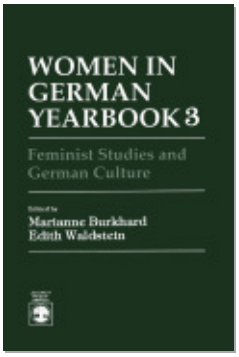
Who Learns a Lesson?: The Function of Sex Role Reversal in Lessing's *Minna von Barnhelm*



Judith P. Aikin

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Who Learns a Lesson?
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Feminist criticism is providing an ever-increasing variety of possible approaches for literary interpretation and textual analysis. Those approaches particularly applicable for the works of male authors, contextual/sociological[1] and stereotypical,[2] have thus far produced important definitions of women's social role and status, both in societies of the present (e.g. Kate Millett's analysis of passages by Norman Mailer and Henry Miller in *Sexual Politics*[3]) and of the past. Such analyses almost invariably discover a pattern of female submission and male dominance in works written by European and American men. Thus far, such feminist approaches have primarily served as devices to help raise the level of consciousness about sexual prejudices and stereotypification of sex roles. However, the procedures for analysis of sex role stereotypification and relative status of the sexes can sometimes be utilized to solve problems in literary works for which other attempted solutions have not succeeded. They can and should be admitted to the canon of literary methodologies available for all critics and interpreters. Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's *Minna von Barnhelm* is a case in point.

Although it can be demonstrated that the ideal behavior of male and female characters in European literature before the twentieth century usually conforms to stereotypes which change little from century to century, it is the number of literary works which concentrate on deviations from this norm that is astonishing. In such works, which deal with masculine and feminine behavior *per se*, the plots usually follow a single pattern: the man is displaying an extreme version of "masculine" behavior because the woman has usurped his normal, moderate masculine role. To remain more masculine than she, he must exaggerate his masculinity. His behavior has become a parody of masculinity not as a counterpart to her femininity,[4] but rather to reinstate the sex role and status distinctions which her "masculine" behavior has threatened.[5]

The idea that "masculine" or "feminine" behavior is role-playing, independent of anatomical gender, is not new. This is particularly evident in Shakespeare's comedies, in which the plot often revolves around female characters disguising themselves as men, complete with swagger and swear words. The confusion of sex roles and resultant humor is amplified by knowledge on the part of the Elizabethan audience that the female roles are played by

male actors. The comic complications can only be resolved, however, by a return to "natural" sex roles, thus indicating that such reversals of sex role were abnormal and to be rejected. These physically apparent sex role reversals are paralleled in other literary works by a more subtle reversal of sex role, as female characters display the "masculine" characteristics of assertiveness and dominance. But role-playing is seen in these pre-twentieth-century works as a possibility for masculine or feminine behavior only in sex role reversals, not for the feminine behavior of a woman or the masculine behavior of a man--then considered totally instinctive, and thus "natural."

Drama seems to be the literary genre which most often deals with deviation from sex role stereotypes, perhaps because of the concern with role-playing inherent in theater itself. Not only does this literary form have a non-literary aspect--performance by physically present persons each of whom pretends, for an audience which expects to be presented with verisimilitude, to be someone else--but it also frequently reflects ironically on this mode of presentation. In Lessing's Minna von Barnhelm, such self-consciousness that it is a play with actors playing roles appears, for example, in Tellheim's appellation for Minna and Franziska: "Komödiantinnen" (V.xii, 547).[6] Minna responds that playing a role had presented difficulties for her. Such objectifications of human behavior provided by drama have probably, in fact, formed and informed the way that modern European culture, and particularly the social sciences, view social or political behavior as "role." The modern uses of the word, now a term in general use meaning a function assumed by someone, and at the same time jargon referring to behavior or societal function in the social sciences, derives from the traditional metaphor "All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players." Thus it is only natural that much of the literary inquiry into feminine and masculine behavior since Elizabethan times is to be found in dramatic texts designed to be performed on stage.

