

# WAR AND SENTIMENTALISM: IRONY IN VOLTAIRE'S *CANDIDE*, STERNE'S *TRISTRAM SHANDY*, AND LESSING'S *MINNA VON BARNHELM*<sup>1</sup>

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**282** The period from the mid-1750s to the mid-1760s was marked by the Seven Years' War, a proto-nationalistic military conflict that saw a death toll of over a million, as well as the rise of sentimentalism, an intellectual movement based on the principles of sympathy, benevolence, and humanity.<sup>2</sup> The clash of these two historical phenomena finds expression in some of the century's most canonical works of fiction, including Voltaire's *Candide, ou l'optimisme* (1759), Laurence Sterne's *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* (1759-67), and Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's *Minna von Barnhelm, oder das Soldatenglück* (1767). All three of these texts use various forms of irony (verbal, situational, structural, and historical) to explore the tensions and affinities between the inhumanity of the Seven Years' War and the affective ethics of sentimentalism. In all three cases, it is not a satiric irony that destroys its target, but a productive irony that probes truth through a dialogic interaction of said and unsaid. Ultimately, the ironic treatment of the relationship between war and sentimentalism emerges as a backdrop for a discussion of the nationalist and cosmopolitan paradigms.

British sentimentalism, French *sensibilité*, and German *Empfindsamkeit* are closely related intellectual movements within the European Enlightenment. The philosophy of sentimentalism (developed in Britain by Shaftesbury, Francis Hutcheson, David Hume, and Adam Smith) defines morality as a product of sentiment rather than reason, a result of "an immediate feeling and finer internal sense" rather than "argument or induction" (Hume 3). Philosophical sentimentalism (also known as moral sense theory) emerges, in part, as a response to Thomas Hobbes's view of human behaviour as essentially selfish. The sentimentalists counter Hobbes's egoism by arguing that the human creature is naturally benevolent, that its "merit arises from its tendency to promote the interests of our species, and bestow happiness on human

society” (Hume 12). As indicated by this passage from Hume’s Second Enquiry, the doctrine of sentimentalism extends to the entire human species, not just to one particular nationality, social class, or gender. In a similar vein, Louis de Jaucourt describes sensibility as the mother of humanity (“la mere de l’humanité”) (Jaucourt). The philosophical movement thus has strong cosmopolitan implications.<sup>3</sup> Literary sentimentalism, however, loses much of its cosmopolitan thrust, because characters withdraw into domestic spaces, thereby limiting their sphere of influence (cf. Brewer 32). The question therefore arises: what happens when sentimentalism moves from the boudoir to the battlefield, when it takes on an explicitly political dimension?

Voltaire’s *Candide*, Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy*, and Lessing’s *Minna* are not sentimental texts, but rather are texts that engage with sentimentalism, promoting and challenging it in various ways. All three authors endorse the sentimental principles of sympathy, benevolence, and humanity. Yet they show these principles to be (in the best case) at odds with and (in the worst case) complicit in the prevailing social realities of the day, most importantly the atrocities of the Seven Years’ War.

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Winston Churchill famously referred to the Seven Years’ War as the first world war (Bowen 7). On the European continent, the war played out as a clash between Prussia and Austria (with their respective alliances) for control over Silesia. In British America, New France, the Indian subcontinent, and several other smaller fronts, it was a struggle between Britain, France, and Spain for control over trade and colonies. By the time the enemy parties signed the Treaty of Paris in 1763, the Seven Years’ War had claimed over a million lives. It also fuelled the nationalistic ideologies that provided the intellectual climate for the Napoleonic Wars of the nineteenth century and the fascism of the twentieth century.

In theory, the eighteenth-century cabinet wars (*Kabinettskriege*) were more rational than their seventeenth-century counterparts (Kagel 9). Whereas the Thirty Years’ War resulted in massive civilian casualties (approximately a third of the German population) and the destruction of thousands of towns and villages, the violence of the cabinet wars was controlled and circumscribed. Highly disciplined armies faced off on clearly defined battlefields, which were far removed from civilian populations. Yet, rationalizing warfare is not the same thing as humanizing it. Line formations, the standard tactical formation on the eighteenth-century battlefield, reduced individual soldiers to an anonymous fighting mass and resulted in huge numbers of casualties. The Battles of Zorndorf (1758) and Kunersdorf (1759) claimed approximately 30,000 lives apiece (Birgfeld 7).

