

The University of Manitoba

THE INDIVIDUAL AND FREEDOM IN LESSING'S DRAMAS

by

Vernon Henry Epp

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A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of
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Abstract

Any investigation dealing with that period in history known as the Enlightenment is immediately confronted by a problematic complex related to the individual. This is no accident since the Enlightenment essentially constitutes a movement in which the individual as rational and moral entity, as moving force of history, and as reservoir of the most diverse potentialities, is re-discovered. It is the aim of this thesis to examine the individual, as he appears in Lessing's dramas, under the aspect of his struggle for freedom in the Enlightenment sense, that is, as the effort to direct his life according to the principles of reason and self-determination.

The first two chapters of this thesis are intended to give the historical and literary-theoretical background of the dramas to be considered. Chapter I outlines the contradictory social forces at work in 18th-century Germany, which are the base for the contradictory view of the individual as evidenced in Lessing's dramas. Chapter II deals with the theoretical presuppositions Lessing held in regard to the drama; their inclusion in the thesis is warranted by the fact that they demonstrate the relation, as perceived by the author, between historical reality and its reflection in artistic production. Simultaneously, an examination of Lessing's dramaturgy furnishes evidence of his

conception of the audience, and thus, of his anthropological presuppositions.

Chapters III and IV examine the primary material itself, essentially with the view of identifying specific social and psychological factors as they appear in the dramas, which have a bearing on the question of the individual as posed in the title of this thesis. Special attention is devoted to the social factors of sexual oppression, the role of the family, and class conflicts; other important aspects to be considered are the practice of tolerance in the forms of forgiveness and "Witz", and of its obverse character trait, the "Halsstarrigkeit der Tugend".

The division of the primary material according to genre is determined essentially by considerations related to the contradictory nature of the individual as perceived by Lessing. Thus, the comedies tend to take an optimistic viewpoint and depict the individual as someone who, although flawed, can overcome his mistakes. In the tragedies, where the overall positive attitude toward the individual remains intact, more weight is placed on showing the obstacles which stand between him and the attainment of self-determination.

Finally, given that in the dramas we are shown the individual as someone both heroic and miserable, the Conclusion aims at summarizing Lessing's viewpoint as to how such a contradictory phenomenon can, nevertheless, be seen in an integral manner.

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Introduction

The relationship between man's urge to be free and the concrete conditions which determine his existence as individual can be considered to be one of the driving forces of human history. Fundamentally, this relationship has appeared as man's attempt to make decisions affecting his life not on the basis of the force of circumstances, but on the basis of self-determination. However, while freedom in this generalized sense of the word is the more or less consciously held goal of persons everywhere and during all times, the concept remains purely formal and unspecific until it is viewed in the context of a particular historical, social, and cultural background. It is this context which determines the characteristic content of the struggle for autonomy and which allows us to speak about it in a meaningful way.

Looked at in this manner, the struggle for freedom appears as a more or less intense conflict, or contradiction, between the individual and the society which exist in a particular historical period and geographical location. The outcome of this conflict depends on two fundamental factors: first, the relative strength of the social forces active during the period in question - and thus also the relative strength of the cultural and moral values of these forces; and second, the self-understanding

of the individual himself and the degree to which he identifies his interests with those of a certain social caste or class, and thus regards the question of his own destiny as one which either requires a political or an individualistic solution. Since both these factors, the objective and the subjective, are specifically historical in their content, it is necessary to turn directly to the historical period we are dealing with.

The epoch during which Lessing lived is commonly known as the Enlightenment. The literature of this time, as well as the thrust of its philosophy and the best of its endeavours in the religious-theological field, were primarily moral-didactic in their orientation, and saw as their most important aim the education of mankind to a higher level of virtue. If we therefore choose to speak of the emancipative purpose of Enlightenment culture, we characterize the struggle which this entailed as the effort to dispel obscurantism and prejudice in all areas of life, but especially in the field of ethics, through the consistent and rigorous application of reason. Kant defined the Enlightenment's aims as follows:

Aufklärung ist der Ausgang des Menschen aus seiner selbstverschuldeten Unmündigkeit. Unmündigkeit ist das Unvermögen, sich seines Verstandes ohne Leitung eines anderen zu bedienen. Selbstverschuldet ist diese Unmündigkeit, wenn die Ursache derselben nicht am Mangel des Verstandes, sondern der EntschlieÙung und des Mutes liegt, sich seiner ohne Leitung eines andern zu bedienen. Sapere aude! Habe Mut, Dich deines eigenen Verstandes zu bedienen! ist also der Wahlspruch der Aufklärung.¹

¹ Immanuel Kant, Immanuel Kants Werke, ed. Arthur Buchenau and Ernst Cassirer (Berlin: Bruno Cassirer, 1913), IV, 169.

This passage clearly places the onus of the struggle for freedom squarely on the self-conscious activity of the individual himself. If the core of the Enlightenment's thinking was based on the belief in reason, it followed logically that it must be the individual who carried out the tasks of the Enlightenment, for it was in the individual that the capacity to analyze, to criticize, and to use reason unfettered by the authority of orthodoxy and tradition showed itself. Moreover, it was the individual who was also the repository of morality, the agent of ethical choices.

It is evident that, generally speaking, the Enlightenment saw little connection between the individual's quest for self-determination and the political/social implications of this process. The Enlightenment essentially constitutes a period in the history of man in which reason is discovered, or re-discovered. It therefore becomes a period in which the individual, because he is the rational entity, is re-discovered. To the Enlighteners, the experience of the Enlightenment itself confirmed its own presuppositions, namely that the individual could achieve clarity about the conditions of his existence, and therefore also learn to determine them. Thus, the question regarding the individual becomes the question about the legitimacy of the Enlightenment itself. When it studies the individual, it searches its own soul: to what extent are the belief in reason and the optimism toward the future justified - what is the claim to autonomy and freedom which the individual, as a rational and moral being, can legitimately make for himself? In other words, is enlightenment

a self-delusion, is freedom a chimera?

For the purposes of this thesis therefore, we will employ the concept of freedom or, to use a term which better expresses the progressive and dynamic character of this concept, the problem of emancipation and self-determination, in the sense that it is the struggle of the individual, par excellence. As an example of someone engaged in such a never-ending effort to secure independence of choice in all matters we need go no further than Lessing himself, of whom Goethe tells us: "Lessing hält sich, seiner polemischen Natur nach, am liebsten in der Region der Widersprüche und Zweifel auf; das Unterscheiden ist seine Sache. . . ." ² Lessing, above all others, believed in the individual's right to gain understanding and insight through analytical criticism, and to apply his findings in an ethic which corresponded to the results of this critique.

Consequently, we find that he transformed theoretical insights into practice: he polemicized against orthodoxy not only in religion and literature, but in and through his own life. For him, theory and practice, ideal and reality were never a mutually exclusive dichotomy, but always a productive and coherent whole. We read, for instance, in a letter to his mother as he was approaching his 20th birthday:

Ich lernte einsehen, die Bücher würden mich wohl
gelehrt, aber nimmermehr zu einem Menschen machen.
Ich wagte mich von meiner Stube unter meines gleichen
. . . Ich lernte tanzen, fechten, voltigieren . . .

² Johann Peter Eckermann, Gespräche mit Goethe (Wiesbaden: Insel, 1955), p. 229.

Ich kam in diesen Übungen so weit, daß mich diejenigen selbst, die mir im Voraus alle Geschicklichkeit darinnen absprechen wollten, einigermaßen bewunderten. Dieser gute Anfang ermunterte mich heftig. Mein Körper war ein wenig geschickter worden, und ich suchte Gesellschaft, um nun auch leben zu lernen. Ich legte die ernsthaften Bücher eine zeitlang auf die Seite, um mich in denjenigen umzusehen, die weit angenehmer und vielleicht eben so nützlich sind.³

It is noteworthy that Lessing attempted, and until the last decade of his life succeeded, to lead the life of a free and respected writer, independent of the courts which, even at this time, still controlled a large portion of cultural production, either through patronage, through their favouring of French over German culture, or indirectly through censorship and the control over academic appointments. Lessing himself is the best example of an emancipated individual in the sense of the Enlightenment, but anyone familiar with his biography can attest to the personal hardships and restrictions which, significantly, this quest for emancipation often entailed.

In the following pages it will be my interest to show how the problem of emancipation, in the sense of liberation from the constrictions of orthodoxy, tradition, and social hierarchy, is presented in some of the works written by Lessing. Since I have already established the subject of emancipation (the individual) and its object (application of rational and humane principles to ethics), it will be of primary concern, in this thesis, to examine the specific nature of emancipation itself. Or, to take Lessing

³ Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing - Gesammelte Werke, ed. Paul Rilla (Berlin: Aufbau, 1954), X, 10-11.

as an example, the main question to be answered is that of why a life so totally dedicated to the pursuit and application of reason with the purpose of liberating mankind, could end in the obscurity and narrowness of Wolfenbüttel. Evidently emancipation is an ideal which does not always find correspondence in reality; as we have already seen, it is therefore a continuous struggle.

It is the different forces and elements engaged in this struggle which I wish to examine and identify in the subsequent pages. What are the specific social factors which prevent or encourage the process of emancipation and how are they related to each other? is the main question I shall attempt to answer.

This necessarily implies a consideration of the historical context which forms the background to the literature under investigation. A topic such as emancipation is too vast and abstract to be dealt with in a historically undifferentiated manner, if we do not wish to run the risk of meaningless and ambiguous generalization. Moreover, "Literarische Kommunikation geschieht nicht im luftleeren Raum, sondern in konkreten politischen, sozialen, ökonomischen und ästhetischen Situationen."⁴ The text presupposes a context; it is not created in a vacuum, but in a multifaceted and sometimes contradictory relationship to its time and place. In the opinion of Christopher Caudwell, literature cannot be understood

⁴ Jochen Schulte-Sasse, Literarische Struktur und historisch-sozialer Kontext. Zum Beispiel Lessings "Emilia Galotti" (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1975), p. 14.

. . . wenn wir sie nicht historisch, d.h. in Bewegung erfassen. Wenn wir die Poesie als etwas Erstarretes und Verknöchertes studierten, ihre Produkte nur als statische "Kunstwerke" begriffen, dann könnten wir lediglich leere Formeln aufstellen. Das träfe besonders dort zu, wo die Poesie das organische Produkt einer ganzen Gesellschaft ist, die sich in heftiger Bewegung befindet.⁵

The confrontation of contradictory and seemingly unresolvable social and moral pressures is a characteristic feature of Lessing's works. They reflect the historical moment out of which they evolved, the flowering of Enlightenment culture and the acceleration of the transitional process from feudal autarchy and backwardness to free trade on a world scale in the field of economics. Such sweeping social and intellectual changes inevitably had a profound bearing on the shape of the individual's confrontation with the world around him, i.e., the specific moral and social dilemmas he was forced to come to terms with and the alternatives available for their resolution.

For this reason, I have included in this study a brief historical survey in which an outline of the most important features of the period in which Lessing lived will be made. This will help to understand Lessing's own point of view, as well as to clarify the motivations of and problems confronted by the characters of the dramas which will be examined.

But these dramas are not just an unconscious reflection of

⁵ Christopher Caudwell, Bürgerliche Illusion und Wirklichkeit. Beiträge zur marxistischen Ästhetik (München: Hauser, 1971), p. 55.

the surrounding world; they are also directly influenced by Lessing's theory of the drama itself, a theory designed to meet, on the one hand, the requirements of the rigorous analytical tradition of the Enlightenment, and on the other, to analyze and provide for the needs of a new audience which began more and more to fill the theatres, the "gebildetes Bürgertum".⁶ The theory of the drama, therefore, also reflects the "heftige Bewegung" in which the society of the time found itself and, in examining Lessing's dramaturgy, we can achieve a better understanding not only of his concept of dramatic rules, but, inasmuch as dramaturgy also reveals a conception of society and of social relations (through its criteria for the depiction of characters on stage as well as in its perception of the audience), also of the author's concept of what causes a person to act in a certain manner and what motivates him in the making of decisions.

If this observation is true in a general sense, it is particularly applicable in the case of Lessing, since his dramaturgical formulations reject a theatre based on the effect of admiration for the grandiose and heroic and advance a drama which encourages a close identification between audience and stage by portraying on it the reality and experience which this audience knew. Lessing's drama is, therefore, full of evidence about the society for which it was written and his dramaturgy is equally rich in information of this kind when it establishes

⁶ Kurt Wölfel, "Moralische Anstalt," in Deutsche Dramentheorien, ed. Reinhold Grimm (Frankfurt a.M.: Athenäum, 1971), I, 97.

certain theoretical conclusions about the nature of individuals: their expectations, dilemmas, and conflicts. A short examination of Lessing's dramaturgy can therefore furnish valuable clues about those social forces which determine the struggle for emancipation.

On the other hand, the limits imposed on me by the parameters of this thesis disallow the analysis of everything Lessing wrote, and, therefore, call for a careful selection of primary material with which to work. Since it was my interest to study a question such as that posed by the title of this thesis, which is essentially a topic of historical interest, at hand of specific literary products - as opposed to writings of an essentially theoretical nature - I chose to concentrate on Lessing's dramas. Among these, I have selected two plays and one fragment representative of Lessing's early period (Der junge Gelehrte, Der Freigeist, Samuel Henzi) and three of his major works, namely Minna von Barnhelm, Miss Sara Sampson, and Emilia Galotti. While Lessing wrote a considerable number of other "Jugenddramen" (Der Schatz, Der Misogyne, Die Juden, Damon oder die wahre Freundschaft, Die alte Jungfer), these have not been taken into account because of their great similarity to Der junge Gelehrte and Der Freigeist: all of them are "Typenkomödien" which parody a specific vice, and the corrective process to which these vices are submitted is essentially identical in all of these dramas. Thus, Der junge Gelehrte and Der Freigeist can be considered to be representative of the production of this period in the comic genre, and the inclusion of all the plays would not

add to the conclusions to be made in the course of this investigation.

Since the task of this thesis is essentially to identify specific social factors upon which the development of the individual as an autonomous moral being is contingent, the main criterion for selecting the dramas to be considered was that of their specific-historical content, i.e., the degree to which they contain graphic information about society during the time in which they were written. Actions and beliefs do not exist in and of themselves; they appear within and reflect upon a given context of causes and effects which is specifically historical. The richer the historical evidence therefore, the more depth will an interpretation of the determinants of human action acquire. The inclusion of Samuel Henzi, although only a fragment, is therefore justified, because of its graphic portrayal of social conditions and its subject matter, which deals programmatically with the relation between individual and society.

Further, while both Philotas and Nathan der Weise are considered to be among Lessing's masterpieces, they have not been included in this study, because of the absence of any specific historical content they display, and for their polemical and abstract nature. This does not imply that they are not subject to the same conditions and influences as any other work of art, as outlined above; what is meant is that they do not contain portrayals of 18th-century society and customs to the extent that, for example, Samuel Henzi or Miss Sara Sampson do.

Philotas - probably written in 1758-59 - is a response to two

questions preoccupying Lessing: the question of patriotism and heroic stoicism as related to the Seven-Years War, personified by Philotas who represents Lessing's dead friend, Ewald von Kleist; and the question of whether the tragedy should be heroic or compassionate, the subject of an intense theoretical debate between himself, Nicolai, and Mendelssohn. In both instances Lessing unequivocally rejects heroism and stoic adherence to abstract principles. Philotas is the polemical response to these questions and the programmatic statement of Lessing's position in this respect. In the words of Conrad Wiedemann:

Zeitkritik - das ist wohl ein Teil, vermutlich der Anlaß, nicht aber das Ziel des Stückes. Ein Zug ins Grundsätzliche, Exemplarische prägt nicht nur den Dialog, sondern das ganze Drama entscheidend. Die vier agierenden Personen sind Grundtypen menschlichen Verhaltens, es gibt keine Nebenhandlung und Nebenmotive, die Einaktigkeit sorgt für eine bruchlose Entwicklung des streng zielgerichteten Dialogs. Auf theatralische Effekte ist verzichtet, auf Probleme der äußeren Motivation wenig Mühe verwandt.⁷

Nathan der Weise, which Lessing himself denominates a "dramatisches Gedicht,"⁸ was not written with the intention of a possible dramatic production, but with the express purpose of carrying on the theological debate with Goeze. To his brother Karl he wrote the following lines: "Ich glaube, eine sehr interessante Episode dazu erfunden zu haben, daß sich alles sehr

⁷ Conrad Wiedemann, "Ein schönes Ungeheuer - Zur Deutung von Lessings Einakter 'Philotas,'" Germanisch-Romanische Monatsschrift, Neue Folge 17 (1967), 382.

⁸ Lessing, Werke, II, 319.

gut soll lesen lassen, und ich gewiß den Theologen einen ärgeren Possen damit spielen will, als noch mit zehn Fragmenten."⁹ In truth, Lessing expected not even to see Nathan on the stage:

Es kann wohl sein, daß mein "Nathan" im Ganzen wenig Wirkung tun würde, wenn er auf das Theater käme, welches wohl nie geschehen wird. Genug, wenn er sich mit Interesse nur lieset, und unter tausend Lesern nur einer daraus an der Evidenz und Allgemeinheit seiner Religion zweifeln lernt.¹⁰

Both these plays contain the same thoughts on freedom, tolerance, and individual autonomy which can be found in Lessing's other plays. But precisely because of this sameness and because of their polemical rather than theatrical intent, as well as their abstract and rhetorical rather than dramatic content, they have not been taken into consideration. As with the early plays, their exclusion was considered to be warranted in that they did not significantly add to the conclusions to be made in respect to the topic under investigation.

By contrast, in the question of historicity and theatrical effect, Miss Sara Sampson, Minna von Barnhelm, and Emilia Galotti are incomparably richer, for in them the question of the individual - his moral predicaments, his longing for freedom, and his doubts - find expression in a milieu familiar from personal experience not only to Lessing, but also to the audience. For us, as members of the extended audience, these plays are more interesting because they are more realistic: they depict not only

⁹ Lessing, Werke, IX, 797.

¹⁰ Lessing, Werke, IX, 830.

an abstract and theoretical struggle, but one which takes place in the arena of everyday life. We learn something about the individual's struggle for self-assertion, but we also learn something about this struggle in a specific time and place and we are, therefore, able to give it an identity of its own. We learn about the individual not as a static and universal abstraction, but as a unique, historically determined and changing entity.

Despite a wealth of research on Lessing's dramas, a comprehensive approach to the subject we are dealing with, which is based on an examination of the plays, has as yet not been undertaken from an historical perspective. While this method has been applied profitably by critics of a Marxist orientation, these efforts have been either confined to individual dramas, e.g. Manfred Möckel's essay on Minna von Barnhelm entitled "Über Theaterarbeit an Klassikern," and Peter Weber's excellent monograph on Miss Sara Sampson, Das Menschenbild des bürgerlichen Trauerspiels; or they have tried to convey a general picture of Lessing and his time, thus not going into detail where the individual dramas are concerned, e.g., Franz Mehring's classic Die Lessing-Legende, and the more recent work by Paul Rilla, Lessing und sein Zeitalter. While these studies approach the topic from the valid viewpoint that it reflects the class struggle between bourgeoisie and feudal aristocracy, some of them (especially those produced in the GDR, such as the book by Rilla and the handbook Aufklärung, Erläuterungen zur deutschen Literatur) have tended to overemphasize the aspect of bourgeois

class solidarity and political consciousness. Although it may be correct to see in Lessing a personification of the most progressive elements within the bourgeoisie of this time, engaged in a struggle which already foreshadowed the political and ideological struggles which lay ahead, it would nevertheless be historically inaccurate to attribute to him or to the bourgeoisie of this period a sense of class solidarity strong enough to seek or even envision the taking of political power. As remains to be shown, the form which bourgeois consciousness took was expressed primarily in the intimate context of family and friends, and emancipation was not seen as the assertion of bourgeois class power in the political arena, but as the progressive enlightenment of entire humanity to the values of a humane and rational morality. This is clearly illustrated, for instance, by the concept of "Fürstenerziehung" and in general, by the low level of political consciousness and outright political impotence displayed by the German bourgeoisie during most of the 18th century.

Among the studies on Lessing's works can also be found a number which approach the question of the individual from perspectives different than the one central to this thesis. F. G. Schmitz takes it upon himself to deal with the topic of individualism in his Lessings Stellung in der Entfaltung des Individualismus, a good summary of which can be found in the essay entitled "The problem of individualism and the crisis in the lives of Lessing and Hamann," by the same author. In the area of Lessing's philosophical and theological writings a study

on individualism, here approached from the viewpoint of irrational and rational tendencies in Lessing's thought, is provided by Martha Waller's Lessings Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts.

A high degree of interest in Lessing and the individual has been evidenced in connection with speculation on the nature of his relationship to the "Sturm und Drang" - a literary movement which certainly was centered on the individual although, in contrast to the Enlightenment, its interest was directed more toward the subjectivist and non-rational motives for human behaviour and self-realization. Thus Franz Koch feels he can show irrational elements in Lessing's work by establishing that in Emilia Galotti Conti's view of the artist and his art demonstrates Lessing's belief that "Die 'Idee', der bildende Geist, das Irrationale . . . tritt vor die Form. . . ." ¹¹ Indeed, this is " . . . ein Zustand, der sich für Lessings Schaffen verallgemeinern läßt. . . ." ¹²

Fritz Brüggemann, while granting that Lessing may have occupied himself with the "subjective", qualifies this:
" . . . Anwendungen subjektivistischer Natur waren ihm nicht mehr fremd. Aber das Normale waren sie für ihn doch nicht. Sie waren für ihn das Ungewöhnliche, das Problematische, mit

¹¹ Franz Koch, "Lessing und der Irrationalismus," Deutsche Vierteljahresschrift für Literatur und Geisteswissenschaft, 6 (1968), 127; hereafter cited as DVLG.

¹² Koch, "Irrationalismus," p. 127.

dem die Zeit ringt. . . ."13 Thus, "Lessing wagt es Anfang der siebziger Jahre noch nicht, sich für den Subjektivismus zu entscheiden" because he lived in a time when subjectivism was a mark of the reckless and anti-social individual who had no sense of moral and communal responsibility, e.g., Marinelli and the prince in Emilia Galotti, and Marwood and Mellefont in Miss Sara Sampson.14

A similar view is represented by Gonthier-Louis Fink, according to whom Miss Sara Sampson and Emilia Galotti are primarily written to show " . . . die verbrecherische Macht der Leidenschaften . . . ," i.e., the individual's attempts at self-assertion, rather than being positive products of his rational and moral faculties, result from the self-abandonment to his passions which leads to tragic results.15

While all of these works possess merit in dealing with the question of the individual in Lessing's works, they suffer

13 Fritz Brüggemann, "Lessings Bürgerdramen und der Subjektivismus als Problem," in Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, ed. Gerhard Bauer and Sibylle Bauer (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1968), p. 112.

14 Brüggemann, "Lessings Bürgerdramen," p. 124. The same author deals more specifically with the question of bourgeois psychology in an article entitled "Die Entwicklung der Psychologie im bürgerlichen Drama Lessings und seiner Zeit," Euphorion, 26 (1925), 376-88.

15 Gonthier-Louis Fink, "'Laster ist oft Tugend'. Das 18. Jahrhundert im Spiegel des moralischen Paradoxes," Akten des V. Internationalen Germanisten-Kongresses, Cambridge 1975, 3 (1975), 137; hereafter cited as AIGK. See also Benno von Wiese's interpretation of Emilia Galotti for another view of Lessing's "irrationalism": Benno von Wiese, Die deutsche Tragödie von Lessing bis Hebbel (Hamburg: Hoffmann & Campe, 1948), I, p. 51ff.

from the approach they use when taking up this topic. This shortcoming consists essentially in that they center their investigations of the questions of the individual around such categories as "subjectivism," "individualism," and "irrationalism," categories which are ahistorical and which can be defined only in the most general terms.¹⁶

A better understanding has been shown by Wilhelm Dilthey who, starting from the concept of moral virtue ("Tugend") - the most important criterion for judging the individual in the Enlightenment - sees individualism in Lessing's dramas as an assertion of personal morality against the pressures of a hostile social environment: "Das Tragische liegt hier vielmehr in der gänzlichen Heterogenität des moralischen Affektes zu der

Emil Staiger, through an examination of the theme of "rasende Weiber" in the German tragedy also tries to establish in Lessing a tendency toward a more irrational relationship with nature, and hence, his affinities with the "Sturm und Drang": Emil Staiger, Stilwandel (Zürich: Atlantis, 1963), pp. 25-74. Further, Leonello Vincenti in his interpretation of Philotas asserts the following conclusion:

So unglaublich ist also die Gestalt des Philotas in Lessings Werk nicht: sie ist vielmehr ein Zeichen für das periodische Auftauchen jener irrationalen Neigungen, die aus Lessing den unmittelbaren Vorbereiter des Sturm Drang auf der deutschen Bühne machen.

Leonello Vincenti, "Lessings 'Philotas,'" in Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, ed. Gerhard Bauer and Sibylle Bauer (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1968), pp. 209-10.

¹⁶ Peter Weber deals with this problem specifically as it relates to Miss Sara Sampson: Peter Weber, Das Menschenbild des bürgerlichen Trauerspiels (Berlin: Rütten & Loening, 1970).

umgebenden Welt und in der so entstehenden Unmöglichkeit für das sittliche Heldentum, sich ihr gegenüber zu behaupten."¹⁷

Individual autonomy in this sense, however, is something infinitely more complex than that which is perceived by interpretations such as that of Koch. For, the individual who defines his actions according to the concept of "Tugend" is the individual who defines his freedom out of a consciousness of his relationship and responsibility to other individuals. "Tugend" designates a relationship of dependency and contingency rather than a state of "unbedingte Natur-Freyheit."¹⁸ This kind of moral choice entails a recognition of the claims of the individual together with those of society and morality, and therefore has to do with more than the universality and absoluteness of "irrationalism" and "subjectivism". It is not an absolute, but a relative morality, and hence, a relative freedom which the individual can hope to achieve because reason itself is relative and dependent on the concrete facts of social life. F. J. Schmitz concludes as follows:

Was sich aus Lessings Gesamteinstellung als das Wesentliche herauslesen läßt, ist, daß er als der Wegbereiter der kommenden Größen unserer Literatur einen Unterschied macht zwischen schrankenloser Subjektivität und verantwortungsbewußter Individualität. Er sah die Notwendigkeit der Wahrung des Individuellen und Besonderen, aber auch die Unmöglichkeit, ja, den Unsinn eines Individuellen und Besonderen, das in

¹⁷ Wilhelm Dilthey, Das Erlebnis und die Dichtung (Leipzig: Teubner, 1906), p. 48.

¹⁸ Friedrich Schlegel, "Über Lessing," in Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, ed. Gerhard Bauer and Sibylle Bauer (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1968), p. 34.

einer stummen, nichtssagenden Isoliertheit verblieb und jeder Bindung an die Allgemeinheit und jeder Beziehung auf das Allgemeine entsagte.¹⁹

It is the correct "Bindung an die Allgemeinheit" which is problematic and which preoccupies Lessing. It is therefore also from this perspective that he criticizes Goethe's Die Leiden des jungen Werther, admonishing its author for his mystifying and unrealistic conception of human motivation:

Solche kleingroße, verächtlich schätzbare Originale hervorzubringen, war nur der christlichen Erziehung vorbehalten, die ein körperliches Bedürfnis so schön in eine geistige Vollkommenheit zu verwandeln weiß.²⁰

Clearly this passage is revealing of Lessing's striving for a realistic and precise depiction of causes and effects; a "körperliches Bedürfnis" is not a "geistige Vollkommenheit", the individual is determined by tangible, not by ineffable forces. The individual does not enjoy absolute autonomy when he makes choices or embarks upon a certain course of action. He is influenced in this by a series of ties to society, and any attempt to deny or ignore them leads to embarrassing or even catastrophic situations.

In the following pages I hope to show how Lessing presents his characters as conscious of and responsible to their obligations as enlightened individuals and members of society.

¹⁹ F.J. Schmitz, Lessings Stellung in der Entfaltung des Individualismus (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1941), pp. 137-38.

²⁰ Lessing, Werke, IX, p. 614.

Whether they are capable of this or not, depends in part on them and in part on things beyond their control. It is these factors which interest us.

Finally, the formal division of this study has also largely been determined by the topic under investigation. For reasons already stated, short chapters on 18th-century history and on Lessing's dramaturgy have been included. In the analysis of the dramas themselves, a grouping according to genre (comedy and tragedy) rather than chronology has been employed, the main reason for this flowing from the difference in moral problems and dilemmas which the individual must confront in either genre, and in the difference of conflict resolution (or non-resolution) which this implies. According to Lessing:

Die Komödie will durch Lachen bessern; aber nicht eben durch Verlachen; nicht gerade diejenigen Unarten, über die sie zu lachen macht, noch weniger bloß und allein die, an welchen sich diese lächerliche Unarten finden. Ihr wahrer allgemeiner Nutzen liegt in dem Lachen selbst; in der Übung unserer Fähigkeit das Lächerliche zu bemerken; es unter allen Bemäntelungen mit noch schlimmern oder mit guten Eigenschaften, sogar in den Runzeln des feierlichen Ernstes, leicht und geschwind zu bemerken.²¹

By contrast, the tragedy is aimed at evoking the emotions of fear and compassion in the audience in order that it acquire

²¹ Lessing, Werke, VI, 149-50.

" . . . eine Fertigkeit im Mitleiden. . . ." ²² This automatically implies that in the comedy only superficial character flaws, i.e., such flaws as can be corrected, will be portrayed, while in the tragedy the individual stands at such deep variance with society that he cannot assert himself and therefore takes an untimely end. In turn, this implies a different perspective on the relative strength of the individual and various social factors; while in the comedy more emphasis is placed on the stability of such forces to socialize the individual and reintegrate him into the community, the tragedy occupies itself with events in which even such positive efforts are powerless, indeed, where they often produce what they are intended to prevent.

²² Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, Moses Mendelssohn, Friedrich Nicolai, Lessings Briefwechsel mit Mendelssohn und Nicolai über das Trauerspiel, ed. Robert Petsch (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1967), p. 84.

I. The eighteenth century

As shown in the preceding pages, Lessing conceives of the individual as standing in a complex relation of cause and effect to the circumstances of his existence; he does not live in a vacuum but in a thoroughgoing and visible "Bindung an die Allgemeinheit". It is therefore necessary to show this "Allgemeinheit", i.e., the background to the actions and problems of the individuals we see portrayed in Lessing's dramas, in order to better understand them.

