Luise, Queen of Prussia from 1797 until her death in 1810 and wife of Fried- 
rich Wilhelm III, remains to this day Prussia’s most popular and beloved 
queen.1 Her beauty and grace were legendary and her relationship with her 
husband and family – founded, as it appeared to be, on middle-class domestic 
values – became a model and inspiration for the self-confident bourgeoisie 
of Berlin and of Prussia in general. Luise herself was held aloft as a model of 
German femininity and, upon her death, eulogized as an angel and martyr for 
the Prussian and German cause. Decades after her death, Luise remained a 
potent symbol of idealized German femininity, especially within the context 
of girls’ education in Prussia. Her biography, having entered the realm of my-
thology even during her lifetime, was instrumentalized as a pedagogical tool 
for conveying lessons about German history and the role of girls and women 
in German culture to the young women of the Kaiserreich.

Wulf Wülfing has written of the Luisenkult in the nineteenth century, an 
appropriate term for the adoration of Luise that was well established dur-
ing her lifetime and grew after her death. Historical fiction, biography, and 
popular works that appeared to combine these two genres all celebrated the 
deceased queen as the paragon of female German virtue. Her image was ubiq-
uitous, appearing in books, magazines, and pamphlets, designed to be cut or 
torn out and displayed in the home (de Bruyn 74–81). Writers such as Novalis 
(Glaube und Liebe oder der König und die Königin, 1798) and Kleist (Prinz-
nessin Natalie in Prinz Friedrich von Homburg, 1810; and «An die Königin 
von Preussen [zum 10. März 1810]) praised her as the pinnacle of German 
femininity and the symbol of national hope and renewal. Poets of the Wars of 
Liberation, especially Theodor Körner, dedicated works to her, as well. From 
these beginnings, the Luisenkult developed into a foundational national myth 
and Luise herself was elevated to the status of Prussian saint.

This essay builds upon the Luise research of Wülfing and Brent Petersen, as 
well as the work of essayist and novelist Günter de Bruyn. Peterson’s recent 
work, History, Fiction, and Germany: Writing the Nineteenth-Century Na-
tion, emphasizes the role Luise stories played in the construction of a German
national narrative in the nineteenth century, particularly in the narrativization of the Prussian loss to Napoleon at Auerstadt und Jena. Günter de Bruyn has written eloquently of Luise’s continued popularity among Germans as a symbol of both the sorrow of the nineteenth century and the emergence of the German nation under the Hohenzollern dynasty. This essay is indebted Wülfing and Petersen inasmuch as we are all concerned less with chronicling the life and times of the real Queen Luise than with exploring the ways in which the myth of Queen Luise contributed to the construction of a coherent, top-down, centralizing, Prussian narrative of German national identity.

In what follows, I focus on a representative selection of Luise stories written for girls and young women at the end of the nineteenth century. The novels by Friedrich Adami, Brigitte Augusti, Elisabeth Halden, and Marie von Felseneck examined here represent a large body of Luise literature written for «die deutsche Jugend,» «das deutsche Volk,» or «deutsche Mädchen» that abounded during the reign of King/Emperor Wilhelm I. These popular biographies and historical novels reproduce many of the themes common to all treatments of Luise during the nineteenth century: Luise as a unifying element on the rocky path of nation-building (Wülfing), Luise as emblematic of bourgeois traits that came to be associated with the bourgeoisie and, thus, with Germany (Peterson); Luise as the paragon of self-sacrificing feminine virtue. What distinguishes these narratives for youth, however, is how they tell a particular story of a woman’s (Luise’s) role in German history and culture as a kind of primer not only in a teleological Prussian interpretation of German history, but also in the realization of a particularly feminine German way of being. In the works for girls analyzed here, Luise represents the ideal German woman, and her story – the narrativized version of her life and marriage to Friedrich Wilhelm III, told in the guise of historical narrative or fairy tale – serves to draw young women readers into an emotional relationship with the new national entity known as Germany.

The mythologizing and fictionalizing of Luise’s biography during the course of the nineteenth century, documented by Heinz Ohff, Peterson, and Wülfing, takes on a particular flavor in works written for young women. Augusti, Halden, Friedrich Adami, along with other youth literature authors such as Marie Luise Felseneck, and Ferdinand Schmidt, and popular authors such as Luise Mühlbach, draw Luise close to their readers and portray her as a middle-class girl such as themselves, in the service of bringing their young readers into the emotional family of German national history. Luise narratives, as Wülfing has pointed out, tell and re-tell certain canonical stories from Luise’s life, which in turn function as stations of the cross for German nationalists. The novels for young women examined here adhere to this model of
telling Luise stories and can be considered paradigmatic for the genre. One of these canonical stories involves Luise inviting «anständige Fremde» and local citizens to a ball at their country estate near Potsdam, Paretz, without regard for nobility of birth. Friedrich Adami writes,

So wurde das stille Paretz am Tage seines Erntekranzes mehr und mehr ein anziehender Wallfahrtsort für Nah und Fern. Eine Stadt von Buden erbaute sich zu dem Volksfeste in dem kleinen Dorfe. (... ) Und wie in Berlin auf dem Weihnachtsmarkt, so erheint Luise in Paretz auf dem Jahrmarkt mitten in dem fröhlichen Gedränge. (57)

Luise’s presence at the country festival and in Berlin serves to unite a broad range of Prussian subjects. Instead of projecting royal court reserve, Luise, according to her legend, embodied bourgeois values and national inclusion.

