I. *Hallo's felicitous evening*: transforming society through reading

In the weekly journal *Neueste Critische Nachrichten* of the year 1783 (issue 49) we find a review of a ‘political and economical novel’ with the rather odd title of *Hallo’s felicitous evening*. Since 1743, the critical journal had been edited in the German university town of Greifswald, situated within Swedish Pomerania on the Baltic shore under Swedish dominion. According to the reviewer, the novel presented ‘valuable insights into governmental and agricultural issues’. The subsequent three pages summarize the novel, revealing a plan of comprehensive societal reform in the spirit of the Enlightenment. The aging statesman Hallo is philosophical and paternal consultant to the new sovereign Prince Gustaf. Hallo refuses all insignia of honour and lives on estates close to the royal residence, where he delves into clandestine works aiming at a reform of the living-conditions of his local subjects. He evolves into ‘the father and friend of his peasants, he abolishes service at the estate, transforms [serving] peasants into taxpayers, grants them more land for their fields […],’ and so on. With ‘rational arguments’ he convinces the peasants to surmount their prejudices and superstition. A church is established in the

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1. ‘When light is lit and spreads throughout a country / Heaven first puts the torch in the hands of its sovereign.’ *Neueste Critische Nachrichten* 1.12 (1775). Unless otherwise noted, all translations are by the author.
village; its priest, physicist and midwife care for the physical and spiritual well-being of its inhabitants.

From time to time, Prince Gustaf visits Hallo’s estates to seek advice on governmental affairs. As a result, the death penalty is abolished, schools are improved and the ‘incomes of the idle’ at court are done away with. The underlying motto of these changes is that ‘wherever a sovereign is competent and his subjects virtuous, crime is diminished and, as a consequence, also punishment’. An educational reform of the clergy is carried out in accordance with ‘the religious science, as our Lord Christ himself taught and preached it’. Government officials are paid wages that cover the cost of living. Workers’ wages are appropriate, insurance companies established, ‘likewise, there is the call for free trade and all custom-houses are to be abolished’, and well-organized medical care is introduced. The critic summarizes the main ambitions of the work as follows: ‘Our Hallo reverently and constantly conveys these rules of good government to Gustaf, in whom he finds a ready follower and listener, to the latter’s eternal honour’. The novel followed the tradition of the so-called ‘Hausväterliteratur’, a literary genre in which the psychological development of the protagonist is of minor interest. The stereotype figure *Hausvater* (*pater familias*) is perhaps best translated as the ‘patriarch’ of a home or estate, who takes care of his family, servants, peasants, efficiently plans work in the fields and constantly strives to improve the conditions within his own realm. *Hausväterliteratur* is related to the *Staatsroman* (state novel), a similar genre which was established by Albrecht von Haller (1708-1777). The state novel treated the topic of wise statesmanship and efforts for improving a country in the same stereotypical manner. These fictional tales of good government concealed moral messages, with the target of functioning as practical reform programmes.3

Hallo performs within his microcosm, within the framework of existing political order, bringing about profound changes and improving conditions for the people under his responsibility. The pattern for the state sovereign is obvious: society will improve if he follows Hallo’s plan. Thus, the novel is self-affirmative: the aged, wise man advises the young prince and things change for the better. The author of the novel, Christian Friedrich Sintenis (1750-1820), can be counted among a group of Enlightenment writers who advocated a moderate reform ‘from above’ as the preferable model for trans-

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