Lessing's conception of the individual is also evident in his dramaturgy, where it manifests itself in the advancement of a drama which clearly shows the causality of human actions and fates rather than relating them to some moral or metaphysical abstraction. Thus, although both Gottsched and Lessing propose to "enlighten" by means of the drama, and while for both the target is composed of the "Bürgertum", the difference between them is exemplified by a divergence in the choice and nature of subject matter. In Sterbender Cato, Gottsched chooses to depict the "Staat" - a totally abstract concept to the politically impotent bourgeoisie - while Lessing, as in Miss Sara Sampson, portrays the much more familiar sphere of the private world, of

the circle of friends and family.¹ Moreover, Cato takes place in a setting of timelessness where the historical detail, besides being remote to the audience's consciousness, is merely incidental to the moral teaching of the drama. Miss Sara Sampson, by contrast, shows moral dilemmas specific to the historical period and social state depicted, and takes place in a setting familiar to the bourgeois audience from its own experience. This shift from abstractions and generalities such as "ganze Völker" to the particular "Gegenstand" of persons living in familiar and private circumstances, while reflecting the qualitative change that has come about in drama theory between Gottsched and Lessing, also reflects the profound changes being wrought in 18th-century German society and in the mode of thinking of the Enlightenment itself.

Looking at economics, the 18th century is characterized by the accelerated transition from feudal to capitalist forms of production. While to a lesser extent and somewhat later than in England and France, the shifting of economic importance from the aristocracy to a new class, the bourgeoisie, is also evident in Germany. Apart from the effects of the 30-Years War which only gradually could be overcome, the main obstacle preventing a more rapid transition to a free market economy, and hence, to the economic hegemony of the bourgeoisie over the aristocracy, can be seen in the decentralized state of Germany's political

¹ Richard Daunicht, Die Entstehung des bürgerlichen Trauerspiels in Deutschland (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 1963), p. 293.

constitution - itself a direct result of the peace of Westphalia - which prevented the flourishing of an internal market. For an extensive period, therefore, the economic bourgeoisie, if present at all, existed as a very weak and dependent class; it was an appendage to the courts since it produced and imported primarily in response to their requirements for armaments and luxuries. Similarly, in the field of external trade, the main beneficiary again was the feudal class, since the majority of exports were made up of agricultural products.² Another important source of income for the aristocracy, which served to bolster its often shaky finances, was the virtual sale of subjects as mercenaries to foreign powers.³

Nevertheless, capitalist modes of production continued to expand, and with them the power and self-awareness of the bourgeoisie. This development was accelerated especially around the middle of the 18th century and the impetus for it came in various forms. In agriculture new techniques were developed and in the field of technology new inventions were made. This increased the possibility of greater efficiency in production and hence, the attractiveness of making an investment. Thus:

² For a concise account of the economic history of Germany in the period 1700-1750, see: Gerhard Schilfert, Deutschland 1648-1789 (Berlin: VEB Deutscher Verlag der Wissenschaften, 1975), pp. 77-135.

³ Franz Mehring, Die Lessing-Legende (Frankfurt a.M.: Ullstein, 1972), pp. 94-95.

Die Mehrzahl der in Preußen 1769 vorhandenen Manufakturen war erst um bzw. nach 1750 gegründet. Besonders seit dieser Zeit war eine verstärkte Aktivität inländischer bürgerlicher Unternehmer auch außerhalb Preußens zu beobachten. In Preußen wurden nunmehr auch Betriebe von zentraler Bedeutung, wie z.B. das Lagerhaus, die Gold- und Silbermanufaktur, in Privatbesitz überführt. . . . Am meisten blühten die Manufakturen in Sachsen auf, wo sie mit wenigen Ausnahmen "rein kapitalistisch" waren und sich Massenabsatz sichern konnten. Ein weiteres neues Moment der Entwicklung war die Entstehung einer größeren Anzahl von Manufakturen nicht nur für den Bedarf der höheren Stände, sondern auch für die Versorgung großer Teile der Bevölkerung mit Gütern des Massenbedarfs.⁴

The main importance of this economic upsurge was that it helped to accelerate the development and strengthen the class indigenous to capitalism, namely the bourgeoisie, and with it a new set of values and aspirations, a new culture.

Vor allem aber entstand aus dieser Bewegung eine neue soziale Schicht, das politische, wirtschaftliche und geistige Freiheit begehrende Bürgertum, der Abnehmer einer mit ihm zugleich entstehenden und für ihn arbeitenden Literatur, der Träger einer bürgerlichen, freien Bildung. . . . "⁵

This culture stood in direct contradiction to that of the courts: in economics it stood for a market of free and equal producers and consumers, in contrast to the hierarchic and autarchic interests of feudalism. "Unbeschränkte Arbeits- und Kapitalfreiheit gehörte von nun ab zu den unveräußerlichen Menschenrechten, deren Forderung man auch da nicht aufgab, wo man in der Politik

⁴ Schilfert, Deutschland, p. 139.

⁵ Ernst Troeltsch, "Aufklärung," in Aufklärung, Absolutismus und Bürgertum in Deutschland, ed. Franklin Kopitzsch (München: Nymphenburger, 1976), p. 250.

Kompromisse schloß."⁶ From now on, forced by the necessity of capitalist accumulation, came also the belief in the natural rights of the individual, and hence, the equality between all individuals. In truth, before capital one was no longer interested in kings as kings, but in kings as human beings, essentially equal to oneself in that they too must bow before the laws of the market place.

It would, however, be one-sided and historically inaccurate to define the bourgeoisie of the mid-18th century in Germany as a purely economic bourgeoisie, i.e., the bourgeoisie defined in the classical sense as it applies specifically to the period of industrialization. The highest forms of production during this period did not go beyond the stage of manufacture, and even here the level of production was far below that of England and France; as an economic force, the bourgeoisie in Germany was therefore relatively weak.⁷ The merchant and commercial bour-

⁶ Troeltsch, "Aufklärung," p. 251.

⁷ According to Schilfert, Deutschland, pp. 238-29:

Die Manufaktur ist ein auf Handarbeit beruhender Betrieb, in dem eine Anzahl von Arbeitern in Arbeitsteilung für den Markt produziert. Findet der gesamte Produktionsprozeß in einer Werkstatt statt, sprechen wir von einer zentralisierten Manufaktur. Gehen jedoch nur Teilprozesse der Herstellung (in der Regel die Anfangs- bzw. Endprozesse) in einer zentralen Werkstatt vor sich, während die anderen Arbeiten von Heimarbeitern, die zumeist in der Nähe der zentralen Werkstatt wohnen, ausgeführt werden, so sprechen wir von einer dezentralisierten oder zerstreuten Manufaktur. In Deutschland gab es von 1648 bis 1789 sowohl kapitalistische Manufakturen (d.h., die unmittelbaren Produzenten waren "freie" Lohnarbeiter, die ihre Arbeitskraft an einen Manufakturisten verkauften) als auch, wenn auch viel seltener,

geoisie also constituted only a small group. Moreover, as is evident from several sources, this economic bourgeoisie did not give the main impulse for the cultural achievements and aspirations of the time:

. . . es spielt eine bedeutende Rolle, daß in Deutschland als progressiver Kern der bürgerlichen Emanzipationsbewegung nicht die handeltreibenden und unternehmenden "Kapitalisten", sondern die gebildeten Bürgerlichen auftreten: ihnen mußte es weit näherliegen, sich im Theater eines Instrumentes zu bedienen, mit dem zugleich als Nachweis und als Anspruch, "höhere Kultur" vor der Öffentlichkeit reklamiert werden konnte.⁸

Or, according to Rudolf Vierhaus:

Eine wohlhabende "Bourgeoisie" gab es, abgesehen von einigen See-, Handels- und Messestädten, in Deutschland nicht. Das politische Interesse von bürgerlichen Unternehmern überschritt in der Regel kaum den lokalen Horizont. Anders die bürgerlichen Gebildeten, die - eben in der Kompensation ihrer faktischen Machtlosigkeit - mit wachsendem Mut den Herrschaftsanspruch der Vernunft, des kritischen Denkens, der aufgeklärten Humanität und des geläuterten Gefühls in allen Lebensbereichen erhoben und, wenn sie allgemein über die Natur zwischenmenschlicher Beziehungen und die Aufgaben guter Obrigkeit diskutieren, ihre eigene Gegenwart meinten.⁹

feudale Manufakturen (die unmittelbaren Produzenten wurden unter Anwendung des außerökonomischen Zwanges ausgebeutet, d.h., sie waren dann in der Regel Leibeigene oder Zwangsarbeiter, wie z.B. in den Zuchthausmanufakturen).

⁸ Wölfel, "Anstalt," p. 97.

⁹ Rudolf Vierhaus, "Deutschland im 18. Jahrhundert: soziales Gefüge, politische Verfassung, geistige Bewegung," in Lessing und die Zeit der Aufklärung, ed. Joachim-Jungius Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften, Hamburg (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1968), p. 19.

The position of the bourgeoisie, economic or "gebildet", was therefore ambiguous in its relation to the feudal class. Even though an economic development in the direction of a "free" market was taking place, the representatives of this development were incapable or unwilling to assume the risks of greater political responsibilities. When bourgeois economists and agricultural technicians deplored serfdom as a hindrance to increased productivity in the fields, they were touching upon the fundamental contradiction between feudal and capitalist modes of production, yet there was little they could do to change the fact of feudal exploitation and inefficiency.¹⁰ In a similar manner, the position of the learned bourgeoisie - the pastors, the professors, and the government bureaucrats - was characterized by an impotence to affect the political status quo: regardless of all rhetoric about the freedom of the individual, they knew perfectly well upon whom their sinecures depended. Hauser gives a concise summary of this state of affairs and its consequences:

Die Machtlosigkeit der bürgerlichen Klasse, ihre Ausschließung von der Regierung des Landes und so gut wie jeder politischen Tätigkeit führt eine Passivität herbei, die sich auf das ganze Kulturleben erstreckt. Die aus subalternen Beamten, Schulmeistern und weltfremden Dichtern bestehende Intelligenz gewöhnte sich daran, zwischen ihrem Privatdasein und der Politik eine Trennungslinie zu ziehen und auf jeden praktischen Einfluß von vornherein zu verzichten. Sie entschädigt sich dafür durch den übersteigerten Idealismus und die betonte Interessenlosigkeit ihrer Ideen und überläßt das Lenken des Staates den Besitzern der Macht. Es äußert sich in diesem Verzicht nicht nur eine vollkommene Gleichgültigkeit gegen die scheinbar unabänderliche soziale Praxis,

¹⁰ Schilfert, Deutschland, pp. 137-39.

sondern auch eine ausgesprochene Verachtung der Politik als Beruf. Die bürgerliche Intelligenz verliert auf diese Art jeden Kontakt mit der gesellschaftlichen Wirklichkeit, wird immer weltfremder, verschrobener, verbohrt. Ihr Denken wird rein kontemplativ und spekulativ, unreal und irrational, ihre Ausdrucksweise eigensinnig, verstiegen, inkommunikabel, jeder Rücksicht auf andere unfähig und jeder Korrektur von außen widerstrebend. Sie zieht sich auf ein "allgemeinmenschliches", über den Klassen, Ständen und Gruppen stehendes Niveau zurück, macht aus ihrem Mangel an praktischem Sinn eine Tugend und nennt ihn Idealismus, Innerlichkeit, Überwindung der räumlichen und zeitlichen Grenzen. Sie entwickelt aus ihrer unfreiwilligen Passivität ein Ideal des idyllischen Privatdaseins, aus ihrer äußeren Gebundenheit die Idee der inneren Freiheit und der geistigen Souveränität über die gemeine, empirische Wirklichkeit. So kommt es in Deutschland zur völligen Scheidung der Literatur von der Politik und zum Verschwinden jenes im Westen so wohlbekannten Repräsentanten der öffentlichen Meinung, der gleichzeitig Schriftsteller und Politiker, Wissenschaftler und Publizist, ein guter Philosoph und ein guter Journalist ist.¹¹

The main reasons for this deplorable state of affairs were historical:

Die unglaubliche Verwüstung des Dreißigjährigen Kriegs und die irrationalen religiösen Kontroversen bis weit ins 18. Jahrhundert hinein, die einen Großteil an geistiger Energie und materiellen Reserven verschlangen; der Partikularismus innerhalb des Heiligen Römischen Reichs, der die deutschen Länder daran hinderte, sich als Ganzes zu sehen und entsprechend zusammenzuarbeiten; und die Lage des Geisteslebens vom Ende des 17. und bis zur Mitte des 18. Jahrhunderts, die sich u.a. in der mangelnden Unterstützung für Kunst und Wissenschaft, im Elend der alten Universitäten und in der Misere des Schulwesens kundtut.¹²

¹¹ Arnold Hauser, Sozialgeschichte der Kunst und Literatur (München: C.H. Beck, 1967), pp. 622-23.

¹² Thomas P. Saine, "Was ist Aufklärung? Kulturgeschichtliche Überlegungen zu neuer Beschäftigung mit der deutschen Aufklärung," in Aufklärung, Absolutismus und Bürgertum in Deutschland, ed. Franklin Kopitzsch (München: Nymphenburger, 1976), p. 319.

That, and the fact that " . . . die deutschen Länder im ganzen gesehen zwischen dem Ausgang der Reformation und dem Wiener Kongreß so blind, selbstsüchtig und schonungslos regiert wurden wie überhaupt wenige in der ganzen Weltgeschichte"¹³ bore the consequence that " . . . die deutsche Aufklärungskultur eine apolitische wurde, die Kultur derjenigen, die in den Regierungen keinen Einfluß hatten, noch ihn zu gewinnen hoffen konnten."¹⁴

While the demand for recognition of the individual continued to be made in an abstract sense and out of the implications of an economic and cultural ideal, it was severely constrained when posited concretely. The political theory of 18th-century Germany before 1789 is an eminently conservative one and the relationship of the bourgeoisie to the aristocracy paradoxical: while asserting the rights of all individuals, not only of those "born by the grace of God", in order to justify ideologically the requirements of a "free market" in economics, religion, and literature, it also recognized that the activity of this "free market" depended heavily on the goodwill of those "born by the grace of God". Because this was a paradoxical position, directly resulting from the weakness of the bourgeoisie, there emerged a tendency toward passive resistance, i.e., an assertion of individuality without demands for political representation. Pietism was the equivalent in the religious field of this anti-

¹³ Saine, "Aufklärung," p. 319.

¹⁴ Saine, "Aufklärung," p. 320.

orthodox yet reformist trend to internalize the personal life,¹⁵ and in literature we may see an example of the individual's claims and his subservient relationship to the state in Gellert's Schwedische Gräfin von G. In Philosophy, Christian Wolff's systematization and popularization of Leibniz' theory of the preestablished harmony furnished further support to bolster the idea of a static universe wherein everything occupied its rightful place, and for which change was not to be foreseen since this would question the wisdom of the Creator. It was with good reason that Frederick II, after having rejected it once, came to see the political utility of this philosophy for the absolutist state.

The question of the individual in the 18th century could therefore not be answered in an unequivocal manner. It was a highly paradoxical issue, reflecting on the one hand the bourgeoisie's abdication of political responsibility and the cultivation of individuality in the private and sentimental sphere, and on the other, the increasing economic and cultural significance of this class and its never-ending inquisitiveness which, at least on a theoretical level, held nothing to be sacred and which produced such an astounding amount of new knowledge. The posture of the individual belonging to this class can be circumscribed with one word: "Tugend".

¹⁵ Klaus Scholder, "Grundzüge der theologischen Aufklärung in Deutschland," in Aufklärung, Absolutismus und Bürgertum in Deutschland, ed. Franklin Kopitzsch (München: Nymphenburger, 1976), pp. 294-318.

The contradictory nature of this concept is revealed in a study done by Wolfgang Martens at hand of one of the popular "moralische Wochenschriften", namely the Patriot of Hamburg, which was published between 1724 and 1726.¹⁶ Martens finds that, while at the beginning of the century the predominant trend consists in the bourgeoisie being attracted to the gallant yet reckless lifestyle of the aristocracy, by mid-century the tendency has shifted to its opposite, i.e., the aristocrat tends to accept bourgeois values and middle-class style of life. e.g., Schwedische Gräfin von G.¹⁷ Important elements of this lifestyle are thrift, altruism and privacy - what one might call "tugend-

¹⁶ Wolfgang Martens, "Bürgerlichkeit in der frühen Aufklärung," in Aufklärung, Absolutismus und Bürgertum in Deutschland, ed. Franklín Kopitzsch (München: Nymphenburger, 1976), p. 349.

¹⁷ Paul M. Lützel's critique of Emilia Galotti would therefore appear to be incomplete in trying to establish that this play is essentially heroic (as opposed to "bürgerlich") because the characters are all of the "nicht-höfischer Adel" which, although politically and materially disenfranchised, defended a pre-rococo courtly code of ethics based on "Ehre, Tugend, Gesetzestreue und Religiosität" rather than the bourgeois ethic of "Tugend und Gelassenheit". A similar conclusion is drawn by Michael Metzger, who sees in Odoardo and Appiani members of the "Kriegsadel", who at the moment find themselves without employment and who therefore can retain their stature in society only by either withdrawing into a rural idyll or by making themselves available to their lord for whatever purpose he might deem expedient.

Both interpretations, while correct in categorizing both Odoardo and Appiani as members of the nobility, draw from this the false conclusion that they can therefore not espouse bourgeois values and a middle-class style of life. Martens concludes that,

. . . diese neue Lebensform nicht auf die bürgerlichen schichten beschränkt blieb, sondern ihrerseits auf gewisse Gruppen des Adels, ja auf einige Höfe in Deutschland Einfluß nehmen konnte. . . .

hafte Weltlichkeit".¹⁸ It is not ascetic, but neither are its enjoyments extravagant. However, as evidenced by the Patriot,

Lediglich die Ansätze zu politisch mündiger Bürgerlichkeit . . . haben sich im 18. Jahrhundert im deutschen Bereich nicht weiter entwickelt. Bürgerlicher Gemeinsinn bleibt - anders als in England und Frankreich - bei uns im allgemeinen unterhalb der Ebene selbstbewußter Verantwortlichkeit für die öffentlichen Angelegenheiten - er bleibt ein friedlicher, obrigkeitsfrommer, bieder-subalterner Gemeinsinn. Sonst aber sind fast alle Elemente der entfalteten bürgerlichen Kultur der Goethezeit bereits in den Bemühungen der frühen Aufklärung angelegt, die Faszination der höfisch-aristokratischen Kultur zu brechen und im Zeichen der Tugend eine neue Lebensform dagegen zu setzen.¹⁹

The implications of this state of affairs for the belief and optimism in the individual's capacity for self-determination are obvious: on the one hand, a growing and increasingly class-conscious and influential bourgeoisie affirms its own value and its own right to self-determination. It claims, by virtue of its superior education and ability to generate pecuniary wealth, that the criteria of personal worth by virtue, industry, and intelligence, rather than ecclesiastical authority or feudal birthright. On the other hand, it is politically impotent and

Paul M. Lützeler, "Die marxistische Lessing-Rezeption (II) - Darstellung und Kritik am Beispiel der Emilia Galotti-Interpretation in der DDR," Lessing Yearbook, 8 (1976), 42-60; Michael Metzger, "Soziale und dramatische Struktur in Lessings Emilia Galotti," AIGK, 3 (1975), 210-16; Martens, "Aufklärung," p. 359.

¹⁸ Martens, "Aufklärung," p. 357.

¹⁹ Martens, "Aufklärung," p. 359.

subject at all times to the caprice of its masters. This is a contradiction which the bourgeoisie is incapable of resolving. Although it desires to see itself depicted on stage in the role of hero, the scenario of its activity remains confined to the private circle of family and friends. To a certain extent, it can find freedom of action and happiness in this sphere - as shown in the comedy. Yet this idyll is vulnerable to invasion by alien and hostile values, the values of a vice-ridden and wilful aristocracy, which are as attractive as they are destructive. When this occurs, tragedy becomes unavoidable.

II. Lessing's dramaturgy

If the theses previously stated, that literary communication presupposes a specific historical-social context and that the link between this context and the literary product is constituted by literary theory, are accepted as valid, it becomes then necessary to consider these aspects if we wish to deal adequately with the topic under investigation. In the case of Lessing's dramaturgy this point is even more valid since his theory of the tragedy, for instance, consists precisely in a statement of the importance of causal realism in the drama. A study of Lessing's dramaturgy, therefore, will reveal his theoretical assumptions about the factors which determine human actions, and hence, the individual's freedom.

In Lessing's theory of the tragedy, the premise that this genre - as all literature - has a definite didactic function, was never doubted: "Bessern sollen uns alle Gattungen der Poesie: es ist kläglich, wenn man dieses erst beweisen muß; noch kläglich ist es, wenn es Dichter gibt, die selbst daran zweifeln."¹ Here, as everywhere, Lessing reveals himself as the moralist, the enlightener, and the teacher; to suggest that the tragedy could have a purpose other than that of the improvement of mankind would

¹ Lessing, Werke, VI, 405.

be alien to his manner of thinking. The question was consequently not whether, but how to accomplish this task through the specific medium of the stage.

In the controversy with Nicolai and Mendelssohn over the tragedy, Lessing arrived at a viewpoint in which he concluded that the classical tragedy was no longer adequate in fulfilling its moral-didactic purpose. The reason for this, according to Lessing, was the fact that such a tragedy tried to affect the audience by evoking its admiration; but, "Der bewunderte Held ist der Vorwurf der Epopee . . ." ² and furthermore,

Die Bewunderung in dem allgemeinen Verstande, in welchem es nichts ist, als das sonderliche Wohlgefallen an einer seltenen Vollkommenheit, bessert vermittelst der Nacheiferung, und die Nacheiferung setzt eine deutliche Erkenntniß der Vollkommenheit, welcher ich nacheifern will, voraus. Wie viele haben diese Erkenntniß? Und wo diese nicht³ ist, bleibt die Bewunderung nicht unfruchtbar?

This recognition leads Lessing to postulate that, rather than appealing to the audience's "Erkenntniß" and "Bewunderung", the tragedy can fulfill its moral function more efficiently if it appeals to the emotions instead. Since, moreover, the subject matter of the tragedy is serious by nature, the principal emotions it should evoke are those of "Mitleid" and "Furcht" (compassion and fear). "Die dramatische Form ist die einzige, in welcher sich Mitleid und Furcht erregen läßt; wenigstens können in keiner andern Form diese Leidenschaften auf einen so hohen Grad erregt

² Lessing, Briefwechsel, p. 56.

³ Lessing, Briefwechsel, p. 68.

werden. . . ."⁴ But how must characters appear on stage to achieve this effect?

We may arrive at an answer by examining the concept of "Furcht und Mitleid". Interpreting Aristotle, Lessing defines "Furcht" as included in the emotion of "Mitleid", but a fear

. . . welche aus unserer Ähnlichkeit mit der leidenden Person für uns selbst entspringt; es ist die Furcht, daß die Unglücksfälle, die wir über diese verhängt sehen, uns selbst treffen können; es ist die Furcht, daß wir der bemitleidete Gegenstand selbst werden können. Mit einem Worte: diese Furcht ist das auf uns selbst bezogene Mitleid.⁵

True compassion can only be aroused by such actions which are capable of making us afraid for ourselves, i.e., we can only sympathize with characters and situations with which we can also identify. It is for this reason that Lessing demands characters who are " . . . von gleichem Schrot und Korne . . . " with us, for

Aus dieser Gleichheit entstehe die Furcht, daß unser Schicksal gar leicht dem seinigen eben so ähnlich werden könne, als wir ihm zu sein uns selbst fühlen: und diese Furcht sei es, welche das Mitleid gleichsam zur Reife bringe.⁶

What Lessing demands of the characters and situations of his drama, is that they be similar to the world the audience knows. Since the effect of the tragedy depends entirely on the close

⁴ Lessing, Werke, VI, 405.

⁵ Lessing, Werke, VI, 381.

⁶ Lessing, Werke, VI, 383.

identification of the audience with the stage, this means that the characters cannot be heroes in the traditional sense, they must be realistic depictions of people, with all the strengths and weaknesses which people usually have, living in a social environment which is familiar to the audience, and subject to the same influences and conflicts which this audience knows out of its own life. Only under these conditions can the tragedy induce " . . . eine Fertigkeit im Mitleiden . . . "⁷ because only in these circumstances will the viewer also feel the fear that what he has seen on the stage, could also happen to him. If this fear is not present, compassion as such ends the moment the viewer leaves the theatre; it is the essential component which ties the viewer to the actions on the stage.

"Furcht und Mitleid", being the strong emotions characteristic of the effect the tragedy should produce, induce in the viewer a feeling which Lessing saw as integral to all strong emotions, namely " . . . daß wir uns bey jeder heftigen Begierde oder Verabscheuung, eines größeren Grads unsrer Realität bewußt sind. . . . "⁸ As emotions "Furcht und Mitleid" are the feeling of one's own reality and worth: self-awareness. On the other hand, the content of the self-awareness produced by these specific emotions is both the sympathy which one has for others who are like oneself ("Mitleid"), and the relating of their lot to one's own circumstances ("Furcht"). It is the feeling of

⁷ Lessing, Briefwechsel, p. 84.

⁸ Lessing, Briefwechsel, p. 98.

solidarity with a group which undergoes common experiences, the feeling of fraternity. As the essence of the social content of Enlightenment moral philosophy - and that of Lessing - the concept of human fraternity embodies at the same time the idea of the worth of the individual, and of the commonality and equality between all human beings. Thus:

. . . die Bestimmung der Tragödie ist diese: sie soll unsere Fähigkeit, Mitleid zu fühlen, erweitern. Sie soll uns nicht blos lehren, gegen diesen oder jenen Unglücklichen Mitleid zu fühlen, sondern sie soll uns so weit fühlbar machen, daß uns der Unglückliche zu allen Zeiten, und unter allen Gestalten, rühren und für sich einnehmen muß. . . . Der mitleidigste Mensch ist der beste Mensch, zu allen gesellschaftlichen Tugenden, zu allen Arten der Großmuth der aufgelegteste.⁹

The aim of Lessing's drama is to produce among the audience a feeling of solidarity on the level of entire humanity. This solidarity - which can be defined as fraternity - is not merely a "Leidenschaft" nor is it a fleeting "Bewunderung". It is the acquired ability which enables the individual at once to achieve a greater sense of his own "Realität", i.e., awareness of his own uniqueness, and also to be a better member of society.

This aim of the tragedy in turn, is achieved by inviting the audience to identify with the proceedings on stage. In order to attain this identification therefore, these proceedings must be familiar in every sense to the audience. Hence, if the drama of the Enlightenment in general, and that of Lessing in particular,

⁹ Lessing, Briefwechsel, p. 54.

is the drama directed at the bourgeois (e.g., "bürgerliches Trauerspiel"),¹⁰ the stage must present characters and heroes representative of his class, and deal with plots and themes drawn from the world of his experience. Moreover, in accordance with the immanent and optimistic "Weltanschauung" of the middle class and the Enlightenment in general, the drama must be motivated in a thoroughly understandable and consequent manner. To cite Lessing once more on the "Genie":

Das Genie können nur Begebenheiten beschäftigen, die in einander gegründet sind, nur Ketten von Ursachen und Wirkungen. Diese auf jene zurück zu führen, jene gegen diese abzuwägen, überall das Ungefähr auszuschließen, alles, was geschieht, so geschehen lassen, daß es nicht anders geschehen können: das, das ist seine Sache, wenn es in dem Felde der Geschichte arbeitet, um die unnützen Schätze des Gedächtnisses in Nahrungen des Geistes zu verwandeln.¹¹

The ideal of causal realism and consequence, an ideal which brought with it a high degree of complexity and, sometimes, ambiguity for the drama, forced Lessing into direct conflict with the dean of German drama at this time, Gottsched. Gottsched was the proponent of a static and regular drama; he reserved the characters of the tragedy for representatives of the aristocratic

¹⁰ For the purpose of semantic clarification it should be stated here that throughout this thesis the French term "bourgeois" is used as a direct translation of the German "bürgerlich" even though the two concepts have divergent sociological connotations. Karl S. Guthke defines the "Bürgertum" of 18th-century Germany as the ". . . 'Mittelstand' als Klasse der Untertanen . . . vor allem die Spaltung innerhalb des Mittelstandes, der nach zeitgenössischem Weltverständnis Bürgertum und Adel außer dem höchsten umschließt. . . ." Karl S. Guthke, Das deutsche bürgerliche Trauerspiel (Stuttgart: Metzlersche, 1972), p. 61.

¹¹ Lessing, Werke, VI, 155-56.

class because only they could be regarded as worthy of the "Hoheit der Handlung". His ideal, rather than portraying realistic and familiar characters and situations, attempts to force them into a preestablished and eternally valid mold, namely that of the classical tragedy:

Die Engelländer sind zwar in Gedanken und Ausdrücken sehr glücklich; sie formieren gute Charaktere und wissen die Sitten der Menschen sehr gut nachzuahmen: Allein, was die ordentliche Einrichtung der Fabel anlangt, darin sind sie noch keine Meister, wie fast aus allen ihren Schauspielen erhellet.¹²

The moral-didactic function of the tragedy is therefore accomplished on a purely abstract level, in accordance with this scheme which uncritically reflects the belief in the preestablished harmony of the universe and which in its view of society translates into an unqualified acceptance of class society as it existed at the time. Gottsched's drama was therefore little more than a "Untertanen-Schule"¹³ inasmuch as it had a moral-didactic purpose; the only "Realität" he intended his audience to feel was the resignation to its present powerless position in society:

Wer die großen Unglücksfälle vorstellen sieht, die Königen und Helden begegnet sind, der erschrickt, daß es solche schreckliche Zufälle des menschlichen Lebens giebt, davon er in seinem Privatstande sich nichts hätte träumen lassen. Dieses macht ihn nun künftig gesetzter, wenn es ihm selbst nicht nach Wunsche geht. Er weis es nunmehr, daß kein Stand

¹² Johann Christoph Gottsched, "Vorrede," in his Sterbender Cato (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1964), p. 13.

¹³ Wölfel, "Anstalt," p. 104.

der Menschen von Kummer frey ist; und daß seine Zufälle, noch nichts gegen denen zu rechnen sind, die großen Herren begegnen.¹⁴

Lessing, taking the opposite position, demands that the characters be "mit uns von gleichem Schrot und Korne", that heroes and villains be neither all good nor entirely bad, that above all, they appear as they would in reality. No longer must heroes be only of high birth:

Die Namen von Fürsten und Helden können einem Stücke Pomp und Majestät geben; aber zur Rührung tragen sie nichts bei. Das Unglück derjenigen, deren Umstände den unsrigen am nächsten kommen, muß natürlicher Weise am tiefsten in unsere Seele dringen; und wenn wir mit Königen Mitleiden haben, so haben wir es mit ihnen als mit Menschen, und nicht als mit Königen. Macht ihr Stand schon öfters ihre Unfälle wichtiger, so macht er sie darum nicht interessanter. Immerhin mögen ganze Völker darin verwickelt werden; unsere Sympathie erfordert einen einzeln Gegenstand, und ein Staat ist ein viel zu abstrakter Begriff für unsere Empfindungen.¹⁵

Lessing is the first German playwright to draw this consequence in a concrete manner for the tragedy, a genre which even for Gellert was reserved exclusively for the

. . . Adel und . . . Hoheit der Handlung . . . den Sitten und Empfindungen großer Helden, welche sich entweder durch ihre erhabne Tugend oder durch ihre außerordentliche Häßlichkeit ausnehmen . . . jenem tragischen, hohen und prächtigen Ausdrucke.¹⁶

¹⁴ Johann Christoph Gottsched, Beyträge zur Critischen Historie der deutschen Sprache, Poesie und Beredsamkeit, VI (Leipzig: Bernhard Christoph Breitkopf, 1740), 599.

