



**Language,
Life, Literature,
Rhetoric and
Composition
as Dramatic
Action**

*A Burkean Primer
By: Edward C. Appel*

**Language, Life, Literature,
Rhetoric and Composition
as Dramatic Action:
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By: OarPress

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Library of Congress Control Number: 2012901225

ISBN 978-0-578-08246-2 (paper)

In cooperation with
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To Ruth Anne

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Foreword

I want to acknowledge and thank various journals and an encyclopedia for permission to reproduce materials that first saw the light of day in their publications. The Introduction and chapters 1, 2, 4, 5, 10, 11, and 12 contain passages and research of mine taken from those sources. My studies of Burke and the negative, and the perfected rhetorical drama of Rev. Jerry Falwell, first appeared in *Communication Quarterly*; the critique of the burlesque rhetoric of William F. Buckley, Jr., and later the comedy-turned-to-tragedy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., the *Western Journal of Communication*; the mixed-genre radio discourse of Rush Limbaugh, and then the thorny problem of melodrama vs. tragedy as generic label, the *Southern Communication Journal*; the potent but generically fish-out-of-water preaching of Rev. Dr. Wallace E. Fisher, and my case for Burke as a theologian of a sort, the *Journal of Communication and Religion*; and some of the explanations and examples in the opening sections, from the chapter “Dramatic Elements in Messages” in the two-volume 21st

Century Communication: A Reference Handbook, published by Sage. I have condensed and summarized here and there. In some cases, I have expanded. In others, I have revised. Along with my not-surprisingly tragic-frame look at a speech by Adolf Hitler (in Chapter 10), and my illustration of rhetorical melodrama via three addresses by Congressman Tom DeLay (in Chapter 12), chapters 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 14 are pristinely new, and 1 and 2 mostly new. In Chapter 13, on Burke and composition, I build especially on the thought of Michael Hassett (*Journal of Advanced Composition*) and Tilly Warnock (*College English*), as well as, of course, on Burke himself.

This is where thanks are usually extended to all those scholars and editors who have read various drafts of chapters and sections, and have offered their comments. No one else has pondered or reviewed this final draft of my understanding of so many, many things Burkean. I take full responsibility. Yet, obviously, dozens of journal editors, associate editors, and ad hoc referees have read and passed judgment on the already published renderings of much of what I offer in these pages. I thank them profusely for their help and admirable dedication to research in the fields of Rhet/Comm and Burke studies. This book would not have been possible in its present form without their insight and effort.

At the risk, though, of overlooking other important sources of inspiration, I will mention a few Burkophiles by name who have given me particular encouragement and confirmation over the course of my engagement with things dramatic. At Temple University, Jim Chesebro was my first Burke mentor. I'm incurably left-brained, and Jim was a great lecturer. My style of learning and his style of teaching blended well (not that Jim wasn't a varied and inventive pedagogue, especially for undergraduates, when I served as his TA). I eventually came to differ with Jim on a few points of theory, but I'll always appreciate the care and intellect he put into the teaching enterprise.

At Temple, Herb Simons and Dennis Smith also came at Burke, on a slant. A top scholar in the communication field, Herb was an acute interpreter and critic of Burke. Herb gave us some pause on the literality of dramatism, and on the limits of the comic frame. Smith deftly worked dramatism into his construction of the personal and interpersonal contexts of communication. Together, they broadened my appreciation and discrimination in respect to Burke's notions. Many thanks.

In addition, and beyond the confines of Temple U., I'm indebted to Clarke Rountree for his friendship, support, and validation of my contributions to ongoing debate on the KB listserve and elsewhere (and for trusting me to be the first Conversation Editor of the *KBJ!*). I want to acknowledge his invaluable leadership, official and unofficial, in Burke studies (e.g., first Editor of the *KBJournal*, and, as I write, current President-Elect of the Kenneth Burke Society). He's been a treasure to have as a colleague and partner.

