

THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY GERMAN "TRIVIALROMAN" AS CONSTRUCTED BY LITERARY HISTORY AND CRITICISM

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Le corpus considérable de connaissances concernant le roman allemand du 18^e siècle se divise grosso modo en deux catégories qui sont non seulement informatives mais aussi normatives : « le roman populaire » (Trivialroman, pour recourir à la terminologie des études littéraires allemandes) d'une part, et « le roman » en tant que forme artistique, genre littéraire, d'autre part. Par conséquent, il existe deux différents types d'histoire littéraire allemande de la même période, dont les méthodologies sont tout à fait divergentes. Les histoires du « roman populaire » sont abordées à partir d'une perspective « sociologique » et la conception dominante est celle d'un modèle de production, déterminé par des principes de marché et surtout par « le goût public » (quel que soit le sens que l'on donne à cette expression). Les histoires littéraires canoniques, en revanche, sont organisées, d'habitude, selon « les formes littéraires », les idées, ou les notices biographiques concernant les auteurs individuels, sans que grand cas soit fait de facteurs sociologiques. Il arrive que le discours « sociologique » —qui définit « le populaire » par voie de négation, en l'opposant à « l'authentiquement littéraire » — serve à établir une différenciation hiérarchique ayant pour effet d'exclure toute production littéraire « non convenable ». Cela est certes plus révélateur des luttes qui ont lieu à l'intérieur du champ littéraire que de « la production littéraire » en tant que telle.

La distinction entre le roman « populaire » et le roman « artistique » ne se manifesta dans la littérature allemande que pendant les dernières décennies du 18^e siècle. L'attaque contre « le roman des masses », qui se fondait sur le concept péjoratif du « goût du public », s'intensifia dans la critique littéraire allemande comme moyen, pour les agents littéraires, de lutter pour prendre définitivement le dessus en déterminant les règles et les critères d'évaluation à l'intérieur de leur champ d'action restreint sans aucun égard pour la situation réelle du « public des lecteurs ». Le débat concernant « le public des lecteurs » devait devenir un concept crucial pour la critique littéraire contemporaine, laquelle, plus tard dans le siècle et précisément en réaction contre ce débat, promut l'idée opposée de « l'autonomie littéraire », dont l'expression extrême devait s'incarner dans la théorie littéraire (notamment

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dans celle des Romantiques) qui établit, par définition, un rapport inversement proportionnel entre l'accessibilité et « la littérarité » : le « roman artistique » s'y présentait comme la manifestation la plus exemplaire d'une telle conception.

THE present-day thought of the late eighteenth-century German novel is divided into two categories: the "popular novel" on the one hand, and "the novel" as an "art" form, a literary genre, on the other. Indeed, the interest in the "popular novel" {"*Trivialroman*"¹, to use the terminology of German literary studies, or "*Trivialliteratur*" in general), emerges as exceptionally characteristic of German literary history of that particular period. However, the basis for this split of categories is rather vague. To begin with, the "popular novel" does not refer to any specific poetic form. Even scholars who tirelessly seek classifications agree that there are no common features shared by the different forms included here, whether in terms of conventions of writing or as regards historical sources (see especially Kreuzer 1967). That is to say, there is no generic basis for the formalization of this category. Furthermore, these two categories are hardly linked in the historical perspective. Often, the "popular" is viewed as the earlier, "primitive" phase of the "artistic" novel, with a linear continuity leading from the former to the latter. Yet, as a rule, the reason for this evolutionary leap is left rather obscure. Where exactly did the power of novel writing as a cultural practice lie, which facilitated (or was the reason for) such a "transformation"? Why and how the novel could induce such a cultural change and acquire such dominance in our notion of the late eighteenth-century literary achievements?

Apparently, the "problem" lies to a large extent in the very ways of writing the "history of the German novel". Roughly speaking, there are two different types of literary histories from which information on the German novel of the very same period is obtained, in fact — two *genres* of historical writing, which are utterly divorced from one another in their methodology, exhibiting a clear incongruity between two different perspectives in constructing the history of the German novel: traditional literary histories² on the one hand,

1 I do not intend to deal here with questions of terminology. Both terms have a pejorative tone to them, in spite of attempts to define them on an "objectively, semantic" basis. The "popular" is a more general and widespread term, while the "trivial" is more specifically characteristic of modern German literary criticism, especially in relation to the eighteenth-century novel. Helmut Kreuzer points out that this term, used in this sense, has been available since 1855, and became a current one in the realm of literary study in the 1920s when used by Marianne Thalmann (Helmut KREUZER, "Trivialliteratur als Forschungsproblem: Zur Kritik des deutschen Trivialromans seit der Aufklärung", *DVjs*, no. 41, 1967, pp. 173-91.). In this paper I shall apply both concepts without making any significant distinction between them.

2 Histories of German Literature in general, such as Wolfgang BEUTIN (et al.), eds. *Deutsche Literaturgeschichte: von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart* (Stuttgart, Metzler,

and histories of the "popular novel" on the other³. Consequently, I find this body of historical writing a perfect example of the manipulative use of the idea of "the popular" in scholarly cultural analysis and cultural history.

My most general claim in this connection is that although this category thus pervades discussions of cultural stratification, it nevertheless does not reflect an adequate methodological conception, but rather, its function lies primarily in its rhetorical potency. That is to say, the category of "the popular" indicates an *attitude* towards the object under discussion (that is, its image) more than it accounts for or explains the object as such. In spite of all the methodological introductions to the histories of the "*Trivialroman*", it is still unclear what kind of "entity" "the popular" is, whether it defines *properties* of special types of *products*, *attitudes* or special *practices* characterizing specific social groups, or the *technology* of production and distribution ("for the masses") .

1984 [1979]), Eduard ENGEL, *Geschichte der Deutschen Literatur: von den Anfängen bis zu Goethe* (Leipzig & Wien, 1907), Kuno FRANCKE, *A History of German Literature (as Determined by Social Forces)* (New York, AMS Press, 1969 [1901]), Ernst ROSE, *A History of German Literature* (New York University Press, 1960), E. L. STAHL, *Introduction to German Literature* (London, The Gresset Press, 1970); or of the particular relevant sections thereof, such as the German Enlightenment or the German Novel (for instance, Jürgen JACOBS, *Prosa der Aufklärung: moralische Wochenschriften, Autobiographie, Satire, Roman: Kommentar zu einer Epoche* (München, Winkler, 1976), Wolfgang MARTENS, *Die Botschaft der Tugend: der Aufklärung im Spiegel der deutschen moralischen Wochenschriften* (Stuttgart, Metzler, 1968), Herbert SINGER, *Der deutsche Roman zwischen Barock und Rokoko (Literatur und Leben)* (Köln, Graz, Böhlau Verlag, 1963), Heinrich SPIERO, *Geschichte der deutschen Romane* (Berlin, Walter de Gruyter, 1950), E. L. STAHL and W. E. YUILL, *German Literature of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries and Introduction to German literature* (London, The Cresset Press, 1970)), "Classicism" and "Romanticism" (for instance, Walter MÜLLER-SEIDEL, *Die Geschichtlichkeit der deutschen Klassik: Literatur und Denkform um 1800* (Stuttgart, Metzler, 1983), Gert UEDING, *Klassik und Romantik: Deutsche Literatur im Zeitalter der französischen Revolution 1789-1815* (München, Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, colli. "Hansers Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur vom 16. Jahrhundert bis zur Gegenwart", 1988)) and a host of others.

