In Response

Tempered with a Harsh Word: Harzem's Review of *Modern Perspectives on John B. Watson and Classical Behaviorism*

James T. Todd
Eastern Michigan University

I appreciate Peter Harzem's (1995) favorable review of *Modern Perspectives on John B. Watson and Classical Behaviorism* (Todd & Morris, 1994). It is flattering to have a respected figure in the field of behavior analysis state that one has coedited a book that "all who aspire to scientifically understand the behavior of organisms . . . have a duty to read" (Harzem, 1995, p. 383; cf. Lichtenstein, 1995; McGuigan, 1995; Tolman, 1995). This positive appraisal notwithstanding, aspects of Harzem's review suggest a statement from Andrew Salter's (1949) classic *Conditioned Reflex Therapy*: "A critic never reviews books. He reviews himself, and sometimes tempers his remarks with a harsh word" (p. 163). Salter was referring, in part, to reviews of Skinner's *Walden Two* (1948) and was overgeneralizing as well. Nevertheless, Harzem's frequent use of unsupported assertions and harsh rhetoric is not just disrespectful to the book's contributors, it embodies the very approach Harzem accuses others of employing to discredit Watson (Harzem, 1993, 1995).

Most of the negative comments in Harzem's review center on the issues of historical inaccuracy and rhetorical distortion. In some cases, Harzem's criticisms seem overly narrow and selective. For instance, Harzem criticizes Baum's (1994) statement, "Watson left

off studying animals in favor of human babies" (p. 134) because Watson had also done some research on adult humans (e.g., Lashley & Watson, 1920; Watson, 1916). Samelson (1994), in contrast, is not criticized for an equally "incorrect" section title, "From Rats and Birds to Humans: Why?" (p. 7)—Watson had also published research with monkeys (e.g., Watson, 1909), rabbits (Watson & Watson, 1913), and other organisms (see Boakes, 1984; Todd, Dewsbury, Logue, & Dryden, 1994). Similarly, Harzem labels Baum's use of the term *group* (p. 134) to describe Watson's colleagues at Johns Hopkins University as "patently inaccurate" (p. 381) because "Watson had different relations with each of these individuals" (p. 381) and implied that Baum incorrectly asserted that "behaviorism arose collectively" (p. 384) from this group. However, Baum, citing Boakes (1984), was commenting more about influence than explicit collaboration. To suggest that Watson interacted with different people differently is not a revelation. But, it is difficult to believe that behaviorism, and writings about it, were not shaped by Watson's interactions with his colleagues (see Boakes, 1984; Leahey, 1992; Pauly, 1987; Samelson, 1994).

A problematical aspect of Harzem's critique of Baum's chapter is that none of Harzem's corrective assertions are substantiated. Indeed, in the entire review, only one of Harzem's statements about Watson is accompanied by a supporting citation. This one instance is

Address correspondence to James T. Todd, Department of Psychology, Eastern Michigan University, Ypsilanti, Michigan 48197 (E-mail: PSY_TODD@ONLINE.EMICH.EDU).

significant because Harzem uses it to make the case that John Burnham (and the editors) have not only committed a professional lapse but have also sullied the reputation of Rosalie Rayner, Watson's second wife and collaborator (see, e.g., Watson & Rayner, 1920; Watson & Watson, 1928). In his chapter, Burnham discusses his difficulties with interviewees who sometimes seemed more interested in talking about Watson's sexual reputation than his professional achievements: "Each time I tried to find out about his work in psychology . . . what I heard about instead was some woman with whom he supposedly went to bed" (Burnham, 1994, pp. 69–70). Harzem charges that Burnham's account is a "falsehood" (p. 383) and states:

The editors bear a responsibility for letting the "some woman with whom he went to bed" commentary get into print without any substantiating evidence. The point here is not about censorship, but relates to the editorial responsibility of filtering out unsupported conclusions. (p. 383)

Despite his admonition about "filtering out unsupported conclusions," Harzem offers no real evidence for his charge that Burnham's report was false. The "evidence" Harzem does offer, a quote that includes James Watson's comment that his father "maintained a superb sense of ethicality, decency, and responsibility" (p. 383), does not exclude the possibility that Watson could have also been sexually active. Harzem's case is not made stronger by James Watson's comment that John B. Watson was "well before his time in his advocacy of sex education, people living together without marriage, and freedom from normal sexual inhibitions so prevalent in the 20's and 30's" (p. 383). Harzem's additional contention that Burnham's account is "offensive to the memory of Rosalie Rayner" (p. 383) is puzzling. Is Rayner, whom Harzem describes as "an emancipated, cultured person with impeccable good taste and freedom of thought" (p. 381), to be judged on the basis of reports about her husband's

behavior rather than her own actions? If Harzem is truly concerned about giving Rayner the respect she deserves, why does he repeatedly address her by her first name (see pp. 377, 381) while all of the men mentioned in the review are addressed by their full or last names?