I thank Andrew King for the imprimatur he put on my foray into the deepest of the "lower layers" of Burke's philosophy, Burke's obsession with the "negative" (Chapter 4), and for the very kind things he said about me on the Editor's Page of the *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, August 2000, near the end of my service there as Associate Editor. Thanks, also, to Em Griffin for his confidence in my handle on Burke. I'm not sure that grasp is as "encyclopedic" as he has claimed, but I thank him nonetheless (*Journal of Communication and Religion*, 1998 113).

Speaking of the "little lower layer," I am grateful to Greig Henderson and Wayne Booth for the warrants they've offered for my take on Burke as theologian. I reference their work in Chapter 5. Greig, personally, and his writings have given ongoing affirmation. Professor Booth was a source of assurance in conversation, correspondence, and two most-welcome publications.

I thank, penultimately, my six amigos, what I call our off-list-list of Burke scholars, associates, and friends. They've been a treasure to the max. I speak of Greg Desilet, Herb Simons, John Hatch, Camille Lewis, Les Bruder, and Lance Haynes. We got together, online, after the Villanova Conference in 2008. We shared an interest in Burke's "Poetic Categories" (*ATH*), and paneled in concert on that theme at NCA in Chicago, 2009. We've been inseparable correspondents ever since, whether "huddling together, nervously loquacious, at the edge of an abyss" (*P&C* 272), or not. Kudos, guys and gal, for serving so faithfully and sagaciously as human "Equipment for Living" (*PLF* 293-304).

Finally, an extra word on my association with Greg. As I told him after our joint authorship of "Choosing a Rhetoric of the Enemy: Kenneth Burke's Comic Frame, Warrantable Outrage, and the Problem of Scapegoating" (*Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, 2011, in press as I write), Greg Desilet is one of those rare persons without a mean bone in their body. What's most special about Greg,

besides his remarkable intellect, is, he has an articulate philosophy that informs and reflects that cast of character completely. It was a blessing to be included with him in the generation of that essay.

And yet another encomium I must not stint on: Compliments to NeFra Communication, for their expeditious work on my MS. Much obliged.

Taking a cue from *Dramatism and Development*, but without Burke's intended irony: ONWARD, OUTWARD, and UP!

Introduction

Picture this. Maybe remember this! You're a child. You're playing in your backyard with your sibling. He or she throws sand in your face. You run to Mother to tattle. "Freddie threw sand at me again," you exclaim. "Yes, but you hit me first," is his reply. "But you called me a bad name, that's why," you retort. (You each "punctuate" your squabble differently, begin your narration of the event at some self-serving turn of events.)

Mom's had it with this scenario. She's heard it before. "You know the rules," she says for the fifth time: "No throwing sand, period! You don't go near the sandbox, the jungle gym, or the swings, neither of you, for a week! Now go do your homework." In a day or two, there're hugs and kisses and a milder tone of voice. You've learned your lesson---maybe.

That's drama.

Here's another, on a no doubt incomparable plane of importance. It's 8 December 1941. The day before, Japanese planes destroyed America's Pacific fleet at Pearl Harbor in

Hawaii, except for aircraft carriers then at sea. President Franklin D. Roosevelt addresses a joint session of Congress to ask for a declaration of war. He details in general fashion the extent of the aggression on this U. S. territory, including heavy loss of military personnel. He lists Japanese attacks on Malaya, Hong Kong, Guam, the Philippines, and Wake and Midway islands as well, extending the scope of Japan's violation of the rules of international relationship. Using words like "infamy," "dastardly," "sought to deceive," and "grave danger," Roosevelt identifies the bad guys against whom the "American people" will rise up "in their righteous might."

