

Article

A Scandal Averted: Bettina von Arnim's Open-Letter Novel *Dies Buch gehört dem König* (1843)

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Abstract

Dies Buch gehört dem König (*This Book Belongs to the King*), written and published in 1843 by the German Romantic author Bettina von Arnim, is a quasi-open letter, presented as a series of fictional dialogues with traces of a novel. Dedicated to the newly crowned King of Prussia, Friedrich Wilhelm IV, the letter unfolds social grievances and aims to persuade Friedrich Wilhelm to act like a just king. Due to its delicate socio-critical impetus, the letter does so through strategies of obfuscation and by using a richly pictorial, seemingly naive and lavish way of speech rather than taking an openly reproachful stance. Crucially, von Arnim does not install herself as the letter's speaker but instead fictionalizes the letter and presents Goethe's mother, Catharina Elisabeth Goethe, as the letter's primary voice ('Frau Rat'). By using a well-respected figure of the ruling class as the letter's main voice, von Arnim aimed at minimizing its scandalous potential. But even prior to publishing the letter, von Arnim had already managed to trick Friedrich Wilhelm and the Prussian censors herself: by fusing the book's title and dedication, she paratextually outwitted both the censors and the King, whose permission she sought precisely to bypass Prussian censorship. This article shows how von Arnim managed to avoid a larger scandal both textually by implementing semi-fictional devices and paratextually by presenting the letter as an affirmation of Friedrich Wilhelm IV and his policies.

Keywords: Bettina von Arnim; *Dies Buch gehört dem König*; Romanticism; Prussian censorship; digressio



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1. Introduction

Censorship has ambivalent consequences: on the one hand, as an instrument for controlling expression and communication, its strongly repressive effects can hardly be overstated from a creative point of view; on the other hand, it has the potential to lead to creative tricks and strategies of obfuscation. In the literary field in particular, there are often ingenious and remarkably creative counter-reactions to oppose and circumvent censorship. An example of the aesthetically productive influence of censorship practices on nineteenth-century literary writing is the phenomenon of *Aesopian language*: The expression "Aesopian language," which was largely disseminated in the 1860s by M. E. Saltykow-Schedrin, was initially employed as "a purely metaphorical designation for a distinctive body of phenomena new to Russian literature in the 1860s" (Loseff 1984, p. 2) before it became a broader term, applicable to literary practice in other historical and ideological contexts. The very existence of ideological state censorship significantly influences the mode of writing (cf. Loseff 1984, p. 7) within a given historical period, typically resulting in highly coded language in the literature that encompasses different shades of meaning, allusions,

circumlocutions, and various rhetorical tropes. It also shapes literary criticism and public intellectual discourse, ultimately leading to a “hermeneutics of censorship” (Patterson 1984). It is, one can resume, the very existence and precondition of state censorship that gave rise to aesthetic strategies of Aesopian language in nineteenth-century literature in the first place. Following Annabel Patterson, one should, however, add that censorship can be beneficial only “in the sense that it sharpens the wits and raises the stakes, giving writers a real task and their work a definable social value, supplying a costly content to a sometimes merely notional intellectual freedom” (Patterson 1984, p. 22).

Against this background, the reaction of the poet Heinrich Heine to the planned German ban on censorship in 1848 appears exemplary:

Alas! I cannot write anymore, I cannot, because we do not have censorship! How can a person write without censorship who has always lived under censorship? All style will cease, all grammar, all good manners [...].

[A]ch! Ich kann nicht mehr schreiben, ich kann nicht, denn wir haben keine Censur! Wie soll ein Mensch ohne Censur schreiben, der immer unter Censur gelebt hat? Aller Styl wird aufhören, die ganze Grammatik, die guten Sitten [...]. (Heine cited in Werner 1973, p. 108)¹

As this statement, with Heine’s characteristic biting irony, reveals, the creative potential of impending censorship is precisely what has inspired many literary publications and their individual final form in the first place. Clearly, writers have always sought to express their subversive and unorthodox thoughts through various forms of writing, regardless of how high the risk of censorship was. While censorship and press control—both “a precondition of intelligible discourse” (Heady 2009, p. 2)—have prevented some works of literature from ever reaching the public sphere, authors and artists have also felt compelled to find alternative modes of literary expression.

There is a fragile line between permissible and impermissible literary expression in the public discourse of nineteenth-century Germany. One author who was particularly keen to push and challenge that line is Bettina von Arnim, who repeatedly had to contend with Prussian censorship practices during the mid-nineteenth century. Even more so, von Arnim’s literary oeuvre cannot be separated from the various German small-state censorship regulations at mid-century, as they strongly shaped her literary voice. In 1835, four years after the death of her husband, Bettina made her public debut as an author with the publication of her first book, *Goethe’s Briefwechsel mit einem Kinde* (*Goethe’s Correspondence with a Child*), a rather provocative work that immediately made her famous and established her as a literary voice in her own right.

From an early age, Bettina von Arnim was a prominent public figure, deeply engaged in the literary and political life of her time. As an upper-middle-class woman and sister of the Romantic writer Clemens Brentano, she had access to influential literary circles and salons. Beyond her literary pursuits, she was actively involved in various social causes, including efforts to alleviate the cholera epidemic. Her poetic works are inseparable from her political views; her fiction is consistently suffused with moral and political critiques of contemporary society. This is undoubtedly influenced by the fact that she lived and wrote between two revolutions—the French Revolution of 1789 and the German Revolution of 1848/1849. Bettina von Arnim was particularly inspired by the French revolutionaries of the 1790s, who championed the ideal of free speech. Although she gained early recognition as a politically committed individual, it was with the publication of *Dies Buch gehört dem König* (*This Book Belongs to the King*) in 1843 that she became widely acknowledged as a politically engaged author. This work, composed of fictional dialogues and letters between, among others, Goethe’s mother and the mother of the Prussian King, addressed social

issues in Prussia and aimed to persuade King Friedrich Wilhelm IV to act justly. The book was published anonymously, but her authorship was well known. Notably, Bettina von Arnim had obtained the King's permission to dedicate the book to him in an attempt to circumvent Prussian censorship. Nevertheless, *Dies Buch gehört dem König* was banned in Bavaria and later in Prussia due to its social criticism.

Von Arnim writes for a literary audience that takes the place of a political public. It is no coincidence that she often chose the epistolary form for her publications: as the art form of early Romanticism par excellence, she was able to achieve the programmatic interlocking of the private and public spheres, of the "'solitary/communal' binary" (Karschay 2025, p. 22), and the aestheticization of everyday life in the sense of Romantic sociable writing. As an author, however, she occupies a peculiar position within the Romantic movement, for almost all her texts are "partially fictionalized source documentations" ("teilfingierte Quellendokumentationen", Bunzel 2022, p. 177), in which she mostly appears as an "authorial editor" ("auktoriale Editorin," *ibid.*), and thus also challenges common concepts of authorship of her time. Any attempt at categorizing von Arnim's publications within a conventional genre framework is challenging since equal justice should be done to her works' dual dimension of facticity and fictionality.