3 Studies of the "*Trivialroman*", such as Marion BEAUJEU, *Der Trivialroman in der zweiten Hälfte des 18. Jahrhunderts* (Bonn, Bouvier, 1964), Eva D. BECKER, *Der deutsche Roman um 1780* (Stuttgart, Metzler, 1963), Heinz Otto BURGER, ed., *Studien zur Trivialliteratur* (Frankfurt am Main, Vittorio Klostermann, 1968), Carl MÜLLER-FRAUREUTH, *Die Ritter- und Räuberromane* (Hildesheim, Georg Olms, 1965 [1894]), M. SPIEGEL, *Der Roman und Sein Publikum im Früheren 18. Jahrhundert 1700-1767* (Bonn, Bouvier, 1967) and others, including bibliographies, e.g., Michael HADLEY, *The German Novel in 1790* (Berne, Peter Lang, 1983); *Romanverzeichnis: Bibliographie der zwischen 1750-1800 erschienenen Erstausgaben* (Berne, Peter Lang, 1977), W. Manfred HEIDERICH, *The German Novel of 1800* (Berne and Frankfurt/m, Peter Lang, 1982), Ernst WEBER and Christine MITHAL, eds., *Deutsche Originalromane zwischen 1680 und 1780: eine Bibliographie mit Besitznachweisen* (Berlin, E. Schmidt, 1983) and many others.

4 This confusion characterizes also "theories" of the "popular arts". The following formulation is quite representative of 1970s American debate of "popular culture": Donald Dunlop cites, inter alia, Ray BROWNE, "Popular Culture: Notes Toward a Definition" in Ray BROWNE & Ronald J. AMBROSETTI, eds., *Popular Culture and Curricula* (Ohio,

Following the semiotically oriented social analyses of culture, I proceed from the assumption that literary histories (like other types of meta-literary discourse) are agents in the institutionalization of literature, in that they reflect the strategies maintained by interested literary parties in their efforts to establish an authorized "description" of this field and its history. Let me state my thesis in advance: The conventional methods of writing the literary history of the German novel establish and adhere to an evaluative and ahistorical dichotomy between the "popular" and the "artistic" novel. This dichotomy seems to be the crystallization of a once functional distinction which apparently played an important role in the organization of the literary field of the time. Accordingly, the fact that this distinction endures all the more strongly in the work of present-day literary historians, may indicate the extent to which it was firmly established and sanctioned in the formative stage of the then newly canonized late eighteenth-century literary notion of the novel.

In this paper I shall first introduce the contemporary discussion of the "*Trivialroman*" against the background of "the novel" as a topic in traditional literary histories, and try to show that the category of "the popular" is based on a problematic idea of "public demands". Then I shall try to show how this category was established in the literary criticism of the eighteenth century, not so much out of interest in real "public demands", but more as a result of "inside" struggles over the construction of a literary canon and the institutionalization of a small and exclusive literary field.

1. the "*Trivialroman*" in contemporary German literary criticism

In the context of traditional canonical literary histories, studies in the German popular novel differ dramatically. To begin with, these studies exhibit a

Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1970), according to whom "a viable definition for Popular Culture is all those elements of life which are not narrowly intellectual or creatively elitist and which are generally though not necessary, disseminated through the mass media" (Donald DUNLOP, "Popular Culture and Methodology", *Journal of Popular Culture*, vol. 9, no. 2, 1975, pp. 375-83.). In the final analysis, the tag "popular" usually presupposes an *inherent* link between all these factors, (as if the nature of *consumption* of the "popular" product is supposedly incorporated in its "properties"). Certainly, such deterministic idea of "the popular form" can not serve as an explanation for the rise of the "genuinely literary form" of the novel, if only because, *according to these histories' own logic*, "mass production" cannot give rise to anything of "artistic value" (see discussion below). What we have in this case, then, is but a pointer to that alleged "special type" of culture for which — and only for which — such determinism is considered "appropriate", that is, an indication of a patronizing attitude towards the cultural section under discussion. The question which thus arises is *whose interests do this historical conception serve in our particular easel*

methodological awareness, which is rather uncommon in traditional literary histories. Most of these works, to judge from their apologetic introductions, share a great deal of "uneasiness" concerning the fact that they chose to deal with "popular" material, hence material which is "problematic" according to their standards, and take trouble to excuse its inclusion as a legitimate object of scholarly discussion in its own right. As a rule, the "popular novel" is defined in these studies by way of negation vis-à-vis what is considered "genuine literature". Broadly speaking, attitudes towards the subject matter oscillate between two poles: it is either viewed as "literature", however questionable its value (which falls short of aesthetic literary standards); or it is viewed as a "non-literary" corpus altogether (i.e., a corpus which is not intended to meet aesthetic literary criteria in the first place) since it is believed to be subject to different rules — not "literary", but "social" or "economic".

Consequently, there are, in principle, two legitimate ways to deal with such a corpus: either as a body of social documents, or as an active index of literary traits, marked out by their absence. In the introduction to her book *Der Trivialroman in der zweiten Hälfte des 18. Jahrhunderts*, Marion Beaujean concludes after a detailed survey of the issue: "Apart from its significance as a mirror of still prevalent outlooks, the eighteenth-century popular novel is also of interest for the evolution of the novel's literary genres." ⁵ In any event, the "*Trivialroman*" is by definition a "literary entity", which is also by definition marked as *excluded* from the framework of literature (it lacks recognition, is irregular, etc.). Naturally, this kind of definition functions first and foremost as means of *selection and control*: more than saying anything about its subject matter — the "popular novel" as such — it embodies, and helps determine, precisely those norms of "literariness", from which the novel is judged to diverge.

Secondly, studies in the "*Trivialroman*" are marked by the stamp of sociological methods. As mentioned above, while declared ineligible for literary consideration, the "popular" material is nevertheless assigned legitimacy through its worth as a social document. It so happens that the histories of the popular novel (in sharp contrast to canonical literary histories) are, as a rule, "social" or "economic" histories. It may, in fact, be rightly concluded that once a certain section in culture is declared "popular", it automatically becomes a "sociological issue", or conversely: "sociology" exists only for what is viewed as "popular". Hence, it emerges that the only way to "define" the "popular" is actually as "something that is investigated using a sociologi-

⁵ My translation. "Außer seiner Bedeutung als Spiegel für die noch herrschenden Anschauungsformen gewinnt der *Trivialroman* im 18. Jahrhundert also auch ein Interesse für die Entwicklungsgeschichte der literarischen Gattung des Romans." (Marian BEAUJEAN, *Der Trivialroman in der zweiten Hälfte des 18. Jahrhunderts* (op. cit., p. 9).

cal method". Let me detail the most striking characteristics of this "sociological" discourse:

1.1. the use of statistics

On the whole, there is hardly any study on the *"Trivialroman"* which is without statistics. This fact is clearly loaded with a signifying value: statistical analysis and graphic representation in tables and diagrams are certainly the trade-marks par excellence of "sociological research" (no matter how reductive such an idea of sociological research is), serving conventionally to authenticate the reliability of the argument⁶. Here they are certainly intended to indicate that in this context, by contrast to literary discourse whose finesse lies in the virtuosity of interpretations, the name of the game is the solidity of "empirical research" and "scientific precision".

