

COMM 522: Kenneth Burke's Dramatistic Theory
Fall, 2007
2:00-4:50 Th, ASC 225
Professor: Dr. Randy Lake
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Office Hours: TBA



Kenneth Burke (1897-1993) is one of the most versatile, widely respected and influential “men of letters” of the 20th century. As you will quickly discover, there are many Burkes: the poet, the literary and music critic, the social and political theorist, the journalist, the unconventional communist, and--of course--the rhetorical theorist and critic. He is widely read and cited by scholars in numerous fields including literature, linguistics, sociology, political science and anthropology. In communication (at least in rhetoric), I think it fair to say that Burke has been the single most influential theorist of this century. As one sign, consider that no one else's admirers/adherents have formed a society (some might say “cabal”) that hosts scholarly conferences for the express purpose of promoting continued study of the person and her/his ideas.

Reading Burke is truly an adventure, sometimes frustrating and humbling, sometimes exhilarating. Systematic exegesis is not his strong suit; instead, his train of thought often seems stream-of-consciousness, even haphazard or chaotic (a “blooming, buzzing confusion,” to appropriate one of Burke's own phrases). Too, the rigor of his thinking is uneven; a few pages away from what you consider an absolutely brilliant insight you undoubtedly will find an idea that strikes you as utter rubbish. So expect surprises. Just when you think you've finally grasped an idea, Burke will charge off in an unexpected direction that will leave you bewildered and doubting whether you really ever understood anything at all. Yet, just when you are ready to throw in the towel, the pattern and import of his thinking will emerge with startling, almost revelatory clarity (although my malpractice attorney advises the disclaimer that revelation may take more than a semester!)

One of the most apt characterizations of these qualities comes from an interview in the *New York Times Review of Books*, which describes Burke's as a “mind that cannot stop exploding.” Explosions, remember, are always helter-skelter, and can be both awe-inspiring and frightening! More than any other author I've ever read, I know that I learn something new every time I encounter Burke, and I expect to learn some more this semester.

These qualities have implications for the way in which we will conduct this seminar. First, because Burke means so many different things to so many different people, it is absolutely vital that we read Burke himself rather than rely upon the Burkes that secondary sources have constructed; only then can we decide for ourselves what Burke is up to. Second, despite the number of times that I have read and re-read Burke, there will be times when you will ask questions I cannot answer; conversely, I will pose some questions that you cannot answer, either. Encountering Burke is like that. Third, the seminar will be most rewarding and enjoyable if

approached in a spirit of high adventure, perhaps with a little trepidation and healthy doses of curiosity and courage. Let us explore the terrain that lays before our eyes, but let us also remember that much lays beyond the horizon. Definitive maps of the Burkeian landscape are notoriously suspect and incomplete, much like the ancient maps of the so-called “known world.”

Required Readings:

Kenneth Burke, *Counter-Statement* (1931, rpt. 1968)

_____, *Permanence and Change: An Anatomy of Purpose* (1935, 2nd ed. 1954, 3rd ed. 1984)

_____, *Attitudes Toward History* (1937, 2nd ed. 1959, 3rd ed. 1984)

_____, *The Philosophy of Literary Form: Studies in Symbolic Action* (1941, 2nd ed. 1967, 3rd ed. 1973)

_____, *A Grammar of Motives* (1945, rpt. 1969)

_____, *A Rhetoric of Motives* (1950, rpt. 1969)

_____, *The Rhetoric of Religion: Studies in Logology* (1961, rpt. 1970)

_____, *Language as Symbolic Action: Essays on Life, Literature, and Method* (1966, rpt. 1973)

Greig Henderson and David Cratis Williams, eds., *Unending Conversations: New Writings by and about Kenneth Burke* (2001)

Other readings will be assigned as we go.