Lessing wrote his comedy Minna von Barnhelm at the end of the Seven Years' War, and it was published in 1767. The plot deals with problems of a society grown accustomed to war but now confronted with peacetime by focusing on those of a Prussian officer, Major von Tellheim, and his Saxon fiancée, Minna von Barnhelm. Tellheim, dismissed from the Prussian army in dishonor due to suspicions that he had mishandled money, taken bribes, and conspired with the enemy Saxons during the war, avoids his fiancée and his friends because of his disgrace. Minna seeks him out and, upon hearing of his misfortune, offers him her own fortune and insists that their marriage take place as planned; he refuses on grounds of honor. A friend tries to give him money to help him out of his financial difficulties; he refuses on grounds

of honor. On grounds of honor Tellheim tries to dismiss his servant, Just, whom he can no longer afford to pay. As Paul Hernadi has shown, Tellheim's experiences with undeserved blame have made him into a misanthrope whose behavior closely parallels that of Moliere's own embittered protagonist.[7] His conduct appears so exaggerated and ridiculous to Minna that she determines, even after the restoration of his honor and wealth has restored his normal behavior, to teach him a lesson with her ring trick.

Most scholars have seen the source of Tellheim's behavior in his sense of honor, for good or for ill.[8] This sense of honor demands that Tellheim have not only a sense of self respect, but that those around him--even those who don't know him personally--have a good opinion of his honesty, integrity, and courage. This sense of honor has been damaged by the accusations leveled against him, even though he knows that they are untrue. The damaged sense of honor precludes handouts from anyone, even from those whom he has helped in the past. The widow of one of his fallen comrades who owed him money tries to repay the loan, but he refuses to accept the money; he refuses to be supported financially by Minna, although he had advanced money to her and her government; he tries to refuse to accept the gratis services of his servant, in spite of the fact that Tellheim had many times helped Just, financially and otherwise. Tellheim even refuses help from those from whom he had accepted aid in the past, as his friend Werner points out. These actions all indicate the extremes to which Tellheim's damaged sense of honor has driven him.

According to some, this sense of honor is a great virtue and as such deserves our respect.[9] Lessing's contemporary, Johann Gottfried Herder, viewed Tellheim's behavior in this light: "Dieser Mann denkt so edel, so stark, so gut und zugleich so empfindsam, so Menschlich, gegen Alles, wie es seyn muß, gegen Minna und Jost, gegen Werner und die Oberstin, gegen den Pudel und gegen den Wirth."[10] Goethe, on the other hand, in the seventh book of his Dichtung und Wahrheit of 1812, finds reprehensible as well as admirable aspects in Tellheim's sense of honor.[11] Tellheim's stiff-necked stubbornness and humorlessness mean, for Goethe, that the sense of honor will have to be overcome by the charm of the Saxon women.

Those modern scholars who view Tellheim's sense of honor as exaggerated and odious have assumed that Lessing meant his audience to be critical. Some have pointed out that Minna's intentions to teach Tellheim a lesson coincide with the Enlightenment view of comedy, as expressed in Lessing's own Hamburgische Dramaturgie: to cleanse people of their vices by demonstrating their ridiculous and laughable behavior to them.[12] The problem

with this interpretation, which otherwise seems to conform well to Lessing's theoretical and dramatic writings, is that, as many have pointed out,[13] there is no recognition by Tellheim of the laughable aspects of his sense of honor, and no change in his values or in his character. The "happy ending" is brought about not by Minna's trick, but rather deus ex machina, by the restoration of his lost honor in the satisfactory conclusion of his legal case. Two questions arise: why doesn't Tellheim follow Lessing's prescriptions for the educational goal of comedy by gaining insight into his exaggerated and ludicrous sense of honor? And why does Lessing have to resort to a fortuitous coincidence (which he elsewhere deplores)[14] in order to resolve the conflict he creates in the drama? Comparison with the ring episode in Shakespeare's Merchant of Venice (perhaps a source for Lessing's own plot) coupled with several feminist approaches to interaction between men and women may help to answer these questions.

The ring trick Portia plays on Bassiano, a small episode in Shakespeare's fifth act, becomes in Minna von Barnhelm the comic backbone of the entire plot. The two ring tricks bear a marked resemblance to one another--each man has received a ring from his fiancée; and each man, contrary to oaths and apparently contrary to constancy, allows the ring to leave his hand. In each case the woman obtains the ring, and in each case she fully utilizes the situation to berate the man for his supposed inconstancy. A major discrepancy occurs at this point--Portia ends the game with an admission of the trick upon Bassiano's promise to be faithful in the future, and general laughter ensues. Lessing's Minna, however, continues the trick to a point where the comedy nearly becomes tragedy. Unlike Bassiano, Tellheim is so blinded by upsetting circumstances that he neither recognizes the truth nor gains insight into his fault. When the game is finally brought to an end with the arrival of Minna's uncle and Minna's hasty explanation, Tellheim's confusion is akin to despair.