In these narratives for young women, Luise’s national significance as symbol *par excellence* lies in her ability to model and encourage a specific emotional tie to the cultural and political nation of Germany, a tie that can only be felt, lived, and realized by women alone. I suggest that, whereas young men of the middle classes enjoyed multiple avenues of access to the public sphere and thus multiple avenues of national(ist) expression – education, civil service, the military, party politics, and industry – young women’s national experience was qualitatively different. Ernest Gellner describes the secret of nationalism as the pervasiveness of high culture, i.e., a state of affairs which requires national education (34). Keeping with the widely held belief, in the nineteenth century, that women *were* and men *did*, the nationalism toward which women were educated encouraged a different experience and articulation of nationalism than that of young men. Specifically, girls were taught to form romantic, emotional ties to the state, its monarchs, and its foundational myths.

These fictionalized biographies of the queen and her circle served also as comportment manuals of a sort, demonstrating to their young female readers the proper attitude and emotional stance toward family, nation, literature and culture, and matters of the heart. Luise’s life in these fictional works reflected the dominant pedagogical discourse on the national education of young women during the Wilhelmine era, as well. Authors and educators alike viewed the mythic story of Luise’s life as a narrative through which they could model and inculcate a nationally identified German femininity in young women of the Wilhelmine era. Bernhard Rogge wrote in his forward to a popular biography of Luise commissioned from him in 1910 by the pedagogical *Pestalozzi-Verband* that his work did not aspire to academic status, nor to earnestly treat the political movements with which Luise was aligned during her life. Rather, he writes:
In Rücksicht auf den von dem Pestalozzi-Verein mir vorgezeichneten Zweck der Schrift bin ich vor allem bestrebt gewesen, diejenigen Züge an dem Lebensbilde der Königin hervorzuheben, in denen sie als Königin, Gattin, Mutter und deutsche Frau auch für unsere Zeit als leuchtendes Vorbild vor uns steht, als ein Vorbild, an dem das heutige Geschlecht, und insbesondere die heutige Jugend echte Pflichttreue lernen und mit vaterländischer Begeisterung sich erfüllen lassen kann. (8)

Rogge’s biography was no exception to the general treatment of Luise in historical fiction and popular biographies written for young women at the end of the nineteenth century. These works paint Luise as the ideal bourgeois woman. Her attitude toward family and nation in these stories reflects more the prevailing bourgeois attitudes than it does any biographically factual information about Luise’s personal life. Additionally, Luise’s experiences with German literature reflects the importance the Prussian middle class placed upon it as a vehicle for the proper national(ist) education of young women.

Luise’s life was an ideal conduit for teaching young women about the emotional nationalism that characterized their role in the public sphere of the nation. Her short life spanned the era from the coronation of the last two emperors of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation (Leopold II, 1790 and Franz II, 1792) to Napoleon’s domination of Europe. After her death, Friedrich Wilhelm III kept the memory of Luise and her symbolic connection to the cause of Prussian glory alive through the awarding of the Iron Cross – established in her name in 1813 – for service in the Wars of Liberation. Decades later, Prussian enthusiasts were eager to interpret Wilhelm’s defeat of the French at Versailles as revenge for the suffering and humiliation his mother, Luise, had endured under Napoleonic occupation. Biographers, without exception, draw the reader’s attention to this intimate relationship between Luise’s life and times and the political fate of Germany. Luise Mühlbach made this connection explicit when she has Luise say, in *Napoleon und Königin Luise* (1863), «Denn in meinen Schmerzen und in meiner Liebe bin ich jetzt die Repräsentantin Deutschlands, und mich angreifen und verlästern, heißt alle deutschen Frauen, alle deutschen Mütter beschimpfen und verlästern» (171). Her role as wife, mother, and queen provides a unique example in modern German history of the intertwining of an individual female life and the politics and experience of nation. By following her through her supposedly bucolic childhood, her marriage to Crown Prince (later Friedrich Wilhelm III), their coronation, their exile at the hands of Napoleon, and their return to Berlin shortly before her death, young readers were introduced to the statesmen, the landscape, and the political and military history of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Germany.
During the last third of the nineteenth century, the reinvigorated *Luisenkult* held the deceased queen aloft as the ideal combination of nobility and bourgeoisie, as the model wife and mother, and as the embodiment of an immortal Prussian-German spirit. Luise comes to represent the core values of the German Empire under her son Wilhelm I: bourgeois domestic harmony as the foundation and incubator of the state; a pervasive private, as well as public, sense of national purpose and duty, and an idealized notion of the German woman as the guarantor of the progress of German civilization. Her early death lends a romantic, fated aspect to her story and the entire Luise narrative is conjoined with the persistent threat from Napoleon’s France, a threat – if only perceived – that continued to inform the construction of German national identity throughout the nineteenth century. Told and retold, Luise’s life from her earliest days was memorialized – and fictionalized – as a lesson in history and femininity for Germany’s young women.

Ute Frevert’s history of the emergence of a militantly biological, as well as nationalistic, gender discourse in nineteenth-century Germany in *Mann und Weib, und Weib und Mann* centers the *Frauenfrage* of the nineteenth century squarely within the debates about the nature and mission of the state and thus provides a useful framework for any discussion of a public female figure such as Luise. Frevert, in a thorough discussion of encyclopedic entries on the subject of men, women, and gender in the nineteenth century, writes:

> Die höchste Stufe der Kultur gilt dann als erklommen, wenn Frauen sich, von ihren Männern geliebt und geachtet, ausschließlich auf das ‹häusliche oder Familienleben› konzentrieren dürfen und damit die ‹heiligste, festeste Grundlage menschlicher und bürgerlicher Tugend und Glückseligkeit› sichern. Jene Stufe, daran lassen die Lexikonautoren des 19. Jahrhunderts keinen Zweifel, ist in ihrem, im bürgerlichen Zeitalter erreicht, und zwar vor allen anderen Ländern in Deutschland. (39)

