

MAJOR VON TELLHEIM OR TRAGEDY AVERTED

MAJÖR VON TELLHEIM OR TRAGEDY AVERTED: A RE-EVALUATION
OF LESSING'S SERIOUS COMEDY MINNA VON BARNHELM

By

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ABSTRACT

This thesis will consider the serious side of Lessing's play Minna von Barnhelm by focusing on the figure of Major von Tellheim.

It is important to note that we will assess the work as a serious rather than as a tragic comedy. It is not the tragic but rather the potentially tragic nature of Tellheim's dilemma which we will consider.

In order that this study present as complete a picture as a master's thesis will allow, both popular and controversial views of this character will be examined. In this way we hope not only to show how critics have dealt with the major in the past, but also to indicate the direction in which modern research seems to be moving as scholars continue to scrutinize this most compelling figure.

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" ... Eines Werkes aber, der wahrsten Ausgeburt des Siebenjaehrigen Krieges, von vollkommenem norddeutschen Nationalgehalt, muB ich hier vor allen ehrenvoll erwaehnen; es ist die erste aus dem bedeutenden Leben gegriffene Theaterproduktion, von spezifisch temporaerem Gehalt, die deswegen auch eine nie zu berechnende Wirkung tat: Minna von Barnhelm ... Man erkennt leicht, wie genanntes Stueck zwischen Krieg und Frieden, HaB und Neigung erzeugt ist. Diese Produktion war es, die den Blick in eine hoehere, bedeutendere Welt aus der literarischen und buergerlichen, in welcher sich die Dichtkunst bisher bewegt hatte, gluecklich eroeffnete."

(Goethe, Dichtung und Wahrheit)

INTRODUCTION

Minna von Barnhelm has been the focus of much critical analysis. It is a play which has stood the test of time - today it is still read, pondered and performed. A drama of contrasts and of conflicts, it entails Prussian and Saxon, pessimism and optimism, laughter and sympathy, the comic and the serious. Exquisite balance characterizes this work. In this discussion, however, we intend to concentrate our attention on one side of the balance scale. We will examine the serious aspects of such a comedy.

We begin by exploring Lessing's theory of comedy, the various authors and trends, German or otherwise, who appear to have influenced him up to and including the time of his writing Minna von Barnhelm. Some of Lessing's early plays will serve to illustrate his practical application of various attitudes of the early eighteenth century. Yet we will also discuss his eventual dismissal of certain popular concepts, his desire for a more humane approach to comedy and his growing appreciation for the serious, sentimental comedy. In Lessing's view, the serious and the comic could exist simultaneously on the stage. His masterpiece, Minna von Barnhelm, consists of both serious and comic elements.

When considering the serious aspects of the play, our attention turns first to the setting. Lessing chooses a most grim location for his play - post-war Berlin. This choice of setting immediately establishes a solemn aura for the drama.

To this sombre atmosphere Lessing adds a most melancholic figure - Major von Tellheim - a living testimony to the debilitating effects of war. As our discussion centres on the serious side of the play, it is logical that we concentrate our efforts on the figure of Tellheim, since he is by far its most gloomy and problematic character.

As evidenced by the vast amount of literature concerning itself with the major, he remains, for many, a very puzzling yet intriguing character. For the purposes of this paper we will first consider Tellheim, the honourable officer, the loving and generous friend and the betrayed servant of Frederick the Great. Our analysis will then include another view of the major, that of an alienated figure, of an unreasonably stubborn Tellheim, whose sense of honour has become distorted and whose feelings of betrayal border on paranoia. His relationships with others will be examined: with that of his servant, with Werner and, of course, with Minna, who, with her natural confidence and optimistic outlook on life, serves as an excellent foil for the major. Particular interest will be paid to Minna's 'Spiel'. We will investigate Minna's motivation - what

prompts her to concoct the ruse, her execution of the plan and its effect on Tellheim.

Any consideration of the serious side of Lessing's play must centre around the grim nature of Tellheim's situation. The major's problem cannot be judged as simply a misguided sense of honour. His highly erratic behaviour - his flights from self-destructive depression to precarious heights of joy are indication of a deep emotional problem. In this thesis we will attempt to suggest possible explanations for this behaviour by exploring a relatively new approach to the major's character. We will examine the question of alienation and how this concept relates to Tellheim and his situation.

The major remains a most problematic figure. We find him intelligent yet ridiculous, incomprehensible yet affecting. It is strange to find such a gravely troubled character in a comedy. However, it is our contention that in his ability to at once arouse feelings of exasperation and sympathy in his audience, Major von Tellheim serves as the perfect vehicle for Lessing's attempt at the serious sentimental comedy.

CHAPTER ONE

Lessing's Theory of Comedy and the Historical Background to 'Minna von Barnhelm'

Critics have commented on the fact that although Lessing devotes much attention to the consideration of other literary genres, he has little to say concerning comedy.¹ J. G. Robertson, when speaking of Lessing and comedy, also adds that Lessing's observations " ... if anything are a reproduction of a traditional opinion ... "² A common criticism of Lessing is that his statements concerning comedy " ... largely echo the standard aesthetic theories of the time."³ Cassirer, however, as an eminent interpreter of the eighteenth century, has pointed out that Lessing's contribution to aesthetics " ... does not manifest itself in the invention of new ideas, but in the order and correction, in the logical arrangement and election, which he accomplished with materials already available."⁴ One must, therefore, explore the Enlightenment view of comedy in order to appreciate Lessing's contribution to its interpretation.

In the eighteenth century, all theorists recognized three basic functions of comedy: it should "imitate", "please" and, above all, "instruct".⁵ " There was a strong desire to rid society of its vices and upgrade the tastes of the German

people ... "6:

" Die sittliche Erziehung des Menschen erscheint damit als reine Aufklaerung."7

Comedy should illustrate one's relationship to society, and how one should conduct oneself within it, thereby reinforcing the established order:

" Solange sich ... der Mensch in der urspruenglichen Ordnung haeilt und nicht einmal den typischen Verfehlungen verfaellt, befindet er sich im Zustande der Vollkommenheit."8

The "typischen Verfehlungen" to which Christian Wolff, as cited by Lappert, refers are the common character flaws and vices with which most of the comedies of the early Enlightenment concerned themselves (eg. Der Misogyn, Die Betschwester)9; the flaws and vices not of individuals, but of humanity in general:

" ... sie brachte den Menschen im Hinblick auf die allgemeine "Natur", im Hinblick auf das Typische und Allgemeinmenschliche."10

"Das Einmalige" had no place on the stage of the early Enlightenment comedy.11

Personality defects were designated vices, and the main figure on the stage appeared not as an individual, but rather as the personification of a particular foible12:

" ... Le Jaloux ne peut être qu'un titre de comédie. C'est que le vice comique a beau s'unir aussi intimement qu'on voudra aux personnes; il n'en conserve pas moins son existence indépendante et simple; il reste le personnage central, invisible et présent, auquel les personnages de chair et d'os sont suspendus sur la scène."13

The characters of the Enlightenment stage have often been described as 'types', or, as stated by Lappert, they were

" ... Marionetten des komischen Lasters und verlieren ihre Individualitaet, weil sie im Hinblick auf diesen Fehler entworfen sind."¹⁴

The vice portrayed could be any of a list of inconsequential faults, such as " absentmindedness, quaint mannerisms, eccentric habits or mechanical tricks of behaviour "¹⁵, which were considered contrary to accepted norms. The norms themselves were never seriously called into question, and these vices were considered universal.¹⁶

By presenting the embodiment of a particular vice on the stage, it was hoped that through laughter the play might instruct the spectator in the betterment of his social and moral behaviour.¹⁷ In order to be of benefit to the audience, however, the laughter provoked had to be scornful: that of ridicule. Since they represented flaws deemed unacceptable to society, such persons were to be scorned and despised by the audience, who would then strive to avoid the vices they had seen presented before them.¹⁸

This concept of comedy in the first half of the eighteenth century in Germany was upheld by its most influential literary critic, Gottsched. He supported the theory that comedy should be employed to correct petty character flaws and that the more significant vices of humanity should, on the other hand, be dealt with in the tragedy:

" Die Komoedie will nicht grobe Laster, sondern laecherliche Fehler der Menschen verbessern."¹⁹

Gottsched also maintained that the characters in a comedy should " imitate the speech and manners of the educated middle class."²⁰ They and their audience would represent this social milieu. " In no comedy should the members of the aristocracy be made to look ridiculous, since this would be showing disrespect for the established order."²¹

Gottsched fully supported the view of the early Enlightenment that comedy was to be employed for instruction, and that only by provoking the laughter of mockery and scorn could it help society purge itself of its vices.²² His open contempt for the popular form, the comedy of the "Hanswurst", was based on this concept.²³ Because the audience laughed with the character and not at him, Gottsched saw no didactic use for this type of comedy. In his own words, comedy

" ... ist nichts anders, als eine Nachahmung einer lasterhaften Handlung, die durch ihr laecherliches Wesen den Zuschauer belustigen, aber auch zugleich erbauen kann."²⁴

The educative properties of comedy must always take precedence over those which merely entertain. Therefore, Gottsched saw no constructive purpose in the character of the "Hanswurst".

Neither did soliciting spontaneous laughter offer a worthwhile goal in the comedy. Gottsched could not accept sacrificing its use as an educational tool for the sake of entertaining the audience.²⁵ He sought to provoke thoughtful

laughter for the ultimate benefit of the spectator. For Gottsched, comedy had a special function: it was useful only when it conveyed a conscious moral responsibility to its audience.²⁶ Critics of the time reprimanded him for this narrow view of comedy.²⁷ Others have also faulted this theorist for failing to recognize the value of laughter "for its own sake", rather than the laughter which is directed at a character displaying "a particular human vice."²⁸

In keeping with the Enlightenment tradition, the audience was not expected to simply accept any action on the stage as mere entertainment, but rather it was obligated "Muehe und Vergnuegen kritischer Betrachtung zu erfahren."²⁹ The public was always to remain at a distance, removed from the action on the stage. The spectator was not to sympathize or identify with the figure. Instead, "...er faBt das Buehnengeschehen als Demonstration, die ihn belehrt und erfreut ..."³⁰ From time to time in the works of Gottsched's followers, however, one discovers characters who, through no fault of their own, find themselves in awkward situations. These characters tend to evoke feelings of sympathy rather than scorn from the audience.³¹ (eg. Timant in Cronegk's Der Misstrauische, Charlotte in Die stumme Schoenheit by Schlegel)

The influence of Gottsched and his disciples is evident in Lessing's early works. Like Gottsched, he saw

a moral-didactic purpose in comedy:

" ... Der Komoedie kommt insofern eine eminent praktische Bedeutung zu, als sie den Zuschauer und Leser lehrt, sich innerhalb der Gesellschaft "richtig" zu verhalten, indem sie das MaB des Schicklichen setzt ... denn die Komoedie will nicht nur erfreuen, sondern zugleich auch unterrichten und bessern."³²

Die Juden, one of Lessing's earliest works, clearly shows his concern that comedy illustrate the individual's relationship to society.³³

In 1749, Lessing defined a writer of comedies as: "ein Mensch der die Laster auf ihrer laecherlichen Seite schildert."³⁴ To educate the spectator was still the prime function of the comedy, as Lessing explained in the fourth Beytrag zur Historie und Aufnahme des Theaters:

" Was ist aber die Absicht des Lustspiels? Die Sitten der Zuschauer zu bilden und bessern. Die Mittel, die sie dazu anwendet, sind, daB sie das Laster verlaebt und die Tugend liebenswuerdig vorstellt."³⁵

Clearly the young Lessing supported the Gottschedian theory of comedy as a social-moral corrective. In contrast to Gottsched, however, he acknowledged the tradition of the "Hanswurst" as the source of most of the comic action in his early plays.³⁶ He was obviously interested not only in instructing, but also in entertaining his audience. In this respect Lessing was also influenced by the English comedy, which emphasized the pleasing aspects of comedy.³⁷

The didactic principle of comedy as embracing 'Tugend' and 'Laster', adopted by Lessing at the outset

of his career, was derived from Gottsched and the traditional theory of the comedy of the Enlightenment, while the satiric structure of the early plays shows the influence of the Saxon comedy on the young writer. Such works as Damon, oder Die wahre Freundschaft (1749), Die Juden (1749) and Der Freygeist (1749), although for the most part "sentimental" in content, all owe their structure to the form of satire.³⁸ In the words of Steinmetz:

" Fuer Lessing war die Satire unentbehrliches Ingrediens aller Komik."³⁹

In Der junge Gelehrte, for example, one sees the "satirische Entlarvung" with which Lessing was very concerned in his early works.⁴⁰ In this play it is particularly interesting to note that many of the characters, while portraying human vices, also possess other human qualities, making them individuals rather than types. Lessing evidently preferred to model his characters after those of Gellert, rather than after the two-dimensional characters found in the Saxon comedies,⁴¹ the works of Gottsched or, for that matter Diderot.⁴² By allowing his characters to appear not as personified vices, but as individuals, Lessing accomplished two objectives: first, although the characters display faults and vices, they also display other traits which make their flaws appear less ridiculous. Since the figures on the stage are presented as "human" characters, the audience is able to identify with them rather than feel totally alien-

ated both from the characters and from the situation.⁴³ A letter, dated January 20, 1749, clearly indicates Lessing's growing inclination towards a more humane approach to the comedy and the comic figure.