Some contemporary thinkers attempt to reconcile the brutality of the Seven Years’ War and the cult of sensibility. In *Geschichte des siebenjährigen Krieges in Deutschland von 1756 bis 1763* (1791), Johann Wilhelm von Archenholz defended Frederick the Great against allegations of excessive cruelty that followed the invasion of Saxony in 1756:

His and his soldiers’ behavior on this occasion characterized the spirit of our times,

where one strives, even in war, in the midst of harsh indignities and highly grievous, yes shocking scenes, to demonstrate refined morals, sensibility and civility. (22)<sup>4</sup>

For Archenholz, Frederick the Great was both the military hero of the century and a proponent of sentimental values. Voltaire, Sterne, and Lessing recognize the contradictions at play. Like Archenholz, they thematize the figure of the peace-loving soldier, but their descriptions are rife with irony.

In Chapter 1 of his philosophical tale, Voltaire describes Candide and Miss Cunégonde in sentimental terms.<sup>5</sup> Candide is “a young boy whom nature endowed with the gentlest of dispositions” (3).<sup>6</sup> He expresses his love for Cunégonde “with singular vivacity, sensibility, and grace” (5).<sup>7</sup> Yet the lovers’ sentimental paradise is marred from the very beginning with blood. The title page informs the reader that the text of *Candide* is based on a manuscript that was found on the body of a German doctor who was killed at the Battle of Minden in 1759. The text is thus literally and figuratively bloodstained.

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Chapters 2 and 3 contain a thinly veiled allegory of the Seven Years’ War. In Chapter 2, recruiting officers for the Bulgar (i.e., Prussian) army force Candide (an Abar; that is, a Frenchman) into conscription and subject him to a brutal training program. The success of their recruitment efforts lies, in part, in Candide’s inability to detect their use of irony. They lure him to their table: “Oh sir, do sit yourself down at the table. Not only will we pay for you, but we will not see man such as yourself go short either. *Man was made that he might help his fellow-man*” (6, my emphasis).<sup>8</sup> Candide interprets their reference to man’s benevolence literally. For him, the sentimental conception of man is part and parcel of the Leibnizian Optimism espoused by his tutor Pangloss. In the best of all possible worlds, men exist to help one another. However, given their malicious intent to conscribe Candide against his will, the recruitment officers could only have used this statement ironically. At the level of dialogue, this is a simple case of semantic inversion (also known as antiphrasis), the simplest form of verbal irony. The recruitment officers espouse a definition of human nature that is in direct contradiction to the egoism of their actions, and thus the overall speech situation.

Yet, the ironies of this statement are not exhausted by simple semantic inversion. There are historical and structural ironies at play as well. The Bulgar officers triumph over Candide’s candour and innocence with Machiavellian duplicity and cruelty. The historical irony here is that these officers are representatives of Frederick the Great, who co-authored an essay against Machiavellianism with Voltaire. *Anti-Machiavel, ou essai de critique sur le prince de Machiavel* (1740) is an interesting foil for Candide, not least because of the two chapters dedicated to analyzing the benefits of employing mercenary and auxiliary troops. Machiavelli was against the practice because the troops never remained loyal to the cause: Candide, a perfect example, deserts twice. Frederick the Great was in favour of using mercenaries and auxiliaries because he saw no way to avoid it. His reasoning was practical rather than theoretic-

cal. Even so, he takes the moral high ground and rails against Machiavelli for inciting princes to treat their non-native troops with “cruelty and barbarity” (149). He claims that “an honest Writer ought to take all Opportunities of inspiring Princes with an Aversion to every thing that has the least Appearance of Inhumanity or any other Abuse of Power” (149).<sup>9</sup> Juxtaposing these statements with the war scenes in *Candide* reveals a layer of historical irony. When Candide is being flogged to death by his fellow soldiers for desertion, the King of the Bulgars shows mercy, not because he disagrees with treating deserters with cruelty and barbarity, but because Candide is a young metaphysician and thus a special case. Furthermore, the text implies that the king only demonstrates compassion to improve his public image (Williams 38). Significantly, the historical Frederick the Great was indeed known for barbaric treatment of deserters, many of whom did not enter his service freely (Dyke 39). *Candide* exposes the moral posturing of the *Anti-Machiavel* as a farce: the King of Prussia is a Machiavellian in sentimental clothing.

In addition to verbal and historical layers of irony, the conscription episode also features a structural irony. If one views the statement “man was made that he might help his fellow-man” in the context of *Candide* as a whole, it takes on a different meaning than it has in the mouths of the recruitment officers. The heroes of Voltaire’s philosophical tale are defined, at least in part, by their readiness to help their fellow man: Jacques the Antibaptist saves Candide from starvation; Candide is “moved by compassion” to help an appalling beggar who turns out to be Pangloss (9);<sup>10</sup> and Cacambo remains loyal to his master in the face of physical hardship and financial temptation. All of these characters demonstrate the benevolence that is characteristic of sentimentalism.