"The very life and safety of our nation" at stake, Roosevelt says, "all measures [will] be taken for our defense . . . no matter how long it may take us." "Unbounded determination" will energize this effort. In the end, "We . . . will make very certain that this form of treachery shall never endanger us again." "Absolute victory" is the goal. "We will gain the inevitable triumph---so help us God."¹

That's *drama*. Let's define it for now as simply as we can: Moral conflict to set right a situation gone wrong, or to keep right, a situation that could go wrong.

This volume is about drama, *Drama in Life*, yes, to borrow the title of a fine anthology of essays on the topic.² We extend the range of that title, though, to encompass language itself in its very essence, its manifestations in literature and practical rhetoric, and the lessons a dramatic perspective might teach us about how to write with useful scale and integrity. Our working thesis is this: Drama is intrinsic to human life and discourse. Whether it's rooted in pre-linguistic structures of the mind, as suggested by Steven Pinker in *The Stuff of Thought: Language as a Window into Human Nature*, or accessible via study and critique of verbal motives in particular, Kenneth Burke's take on the matter, drama is still ubiquitous and controlling in how humans think and what humans do.

Indeed, Burke will be our guide throughout. Philosopher of language, rhetorician, literary critic, poet, novelist, even theologian of a kind it says here (see Chapter 5), Burke was proto-postmodernist, if in the final analysis only quasi-postmodernist, thirty years before the Derridas and Jamesons came on the scene. Burke studies have virtually defined humanistic scholarship in the rhetoric/communication field in America the past half century. Dramatism/logology, the two names Burke has given his "system,"

is entrenched in the fields of literature and composition as well, if not quite so profoundly. Sociology, cultural studies, religion, theater, even economics have been touched by Burke's thought. Dozens of books and hundreds of essays of both a theoretical and critical nature have explained, interpreted, applied, and extended Burke's unique and quirky contributions to what he has called the Unending Conversation in the "parlor" of human philosophic history.³

Language, Life, Literature, Rhetoric, and Composition as Dramatic Action: A Burkean Primer, affords my take on what Burke has said, and how we can use what he has said, in productive, insightful ways. The intended audience for this interpretation and application is college level. A few chapters, particularly 4 and 5, might stretch the mind of an early twenty-something, I hope not too painfully. I offer those chapters as mere options for the uninitiated in any case.

A few parameters this presentation adheres to are these: I am not a linguist. I am a US American rhetorician and English teacher. I therefore restrict the purview of what follows to English language, literature, and polemics. Plainly---see especially chapters 2 and 6---I do not limit my claims about the ubiquity of drama *in human life in general* to the borders of the English-speaking world, if any such borders exist in this age of English as universal medium of verbal exchange. Drama, of course, has to suffuse all linguistic utterance across all times and cultures, or Burke's philosophy falls flat on its face. Still, I want to contain explicit assertions about what language inherently is and how language essentially works in discourse to the argot my readers and I share.

The starting point for the case I make for drama as omnipresent and intrinsic in English language and human life is in English grammar as traditionally conceived and taught in US American schools. Many different avenues of approach to English grammar and grammar in general have surfaced in the past century.⁴ I choose the one most speakers of American English are likely familiar with.⁵ I might add that my traditional grammatical pathway into the arcana of Burke's thought has the imprimatur of the recently-published Sage encyclopedia, *21st Century Communication: A Reference Handbook*.⁶

And, speaking of previous sources of my work in print I'm incorporating into this treatment:

A few passages in chapters 1 and 2, and the opening of this introduction, were formerly published in that Sage volume.

