

stereotypes here are not only verbal but also social and implicit.

Benstock is emphatic about several points that at the very least are open to discussion. According to him Bloom's memory of the seedcake episode is not erotic. Let me quote more of the passage:

Ravished over her I lay, full lips full open, kissed her mouth. Yum. Softly she gave me in my mouth the seedcake warm and chewed. Mawkish pulp her mouth had mumbled sweet and sour with spittle. Joy: I ate it: joy. Young life, her lips that gave me pouting. Soft, warm, sticky, gumjelly lips. Flowers her eyes were, take me, willing eyes. . . . Wildly I lay on her, kissed her; eyes, her lips, her stretched neck, beating, woman's breast full in her blouse of nun's veiling, fat nipples upright. Hot I tongued her. She kissed me. I was kissed. All yielding she tossed my hair. Kissed, she kissed me.

Not erotic?

On *Finnegans Wake*, Benstock disallows readings on grounds that are inappropriate to a work that—apart from everything else—plays with, and on, the rules of more than one language. While Shem admittedly revels in his own “productions,” I do not agree that words like “foul” or “smelly” therefore cease to be relevant. All the tension and interest would disappear if the negative element in the situation were disallowed. After all, Joyce is asking us to consider that *mixture* of fascination and repugnance that we all experience, though each of us may place the stress differently. In any case, why should Shem's perspective be privileged? Why not Shaun's? I am interested in what is posed by the *Wake* as a whole, not in the response of a single character. Is there an extension of Benstock's “Stephen Dedalus = Joyce (= Shem) = the Truth” argument here?

Again, on *Finnegans Wake*: the “Alma Luvia, Pollabella” that ends the letter would seem less a “precise signature” than a notoriously slippery point of origins (vide, e.g., “Annushka Lutetiavitch Pufflovah,” “Anna Lyncha Pourable,” “anny livving plusquebelle,” “analectual pygmyhop,” “appy, leppy and playable”). Yes, many punctuation marks on the letter are made by a reader's fork. But the “four leaved shamrock or quadrifoil jab” is made by the hen, and we are invited to see the hen's retrieval of the letter as yet another reading: an irreverent but precise image of reading as an activity that both restores and alters the original. Benstock says, and I agree completely, “That the text is being shaped and reshaped by every reader is fundamental to *Finnegans Wake*”; surprisingly, however, he presents this statement as though it were something I had argued against.

Finally, the point about Anthony Burgess should surely be that, whether dilettante or scholar, he is

an intelligent reader of Joyce's work. And my point in quoting him together with Fritz Senn is that, however different their readings may at first appear, both are organized around a notion of origins. Given the argument throughout the essay, an argument made specific immediately after the reference, the reconciliation Benstock asks for should be obvious.

JENNIFER LEVINE
University of Toronto

Hedda Gabler and Nora Helmer

To the Editor:

Critics persist in viewing Henrik Ibsen's Hedda Gabler as a feminist heroine stifled by the bourgeois world in which she lives, despite the wealth of evidence in the play itself that Hedda is herself a petty-bourgeois housewife, whose highest ambition is to engage a footman and buy a second piano. Arthur Ganz accepts and expands John Northam's view of Hedda as rebel when he argues, in “Miracles and Vine Leaves: An Ibsen Play Rewrought” (*PMLA*, 94 [1979], 9–21), that Hedda wishes her surrogate Lövborg “not only to fulfill her desire to break through bourgeois constraints, but, as her vision of the crown of vine leaves suggests, to realize her longing for a wider psychological liberation” (p. 17). Only in his last paragraph does Ganz reluctantly admit that Hedda is a monster, but then he immediately defends her as a monster with a vision.

In what, however, does Hedda's vision consist? In her demand for another piano, a manservant, a salon, and a saddle horse? In cruelly teasing her husband's aunt? In making Berte call Master Jörgen “Doctor Tesman”? In betraying Thea's confidence? In tempting Lövborg to drink? In refusing to attend Aunt Rina's deathbed? In handing a drunken man a pistol? In killing herself and her unborn child? Clearly, this woman is more monster than visionary.

