As she counts them, she realizes that there is one door too many; the girls had made one for her as well. Gritta is so grieved by the possibility and what she must give up in order to marry that she “machte die Augen zu, um es nicht zu sehen, denn es tat ihr leid” (127).<sup>43</sup> Gritta recognizes the open possibility to refuse marriage, like her ancestor Countess Bärwalda. Through her expression of sadness and pain at the loss of her body’s queer potential, Gritta understands what she is abandoning in order to continue on a heteronormative upward moving growth. Gritta is confronted with a choice between joining the other young girls in the cloister and continuing her “sideways growth” or marrying and “growing up.” By choosing to marry Prince Bonus she fulfills the heteronormative expectations and “grows up.” However, Gritta maintains a longing for the potential of the queer body and the lost “sideways growth.”

---

<sup>42</sup> “[...] the bridal crown on her head tottered and then fell, rolling into the dimness” (Arnim trans. Ohm 145).

<sup>43</sup> “She closed her eyes, not wishing to see it for she was sorry not to be able to live in it [...]” (Arnim trans. Ohm 145).

## 4. Conclusion

Through the non-traditional material modifying female figures throughout the text, their queer bodies become “inscribed surfaces” and their clothing portrays their “sideways growth.” As foreshadowed by the book-dress, Gritta must ultimately choose between continuing her “sideways growth” or abandoning her queer body in order to begin a linear and heteronormative “growing up.” As she realizes the possibilities, she is confronted with the example of her ancestor, Countess Bärwalda, and the consequences of refusing to fulfill her heteronormative potential. Likewise, the story of Princess Merkusuli and her *Schmetterlingsflügel* portrays a queer body’s successful transition to that of a body like all others, a body that conforms to heteronormative expectations through marriage and reproduction. Gritta’s struggle to choose between the two possibilities is thematized through her clothing. The loss of her bridal crown as she chooses to marry subverts the heteronormative expectations and maintains a longing for the queer potential of her body. Ultimately, the clothing provides possible paths of “sideways growth” and

## References

- Alaimo, Stacy and Susan Hekman. "Introduction: Emerging Models of Materiality in Feminist Theory." *Material Feminisms*. Indiana Univ. Press, Bloomington, 2008, pp. 1-19.
- Blackwell, Jeannine. "Laying the Rod to Rest: Narrative Strategies in Gisela and Bettina Von Arnim's Fairy-Tale Novel Gritta." *Marvels & Tales: Journal of Fairy-Tale Studies*, vol. 11, no. 1-2, 1997, pp. 24-47.
- Fairfield, Joy B. "Becoming-Mouse, Becoming-Man: The Sideways Growth of Princess Mouseskin." *Transgressive Tales: Queering the Grimms*. Edited by Kay Turner, and Pauline Greenhill. Wayne State UP, 2012, pp. 223-243.
- Grosz, Elizabeth. "The Body as Inscriptive Surface." *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*. Indiana University Press, 1994, pp. 138-159.
- Jarvis, Shawn C. "Spare the Rod and Spoil the Child? Bettine's Das Leben Der Hochgräfin Gritta Von Rattenzuhausbeiuns." *Women in German Yearbook: Feminist Studies in German Literature and Culture*, vol. 3, 1986, pp. 77-89.
- Stockton, Kathryn B. "Growing Sideways, Or Versions of the Queer Child: The Ghost, the Homosexual, the Freudian, the Innocent, and the Interval of Animal." *Curiouser: On the Queerness of Children*. Edited by Steven Bruhm, and Natasha Hurley. University of Minnesota Press, 2004, pp. 277-315.
- . *The Queer Child, Or Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century*. Duke UP, 2009.
- Stryker, Susan. "An Introduction to Transgender." *Transgender History*. Seal Press, Berkeley, CA, 2008, pp.1-30.
- Urang, John G. "The 'Old Wheelwork' and its Revolutions: Precarious Authority in Gisela and

Bettine Von Arnim's *Das Leben Der Hochgräfin Gritta Von Rattenzuhausbeiuns*."

*Germanic Review*, vol. 88, no. 2, 2013, pp. 165-184.

von Arnim, Bettina. *Das Leben Der Hochgräfin Gritta Von Rattenzuhausbeiuns*. Hofenberg, 2015.

von Arnim, Bettina and Gisela von Arnim Grimm. *The Life of High Countess Gritta von Ratsinourhouse (Das Leben Der Hochgräfin Gritta Von Rattenzuhausbeiuns)*. Translated by Lisa Ohm, University of Nebraska Press, 1999.

Waldstein, Edith. "Romantic Revolution and Female Collectivity: Bettine and Gisela von Arnim's Gritta." *Women in German Yearbook: Feminist Studies in German Literature and Culture*, vol. 3, 1986, pp. 91-99.