Following previous scholarly perspectives, Silvia Bovenschen refers to Bettina von Arnim's work as having a "hybrid aesthetic form" ("ästhetische Mischform," Bovenschen 1979, p. 216) and identifies a process of "poeticising the factual" (Bunzel 1987, pp. 23–24), which characterizes von Arnim's poetry as Romantic. Due to von Arnim's overarching approach of poeticizing life, she can be considered an "author without a work" ("Autorin ohne Werk," Bunzel 2022, p. 179), as her oeuvre primarily consists of an artful arrangement of "highly poetic original letters" (*ibid.*). Consequently, it is plausible to describe her as primarily an epistolary poet insofar as she often uses actual letters, either directly or in a rewritten way, for her literary writings. However, von Arnim notably deviates from the conventional epistolary literature of her time, which often portrayed living individuals with utmost consideration and caution. In contrast, she frequently adopts a polemical tone in her writings, while straying only minimally from the original epistolary documents that serve as her source material (cf. Bunzel 2022, p. 187).

Nevertheless, the autobiographical depictions of her life are simultaneously fictionalized, making it challenging to distinguish the historical person Bettina von Arnim from the literary persona she constructs. Her ideal of poetry is shaped by the belief that poetry should be true to life and that life and society should be poetically shaped. In her writing process, von Arnim thus romanticizes life—this is the only way to adequately understand 'Romanticism'—presenting a "mythicization of everyday life with simultaneous criticism of the everyday life of the period" ("Mythisierung des Alltags bei gleichzeitiger Kritik des Alltagslebens der Epoche," Dischner 1981, p. 22). Gisela Dischner rightly characterizes this as a preliminary form of literary alienation (*ibid.*), a concept that becomes programmatic in later modern literature. Von Arnim's two especially political writings, *Dies Buch gehört dem König* (1843) and its sequel *Gespräche mit Dämonen: Des Königsbuches zweiter Band* (1852), as well as the large-scale project *Armenbuch* (though widely unpublished due to pressure from the Prussian censorship authorities)², demonstrate a programmatic connection to the literature of the *Junges Deutschland* movement, whose members were also a particular target of censorship. Indeed, Bettina von Arnim had been involved in a series of legal disputes since 1840, particularly after the publication of Clemens Brentano's *Frühlingskranz* in 1844. Her correspondence frequently reveals her awareness of the looming threat of censorship, which would henceforth characterize her writing.

As the literary voice of a politically educated public, sensitized not least by the ideals of the French Revolution, Bettina von Arnim skillfully acted as a "publicist undercover"

(“Publizistin undercover”, [Bunzel 2009](#)) and presented her criticism of the socio-political status quo in a subtle and often ironic manner. This approach is evident in her work *Dies Buch gehört dem König*,³ where she critiques the prevailing social conditions and even anticipates a critique of capitalism, making her a critical figure in the Romantic movement (cf. on this categorization [Dischner 1981](#), p. 19).

Dies Buch gehört dem König is the most vivid expression of von Arnim’s special relationship to Prussian censorship practices, which she (largely) managed to circumvent in a sophisticated manner. The *Königsbuch* also demonstrates her exceptional symbiosis of political commitment and literary participation in the public sphere. This illustrates how strongly she was engaged in socio-political matters and can therefore be considered politically progressive and revolutionary in her aesthetically expressed agenda.

2. Censorship in Nineteenth-Century Prussia

In terms of literature and cultural policy, Bettina von Arnim was strongly influenced by liberal, progressive values, which she also cultivated as an influential salon hostess. It therefore comes as no surprise that her salon was put under surveillance by the Prussian censorship authorities. This is evidenced by an 1847 report, sent to the so-called ‘Central Office of Information’ (“Zentrale Informationsbehörde”), which even claimed a ‘socialist’ (“sozialistische”) tendency within her salon society and, in particular, identified Bettina von Arnim as the driving, conspiratorial force (cf. [Bäumer and Schultz 1995](#), pp. 89–90).

That the censorship authorities recognized a potential conspiratorial force in her had already become evident a few years earlier, when she was met with particular harshness by the censors for her documentary project, *Armenbuch*. She was forced to discontinue this book⁴ in 1840, due to increased censorship pressure after she had been publicly accused of being an instigator during the Weavers’ Uprising.⁵ This accusation was further reinforced because she publicly supported numerous liberal figures (such as the Brothers Grimm) and, in her political values, appeared to be rather close to the authors of *Junges Deutschland*, with whom she shared, first and foremost, an all-encompassing criticism of social problems perceived as the government’s fault, a questioning of religion and Christianity (“do not call it ludicrous that I do not want to believe in the seven days of creation”; “nennt das nicht Aberwitz, daß ich an die sieben Schöpfungstage nicht glauben will”, ([Bettine von Arnim 1995](#), p. 38) and a strong demand for freedom of the press. Freedom of the press was also one of the central political demands in the *Vormärz* (‘Pre-March’) period, when the growing bourgeois freedom movement had to contend with a tightening of cultural-political restrictions after the failed July Revolution of 1830.

At first, the outbreak and effects of the French Revolution of 1789 only led to a surface liberalization of the censorship system. Behind the scenes, censorship regulations were tightened, particularly within the German poly- and small states, and implemented with the threat of police power to forestall any seditious movements. Because these regulations were not uniform, the Carlsbad Decrees of 1819, which were a reaction to the assassination of the successful reactionary dramatist August von Kotzebue by the radical student and activist Karl Ludwig Sand on 23 March 1819, led to even stricter censorship practices (cf. [Lorenz 2009](#), p. 32). Subsequently, general press censorship was introduced in almost all German states. For instance, the severity of literary censorship was particularly evident on 10 December 1835, when all writings by the authors of *Junges Deutschland* and any other oppositional literary movement were subjected to a general ban.

From 1819 onwards, the absolutist police state increasingly aimed at preventing the people from being able to educate and enlighten themselves. Yet what complicated the practice of censorship was that no single state—apart from Austria—had an overview of, let alone control over, what was published or banned in the neighboring states. This

resulted in inconsistent, non-standardized censorship practices. Furthermore, individual censorship laws left room for interpretation and were thus understood and implemented differently by the respective state censors. Hence, between 1819 and 1848 (in terms of censorship arguably the strictest phase in German history), press control and literary censorship varied from state to state, even though “a censorship commission of some kind” (Heady 2009, p. 15) was typically in charge. Other institutions, like the police force, which would regularly inspect book traders, had a massive influence, too. As Katy Heady points out, Prussia’s division of censorship tasks was particularly complex: each region had a provincial *Oberpräsident*, who would manage both the appointment and supervision of censors. Until 1843, however, the main responsibility for press control lay with the so-called *Oberzensurkollegium*, which appointed specific ministries to coordinate censorship, such as a foreign ministry for newspapers and political works (cf. Heady 2009, p. 15).

A new censorship law was established in 1819 as part of the Carlsbad Decrees. This new law, which did not apply in Prussia, where all works continued to be affected by pre-censorship without restriction⁶—imposed pre-censorship for all printed matter under 20 printed sheets⁷ (also known as the “twenty-sheet clause” (“Zwanzig-Bogen-Klausel”)). Therefore, political journals and publications about current affairs in particular felt the harshness of censorship. Although writings with more than 20 printed sheets were nominally exempt from pre-censorship, they were still affected by the possibility of post-censorship, as the fate of Bettina von Arnim’s *Königsbuch* shows. The high financial risk of not being able to sell an expensive, entire edition in the event of censorship (cf. Lorenz 2009, p. 33) also often led to instances of self-censorship.