¹⁵ Lessing, Werke, VI, 76

¹⁶ Christian Fürchtegott Gellert, "Abhandlung für das rührende Lustspiel," in his Die zärtlichen Schwestern, trans. G.E. Lessing (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1965), p. 121.

Regardless of literary or social convention, Lessing affirms the necessity of realism. Individuals are personalities of flesh and blood, subject to a multiplicity of influences which shape and direct their lives. They are not merely reifications of moral or social ideals, but members of society, to which they stand in a causally reciprocal relationship. As such, they are neither absolutely autonomous beings, nor are they entirely powerless to determine their destinies.

III. The comedies

Among Lessing's early literary works some of the most noteworthy are Der junge Gelehrte and Der Freigeist. Although these plays conform closely to the dramaturgical rules as set forth by the classical theatre and by Gottsched (adherence to the three unities, the ridiculing and eventual cure of a character flaw or vice, depiction of types rather than characters),¹ there is evident already in these early works an interest in the individual which foreshadows the concern of the masterpieces.² Even while contrasting starkly to Minna von Barnhelm in the lack of specific-historical content which they display and in the presentation of schematic types rather than individual personalities as dramatic personages, many of the human characteristics and problems embodied in Tellheim and Minna can already be observed in Damis, Valer, Adrast, and Theophan. Despite the essential adherence to the tradition of the "Typenkomödie", there is here already an attempt at differentiation of characters and at showing the multiplicity of influences to which individuals are subject (even though at the

¹ Mehring, Legende, p. 274.

² Manfred Durzak, "Von der Typenkomödie zum ernsten Lustspiel," in his Poesie und Ratio (Bad Homburg v.d.H.: Athenäum, 1970), p. 12.

time of writing these comedies Lessing had not yet formulated his theory of dramatic realism).

Thus, even though primitive by comparison with the richness and complexity of Minna, these plays show the beginnings of Lessing's dramatic efforts to come to terms with the question of human freedom. As such, they can serve as an introduction to several of the main motifs and techniques used by the author in this endeavour.

Specifically this involves looking at the "fragmented norm", and the consideration of its corollary, the element of tragedy, inherent in the comedy at least as a possibility. Comedy, for Lessing, is the avoidance of tragedy; laughter easily turns into its opposite, or, as Minna later asks: "Kann man denn auch nicht lachend sehr ernsthaft sein?" (IV, vi) Since for the problem of emancipation the difference between comedy and tragedy is precisely that between success and failure, the essential question for us will be that of determining the factors which enable the avoidance of tragedy, apart from the obvious reason given by the requirements of the comic genre itself.

Der junge Gelehrte

The difference between Gottsched and Lessing appears in that the former tries to achieve the moral-didactic function of the comedy by arriving at a generalized and abstract moral maxim through the stark contrasting of good and evil moral types, while

the latter prefers to end with a concrete solution of the plot in a causally realistic way.³ Hence, the theoretical justification in regard to the "weinerliches Lustspiel" of what already appears concretely in Der junge Gelehrte:

Ja, ich getraue mir zu behaupten, daß nur dieses allein wahre Komödien sind, welche sowohl Tugenden als Laster, sowohl Anständigkeit als Ungereimtheit schildern, weil sie eben durch diese Vermischung mit ihrem Originale, dem menschlichen Leben, am nächsten kommen.⁴

For Lessing the characters in the comedy must meet two requirements: they must communicate the moral-didactic message to the audience, and they must to a certain extent be typical, hence general and representative; on the other hand, in order to be realistic, they must be depictions of individual human personalities as they appear in real life. While admitting that he does not know the final answer of how these two opposing demands can both be met,⁵ Lessing suggests that what is required is not a general character in the sense that he personifies a certain vice or flaw, but a character who is average:

In der andern Bedeutung aber heißt ein allgemeiner Charakter ein solcher, in welchem man von dem, was an mehreren oder allen Individuis bemerkt worden, einen gewissen Durchschnitt, eine mittlere Proportion angenommen; es heißt mit einem Worte, ein gewöhnlicher Charakter, nicht zwar in so fern der Charakter selbst,

³ Helmut Arntzen, Die ernste Komödie: Das deutsche Lustspiel von Lessing bis Kleist (München: Nymphenburger, 1968), p. 21.

⁴ Lessing, Werke, III, 648.

⁵ Lessing, Werke, VI, 479.

sondern nur in so fern der Grad, das Maß desselben gewöhnlich ist.⁶

A character who is general in that he personifies a specific human characteristic is, in the words of Hurd, whom Lessing quotes to defend his thesis, ". . . eine widrige Schilderung; denn da es die Schilderung einer einfachen unvermischten Leidenschaft ist, so fehlen ihr alle die Lichter und Schatten, deren richtige Verbindung allein ihr Kraft und Leben erteilen könnte."⁷

The demand for realism in characterization therefore not only implies that in the comedy "sowohl Anständigkeit als Ungereimtheit" be depicted, but that these opposing elements exist simultaneously in one person. It is what might be called the "fragmented norm" of Lessing's drama, i.e., ". . . the conscious distribution of positive attributes - the author's own point of reference - among all of the personages."⁸ This aspect of the theory of the comedy reflects Lessing's view of the individuals as such, and the same idea surfaces in the discussion regarding the tragedy:

Auch der Bösewicht ist noch Mensch, ist noch ein Wesen,

⁶ Lessing, Werke, VI, 478.

⁷ Lessing, Werke, VI, 465.

⁸ Robert E. Rentschler, "Lessing's fragmented norm: a reexamination of 'Der junge Gelehrte,'" Germanic Review, 50 (1975), p. 165 hereafter cited as GR. A similar conclusion is drawn by Walter Hinck: Walter Hinck, "Das deutsche Lustspiel im 18. Jahrhundert," in Das deutsche Lustspiel, ed, Hans Steffen (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1968), I, 7-26.

das bei allen seinen moralischen Unvollkommenheiten genug behält, um sein Verderben, seine Zernichtung lieber nicht zu wollen, um bei dieser etwas Mitleidähnliches, die Elemente des Mitleids gleichsam, zu empfinden.⁹

And for the character in the comedy: "Wir schätzen seine übrige guten Eigenschaften, wie wir sie schätzen sollen; ja ohne sie würden wir nicht einmal . . . lachen können."¹⁰

An example of the application of the fragmented norm can be found in what was probably Lessing's first dramatic production. Der junge Gelehrte at first glance appears to be a satire on the pedantry so common in Lessing's time, presented in the form of the traditional Saxon "Typenkomödie". A closer look, however, reveals a much deeper criticism of society which arises out of the personalities of all characters involved, not only out of that of Damis, who represents the most negative personage in the play.

Damis is beset by problems: he is proud to the point of vanity of his stature as "Gelehrter", and disdainful of anyone not on his level of erudition. But this is nearly everyone, and consequently he has made himself generally disliked. He is alienated from his surroundings and his knowledge, apart from being pedantic and entirely without practical connection or relevance to reality, is also based on an undifferentiated and uncritical assimilation of the various ideas and teachings he

⁹ Lessing, Werke, VI, 387.

¹⁰ Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, Gotthold Ephraim Lessings sämtliche Schriften, ed. Karl Lachmann und Franz Muncker, 3rd. ed. (Stuttgart: G.J. Göschen'sche Verlagshandlung, 1887), IX, 303.

comes across in his studies. Thus, whatever book he has last read, determines the stand he takes on any specific issue (e.g., the question of marriage). Damis' inability to perceive reality and to use reason in a critical way as would become him as a scholar, is also shown by his prejudiced view of the opposite sex:

Jedes Frauenzimmer ist eitel, hoffärtig, geschwätzig, zänkisch und zeitlebens kindisch, es mag so alt werden, als es will. Jedes Frauenzimmer weiß kaum, daß es eine Seele hat, um die es unendlich mehr besorgt sein sollte, als um den Körper. Sich ankleiden; vor dem Spiegel sitzen, seinen eignen Reiz bewundern; auf aufgekünstelte Mienen sinnieren; mit neugierigen Augen müßig an dem Fenster liegen: unsinnige Romane lesen, und aufs höchste zum Zeitvertreiber die Nadel zur Hand nehmen: das sind seine Beschäftigung; das ist sein Leben. (I,ii)

Whenever confronted by some pressing practical problem he feigns absent-mindedness in order to avoid having to deal with it.

Damis, because of his pedantry, is not integrated into the social circle of his family and friends; the overall evaluation of him is that of a "Narr" (e.g., Chrysanter in I,ii). Yet, even while regarding reality as nothing but an abstraction, Damis craves to be recognized - and this recognition is sought in the form of a prize from the Berlin Academy.¹¹ Through the prize he hopes to achieve the desired status of a bona fide scholar, a human being with "Ehre" which, according to Anton: "Um die tut ein junger Gelehrter alles!" (I,vi)

However, the fact that Damis is unsuccessful in attaining

¹¹ Durzak, "Typenkomödie," p. 21.

the desired goal is not a fault of his alone. Because his father's pecuniary ambitions hinge on whether or not Damis marries Juliane and because he represents a rival to Valer who loves Juliane, Damis becomes the unwilling accomplice in a complex intrigue. Thus, despite his craving for isolation, we see almost the entire play taking place in Damis' study: "Will denn meine Stube heute gar nicht leer werden? Bald ist der da, bald jener; bald die, bald jene. Soll ich denn nicht einen Augenblick allein sein?" (III,iii) He is used as the pivotal point of all the schemes around him, intrigues in which he has not the slightest personal interest. Especially Chrysander the merchant uses him to further his own interests, although ostensibly only interested in his son's familial happiness. Even while professing that "Ich lasse jedem seine Freiheit . . ." (III,xvi), he has no scruples about ". . . dich zu enterben, wann du mir nicht folgest." (III,xvii) How little he is really concerned with his son's problems is revealed clearly when, Valer assuring him of his intentions not to make any claim to Juliane's fortune, Damis is suddenly expendable and told that he may now proceed with the journey he had planned (III,xviii).

But not only Chrysander displays negative qualities of character. Even Juliane and Valer, otherwise portrayed as persons of the highest virtue, show negative features which flow from this very virtuousness, i.e., whenever this virtue becomes an end in itself. They tend to place a strict adherence to the rules of morality above the constant struggle to redefine them in concrete situations, and their characters therefore take on a

lifeless and puppet-like quality (III,i). This excessive virtue manifests itself in a tendency to be paternalistic toward Damis and to be uncritical toward Chrysender's evidently selfish motives in regard to his son and Juliane.

Clearly evil is not a characteristic of Damis' personality alone, and it is conceivable that, were it not for the pervasive self-interest (Chrysender) and lack of critical perspective (Valer and Juliane) which characterize this group of persons, it would be easier for him to adjust to social reality. However, not only the bad attributes of character are distributed among all personages in the play. The same can be said of the good and positive features.

Chrysender, although an astute businessman, also has his good sides. He is a jolly fellow and even his greed has limits (III,xviii). Valer and Juliane are veritable paragons of virtue, nearly perfect models of the enlightened ideal as it frequently appears in the "Typenkomödie". Even Damis, although otherwise playing the role of black sheep, at least does not suffer from their " . . . inelasticity of character . . . ",¹² a feature he immediately recognizes in Juliane who, in blind filial obedience to Chrysender, refuses to change her opinion about his altruism and goes to the extreme of declaring her willingness to marry Damis even though she dislikes him. In such circumstances, according to Damis, " . . . die Tugend ist oft eine Art von Dummheit." (III,iv)

¹² Rentschler, "Fragmented norm," p. 177.

He also has other valuable insights, which lack only in that he fails to see their applicability to his situation as well: ". . . die Geistlichen überhaupt sind schlechte Helden in der Gelehrsamkeit" (I,i); or the profound statement that

Es kommen Gelegenheiten, wo ihr selbst erkennet, wie mangelhaft euer Wissen sei; voll tollen Hochmuts beurteilt ihr alsdann alle menschliche Erkenntnis nach der eurigen, und ruft wohl gar in einem Tone, welcher alle Sterbliche zu bejammern scheint, aus: Unser Wissen ist Stückwerk! . . . der Mensch ist allerdings einer allgemeinen Erkenntnis fähig. Es leugnen, heißt ein Bekenntnis seiner Faulheit, oder seines mäßigen Genies ablegen. (I,i)

The aim of Lessing's comedy, to transmit a moral teaching and to do it realistically within the framework of the comedy, offers a much greater variety and concreteness to the viewer than the traditional "Typenkomödie". Concession, albeit only to a limited measure, is made here already to the complexity of characters and motivations; the criticism which is contained in the moral purpose of the comedy is therefore not an abstract and generalized one, but concrete and social. Damis obviously has a flawed personality - he is vain and proud - but this is only partly his problem since its main negative effect, his inability to be integrated into society as a recognized and productive individual, is also a fault of those who comprise this society, namely his family and friends. They are at least partly to be blamed for this situation because of their selfishness and their excessive piety, which leads them to take an uncritical attitude towards social relations: Chrysender, who sees in Damis not his son but an instrument for gain; Juliane and Valer, who support

rather than criticize Chrysander in his attitude of exploitation not because they are ignorant of it, but because of Chrysander's authority as father, and who, out of a feeling of moral superiority, adopt a supercilious and paternalistic attitude toward Damis which prevents them from recognizing the human being underneath.

While the didactic aim of the comedy resides, at least partially, in the portrayal of character flaws or vices which are corrected through the conflicts the comic personage enters because of these flaws, Der junge Gelehrte fails to arrive at an explicit solution in this direction because Damis remains intransigent to the end. The only evidence for an eventual "cure" consists of our hope that Damis' venture into the world will provide for him the concrete experiences upon which a better understanding of reality and himself, than that provided by books, can be based. For the moment, however, his behaviour - and that of his father and friends - has essentially negative results: They are all individuals who, by asserting and standing upon their various individualistic quirks of personality, show themselves incapable of living in communal harmony with one another: Chrysander, having acquired Juliane's fortune as he intended, no longer wastes a thought on Damis; Valer and Juliane have each other and presumably will withdraw into a private idyll in accordance with their notions of morality and the customs of the time; even Lisette and Anton can rejoice since ". . . nun war die Taube gefangen." (III,xviii)

Damis, refusing to admit defeat, has no other alternative but to pack up and leave in order to save what "Ehre" he has left.

We can see the "fragmented norm" in all the main characters of this comedy: neither of them is unequivocally evil or good. The problem and solution of Damis' integration into society and his acceptance of reality is a communal one, the causes of this state of affairs being determined both in a wider social sense (the educational system which could produce a type of "Gelehrter" as vain and proud as Damis - this figure must have been typical to warrant an entire comedy dedicated to it) and in a narrower and private area (the self-interest, the unquestioning filial submission to paternal authority, and the piousness which bolsters the lack of critical perspective, which grow on the soil of an isolated and excessively paternalistic family situation).

Accordingly, the end of the play is ambiguous: we do not know, given the complexity of causes incidental upon the individual, whether his flaw - the alienation from reality - will be corrected or whether it will drive him into total isolation and eventual doom. The only real reason for believing in a positive resolution of Damis' dilemma is based on the fact that the play in question is a comedy and can therefore not have tragic results.

Der Freigeist

A somewhat less uncertain solution to the problem of the flawed personality is presented in Der Freigeist, a solution which almost borders on the utopian. While in Der junge Gelehrte the immediate object of satire had been pedantry, in the Freigeist Lessing chose to parody a mode of behaviour characteristic of the courtly dandies and their imitators who plagued the more staid and conventional burghers of middle-class society. Franz Mehring identified this false and prejudiced version of the free-thinker with the " . . . höfische Freigeisterei . . . ",¹³ an interpretation already made by Danzel who saw in this fashionable trend a reflection of the French influence on German customs and culture which was transmitted primarily through the nobility at the courts.¹⁴

Adrast himself confirms our suspicion that his free thinking, rather than flowing from the free use of critical reason, represents this kind of trendy and prejudiced mode of thought. Contrary to the true free-thinker who tries to approach each experience with an objective and open mind, Adrast justifies his hatred of clerics in general and his contempt for Theophan in particular as follows:

¹³ Mehring, Legende, p. 274.

¹⁴ Theodor W. Danzel and G.E. Guhrauer, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, sein Leben und seine Werke (Berlin: Theodor Hoffman, 1880), I, 159.

Aber verwünscht sind seine Wohltaten, und seine Art!
Und wenn auch keine Schlange unter diesen Blumen läge,
so würde ich ihn doch nicht anders als hassen können.
Hassen werde ich ihn, und wenn er mir das Leben
rettete. Er hat mir das geraubt was kostbarer ist,
als das Leben: das Herz meiner Juliane . . . (V,ii)

Clearly Adrast recognizes here that his unrelenting prejudice against the clergy is not justified because he himself admits that exceptions to the rule may exist ("wenn auch keine Schlange unter diesen Blumen läge"). But this is the direct opposite of free, i.e., critical and discriminating thought. The more deep-lying cause for Adrast's hatred of Theophan is to be found somewhere else, namely in the fact that Theophan is perceived by the former as a rival in the matter of Juliane's love. Further, the excerpt above reveals the extent to which Adrast is imbued with pride: even while admitting, albeit unconsciously, that his "Freigeisterei" has become a mere pretext to justify his antagonism towards Theophan and his prejudice toward the clergy, he shows no intentions of revealing towards the latter his true feelings or motives, or of confessing to his prejudice.

Adrast's flaw is therefore not that of free thinking in the proper sense - he is no such free-thinker - but that of prejudice and pride, features which make him an extremely difficult person to live with. The supposed differences of ideology and faith between him and Theophan are not the real ones; even Lisidor can see this: "Glauben, oder glauben sollen: es kömmt auf eines heraus. Wer kann alle Worte so abzirkeIn? - - Und ich wette was, wenn ihr nur erst werdet Schwäger sein, kein Ei wird dem andern ähnlicher sein können. - - " (I,iii) And because

Lisidor is not one of those who can "alle Worte so abzirkeln,"
the solution is clear:

Wenn ihr euch in den Haaren liegt so fische ich im
Trüben. Da fällt manche Brocke ab, den keiner von
euch brauchen kann, und der ist für mich. Ihr dürft
deswegen nicht neidisch auf mich sein; denn ich
bereichere mich nicht von einem allein. Das nehme
ich von dir, mein lieber Adrast; und das vom Theophan;
und aus allen dem mache ich mir hernach ein Ganzes
- - ." (I,iii)

Evidently Lisidor is also familiar with the "fragmented norm".

Theophan, the enlightened cleric, also sees the falseness
of Adrast's "Freigeisterei" although he cannot discern the true
motive behind it and therefore is also unable to deduce the
true reasons for his intransigence, i.e., jealousy and pride.
In spite of this, however, when he looks beyond the façade
presented to the world by Adrast, Theophan sees in him an
essentially good and humane person:

Ich habe von je her einigen Wert auf meine Freundschaft
gelegt; ich bin vorsichtig, ich bin karg damit
gewesen. Sie sind der erste, dem ich sie angeboten
habe; und Sie sind der einzige dem ich sie aufdringen
will. - - Umsonst sagt mir Ihr verächtlicher Blick,
daß es mir nicht gelingen solle. Gewiß, es soll mir
gelingen. Ihr eigen Herz, Adrast, welches unendlich
besser ist, als Ihr Witz, der sich in gewisse groß
scheinende Meinungen verliebt hat, vielleicht wünscht.
(I,i)

Theophan's attitude, as revealed in this excerpt, is
noteworthy because, even in its criticism of Adrast's beliefs,
it does not make the possibility of friendship contingent upon
the renunciation of these beliefs. The message is, that
underneath all ideological differences (which Theophan at this

point believes to be the only thing preventing Adrast from accepting his friendship) exists the human personality which, by its uniqueness, constitutes a basis for understanding and fraternity. It is important that Theophan does not enter into a polemic against free thinking itself, but merely deplores "gewisse groß scheinende Meinungen" which are not even identified as products of reason, but of "Witz". Theophan's appeal is to Adrast's "Herz", and in respect to the capacity for critical thinking, he expresses himself optimistically:

Aber nur Geduld! ein großer Verstand kann diesen Fehlern nicht immer ergeben sein. Adrast wird das Kleine derselben endlich einsehen, welches sich nur allzusehr durch das Leere verrät, das sie in unsern Herzen zurück lassen. (II,ii)

True capacity for free thinking is here explicitly identified with a compatibility towards the affairs of the heart; the two poles, "Herz" and "Verstand", are not mutually exclusive but complementary. Because they exclude each other in Adrast's behaviour, Theophan recognizes his "Freigeisterei" as a farce. The contraposition of persons in this play is, therefore, not between the believer and the atheist, but between the proud and the humane. It is in this sense that Adrast's flaw is corrected.

Indeed, it would seem unlikely for Lessing to devote an entire drama to the demonstration of the evil effects of free thinking, given the importance, both to him personally and to the Enlightenment in general, of free and critical analysis which does not stop at the sacred cows of orthodoxy and tradition.

In response to his father's worries that his activities as "Komödienschreiber" might be detrimental to his Christian faith, Lessing had staunchly defended his right to satirize all aspects of life:

Ein Komödienschreiber ist ein Mensch, der die Laster auf ihrer lächerlichen Seite schildert. Darf denn ein Christ über die Laster nicht lachen? Verdienen die Laster so viel Hochachtung? Und wenn ich Ihnen nun gar verspräche, eine Komödie zu machen, die nicht nur die H. Theologen lesen sondern auch loben sollen? Halten Sie mein Versprechen vor unmöglich? Wie wenn ich eine auf die Freigeister und auf die Verächter Ihres Standes machte? Ich weiß gewiß, Sie würden vieles von Ihrer Schärfe fahren lassen.¹⁵

Here Lessing defends his own right - even as a Christian - to think and write freely, all the while proposing to write a play with the object of satirizing free thinkers. This would be a paradoxical undertaking, were it not for Lessing's belief, as shown in this play, that while real or supposed differences in creed or ideology exist between people, these do not represent insurmountable barriers to friendship, inasmuch as they are really the products of true reason, for in that case they will also do justice to the basis of all understanding and community, to "Herz".

It is for these reasons that Theophan persists in appealing to Adrast's "Herz" rather than in challenging the supposed rationality of Adrast's "Freigeisterei" with the supposed irrationality of religion. The point is, that here the roles are exactly reversed: Theophan is the rationalist and Adrast the

¹⁵ Lessing, Werke, X, 20-21.

irrationalist. It is Adrast who, because of his prejudice rather than his critical understanding, reduces the role of religion to that which is played by orthodoxy, namely that of an opiate of the "Pöbel", a role which he affirms: "Man lasse daher dem Pöbel seine Irrtümer; man lasse sie ihm, weil sie ein Grund seines Glückes und die Stütze des Staates sind, in welchem er für sich Sicherheit, Überfluß und Freude findet." (IV,iii) For Theophan, by contrast, religion is much more than the orthodox church and dogma; for him it is rational and therefore compatible with the true happiness and freedom of man. In the formulation of Juliane, who here speaks for him:

Was kann unser Herz, diesen Sammelplatz verderbter und unruhiger Leidenschaften, mehr reinigen, mehr beruhigen, als eben diese Religion? Was kann uns im Elende mehr aufrichten, als sie? Was kann uns zu wahren Menschen, zu bessern Bürgern, zu aufrichtigeren Freunden machen, als sie? (IV,iii)

For Lessing, if in these words we can see his own viewpoint, religion is rational to the extent that it contributes to the harmony between people in society. Dogmatism and orthodoxy - the kind of religion Adrast envisions - are therefore a direct contradiction of the spirit of religion, in the same way that these qualities contradict the spirit of free thinking. The individual's freedom, as his right to hold whatever ideological position that does not exclude the demands of "Vernunft" and "Herz", is therefore not contradicted by persons with divergent creeds but affirmed by them. True freedom in this understanding can unfold fully only in the context of a community of other

individuals in which the claims of the heart, of humane feeling, are acknowledged. Religion is the highest expression of this aspiration for individuality and freedom within the commonality.

Cesare Cases concludes:

Die deutsche Aufklärung ist nicht nur durch diese bessere Einsicht in das Wesen und die Entwicklung der Religion gekennzeichnet, sondern die religiöse Bindung bedeutet wie bei Rousseau eine Ablehnung des Ideals des egoistischen bürgerlichen Individuums, wie es bei Voltaire oder bei den französischen Materialisten auftrat.¹⁶

Lessing thus affirms the compatibility of free thinking and religion, because both are rational and therefore reflect a universe devoid of ultimate and irresolvable contradictions. It is only when they are trivialized or transformed into dogma that they become a religious opiate or a travesty of free thinking. The criticism that "Im 'Freigeist' gewährte Lessing dem offenerbarungsgläubigen Theophan eine sachliche Debatte mit dem freisinnigen Adrast, dem Manne 'ohne Religion, aber voller tugendhafter Gesinnungen,' konnte aber die beiden nur menschlich, nicht theologisch aussöhnen"¹⁷ is therefore without basis, since the content, if not the letter of religion, consists precisely in the reconciliation of human beings (e.g., Juliane's definition of religion in IV,iii) under the sign of reason and humanity.

¹⁶ Cesare Cases, "Über Lessings 'Freigeist,'" in Festschrift zum achtzigsten Geburtstag von Georg Lukács, ed. Frank Benseler (Neuwied: Herman Luchterhand, 1965), p. 381.

¹⁷ Albert Köster, Die deutsche Literatur der Aufklärungszeit (Heidelberg: Carl Winters, 1925), p. 160.

It is clear that if Adrast misses the mark of orthodoxy in religion, the same can be said for Theophan; his view of the religious is far removed from that of, for instance, Pastor Goeze of Hamburg. Again, to quote Cases:

Daß dieses Religiöse mit der konfessionellen Orthodoxie kaum etwas gemeinsam hat, verstehe sich von selbst. Man muß mit Franz Mehring Lessing bewundern, weil es ihm gelungen ist, den Freigeist zu Fall zu bringen, ohne daß er seine Gottlosigkeit zu widerrufen braucht. Da die Auseinandersetzung sich eigentlich nie um den Inhalt der religiösen Vorstellungen selbst dreht, sondern nur um die Fähigkeit, ein moralisch gültiges praktisches Verhalten zu begründen, braucht Adrast sich nur in diesem Punkt selbst zu verleugnen. Er kapituliert nicht vor der Religion, sondern vor Juliane und Theophan, vor Liebe und Freundschaft, die ihm in der Gestalt religiös gebundener Menschen erscheinen, welche seine ideologische Erstarrung auflösen. Nicht einmal das, was der Verfasser deutlich an dieser Theologie tadelt, nämlich ihre aristokratische Seite, braucht er ausdrücklich zurückzunehmen. Irrtümer, die auf der Grundlage der Aufklärung entstehen, sind für Lessing doch bestimmt nicht gewichtiger als die Orthodoxie.¹⁸

Although both plays are comedies, Der Freigeist differs from Der junge Gelehrte in showing that communal harmony and the fulfillment of individual aspirations, i.e., the amorous preferences of Adrast and Theophan as well as their different creeds, are compatible rather than mutually exclusive. Indeed, this communal harmony depends on whether Adrast and Theophan do or do not get the match they secretly desire, and in this sense the drama strikes one as utopian.

What brings about a turn to a happy conclusion in Der

¹⁸ Cases, "Lessings 'Freigeist,'" p. 386.

Freigeist is the ability of both men finally to recognize each other as human beings rather than competitors in love or creed. Once Adrast recognizes that Theophan has no designs on Juliane, the main reason for their animosities has been removed. When Adrast perceives for the first time that Theophan also has emotions and frustrations, the last vestiges of anti-clerical prejudice are swept away: "Ich glaube in Ihrem Trotze mehr Aufrichtigkeit zu sehen, als ich jemals in Ihrer Freundlichkeit gesehen habe." (V,iii) Perhaps also Theophan, like Adrast, has some difficulties in showing his real feelings, thus erecting a barrier between them. The play then becomes not only a criticism of the pride which hides behind "Freigeisterei" but also that which takes refuge behind an excessive show of altruism. It is a reminder to the "H. Theologen" that religion, like "Freigeisterei" easily becomes its opposite when it approaches human relations in a paternalistic rather than fraternal manner, when it acts out of an authority other than that of "Herz" and "Vernunft".

We can learn a number of things about the individual's autonomy from Der Freigeist: as in Der junge Gelehrte, the individual is portrayed as standing in a complex system of causes and effects. In Der junge Gelehrte the result of this contingency is negative, at least for the moment; community cannot accommodate the demands of all individuals and the optimistic outlook of the play is safeguarded only because Damis is presented as a truly ridiculous figure, who has no heart to be wounded by his exclusion from the family circle. Der Freigeist,

while at no point asserting the absolute independence of the individual, shows his aspirations to be fulfilled precisely through the mutual effects all characters have on each other: communal harmony and individual aspirations are not only compatible, but depend on each other.

The reason for this difference between the two plays is clear: while both Theophan and Adrast are able to achieve an understanding on the basis of "Herz" and "Verstand", in the face of which their other differences lose significance, neither Chrysender nor Damis show any sign of these qualities. Indeed, it is precisely the lack of these features in their personalities which prevents harmony between them, and causes their frustrations and lack of success when they undertake some practical enterprise.

Essentially then, the individual's emancipation can take place only on the basis of reason and feeling. Since the dependence of the individual on circumstances beyond his control is recognized (e.g., the existence of different ideologies, different expectations, a person's past - Adrast's pleasure-seeking past and his previous negative experiences with the clergy are mentioned) he can only hope to attain those things he desires if he stands in a complementary rather than antagonistic relationship to his social surroundings. On the other hand, such a community can only be established if the aspirations of the individual are recognized and fulfilled.

While the deeper reasons for Adrast's and Theophan's divergence of opinion are evident (Adrast's dissolute lifestyle and Theophan's slightly condescending attitude toward the

question of friendship) the turn of events by which they become reconciled comes suddenly, seemingly without immediate motivation. Both have lived in Lisidor's house and in each other's company for a number of months already; during this entire time Theophan's offer of friendship has stood and has just as consistently been rejected by Adrast's pride and jealousy. Then, suddenly, this pride is compromised and Adrast blurts out his confession of love to Juliane. Theophan too, for a moment forgets his mission of winning Adrast's friendship, regardless of cost, and loses his temper out of frustration over the other's intransigence. It is at this point that Adrast sheds his jealousy and his anti-clerical prejudice, for he recognizes in Theophan not only a competitor and a do-gooder, but a human being with strengths and weaknesses, someone very similar to himself.