An obvious difference between the two ring plots is that Portia dresses as a man in order to obtain the ring from her fiancé, while Minna merely retrieves Tellheim's ring from the landlord to whom he had pawned it. Portia's action constitutes a physical sex role reversal which does not occur in Minna von Barnhelm. Yet this difference is only superficial, for a sex role reversal of a subtler sort does take place in Minna von Barnhelm. Let us now reexamine the plot according to conformity of the characters to sex role stereotypes. Kate Millett's analysis of erotic passages in literary works by such modern authors as Norman Mailer, Henry Miller, and D. H. Lawrence as incidents of sexual politics will serve as a model for this discussion of marital politics in a drama from the eighteenth century.

In the first scene between Minna and Tellheim we learn that the two protagonists had met and agreed to marry during the war when Tellheim was the officer of the victorious forces placed in charge of the defeated Saxons. In spite of the fact that Minna probably comes from a higher social class than Tellheim, the circumstances of war had made him her superior; his masculine pride was intact. However, the situation at the opening of the play constitutes a reversal. Tellheim describes his loss of worthiness: "Ich bin Tellheim, der verabschiedete, der an seiner Ehre gekränkte, der Krüppel, der Bettler" (II.ix, 492). His figurative emasculation--the damage to his honor--signifies damaged masculinity and inability to fulfill the stereotyped masculine role. The wound to his honor proves as much a barrier to marriage as physical emasculation would do. Indeed, his notion of honor is synonymous with his feeling of masculine pride, and it has little to do with the lofty ethical stance claimed by Herder.

Meanwhile, Minna's uncle has returned from exile, and she is once again the wealthy heiress of a count. As Tellheim refuses to accept the match in such a situation of role reversal, she makes an attempt to naturalize the relationship. She "plays very feminine." To his protestations that he would bring dishonor on her if he married her in his low circumstances, she replies that if he abandons her, that would bring dishonor upon her: "Sie könnten eines so häßlichen Streiches fähig sein, daß Sie mich nun nicht wollten? Wissen Sie, daß ich auf Zeit meines Lebens beschimpft wäre? Meine Landsmänninnen würden mit Fingern auf mich weisen. - 'Das ist sie,' würde es heißen, 'das ist das Fräulein von Barnhelm, die sich einbildete, weil sie reich sei, den wackern Tellheim zu bekommen: als ob die wackern Männer für Geld zu haben wären!'" (IV.vi, 523). Her attempt is in vain, since he continues to point out his subordinate position.

If the first sex role reversal is brought about by circumstances, the second is created by Minna herself. To his self-characterization as inferior--the female role stereotype--she now responds from the masculine role stereotype of superiority and power (IV.vi). Regarding his dismissal from the military, she says: "Ich sage den Großen meinen großen Dank, daß sie ihre Ansprüche auf einen Mann haben fahren lassen, den ich doch nur sehr ungern mit ihnen geteilet hätte. - Ich bin Ihre Gebieterin, Tellheim; Sie brauchen weiter keinen Herrn." And to his claims of being a cripple, she replies: "Ein Schuß hat Ihnen den rechten Arm ein wenig gelähmt. - Doch, alles wohl überlegt, so ist auch das so schlimm nicht. Um soviel sichrer bin ich vor Ihren Schlägen" (524). Minna is, in this passage, at least tacitly calling attention to the fact that his present behavior is in accord with a gender-related stereotype: the "strong" male who beats his "weak" mate. But this traditional male prerogative

is here undermined, and although Tellheim's own innate courtesy and respect for women would seem to preclude such behavior, the very fact that Minna denies him even the physical ability to do so in this speech underscores her purpose: with each of these two statements Minna tries to usurp the dominant role in the relationship. But while she has done so expecting him to laugh, he takes her statements literally and in all earnestness. Her next attempt to win him continues to place herself in the dominant position, him in the receptive feminine role: she tells him that her uncle is bringing him the small fortune he had loaned to the Saxon government which will put him back on his feet financially. He finds this offer unacceptable, not only because he is refusing all offers of help, but precisely because he sees it as coming from a woman: "Ihres Oheims! Ihrer Stände! Ha, ha, ha!" (526).[15] In a sentence which Minna's exclamation of anger does not permit him to complete, he indicates his disgust for a man who would accept support from his wife: "Es ist ein nichtswürdiger Mann, der sich nicht schämet, sein ganzes Glück einem Frauenzimmer zu verdanken, dessen blinde Zärtlichkeit -" (528).