At first glance, the assurances granted by the German Federal Act of 1815⁸ gave a progressive impression by strengthening freedom of the press. However, it quickly became apparent that state censorship was now implemented with even greater rigor. Thus, the fight against state censorship became one of the main objectives of the liberal opposition in the 1840s, pushing most German states and their censorship apparatuses to their limits. This public pressure mounted, not least due to the expansion of the readership, and political publications increased visibly. In the early 1840s, one consequence of this development was that the German Confederation started discussing abolishing pre-censorship in favor of a post-censorship system.

In the context of German state censorship, Prussian laws and practices were not only considered particularly complex but also particularly strict from the outset. The aggressive censorship in Restoration Prussia during the 1840s affected not only the written but also the spoken word as soon as it became remotely political, as is evidenced by the fervent persecution of demagogues during the Restoration in Prussia. This also affected Prussian salon culture, which in the first half of the nineteenth century came under increasing scrutiny and suspicion. Salon conversations had to significantly minimize their socio-political dimensions.⁹ Bettina von Arnim’s salon was among those under particular observation.

King Friedrich Wilhelm IV played a key role in the history of censorship. Initially seen as a bearer of hope (cf. Bunzel et al. 1995, pp. 701–2), he was known for his interest in the arts and his support for advancing the education of the populace. However, Bettina von Arnim soon had to acknowledge the King’s conservative views, as evidenced not least by her *Königsbuch*. At least at first, a course of liberalization seemed to continue after Friedrich Wilhelm’s accession to the throne, as he instigated significant censorship relaxations. For instance, all written material over 20 sheets (i.e., over 320 pages) was now also to be exempt from pre-censorship in Prussia. These ‘relaxations,’ however, led to numerous criticisms from conservative–reactionary circles, prompting the King to soon reverse these measures.

3. *Dies Buch gehört dem König* (1843)

3.1. *Origin and History of Censorship*

Bettina von Arnim's literary career was marked by clashes with the censorship authorities. That she was able to publish her first two books of letters in 1835 and 1840 without difficulty, despite their contentious political content, was undoubtedly due to her privileged position. This would change with the publication of *Dies Buch gehört dem König* in 1843. From then on, the censorship authorities would keep her under strict supervision.

Dies Buch gehört dem König was published in Prussia in 1843 by the Berlin printing house Trowitzsch und Sohn after having been submitted to the responsible censor in the summer of 1842. Despite its extremely harsh (albeit textually obscured) criticism of the Prussian state and royal leadership, numerous printed copies were delivered for sale. In Bavaria and Austria,¹⁰ by contrast, the book was immediately banned. As the *Königsbuch* ran to a length of over 20 sheets with its documentary appendix, pre-censorship had been aborted. Post-censorship measures were nonetheless looming, but von Arnim was initially able to prevent them. The avoidance of post-censorship of her book was successful in Prussia because of her ingenious publishing strategy, which made use of her correspondence with the Prussian King. Von Arnim's correspondence with the Crown Prince Friedrich Wilhelm dates back to 1839 and her efforts to employ the Grimm brothers in Berlin. It continued until 1852.¹¹ With her *Königsbuch*, von Arnim hoped to provide the king with a princely education in the manner of a *Fürstenspiegel* (Mirror of Kings). Yet Friedrich Wilhelm's political actions soon disappointed such endeavors (cf. [Bunzel et al. 1995](#), pp. 725–26). After the King relaxed censorship regulations in the autumn of 1842 for printed material of over 20 sheets as long as the publisher and author were identifiable on the title page, significantly stricter government policies followed, including a tightening of the press law.

In February 1843, Bettina von Arnim wrote to King Friedrich Wilhelm, announcing the planned publication of her book and, as was customary at the time, indirectly requesting his prior permission to dedicate it to him:

I'm capable of speaking to the people, to redeem them from their alienation from their ancestral ruler, so that they may move freely in love for him and not merely as a chorus in the world theatre. I have the conception of what is right, and also the courage to snatch the key to it from any armoured giants and sulphur-breathing dragons, as soon as my King will be inclined to open up the paradise of Germany with this key [...].

Ich vermags mit dem Volk zu reden, von seiner Entfremdung dem angestammten Herrscher, es zu erlösen, daß es sich frei in der Liebe zu ihm bewege und nicht blos als Chorus auf dem Welttheater. Ich habe den Begriff vom Rechten, und auch den Muth, den Schlüssel dazu, allen Geharnischten Riesen und Schwefelspeienden Drachen zu entreissen, so bald mein König mit diesem Schlüssel das Paradies Deutschlands zu erschließen geneigt sein wird [...]. (Bettina von Arnim in February 1843, cited in [Püschel 2001](#), pp. 81–82)

Although he had not read the book beforehand, Friedrich Wilhelm granted it a special license, thus exempting it from pre-censorship, along with the general rule in Prussia at that time that publications with more than 20 sheets were exempt from pre-publication censorship. Von Arnim's plan was therefore successful, and for quite some time she could rely on the royal protective shield against any form of censorship: the title, which suggested a panegyric, together with the prior announcement of her book in correspondence with the head of state, ensured the King's confidence that it was a publication aligned with his political views. Her publication strategy did not end there; announcements such as "*Bettina*

is soon to publish a book titled ‘This Book Belongs to the King’” (“Von Bettina soll nächstens ein Buch unter dem Titel: ‘Dies Buch gehört dem König’ erscheinen”; *Intelligenzblatt der Allgemeinen Literatur-Zeitung*, no. 3, February 1842, p. 37; cited in Bettine von Arnim 1995, p. 836) appeared in public newspapers, thereby securing broad public interest in advance.

Von Arnim had her entire manuscript printed as early as 1842 and sent an advance copy to the King via Alexander von Humboldt the following year. In the accompanying letter, she explained her intentions for the *Königsbuch* in greater detail:

I had a fable in mind as to how the spirit of the people could be clearly characterized in contrast to the illusory power of statesmanship, which, although it steers the reins, rides a wooden horse that does not move forward, while the enthusiasm of the people is a winged horse that stamps the clouds with its hooves of fire in order to procure light for itself [...]. To be the genius of the people, to roundly strengthen and enlighten them to bold action, that is the king’s calling [...].

Mir schwebte eine Fabel vor, wie sich der Volksgeist deutlich bezeichnen lasse, gegenüber jener Scheinmacht der Staatskunst, die zwar die Zügel lenkt, aber einen hölzernen Gaul reitet, der nicht vorwärts geht, während die Volksbegeisterung ein Flügelpferd ist, das mit seinen Feuerhuf die Wolken zerstampft, um sich Licht zu verschaffen [...]. Dem Volk Genius sein, es umfassend stärken und erleuchten zur kühnen That, das ist des Königs Beruf [...].” (Bettine von Arnim 1995, p. 845)

The King responded swiftly on 14 July 1843 with a handwritten letter, in which he thanked her for the advance copy. His letter is notable for its “flowery” (“blumig[e]”, Becker-Cantarino 2009, p. 72) style and its playful poetic borrowings in the prefixed salutation: “My dear, gracious, vineyard-land-sprouting, sunbeam-baptized native of Bärwalde, the sand-saturated!” (“Meine liebe, gnädige, RebenGeländerEntsprossene, SonnenstrahlenGetaufte Gebietherinn von Bärwalde, dem Sande-satten!”, cited in Püschel 2001, p. 97). We know that the King did not read the manuscript; nevertheless, he allowed the dedication.