As monster, she can hardly be the psychological counterpart of Nora Helmer in *A Doll's House*; she is, rather, her foil. Unlike Nora, who is thoughtful, busy, brave, and generous, Hedda is thoughtless, bored, cowardly, and selfish. One can hardly imagine two characters more opposite; yet Ganz's thesis regarding *A Doll's House* and *Hedda Gabler* is that “at quite different stages of his career Ibsen has written the same play or, more precisely, that he used again in *Hedda Gabler* the same pattern of action and character relationships that he had employed eleven years earlier in *A Doll's House*” (p. 9). Hedda, says Ganz, is a later, darker version of Nora. The distorted way in which Ganz summarizes the plots does indeed point up the similari-

ties between the two plays; but if we examine the basic structure of each play in a commonsense fashion, we see that *A Doll's House* explores what might happen when a simple, decent woman, who wants only to lead an ordinary life, marries a man who will stop at nothing to get his own way, whereas *Hedda Gabler* reverses the situation. There a simple, decent man marries a woman who wants only "to control a human destiny" (*Oxford Ibsen*, vii, 230). Ganz is right when he says that *Hedda Gabler* is *A Doll's House* rewrought; he is wrong when he states that Hedda is a later version of Nora, for she resembles Helmer far more than she does Nora.

Take, for instance, Nora's response to Helmer's "Don't you consider what people will say!" She replies, "That's no concern of mine. All I know is that this is necessary for *me*" (v, 282). Hedda would never respond as Nora did, since the key difference between the two women is that Hedda cares what people will say, whereas Nora does not. Her scorn for scandal links Nora not with Hedda, who asks, "But what do you think people will say about you, Thea?" but rather with Thea, who replies, "Oh, they'll just have to say what they please. I simply had to do what I did" (vii, 193). While Ganz forces similarities between Nora and Hedda throughout his article, the comparison between Nora and Thea seems far more obvious.

Ganz also makes much of what he calls "the identical aspirations of Nora and Hedda." "Both heroines," he says, "dream of achieving self-realization by seeing an admired man perform an act of extraordinary courage. In each play the failure of the man to do what the heroine desires precipitates the decision by the heroine to take destiny into her own hands and separate herself drastically from the life she has previously known" (p. 10). That is, Nora leaves her husband because he will not perform the "miracle" of taking the blame for her forgery, and Hedda commits suicide because Lövborg does not return with vine leaves in his hair. From this "central point of thematic congruence" (p. 10), Ganz takes his title.

Ganz, then, answers Freud's question, "What do women want?" by responding that Hedda and Nora seek only vicarious achievement. If, however, we recognize their desire for miracles and vine leaves as peripheral to the main action, we see that what Nora really wants is love, what Hedda really craves is power. Nora leaves her husband when she finally figures out that he is not worthy of her love. The payoff in having Torvald take the blame for her forgery does not lie in the opportunity to live vicariously through a man's noble gesture. If so, Nora would be satisfied with Dr. Rank's theatrics. To Nora, Torvald's refusal to sacrifice his honor for

her sake is simple proof that he does not love her after all. Once she has realized this, she shuts the door—forever. Similarly, once Hedda recognizes defeat—"And so I am in your power, Mr. Brack. From now on I am at your mercy"—she decides to commit suicide rather than "acquiesce in what is inevitable" (vii, 266). Each of these women, then, sees herself as capable of determining her own destiny. Ganz's arguments to the contrary, neither of them is content to put her destiny into the hands of a man. Indeed, it is the desire to escape her husband's power that impels Nora's decision to leave him, just as the refusal to submit to Judge Brack's power motivates Hedda's suicide.

In short, then, all Hedda's talk of vine leaves amounts to little when weighed against her actions in the play. And while Ganz may be taken in by Hedda's fancy notions, the characters on stage see right through her. When Hedda tells Thea about Lövborg "sitting there reading aloud—with vine leaves in his hair," Thea boldly calls her bluff: "Oh, Hedda, you're just saying all this, you don't really believe it yourself" (vii, 234).

And so Ganz's thesis that "Each [heroine] idolizes a man through whom she intends to achieve 'the unattainable'" (p. 11) falters when we take a more careful look at these two women—Nora consumed by the desire for love, Hedda consumed by the desire for power, each taking the course she thinks will fulfill her desire. As different as the two characters are, they have this in common: when Nora reaches for her bags and Hedda for her pistol, each is determining her own destiny, by her own hand, not her husband's or lover's. Ganz's failure to understand the independence of these two strong women results only in a distorted view of their motives.

CHRISTINE M. BIRD
Morehouse College

Mr. Ganz replies:

I should probably not recapitulate my essay in miniature, but perhaps I can at least clarify one significant matter, the relationship of Nora and Hedda to the "idealized" man. Christine Bird seems to feel that I have minimized "the independence of these two strong women," each of whom "is determining her own destiny, by her own hand, not her husband's or lover's." (It is, by the way, difficult to reconcile this description of two independent women with her view presented earlier of Hedda as a "petty-bourgeois housewife" and Nora as "a simple, decent woman, who wants only to lead an ordi-