Furthermore, Hobbes’s egoism and his “war of all against all” are equally subject to ironic commentary. Cacambo tries to convince the Oreillons not to eat Candide, who is dressed in the robes of a Jesuit priest:

“So, gentlemen,” said Cacambo, “you think you’re going to have Jesuit today. That’s fine by me. Nothing could be fairer than to treat your enemies this way. The laws of nature do indeed tell us to kill our neighbor, and that is the way people behave throughout the world.” (38)<sup>11</sup>

This statement, though otherwise confirmed by the brutality of *Candide*’s fictional world, is ironic because it comes from Cacambo, the most self-sacrificing character in the tale. The text thus pits two contradictory statements against each other: on the one hand, we have an ironic statement undermining man’s compassion and benevolence; and on the other, an ironic statement undermining man’s brutality and egoism.

Linda Hutcheon defines irony as “constituted not necessarily only by an either/or substitution of opposites but by both the said and the unsaid working together” (63). Her definition prompts the question of how Voltaire’s use of irony helps us to understand the relationship between war and sentimentalism. If we unpack the ironic statements into the said and unsaid, all we have are contradictions: humans

are compassionate and benevolent by nature and they are not; humans are violent and self-serving by nature and they are not. Voltaire does not leave us with univocal pronouncements on the nature of man, nor do Sterne and Lessing. But ironic meanings are not dependent solely on the intensions of the ironist. The interpreter is equally important in making irony happen. Paul de Man foregrounds the role of the interpreter in his theorization of irony. In response to Kierkegaard's definition of irony as "absolute infinite negativity," de Man comments: "Irony in itself opens up doubts as soon as its possibility enters our heads, and there is no inherent reason for discontinuing the process of doubt at any point short of infinity [...] It is not irony but the desire to understand irony that brings such a chain to a stop" (166). Voltaire, Sterne, and Lessing all use irony in this spirit, namely, to engage the reader in a process of doubt and critical reflection. Friedrich Schlegel's Romantic definition of irony as "a permanent parabasis" ("eine permanente Parekbase") (85) is enigmatic formulation of what postmodern theorists such as Hutcheon and de Man spell out in more

**286** detail: irony is an interruption in narrative, a direct appeal to the reader or audience to engage productively with contradiction.

By leaving his statements about man's natural brutality and compassion open to interpretation, Voltaire undermines both of the dominant schools of mid-eighteenth-century moral philosophy: the Hobbesian and the sentimental. The final decision about the nature of man is taken from the philosophers and placed in the hands of the reader. Whether human nature is compassionate or violent comes down to an act of interpretation. In *Candide*, structural irony serves the anti-systematic thinking of its author (cf. Pearson 15-16; Starobinski 197-99). Sentimentalism and Hobbesian egoism are simultaneously affirmed and negated, but, more importantly, they are shown to be irrelevant. Human nature is what we make of it, in our methods of interpretation and, more importantly, in our actions.

Candide is a gentle soul by birth, but he becomes a killer by necessity. Caught between warring factions, he has no choice but to defend himself. In the end, the only way for Candide to live out his compassionate nature is to withdraw from society. Voltaire ultimately alleviates the tension between war and sentimentalism by having Candide establish a self-sustaining farming community beyond national and religious divides (cf. Davies 49). He pairs sentimentalism with cosmopolitanism, and war with nationalism and religious dogmatism.<sup>12</sup>

That said, Voltaire also shows how sentimentalism can be used to cover up selfish, uncompassionate behaviour. In Chapter 3, Candide climbs "over heaps of dead and dying" as he flees the battlefield.<sup>13</sup> He is deaf to the agonies of the wounded men, because he is preoccupied with his love for Cunégonde. In this case, Voltaire depicts sentimental love as obscuring the voice of compassion in the service of selfishness (Williams 40). He insightfully diagnoses the moral narcissism inherent in sentimentalism, the tendency to linger self-indulgently over beautiful feelings at the expense of active compassion.

In a similar vein, Laurence Sterne draws attention to the ability of sentimental-

ism to mask self-interested justifications for war. In *Tristram Shandy*, the tension between war and sentimentalism produces comparable forms of structural irony.<sup>14</sup> Similar to *Candide*, the character of Uncle Toby exemplifies the contradictions of the peaceful soldier. His nephew Tristram describes him as the embodiment of sentimental virtues, “She [Nature] had formed him of the best and kindest clay—had temper’d it with her own milk, and breathed into it the sweetest spirit—she had made him all gentle, generous and humane” (517). Yet, despite Uncle Toby’s inability to “hurt a chicken” (291), he is a career soldier, an enthusiastic supporter of war and lover of war games. The contradictions inherent in his character form the heart of *Tristram Shandy*’s ironic treatment of the clash between war and sentimentalism (Dobie 1852-53).