The narrativization of Luise’s life illustrates the convergence of the conservative gender ideology of the Wilhelminian era with the nation-building project that reached its culmination at the same time. Karin Hausen, in her 1976 article «Die Polarisierung der ‹Geschlechtscharaktere›» discusses the role of the family as the socializing unit involved in passing the gendered division of labor and associated norms down to the next generation, and Luise as daughter and mother illustrates this phenomenon, as well. By examining late-nineteenth-century biographies and historical fiction that deal generally with the facts of Queen Luise’s life and paying close attention to how these largely fictional works portrayed Luise’s role in her family – most significantly, her devotion to her husband – and her literary activity (her reading and letter writing), I hope to show that Luise’s domestication in fiction corresponded to a
nationalist gender ideology being deployed in the education of young women that held that domestic activity, especially reading, could in itself constitute patriotic or nationalist involvement on the part of young women.\textsuperscript{2}

In novels and biographies as well as schoolbooks, authors and pedagogues sought to develop a personal connection between the höhere Töchter of the late nineteenth century and the historical Luise. This reflects both the strength of the Luise cult in the Wilhelminian era and the prevailing understanding of how girls and women learned. Nineteenth-century pedagogues insisted that girls and women learned best – especially in subjects such as literature, history, and religion – if they could form an emotional attachment to individual human figures who feature predominantly in the lessons.\textsuperscript{3} The \textit{Preußischer Verein für öffentliche höhere Mädchenschulen} stated in its \textit{Allgemeiner Lehrplan} for 1888

\begin{quote}
\end{quote}

In the case of history, teachers suggested, it was best to impress upon girls the courage and virtue of leaders and not insist too much upon the rote memorization of dates, common practice in \textit{Gymnasia} and höhere Bürgerschulen for boys. By appealing to female emotions, school lessons would insure the development of a kind of emotional nationalism in their pupils – gender appropriate, inward-directed identification with the nation. Stories from Luise’s life, therefore, were common in school readers for girls’ schools and in popular histories marketed to women.

Those life circumstances that Luise had in common with young female Wilhelminian readers of her life – sex, gender role, nationality, mother tongue – inform the narration of her life story in novels such as Elisabeth Halden’s \textit{Königin Luise} (1893) and Brigitte Augusti’s \textit{Die Erben von Scharfeneck} (1889) far more than her nobility and status as queen. Her childhood, teenage years, and her status as bride, wife, and mother represent stations in female development as it was understood in the nineteenth century and with which most of her readers could identify. The similarities between Princess Luise’s childhood and that of the average middle-class höhere Töchter of the late nineteenth century were not that great. However, by highlighting the struggles of Luise’s youth – both financial and emotional – authors of works for young women successfully drew their readers into a familiar world. The house of Mecklenburg-Strelitz experienced the deaths of small children and of birthing moth-
«Von dir hätte ich nur lernen können»

ers, financial stability followed by periods of financial woe, and the tumult of the French Revolution and the war Friedrich Wilhelm II waged against the French Republic in defense of absolutism. Seventy or eighty years later, the young women reading about the remarkable Queen Luise would have perhaps also experienced illness and death, and the memory—and wounds—of recent wars against Denmark, Austria, and France would certainly have left their mark.

Luise’s story is frequently written much like a fairy tale. She is a beautiful girl whose mother dies when she is six years old. Felseneck writes,

So verflossen Prinzessin Luise’s erste Jugendjahre in ungetrübter Seligkeit, im Paradies der Kindheit. Doch plötzlich umwölkte sich dieser heitere Himmel, dunkle Wolken, Krankheit genannt, zogen herein. Noch ahnte die fürstliche, glückliche Familie nicht, wie nahe der Todesengel über ihrem Hause schwabte, als auch schon ohne eigentliche Krankheit die treu sorgende Mutter ihren Kindern entrissen ward.

The fairy tale continues with Luise and her siblings being left in the care of her grandmother, away from their bereaved father. Prinzessin Georg, the grandmother, is no ogre and Luise’s story is, for a while, happy. She meets Friedrich Wilhelm and they fall in love at first sight. Ferdinand Schmidt recounts the popular story that Friedrich Wilhelm proclaimed «Die, oder keine sonst auf Erden,» when he saw her. Their marriage, readers learn, was not a court alliance, but a heartfelt bond. Readers learn «daß der König, von allen politischen Erwägungen, wie sich solche bei Heiratsfragen an Höfen einzudrängen pflegen, absehend, ja und Amen zu dem Herzensbunde seiner Kinder gesagt habe» (Schmidt 49). As with the girls in popular tales, Luise is beautiful because she is good, is good because she is beautiful, and earns the rewards that goodness brings her way.

Alongside this fairy-tale narrative of Luise’s life, however, these biographies and historical novels emphasize the similarities between the young female ideal readers and the deceased queen. This perceived similarity constitutes this literature’s most significant aspect. In nineteenth-century novels and biographies, Luise, the queen, takes on the arguably more significant role of Luise, the German woman, much like any other. Her domestic roles as wife and mother, her devotion to Friedrich Wilhelm III and her children, her female friendships, and her delight in a good party overshadow, in most fictional and biographical accounts of her life, her official duties as queen and representative of the Prussian state.