" ... Ich lernte wahre und falsche Tugenden daraus kennen, und die Laster eben so sehr wegen ihres laecherlichen als wegen ihrer Schaendlichkeit fliehen. Habe ich aber alles dieses nur in eine schwache Ausuebung gebracht, so hat es gewiB mehr an andern Umstaenden als an meinen Willen gefehlt. Doch bald haette ich den vornehmsten Nutzen, den die Lustspiele bey mir gehabt haben, vergessen. Ich lernte mich selbst kennen und seit der Zeit habe ich gewiB ueber niemanden mehr gelacht und gespottet."⁴⁴

In 1756, Lessing defined a new concept with respect to the didactic aspects of comedy. It was not necessary that it attack human faults and instruct only through ridicule. It could, however, " ... bring healthy people to an awareness of the various forms that the ridiculous, i.e. straying from the norm, can assume and thus help protect people from folly. Rather than punish folly, comedy reinforces normal behaviour."⁴⁵

In the twenty-eighth piece of the Hamburgische Dramaturgie (August 4, 1767), Lessing distinguishes between two kinds of laughter: 'Lachen', or sympathetic laughter, and 'Verlachen', the laughter of mockery and scorn. As Haberland points out, this distinction had previously been made by Moeser.⁴⁶ Although the idea is not original, its application to the comic theory is. 'Verlachen' stems from a sense of superiority on the part

of the spectator, i.e. the spectator's knowledge of the situation is superior to that of the figures on the stage. 'Lachen', on the other hand, for Lessing's comedy, is associated with feelings of sympathy, affection and identification. To Lessing, laughter was to function in a comedy in the same way that compassion functions in a tragedy.⁴⁷ Haberland observes that Lessing used this distinction in order to explain why Regnard's play, Le Distrain, which was a failure in 1697, was later quite a success. Ridicule, though thought to cure other faults, could not correct absent-mindedness. When the audience laughed at the performance of 1731, they were laughing with the character and not at him.⁴⁸

Lessing was always very curious about the origins of laughter and showed increasing interest in it in a pure form, or laughter for its own sake, rather than solely as a cure for "moral defects"⁴⁹:

" ... wo steht es denn geschrieben, daß wir in der Komödie nur ueber moralische Fehler, nur ueber verbesserliche Untugenden lachen sollen? Jede Ungereimtheit, jeder Kontrast von Mangel und Realitaet, ist laecherlich."⁵⁰

In his works, Lessing allows for " non-satiric, situational humor ".⁵¹ In this way he differs from Diderot, whom Lessing once called " the greatest modern theoretician of the Drama, after Aristoteles."⁵² Though he later recanted a bit on his original statement, Lessing, in the second edition of Das Theater (1781), does credit Diderot with having strongly

influenced the direction of his work.⁵³ It is one critic's contention that, at the very least, Diderot changed Lessing's opinion concerning the value of the sentimental comedy or "le genre sérieux".⁵⁴

In 1754, it would appear that Lessing saw little advantage to the limited effects of either the "Possenspiel" or the "weinerliches Lustspiel":

" Possenspiel will nur zum Lachen bewegen; das weinerliche Lustspiel will nur ruehren ... "⁵⁵

Instead he proposed what he called the "wahre Komoedie", which would perform both functions. Somewhat later he suggested, " eine ganz ernsthafte Komoedie, wo man niemals lacht, auch nicht einmal laechelt ".⁵⁶ That Lessing saw a definite connection between laughter and weeping, virtue and vice, is evident from his own letters:

" ... ich getraue mir zu behaupten, daB nur dieses allein wahre Komoedie sind, welche so wohl Tugenden als Laster, so wohl Anstaendigkeit als Ungereimtheit schildern, weil sie eben durch diese Vermischung ihrem Originale, dem menschlichen Leben, am naechsten kommen."⁵⁷

Life itself, he observed, is a constant interplay of virtue and vice, of laughter and tears. It was in the "ruehrendes Lustspiel" of Gellert that Lessing found the closest imitation of life on the stage.⁵⁸ A stage production of 'life', in his opinion, is very difficult to achieve, and as Lessing explains in the seventeenth piece of the Hamburgische Dramaturgie, if a mixture of the serious and the comic

was to exist, this mixture must be allowed only within the framework of the genre. In other words, it must not be a case of one emotion following the other, i.e. no correlation between the sentimental and comic scenes. Instead, one emotion must give rise to the other.⁵⁹ Within the context of the play a "special reciprocity" must be present: "... not a mere compounding of parts, but a dynamic system in which each element gives rise to another."⁶⁰

" So sieht er im rührenden Lustspiel und sogar in der *comédie sérieuse* den Gattungscharakter der Komoedie immer noch gewahrt."⁶¹

In the tradition of the Enlightenment, comedy involves some deviation from accepted human norms of behaviour.⁶² In comedy, as opposed to tragedy, " the conflict is located primarily in the character rather than in the necessity of the situation."⁶³ Conflicts which exist between the character and the "outside world" must be of such a nature that they can be resolved during the course of the play. The figure may also see such a conflict as more serious than it actually is, and the audience, safe in the knowledge that the situation is actually of little consequence, can watch his/her struggle with amusement and sympathy.⁶⁴

In a serious comedy, however, the comic mood of the play is overshadowed by the very real presence of potentially tragic elements. As Barrack and Wessel point out, " the serious comedy runs the risk of becoming tragedy at the

point where human values are threatened by potentially destructive elements."⁶⁵ There is also the possibility that the character's own personality may cause his downfall.

" Only by his willingness to exercise his powers of reason " can the character resolve the inner crisis which could potentially destroy him. Enlightenment must come from within.⁶⁶

In the sentimental comedy, moral qualities dominate to expose and correct flaws. Whereas the traditional satiric comedy sought to arouse scornful amusement at folly and vice, the purpose of this type of comedy is to " arouse delight over the display of virtue "; " an stillen Tugenden ein edles Vergnuegen finden zu lassen."⁶⁷ No longer are the characters to be objects of ridicule, rather they are to be admired. Although displaying flaws, they must also be appreciated as worthwhile figures who reveal simultaneously many virtues.

Minna von Barnhelm represents a culmination of Lessing's years of concern with the genre of the serious comedy, its form, its foundation and its purpose.

The play Minna von Barnhelm takes place in an inn, shortly after the end of the Seven Years' War. It was around that time that Lessing actually began serious work on the drama. It is our contention that the inspiration for Minna sprang from Lessing's personal experiences during those years of conflict. The effect of the war on the writer had been such that by 1763 he was determined to use it as the

setting for a major dramatic work.⁶⁸

The outbreak of war in 1756 forced the cancellation of an extended European tour, upon which Lessing and a friend had just embarked. Lessing returned to Leipzig, to await what he hoped would be a speedy end to the conflict. There he met an old acquaintance, Christian Ewald von Kleist, a major in one of the regiments of occupation.⁶⁹ Kleist was a Romantic, " ... loving the poetry of woods, skies and fields, hoping for a hero's death under the flag of Frederick ".⁷⁰ A warm friendship developed between the two men.⁷¹ This friendship, however, was not to last. In April of 1758, Kleist's regiment was ordered to active service.⁷² On August 12, 1759, he was seriously wounded at the battle of Kunnersdorf, but fought on. Abandoned by his comrades, plundered twice by Cossacks and left to die in a swamp, he was found the next day by a party of Russian cavalry and sent to Frankfurt. He died ten days later in the home of Nicolai's brother.⁷³

Through Kleist, Lessing made the acquaintance of many Prussian officers, including General Bogislav Friedrich von Tauentzien from whom he later acquired a "quasi-military" post. At the time of the occupation, Frederick the Great had demanded a contribution of 90,000 thalers from Leipzig. This did little to improve Saxon-Prussian relations.⁷⁴ Lessing, though " Saxon by birth " was " Prussian by conviction ".⁷⁵ His open admiration for Frederick the Great and

his associations with Prussian officers did not impress Leipzig society.⁷⁶ Lessing observed that although the war solidified German national sentiment, it also created intense animosity between Saxony and Prussia.⁷⁷ When Kleist's regiment left, Lessing saw no reason for remaining in Leipzig and left in May of 1758 for Berlin.⁷⁸

In Berlin, Lessing, together with Nicolai⁷⁹ and Mendelssohn⁸⁰, began the Litteraturbriefe, a weekly publication of letters on contemporary literature.⁸¹ It was in Berlin that Lessing received the news of Kleist's death, and he was deeply affected. One sees the confusion of emotions in a letter written to Gleim shortly afterwards: guilt because he was not with Kleist at the end, anger towards those who neglected and abused his friend, and anger even towards Kleist himself for not withdrawing from the battle immediately after he was injured. Though he admired his friend's bravery, Lessing found his obstinacy in refusing to leave the field incomprehensible.⁸²

From 1760 to 1765, Lessing served as secretary to General Tauentzien, governor and director of the mint in Breslau⁸³:

"... trat er (Lessing) hinaus auf den Schauplatz der großen Welt, in die Naehel des Kampfes, der eben die Geschichte Europas entschied."⁸⁴

In 1763, as secretary to the governor, it was Lessing's duty to publicly proclaim the Peace of Hubertsburg.⁸⁵

With peace declared Lessing's duties as secretary became lighter and he was able to spend more time on literary pursuits. Before being stricken with a dangerous fever in the summer of 1764, he had completed the bulk of the work for Minna von Barnhelm. His aim: "... die Handlung bis ins einzelne genau festzustellen."⁸⁶ The characters he modelled after the men he had met in Leipzig and Breslau.⁸⁷ Tellheim, as T. W. Rolleston and others have pointed out, displays many of the characteristics of Lessing's close friend Kleist: brave and loyal, but unreasonably stubborn in his sense of honour.⁸⁸ Frederick the Great also appears in the play as a symbol of justice, as a testimony of Lessing's unyielding loyalty and devotion to his monarch.⁸⁹

It is important to remember that Minna von Barnhelm is a serious comedy. By establishing the close of the Seven Years' War as the setting for the work, Lessing creates a sombre undertone which is present throughout the course of the play. No matter how diverted the spectator is by Just's amusing encounters with the landlord, or by the light-hearted flirtation of Franziska and Werner, the harsh reality of the war and its consequences constantly prevail, which the characters' behaviour is unable to dispel. The entrance of Tellheim in any scene serves to accentuate the serious tone, for he is the embodiment of the financially, physically and emotionally crippling effects of war. Act I provides a most graphic post-war scene - a dishonoured officer and a war-

widow. The appearance of the widow Marloff is a touching reminder that the sorrows of war have not confined themselves to Tellheim. Lessing's recreation of post-war Berlin is critically accurate and moving.

Besides the obvious identification between Tellheim and Lessing's friend Kleist, both the author and his character share a common background: neither Lessing nor Tellheim were born in Prussia. Even more significant is the fact that they were both staunch supporters of Frederick. Tellheim's uncomfortable position as a non-Prussian fighting for the Prussians was all too well known to Lessing, who was himself born in Saxony. The gap between Saxony and Prussia, which he saw widened by the war, Lessing attempts to bridge in his play where " the grace and spirit of Saxony vanquishes the perverse, if honourable obstinancy of Prussia, and national enmities are lost in individual affections."⁹⁰

Footnotes to Chapter One

¹Bruce Duncan, " The Implied Reader of Lessing's Theory of Comedy ", LY, X(1978), 35. Hereafter cited as Duncan, " The Implied Reader ... "

²J. G. Robertson, Lessing's Dramatic Theory (Cambridge, England: The University Press, 1939), p. 389.

³Duncan, " The Implied Reader ... ", p. 35.

⁴Ernst Cassirer, The Philosophy of the Enlightenment, trans. Fritz C. A. Koellen and James Pettegrove (Boston: Beacon, 1965), p. 357.

⁵Duncan, *ibid.*, p. 38.

⁶P. M. Haberland, " The Development of the Comic Theory in Germany during the Eighteenth Century ", DAI, XXX (1969-70), 2484A(Johns Hopkins), 55. Hereafter cited as Haberland.

⁷Hans-Ulrich Lappert, " Gotthold Ephraim Lessings Jugendspiele und die Komoedientheorien der fruehen Aufklaerung." Diss. Zurich, 1968, p. 49. Hereafter cited as Lappert.

⁸*ibid.*, p. 48.

⁹*ibid.*, p. 46.