Although it is Theophan who in this play represents the virtuous character, he is not entirely devoid of negative features. The most important of these is that which originates from his "Tugend" itself, a tendency to over-emphasize virtue to the point where it is perceived as a nuisance rather than a blessing by those it is intended to benefit, i.e., Adrast. His ambition to overcome Adrast's defences and to win his friendship despite the remonstrations of the latter, while in itself a laudable project when observed from an outsider's standpoint, easily becomes a cause for suspicion of Theophan's honesty of intentions when one feels, as does Adrast, that this is merely designed to compensate for the commitment of a deeper injustice. Judged from this perspective, which is that of Adrast, Theophan's

advances demonstrate clearly the clergy's habit of covering up its self-interest with pious actions and words. Because Theophan cannot know the true motive for Adrast's prejudice, namely the latter's jealousy, he can also not see that his friendly advances must yield the direct opposite to the intended results. It is only when he, almost accidentally, momentarily vents his frustrations, that Adrast recognizes Theophan's emotional side, i.e., that Theophan not only talks about "Herz" but also shows that he has one.

Gerd Hillen, taking his cue from Lessing's correspondence with Nicolai and Mendelssohn regarding the tragedy, names this personality feature, i.e., the tendency of excessive adherence to an abstractly fixed code of moral behaviour at the expense of losing sight of the correct ethical behaviour each concrete situation demands, the "Halsstarrigkeit der Tugend".¹⁹ While in Theophan's personality this feature is not as highly developed or clearly shown as in Sara Sampson, for instance, it cannot be overlooked that the final turn for the better between them occurs at the moment in which Theophan breaks his vow never to lose patience with Adrast. That his aim is achieved precisely through behaviour which, for him, must be considered as morally questionable because it contradicts the ideal of "Gelassenheit", is what catches our attention. For, in this case, the claims and aspirations of the individual (both of Theophan and Adrast)

¹⁹ Gerd Hillen, "Die Halsstarrigkeit der Tugend. Bemerkungen zu Lessings Trauerspielen," Lessing Yearbook, 2 (1970), 115-34; hereafter cited as LY.

are asserted not by a strict observance of accepted moral norms or forms of behaviour - in this case tolerance and patience - but by a momentary disregard of them.

Minna von Barnhelm

While in the Freigeist this over-stepping of the accepted norm, the rejection of the "Halsstarrigkeit der Tugend", occurs impulsively as losses of temper usually are, the same process is portrayed in a much more detailed and well-motivated manner in Minna von Barnhelm. In the Freigeist, Theophan and Adrast overcome their respective stubbornness in spite of themselves; in Minna this process is programmatically and objectively taken to its final solution.

Undoubtedly Lessing saw in Minna the personification of that human ideal which is capable of arriving at a solution to the problem of human freedom and normative morality, even though she too does not escape entirely from the fragmented norm, i.e., the fact that she plays her game with Tellheim a little longer than necessary, thus showing in her character a penchant for revenge (V,ii). In the words of Georg Lukács:

Die ganze, höchst eigenartige Komposition von Minna von Barnhelm beruht ja gerade auf diesem ununterbrochenen Umschlagen der abstrakten Moral in menschlich-konkrete, individualisierte, aus der jeweils konkreten Lage entspringenden Ethik.²⁰

²⁰ Georg Lukács, "Minna von Barnhelm," in Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, ed. Gerhard Bauer and Sibylle Bauer (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1968), p. 431.

If in the Freigeist a tendency towards stoic morality is perceptible in both Adrast and Theophan, namely in their equally dogmatic adherence to their respective philosophies, the same quality can also be seen in Tellheim, who has set his " . . . stieres Auge auf das Gespenst der Ehre. . . ." (IV,vi) It is indeed a "Gespenst", for it floats about in space - or in his imagination - lacking any positive definition so that when hard pressed by Minna, Tellheim can only stammer: "Die Ehre ist nicht die Stimme unsers Gewissens, nicht das Zeugnis weniger Recht-schaffenen - - " (IV,vi), which she complements wittily with the tautologous "Nein, nein, ich weiß wohl. - Die Ehre ist - die Ehre." (IV,vi)

While there is never any doubt in the audience's or Minna's mind that Tellheim is an " . . . ehrliche[r] Mann . . . " (IV,vi), it is a problem not only for Minna and ourselves, but apparently also for Tellheim, to determine exactly what this "Ehre" actually is. In II,ix and IV,vi he intimates to Minna that his honour has been injured through the dismissal from his post as officer in the army. When Minna takes polemical advantage of this revelation, showing that it lacks substance, Tellheim changes his excuse and tells her that his honour has been tainted by an accusation of dishonesty coming from the royal offices (IV,vi); unless " . . . meiner Ehre nicht die voll-kommenste Genugtuung geschieht, so kann ich, mein Fräulein, der Ihrige nicht sein. Denn ich bin es in den Augen der Welt nicht wert zu sein." (IV,vi)

But these considerations and excuses are invalidated in

their turn when Minna discovers to him that she too has suffered hardships, that she is fleeing from her cruel uncle, and that she has therefore sought his assistance (V,vii). Now the "Augen der Welt" are as if nonexistent:

Und übermorgen geh ich mit ihr fort. Ich darf fort;
ich will fort. Lieber hier alles im Stiche gelassen!
Wer weiß, wo mir sonst ein Glück aufgehoben ist . . .
Mein eignes Unglück schlug mich nieder; machte mich
ärgerlich, kurzsichtig, schüchtern, lässig: ihr
Unglück hebt mich empor, ich sehe wieder frei um mich
und fühle mich willig und stark, alles für sie zu
unternehmen. . . . (V;i,ii)

Because they have both suffered misfortune in the eyes of the world, they are equals; and "Gleichheit ist immer das festeste Band der Liebe." (V,v)

This is again contradicted, however, when Tellheim receives news that the king, being " . . . um Eure Ehre besorgt . . . " (V,ix), has reinstated him and retracted on the insinuations of bribery, thereby disturbing the "Gleichheit im Unglück" which ostensibly had existed between Tellheim and Minna. Now his argument is that "Minna ist keine von den Eiteln, die in ihren Männern nichts als den Titel und die Ehrenstelle lieben. Sie wird mich um mich selbst lieben; und ich werde um sie die ganze Welt vergessen." (V,ix) When Minna points out that now they are no longer equals, and proceeds to use the very same arguments about the necessity of equality in love which he had used against her previously, he unthinkingly declares: "Ah, Minna, ich erschrecke vor mir selbst, wenn ich mir vorstelle, daß jemand anders dieses gesagt hätte als Sie. Meine Wut gegen ihn würde ohne Grenzen sein." (V,ix) That he himself is this person, that

he is himself one of those "Eitel'n", never enters his mind. He thereby confirms to us what Minna had already perceived shortly after meeting him: "Bloß ein wenig zu viel Stolz, Franziska, scheint mir in seiner Aufführung zu sein. Denn auch seiner Geliebten sein Glück nicht wollen zu danken haben, ist Stolz, unverzeihlicher Stolz!" (III,xii)

It is therefore not Tellheim's obsession with "Ehre", its lack of definition notwithstanding, which Minna finds reprehensible, but Tellheim's pride. For Tellheim, "Ehre" is just as much a pretext to cover his pride as "Freigeisterei" was for Adrast. While for Adrast, pride resulted from anti-clerical prejudice and jealousy, for Tellheim it represents a false conception of honour and virtue, a "Halsstarrigkeit der Tugend". Adrast's pride is overcome not by a refutation of "Freigeisterei", but by a removal of the obstacles to friendship. Equally, Minna does not attack Tellheim's "Ehre" nor does she see in it an obstacle to their union; the real obstacle to friendship is Tellheim's underlying "Stolz".

This pride is in evidence everywhere, not only in Tellheim's relation to Minna. It is exemplified especially well when the matter of money arises.²¹ Thus, to Paul Werner: "Ich sage: es

²¹ An example of this is given by the interpretation of Ilse Appelbaum-Graham, who compares the themes of money and love in the play. Thus, because Tellheim's gift to the Saxony estates is rewarded with dishonour,

He no longer believes in any meaningful connexion between virtue and reward . . . the living currency of love, the give and take of relatedness which in

ziemt sich nicht, daß ich dein Schuldner bin; ich will dein Schuldner nicht sein. Nämlich in den Umständen nicht, in welchen ich mich jetzt befinde." (III,vii) Tellheim regards it as a dishonour, and therefore unethical, to accept money from a friend even though he is in need. That he might be offending the more important dictates of friendship by his stubbornness, does not occur to him.

Indeed, that the "Umstände" to which he refers really are beyond his control - they depend on the king's good will - and that an "Ehre" which is tied to such circumstances is therefore also beyond his control and hence, not a sign of integrity but of dependency, also does not occur to his mind. It is indeed a phantom which has hypnotized him.²² That Tellheim identifies his personal integrity with his "Ehre",

 this play is symbolized by money, for Tellheim has become devalued. He will not take because he has learnt to expect a bad return from a corrupt world.

Ilse Appelbaum-Graham, "The Currency of Love: A Reading of Lessing's 'Minna von Barnhelm,'" German Life and Letters, 18 (1964), 274-75; hereafter cited as GLL.

²² To what extent Tellheim is fixated by the idea of honour is revealed by his inability to perceive what is happening around him. Thus, for instance, the stage directions in V,xii: "Der vor Wut an den Fingern naget, das Gesicht wegwendet und nichts höret." He also fails to take notice of Werner's news of his rehabilitation in V,i: "Begreifst du denn nicht, daß, wenn es wahr wäre, ich es doch am ersten wissen müßte?" Further, the inability to recognize the ring which Minna has returned to him in IV,vi, so that she exclaims in exasperation: "O über die Blinden, die nicht sehen wollen!" (V,xii) For an article dealing with this effect of Tellheim's intransigence, see Jürgen Schröder, "Das parabolische Geschehen der 'Minna von Barnhelm,'" DVLG, 43 (1969), 222-59.

is what constitutes the comical and quixotic aspect of his character.²³ By the same token, however, that misperceiving reality and charging windmills is comical, it is also tragic, because it implies a grotesque overestimation of the importance and nature of windmills, and hence, a useless and misguided dispersal of energies.

This is the reason why Tellheim is "stolz" - for in him pride is merely the negative expression of an elusive quest for self-respect and integrity. In this quest, in trying to avoid a future " . . . wo ich mich selbst hassen müßte" (V,v), he has set his eye on the phantom of honour, but all it can give him is an intransigent pride which hardens him to all other humane feelings. Rather than trusting his own reason and feelings in this quest for personal fulfillment and happiness, he forces upon himself an alien concept of what its content should be. Rather than following his instincts in respect to Minna, he bows to an "Ehre" totally dependent on the caprice and whims of the king and his bureaucrats. Instead of rejoicing over his luck at being loved by someone like Minna, he spends his entire time in melancholy and dreary broodings over his bad luck at being mistreated by the court. Instead of grasping with both hands the happiness Minna offers him, he makes ineffectual invectives over how the king ought to restore his honour.

The extent to which "Ehre" is satirized by Lessing in this play can hardly be overlooked. To see in this drama nothing but

²³ Wolfgang F. Michael, "Tellheim eine Lustspielfigur," DVLG, 39 (1965), 207-12.

the manly assertion of honour against the attacks of fate and the "Ungereimtheiten" of an enamored damsel, as would supposedly fit the conduct of an officer of Frederick's army, disregards the bulk of the evidence in the play.²⁴ For the same quality of "Ehre" is also a characterizing feature of Riccaut de la Marlinière who not only originates from ". . . ein groß, groß Familie . . . qui est veritablement du sang Royal" (IV,ii), but who also confesses, not without pride, that it was "Ein Affaire d'honneur [which] machte mich fliehen" (IV,ii), and that now, because he is a ". . . Honnet-homme . . ." (IV,ii), he has been forced to resort to that most gentlemanly of all occupations, gambling, in order to support himself. By identifying the concept of honour with that of the vice-ridden and mercenary French nobility, Lessing identifies it with a sphere of life totally alien to that of Tellheim.

It is true: Tellheim is also a nobleman, he is also a mercenary in Frederick's army, he is also an officer. Yet these are only superficial similarities; the differences between him and Riccaut are much more extensive. Riccaut cheats at cards; Tellheim is, in the words of Graf von Bruchsal and despite the fact that he wears the Prussian uniform, ". . . ein ehrlicher Mann . . . und ein ehrlicher Mann mag stecken in welchem Kleide er will, man muß ihn lieben." (V,xiii) Further, while Riccaut

²⁴ Such misinterpretations are furnished by, for example Raimund Belgardt, "Minna von Barnhelm als komischer Charakter," Monatshefte, 58 (1966), 209-16 and Raimund Belgardt, "Tellheim's Honor: Flaw or Virtue? A Reinterpretation," GR, 42 (1967), 16-29.

is a mercenary by profession, quite without scruples as to the cause or reason for his fighting (IV,ii), Tellheim recognizes that "Man muß Soldat sein für sein Land oder aus Liebe zur Sache, für die gefochten wird. Ohne Absicht heute hier, morgen da dienen heißt wie ein Fleischerknecht reisen, weiter nichts." (III,vii)

Ich ward Soldat aus Parteilichkeit, ich weiß selbst nicht für welche politische Grundsätze und aus der Grille, daß es für jeden ehrlichen Mann gut sei, sich in diesem Stande eine Zeitlang zu versuchen und sich mit allem, was Gefahr heißt, vertraulich zu machen und Kälte und Entschlossenheit zu lernen. (V,ix)

During this term of service he has learnt that "Die Dienste der Großen sind gefährlich und lohnen der Mühe, des Zwanges, der Erniedrigung nicht, die sie kosten." (V,ix) "Ehre" of the kind Riccaut represents, is a purely external quality, a façade behind which any scoundrel can hide. But this is precisely the reason why it is so elusive for Tellheim, for he identifies it with "Ehrlichkeit", a quality which resides in the interior of man, not in his outward appearance.

Tellheim, while despising the values and lifestyle of the "Großen", is nevertheless preoccupied with his image in their eyes. He is evidently someone standing on the boundary between two systems of value, between two ideologies: that of the aristocracy, with its social status and privileges guaranteed by a purely externalized and antiquated code of honour, which imparts a haughty pride to the bearer, but does not commit or allow him to follow the dictates and desires of humane feelings,

and that of the ever more self-confident and enlightened bourgeoisie which looks not towards title for a confirmation of individual worth but to inner qualities such as "Ehrlichkeit" (rather than "Ehre"), "Rechtschaffenheit", and "Edelmut" - in a word, "Tugend".²⁵ In Minna von Barnhelm, the model of such a self-confident personality is Minna herself. She is also of high birth, yet she has broken through the antiquated and meaningless codex of blood-relations, courtly etiquette, and titles, by affirming the feelings of her own heart and by following the dictates of reason.

It is through her that Tellheim is eventually freed of his false conception of "Ehre", of his pride, and shown what the real definition of personal integrity is and where his true happiness lies. Paradigmatic for this redefinition is Minna's allusion to cards: "Der König war eine unglückliche Karte für Sie, die Dame - auf sich weisend - wird Ihnen desto günstiger sein." (IV,vi) Thus, even though the king reestablishes

²⁵ Manfred Möckel:

Der Ehrbegriff ist, wie die Moralvorstellungen insgesamt, auf die er bezogen ist, klassengebunden und historisch veränderlich. In Zeiten gesellschaftlichen Umbruchs geschieht es häufig, daß sich in den Ansichten des einzelnen darüber, was ehrenhaft ist und was nicht, altes und neues Verhalten mischen. Alte und neue Vorstellungen können im Bewußtsein des Individuums unvermittelt nebeneinander stehen. Dieses Nebeneinanderstehen kann zu widersprüchlichen Verhaltensweisen und zu daraus resultierenden Konflikten mit der Umwelt führen. Das ist der Fall in der Geschichte des Majors von Tellheim.

Manfred Möckel, "Über Theaterarbeit an Klassikern," Weimarer Beiträge, 12, No. 18 (1972), 129.

Tellheim's honour, and Tellheim in turn rejoices that "Mein Glück, meine Ehre, alles ist wiederhergestellt!" (V,ix), this has ultimately nothing to do with the union between him and Minna. What is decisive is the fact that she has taught him a new and better meaning of "Ehre".

How differently they judge the concept of honour is already revealed even before they meet." Tellheim, after receiving Minna's compliments through her servant, rejects the invitation toward further communication: "Die Höflichkeit der fremden Dame ist mir empfindlicher als die Grobheit des Wirts." (I,x) Feeling that he has been mistreated by the innkeeper, he regards any further reminders of this injury to his honour as additional injury, regardless of where they come from. Franziska has a different attitude toward his posture: "Und der Herr Offizier, den wir vertrieben und dem wir das Kompliment darüber machen lassen; er muß auch nicht die feinste Lebensart haben, sonst hätte er wohl um die Ehre können bitten lassen, uns seine Aufwartung machen zu dürfen. - " (II,i) To which Minna, not knowing of whom she speaks, responds: "Es sind nicht alle Offiziere Tellheims." (II,i)

The difference between their concepts of honour is most clearly revealed in the episode in which Tellheim presents his letter to Minna. In it he had told her that his honour did not permit any further ties between them; he justifies his intent to end the relationship by saying that this was "Nichts, als was mir die Ehre befiehlt." (IV,vi) But Minna draws her own conclusion: "Das ist: ein ehrliches Mädchen, die Sie liebt, nicht sitzenlassen. Freilich befiehlt das die Ehre." (IV,vi)

It is for the purpose of convincing Tellheim of the error of his ways, to show him where his true happiness is to be found and confirmed, that Minna resorts to intrigue. It is her aim " . . . ihn wegen dieses Stolzes mit ähnlichem Stolze ein wenig zu martern" (III,xii); the instrument in this strategy will be " . . . ein kleiner Streich . . . " (III,xii), or "Spiel" (V,v), as she later calls it.

If Tellheim is presented to us as a contradictory character, in which bourgeois "Ehrlichkeit" clashes with aristocratic "Ehre", the same can be said about Minna. But whereas the contradiction, the different constitutive elements of his character, drive Tellheim to the brink of despair because of his futile attempts to reconcile them (IV,vi), for Minna the multifacetedness of her character constitutes its vitality and provides the very impetus for all her actions. Minna is also of the nobility, yet this does not imply for her an obligation to adhere to an aristocratic code of honour; on the contrary, its rules and etiquette mean nothing to her if they constitute an obstacle to the way she feels and thinks:

Sie wissen, ich kam uneingeladen in die erste Gesellschaft, wo ich Sie zu finden glaubte. Ich kam in dem festen Vorsatze, Sie zu lieben - ich liebte Sie schon! -, in dem festen Vorsatze, Sie zu besitzen, wenn ich Sie auch so schwarz und häßlich finden sollte als den Mohr von Venedig. (IV,vi)

Indeed, feeling - "das Herz" - is a key component of Minna's character, and she ascribes great importance to it: "Franziska, mein Herz sagt es mir daß meine Reise glücklich sein wird, daß

ich ihn finden werde. -" (II,i) As it turns out, her premonition and her confidence in her own feelings are justified. She feels that "Was kann der Schöpfer lieber sehen als ein fröhliches Geschöpf" (II,vii), and she acts accordingly, in the fullest confidence that besides being rich " . . . ich auch sonst noch ein ziemlich gutes Mädchen bin, das seines Mannes wert ist." (IV,vi) She regards happiness not as something for which one sits back and waits, but to be sought after and grasped with both hands. Otherwise her trip to Berlin, the exclusive purpose of which is " . . . dem König einen Offizier wegzukapern -" (II,ii) would be unthinkable, given the fact that she is a dignified lady and of high birth.

Her happiness at being alive and in love contrasts sharply with Tellheim's dreary passivity, yet hers is not a self-interested attitude which excludes others or exists at their expense. "Es ist traurig, sich allein zu freuen" (II,iv) she tells Franziska, and when hearing about Tellheim's misfortunes: "Unglück ist auch gut. Vielleicht, daß ihm der Himmel alles nahm, um ihm in mir alles wiederzugeben!" (II,vii) The recognition that her happiness is intimately bound up, even dependent on that of others, marks Minna as the representative of an ethic which seeks to establish the happiness of the individual in a communal context, not in antagonism to it. In this her "subjectivism" is radically different from that which is later espoused by the "Sturm und Drang" and Romanticism.

Minna's "subjectivism" is of a kind which flows from the heart; it asserts its own right to existence, but under the

auspices of reason and enlightenment. As in Der Freigeist, the qualities of "Herz" and "Vernunft" constitute the basis for communal harmony and the individual's self-assertion. Unequivocally she asserts that "Ich bin eine große Liebhaberin von Vernunft, ich habe sehr viel Ehrerbietung für die Notwendigkeit." (II,ix) Indeed, it is precisely because she believes in reason and necessity, that she can allow her heart to speak out, for "Aber lassen Sie doch hören, wie vernünftig diese Vernunft, wie notwendig diese Notwendigkeit ist." (II,ix) Like Lessing, Minna is versed in the art of criticism and differentiation, and because of this, she sees that Tellheim's aristocratic conception of "Ehre" is neither "vernünftig" nor "notwendig", for him or for her. She is capable of being "vernünftig" in an enlightened sense, that is, in such a manner that the determinant for action is not tradition or authority, but independent reason and feeling.

Reason and feeling, "Vernunft" and "Herz", are the two main elements which make up her character and which give her the self-confidence that distinguishes her from Tellheim. From here also stems the contradiction in her personality: "Zärtlich und stolz, tugendhaft und eitel, wollüstig und fromm . . . Ich verstehe mich wohl selbst nicht.- Die Freude macht drehend, wirblicht.-" (II,viii) Minna is "tugendhaft", but not in a fashion which sets an abstract and fixed code of morality over personal insights and desires. She is not a proponent of the "Halsstarrigkeit der Tugend", but an opponent of it.

Whenever, therefore, she is confronted with a stoicism like that of Tellheim, with his " . . . widriger, melancholischer,

ansteckender Ton" (II,ix), she counters it with wit and satire. She demands to know " . . . wie vernünftig diese Vernunft, wie notwendig diese Notwendigkeit ist" (II,ix), thereby totally disarming the pseudoarguments with which Tellheim tries to defend himself: "Das ist zu viel! - Wo bin ich? - Lassen Sie mich, Fräulein! Ihre Güte foltert mich. - Lassen Sie mich." (II,ix) Minna recognizes the therapeutic and didactic value of laughter, and she uses it as an instrument to show up the true nature of Tellheim's intransigence, and to wage a campaign against it:

Was haben Sie denn gegen das Lachen? Kann man denn auch nicht lachend sehr ernsthaft sein? Lieber Major, das Lachen erhält uns vernünftiger als der Verdruß. Der Beweis liegt vor uns. Ihre lachende Freundin beurteilt Ihre Umstände weit richtiger als Sie selbst. Weil Sie verabschiedet sind, nennen Sie sich an Ihrer Ehre gekränkt, weil Sie einen Schuß in dem Arme haben, machen Sie sich zu einem Krüppel. Ist das so recht? Ist das keine Übertreibung? Und ist es meine Einrichtung, daß alle Übertreibungen des Lächerlichen so fähig sind? (IV,vi)

But this strategy of Minna works only partially. She succeeds in totally destroying Tellheim's arguments in defense of his honour, but she cannot persuade him to give it up. What is more, Tellheim counters with his own brand of laughter, " . . . das schreckliche Lachen des Menschenhasses" (IV,vi), in which he reveals the extent of his isolation from human feelings and rationality. Minna realizes that a different tactic is required.

In the encounter with Riccaut, Minna had revealed that, like him, she " . . . gleichfalls das Spiel sehr liebe -."

(IV,ii) Moreover, despite her remonstrations to the contrary, the idea of being able to "Corriger la fortune . . ." (IV,ii) through such a "Spiel" evidently also appeals to her "Eitelkeit" and "Eigenliebe" (IV,i), just as it does to Riccaut's (IV,iii).²⁶ She does not regard engaging in a little subterfuge at the expense of Tellheim (which in the end is really intended for his own benefit - here Minna is different from Riccaut) as something which would set her honesty into question; ". . . eines Fehlers wegen entsagt man keinem Manne" (III,xii), and so she expects to be judged by the same standard.

It is through this game which Minna plays with Tellheim, that she succeeds in breaking through the barrier of his pride and showing him where his honour really lies.

Minnas emanzipatorischer Anspruch, ihr Liebes- und Lebensschicksal nicht passiv abzuwarten, sondern

²⁶ Riccaut, besides functioning as transmitter of the good news, also has the function of clarifying the characters of both Tellheim and Minna. He is the direct opposite of Tellheim in that the latter has an exaggerated notion of honour where the former has a deformed one: "Ehre" is thus relativized and satirized. In regard to Minna's character, Riccaut reveals several features which had been unknown until the encounter between the two, specifically the idea that Minna, too, is not disinclined to "corriger la fortune" through "Spiel". This in turn defines the concept of "Tugend", i.e., virtue is not transmitted along blood-lines or titles - Riccaut is not "tugendhaft" - its authority flows from "Herz" and "Vernunft" which Minna embodies. Further, Minna reveals her similarity to Riccaut through her "Witz", which in turn sets her apart from the staid and serious Tellheim, with whom, however, she shares the traits of honesty and the "Sprache des Herzens". For an interpretation along the lines of Riccaut's function in the play, see Fritz Martini, "Riccaut, die Sprache und das Spiel in Lessings Lustspiel 'Minna von Barnhelm,'" in Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, ed. Gerhard Bauer and Sibylle Bauer (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1968), pp. 376-426.

aktiv selbst zu bestimmen, veranschaulicht . . . das Humanitätsideal der Aufklärung, das den Menschen als schöpferisch-tätige, allseitig ausgebildete und harmonische Persönlichkeit faßt, die sich der Gesellschaft gegenüber verpflichtet weiß und aus moralischer Einsicht fördernd wirkt.²⁷

That Minna's little dishonesty at no point has other than the most altruistic intentions is never in doubt for the audience. For when she begins her "Spiel" towards the end of IV,vi, her first action is to give back to Tellheim his ring, thus reaffirming her loyalty and love toward him. It is Tellheim's "Stolz" and the accompanying blindness which prevents him from recognizing it; in a sense, it is not Minna but Tellheim who is playing a trick on himself, for the fact that he does not recognize the ring forces him always to understand precisely the opposite of what Minna's words imply. Thus, her words in V,ix

So gewiß ich Ihnen den Ring zurückgegeben, mit welchem Sie mir ehemals Ihre Treue verpflichtet, so gewiß Sie diesen nämlichen Ring zurückgenommen, so gewiß soll die unglückliche Barnhelm die Gattin des glücklichen Tellheims nie werden!"

are for the audience a direct confirmation of her belief that Tellheim will be hers, but for Tellheim they appear to imply the end of their relationship. This derives simply from the fact that he still has not looked at the ring on his finger.

But Minna plays along with the charade, delivering back to him his own words about the necessity of equality in love, and

²⁷ Möckel, "Über Theaterarbeit," pp. 125-26.

pointing out that since the arrival of the king's letter this equality no longer exists between them. Tellheim here, believing himself to have been driven into a corner (only apparently so: he merely has to recognize the ring on his finger to also recognize Minna's words about equality to be facetious), finally surrenders. In order to reestablish the supposedly necessary equality between them, he proposes to destroy the king's letter, thus renouncing all the claims to "Ehre" which up until this point were not negotiable. From now on, his honour and pride are to be Minna alone.

If in Der Freigeist the character flaw to be corrected was that of Adrast's pride, a pride which hid behind a smoke-screen of "Freigeisterei", in Minna von Barnhelm it is Tellheim's "Halsstarrigkeit der Tugend" which must be corrected in order that individual happiness and communal harmony be established. While in the Freigeist Adrast's intransigence is overcome by Theophan who momentarily and accidentally over-steps the norm of "Gelassenheit", in Minna the reeducative process is carried out in a systematic fashion, in which the instruments of Minna's emancipative influence are constituted by her ability to use Tellheim's arguments against him, i.e., by a very sharp mind, by her talent for satire and laughter, and by her conscious use of deception and subterfuge in which she deliberately disregards the social norm in the interest of asserting her and Tellheim's real aspirations. Minna dispels the contradiction between "Ehre" and "Ehrlichkeit" in Tellheim's

character by first reducing his arguments to absurdity, then by means of satire and wit, and finally through a "Spiel", a subterfuge in which the stakes are high but, because of this very reason, the gamble is justified since Tellheim would otherwise be lost. In Minna, as in Theophan, but developed to a much higher degree, personal autonomy takes precedence over the rules and conventions of the usual norm because only in this manner can Tellheim be liberated from his abstract notions of morality, and the bonds of community be established and strengthened all around.

But the difference between Minna and Tellheim, between Theophan and Adrast, does not just reduce itself to a difference in temperament, or to a difference between "Tugend" and "Laster". All characters are subject to the fragmented norm; Theophan's over-zealousness in matters pertaining to his relationship with Adrast has already been pointed out, and Minna is also not entirely free of questionable character traits. Thus, even though the scene in V,xii constitutes one final and significant comment on Tellheim's intransigence and on his inability to see the obvious, the victory attained when Tellheim agrees to tear up the king's letter of rehabilitation (V,ix) is almost forfeited because here the "Spiel" has really been played beyond the point of necessity. Rather than immediately revealing the truth about the exchanged rings, Minna tortures Tellheim beyond what is called for, since in the end he still does not recognize the ring, and she has to tell him anyway: "Ah, liebe Franziska, ich hätte dir folgen sollen. Ich habe den Scherz

zu weit getrieben." (V,xi) On the other hand, we have also seen that Adrast, underneath his "Freigeisterei", is a man of good will, and that Tellheim is "ehrlich", whatever else he may be besides.

The real differences between Minna and Tellheim, between Theophan and Adrast, are those which can be traced to the clash of conflicting class values. Both Adrast's and Tellheim's character flaws - "Freigeisterei" and "Ehre", respectively - originate in the aristocratic sphere of society, in the fashionable values of the courts and the nobility. "Freigeisterei", as Adrast himself admits, is a justification of him " . . . der sich der Religion nur deswegen zu entziehen sucht damit er seinen Lüsten desto sichrer nachhängen könne." (I,i) It is the shallow and witty intellectualizing which, at the courts, serves as a pretext for rational acerbity and an "emancipated" lifestyle. On the other hand, "Ehre" is an aristocratic value because it pertains exclusively to external trappings of social status and implies nothing about the honesty and integrity of the person underneath. Riccaut clearly exemplifies this.

Adrast and Tellheim therefore, because they are both portrayed as persons with a sense of humanity and personal integrity, have nothing in common with the ideology of the nobility. "Ehre" and "Freigeisterei" are anachronistic to their true self and these qualities must therefore be purged if they are to achieve true self-respect and a sense of freedom and responsibility. Both Tellheim and Adrast stand on the boundary

between different class ideologies, and this marks them as representatives of a transitional period of history, the transition from feudalism to bourgeois democracy.

