It is a commonplace that the most popular works written towards the end of the eighteenth century fall under the rubric of "Räuber-, Ritter-, und Schauerromane." Scholars have often pointed out the thematic kinship between these works and Goethe's Götz von Berlichingen, but curiously, attention to such writings has caused another, and equally significant formal affinity to be overlooked. Goethe's masterpiece obliged critics to engage in a debate concerning the aesthetic legitimacy of the "Lesedrama"—a five-act drama considered unworthy or incapable of theatrical performance. Before a consensus could be reached on the merit of such a genre, several writers began to extend the scope of the "Lesedrama" and to write compendious, novel-length biographies almost exclusively in dialogue. Unable to classify such multi-volumed dramatized works with the tools of conventional poetics, contemporaries regarded this "Mittelding zwischen Drama und Roman" as "ein Schauspiel in zwey Bänden für den Leser," "ein dialogischer Roman," or, more commonly "ein dramatischer Roman." Uncertainty about the identity or aesthetic merit of this experimental genre did not affect many book producers and consumers. By 1790 the dramatized novel was said to have eclipsed the epistolary novel in popularity; it was even suggested that novelists could improve sales simply by affixing the term "dramatisirt" to the subtitle of their works. Indeed, in the last decade of the eighteenth century writers began to exploit the dramatizing technique in works other than biographies. By 1795 an observer noted that dramatized Gothic novels continued to gain large shares of the German book market. The observation was correct on one count: German readers continued to devour Gothic novels well into the nineteenth century. However, their penchant for (or tolerance of) an exclusively dramatized or dialogized manner of presentation had waned before 1800. With few exceptions, writers and publishers turned their backs to the dramatized novel by this time as well.

Scholars have also turned their backs to the dramatized novel. Koberstein accused the genre of defying "the natural line of demarcation between narrative and drama" and dismissed it as "a time-consuming means of entertainment for a people whose aesthetic judgment still left much to be desired." This verdict echoes sentiments which have attended virtually all prior and subsequent critical accounts of the dramatized novel. The goal of the present inquiry is not to vindicate the genre, but rather to explore the socio-cultural reasons for its meteoric rise and fall. What are the distinctive features of the dramatized novel? Who were its proponents? Why did they prefer this experimental manner of presentation to conventional modes such as those based on omniscient narrators or epistolary form? Why did this mannerism seem to delight contemporary readers, if only for a short period? By answering these questions I hope not only to illuminate aspects of the Age of Goethe which have been marginalized or overlooked, but also to create one more gateway through which we can arrive at a better understanding of the dynamics of production and reception in late eighteenth-century Germany.

I. Theory

The roots of the German dramatized novel may be traced back to early eighteenth-century theoreticians, but for the purposes of this inquiry it suffices to focus attention on a later date. In 1774, the year that saw the refunctioning of the epistolary novel in Goethe's Die Leiden des Jungen Werthers and the broadening of dramatic technique in Lenz' Der Hofmeister and Der neue Menoza, Tobias Gebler published anonymously a modest "Trauerspiel in fünf Akten" entitled Adelheit von Siegmar. This work hardly distinguished itself in the eyes of contemporary critics, and has little to commend to the modern reader. To the best of my knowledge, however, this is the first piece of German literature to have been described as a "dialogisirten Roman." Evidently one reviewer felt it necessary to invent this neologism in order to pass proper critical
judgment on a work that, in his eyes, neither honored the most desirable features of conventional
dramatic presentation nor emulated the beauties of Shakespeare. In other words, this reviewer
relegates the disappointing drama Adelheit von Siegmar to the status of the most aesthetically
tenuous genre in 1774: the novel.

The term “dialogisirter” or “dramatisirter” novel does not surface again in German critical
discourse for another six years, when another reviewer suggested that it was better to render a
complicated story as a dramatized novel than to create an untheatrical play. However, at the
same time that Gebler was admonished for misdirecting his artistic talents and the notion of a
dramatized novel was invented to pigeonhole an ill-conceived play, two significant treatises on
the merits and limitations of narrative and dramatic forms of presentation were published:
Friedrich von Blanckenburg’s seminal Versuch über den Roman, and Johann Jakob Engel’s
essay Über Handlung, Gespräch, und Erzählung. Although neither Blanckenburg nor Engel
uses the term “dramatisirter Roman,” both writers seem to have furnished the theoretical
underpinning for a genre that would flourish in the final two decades of the eighteenth century.

These two treatises are significant documents in the process of interiorization that gradually
displaced the focus of poetry from external events to internal processes. Blanckenburg tries to
identify the qualities that the novel must exhibit if it is to gain credibility as an aesthetic genre.
Engel, on the other hand, expressly resists the temptation to offer a theory of genre, preferring
instead to view dialogue and narration as communicative strategies, each of which supports a
unique development of plot.

Blanckenburg and Engel subscribe to the principles of pragmatic writing. These require that the
plot must simultaneously entertain and edify by enabling the reader to witness firsthand, without
distraction, every stage of a “soul’s” development; at every juncture “die geheimen Triebfedern” of
the action must become transparent (HGE 188). Engel, in particular, focuses attention almost
exclusively on the psychological rather than the physical, on internal processes rather than
external events, and for this reason he ascribes little significance to natural forces such as space,
time, and physical appearance (HGE 188-191). Engel, however, speaks for Blanckenburg when
he asserts that “der eigentliche Schauplatz aller Handlungen ist die denkende und empfindende
Seele …” (HGE 201). For both theorists, the ideal plot manifests the progressive, sequential
expression of interiority through unmediated language—a language which Engel, at least,
optimistically considered to be an unclouded mirror unto the soul (HGE 233). Both theorists
intimate that dialogic presentation alone can furnish the immediacy which allows for a greater
effect and influence on the reader. To quote Engel, narration is inferior to dialogue because it
“kann von dem jedesmaligen Zustande einer handelnden Seele … kann auch von dem ganzen
genauen Zusammenhange aller in ihr vorgehenden Veränderungen nie eine so spezifische,
bestimmte, vollständige Idee geben, als das Gespräch” (HGE 233).

Blanckenburg, in particular, feels that no novel written prior to 1774—with the possible exception
of Wieland’s Agathon—had realized the virtues of pragmatic writing. It is perhaps for this reason
that he, in his attempt to legitimate the novel, feels compelled to illustrate many of his
recommendations with passages from Shakespeare and Lessing. At one point Blanckenburg
suggests wryly that narrative strategies should be jettisoned if they cannot ensure a compelling
account of how things really unfold in time (VR 98). Although he ultimately advocates a genre
that relies on the judicious interplay of narration and dialogue, Blanckenburg makes strong
arguments that are not too far removed from sanctioning the virtual lack of authorial presence and
narrational guidance characteristic of the dramatized novel: “Der Dichter gehört gar nicht mit ins
Ganze seines Werks; er wäre was außerordentliches, das gleichsam in den Gang desselben
hineingriffe. Der Künstler, der all’ Augenblicke über seiner Uhr stellen muß, hat wirklich keine
gute Uhr gemacht” (VR 339f).

What should be clear from this all-too brief account of contemporary theory is that there was
yearning for a literary renewal that would valorize the aesthetics of transparency and discard
conspicuous manifestations of narrative control. The novel had still not earned respect as a viable genre, and drama as performance was still all too frequently confined to the theater as an institution dependent on court subsidy. One possible way of bringing about the desired literary renewal—a way intimated by Blanckenburg and Engel—was to infuse the preferred manner of presentation (dramatic) and its attendant strategy (dialogue) into the ascendant, still undefined, and unsanctioned genre: the novel.

