

notable extended discussions in long chapters of books, such as by Ahmad, Suleri, and Gorra.

- <sup>3</sup> St. Martin's has commissioned another monograph that is under preparation by D. C. R. A. Goonetilleke. Dhawan's volume offers an early sample of Indian scholarship on Rushdie, while a collection of more recent critical essays is also under preparation by Twayne, edited by Keith M. Booker.
- <sup>4</sup> It is worth recalling that the novel is not exclusively a Western form. As Brennan tells us, the novel in Bengali, Hindi, and Urdu thrived in Anglo-India long before the Indian novel in English (80).

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Caryl Emerson. *The First Hundred Years of Mikhail Bakhtin*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1997. Pp. xvi, 293. \$29.95.

I was at the 1997 International Bakhtin Conference in Calgary, about to hear my umpteenth paper on "Bakhtin and [insert name of scary continental philosopher]" and wondering whether I was the only literary type in the audience? Then Caryl Emerson strolled in and happened to sit down beside me; under her arm were proofs of *The First Hundred Years of Mikhail Bakhtin*. I don't think I asked her about it (everyone knows she's been doing a new book, right?—not the time to show my ignorance). But I do recall thinking to myself, "If there's anyone who can find some order in this. . . ."

Marking the centennial of the world's most influential Russian humanist and written by one of his foremost non-Russian interpreters, this is a work of synthesis that is bound to be noticed. All the more so, since the Bakhtin industry has proven itself without equal in its capacity to generate an ideologically irreconcilable diversity of scholarly approaches. Not that there's anything wrong with heteroglossia; still, the question of Bakhtin's amenability to unification and systematization has been particularly troubling. On the one hand, if we take him at all

seriously, we must be willing to apply the Bakhtinian credo of unfinishedness and internal dialogue to his own work. More pragmatically, we must accept the inevitability of change over such a long, tortuous career as was Bakhtin's. On the other hand, there is so much to convince us that, despite everything, Bakhtin was indeed pursuing one grand vision throughout his life. We can justify the vagueness of its contours by appealing both to the extrinsic obstacles he faced in saying what he really wanted to say, as well as to his intrinsic difficulty in finding a language adequate to his revolutionary thought. So much to convince us . . . and the mute anxiety that if Bakhtin, with his charming abstruseness and mercurial neologisms, is *not* a man of one grand, original vision, then perhaps he is much less of a paradigm-breaker than we were led to believe in the first place. Or maybe it's that we don't know Russian; maybe we lack the patience to wait for some last smudged-pencil Saransk/Rosetta scribble to be unarchived and decrypted; or maybe these neologisms can't be translated in the first place.

Western scholars' suspicion that their outsidersness (*vnenakhodimost'*) is not of the good, Bakhtinian kind has only increased in the post-Soviet era, as Russians hasten to stake patriotic claims on a profitable, formerly export-only commodity. The mass of non-Russians who merely *use* Bakhtin (and with whom the enthusiasts of Saransk and Vitebsk have the least patience) will lose little sleep over this issue. Those more actively engaged, however, will agree that only someone with Caryl Emerson's credentials could hope to achieve a clear perspective on the turbulent state of contemporary international Bakhtin studies. A major translator of his works, co-author of the 1990 *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics* (arguably the best attempt so far at fitting any sort of hermeneutic template on the thinker's oeuvre), and a leading American Slavist with strong links to the Russian Bakhtin community, Emerson seems ideally suited for such a task.

As it turns out, *The First Hundred Years* is not quite the comprehensive overview hinted at in its title (and dust-jacket blurb). While full of insightful parallels between Western and Russian approaches to the key concepts (*prosaics*, *dialogue* and *unfinalizability*, as per *Creation of a Prosaics*), it concentrates on the Russian side—on guiding non-Slavist readers through the cultural complexities of Bakhtin's reception in his homeland, not only today, but from the very beginning in the 1920s. Of course, Emerson's book is no less valuable for this: not only does she advance our understanding of the field as a whole, but she also argues convincingly (as do most of her Russian colleagues) that Bakhtin must be appreciated within his native context. To understand the current struggle over his legacy is also, to a great extent, to understand the dynamics of post-Soviet intellectual culture in its relationship with the West. This includes the question of Russian post-modernism, upon which Emerson offers some shrewd comments—

and also the naïve American assumption that after 1991, Moscow's cultural values would automatically converge with those of the West.