¹⁰*ibid.*, p. 47.

¹¹*ibid.*, p. 46-47.

¹²*ibid.*, p. 49-50.

¹³Henri Bergson, " Le Rire. Essai sur la Signification du Comique ", Presses Universitaires de France, 1964. p. 12.

¹⁴Lappert, p. 50.

¹⁵James Feibleman, In Praise of Comedy (New York: Russell and Russell, 1962), p. 102. Hereafter cited as Feibleman.

¹⁶Lappert, p. 47.

¹⁷ibid., p. 50.

¹⁸Haberland, p. 56-57.

¹⁹Johann Christoph Gottsched, Versuch einer kritischen Dichtkunst (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1962), p. 645. Hereafter cited as Gottsched.

²⁰Haberland, p. 57.

²¹ibid., p. 57.

²²ibid., p. 119.

²³ibid., p. 56.

²⁴Gottsched, p. 643.

²⁵Haberland, p. 57.

²⁶Lappert, p. 51.

²⁷Haberland, p. 119.

²⁸ibid., p. 61-62.

²⁹Helmut Arntzen, "Die ernste Komoedie: Das deutsche Lustspiel von Lessing bis Kleist." In Die Komoedie des Individuums (Munich: Nymphenburger, 1968), p. 21. Hereafter cited as Arntzen.

³⁰Lappert, p. 70.

³¹Bruce Duncan, "Dark Comedy in the Eighteenth Century: Lessing and Lenz", DAI, XXX(1969-70), 5442/43A (Cornell), 53. Hereafter cited as Duncan, "Dark Comedy ..."

³²Lappert, p. 51.

³³Arntzen, p. 24.

³⁴G. E. Lessing, Saemtliche Schriften (edited by Karl Lachmann; third edition by Franz Muncker; Stuttgart: G. J. Goschen, 1886-1924), XVII, 16. Hereafter cited as Lessing.

³⁵Duncan, " The Implied Reader ... ", p. 38.

³⁶Duncan, " Dark Comedy ... ", p. 57.

³⁷ibid., p. 57.

³⁸Joseph Carroll, "'Minna von Barnhelm' and Le Genre Sérieux: A Reevaluation ", LY, XIII(1981), 147. Hereafter cited as Carroll.

³⁹Horst Steinmetz, " Die Komoedie der Aufklaerung." In Realienbuecher fuer Germanisten (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1966), VIII, 58. Hereafter cited as Steinmetz.

⁴⁰ibid., p. 58.

⁴¹ibid., p. 62.

⁴²Wolfgang Ritzel, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1966), p. 165. Hereafter cited as Ritzel.

⁴³Steinmetz, p. 62.

⁴⁴Lessing, VIII, p. 286.

⁴⁵Duncan, " Dark Comedy ... ", p. 58-59.

⁴⁶Moeser, Justus M., 1720-1794, "Arminius" (1748).

⁴⁷Duncan, " The Implied Reader ... ", p. 42.

⁴⁸Haberland, p. 85-86.

⁴⁹ibid., p. 85-86.

⁵⁰G. E. Lessing, Hamburgische Dramaturgie (Stuttgart: Kroener Verlag, 1958), #28.

⁵¹Carroll, p. 146.

⁵²ibid., p. 144.

⁵³ibid., p. 145.

⁵⁴ibid., p. 143.

⁵⁵Lessing, VIII, p. 286.

⁵⁶ibid., IX, p. 271.

⁵⁷ibid., VI, p. 51.

⁵⁸Walter Hinck, Das deutsche Lustspiel des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts und die italienische Komoedie (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1965), p. 257. Hereafter cited as Hinck.

⁵⁹Duncan, "Dark Comedy ...", p. 64.

⁶⁰Duncan, "The Implied Reader ...", p. 40.

⁶¹Hinck, p. 259.

⁶²Charles M. Barrack and Leonard P. Wessel, "The Tragic Background to Lessing's Comedy 'Minna von Barnhelm'", LY, II(1970), 149. Hereafter cited as Barrack and Wessel.

⁶³ibid., p. 153.

⁶⁴ibid., p. 153.

⁶⁵ibid., p. 150.

⁶⁶ibid., p. 155.

⁶⁷Carroll, p. 146.

⁶⁸A. Thorbecke, in the introduction to Minna von Barnhelm (Deutsche Schulausgaben, Band 12; Bielefeld: Velhagen and Klasing, 1915), p. iv. Hereafter cited as Thorbecke.

⁶⁹Kleist, Christian Ewald von (1715-1759): met Lessing in Berlin, 1755, through Johann Wilhelm Ludwig Gleim (1719-1803).

⁷⁰T. W. Rolleston, The Life of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (London: Walter Scott, 1889), p. 80. Hereafter cited as Rolleston.

⁷¹ibid., p. 80.

⁷²ibid., p. 84.

⁷³ibid., p. 90-91.

⁷⁴ibid., p. 80.

⁷⁵ibid., p. 102.

⁷⁶ibid., p. 80.

⁷⁷ibid., p. 102.

⁷⁸ibid., p. 84.

⁷⁹Nicolai, Friedrich Christoph, 1733-1811.

⁸⁰Mendelssohn, Moses, 1729-1786.

⁸¹Rolleston, p. 88.

⁸²ibid., p. 91.

⁸³Siegfried Seidel, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing: Leben und Werk (Berlin: Verlag Neues Leben, 1963), p. 59. Hereafter cited as Seidel.

⁸⁴Thorbecke, p. iii.

⁸⁵Rolleston, p. 90.

⁸⁶Thorbecke, p. iv.

⁸⁷Seidel, p. 75-76.

⁸⁸Rolleston, p. 100.

⁸⁹ibid., p. 101.

⁹⁰ibid., p. 102.

" ... My dear, dear lord,
The purest treasure mortal times can afford
Is spotless reputation: that away,
Men are but gilded loam or painted clay.
A jewel in a ten-times-barr'd-up chest
Is a bold spirit in a loyal breast.
Mine honour is my life; both grow in one;
Take honour from me, and my life is done:
Then, dear my liege, mine honour let me try;
In that I live and for that I will die."

(King Richard II (I,i))

Die Dame: Wer weiß es besser als ich, wie wert Sie seiner Freundschaft waren, ... Sie wuerden sein letzter Gedanke, Ihr Name der letzte Ton seiner sterbenden Lippen gewesen sein haette nicht die staerkere Natur dieses traurige Vorrecht fuer seinen ungluecklichen Sohn, fuer seine unglueckliche Gattin gefordret - ... (I,6)

Franziska: ... Jawohl kenn ich den braven Mann. (III,5)

Minna: Freund und Feind sagen, daB er der tapferste Mann der Welt ist ... (II,1)

Lessing has taken great pains to establish audience sympathy for the character of Tellheim, even before Tellheim himself appears on the stage.³ Initial information concerning Tellheim and his financial difficulties is derived from Just's argument with the innkeeper at the beginning of Act I.⁴ Just's account of the landlord's apparent abuse of his noble master is clearly designed to provoke an immediate sympathetic response from the audience.

When Tellheim appears (I,3), the stage has been set and the proper mood established. The scenes which follow serve simply to re-affirm the high opinion of the major already put forward by Just. His dignity and honesty, for example, are keenly displayed and heightened by the very presence of the innkeeper. The distinct contrast between the man of honour and the sycophantic landlord⁵ has obviously been devised to increase the spectator's appreciation for Tellheim's nobility of character. This nobility also contrasts sharply with the "bestial" manners of Just, whom Tell-

heim chastises for his desire to take revenge in the form of physical violence upon the landlord. Tellheim's refusal to spend Werner's money is a further indication that he is, above all, an honourable man. This discussion is followed by the encounter between the major and the widow which further serves to emphasize his admirable qualities. Intent upon settling her late husband's debts, the widow has sought out the officer in Berlin. Tellheim, however, protests that he has no knowledge of such a debt, refuses to accept any payment and extends an offer of future financial aid to the widow and her son. He urges that she put her son's practical needs above the desire to settle a debt honourably. The widow, recognizing both the logic and sincerity of this argument, accepts his decision. In the same way, Tellheim respects the reasoning of Just's claim that he, as Tellheim's debtor, must remain in the major's service, until such time as his debt to his master is paid. Tellheim tries to dismiss Just because he cannot pay him. As Carroll has observed⁶, it would be unjust for the major to retain a servant when his own financial situation is, at present, so uncertain. Only when Just argues that in fact his debt is considerably greater than his master's, will Tellheim allow him to remain in his service.

In his dealings with the innkeeper, the widow and Just, Tellheim is compelled by virtue of his character to act honourably: he will settle his account with the landlord, but

he will not use the money entrusted to him by a friend; he will not seek to improve his own financial situation by "stealing" money from the widow of an old friend; he will not dishonour a faithful servant by dismissing him from his service. All these acts confirm and increase our admiration of Tellheim as a worthy character.⁷

This very favourable view of the major, however, differs greatly from the way he sees his lot:

" Ich bin Tellheim, der verabschiedete, der an seiner Ehre gekraenkt, der Krueppel, der Bettler ... " (II,9)

In order to explain this discrepancy we must now examine the nature of the situation in which Tellheim finds himself. As the audience is aware, by the end of Act II, Tellheim has been discharged from military service. However, the circumstances under which he left are, as yet, unclear. We only know that Tellheim feels that his honour has been besmirched. He also seems, at present, to lack money. These circumstances suggest an unhappy situation, but hardly an "unbearable" one.⁸ He still maintains the devotion of his servant, the friendship of a fellow officer and the love of a beautiful and wealthy girl. And yet the major finds the present situation intolerable. He will accept help from no one, nor will he make any attempt to better his situation. Indeed, he seems to make the situation worse deliberately.⁹ That he refuses, for example, to use money left in his care is admirable. Nevertheless, as Just points out, Werner

fully intended that Tellheim make use of that money. That he tears up Marloff's promissory note is also highly commendable, but he also destroys the notes of others who could conceivably be of help to him in his present financial dilemma.¹⁰ He seems determined to intensify the situation despite "an overriding concern not to be pitied."¹¹ Arntzen states¹² that Tellheim often appears comic because of the contrast between his desire to act logically and his actions, which at times hardly seem logical. Instead of making use of Werner's money or the other notes in his possession, Tellheim sends Just off to pawn Minna's ring. This action not only appears illogical, since it will not really help Tellheim out of his financial difficulties, but also seems quite insensitive. He seems to want to suffer more than is actually necessary. Werner also makes this observation, and he is no more satisfied with Tellheim's explanation than is the sceptical audience or reader:

Tellheim: Die Leute moegen es immer wissen, daB ich nichts mehr habe. Man muB nicht reicher scheinen wollen, als man ist.

Werner: Aber warum aermere? ... (III,7)

How is such behaviour explicable? Why does Tellheim find it necessary to act so, and what in fact constitutes his predicament?

Scenes such as those with Just and the widow "illustrate that honour is the primary ethical principle"¹³ which directs all of Tellheim's actions. He is compelled by the

very nature of his character to act honourably. Honour is " the moral centre of Tellheim's existence."¹⁴ It is that which Tellheim values above everything. Moreover, one can only be said to have it through official and public recognition.¹⁵ Until the sixth scene of Act IV, the apparent source of Tellheim's dilemma seemed to be principally financial. In this scene, however, we discover that " Tellheim's monetary problem has a larger dimension."¹⁶ Prussian officials refuse to acknowledge his claim to the promissory note from the Saxon government. Faced with a criminal charge Tellheim has lost his honour. This value reveals the essence of Tellheim's being and therefore it is not merely this aspect alone but rather his entire existence which has been called into question.¹⁷ Consequently, the dilemma which Tellheim faces can best be conceived of as an existential crisis: he no longer recognizes himself or the world.¹⁸ Tellheim suddenly finds himself in a world which does not function logically: " ... in a situation where virtuous actions no longer have virtuous consequences, where love demands renunciation and honor requires disgrace."¹⁹ Indeed, because of a noble act he suffers.²⁰ His world has truly been turned upside down. As a result he is bewildered and very bitter.²¹ Fate has dealt him a staggering blow, for it has stripped him of his very identity, that of an honourable man. His honour was the source of his autonomy. Without it he has become powerless, having to be avenged through his servant (I,4)²²;

moreover, he cannot leave Berlin and start a new life, either with Werner in Persia (I,11) or with Minna in Saxony.²³ It is this "Gespenst der Ehre" which haunts Tellheim.²⁴ Hence his obsessive need for moral integrity; otherwise life is devoid of meaning.