The critical reception of Uncle Toby speaks to the unresolvable tensions in his character. Some scholars read Uncle Toby as Sterne’s critique of British militarism (Richardson 602; New 67-88), while others see him as expressing the pro-war stance of his author (Zach 392). Whether one interprets Uncle Toby as war satire or war propaganda depends on how one reads certain passages; that is, whether one reads them literally or ironically.

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In the chapter “My uncle TOBY’s apologetical oration,” Uncle Toby defends himself against his brother Walter’s accusations that he desires the continuation of war for his own amusement. To clarify, Uncle Toby is expressing his support for the War of Spanish Succession (1701-13), not the Seven Years’ War. However, given the dates of *Tristram Shandy*’s composition, it is an accepted scholarly convention to read the novel’s thematization of war as reflecting Sterne’s thinking about Britain’s military engagements, past and present:

Need I be told, dear Yorick, [...] That so soft and gentle a creature, born to love, to mercy, and kindness, as man is, was not shaped for this [i.e., for war]? But why did you not add, Yorick,—if not by NATURE—that he is so by NECESSITY?—For what is war? What is it, Yorick, when fought as ours has been, upon principles of liberty, and upon principles of honour—what is it, but the getting together of quiet and harmless people, with their swords in their hands, to keep the ambitious and the turbulent within bounds? And heaven is my witness, brother Shandy, that the pleasure I have taken in these things,—and that infinite delight, in particular, which has attended my sieges in my bowling green, has arose within me, and I hope in the corporal too, from the consciousness we had that in carrying them on, we were answering the great ends of our creation. (370)

In this passage, Uncle Toby first affirms Yorick’s sentimental conception of man as naturally good and then claims that war games constitute the ultimate reason for his existence. He thinks he can resolve the contradiction with his definition of war as “the getting together of quiet and harmless people, with their swords in their hands, to keep the ambitious and turbulent within bounds” (370). Do we read this definition literally because the narrator endorses Uncle Toby’s apologetical oration as “a fine model of defense” (368), or do we read it ironically because at the time it was written, Great Britain was waging an imperialistic war from which it emerged the world’s

leading colonial power? These questions have plagued scholarship for decades.

In an article on the theme of war in *Tristram Shandy*, Madeleine Descargues calls for a truce, describing the apologetical oration as a “deadpan presentation of contradictory rhetorical discourses” (241). Taking into account its eighteenth-century historical context, Sterne’s intertextual references, and the wider overall narrative structure, she demonstrates the impossibility of employing this passage as either an attack on or a defence of war. Furthermore, she argues that the passage’s unresolvable ironies form part of Sterne’s efforts to advance critical reading practices, summarizing: “the problematic apology for war can be said to condense the formidable energies of Sterne’s text, and for the best of reasons: ‘—Endless is the Search for Truth!’<sup>15</sup>—all to make the reader more present to his own act of interpretation” (255).

Descargues’s reading of *Tristram Shandy* is comparable to my reading of *Candide* insofar as both texts are shown to use irony as a means of fostering a critically engaged readership. They set aside univocal pronouncements on the nature of man in order to empower the reader. Nevertheless, there are some fundamental differences. Voltaire suspends judgement on the nature of man but offers a vehement critique of war. Sterne suspends judgement in both cases. Voltaire finds the roots of war in egoism and, by extension, nationalism and religious dogmatism. Sterne also locates the origins of war in self-love (101), but he is not so quick to condemn national pride or organized religion. On the contrary, his embodiments of man’s natural goodness are a British soldier and an Anglican priest.

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Sterne complicates the moral landscape by asking the reader to assess under what conditions war might be understood to promote the cause of humanity. Uncle Toby, for example, frames his participation in war as a humanitarian imperative:

I hope, Trim [...] I love mankind more than either [glory or pleasure]; and as the knowledge of arms tends so apparently to the good and the quiet of the world—and particularly that branch of it which we [Uncle Toby and Corporal Trim] have practiced together in our bowling green, has no object but to shorten the strides of AMBITION, and intrinche the lives and fortunes of the *few*, from the plunderings of the *many*—whenever that drum beats in our ears, I trust, Corporal, we shall neither of us want so much humanity and fellow-feeling as to face about and march. (497, emphasis in original)