Chapter 4 is a revision and expansion of my essay, “Implications and Importance of the Negative in Burke’s Dramatistic Philosophy of Language.”⁷⁷

Chapter 5 revises my article, “Kenneth Burke: Coy Theologian.”⁷⁸

Chapter 10 revises, summarizes, and coordinates my findings in, “The Perfected Drama of Rev. Jerry Falwell”;⁹ “The Tragic-Symbol Preaching of the Rev. Dr. Wallace E. Fisher”;¹⁰ and “The Rhetoric of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.: Comedy and Context in Tragic Collision.”¹¹

Chapter 11 revises and summarizes my studies, “Burlesque Drama as a Rhetorical Genre: The Hudibrastic Ridicule of William F. Buckley, Jr.”¹² and “Rush to Judgment: Burlesque, Tragedy, and Hierarchical Alchemy in the Rhetoric of America’s Foremost Political Talkshow Host.”¹³

And Chapter 12 builds on, and extends with a previously unpublished application, my essay, “‘Tragedy-lite’ or ‘Melodrama’: In Search of a Standard Generic Tag.”¹⁴

In order to streamline documentation and references as much as possible, the following abbreviations will substitute for the full title of Burke’s books:

Counter-Statement (1931): *CS*.

Permanence and Change: An Anatomy of Purpose (1935): *P&C*.

Attitudes Toward History (1937): *ATH*.

The Philosophy of Literary Form: Studies in Symbolic Action (1941): *PLF*.

A Grammar of Motives (1945): *GM*.

A Rhetoric of Motives (1950): *RM*.

The Rhetoric of Religion: Studies in Logology (1961): *RR*.

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

Dramatism and Development (1972): *DD*.

On Human Nature: A Gathering While Everything Flows, 1967-1984 (2003): *OHN*.

Last, and in this case very definitely least, I employ the terms “hierarchal” and “hierarchally” instead of “hierarchic” or “hierarchical,” etc., in my rendition of this exceedingly important concept in Burke’s dramatism. The form “hierarchal” is not to be found in the *Shorter OED*, Sixth Edition, or in the *Merriam-Webster Third New International Dictionary*, to which I make various references. I prefer “hierarchal” for its euphony. Burke uses it in *A Rhetoric of Motives*.¹⁵ If it’s good enough for Burke and the University of California Press, it’s good enough for me.

Oh, one more thing: A few fastidious Burkeans might object to my book title. “Dramatic action” could, to some, seem redundant. Isn’t action, in Burke parlance, *ipso facto* “dramatic”? Yes, but not necessarily in common, everyday usage. See Chapter 1, for particulars. The term “action” is often employed to denote what Burke calls “motion,” the apparently blind, amoral, seemingly purposeless machinations of the nonsymbolic universe.¹⁶ The notion of “dramatic action,” morally purposeful motion of the kind only symbolizers can inaugurate, makes clearer, I think, what this book is about.

Please abide the redundancy.

Chapter 1

The General, Implicitly Moral Pattern of Verbal Action

The Sentence: What Comes between Two Periods

We start with the English language. We begin with simple things. We begin with the **sentence**, the basic unit of English discourse. It must be basic and important. A sentence is the group of words that get set off by periods at either end. The period is the most emphatic and fundamental punctuation mark.

The Two Parts of a Sentence

A sentence is defined as a group of words that make a complete thought. These words make a complete thought because they possess the two major parts of a sentence. They have a **subject** and a **predicate**. A sentence might have more than one subject/predicate combination. It might therefore be “compound” or “complex” instead of “simple.” We limit our discussion now to simple sentences, those with one subject/predicate combination.

A subject is the focal concern of a sentence. It is the thing or idea the sentence makes a statement about. It usually appears in the front part of the sentence, before the predicate. Sometimes, though, sentences are spoken or written in reverse order, with the subject coming after the predicate.

A predicate states something about the subject. It tells about something the subject did or does or will do. Or it tells about something the subject has done to it, or will have done to it. When the subject of a sentence is made to do the acting described in the predicate, we say the sentence is in the “active voice.” When the subject is made to receive the action, we say the sentence is in the “passive voice.”

A predicate can state something about the subject very different from an action the subject performs or receives, however. It can instead state what the subject is. The predicate can identify the subject (John is the son of Fred and Mary Jones), classify the subject (John is a kook), or give the subject an attribute (John is kooky) or sensation (John feels good).