Tellheim and Adrast, in order to negotiate this transition successfully, require the help of other individuals who are in a position to do so. These are represented by Minna and Theophan, and the essential feature which defines them as such is their ability to transcend normative morality in the effort to reeducate their respective partners. Indeed, it is only through a collective effort of this type that the education of all individuals concerned is made feasible, and it is in this collective aspect of education that bourgeois individualism distinguishes itself from the destructive individualism which we later see personified in Marwood and Hettore Gonzaga, both members of the nobility. It is also in this definition of personal freedom as a collective process of education that we see why the tragic consequences of Der junge Gelehrte are discernible, for here no such communal educative process is in sight. The personages who in Der Freigeist and Minna von Barnhelm carry out this task, namely the intimate sphere of family and friends, are depicted as self-interested or as aloof in Der junge Gelehrte and can therefore not engage in such an educative process.

We can therefore conclude that the problems portrayed in Der Freigeist and in Minna von Barnhelm are the direct result of a historic and social conjuncture, namely the transition from aristocratic to bourgeois society, at a stage in which the different ethical values inherent in the ideologies of these two

classes could present a hard moral struggle for the individual person. The solution to this problem reflects the political weakness of the bourgeoisie during this period, i.e., the problem of conflicting moralities arises out of the deep antagonism between entire social classes but can only be resolved in the private sphere of family and friends. A more thoroughgoing transformation, in the political sense, is not possible. Accordingly, friendship is the highest expression of morality and practical religion; normative morality may be transcended in the interest of this ideal, which represents the most pure form of freedom the individual person can hope to attain.

IV. The tragedies

In the previous chapter it was shown to what extent Lessing attributed freedom to the individual human being and what the nature of this freedom is, i.e., a freedom which exists within the context of the private. The genre of the comedy is appropriate for the communication of this ideal for its purpose is to show character flaws which can be laughed at, i.e., which are not so severe that they cannot be corrected. In Minna von Barnhelm and Der Freigeist these anti-social features of the personality are shown as flowing from a false conception of the world, namely that which is formed in the context of the courtly culture of the time. Opposed to the values embodied by the nobility and the courts are those of the bourgeoisie; they assert themselves not in a public way, but find expression in the private world. It is by entering into direct contact with these values that the "lasterhafte" person is cured of his flaw to the point where he can again take his place as a responsible and free member of society. Thus, the possibility of a rational morality is assured wherever the private sphere is allowed to transcend the influence of the mores and values perpetuated in and by an absolutist society.

The social system envisioned in the comedies is that in which the individual's aspirations and freedoms are based not

upon the norms and etiquette of feudal society, but upon friendship and humanity - qualities which are indicated in the emancipated individual through his capacity to give expression to "Herz" and "Vernunft". Indeed, we can define the new social norm these comedies convey as based upon an evaluation of the person which takes as criterion the condition of humanity itself rather than of adherence to class, as is the case in the aristocratic concept of values, e.g., Riccaut. We may therefore say that a defining characteristic of the bourgeoisie as a class is its refusal to see itself as class, preferring instead to regard itself simply as "humanity". This is confirmed by the importance of the private, familiar sphere as the arena in which consciousness develops and in reference to which humane values are cultivated. Indeed, the private sphere is the only one in which the idea of the individual as human, as an entity primarily characterized by "Herz" and "Verstand", can take root, for it is based on the possibility of intimate intercourse between individuals, something which is almost impossible on the much wider scale of class.

Nevertheless, the attempt to assert personal aspirations can equally well result in alienation and isolation for the individual. For if true personal freedom is in reality only the name of a relationship in which the individual stands in a responsible and yet autonomous relation to a determinate community, it stands to reason that freedom will be curtailed if this relationship for some reason is broken off or deformed.

But this is a state of affairs for the portrayal of which

the tragic genre is better suited. In the comedy, character flaws and errors of judgement are ridiculed and corrected. The conflict between public (courtly) and private (bourgeois) morality is resolved by the victory of the latter over the former. However, when the opposite occurs, we see a conflict between opposing value systems in which the individual striving for emancipation is defeated by outmoded and oppressive norms; we then have a "Trauerspiel". Here moral dilemmas, character weaknesses, and errors of judgement are not resolved or corrected, but conspire to overtake the individual and render him powerless to affect his own destiny.

Yet the bourgeois tragedy - and this is Lessing's tragedy - cannot yield to the fatalism regarding human freedom which this implies. To do so, would contradict the fundamental belief in the individual's ability to perceive order in the universe and to take part in the formation and fulfillment of himself in all respects. The bourgeois and enlightened tragedy must show the conflict between the individual's freedom and social norms, and in doing so it can show the tragic fate of an individual, thus revealing the norms to which he is sacrificed as being oppressive. But it must also maintain an ultimate optimism, an optimism which envisions the possibility of an alternate model of social norms to the one which is being criticized.¹ Normative morality,

¹ As Klaus-Detlef Müller states, it is precisely in trying to meet his double requirement that the bourgeois tragedy becomes problematic as a genre:

. . . im bürgerlichen Trauerspiel behauptet sich das untragische Weltbild des Bürgertums der Aufklärung,

which is the expression of social responsibility, must be left intact or affirmed through modification because only through it can the individual ultimately assert himself in any meaningful way; but the belief and optimism in the individual, in his right to self-determination, must also be upheld, for it embodies the right of criticism, of reason, and of feeling.

Samuel Henzi

This apparently contradictory demand is first taken up by Lessing in Samuel Henzi. This fragment, designated to be a "Trauerspiel", carries underneath the title the following quote from Aristotle's Politics: "Die Freiheit besteht einerseits darin, daß man abwechselnd gehorcht und befiehlt, andererseits darin, daß in der Republik jeder so lebt, wie er will."²

According to this formulation, the entirety and fulness of human freedom consists of a dialectical unity of opposites, i.e., it is both the subordination of the individual to a communal whole towards which he accepts responsibilities either in giving commands or in obeying them, and it is the individual

so daß sich die Gattung als insgesamt eher fragwürdiger Kompromiß zwischen ästhetischer Konvention, der die Tragödie als die neben dem Epos ranghöchste Form galt, und pragmatisch - untragischer Weltanschauung darstellt.

Klaus-Detlef Müller, "Das Erbe der Komödie im bürgerlichen Trauerspiel. Lessings 'Emilia Galotti' und die commedia dell'arte," DVLG, 46 (1972), 53.

² Lessing, Werke, II, 515.

living in accordance with his own ambitions and desires. The person is conceived of here as standing in essentially two kinds of relationships; the first, in which he is seen as a citizen, i.e., a political being; and the second, in which he is defined as a private entity. In the first relationship he relates to society as a whole, in the second he relates to his own aspirations and ambitions, i.e., to himself. These two kinds of relationships are seen as distinct yet, as in this definition of the ideal state, not mutually exclusive.

The republic is defined as that political constitution of the state in which the essential elements of both these requirements are contained; that is, if one of these conditions is disregarded, the republic no longer exists de facto, since either the individuals in it hold to a lifestyle which precludes communal responsibilities and bonds, thus causing political and communal disintegration, or else the system of duties and communal ties is so strict that the individual loses all autonomy of action, the state in this case becoming a fossilized and immobile structure.

Since Lessing believed of tragedy that ". . . unsere Sympathie erfordert einen einzeln Gegenstand, und ein Staat ist ein viel zu abstrakter Begriff für unsere Empfindungen",³ and since Samuel Henzi was intended to be a tragedy, it seems likely that Lessing wanted to show the tragic fate, i.e., the defeat of one ordinary individual when caught in a conflict of

³ Lessing, Werke, VI, 76.

interest as defined above, i.e., when the two relationships in which the individual stands become mutually exclusive. The plot would then run somewhat along the following lines, given the quote at the beginning: a republic attains a level of development at which the individual's right to self-determination is no longer recognized because power has been usurped by those who command, and where, by virtue of the fact that the state is no longer a legitimate republic, the individual is entitled to forego the normal process of law - indeed, is morally obligated to do so because of his role as citizen - if this is necessary to restore legitimacy. Since, however, the state is by definition of this relationship powerful and the individual weak, it is likely that the individual will be defeated by the state, regardless of whether moral authority is on his side or not. He will simply be treated as an outlaw.

The individual must therefore seek out others whose rights have also been curtailed by the excessive power of the state, in order to form an insurrectionary party. It is likely that he will find such other individuals, since, if the state is really oppressive, they must necessarily exist. But individuals are different from each other - that is one of the characteristics which define the individual. Thus, although they may be united in the purpose of overthrowing or restructuring the state, they all may have different reasons for doing so. The reasons, being different, entail a difference of attitudes toward the manner, methods, and extent to which the state should be restructured. In this situation, if any kind of action is to be taken at all,

some of the individuals must give up their demands, at least partially, and some will have to make demands which they originally did not intend to make. To the extent that this is possible, i.e., to the extent that the individuals are capable of suppressing desires, anxieties, and even the voice of their own conscience for the moment, this collective action may be successful. To the extent that this is not possible, i.e., to the extent that individuals fail to see any advantage for themselves in adhering to the discipline of the insurrectionary party rather than to that of the oppressive state, the rebellion crumbles and is defeated.

The dilemma of the individual in this situation is clear. Can he give up, even in part, the very principles and goals which have caused him to enter this situation, in order to save them? Is there then any difference of moral purity left between him and the oppressor who also presumes to be a "republican"? On the other hand, can he allow himself the luxury of such scruples when the rights and lives of many people depend on him? Indeed, if he sets these principles above the endangered lives of those who depend on his actions, does he then not also sink to the level of moral bankruptcy of those whom he hopes to overthrow, who, also claiming to be defenders of a "republic", do not care for the rights of the individual?

This, in short, might be a possible scenario of how the play could have progressed. The tragic conflict is easily discernible: either Henzi chooses to stand on his honour as an altruistic and humane defender of Bern's freedom in the public

forum of parliament, thereby giving the oligarchy a chance to smash the opposition before it can provide the necessary "Nachdruck" (I,i), or else he must set himself above these moral scruples and go about ruthlessly exterminating the members of the council in accordance with the advice given not only by the villain Dücret, but also by his close friend Wernier who perceives that words no longer suffice to convince the council:

Euch, nur im
Drohen stark, wird keine Otter hören!
Ja führe nur das Wort! donnre wie Cicero.
Du weißt es wie er starb, vielleicht stirbst du
auch so.
Den Wütrichen das Recht keck unter Augen setzen,
Gibt unglückseligen Stoff, daß sie's nur mehr
verletzen.
Besinn dich, wie es ging, nun ist's das fünfte
Jahr - -
Nein, wenn der Nachdruck fehlt, so unterlaßt's
nur gar. (I,i)

Henzi's strategy consists of an attempt to argue with the council over the demands of the opposition, and to use force in a selective and sparing manner only when these first attempts prove to be fruitless. Even then, he only proposes to use the power he has at his disposal in order to:

Durch sie Bern zu befreien,
Den Rat zu nötigen, groß und gerecht zu sein.
Er bleibe, was er ist, wann er uns nicht mehr
drücket,
Wann Dienst und Regiment zum gleichen Teil beglücket,
Und ist nur, was er ist, des Vokes Mund und Hand.
Wie gern wird Bern alsdann in ihm sich selber lieben.
(I,i)

Henzi's demands are moderate; his aim is to reform rather

than to overthrow the council, and he therefore proposes to use moderate means. This contrasts sharply with Dücret who has more radical and far-reaching goals, and therefore requires different methods:

Drum soll die Nachwelt auch durch uns geborgen sein,
Und wollen wir in uns auch unser Kind befreien,
So muß die Tyrannei und der Tyrann erliegen,
Denn nur durch dessen Tod ist jene zu besiegen. (I,i)

While Henzi believes that the council can be reformed, Dücret rejects this option as utopian. He knows that the council is corrupt and will do anything in its power to retain its privileged position. The only possibility of reform is to oust it; the only chance at success in this endeavour is to eliminate all members of the council. For him a solution to the problem must be radical, and, given his analysis of the situation, he foresees what will inevitably happen even in the remote possibility that Henzi's suggestions for reform are accepted, namely that then the tyranny will merely become more subtle (I,i). Dücret's criticism of Henzi therefore is that: "Du hast Verstand genug zu einem Rädelsmann,/Doch Tugend allzuviel" (I,i), to which Henzi responds: "Die man nie haben kann," (I,i)

The recognition of the elusiveness of virtue is central to the fragment, for it contains a clue to the weakness and the strength of Henzi's character. It also accurately reflects the contradictory relationships he stands in. As a recognition of himself, it reflects Henzi's belief that virtue is a never-filled quantity; it is something which the virtuous individual is constantly striving to attain, which does not allow for

passivity or pride. However, as a perception which is projected onto the enemies of the revolt, this recognition is a source of vacillation for Henzi, the leader of the rebellion. It leads him to underestimate the power and viciousness of the council, in the vain hope that it can be reformed; it also leaves the insurrectionary party in great danger from within since he refuses to eliminate Dücret who, in Henzi's opinion, will betray the movement if his strategy is not followed. Since the strategy of Dücret is not put into practice, the movement is doomed to failure from the outset, and the fault for this lies squarely on Henzi's shoulders - a result directly counterproductive to the interest of Henzi's policy and moral position.

But excessive tolerance is only one aspect in the difference between Dücret and Henzi. It is conceivable that if their difference were merely a matter of strategy, i.e., of personal advantage or political principle, they could come to an accommodation, as was the case in Der Freigeist. The real differences between Dücret and Henzi are personal - they despise each other for a variety of reasons which, when consideration is taken that these are two prominent and intelligent men, seem amazingly shallow. Henzi justifies his moral indignation over Dücret by pointing out that the latter: " . . . die Tyrannen haßt, nur um Blut zu vergießen. . . . " (I,i)

While this is a blatant misrepresentation of Dücret's position as outlined above, it is also unreasonable in another sense: why should a person who enjoys the shedding of blood

for its own sake go to so much trouble and incur so much personal danger in making sure that the person to be killed be a tyrant? Even while Dücret is in this case also motivated by an opportunistic desire for personal revenge (against Steiger), Henzi himself must grant his opponent the virtue of hating tyranny out of principle.

Wernier, Henzi's friend, tries to tarnish Dücret's reputation by seeing in his willingness, as a foreigner, to defend Bern's freedom, evidence that he is an unprincipled mercenary. It seems highly unlikely that Lessing, the avowed cosmopolitan, for whom personal honour never represented an ambition of great importance (e.g., Philotas, or the poem Ich in: Lessing, Werke, I, 113), could have regarded such grounds as valid for establishing a certain character as evil. Finally, Dücret is also accused of being "frech", because he has had the insolence to ask for Wernier's daughter in marriage.

It is evident from what Wernier has to say about Dücret, that the matter of Dücret's strategy is insignificant as a factor which creates animosities between them since Wernier also recognizes the legitimacy of such a strategy, and himself would espouse and carry it out, albeit with less "Bosheit":

Was geht Fremdlingen Bern, und unsre Freiheit an?
O speit ihn aus von euch! daß er die beste Sache,
Die besten Bürger nicht durch sich verdächtig mache.
O speit ihn aus von euch! Nehmt mich an seine Statt,
Der mindre Bosheit zwar, doch gleiche Kühnheit hat.
Wer wird sich lieber nicht zur Sklaverei bequemen,
Wenn er die Freiheit soll von Dücret's Händen
nehmen? (I,i)

The remaining conspirators also realize the utility of having Dücret as their henchman - eventually his tactical suggestion for the uprising may have to be considered. However, they also share Henzi's and Wernier's resentment against Dücret; they suspect that his motives for taking part in the insurrection are less pure than theirs. While they presume to: "Des unterdrückten Staats großmütige Rächer sein;/Sich für das Vaterland, und nicht für sich befrein" (II,i), Dücret is given credit for nothing but " . . . Rach' und Eigennutz, ein Feind gemeiner Ruh',/Ein Fremdling, der sich uns nur schrecklich sucht zu machen. . . ." (II,i)

Since revenge is, by Dücret's own admission, a primary motive for his participation in the revolt (I,iii), and since he is represented as a somewhat unsavoury character, he cannot be regarded as belonging to the same level of moral principle as Henzi. However, the estimation of Fuetter as to the purity and altruism of motives of the revolutionary party is also contradicted in several places. Thus, Fuetter shows himself to have few scruples about betraying his comrades over to the council if they insist on following Dücret, and this at a moment when Dücret clearly has the majority of the group on his side (II,i). Wernier, although not in disagreement with a radical strategy, as proposed by Dücret, prefers to side with the council simply because Dücret is not on it and despite his recognition that Dücret's plan might be successful (I,i). Henzi also contradicts himself at least once: although at first claiming the insignificance of his honour (I,i) he later chastises his

companions for believing the (true) insinuations Dücret had made in regard to Henzi's betrayal of his oath of secrecy. This, he assures them, would " . . . Henzi's Ehre kürzen. . . . " (II,ii) What is more, Henzi, while under the impression that Dücret's black list has been agreed upon by all members of the group, openly states that he would disregard it, i.e., betray the decision of his comrades, that therefore the welfare of his friend Steiger in the council is more important to him than the success of the rebellion or the welfare of his companions (I,ii).

The evidence for the fragmented norm is obviously quite extensive in this short fragment. Neither Dücret nor Henzi are unequivocal characters; both have good and bad sides. Dücret has a more realistic political analysis, which is recognized by Henzi's henchmen, but he is also unscrupulous in his willingness to betray the movement if his thirst for revenge is rejected by the companions. On the other hand, Henzi is politically unrealistic, but has a more humane moral position. However, that these two positions cannot be accommodated somehow is a problem flowing not from the positions themselves, i.e., the issue at stake is not the use of violence or the problem of ends and means: both Dücret and Henzi manifest a willingness to use whatever means are necessary to achieve their particular ends - and that they have different aims necessarily entails different means.⁴ But while in

⁴ For an opposing view, see: Ernst Loeb, "Lessings 'Samuel Henzi': Eine aktuelle Thematik," Monatshefte, 65 (1973), 51-60.

Der Freigeist a difference of this kind, one which existed between different ideas or principles, could be resolved on the basis of the equalizing factor of humanity and friendship, on the basis of "Herz" and "Vernunft", here this avenue is cut off. And it is cut off precisely because here the factor of humanity itself becomes contradictory.

Henzi's predicament is, that if he follows Dücret's strategy - the only realistic one for the intended purpose - he must kill those people on the council who are his personal friends and who may be innocent, such as Steiger. Moreover, he must allow a free hand to Dücret's nefarious ambitions of revenge. On the other hand, if he liquidates Dücret, betrays the rebels to the authorities, or takes a moderate course of action, the revolt will inevitably collapse, his friends will be killed in this case as well, and he will be forced to betray his oath of secrecy and loyalty.

The difference between Samuel Henzi and the comedies thus, is that in the latter the obstacles to free human interaction are only superficial while in the former we are confronted by a moral paradox, i.e., by the conflict of equally valid moral norms. This conflict is precipitated by the conflict of individual and society, by the aspirations of one individual (Henzi) and that of many others (Bern). Whatever course of action Henzi takes is morally reprehensible and tragedy becomes unavoidable.

As Der junge Gelehrte already hints at, the aspirations of the individual can become the source of destruction and isolation;

yet in Samuel Henzi these consequences no longer depend on the individual alone, or that of a few close associates, but are contingent on a multitude of social relationships - on Dücret, on the city council, on the rebels, on the citizens of Bern, on friends, and lastly also on himself - which leave the individual paralyzed and impotent to determine the outcome of his own moral decisions. Contrary also to the Freigeist, no hope is given that this predicament can be transcended through an appeal to "Herz" and "Vernunft", to humanity and brotherly understanding: in Henzi humanity itself becomes problematic and contradictory.

It is impossible to know exactly how Henzi might have ended. However, if we consider the model as suggested by the excerpt from Aristotle, the play was probably intended as an examination of the contradiction between private allegiances and political responsibilities. Morality is then conceived of as something which ultimately cannot be determined by the individual alone nor even in the context of the private world, but as something which must strive to take into account the public and external circumstances, which are often beyond the control of the individual person. We have here the same conflict which was already pointed out in chapter I, i.e., the bourgeois aspiration of self-determination, based on moral certainty and optimism, which is accompanied by a total inability to affect the existing power structure in a political way, both in the practical and theoretical sense. Not the least important factor in this impotence is the inability to reconcile

the individual's private life with his political obligations; this in turn, has its roots in the view of society which sees it as humanity in general rather than as an organism composed of antagonistic classes.

The fragment therefore establishes an awareness in Lessing of the essential contradiction between private morals - even those of the most enlightened and humane person - and the citizen's social responsibilities. In order to do justice to one demand, it is necessary to do injustice to the other. In Samuel Henzi we are given no clue to how Lessing might have resolved the pessimism which this implies for the question of the individual's morality or for the prospects of his emancipation. Perhaps the inability to answer the question at this point is one of the reasons why the play was never completed.

Miss Sara Sampson

In this drama, Lessing's first tragedy and the first "bürgerliches Trauerspiel" of consequence to appear in Germany,⁵ the author again attempts to come to terms with the individual's problem when confronted by the contradictory demands of different moral norms.

At first glance already, it becomes clear that Sara bears a similarity to Tellheim in that she too raises certain moral

⁵ Richard Daunicht points out that, although often regarded as the first bourgeois tragedy ever, Miss Sara Sampson was preceded by Martini's Rhynsolt und Sapphira. Daunicht, Entstehung, p. 238.

values to the level of fixed and unalterable dogma, thus becoming another representative of the "Halsstarrigkeit der Tugend".⁶ However, whereas Tellheim's stoicism - his inability to adjust his behaviour to the requirements of specific and concrete situations - consisted of the excessive and false value attributed to the aristocratic concept of honour, Sara's heroism is that of a Christian martyr who sees in life nothing but a vale of tears and therefore has no regrets about leaving it behind her (I,vii).

Sara's relationship to reality is therefore somewhat tenuous. Rather than seeking to atone for her transgression in the worldly and social sphere in which it was committed, her efforts are oriented exclusively towards the beyond. Rather than seeking ways in which to reconcile her old father to the new circumstances, her preoccupation is to placate an irate God through the formalization of her ties with Mellefont in marriage. When he sets before her his doubts as to the wisdom of such a step, she is incapable of understanding his reasons:

. . . ich war sinnreich genug, meinen Verstand zu betäuben; aber mein Herz und ein inneres Gefühl warfen auf einmal das mühsame Gebäude von Schlüssen übereinander. Mitten aus dem Schlafe weckten mich strafende Stimmen, mit welchen sich meine Phantasie, mich zu quälen verband. (I,vii)

⁶ It does not seem likely that, according to Ferdinand van Ingen, "Sara beharrt bei ihrem Standpunkt. Es geht ihr um die Unbedingtheit der Tugend, um eine kompromißlose Moralität" (p. 55), or that Lessing saw in her someone whose

Sara regards the imagination - and she has a vivid one - as the very seat of the conscience, the path through which God is perceived and the virtuous life attained:

Klagen Sie den Himmel nicht an! Er hat die Einbildungen in unserer Gewalt gelassen. Sie richten sich nach unsern Taten, und wenn diese unsern Pflichten und der Tugend gemäß sind, so dienen die sie begleitenden Einbildungen zur Vermehrung unserer Ruhe und unseres Vergnügens. (I,vii)

It is therefore not surprising that the marriage is primarily intended to " . . . meine zerrüttete Phantasie wieder heilen" (I,vii), a phantasy to which she attributes more authority than to the precepts of reason and the perception of the concrete world: "Erbarmen Sie sich meiner, und überlegen Sie, daß wenn Sie mich auch dadurch nur von Qualen der Einbildung befreien, diese eingebildeten Qualen doch Qualen, und für die, die sie empfindet, wirkliche Qualen sind." (I,vii)

The intense subjectivism with which Sara looks at the world

. . . Tugendbegriff, der die göttliche Ordnung keineswegs in Frage stellt, ist in Übereinstimmung mit ihrer Individualität, nicht weniger auch ihr "Fehler", in der Liebe der Stimme ihres Gefühls gehorcht zu haben . . . (p. 68)

Such a view does not explain the fact that Sara's "Tugendhaftigkeit" changes over the course of the drama, as does her entire relationship to the world around her. Further, the legitimacy of her love for Mellefont is never questioned either by herself or, ultimately, by Sir William; it can therefore not be regarded as a "Fehler" which causes her misfortunes, except in the sense that it makes her a rival of Marwood who poisons her for it. Ferdinand van Ingen, "Tugend bei Lessing, Bemerkungen zu 'Miss Sara Sampson,'" Amsterdamer Beiträge zur neueren Germanistik, 1 (1972), 43-73.

causes her to exaggerate what she sees. Thus, when Mellefont finally agrees to their marriage, but on the condition that it be held in France, Sara objects:

Dessen Herz muß ruhiger oder muß ruchloser sein als meines, welcher nur einen Augenblick zwischen sich und dem Verderben mit Gleichgültigkeit nichts als ein schwankendes Brett sehen kann. In jeder Welle, die an unser Schiff schläge, würde mir der Tod entgegenrauschen . . . (I,vii)

Here an ocean-going vessel has been transformed into a "schwankendes Brett", in danger of destruction from the merest wave. Religious precepts are also transfigured and absolutized: God is pictured as nothing but a vindictive deity whose main occupation is to punish transgressors like herself, a judge " . . . der die geringste Übertretungen seiner Ordnung zu strafen gedrohet hat." (I,vii) These "Ordnungen" are for Sara strict apodictic laws, absolutes which cannot be overstepped without the severest retaliation. Automatically, she transfers this tendency to absolutize to her love for Mellefont: " . . . ich bin in meinem Herzen die Ihrige und werde es ewig sein" (I,vii), and she has made it " . . . zum unverbrüchlichsten Gesetze . . . niemals an der Aufrichtigkeit Ihrer Liebe zu zweifeln. . . . (I,vii)

Sara's mode of thought therefore is characterized by a remoteness from reality - it is more phantasy than reason - and by a tendency to transform the visions of her imagination into absolutes. Hence, it does not surprise that these various absolutes, which all spring from her heart in accordance with the " . . . weibliche Denkungsart . . . " (I,vii), enter into conflict with each other.

As she recognizes herself, it is impossible to do full justice to both the demand for filial respect and that of her love for Mellefont. Yet she has no intention of renouncing Mellefont, indeed, she regards his love - the very cause of her troubles - to be the " . . . letzte einzige Versüßung desselben. . . ." (I,vii) Thus, while having no intention of correcting the reality which has cast her into distress - either through giving up her love or through a reconciliation with her father - Sara hopes to assuage a terrible and omniscient God through a mere formality, whose only real value lies, as she admits herself, in the " . . . Beruhigung meines Gewissens" (I,vii), but which, by her own depiction of God, can do nothing to avert disaster and calamity for all involved. Like Tellheim, Sara's "Halsstarrigkeit" brings about in her a willingness to suffer and even wallow in her misery. In taking such a passive attitude towards her predicament, she identifies herself as thoroughly different from the self-possessed person as exemplified by Minna.

Sara can therefore expect nothing but tragedy - and in being consistent to this belief, she shows a streak of reason. However, this circumstance also provides us with an almost comical scene, in which she defends with great energy and cogency the irrationalism of her views (III,iii), and where she demonstrates as much as Tellheim, the inability to see the obvious, because her mind is obfuscated by preconceived notions.

While Sara undoubtedly is one of the causes of her own difficulties, Lessing by no means places all the blame for the

final tragedy at her feet. It is clear that, given the contradictory situation she all of a sudden found herself in, Sara had but two choices. She could leave her father, thus casting aside the rule of filial duty, love, and respect; or she could give up her love for Mellefont, thus abandoning her personal right to express the feelings of her heart. Both are unsatisfying solutions, but, if we again take Minna as an ideal, the latter choice is preferable for in making it, Sara shows that even she is capable of reaching a decision on her own.

While it has become obvious why she has attempted nothing to rectify her situation (her irrationality and consequent dogmatism), the blame for the initial break with the paternal home is at least partially to be placed on Sir William himself. We read:

Ich habe selbst den größten Fehler bei diesem Unglücke begangen. Ohne mich würde Sara diesen gefährlichen Mann nicht haben kennenlernen . . . Das Unglück war geschehen, und ich hätte wohlgetan wenn ich ihnen nur gleich alles vergeben hätte. Ich wollte unerbittlich gegen ihn sein und überlegte nicht, daß ich es gegen ihn nicht allein sein konnte. Wenn ich meine zu späte Strenge erspart hätte, so würde ich wenigstens ihre Flucht verhindert haben. (III,i)

It is in order to rectify this past mistake that Sir William comes to the inn where Sara is lodging, and that he sends her the letter, through Waitwell, in which he offers his forgiveness. Contrary to Sara, Sir William has a somewhat more practical inclination, by means of which he realizes that the whole matter can best be cleared by simply removing its causes, namely his own

ill will and intransigence towards the union of the two. Sara however, in her blindness and remoteness, fails to see the outstretched hand of friendship, seeing in it nothing but a " . . . Bote des Unglückes, des schrecklichsten Unglücks unter allen, die mir meine feindselige Einbildung jemals vorgestellt hat!" (III,iii)

Rather than accepting her father's gesture as evidence of his good will and an honest change of heart, she interprets it as a self-sacrifice which can only serve to increase the burden of her own guilt before God:

Siehst du denn nicht, wie unendlich jeder Seufzer, den er um mich verlöre, meine Verbrechen vergrößern würde? Müßte mir nicht die Gerechtigkeit des Himmels jede seiner Tränen, die ich ihm ausgepreßt, so anrechnen, als ob ich bei jeder derselben mein Laster und meinen Undank wiederholte?" (III,iii)

For her it is an unalterable fact that, if her father once disapproved of her love for Mellefont, he must forever keep on disapproving of it. This is another one of Sara's "unverbrüchliche Gesetze" and, by means of logical argument, she bases upon it the conclusion that "Ganz allein ohne ihn unglücklich zu sein, das ist es, was ich jetzt stündlich von dem Himmel bitte. . . ." (III,iii) That the "Himmel" might disapprove of her request, that it might prefer to see her living happily reconciled to her father, does not for a moment occur to her.

It is at this point, where Sara seems to have irrevocably unleashed the tragedy through her stubbornness and blindness, that Waitwell undertakes a similar manoeuvre as that of Minna:

"Ich glaube wahrhaftig, ich werde das gute Kind hintergehen müssen, damit es den Brief doch nur lieset." (III,iii) His "Spiel" succeeds, and in the ensuing argument Waitwell demonstrates in a rational manner that Sir William's offer is an honest one and that Sara, if she wishes not to be taken for one of those " . . . stolze unbiegsame Leute, die durchaus nicht gestehen wollen, daß sie unrecht getan" (III,iii), must accept his forgiveness. What is more, he shows how this acceptance would in reality give Sir William much more pleasure than would its rejection, and that it would therefore demonstrate a higher level of virtue in Sara.