As previous research has shown (cf. Püschel 2005, p. 285), a book ban was recommended to the King at an early stage.¹² The Privy Councillor Ferdinand Bitter informed the Minister of the Interior, Adolf Heinrich Graf von Arnim-Boitzenburg,¹³ who in turn drew the King’s attention to the book’s “unholy radicalism” (“heillosen Radicalismus”, Bettine von Arnim 1995, p. 851). However, no censorship measures were implemented because the King spoke approvingly of the *Königsbuch* to Arnim-Boitzenburg, who noted:

The King ordered me to reply “He will soon thank Frau von Arnim himself in writing for the translated book, but she need not postpone publication until then.” A few days later, Your Majesty had the pleasure of writing to Frau Bettina von Arnim.

Der König befahl mir zu antworten “Er werde Frau von Arnim bald selbst für das übersendete Buch schriftlich danken sie brauche aber bis dahin die Publication nicht zu verschieben.” Wenige Tage darauf haben Sr Majestät geruht, an Frau Bettina von Arnim zu schreiben. (Arnim-Boitzenburg cited in Schultz [1997] 2014, p. 258)

Thus, the King only became aware of the provocative content of the book through von Arnim-Boitzenburg, one of his closest advisers and a distant relative of Bettina’s husband, Achim von Arnim.¹⁴ Karl August Varnhagen (von Ense) also reported that the King later became quite angry about the book’s content, which had previously been unknown to him: “After the King had read on and talked about what he had read, his mood became one of true displeasure.” (“Nachdem der König weitergelesen und über das Gelesene gesprochen hat, ist seine Stimmung wahrer Unwille geworden,” letter dated 13 November 1843, cf. Varnhagen (von Ense) [1861] 1972, vol. 2, p. 225)

Nonetheless, for Bettina von Arnim, the royal attention was not only important in order to publish her *Königsbuch*. Beyond this self-serving aspect, she was also interested in educating the King *en passant*—that is, without appearing too overtly solicitous—to act justly towards his people:

To be the genius of the people, to strengthen and enlighten them comprehensively for bold action, that is the King's calling, but let him not pay heed to false politics, which throws stones into the well in order to dim the reflection of a higher enlightenment[.] True politics must be the inventor, it must awaken the needs through new higher talent [..]. Only genius can be a prince! And our King—wanted to be the unrestricted genius! Let the ideal of the ages arise in his spirit!—All this went through my mind when I wrote my book.

Dem Volk Genius sein, es umfassend stärken und erleuchten zur kühnen Tat, das ist des Königs Beruf, aber er achte der falschen Politik nicht, die Steine in den Brunnen wirft, um den Widerschein zu trüben einer höheren Erleuchtung[.] Die echte Politik muß Erfinderin sein, sie muß die Bedürfnisse wecken durch neue höhere Begabung [..]. Der Genius nur kann Fürst sein! Und unser König—wollte der unumschränkter Genius sein! Stieg das Ideal der Zeiten in seinem Geist uns auf!—All dies ist mir durch den Kopf gegangen, als ich mein Buch schrieb. (Bettine von Arnim 1995, p. 845)

The *Königsbuch* was later targeted by Prussian censors, not least because of the inclusion of a documentary appendix entitled *Erfahrungen eines jungen Schweizers im Vogtlande* ('Experiences of a Young Swiss in the Vogtland'), which Wolfgang Bunzel describes as a novel textual technique of an "aesthetically accentuated arrangement of brittle empirical data" ("wirkungsästhetisch akzentuierte[n] Arrangement[s] spröder empirischer Daten," Bunzel 2022, p. 19). As one of the earliest social reportages, the report, commissioned by Heinrich Grunholzer,¹⁵ a Swiss teacher and one of von Arnim's friends who regularly visited her salon, is also remarkable for its combination of the documentary with the highly figurative ("What is education through art if it does not release the butterfly from its chrysalis, what is spirit if it does not make you clairvoyant?", "Für was ist alle Kunstbildung wenn sie nicht den Schmetterling aus seiner Verpuppung löset, für was Geist wenn er Euch selbst nicht hellsehend macht?", Bettine von Arnim 1995, p. 225), in the imaginatively designed conversations of *Frau Rat* ('Madam Counsellor'), the main speaker in the book. In contrast to the largest parts of the *Königsbuch*, the appendix is written in an objective, data-oriented register.¹⁶ The command to the King to strive for a fairer style of governance is further reinforced by the sober, fact-based social study contained in the appendix. The appendix is by no means at odds with the language of *Frau Rat*, which aims at sensibility and imagination; rather, it may be regarded as complementary to the book's overarching objective.

The *Königsbuch* is closely linked to censorship not only in its history of publication and distribution but also textually, in three respects: firstly, the censorship threatened and effected by the government; secondly, the author's own (self-)censorship; thirdly, and more profoundly, the book's self-reflexive comments on censorship along with the conditions of and changes in writing styles due to the very threat of censorship, to which *Frau Rat* often alludes in passing. For instance, while discussing the state's treatment of criminals with the Mayor of Frankfurt am Main, she suddenly adds, "And now, Mr Mayor, refute me strongly, otherwise the censors will not let it pass." ("Und nun Herr Bürgermeister widerlegen Sie mich nur derb sonst läßt die Zensur nicht passieren[.]" (Bettine von Arnim 1995, p. 221)). Censorship, both actual and imagined, proves to be an equally constitutive element of the book.

The *Königsbuch* was received enthusiastically by most readers, and, with Goethe's *Briefwechsel mit einem Kinde*, it is her publication with the greatest resonance. Around 100 contemporary reviews of the *Königsbuch* have been recorded (cf. [Becker-Cantarino 2019b](#), p. 409) so that Barbara Becker-Cantarino even identifies it as the most frequently reviewed publication in Prussia (cf. [Becker-Cantarino 2009](#), p. 73). Despite this largely positive reception, the book was also met with skepticism and—in some cases—rejection, being perceived in turn as anti-state, reactionary, communist, contradictory and unstructured. In political terms, the book remained ineffective; indeed, in view of the demands of the 1848 Revolution, which, among other things, sought a constitutional monarchy, von Arnim's ideal of a people's kingship already seemed outdated.