As Don Zimmerman and Candace West have demonstrated in their article "Sex Roles, Interruptions and Silences in Conversation,"[16] interruption of the speech of another is an indication of dominance and is therefore usually more characteristic of male speech, particularly in conversations with women. Minna continues to interrupt Tellheim's utterances throughout this scene, another proof of the inversion of stereotyped sex roles which has taken place.

But Minna's attempt to "play masculine" to his "feminine" inferiority has failed. She now proceeds with the ring-trick with which she intends to bring him to his senses. She has her maid inform Tellheim that Minna has actually been disinherited due to him, and that his refusal to marry her has made her disgraced and defenseless. Tellheim's response to this apparent reinstatement of the masculine/feminine role stereotypes is immediate. He rushes to her defense and is elated at the prospect of protecting her: "Wie ist mir? - Meine ganze Seele hat neue Triebfedern bekommen. 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.ii, 532). He expresses his readiness to defend and support Minna in terms of his masculine identity: "Bin ich nicht Manns genug, ihr einmal alles zu ersetzen?" (V.iii, 533). He tells Minna that her misfortune means more to him than his own. But his reaction, as he admits, is not due so much to sympathy for an unfortunate, but rather to a reinstatement of his own masculine pride and a correction of the unnatural sex role reversal:

"Diesen Ring nahmen Sie das erstemal aus meiner Hand, als unser beider Umstände einander gleich und glücklich waren. Sie sind nicht mehr glücklich, aber wiederum einander gleich. Gleichheit ist immer das festeste Band der Liebe" (V.v, 535). That equality to Tellheim means male dominance is obvious from his actions as he says the words--he aggressively seizes Minna's hand to place the ring on it, to which she reacts: "Wie? mit Gewalt, Herr Major?"

When Tellheim receives the letter informing him that his court case has been successful, that honor, fortune, and position have been fully restored, Minna no longer needs to dissemble in order to make the match. The equality he desired has been restored in actuality, not just in the context of her pose. Yet she does not enlighten him at this point. Why not? Although his sense of honor is no longer exaggerated or ridiculous now that the rightness of his cause has been publicly noted, Minna still feels she must teach him a lesson. It is no longer his sense of honor, but the masculine pride underlying it which she wishes to reveal as laughable.

In spite of all the hints and clues provided by both Minna and her maid, and in spite of the fact that Minna still flaunts her own ring on her finger, Tellheim believes that the ring which Minna gives him is the one he had earlier given her. His blindness in this matter is symptomatic of his blindness regarding his exaggerated code of honor and his ridiculous masculine pride. He never does recognize that either of these excesses is ridiculous, but only that they are no longer under attack by the end of the play. While other vices may be correctable on the stage and in life through the medium of comedy, excessive masculinity can be relieved only when its causes--the attacks upon it--are removed. The dilemma can not be resolved without the deus ex machina device of full restoration of his honor and his fortune, since without both he is not Minna's equal.

The extension of the ring trick by Minna beyond the full restoration of Tellheim's honor (V.ix) is interesting from several perspectives. In one last attempt to convince Tellheim of the ridiculousness of stereotyped sex roles, she now repeats the objections, nearly verbatim, with which he had refused marriage unless his honor and wealth (and superiority) were restored: " . . . so gewiß soll die unglückliche Barnhelm die Gattin des glücklichern Tellheim nie werden! . . . Gleichheit ist allein das feste Band der Liebe. - Die glückliche Barnhelm wünschte, nur für den glücklichen Tellheim zu leben. Auch die unglückliche Minna hätte sich endlich überreden lassen, das Unglück ihres Freundes durch sich, es sei zu vermehren oder zu lindern" (542). Not understanding her purpose, he offers to tear up the letter which grants him not only restoration of honor, but

a return of his wealth as well. In so doing, he becomes imperious, demanding her capitulation. She responds once more with the spirit of an emancipated woman, throwing his own words back at him: "Wie? in diesem Tone? - So soll ich, so muß ich in meinen eignen Augen verächtlich werden? Nimmermehr! Es ist eine nichtswürdige Kreatur, die sich nicht schämet, ihr ganzes Glück der blinden Zärtlichkeit eines Mannes zu verdanken!" (543). The finale of this confrontation constitutes a dismissal of her claims for equality in status and for a right to honor or pride for women:

> TELLHEIM: Falsch, grundfalsch!
>
> DAS FRÄULEIN. Wollen sie es wagen, Ihre eigene Rede in meinem Munde zu schelten?
>
> TELLHEIM. Sophistin! So entehrt sich das schwächere Geschlecht durch alles, was dem stärkern nicht ansteht? So soll sich der Mann alles erlauben, was dem Weib geziemet? Welches bestimmte die Natur zur Stütze des andern? (543).

Tellheim is unable to accept a relationship with Minna in which he would be in an inferior position, but he apparently expects her to accept being dependent on him when he is restored to fortune. When she parrots his own words insisting on equality, he exhibits astonishment and disapproval. To Tellheim the superiority of one partner in marriage is acceptable only if the superior partner is male.

Other evidence of the pattern of male dominance and male expectation of female submission in this scene (and elsewhere in the play) supports the content of Tellheim's objections to Minna's claims. In this scene he treats her as a chattel, an object to be owned, when he announces his intention to "possess" her ("Sie besitzen"). His tone of voice and attitude, to which she must remonstrate "Wie? in diesem Tone?" are obviously imperious, an exhibition of his status and power. As she had done in the earlier scene (IV.vi) when she assumed the dominant position, he now proceeds to interrupt her throughout this scene (539-43).

Nancy M. Henley[17] has shown that subtler aspects of language such as terms of address, and non-verbal communication such as touching, can express differences of status between the sexes. In each case, the individual who demonstrates familiarity, that is, who initiates familiar forms of address or touching, is the dominant person in the interaction. Although eighteenth-century German distinguishes not just two forms of "you," polite and familiar, as in modern German, but a multiplicity of forms indicating an entire hierarchy of status,[18]

this fact does not illuminate the status configuration for Tellheim and Minna. Both use, almost without exception,[19] the polite "Sie" form of address to each other, a fact that indicates equality and respect. Yet another form of address may be more significant here. According to Henley, the dominant person can call the person of inferior status by his or her first or Christian name, while the subordinate person must term the person of superior status by title and/or family name. Throughout the play Minna refers to Tellheim by his family name or by his title, "Major," and we never learn his first name. The Major, however, alternates between terming his fiancée "Fräulein" or "Fräulein von Barnhelm" and "Minna," her first name. It is interesting to note when the two usages occur: the latter, "Minna," is used when Tellheim is trying to assert his control or when establishing familiarity, as in V.ix. As remarked above, even this second purpose reveals a status hierarchy. Two uses for the more formal or egalitarian nomenclature can also be identified. In the early scenes, when Tellheim's status is lower than hers, it indicates this differential which he perceives (the moments when he calls her "Minna" are a source of embarrassment to him at this point); later, his honor restored, but his pride still under attack by Minna's actions and words, it becomes (as in V.ix) a mockery of her "unnatural" claims for equality and a signal of his rejection of her (a removal of familiarity). Another indication, beginning in V.ii when he believes their circumstances equalized, and continuing into V.ix, is provided by the stage directions showing that he has initiated touching her. In each case he does so from a feeling of assertiveness; in each case she withdraws from his touch to indicate a lack of acceptance of his dominance. A reversal of this indication of status hierarchy occurred, as might be expected, in Tellheim's first two encounters with Minna (e.g., II.viii and ix; IV.vi).