Evidence that such notions were not confined to theoretical musing is furnished by August Gottlieb Meißner, a popular writer whom some regarded as the father of the dramatized novel. As early as 1776 Meißner had become interested in creating "ein Mittelding zwischen Drama und Roman"—not in order to demonstrate an innovative aesthetic principle, but simply to indulge his "Liebe zur Neuheit." This rather cavalier intention was explained in the preface to his first historical drama, Johann von Schwaben (1780). Meißner concedes that this work, written "in den Nebenstunden weniger Monden," will fall short of the expectations of critical readers. Although he insists that it would have cost him little effort to remedy several imperfections and create a complicated intrigue, Meißner deliberately neglects to make these emendations, appealing to "manches Privilegium" which he neither identifies nor elucidates. Despite its thoroughly dramatized and dialogized form, Johann von Schwaben was intended expressly for readers:

Dialogirte Geschichte, oder, wenn man will, dialogirter Halbroman, war alles, was ich mir zum Ziel steckte; und wenn ichs in Akte und Auftritte zerschnitt, so geschahs um meinen Lesern Ruhepunkte zu weisen, nicht etwa für irgend einen Zuschauer den Vorhang fallend zu machen

The division into scenes and acts is simply a device to compensate the reader for the frequent absence of any authorial or narrative voice. For this reason Meißner prefers to label the work a "dialogirte Geschichte," or "dialogirter Halbroman"—a designation that not only brings to mind Schiller's later description of the novelist as the "Halbbruder" of the dramatist, but also suggests that Meißner himself has misgivings about the adequacy of the vehicle he has chosen to display his dialogic talents. After all, the designation "Halbroman" could suggest, in addition to the relative brevity of the work, his reluctance to subscribe wholeheartedly to the ascendant, but still aesthetically dubious, genre of the novel.

Meißner's failure, or refusal, to identify the aesthetically meritorious features of this endeavor makes it hard to think of Johann von Schwaben as anything other than an poorly executed play, or, in the critical parlance of that time, a "Lesedrama." Yet his brief statement of intent signals a fine, but significant distinction between the dramatized novel and the closet drama that obtains despite their overt structural similarities. The term "Lesedrama" was a neologism invented solely by critics who tried to stake out a sub-generic realm of legitimacy for works like Götz von Berlichingen and Der Hofmeister, which were classified by their own authors as "Schauspiele" or "Kömodien." In other words, although these innovative works exploited principles of dramatic presentation to achieve new effects, they nonetheless were evidently conceived in terms of traditional genre theory, and specifically in terms of the genre that was felt to be most effective in entertaining and edifying the public. Authors who wrote dramatized novels, however, explicitly and intentionally defined their works as "dialogierte Geschichte," "dramatischer Roman," "Begebenheiten in Dialogen, Briefen, und verbindenden Erzählungen," or as being "dialogisirt von ..." or "dramatisch behandelt von ...." By claiming to exploit dramatic presentation in a genre that had yet to earn aesthetic legitimacy, these authors broke off their tenuous ties to the hallowed institution of the theater and explored (and exploited) a new, unmediated forum for appealing directly to a new reading public—people that may not have had easy access to the theater, but who, during a time of unprecedented growth in the book trade and in literacy, always could find their way to printed materials.

Sympathetic to this movement towards a genre that promised to achieve a heightened sense of representational immediacy was the young Friedrich Schiller. In the "unterdrücktes Vorwort" to Die Räuber, written in 1781, Schiller admits almost boastfully that his work cannot be performed...
on stage. After providing a well-reasoned argument for his anti-theatrical sentiment, he concludes:

Ich kann demnach eine Geschichte Dramatisch abhandeln, ohne darum ein Drama schreiben zu wollen. Das heißt: Ich schreibe einen dramatischen Roman, und kein theatralisches Drama. Im ersten Fall darf ich mich nur den allgemeinen Gesetzen der Kunst, nicht aber den besonderen des Theatralischen Geschmacks unterwerfen.  

Unlike Meißner, Schiller is not content with merely indulging "a love of novelty," he tries to justify his work as a dramatized novel, not to apologize for it, and thereby intimates plausible reasons for the emergence of the genre. From an aesthetic standpoint, the dramatized novel comes closer to realizing "de[n] wahre[n] Geist des Schauspiels," since it employs a manner of presentation which was considered most effective in portraying the psychological workings of the soul. The awesome power of dialogue renders any sensorial pretense ("sinnliche Vorspiegelung") obsolete, such as theatrical props or, in an extended sense, descriptive embellishments by a narrator (Werke 455). As a genre not wedded to any tradition or convention, the dramatized novel was uniquely suited for exploring, portraying, and conveying the desired interiority. It creates an illusion of immediacy and transparency that suspends more efficiently and consistently the distance between reader and text. Moreover, with the dramatized novel the poet liberates himself from the dogmatic precepts of the arbiters of taste. A strict reading of the passage above suggests that the dramatized novelist is not even obliged to observe the general rules of art; these are merely those which he may decide to follow. This genre, then, grants the poet considerable aesthetic liberty and autonomy — privileges which, when abused, ultimately foster the mediocrity and indolence for which many writers of dramatized novels were reproved.

From a sociological standpoint, the dramatized novel created a window of opportunity not only for aspiring playwrights who wished to avert the compromises likely to be imposed by the institution of the theater, but also for the rapidly increasing number of readers in the German-speaking domain. In the conclusion to the "unterdrücktes Vorwort" Schiller refuses to make the parterre the ultimate arbiter of aesthetic quality: "Der Zuschauer, vom gewaltigen Licht der Sinnlichkeit geblendet, übersieht oft ebensowohl die feinsten Schönheiten als die untergefassten Flecken, die sich nur dem Auge des bedachtsamen Lesers entblößen" The spectator in the theater, constantly distracted by the externalities of the theatrical show, cannot be expected to appreciate the inner and essential qualities of any play. The reader, particularly the reader of a novel marked by a preponderance of dialogue, was empowered to stage the work on her own terms and on her own stage, i.e. in solitude, or perhaps at a social gathering. Schiller's strategy to obviate "sensory pretense" ("sinnliche Vorspiegelung") and to circumvent the "blinding" ("geblendet") spectacle of a "physical" aesthetic experience ("Sinnlichkeit") signifies the gain of interiority and the loss of sensuality that was a hallmark of eighteenth century aesthetics. During a silent and solitary reading, particularly during the reading of a dramatized novel, the reader is "all eye:" the tactile and aural senses do not interfere appreciably with the immediate and direct appeal of the text to the reader's imagination and emotions—faculties that, in accordance with conventional "Wirkungsaesthetik," were linked, or should have been linked, to some internalized rational control.

Schiller's youthful exuberance was predicated on the activity of the "careful reader," that is, a reader who had the wherewithal to make sound aesthetic judgments, a reader whose imagination had not dissociated itself from reason and understanding. "Careful readers," however, were becoming disproportionately scarce as an unstudied literacy increased among the German populace. One could argue as well that "careful writers" were becoming equally scarce as the German book trade was driven ever more by commercial interests, particularly by the desire to capitalize on the latest fad that seized the public's heart. Hence the increasingly frequent diatribes against "Lesesucht" and "Vielschreiberex" as the century neared its end. The quality of production
and reception which the young Schiller anticipated was hardly attained in the “Modeliteratur” that was to dominate the late eighteenth-century German book market.