Von Arnim continued to have difficulties with both the censorship authorities¹⁷ and her publisher. Her relationship with Eduard Heinrich Schroeder, who published *Dies Buch gehört dem König* in two parts, became increasingly strained and ended in early 1844 (cf. [Pietsch 2019](#), p. 291). After several conflict-ridden experiences with publishers, she began to self-publish in the mid-1840s—yet not without further difficulties. On 18 August 1846, she was ordered by the Berlin magistrate to acquire Berlin citizenship because she was operating a business as a book publisher. She resisted the demand, and it was thanks to her brother-in-law Friedrich Carl von Savigny's intervention—at that time a member of the Prussian State Council and Minister of State for Law Revision—that she was prevented from being sentenced to two months' imprisonment for supposedly insulting the magistrate in December 1847 (cf. [Pietsch 2019](#), p. 292; cf. [Meyer-Hepner 1960](#) for details on the magistrate trial).

3.2. Strategies of Obfuscation

In *Verbotene Literatur von der klassischen Zeit bis zur Gegenwart* (1924), a classic catalogue of over a hundred censored books, Heinrich Hubert Houben mentions only one example by a female author: Bettina von Arnim's *Dies Buch gehört dem König*. Yet, as [Kord \(1997, p. 367\)](#) notes, Houben diminishes von Arnim's status as a literary author, and he implicitly questions the revolutionary potential of her book. He points out that von Arnim's acquaintance with the King allegedly proves that her *Königsbuch* was never truly in danger of censorship, and he emphasizes that it was only *after* publication that the book's potential for scandal was recognized (cf. [Houben 1924](#), p. 32). However, as will be further demonstrated, the book follows a multitude of textual strategies of obfuscation and thus contains the potential to distract and outwit the censors.

The *Königsbuch* proves extremely challenging in terms of genre characterization: even though the classification as a novel with an epistolary dimension has become established, it must be acknowledged that this has been questioned many times, not least because Bettina von Arnim mixes several different text types in her special art of fabulation (cf. [Wallenborn 2006](#), p. 247, footnote 2). Odo Marquard describes her writing as an amalgamation of "fictions with non-fictional fiction" ("Fiktionen mit Nichtfiktivitätsfiktion," [Marquard 1983](#), p. 35). Furthermore, both *Dies Buch gehört dem König* (1843) and its successor *Gespräche mit Dämonen* (1852) are "protocol books" ([Bunzel 2022](#), p. 182), insofar as they do not aim to stage fictionality but demonstrate a constant embedding of real documentary material: "By entrusting herself to the propositional mode of the biographical document, she subverts the rules of literary discourse of her time. In this way, she cleverly conceals the unquestionably existing autofictional parts of her paradocumentary editions." ("Indem sie sich [...] dem Aussagemodus des biographischen Dokuments anvertraut, subvertiert sie die literarischen Diskursregeln ihrer Zeit. Auf diese Weise kaschiert sie geschickt die fraglos vorhandenen autofiktionalen Anteile ihrer paradokumentarischen Editionen", [Bunzel 2022](#), p. 182).

The first part of the *Königsbuch* is anecdotal and entitled *Der Erinnerung abgelauschte Gespräche und Erzählungen von 1807*, containing fictitious conversations between Frau Rat

and important figures from politics and society. The second part comprises the *Socratic der Frau Rat*, structured as a didactic “Socratic,” in which points of view are destabilized through counter-questions, facilitating the dialogue partner’s self-insight. The most explosive section is the appendix, which must be understood as a testimony to the failure of Prussian policy in combating pauperism. Overall, the *Königsbuch* lacks a linear plot, consisting instead of a series of conversations interspersed with smaller narratives akin to fairy tales. The conversations are marked by speech and counter-speech.

Dies Buch gehört dem König, along with its successor *Gespräche mit Dämonen* (1852)—published after the revolution and with little resonance, its subtitle notably being *Des Königsbuchs zweiter Band*—was primarily addressed to the King. The work takes the form of “epistolary writing” (“epistolar[e] Schriftlichkeit,” [Becker-Cantarino 2019e](#), p. 341), consisting of fictional letters depicting the young literary figure Bettina von Arnim in conversation with Frau Rat (Catharina Elisabeth Goethe). Following the late Romantic ideal of conviviality, the conversational aspect functions as a synthetic method of uniting the individual and society, a fundamental element of Romantic political salon culture. However, upon closer examination, it becomes clear that the interlocutors are by no means equals; rather, the dialogue resembles a Socratic conversation, a type of “didactic conversation” (“Lehrgespräch”) or “instructional conversation” (“Unterrichtsgespräch,” cf. [Becker-Cantarino 2019e](#), pp. 341–42). A hallmark of this form of Socratic discourse, particularly associated in Romantic thought with the poet Novalis, is the achievement of self-insight by the interlocutor, primarily through the deliberate sowing of doubt in a didactic manner.

Irrespective of the particular textual design, it must be recognized as a special merit of von Arnim that she, as a woman, not only dared to present her ideal of a good state doctrine to the King in the manner of a *Fürstenspiegel* but also managed to obtain the King’s protection from censorship in advance in such a sophisticated manner. In the Wilhelmine era, von Arnim’s actions constituted a belated scandal, which the author no longer intended to avoid; rather, as [Hollmer \(2009, p. 84\)](#) specifies, for von Arnim, this became a matter of staging the transgression of boundaries that had thus been committed.

With the *Königsbuch*, Bettina von Arnim identifies herself as part of the second generation of Romantics, internalizing the ideal of a synthesis between art and life (cf. [Schultz \[1997\] 2014](#), p. 255). Through a form of Romantic universal poetry, she sought to unite spheres previously considered distinct—society, privacy, and art—within her writing. In this conception, the political figure is also an artistic figure; any opposition between art and politics is rejected. Von Arnim follows the early modern tradition of the *Fürstenspiegel* while simultaneously drawing on the oral salon culture of her time. Formally, the aesthetic and the real worlds are intertwined in the *Königsbuch*: the main part of the book is designed as a “quasi-protocol” (“scheinprotokollarisch,” [Bunzel 2022](#), p. 188), while the appendix provides an actual documentary report, written by the Swiss teacher Heinrich Grunholzer at von Arnim’s behest.¹⁸ Through this social reportage and her subsequent projects, she emerges as a “private documentation centre of pauperism in Germany” (“private[] Dokumentationszentrale des Pauperismus in Deutschland,” [Bunzel 2022](#), p. 192).

In terms of content, the *Königsbuch* centers on the fundamental idea of how a king ought to govern justly and rightly. The book thus serves as a poetic thought experiment, exploring the possibilities of fairer governance. Based on real, regular conversations with Catharina Elisabeth Goethe, the *Königsbuch* is set around 1807 and consists of fictional, highly allusive scenes and polylogues.¹⁹ The work comprises two volumes, the first of which is itself divided into two parts. The first volume mainly contains remembered conversations with Frau Rat, while the second part takes the form of a debate (“Streitgespräch,” [Müller-Dietz 2008](#), p. 691) involving Frau Rat, the mayor of Frankfurt am Main, and a priest. Attached to the book is a documentary report entitled *Erfahrungen eines jungen Schweizers im Vogtlande*,

which describes the poverty-stricken conditions in a craftsman's quarter in the Vogtland, a northern district of Berlin.²⁰ This appendix not only takes the Romantic ideal of an indissoluble link between art and life to the extreme but also lends the book the character of social reportage—albeit presented in a Romantic guise. What is the function of this factual documentation? In line with her ideal of a people's king, which Bettina hoped the Prussian monarch would embody, the appendix served to inform the King of the dire social conditions in Prussia. Undoubtedly, the author aimed to effect positive change in the shape of socially conscious political action. Thus, the work can be understood as a literary communication of social reformist ideas. Von Arnim was highly skilled in conveying her political messages to the King through literary strategies and developed a “sophisticated communication structure with modifications for the respective occasions, often blurring the boundary between mere communication and literature” (“raffiniertes Kommunikationsgebilde mit Modifikationen für die jeweiligen Veranlassungen, mit dem häufig die Grenze zwischen bloßer Mitteilung und Literatur überschritten wurde,” Püschel 2005, pp. 197–98).