Tellheim faces a crisis. He has lost faith in the world and in himself. He no longer has confidence in his own strength of character.²⁵ As he tears up Marloff's note he muses:

"Wer steht mir dafuer, daB eigener Mangel mich nicht einmal verleiten koennte, Gebrauch davon zu machen."
(I,7)

He can no longer trust himself to act nobly, nor does he recognize himself as the man he once was. He speaks to Minna of two Tellheims, the former: "... der bluehende Mann, voller Ansprueche, voller Ruhmbegierde; der seines ganzen Koerpers, seiner ganzen Seele maechtig war: ...", and the present: "Ich bin Tellheim, der verabschiedete, der an seiner Ehre gekraenkt, der Krueppel, der Bettler." (II,9)

His faith in mankind has also been shaken.²⁶ His terrifying laugh (IV,6) shocks and frightens Minna, for it is "das Lachen aus tiefster Verzweiflung ueber den Lauf der Welt."²⁷ Minna urges him to trust that all will turn out for the best:

"... Nein, Sie sind der Mann nicht, den eine gute Tat reuen kann, weil sie ueble Folgen fuer ihn hat. Nein, unmoeglich koennen diese ueblen Folgen dauern! Die Wahrheit muB an den Tag kommen ... Wenn Sie an Tugend und Vorsicht glauben, ... , so lachen Sie so nicht!"
(IV,6)

Tellheim, however, can no longer believe in a providence which rewards all virtue. Justice does not exist. That he will be found guilty is a fate which he accepts as inevitable.²⁸ His response to Minna's plea is " das schreckliche Lachen des Menschenhasses ". He will have nothing more to do with a world which seeks to destroy him. He cannot function in a society which does not acknowledge his honour.²⁹ His most fervent desire is to alienate himself from that world and from those in it.³⁰ He tries, albeit unsuccessfully, for example to sever the relationship between himself and his servant. His pawning of the ring is a symbolic attempt to break the bonds which join him to Minna.³¹ ✓

Loss of honour has totally incapacitated the major. Though other material difficulties (i.e. lack of money, his wounded arm) are present, we are led to believe that they would hardly prove insurmountable were they not compounded by this devastating blow. It is the source of his dilemma, which makes the physical handicaps appear more pronounced. It serves to accentuate these problems³²: losing two thousand Pistolen has made him a beggar; his wounded arm is a physical manifestation of his psychologically crippled state. A figure of self-abnegation, Tellheim is no longer Tellheim.

We see, therefore, that the legal case involves much more than a financial transaction.³³ His reputation, indeed his very existence is in question. As the basis of his

identity, his personal integrity must be restored if he is ever again to function effectively in society or be at peace with himself.

Unlike some of Lessing's earlier characters, (Damis, the foolish 'hero' of Der junge Gelehrte, for example), Tellheim evokes our sympathy rather than our scorn. We pity him his predicament and the circumstances to which he has been reduced. Though his actions may at times appear questionable, one cannot but feel for him, as one would for any worthwhile character suffering such a crisis.

Tellheim's situation is indeed very serious, and if we are to do the character any justice at all, we, as spectators, must appreciate that fact.³⁴ The consequences of his problems do not, however, confine themselves to the character of Tellheim. The situation involves others, and therefore cannot be seen merely as the major's personal quandary. Just and, in particular, Minna will be greatly affected by decisions made by the officer concerning his predicament. Minna's future happiness is dependent upon Tellheim's resolving his present crisis.

The special circumstances of his misfortune have influenced Tellheim profoundly. Although he is instinctively generous, to which the widow can attest, the major can offer nothing under the existing conditions. A "neurotic fear of debt" now asserts itself.³⁵ Just and Werner, who have often been recipients of Tellheim's generosity, are not allowed to

help. It is only when Just makes his claim that he is, in fact, financially more obligated to Tellheim, that he is permitted to stay. Just's "canine" loyalty to his master is unshakeable. It is clear that, like the poodle of the story, Just would never willingly leave Tellheim regardless of the circumstances. Tellheim's concept of honour, however, does not allow him to be the beneficiary of any acts of charity. He must always be the one to give, never the one to receive. This point is raised again in the course of his conversation with Werner (III,7). This discussion also reveals another side to the major's sense of integrity. It appears, at first, that Tellheim simply does not want to exploit his friends.³⁶ He feels in no position to borrow because he has no way of knowing when he will be able to pay the money back.³⁷ Werner resorts to a trick in order to make the money more acceptable, however the scheme fails and Werner's action appears patronizing to Tellheim.³⁸ This provokes the angered and demoralized major to respond:

" Es ziemt sich nicht, daB ich dein Schuldner bin ... "
(IV,6)

This remark not only indicates his unwillingness to become Werner's debtor, but also that such a transaction, to Tellheim's mind, would be improper; his social position above Werner must be maintained. The major's personal values will not allow him to borrow money from someone below his social rank.³⁹ Werner, while recognizing the major as his superior⁴⁰,

is reminded of a time when Tellheim was not embarrassed to ask a favour of a friend when he was in need. It would seem, however, that those days have past:

" ... ich will dein Schuldner nicht sein ... "

This remark angers Werner, and justifiably, for as he points out, Tellheim is already heavily indebted to him for having twice saved his life in battle. In his relationship with the sergeant as with Just, Tellheim tries, unsuccessfully, to " weigh relationships in terms of debt and credit ".⁴¹ His failure to achieve his goal in both cases, (i.e. the dismissal of his servant and an honourable refusal to accept money from a friend), serves to illustrate the futility of counting monetary obligations in order to evaluate relationships.⁴² The posture Tellheim assumes towards others cannot be judged in these terms since it is not based upon money. Tellheim himself uses this argument early in the play, in his conversation with the widow:

" ... Ich habe nie etwas tun koennen, mich mit einem Manne abzufinden, der sechs Jahre Glueck und Unglueck, Ehre und Gefahr mit mir geteilt ... " (I,6)

Tellheim, however, ignores this reasoning in his dealings with Just and Werner. They must remind him of it. Through Just's story of the poodle, Tellheim is made to see that their relationship is more than that of an employer and his employee.⁴³ Werner, in turn, points out that the rapport which he and Tellheim enjoy derives from the experiences

shared as comrades in arms. Their eagerness to help Tellheim is not motivated by money, but rather by love and respect. In choosing to remain blind to the true motives of Just and Werner, Tellheim, in point of fact, ignores his own argument and hurts the feelings of both his loyal companions.⁴⁴ He refuses to acknowledge the value of actions prompted by sentiment. His sense of honour will not allow him to accept such help. This forces both Just and Werner to make "counter-claims for their own honor".⁴⁵ Just will be dishonoured if he is forced to leave Tellheim's service feeling, as he does, that he is still indebted to his master; Werner states that he is depending on Tellheim to ensure that he can "... als ein ehrlicher Kerl sterben ... " They must express their motives in monetary terms. It is only in this way, by allowing the major to help them maintain their personal integrity that he can accept them and still maintain his own. It should be noted here as well, that his reconciliations with Just and with Werner represent important steps in Tellheim's development as a character, for in accepting their reasoning, Tellheim acknowledges that their claims to honour are as important as his own.⁴⁶

Minna is also very anxious to help the officer. Her approach to the problem differs from the claims put forth by Just and Werner. In response to Tellheim's declaration that "reason and necessity" compel him to forget her, Minna immediately challenges the severity of the situation⁴⁷:

" ... wie vernuenftig diese Vernunft, wie notwendig diese Notwendigkeit ... " (II,9). She will not accept Tellheim's grounds for ending their relationship. Minna's sole concern lies in finding out whether or not Tellheim still loves her. Once she has managed to wrench an affirmative answer from him, she considers the greatest part of the problem solved. When Tellheim persists in arguing the point her tone becomes mocking: " Das klingt sehr tragisch! - " (II,9). For Tellheim, however, the situation is tragic, and in the face of his wounded pride, Minna's tone seems too light.⁴⁸ Her refusal to accept the gravity of his position confuses Tellheim and her gentle mockery of his condition: " ... Deine Hand, lieber Bettler!" (II,9), serves only to "demoralize" him.⁴⁹ His existential crisis becomes apparent: " Das ist zu viel! - Wo bin ich? - ... " (II,9). Her presence torments him and he must flee from it.

Despite her obvious love for Tellheim, in light of the play's development, Minna's approach to the problem does seem rather insensitive. We must, however, remember that at this point in the play, Minna, like the audience, is not in possession of all the facts. Tellheim is aware of this. He is eager to justify his position and therefore writes her a letter. He assumes that at their next meeting her attitude will be somewhat more realistic and that she will respect his decision. Minna still, however, does not appreciate the critical issues confronting her beloved. Her tone is as light-

hearted as ever. She adopts a highly optimistic attitude, and urges Tellheim to face hardship with humor:

" Was haben Sie denn gegen das Lachen? Kann man denn auch nicht lachend sehr ernsthaft sein? Lieber Major, das Lachen erhaelt uns vernuenftiger als der VerdrueB."
(IV,6)

In the play, as an important aspect of comedy and its evolution in the eighteenth century, two kinds of laughter are presented: Tellheim's laugh is the perverse and destructive 'Verlachen' while Minna advocates the healthy, friendly 'Lachen' with which Lessing was so concerned. Minna possesses a "naive confidence" which allows her to believe that everything will work out for the best.⁵⁰ She has also just finished talking with Riccaut, who brings good news about the major's case. Tellheim, however, finds it impossible to share Minna's optimistic point of view. Even when informed of Riccaut's encouraging message, he refuses to believe anything but the worst; he assumes that the case will simply be dropped and that no restitution will ever be made. Ignoring all hope, the affronted officer prefers not to stray from his purpose. He means to sever his relationship with Minna. His reputation has been questioned and, under the circumstances, he cannot justify dragging Minna down with him.⁵¹ To Minna, nothing but love is of any consequence. She will be the source of his happiness. This solution offends Tellheim's sense of personal worth for he cannot but be aware of the implication that he would be totally dependent on her.⁵² He cannot degrade

himself further by agreeing to become a charge on her revenues. The only proper solution is to free Minna from an obligation to a man no longer worthy of her esteem.

Because of the nature of the situation and given Tellheim's character, it is impossible for him to retain both love and honour.⁵³ He must abandon one in order to save the other, and Tellheim is ready and determined to sacrifice the former for the latter.⁵⁴ Minna will not acknowledge this reasoning⁵⁵, nor can she accept it:

" - Die Ehre ist - die Ehre." (IV,6)

She interprets his decision only as pride. The two characters do not and cannot understand each other. The conflict becomes "entrenched".⁵⁶

Reh describes the friction between Tellheim and Minna as one of values: honour versus love.⁵⁷ These govern the actions of the two central characters: neither is able nor willing to concede the superiority of the other's predominate ideal. From Minna's point of view, honour cannot take precedence over love, and she is confident that Tellheim will eventually come around to her way of thinking. She does not acknowledge that Tellheim's convictions are as strong as her own. In overlooking this she does him an injustice. In failing to recognize the significance which honour holds for Tellheim, Minna displays the same blindness which Tellheim exhibited in his dealings with Just and Werner, for she does

not concede the worthiness of his motives.

Tellheim truly views his resistance to Minna as justifiable⁵⁸:

" ... Darf er die glueckliche, das heit nicht nur die schoene und reiche, sondern die in ihrer gesellschaftlichen Ordnung geborgene Minna in sein Unglueck hineinziehen; darf der AusgestoBene ihr ihrerseits das Schicksal der AusgestoBenen bereiten oder sie auch nur der Moeglichkeit gesellschaftlicher Diffamierung aussetzen? ... "59

One must, however, admit that in this heroic act of renunciation there are shades of egoism.⁶⁰ Tellheim sees only his personal misfortune.⁶¹ He does not consider how his attitude is affecting Minna, rather he is far more concerned with his own situation. Her feelings, her sense of honour, too should be considered. Minna's claim that her reputation is also in question appears quite justified.

" Das ist: ein ehrliches Maedchen, die Sie liebt, nicht sitzen lassen. Freilich befiehlt das die Ehre ... " (IV,6)

Yet Tellheim refuses to acknowledge that her claim to honour is as important as his own. He cannot see how selfishly he is acting towards the woman he loves. One can argue that Tellheim has not dealt fairly with Minna. Her trip to Berlin was necessary only because he had not contacted her since being discharged. Not until she confronts him does he inform her of his problems. While believing that he is being honest with her, he, in fact, suppresses both his doubts and his true feelings. He tries to assume an affected attitude to-

wards her.⁶² Minna manages to tear down this facade quite easily, for Tellheim cannot maintain it long in the face of the woman who loves him.⁶³ If Tellheim hoped to deceive her by it, he was merely fooling himself.

This officer shows a remarkable aptitude for self-deception. He believes himself to be greatly changed by what has happened. Is he not, in fact, the same person, acting under greatly altered circumstances? Nobility of mind and a keen sense of honour have always defined Tellheim's character. In fact it was a noble act which first attracted Minna to him. His graciousness towards the widow indicates that nobility and generosity have in no way diminished. Under the pressure of the present unhappy situation, however, his sense of moral worth has become distorted, to the point where it is doubtful whether Tellheim will ever again be capable of reciprocity, be it financial or emotional.