Significant for my analysis of Luise as historical object lesson and pedagogical model is the function of literature and history in the mythologized
portrayal of Luise’s life. Königin Luise. Ein Lebens-Bild nach authentischen Quellen bearbeitet. Der deutschen Jugend gewidmet, a historical novel by Marie von Felseneck, provides a typical example of the tendency common to both biographical and fictional works of reinforcing the lessons Luise’s life illustrates with recourse to stories and methodologies already familiar to young female readers. Felseneck’s novel contains a theme that first appears in Jean Paul’s eulogy to Luise, «Schmerzlich-tröstenden Erinnerungen an den neunzehnten Julius 1810,» and finds its way into various fictional accounts of Luise’s life, including Brigitte Augusti’s Die Erben von Scharfeneck. Felseneck writes Luise’s christening as an episode from the fairy tale Sleeping Beauty, where Luise is the infant princess and elves bestow upon her gifts of royalty, nobility of spirit, charm, beauty, and intelligence. A grim and vengeful elf, however, announces to the christening party that the young princess will suffer as no other woman has suffered. «‹Du sollst leiden. Schon früh wird der Kelch der Schmerzen an Deine jungen Lippen gesetzt, früh schon sollst Du der Erde Leid und Weh erfahren,› so sprach die dunkle Gestalt. Das Antlitz des Kindleins in der Wiege verdüsterte sich, der helle Glanz von der reinen Stirn verschwand, wie ein dunkler Schleier senkte es sich über das Antlitz der Prinzessin» (Felseneck 4). The last elf cannot, of course, save Luise from this fate but gives her instead tears, which will be her comfort and her salvation. Jean Paul had referred to «den Blumenkranz der Schönheit, den Myrtenkranz der Ehe, die Krone eines Königs, den Lorbeer- und Eichenkranz deutscher Vaterlandsliebe, und auch eine Dornenkrone» that Fate lays in her cradle at her birth, and Augusti avails herself of the same imagery in her historical novel, when she has a blind woman «read» Luise’s future and «see» all the crowns she will wear. Felseneck’s deliberate analogy to Sleeping Beauty typifies Luise texts in an important respect: although she dwells on the many crowns that Luise will wear as queen and Landesmutter, her characterization of the fate that awaits Luise in terms of the fairy tale reinforces the powerlessness of her historical and individual position as a woman of her estate. Here a real German woman who suffered for her people exists in the guise of the fairy-tale damsel in distress with whom the young readers of these books would have been only too familiar. Having identified with the powerlessness of the female position, these girls perhaps found Luise’s ultimate significance as national symbol of filial love and bourgeois respectability that much more convincing and empowering. Luise’s own education – slapdash and sporadic as it appears to have been according to twentieth- and twenty-first century historians – as represented in popular literature about her life bears a close resemblance to the pedagogical methods and goals of girls’ education in late-nineteenth-century Prussia.
Offered (Ohff 39). Ferdinand Schmidt, author of many nineteenth-century historical novels and history books for children and youth, describes Luise’s education under her governess Fräulein von Gelieux in Königin Luise. Ein Lebensbild:


Schmidt establishes early on in his narrative Luise’s essential similarity to the ideal middle-class girl who was his intended reader. Luise in her youth learned the lessons of German history exactly as the readers of Schmidt’s story are learning theirs: through immersion in the stories of the German past. In this particular moment in the story, Fräulein von Gelieux and Luise are at the top of the Strassburg Münster and the governess is recounting to Luise tales of the Germanic tribes from that area. Depicting Luise as a pupil deemphasises the class differences between her and his readers, and Schmidt is keen to establish these commonalities. He encourages identification with Luise with an eye to the moral and patriotic education of his readers. As they learn to see Luise as a girl not so very different from themselves, the young women reading about her life at the end of the nineteenth century learn that not only their domestic attitude, their love toward the family that served as the foundation of the state, served as their participation in the progress of German culture and history, but also that their attitude towards books, stories, and legends about the German past formed a crucial component of their limited participation in nationalist discourse. Their very knowledge of Germanic sagas, as well as the legend of Friedrich the Great, made them a part of the bourgeois, nationalist German culture their respectability came to represent.

As with most historical narrative presented didactically to young women in the Wilhelminian period, these fictional stories of Luise’s life consistently contain plot and structural elements that aim to make an emotional connection between the historical subject matter – in this case Luise – and the young readers. Idolization and emulation are quite obviously the dual goals of this didactic fiction. As with Novalis’ proclamations on the restorative value of
the new young monarchs at the beginning of the century (Hardenberg 49–50), these books suggested that their young female readership would contribute to national renewal and strength at the end of the nineteenth century by properly absorbing the lessons of Queen Luise’s life and death. These texts encouraged identification with the queen and her story in several ways. First and foremost, the authors or publishers of the books suggested that the elevation of the queen’s memory and appreciation of her symbolic value provided valuable lessons for their late-nineteenth-century readers. Ferdinand Hirt & Sohn, publishers of Augusti’s *An deutschem Herd* series, wrote in their introductory comments to the final volume of the work:

Für jeden Preußen, wie jede Deutschen, gilt aber jedenfalls als die idealste Gestalt aus jenen Tagen tiefster Erniedrigung und höchster Erhebung das Bild der Königin Luise. Darum ist auch die verehrte Mutter unseres heimgegangenen Kaisers Wilhelm besonders in den Vordergrund gestellt worden, und ihr gehört eignetlich dieses Buch zu. Wir glauben, daß die […] Leser desselben der Verfasserin zu hohem Danke verpflichtet sein werden dafür, daß sie das Kulturbild aus sieben Jahrhunderten, wie es die Sammlung *An deutschem Herd* darbietet, abschließen läßt mit der bevorzugten Darstellung des edelsten Frauencharakters den die deutsche Geschichte kennt. (Augusti 5)

As the comments from Rogge above also make clear, Luise’s life served as a shining example of ideal feminine behavior for readers one hundred years after her death.