The central theme of the *Königsbuch* is the ideal of popular kingship, a romantic political concept that von Arnim initially believed could appeal to the Prussian King, who had only begun his reign in 1840. At first, she envisaged him as a potential “Romantic on the throne” (“Romantiker auf dem Thron,” David Friedrich Strauß cited in Bunzel et al. 1995, p. 705), a notion supported by early signs such as the King's letter to her, written in a romantic–poetic style (see III.1). However, she soon came to admit that the Prussian King lacked any real willingness to pursue reform.

The dedication within the title of the *Königsbuch* deserves special attention, as it creates intimacy between speaker and addressee yet remains discreet by not naming the King explicitly via his proper name. Alongside a mayor and a priest, the *Königsbuch* also features several important women from the upper and bourgeois classes, most notably the mother of the Prussian King and, in Catharina Elisabeth Goethe, as the leading figure, the mother of Germany's most famous poet. She is introduced under the names ‘Frau Rat’ or ‘Frau Aja’—her real-life nickname—by the much younger Bettina von Arnim in the text. Given the intimate, though late, factual friendship and bond between Catharina Elisabeth and Bettina, it is highly likely that von Arnim channelled her own socio-political views through the character of Frau Rat. It is therefore unsurprising that Frau Rat is the driving force in the conversations, dominating and guiding her interlocutors in terms of both quantitative length and argumentative power. Frau Rat's is presented as the text's leading voice; her prominence as a woman in this role is itself a revolutionary novelty at this time. By contrast, the male representatives of the established ruling class—such as the mayor and the pastor—appear “incapable of movement due to the systemic thinking they have learned” (“durch das eingelernte Systemdenken bewegungsunfähig,” Schultz [1997] 2014, p. 267). Hartwig Schultz also highlights the strikingly different way Frau Rat's “opponents” speak: their arguments are weak, their positions lack substance, and they generally come across as “philistines” (“philiströs”, cf. Schultz [1997] 2014, p. 256). Consequently, they are not only portrayed as antagonists but also as figures guilty in Frau Rat's understanding:

Yes, Mr Mayor, I can see my political innocence shining in your eyes, which you take with indulgence; I, however, do not see any innocent politics in you, for it comes with the original life of all perversity, and this has degraded your spirit to such an extent that it is no longer even sane.

Ja Herr Bürgermeister ich sehe in Ihren Augen leuchtet meine politische Unschuld! Die Sie mit Nachsicht überschwemmen, ich aber anerkenne in Ihnen keine unschuldige Politik; denn sie ist aller Verkehrtheit Urlüge, die hat so weit

Euren Geist herabgewürdigt, daß er nicht einmal mehr zurechnungsfähig ist.
(Bettine von Arnim 1995, p. 228)

Frau Rat leads the conversation, and she is portrayed as an elderly, distinguished woman who unsettles both the Mayor of Frankfurt and the city priest with her utopian ideas. One of her distinctive features is that she offers both an educated salon voice and a popular one. What stands out is her highly allusive and metaphor-rich imagery, which at times appears strange, challenging, and unusual to her conversation partners: “A threadbare jacket that is too tight is bound to make a racket at the first opportunity” (“Eine dünnfädige Jacke, die zu eng ist, muß bei erster Gelegenheit einen Krach tun.” Bettine von Arnim 1995, p. 223).

Frau Rat’s style of speaking, tinged with Frankfurt dialect (“So manchem Frankfurter Bürgerskind wüßts gangen sein wie mir [...]”, Bettine von Arnim 1995, p. 91), is (seemingly) spontaneous, associative and digressive. The rhetorical technique of *digressio* (cf. Becker-Cantarino 2019e, p. 343) suggests authentic orality, thereby conveying naturalness and sincerity. What Stephan Karschay, in a recent publication, sees as one key source of popularity for Samuel Richardson’s novel-in-letters *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded* (1740) in its eighteenth-century reception, similarly pertains to the dialogues and Frau Rat’s manner of speaking in von Arnim’s *Königsbuch*, namely that “[n]either are a letter’s suasive elements—its rhetorical flourishes, unctuous flatterings, aestheticised moral pronouncements etc.—evidence of the spontaneous effusions ‘of the moment,’ but carefully constructed and well-timed speech acts” (Karschay 2025, p. 30). Indeed, as Joe Bray further highlights, perceiving letter-writing—or in von Arnim’s case the narrated representation of dialogue—as “‘the spontaneous transcription’ of ‘uncensored streams of consciousness’” often “misses the subtlety with which epistolary novelists can probe the ‘recesses’ of their characters’ minds, and the tensions within the ‘subjectivity’ of the self that they can reveal.” (Bray 2003, p. 20).

Although Frau Rat frequently strays from the main subject of her speech, she never loses sight of her true aims and intentions.²¹ This meandering style, modelled on Plato’s *Republic* with its speech-and-counter-speech structure, is underscored by the section’s title, “Socratie der Frau Rat”. In this context, the young Bettina can be seen as Socrates’s student, Plato. Remarkably, Frau Rat never sounds authoritatively aggressive; rather, she comes across as sentimental and at times even naïve. Folkloristic and fairytale-like elements make her speech stand out from that of her dialogue partners. Indeed, the strongly metaphorical and associative language she employs can be considered quintessentially Romantic. The vivid imagery aims to evoke the reader’s ‘natural voice,’ creating a connection that would be far less achievable through rational, less figurative language. In contrast, the pastor and the mayor, representing ecclesiastical and administrative authorities, respectively, appear as her opponents.

The threat of censorship is most evident in the fact that Frau Rat’s anti-Prussian criticism is always coded; Prussia itself is never explicitly named as the main target. Nevertheless, her critique clearly targets the Prussian state, especially Friedrich Wilhelm IV, but also other institutions such as the Church (“What is genius?—It is God’s free play within the human spirit. The church father cannot keep this in check by any commandment.” “Was ist Genie?—Es ist des Gottes freies Spiel im Menschengestalt. Das aber kann der Kirchenvater durch kein Gebot im Zaun halten,” Bettine von Arnim 1995, p. 231).