In his dealings with others, Tellheim endeavours to act honourably and in the best interest of those closest to him. He dismisses Just because he cannot pay him; he will not take money from Werner because he is well aware that his friend will need funds to further his military career; he will not disgrace Minna by forcing on her an unworthy bridegroom. Yet he does not see how selfish these decisions are, in that he does not consider the feelings of others while making them. By refusing to acknowledge their motives as worthy and justified, he forces his friends to find less

acceptable means of assisting him. He provokes dishonesty from Werner, who must try to trick him into accepting money, and it is also this steadfast position which forces Minna to contrive the elaborate and potentially dangerous 'Spiel'. Werner has the right, as a friend, to offer help, just as Minna has the right to love Tellheim, regardless of any change in his social or financial position.⁶⁴

With the character of Tellheim, a new image of the army officer emerges on the stage. One observes, for example, a dramatic contrast between Tellheim and his fore-runners of the English stage, characters such as Falstaff and those of Farquhar's comedy The Recruiting Officer (1706). Despite his obvious flaws, the character of Tellheim also differs greatly from other protagonists of Lessing's works. A comparison, for example, of Tellheim and Damis, the "hero" of Der junge Gelehrte, clearly illustrates a trend towards producing characters who evoke sympathy rather than ridicule. An audience can feel little but scorn for the pompous young man.

" ... Ich verstehe sieben Sprachen vollkommen, und ich bin erst zwanzig Jahre alt. In dem ganzen Umfange der Geschichte, und in allen mit ihr verwandten Wissenschaften, bin ich ohne gleichem - - ... " (III,3)

When at the end of the play, Damis, dejected and sulky vows to leave Germany, one can only feel pity for the country in which he plans to take up residence. There are no admirable qualities displayed which could redeem Damis in the eyes of

the spectator. He is consistently insensitive and egocentric.

" ... Mit wie viel Toren und Unwissenden findest du mich nicht hier umgeben? Einige davon wissen nichts, und wissen es, daß sie nichts wissen ... Andre wissen nichts und wollen auch nichts wissen; sie halten sie bei ihrer Unwissenheit fuer gluecklich; sie scheuen das Licht der Gelehrsamkeit - - ... Noch andre aber wissen nichts, gar nichts gelernt, und wollen doch den Schein haben, als haetten sie etwas gelernt. Und diese sind die allerunertraeglichsten Narren, worunter, die Wahrheit zu bekennen, auch mein Vater gehoert."
(II,4)

Lessing has taken great pains to ensure that Tellheim not be equated with such a character. His masterful characterization enables the major to display many admirable traits which save him from becoming an object of ridicule. The audience cannot despise him. One, instead, applauds his generosity of spirit, his loyalty and nobility of mind, and sympathizes with his plight. This is the distinction between 'Lachen' and 'Verlachen'. We do not mock Tellheim but, in fact, find him more and more intriguing as the play progresses.

Guidry describes the flaw in Tellheim's character as an " incompleteness of the value-structure ", in that his sense of honour outweighs all other emotions.⁶⁵ Honour, though admirable in a soldier, " becomes dubious, as soon as it cannot make room for more humane emotions ".⁶⁶ Tellheim's fault lies in his failure to concede the value of tender sentiments, such as compassion and love. He must learn, (as demonstrated by the widow), that a person ennobles himself by the gracious acceptance of help⁶⁷, and by recognizing

the worth of sentimental emotions, for these too are important and deserving of respect.

It is towards this "sentimental education" that Minna hopes to lead Tellheim with the 'Spiel'.⁶⁸ The reasons for the success or failure of her plan are now to be discussed.

Footnotes to Chapter Two

¹H. B. Garland, Minna von Barnhelm (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1967), p. xix. Hereafter cited as Garland.

²Juergen Schroeder, " G. E. Lessing: 'Minna von Barnhelm' ". In Die deutsche Komoedie vom Mittelalter bis zur Gegenwart (Duesseldorf: A. Bagel, 1977), p. 49. Hereafter cited as Schroeder.

³Arntzen, p. 29.

⁴Bruce Kieffer, " Wieland and Lessing: 'Musarion' and 'Minna von Barnhelm' ", LY, XIV(1982), 190. Hereafter cited as Kieffer.

⁵Michael M. Metzger, Lessing and the Language of the Comedy (Paris: Mouton and Co., 1966), p. 205. Hereafter cited as Metzger.

⁶Carroll, p. 150.

⁷Kieffer, p. 191.

⁸Barrack and Wessel, p. 155-156.

⁹Kieffer, p. 191.

¹⁰ibid., p. 191.

¹¹ibid., p. 191.

¹²Arntzen, p. 33.

¹³Glen A. Guidry, " Money, Honor and Love: The Hierarchy of Values in Lessing's 'Minna von Barnhelm' ", LY, XIV (1982), 178. Hereafter cited as Guidry.

¹⁴Benno von Wiese, Von Lessing bis Grabbe, Studien zur deutschen Klassik und Romantik (Duesseldorf: A. Bagel, 1968), p. 11-12. Hereafter cited as Wiese.

¹⁵Emil Staiger, "Lessing's 'Minna von Barnhelm'", GL&L(N.S.), I(1948), 262. Hereafter cited as Staiger.

¹⁶Kieffer, p. 190.

¹⁷Gerhard Fricke, "Lessings 'Minna von Barnhelm'". In Studien und Interpretationen (Frankfurt: H. F. Menck, 1956), p. 36. Hereafter cited as Fricke.

¹⁸Barrack and Wessel, p. 157.

¹⁹Duncan, "Dark Comedy ...", p. 92.

²⁰Barrack and Wessel, p. 156.

²¹Schroeder, p. 57.

²²Duncan, "Dark Comedy ...", p. 86.

²³Arntzen, p. 36.

²⁴Guidry, p. 177.

²⁵Arntzen, p. 37.

²⁶Staiger, p. 265.

²⁷Hans-Egon Hass, "Lessings 'Minna von Barnhelm'". In Das deutsche Lustspiel (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1968), I, 45. Hereafter cited as Hass.

²⁸Kieffer, p. 197.

²⁹Raimund Belgardt, "Minna von Barnhelm als komischer Charakter", Monatshefte, LVIII(1966), 211. Hereafter cited as Belgardt.

³⁰Schroeder, p. 57.

³¹Kieffer, p. 192.

³²Otto Mann, "Minna von Barnhelm". In Das deutsche Drama vom Barock bis zur Gegenwart (edited by Benno von Wiese; Duesseldorf: A. Bagel, 1958), I, 97. Hereafter cited as Mann.

³³Guidry, p. 178.

³⁴Fricke, p. 32.

³⁵Alfred Hoezel, "Truth and Honesty in 'Minna von Barnhelm'", LY, IX(1977), 35. Hereafter cited as Hoezel.

³⁶Fricke, p. 32.

³⁷Carroll, p. 151.

³⁸Hoezel, p. 34.

³⁹Kieffer, p. 193.

⁴⁰Carroll, p. 151.

⁴¹Duncan, "Dark Comedy ...", p. 87.

⁴²Staiger, p. 264.

⁴³Guidry, p. 182.

⁴⁴Ritzel, p. 162.

⁴⁵Carroll, p. 150.

⁴⁶Kieffer, p. 192-193.

⁴⁷Albert Reh, "Das Motiv der Rettung in Lessings Tragoedie und ernste Komoedie", LY, XI(1979), 45. Hereafter cited as Reh.

⁴⁸Fricke, p. 36.

⁴⁹Barrack and Wessel, p. 157.

⁵⁰Metzger, p. 226.

⁵¹Hass, p. 37.

⁵²Carroll, p. 152.

⁵³Gunter Wicke, Die Struktur des deutschen Lustspiels der Aufklaerung (Bonn: H. Bouvier and Co., 1965), p. 117.
Hereafter cited as Wicke.

⁵⁴Reh, p. 47.

⁵⁵Wicke, p. 117.

⁵⁶Carroll, p. 152.

⁵⁷Reh, p. 44.

⁵⁸Carroll, p. 151.

⁵⁹Hass, p. 37.

⁶⁰Kieffer, p. 195.

⁶¹Hass, p. 45.

⁶²Hoezel, p. 39.

⁶³Staiger, p. 262.

⁶⁴Fricke, p. 31.

⁶⁵Guidry, p. 183.

⁶⁶ibid., p. 185.

⁶⁷Hoezel, p. 33.

⁶⁸Guidry, p. 184.

CHAPTER THREE

Das Spiel

As discussed in the last chapter, the conflict between Minna and Tellheim is one of values: love versus honour. Neither is able nor willing to concede the superiority of the other's predominate value. Minna's appeals to Tellheim's reason and to his heart are futile.¹ He remains adamant in his decision to end their relationship.

Minna, however, refuses to accept his decision. Although she regards his behaviour merely as a display of " ... Stolz, unverzeihlicher Stolz " (III,12), she is far from willing to give him up. As she explains to Franziska:

" ... Nein, liebe Naerrin, eines Fehlers wegen entsagt man keinem Manne."

No matter what external changes have taken place, Minna still believes that Tellheim is a man worth fighting for.² She maintains complete trust in the quality of Tellheim's character.³ It was this trust which prompted her to defy all convention to seek him out, confident that his silence was due to no disloyalty.⁴ She is also well aware that he is completely innocent of the charges against him.⁵ Moreover, the major has admitted that his feelings towards her have not changed. Under these circumstances, and given Minna's unshakeable love for and devotion to Tellheim, it would be

impossible for her to even consider abandoning him. His obstinancy only increases her determination to help him.

In order to achieve her goal, Minna decides to employ a 'Spiel':

" Ich muB Ihnen bekennen, daB ich - gleichfalls das Spiel sehr liebe - "

Minna freely admits to Riccaut (IV,2). Minna is, of course, speaking of gambling. This innocent comment becomes highly significant later in the play, for 'spielen' implies risk. Yet Minna proceeds with her game, seemingly oblivious to the possible risks she is taking.

One must appreciate the fact that Minna's motives in concocting the 'Spiel' stem from her desire to aid the man she loves.⁶ The loss of his honour has incapacitated Tellheim, both physically and psychologically. He cannot help himself out of his present predicament, nor will he accept help from others. Deaf to appeals from both Werner and Minna, Tellheim is determined to accept his fate without taking any action to right the wrong being done to him. It is this willful submission to an undeserved punishment which prompts Minna to resort to a ruse. Unwilling and incapable of resolving his own crisis, Tellheim requires the aid of others.

But what does Minna hope to accomplish with this imaginative deception? It is necessary to first establish her aim in order to determine whether or not she is successful. Her obvious goal is, of course, the renewal of the relation-

ship. This she accomplishes quite easily. Informed of her alleged misfortune Tellheim immediately forgets his own problems and rushes to her aid. His reaction clearly fulfills Minna's earlier prediction:

" ... Der Mann, der mich jetzt mit allen Reichtuemern verweigert, wird mich der ganzen Welt streitig machen so bald er hoert, daB ich ungluecklich und verlassen bin." (IV,1)

The introduction of the 'Spiel' ends the stalemate between the two characters. Concern for Minna's plight successfully draws Tellheim's attention away from his own troubles. If, however, a reunion with Tellheim were Minna's only ambition it would not be necessary to continue the game, for her goal would have been achieved. Minna clearly has more than one specific aim in mind. She begins a second phase of her plan; Minna refuses Tellheim's offer of assistance on the same grounds that he refused her help:

" Es ist eine nichtswuerdige Kreatur, die sich nicht schaemt, ihr ganzes Glueck der blinden Zaertlichkeit eines Mannes zu verdanken." (V,9)

It is evidently not Minna's intention merely to " provoke a loving response " from Tellheim.⁷ Critics have put forward various suggestions as to the deeper purpose in Minna's 'Spiel'. Some, such as Otto Mann, maintain that Minna seeks to show Tellheim the folly of excessive pride.⁸ Others support the theory that Minna hopes to lead him to self-knowledge and thereby cure his self-delusions.⁹ Still others propose

that her aim is to " free Tellheim's inner self "¹⁰, while Reh feels that the salvation of 'Menschlichkeit' is the ultimate goal of Minna's plan.¹¹ All of these suppositions are valid and important in our consideration of the 'Spiel'. Minna herself says very little about her plans for Tellheim, except that she intends " ... ihn wegen dieses Stolzes ein wenig zu martern " (IV,1). We must therefore derive her purpose from the 'Spiel' itself. Her tactic seems to be an exact reversal of the situation in such a way that she appear as destitute as Tellheim. When he offers help, (which she is certain he will), she intends to dismiss him for exactly the same reasons that he forsook her. In this way she wishes to place before him a mirror-image of himself: and "alter-ego", displaying the same foibles as those she sees in him.¹² Tellheim should then see the error of his ways: i.e. the absurdity of his extremism and the value of tempering it with more humane emotions. Her motives are admirable: to free the generous, loving major who is virtually a prisoner of his own distorted sense of honour; her plan: a " Maskenspiel gegen Maske."¹³ She wishes to reconcile Tellheim with himself and thus free the tender sentiments which he is willfully suppressing; to cure him of his blindness to his own feelings and to those of others, and to reconcile him with society: " Ein Sieg des Menschen ueber den Offizier."¹⁴