As Melvyn New points out, this passage receives scant attention from those who read Uncle Toby as a sentimental hero, presumably because it provides such a stark contrast to the other evidence we have of Uncle Toby’s character (87). Instead of the generous, charitable gentleman who defines humanity as the willingness to open one’s purse to the unfortunate (for example, the wounded Le Fever), this speech recasts Uncle Toby as a smug, conservative defender of social inequities.<sup>16</sup> For New, Uncle Toby’s speech places “war where it truly belongs, among privilege and inequity and the preservation of property and wealth” (87). Seen from New’s perspective, *Tristram Shandy* is thus an indictment of war, and Uncle Toby is Sterne’s commentary on the failure of sentimentalism (84). But if that were true, why would Sterne bury his dissent beneath layers of ambiguity? This passage is not a clear condemnation of war, but a confused

muddle of contradictory statements, similar to the apologetical oration. Uncle Toby initially claims that he loves mankind above all else. Then he claims that he approves of war because it protects the wealth of the minority, to which he belongs, from the ambitions of the majority. The juxtaposition of these comments yields the following paradoxes: War is necessary to secure peace, and benevolence is necessary to preserve inequality. Sterne's text keeps the virtues and vices of war and sentimentalism in perfect balance, asking the reader to suspend judgement (cf. Wehrs 145).

Without pronouncing a verdict on the humanity or inhumanity of war, Sterne links it not only to egoism but also to sentimentalism. As with *Candide's* flight from the battlefield, sentimentalism does not necessarily oppose egoism but can also feed into it. If we affirm Uncle Toby's definition of war, Great Britain leads an army of self-sacrificing soldiers against an egoist other. If we ironize Uncle Toby's definition of war, Great Britain hides its self-serving nationalism under the banner of sentimentalism. For Sterne, war and sentimentalism are not just opposites, but also potential partners.

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Lessing's *Minna von Barnhelm, oder das Soldatenglück* paints a similar picture, exploring not only the tensions, but also the affinities, between war and sentimentalism. The title of the play juxtaposes these two historical phenomena, identifying the female protagonist Minna, whose name derives from the Middle High German word for courtly love (*Minne*), with the soldier's luck and/or happiness (the German term *Glück* contains both meanings). The play's title reflects the intimate connection of war and sentimentalism throughout the play. The male protagonist, Major von Tellheim, and his fellow soldiers balance sentimental principles with warlike mentalities in a way that engenders ironic tension.

The first scene of the play opens with Just, Tellheim's sole remaining servant, violently attacking his landlord in a dream for having slighted his master. Subsequent scenes flesh out the tensions in Just's character; he is a would-be murderer, arsonist, and thief, who threatens violence at every corner. On the other hand, he is incredibly sensitive, honest, and loyal. When Tellheim lets him go because he no longer has the money to support a servant, Just breaks down in tears (a hallmark of sentimentalism), claiming he would have expected his death before his dismissal. In an attempt to convince Tellheim to keep him on, he recounts an anecdote about a stray dog that he unintentionally saved from drowning. The dog, grateful to his unwitting savior, follows him everywhere. Just, who dislikes dogs intensely, beats him and neglects him, but the dog remains so faithful that he states he will probably overcome his aversion. In a recent biography of Lessing, H.B. Nisbet refers to Just's story as a "quintessential example of literary sensibility" (351). This is an interesting claim because it implies that the quintessence of sentimentalism is not emotion, as is generally believed, but rather a pairing of violence and emotion. It is true: classic examples of sentimentalism such as Richardson's *Clarissa* (1748) center around a victim of violence, whether physical or symbolic, with whom the reader is meant to experience compassion. Voltaire, Sterne, and Lessing complicate the matter by merging victim

and perpetrator. What sets Just, Candide, and Uncle Toby apart from other examples of literary sensibility is that the violence and emotion are embodied in one individual. Tellheim himself draws a direct connection between Just and the sentimental doctrine of man's natural goodness. To Just's account of the stray dog, he responds: "No there are no completely inhuman people" (11).<sup>17</sup> Tellheim's "no" suggests that he had begun to doubt the validity of sentimental principles but Just's story of animal abuse reaffirms his faith in man's natural goodness.

Just's curious mix of irascibility and tenderness gives rise to a humorous scene rife with verbal and situational ironies. Franziska, Minna's maid and companion, questions Just about the whereabouts of Tellheim's other servants, whom she knew and respected during the war. Offended by Just's brusque and uncivilized manner, Franziska wonders why Tellheim would have let so many good people go in order to retain the worst. Just explains how one servant after another betrayed the major, leaving him alone and penniless in his hour of need. However, he cloaks his initial explanations in ironic euphemisms, which Franziska takes at face value: "The valet? The major sent him off on a trip [...] The gamekeeper? The major left him in good hands [...] The coachman? He went out for a ride" (30).<sup>18</sup> As the dialogue proceeds, what actually happened becomes clear: the valet absconded with Tellheim's wardrobe, the gamekeeper was imprisoned for aiding deserters, and the coachman was a drunk who stole the major's last remaining horse. Just's initial euphemisms function as ironic commentaries on the ability of beautiful language to hide unattractive truths. Moreover, a situational irony arises in that the only man Franziska thought unworthy of Tellheim turns out to be his only faithful servant.