II. Practice

One of the literary fads that was to court readers (many, careless) and attract writers (many, aesthetically carefree) was introduced shortly before Schiller wrote the words above. In 1780 an anonymous critic, reflecting on trends in contemporary German literature, observed that omniscient narratives and epistolary novels had become tedious; works which emphasize dialogue would appeal more to contemporary readers.\textsuperscript{29} It is no surprise, then, that he welcomes the publication of \textit{Gustav Aldermann} (1779), the first bona fide German dramatized novel.\textsuperscript{30} The highly unorthodox form of this work exhibits a richly woven texture of dialogue fragments and fresh, variegated conversational tone:

\begin{quote}
das Buch [besteht] nicht aus zusammenhängenden Dialogen ..., die mit einander unmittelbar, wie die Auftritte eines Schauspiels, verbunden sind, sondern jeder ist für sich allein ein ganzes, oder ein Fragment einer Unterredung, das sich weder auf das vorhergehende, noch auf das folgende unmittelbar bezieht, das aber doch einen Zug zum ganzen Gemälde liefert ... Nebst der Neuheit dieser Einkleidung, haben diese Dialogen den Vortheil, daß sie die Vorstellung sehr lebhaft machen. Der Leser hört nicht blos, er sieht die aufgestellten Charaktere vor seinen Augen handeln; der Vorhang fällt aber, sobald die Handlung keine Beziehung weiter auf die Hauptsache hat, wodurch viel unnützes, episodisches Geschwätz vermieden worden ist.\textsuperscript{31}
\end{quote}

This text identifies the salient features of the “pure” dramatized novel: the preponderance of crisp dialogue, monologue, and terse parenthetical staging directions; the jettisoning of the reflective and explanatory potential of narration; the virtual absence of authorial voice; and the resolute commitment to the immediacy of an unmitigated dramatic present that precludes flashback and foreshadowing. The “sprechende Personen” are rarely seen in action; the reader almost always witnesses them either reacting to or preparing for action “offstage.” These factors support a representational minimalism that often requires the reader to reconstruct story as well as plot. This thumbnail sketch of the genre is complemented by the description of \textit{Gustav Aldermann} as “ein Schauspiel in zwey Bänden für den Leser,” which draws attention to the multi-volumed, epic breadth of the dramatized novel.\textsuperscript{32}

Proponents of the dramatized novel seem to have taken to a logical extreme Henry Home’s call for an “idealized presence” that would make “everything become as dramatic as possible.”\textsuperscript{33} In this genre a premium is placed on the visualizing activity of the reader, who at once “sees” and “hears” the characters act. A contemporary observer not predisposed to the genre echoed the young Schiller’s sentiments and conceded: “es ist nicht zu leugnen, die dramatische Form des Romans hat manche Vorzüge vor der historischen: der Leser wird den Personen und der Geschichte näher gerückt und gleichsam selbst Zuschauer.”\textsuperscript{34} Where the conventional narrative fails to engage the reader satisfactorily, the dramatized novel introduces a new reading experience, arguably one that grants her greater poetic license.\textsuperscript{35} This experience transforms the reader into a “non-physical” spectator,\textsuperscript{36} thereby allowing for an internalization and interiorization of the theater and obviating “sensorial pretense.”

The most felicitous description of the dramatized novel—one that applies well to the three variants identified below—was advanced by Meißner. In the first volume of \textit{Alcibiades} (1781) he catches himself resorting to conventional narrative practices while reporting events that influenced the protagonist in his formative years:
Ich will ja seinen Karakter nicht erzählen; dialogiren will ich ihn; und wenn ichs nicht dahin zu bringen vermag, dass ihn der Leser selbst sich so entwerfe, was nützte dann hier meine Schilderung? .... Man verzeihe, wenn ich von jetzt an meine Dialogen noch seltner, als bisher, durch Erzählungen zusammenhefte. Es sind Inseln im Archipelagus, freilich ohne Brücken, aber doch leicht durch jeden Fischerkahn zu erreichen.37

Formally, dramatized novels exhibit three different strategies of configuring these islands in an archipelago, and I have chosen to characterize them as "pure," "raw," and "hybrid." The "pure" variety (see Appendix A) has been described above in my discussion of Gustav Aldermann; the "raw" variety that retains all features of the "pure" dramatized novel, but includes so many lengthy, descriptive staging directions that a narrational voice becomes too conspicuous (see Appendix B); and the "hybrid" variety that consists predominantly of dialogue, but which allows for authorial commentary and narratorial guidance from dialogue to dialogue (see Appendix C). Thematically, the dramatized novel had three distinct manifestations: it either explores issues pertaining to contemporary Germany (works by Hase, Froebing, Wallenrodt, Wobeser); it contains historical or philosophical accounts based on the life of notable personages (works by Albrecht, Feßler, Meißner, Schlenkert, Schmieder); or it comprises sensational, quasi-historical accounts replete with Gothic elements (works by Albrecht, Cramer, Vulpius, Zschokke). Spatial constraints make it necessary to defer an elaboration of the distinctions between these variants to a future study. Unless otherwise noted, the "dramatized novel" to be examined in this discussion is a heuristic construct that subsumes the salient features common to all variants.

Production of dramatized novels falls into two distinct phases. The first (1779-1789) occurs almost exclusively in the Leipzig-Dresden area. The authors of early dramatized novels (Hase, Meißner, Schlenkert, Cramer) were men who had studied in Leipzig and found subsequent employment at the court in Dresden. Their works were published by well-known Leipzig houses such as Weygand, Breitkopf, Dyk, and Walther. This geographical focus prior to 1789 intimates the existence of a Leipzig-Dresden school, or "cradle" of dramatized novel production.38

In the final phase (1790-1818) all indications of such a school vanish. Hase had long since given up his literary ambitions, Meißner abandoned the genre, and a new group of authors submit works from various regions of Germany: Carolath (Feßler), Berlin (Wallenrodt), Hamburg (Albrecht), Prague (Albrecht), and Weimar (Vulpius). Leipzig continued to remain the hub of all publishing activity, although after 1789 several dramatized novels were published elsewhere—by Vieweg in Berlin, Langbein & Krüger in Rudolstadt, Korn in Breslau, Wilmans in Bremen, Ziegler in Zürich, and Albrecht in Prague.

Why were these second-phase writers drawn to the dramatizing manner of presentation? The only extant documentation that might help answer this question are novel prefaces, particularly those written by the tireless authors Johann Friedrich Ernst Albrecht, Carl Gottlob Cramer, and Christian August Vulpius. In his first and anonymously published dramatized novel, Lauretta Pisana (1789), Albrecht claims that dialogic presentation is not only more pleasing to him, but that readers find it more lively. He consciously resists the temptation to resort to a narrative account of "the slightest nuances and motivations" since this would have bored him and his readers.39 Albrecht is thus content to let the novel speak for itself; he tends to resort to parenthetical staging instructions less frequently than any other proponent of the "pure" dramatized novel.