Secondly, and less directly, Luise’s fairy-tale story about a good girl who grows up to be queen fit perfectly into an established pattern of reading tales of femininity that rewarded noble behavior and punished bad girls and women for their selfishness or greed. Ferdinand Schmidt, in his popular biography of Luise, describes her in language that would not be out of place in a retelling of *Sleeping Beauty* or *Cinderella*: «Das Haupt der Prinzessin war von den schönsten bloden Locken umwallt, ihre großen blauen Augen hatten einen zauberischen Glanz, ihr Angesicht, belebt von dem Ausdruck der Empfindungen, wie andächtiges und bewunderndes Schauen sie erzeugen, leuchtete wie das Angesicht eines Engels; wer sie sah, vermochte seine Blicke nicht leicht von ihr abzuwenden» (9). Fairy tales and legends, from a very early age an integral part of a young middle-class girl’s reading instruction and cultural education, provided fertile ground for stories like Luise’s to take root and grow.

A further narrative tool common to these nineteenth-century works, and one especially suited to facilitate further reader identification, was the introduction into Luise’s biography of a fictional young female character whose situation in life more closely paralleled that of the reader than did Luise’s.
Since most readers were not young women of the nobility, intense identification with Luise would perhaps remain in the realm of fantasy. By introducing a bourgeois girl into Luise’s circle of acquaintances, authors provided an additional possibility for reader identification, as well as a model for the relationship between bourgeoisie and nobility, a queen and her subjects, and by extension, the nation of Prussia and the readers of these texts. In her relationship with Luise, this identificatory character allows the reader to see the qualities that make Luise both an exemplary queen and an extraordinary woman. These fictional companions to Luise and their stories allow readers to glimpse the queen as she articulated her faith in Prussia and its leaders, as she engaged with her subjects, and as she devoted herself in her private time to German literature. Johanna and Gabriele, Luise’s fictional companions in novels by Elisabeth Halden and Brigitte Augusti, both learn to be more like Luise through observing her actions and absorbing the lessons of her life. By reading what she reads, by learning to feel what she feels, these girls (and, the narrative suggests, the readers, as well) can achieve exemplary German womanhood and serve, as did Luise, as the bond between the state, its cultural production, and its people. These fictional relationships with Luise also serve to highlight the seemingly eternal nature of the qualities that define German womanhood: piety, obedience, love of country, and a devotion to German culture.

Luise’s fictional companions mirror her self-sacrifice in their own lives, but also and perhaps more importantly, the virtues of nuclear family life and Nestwärme. They watch their sweethearts and fathers go off to war, and perhaps lose them to a hero’s death. They mourn the death of their queen and identify with her sacrifice, as does Gabriele in Augusti’s Die Erben von Scharfeneck when she returns from her visit to the queen’s mausoleum in Charlottenburg, holding up Luise’s nobility as an example to endure any hardship life might have in store for her: «O meine Luise,» sagte sie leise, «deinem Vorbilde bin ich nicht gefolgt, als ich mein Herz dem Haß und Rachedurst öffnete; vor dir hätte ich nur lernen können, zu dulden und zu tragen, zu vergeben und zu hoffen, und alles dem gerechten Richter anheimzustellen» (239). By following Gabriele’s example, even those readers who do not receive a share of the attention and glory reserved for the men in their families and community in times of national need or crisis are able to integrate their own experiences and perceptions into what was generally perceived as history, i.e., the lives and actions of statesmen, kings, and warriors.

Die Erben von Scharfeneck, the final volume of Brigitte Augusti’s series of historical novels for young women, An deutschem Herd, chronicles the story of Gabriele von Fiedler, a friend of Luise’s who becomes a lady in waiting.
at her court. Elisabeth Halden’s Königin Luise takes up the story of young Johanna, a bourgeois daughter, as she first learns to admire the queen from a distance and, later, becomes her companion and, primarily, her reader. These two novels weave together the themes of Luise’s biography – her primary duty to her family, her fairy-tale exemplarity, and her role as nationalist symbol and representative of Prussia’s hope for the future – so that it functions both as German history and as a description of the girl next door. By introducing a young woman much like the target audience of their fiction into Luise’s life story, Augusti and Halden show how the average girl can become more and more like the German feminine ideal not only by aspiring to be like Luise but by adopting the emotional attachment to the state, its representatives, and its welfare exhibited by the middle-class characters that populate these Luise stories and spend time at the queen’s side. As in the design of the history curriculum in the Töchterschule, these stories show young middle-class women forming affective bonds with historical figures, making history come alive through emotional understanding; rather than bookish historical learning.

Of interest in these Luise stories and their intended reception is Luise’s own relationship to her position and, in turn, how the young readers of these texts relate to Luise’s story as a possible variation of their own. Following the popular consensus regarding the teaching of history to young women and girls, authors of Luise stories employ a combination of politics, romance, legend, and national myth to attract the reader’s attention to the queen and keep it fixed on the story of developing German nationhood.

Familial and emotional connections between women and the state were, of course, not confined to women like Luise who actually married the representative of the state, but rather were encouraged by the intertwining pedagogical and social discourses of politics, romance, history, legend, and nation. Schools, churches, and the family library all cooperated in creating and reinforcing a pattern of identification with and affection for the German nation and an understanding of a woman’s symbolic and emotional role in it. By directing the attention of women and girls towards the personalities, character traits, and physical descriptions of national heroes and leaders, literature and formal education created an atmosphere in which a woman was expected to respond emotionally rather than rationally or politically to events of national importance.