If Tellheim has not learned a lesson, but has only been saved from tragedy by a deus ex machina device, the title figure has learned a lesson. She has discovered that assumption of the masculine role will lead only to rejection by the man, and that a demand for equal rights will bring her derision. Is she perhaps, rather than Tellheim, the character in the play who is cured of a laughable vice, according to Lessing's theory of comedy? As her uncle arrives, all her attempts at explanation having failed, she falls into Tellheim's arms, exclaiming, "Ah, was sind Sie für ein Mann! - Umarmen Sie Ihre Minna, Ihre glückliche Minna! Aber durch nichts glücklicher als durch Sie!" (V.xii, 546). Even with the restoration of the necessities for his masculine pride, she must still return to her feminine role. The only possible solution is the normalization of the stereotyped relationship between the sexes--he behaving in a dominant, "masculine" manner and she in a subordinate, "feminine" manner. Lessing has transformed Shakespeare's physical role reversal into gender

exchange on the level of sexual politics, and in so doing has come dangerously close to creating a catastrophic crisis which comedy cannot overcome.

That the contemporary audience had at least some insight into this aspect of the plot--that sex role reversals were the heart of the problem--is shown in returning to the description by Herder: "wie hat Ihnen der Charakter von Tellheim nicht gefallen können! . . . [er ist] ganz mein Mann! Freilich ist er gegen die Minna kein Petrarca, gegen den Wirth kein Hernhuter, gegen Josten kein Lammskerl, und gegen Werner kein weicher Narr; aber er ist überall Major, der edelste, stärkste Charakter, der immer mit einer gewißen Würde und Härte handelt, ohne die keine Mannsperson seyn sollte. . . Aber nun seine Minna? . . . Meine Minna ists nicht. . . Mir gefällt sie gar nicht, außer in ein paar Stellen, und just eben da, wo das Eine Schwachheit ist und Ueberlaufen des Herzens" (see note 10 above). Herder has intuitively grasped Minna's sex role reversal and Tellheim's defenses of his masculine pride against it, and he has reacted with warmth for the stereotypical behavior and with dislike for deviations from it. This letter also contains a tirade against learned women and a defense of what he terms his "natural feeling of disgust" for such a "misuse" of feminine powers. A woman should, according to Herder, form herself to be a girlfriend, wife, mother, decorative acme of creation, stimulation for the efforts of men to excel. It is abundantly clear what prejudices Herder brings to Lessing's text!

Opinion is divided on Lessing's own attitude toward women. Did he posit Minna as the exemplar of the liberated woman of the Enlightenment whose ethical stance and wisdom elevated her above the men who were still trapped in their antiquated conceptions of honor and sex role? Or does she instead exemplify the foolishness of the pretensions to equality voiced by women of the Enlightenment?[20] Minna's eventual return to the traditional feminine role could indicate merely a retreat from a sincere liberal stance on the part of the author to avoid trouble with the ever-present censor, not to mention such contemporary readers as Herder. But it could instead represent an equivocation in Lessing's feelings about the emancipation of women, or even an intolerance of female claims for equality not unlike that of Herder. A portion of a letter Lessing wrote in 1772 to his brother Karl offers support for the latter conclusion:

> Die jungfräulichen Heroinen und Philosophinnen sind gar nicht nach meinem Geschmacke. Wenn Aristoteles von der Güte der Sitten handelt, so schließt er die Weiber und Sklaven ausdrücklich davon aus. Ich kenne an einem unverheirateten

> Mädchen keine höhere Tugenden als Frömmigkeit und Gehorsam.[21]

Applied to Minna von Barnhelm, this passage would offer the following interpretation of the female protagonist's behavior:

> Minna's clever and aggressive machinations to win Tellheim and alter his character are not to the author's taste. She can have no true understanding of the ethical issues involved due to the limitations of her gender. It best befits an unmarried woman like Minna to concentrate instead on those simple, mindless, and distinctively feminine virtues, piety and obedience.

But Minna remains, regardless of authorial intention, a monument to the (also largely unsuccessful) attempts made during the Enlightenment to provide for the emancipation of women from centuries of prejudice, oppression, and inequality.

University of Iowa

Notes

I would like to acknowledge my debt to certain insights into Lessing's works made by Gerd Hillen in a series of unpublished lectures in 1971 at the University of California at Berkeley, especially his perception of the series of reversals in the relative status of the two main characters of this play; and offer my thanks to my former colleague at the University of Iowa, Paul Hernadi (now at the University of California at Santa Barbara), for his helpful comments and to Barbara Becker-Cantarino (now of the Ohio State University) for her useful criticisms and suggestions.