Albrecht and his colleagues cast a deaf ear to the concerns and objections raised by critics. Aesthetic deliberations were often consciously compromised (if even considered) in favor of formulae that guaranteed popular success. Cramer spoke for many of his colleagues when he dismissed the frequently disparaging tone of his critics:

Uns ist daran gelegen, daß die Welt uns lese und gern lese; darum kümmern wir uns auch nicht, es ist uns einerlei, was ihr von uns schmiert, wenn wir nur den Ton treffen, in welchen Herzen und Sinne unsers Zeitalters gestimmt sind.40
Commercial viability and profit margins—and not necessarily "love of novelty"—certainly figured predominantly among the personal reasons of second-phase writers for producing dramatized novels. In his first dramatized novel, Johann von Leiden (1791), Vulpius openly declares his desire to cater to popular fashion: "Was die Form und Gestalt anbelangt, in welcher gegenwärtiges Werkchen erscheint, das ist ebendieselbe, welche die Lesewelt jetzt am meisten goutiert." Publishers and retailers certainly bore considerable responsibility for the proliferation of such low-quality consumer goods:

Die Buchhändler sind es, die die Modeartikel zu schreiben vorschlagen, und ihre Miethlinge in allen Ecken von Deutschland pensioniren ... Man sieht, es ist weniger Bedürfniss des Autors als des Buchhändlers, denn dieser muß für jede Messe seine zwanzig oder dreyßig neue Artikel haben, damit er die Conkurenz mit seinen Nachbarn halten, und vieles den fremden, die Messe besuchenden Buchhändlern aufhängen kann; denn durch reizende Titel und andere Kunstgriffe wird dieser genöthigt, davon für sein nach Neuigkeiten lechzendes Publikum mit nach Hause zu nehmen

Assuming that the penchant for dialogization and dramatization was as strong in 1790 as was indicated earlier, there is every reason to suspect that publishers and retailers exploited the dramatized novel for their own short-term gain. Breitkopf's commercial success in publishing Meißner's Alcibiades, his Erzählungen und Dialogen, and Schlenkert's Friedrich mit der gebissenen Wange seemed to ensure the marketability of this manner of presentation—even though Breitkopf did not publish another dramatized novel after the penultimate installment of Schlenkert's Heinrich der Vierte (1790). In his stead lesser publishers vied to offer works that adopted the thematic and stylistic features of Meißner's and Schlenkert's early works while tapping a pool of popular traditions that comprised folklore, adventurous-galant novels, Sturm und Drang pathos, and sentimentalism. In more concrete terms, Meißner emulated Wieland's Agathon with his Alcibiades; Cramer's Der deutsche Alcibiades was an unmistakable "German" reworking of Meißner's bestseller, and his Haspar a Spada and Adolf der Kühne drew strongly on Goethe's Götz von Berlichingen and Schiller's Die Räuber; Albrecht's Lairetta Pisana and Die Familie Eboli reworked historical material introduced in Schiller's Don Carlos; and Wallenrodt's Karl Moor und seine Genossen nach der Abschiedscene beim alten Thurm. Ein Gemälde erhabener Menschennatur als Seitenstück zum Rinaldo Rinaldini shamelessly courted readers by promising to refine works by Schiller and Vulpius.

In sum, several publishers and writers were willing to speculate on the appetite of readers for dramatized novels. Unfortunately, there is no extant data that reveals how many copies of each work were published; contemporary statistics indicate that the average book edition in 1786 comprised between 600 and 2000 copies. However, the quality of paper, typesetting, and illustrations for several novels (e.g., in addition to Breitkopf's offerings, Meißner, Bianca Capello; Albrecht, Die schöne Gabriele and Der deutsche Joseph; Feßler, Marc-Aurel and Matthias Corvinus) suggests that several publishers anticipated the primary customers to be the affluent or the lending libraries.43

There is good reason to suspect a gentleman's collusion between publishers, retailers, and lending libraries. Lending libraries and book retailers possessed valuable insights into the kinds of reading material their clientele desired, and it is not improbable that publishers solicited such information before contracting to have popular works written and brought to market.44 Moreover, many lending libraries were affiliated with book retailers—a coincidence giving rise to suspicions that edition sizes may have been artificially increased by enterprising merchants who speculated on profits from the sale and lending of "best-sellers.”

As noted earlier, most of the dramatized novels written by Albrecht, Cramer, Meißner, Schlenkert, and Vulpius were published in multiple volumes, each of which often contained more than 250 pages; the suggested retail price for these works ranged between 1 1/2 and 3 Reichsthaler. Economic realities confronting most eighteenth-century Germans (e.g., real wages remaining at or below subsistence level; steady erosion of purchasing power by alarming increases in the price of
staples such as grains; minimal levels of discretionary income) made the purchase of such reading material improbable for the overwhelming majority of German readers. Since the best-selling, multi-volumed dramatized novels went through several legitimate editions (not to mention cheaper versions pirated in Tübingen and Karlsruhe), it stands to reason that the lion’s share of such reading material was purchased not by individual readers, but by institutionalized representatives of readers (e.g. reading societies and lending libraries).

Three economic issues made multi-volumed works particularly desirable and profitable for publisher, writer, and distributor: Most publishers paid their writers modest honoraria for each sheet published; many educated, but poorly compensated individuals (Meißner, Schlenkert, Feßler, Cramer) sought to supplement their meager earnings by writing voluminous novels that would appeal to the growing mass of consuming readers and reading consumers; most lending libraries charged their patrons fees per volume rather than per work. Readers with an insatiable hunger for adventure, intrigue, and pseudo-historical portraits became the driving force in perpetuating a commercial strategy that gave primacy to quantity over quality and thus exceeding the practicable reach of the dramatized novel.

III. Critical Response

Wozu denn die dramatische Form? wozu alle Anstalten, wenn doch platterdings kein ander Zweck hervorgebracht wird, als die Regungen, die die Erzählung, von jedem zu Hause in seinem Winkel gelesen, auch hervorbringen würde? (Lessing, Hamburgische Dramaturgie, 80. Stück)

The first two sections of this inquiry have shown that the dramatized novel was embraced by a rather small group of writers and publishers. With rare exceptions the genre was not welcomed by those who try to mediate between the producers and consumers of literature: critics, reviewers, and scholars. Such professional readers were not hesitant to express their disregard for this tenuous genre that seemed fraught with unavoidable and irresolvable problems. A disorientating manner of presentation, an indulgence in the liberties that had once been subsumed under the catch-all slogan ”Shakespearisiren,” a lack of aesthetic economy, a license for indolence: All these adverse features seem to have attended the dramatic novel and undermined its aesthetic value. A critical review published in 1791, at the height of the dramatized novel’s popularity, speculates on the reasons why pedestrian writers alone were attracted to this experimental manner of presentation:

Seit einigen Jahren haben wir dramatisirte und romanisirte Biographien zu Dutzenden bekommen. Wahrscheinlich weil die Arbeit ziemlich bequem ist, und man so auf die leichteste Art den Namen eines Dichters zu erlangen glaubt. Vor den Plan ist dabey gesorgt, dem Bearbeiter steht es frey, so viel dazu zu thun, als er will; und er hat nicht nöthig, seine Dichtungskraft in große Unkosten zu setzen. Unwahrscheinlichkeiten, Langweiligkeiten, u. dgl. rechtfertigt er, seinen historischen Führer in der Hand. Das schwerste, was ein Dichter bey der Bearbeitung irgend eines selbst erfundenen Stoffs zu überwinden hat, der Handlung Einheit zu geben, und alle Fäden des ganzen so zu verflechten und zu teilen, daß sie endlich in Einem gemeinschaftlichen Mittelpunkte zusammenlaufen: auch diese Mühe erspart er sich. Kurz, die meisten Produkte dieser Art sind, wie die meisten Dramas des französischen Theaters, Kinder der Mittelmäßigkeit und der Trägheit.47

The accusation of indolence becomes more credible when one takes prefatory remarks made by proponents of the genre into consideration. Meißner acknowledged that Johann von Schwaben was laden with flaws and conceded that he could have corrected them easily, but insisted that “ein Drama zum Lesen hat manches Privilegium vor demjenigen, welche ihre Verfasser (oft aber freilich auch nur sie allein) zur Aufführung bestimmen.”48 Content with publishing merely “das erste Geripp” of his bestselling Haspar a Spada, Karl Gottlob Cramer stated bluntly: “Meine
Absicht war mehr bloß Szenen aus jener traurigen Epoche darzustellen als eine zusammenhängende Geschichte derselben zu liefern.49 One soon realizes that writers were drawn to the genre not for artistic reasons, but for its formal simplicity and market value.