Making an “action statement” or a “being statement” about the subject---that’s what a predicate does. Both the “action” verb and the “being” verb are called a “predicator.”¹

So much for subjects and predicates in terms of general definition, the two parts of a sentence that enable it to make a complete thought. Let’s look now at what subjects and predicates are made up of.

The Four Parts of Subjects and Predicates

Subjects and predicates are put together in English, fundamentally, with four building blocks. These four building blocks can be called the “content parts of speech,” since they make up the content, the “meat and potatoes” so to speak, of the

spoken or written sentence. There are four other parts of speech we can call the “connective parts of speech.” We can call them that because they tie together the thoughts in the content parts of speech in various ways. Right now, we’re interested in the content, or substance, of the subjects and predicates that comprise sentences, and give sentences the ability to make a complete thought.

The four content parts of speech that go together to make subjects and predicates are **nouns**, **verbs**, **adjectives**, and **adverbs**. We can go to dictionaries, grammars, or books written by linguists (scholars who study the structure and content of languages in a very detailed way) to find the meanings of nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs. We can find in those definitions the thoughts nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs put in our mind when we use them, hear them, or read them. Dictionaries, grammars, and books written by linguists give us the following meanings for these four building blocks of the subjects and predicates that make up sentences:

Noun: a word (or group of words) that names a person, place, thing, or idea.

Verb: a word (or group of words) that states an action that is taken, or states what type of being a subject has, what it is.

Adjective: a word (or group of words) that describes a noun, that is, describes a person, place, thing, or idea, offers a sharper picture of what it is; a word that tells “what kind” of thing or idea we’re dealing with when we use or encounter a given noun.

Adverb: a word (or group of words) that describes a verb, adjective, or other adverb, a word that can tell, for instance, *why* an action took place, *how* it was accomplished, *when* and *where* it happened, and the *manner* in which it was carried out.²

The General Pattern of Verbal Action

Armed with these definitions of nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs---the building blocks of the subjects and predicates that go together to make sentences---we can now state the basic forms of thought the English language puts in our mind when we use it, hear it, or read it. In terms of traditional grammar---the subject being the main idea and the predicate being what is said about that main idea---we can say the following:

In English discourse---

A noun subject actor or receiver of action (“agent” or “patient,” to use the words linguists like Jean Aitchison call them) performs or receives a verbal action (the who and the what)

Or

A noun subject is identified, classified, or given an attribute or sensation, if the verb is a linking verb, like “is” or “feels” (the who and the what)

For some purpose, end, or goal (the why)

By way of some means or cause (the how)

To some extent or degree, or with some quality or attitude (the manner)

In a time-and-place scene, situation, or context (the when and the where)

The how, when, where, and in what manner are usually expressed with adverbs: the why, frequently so, with action verbs.

The thought of the verb is usually completed with what is called a “predicate complement” noun or adjective of some kind: a direct object, indirect object, objective complement, predicate noun, or predicate adjective. We won’t be worried much here about those forgettable functions that might have vexed you in high school English classes. Most speakers of English use them well, oblivious of their arcane nomenclature, or not.

Noun subjects and objects are often modified by adjectives.

These, then, in abbreviated summary, are the basic forms of thought expressed in statements about anything---humans, nonverbal animals, vegetables, inanimate materials, and ideas:

Noun subject actor or receiver of verbal action, or noun subject verbally identified, etc.; purpose; means; manner; and scene. These are the basic forms of thought expressed in English communication.³

The Implicitly Moral Nature of This General Pattern of Verbal Action

Up to this point, this analysis of the basic forms of thought expressed in English discourse may not have seemed very “dramatic.” We’ve touched on nothing yet that might strike you forcefully, stir your emotions, or suggest intense or even mild conflict. We’ve not yet even hinted at how language might essentially and inherently do those very things. It’s time now for such a hint.

