ings of sense in Burke and spirit in Burke's literary forms, in the genres of satire, comedy, and tragedy.

All Things Vain identifies the "perennial and immemorial ambivalences" that are built into religious satire; primarily because of the nature of its subject matter, it posits a dualistic literary perspective. In considerable detail throughout my book, I present a synopsis of binary and binomial oppositions within as well as outside literary theory, identifying numerous perspectives I call "bifocal" and "Janus-like." Most probably some of them are what McMahon refers to as "conventional categories." I think they include the kind that McMahon describes as an amalgam of forward-backward and upward-downward "dialectical strategies" (59): in my introduction I say that "satire attacks metaphysical esoterica, often being high-minded even as it takes the low road," and that "high art forms, even when they soar, are not devoid of their terrestrial, or low, subject matter." Clearly, McMahon and I have had similarly horizontal and vertical thoughts.

McMahon says that Burke's "double mode of comedy and true irony" is most apparent in *The Rhetoric of Religion*'s epilogue, that it is serious without being theological (58). Also focusing on it in chapter 4, I quote Burke specifically on his intentions in *The Rhetoric of Religion*, saying that "politics and literature contain humanistic and rhetorical genres *as* techniques," that "Burke's concluding 'Epilogue: Prologue in Heaven' is a satiric 'Parable of Purpose,'" that it is "a demonstration of the very resources of language that solve some problems in 'the talking animals' way of life in a civilization,'" and that "in an explicitly and insistently generic way, Burke maintains his sense of both politics and literature." McMahon's concluding dual celebrations—of the literary utility of Burke's dialectic irony insofar as it "responds in several ways to the sociopolitical context of America at the time it was written" and of Burke's "patiently working through texts that are central to the Western tradition and through principles that are, according to Burke, common to all human beings as symbol-using animals" (62)—seem to me unassailable. With McMahon, I value what he calls Burke's élan and incisiveness; I also think that McMahon might imitate more closely the vast scope and attention to contemporary issues in what he calls Burke's "symbolic action of comic criticism" (62). In what ways, in what particulars, I wonder, do McMahon's viewpoints differ from mine? Is his interest in "Platonist comedy" with an Augustinian bent similar to that expressed in the title of my third chapter, "'Tragisatire': Legitimacy for an Unchristened Genre"?

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Tuition, Theory, Feminism, and the Canon

To the Editor:

Large segments of the American public, including parents who pay heavy tuition tabs, appear disenchanted with the American literary academy. They ill understand strident defenses of literary theories that may prove ephemeral, insistence on a "feminist" agenda, and "canon revision," which they fear will downgrade Shakespeare and Hawthorne to make room for writers whose voices may bolster social and political priorities dear to some academicians. "Is such," some parents in effect are asking, "the 'education' for which we are spending $10,000 or $15,000 a year?"

As an MLA member living abroad and following the fray from afar (perhaps thus able to see the forest, if not all the trees?), I wish to venture the following questions, observations, and suggestions:

Who in the academy is concerned enough about the public perception to institute some dialogue—especially with tuition-paying parents?

How can we afford to wax dogmatic about the theories of living critics? It seems characteristic of our American cultural impatience *not* to allow these theoreticians the same test of time that critics from previous generations have had to undergo. Debate, yes; dogmatism, no—it's much too early. And should we be surprised if the public sees such dogmatism, bordering at times on petulant intolerance of others' views, as the very opposite of what a liberal education is meant to engender?

Feminism—and feminist women admitted this to me during a recent MLA convention forum—is no longer the best word to delineate what progressive men and women espouse today. Its continued use will prove constricting, maybe even intellectually embarrassing. If *feminism* is to continue to be taken as a positive term, we need a companion term—*masculinism* (likewise with positive connotations)—to delineate a whole complementary field of study. The absence of research into "masculinism" leaves our endeavors badly unbalanced. (I am taking issue not with the range of "feminist" priorities, many of which I endorse, just with the use of so one-sided a term and with the concomitant slighting of "masculine" notions.) Let us go on promoting the rights and sensitivities of whatever groups, or individuals, may suffer from injustice—women, men, ethnic minorities, and so on—but let us do so under a more inclusive banner.

"Canon revision"? From where I sit it looks more like canon explosion—scattershots of proposed new "must be read" authors from every interest group in the world literary marketplace. Within ten years we shall have not merely "revised" the canon but quintupled it, particularly if another cherished—and worthwhile—goal is achieved: the opening up of the MLA to constituencies in Europe, Africa, Latin America, and Asia. The use of the word

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canon as designating a body of authors whose acquaintance should be urged on those aspiring to be "educated persons" will become ludicrous. Again, the problem is less with the process than with the nomenclature (and perhaps with unrealistic expectations for the reception of the newly "canonized" authors). Should we not perhaps speak of "canon*s*" (rather than of "*a* canon"), classical, traditional, revised, expanded, possibly schematized by rings in concentric circles to demarcate amplifications?