It is doubtful whether the dramatic intensity characteristic of conventional tragedies and comedies could have been sustained in an expansive genre such as the novel, but flippant attitudes such as those presented above hardly instill faith in these writers’ resolve to explore the potential of the dramatized novel. It is debatable whether they simply lacked the talent to create compelling stories, or whether they willingly compromised aesthetic quality to the pressures of the market. The relative ease with which these writers produced reading material was fit to order for increasing commercialisation and trivialisation of literature—a circumstance which certainly did not help the genre win over many advocates among critics.

This point proved to be the Achilles’ heel of the dramatized novel. Most observers conceded that its proponents failed to tap the genre’s potential, and consequently refused to grant it any legitimacy. Representative of this consensus is the first and most cogent discussion of the dramatized novel, which appeared in 1791, at the height of the genre’s popularity.50 Here an anonymous critic conversant in the theories of Engel and Blanckenburg—and hence possibly associated with the Leipzig “school”—carefully analyzed the shortcomings of its practitioners while delimiting the field for viable dramatized novels. By describing his personal response to Meißner’s Alcibiades, Schlenkert’s Friedrich mit der gebissenen Wange, and Feßler’s Marc-Aurel, the critic lent special credibility to his account of the causes which impede effect of the dramatized novel (UdR 5).

The critic argued that, since human experience is by nature not confined to dialogic situations, the exclusive use of dramatic form in a novel violates natural principles (UdR 13) and deters, if not hinders, the more perfect (“vollkommener”) portrait of character development (UdR 7). As a result, the dramatized novel portrays deliberations and expressions of sentiment rather than actions:

Und so kömmt es denn, daß uns, wir mögen lesen, wo wir wollen, immer nur das Bild begegnet, das uns schon von der Wiege an verfolgte, ohne dass unsere Einbildungskraft einen neuen Reiz erhält und unsre Ideen vollständiger und deutlicher werden, kurz, ohne dass sie durch die wiederholten Schilderungen extensivisch und intensivisch gewinnen” (UdR 14).

For all the inadequacy of the dramatized novel, the critic does not dispute the potential of the genre for poetic legitimacy. In his view, the consummate dramatized novel would be a short, single-volumed work in which the author explored one character thoroughly, without portraying any single characteristic twice (UdR 18).

Critical consensus held that the unmitigated procession of dialogues and monologues ultimately rendered the dramatized novel, particularly in its pure and raw variants, an effete genre. It became increasingly clear that the ideal genre should exhibit a prudent juxtaposition of narrative and dialogic manners of presentation.51

IV. Popular Response

In a cultural environment in which remedies for the epidemic of “Lesesucht” were fretfully debated, critics and scholars often presented themselves as advocates for the reader. Yet the reader whose interests the above critic claimed to represent did not belong to the already sizable, and rapidly growing, group of pleasure readers who evidently did not mind the predominant interiorization that often suspended the factors of time and space in the dramatized novel.52 In all likelihood, some readers embraced the dramatized novel for shallow reasons similar to Meißner’s "love of novelty."
The above discussion has identified three interdependent factors that may account for the genre’s popularity: a lingering disaffection with conventional narrative styles, an indiscriminate “love of novelty,” and the interest of publishers and writers in exploiting or serialising popular themes in a “novel” manner of presentation. Qualitatively, these works are no better than the bulk of novels and dramas churned out by the end of the century. Quantitatively, they consumed as much printed paper as other forms of contemporary pulp fiction. Why, then, did the dramatized novel enjoy such short-lived popularity? One might be tempted to attribute this popularity to unbridled “Lesewut,” that is, an undiscriminating appetite for reading material. This hypothesis, however, is not wholly congruent with empirical evidence cited above which claims that readers of the early 1790s found dramatized and dialogized works especially attractive. Taking such evidence at face value suggests that dramatization or dialogization addressed a special need among certain groups of the literate public in the final decade of the century.

Who read dramatized novels? One rather nebulous answer is provided by prefaces to such works. The earlier biographical variants sought a rather distinguished audience: Meißner dedicated his dramatized novels to respected men of letters such as Gleim and Boie; Schlenkert and Feßler dedicated their works to male aristocratic personages, perhaps in search of more gainful employment. These works offer a more genteel and sober portrait than the quasi-historical and sensational variants written by market-wise authors such as Cramer, Albrecht, Wallenrodt, and Vulpius, who, by addressing anonymous “Leser und Leserinnen” in their prefaces, indicate that they intended their works to cut across gender lines. When one observes the trajectory of the dramatized novel, it becomes evident that the experimental genre tenuously bridged the gulf between a socio-economic system based on patronage and one based on capitalism. In neither system did it find sufficient support to sustain its viability.

It is doubtful that educated Germans who had come of age reading works by authors such as Lessing or Wieland would have enjoyed dramatized novels. None of the “first-rate” intellectuals of eighteenth-century Germany (e.g. Goethe, Herder, Wieland, Moritz, Kant, Humboldt, Hölderlin) acknowledge the existence of the genre or its foremost practitioners in their extant writings; it is worth noting that Schiller’s use of the term occurs only in the “unterdrücktes Vorwort” to Die Räuber. In all likelihood the readers of dramatized novels were either novice readers or those who abandoned a repetitive or intensive reading habit prematurely in favor of a superficially extensive one. Numerous contemporary observers claimed that such readers had a less reverent regard for the printed word than earlier generations; this new class of readers saw the value of reading material primarily as divertissement. Moreover, by the turn of the century the insistence on a meaning that could be explicated rationally and authoritatively gradually gave way to a more personal, empathic experience of literature. For this reason it is highly probable that readers of dramatized novels came from groups whose access to books had previously been restricted or who were discouraged from dealing with texts of great import: women, domestic servants, and laborers. Noteworthy writers such as Grillparzer, Hauff, Horn, Kestner, Tieck, Uhland comment briefly on their perusal of dramatized novels in their childhood. At the risk of oversimplification, I submit that these diverse groups of readers may have not only have had different motivations for reading; they may well have cultivated a radically different reading habit, one that could find temporary gratification in the dramatized novel.