Other Books by Burke:

The White Oxen and Other Stories (1924)

Towards a Better Life (1932, 2nd ed. 1966, rpt. 1982)

Book of Moments, Poems 1915-1954 (1955)

Collected Poems, 1915-1967 (1968)

Dramatism and Development (1972)

Perspectives by Incongruity, S.E. Hyman & B. Karmiller, eds. (1965)

Terms for Order, S.E. Hyman & B. Karmiller, eds. (1965)

On Symbols and Society, Joseph Gusfield, ed. (1989)

On Human Nature: A Gathering While Everything Flows, 1967-1984 William H. Rueckert & Angelo Bonadonna, eds. (2003)

Here and Elsewhere: The Collected Fiction of Kenneth Burke (2005)
Late Poems, 1968-1993: Attitudinizing Verse-wise, While Fending for One's Selph, and in a Style Somewhat Artificially Colloquial, Julie Whitaker & David Blakesley, eds. (2005)
Essays Toward a Symbolic of Motives, 1950-1955, William H. Rueckert, ed. (2006)
Kenneth Burke on Shakespeare, Scott L. Newstok, ed. (2007)

Other Books About Burke:

- Biesecker, Barbara A. *Addressing Postmodernity : Kenneth Burke, Rhetoric, and a Theory of Social Change*. Tuscaloosa: U of Alabama P, 1997.
- Blakesley, David. *The Elements of Dramatism*. New York: Longman, 2002.
- Bobbitt, David. *The Rhetoric of Redemption: Kenneth Burke's Redemption Drama and Martin Luther King, Jr.'s I Have a Dream Speech*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007.
- Brock, Bernard L., ed. *Kenneth Burke and Contemporary European Thought*. Tuscaloosa: U of Alabama P, 1995.
- Brock, Bernard L., ed. *Kenneth Burke and the 21st Century*. Albany: State U of New York P, 1998.
- Brummett, Barry, ed., *Landmark Essays on Kenneth Burke*. Davis, CA: Hermagoras, 1993.
- Bygrave, Stephen. *Kenneth Burke: Rhetoric and Ideology*. New York: Routledge, 1993.
- Carter, C. Allen. *Kenneth Burke and the Scapegoat Process*. Norman: U of Oklahoma P, 1996.
- Chesebro, James W., ed. *Extensions of the Burkeian System*. Tuscaloosa: U of Alabama P, 1993.
- Clark, Gregory. *Rhetorical Landscapes in America: Variations on a Theme from Kenneth Burke*. Columbia: U of South Carolina P, 2004.
- Coupe, Laurence. *Kenneth Burke on Myth: An Introduction*. New York: Routledge, 2004.
- Crusius, Timothy W. *Kenneth Burke and the Conversation After Philosophy*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1999.
- Duncan, Hugh Dalziel. *Communication and Social Order*. New York: Oxford UP, 1962.

_____. *Symbols in Society*. New York: Oxford UP, 1968.

East, James H., ed. *The Humane Particulars: The Collected Letters of William Carlos Williams and Kenneth Burke*. Columbia: U of South Carolina P, 2003.

Eddy, Beth. *The Rites of Identity: The Religious Naturalism and Cultural Criticism of Kenneth Burke and Ralph Ellison*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2003.

Frank, Armin Paul. *Kenneth Burke*. New York: Twayne, 1969.

Garlitz, Robert. *Kenneth Burke's Logology and Literary Criticism*. Philadelphia: Xlibris, 2004.

George, Ann, and Jack Selzer. *Kenneth Burke in the 1930s*. Columbia: U of South Carolina P, 2007 (forthcoming).

Heath, Robert L. *Realism and Relativism: A Perspective on Kenneth Burke*. Macon, GA: Mercer UP, 1986.

Henderson, Greig E. *Kenneth Burke: Literature and Language as Symbolic Action*. Athens: U of Georgia P, 1988.

Holland, Laura Virginia. *Counterpoint: Kenneth Burke and Aristotle's Theories of Rhetoric*. Philosophical Library, 1959.