As for Bakhtin's own values—aesthetic, spiritual, political—these have become an ever greater source of interest, pushing aside such problems as the validity of his literary-critical methods, as Russians discover the philosopher (or *myslitel'* ["thinker"])—implying an eclectic, less purely academic range of interests) behind the philologist. For the most part, *The First Hundred Years* stands as an apology for this decisive reinterpretation. Scholarly attention has shifted from those texts that originally made Bakhtin's name outside of Russia (the Rabelais and Dostoevsky books, the essays of *The Dialogic Imagination*) to those more recently-published early and late manuscripts that are "crucial to any informed study of Bakhtin's mature work" (73). Literature has "faded from view" or become merely illustrative of deeper philosophical concerns (125). The leftist flavour of much Western Bakhtinian criticism (especially that involving *carnivalization*, an idea given short shrift in *Creation of a Prosaics*, but shown in a more positive light here) sets it squarely against this new philosophical orientation, which gives us a Bakhtin whose values of "radical conservatism" (69) were cast in the pre-revolutionary era. Imbued with a sense of individual moral obligation based on Orthodox spirituality, he claimed at the same time to be "utterly apolitical." This makes him uniquely attractive to today's generation of "Russian cultural survivors." As Emerson writes,

For some time now, Russian intellectuals have been experiencing a general and very sensible revulsion against politicized group-think—which, after all, had brought them to the edge of an abyss. They argue that there is no greater honor than to be genuinely marginal, out of the way, not part of a powerful institution, your own person, alive. (22)

This is indeed an understandable attitude. Still, even if one ignores the general implications of this sanguine division of the personal and the political, it remains troubling—especially when voiced by such a figure of Western academic authority. To many former members of the Soviet intelligentsia, Bakhtin's reputed apoliticism will make a convenient precedent, as they seek exculpation for their past political acquiescence—and more significantly, for their current avoidance of their civic duties. (A similar role has been played by Western postmodern theory—for example, the idea that Soviet life was only a Baudrillardian simulation of reality, thus precluding the very possibility of ethical choice.) The fashionable avoidance of political commitment among the post-Soviet cultural elite has already made a clear contribution to the electoral success of those who appeal to the lowest common denominator. The "aristocratic and disengaged image" (26) of Bakhtin may have something to recommend it; but would one so unwilling to be "driven into a realm where personal responsibility no longer applied" (123) have countenanced the direction in which

his cult is heading today? Surely Emerson, with her Bakhtinian suspicion of "the easy reflex of flipping the sign" (124) will not insist that the best and only alternative to Marxist pan-politicization is its total opposite?

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Barry Rutland, ed. *Gender and Narrativity*. Ottawa: Carleton UP, 1997. Pp. 259. \$29.95.

*Gender and Narrativity* examines the link between gender and narrativity from a variety of perspectives. The nine essays in the book are only very loosely connected—a strength or a weakness, depending on one's reading. The conjunction "and" in the title is apt, for the collection includes both stories of gender and how gender figures in various stories. There are limitations, however, inherent in the term "gender," ones that *Gender and Narrative* refracts. The concept of gender is sociological; "gender" is regarded as a social construction and contrasted with "sex," which is considered a biological given. The problem, of course, is that there are no biological "givens;" what constitutes a biological given, that we regard something as a biological "fact," is already social (and historical and cultural and linguistic). Many theorists prefer the term sexual difference, which emphasizes that femininity and masculinity are constructed *against* one another and *in* language, rather than *on* biology.

The problematic conception of a material biological body that gender grids (Introduction 2) impairs the first essay. Nevertheless John Verdon's "Toward an Epistemology of Gender," in spite of its overly scientific, system theory language, does contain the important question of why differences between the sexes came to be salient. Verdon links the emergence of gender to the story of the human evolutionary process. Despite the many significant differences between individuals, sexual difference becomes so significant, he argues, because it is the key factor in reproduction. Given that two sexes are required for reproduction, each sex is expected to make a different contribution, and the sexes come to be regarded as complementary or even as oppositional. This is where gender emerges, Verdon explains; he then goes on to argue that there is an "inevitable association of the womb with the lifeworld" (28) and that males, in order to become male, strive to differentiate themselves from the mother and the lifeworld, while females tend to identify with both. Verdon believes he detects support for his position in theorists such as Gilligan who criticize accounts of moral development that privilege a male quest for autonomy over a female concern with intersubjective relations. Verdon concludes that there is a sex-specific perceptual relation to the world, which eman-