How were dramatized novels read? The most prevalent form of reading in eighteenth-century Germany was voiced and communal. The small reading group experienced an evolution from a small assembly governed by a form of patriarchal authority (such as the family) to a “geselliger Kreis” that was much more liberal in its selection and discussion of reading material. Reading texts out loud tends to serve a ritualistic function: In the best of circumstances it can provide a unique intensity to the aesthetic or emotive experience of texts. Although pedagogues increasingly extolled the virtues of solitary, silent reading as the century neared its end, it is likely that many readers sought reading material that lent itself well to a vocalized or sub-vocalized (whispered) reading.
Several factors lend credence to the suggestion that the dramatized novel found a rather sizeable audience among the lower middle stations (“Kleinbürgertum”): Dialogized reading material was perfectly suited for novice readers who had grown up in a predominantly oral culture; the treatment of quasi-historical themes addressed a fairly widespread interest in chronicles and other historical writings; works relying heavily on adventure and spectacle appealed to those who still delighted in stories such as the widely-circulated Des Christlichen Teutschen Großfürsten Hercules and Die Asiatische Banise. Among this socio-economic group traditional story-telling sessions were gradually complemented by reading groups; towards the end of the century it was not uncommon for novels to be read aloud in small social settings.56

If one assumes that the primary readers of the second-phase dramatized novels were women, domestic servants, laborers, students, and adolescents—many of whom came from the lower middle stations—, then one is dealing with a group that had little, if any, discretionary income. Their access to such reading material was thus contingent on a support group. In eighteenth-century Germany each book loaned or purchased is said to have found its way into the hands (or ears) of ten to twelve readers/listeners, or “Multiplikatoren.”57 This communal circulation of books may have not only allowed for a leisurely and free exchange of ideas, but also promoted a performative reading—especially if some of those multipliers in any social group were illiterate or insistent on having books read to them. This “Geselligkeit” was facilitated by institutions such as lending libraries and reading societies.58 One astute contemporary observer claimed that “Friseurs, Cammerjungfern, Bedienten, Kaufmannsdienern und dergleichen” comprised the largest group of patrons of lending libraries.59 This does not mean that members of the service sector were the only ones to read popular literature; it is not unlikely that such library patrons were directed by their superiors or employers to check out certain books. But when discussing loaned books one must keep in mind that their circulation would have to occur at a quick pace to avoid assessment of late fees, a practice that would necessitate a rapid consumption of literature, one that would keep pace with the rapid production of novels.

A further cause of the dramatized novel’s popularity may have been its structural fragmentation. When viewed from the perspective of production aesthetics, the fragmented structure may have been designed to indulge a more casual approach to reading. It is unlikely that any reader would have had the time or patience to read an entire multi-volumed novel at one sitting; the numerous discrete units of the dramatized novel may have allowed for short-term divertissement. From a superficially visual perspective, the jagged lines of dialogue and quick succession of short scenes are much less formidable than blocks of narration arranged in lengthy chapters.

From the perspective of reception aesthetics one could argue that the fragmented dialogization of plot emerged in response to an altered approached of reading, pioneered by new kinds of readers who were neither accustomed nor inclined to process lengthy blocks of narration.60 One need only consider the popularity of the Bibliothek der Romane in 21 volumes that Heinrich August Ottokar Reichard edited between 1778 and 1794—precisely the period which saw the birth and heyday of the dramatized novel. This compendious anthology was not designed to impart an understanding of an entire work, but merely to delight the reader with abridgements or summaries of episodes and adventures from a variety of novels. From a structural perspective the dramatized novel replicates the effect of this anthology: It tends to exhibit a sequence of episodes without any effort to explain or elaborate the larger context in which these occur. It is a noteworthy coincidence that one of the collaborations on this project was Christian August Vulpius—one of the most renowned proponents of the dramatized novel.

V. Conclusion

If one is inclined to consider the dramatized novel as anything other than a literary trifle, there are two plausible accounts of its sociological signifiance that, given the inherent fracture of the German Enlightenment, are not mutually exclusive. On the one hand, it is possible that the fragmented quality of the dramatized novel structurally represented the estrangement and alienation that manifested itself as German culture and society moved haltingly toward modernity.
In other words, the dramatized novel’s virtual lack of authorial voice or narrational guidance reflected the gradual erosion of a paternal/authoritative ethos and its displacement by a maternal/empathic ethos,\(^6^1\) which associates modernity with the feminine. The failure, or refusal, of most dramatized novels to endorse overtly a normative or prescriptive morality may have evolved from an experimental aesthetic strategy to a commercial ploy to create a least offensive denominator that would attract the greatest number of readers.\(^6^2\)

The polyvalence of the dramatized novel makes a second account possible. Given the virtual absence of an authorial or narrational instance, the dramatized novel required that the reader take ownership of the work and “flesh it out” through a performative act. If one is willing to entertain the notion that the dramatized novel was caught up in the crest of a movement which brought about the penchant for tableau vivants and private theatricals at the end of the century, then the emergence of the genre takes on special socio-cultural significance:

> Es ist ein Wandel des Interesses an Literatur, daß es nicht der räsonierend zu explizierende Sinn ist, um den die Rezipienten um 1800 sich bemühen, sondern die Möglichkeit zu literarischer Erfahrung in empatischer Teilnahme; und die Faszination dieser im 18. Jahrhundert ja erst noch in Ausbildung begriffenen Fähigkeit demonstriert der Charakter der populären Texte ebenso wie die Vielzahl der auf spielerische Formen dieses Interesses zurückzuführenden ‘literarischen Beschäftigungen,’ in denen sich das gewandelte Verhältnis zur Literatur Realität schafft.\(^6^3\)

The dramatized novel, with its loosely connected array of dialogues and monologues, could have furnished material suitable for such empathic reception, particularly “im geselligen Kreis,” where more frivolous texts—in the broadest and strictest senses of the word—were more likely to have been read than in the more conventional and authoritarian setting where reading was conducted, controlled, or supervised by a father figure.\(^6^4\)

This discussion submits that four factors contributed to the emergence and short-lived popularity of the dramatized novel: (1) the valorization of transparency and interiority in German aesthetics, (2) the astonishing boom in the popularity of the novel since the 1770s, (3) the astronomical growth of the publishing industry, and (4) the increased literacy of the German public. When regarded charitably, the dramatized novel not only depicted interiority, but, by exploiting an anti-theatrical gesture and exploring the potential of an ascendant genre, effectively displaced action from the real stage to the boundless mental theater of the reader. When viewed more critically, dramatized novels do not merit an intensive or repetitive reading. The dialogic immediacy of presentation usually exhausts itself in one superficial reading; the frequently overwhelming accumulation of formulaic episodes allows for a complex, but not profound, plot which does not usually invite further exploration of the text. The precipitous decline in popularity of the dramatized novel could be explained by the inadequacy or monotony of the manner of presentation, or by its outliving its own usefulness as an “Eselsbrücke” for novice or pleasure readers.\(^6^5\) The ultimate failure of the genre may be attributed to the sheer difficulty of sustaining dramatic intensity and dialogic immediacy in the breadth and depth required by (quasi-)historical or (quasi-) biographical novels.
Notes

1 Although it would be erroneous to dispute the great influence of Götz von Berlichingen on the "Ritter- and Schauerromantik", the thematic roots of this trend must be traced back to a diverse body of popular literature from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Christine Touaillon, Der deutsche Frauenroman des 18. Jahrhunderts (1919; New York: Lang, 1979) 431-434.


5 Jenaische Litteratur Zeitung 1. Stück (1795):65


8 Teutscher Merkur 7.3 (1774): 358. Adelheit von Siegmar is certainly not the first work to exhibit features that would soon constitute the dramatized novel. Bodmer's political and historical dramas written in the 1760s and 1770s were intended expressly for readers. His Politische Schauspiele were reviewed collectively as "eine dialogisirte Geschichte, aber kein ächtes Drama." Allgemeine Deutsche Bibliothek 24.1 (1775): 84-87, here 86. One could arguably identify Wieland's Araspes und Panthea, Eine Geschichte in Dialogen (1760) as the first German dramatized novel, but this work, published a quarter-century before the genre began to flourish, seems to have been without resonance.

