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Blanka Maderova

Self, Speech and Agency: Emerson, Melville and Bartleby - Beyond Pragmatism and Performativity

This dissertation examines silence, deactivation, ruptures in discourse, and subjectivities in Melville's work and their relationship to the vitalism, rhetoricism, and performativity often characterized as constitutive to the American myths of success, willfulness, and performativity. In this work, Ms. Maderova contends that the potentialities of Bartleby, as a Melvillean anti-hero and a linguistic/operational singularity, contest the rhetorical force, performance, and unity of the isolated self represented in those myths.

In the process, Ms. Maderova compares and contrasts Melville's work with Emerson's in this regard, concluding both that the dynamic relationship between Emerson and Melville "has been shaping American culture and thinking from its very beginning and continues to do so in contemporary debates regarding the formation of subjectivity, issues of performativity and agency," and that "although Emerson is often portrayed as 'the beautiful enemy' of Melville, it can be shown that they address the same topics, especially the issues of power, speech, will, silence, protest against paternal authority, the construction of self, with the emphasis on potentiality." Both Melville's Bartleby and Emerson's poet, she argues, speak a foreign, *minoritarian* language within the language of the majority, which shall reveal new possibilities, positions for personal identity/self.

Ms. Maderova then expands her analysis to address the relevance of Melville's (and Emerson's) work to a number of related topics of particular concern to contemporary philosophical, communication, and cultural studies, such as the power of rhetoric, performativity, repetition, and presence (interpreted with the help of J. L. Austin and Gilles Deleuze) in Melville's Bartleby; detachment from the body, originality and sacrifice (exemplified in Bartleby's formula "I would prefer not to"; the self, its will, speech, and power (from the perspective of Emerson's late work, that is, of immanence that goes beyond pragmatism and speech-act theory, and which was, to a certain extent, later developed by Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault, Deleuze, Butler and others); confidence and forgery (in Melville's "Bartleby, the Scrivener" and *The Confidence-man*); rhetoric, potentiality, silence, abyss, death and the power of the self (in relation to poetic creation, gnosis, and semiotics of expressive symbols suggested in the work of Charles Sanders Peirce); law, agency, deferred action, order-words, paternal function, and pragmatic operatives (in Melville's Bartleby and Kafka's "Before the Law") and their implications for potential revision of Austin's performative theories; and (drawing on Deleuze, in contrast to Chomsky) the nonlinguistic and superlinear fluidity of Bartleby's "performance."

In these ambitious and far-ranging excursions, Ms. Maderova is successful on a very impressive proportion of occasions. Her work is knowledgeable and well-grounded in all of the disciplines on which she draws; the currency and comprehension of her bibliography are exemplary; her English is fluent and efficient; her analysis is

consistently original, insightful, and revealing; and her synthetic powers border not occasionally on the brilliant.

While, as is normal among scholars, I have certain nuanced disagreements with a few of Ms. Maderova's emphases, I must say that, within my area of particular research competence (the American Renaissance and Pragmatism), her premises and background are sound and consistent with current scholarly consensus, and her conclusions based on them often point in significant and important new directions not at all incompatible with the current trajectory of exploratory scholarship. Regarding the application to this subject matter of contemporary communication and philosophical approaches, she has received similarly superlative comments from individuals fluent with those heuristic strategies.

Ms. Maderova's dissertation provides an extremely promising précis for programs of future work to be carried out in numerous fields and directions. In itself, it is a *tour de force*, an exemplary combination of research, analysis, and synthesis. It is a work of the highest intelligence, competence, and professionalism.

Dissertation evaluation: "1, vyborne"

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).