Jay, Paul, ed. *The Selected Correspondence of Kenneth Burke and Malcolm Cowley, 1915-1981*. New York: Viking, 1988.

Kimberling, C. Ronald. *Kenneth Burke's Dramatism and Popular Arts*. Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State U Popular P, 1982.

Knox, George A. *Critical Moments: Kenneth Burke's Categories and Critiques*. Seattle: U of Washington P, 1957.

Lentricchia, Frank. *Criticism and Social Change*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1983.

Lewis, Camille K. *Romancing the Difference: Kenneth Burke, Bob Jones University, and the Rhetoric of Religious Fundamentalism*. Waco, TX: Baylor UP, 2007 (forthcoming).

Lindsay, Stan A. *Implicit Rhetoric: Kenneth Burke's Extension of Aristotle's Concept of Entelechy*. UP of America, 1998.

Murray, Jeffrey W. *Kenneth Burke: A Dialogue of Motives*. Lanham, MD: UP of America, 2003.

Rueckert, William H., ed. *Critical Responses to Kenneth Burke*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1969.

_____. *Encounters with Kenneth Burke*. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1994.

_____. *Kenneth Burke and the Drama of Human Relations*. 2nd ed. Berkeley: U of California P, 1982.

_____. *Letters from Kenneth Burke to William H. Rueckert, 1959-1987*. West Lafayette, IN: Parlor Press, 2002.

Selzer, Jack. *Kenneth Burke in Greenwich Village: Conversing with the Moderns, 1915-1931*. Madison, WI: U of Wisconsin P, 1996.

Settle, Peter. "An Index to the Major Works of Kenneth Burke." Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Bowling Green State U, 1983.

Simons, Herbert W. and Trevor Melia, eds. *The Legacy of Kenneth Burke*. Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1989.

Southwell, Samuel B. *Kenneth Burke and Martin Heidegger: With a Note Against Deconstructionism*. Gainesville: U of Florida P, 1987.

Wess, Robert. *Kenneth Burke: Rhetoric, Subjectivity, Postmodernism*. New York: Cambridge UP, 1996.

White, Hayden and Margaret Brose, eds. *Representing Kenneth Burke*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1982.

Williams, David Cratis. "Toward Kenneth Burke's Philosophy of Rhetoric: An Intellectual History, 1897-1935." Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, U of Kansas, 1990.

_____. *Kenneth Burke: Portrait of the "Genius" as a Young Man*. Manuscript in progress.

Wolin, Ross. *The Rhetorical Imagination of Kenneth Burke*. Columbia: U of South Carolina P, 2001.

Wright, Will. *Wild Knowledge: Science, Language, and Social Life in a Fragile Environment*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1992.

See also the two special issues of *Pre/Text* devoted to Burke (Vol. 6, Nos. 3-4, 1985; and Vol. 12, Nos. 1-2, 1991)

Kenneth Burke Society:

<http://kbjournal.org/>

Assignments:

1. Discussion, OF COURSE. I do not intend to lecture in this seminar; rather, it is essential that you read each week's material thoroughly and carefully, reflect upon it, and be prepared for substantive, high-level discussion. To this end, you should bring with you to each class session answers to the following two questions: (1) what is the best or most important idea contained in the week's readings? and (2) what is the week's worst or most confusing or unclear idea? Your answers are not intended to be the weekly reaction papers that I traditionally assign; you will not turn them in and do not need to make copies for the rest of us. I will not grade them *per se*. However, you should be prepared to lead a discussion about them when called upon; thus, they should be thoughtful and reflect seriousness of purpose.
2. Participation (at least as a lurker) in the KB discussion list. Go to the society website (above) and follow the links to join.
3. Reports as assigned. Please prepare handouts as appropriate to supplement your oral presentation.
4. A major project of your own design and execution. You may wish to critique, organize, illuminate, elaborate on, and/or apply one or more of Burke's concepts/ideas. Grades will be based on demonstrated understanding of Burke, originality and quality of thought, and clarity and quality of writing (including adherence to scholarly conventions). An "A" project will be superior in every respect. You should strive for a publishable product; certainly it should be suitable for presentation at a professional conference, such as the triennial Kenneth Burke Society conference, or NCA or WSCA, where the Society also sponsors panels (hint, hint). In lieu of a final exam, you will present your project to the class on December 13.