Minna has no doubt but that the 'Spiel' will succeed.¹⁵ She maintains that she knows Tellheim " von Grund aus ", and

can therefore predict his reaction to any given situation.¹⁶ She also retains complete trust in the power of love. She proceeds with her plan, assured that love will conquer all obstacles.¹⁷ It appears, at first, that her confidence is well justified: her initial scheme to get Tellheim back is a smashing success. Tellheim's reaction is exactly as she anticipated. Minna does not, however, fare as well in the second phase of her ruse. Problems do develop during the course of the game, which are the result of flaws in the plan itself. These cannot be ignored. First, it must be remembered that the game which Minna is playing is, in fact, an elaborate deception. The circumstances to which Tellheim is reacting are fictitious, therefore, any solution to the problem will last only as long as the deception is maintained.¹⁸

Minna hopes, by means of the 'Spiel', to reverse the situation in order that she appear to be in as much of a dilemma as Tellheim. This presents another basic problem, for as Carroll points out, the fictitious situation which Minna creates for herself is not the same as Tellheim's predicament. In refusing Tellheim's help, Minna does not, as Tellheim felt compelled to do, reject the aid of one socially superior to herself.¹⁹ It would bring no further dishonour to the major were he to marry a woman who had renounced everything for him. On the contrary, since he is the cause of her misfortune, he is bound in duty to do all he can to atone for her loss.²⁰ This is not to say that Tellheim proposes to Minna merely out

of a sense of duty. He is obviously delighted at the prospect of reclaiming Minna's hand. In marrying Minna he would satisfy both his heart as well as his sense of honour.

One must also consider that Tellheim is a man.²¹ For an eighteenth century damsel in distress to accept aid from the man who loves her would be both romantic and perfectly acceptable socially. Tellheim's position is somewhat different. As Tellheim himself argues:

" Sophistin! So entehrt sich das schwaechere Geschlecht durch alles, was dem staerkern nicht ansteht? So soll sich der Mann alles erlauben, was dem Weibe geziemt? Welches bestimmte die Natur zur Stuetze des andern?"
(V,9)

" ... the same principles, (of pride and honour), in her society, do not apply to her as a woman."²²

A fundamental difficulty with the 'Spiel' lies in the fact that Minna believes that she can anticipate Tellheim's reactions. She is confident, for example, that he will immediately realize the meaning of the swapping of rings. Tellheim, however, does not understand this manoeuvre. It finally becomes necessary for Minna to point out its significance to him. This confusion almost leads to disaster, for Tellheim completely misinterprets Minna's reasons for the exchange. He thinks that Minna has betrayed him.²³

Why does Minna include this trick in her plan? The move is impulsive rather than strategic²⁴:

" Recht weiB ich es selbst nicht, aber mich duenkt, ich sehe so was voraus, wo ich ihn brauchen konnte, - ... "
(IV,5)

Yet it becomes an important part of Minna's stratagem, for in returning the ring to Tellheim, she symbolically renews their engagement.²⁵ Tellheim, however, does not examine it. He remains blind to Minna's true motives and chooses instead to believe that Minna no longer loves him. "Der Komoediantin entgleitet jetzt das Spiel."²⁶ Minna becomes ensnared in her own trap for she has lost control of the game. She is once again unable to 'reach' Tellheim. The conflict between the two once more becomes entrenched.

The timely arrival of Minna's uncle saves the situation. The re-introduction of the 'Spiel' ends the deadlock between the two characters and allows the action to resume. The arrival allows the game to continue a little longer in order that Tellheim once again be free to follow his more loving inclinations. Despite his feelings of anger and humiliation, the major cannot abandon Minna.²⁷ His instinctive need to protect her overcomes his wounded pride. The 'Spiel' is, therefore, not without success. Tellheim, as Strohschneider-Kohrs has noted, "feels strong and free".²⁸

"Wie ist mir? - Meine ganze Seele hat neue Triebfedern bekommen. Mein ganzes Unglueck schlug mich nieder, machte mich aergerlich, kurzsichtig, schuechtern, lassig; ihr Unglueck hebt mich empor, ich sehe wieder frei um mich und fuehle mich willig und stark alles fuer sie unternehmen - Was verweile ich?" (V,2)

In the face of Minna's problems his own seem to disappear. Tellheim is no longer helpless but can act, and he quickly takes steps to aid Minna. He can now receive the money

offered him by Werner. As with the widow, it is easier for Tellheim to accept help for the sake of another. Minna has literally given him a reason to live, as Tellheim himself explains:

" ... Der Trieb der Selbsterhaltung erwacht, da ich etwas Kostbareres zu erhalten habe als mich, und es durch mich zu erhalten habe ... " (V,5)

His need to help Minna diverts him from his obsession with his loss of honour.²⁹ By the time the letter from the king arrives he has decided to devote himself to her service.³⁰ If Minna wishes, he will tear up the letter in order to be her equal in misfortune.³¹ Minna's plan, therefore, at least partially achieves its objective. Tellheim has learned to place another's needs above his own. He appears, once again, to be the gallant, caring man with whom she fell in love.

This change in Tellheim's outlook does not, however, result from a change in attitude towards his own loss of honour. The inner conflict between the frustration he feels because of his dishonoured reputation and the knowledge of his own innocence remains. It is merely external circumstances which have been altered.³² Tellheim is forced to react to a new situation which, for a time, takes his mind off his own problems. Minna's troubles take precedence over his own. He does not abandon his peculiar sense of personal integrity. As Martinson observes, the letter from the king serves to re-affirm it.³³

Besides the various strategic aspects of the plan of the 'Spiel' itself, one should also consider whether or not the 'Spiel' is an appropriate means to the desired end. Though it shows great ingenuity and imagination in its design, the light-hearted approach of the game throws into sharp relief the very serious nature of Tellheim's problem.³⁴ The major believes that in renouncing Minna he is protecting her.³⁵ He tries to harden his heart and suppress his feelings, but is unable to do so. Minna exploits this weakness in order to show the superiority of love. She does not consider his problems to be insoluble and disregards Tellheim's reasons for trying to hide his love from her.³⁶ She draws him into a game of confused symbols which only bewilders and frustrates him all the more.³⁷ Though her motives are well-intentioned, Minna does not fully recognize the severity of his plight. Tellheim's erratic behaviour should serve to illustrate the serious nature of the situation. Minna, however, chooses to disregard all danger signals and proceeds with the 'Spiel'. Her light-hearted approach demonstrates her inability to cope with the situation on an earnest and mature level. Though Minna, in fact, serves as the voice of Lessing in her promotion of serious and sympathetic laughter (IV,6), the author is also anxious to point out that in certain cases, such as that of the major, laughter is most inappropriate, for it serves to intensify feelings of bitterness and frustration.

Minna sees herself as somewhat of a professional

gamester and therefore proceeds confidently with her plan. Tellheim, however, is unaware that he is another player in Minna's game. He is unfamiliar with the rules; he does not anticipate hidden meanings in words and symbols. It would never occur to him that Minna would, for whatever reasons, try to deceive him by means of an elaborate scheme. It is therefore not surprising that Tellheim reacts to the discovery of deceit with astonishment and anger.

Until this moment Minna does not realize the potentially tragic consequences of the 'Spiel'. Franziska attempts to warn her, but she refuses to listen.³⁸ By failing to foresee how Tellheim might misinterpret the meaning behind the illusion, Minna almost loses him. She expects her fiancé to act rationally, and is therefore totally unprepared to deal with his anger.³⁹ It is only at this point that she realizes the danger of trying to manipulate him:

" Ah, liebe Franziska, ich haette dir folgen sollen.
Ich habe den Scherz zu weit getrieben." (V,11)

She also realizes that the only solution to this muddle is the revelation of truth. Tellheim is not capable of correctly interpreting these strange events. She must needs enlighten him. First, however, it is necessary that the stalemate once again be broken. For one terrible moment this seems unlikely. Tellheim: " ... vor Wut an den Fingern nagt, das Gesicht wegwendet und nichts hoert." (V,11) The uncle's fortuitous entrance affords her one last chance. Not willing

to risk yet another misunderstanding, Minna seizes this opportunity to explain all.

Though her spirit and confidence bring vitality to the play, an unfortunate aspect of that assurance, which one cannot ignore, is Minna's vanity. She fully believes, for example, that she can compensate for any misfortune Tellheim may have suffered:

" ... Unglueck ist auch gut. Vielleicht, daB ihm der Himmel alles nahm, um ihm in mir alles wiederzugeben."
(II,7)

Vanity is also reflected in the very design of the 'Spiel'. With a few well-chosen words she has Tellheim begging for her forgiveness and for her hand in marriage. As Franziska observes:

" Und so was muB die feinste Eigenliebe unendlich kitzeln." (IV,1)

Nothing could be more appealing to her ego. Minna is not, however, content and will not be so until Tellheim concedes the prerogative of love. He must, in fact, renounce his sense of honour in order to win her. In the meantime she continues to torment him. Her attitude toward the problem is comparable to a parent admonishing a small child, deeming the punishment as ultimately providing for its spiritual development. Minna therefore views her treatment of Tellheim as perfectly justified. As with the motives of the major, behind Minna's good intentions one discerns egocentric trends which, in this case, prove quite dangerous, for in order to satisfy

her vanity she pursues her goals, oblivious to the risks entailed. Her cheerful replies to Franziska's warnings cannot remove the doubts of her maid or of the audience to whom the severity of the situation is all too clear. It is here that Franziska displays greater sensitivity and a better understanding of human nature. Her words, however, fall on deaf ears:

" ... - Schweig, das will ich nun einmal so. Wo du mir diese Lust verdirbst; ... " (IV,3)

This quote clearly illustrates that Minna's prolonging of the game is selfish. It will be only what she wants it to be. Franziska's sympathies and those of the audience are drawn more and more to Tellheim as Minna's prank becomes less amusing and her treatment of the major appears unintentionally cruel. Despite the many fine qualities displayed by Minna, it is imperative that we recognize that her vanity, coupled with a definite lack of sensitivity, is responsible for the near tragedy of the fifth act.

Though the play ends happily enough - the hero and heroine are united, as are Werner and Franziska - Lessing leaves us with several serious matters to consider. Many critics, for example, are sceptical of the rapid reconciliation between Tellheim and Minna.⁴⁰ Tellheim's argument that equality is the only solid basis for marriage does not hold true, for Tellheim felt most secure when he was in a superior position: i.e. when he was in a position to help

Minna. Tellheim's sense of honour remains intact. We are in no way assured, should similar circumstances arise at some future date, that Tellheim would not find the situation equally intolerable.⁴¹

We must also consider Lessing's reasons for including the 'Spiel' in his comedy. This device is proposed as a possible means of curing Tellheim's self-delusions. By freeing the tender sentiments of love and compassion from the overwhelming influence of his pride, Minna hopes to reconcile Tellheim with himself and the world. She is, to a certain degree, successful, in that Tellheim's feelings towards her do manage to overcome his obsession with his loss of honour. Lessing, however, does not wish to encourage the use of deceit as a common practice in human relationships.⁴² Deceit always carries with it a certain amount of risk, or as Werner, who is himself caught in a lie, puts it:

" ... und daB es eine hundsfoett'sche Sache ums Luegen ist, weil man darueber ertappt werden kann." (III,7)

Deceit tends to compound, rather than to solve problems; Minna von Barnhelm most certainly illustrates the "tragic possibilities" which can arise whenever deception is used in one's social relationships: eg. Tellheim and Werner, Tellheim and Minna.⁴³ Manipulating another person is a dangerous business since one can never be certain of another's reaction to a given situation.⁴⁴

In the play, Lessing does not recommend the employment

of deception, but rather warns against it. Neither does he wish to demonstrate the superiority of either love or honour. Lessing's chief aim is to warn against "extreme behaviour".⁴⁵ Minna and Tellheim are admirable characters, and we can no more doubt the sincerity of Minna's love than we can Tellheim's sense of honour. Both are guilty, however, of allowing only love or honour to rule their actions. Hence, each must become aware of the emotions of others and through this appreciation, learn to temper their judgement. The 'Spiel', therefore, serves as much to educate Minna as Tellheim. It instructs her in the danger of manipulation; it teaches him that one must be willing to accept help as well as give it; finally, both characters realize that one must acknowledge the worth of another's sentiments and learn to respect those feelings.