Sergeant Paul Werner demonstrates an analogous mixture of sentimental virtue and military aggressiveness. Lessing introduces Werner's friendship with Tellheim in sentimental terms, as Werner offers Tellheim money despite his own poverty. Tellheim, whose honor has been tarnished as a result of corruption charges, continuously refuses his friend's help. Frustrated with Tellheim's stubborn refusal, Werner reminds him of his willingness to accept aid during battle:

You don't want to be in my debt, but supposing you are already in my debt, Major? Or don't you owe anything to the man who warded off the blow that would have split your head in two, or who another time chopped off the arm which was going to shoot you through the heart? How can you get further in his debt? Or is my neck worth less than my purse? (38-39)

Werner construes his violent deeds in battle as acts of sentimental benevolence. Martin Kagel argues that *Minna von Barnhelm* idealizes war as a method of self-transcendence. According to Kagel, Lessing equates war with sentimental love insofar as both are presented as opportunities for transcending the self and giving oneself to the other, be it a friend, lover, nation or ideal (Kagel 26). The basic structure of the play seems to confirm Kagel's thesis. The war brings the hero and heroine together and establishes sentimental friendships between Tellheim and his fellow soldiers, transcending differences of military rank and social estate. Peacetime, by contrast,

threatens to replace the sentimental bonds of war with Tellheim's cold stoicism. Yet, in arguing his point, Kagel downplays the text's indictment of war.

As Monika Fick argues, the very act of generosity that places Tellheim under suspicion of corruption constitutes a criticism of Prussian war tactics (342). When tasked to collect war contributions from the Saxon population, Tellheim loans the Saxons money, covering the difference between what they have and what Prussia demands. After the armistice, he goes to the Prussian authorities to be reimbursed, but the Prussians claim he did not actually loan the Saxons money, but instead took the sum as a bribe for accepting the lowest possible contribution. Tellheim's willingness to forward his own money to the Saxons suggests that he finds the Prussian policy of war contributions too harsh. Furthermore, the false charges laid against him suggest that the Prussian system is not only harsh but also unjust. Other critical moments in Lessing's portrayal of war include his characterization of Frederick the Great. Several scholars have noted that Lessing paints the fictional King of Prussia in such a way as to highlight the failings of his historical counterpart (Brenner 123; Nisbet 355; Wittkowski 61). Lessing's text portrays the theatre of war not only as a place of sentimental communion but also as a locus of cruelty and injustice.

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Lessing's play uses structural irony to reinforce the text's ambivalent presentation of war. In a conversation with Just, Werner expresses his excitement about the outbreak of war in Persia: "Thank God there's somewhere left in the world where there's a war on! I kept hoping it would break out here again [...] Our ancestors used to fight the Turks, and we would too if only we were honest men and good Christians" (13-14).<sup>19</sup> Werner's positive attitude toward war finds an echo in some of Franziska's comments. When responding to Minna's anxiety about Tellheim's lack of communication since the armistice, Franziska exclaims: "Another complaint against peace. Wonderful! Peace is supposed to make good all the evil caused by the war, but it also seems to destroy whatever good the war brought about. Peace ought not to be so obstinate" (17).<sup>20</sup> It is tempting to interpret these comments as classic examples of structural irony, in which the comments of a naïve character are contradicted by the structure of the narrative as a whole. However, the situation in *Minna* resists such simplifications. Werner's and Franziska's positive commentary on war is affirmed by the war's ability to bind people together, but is also negated by its cruelties and injustices.

As sentimental soldiers, Just and Werner comically illustrate the tensions between sentimental culture and militarism, from which Tellheim then draws broader political implications. The major responds to Werner's suggestion they recommission themselves in the army of Prince Heraclius in Persia by differentiating between honourable and dishonourable reasons for enlisting: "A man should be a soldier in order to fight for his country or for a cause, not to serve here today and there tomorrow. That's no better than being a butcher's boy" (39).<sup>21</sup> According to Helmut Walser Smith, Tellheim's justification for military service expresses a new form of nationalism, which grafted "an ideal of friendship onto the territorial state" (9).<sup>22</sup> Smith

