

WOMAN "ON WAR": MARIE VON CLAUSEWITZ'S ESSENTIAL CONTRIBUTION TO MILITARY PHILOSOPHY

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Carl von Clausewitz's writings come down to us via his wife Marie. Although Clausewitz himself intended to write a timeless work,¹ if not for his wife, whom he most obviously relied upon, his work would have been forgotten. Marie von Clausewitz posthumously published her husband's *On War* after editing his unfinished manuscript. Ironically, Marie's undeniably crucial role in the progress of military science is virtually unknown or deemed insignificant. A careful reader, however, will find much of Clausewitz's intentions and philosophy of war revealed by her description of his endeavors, in her own character which mirrors his own and in her correspondence with her fiancé and husband. Although their role in battle as nurses and prisoners of war is well documented women are seldom associated with military philosophy or theory. Marie von Clausewitz's work and contribution fills this void. This article is designed to point out her role and contribution to a wider audience. It concludes with her remarkable letter which prefaced *On War*.

Marie von Clausewitz's correspondence with her husband is the primary source of his biography. "Their uniquely close attachment,"² leads one to conclude that any comprehensive study of Clausewitz is, in fact, unimaginable without a consideration of his wife's role in the development of his military philosophy. Thus her

¹Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, M. Howard and P. Paret (eds.) (Princeton, 1976), p.63, 66.

²Azar Gat, *The Origins of Military Thought* (Oxford, 1989, p. 172.

bold claim in the preface to *On War* appears to be justly asserted.³ Current attempts to date the undated notes of Clausewitz which state the current status of his work rely upon Marie's own suspicions regarding the dating and on the intimate knowledge she possessed of her husband's activities.⁴

Marie von Clausewitz's correspondence, moreover, is instrumental in setting the philosophical context of Clausewitz's writings. Clausewitz's contributions to military science can be fully understood only in light of his historical context which is most clearly revealed in those philosophical interests which he shared with Marie. Both Marie and Carl von Clausewitz moved within the social circles which were reacting against Enlightenment rationalism.⁵ The revolutionary climate of Europe had asserted itself in Prussia; however, there arose a counter-revolution against Enlightenment rationalism. Clausewitz's philosophy of war must be understood to counter the scientific or mathematical military philosophies produced by enlightenment thinkers without falling into the emotionalism of the Romantics.

The form of Marie's preface itself reflects the author's sensitivity to social propriety. She feels compelled to explain why she is making an appearance before the reading public. The modesty of the author is rooted in the social norms which dictated that women not enter the public arena. Nevertheless, Marie is quite assertive in her claim to familiarity with her husband's intellectual pursuits and in her confidence of sharing in all his endeavors. She reveals an awareness of not only the external limitations placed upon her husband's military career but also those placed upon herself as a woman. One might suggest that Marie's preface reveals

³Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, M. Howard and P. Paret (eds.) (Princeton, 1976), p. 65.

⁴Azar Gat, *The Origins of Military Thought* (Oxford, 1989, p. pp. 255-263.

⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 168-189. Enlightenment rationalism may be characterized as the attempt to account for the phenomena of the universe in terms of mechanistic laws. When applied to the art of war, this rationalism produces a theory which fails to take into account experience or military history and the individual characters of men. Clausewitz found the military theories produced by enlightenment rationalists unrealistic and inhuman.

the disquiet which arises in individuals with "richly endowed minds"⁶ when hampered by political circumstances. Carl von Clausewitz turned his naturally active mind to intellectual pursuits and Marie turned her mind to completing his work and helping to shape the future ruler of her fatherland.⁷

By Marie von Clausewitz
to the Posthumous Edition
of Her Husband's Works
Including *On War*

Readers will be rightly surprised that a woman should dare to write a preface for such a work as this. My friends will need no explanation; but I hope that a simple account of the circumstances that causes me to take this step will remove any impression of presumptuousness in the minds of those who do not know me.

The work which these lines precede occupied my inexpressively beloved husband almost completely for the last twelve years of his life. His fatherland and I unfortunately lost him far too early. To complete his work was his dearest wish, but it was not his intention to communicate it to the world during his lifetime. When I would try to dissuade him from this decision, he often responded, half jokingly, but perhaps also with a presentiment of his early death: "You shall publish it." These words (which in happier days often caused me tears, even though I scarcely took them seriously) oblige me in the view of my friends to introduce the posthumous works of my beloved husband with a few lines. Even though readers may have differing opinions on this point, they will surely not misinterpret the emotion that has caused me to overcome the timidity which makes it so difficult for a woman to appear before the reading public even in the most subordinate manner.

It goes without saying that I have no intention whatever of regarding myself as the true editor of a work that is far beyond my intellectual horizon. Only as a sympathetic companion do I want to help its entry into the world. I may claim this role since I was granted a similar function in the creation and development of the

⁶Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, M. Howard and P. Paret (eds.) (Princeton, 1976), p. 65.