Consequently, unlike literary histories which deal with "important" individual texts and writers, here the material is often anonymous and is treated merely as statistical evidence: even when they deal with the textual aspects of the "popular novel", these studies ultimately aim to construct a *typology* for large corpora, individual novels thus usually serving as "samples". As a rule, the generic characteristics, rather than particular properties of individual works, are perceived to be central. This is perfectly obvious, for instance, in Michael Hadley's bibliography *The German Novel in 1790*⁷. In his introduction, Hadley dedicates a whole chapter to listing "Narrative TECHNIQUES and Literary CONVENTIONS in 1790"⁸, to which a "STATISTICAL Table of Themes and TECHNIQUES in 35 Extant Novel of 1790 ACCORDING TO TYPES"⁹ is appended, where the distribution of 28 listed literary conventions (e.g., epistolary conventions, dialogue, the use of the first-person, prefaces, digressions, the bourgeois hero, etc.) is measured according to genres (Hadley lists the following genres: the love-, historical-, satirical- and character-novel). Needless to say, nothing of the sort is even conceivable in ordinary literary histories (but indeed is the order of the day in the study of "folklore").

1.2. a "consumer oriented" model of explanation

The massive deployments of statistics reveal the conception of a whole *mechanism of production* based on the model of relations "producers-artifacts-consumers", so current in discussions of "popular art". According to

this model, the novels (that is, the "texts") are perceived as no more than *products* (as opposed to "masterpieces"); the most dominant factor regulating production is "public demand", and "distribution" (or "market") plays an indispensable role of mediation¹⁰. What is crucial here is the shift of emphasis in perception of the responsibility for the generation of texts from the pole of the "producer" (the writer) to that of the "consumer": the *reading* public is attributed primacy here as the chief factor determining the properties and "quality" of this kind of literary production. This is often lamented as a misfortune: *"Popular literature was in fact a response to the demand of public taste; the public, NOT THE AESTHETICIANS, established the criteria."*¹¹. Here, the idea of the absolute "literary creation" is relinquished. Instead, it is basically assumed that the writers of such material, by contrast to writers of "genuine" literature, neither enjoy nor aspire to any "freedom of creation" whatsoever, but respond rationally to the pressure of "public taste".

Such an attitude underlies the relatively broad interest in the cost of books and the public's purchasing power; in the level of education of social groups; marketing channels, etc., issues which are the order of the day in studies of the "popular novel". This fact is indeed striking: all these "sociological" issues, which hardly arise in — and in fact are excluded as blasphemy from — canonical literary histories whose interest is in "genuine literature", are applied in the case of the "popular novel" as supposedly *the natural and sole method* of dealing with it. Is there no "sociology" of "genuine" literature — or is it *a priori* impossible to construct one for "genuine" literature? (It is an indisputable axiom that to deal with such issues in the context of canonized literary material would be to miss its essence entirely.) At any rate, it appears that confining the application of "sociological" discourse to the context of "the popular" alone, actually serves to draw the boundaries of the "literary", as precisely the particular domain for which sociological analysis is supposedly irrelevant¹².

6 See Thomas Kuhn's analysis of "The Function of Measurement in Modern Physical Science" and its emergence into "the *paradigm of sound knowledge*" (Thomas KUHN, "The Function of Measurement in Modern Physical Science", *Isis*, no. 52, 1961, pp. 161-90.).

7 See note 3.

8 M. HADLEY, *op. cit.*, pp. 39-71.

9 *Ibid.*, p. 238.

10 Such a "model of production" predominates in most "theories" of the "popular arts". Donald Dunlop, for instance, proposes a "*rudimentary scheme*" to illustrate the relationships among what he views as the three factors which must be involved in a "*systematic analysis of the popular arts*": the artist, the artifact, and the audience. The relationship between the artist and the artifact are governed by a *formula*. The relationship between the artist and audience are governed by the *middlemen*. And the relationship between the audience and the artist are governed by the *medium*.

11 Michael HADLEY, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

12 Whenever researchers show any awareness of this methodological discrimination, they feel obliged to substantiate it with rational excuses. One most conspicuous such rationalization is made with reference to the situation in the eighteenth century: researchers are usually at pains to support their discriminatory methodology precisely on the grounds that 'such was the state of affairs at the time'. In his book on *Book Production, Fiction and the German Reading Public 1740-1800* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1974), Albert Ward explains why the "*classical works*" (in his words) do not exactly constitute part of his object of study. For Ward, their exclusivity relies simply on their material scarcity. His argument goes as

Of course, the approach of studies of "the popular" need not always be that of extreme "economic determinism". The assumption that popular novels were merely designed to meet the "lowest common denominator" (whatever that might be) of the public's expectations is even more common. Hadley voices this cynical view of the novelists' opportunism very colorfully, yet with great contempt, not accidentally using figurative language drawn from the semantic field of digestion: "*Novelists of 1790 [...] 'joined cookery with authorship' by 'serving up' works of 'considerable corpulence' with 'something for every palate', and even for 'all digestive systems' [...]*"¹³.

However, careful attention should be paid to the fact that, for all the argument's air of "pragmatism" (for all the seeming *démystification* of literary activity and the down-to-earth analysis of its mechanism of production), the notion of "the public" in histories of "the popular" remains vague and mystified all the same. The most favorable axiom about the public's character (its "needs" and "desires"), is so regularly repeated that it seems to be accepted without debate as genetic — although its basis is never convincingly elaborated. Yet what is the specific content of the alleged character of the "public"? Ostensibly, the answer is at everyone's disposal: it is the average combination of both "light entertainment and amusement" on the one hand, and "instruction" on the other. How was this combination established — if not precisely through the activities of the very critics and writers on the basis of whose testimony it was deduced in the first place? Furthermore, what kind of social entity is "the public", and who exactly are the people who are said to appropriate these expectations? How are the public's expectations expressed, and how do novelists detect and successfully respond to them?

follows: First, he argues that books in general were rather expensive, even late in the century: "[...] *The capacity to afford to buy books is of obvious relevance in our present context; indeed, for those of the lower fringes of the reading public the price of the book is often the decisive factor*" (pp. 149-50). Ward concludes that "*the over-all verdict must be that even the most popular type of novel was by no means cheap*" (p. 151), yet he finds it particularly vital to specify that "*beyond any doubt the classics were not a commercial success*" (p. 131), to say the least. In fact, he asserts that "*classical works were read as rarely as they were bought*" (p. 132). This implies an ostensibly clear argument regarding the question of the novel's "popularity": literature was apparently beyond the public's financial means altogether, therefore, it is doubtful whether it could have constituted a "mass culture" at all. However, Ward manages to state his claims in a manner that simultaneously leads to two opposing conclusions concealed within a single argument. On the one hand, knowledge of the economic conditions and the market situation of the period is crucial for understanding the evolution of the novel; on the other hand, with regard to what he calls "the classics" these matters are of no interest whatsoever, since "classical" works transcend even these basic rules of reality. This is ultimately only another way of stating that by restricting the discussion of economic constraints to the realm of the "popular" novel, one merely perpetuates the same historical value distinctions which isolated the particular segments of cultural production from the rest.

13 *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5.

