

Response

I am grateful to Mr. Abbas both for his generous praise and for his extremely thoughtful criticisms of some aspects of my paper. My response is neither full acceptance nor complete rejection but, I hope, part of a larger 'dialogic' encounter.

Firstly, then, with regard to the charge that I set up Bakhtin as a "patriarchal" authority, ignoring his theory of laughter: in fact I have simply assumed sufficient familiarity with Bakhtin's arguments concerning the close links between the dialogism of novelistic discourse and the anti-hierarchical and anti-metaphysical social function of carnival laughter. After all, it is argued throughout the works on Dostoyevsky and on Rabelais, and has been frequently commented on in secondary literature. It is true that I use these concepts to "dialogise" Lukács, and not Bakhtin himself. To a certain extent I am attempting to offer a critique of the metaphysics of "totality," whereas I draw little attention to the possible limits of Bakhtin's theory. I would confess a bias here. Mr. Abbas suggests that there should be a symmetry in my treatment of the two sides of the "Lukács/Bakhtin double act." There is certainly a great deal of value in this suggestion. For example, it may indeed be possible to show that Bakhtin too relies on certain concepts of artistic "unity" (particular statements in *Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics* could be cited), which appear to be inconsistent with his theory of "unfinalisedness." Thus Bakhtin as a writer might be seen as inwardly divided along lines that are not entirely dissimilar to the divisions that I argue for in the case of Lukács. This would be consistent with the question mark in the title of the paper, which suggests that the opposition between totality and dialogic is itself not absolute.

With regard to the charge that I "perhaps inadvertently introduce a powerful counter-polemicist" in the person of Fredric Jameson, I must state that it is not so clear to me that my thinking is indeed in total opposition to Jameson's. Certainly I have shifted the terms. Where Jameson talks of the "imperative to totalise" (*The Political Unconscious* 53-4) which is exemplified in Lukács' "will to reestablish epic narrative" (*Marxism and Form* 204-5), I talk of Lukács' "desire for totality." Put simply, there is of course a great deal more suspicion in my formulation than in Jameson's,

since I link this desire to a historically locatable form of nostalgia. In his preface to *The Political Unconscious*, Jameson opens with the injunction: "Always historicise." Can one therefore not historicise the "imperative to totalise" itself as a form of desire arising from bourgeois alienation? Where we agree, and where I find Jameson's rereading "very valuable" (to Mr. Abbas' surprise) is in his argument that the totality is always both present and non-realizable. I cannot claim to have done justice to Jameson's subtly argued work, but I would wish to question the assumption that I am in complete opposition to Jameson. Nevertheless, the difference in my terminology is admittedly not negligible either. If the "imperative to totalise" can indeed be seen as a product of bourgeois "nostalgic" desire, then its *primacy* over modernist theories of "difference, flux, dissemination, and heterogeneity" (*Political Unconscious* 53) is no longer self-evident. It is only at this point that my argument comes into conflict with some of Jameson's formulations. A precise assessment of the extent and significance of this conflict would require a full study, in which my own views might well require modification or revision. But the crux of the matter would still remain the ideological implications of Lukács' concept of totality in the light of its mode of insertion into his own discourse. This, if understood in Bakhtin's dialogical sense, would also require a penetration of the relationship of Lukács' discourse to the contending (and frequently repressed) discourses of his epoch. In my paper, I have tried to suggest a connection between this external repression and the self-repression within Lukács' discourse. For this reason, it was important to try to show that Bakhtin's theories of textual "unfinalisedness" mean not a dismissal of history, but a form of historical consciousness which Lukács' valorisation of epic integration represses.

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