⁷After Carl's death she was governess to Prince Friedrich Wilhelm, the later Emperor Frederick III.

work. Those who knew of our happy marriage and knew that we shared *everything*, not only joy and pain but also every occupation, every concern of daily life, will realize that a task of this kind could not occupy my beloved husband without at the same time becoming thoroughly familiar to me. For the same reason no one can testify as well as I to the energy and love with which he dedicated himself to the task, the hopes he associated with it, and the manner and time of its creation. From early youth his richly endowed mind had felt the need for light and truth, and while he was broadly educated, his reflections were directed primarily toward military affairs, which are of such great importance to the well-being of nations and which constituted his profession. Scharnhorst first showed him the right course; his appointment as teacher at the General War College, as well as the simultaneous honor of being chosen to introduce His Royal Highness the Crown Prince to the study of war, gave him additional reasons for directing his research and efforts toward these matters, as well as to set down his findings in writing. An essay with which he concluded the instruction of His Royal Highness the Crown Prince in 1812 already contains the seeds of his later works. But it was not until 1816, in Coblenz, that he again took up his scholarly work and began to gather the fruit that had ripened in the course of his rich experiences during four significant years of warfare. To begin with he developed his views in brief essays only loosely connected with each other. The following undated note, which was among his papers, seems to belong to that early stage: [See "Author's Comment," p. 63 above].

In Coblenz, where he had many duties, he could devote only a few hours now and then to his private studies. Not until 1818 when he was appointed Director of the General War College in Berlin did he acquire enough time to expand his work, and further enrich it with the historical interpretation of the more recent wars. This new leisure also reconciled him to his assignment, which in other respects could not quite satisfy him, since under the present arrangements of the college its educational program is not the Director's responsibility but is guided by a separate commission of studies. Free as he was of any petty vanity, of restless egotism and ambition, he nevertheless felt the need to be truly useful, and not let his God-given abilities go to waste. In his professional life he did not occupy a position that could satisfy this need, and he had little hope that he would ever reach such a position. Consequently, all his efforts were directed toward the realm of scientific understanding, and the benefits that he hoped would result from his work became his purpose in life. If in spite of this he was ever more determined not to have his work published until after his death, it

must be the best proof that no vain desire for praise and recognition, no trace of egoistic motive, mingled with this noble urge for great and lasting influence.

He continued to work intensively until the spring of 1830, when he was transferred to the artillery. His energies were now taken up for a different purpose, and to such an extent that at least for the moment he had to renounce all literary work. He arranged his papers, sealed and labeled the individual packages, and sadly bade farewell to an activity that had come to mean so much to him. In August of that year he was transferred to Breslau, where he was assigned to head the 2nd Artillery Inspection; but already in December he was recalled to Berlin and appointed chief of staff to Field Marshal Count Gneisenau (for the duration of the latter's command [in the East]). In March 1831 he accompanied his admired commander-in-chief to Posen. When he returned to Breslau in November, having suffered the most painful loss [in Gneisenau's death], he was cheered by the hope of resuming his work, and possibly completing it in the course of the winter. God decided otherwise. He returned to Breslau on 7 November, on the sixteenth he died, and the packages that his hand had sealed were not opened until after his death!

These literary remains are published in the following volumes exactly as they were found, without one word being added or deleted. Nevertheless their publication called for a good deal of work, arranging of material, and consultation, and I am profoundly grateful to several loyal friends for their assistance in these tasks. Above all I must name Major O'Etzel, who was kind enough to read the proofs and to draw the maps that will accompany the historical sections of the edition. I also take the liberty of mentioning my beloved brother, my support in times of trial, who rendered so many different services in preparing the manuscripts for publication. Among others, in the course of careful checking and sorting the material he found the beginnings of the revision that my beloved husband mentions as a future project in the *Note of 1827*, printed below. The revisions have been inserted in those parts of Book I for which they were intended (they did not go further).

I want to thank many other friends for their advice and for the sympathy and affection they have shown me; though I cannot name them all, they will surely not doubt my warmest gratitude. This gratitude is the greater since I am firmly convinced that everything they have done was done not only for me but also for the friend whom God took from them so prematurely.

For twenty-one years I was profoundly happy at the side of such a man. Treasured memories, hopes, the rich inheritance of

sympathy and friendship that I owe to the beloved departed, and the elevating sense that his rare distinction is so generally and nobly recognized sustain this happiness despite my irreplaceable loss.

The trust that led a noble prince and princess to call me to their side is a new favor for which I thank God.¹ It has given me a new and valued task, to which I dedicate myself gladly. May this task be blessed, and may the cherished little prince, who is presently entrusted to my care, someday read this book, and be inspired by it to deeds similar to the deeds of his glorious ancestors!

Written in the Marble Palace at Potsdam, 30 June 1832.

Marie von Clausewitz
Born Countess Brühl

First Lady in Waiting
of her Royal Highness
Princess Wilhelm

¹Marie von Clausewitz had been appointed Governess of Prince Friedrich Wilhelm, the later Emperor Frederick III. Eds.