We can define “drama” in many ways. Right now, we’ll offer a very simple definition. “Drama” is “moral conflict.” It is moral conflict to set right a situation that has gone wrong, or prevent a situation from going wrong. Usually, we know when an act or situation has gone wrong, at least from our own religious or cultural understanding of what is right or wrong. Some generally agreed-upon standard of behavior has been violated. That’s how we know. Something anti-social, “immoral” or “illegal” has happened, we tend to say. Somebody did something that was “not right.” He or she broke a rule. The improper, immoral, or illegal act or situation sets the stage for a drama of “redemption” aimed at setting things right once again.⁴ We put things back into “moral order” by way of “moral conflict” with the persons or forces that did the bad deed or support those that did it.⁵ We’re getting a bit ahead of our story, but we need to know this much about drama. We need to see how even on this most basic and general level of English discourse, the level of the content parts of speech that generate the forms of thought used in descriptions of *anything*, drama, moral conflict, is in play.

Actors and agents perform an action for a *purpose* (the why), English discourse tells us. Actors may use *means* or instruments, or steps or stages (the how), to accomplish that purpose. They may pursue that purpose in a listless or vigorous *manner*, or with a positive or negative *attitude* (the manner, attitude, extent, or degree). They will surely be constrained in the pursuit of their purpose in some way by the *scene* in which they operate, the time-and-place pressures, obstacles, and opportunities that a given situation presents (the when and where). Their own personality traits as a certain kind of *actor* or *agent* will help shape their quest (the who). A measure of freedom, novelty, perhaps even creative “magic,” as it were, will inhere in the seeking *act* itself (the what). All the terms in the general pattern of verbal action derived from the definitions of nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs, and of course the concrete, nonverbal realities to which they refer in the real world, can be viewed as sources of motivation, principles of causation, goads that nudge an action this way or that. Actor, act (including the act of asserting that something is the case), purpose, means, manner, and scene are at the very least lively descriptive notions that picture forth the contours of what persons, other animals, vegetables, minerals, and ideas are about when we tell of their functions and qualities.⁶

An actor performing an action for a *purpose*, though, is at

the center of language as *dramatic action*. A close look at what a purpose is or means tells us why. If not up to its ears, the word *purpose* is, for sure, up to its knees in moral conflict. Consider the following:

The Notion of *Purpose* as a Negative Inducement to Action

The word *purpose* names a “negative.” It names something that does not yet exist, or something that does not yet exist in sufficient quantity, quality, or duration. If your purpose is to win a ballgame, you get in shape, practice hard, and cooperate with your teammates in drills that perfect the plays the coach has designed. The victory on the field or court, though---the purpose or aim of your efforts---has not yet come to pass at the time you formulate or speak of your purpose. The victory, your purpose, is still in the future. And the future is a “negative” for the present. It has *not* happened yet.⁷

The same holds true for politicians whose purpose is to maintain things the way they are. They don’t want anything new or different from the status quo, as it is labeled. All the laws and economic arrangements presently in place are just fine, they feel. These “conservative” statesmen and women, or “reactionary” social-movement leaders and supporters, oppose innovators and revolutionaries. Problem: The future isn’t here yet. It is still a negative. What will it be filled with? The conservative status quo? Or revolutionary change and innovation? The purpose these resistance politicians or reactionary social-movement devotees will serve is one of lengthening the duration, enhancing the quantity and perhaps the quality, of the kind of government and social system the nation currently has. Their purpose, like that of the ballplayers, points ahead in time to a set of conditions that do *not* yet exist, because the future does *not* yet exist.⁸

Note this point carefully: The notion of what is *not* is sheer verbal action, not reaction. Negatives do not exist in nature. Only “positive” things appear there, things like trees and rocks, stars and atoms. When we say something like, “This room does not have any furniture,” we are bringing to our descriptive account an insight that resides in us, lives in our language and in our language alone. We are *bringing something to* the room which we describe, something that is, in fact, *not* in it. We are *superimposing* an idea

on it. We are engaging in *verbal action*, some performance or type of conduct initiated by ourselves, not just descriptive reaction.⁹