Grading:

Approximately one-half of your course grade will be based on seminar participation, including both discussion and reports; the other half will be based on your project.

Academic Integrity:

The Annenberg School for Communication is committed to upholding the University's

academic integrity code as detailed in the *SCampus* guide. It is the policy of the School of Communication to report all violations of the code. Any serious violation or pattern of violations of the academic integrity code will result in the student's expulsion from the Communication major or minor.

If you have any doubts about what is and is not an academic integrity violation, please check with me. The University presumes that you are familiar with its standards and policies; should you be found to have committed a violation, ignorance of these standards and policies will **not** be accepted as an excuse.

Utopian Syllabus (to be refined as needed, in due time):

August 30 Dramatism: The Nature of the Beast

For background on Burke and the early years (through the Twenties), I recommend: (a) David Cratis Williams, *Kenneth Burke: Portrait of the "Genius" as a Young Man*, Chs. 1-3 [I have a draft of Ch. 1]; and (b) Jack Selzer, *Kenneth Burke in Greenwich Village: Conversing with the Moderns, 1915-1931*, Chs. 1-5.

For varying synoptic accounts of what Burke is "up to," I recommend: (a) William H. Rueckert, *Encounters with Kenneth Burke*, Chs. 1-3; (b) Hugh Dalziel Duncan, "Introduction" in *Permanence and Change*, pp. xii-xliv; (c) Duncan, "Introduction" in *Symbols in Society*, pp. 3-42; (d) Joseph Gusfield, "Introduction" in *On Symbols and Society*, pp. 1-49; (e) Herbert W. Simons and Trevor Melia, *The Legacy of Kenneth Burke*, pp. vii-54; (f) "Counter-Gridlock: An Interview with Kenneth Burke," *All Area*, No. 2 (Spring, 1983): 4-32; and (g) Richard Kostelanetz, "A Mind that Cannot Stop Exploding," *New York Times Book Review*, March 15, 1981: 11, 24-26.

September 6 *Language as Symbolic Action*

READ "Definition of Man"; "Poetics in Particular, Language in General"; "Terministic Screens"; "Mind, Body, and the Unconscious"; "Rhetoric and Poetics"; "What are the Signs of What? (A Theory of 'Entitlement')"; "A Dramatistic View of the Origins of Language"; "On Words and The Word" (from *The Rhetoric of Religion*). IF POSSIBLE READ "The Thinking of the Body (Comments on the Imagery of Catharsis in Literature)"; "Myth, Poetry, and Philosophy"; "Medium as 'Message'."

September 13 *Counter-Statement*

READ the entire work. Also read Charles J. G. Griffin, "The Rhetoric of Form in Conversion Narratives," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 76 (1990): 152-63.

For discussions of this work, I recommend: (a) William H. Rueckert, "Both/And: The Aesthetic of *Counter-Statement*," Ch. 1 of *Kenneth Burke and the Drama of Human Relations*, pp. 8-33; (b) Richard B. Gregg, "Kenneth Burke's Prolegomena to the Study of the Rhetoric of Form," Ch. 6 of Barry Brummett, ed., *Landmark Essays on Kenneth*