[1] According to Annis Pratt, in a lecture in January 1977 at the University of Iowa titled "New Feminist Criticism," the contextual/sociological approach involves analysis of literature in the context of attitudes toward the family, culture, etc.; it treats literary works as historical documents. This method is equally applicable to works written by women; one always needs to keep in mind the gender of the author as a possible determinant.

[2] Pratt defines the stereotypical approach as the identification of stereotyped images of women in literature.

Naturally, it is possible, although less frequently useful, to apply this approach to literary works written by women.

[3] Kate Millet, Sexual Politics (New York: Doubleday, 1969).

[4] Betty and Theodore Roszak, in the foreword to their collection of excerpts and essays, Masculine/Feminine: Readings in Sexual Mythology and the Liberation of Women (New York: Harper, 1969), p. vii, present an encapsulation of masculine and feminine behavior determined by stereotypes in which both sets of behavior are role playing. This passage begins: "He is playing masculine. She is playing feminine. He is playing masculine because she is playing feminine. She is playing feminine because he is playing masculine." Such a view--that all "masculine" or "feminine" behavior is role playing unrelated to any anatomical or "natural" determinants--is a product of the twentieth-century Women's Movement.

[5] In the Germanic Nibelungenlied, written down in the High Middle Ages, for example, the male heroes and the male author react with horror and violence to the heroine's murder of another hero. A woman usurping the masculine role as avenger is unthinkable to the men, and she must be destroyed as a monster. Shakespeare treats the theme in his Taming of the Shrew: Katherine's "shrewishness" is aggressive behavior, both verbal and physical, directed not only against men, but against other women as well. She, like Kriemhild in the Nibelungenlied, is considered a kind of monster who must, in this case (after all, she is only a trivialized, diminutive sort of monster, a shrew) be tamed. The man who is to restore her to her natural feminine role must combat her masculine aggressiveness with super-masculinity and extreme aggressiveness, since he must be more masculine than she. Heinrich von Kleist's drama Penthesilea of 1808 constitutes a reversal of the Greek myth of Achilles and the Amazon queen Penthesilea (and thus also a reversal of sex roles). Instead of having Achilles fall in love with Penthesilea at the moment he kills her, Kleist takes the pair through a series of preparatory role reversals and then has the Amazon queen savagely murder the Greek hero. Achilles had succeeded in wooing her only by assuming the feminine role of passivity and submissiveness since her Amazon culture forced her to assume the masculine role of aggressor. His death results from an apparent return to his masculine role and her inability to reciprocate with femininity.

[6] The edition used for this study is in Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, Gesammelte Werke (München: Carl Hanser, 1959), vol. I, 459ff. Quotations will be identified in the text by act and scene numbers and page numbers from this edition.

[7] Paul Hernadi, "Lessings Misanthropen," Euphorion 68 (1974): 113-118.

[8] For discussions of the various views, see F. Andrew Brown, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, TWAS (New York: Twayne, 1971) 97-100; Horst Steinmetz, Die Komödie der Aufklärung (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1966) 63-68; Karl S. Guthke, Der Stand der Lessing-Forschung: Ein Bericht über die Literatur von 1932-1962 (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1965) 46ff.

[9] E.g. Fritz Brüggemann, "Lessings Bürgerdramen und der Subjektivismus als Problem: Psychogenetische Untersuchung," Jahrbuch des freien deutschen Hochstifts (1926): 82-83. Many others see Tellheim's honor as a virtue and him as a virtuous character but with some exaggeration which needs to be moderated. For a list see Brown 97-98; also Arnold Heidsieck, "Adam Smith's Influence on Lessing's View of Man and Society," Lessing Yearbook XV (1983): 141 (his note 11). Heidsieck's article deals in part with the problem of honor in Minna von Barnhelm. Another very recent study which addresses this issue is Glenn A. Guidry, "Money, Honor, and Love: The Hierarchy of Values in Lessing's Minna von Barnhelm," Lessing Yearbook XIV (1982): 177-86. None of these studies directly addresses the synonymy of Tellheim's sense of honor and his masculine self-identity.

[10] Letter to Caroline Flachsland, Sept. 20, 1770, in Herders Briefwechsel mit Caroline Flachsland, ed. Hans Schauer, Schriften der Goethe-Gesellschaft no. 39 (Weimar, 1926) 48-50.