Philosophers of language who call themselves “positivists”---there aren’t too many of them today---have a terrible time with the “no,” the “not,” the “nothing,” and the “never” of discourse. Their rule of thumb is that the only truly meaningful statements are those that “hook into” or “represent” something “real” in the world of objects. For them, saying something “meaningful” means telling about some thing that can be seen, heard, felt, tasted, or smelled. Or it can be using a highly abstract term, like “beauty,” that has some basis in the phenomenal world, the world that we can access through our senses. All talk that transcends the observable world is “meaningless,” they say.¹⁰

The negatives of language intimate an ability humans possess to get outside of and above the sheer brute materials of the world as it is, at least in how humans think. The negatives of language destroy the positivist view of language as mainly a conduit for mere information. The negatives of language bespeak a capacity for verbal “action” on the part of a speaker or writer, an innate aptitude for bringing something to the narrative, descriptive, or analytical process that is not inherent in the objects or materials physically at hand. The notion of the negative is built into and undergirds the notion of purpose. The meaning of “purpose” is beyond our comprehension without the idea of the *not yet*.¹¹

The Moral Connotations of the Notion of *Purpose*

Examined in terms of its implications as a word in the English language, a *purpose* not only names a negative and thus epitomizes language as verbal action. It also names a morally-tinged good or value, or, possibly, Edgar Allen Poe reminds us, a “perversion” of a morally-tinged good or value.¹² We can say “yes” or “no” to the command to do what is good or right. Even when we’re talking about the biological purposes of animals (think of Lassie and Dumbo, Mickey and Minnie) or the import of the circling constellations and planets (think of astrology and the horoscope), we have difficulty not letting drama, a sense of moral conflict or ethical judgment, leak into our thoughts. We will try here, as best we can, to do that very thing, show how drama leaks in, via our illustrations of how the word *purpose* prods us toward conceptions of the desirable, the valuable, the morally good.

Social psychologist Abraham Maslow drew a famous diagram in the shape of a pyramid. He called it the hierarchy of human needs and motivations. We could call the common human needs he lists in ascending order, lower to higher, a hierarchy of human *purposes*. Certainly, we all pursue in our daily rounds the ends and goals Maslow deems most generally important for human life and success.¹³

On the bottom tier of the pyramid, Maslow lists those physical needs humans directly share with nonverbal animals. They are those of food, drink, cover, shelter, reproduction, and elimination. Higher motivations include safety, esteem, and belongingness needs. At the pinnacle of the pyramid is the motive of self-actualization, self-fulfillment.

The moral drama that the word *purpose* conjures in our mind by way of hints and suggestions can be seen in a comparison and contrast between humans and other animals on Maslow's lowest level of needs and motivations. The physical needs of humans Maslow cites are exactly the same, on a high level of abstraction, as those of insects and birds, squirrels and chimpanzees. All animals, human and nonhuman, need, and seek after, food, drink, shelter or habitat of some kind, reproduction, etc. The difference is: When nonhuman animals do not meet these needs, they get hungry, thirsty, vulnerable to danger and the elements, and deprived of offspring. When humans do not meet these needs, they get hungry, thirsty, vulnerable to danger and the elements, and deprived of offspring---and they get shamed! The poor themselves are deemed guilty for not properly providing for themselves and their dependents, a typical 19th-century approach to the problem of hunger and homelessness in society. Or the social order that allows such deprivations to exist within it is blamed, a typical 20th-and-21st-century approach to the problems of hunger and want. Somebody or some condition is blamed. Moral conflict transpires. Dramas of correction and redemption ensue.