In Halden’s Königin Luise (1893), the girl Johanna, is Luise’s fictitious companion, and through her eyes Halden’s readers are granted an intimate glimpse into the life of the queen. A young woman from a bourgeois household that has fallen upon hard times after the death of her father, Johanna becomes through good fortune and inner worth Queen Luise’s official reader.
In her relationship with Johanna, Luise is actively engaged in furthering her own cultural education, in passing judgment on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century German authors and their works, and in incorporating the lessons and inspirations of German literature into her life. Halden’s text thus explores not only the details of Luise’s family life that were to serve as inspiration for generations of German women, but also suggests the level of Luise’s literary engagement and intellectual activity.

This configuration is significant for the present analysis because Luise was frequently held up in biographical and fictional works as a woman deeply interested in improving upon her girlhood education, devoting herself with earnestness to the study of German letters and German history. Additionally, Luise gained a reputation as a benefactress of educational institutions and patron of the arts. An appreciation for and commitment to German literature was an integral part of the middle- and upper-middle-class woman’s life; as a component of a patriotic and emotionally involved Germanness. Portraying Queen Luise as the embodiment of this ideal, as well as the paragon of domestic virtues, enhanced the picture of her as the complete German woman, and involved school-age readers in the cultural self-betterment program that was so crucial to the nineteenth-century understanding of German womanhood.

The description of Queen Luise’s reading activity in biographies and fictional stories about her life offers the clearest indication of the overlap between official education in emotional nationalism – in schools and the church or family – and an unofficial education provided by leisure-time reading, whether Unterhaltungsliteratur or canonical works. Luise reading, Luise being read to by a höhere Tochter, and Luise and the women in her circle discussing German literature all give witness to the manner in which the bourgeoisie constructed their social class and their national identity using cultural distinction and differentiation. Reader identification with Queen Luise was not merely a matter of allowing young female readers a fairy-tale fantasy story in which they could imagine themselves as princesses or queens. It was also a matter of reminding them that they, as höhere Töchter, had much in common with the most exemplary Queen in the Hohenzollern dynasty, that their values and life experiences were much the same, and that this consistency over time constituted the foundation upon which Germany as a cultural and national entity rested. Reading literature, Queen Luise’s experiences show the young readers of her biographies, was one of the primary ways in which a German woman could demonstrate her personal involvement in her nation and its history.

The same discussion about the national significance of certain kinds of female reading behavior that influenced the curriculum and methodology of
the *Töchterschulen* appears repeatedly in biographies of Luise as well. When the nineteenth-century pedagogue Otto Richter wrote,

Wie dankenswert ist es, z.B. die Johanna Schiller’s mit ihren Schwestern, sowie mit der Sorell; die Minna von Barnhelm mit ihrem Kammermädchen, die Leonore von Este mit der Leonore von Sanvitale zu vergleichen; wie dankenswerth selbst, die hochherzige Dorothea der würdigen Mutter ihres Hermann gegenüberzustellen!

(29)

He could have been describing how Luise went about selecting her reading material and the manner in which she intended to use it. The reading list for girls suggested by Richter (*Minna von Barnhelm; Iphigenia auf Tauris; Hermann und Dorothea; Wilhelm Tell*, etc.) sought to provide school girls with both positive and negative models of female behavior, as well as what Richter termed «true German womanood.» Luise’s reading activity with Johanna (they read *Tell* together during their exile) appears to take these qualities into account. Additionally, these works – especially *Tell* and *Hermann und Dorothea* – recap for the reader significant moments in German national history and lore.

The queen’s love of Schiller or Jean Paul models for the young readers of her life story an appropriately feminine and German aesthetic sensibility. Her biographers insist that Luise selected and read literature based upon an understanding of the political events taking place around her and that she was always aware of the necessity of reading national literature. Luise does not read French courtly dramas but follows a reading list that would have been included in or easily recognized as a continuation of the curriculum of the *Töchterschule*, and the pedagogical moment of her biographies is complete: schoolgirls read about the life of an exemplary German woman, who, in turn, is also engaged in exemplary reading activity.

Friedrich Adami, whose biography of Luise was first published in 1868 and enjoyed widespread popularity well into the twentieth century (18th edition 1906), tells us, for example, that

Ihre Kindheit war in die schönste Blütezeit der deutschen Poesie und Kunst gefallen. Herder, Goethe und Schiller begeisterten ihr für alles Schöne und Wahre glühendes Gemüt. Die alten griechischen Tragiker lernte sie durch Übersetzungen kennen, eben so Shakespeare: auf den Schwingen seiner wundersamen Poesie erhob sie sich zu geistigen Höhen, auf denen ihr das tiefste Geheimnis der Dichtkunst klar zu werden schien. (85)

Both the texts she read and the manner in which she read them, readers learn, represented the ideals of the properly educated German woman for her era. Adami and others suggest that Luise led an intellectually distinguished life and demonstrated an active interest in literature and the arts. This descrip-
tion matches the image of the nineteenth-century German woman functioning as the civilizing force in the family, lending the necessary air of cultivation and enlightenment to the bourgeoisie’s otherwise prosaic life of numbers and profits.