The answers to all these questions are confusing. As a matter of fact, any response is based on the *abstraction* of heterogeneous factors, the construction of an *average* that has no actual existence nor any specific manifestation in reality. It thus transpires that precisely this quasi-sociological notion of "the public", which was supposed to ground the more solid and pseudo-scientific level of discussion, implies a rather obscure, certainly not "sociological", assumption that a seemingly anonymous, uniform and passive population exists, and that it supposedly acts in an "average manner". Certainly, the notion of the public bears no genuine reference to any real social group, and to the ways social groups generate or appropriate their practices according to their variable (and usually conflicting) interests and circumstances. There is nothing, therefore, in this notion that explains the nature and functions of the cultural products (e.g., novels, in this case) which these groups really "consume". Apparently, what we have here is nothing but an empty formal index of sociological discourse.

In short, "the public", which plays no role in traditional literary histories, is regarded as the major factor in the histories of the "popular novel". These studies exhibit a different historical model — a history of production and consumption (albeit quite dogmatically), in other words, a history of the "large scale field of production"¹⁴. Such conspicuous divorce of methodology reveals, by way of elimination, the ideology of "literary autonomy". This ideology finds its direct expression in the structure of canonical literary histories, which hardly take into consideration any factor other than the *producers* (the writers) and the *products* (their works), namely, what is considered the finalized (selected) product of literary activity. The canonical literary history is, then, a history of the "restricted field of production", to use Bourdieu's terms. It refers to a rather intact cultural field, in which the producers are also the consumers, and in which the very notion of production and consumption, and the distinction between them, are actually prohibited and inconceivable. In such cultural fields the agents are entitled, and in fact obliged, to ignore the basic dynamic in culture, that of offer and demand, to the extent that pointing out this dynamic alone serves to mark out the "excluded". Consequently, it may be further concluded that the very rise of interest in the "popular", and the "sociological" discourse associated with it, are indicative precisely of the state of affairs of the cultural *elite*, in which the demand apparently arises to reestablish its boundaries, block its canon and secure its exclusivity.

14 Pierre BOURDIEU, "The Field of Cultural Production, or: The Economic World Reversed", *Poetics*, vol. 12, nos. 4/5, pp. 311-56, and "The Market of Symbolic Goods", *Poetics*, vol. 14, no. 1/2, 1985, pp. 13-44.

2. the problem of the "popular novel" in eighteenth-century literary criticism

It appears from the above that the German "*Trivialroman*" is believed to have the existence of a distinct "entity". However, such distinctiveness was not in effect at all before the last decades of the eighteenth century. According to Eva Becker, the *Trivialroman* became recognizable in this culture only late in the century when it served as a sign of the then emergent "Romanticism"¹⁵; before that, Becker claims, no "substantial break of 'artistic' with 'entertainment' novel" was valid, and apart from "differences in quality, [there was] no essential differences among the novels that appeared in the period between 1765 to 1790"¹⁶. If we bear in mind that the novel was by no means an "invention" of late eighteenth-century literature, and indeed flourished many years earlier and for quite some time enjoyed a large measure of "public interest", the question inevitably arises as to what caused the emergence of such a dramatic distinctiveness? What underlies the increasingly massive attack on the popular novel, especially towards the end of the century¹⁷?

15 Eva D. BECKER, *Der deutsche Roman um 1780* (Stuttgart, Metzler, 1963), p. 2.

16 *Ibid.*, p. 1. My translation: "Eine grundsätzliche Unterscheidung von 'Kunstromanen' und 'Unterhaltungsromanen' für diese Zeit überhaupt der Berechtigung entbehrt. Es gibt QUALITATIVE, ABER KEINE PRINZIPIELLEN UNTERSCHIEDE zwischen den Romanen, die in der Zeit von 1765 bis 1790 erschienen." Nevertheless, this distinction is so firmly established in literary criticism, that even those researchers who are more aware of its historical conditioning still fail to avoid it. Christa Bürger, for instance, calls attention to the weakness of research which retains the "value judgments of literary criticism of the period (such as that of Nicolai's most influential *Allgemeinen deutsche Bibliothek*)" as if they were solid "facts", instead of viewing them as "a momentum of historical process" ("Die Wertungspraxis der Zeitgenössischen Literaturkritik [z.B. der einflussreichen *Allgemeinen deutschen Bibliothek* des Aufklärers Nicolai] wird dann zum 'Faktum', während sie doch als Moment einer historischen Entwicklung gedeutet werden müßte". [Christa BÜRGER, "Das menschliche Elend oder Der Himmel auf Erden? Der Roman zwischen Aufklärung und Kunstautonomie" in Christa BÜRGER, Peter BÜRGER and Jochen SCHULTE-SASSE, eds., *Zur Dichotomisierung von hoher und niederer Literatur* (Suhrkamp, 1982), pp. 172-207; cf. p. 173]). Yet, at the same time, Bürger unintentionally exercises the very methodological bias which she seeks to lay bare, by the seemingly naive application of different terminology for canonical literary study (*Literaturwissenschaft*, i.e., "the science of literature") on the one hand, and the study of popular literature which to her is no more than "research" (*Trivilliteraturforschung*).

17 It has to be stressed that in the discussion of late eighteenth-century "popular literature", the novel is without question the most berated genre; it is considered the most typical "popular" product of the age. The study of other popular genres of the period is rather negligible in comparison, especially that of lyrical poetry, and above all, of the idyll, which, for all their longstanding association with the canonical literary tradition, undoubtedly enjoyed a vast popularity at the time, at least to the extent the novel did.

Marion Beaujean poses exactly this question when she asserts in her introduction:

Never before had the discrepancy been so great between the absolute height of intellectual achievements and the coarse items-of-commodity. The existence of a "popular novel" increasingly emerged into consciousness. Yet what did it look like? What facilitated its sudden success? What position did it take in the literary life of its time?¹⁸

Later on in her discussion, Beaujean rephrases the same question in a way that reveals her suppositions on the subject — (1) a question of "quantity": What was the reason for the production of such an enormous number of novels, particularly in the second half of the century? and (2) a question of "quality": Why precisely then, in contrast to previous periods, was the distinction between the "artistic" and the "trivial" novel so clearly and firmly drawn¹⁹? Indeed, Beaujean's conclusions relate more to the first part of the question, relying on the prevailing assumption that the growth of the "popular novel" was the reaction to increased demand on the part of a supposedly "newly emerging" reading public. Nevertheless, in so formulating her question, she also implies the substantial connection between these observations (and this is what I would like to make the main issue here): It is not accidental that the "popular novel" become a literary "fact" — or indeed a literary "problem" — exactly simultaneously with the canonization of the novel as an "artistic" literary genre par excellence (the *Kunstroman*); that is, the rejection of the novel as a work of "mass production" ran parallel to all the efforts to establish it as the supreme achievement of literary creation and to associate it with the great classical tradition.