The Prussian King, imagined as a potential king of the people in her pseudo-factual poetry, in a broader sense simultaneously serves as a critique of real individuals and their behavior, exposing the gap between possibility and reality, promise and failure, utopia and everyday life (“als Kritik an den realen Personen und ihrem Verhalten gemeint, wiesen sie [i.e., von Arnim’s imagined characters] die Diskrepanz von Möglichkeit und Wirklichkeit,

von Versprechen und Versagen, von Utopie und Alltag auf", Lützeler 1997, p. 59). Frau Rat's harsh criticism is directed at the monarchical Prussian state—her repeated protestations of loyalty to the King notwithstanding (e.g., p. 161). Her plea for the humanization of the criminal law and her critique of the rigid penal and police systems as the root cause of crime are also encoded criticisms of the Prussian government and the police more generally. As Becker-Cantarino notes, the literary techniques here both aim to outwit the censors and serve as a "poetic end in themselves" ("poetischer Selbstzweck," Becker-Cantarino 2019b, p. 402). At the same time, Frau Rat presents herself as not quite responsible for her statements by portraying herself as somewhat unwell due to excessive wine consumption:

Remember, there is no responsibility in intoxication. That's why I always have the bottle at hand when someone is annoyed by something I say, something treasonous or otherwise despicable, for which someone could blame me; then the bottle has done the trick.

Bedenken Sie im Rausch ist keine Verantwortung. Drum hab ich immer die Flasche bei der Hand wenn einem was verdrießt, was ich vorbring, Hochverräterisches oder sonst Despektierliches, worüber einer mir könnt eine Verantwortung zuschieben, dann hats die Flasche getan. (Bettine von Arnim 1995, p. 141)

From the very beginning, Frau Rat establishes a connection between her rather excessive consumption of alcoholic beverages and the imaginative, fictional realm that accompanies it: "[...] Today I am in the mood for a bit of a buzz; there is not much more to tell about the realities—only about the fantasies" ("heut hab ich grad Lust nach einem kleinen Räuschen; denn von den Wirklichkeiten ist so nicht mehr viel zu erzählen—nur noch von denen Einbildungen," Bettine von Arnim 1995, p. 43). This further exemplifies the *Königsbuch's* oscillation between fact and fiction.

Frau Rat repeatedly shows awareness of her own self-censorship and often expresses this with ironic gestures: "I mean a completely different state located behind the Himalayas [...] but should censorship want to remove that too; well, I don't mean that one either." ("[I]ch mein einen ganz andern Staat hinter dem Himalaja gelegen [...] sollte mir aber auch das die Zensur streichen wollen; nun so mein ich den auch nicht," Bettine von Arnim 1995, p. 281) Her worldview and political stance are shaped by the Romantic ideal of the *vox populi*. This notion of a shared origin and equality among all members of humanity was a core postulate of the French Revolution. The *Königsbuch* aims to offer the monarchy a new *raison d'être*, grounded in popular kingship and the joint education of prince and people.²² This popular ideal becomes manifest on multiple levels: Frau Rat herself, with her slight Frankfurt dialect, embodies the *vox populi* (cf. Becker-Cantarino 2009, p. 77) most directly. Furthermore, a popular style permeates the text more generally, sometimes with religious and primitive–archaic tones. The childlike Bettina, with her authentic, naïve voice, signals further closeness to the people.

Becker-Cantarino identifies clear parallels between von Arnim's ideal of the people's king and the "political Romanticism" of Novalis's *Glauben und Liebe oder Der König und die Königin* (1798), which envisions a "community of love" ("Liebesgemeinschaft") between king and people (Becker-Cantarino 2009, p. 78). In the *Königsbuch*, von Arnim argues for a popular kingship prioritizing the people's interests, which marks her as a liberal voice infused with philanthropic concerns. Frau Rat's views on freedom and equality ("the freedom of all makes the individual free"; "die Freiheit Aller macht den Einzelnen frei," Bettine von Arnim 1995, p. 297) were revolutionary in their time. Though the French Revolution had failed, it sparked a "collective shake-up of consciousness" ("kollektive Bewusstseinserschütterung," Becker-Cantarino 2019b, p. 405), and Frau Rat insists that its consequences can no longer be ignored.

Frau Rat's (and von Arnim's) proposals for crime prevention are particularly progressive. Instead of harsh criminal laws, she advocates social and educational reforms. Her critique of imprisonment and the death penalty is sharp; she pleads for a humanistic approach to crime, emphasizing effective prevention through social education and policy. The *Königsbuch*, then, presents a profound "state and criminal policy reform programme" ("staats- und kriminalpolitisches Reformprogramm," Müller-Dietz 2008, p. 697), including reflections on the link between poverty and crime and a plea to combat pauperism through just social policies. Although this critique of the penal system is aligned with contemporary legal reform movements—such as those inspired by John Howard's *The State of the Prisons in England and Wales* (1777)—the views expressed in the *Königsbuch* were particularly daring. For Frau Rat, the state itself is the first criminal: "The criminal is always the fault of the state." ("So ist der Verbrecher immer die Sündenschuld des Staates," Bettine von Arnim 1995, p. 199), and "The criminal is the actual victim!" ("Der Verbrecher selbst ist das Opfer!" Bettine von Arnim 1995, p. 200). Frau Rat condemns the use of violence as crime prevention—deterrence and retribution—which she vehemently criticizes as inhumane. It should be noted, however, that her analyses remain somewhat superficial; she offers no detailed "conflict analysis" ("Konfliktanalyse," Becker-Cantarino 2019a, p. 260) nor concrete state policy proposals, addressing state theory only at an abstract level. Instead, von Arnim presents a utopian vision of the state. As Becker-Cantarino (2019b, p. 404) argues, her approach is less a depiction of reality and more an appeal and utopian construction of a better society.

4. Concluding Remarks

Although censorship, in its various forms, has always shaped public discourse, nineteenth-century German (and particularly Prussian) censorship is peculiar in that the secular shift led to even more aggressive state censorship of political voices that did not conform to the state's agenda. However, strict censorship measures did not only lead to increased self-censorship: authors such as Bettina von Arnim prove that alternative, subversive, and obfuscating strategies and modes of literary expression and communication were also developed, in part, as a reaction to censorship. Throughout her life, Bettina von Arnim exhibited an extremely self-confident and creative approach to censorship. In fact, her playful handling of censorship at times went even further than in *Dies Buch gehört dem König*: sometimes she filled up to one half of her pages with redacted lines to indicate where the (self-)censor had intervened, and, according to Karl August Varnhagen, she even planned to enclose entire white sheets annotated with "Eigne Zensur" ("self-censorship") (cited in Becker-Cantarino and Brandes 2019, p. 302).

Her self-confidence as an author and self-publisher was once again demonstrated in 1846 in the so-called *Magistratsprozeß* (Magistrate's Trial), which took place after von Arnim refused to pay a trade tax to the city of Berlin for self-publishing. Prior to that, the Berlin magistrate had accused her of not being officially authorized to self-publish books, as she did not have Berlin citizenship and had not applied for it after being requested to do so by the city of Berlin. The magistrate, who saw von Arnim's refusal as an insult, subsequently sentenced her to two months in prison. It was only thanks to the intervention of Savigny that she did not have to serve this sentence, albeit against her will—he also prevented her from publishing the trial records from which she was to emerge as a victim of justice (cf. Becker-Cantarino 2019d, pp. 197–98).

