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Anna Svetlikova
Typology as Rhetoric: Reading Jonathan Edwards
Doctoral Dissertation
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The main argument of this dissertation, and the principal contribution which it aims to make to the study of Edwards and to the field of American Studies, is to focus on Edwards's typology as rhetoric in order to open an examination of Edwards's texts in connection to more general issues than the existing framework of interpretation of Early American writings makes possible. The dissertation undertakes to do this by discussing the affinities of the rhetoric of Edwards's typology to that of early Romantic nature poetry, but also its connections to Renaissance allegory, thus arguing for a more complex criticism of Edwards's Early Modern typological theory than is afforded by an exclusively historical interpretation.

In the process, Ms. Svetlikova explores the respective defects and virtues of the diachronic "continuities theory" approach to American Studies as typified by Perry Miller and Frederick Mathiessen and of the method that succeeded it, Sacvan Berkovitz's historical reconstruction of social milieux of literary works to retrieve previously neglected voices.

Using the methods and works of the "Yale school of deconstruction" (Paul de Man, J. Hillis Miller, Jacques Derrida), Ms. Svetlikova undertakes a wide-ranging and comprehensive overview of the ancient and classical origins of typology and of its employment in Judaic and early Christian exegesis and hermeneutics, as well as of the Reformation, Renaissance, Pre-Romantic, and Romantic tropological relatives of the type (allegory, emblem, metonymy, symbol). Agreeing with Northrup Frye that each of these tropological traditions constitutes "a mode of thought and consequently a mode of rhetoric," she explores the rhetorical properties of each, and especially the typology employed by Jonathan Edwards, pointing out the problems with regarding Edwards's typological project, and particularly that of his "natural types," as based either on "correspondence" or on "performativity" (as the latter is understood by J.L. Austin). What remains is her conclusion that Edwards's typology might most usefully be regarded as a "parable" (in J. Hillis Miller's sense) which "promises a unified meaning of history and at the same time suggests that the fulfillment of that promise is parabolic, `thrown beside.'"

At first reading, Ms. Svetlikova's approach appears self-effacing, almost self-erasing and self-defeating. Having established the unreliability and the under- or over-determinacy of

each interpretative scheme she encounters, her dissertation seems leaves the reader beginning to wonder what is left with which to approach Edwardsian tropology and rhetoric.

But the deconstructive analyses by which she arrives at her somewhat bleak conclusions reveal themselves, on initial reading and increasingly so with each subsequent reading, as extraordinarily knowledgeable and capable applications of the methodological tools of the critical, philosophical, tropological, and rhetorical strategies that she deploys. Her analyses lead reliably and sure-handedly to her conclusions, which has much to say in favor of any dissertation.

Ms. Svetlikova writes with great fluency, rendering jargon scarce (or at least transparent after her explication) and very complicated matters readily accessible. This skill (combined with the intellectual clarity of her analysis) permits her—and her readers—to cover an enormous amount of ground (diachronically as well as synchronically) in a lucid, cogent, comprehensive, and synthetic manner. In doing so, she quietly demonstrates her own expertise and significantly sharpens the reader's understanding of Edwards's typology and its approximate virtual location in diachronic and synchronic literary, rhetorical, and historical space.

She demonstrates throughout the dissertation a well-developed familiarity with, and often manages elegantly to knit together, such apparently disparate fields as literary history from the ancients to the moderns; Reformation (and pre-Reformation) theology, homiletics, didactics, exegesis, and hermeneutics; Romantic (and Pre-Romantic) philosophical and literary problematics; and Derrida's and Miller's "deconstructive" premises regarding philosophy's failure of mastery over metaphor, along with their applications and implications.

The sections on the sublation of the self in God and on the relations of Edwards and his typology to Pre-Romanticism and Romanticism were particularly impressive to me, probably because, given my specializations, I was better able to appreciate the subtlety and accuracy with which Ms. Svetlikova understood the central issues and deployed relevant analytical matter. The exemplary skill with which this was undertaken in a section addressing issues well-known to me adds to my confidence regarding similar impressions created in other sections a bit farther from my core expertise.

She begins her dissertation with a clear and comprehensive outline of her methodological models and the sources from which they are derived. These are as diverse as her subject matter, and her introduction reviewing them provides an excellent "road map" to the dissertation and its potential significances.

All of this said, I have two questions that I would like Ms. Svetlikova to address, for my sake and (I hope) for hers, as well:

These questions are:

1) *Is Edwards a Pre-Romantic? If so, in what ways? If not, what separates him from the Pre-Romantics and Romantics? What does the preponderance of your evidence tell you?*

2) *Do you mean to place as much emphasis on the superior value of synchronic analysis as you seem to? If so, then what is wrong with diachronic analysis, and does it not have its value? And, again if so, why do you, in practice, include as many diachronic references and diachronically- (i.e. historically-) oriented critics as you do?*

Overall, this is a very impressive dissertation, of highest quality and comprehensiveness.

Dissertation evaluation: Fully satisfies the relevant requirement(s) for the PhDr. degree.

Signed:

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If the reader has any questions or needs additional information, please contact me at [drobbins@suffolk.edu](mailto:d Robbins@suffolk.edu).