

As Caryl Emerson and I have explained at length, *theoretism* (our preferred translation of the word) as Bakhtin coined the term applies to *many* doctrines that think away the “eventness” of events and see the messy particularities of experience as capturable at least in principle by a system of rules or laws. For Bakhtin, structuralism, Russian formalism, and Freudianism, as well as the Marxism he knew and lived under, were all examples of theoretism. As for our “effectively” saying—that is, our *not* saying—that Bakhtin endorsed “Anglo-Saxon empiricism”: surely Hirschkop and Shepherd are aware of attempts in many cultures and philosophical traditions to argue the irreducibility of the particular to the general. To take a Russian example, Tolstoy explodes system after system in *War and Peace*. And while Hirschkop and Shepherd insist on German sources, they overlook this theme in Goethe—hardly an Anglo-Saxon empiricist—to whom Bakhtin devoted a study.

Nowhere do I (or does Emerson) say that Bakhtin was an American liberal. We do say that in contrast to the picture of him common among a number of British and American commentators, Bakhtin would not have considered himself a Marxist and was, indeed, hostile to Marxism. (In my *PMLA* introduction, I quote two of his withering comments on it.) And I have argued that in his antipathy to theoretism he belongs to a tradition of Russian writers and thinkers—some of whom were active liberals—who saw the danger of Marxism, of utopianism, and of the penchant for abstract social systematizing common among the prerevolutionary Russian intelligentsia.

What I found most startling in a first reading of Hirschkop and Shepherd’s letter, apart from its rather hectoring tone, was the ambitious range of motives, tasks, visions, endorsements, and axes to grind that they project onto me. As my opening example illustrates, they conflate the ideas and viewpoints I have stated as my own with those I have ascribed to others. They fantasize a range of opinions and projects for me. They use quotation marks in such a way as to suggest they are quoting my personal point of view when in fact they are quoting my description of others’ viewpoints. And they adopt alternately outraged and sneering tones when referring to some of the most commonplace of historical and political judgments. (Dislike of Stalinist tyranny becomes for them cold-war hysteria.) It is their representation of my views that deserves their term “farcelike.”

The authors flail around at everything in sight without ever seriously addressing the major contentions in my introduction to the Russian cluster, which are these:

(1) Most American Slavists are rather alienated from the predominant trends in academic literary theory.

(2) Most American Slavists are acutely aware of the pitfalls of political reductionism because of their familiarity with Soviet cultural history. For instance, arguments that literary value is entirely relative to social needs or to political power and attempts to reduce all aesthetic categories “ultimately” to political ones are neither new nor attractive to most American Slavists. (Do these two scholars from British universities think I mischaracterize American Slavistics?)

(3) This familiarity with Soviet history also leads most American Slavists to be suspicious of Marxists’ claims to be the champions of social progress.

(4) Most Slavists and Russians diverge widely from the larger American theoretical world in their view of Bakhtin and in the use they make of his terms and concepts. This is not to deny that there are also wide divergences on this subject within the first group, but the intragroup controversies often differ from the intergroup conflicts.

My introduction to the Russian cluster appears to have presented Hirschkop and Shepherd a convenient pretext for launching an attack, although their real grievances seem to lie with the views of Bakhtin and literary theory that I have expressed in books and articles over the years. In a short reply, I can hardly correct all the misrepresentations in their letter, but if readers would like to know what I did say about Bakhtin, I refer them first to the book I wrote with Caryl Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1990); to our introduction to *Rethinking Bakhtin: Extensions and Challenges*, which contains a detailed summary of Bakhtin’s essay “Toward a Philosophy of the Act” (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1989); and, among my recent articles, to “Bakhtin, Genres, and Temporality” (*New Literary History* 22 [1991]: 1071–92) and “Prosaic Bakhtin” (*Common Knowledge* 2 [1993]: 35–74).

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Intentions, Foundationalism, Symmetry

To the Editor:

Although I agree with many of the substantive points in Barbara Hodgdon’s Forum reply to Lucien Goldschmidt, Robert F. Fleissner, and Thomas A.