9 "Vermuthlich wollte er es nicht wagen, in der Schilderung solcher Leidenschaften, wie Gewissensangst und Argwohn sind, mit Shakespear einen Wettstreit einzugehen." Teutscher Merkur 7.3 (1774): 358.


11 Friedrich von Blanckenburg, Versuch über den Roman (1774; Stuttgart: Metzler, 1965). Johann Jakob Engel, "Über Handlung, Gespräch und Erzählung," Neue Bibliothek der schönen Wissenschaften und freyen Künste 16.2 (1774): 177-256. All subsequent reference to these works not requiring commentary will be included parenthetically in the text, with the designations "VR" and "HGE," respectively.

12 The first treatise to weigh the merits and limitations of the dramatized novel rehearsed the theories of Blanckenburg and Engel, thereby intimating their parentage of the genre. See the discussion below of the critical review "Über den dramatischen Roman."

13 The theories of Blanckenburg and Engel are subjected to comparative analysis in Hans-Gerhard Winter, Dialog und Dialogroman in der Aufklärung (Darmstadt: Thesenverlag, 1974) 140-143; Horst Turk, Dialektischer Dialog (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1975)

14 In a similar vein, Blanckenburg contends that "von [dem Dichter] wollen wir selten etwas wissen. Wir haben es mit seinen Personen zu tun. Das größte Lob, das er erhalten kann, ist—daß wir ihn ganz über seinem Werke vergessen haben" (VR 525).


16 Meißner, Skizzen 81.


18 Meißner, "Vorbericht," 3.


21 The foremost proponents of the dramatized novel—Meißner, Friedrich Traugott Hase, Friedrich Christian Schlenkert, Johann Friedrich Ernst Albrecht, and Ignaz Aurelius Feßler—all began their literary careers as playwrights.

22 Schiller, Werke 2:502-505, here 503.

23 Schiller, Werke 2: 503. The introduction to the published version of Die Räuber reads: "Man nehme dieses Schauspiel für nichts anderes als ein dramatisierte Geschichte, die die Vortheile der dramatischen Methode, die Seele gleichsam bei ihren geheimsten Operationen zu erappen, benutzt, ohne sich übrigens in die Schranken eines Theaterstücks einzuzäumen, ohne nach dem so zweifelhaften Gewinn bei theatralisicher Verkörperung zu gezien" (Werke 1:7-10, here 7).

24 Schiller, Werke 2:505.
25 Schiller, Werke 2: 505.

26 By using the pronouns "she" and "her" to describe the reader, I am not imputing the reading of dramatized novels exclusively to women.


29 Allgemeine Deutsche Bibliothek 41.2 (1780): 471-472, here 471.
30 The novel was published anonymously. Friedrich Traugott Hase (1754-1823) has been credited as author of the first two German dramatized novels Gustav Aldermann (1779) and Friedrich Mahler (1780), both published by Friedrich Weygand in Leipzig.

31 Allgemeine Deutsche Bibliothek 41.2 (1780): 471-472.
32 Review of Gustav Aldermann cited from "Dritte Fortsetzung der Bilanz der schönen Literatur im Jahre 1779," Teutscher Merkur 5. Stück (1780): 240. Virtually all dramatized novels were published in multiple volumes. Meißner's Alcibiades, Schlenkert's Friedrich mit der gebissenen Wange and Rudolf von Habsburg, Albrecht's Familie Eboli and Friedrich von Zollern, Feßler's Marc-Aurel were published in four volumes; Schlenkert's Heinrich der Vierte in five. The size of these novels was certainly determined more by commercial considerations than aesthetic

33 Henry Home, Elements of Criticism, 2 vols. (1762; Hildesheim and New York: Olms, 1970) 2: 197. Home’s work exerted considerable influence on German aesthetic theory in the 1770s. In the present context it is important to note that Engel co-edited a new edition of Meinhard’s translation of Grundsätze der Kritik von heinrich Home in 1772—two years before writing his treatise Über Handlung, Gespräch und Erzählung. See Wilhelm Neumann, Die Bedeutung Homes für die Ästhetik und sein Einfluß auf die deutschen Ästhetiker, Inaugural-Dissertation, Halle, 1894.

34 Anonymous review of Johann Friedrich Ernst Albrecht's Lauretta Pisana in Allgemeine Deutsche Bibliothek 94.1 (1790): 138-140. It must be pointed out that the critic immediately qualifies his judgment: "... versteht sich aber, daß der Dichter Meister seiner Kunst seyn muß" (140).

35 Friedrich Kittler’s study of discourse networks in 1800 focuses primarily on “classical” literary texts—he does not take dramatized novels or other “trivial” genres into consideration—but his insight into aesthetic experience around 1800 is relevant here: “daß um 1800 gerade hohe Texte in audiovisueller Sinnlichkeit schwellen, haben nur Filmhistoriker erkannt. Eine Lust, die den unerhörten Belletristikboom erst möglich machte, bleibt Interpreten dunkel, die von ihr noch zehren. Denn das halluzinatorische Inszenieren, weil es Stimmen und Gesichte zwischen die gelesenen Zeilen trägt, ist die Transmissionstechnik, die aus Lesern neue Autoren macht.” Aufschreibesysteme. 1800-1900, 3rd ed. (Munich: Fink, 1995) 150.

36 Of interest here is a passage from a handbook on proper reading habits: "Der Leser eines Buches muß das thun, was der Schauspieler, der Künstler ist, thut. Er muß dem Schriftsteller nachhelfen: er muß das Selbstdenken nicht aufgeben, sondern er muß ihm vor- und nachdenken." Johann Adam Bergk, Die Kunst, Bücher zu lesen (1799: Leipzig: Zentral-Antiquariat der DDR, 1967) 66. Bergk obviously has in mind here the “careful reader” who reads aesthetically meritorious literature. A dramatized novel, especially in its “pure” variety, is precisely the kind of work that heeds his call for a transformation of reader into actor. The same cannot be said of the other variants.


38 I suspect that a key figure in this “school” was Christian Felix Weiße, a well-known poet, playwright, and editor of the Neue Bibliothek der schönen Wissenschaften und freyen Künste. Weiße personally knew Engel, Meißner, and Blanckenburg, each of whom contributed articles and reviews to his journal, and he was instrumental in securing for Hase the editorship of Schwickert’s Leipziger Musenalmanach (1776-1778) and Meißner’s administrative post in Dresden. In addition, Weiße broke with his own reputation as an author of sentimental plays by authoring in 1774 (but not publishing until 1780!) a historical drama that resembled the aforementioned Adelheit von Siegmar. Weiße himself considered only an abridged version of this work suitable for theatrical performance. See preface to Der Fanatismus, oder Jean Calas. Ein historisches Schauspiel (Frankfurt and Leipzig: Dyk, 1780) *2-*4, here *4.


42 Johann Georg Heinizmann, Über die Pest der deutschen Literatur. Appell an meine Nation über Aufklärung und Aufklärer; über Gelehrsamkeit und Schriftsteller; über
Büchermanufakturisten, Rezensenten, Buchhändler; über moderne Philosophen und Menschenenerzieher usw., ed. Reinhard Wittmann (1780; Hildesheim: Olms, 1977) 427. Also Bergk, 414. Without disputing these claims, it is important to note that several poorly situated contemporaries wrote prolifically in order to maintain a modest standard of living, such as the former physician Albrecht, the former civil servant Schlenkert, the former priest Feßler, and the widow Wallenrodt.