Though a good deal of time has been spent in discussing Minna's 'Spiel' and its effect on the character of Tellheim, it is also vital to keep in mind that what we have is indeed a 'Spiel' within a 'Spiel' - a play within a play. Minna may plan, concoct and draw Tellheim into her game in an effort to solve her lover's dilemma. She believes herself to be in control but is, of course, merely a player in a much larger game. It is not Minna nor Tellheim, but Lessing who will resolve the crisis and who will have the last word.

Footnotes to Chapter Three

¹Steven D. Martinson, "The Cunning of Deceit in Lessing's Major Works", LY, XIV(1982), 101. Hereafter cited as Martinson.

²Garland, p. ix.

³Arntzen, p. 32.

⁴Heinrich Meyer-Benfey, Lessings 'Minna von Barnhelm' (Goettingen: O. Hapke, 1915), p. 161. Hereafter cited as Meyer-Benfey.

⁵Hass, p. 37.

⁶Fritz Martini, "Riccaut, die Sprache und das Spiel in Lessings Lustspiel 'Minna von Barnhelm'". In Formenwandel: Festschrift zum 65. Geburtstag von Paul Boeckmann (Hamburg: Hoffman and Campe, 1964), p. 79. Hereafter cited as Martini.

⁷ibid., p. 81.

⁸Mann, p. 99.

⁹Martinson, p. 112.

¹⁰Martini, p. 87.

¹¹Reh, p. 43.

¹²ibid., p. 48.

¹³Martini, p. 103.

¹⁴Meyer-Benfey, p. 114.

¹⁵Staiger, p. 262.

¹⁶Guidry, p. 183.

- ¹⁷Hoezel, p. 37.
- ¹⁸Duncan, " Dark Comedy ... ", p. 114.
- ¹⁹Carroll, p. 153.
- ²⁰ibid., p. 153.
- ²¹ibid., p. 153.
- ²²Guidry, p. 183.
- ²³Hass, p. 40.
- ²⁴Martini, p. 86.
- ²⁵Hass, p. 39.
- ²⁶Ingrid Strohschneider-Kohrs, " Die ueberwundene Komoediantin in Lessings Lustspiel ", WSA, II(1975), 193. Hereafter cited as Strohschneider-Kohrs.
- ²⁷Hass, p. 41.
- ²⁸Strohschneider-Kohrs, p. 189.
- ²⁹Arntzen, p. 39.
- ³⁰Guidry, p. 183.
- ³¹Fricke, p. 43.
- ³²Belgardt, p. 210.
- ³³Martinson, p. 102.
- ³⁴Fricke, p. 37.
- ³⁵ibid., p. 36.
- ³⁶Duncan, " Dark Comedy ... ", p. 108.

³⁷ibid., p. 115.

³⁸Martini, p. 84.

³⁹Hass, p. 40.

⁴⁰H. B. Garland, Lessing, the Founder of Modern German Literature (Cambridge, England: Bowes and Bowes, 1937), p. 134.

⁴¹Duncan, " Dark Comedy ... ", p. 114.

⁴²ibid., p. 102.

⁴³ibid., p. 102.

⁴⁴Martini, p. 96.

⁴⁵Martinson, p. 102.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Major: The Problem of Alienation

The term 'Spiel' is particularly à propos to the case of Minna von Barnhelm. In the play, Lessing presents two opposing points of view in the figures of Tellheim and Minna, and it is the lack of reconciliation between these two view points which becomes the focus of the play. This conflict, as previously diagnosed, involves a case of devoted love which is opposed by honour, threatening the negation of all other sentiments. On a larger scale, however, we can examine the situation of Tellheim and Minna as the struggle between a very negative attitude towards life and a very positive one - of the serious versus the comic. In the play, Minna is the comic figure - bright, witty and resourceful. To her falls the task of saving Tellheim from total despair. We certainly hope that Minna will manage this, for, if his friends are accurate in their praise of Tellheim, he is indeed a person worth saving. With the help of Franziska, Minna does much to ease the tension created by the first act. The severity of Tellheim's situation, unfortunately, overshadows this light-hearted atmosphere and accounts for a strikingly serious comedy. Whereas Minna is free to pursue her desires, his love is inhibited by a need to act honourably. Tellheim

is the dark figure of pessimism in the play. Utterly defeated by what he believes to be society's unjust condemnation of his character, he has no motivation to change his present, seemingly unalterable predicament. Next to Minna's unflagging optimism the figure of Tellheim appears even more gloomy.

The major's problems are not such as can be solved by the simple reversing of roles. Minna's plan can only succeed to a certain point. In Act IV she repeatedly rebuffs him with his own previously advanced arguments, hoping, indeed confident, that he will eventually recognize how unreasonably he has been acting and resolve his own crisis. Tellheim is, unfortunately, unable to understand or to realize Minna's intention. He is too engrossed in his own plight and, at times, is not even aware of what is happening around him. He seems quite divorced from reality, as when Minna remarks:

" Wo sind Sie, Tellheim?" (IV,6)

At this point in the play, Tellheim slips into a dream-like state as he ponders Minna's comparison of himself and the figure of Othello. Our discussion must now examine an aspect of Tellheim's problem with which, hitherto, very few critics have concerned themselves: the question of alienation. Let us begin by exploring the situation between Tellheim and the Prussian government, since it is this conflict which gives rise to the action of the play.

The reference to the 'Moor of Venice' in Act IV presents intriguing possibilities concerning the problem of alienation. Here the major puzzles over the issue of serving a foreign cause. As critics have noted¹, Tellheim was not born in Prussia, but in Courland. Yet it is not simply a matter of geography which distances him from Prussia and from its attitudes. As discussed in Chapter Two, Tellheim feels that the government, for which he risked his life, has stripped him of his honour. Bennett explains:

" ... our condition in the actual society that surrounds us is an inescapable part of what constitutes our inner being."²

Tellheim has never thought of himself as anything but an honourable man. Because society no longer recognizes him as such, he does not accept himself; the image of his very being is in question. He bitterly struggles with the knowledge of his total innocence and with the realization that it will not be acknowledged by society. Tellheim's honour must be recognized in order for this conflict to be resolved. For this reason it is impossible for him to consider leaving Berlin. In Act IV he vows to stay until such time as his honour is restored to him. Bennett further points out:

" ... by refusing to turn his back on the consequences of his situation as a Prussian officer - ... - he is attempting valiantly to solve the tormenting riddle of his own self, to restore the lost unity of his personal existence."³

Tellheim cannot really consider the future while his present situation remains so unclear. If he were, as suggested in

Act V, to leave Prussian territory, the conflict would never be resolved.⁴

The major finds his own sense of identity opposed by the Prussian government. Yet as one critic astutely observes, this is not the first instance in which Tellheim has found himself at odds with the 'militaerische Ordre'.⁵ The initial point of disagreement, from which all of Tellheim's present troubles originated, lay in the question of the contribution.⁶ This critic notes that in demanding only the minimum amount, Tellheim chose to follow his own judgment rather than paying strict attention to his duty to the Prussian authorities.⁷ It is, therefore, the conflict between Tellheim's more humanitarian instincts and his sense of duty to the state which is responsible for his present predicament.

Tellheim, by choice, has adopted the Prussian criteria of honour. Yet it is from this system of values, which he seeks to uphold, that he feels alienated, for it denies him the right to marry the woman he loves.⁸ The officer's sense of personal dignity demands that he renounce Minna. The desires of his heart are therefore at odds with the Prussian sense of honour. What we are in fact dealing with is a conflict of a personal code versus that of the state. The inner struggle which was previously diagnosed as a conflict between Tellheim's image of personal integrity and society's low opinion of him, reveals further implications.

It now expands its horizon to include a need for self-respect and his love for Minna to be satisfactorily resolved. He desires yet cannot retain both love and honour. In order to fulfill the impulses of his heart Tellheim must forever relinquish his sense of integrity, for his dignity will not allow him to marry a woman of whom he no longer feels worthy. He chooses instead to sacrifice his love for the sake of his self-respect. Like Othello, he seeks to destroy his love in the name of honour⁹:

" ... An honourable murder, if you will;
For nought I did in hate, but all in honour." (V,ii)

Tellheim tries to suppress his love in order to satisfy his personal dignity and is initially successful. As Bennett points out, his pawning of the ring, " the final symbolic break with his beloved ", is remarkably unemotional.¹⁰ This critic explains that " ... Tellheim's humiliating situation operates internally to temper, or indeed to suppress his love."¹¹ As long as Minna is absent from the scene, his honour can overcome his love.¹² With her arrival, however, the conflict resumes. As this battle continues, Tellheim feels more disoriented. This inner turmoil torments him. Even Minna's unremitting optimism diminishes in the face of the undeniably grave nature of Tellheim's situation. This is a major achievement of serious comedy on Lessing's part. Tellheim appears absurd only at first glance in Acts II and III. Yet his feelings of betrayal, convincingly re-

vealed in Act IV, are understandable, given the circumstances under which his honour has been called into question. Tellheim's reasons for renouncing Minna also appear quite rational. Bennett presents a very convincing argument in support of Tellheim's thinking. In marrying Minna, the major would place both himself and his beloved in a most vulnerable position.¹³ Minna's argument that love alone should be the prime concern in marriage is acceptable only if she and Tellheim intend to live their married life completely divorced from the rest of the world.¹⁴ Tellheim realizes that, again as in the case of Othello, even the strongest, most genuine love can so easily be destroyed by the malicious tongues of society. He understands human nature far too well:

" Ja, ja gnaediges Fraeulein, daran erkenne ich Ihre Landsmaenninnen. Sie werden Ihnen einen abgedankten, an seiner Ehre gekraenkten Offizier, einen Krueppel, einen Bettler trefflich beneiden." (IV,6)

Social and personal existence are inextricably connected.¹⁵ It is unreasonable and naive to assume that one can live within a society and yet not be affected by it. Love is simply not enough to overcome the pressures which society can exert on members who attempt to defy its conventions. As yet another critic has observed, Lessing's play does not take place in an ideal world, where social conventions can be ignored, but in the real world, " ... und Tellheim wuerde Minna mit einer Heirat nicht nur in sein Gewissen, sondern in sein ganzes moralisch fragwuerdig gewordenes Schicksal

in dieser Welt hineinziehen."¹⁶

Act IV demonstrates not only the valid reasons for Tellheim's pessimism but also the justifiably extreme degree of depression which it arouses in him. Only the commencement of Minna's 'Spiel' saves the fourth act from ending on a totally tragic note.

Act V, subsequently, reflects the intense volatility of Tellheim's nature, in that he unfortunately moves from one extreme pole to another. At this point an important new facet of his personality becomes evident. The major is a man of " ... mercurial temper, capable of indeed performing somersaults of attitude in quickly changing situations."¹⁷ The apparently ridiculous behaviour of Act IV becomes distinctly so in Act V, where he frequently loses all presence of mind. He seems totally unaware of the fact that he negates his previous statements. He first tells Minna: "Gleichheit ist immer das feste Band der Liebe. - "(V,5). Yet he fails to recognize his own argument when she uses it to refuse him only moments later. Earlier in the play, Tellheim lectures Werner on the necessity of a soldier's devotion to a cause (III,7), yet in order to support Minna he is prepared to consider joining the sergeant as a mercenary in Persia. His position as an army officer seems quite peculiar. He appears to lack the stability expected of a man who leads others into battle. In examining the question of alienation, as it concerns this character, it has been noted that the

personal crisis presented in the play stems from Tellheim's conflict with his adopted system of values. That the major suffers a severe personal dilemma as a result of the struggle between his more humane emotions of compassion and love, and the demands of duty and honour, calls into question the entire concept of 'Dienst bei den GroBen'.¹⁸ Tellheim himself finds his own reasons for joining the army unsatisfactory:

" ... Ich ward Soldat aus Parteilichkeit, ich weiß selbst nicht fuer welche politischen Grundsätze
... " (V,9)

and now he reflects on the validity of such service:

" ... Die Dienst der GroBen sind gefaehrlich und lohnen der Muehe, des Zwanges, der Erniedrigung nicht, die sie kosten." (V,9)

The fact that Tellheim continually contradicts himself throughout the whole of Act V brings to light the problem of alienation. Previous acts have demonstrated his feelings of estrangement from society, from Prussian values and from his own self-image. Now the very meaning of his profession is in question. The hitherto noble concept of 'king and country' appears faulty. It is clear that in Tellheim's case reflection and re-evaluation of basic values and ideals are necessary.