Such a conclusion may be drawn from the histories of German literature, even when they do not make it explicit: The "history of the novel", as summarized above, is generally perceived in German literary history as a shift from a lower, popular phase to a more "developed", canonical one, as if the novel transformed itself from one "entity" — the "popular" work, to another — the "artistic". This "evolution", usually located in the last decades of the eighteenth century, is presented in literary histories in terms of a gap between the initial phase when the novel was merely a "negligible product for mass consumption" and the "final" one in which the "outstanding" novels appeared, turning this genre into an important "literary form". Here is, for instance, Stahl and Yuill's view of the novel's evolution:

18 My translation. "Nie zuvor schien die Diskrepanz zwischen der absoluten Höhe der Geistesschöpfung und der profanen Gebrauchsware größer zu sein. Die Existenz eines 'Trivialen Romans' war bewußt geworden. Wie aber sah er aus? Was bedingte seinen plötzlich einsetzenden Erfolg? Welche Stellung kam ihm im literarischen Leben seiner Zeit zu?" (Marion BEAUJEAN, *op. cit.*, p. 178).

19 *Ibid.*, p. m.

Already in the 17th century the sheer volume of novel production MAKES IT NECESSARY TO SELECT FOR DISCUSSION ONLY THESE WORKS OF TYPICAL SIGNIFICANCE OR OF INTRINSIC MERIT. With the widening of the reading public, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries there developed a vast literature of entertainment, largely in the form of novels and short stories. In any account of prose fiction of this period it must be born in mind that one is dealing with peaks and landmarks — at most with the contours of a vast landscape. It goes without saying that the celebrated works of any era are frequently surrounded in their historical context by a host of imitations, sequels and parodies.²⁰

However, on the basis of "socio-economic" histories of German literature, as well as judging from the history of its criticism, it appears that instead of such a linear description, it would be more appropriate to speak about a simultaneous process during which both categories were established at the same time and focused the attention of literary critics in relation — and, in fact, in opposition — to one another.

The literary field in Germany during the last decades of the eighteenth century is generally mapped out as bearing the mark of the following two dramatic changes: the unprecedented flourishing of the literary *market* and of "public reading habits" on the one hand, and the "autonomization" of literature, on the other. That is, broadly speaking, there are two (*seemingly*) contradictory tendencies regarding the function of literature as a cultural institution that are claimed to have held sway within literary life at the time: an increased adherence to the conception of "Art for Art's Sake" in terms of which literature is accessible to restricted circle of experts only, versus the tendency to enlarge the literary public, and to make literature a means of conveying, as well as shaping, a whole cultural (ideological and economic) system. Ultimately, the fierce intellectual combats over the issue of "the autonomy of literature" also served those who had interests in the literary market. Essentially, this polemic was part of the struggle for domination over the literary field.

The idea of "the autonomy of literature" is viewed as a "new" concept which became prevalent at this relatively late phase in the consolidation of modern German literature, as a *reaction* against its earlier phase when literature was judged to be "engaged" with the intellectual endeavours of the Enlightenment. The concept of "literary autonomy" endorses the *break* of literature with "life" in two respects: Christa Bürger²¹, for instance, discusses it mainly as opposing the "instrumental" ("didactic") conception of literature (i.e., as committed to reporting "reality", to moralizing, educating, etc.). In her opinion, the call for "literary autonomy" voiced the need to free literature from its bonds of social mission as a means of constructing a "large public

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life". Jochen Schulte-Sasse, on the other hand, discusses "literary autonomy" more as opposed to the "commercial" phase of literature, which is said to have developed strongly in response to the increasing "market principle". Whether literary autonomy be the reaction against making literature a "consumer product" yielding to market principles only, or a reaction to the "subjugation" of literature to "ideological ends", in the name of the unity and harmony of culture, the role played by "the public" became a crucial question in the struggles that took place in the literary arena. "The public", a vague and anonymous object in whose name the senior agents of the literary institution had acted up to this time, became, from the viewpoint of the promoters of literary autonomy, a "threat" against "pure literary quality", an impediment.

I shall not dwell on the reasons for this state of affairs. For the present context, it is important only to stress that the debate concerning "the public" and "public taste" was basically established as a convention of literary criticism, as the exclusive business of the rival factions in the field. To put it more boldly, this subject seems to have been *invented* to suit the critics' purposes in accordance with their *desired image of literature*, but with scant connection to a concrete "readership" or to its real nature.

2. /. "the public" and the idea of literary autonomy

The ideology of "literary autonomy" (i.e., the ethos of "freedom of aesthetic rules" and disregard of "public demands") was advocated by elitist circles (especially the "Weimar Classicists", and subsequently, the early Romantics) who set the tone in literary criticism at the end of the century. There was nothing essentially novel about these slogans as such: in canonical Baroque literature which relied on the classicist tradition (a literature undoubtedly familiar to eighteenth-century intellectuals), there were no criteria other than the rules of rhetoric and poetics of "the Ancients". "Public taste", in any event, was never considered a literary criterion. However, from the perspective of literary agents at the end of the century, this matter had a totally different significance: it was by no means a reliance on tradition; but conversely, an attempt to establish an *alternative* to the existing literary institution that continued to bear the mark of the Enlightenment. By the last decades of the eighteenth century, the modern literary system with all its institutions of distribution and control (e.g., journals and almanacs of various kinds, book fairs, libraries, etc.) was constituted in the name of the Enlightenment. Regardless of the question to what extent the literary milieu had indeed expanded, all these were certainly very effective at least in that they helped

20 E.L. STAHL and W.E. YUILL, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

21 *Op. cit.*

22 Jochen SCHULTE-SASSE, "The Concept of Literary Criticism in German Romanticism 1795-1810" in Peter Uwe HOHENDAHL, ed., *A History of German literary Criticism 1730-1980* (Lincoln and London, Nebraska University Press, 1988 [1985]), pp. 99-178.

to determine the *image* of literary life as "mass culture": literary criticism up to this point strongly endorsed the idea of "readership" ("die Leserschaft"), which meant (to the Enlightenment) a "homogeneous public that could be shaped by criticism and expand without limit"²³, no matter how restricted the number of "scholars, art lovers and educated individuals" this notion encompassed *de facto*²⁴.

A particular literary atmosphere prevailed in which the ratio between the properties of the literary product and "public demands" became a prominent issue: whoever had anything to win or lose in the literary arena expressed his stance in terms of "meeting" or else "shamelessly yielding to" public expectations. The long-standing position of Friederich Nicolai, the gigantic figure of the Enlightenment until the end of the century, in the broad field of production is a well-known example: His journal *Allgemeinen Deutsche Bibliothek*, which persisted for about forty years and had the largest distribution of all the journals, was intended to review (and thereby to expose to as large a public as possible) the *entire* prose production of the time, including