Forgiveness, according to the old man, is " . . . etwas Sanftes, so etwas Beruhigendes, so etwas Himmlisches . . . " (III,iii) which, in his own experience, has given cause to " . . . an die große unüberschwengliche Seligkeit Gottes zu denken, dessen ganze Erhaltung der elenden Menschen ein immerwährendes Vergeben ist." (III,iii) The argument that she should not deprive her father of the pleasure of forgiving her convinces Sara of the legitimacy of Waitwell's arguments; she forgets her preoccupations with eternal salvation for a moment in order " . . . selbst nachzudenken . . . " (III,iii), and all her troubles vanish. In her acceptance of forgiveness Sara's stubborn and pious "Halsstarrigkeit der Tugend" is overcome by a living and concrete ethic, the law of tolerance.⁷

⁷ Manfred Durzak points out that the process of Sara's transformation is really only completed through the confrontation with Marwood (IV,viii), where Sara acknowledges Marwood as

Sara therefore has no reason to regard herself any longer as a criminal; her deviation was only a mistake: "Mein Irrtum, sag ich; denn warum soll ich länger so grausam gegen mich sein und ihn als ein Verbrechen betrachten?" (IV,viii) She has come around to the viewpoint set forth by Mellefont at the outset:

. . . muß der, welcher tugendhaft sein soll, keinen Fehler begangen haben? Hat ein einziger so unselige Wirkungen, daß er eine ganze Reihe unsträflicher Jahre vernichten kann: so ist kein Mensch tugendhaft; so ist die Tugend ein Gespenst, das in der Luft zerfließet, wenn man es am festesten umarmt zu haben glaubt; so hat kein weises Wesen unsere Pflichten nach unsern Kräften abgemessen; so ist die Lust, uns strafen zu können, der erste Zweck unsers Daseins . . . (I,vii)

and which is echoed by Waitwell: "Wer einmal betriegt, der ist ja deswegen noch kein alter Betrieger." (III,iii)

Forgiveness, as conceived of in this play, is characteristic of God's very essence, for otherwise his exclusive purpose for being would have to be the punishment of mankind due to the impossibility of ever achieving perfect "Tugend". Furthermore, this forgiveness is the main principle of divine intervention

someone with valid claims even while begging not to be placed in the same category as she. Sara recognizes thereby, that Marwood is ". . . eine mir ähnliche Person . . ." (I,vii), and that therefore her own sin is not so different from that of her rival. She would therefore also deserve the same punishment she considers justified for Marwood, were it not for the fact that she has been forgiven and that in the hour of death, she actively demonstrates that she has learnt the lesson of true tolerance (V,x). Manfred Durzak, "Äußere und innere Handlung in 'Miß Sara Sampson'. Zur ästhetischen Geschlossenheit von Lessings Trauerspiel," in his Poesie und Ratio (Bad Homburg v.d.H.: Athenäum, 1970), pp. 44-68.

in the affairs of the world, which alone can maintain the existence of wretched humanity. But what is most significant is that a recognition of this principle and its correct application can be found without the necessity of recourse to religious dogma or a knowledge of theology, but can be had if one is willing " . . . selbst nachzudenken. . . ." (III,iii)

Sir William concludes that he must forgive Sara not through religious or theological considerations, but through a recognition of the causes of her actions, and an admission of the role he plays as one of them. Similarly, Waitwell does not appeal to Sara's religious phantasies when persuading her to accept forgiveness, but lays before her a cogently reasoned argument which shows her all the consequences her action might entail. Forgiveness, here, is not seen as a religious gesture of self-abnegation and charity in the sense of the fifth request of the Lord's Prayer,⁸ but as a rational principle of harmony in the universe, a principle understandable and applicable by everyone, which serves to reconcile individualistic incongruities in the interests of all concerned. Although forgiveness

⁸ As in the article: Heinrich Bornkam, "Die innere Handlung in Lessings Miss Sara Sampson," Euphorion, 51 (1957), 385-96. Irmgard Ackermann counters that

Trotz der Offenheit zur Transzendenz geht es nicht um die Darstellung dieser Perspektive als solcher, die nicht geleugnet wird, ja als selbstverständlicher Hintergrund anwesend ist, aber auf die sich nicht die Intention des Dichters richtet. Wie die Wahrung der sittlichen Weltordnung bei Lessing in die Hand des Menschen gelegt ist, so ist der Akt des Vergebens, in dem diese sittliche Weltordnung sich zentral ausdrückt, ein menschlicher Akt. Nicht das göttliche Vergeben wird thematisch, nicht die Gnadenperspektive

is an essential attribute of God, its proper appropriation and dispensation takes place on earth, between people, where it serves to secure the individuality of each by safeguarding the community of all.

Forgiveness as an element of true virtue is therefore also essentially a social and concrete phenomenon rather than an abstract and metaphysical one, a quality which was also inherent in the elements of "Spiel" and "Witz". As such, it is determined by the interaction of persons within a community, rather than by the decisions of a single individual, be he divine or human. Thus, the individual is again confirmed through the conscious effort of the group: forgiveness is a concept which implies someone who gives and someone who accepts, and therefore is, as evidenced by Waitwell's characterization, a blessing to all concerned.

If we seek the causes which have brought about Sara's predicament, we find that they spring not from one but from all personages, and the interrelationship between them: in Sir William's excessive paternalism, in Mellefont's reckless behaviour in view of Sara's inexperience, and in Sara's excessive piety. Yet all these faults can be accommodated

im menschlichen Vergeben, sondern das zwischenmenschliche Vergeben als Verwirklichung des neuen Tugendideals, an dem alle Abtönungen der Tugendhierarchie sichtbar gemacht werden.

Irmgard Ackermann, Vergebung und Gnade im klassischen deutschen Drama, (München: Fink, 1968), p. 41,

through forgiveness, i.e., the acceptance of each other despite faults and mistakes. Sir William can then continue to hope for Sara's presence in the hour of death, Mellefont's impetuosity can be excused because its object deserves devotion, and Sara no longer needs to regard herself as criminal for she has been forgiven and all danger that the heavenly father would continue his grudge ceases.

Forgiveness - the active sign and real demonstration of the principle of tolerance - must therefore be considered as an additional and very important factor in society which safeguards the individual's integrity and autonomy from the onslaughts of self-interest and moral orthodoxy. Naturally, as a consequence of the nature of forgiveness, it cannot be conceived of in the isolated individual; it requires a community of other individuals who practice it. The individual who recognizes the principle of tolerance, who can forgive and accept forgiveness, is an individual whose being so is not defined in terms of conflict with society, but in and through it.

Finally, Lessing's plea for tolerance is especially well confirmed by Miss Sara Sampson where, despite the fact that forgiveness is unable to prevent tragedy, it nevertheless is given the final word - and herein lies the optimistic side of the drama, at least for its 18th-century audience. Sara, just before dying, tears up the note sent by Marwood, with the following words: "Marwood wird ihrem Schicksale nicht entgehen; aber weder Sie noch mein Vater sollen ihre Ankläger werden. Ich sterbe und vergeb es der Hand, durch die mich Gott heimsucht."

(V,x) Regardless of the appearance that the forces of evil have triumphed, Sara continues to manifest her new-found faith in the goodness of the world, and, in accordance with this belief, she is able to apply it to her own situation by forgiving Marwood.⁹ The optimism demonstrated in Sara's last will thus serves as the play's ending: "Komm, schleunige Anstalt zu machen, und dann laß uns auf Arabellen denken. Sie sei, wer sie sei: sie ist ein Vermächtnis meiner Tochter." (V,xi) The tolerance which Sara had learned from her father, is thus passed on by him to the future generation.

The struggle between conflicting moral demands, between those of social norms and individual aspirations, is shown here to be resolved by the application of the principle of tolerance. However, it is also evident that this solution can function only in the private world of family and friends, where it can build on a base of trust and understanding. As events show all too clearly, Marwood is not someone who forgives.

Ultimately, and despite Sara's "cure", tragedy cannot be averted.¹⁰ It forces itself into the newly reestablished harmony

⁹ Peter Weber states: "Hat das Böse auch eine gewaltige Bresche in den Kreis der Tugendhaften geschlagen, so ist doch deren Aufgabe nicht die Verzweiflung, sondern der gesellige Neuaufbau." Weber, Menschenbild, p. 59.

¹⁰ Brown sees in the death scene a reversal of Sara's thinking to its former conceptions in that she perceives in Marwood God's instrument for her punishment: "Ich sterbe, und vergeb' es der Hand, durch die mich Gott heimsucht." (V,x) Yet "Heimsuchung" does not necessarily translate as "punishment"; here the term simply refers to the fate which God, in his inscrutable wisdom, chooses to visit upon her. The use of this verb by Sara does not imply the admission of a guilt of such proportions that only death would vindicate it:

of the Sampson family and tears it apart. At the very moment when Sara's affairs seem to be taking a final turn for the better, when she sits down to write her letter of gratitude to Sir William (III,iv), Marwood appears on the scene in the guise of Lady Solmes (III,v).

Although Miss Sara Sampson is a tragedy, the play does not show the causality of Sara's death to be derived exclusively from some shortcoming of hers, in a "hamartia". Her most striking flaw, the stoic piety which allows her even to misperceive the goodness of her own father, is cured by Waitwell's argumentation; moreover, she proves by her actions in the final moments before death that she is capable of practicing what she has learnt. Had Sara not been cured of her stoicism, her death would have to be interpreted as the affirmation of a patently oppressive morality over the individual's right to love and to give free expression to that love. But it is a causal chain originating outside of Sara's own character which finally lets events culminate in tragedy.

Here the fragmented norm again shows its utility as an element for dramatic construction, for it warrants the causation of tragedy by a collective or social "guilt", rather than by an individual one. Since, according to this concept, positive and negative characteristics are distributed among all

Sara describes her misdeed as a "Fehler", and not an "Irrtum" (V,ix). Andrew Brown, "Sara Sampson: The Dilemma of Love," LY, 2 (1970), 135-48.

personages of the drama, the argument sometimes raised over the question of who the tragic hero, in the Aristotelian sense, might be, is quite unproductive. Through the fragmented norm, causality is elevated from a simple interplay between the individual and his fate, as in Sterbender Cato for instance, to a complex dialectical process which takes place in the entire field of human relationships.

The appearance of Marwood and her role in determining the tragic fate of Sara is therefore legitimate, because it is she who ultimately gives the play its momentum. It is she who initiates the process of reconciliation, albeit unwittingly, by informing Sir William of Sara's whereabouts (II,iv). She also has been tightly woven into the strand of action because of her liaison with Mellefont, and her appearance before Sara is therefore not accidental or haphazard.

Sara, who has seen Marwood in a dream even before meeting her, characterizes her as " . . . eine . . . mir ähnliche . . . Person. . . ." (I,vii) And the similarities between the two women are indeed remarkable, the differences being of degree rather than kind, except for the one, that Sara is cured of her excessive subjectivism and reintegrated into her family (and thus also symbolically into the collective of human society), while Marwood takes it to its logical conclusion in which she becomes alienated from that sphere of life represented by the Sampsons, a renegade from virtuous society. Both women are

of noble descent,¹¹ and both have amorous ties to Mellefont; they have also committed essentially the same error, namely that of entering an intimate relationship with him without having had it legitimized before society through marriage.

The most important similarity between the two women, however, is to be found in the high degree of subjectivism which both display. For Sara, the nature of this subjectivism has already been shown: it contains strong elements of pious other-worldliness and a vivid imagination which prevents her recognition of concrete reality, and hence, the ability to form a differentiated and critical opinion of herself and the world. She is highly impressionable, and tends to exaggerate and absolutize her impressions.

In Marwood, by contrast, the content of subjectivism is very practical and concrete. She has certain ambitions and is willing to do whatever is necessary, regardless of the consequences, to attain her goals: "Es wäre wenig in der Welt unternommen worden, wenn man nur immer auf den Ausgang gesehen hätte." (IV,ix) There is a highly developed vindictiveness and possessiveness in her character, which speaks against the idea that she is still in love with Mellefont and hopes to regain him for his own sake. Thus, she herself calls their love affair " . . . eine . . . alte . . . Liebe . . . " (II,i), a conquest which has once been made and must now be defended (II,i). In her strategy of defense, "Nachsicht, Liebe, Bitten

¹¹ Marwood explains to Sara that she is " . . . aus einem guten Geschlechte." (IV,viii)

sind die einzigen Waffen, die ich wider ihn brauchen darf, wo ich anders seine schwache Seite recht kenne." (II,i) For Marwood, Mellefont represents not so much a lost love for which one may fight under the sway of that love, but the object of an almost military campaign, in which this love is but another weapon.

It is not hard to determine which is the real motive behind Marwood's need to reconquer Mellefont. In her self-characterization as Lady Solmes, she explains to Sara her situation when first having met Mellefont: "Man sagt, es habe ihr weder an Schönheit noch an derjenigen Anmut gemangelt, ohne welche die Schönheit tot sein würde. Ihr guter Name war ohne Flecken. Ein einziges fehlte ihr - Vermögen." (IV,viii) This circumstance notwithstanding, ". . . ward sie von Personen gesucht, die nichts eifriger wünschten als sie glücklich machen zu dürfen. Unter diesen reichen und vornehmen Anbetern trat Mellefont auf." (IV,viii) We learn further, that despite his wealth and subsequent promises of generosity, Mellefont had already recognized at their first interview that ". . . er mit keiner Eigennützigem zu tun habe. . . ." (IV,viii) Yet despite this seemingly good rapport, the planned marriage does not take place.

Mellefont, who is in a position to inherit a large fortune if he concedes to marry a distant cousin, ". . . war willens, ihr von dieser Erbschaft eher nichts zu sagen, als bis er sich derselben durch sie würde verlustig gemacht haben." (IV,viii) But before he can put this plan into action, the secret becomes public, and the marriage is cancelled. It is not hard to guess

on whose initiative this is done.

Marwood herself explains the tactic she employs to keep Mellefont from marrying her, namely to put on a show of self-abnegation similar to the one employed in II,iii:

Sie erlasse ihn seines Versprechens und ersuche ihn, ohne weiteres Bedenken durch die Vollziehung der in dem Testamente vorgeschriebenen Verbindungen in den Besitz eines Vermögens zu treten, welches ein Mann von Ehre zu etwas Wichtigem brauchen könne als einem Frauenzimmer eine unüberlegte Schmeichelei damit zu machen. (IV,viii)

In a well-calculated move, she leaves Mellefont; he, in a fit of passion, sends out messengers who eventually find her, "Weil sie sich finden lassen wollte, ohne Zweifel" (IV,viii), as Sara remarks indiscreetly. But although Mellefont is despairing over losing her, Marwood makes only a small but well-calculated concession: "Sie wollte seine Hand durchaus nicht annehmen; und alles was er von ihr erhalten konnte, war dieses, daß sie nach London zurückzukommen versprach." (IV,viii)¹²

¹² The conclusion that it is Marwood who breaks off the engagement (IV,viii) is contradicted in her conversation with Mellefont (II,vii). Here she accuses him of the cancellation of their marriage:

Ward ich nicht von dir beredt, daß du dich in keine öffentliche Verbindung einlassen könntest, ohne einer Erbschaft verlustig zu werden, deren Genuß du mit niemand als mit mir teilen wolltest? (II,vii)

However, her testimony toward Sara in IV,viii seems to be more credible than that in II,vii. Marwood's argument in IV,viii aims at legitimizing her claim to Mellefont; she must therefore show their relationship in the most positive light possible by emphasizing Mellefont's passion and generosity toward her. This unwittingly leads her into the trap of revealing the true motives for her relationship with Mellefont, which cannot have

That Marwood possesses a distinct financial advantage in Mellefont is further confirmed by their encounter in Act II. In accordance with the purpose of her intrigue, Marwood assures Mellefont that " . . . alle die Geschenke, welche Sie mir gemacht haben, noch da sind. Ich habe Ihre Bankozettel, Ihre Juwelen nie als mein Eigentum angesehen und itzt alles mitgebracht, um es wieder in diejenigen Hände zu liefern, die mir es anvertrauet hatten." (II,iii) Through this manoeuvre she hopes to convince Mellefont that she is " . . . keine von den feilen Buhlerinnen . . . denen es gleichviel ist, von wessen Beute sie sich bereichern." (II,iii) But this is just a bluff. Her conversation with Hannah, once Mellefont has left, shows that she never had the intention of returning any of his money:

Hannah: Auf welcher Seite wußten Sie ihn nicht zu fassen! Aber nichts, glaube ich, rührte ihn mehr als die Uneigennützigkeit, mit welcher Sie sich erboten, alle von ihm erhaltenen Geschenke zurückzugeben.

been in her interest since she wishes to establish Marwood's character as "uneigennützig". It is her luck that Sara does not perceive this circumstance; had Sara paid attention, she would have seen that if the relationship between Marwood and Mellefont were really as altruistic as Marwood depicts, they would have gotten married regardless of the financial losses, especially in view of Mellefont's supposed willingness to incur these losses if that enabled him to marry her, and her own self-characterization as a " . . . Frauenzimmer, voll des zärtlichsten Gefühls, welches eine Hütte einem Palast würde vorgezogen haben, wenn sie in jener mit einer geliebten und in diesem mit einer gleichgültigen Person hätte leben sollen." (IV,viii) In II,vii by contrast, Marwood is waging a campaign against Mellefont, the aim of which is to destroy him; her arguments are tailored to the purpose of venting her hate rather than to convince him of the injustice she has suffered. The factuality of her assertions must therefore be doubted.

Marwood: Ich glaube es auch. Ha! ha! Verächtlich.
Hannah: Warum lachen Sie, Madam? Wenn es nicht Ihr
Ernst war, so wagten Sie in der Tat viel. Gesetzt,
er hätte Sie bei Ihrem Worte gefaßt?
Marwood: O geh! man muß wissen, wen man vor sich
hat. (II,v)

All this leads to the conclusion that, even if Marwood is not exactly one of those "feile Buhlerinnen" - after all, she has spent more than ten years at Mellefont's side - she is obligated to finance her way through life by bestowing her favours on someone who can pay for them. This way of life is in good measure due to her own personal ambitions to lead a life of luxury, but it is also forced on her by external circumstances.

Marwood herself recognizes that she is not a paragon of virtue (II,vii: ". . . genug, daß ich in den Augen der Welt für ein Frauenzimmer ohne Tadel galt. Durch dich nur hat sie erfahren, daß ich es nicht sei . . ."), but she also realizes the causes of this circumstance, namely that in a world dominated by men, a woman like herself has little or no chance of retaining her self-respect and of leading a life in accordance with her status through legitimate means. Marwood, according to her own story, is a widow who, through the love of a man, has lost her fortune. In order to regain a financial position in conformity with her good name and manner of life, she enters the liaison with Mellefont (IV,viii).

Marwood's plight is an example of the dilemma of all women in the 18th century, namely of how to reconcile the demands of

men with the requirements of virtue and chastity.¹³ Marwood points out to Mellefont this double standard, whereby a woman can always lose but never win:

Ihr Mannspersonen müßt doch selbst nicht wissen, was ihr wollt. Bald sind es die schlüpfrigsten Reden, die buhlerhaftesten Scherze, die euch an uns gefallen; und bald entzücken wir euch, wenn wir nichts als Tugend reden und alle Sieben Weisen auf unserer Zunge zu haben scheinen. Das schlimmste aber ist, daß ihr das eine sowohl als das andre überdrüssig werdet. Wir mögen närrisch oder vernünftig, weltlich oder geistlich gesinnet sein: wir verlieren unsere Mühe, euch beständig zu machen, einmal wie das andre. (II,iii)

Marwood, having lost her husband, spends her entire fortune - obviously in vain - on the liberation of a man she loves. Her only recourse is to fall back on the only asset she still has - her womanhood - and hope thereby to regain lost ground. She is a highly self-confident person, who does not intend to let the fact that she is a woman stand in the way of the realization of her ambitions. Having been injured more than once by the inconstancy of men, she has no scruples about taking advantage of them. Marwood knows that she lives in a male-dominated society, yet she refuses to become a sacrifice to its false morality.

It is in this consciousness that Marwood's affinity with Sara originates. Marwood recognizes that Sara, just like herself, is a victim of the double standard. She understands much better than Mellefont what Sara must be going through: "Wenn Sie bis

¹³ Madelaine F. Marshall, "Millwood and Marwood: Fallen Women and the Moral Interest of Sentimental Tragedy," Mary Wolstonecraft Journal, 2 (1974), 5.

auf den Grund meines Herzens gesehen hätten, so würden Sie entdeckt haben, daß es mehr wahres Erbarmen gegen Ihre Miß fühlt als Sie selbst. Ich sage wahres Erbarmen; denn das Ihre ist ein eigennütziges, weichherziges Erbarmen." (II,iv) Therefore also the solidarity with Sara and toward all women:

Wir Frauenzimmer sollten billig jede Beleidigung, die einer einzigen von uns erwiesen wird, zu Beleidigungen des ganzen Geschlechts und zu einer allgemeinen Sache machen, an der auch die Schwester und Mutter des Schuldigen Anteil zu nehmen sich nicht bedenken müßten. (IV,viii)

Sara does not represent a threat to Marwood because of Mellefont's love for her, but because she stands in the way of Marwood's revenge and self-assertion as woman, goals which can only be accomplished through her exploitation of Mellefont. As she explains herself, it never was her purpose to demand Mellefont's unconditional loyalty toward herself; indeed, the very fact that she has not demanded it has welded him to her for so long: "Du kehrtest mit neuem Feuer, mit neuer Inbrunst in meine Arme zurück, in die ich dich nur als in leichte Bande und nie als in schwere Fesseln schloß." (II,iii) Marwood's revenge in the poisoning of Sara is therefore an action directed not only against Mellefont, but also against Sara herself, for refusing to recognize the affinity between them, for refusing to see in Mellefont anything but an altruistic and generous man, for, in short, betraying herself and Marwood as women.

Marwood is an individualist, and she is destructive in the assertion of this individualism. But while true human freedom

exists as a result of the individual's integration into a community, the same is true also for a socially destructive appropriation of freedom such as that of Marwood. Here the roots of the problem are to be found in the interrelationship of the sexes on a wide social scale, in the existential dilemma of women who live in a male-dominated society.¹⁴ The fate of Sara and of Marwood demonstrates clearly what the two logical consequences of this predicament are: while both lose their "Tugend" in the eyes of society, Sara in addition also loses her life, a victim of the double standard; and Marwood becomes an outcast, someone who can only affirm her value as a woman and person through the destruction of the community on whose fringes she exists.

But even while Sara sees in Marwood "eine mir ähnliche Person", and while Marwood in turn manifests her solidarity with Sara (II,iv), the differences between the two are nevertheless striking. In the end, and despite the fragmented norm, Marwood still must play the role of "Lasterhafte" and Sara that of virtue incarnate.¹⁵

What sets Marwood apart, is her ability to perceive her lot

¹⁴ Marshall, "Moral Interest," p. 2.

¹⁵ For a comprehensive survey of evil and virtuous women in 18th-century literature, see: Ursula Friess, Buhlerin und Zauberin (München: Fink, 1970). Also included is a chapter on Marwood and Sara:

Die Marwood . . . wird von Lessing mit einer monströsen Widernatürlichkeit ausgestattet: sie ist verurteilt zum Rollenspiel . . . eine letzte Reminiszenz an die dem Barock geläufige naturferne Kunst erhabener Repräsentanz. (p. 50)

on a broad scale, as something she shares with womankind in general. Sara has no consciousness of this kind; in response to Marwood's demonstrations of the need for solidarity, she maintains her defense of Mellefont: "Was sollen Sie, Lady? Kenne ich meinen Mellefont nicht schon? Glauben Sie mir, ich kenne ihn wie meine eigne Seele. Ich weiß, daß er mich liebt - -" (IV,viii). How little she knows Mellefont, is shown clearly in Marwood's subsequent revelations.

Marwood knows Mellefont; she is familiar with all his weaknesses and a master at using them in her manipulations. In contrast to Sara " . . . das schöne Landmädchen . . . " (II,iii), who has lived her entire life in the isolation of her family, Marwood is familiar with the ways of the world, she is a city dweller. While Sara's actions are determined by pious virtue and uncritical devotion, Marwood leads a life with Mellefont whose main purpose is the pursuit of pleasure, a life which the virtuous Norton characterizes with disgust:

In der nichtswürdigsten Gesellschaft von Spielern und Landstreichern - ich nenne sie, was sie waren, und kehre mich an ihre Titel, Ritter und dergleichen, nicht -, in solcher Gesellschaft brachten Sie ein Vermögen durch, das Ihnen den Weg zu den größten Ehrenstellen hätte bahnen können. (I,iii)

In regard to the "Begierden" und "Geschmack" Marwood reasons that " . . . man muß sie austoben lassen. Sich ihnen widersetzen ist Torheit." (II,iii)

Marwood and Sara come from two different worlds, from that of aristocratic indolence and cosmopolitanism, and from that of

private bourgeois isolation. Although the confrontation of classes in this drama as yet lacks definition and explicitness, it nevertheless is in the background, just as it is evident in Tellheim's false conception of honour in Minna von Barnhelm. In Miss Sara Sampson the dichotomy of "Tugend" and "Laster", personified respectively by Sara and Marwood, is accompanied by a dichotomy which indicates social antagonisms, and which can be circumscribed by such word pairs as "Stadt und Land", "Öffentlichkeit und Innerlichkeit", "Intrige und Unschuld", "Adel und Bürgertum".¹⁶

These word pairs, while describing the conflicting worlds of which Marwood and Sara are representatives, also describe the ground on which Mellefont stands. However, rather than clearly belonging to either one of these sides, both are embodied in the make-up of his personality. In this sense, but to a much greater extent and with more severe consequences, he shows a resemblance to Tellheim.

¹⁶ Ursula Friess points out this aspect in connection with her analysis of the theme of seduction:

. . . die Gegensätze, die als konstituierend immer wieder für das "bürgerliche Trauerspiel" herausgestellt werden: das Öffentliche und das Private, "große Welt", auf der einen, Liebe, Freundschaft, Familie auf der anderen Seite, enthalten genau jene Gegensätze, die später als Standesgegensätze von adelig (höfisch) und bürgerlich (privat) hervortreten. In "Miß Sara Sampson" sind sie latent vorhanden. Die Personen, äußerlich durch keine Standesunterschiede voneinander getrennt, leben gleichwohl in verschiedenen "Welten".

Ursula Friess, "'Verführung ist die wahre Gewalt:' Zur Politisierung eines dramatischen Motivs in Lessings bürgerlichen Trauerspielen," Jahrbuch der Jean-Paul Gesellschaft, 6 (1971), 110.

Fritz Brüggemann, in his article entitled "Lessings Bürgerdramen und der Subjektivismus als Problem" posits that Mellefont is a ". . . noch nicht bewußter Subjektivist" and that the portrayal of his character represents for Lessing ". . . einen ersten tastenden Versuch auf dem Wege zu einem neuen Typus Mensch",¹⁷ i.e., the subjectivist conception of the individual as projected by the "Sturm und Drang".¹⁸ Undoubtedly this view is based to a large extent on Mellefont's words regarding "Tugend" in I,vii and the subsequent invocation: "Euch, unmenschliche Tyrannen unserer freien Neigungen, euch werde alle das Unglück, alle die Sünde zugerechnet, zu welchen uns euer Zwang bringet!" (I,vii)

While such an interpretation may be warranted by a strictly psychological approach to Mellefont's character, the conclusion that thereby Lessing is anticipating a new type of man who will presumably be "bewußter Subjektivist" is the very proof of the shortcomings of this method. For while recognizing the heterogeneity of Mellefont's character it fails to account for and differentiate between the elements which make up this heterogeneity, and to establish the nature of their relationship, something which can only be verified by examining these elements as the manifestations of a concrete social conjuncture in 18th-century Germany. Thus, Brüggemann, in view of Lessing's

¹⁷ Brüggemann, "Lessings Bürgerdramen," pp. 90, 92.

¹⁸ Brüggemann attempts to establish a connection between Karl Moor of Die Räuber and Mellefont.

well-known attitude toward the "Genies",¹⁹ is forced to the somewhat sterile conclusion that "Lessing wagt es nicht, für Mellefont einzutreten. Mellefont ist für ihn ein problematischer Charakter. Er interessiert ihn".²⁰

The essential characteristics of Mellefont are summarized succinctly by Marwood: "Ihr Herz, Mellefont, ist ein gutes Närrchen. Es läßt sich alles bereden, was Ihrer Einbildung ihm zu bereden einfällt." (II,iii) He is ". . . ein kleiner Flattergeist . . ." (II,iii) and a ". . . liebste wunderliche Seele . . ." (II,iii), the recognition of which has allowed her to assert control over him for so long, in that she ". . . dich nur als in leichte Bande und nie als in schwere Fesseln schloß." (II,iii)

Mellefont, according to Norton's testimony, has spent most of his life and money "In der nichtswürdigsten Gesellschaft von Spielern und Landstreichern . . . and in the . . . Umgang mit

¹⁹ As in his words from "96. Stück" of the Hamburgische Dramaturgie; see Lessing, Werke, VI, 482-83. If Mellefont is really a prototype of this "Genie", then Miss Sara Sampson is a terrible satire on it. For in that case, the "Tyrannen unserer freien Neigungen" must spring from Mellefont's own character - and they do this, at least in part (Marwood: "Deine Begierden und dein Geschmack sind itzt deine Tyrannen" I,iii), and in the curse he speaks out over them he is condemning himself. There can therefore be no doubt about why Lessing does not dare to "für Mellefont einzustehen", namely because he is advocating a position directly opposed to that which Brüggeman sees represented in Mellefont.

²⁰ Brüggeman, "Lessings Bürgerdramen," p. 92.

allen Arten von Weibsbildern, besonders der bösen Marwood - -." (I,iii) To a certain extent, he has adopted the customs of this gallant company in that he has acquired its talent for intrigue and seduction, and in adopting the "Begierden" and "Geschmack" as the determinants of his morality. Indeed, it is these skills and qualities which first raise in him an interest for Sara, and subsequently allow him to fulfill his desires by seducing her.

But this encounter with Sara, besides satisfying his lust, proceeds to affect him in a much deeper sense. He realizes that Sara, despite running off with him, is different from the fare to which he is accustomed. She is innocent, " . . . a maiden of the extremest virtue . . ." ²¹ whose only fault lies perhaps in her being too unfamiliar with the ways of the world (I,vii). In the face of Sara's "Tugend", Mellefont recognizes the extent of his transgression:

Ich besuchte lasterhafte Weibsbilder; laß es sein.
Ich ward öfter verführt als ich verführte; und die
ich selbst verführte, wollten verführt sein. - Aber
- ich hatte noch keine verwahrlosete Tugend auf meiner
Seele. Ich hatte noch keine Unschuld in ein unab-
sehliches Unglück gestürzt. Ich hatte noch keine
Sara aus dem Hause eines geliebten Vaters entwendet
. . . (I,iii)

The extent of his contrition is such, that for the first time in many years he sheds tears, even though not without some nostalgia for the days when he had the " . . . Gabe der Verstellung . . .