The major's irrational tendencies become increasingly apparent in Acts IV and V. He appears to have lost his

power to reason logically. He does not even believe his own eyes for he immediately acknowledges Minna's denial at having read the letter, when it has quite obviously been opened. He too easily accepts the words of others. Leopold, in his notes on Minna von Barnhelm, likens Tellheim to the figure of Don Quixote, "the gullible stickler for honour".¹⁹ Minna herself calls him a "leichtglaebiger Ritter", for he is so easily lead into her game. Though the comment seems rather off-handed, this brief comparison of the major and Don Quixote suggests interesting possibilities for further study both of Tellheim's character and the question of alienation. Like the 'tarnished knight', Tellheim is disgusted with his society. Both characters find reality unsatisfactory. The fantasy worlds, one of which Don Quixote creates for himself and the other which Minna creates for Tellheim, fulfill a need in both men to lead a life governed by the same principles of loyalty and honour which guided the knight errants of old. As in the case of Don Quixote, one critic notes that in Minna von Barnhelm reality and dream become inextricably intertwined.²⁰ Eventually the more attractive world of fantasy takes precedence over that of reality. Tellheim eagerly accepts the fictitious realm of the 'Spiel', for in it he can retain the chivalry, gallantry and honour which he finds so lacking in the often unfair and incomprehensible world of reality. He openly accepts these illusions and in doing so, completely misses the true intention of

the game, which was to bring him into the sphere of reality rather than one of romantic fairytales. One must understand, however, that Tellheim is perfectly content with the 'Spiel' exactly as it is. There is no reason for him to search for hidden meanings behind a situation which allows for both love and honour to be retained, thus resolving the inner conflict which has been tormenting him. When the plan goes awry and the major reacts violently to what he believes to be Minna's betrayal of him, it is with anger and bitterness, for she has destroyed his ideal world.²¹

Tellheim, unable to realize the true motive behind the 'Spiel', is incapable of self-enlightenment and therefore of controlling his own destiny. Thus, it becomes necessary for outside forces to intervene to solve the crisis. Though Minna's goal is achieved, it is not her ruse which brings about the solution. The ending remains problematic, for there is no conclusive evidence that Tellheim has seen the error of his ways. Tellheim is not 'cured'. His sense of honour remains intact. As Carroll, Mann, Martini and others have successfully argued, Minna does not convince Tellheim that he was wrong. Hass further observes that the reconciliation of the major with society is not achieved through the 'Spiel' but rather through the letter from the king.²² It is this alone which resolves Tellheim's personal predicament by restoring his honour to him. Martinson also points out that the letter serves to reinforce Tellheim's

sense of honour.²³ His image of his 'self' is thus reaffirmed and, if he wishes, he can now take his place in society.

The intervention of reality in the form of the pardon and the arrival of Minna's uncle save the situation, yet these factors also deprive Tellheim of determining his own fate. As it has been argued, the 'Spiel' afforded him the opportunity for enlightenment through self-reflection and self-awareness²⁴, yet he was unable to make use of it.

As the play progresses, Tellheim reveals himself to be a most complex individual with an equally intricate problem. As Michael notes, what we are faced with is much more than 'error through the illusion of honour': "... ein edler Mensch steht hier vor der Katastrophe seiner ganzen Existenz."²⁵ Such a personality does not frequently appear in the genre of the comedy. Garland, for one, has suggested that Tellheim is perhaps too serious a character to be suitable as a comic hero. Yet he is a perfect figure for Lessing's serious comedy. Though his actions often appear contradictory, our amusement at his confusion is tempered by sympathy, for he is indeed a man faced with a grim predicament. As Carroll observes, "... his efforts of honour and passion become absurd, and the absurd becomes profoundly moving."²⁶ It is therefore 'Lachen' and not 'Verlachen' which the character elicits. We cannot, in the words of one critic, laugh too loudly at Tellheim²⁷, for beneath

the often comically erratic behaviour we see not a 'type', but an individual struggling with a personal crisis.

Is this a problem too serious to be dealt with in a comedy? Perhaps, yet as Lessing observed, life is indeed a constant mixture of the serious and the comic, of laughter and tears. In the play, the author expresses himself through the character of Minna:

" ... Kann man denn auch nicht lachend sehr ernsthaft sein?" (IV,6)

Minna demands of Tellheim, when he accuses her of making too light of his dilemma. Does not the play Minna von Barnhelm ask the same of its audience in choosing to explore a most serious issue within the light-hearted world of the comedy?

Footnotes to Chapter Four

¹Hans-Georg Werner, "Komoedie der Rationalitaet zu Lessings 'Minna von Barnhelm'", Weimarer Beitrage, 25 no. 11(1979), 51. Hereafter cited as Werner.

W. F. Leopold in his notes on Minna von Barnhelm (Boston: D. C. Heath and Co., 1961), p. 212. Hereafter cited as Leopold.

²Benjamin K. Bennett, "The Generic Constant in Lessing's Development of a Comedy of Institutions and Alienation", The German Quarterly, vol. LVI (March, 1983), 2, 235. Hereafter cited as Bennett.

³ibid., p. 235.

⁴ibid., p. 235.

⁵Werner, p. 51.

⁶ibid., p. 51.

⁷ibid., p. 51.

⁸Bennett, p. 233.

⁹Martini, p. 93.

¹⁰Bennett, p. 234.

¹¹ibid., p. 235.

¹²ibid., p. 235.

¹³ibid., p. 233.

¹⁴ibid., p. 233.

¹⁵ibid., p. 235.

¹⁶Fricke, p. 29.

¹⁷Garland, p. xix.

¹⁸Werner, p. 51.

¹⁹Leopold, p. 253.

²⁰Otto Mann, Lessing, Sein und Leistung (Hamburg: Marion von Schroeder Verlag, 1949), p. 210.

²¹Carroll, p. 153.

²²Hass, p. 31.

²³Martinson, p. 102.

²⁴Martini, p. 102-104.

²⁵Wolfgang F. Michael, " Tellheim eine Lustspielfigur ", DVLG,XXXIX(1965), 207. Hereafter cited as Michael.

²⁶Carroll, p. 155.

²⁷Michael, p. 209.

CONCLUSION

Many literary attitudes appear to have influenced Lessing's work. Prior to the writing of Minna von Barnhelm Lessing experimented with numerous trends. Notable influences included that of Gottsched, who promoted the moral-didactic purpose of comedy, the satiric Saxon and the English version of that genre, which stressed the importance of entertainment rather than instruction. Some of these styles Lessing would eventually abandon in favour of a comedy which would evoke 'Lachen' as opposed to 'Verlachen'. He was deeply concerned with the need to present "human" characters on the stage, such as those found in the works of Gellert. These figures need not be objects of ridicule, but rather the audience should sympathize and identify with them. In order to achieve this, they could not be mere personifications of vice. They must be individuals, not types. Lessing's characters are human, portraying both vice and virtue. In this particular comedy, all the figures are individuals, each displaying their own strengths and weaknesses. Just is loyal, but crude in manner and speech, Franziska is witty and charming but sarcastic, Werner is a loyal friend who, unfortunately, displays mercenary tendencies, Minna is warm-hearted and loving, but a trifle

over-confident and naive, and Tellheim, brave and generous, yet possessing a stubborn and irrational sense of honour which threatens to destroy his relationships with the world and with himself.

Lessing saw life as a constant interplay of vice and virtue, of laughter and tears, of the serious and the comic. True comedy would strive to recreate this mixture on the stage. Yet if this combination was to exist, there must be a correlation between the serious and the comic. Each must give rise to the other, and it is this dramatic interplay of the serious and the comic which constitutes our play. The gloom of Tellheim's situation is lightened by Minna's gaiety, which, in turn, is overshadowed by the severity of Tellheim's problem. The major, by all accounts, was a much admired figure until, by a recent twist of fate, he is punished for an act of generosity. He has lost the mobility of an arm, his fortune and, above all, his honour. Nothing can recompense such a loss. He feels betrayed and wishes to have nothing more to do with society. He avoids his friends and makes his own situation worse by refusing help from anyone. Any offer of help only serves to demoralize him.

Though we can easily sympathize with his position, it is also necessary to understand that Tellheim, while doing harm to his own state, also offends others. He misjudges the motives of those who try to help him - Werner,

Just and Minna are all motivated by the love and respect they feel for this man. The major, however, views all such attempts to aid him as merely patronization. Yet Tellheim himself is not above displaying the same sort of charity to the widow of an old friend. Tellheim is a veritable symphony of contradictions. His sense of honour changes according to the situation. His actions and thinking follow no logical pattern; eg. he does not wish to force an unworthy bridegroom on Minna and so will abandon her, without explanation, in order to save her reputation?! Tellheim cannot see how unreasonably and selfishly he is acting in not considering the feelings of others. One observes a definite lack of harmony both in the major's actions and in his emotions. Love and compassion are caught in a hopeless struggle with Tellheim's indomitable code of honour, and it is this inner conflict which accounts for our character suffering a severe personal crisis.

In her attempts to help her disillusioned fiancé, Minna at first employs humour - she tries to joke him out of his depression by making light of the situation. To Tellheim, however, the predicament in which he finds himself is not joking matter. Paralyzed by the apparent hopelessness of his dilemma, Tellheim is unable to take any steps to help himself. He has all but surrendered to the unjust assassination of his character. Minna, however, refuses to abandon the major to despair. Determined to cure Tellheim

of his distorted sense of honour, she resorts to using a ruse. This 'Spiel' does not succeed in curing Tellheim for many reasons, not the least of which lies in the fact that it is, after all, an elaborate deception and any solution reached will last only as long as the game is maintained. Minna also believes that she can predict Tellheim's reactions. Unfortunately, his actions prove quite irrational. He cannot, nor does he wish to see what is really happening. He does not understand what Minna is trying to achieve. He misinterprets the reasons for her actions and assumes the worst possible motives. Only the timely entrance of Minna's uncle saves the situation. As discussed, Minna's 'Spiel' can only succeed to the point where Tellheim's wish to help and protect those he cares for concurs with his sense of honour. As long as the desires of his heart do not conflict with his personal integrity, Tellheim is free to fulfill those impulses. He does not, however, consciously acknowledge the fact that his concept of honour is inconsistent. It is entirely dependent upon the specific nature of a particular situation. He is incapable of realizing this even when confronted by his own arguments. The widow Marloff accepts help yet retains her dignity. At this point in the play, Tellheim himself argues that honour must be tempered by reason. Yet he will not allow reason to govern his own sense of honour. When confronted with Minna's arguments, which are of course his own, that she cannot risk dishonouring

him, Tellheim begs her to use reason to temper her judgment - the same reason that he neither wishes to, nor is capable of using.

Tellheim is a mass of irreconcilable statements. He frequently contradicts himself. Act V serves to accentuate these highly irrational tendencies. Besides negating remarks he makes earlier on in the play, he is also unsure of decisions made prior to the opening of the drama. His reasons for supporting the Prussian cause and his partisanship are unclear even to himself. We find that Tellheim is a social outcast. He feels, even desires to be alienated from a society in which he can no longer function. Yet in time we also discover that his affiliation with the army and with the Prussian cause are dubious. Passing comparisons of the major with the figures of Othello and Don Quixote within the context of the play itself, serve to accentuate this sense of alienation. In the final analysis, Tellheim does not appear to 'fit in' anywhere. Through choice or chance he constantly finds himself in situations where he does not seem to belong. One wonders if Tellheim will ever find a society in which he will feel entirely at ease. The ending of the play remains problematic, in that we are given no conclusive evidence that Tellheim has indeed seen the error of his ways. His honour, rather than being proven faulty, is re-affirmed by the letter from the king.

In the figure of Major von Tellheim, Lessing presents

an extremely complex individual. Tellheim is a character with a serious emotional problem which is brought to the surface by an unjust attack upon his personal integrity. Yet, in spite of the fact that we sometimes find his actions ludicrous and exasperating, our condemnation of Tellheim is tempered by our sympathy for a character faced with a grave personal crisis. As Minna puts it:

" ... eines Fehlers wegen entsagt man keinem Mann."
(III,12)

She is not willing to abandon Tellheim to total despair. Lessing does not forsake him either. Like Lessing, we see that the major possesses fine qualities which, unfortunately, are overshadowed by his obsession with a distorted sense of honour. Yet Lessing sees those traits as worth saving, even if outside influences, in the form of the uncle and the letter, must intervene to solve the crisis.

Throughout the play, the serious and the comic work together. While fully acknowledging the comic features of Minna von Barnhelm, our purpose has been to focus on the grave aspects of the play. Lessing presents us with an extremely complex problem which centres around the character of Tellheim. Through a discussion of the serious nature of the major's personal dilemma we hope to encourage further appreciation of the richness of Lessing's serious, sentimental comedy, Minna von Barnhelm.

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Abbreviations

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Diss.	Dissertation
DVLG	Deutsche Vierteljahrschrift fuer Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte
GL&L	German Life and Letters
Jb.(Jbb.)	Jahrbuch (Jahrbuecher)
JDSG	Jahrbuch der Deutschen Schillergesellschaft
JFDH	Jahrbuch des Freien Deutschen Hochstifts
LY	Lessing Yearbook
MLQ	Modern Language Quarterly
Monatshefte	Monatshefte fuer deutschen Unterricht, deutsche Sprache und Literatur
WSA	Wolfenbuetteler Studien zur Aufklaerung
ZfDk.	Zeitschrift fuer Deutschkunde

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