23 Klaus L. BERGHAHN, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

24 Furthermore, it appears that even for Enlightenment agents par excellence as far back as the 1740s, such as Johann Christoph Gottsched, the recognition of "the public" in the context of literary discourse derived more from the demands for a *model of criticism* than it constituted a rational response to the state of the readership as such. In his analysis of Gottsched's *Versuch einer Critischen Dichtkunst vor die Deutschen*, which is viewed as a pioneering work in the realm of German literary criticism, Berghahn indeed claims that Gottsched opened the way to discussing the notion of "taste" (hereby establishing a different standard for criticism, based on "common sense" and seemingly not dictated by the Classicist dictum). Berghahn also mentions that Gottsched dedicated a special chapter to the subject, a fact which was unprecedented in works on poetics until then. However, he shows that Gottsched's intentions were by no means "anti-elitist". To Gottsched, "taste" was something that every *poet* should have and which he was to deliver to his audience in order to "improve" it, but which could not be determined by the public. The poet "*müssen sich [...] niemals nach den Geschmache der Welt, das ist, des großen Haufens oder unverständigen Pöbels richten. [...] Er muß vielmehr suchen, den Geschmack seines Vaterlandes, seines Hofes, seiner Stadt zu läutern [...]*" (The poet "may [...] never take his direction from the taste of the world, that is, from the great mass of the uncomprehending mob [...]) The poet must instead try to purify the taste of his fatherland, of his court, of his city." Johann Christoph GOTTSCHED, "Veruch einer Critischen Dichtkunst vor die Deutschen" in *Schriften zur Literatur* (Stuttgart, Reclam, 1982 [1751]), pp. 12-196, cf. p. 73. Cited by Klaus L. BERGHAHN, "From Classicist to Classical Literary Criticism 1730-1806" in Peter Uwe HOHENDAHL, *A History of German literary Criticism 1730-1800* (Lincoln and London, Nebraska University Press, 1988). Originally published in German: *Geschichte der deutsche Literaturkritik* [Stuttgart, Metzler & Carl Ernst Poeschel, 1985], pp. 13-98). It follows from this, finally, that the notion of taste suited Gottsched's requirements in the realm of poetics. His need to establish the authority of "taste" (which, previously, was not legitimate in matters of literary judgment) discloses his motives as an interested literary party more than it reveals his supposedly ideological concern for "the public". Apparently, it was the invocation of canonical literary authority at the service of the intellectual project of the Enlightenment, which eventually enabled him to bypass at the same time the tyranny of the "formal literary rule" of generic forms and "aptum".

the "mediocre trash which many people still think has merit"²⁵. Yet, because of this "commercial" might Nicolai had to pay the price of contempt and devaluation of his intellectual achievements by those whose journals were hardly sold and could not survive more than a year or two. In defence of the rapid downfall of his own journal, *Die Horen*, Schiller turned the failure into an "intellectual profit": "Evidently, there are readers who prefer the watery soup of other journals to the heartier fare offered by the *Horen*."²⁶

This was a struggle for survival formulated in terms of "popularity". Nicolai was at pains to affirm that his strength as a publisher, journalist and novelist also had intellectual merit; he denounced Schiller's *Horen* for its "essays full of scholastic sophistry, presented in an impenetrable style, [and which] were ill suited" to its declared purpose as directed at the public mind²⁷. However, Goethe and Schiller denied him literary value and sentenced him to be omitted from the canon of German literature for the coming generations²⁸. Thus, "the public" indeed served as a decisive argument in literary combats. Yet to what extent did this argument reflect the actual weight of "the readership" in determining the state of affairs in the literary field? It seems that on neither side of the dispute, were the positions regarding the question of "public demand" and its role in shaping literary production based on rational conclusions concerning the actual readership of the time.

2.1.1. "the public" and the question of the literary market

The general impression, usually taken for a solid historical truth, is that in the late eighteenth century, literature enjoyed unprecedented prosperity and its status shifted dramatically: whereas in the first half of the century it is possible to cite complaints that people did not read books, the second half provides endless reproaches about exaggerated and tasteless public reading habits, now referred to as an obsession, a mania or an epidemic (*Lesesucht*, *Lesewut*, *Leseseuche*). The prevailing assumption was that everyone read books, that reading had become a "bare necessity" for *all* social strata (viewed, this time, as "cultural affliction")²⁹. The situation is most commonly described as follows: At this point even the advocates of the Enlightenment

25 Cited by Berghahn in *ibid.*, p. 68. According to the figures offered by Berghahn, this journal reviewed 80,000 books in forty years (1765-1805); from 1769 onwards, he argues, the journal could no longer "keep pace with a production rate of 1,300 new books a year" and could only review half of the new publications. Of course, the figures are still too approximate and one should draw no hasty conclusions. Note that no more than 2,000 copies a year of this most popular journal were circulated on average (*Ibid.*, p. 68).

26 In his letter to Cotta, Nicolai and Schiller's publisher, cited by Berghahn in *ibid.*, p. 67.

27 Friedrich NICOLAI, *Anhang zu Schillers Musen-Almanach für das Jahr 1797*. Cited by Berghahn in *op. cit.*, p. 65.

28 *Ibid.*, p. 63.

29 See Albert WARD, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

were disillusioned by its consequences which turned out to be more damaging than constructive, in that the Enlightenment brought about a flooding of the market at the expense of literary quality, and failed in its goal to "improve the public". And so, the argument goes, frustration led to a new literary wave which sought to restore the excellence of literature and to rescue it from the "populism" of the Enlightenment.

Yet it remains questionable to some scholars whether this gives an accurate picture of the state of the readership at the time. Helmuth Kiesel, following Rudolf Schenda, claims that "Empirical reconstruction of eighteenth-century readership is in fact impossible"³⁰. The partial figures about the different factors which bore on the nature and scope of the readership are often contradictory, according to the interests of the reporters — namely, writers and publishers of the period³¹. The assumption that the "reading mania" even reached the lower classes is particularly disputable. According to Kiesel and Schenda, this assumption is hardly reconcilable with the figures they have about the high rate of illiteracy at the time³². Even if they take their conclusions too far, it still casts doubt on the assumption that the popular novel spread throughout Germany simply as a direct response to an uncontrollable demand for reading matter. Whether as a result of questions concerning the market and the public's access to reading material (quantities of books, their

cost, means of distribution, etc.); or as a consequence of the enigma of the rate of literacy (let alone of the *motivation* to read) in various social strata, Helmuth Kiesel (adhering, even more extremely, to Rudolf Schenda's skepticism) firmly concludes, citing Schenda's own words, that "[t]he quantities of reading material consumed by the public was far smaller than critics of readership would suggest. The complaints about an overall reading mania and mass production of books are nothing but ideological fallacy."³³

In point of fact, it was the case that literary "delegates" sought (for different and *opposite* reasons) to establish the existence of a "broad public" and to account for its supposedly critical impact on the nature of literary production. Those whose activity was still associated with the Enlightenment continued to invoke the image of "literature for the people" to support their position; in this milieu, the "politically correct" stance was the call to (seemingly) deny the exclusive access of a restricted circle of "literary experts" — professors, students and journalists³⁴. Against this background, those who challenged the existing state of affairs in the field had no alternative other than to take the extreme opposite stance and to denounce what, up to this point, had endowed literary agents with their power as well as their weakness: "literature for the masses" now indicated inferiority. At the end of the century, the "correct stance" was to assert instead the exclusive nature of literature and to distinguish competent literary agents from the rest of "the public". The threat was not the public as such, but *the other producers who produced for the public*. Although the struggle manifested itself in terms of a critique of "monstrous" literary *consumption* (*Vielleserei*), it appears that the critics were troubled to no lesser extent by "excessive" *production* (*Vielschrei-berei*): Ward tells us that from 1785 no journal failed to point out the danger of the enormous number of publications, citing this statement from the *Deutsches Museum* (May 1776) in support: *"I cannot grasp the art of those three thousand book-producers who, in three years, were able to manufacture four thousand seven hundred and nine books."*³⁵

30 My translation. Helmuth KIESEL & Paul MUNCH, *Gesellschaft und Literatur im 18. Jahrhundert* (München, Beck'sche Elementarbücher, 1977), p. 159.

31 *Ibid.*, pp. 154-79.