²¹ Marshall, "Moral Interest," p. 8.

durch die ich sein und sagen konnte, was ich wollte . . . " (I,v)

Sara has struck the other chord in Mellefont's soul, namely the one which responds to the call of virtue and reason. His relationship to Sara transforms his old and irresponsible ways to the point where he takes all blame for her misfortunes upon himself, and makes it his duty to dispell Sara's false notions of morality. In doing so, he displays opinions and eloquence which seem to come directly from Lessing's own lips:

Wie? muß der, welcher tugendhaft sein soll, keinen Fehler begangen haben? Hat ein einziger so unselige Wirkungen, daß er eine ganze Reihe unsträflicher Jahre vernichten kann: so ist kein Mensch tugendhaft; so ist die Tugend ein Gespenst, das in der Luft zerfließet, wenn man es am festesten umarmt zu haben glaubt; so ist die Lust, uns strafen zu können, der erste Zweck unsers Daseins; so ist - ich schrecke vor allen den gräßlichen Folgerungen, in welche Sie Ihre Kleinmut verwickeln muß! (I,vii)

Mellefont is undoubtedly somewhat of a scoundrel, well-versed in the arts of deception and intrigue, and he recognizes these shortcomings; yet he also retains a degree of optimism in regard to the goodness of God and the harmony in the universe, which alone, perhaps, still enables him to retain a degree of self-respect and hope for the possibility of reform. Marwood herself acknowledges that he is susceptible to the influence of "Nachsicht, Liebe, Bitten. . . ." (II,i)

Yet even while aware of these two conflicting strands in his personality (or perhaps, because of them) Mellefont is incapable of understanding or resolving the paradox in his character:

"Was für ein Rätsel bin ich mir selbst! Wofür soll ich mich

halten? Für einen Toren? oder für einen Bösewicht? - oder für beides? - Herz, was für ein Schalk bist du! - Ich liebe den Engel, so ein Teufel ich auch sein mag." (IV,ii) Even while loving Sara he cannot decide that he wants to marry her. He suffers to the point of tears when unable to fulfill her wish for a marriage ceremony; yet this is considered not as great an evil as " . . . der melancholische Gedanke, auf zeitlebens gefesselt zu sein." (IV,ii) But, he reasons, he is a prisoner of Sara's love in any case - he cannot even consider renouncing her.

Was will ich also? - Das! - Itzt bin ich schon ihr Gefangener, den man auf sein Wort frei herumgehen läßt: das schmeichelt! Warum kann es dabei nicht sein Bewenden haben? Warum muß ich eingeschmiedet werden und auch sogar den elenden Schatten der Freiheit entbehren? (IV,ii)

Mellefont is someone who, with Lessing, recognizes that freedom has limits.²² In this lies his rational, enlightened quality. But contrary to Lessing, he does not accept this circumstance, preferring to believe that the mere illusion of

²² In his conversation with Jacobi, Lessing states his position on freedom as follows:

Ich merke, Sie hätten gern Ihren Willen frei. Ich begehre keinen freien Willen. Überhaupt erschreckt mich, was Sie eben sagten, nicht im mindesten. Es gehört zu den menschlichen Vorurteilen, daß wir den Gedanken als das erste und vornehmste betrachten, und aus ihm alles herleiten wollen; da doch alles, mit samt den Vorstellungen, von höheren Prinzipien abhängt. Ausdehnung, Bewegung, Gedanke, sind offenbar in einer höheren Kraft gegründet, die noch lange nicht damit erschöpft ist.

Lessing, Werke, VIII, 622.

freedom can elevate man beyond the limitations of his existence (as in the above quote). Mellefont recognizes but does not admit to the fact that rather than liberating man, this illusion of freedom actually curtails it, because in reality it is nothing but a self-deception; its ultimate consequence can only be tragic. Thus, in his inability to live without the illusion of absolute freedom, Mellefont unwittingly predicts his own end: "Vermaledete Einbildungen, die mir durch ein zügelloses Leben so natürlich geworden! Ich will ihrer loswerden - oder nicht leben." (IV,ii)

The sources for this fatal conflict between the recognition of reality and the inability to accept it, are evident. Mellefont himself cites the "zügelloses Leben" which has become natural to him, into which he has fallen after the breaking up of his family, at an early age, through the death of his parents (IV,i). He has known the warmth and security of a solid middle-class family life yet, through forces of circumstance (Verführung) and perhaps inclination of character, he has fallen into the ways of the idle rich.

Like Tellheim, but in a much more reprehensible way, Mellefont stands with one foot in the decaying culture of feudalism, and with the other in the nascent culture and values of the middle class. He is "auf der Scheide zwischen grundverschiedenen Welten",²³ where the feudal concept of absolute

²³ Friess, "Verführung," p. 112; in response to Hans Wolff, "Unsittlich oder unbürgerlich?" Modern Language Notes, 61 (1946), 372-77.

individual autonomy has already been revealed as a mere shadow, but the transition to the new, already recognized ideal of humane and responsible individuality can as yet not be accepted. The gulf between these two social ideals runs right down the middle of Mellefont's personality: hence his ability to see the promised land, yet simultaneously, his incapacity to enter into it. Sir William recognizes Mellefont's predicament, and his verdict is therefore: "Ach, er war mehr unglücklich als lasterhaft. - -" (V,x)

These final words also represent the final statement of the play on the question of personal freedom, namely that even an ultimate act of personal autonomy, such as suicide, may also mean the ultimate destruction of the individual. It is a contradictory ending, and does not give a final answer to the questions thrown up in this drama: if the tolerant and harmonious community of family and friends is really the best of all possible social units, in which the individual can express himself freely and autonomously, why is it incapable of defending itself against alien and destructive values which are so obviously inferior in the moral sense? Indeed, why must persons so sensitive to the questions of morality, such as Mellefont and Sara, come to such an untimely and tragic end? Does this not set into question the whole prospect of a humane society which Lessing posits when he portrays the family idyll of the Sampsons?

A solution in the given historical period evidently is impossible. The questions asked in Henzi are restated in Sara Sampson, albeit with a better understanding for the social

causes of the tragic position of the individual, i.e., the antagonistic values of distinct social classes. The individual is, in truth, ". . . mehr unglücklich als lasterhaft. - -" Precisely because the causes of the individual's predicament are social and concrete, it is possible to characterize him as "unglücklich" rather than "lasterhaft"; in his misfortunes he is not so much a culprit, but a victim. However, this does not mean that his situation is hopeless, that morality and freedom are mere figments of the imagination. Precisely because the play ends in a question, an answer can be hoped for. In the final scene, where Sir William takes responsibility for Arabella, Lessing points toward the future; this is where a solution can be found. If the causes of man's predicament are social, it can also be affected and changed in that arena. How this is to be done, however, apart from the practice of tolerance, Lessing can as yet not suggest.

Emilia Galotti

In Miss Sara Sampson tragedy results from the interaction and mutual determination of, on the one hand, excessive adherence to an abstract code of morals, and on the other, from a conflict between the individual and the social system of which he forms a part. While in this drama the significance of social factors as determinants of this conflict is obscured by the somewhat abstract and rhetorical level on which the confrontation between "Laster" and "Tugend" takes place, these elements become highly visible in

Emilia Galotti. If it was the aim of Lessing's drama to confront the bourgeois in the audience with the problems of his existence by depicting them as realistically as possible on the stage, then Emilia Galotti represents the most perfect specimen of that drama.

As already indicated by the name of this play, the central character represented in it is Emilia. Yet even a cursory reading reveals that her centrality to the events portrayed does not hinge on the outstanding or heroic proportions of her character. Throughout the drama Emilia is shown as someone who is overshadowed by more powerful and well-defined personalities than herself - Odoardo, Claudia, Gonzaga - , and determined by factors outside of her control. The reader is thus given an impression of Emilia not as a tragic heroine in the traditional sense, but rather as the embodiment or crystallization of those contrasting and conflicting forces which overwhelm any initiative she might in fact take. The ultimate example of this almost total lack of autonomy is that in which Emilia chooses death rather than risk the loss of virtue, a death which, although amounting to suicide, is administered by her own father (V,vii). From the following quote it is clear that this portrayal of Emilia's character, and the role she consequently plays as dramatic personage, was intended by Lessing to be so:

Weil das Stück "Emilia" heißt, ist es darum mein Vorsatz gewesen, Emilien zu dem hervorstechendsten, oder auch nur zu einem hervorstechenden Charakter zu machen? Ganz und gar nicht. Die Alten nannten

ein Stück wohl nach Personen, die gar nicht aufs Theater kamen. Die jungfräulichen Heroinen und Philosophinnen sind gar nicht nach meinem Geschmack.²⁴

The portrayal of Emilia as a contradictory, ambiguous, and yielding personality rather than as a "hervorstechender" and heroic character who determines the course of events or stands up to them was thus chosen by Lessing in the interest of realism, because the naive and sheltered existence led by the daughters of middle-class families, of whom we have already seen examples in Der Freigeist, Der junge Gelehrte, and Miss Sara Sampson, did not fit the traditional mold of the "jungfräulichen Heroinen und Philosophinnen". An analysis of Emilia Galotti with a view toward determining the causes of tragedy can therefore not proceed with Emilia's character as its starting point, but must look at those factors which determine the manner in which she acts; or, if we do take Emilia's character as point of departure, it must be with the understanding that the very essence of this character is its susceptibility to influences beyond its own control, a feature which expresses itself in the ambiguity and contradiction of Emilia's actions. It is in the sense that Emilia absorbs within herself and reflects faithfully in her actions the conflicting forces at work around and in her, which are beyond the control of her will, that she becomes central to the play, i.e., in a sense almost opposite to that which is attributed to the concept of the tragic hero. To examine Emilia's character, therefore, means that one examines the factors

²⁴ Lessing, Werke, IX, 497-98.

which determine it, and to identify the conflict within her which leads to tragedy means that one identifies the basic poles of the problem confronted by the bourgeois in this drama, and through it, by those in the audience.

Among the most important, certainly the most immediate, of the determining influences in Emilia's life are her parents, Odoardo and Claudia. The fundamental feature of the child-parent relationship is one of obedience to authority, a trait also evident in the relations between Sara and her father. Emilia herself acknowledges this fact toward her mother: "Nun ja, meine Mutter! Ich habe keinen Willen gegen den Ihrigen." (II,vi) The provocation of her father into killing her (V,viii) rather than committing the act of her own responsibility also confirms the importance which parental authority holds for her.

Yet beyond instilling in their daughter that sense of authority characteristic of the patriarchal family system, the influence of Odoardo and Claudia upon Emilia is more differentiated, indeed, contradictory. In the measure that it is so, we can therefore see in Emilia's parents some of the sources for the conflicts and dilemmas she must face.

Immediately apparent, when looking at Odoardo, is that in this play he most perfectly represents the "Halsstarrigkeit der Tugend"; both Claudia and Gonzaga characterize him in this way (II,v and I,iv, respectively). Together with Marinelli, he is the character in this drama least affected by the fragmented norm: he is true to himself to the last in defending his own view of "Tugend" as is Marinelli in perpetrating what the audience

would have classified as "Laster". By the yardstick with which bourgeois ethics measured the performance of a family head, Odoardo is in many ways exemplary: authoritative, honest, independent, and tolerant at least to the extent of allowing wife and child, against his own better judgement, to live in Guastalla, and thus, in the vicinity of Gonzaga's court (II,iv). Odoardo, fully aware of the decadence of this court, engages in a struggle without quarter to protect, even insulate, his family from its influence. Odoardo constantly exhorts his wife to be vigilant: even one step is enough to bring disaster upon them all (II,ii).

For Odoardo it is this court which represents the greatest threat to what he perceives as the virtuous life, and his efforts to live according to the precepts of "Tugend" are therefore in large measure determined by the need to place distance, geographic and otherwise, between himself and everything which the court represents. Against the court, a place characterized by " . . . das Geräusch und die Zerstreung der Welt. . .", where one is forced to "sich bücken, schmeicheln und kriechen . . ." Odoardo holds up the ideal of a withdrawn and private practice of virtue (II,iv). Accordingly, he retires to his property in the country, Sabionetta.

Before Odoardo's "strenge Tugend" (II,iv) everything, including wife and child, takes on secondary importance. Appiani, Emilia's prospective husband, is seen with favour not because he appears capable of making her happy, but because he embodies the same austere virtues as Odoardo (II,iv) and, thus, can be expected

to take on the protective role played by the father to this point. The prince, in turn, is seen with disfavour despite, or perhaps because of the agreeable interchange between him and Emilia at Grimaldi's vegghia: "Ein Wollüstling, der bewundert, begehrt." (II,iv) Emilia, for her part, is seen not so much as an individual in her own right, but as an extension of Odoardo and of his moral ideal; she therefore becomes simply " . . . der Ort, wo ich am tödlichsten zu verwunden bin!" (II,iv)

Claudia, Odoardo's spouse, is not exempted from the effects of her husband's puritanism and she clearly sees the negative consequences it may bear:

Ha, du kennest deinen Vater nicht! In seinem Zorne
hätt er den unschuldigen Gegenstand des Verbrechens
mit dem Verbrecher verwechselt. In seiner Wut hätt
ich ihm geschienen, das veranlaßt zu haben, was ich
weder verhindern noch vorhersehen können. (II,vi)

In particular, it is Odoardo's decision to move to Sabionetta which does not sit well with Claudia. This feeling is so strong that, even against his express wish, she and her child choose to remain in Guastalla.

Although ostensibly to provide Emilia with a suitable education, the resolve to stay in Guastalla obviously is also made with a view toward participating in the social life of the city in a more ample way. Moreover, it is only in a more sociable setting than Sabionetta that Emilia can find an appropriate marriage partner. As even Odoardo admits, events have proven Claudia's decision to be correct, at least in this respect (II,iv).

As indicated by her resolve to remain in Guastalla - and by Claudia's small dishonesty toward Odoardo when explaining her motives for doing so - the concept and practice of "Tugend" held by Claudia differ from those of Odoardo, even if not qualitatively. Thus, in II,v, where Claudia vents her frustration over the intransigence of her husband:

Welch ein Mann! - Oh, der rauhen Tugend! - wenn anders sie diesen Namen verdienet. - Alles scheint ihr verdächtig, alles strafbar! - Oder, wenn das die Menschen kennen heißt: - wer sollte sich wünschen sie zu kennen? (II,v)

Claudia's attitude toward life and her fellow (wo)men is more flexible than that of Odoardo, for whom everything is determined by the preservative striving to maintain a moral ideal. Thus, while Odoardo, upon hearing of the acquaintance between Emilia and Gonzaga at Grimaldi's vegghia, immediately imputes the worst possible motives for the prince's behaviour, Claudia is more generous: ". . . folglich, wenn er ein Auge für die Tochter hat, so ist es einzig, um ihn Odoardo zu beschimpfen? -" (II,v) Claudia, although aware of all the issues which separate Odoardo and Gonzaga - social status, their dispute over Sabionetta (I,iv), the different moral conceptions - here indicates her belief that communication and understanding between the two should nevertheless be possible on the level of the humane ("allgemein menschlich").

What is not entirely clear, however, is the extent to which Claudia's belief in such a possibility results from a more humane conception of "Tugend" than that which Odoardo holds, and the

extent to which it is motivated by selfish reasons. As has already been shown, the motive for remaining in Guastalla given to Odoardo, even though not untrue in itself, is incomplete, and Odoardo suspects as much:

. . . daß es mehr das Geräusch und die Zerstreung der Welt, mehr die Nähe des Hofes war als die Notwendigkeit, unserer Tochter eine anständige Erziehung zu geben, was dich bewog, hier in der Stadt mit ihr zu bleiben . . . (II,iv)

For Claudia, to whom the upper social circles of Guastalla would otherwise be closed, Emilia represents a means by which she can gain access to them. Mehring therefore describes Claudia as a woman " . . . der bei aller sonstigen Bravheit doch der leise Stich der bürgerlichen Hausmutter ins Kupplerische nicht fehlt."²⁵ And indeed, Claudia's attitude toward her daughter's acquaintance with Gonzaga at the vegghia is one of tacit approval (II,v) rather than disapproval; this attitude is not fundamentally altered even after the episode in church (II,vi), where Claudia is concerned less with the possible negative implications of the incident itself, as with calming Emilia's fears and with making sure that Appiani and Odoardo should not hear about it. Marinelli, for his part, believes that " . . . so etwas von einer Schwiegermutter eines Prinzen zu sein, schmeichelt die meisten," (III,vi) a judgement which is exaggerated and especially untrue after Claudia learns of the facts behind Appiani's murder, but which nevertheless contains a grain of

²⁵ Mehring, Die Lessing Legende, p. 493.

truth in regard to Claudia's motives.

The difference between Odoardo and Claudia, thus, is essentially a difference in the conception of "Tugend"; or rather, it is a difference of emphasis on varying aspects which are included in the concept of "Tugend". Essentially, this concept can be conceived of simultaneously as an indissoluble and as a contradictory entity, the main constituting elements of which are a belief in the independence and autonomy of the individual, and a belief that human solidarity is possible only as a result of the recognition of this fact. Both of these aspects mutually determine each other and, taken as a unit within which the contradiction between them expresses itself in a more or less intense way, define the specific character of "Tugend" in a given situation, or as held by a certain individual. While for Odoardo virtue represents a fixed ideal of such purity that the individual can only hope to assert it by isolating himself from the frivolous and decadent life of urban and courtly society, Claudia maintains a more flexible attitude, which considers virtue not simply as a paradox to free social intercourse. As she points out to Emilia: "Wir sind Menschen, Emilia. Die Gabe zu beten ist nicht immer in unserer Gewalt. Dem Himmel ist beten wollen auch beten." (II,vi) (Emphasis added.)

This differential view of "Tugend" and the consequently contradictory attitude toward society, where it is simultaneously something from which one withdraws and something to which one is drawn, is reproduced in Emilia where, magnified by her own

inexperience, the weight of parental authority, and the feeling of her own sensual nature, it acquires the intensity of a conflict with fatal consequences. If, in her commitment to a moral ideal, opposed to that of the court, she most clearly resembles her father, it is through a more natural and less stiff attitude toward her fellow (wo)man that she is attracted to the rich social life of Guastalla, and in this she shows similarity to her mother. Where Odoardo is lavish in his praise of Appiani, a man similar to himself in the austerity of his virtue, Emilia limits herself to ". . . mein guter Appiani" (II,vi) - a great difference, for example, to the effusions of love Sara lavishes on the much less "guter" Mellefont. In contrast to Appiani's ceremonious and convoluted manner ("So feierlich? So ernsthaft?" II,vii), her own is natural and free (" . . . fliegend und frei -" II,vii). Appropriately, it is the rose which serves as a symbol for Emilia's vitality and natural "Lebenshaltung" on the occasion of her wedding preparations (II,vii), as well as in the hour of her death (V,vii).

Yet while the basic features of her parents are reproduced in Emilia, they do not of themselves appear to cause a conflict, either within her or between herself and her surroundings. Despite the parallels in temperament between Appiani and Odoardo, Emilia and Claudia, the relationship between the two young people can not be considered to be hostile; at the most, one might describe it as formal, or indifferent. In this there is also a certain resemblance to the relationship between Odoardo and Claudia, a relationship in which tension exists but which is

not strong enough to approach the breaking point.

The factor which does in fact make the tension between the two main sides of Emilia's nature problematic, by tipping the scale further toward that part of her which is humane, sociable, and close to nature, is the feeling of her own sensuality. If there is one aspect of Emilia's person in which she stands apart from her parents, it is the role of the senses and the power which they have over her, an aspect related not to any psychological or sociological influences, but which results quite simply from a particular stage in the natural physical development of any healthy human being: "Ich habe Blut, mein Vater, so jugendliches, so warmes Blut als eine. Auch meine Sinne sind Sinne." (V,vii)

It is the strength of her natural inclinations, closely linked to her aspiration of leading a life which is more humane, less austere, and socially more amenable than what Sabionetta can offer, which conflicts with Emilia's commitment to moral purity, a commitment reinforced by the authority of her father. The consequences of this conflict are the contradictory and ambiguous reactions of Emilia, throughout the drama.

The most obvious example of such a situation is the episode depicted in II,vi in which Emilia herself admits: "Nie hätte meine Andacht inniger, brünstiger sein sollen als heute: nie ist sie weniger gewesen was sie sein sollte." (II,vi) When identifying to her mother the prince as the person who interrupted her devotions, Emilia uses the exclamatory yet anonymous "Ihn selbst" (II,vi) in an apparent allusion to whatever favourable

impression Gonzaga seems to have made on her during their previous encounter at Grimaldi's house. Yet in the same confession the prince is also described as " . . . fremdes Laster welches uns, wider unsern Willen, zu Mitschuldigen machen kann!" (II,vi) The overall impression of Emilia conveyed by her reaction to this episode is that of an inexperienced girl ("Du bist die unbedeutende Sprache der Galanterie zu wenig gewohnt." II,vi) who, when confronted by a situation where deep religious convictions are swept aside by equally powerful feelings - and that through the agency of someone she appears to have held in some regard -, is incapable, or prevented from, asserting either of the forces which move her, and who therefore can only seek a solution in flight. Emilia herself formulates her dilemma as follows:

Ich habe Blut, mein Vater, so jugendliches, so warmes Blut als eine. Auch meine Sinne sind Sinne. Ich stehe für nichts. Ich bin für nichts gut. Ich kenne das Haus der Grimaldi. Es ist das Haus der Freude. Eine Stunde da, unter den Augen meiner Mutter - und es erhob sich so mancher Tumult in meiner Seele, den die strengsten Übungen der Religion kaum in Wochen besänftigen konnten! (V,vii)

If the incident in church, and Emilia's reaction to it, convey to the audience a sense of the difficulties and conflicts created for her by her deep commitment to moral purity on the one hand, and her humanity and sensual nature on the other - a conflict derived from and exacerbated by her particular family circumstances, as has been shown -, it is nevertheless clear that the circumstances of this particular episode are not sufficient in order to precipitate tragedy. It is a situation

in which virtue and sensuality are as yet not confronted in a way that they are mutually exclusive: Emilia still has the possibility of flight. What ultimately leads to a situation in which they become mutually exclusive is Emilia's relationship to prince Gonzaga, the ruler of Guastalla.

The evidence for Emilia's sensual nature (in II,vi and V,vii) and the indication of a mutually satisfying acquaintance during Grimaldi's vegghia (in II,vi, as has already been shown) has led a number of critics, among them Goethe, to suggest the view that Emilia is secretly in love with the prince, and that this is the real reason why she is unable to resist his advances. In a similar vein, Durzak perceives in Emilia's reticence, when dealing with the prince, an indication of her love for him; thus, her death is an expiation of guilt for having caused Appiani's demise as a consequence of this attraction.²⁶ The motive for interpretations of this sort is the attempt to explain the cause of tragedy from within the framework of the traditional rules of Aristotelian drama: Emilia, being the heroine of the play, must in some sense be found "guilty" of having contributed to or caused her tragic demise.

While the passages in question can be used as a base for such an interpretation, a number of objections appear to be warranted, which put into question the validity of such an interpretation. From a reading of the text itself the conclusion

²⁶ Manfred Durzak, "Das Gesellschaftsbild in Lessings 'Emilia Galotti,'" in his Poesie und Ratio, (Bad Hamburg v.d.H.: Athenäum, 1970), p. 69.

that Emilia loves Gonzaga is not obvious; all the instances which are taken as proof for such a love can also be interpreted to contain different meanings. Emilia's inability to resist Gonzaga does not necessarily imply that she secretly loves him, but can mean simply that she feels incapable of controlling, by means of her will, the demands of her sensuality when placed in a situation where all avenues of escape are cut off. The pertinent passage in V,vii identifies her "Sinne" and her "warmes Blut", not the prince, as that which has power over her. Emilia's statement: "Verführung ist die wahre Gewalt" (V,vii) denotes a situation characterized by coercion rather than by voluntary participation, and can therefore not be taken as a hidden confession of love since such a sentiment, although to a great extent determined by feelings, is at least in part also an act of will. "Verführung" is seen by Emilia as something negative, something which is deemed unacceptable not because it represents an exploitive relationship, where the weakness of one individual (Emilia's incapacity to control or subdue her sensuality) is used to the advantage of another. Sensuality, in such a context, rather than promoting solidarity between individuals because they are equally human, becomes a factor which divides them.

More important is the exclamatory "Ihn selbst" (II,vi), which, spoken in the context of the understanding which exists between mother and child, appears to indicate an attraction between Emilia and the prince. But if it does allude to an attraction she feels for him - or may have felt on the occasion

where she first met him -, it falls short of proving that this attraction is emotional in nature or that she loves the prince. Again, referring to the relevant passage in V,vii, it is clear that the object of Emilia's aroused senses is not the prince, but "das Haus der Grimaldi".²⁷ If the passage (II,vi) as a whole at all conveys the impression of a deep attraction of Emilia to the prince, it does so because of Claudia's evident hopes that there should be such an attraction, i.e., her reluctance in condemning the prince's behaviour and of telling Appiani and Odoardo about the incident.

But even if the evidence examined so far can nevertheless be taken as proof of Emilia's love for Gonzaga, if one holds this hypothesis a priori, there would appear to be instances in the play which indicate the opposite of love. Looking at all the episodes in which Emilia meets Gonzaga, we find that only one - that in Grimaldi's residence - indicates a positive attitude of Emilia to the prince. As for the episode in church: Emilia's reaction is to take flight even when already in the street and no longer in the sanctuary. Her exclamation, "Ihn selbst" describes the feelings of someone who is dismayed

²⁷ Alois Wierlacher, in an article dealing with the passage concerning the "Haus der Freude" (V,vii), shows that Emilia's explanations regarding this house and her "jugendliches Blut" do not necessarily imply an attraction between her and Gonzaga, but can be taken to indicate a desire in her to participate more actively in the life of society and to assert the measure of independence which is natural to someone who is young and therefore filled with vitality and expectations. Alois Wierlacher, "Das Haus der Freude oder warum stirbt Emilia Galotti?" LY, 5 (1973), 147-62.

over the behaviour of a person whom she had regarded with favour, or at least respect, in the past. Significant also, is the moment in which Emilia meets Gonzaga after having been "rescued", in III,v: it is a point when Emilia still believes to have been rescued by Gonzaga from highwaymen, and she is as yet unaware of Appiani's death. At the very least, if Lessing had intended Emilia to love Gonzaga, we would find an indication of it at this point: they are alone (or will be, shortly), Emilia should feel indebted to Gonzaga for "saving" her, it is her last chance of talking to him before being married off to Appiani. Her reaction, however, on hearing that it is Gonzaga who has "saved" her is "äußerst bestürzt" (II,iv) and indicates suspicion as to his motives, as he himself perceives: "Nur kränke mich nicht Ihr Mißtrauen" (III,v), so that she follows him " . . . nicht ohne Sträuben . . . " (III,v) into his private quarters. Finally, the statement: "Verführung ist die wahre Gewalt" (V,vii) is made in a situation where Emilia's choices have been reduced to either surrendering herself to Gonzaga's caprice, or to escaping from the dilemma through death.

From the dramaturgical side, the question of Emilia's love for Gonzaga as tragic flaw also is problematic. Even if Emilia loves the prince, or is attracted to him in a sensual way, it would seem incorrect to regard this as a tragic flaw sufficient to bring on tragedy, unless one regards sensuality or love themselves to be "flaws" of the human personality which must be blamed for the hardships they impose on the bearer.

And it is not sensuality itself which Emilia regards as the source of her problems: it is "Verführung", a situation in which sensuality is misused.

But even if a speculative secret love of Emilia to Gonzaga should be granted, a love imputing a certain guilt upon Emilia because it betrays the relationship she ostensibly has with Appiani: can this be taken as sufficient cause to warrant her death? We may recall Mellefont's words, spoken in a similar situation as the one envisioned here, which seem to summarize Lessing's view on the matter:

. . . muß der, welcher tugendhaft sein soll, keinen Fehler begangen haben? Hat ein einziger so unselige Wirkungen, daß er eine ganze Reihe unsträflicher Jahre vernichten kann: so ist kein Mensch tugendhaft; so ist die Tugend ein Gespenst, das in der Luft zerfließet, wenn man es am festesten umarmt zu haben glaubt; so hat kein weises Wesen unsere Pflichten nach unseren Kräften abgemessen . . . (I,vii, Miss Sara Sampson)

Finally, while assuming that Emilia loves the prince may constitute a convenient explanation for the necessity of her death because it operates in accordance with the traditional rules of the tragedy, and because it appears to bridge the gap between Emilia the naive country girl and Emilia the heroic martyr, the tenuousness and paucity of evidence for such a love contradicts one of Lessing's own dramaturgical rules:

Das Genie können nur Begebenheiten beschäftigen, die in einander gegründet sind, nur Ketten von Ursachen und Wirkungen. Diese auf jene zurück zu führen, jene gegen diese abzuwägen, überall das Ungefähr auszuschließen, alles, was geschieht, so geschehen lassen, daß es nicht anders geschehen können: das,

das ist seine Sache, wenn es in dem Felde der Geschichte arbeitet, um die unnützen Schätze des Gedächtnisses in Nahrungen des Geistes zu verwandeln.²⁸

But if Emilia does not love Gonzaga, if her attraction to him is not of the sort that it constitutes a tragic flaw: in what sense, then, does her relationship to him become problematic to the point that she chooses to die out of fear of her own sensuality? What is it about Gonzaga which attracts her to him - indeed, what is the nature of this attraction, if it is not love -, and what is it which makes him repulsive to her so that she must fear becoming a victim of "Verführung"? A closer look at Hettore Gonzaga and at his relationship to Emilia may furnish an answer.