Burke, pp. 117-134; (c) Robert Wess, "Counter-Statement: Aesthetic Humanism," Ch. 2 of *Kenneth Burke: Rhetoric, Subjectivity, Postmodernism*, pp. 39-54; (d) Jack Selzer, "Counter-Statement as Counter Statement," Ch. 6 of *Kenneth Burke in Greenwich Village*, pp. 137-164; (e) David Cratis Williams, "The Route of Aesthetics," Ch. 4 of *Kenneth Burke: Portrait of the "Genius" as a Young Man*; and (f) the three reviews, by Granville Hicks, Isidor Schneider, and Harold Rosenberg, reprinted in William H. Rueckert, ed., *Critical Responses to Kenneth Burke*, pp. 18-30

September 20 *Permanence and Change*

READ the entire work; concentrate on Hugh Dalziel Duncan's introduction, Parts I (all), II (all), III (chs. 4-5), and the appendix. Also read Denise M. Bostdorff, "Making Light of James Watt: A Burkean Approach to the Form and Attitude of Political Cartoons," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 73 (1987): 43-59.

For discussions of this work, I recommend: (a) William H. Rueckert, "Towards a Better Life Through Symbolic Action," Ch. 2 of *Kenneth Burke and the Drama of Human Relations*, pp. 34-63; (b) Robert Wess, "Permanence and Change: A Biological Subject of History," Ch. 3 of *Kenneth Burke: Rhetoric, Subjectivity, Postmodernism*, pp. 55-83; (c) David Cratis Williams, "Revolutionary Symbolism," Ch. 5 of *Kenneth Burke: Portrait of the "Genius" as a Young Man*; and (d) reviews by Austin Warren and Louis Wirth, reprinted in William H. Rueckert, ed., *Critical Responses to Kenneth Burke*, pp. 38-60 and 102-105, respectively

September 27 *Attitudes Toward History*

READ the entire work; concentrate on Parts I and III and the afterword "In Retrospective Prospect." Also read A. Cheree Carlson, "Gandhi and the Comic Frame: 'Ad Bellum Purificandum'," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 72 (1986): 446-55.

For discussions of this work, I recommend: (a) William H. Rueckert, "Towards a Better Life Through Symbolic Action," Ch. 2 of *Kenneth Burke and the Drama of Human Relations*, pp. 34-63; (b) Robert Wess, "Attitudes Toward History: The Agon of History," Ch. 4 of *Kenneth Burke: Rhetoric, Subjectivity, Postmodernism*, pp. 84-107; (c) William H. Rueckert, "Comic Criticism: Attitudes Toward History, 1937-84," Ch. 5 of *Encounters with Kenneth Burke*, pp. 110-131; and (d) reviews by Arthur E. DuBois, Sidney Hook, Margaret Schlauch, and Henry Bamford Parkes, reprinted in William H. Rueckert, ed., *Critical Responses to Kenneth Burke*, pp. 80-89, 89-101, 105-109, and 109-122, respectively.

October 4 Independent work on projects

October 11 *The Philosophy of Literary Form*

READ the entire work. Also read Carol A. Berthold, "Kenneth Burke's Cluster-Agon

Method: Its Development and an Application,” *Central States Speech Journal* 27 (1976): 302-09; Peter J. Marston and Bambi Rockwell, “Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’: Rhetorical Subversion in Feminist Literature,” *Women’s Studies in Communication* 14 (1991): 58-72; Bettina Heinz and Ronald Lee, “Getting Down to the Meat: The Symbolic Construction of Meat Consumption,” *Communication Studies* 49 (1998): 86-99.

For discussions of this work, I recommend: (a) Robert Wess, “*The Philosophy of Literary Form: History Without Origin or Telos*,” Ch. 5 of *Kenneth Burke: Rhetoric, Subjectivity, Postmodernism*, pp. 108-135; and (b) reviews by William S. Knickerbocker, Harry Slochower, Helmut Kuhn, and John Crowe Ransom, reprinted in William H. Rueckert, ed., *Critical Responses to Kenneth Burke*, pp. 122-130, 130-136, 136-141, and 141-159, respectively.