32 Rudolf SCHENDA, *Volk ohne Buch: Studien zur Sozialgeschichte der populären Lesestoffe 1770-1910*. (München, Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1977 [1970]). As stated above, the figures are far from uniform and complete. Berghahn surveys several sources (*Ibid.*, p. 23): according to Schenda, in 1770, only 15% of the population (which he estimates at 25 million) could read and write. Kiesel is even more skeptical and puts it at only 1% of the population (relying, for instance, on Friederich Nicolai's report in *Das Leben und die Meinungen des Herrn Magister Sebalduß Nothanker* (see below), or on the figures reported by Friederich The Second in his *De la littérature allemande* (*On German Literature*, 1780) where he claims that out of 26 million Germans only 100,000 were capable of reading or engaging in any literary activity whatsoever (*op. cit.*, p. 159). Kiesel cites in detail a critical report of reading habits of different social strata published in 1782 by *Zuschauer in Bayern*. This report mockingly supports the suspicion that reading was by then restricted to the milieu of the "learned bourgeoisie", and that it was, on the whole, a rather borderline activity. Here are some brief extracts from this report: "What does the bourgeois read? He reads the newspaper of Munich or Augsburg. His son reads nothing! The 'gentle lady' reads a lot but ultimately remembers nothing. The only one who reads *everything* is the 'semi-learned'." (my translation). Of the reading habits of the aristocracy it says: *"Ich habe Bibliotheken angetroffen, wo man den Band nicht kennen konnte von Staub; und wieder andere, wo die trefflichsten Bücher verschmutzt, verkritzelt und ganze Blätter herausgerissen waren, weil man sie, wie man sagt, einst der jungen Herrschaft zum Spielzeug gegeben hatte."* ("I saw libraries in which it was impossible to identify the volumes due to the thick layers of dust which covered them; and yet other libraries, where the most excellent books were filthy, scratched, and with entire pages ripped apart, because, as they say, they were once given to the young Lords as toys." [*Ibid.*, pp. 157-9. My translation]).

33 My translation. *"Das Lesepublikum verbrauchte entschieden weniger Lesematerial, als die Kritiker des Lesens suggerieren wollen. Die Klagen über eine allgemeinen Lesesucht und über eine Massenproduktion von Büchern sind eine ideologische Fälschung."* (Helmuth KIESEL und Paul MUNCH, *op. cit.*, p. 161; Rudolf SCHENDA, *op. cit.*, p. 88).

34 Albert WARD, *op. cit.*, p. 59, citing J. SCHMIDT, *Geschichte des geistigen Lebens in Deutschland von Leibnitz bis auf Lessings Tod* (Leipzig, 1862-4), vol. 2.

35 Ward's translation. *"Ich verstehe nicht die Kunst derjenigen dreythausend deutschen Büchermacher, welche in drey Jahren viertausend siebenhundert und neun Bücher verfertigen konnten."* As in other matters, here too the figures often contradict each other, because of the miscellaneous factors that are taken into account (for instance, are these the figures of new titles only or do they include further editions of the same titles? What genres are accounted for? etc.), and also because of the questionable reliability of catalogues and other sources. Beaujean and Schulte-Sasse, and Ward following them, rely on Kaiser's book lexicon of 1836 which claims that between 1771-1780 only 413 titles were published, whereas according to the same source, in the last decade of the century, the number of titles'

The struggle involved "producers", yet was formulated by them in terms of a class struggle — those speaking on behalf of the elite versus those speaking in defence of "the people". In *Das Leben und die Meinungen des Herrn Magister Sebaldus Nothanker* Nicolai bitterly criticized:

This minuscule scholarly world comprises not more than 20,000 teachers and students; they so heartily despise their 20 million German-speaking fellows, that they don't even bother to write for them, and when they occasionally do so, their work [...] appeals to nobody. The twenty million uneducated accordingly repay the contempt of the learned with disregard, scarcely aware that the scholars exist in the world.³⁶

By contrast, Schiller expressed his reservation concerning the ideology of "Volkstümlichkeit" ("populist" ideology) so to speak (that is, the idea of "the people") as the moral dilemma of a poet who must choose either to go the *easy* or the *hard* way: "[The poet has a choice] either to accommodate himself exclusively to the intellectual capacities of the great mass, and renounce the approval of the educated class — or to transcend the huge gap that exists between these two classes by the very greatness of his art."

Such a position did not only influence the realm of criticism; it had some rather material aspects as well. I have already mentioned Ward's report on means of blocking access to "classical works": they were relatively expensive and were printed in small quantities³⁷. Ward also reports on Goethe's efforts to detach his novels from "*die unbekannte Menge*" ("the unknown masses"³⁸), and to ascribe them with a different image, as well as documenting his regret at *Werther's* popularity and his satisfaction, on the other hand, at his success in creating for his *Wilhelm Meister* an intimate readership of friends-admirers — artist and literature lovers³⁹. In the light of this dynamic, one must eventually revise Schulte-Sasse's claim that the Romantics' alienation was a direct response to their meager prospects for success in a flooded market⁴⁰. To invert this claim: It is more likely that in the last decades of the

century, the Romantics could only break into the literary arena by spurning the "broad public" from the outset. Schlegel voiced this stance very clearly:

Two completely different types of literature exist right now alongside one another. Each has its own public, and each proceeds without worrying about the other. They take no notice whatsoever of each other, except when they meet by chance, to express mutual contempt and derision — often not without a secret envy of one's popularity or the other's respectability.⁴¹

No doubt, such a position involves a serious dilemma: On the one hand, a small number of literary agents aspire to distinguish their activity, forcing themselves to defy the rules of the market. Yet on the other hand, their literary activity depended on the large-scale field of production: their power as a restricted elite ultimately derived from a *broad-based* recognition of their distinctiveness, which could be ascribed to them only against the background of standards of mass consumption. Therefore, this group was in particular need of establishing the impact of a large-scale field of production and consumption, yet establishing it as an *inferior* category. This elitist conduct needed, however, an ideological excuse; it had to be legitimized in the name of "pure literary virtues", in terms of which *quantity and accessibility were defined as the antithesis of "literariness"*. Schlegel's answer to Nicolai's lament cited above turns the "disastrous" situation into an ideal one: "[The readers] are always complaining that German authors write for such a small circle, and even sometimes just for themselves. That's how it should be. This is how German literature will gain more and more spirit and character."⁴² Along the same lines, Schlegel's *Briefüber den Roman*, where he crowns the novel as the "Romantic book", opens with the following attack on the "heaps of volumes" which he held to be an insult to the intellect:

With astonishment and inner anger, I have often seen your servant carry piles of volumes in to you. How can you touch with your hands these dirty volumes? And how can you allow their confused and crude phrases to enter through your eye to the sanctuary of your soul? To yield your imagination for hours to people with whom, face to face, you

amounted to 1700 (cited by Beaujean, *op. cit.*, p. 178, Ward, *op. cit.*, p. 64; see also their estimates of their sources).

36 My translation. "*Dieses gelehrte Völkchen von Lehrern und Lernenden, das etwa 20,000 Menschen stark ist, verachtet die übrigen 20 Millionen Menschen, die außer ihren deutsch reden, so herzlich, daß es sich nicht die Mühe nimmt, für sie zu schreiben; und wenn es zuweilen geschieht, so riecht das Werk gemeiniglich dermaßen nach der Lampe, daß es niemand anrühren will. Die zwanzig Millionen Ungelehrten vergelten den 20,000 Gelehrten Verachtung mit Vergessenheit; sie wissen kaum, daß die Gelehrten in der Welt sind.*" (F. NICOLAI in F. BRUGGEMAN ed., *Das Leben und die Meinungen* [Leipzig, Göschen, 1938 (1773)], p. 72), cited by BERGHAIN, *op. cit.*, pp. 23, 67).