Similar to many of Lessing's characters, Gonzaga presents the picture of an equivocal and contradictory personality. In him it is the "Privatmensch" which stands in conflict with the feudal lord, the ruler and public person responsible for maintaining a dynasty. This conflict is not an unconscious one; on several occasions Gonzaga deplores the situation he finds himself in, complaining about the hardships of government and longing for the simplicity and independence, as he sees it, of the bourgeois. Rather than being free to follow the lead of the heart, he must marry in order to safeguard political interests (I,vi). The social privileges bestowed on him by virtue of his position leave him unimpressed: "Mit euren

²⁸ Lessing, Werke, VI, 155-56.

ersten Häusern! - in welchen das Zeremoniell, der Zwang, die Langeweile und nicht selten die Dürftigkeit herrscht." (I,vi)
In response to Marinelli's snobbish remarks regarding the engagement of Appiani to a woman of common origin, he manifests a certain envy: "Wer sich den Eindrücken, die Unschuld und Schönheit auf ihn machen, ohne weitere Rücksicht, so ganz überlassen darf - ich dünkte, der wäre eher zu beneiden als zu belachen." (I,vi)

Gonzaga is a man who envies and admires the virtues and freedoms of the middle class, and who aspires to attain them himself as much as possible. The opinion he has of Appiani is remarkably similar to that which Odoardo holds: ". . . ein sehr würdiger junger Mann, ein schöner Mann, ein reicher Mann, ein Mann voller Ehre. Ich hätte sehr gewünscht, ihn mir verbinden zu können." (I,vi) As for Odoardo, he is respected and admired, even though not regarded with affection: "Er ist mein Freund nicht. Er war es, der sich meinen Ansprüchen auf Sabionetta am meisten widersetzte. - Ein alter Degen, stolz und rauh, sonst bieder und gut! -" (I,iv) In V,v Gonzaga goes as far as wishing that "O Galotti, wenn Sie mein Freund, mein Führer, mein Vater sein wollten!" (V,v)

The admiration and envy which Gonzaga feels for the bourgeois lifestyle and moral values is reflected, to a certain extent, in his own behaviour. The quality of his actions and, especially, his speech, is devoid of the stilted and convoluted formalism which one might expect to find in the dealings between the supreme ruler of a country and his subjects. His behaviour

is generally informal and natural, contrasting with that of Appiani who, although very much a bourgeois in the sense of embodying the ideal of independence and private virtue, is more inclined to austere and formal behaviour in his dealings with others. In a manner very similar to that of Claudia, Gonzaga appears to believe in the importance of the humane as an equalizing factor between human beings. Not surprisingly, therefore, it is the qualities of " . . . Tugend und Gefühl und Witz . . . " (I,vi) which make Emilia so attractive to Gonzaga, even though a sensual attraction is also evident: "Dieses Auge voll Liebreiz und Bescheidenheit! Dieser Mund! - Und wenn er sich zum Reden öffnet! wenn er lächelt! Dieser Mund! -" (I,v)

But if it is Emilia's virtue and her natural and simple manner which make her attractive to Gonzaga, it appears that it is this same quality of "Natürlichkeit" and humanity which also evoke sympathy within Emilia for Gonzaga. Although Emilia never once states what is the nature of her positive feelings for Gonzaga, we may infer from what has so far been shown to be her character, that it is on the level of the humane, of that which allows empathy between people of diverse social status and origins, that a positive correspondence between Emilia and Gonzaga takes place. It is also in the context of this type of a relationship that Emilia's confused and shocked reaction to the prince's disrespectful behaviour in II,vi (admitted by himself as such in I,iv) must be understood; as has already been stated, this is the reaction of a person who is dismayed and perturbed

by the actions of someone whom she has until this point regarded with some esteem.

The question which then poses itself, is that of why Gonzaga, if he admires bourgeois virtues and believes in the validity of the humane as common denominator of interpersonal relations, nevertheless takes a course of action which, rather than serving to establish fraternal ties between himself and Emilia - regardless of whether she gets married or not -, only succeeds in alienating her more and more from him until events finally culminate in her death. The answer lies in that other, more powerful aspect of Gonzaga's being, that which is related to his existence as feudal lord and absolute ruler of Guastalla. Ultimately, no matter what Gonzaga's feelings about humanity may be, it is Emilia's, and especially his position within the class system characterized in Emilia Galotti, which determines the nature of human relations. Thus, despite his apparent high regard for Emilia, it is clear from the outset that she will never occupy a place better than that of mistress (e.g., Gonzaga's words regarding "einer neuen Geliebten" in I,vi), since, if he wishes to maintain the political integrity of his realm, he must marry the princess of Massa.

Yet the problem of adherence to a certain social class does not simply operate on an objective level in the sense of preventing humane relations between people who are attracted to each other. In a much more insidious manner, it shapes and forms the subjectively held values and modes of behaviour of someone who is a member of that class. Hettore Gonzaga is an autocrat;

in a very real sense he represents the state, uniting within his person all its legislative, executive, and judiciary functions. Consequently, he is accustomed to getting what he wants; and it is this feature which ultimately determines and motivates his dealings with Emilia, from the interruption of her devotions (II,vi); to the tacit approval of the ambush at Dosalo, rather than the prosecution of Marinelli (IV,i); to the active participation in planning an injustice against Odoardo and Emilia by removing her to Grimaldi's house (V,v), the prospect of which is what provides the final impulse for Emilia's death.

Whether Gonzaga likes it or not, the subjective and objective barriers placed on him by his position within the context of feudal class society prevent him from ever relating to either Emilia, Appiani, or Odoardo on that level of humanity which he admires and desires. Thus, it is the fact that Gonzaga is prince, and Emilia his subject, which ultimately leads to circumstances where Emilia's sensuality, her humanity, and her virtue combine to create a dilemma from which she can only escape through death. The inequality of social classes, the subordination of the bourgeois to the feudal state, is more powerful than the equality which exists at the human, individual level. For Gonzaga to attain the desired relationship to Emilia, he must either cease to be prince of Guastalla, both subjectively and objectively, or the entire system of classes must disappear - neither of which possibilities are posed in Emilia Galotti.

But the problem of two counterposed social classes manifests

itself in yet more complex ways. It also must be blamed, to a large extent, for that other factor from which spring the sources of tragedy, namely the differences between Claudia and Odoardo. As has already been shown previously, the different emphasis which Claudia and Odoardo place on "Tugend", is determined largely by their respective attitude toward the court. Where Odoardo, due to his differences with Gonzaga and the courtly lifestyle, takes an antagonistic stance, Claudia, because of her hopes for Emilia's future and her more humane attitude, is more generous and conciliatory. Were it not for the court, therefore, it is likely that the rift between Claudia and Odoardo would not have developed, their small differences of emphasis would not have taken on tragic dimensions.

To be sure, none of the characters involved in this tragedy are "perfect", they all display weaknesses: Odoardo's stubbornness, Claudia's dishonesty and attraction to the frivolity of high society, Emilia's belief that her sensuality constitutes something which can be dealt with only through flight. But these are normal human weaknesses which of themselves, or even taken together, are incapable of provoking tragedy. It is only when they are refracted through the prism of feudal class relations that they acquire tragic dimensions, and it is only by setting the events of this tragedy against the background of the current system of class relations, with all its subjective and objective implications, that the portrayal of these human shortcomings acquires that causal coherence which Lessing

considered essential for the "bürgerliche Trauerspiel."²⁹

Yet it is also precisely because of the maintenance of this causal and historical realism that the whole concept of "human weakness" or tragic flaw becomes problematic. For, if the social and social-psychological causes behind a character's behaviour are stated, the traditional terminology of the tragedy, revolving around concepts such as guilt, heroism, etc. - concepts taken from the traditional tragedy in which the individual is confronted by inscrutable fate -, becomes obsolete. The object of the bourgeois tragedy is to portray the bourgeois, that is, the "ordinary citizen", on stage; at the same time it seeks to place him in that position previously occupied by heroes and demi-gods: the contradiction is evident. Stated another way:

. . . im bürgerlichen Trauerspiel behauptet sich das untragische Weltbild des Bürgertums der Aufklärung, so daß sich die Gattung als insgesamt eher fragwürdiger Kompromiß zwischen ästhetischer Konvention, der die

²⁹ Ernest L. Stahl also points out this causality, although for him its ultimate causes are individual human shortcomings:

Keine der dargestellten Projekte, auch nicht die der lautersten, gelingen, oder gelingen so wie sie geplant wurden, denn es sind menschliche Fehler und Schwächen und nicht die Souveränität des freien Willens, die ihnen die wahre Richtung gaben. Auch kann man bei Lessings "Emilia Galotti" nicht von einer Fatalität der Ereignisse im Sinne der Schicksalstragödie reden. Es handelt sich durchgängig, trotz der Häufung scheinbarer Zufälligkeiten, um die Vereitelung menschlicher Anschläge und Vorkehrungen, bis die ungeheuerliche Tat geschieht, die wohl vorbereitet, aber überraschend das ganze Gewebe von Intrige und Verschwörung zerreißt. In dieser Weise schmiedete Lessing jene Kette von Ursache und Wirkung, die er als die wahre Leistung des dramatischen Genies anerkannte.

Tragödie als die neben dem Epos ranghöchste Form galt, und pragmatisch-untragischer Weltanschauung darstellt.³⁰

It is this contradictory character of the "bürgerliche Trauerspiel" which is reflected in, or reflects on the character of Emilia in this play. From it flows the problem of reconciling Emilia, the ordinary, simple, and natural girl known to the audience from its own midst, with Emilia as she takes on heroic proportions in trying to preserve the ideal of virtue and a humane sensuality.³¹ It is this contradiction also, which provides the source of those ambiguous attempts to determine her "guilt", some of which have been examined more closely, and of those which see in Emilia Galotti a simple parable on the paradox between good and evil, "Tugend" and "Laster".³²

But the source, in turn, of the contradictions inherent in the structure of the "bürgerliche Trauerspiel" and in the character of Emilia, can be found in the relationship between

Ernest L. Stahl, "Emilia Galotti," in Das deutsche Drama, ed. Benno von Wiese (Düsseldorf: Bagel, 1958), I, 112.

³⁰ Müller, "Das Erbe der Komödie," p. 53.

³¹ Mehring, Die Lessing-Legende, p. 492.

³² For example, the interpretations of Henry Hatfield, "Emilia's Guilt once more," Modern Language Notes, 71 (1972), 287-96; Harry Steinhauer, "The Guilt of Emilia Galotti," Journal of English and German Philology, 48 (1949), 173-85; Ilse Graham, "Geist ohne Medium. Zu Lessings 'Emilia Galotti'", in Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, ed. Gerhard and Sibylle Bauer (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1968), pp. 362-75; Gerd Labrousse, "Emilia Galottis Wollen und Sollen," Neophilologus, 56 (1972), 311-23; and Benno von Wiese, Lessing bis Hebbel, p. 51 ff.

this drama - in its form as well as in its content - and the historical epoch which it reflects. To quote Mehring once more: "Tragisch läßt sich also der Ausgang der 'Emilia' nicht rechtfertigen, aber nur deshalb nicht, weil er sich historisch nur allzugut rechtfertigen läßt."³³

The ambiguity of the dramatic genre chosen by Lessing to portray those social circumstances depicted in Emilia Galotti, and the ambiguity of its principal character, Emilia, who must be both heroic, in accordance with dramaturgical tradition, and "normal", in order to be realistic, thus reflects that ambiguity of the bourgeoisie, as social class, which has already been described in Chapter I of this study. Lessing, in commenting on Emilia Galotti, stated that:

Sein jetziges Sujet ist eine bürgerliche Virginia, der er den Titel Emilia Galotti gegeben. Er hat nehmlich die Geschichte der römischen Virginia von allem dem abgesondert, was sie für den ganzen Staat interessant machte; er hat geglaubt, daß das Schicksal einer Tochter, die von ihrem Vater umgebracht wird, dem ihre Tugend werther ist, als ihr Leben, für sich schon tragisch genug und fähig genug sey, die ganze Seele zu erschüttern, wenn auch gleich kein Umsturz der ganzen Staatsverfassung darauf erfolgte.³⁴

A number of conclusions can be drawn from this passage. First, that it is the depiction of the private rather than public, or political sphere which most adequately expresses the outlook and experience of a bourgeois audience. Thus, the confrontation

³³ Mehring, Die Lessing-Legende, p. 490.

³⁴ Lessing, Werke, IX, 157.

between the prince and the Galottis takes place in the privacy of Dosalo rather than in the marketplace of Guastalla; the conflict between the ruling aristocracy and its bourgeois subjects takes place on an individual basis, between Odoardo and Gonzaga, between Gonzaga and Emilia, between Appiani and Marinelli. Second, it is recognized by Lessing, that by taking the Virginia story and placing it in the context of the private, the political/revolutionary consequences depicted in that story become unrealistic.

And indeed, as we have seen, the moral heroism and "Tugend" of the Galottis - even the humane features of Gonzaga's personality - , do not suffice to overcome the barriers placed between them by conflicting class interests and values. The private, individual, and humane, counterposed to the political power of uninhibited autocracy, is shown to be incapable of being an alternative to that power: at the end of the play Emilia has succeeded in preserving "Tugend" but the cost has been paid only by herself (and her family) and nothing has been gained in return, it is a pyrrhic victory.

The ambiguity of the bourgeoisie in this tragedy, therefore, is constituted, on the one hand, by its aspirations to equality on the level of the humane and private between persons of all classes, and its incapacity, because of the very nature of this ideal - private rather than political - , to act as a class, in its own interest, vis-à-vis the ruling class of feudal lords. In the contradictory nature of Emilia Galotti, in its form as in its content, Lessing is calling attention to this fact, and

in doing so, the contradictory nature of the "bürgerliches Trauerspiel" no longer represents merely a hybrid genre in the history of literature, but is made productive in the interest of enlightenment. In this sense also, it is a play which, notwithstanding the above quote, is eminently political. Thus, Klaus-Detlef Müller states that

. . . Lessing das scheinbar Private der Familien-tragödie als das zeitgemäße Politische ansah. Dieses wäre dann inhaltlich so zu fassen, daß in der Gegenwart eine Tat folgenlos bleibt, die unter anderen Umständen zum Aufstand des Volkes gegen den Mißbrauch der Macht geführt hat. Der durch den Vergleich provozierte Hinweis auf die Folgenlosigkeit wäre der politische Gehalt des Dramas: er ist Aufklärung und Anklage zugleich. . . . Der Fürstenmord würde zwar die Geschlossenheit des ästhetischen Gebildes herstellen, er würde aber damit zugleich den Realitätsbezug aufheben. Er wäre ja auch insofern eine ästhetische Scheinlösung, als er das politische Problem in die Ebene individueller Sittlichkeit verlagerte. Schließlich ist das Verbrechen mindestens ebenso sehr in den Verhältnissen des Staats wie im persönlichen Verfehlen des Prinzen begründet: es kann deshalb nicht auf der individuellen Ebene wirklich gesühnt werden.³⁵

This cannot, however, be taken to imply that Lessing is agitating for a republican revolution in Emilia Galotti. The play is not a political pamphlet but a work of art which indirectly suggests the necessity of political action. Schulte-Sasse points out that "Der im literarischen Modell eingefangene Pessimismus signalisiert revolutionäres Bewußtsein in statu nascendi."³⁶ The first republican revolution on the European continent took place in France, in 1789, and in

³⁵ Müller, "Das Erbe der Komödie," pp. 58-59.

³⁶ Schulte-Sasse, Literarische Struktur, p. 74.

conditions much more favorable to such a development than existed in Germany during, and after Lessings time. Thus, while the experience of this and subsequent revolutions defines for us the meaning of that term today, it would be ahistorical to credit Lessing with a precise conception of what must happen, in political terms, in order that such conditions might come about in which the ideal of humanity and virtue might flourish.

To cite Schulte-Sasse again: "Lessing ist Autor einer Übergangszeit, in der alte Denkweisen brüchig und neue ertastet werden und für die die 'Emilia Galotti' eines der charakteristischsten Zeugnisse ist."³⁷ This historical stage of transition is depicted in Emilia Galotti by the break-down of the private and individualistic ethic which presumes to exist independently of broad social relationships, either by withdrawing from them or by ignoring their true nature. In the context of a society which is recognized as an integral and complex process, both the "Halsstarrigkeit der Tugend" and the autocratic state are shown to be obstacles to the unfolding of the Enlightenment ideal of a rational and humane ethic.

From our analysis of the tragedies, we may therefore come to the following conclusions. Both Lessing's view of causation and the corresponding dramatic techniques, the fragmented norm, indicate that the human predicament - the conflict between social norms and the individual's quest for freedom - flow from concrete

³⁷ Schulte-Sasse, Literarische Struktur, p. 88.

and social circumstances rather than from subjective or metaphysical ones. There is no fundamental "flaw" in the universe or in human nature which condemns man to eternal frustration and unhappiness. Man is "unglücklich", not "lasterhaft", and he can therefore hope for relief.

This theme is made increasingly clear from one tragedy to the next. In the Henzi fragment the problem of individual emancipation and oppressive social norms is posited almost as a problem in logic, and a solution is not indicated. In Miss Sara Sampson, Lessing gives the issue greater depth by showing the relatedness of the individual's dilemma to social circumstances; here already, a hope that the future will bring a resolution is shown. In Emilia Galotti, by contrast, Lessing identifies the most fundamental obstacle to the individual's self-realization, class society itself, and by posing the problem, he indirectly also points in the direction where this problem must be solved, i.e., the necessity of a class-less society. Precisely because at certain moments in history there exists a sharp discrepancy between the real and the ideal, between what the individual is and what he hopes to be, there is reason to suppose that he will eventually overcome this contradiction and fulfill the ambitions he has had.

The conflict between the ideal and the real, between the aspirations for self-determination and the existence of oppressive norms and values is identified by Lessing, in the tragedies as in the comedies, most clearly with the conflict of values which are associated with specific social classes. An exception to this

rule is the Henzi fragment, in which both Henzi and the city council belong to the patrician class of Bern. However, in Miss Sara Sampson already, class conflict is depicted as the invasion of a closely-knit bourgeois family by outsiders (Mellefont and Marwood) who belong to the courtly sphere and espouse its values. But while in Sara the identification of egocentrism and an irresponsible lifestyle with aristocratic values is as yet not strongly defined, it becomes explicit in Emilia, where an entire family falls victim to an oppressive class system. In the course of this conflict, the private virtue of the bourgeoisie shows its weakness in that, by transforming itself into its opposite of "Halsstarrigkeit", it prevents Odoardo and his family from defending themselves and others of their own class from the onslaughts of aristocratic caprice.

A second important set of relationships to determine and limit the process of human emancipation is that of the family. It can play both a positive and a negative role. It is supportive of the individual's struggle for self-determination when the parent-child relationship is substituted for a relationship of equals. The clearest example of this is Sara; initially, excessive parental authority becomes the cause of Sara's predicament, but this is corrected when Sir William recognizes Sara's right to make her own decisions and to express her feelings freely. By contrast, in Emilia the family plays a predominantly negative role. Emilia, because she is the daughter, is relegated to a submissive role in relation to her parents; thus, the differences between Odoardo and Claudia acquire great importance

in creating the dilemma she must face.

Indeed, the manner in which Lessing portrays the private world - family and friends - leaves us with the impression that he doubted its viability as the ultimate social unit which could assure the exercise of human freedom. The reasons for this have already been stated, namely, that although the circle of family and friends is portrayed as an ideal unit for social interaction and self-expression, it is also extremely vulnerable to destructive influences from outside, specifically those associated with the courts. Further, as Henzi clearly shows, allegiances based on humanity and fraternity easily become contradictory when faced with deeper social contradictions and responsibilities. The private world can therefore not play a dominant role in the advancement of a new social order, namely that in which each individual has the capacity and opportunity to exercise his own critical judgement in making moral choices and to follow the inclinations of his feelings. This weakness of the circle of family and friends in relation to the absolutist state is directly expressed in the "Halsstarrigkeit der Tugend", i.e., in the attempt to live according to an abstract and fixed idea of morality in the seclusion of a private idyll rather than constantly reformulating ethics through the daily experience of life in contact with all layers of society. However, even though Sara and Emilia show the bankruptcy of such a private morality, Lessing does not point to any other unit or sector of society through which the emancipative aspirations of the individual could be advanced. This again reflects accurately,

in accordance with Lessing's theory of literary realism, the state of the German bourgeoisie of his time, namely its total political impotence as a class, as well as the absence of any other social sector which might carry out the necessary struggle.

Ultimately, it is also necessary to consider the issue of the relations between the sexes and the limitations a stifling puritanism places on the individual's ability to lead a humane life in the Enlightenment sense of the word. The women in these tragedies, regardless of which class they belong to, are all victims, to a greater or lesser degree, of a restrictive code of ethics which demands their subservience in all matters to the whims and authority of men, yet which also calls for an untarnished reputation for purity and virtue on their part. To a great extent, it is this impossible moral demand which causes tragic consequences, as in the cases of Sara and Emilia, but at times it also brings with it the total rejection of virtue in the common sense, such as is the case with Marwood.

However, sexual oppression is not something which only the women in these plays suffer from. We can see the same problem also evident in the character of Mellefont, for whom the seduction and selfish enjoyment of women has been developed to a finely-honed art. In the course of this pursuit of pleasure, Mellefont has become aware of its shallowness and destructiveness, yet he is not capable of radically altering his mode of life and his values in adjustment to his insights. Part of the reason for this, as for almost all of the vices we have seen portrayed in the course of these plays, is the inevitable and specifically

historical clash of values which exists between social classes. It is not conceivable, from a realistic point of view, to see Mellefont, who has spent the better part of his youth with pleasure-seeking in the company of the likes of Marwood and other courtly socialites, change his behaviour and outlook the moment he meets Sara. What is likely, and what indeed happens, is that a conflict arises in him, a conflict which shows him exactly the depths of depravity to which he has fallen, yet which does not enable him to rise beyond them. He is as much a victim of oppressive sexual values as is Sara.

Sexual discrimination and restrictive sexual norms of behaviour, although specific to certain classes in their concrete forms, exist in all classes. For the aristocracy they mean a licence to outright sexual exploitation, as the examples of Mellefont and Gonzaga attest, while for the bourgeoisie they imply the application of an excessively paternalistic and rigid control in the context of the family, which places the values of sexual purity even above family harmony and life itself, e.g., Sir William and Odoardo.

V. Conclusion

In the preceding pages it has been my purpose to show Lessing's concept of the individual under the aspect of a personal struggle for moral emancipation and self-determination. Essentially, I have tried to arrive at some conclusions about the possibility and character of the individual's quest for self-determination as Lessing would have seen it, i.e., to what extent is the individual free and how does this freedom relate to the demands of social norms and values? In doing so, I have identified several specific factors which determine the success or failure of the struggle for self-determination.

In order to answer these questions it was necessary, first, to circumscribe the concept of freedom itself. As this concept is integral to ideology as a whole, it is also historically variable; it was therefore paramount to give it a definition in accordance with the historical and ideological context Lessing represents, a definition which then could be applied to an analysis of some of his plays. It was shown that in the context of the late German Enlightenment the idea of the individual's freedom is a contradictory one: the individual struggling for this ideal is seen both as the agent of free and critical thinking, yet he is also integrated into a larger social whole, the laws of which he observes. Ideally, this relationship can

be expressed in the manner of Aristoteles' Politics, an excerpt from which serves as the theme of Samuel Henzi: "Die Freiheit besteht einerseits darin, daß man abwechselnd gehorcht und befiehlt, andererseits darin, daß in der Republik jeder so lebt, wie er will."¹

While Lessing may be regarded as the founder of a national German literature, who provided a starting point for all the varied and rich literary movements that came after the Enlightenment, it would nevertheless be false to see in him a direct forerunner of the "Sturm und Drang" conception of the individual. For Lessing, the individual has a legitimate claim to freedom, but it is not a comfortable claim, the authority of which resides in the unreachable realms of the beyond. It is a claim whose authority stems from the concrete observation of and participation in the constantly changing relationship between society and the individual. Yet the very nature of this relationship, which constantly transforms both the individual and society, is also the reason why it is so hard to define, to state categorically where the authority of social norms begins and where personal freedom ends. Lessing is profoundly aware of this uncertainty, and therefore refuses to set up the individual or society as constant and defined entities, preferring instead to portray them in a manner which shows the contradictions and interactions between them.

Thus, it is impossible to say about any of the characters

¹ Lessing, Werke, II, 515.

or actions in Lessing's dramas that they are unequivocal or final in a moral or normative sense. We need only remember the conversation between two of his most outstanding characters, Tellheim and Minna, in order to see this contradictoriness confirmed. Both are individuals with a highly developed sense of self, yet neither is free of paradoxical features in his/her character, nor are they immune to the influences of each other and the world around them, in a negative as well as in a positive sense. The entire play shows a constantly shifting relationship of causes and effects, of guilt and innocence, of tragedy and comedy.

Undoubtedly the conception of the individual as displayed by Tellheim and Minna, is an ideal. It presupposes persons willing to enter freely and openly into the give-and-take of living in society. The fact that such an ideal is not held or practiced by all persons, was also recognized by Lessing, and we find a number of examples in his plays of the type of individualist who disregards society's claim. Neither Hettore Gonzaga nor Marwood recognize a responsibility toward anyone but themselves; the results are catastrophic for all concerned. Even the positive figures in these plays are infected with an allegiance to abstract and fixed principles which easily becomes a cause of tragedy. In Lessing's view, heroism, stoicism, and self-interest are all "Leidenschaften" which are anti-social and therefore also detrimental to true personal self-fulfillment.

In conformity with Enlightenment thought in general,

Lessing's view of emancipation is immanent² rather than other-worldly and irrationalistic. The individual as an autonomous being exists, but he exists in society and because of it. It is through free interaction with other individuals that he differentiates himself from them, but also through which he is limited, and finds commonality with them. To the extent that he can recognize this dialectic and respond to it, he is in truth virtuous, for morality becomes natural and reasonable. However, if he fails to perceive his condition, if he lets himself be driven by his "Leidenschaften", he is destructive, and to this extent also irrational.

If we, therefore, should choose to speak of Lessing's view of personal freedom as being irrationalistic, this would be justified only to the extent that Lessing admits to the existence of individuals who affirm a morality which is not natural or rational. As such, it is an admission by Lessing of the limits of reason, and to the extent that Lessing, the confirmed believer in reason, is also a dialectician, this admission is nothing but honesty. For, the admission of unreason, far from proving the falsity of belief in reason, merely proves its legitimacy. Unreason exists for Lessing only as the boundary and confirmation of reason. In recognizing this, Lessing recognizes the true relationship between irrationalism and rationalism, since the recognition of unreason can be achieved only through reason itself, and represents the furthest point which reason can reach.

² Ernst Cassirer, Die Philosophie der Aufklärung (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1932), pp. 254-56.

By the same dialectical line of thought, however, having recognized the existence and nature of the limits of reason - and of the individual - the main condition has been met through which these boundaries can be overstepped and extended. It is from this realization that Lessing's optimism and faith in the individual stems. Here also becomes evident the tremendous difference between him and the "Sturm und Drang":

Anders als der Sturm und Drang verfißt Lessing nicht ein schrankenloses Recht des Individuums, sondern seine Einordnung in die Gesellschaft, die nach seiner Meinung ohne Tragik möglich ist und zwar um so leichter, je höher die Vernunft des Menschen entwickelt ist.³

Between the "Sturm und Drang" and Lessing there exists, therefore, a fundamental qualitative difference, in that for the latter the ideal individual is always a particular entity, integrated in a complementary and productive manner with society, through which he defines himself; for the former, on the other hand, the individual exists as an absolute entity unto himself, defined only in reference to itself. For Lessing, the aim of emancipation is not primarily to increase personal pleasure or happiness, but to attain greater degrees of freedom and self-determination through an ever-deepening understanding of the relationship between oneself and other individuals, and the consequent ability to determine one's own destiny by affecting in a socially responsible fashion the relationships he partakes

³ Martha Waller, Lessings Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts. Interpretation und Darstellung ihres rationalen und irrationalen Gehalts. Eine Auseinandersetzung mit der Lessingforschung (Berlin: Ebering, 1935), p. 190.

of. Essentially therefore, to become a free individual is to become more enlightened and humane, to become educated in the sense of achieving greater facility and better opportunity to exercise reason and to express feelings.

This contradictory concept of the individual, i.e., the belief in individual self-determination and the ideal of social integration, can be observed both in Lessing's theory of the drama, and in the nature of economic and social relations of the 18th century.

Lessing's theory of the drama is essentially a theory of realism; it is a theory which attempts to portray human affairs as a process in which the claims of the individual and those of society are mutually determinative. It is Lessing's interest to show the causality of human actions accurately and faithfully, not as grounded in the sublime or irrational, but from the context of history itself.

This context is that of the 18th-century German society, of a transitional period of history, which is characterized by the waning of feudal culture and mode of production, and the rise of bourgeois values and the beginnings of a manufacturing economy. The process is complicated however, by the fact that although the bourgeoisie gradually achieves increasing strength and self-confidence in the cultural, intellectual, and economic life of society, this growth is not complemented by an increase in political power. The relationship to the feudal class is therefore paradoxical: on the one hand, the middle class is obligated to play a role of subservience and compromise, on the

other, its growing strength and self-confidence lead it to question the values and manner of life of its autocratic masters. For the individual this state of affairs creates a dilemma: he believes in the compatibility of personal autonomy and social integration, yet in concrete terms these two poles conflict because of the conflicting class interests and values which characterize social relations. Consequently, when this conflict is transposed to the stage, we see individuals vacillating between contradictory courses of action, we see dogmatic adherence to abstract principles which have only a tenuous relevance to the ethical requirements of specific situations, and we see moral conflicts and dilemmas which are, at least synchronically, insoluble.

In accordance with the contradiction of class interests and the implications of this for the individual, we see both the possibility and the impossibility of emancipation being portrayed in Lessing's plays. In the comedies, we see emancipation resulting from the expression of "Herz" and "Vernunft" and operating through "Witz", "Spiel", forgiveness, and tolerance. However, this is only possible in the context of family and friends, a context which is isolated from society as a whole. Whenever this social unit is invaded - and it is extremely vulnerable to such alien influences - emancipation becomes impossible and the private world is threatened with disintegration. Among these negative factors, the most important ones are exploitive and rigidly puritan sex relations, authoritarian and paternalistic family relations, the "Halsstarrigkeit der Tugend",

and most fundamental of all, the clash of unresolved class contradictions which, at least in part, gives rise to all the other factors mentioned.

All these elements are combined and closely welded together to form an unbroken and closely-knit chain of causes and effects in Lessing's dramas. Nothing is left to chance, but the causes which bring about a certain event are sometimes complex and ambiguous. This creates the appearance that the individual is caught in a web of inevitability and determinism which he cannot understand or affect. Absolute personal autonomy is indeed never even considered as a positive alternative; this would conflict with the idea of social responsibility and with the demand for realism in the drama. Yet its absence does not imply an ultimate fatalism or pessimism. The very same tightly-knit causality which appears to leave no opportunity for chance, also creates movement and progress. Contradictions which cannot be resolved synchronically, are the driving force of a historical process in which their essential elements combine to create something new and different. Characters have not only good, but also evil sides; an action which is performed with altruistic intent results in destruction, catastrophe can constitute a starting point for something new and positive in which the individual will experience a greater degree of freedom.

Therefore, and despite his disbelief in freedom as an absolute, Lessing manifests his optimism in the individual because what he is not today, he can become tomorrow. Freedom, which is contingent on the freedom of others, is also a historical

concept: it is realized in the manner of an on-going process rather than through an apocalyptic event. While it is impossible for the individual to be absolutely free at any given moment, it is equally impossible to determine the limits of his possible freedom, in the historical sense.

In der Natur ist alles mit allem verbunden; alles durchkreuzt sich, alles wechselt mit allem, alles verändert sich eines in das andere. Aber nach dieser unendlichen Mannigfaltigkeit ist sie nur ein Schauspiel für einen unendlichen Geist. Um endliche Geister an dem Genusse desselben Anteil nehmen zu lassen, mußten diese das Vermögen erhalten, ihr Schranken zu geben die sie nicht hat. . . .⁴

⁴ Lessing, Werke, VI, 358-59.

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