Harzem also admonishes authors about excesses of rhetoric. Here his main target is Kerry Buckley's (1994) chapter. After labeling it as "offensive" (p. 382), Harzem asserts that it

merely repeats the false portrait of Watson, painted by sly innuendo and biased selection of episodes, to be found in his biography of Watson. . . . There was nothing of a balanced, scholarly nature . . . in that book, and there is none in its abbreviated version here. Judging by these writings, Buckley is much given to a technique of slipping in adverbs and adjectives that serve to diminish the object of the sentence. (p. 382)

He describes Buckley's biography (1989) as "incomplete, biased, and exaggerated in aspects that show Watson in the most unfavorable light possible" (p. 377). And, he concluded,

This method of adding negative colorings, each minor by itself, is bolstered at the larger scale by the selection of snippets from Watson's life and career that apparently serve the author's agenda. When all this is combined on the large canvas, the result is a portrait of a man none of us would like. (p. 382)

Harzem's characterization of Buckley's work, however, is itself exaggerated in ways that show Buckley in an unfavorable light. Is there really *nothing* scholarly and balanced in Buckley's work? Has Buckley really tried to show Watson in the *most* unfavorable light possible? Would *none* of us like Buckley's Watson? In fact, although scholars have questioned Buckley's conclusions (Coon, 1994), portrayal of Watson (Coon, 1990), and interpretive style (Salzinger, 1994), even those who disagree with him seem to give him credit for his thorough and professional scholarship (e.g., Coon, 1990). Buckley's chapter is based upon citations and direct quotes from more than three dozen archival documents, interviews with two of Watson's children, and nu-

merous published sources. If Buckley's conclusions are in error or his writing style is misleading, at least he has provided scholars with the documentation they would require to draw their own conclusions.

Harzem's use of tactics he criticizes in others goes beyond simple exaggeration. Harzem also engages in "distortion by means of slipping in adverbs and adjectives that serve to diminish the object of the sentence." Harzem does not observe that some chapters were written from a questionable point of view or poorly executed, but states that they were "biased" and "offensive." Buckley does not choose terms because he has a scholarly reason to believe they are appropriate; according to Harzem, he has an "agenda" and employs "sly innuendo." The best Harzem can say about Burnham's chapter is that it might be "interesting in a neighborhood gossip sort of way" (p. 382). Baum does not just misinterpret evidence, his mistakes are said to be "patently inaccurate" (p. 381) and even "astonishing" (p. 382). In the final analysis, however, the fundamental issue for Harzem may not be rhetorical distortion or historical accuracy, but *whose* agenda is to be promoted. Why, for instance, should Harzem complain that Buckley's work is a "selection of snippets from Watson's life and career that apparently serve the author's agenda," when he described his own recent article on Watson (Harzem, 1993) as being "merely a selection of events and incidents from Watson's life and work . . . indicating how this great man has been wronged" (p. 39)?

Whether the issue is convincing readers about whose view is accurate or getting a more fundamental message across, Harzem might be better served by abandoning the practices he criticizes and emulating Buckley's exhaustive scholarship or Burnham's patient winnowing of problematical source material. Harzem is right that the details should be attended to. But, his main message is important and should be emphasized: Distortions of history

have made it easy to misrepresent Watson and, correspondingly, much of what is said about behaviorism is incorrect (see also Todd & Morris, 1992). However, Watson scholarship, and the understanding of behaviorism in general, are unlikely to be advanced by rhetoric that suggests that behaviorists regard a difference of opinion as an occasion for intellectual incivility (see Todd & Morris, 1992). What is more likely, and most unfortunate, is that Harzem's harsh rhetoric will distract readers from his basic message and make some readers react to Harzem's work in the same manner Skinner said many behaviorists reacted when they read Chomsky's: "They cannot understand why a man of Chomsky's distinction would write that way" (1972, p. 63; see Czubaroff, 1988).

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