37 A. WARD, *op. cit.*, p. 131.

38 *Ibid.*, p. 129.

39 *Ibid.*, pp. no-l.

40 *Op. cit.*, p. 102.

41 J. MINOR, ed., *Friedrich Schlegel 1794-1802: seine prosaischen Jugendschriften* (Vienna, 1882), vol. 1, p. 95: "*Ganz dicht neben einander existiren besonders jetzt zwey verschiedene Poesien neben einander, deren jede ihr eignes Publikum hat, und unbekümmert um die andre ihnen Gang für sich geht. Sie nehmen nicht die geringste Notiz von einander, außer, wenn sie zufällig aufeinander treffen, durch gegenseitige Verachtung und Spott; oft nicht ohne heimlichen Neid über die Popularität der einen oder die Vornehmigkeit der andern.*" (Cited by Schulte-Sasse, *op. cit.* p. 108).

42 "[Die Leser] jammern immer, die deutschen Autoren schreiben nur für einen so kleinen Kreis, ja oft nur für sich selbst untereinander. Das ist recht gut. Dadurch wird die deutsche Literatur immer mehr Geist und Charakter bekommen." F. SCHLEGEL in *Friedrich Schlegel's "Lucinde" and the "Fragments"* (Minneapolis, Minnesot University Press, 1971), p. 201. Cited by Schulte-Sasse, *op. cit.*, p. 104; A. WARD, *op. cit.*, p. 129.

would be ashamed to exchange even a few words? It serves no purpose but to kill time and to spoil your imagination. You have read almost all the bad books from Fielding to Lafontaine. Ask yourself what you profit by it. Your memory scorns this vulgar stuff which had become a necessity through an unfortunate habit of your youth [...]"⁴³

Similarly, when Albert Ward (1974) reports on the tremendous success of the prolific writer, August Heinrich Lafontaine, whose literary production amounted to no less than 160 volumes, he cannot avoid taking the scornful point of view of Lafontaine's contemporary rivals. Without hesitation, he relies on the biased assumption that Lafontaine's success resulted directly from his "*yielding to the lowest common denominator of public taste*", voicing the most common clichés concerning the supposedly innate ratio between the product's "popularity" and its properties, overlooking the fact that these are often rather diverse and mingled:

From 1800 onwards Lafontaine lived by his pen alone, producing an endless stream of popular novels, which combined the family motifs and the moralizing tone of the Rationalistic novel, the adventurous twists of the travel novel, the eroticism of the lower type of fiction and the emotional outbursts of the sentimental novel, and winning for himself a place on the book-shelves of every reading woman and many reading men in Germany.⁴⁴

However, probably without noticing, he lays bare the tactics which Lafontaine's competitors used to abuse his reputation as a writer, in their efforts to block his admission into the increasingly restricted literary field of their time:

From his more "literary" colleagues, Tieck and Menzel, Lafontaine earned nothing but mockery and contempt; A. W. Schlegel had indeed praised his early novels as amongst the best Germany could show, but he changed his opinion in later years and joined in his colleagues' derision of Lafontaine, *der Modeerzähler* ("fashionable writer").⁴⁵

43 "Mit Erstaunen und mit innerem Grimm habe ich oft den Diener die Haufen zu Ihnen hereintragen sehn. Wie mögen Sie nur mit Ihren Händen die schmutzigen Bände berühren? — Und wie können Sie den verworrenen, ungebildeten Redensarten den Eingang durch Ihr Auge in das Heiligtum der Seele verstaten? — Stundenlang Ihre Phantasie an Menschen hingeben, mit denen von Angesicht zu Angesicht nur wenige Worten zu wechseln Sie sich schämen würden? — Es frommt wahrlich zu nichts, als nur die Zeit zu töten und die Imagination zu verderben! Fast alle schlechten Bücher haben Sie gelesen von Fielding bis zu La Fontaine. Fragen Sie sich selbst, was Sie davon gehabt haben. Ihr Gedächtnis selbst verschmähst das unedle Zeug, was eine fatale Jugendgewohnheit Ihnen zum Bedürfnis macht [...]" (F. SCHLEGEL in "Brief über den Roman" [1800] in *Schriften zur Literatur* [München, Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, Athenäum, 1972], pp. 312-3. Translated and cited by Behler and Struc, eds., in Friedrich SCHLEGEL, *Dialogue on Poetry, and Literary Aphorisms* [University Park & London, Pennsylvania University Press, 1968], p. 95).

44 A. WARD, *op. cit.*, p. 145.

45 *Ibid.*, *loc. cit.*

At the end of the century, the idea of an inverse ratio between literary quality and "public taste" was a rather established one, and was even rationalized by literary theory. It represented the struggle for a mandate to dictate the legitimate criteria for literary evaluation, or more precisely, it was a struggle to restrict the number of agents authorized to do so. Indeed, the advocates of "literary autonomy" still invoked the support of the classical canon, yet they were ultimately fairly flexible regarding its formal categories, and focused mainly on formulating a new doctrine, that of the exclusiveness of literary competence. The prime authority was now in the hands of the poet. Accordingly, the criteria became obscure, mysteriously revealed only to a few endowed with individual talent. Apparently, the only solid criteria for literary evaluation offered by this doctrine were *incongruity with the market principle, and the quality of being incomprehensible to a wide audience*. In Schlegel's theory, such incongruity (and more so, enigma) is built-in as an *innate property of "genuine" literary production*, ultimately becoming its *differentia specifica*: "Everyday life — economy — is the necessary supplement of all characters who aren't absolutely universal. Often talent and education are lost entirely in this encompassing element."⁴⁶ And in a letter to his brother, August Schlegel, dating from 1791, he presents the whole theory in a nutshell: "The stronger the bonds [of the secret art of poetry] to the innate essence of those few for whom it exists, the better it fulfills its destination and the lesser the possibility that it suits the taste of the people."⁴⁷

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46 My translation. Cited by J. Schulte-Sasse in *op. cit.*, pp. 101-2. "*Alltäglichkeit, Ökonomie ist das notwendige Supplement aller nicht schlechthin universellen Naturen. Oft verliert sich das Talent und die Bildung ganz in diesem umgebenden Element.*" (F. SCHLEGEL in Hans EICHNER, ed., *Kritische Ausgabe 2* [München, Paderborn und Wien, Verlag Ferdinand Schöningh; Zürich, Thomas Verlag, 1967], p. 243).

47 My translation. "*Je inniger diese [die geheime Dichtkunst] mit der Eigentümlichkeit der wenigen, von denen und für die sie ward, verkettet ist, je mehr erfüllt sie ihre Bestimmung und je mehr ist sie vielleicht dem Volke ungenießbar.*" (O. FAMBACH, ed., *Der Aufstieg zur Klassik in der Kritik der Zeit [...]. Ein Jahrhundert deutscher Literaturkritik 1750-1850* [Berlin, Akademie Verlag, 1959], vol.3, p.470).