Elisabeth Halden’s *Königin Luise* consistently returns to the theme of the importance of reading for the national development of young women. Johanna, the protagonist, is an avid reader. In good middle-class fashion, she reads to her mother in the evenings, or reads a book herself while knitting. Their pastor, Pastor Hillern, also comes over and reads aloud to the women and suggests appropriate reading material for Johanna. Whereas Johanna’s mother views reading, especially of «new» German literature, with deep suspicion, Pastor Hillern fully supports Johanna’s love of literature. He tells her that, although she certainly is free to enjoy Götz, Klopstock’s odes, and Schiller’s *Don Carlos*, these works might be too mature for her. He suggests instead that she read Voß’s «liebliche Luise» and Goethe’s *Hermann und Dorothea*. The relationship between Hillern and Johanna eventually develops into a romantic relationship and they marry. Hillern takes an active role in forming – through education – his future spouse. Through Hillern’s male literary guidance, Johanna develops into the cultured, domestic ideal of the marriageable, middle-class woman. Johanna, instructed early in the proper appreciation of age- and gender-appropriate literature, provides the ideal reading companion for Luise. Both women reject the standard Francophile education they received as young women and choose, instead, to concentrate on absorbing the fruits of German cultural production. Luise tells her husband, «Was an dem Kinde versäumt wird, das muß die Frau nachholen. Ich will eindringen in das deutsche Geistesleben, seine Dichter sollen mich in das Wesen des deutschen Volkes einführen» (61). In this passage, Luise subscribes to the popular nineteenth-century belief in the national pedagogical value of German literature. Schiller and Goethe, Herder and Jean Paul wrote works that not only entertained and edified, but that also expressed the deepest truths of German nature, as viewed by the nineteenth-century cultural establishment. In both popular and pedagogical discourses of the German *Kulturbation* and its *Kulturgeschichte* (as written and popularized by the likes of Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl and, especially, Gustav Freytag) literature functions as both the revelation of German nature and as the cultural glue binding together the middle class across time and geography. In the context of girls’ education, reading literature that glorified and explained the *Kulturbation* constituted a legitimate form of patriotic expression for young women.

Emotionally, then, Luise and Johanna demonstrate the proper reading attitude towards German literature. Intellectually, as well, Luise provides a
suitable model for how to read literature for her own benefit and that of her biological and national family. Adami writes of Luise’s reading habits, «Und alles, was sie las und hörte, fruchtete ihr: denn durch die eigenthümliche Art, wie sie Schrift und Rede in sich aufnahm, verwandelte sie Alles gleichsam in ihren Geist» (85). Adami and others who make similar claims regarding the rewards Luise gained from reading literature and history do not specifically tell their readers what her «eigenthümliche Art» of reading was, but they certainly imply that she selected her texts well and used them to their intended purpose – to edify and educate, and perhaps more importantly, to dwell in a state of emotional nationalism in which the domestic and symbolic role of German women serves as the guarantor of German civilization.

Johanna accompanies the queen as she moves from Berlin to the country estate at Paretz, and then, later, as she and her family flee advancing French troops and head toward the eastern edge of Prussia, all the while reading to her and observing her moods and demeanor. Johanna and the queen’s reading covers fiction, poetry, and works of history, each read according to its usefulness for the queen’s present situation or state of mind. During negotiations in Tilsit with Napoleon, Johanna «las ihr Schillers Wilhelm Tell in diesen ernsten Tagen vor, und oft mußte sie eine Stelle voll vaterländischer Begeisterung und leidenschaftlicher Freiheitsliebe wiederholen, weil sie der Königin so ganz aus dem Herzen kam» (101). Wilhelm Tell was universally read in Prussia’s mittlere and höhere Töchterschulen and thus would have been familiar to the young readers of Luise stories. As a nineteenth-century literary icon, Tell serves as a connection between the world of Queen Luise and its values and the world of the later nineteenth-century höhere Tochter.

While in exile in Königsberg, Luise again has Johanna read aloud to her often. Under these circumstances, however, more serious literature moves to the top of her reading agenda, according to Halden. «[N]amentlich zog sie die ernste Weltgeschichte an und sie suchte darin den Schlüssel für die Er- eignisse, die sie selbst ein so trauriges, so bedeutungsvolles Stück Geschichte erleben ließen» (162). Here again Luise’s reading material is chosen to reflect her current situation. Her position as queen of Prussia, moreover, means that her personal situation – exile, fear – corresponds to the state of her nation. Reading, therefore, is seen as an activity that can help the reader make sense of history and make sense of her present circumstances. Luise does not merely read in order to pass the time or excite her imagination; she participates in the same discourse on literature and history that informs the education of young women at the end of the nineteenth century.

Luise’s interest in Germany’s cultural and literary life is augmented by her own literary activity. Adami’s Königin Luise contends that Luise was not only
an exemplary reader and intimately involved in the literary life of her day, but that she was also a producer of literature in her own right. In doing so, he was referring to her copious epistolary output. Adami and others relied heavily on Luise’s own words as source material for stories about her life. Luise was an avid letter writer, and the letters she wrote to her brother Georg and to Friedrich Wilhelm during their marriage and courtship provide to this day a wealth of information about and insight into the life of the queen and served to bolster nineteenth-century accounts of her exemplarity as wife, queen, and Prussian Landesmutter. Nineteenth-century authors used Luise’s letters to add authenticity to their stories – both the obviously fictitious and the more factual, yet mythologizing biographies.

Adami relates for his readers the significance of Luise’s own writing: «Die Königin las nicht nur, sie schrieb auch gern, schrieb mit schwungvoller Feder Tagebuchblätter, Aufsätze und vorzüglich Briefe. Geist und Gemüth adelten alle Briefe, in welchen sie sich unbefangen aussprechen konnte» (89). According to Adami’s assessment, Luise’s letter writing does not make her an author, or place her in the literary company of the classical authors whose works she enjoyed. It does, however, provide yet another avenue of identification and modeling for the reader. Luise’s letter writing, and that of the young women who read about her life and identified with her, takes place in the context of other letters young women would have read. Luise’s letters (along with those of Goethe’s mother, Schiller and Goethe to their mothers, as well as Friedrich Wilhelm’s III letters to Luise) were reproduced in school texts. Thus the letter becomes a component of national cultural expression, relaying information about important historical figures in their own words, but also illuminating relationships and emotions – elements of German history of particular importance to the education of young women.