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Ibsen and Feminism

To the Editor:

In an age of mandarin critical theory, Joan Templeton ignores the basic principle of literary discussion: keep your eye on the text. In her essay on *A Doll House* ("The *Doll House* Backlash: Criticism, Feminism, and Ibsen," 104 [1989]: 28–40), she tells us much about Ibsen and his critics but little about his play. She should have followed, at the very least, the advice she enjoins on others and examined "'the hierarchical oppositions on which . . . [the work] relies'" (34). Since "the moral center of *A Doll House*" in her view is the "conflict . . . between masculine and feminine," Templeton should herself have "risen to . . . [the] challenge" (35, 34) and explained the many forms that the conflict takes.

The conflict is not confined, as Templeton believes it is, to the marriage of Torvald and Nora. It envelops the entire play, from the sad story of the nurse, a seduced and abandoned servant, to the checkered relationships of Mrs. Linde. Mrs. Linde has a particularly crucial role in the drama, for she, far more than Torvald, is "Nora's foil" (34). According to Templeton, the rebuttal of Nora's final position must be sought, if anywhere, in "the dialogue . . . [of the] husband" (34), where paradoxically it cannot be found: nothing "deconstruct[s]" Nora's position. Templeton notwithstanding, the rebuttal of Nora's final position must be sought and found in the actions of Mrs. Linde. As the voice of the playwright, Mrs. Linde opposes to conventional marriage not the credo of "early modern feminism" but a wise and loving heart. When she gives up her independent life to marry Krogstad and to care for his children, she experiences "the miracle" of which Nora has only dreamed, a sense of self-fulfillment in love:

> *Mrs. Linde*: How different! How different! Someone to work for, to live for—a home to build.

Mrs. Linde's decision resolves the battle of the sexes. For its results are no less miraculous to Krogstad ("I can't believe it; I've never been so happy"), and it saves them both from that "Despair" which attends Nora's departure—according to Ibsen's working notes for the play (*The Oxford Ibsen*, ed. James Walter McFarlane, 5: 437). In Mrs. Linde we find embodied that same romantic principle which Ibsen felt, late in life, he had better teach the Norwegian Women's Rights League:

> I am not a member of the Women's Rights League. . . . I am not even quite clear as to just what this women's rights movement really is. . . . It is the women who shall solve the human problem. As mothers they shall solve it. And only in that capacity can they solve it.
> (*Letters and Speeches*, ed. Evert Sprinchorn, 337–38)

Templeton may complain that, in my objections, I mistake her purpose, which is not so much to discuss *A Doll House* as to assault its critics. Even assuming she can overturn other people's interpretations without setting forth her own, how reliable is her method? That many critics believe the play is "not really about women" hardly supports her thesis of a "gentlemanly backlash": many gentlemen interpret the play as narrowly as she does—for example, Hans Heiberg (*Ibsen: A Portrait*) and Theodore Joergenson (*Henrik Ibsen: A Study*), as well as Francis Fergusson (*The Idea of a Theater*), the popularist William Benét (*The Reader's Encyclopedia*), and, among others, John Gassner (*Masters of the Drama*). Although she thinks her views are boldly revisionist, Templeton argues a commonplace. She should have allowed her coadjutors some notice. Their absence makes one wonder about her fair-mindedness and candor.

And one must wonder about much else. To prove her special case, that Ibsen was a dedicated feminist, she points to *Pillars of Society*, the subject of which is not "the New Woman" but the confrontation between the trolls of modern respectability and a Norse goddess in modern dress, and she ignores *Hedda Gabler*, the subject of which is the New Woman, but as femme fatale. She warns us not to infer Ibsen's "intention" in *A Doll House* from the pronouncements of "the aging playwright"; nevertheless, from a pronouncement of the aging playwright—he was pleased his infant granddaughter was to be christened Eleanora—she infers that he cherished the name Nora, a common diminutive for Eleanora, and therefore that he had from the beginning "admired, even adored, Nora Helmer" (34). She invents an excuse for his repudiation of the Women's Rights League ("he was primarily interested in young women and annoyed by the elderly feminists who surrounded him") and then finds in his support for the female members of the Scandinavian Club in Rome proof of "his passionate support for the [feminist] movement" but not of his "'pathetic longing for young girls'" (37, 36).

Besides her slipshod handling of evidence, there is the treatment of her key term: *feminism* (or *feminist*). Not

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