[11] Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Goethes Werke vol. IX (Hamburg: Christian Wegner, 1955) 281-82.

[12] For a list of those who feel that Tellheim's exaggerated honor is a fault to be cured by revelation of its laughableness, see Steinmetz 63. Lessing's theory of comedy is contained in essays 28 and 30 in the Hamburgische Dramaturgie and in a letter of November 13, 1756, to Friedrich Nicolai (Gesammelte Werke, vol. II).

[13] See Steinmetz 63.

[14] Although Lessing does not use the term "deus ex machina," his criticisms in essay 19 of the Hamburgische Dramaturgie of a French play full of marvelous coincidences and fortuitous accidents constitute a rejection of deus ex machina solutions in drama. Elsewhere (e.g., 30th essay) he stresses the need for dramatized events to follow a believable chain of causes and effects.

[15] Paul Hernadi has pointed out to me that the stress on "your" could instead refer to Tellheim's derision at the idea that the defeated Saxons and exiled Count could repay the loan and restore Tellheim's honor.

[16] Published in Language and Sex, Difference and Dominance, ed. Barrie Thorne and Nancy Henley, Series in Sociolinguistics (Rowley, Mass.: Newbury, 1975) 105ff.

[17] Nancy M. Henley, "Power, Sex, and Nonverbal Communication," ibid., 184ff.; originally published in Berkeley Journal of Sociology 18 (1973-4): 1-26.

[18] This hierarchy is clear in the terms of address used between servants and their masters in this play (Minna and Tellheim use the familiar "du" to Franziska and Just, while these servants use the formal "Sie" in return), and between superiors and social inferiors not in a servant-master relationship of familiarity (Minna uses "er" to Just, as does Franziska to the innkeeper, while in return they are referred to with the formal "Sie.") Equals use the same term of address to each other--"du" for persons of lower class who are friends, "Er" for those who are not; "Sie" between persons of higher class. The hierarchy extends to age: Minna's uncle uses "du" with her, while she addresses him as "Sie."

[19] One exception, V.xii, involves Tellheim's use of the plural form of the familiar "du"--"euch"--to Minna and Franziska together, after he has been enlightened about the plot. Reasons for this slip of the tongue can be postulated: he is distraught; he is speaking primarily to Franziska; or, according to Henley's theory, he is indicating recognition of his victory and of his newly-reinstated superior status. Minna's use of the familiar form with Tellheim, "Deine Hand, lieber Bettler" (II.ix), in the context of her assumption of the superior role, however, is clearly in conformity with Henley's findings.

[20] Emil Staiger, Die Kunst der Interpretation: Studien zur deutschen Literaturgeschichte (Zürich: Atlantis, 1955) 91-92, sees Minna's speeches as unequivocal signs of Lessing's belief in the equality of women, but in a contradictory statement seems to include the same speeches in her behavior which (he says) goes too far and creates the crisis of the fifth act. Brown (100-101) discusses the problem with more discernment; on p. 101 he states: "In listing the numerous contradictory traits with which Lessing has endowed his principle characters--the list usually includes the 'northern' Tellheim, imbued with a certain severity, sternness, and, of course, inflexibility in matters of principle, and the warm-hearted, gracious, lovable, and 'practical' Saxon heiress--it seems clear that Lessing also looks beyond them to

the contrast that lies at the heart of the controversy: the fundamentally different approaches to life which he traces to their origins in the nature of man and woman. It would appear that a certain dichotomy existed in Lessing himself. In the figure of Minna, we are presented with a most charming and convincing advocate of equality. And yet her creator rejected the 'philosophical' female as firmly as his Tellheim rejects such an 'unnatural' creature."

[21] This letter is also quoted by Brown, p. 101. The letter can be found in the Gesammelte Werke, vol. II, 1120-1121. The passage refers to another Lessing heroine, Emilia Galotti, and is in answer to objections by his brother that Emilia is not heroic enough. Brown, in a note (179-80), sees irony in the passage, since in his view Emilia does show spirit and character by the end of the play. I follow Gerd Hillen (unpublished lecture, 1971) in seeing in Emilia's plea for death a reflection of her father's values, not her own--a view which precludes an ironic intention for this passage.