October 18 *A Grammar of Motives*

READ Part 3: “On Dialectic.” Also read Robert Wess, “*A Grammar of Motives: the rhetorical constitution of the subject*,” Ch. 6 of *Kenneth Burke: Rhetoric, Subjectivity, Postmodernism* (pp. 136-85).

For other discussions of this work, I recommend: (b) Arnie Madsen, “Burke’s Representative Anecdote as a Critical Method,” Ch. 5 of James W. Chesebro, ed., *Extensions of the Burkeian System*, pp. 208-229; (c) William H. Rueckert, “Criticism as a Way of Life: Kenneth Burke’s *A Grammar of Motives* Forty Years Later,” Ch. 4 of William H. Rueckert, *Encounters with Kenneth Burke*, pp. 99-109; (d) Frank Lentricchia, *Criticism and Social Change*, pp. 66-75; and (e) reviews by John Crowe Ransom, Charles Morris, Max Black, Abraham Kaplan, Francis Fergusson, Donald A. Stauffer, Howard Nemerov, Kenneth D. Benne, and Bernard I. Duffey, reprinted in William H. Rueckert, ed., *Critical Responses to Kenneth Burke*, pp. 159-163, 163-165, 166-169, 169-173, 173-182, 182-187, 187-199, 199-208, and 222-235, respectively.

October 25 *A Grammar of Motives*, continued

READ Parts 1-2: “Ways of Placement” and “The Philosophical Schools.”

November 1 *A Rhetoric of Motives*

READ Parts 1-2: “The Range of Rhetoric” and “Traditional Principles of Rhetoric”

For discussions of this work, I recommend: (a) Robert Wess, “*A Rhetoric of Motives: Ideological and Utopian Rhetoric*,” Ch. 7 of *Kenneth Burke: Rhetoric, Subjectivity, Postmodernism*, pp. 186-216; (b) Frank Lentricchia, “Part Five,” *Criticism and Social Change*, pp. 145-163; (c) Michael Leff, “Burke’s Ciceronianism,” Ch. 5 of *The Legacy of Kenneth Burke*, pp. 115-127; and (d) reviews by Malcolm Cowley, Richard Chase, Hugh Dalziel Duncan, Kermit Lansner, and Marie Hochmuth Nichols, reprinted in William H.

Rueckert, ed., *Critical Responses to Kenneth Burke*, pp. 247-251, 251-255, 256-260, 261-270, and 270-287, respectively.

November 8 *A Rhetoric of Motives*, continued

READ Part 3: "Order"

November 15 NCA (no class)

November 22 Thanksgiving (no class)

November 29 *The Rhetoric of Religion*

For discussions of this work I recommend: (a) Robert Wess, "The Rhetoric of Religion: History in Eclipse," Ch. 8 of *Kenneth Burke: Rhetoric, Subjectivity, Postmodernism*, pp. 217-254; (b) William H. Rueckert, "From Dramatism to Logology, 1961-1978," Ch. 6 of *Kenneth Burke and the Drama of Human Relations*, 2nd ed., pp. 227-287; (c) William H. Rueckert, "Logology and the Rhetoric of Ecology," Ch. 7 of *Encounters with Kenneth Burke*, pp. 171-179; (d) William H. Rueckert, "Poetry, Logology, Technology, Admonology: Kenneth Burke in 1981—from Counter-statement to Counter-nature," Ch. 8 of *Encounters with Kenneth Burke*, pp. 180-184; (e) David Damrosch, "The Rhetoric of Allegory: Burke and Augustine," Ch. 10 of *The Legacy of Kenneth Burke*, pp. 224-238; (f) the review by Joseph Frank reprinted in William H. Rueckert, ed., *Critical Responses to Kenneth Burke*, pp. 401-406; and (g) Kenneth Burke, "Theology and Logology," *Kenyon Review*, n.s. vol. 1, no. 1 (Winter, 1979): 151-185

December 6 *The Rhetoric of Religion*, continued

December 13 2:00-4:00 Project presentations