43 These observations are based on a first-hand examination of various legitimate and pirated editions that are available at the Deutsche Bücherei in Leipzig, the Universitätsbibliothek Leipzig, the Universitätsbibliothek Jena, and the Herzog-Anna-Amalia Bibliothek in Weimar. I am especially indebted to Frau Lieselotte Reuschel of the Deutsches Buch- und Schriftmuseum at the Deutsche Bücherei in Leipzig. Frau Reuschel not only drew my attention to the differing qualities of typesetting, illustrations, and paper, but helped me compare and contrast these qualities in numerous late eighteenth-century works. A scientific analysis of the novels under consideration conducted by members of the Papierhistorische Sammlung of the Deutsche Bücherei established only that the paper used for legitimate editions of works by Meißner, Schlenkert, and Albrecht was „von besserer Qualität“ (personal communication to the author). On the issue of primary customers, see Jäger and Schönert, 42-43.

44 Jäger and Schönert 12.


46 A representative sampling of such criticism would include “Der Leipziger Meßkatalog, oder Aussichten zur modischen Winterlektüre,” Journal des Luxus und der Moden November 1794: 536-537; Koberstein, 1702-1703; D. L. B. Wolff, 450-452; Tarot, 251-252.


48 Meißner, „Vorbericht“ 3.

49 Carl Gottlob Cramer, Haspar a Spada. Eine Saga aus dem dreizehnten Jahrhundert, vom Verfasser des Erasmus Schleichet 2 vols. (Frankfurt und Leipzig, 1794) 1: 1-6, here 5. Similar declarations can be found in prefaces to works by Meißner, Schlenkert and Albrecht.

50 „Über den dramatischen Roman,“ Neue Bibliothek der schönen Wissenschaften und freyen Künste 44.1 (1791) 3-18. All subsequent reference to this review not requiring commentary will be included parenthetically in the text, with the designation “Üdr.”

51 Karl Heinrich Ludwig Pölitz, Die Ästhetik für gebildete Leser, 2 vols. (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1807) 2: 142; also see 2: 217.

52 The anonymous critic argued that the reader “will nicht blos wissen, was diesen Stolz entzündet, genährt, belebt hat; er will über die äußern Umstände und über den Einfluss der Gesellschaft, des Ortes und der Zeit im Dialog, wie in der Erzählung, und wenn es in jenen weniger möglich ist, lieber in dieser, als gar nicht belehrt seyn” (Üdr 9). The popularity of the dramatized novel suggests that many readers felt otherwise, if only temporarily.


54 Schön, 221.

55 The assumptions made in this paragraph derive from arguments presented in Erich Schön, especially 99-122 and 177-184.

56 Möller 259.

57 Kiesel/Münch 160
58 Jäger and Schönert 10.
59 Andreas Georg Friedrich Rebmann, Kosmopolitanische Wanderungen durch einen Theil Deutschlands, cited in Kiesel and Münch, 155.
60 Jäger and Schönert 43.
61 "Der Verzicht auf das Explizitmachen eines Sinns [ist] zugleich auch der Verzicht auf das Insistieren auf dem Vorhandensein eines explizierbaren Sinns überhaupt … Vielleicht kann man eine Entsprechung zum Übergang von der 'Familienunterhaltung' zu den geselligen Zirkeln sehen in jener Schwelle vom 'moralische-didaktischen Roman' der 70er und frühen 80er Jahre … zu Formen, die in den 80er Jahren dominant werden und weniger eindeutig vom Text her auf eine Funktion bzw Intention festzulegen sind." Schön, 204f. See also Kittler, particularly 65-69; Andreas Huyssen, After the Great Divide (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1990).
62 One could draw an analogy to the manner in which the notoriously "amoral" plays by Kotzebue gradually superseded the more conventional moral-didactic works by Iffland as the eighteenth century drew to its close. See Schön 204f.
63 Schön 221.
64 Schön 204.
65 The rapid decline of the dramatized novel is underscored by efforts to ridicule the genre and its practitioners, such as act 1,6 in Kotzebue's Die deutschen Kleinstädter (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1969) 8.
Appendix “A”
“Pure” dramatized novels:

Albrecht, Johann Friedrich Ernst, Lauretta Pisana* (1789); Die Familie Eboli* (1791-1792); Der keusche Joseph* (1792-1794); Kleopatra* (1793); Friedrich von Zollern und seine schöne Else.Stamm-Eltern des königl Preußischen Hauses* (1793-1795), Die schöne Gabriele (1795), Maria de Lucca, Edle von Parma. Ein Opfer der Inquisition* (1801)

Hase, Friedrich Traugott, Gustav Aldermann* (1779); Friedrich Mahler* (1780)

Schlenkert, Friedrich Christian Schlenkert, Friedrich mit der gebissenen Wange* (1785-1788); Kaiser Heinrich der Vierte* (1788-1795); Rudolf von Habsburg (1792-1795)

Tank, Franz Johannes Daniel, Mehr als Lukrezia! Eine Begebenheit aus der wirklichen Welt, in dialogischer Form (1788)

Tieck, Ludwig, Abdallah (1792).

Vulpius, Christian August, Johann von Leiden. Wahre Geschichte der Vorzeit* (1791); Die Portugiesen in Indien* (1793)

Astericized works are available on microfiche in Bibliothek der deutschen Literatur (Saur: München, 1990).
Appendix “B”
“Raw” dramatized novels:


Cramer, Carl Gottlob, *Adolf der Kühne, Raugraf von Dassel* (1792); *Haspar a Spada* (1794)


Schmieder, Heinrich Gottlob, *Der schwache König. Szenen aus der Geschichte König Heinrichs IV von Castilien* (1786-1788)


Astericized works are available on microfiche in *Bibliothek der deutschen Literatur* (Saur: München, 1990).
Appendix “C”
“Hybrid” Dramatized Novels

Albrecht, Johann Friedrich Ernst, Die Familie Medici in ihren glänzendsten Epochen* (1795); Der mächtige Parrunkowitsch nebst einigen anderen Miniatur Gottheiten (1800); Kakodämon der Schreckliche (1800)

Cramer, Carl Gottlob, Leben und Meinungen, auch seltsamliche Abentheuer Erasmus Schleichers, eines reisenden Mechanikus (1791); Der deutsche Alcibiades* (1791); Hermann von Nordenschild, genannt von Unstern. Als Anhang und Nachtrag zum deutschen Alcibiades* (1792); Hans Stürzebecher und sein Söhn* (1798); Der schöne Flüchtling* (1804); Nettchens Hochzeit* (1805); Der Domschütz und seine Gesellin* (1809); Freuden und Leiden des edlen Baron Just Friedrich auf der Semmelburg* (1817)

Feßler, Ignaz Aurelius, Marc Aurel* (1790-1792); Matthias Corvinus* (1793-1794); Attila, König der Hunnen* (1794)

Froebing, Johann Christian, Georg Treumann und seine Familie und Freunde (1796)

Meißner, August Gottlieb, Alcibiades* (1781-1788); Bianca Capello* (1785)

Vulpius, Christian August, Rinaldo Rinaldini* (1790); Abentheuer und Fahrten des Bürgers und Barbiers Sebastian Schnapps* (1798); Glorioso der große Teufel* (1800); Theodor, König der Korsen* (1801), Orlando Orlandino* (1802).

Wallenrodt, Johanna Isabella von, Wie es sich fügt (1793)

Zschokke, Johann Heinrich Daniel Zschokke, Abaellino der große Bandit (1794)