Pendleton (108 [1993]: 153–54), I do not understand why she is scornful of Fleissner's claim to be "in touch with Shakespeare's intentions" when she herself claims to be in touch with *their* intentions: she states at the outset that "each aims at instructing me and amending my essay's 'faults.'" She even claims to be in touch with Goldschmidt's unconscious, for she says his letter is "anxious, even hysterical." I also have trouble understanding why she accuses Goldschmidt of being "antitheoretical" when his crime is that he espouses a theory different from her own. Indeed, to speak of his "foundationalist, antitheoretical position" seems self-contradictory, unless she believes that the theories she disapproves of, like foundationalism, are not really theories.

My main purpose in writing, however, is to object to her reference—or rather to the copyeditor's failure to flag her reference—to her three interlocutors as "these gentlemen." Val Dumond points out, correctly I think, that men's references to women as "ladies" are often condescending or patronizing (*The Elements of Nonsexist Usage*, New York: Prentice, 1990, 47), and I therefore do not use the word. But surely that also applies to a woman's referring to men as "gentlemen," especially when this is meant to be derogatory, as it clearly is in Hodgdon's sentence (note that I too claim to infer writers' intentions from their words, just like any other reader). She is angry at them for presuming to instruct her and amend her "faults," which is her right (although that is the purpose of most letters to the Forum), but it does not give her the right to deploy sexist language against them. It seems to me, therefore, that if the MLA wants to eliminate sexist language from its publications, which I think is a very worthy goal, then she should have been asked to reconsider her use of "these gentlemen."

RICHARD LEVIN
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Reply:

The issues Richard Levin raises have histories that he conveniently elides. On the question of intentionality, he seems to assume not only that all discourse is transparent but that a late-sixteenth-century text is embedded in the same psychosexual and cultural milieu as a late-twentieth-century text. Moreover, he makes no distinction between discerning intentionality as it pertains to "the author" (or her or his unconscious) and as it concerns the discourse the author writes. Although I find a claim for uncovering "Shake-

speare's intentions" difficult to sustain, I do think that one stands on slightly firmer ground when reading a *discourse* that speaks from one's own contemporary cultural space. And although we all tend to espouse particular theoretical positions and so to disavow others (Levin himself is no stranger to such critical moves), foundationalism, as I understand it, is less a theoretical position than a stance that, by celebrating the self-evident and the obvious, aims to erode and disable the tools of theory. I refer Levin to Eve Sedgwick's "Queer and Now," in *Wild Orchids and Trotsky*, edited by Mark Edmundson (New York: Penguin, 1993), especially page 260, where he may find that stance, as well as its politics, described. As for Levin's final point, his account of the usage of "lady" and "gentleman" not only makes a historical error by assuming a linguistic symmetry between the two but thereby misses an issue central to the feminist project: that sexist terms arise from a *lack* of symmetry in the language. It was, I believe, at some point during the eighteenth century that "lady" slipped from class to gender, becoming a term that could be used to contain women; "gentleman," on the other hand, has undergone no such slippage. Could it be that in objecting to my usage of "gentlemen," Levin searches too anxiously for yet another ironic reading to debunk where none was "intended"?

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Face Painting in Early Modern England

To the Editor:

In "Taking the Pencil out of God's Hand: Art, Nature, and the Face-Painting Debate in Early Modern England" (108 [1993]: 224–39), Frances E. Dolan convincingly demonstrates the interdiction of female agency in the cosmetic fashioning of early modern bodies. She provides an interesting array of (primarily) seventeenth-century writings to establish that the hand that mocked and the heart that fed were entirely male. However, the essay would benefit from some commentary on historical or political contingencies, mainly because all the attacks on face painting that Dolan quotes range from 1583 to 1616 whereas all the defenses come from 1660 and 1665. The essay conflates these two periods under the designation "early modern England" without considering how changing cosmologies—both scientific and political—effected changing cosmetologies of the seventeenth century.