Reproducing Luise’s letters in novels and biographies that illustrate her importance for the development of a German national consciousness reinforces the symbolic role of women in the German national myth. Although Luise’s position as queen makes her life interesting in and of itself, she has much in common with a woman like Frau Rat Goethe, whose life becomes interesting primarily through her relationship to her son and whose letters were also frequently reprinted in school texts for young women. The women in these letters – mothers, wives, and sisters of the powerful and famous – represent the national and literary «homefront.» They are the backbone, the reference point, the humanizing factor in the lives of these great men. Luise’s letters remind us of her private, personal nature – an essential element in the biography of a queen whose actual political influence was a hotly contested issue during her life.
Novels and biographies written for young women emphasize Luise’s character as a woman and as a German. Her knowledge of Schiller and Goethe and her drive for self-improvement become aspects of her Gemüth, which is what makes her an exemplary queen and an ideal German woman. Even in Luise’s case, education and historical knowledge do not serve as ends themselves, but rather function as adornments to her image—just as they do for middle- and upper-class German women. Nineteenth-century Luise texts, whether fictional or biographically based, uniformly portrayed Luise in the monolithic, centralizing, and teleological Prussian historical tradition, which included specific Germanic ideals about gender characteristics and cultural production. A historically accurate account of her life was less important than the usefulness of Luise’s story for popular Wilhelminian nationalism.

For the young women who read accounts of Luise’s life, the queen’s life story functions as both comportment manual and entertainment. Told as part history lesson and part fairy tale, Luise’s biography recounts a specific conservative, teleological notion of German nationhood. At the same time, stories and biographies such as those by Halden, Augusti, Adami, and Felseneck provide an avenue for girls and young women to picture themselves within this narrative of German history. By identifying with Queen Luise or her fictional companions, nineteenth-century readers saw their own education and social environment reproduced and reaffirmed. The exemplary queen becomes a young woman much like themselves, with family obligations to fulfill and an awareness that these obligations comprise her contribution to the national cause. Even in her leisure time, Luise appears to follow a program of bourgeois self-betterment much like the one envisioned for upper-middle-class girls at the end of the nineteenth century.

Luise’s biography helps young women internalize the dictates of a gendered national ideology that saw girls and women as guarantors of German cultural continuity. By drawing readers close to the queen and inciting affection for her and her royal family, the biographies and novels discussed here draw the reader into an emotional relationship with the state, with the Hohenzollern dynasty as its representative. Luise, the exemplary queen and mother, is depicted as a loving mother and a patriotic, affectionate queen. Her love of the Prussian people, her suffering during their occupation by Napoleon, are a convincing portrayal of the devotion of the royal family to their country and its people. Fictional characters such as Johanna demonstrate to the reader how to construct the ideal relationship between young women and the state: identify that which is good and noble in your leaders, internalize those values and activities, and express them through your daily actions. In this manner, Luise’s portrayed domesticity, her interest in high German culture, and her
reading activity become models for national behavior for young women at the end of the nineteenth century. Queen Luise’s story teaches young women how to feel and articulate their specifically gendered participation in the greater national whole through the proper appreciation of German history and literature.

Notes

1 For evidence of Luise’s continued popularity, see Müller.

2 By the late nineteenth century, the period when the works I examine here were published, reading was no longer as hotly contested an activity for women and girls as it had been during the Lesewut discussion of the eighteenth century. In the Wilhelminian Töchterschule, the pedagogical emphasis was squarely on reading as a means to educate and mold young women in a particularly nationalist manner. Allowing still that girls’ reading activity, when unsupervised, could lead to emotional troubles and distraction from their domestic duties, the late-nineteenth-century pedagogical discourse on reading held that the proper sort of literature was a key element in endearing Germany – both as a cultural entity and as a newly formed state – to young women, with permanent, positive benefits for the state resulting. Specifically, by reading Schiller and Goethe, a liberal dose of religious texts and bible stories, and narrative accounts of significant German historical events and biographies of important German historical figures, a young woman would learn to identify emotionally with the German state and internalize her “civilizing” role within the German nation.


‘Gieb sie ihm alle, deine Kränze und Kronen,’ sagte das Schicksal, ‘aber es bleibt noch ein Kranz zurück, der alle übrigen belohnt.’

Am Tage, wo der Todtenkranz auf dem erhabenen Haupte stand, erschien der Genius wieder und nur seine Thränen fragten.

Da antwortete eine Stimme: ‘blick’ auf!’ –Und der Gott der Christen erschien” (120).

4 In 1811 the Luisenstiftung was founded in Berlin. It was a higher girls’ school for 12–15-year-old girls of the “gebildeten Stände,” as well as a teacher training school for 18–22-year-old women.

5 For a more thorough discussion of both Riehl and Freytag’s historical writings and how this kind of Kulturgeschichte contributed to a widely held middle-class myth of German nationhood, see Applegate and Tatlock.

6 As Heinz Ohff, in his recent biography of Luise, has pointed out, this common nineteenth-century characterization of Luise exaggerates considerably. Indeed, Heinrich von Kleist’s aunt befriended Luise and introduced her to the world of higher German letters, but Luise remained largely a dilettante. For the purposes of this study, however, her casual reading of German classics is important for its symbolic value.