locates the origin of this new brand of nationalism in eighteenth-century sentimental discourse, which Prussia instrumentalized for its own purposes.<sup>23</sup> The patriotic ideal of self-sacrifice was traditionally directed at the king and/or one's friends, as is the case in Werner's account of saving Tellheim on the battlefield. However, Prussia succeeded in transposing this ideal of loyalty onto the warring state (Smith 9), as expressed in Tellheim's ostensible "love of the cause."<sup>24</sup> In essence, Lessing highlights a historical transition from a conservative conception of honour, which is transferable to various theatres of war, to a progressive honour code, which is founded on a sentimental attachment to a specific nation or cause. However, after espousing the dictates of sentimental nationalism, Tellheim immediately undermines their legitimacy. He acknowledges that his real motives for joining the war effort were not as noble as those he preached to Werner. In fact, he cannot even remember what motivated him politically and he now regrets his decision. The play ends happily, as befits a comedy, with Tellheim devoting himself exclusively to Minna/*Minne*, that is, to service of love and thus destroying the tensions between war and sentimentalism in favour of the latter.

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But the happy ending does not overturn the text's critical analysis. *Minna von Barnhelm* portrays war and sentimentalism as conflicting but also mutually reinforcing phenomena. Lessing's peaceful soldiers differ from Voltaire's *Candide* and Sterne's *Uncle Toby* in significant ways. *Candide* is a gentle soul who is driven to violence by circumstances, whereas Just's and Werner's mixture of violence and goodness is inherent in their constitutions. Furthermore, their contradictory natures are ironically comical in the spirit of *Uncle Toby*, but they are not paradoxical. Sterne's text creates a wormhole that cannot be closed; *Uncle Toby* is either a sentimental hero or a nationalistic defender of injustice. He cannot be both, as the two are shown to be irreconcilable (cf. Keymer 90). Just and Werner are, by contrast, genuine violence-loving sentimentalists. Their hybridity is possible because their violence is neither nationalistic nor cosmopolitan in scope. They fight for pay and for sentimental loyalty to friends, not king, country, or an abstract ideal of humanity.

Tellheim's violence has broader philosophical implications, or would have if it continued. For Tellheim, the violence of war is justified only if one has a sentimental devotion to a cause or country, which reflects his affirmative stance on nascent Prussian nationalism.<sup>25</sup> Hence, by negating his own commitment to the Prussian cause, he also invalidates his justification for violence. In the end, Tellheim no longer balances war and sentimentalism, as *Uncle Toby* does. He considers his participation in war a youthful mistake and withdraws into a domestic space with his Saxon bride, their marriage symbolizing the triumph of an inclusive humanity over nationalistic divisions. Minna's Saxon uncle embraces Tellheim as a son, explaining that Tellheim's goodness transcends his own prejudice against Prussian officers.

In summary, Lessing's *Minna* shows not only the tensions between war and sentimentalism, but also their affinities. On the one hand, war feeds sentimentalism, encouraging men to transcend egoism and sacrifice their lives for the other. On the

other hand, sentimentalism feeds war. The ideal of sentimental friendship, once grafted onto the state, gives rise to a militant nationalism, for which soldiers willingly sacrifice their lives.

The literary responses of Voltaire, Sterne, and Lessing to the Seven Years' War employ irony as a means to promote critical thinking about the nature of man, his relationship to war, and his forms of belonging. Lessing summarizes an approach to aesthetics shared by all three authors when he states, "I am not duty-bound to resolve the difficulties I create. May my ideas always be somewhat disjunct, or even appear to contradict one another, if only they are ideas in which readers find material that stirs them to think for themselves" (qtd. in Arendt 8). *Candide*, *Tristram Shandy*, and *Minna von Barnhelm* uncover a complex nexus of forces, in which sentimentalism is both in opposition to and complicit in the self-interest of nationalistic warfare. Why does this matter? It matters because all three authors show the war-sentimentalism debate as underpinning the nationalism-cosmopolitan debate. In demonstrating the inability of sentimentalism to divorce itself from or triumph over the brutality of war, they foreshadow the defeat of cosmopolitanism by nationalism. However, it was, and is not, a foregone conclusion. Irony keeps these forces in balance. It is up to each reader, and each generation of readers, to decide.