In addition, with this contribution, Bettina von Arnim serves as an example that Romanticism, too, provided inspiration for the *Vormärz* in terms of cultural policy. Von Arnim reacted to political grievances in a creatively subversive way and "with the weapons of new genres, with fictional, seemingly anachronistic conversations" ("mit den Waffen

neuer Gattungen, mit fiktiven, scheinbar anachronistischen Gesprächen”, [Becker-Cantarino 2019c](#), pp. 329–30). While doing so, her literary approach always remained genuinely Romantic as she maintained the Romantic priority of the imaginative over the real.

A special aspect of her writing as a “publicist undercover” (“Publizistin undercover,” [Bunzel 2009](#)) can be detected in the ingenious blending of biographical material and fiction, further supported by her basic assumption of a symbiotic relationship between literature and the wider public. Particularly with the *Königsbuch*, Bettina von Arnim establishes herself as an independent literary voice and also reveals her self-image as a “mentor of political education for self-care” (“Mentorin politischer Bildung zur Selbstsorge”, [Landfester 2000](#), p. 15). According to her most fundamental conviction, politics is a matter of concern to the public and should therefore be shaped and pursued in a dialogical and public manner. In literary terms, she follows this tactic as a decidedly female author, who is thus granted a special license to write letters, by going public with her books that draw on her very own memories and factual correspondences with figures from the political sphere.

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Notes

- ¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all translations of quotations originally in German are my own.
- ² The *Armenbuch* (1844) marks a collection of documents with which Bettina von Arnim aimed to uncover the drastic situation of the Silesian weavers’ poverty. The first part of this large project was published in May 1844, shortly before the Silesian Weavers’ Uprising broke out. She was then accused of inciting the uprising and was sentenced to two months in prison. The Prussian censors banned the book and forced von Arnim to forbid any further work on it.
- ³ In the following, instead of using the full title, *Dies Buch gehört dem König*, I will occasionally make use of *Königsbuch* (*King’s Book*).
- ⁴ The exact form *Armenbuch* would have taken is unclear, as the author was compelled to abandon the project because of censorship measures. However, at least 272 pages of this substantial documentary project had already been typeset before Bettina von Arnim was pressured to discontinue the work following the accusations arising from the Weavers’ Uprising (cf. [Bunzel 2022](#), p. 193).
- ⁵ The Weavers’ Uprising of 1844 was a violent uprising of Silesian weavers in Prussia against exploitative working conditions and starvation wages that nowadays also stands for the social tensions of early industrialization in general.
- ⁶ For instance, one copy of each planned publication still had to be deposited with the police one day before publication or delivery at the latest (cf. [Becker-Cantarino and Brandes 2019](#), p. 297).
- ⁷ One sheet comprises 16 pages.
- ⁸ The German Confederation (*Deutscher Bund*) led to a tightening of state censorship measures. This was the result of numerous absolutist rulers who co-founded the Confederation and sought to strengthen their positions of power in the wake of the French Revolution. This reactionary turn was primarily initiated by its most influential member states, particularly Prussia.
- ⁹ As [Schultz \(\[1997\] 2014](#), p. 264) observes, this highlights the distinct tradition of the political salon in England.
- ¹⁰ By the time it was banned in Bavaria, the first edition, comprising 1475 copies, had largely sold out (cf. [Becker-Cantarino 2009](#), p. 73).
- ¹¹ [Becker-Cantarino \(2009](#), p. 71) notes that 21 letters from the King have survived in this context.
- ¹² Her *Königsbuch* went to print in 1842, but the responsible censor demanded proof of the King’s approval. Bettina von Arnim sought to delay this demand, as she received a reply from Humboldt stating that the King had approved the publication, but no official authorization was given at that time. However, the King later granted permission to print.
- ¹³ An entry in Karl August Varnhagen’s diary, dated 19 June 1844, reveals that Arnim-Boitzenburg later accused Bettina von Arnim of “being the cause of the uprising, of inciting the people, of raising their hopes through her speeches and letters, and even through her royal book!” (“sie sei Ursache des Aufstandes, sie habe die Leute gehetzt, ihnen Hoffnungen erweckt, durch ihre Reden und Briefe, und schon durch ihr Königsbuch!”, [Varnhagen \(von Ense\) \[1861\] 1972](#), vol. 2, p. 314).
- ¹⁴ Within the King’s cabinet, warnings about Bettina von Arnim became increasingly frequent. The Minister of the House, Otto Graf zu Stolberg-Wernigerode, for instance, described her as “the most hideous woman who tramples on everything sacred” (“das scheußlichste, alles Heilige mit Füßen tretende Weib” ([Püschel 2005](#), p. 197)).

- ¹⁵ In 1843, Bettina von Arnim met the Swiss writer and educator Heinrich Grunholzer (1819–1873) at the Grimms’ residence. Shortly thereafter, Grunholzer became a regular visitor at von Arnim’s salon (cf. Becker-Cantarino 2009, p. 76, footnote 28).
- ¹⁶ As the inclusion of this appendix proves, von Arnim’s journalistic strategy involved a semi-public dissemination of news and opinion. Although she explicitly commented on and addressed daily political events, she largely remained in the background and published her political pamphlet, *An die aufgelös’ten preußische National-Versammlung. Stimmen aus Paris*, in which she expressed her understanding of the uprisings in Poland, anonymously, in 1849.
- ¹⁷ Bettina von Arnim later described her experiences with censorship in her satirical report on censorship persecution, confiscation, and police censorship of the book *Clemens Brentano’s Frühlingskranz* from 1844. Initially confiscated after publication, she was only able to secure a release at the instigation of the King in June 1844 (cf. Bettina von Arnim 1989, p. 939). It was not actually the publication of *Frühlingskranz* itself that gave rise to the book’s censorship, but von Arnim’s public support of the peasant class, “who stood for that liberal, Prussian-critical press which the government sought to suppress” (Becker-Cantarino and Brandes 2019, p. 301).
- ¹⁸ Due to her aristocratic status, she was unable to visit the poorhouses herself, as her position would have prevented her from even being allowed to gain entrance.
- ¹⁹ It has not been definitively established when Bettina von Arnim first visited Goethe’s mother. It is certain that this visit must have occurred by 20 July 1806 at the latest (cf. Weißenborn 1987, p. 28). Her initial contact with Frau Rat was driven by her interest in Goethe, especially after discovering early manuscripts in 1806 in which the poet confessed his former love for Bettina’s mother, Maximiliane (cf. Seidler 2019, p. 178). This connection eventually blossomed into a close friendship that lasted until Frau Rat’s death in 1808.
- ²⁰ One year after the publication of the *Königsbuch*, von Arnim was unable to publish a more comprehensive work on the subject, the so-called *Armenbuch*.
- ²¹ For this reason, Schultz ([1997] 2014, p. 257) argues that it was the dedication to the King, rather than textual strategies of distraction and paraphrasing, that initially shielded the book from censorship.
- ²² This intention is expressed even more pointedly in the subsequent project, *Gespräche mit Dämonen* (1852). Here, the dreaming ‘sleeping king’ is portrayed as a projection of Friedrich Wilhelm IV within the context of a lengthy soliloquy with his adviser—a ‘demon’ with positive connotations—who endeavors to whisper the truth to the King in his sleep, thereby encouraging him to act more justly and virtuously.

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