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## NOTES

1. This paper was supported by the Lichtenberg-Kolleg at the University of Göttingen and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.
2. Recent scholarship acknowledges early forms of German nationalism in the middle of the eighteenth century, emphasizing the Seven Years' War as an important factor in its development (Jansen 234-38). British and French nationalism date further back (Greenfeld).
3. Proponents of sentimentalism (including David Hume, Adam Smith, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau) express skepticism about whether the principles of sympathy can be universalized. But their theories nevertheless point in that direction. For example, Rousseau explains his preference for small political states over large ones with the claim, "the sentiment of humanity evaporates and weakens as it is extended over the whole world" (*Social Contract* 219). However, elsewhere, he gives preference to cosmopolitanism over nationalism: "In breaking the bonds that attached me to my country I extended it over the whole earth, and in ceasing to be a Citizen, I became all the more a man" ("Emile and Sophie" 296).
4. "Sein und seiner Soldaten Betragen bei dieser Gelegenheit charakterisierte den Geist unsers Zeitalters, wo man sich bemüht, selbst im Kriege, mitten unter harten Demütigungen, unter höchst kränkenden, ja schrecklichen Szenen, verfeinerte Sitten, Empfindsamkeit und Höflichkeit anzubringen" (22). The above translation is my own.
5. For a book-length study of Voltaire's reception of sentimentalism, see Ridgway, whose claim that "the rare conjunction of irony and extreme sensibility is surely one of the keys to Voltaire's unique qualities as a writer" (226) aligns well with the argument of this article.
6. "un jeune garçon à qui la nature avait donné les mœurs les plus douces" (118).
7. "avec une vivacité, une sensibilité, une grâce toute particulière" (121).

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8. “Ah monsieur! mettez-vous à table ; non seulement nous vous défrayerons, mais nous ne souffrirons jamais qu’un homme comme vous manque d’argent ; *les hommes ne sont fait que pour se secourir les uns les autres*” (122, my emphasis).
  9. “La cruauté et la barbarie [...] Ce serait donc à tous ceux qui doivent gouverner les hommes que l’on devrait inculquer les plus d’éloignement pour tous les abus qu’ils peuvent faire d’une puissance illimitée” (251).
  10. “plus ému encore de compassion que d’horreur” (129).
  11. “Messieurs, dit Cacambo, vous comptez donc manger aujourd’hui un jésuite; c’est très bien fait; rien n’est plus juste que de traiter ainsi des ennemis. En effet le droit naturel nous enseigne à tuer notre prochain, et c’est ainsi qu’on en agit dans toute la terre” (179).
  12. Pearson stresses the importance of nationalism for *Candide* (133).
  13. “Il passa par-dessus des tas de mort et de mourants” (126).
  14. For an interesting reading of the intersection between sentimentalism and irony, see Kim, who wants to explain “what historical conditions enabled such an audacious act of generic hybridity [i.e., sentimental irony] in the first place” (6). Kim finds an answer in shifting gender norms, whereas I find it in the clash of sentimentalism and war.
  15. This quotation is taken directly from *Tristram Shandy* (73).
  16. Uncle Toby reproaches Trim for not having given Le Fever (a penniless, wounded soldier) his purse. Trim explains that he had no orders to do so, to which Toby replies: “thou didst very right, Trim, as a soldier,—but certainly very wrong as a man” (341).
  17. “Nein, es gibt keine völlige Unmenschen” (618).
  18. “Der Kammerdiener? den läßt der Major reisen [...] Der Jäger? den hat der Herr aufzuheben gegeben. [...] Der Kutscher? der ist weggeritten” (643).
  19. “Gott sei Dank, daß doch noch irgendwo in der Welt Krieg ist! Ich habe lange genug gehofft, es sollte heir wieder losgehen [...] Unsere Vorfahren zogen fleißig wider den Türken; und das sollten wir noch tun, wenn wir ehrliche Kerls, und gut Christen wären” (621).
  20. “Auch ein Seufzer wider den Frieden! Wunderbar! der Friede sollte nur das Böse wieder gut machen, das der Krieg gestiftet, und er zerrüttet auch das Gute, was dieser sein Gegenpart etwa noch veranlassen hat. Der Friede sollte so eigensinnig nicht sein” (626).
  21. “Man muß Soldat sein, für sein Land; oder aus Liebe zu der Sache, die gefochten wird. Ohne Absicht heute hier, morgen da dienen: hießt wie ein Fleischerknecht reisen, weiter nichts” (656).
  22. Smith actually uses the term *patriotism*, but I substitute the term *nationalism* for the sake of consistency. My justification for the substitution comes from Jansen, who, referring to the same texts as Smith (e.g. Thomas Abbt’s *Vom Tode fürs Vaterland* (1761)), labels the phenomenon “Prussian monarchist nationalism” (236).
  23. See also Bohnen (34).
  24. “Love of the cause” is my translation of the original “Liebe zur Sache.”
  25. It is important to remember that Tellheim is not a native Prussian; he is from Courland. John Whiton ties Lessing’s reasons for making Tellheim a native of Courland to his anti-Russian sentiments. This does not, however, preclude Tellheim’s nationalistic sympathies. Many Protestant states looked to Prussia and Frederick the Great to create national unity.

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