The higher human needs and motives with a place in Maslow's pyramid---safety, belongingness, esteem, and self-fulfillment---are no less burdened by moral judgment. Persons who neglect their safety needs and suffer for that neglect didn't take proper "care," their neighbors might say. A recluse who doesn't "belong" anywhere is often stigmatized as a "loner" or social outcast. To a great extent, esteem is meted out according to our location on the "social ladder," within our community of

associates. One is deemed estimable or not estimable by way of that social standing. Men and women with talent who never use it to good advantage are sometimes labeled “failures” in life. In pursuit of safety, belonging, esteem, and self-actualization, persons are no less open to criticism and immersed in drama than in their search for food, clothing, and shelter. (See Addendum 6.)

That’s why Erving Goffman, a sociologist, said that human beings in society are “ritually vulnerable.”¹⁴ By that he meant we are so susceptible to moral judgment by those around us. Whether we fulfill our human needs and purposes, lower or higher, is tinged with moral danger. We humans can hardly help thinking of “good” and “bad,” “valuable” and “worthless,” when we confront, contemplate, and employ the word “purpose.”

Not Only *Whether*, but Also *How*

The word *purpose* connotes a *rule-governed* end or goal, as well as a morally valued object of desire. Potential moral censure goes not only with *whether* we fulfill our aims and resolves, but also *how*. Unlike crows and coyotes, we do not descend on a farmer’s field to sate our hunger and take what vegetables or livestock we want, without fear of legal action. At the supermarket, we don’t stuff our shopping cart with goodies and wheel them out to our car, without stopping first at the checkout counter to pay. We hardly walk down a tree-lined suburban street, notice a beautiful home across a well-manicured lawn, and say to our spouse next to us, “That would be a great place to live! Let’s move in and make it our own tonight.” We don’t pass a strange and gorgeous woman, or handsome man, on the street, and go up and say, “I’ve decided you and I are going to make a baby right now.” We can’t “strike it rich” at banks and convenience stores with a pistol or an Uzi, without a likely and long vacation behind bars. *How* we strategize pursuit of our purposes is no less fraught with potential moral conflict than *whether* we bring them to pass. Food, safety, friends, status---whatever it is we want, we have to conform to the *thou-shalt-nots* of society, or else!

The Generalized Use of the Word and Idea of *Purpose* and the Other Basic Forms of Thought That Go with It

An obvious issue prompted by this brief summary of “what we see . . . in the basic parts of speech”¹⁵ is this one: The notion of a *purpose* and the other fundamental concepts that it implies are all embedded in the definitions of nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs, the content parts of speech. Those concepts include, with purpose: actor, act, means, manner, and scene. These are implicitly the dramatic elements in messages. Obviously, we have to access these forms of thought when we describe what nonhuman beings are or do, the same way we have to use them when talking about what human beings are or what human beings do. The English language offers no other content words and meanings to work with, other than nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs, as defined. The notion of an actor performing an action for an (implicitly) *morally-tinged purpose* is at the heart of language, you say? How does this description of moral drama, necessarily insinuated in the only language we have available to use when we speak about rocks and raccoons, plants and peanut butter---how can it dovetail with a nonhuman world that, apparently, has nothing to do with morality or ethics?

Consider these common turns of phrase and modes of thought, for instance:

*The stalking *action* of the lions went unnoticed by the wildebeests.

*The hydraulic *action* of the running water smoothed the edges of the rocks.

*Our car’s engine *acted up* on the trip last week.

*A chemical *agent* in the dish soap cut the grease on the silverware.

*The mother bird gathered twigs for the *purpose* of building a nest.

Neither lions, water, automobiles, detergents, or birds are dramatic beings. None of them have anything at all to do with *moral conflict*. They are innocent of laws and rules. It would seem not one ever experiences guilt or shame. Yet we use the same basic descriptive terms for what they do that we use for the *legal action* Sam took against Fred, the insurance *agent* we bought a medical policy from, and the spiritual *purposes* of the youth group on a religious retreat. And we use these same basic

descriptive concepts in respect to nonhuman beings without a sense of metaphor, without a sense of comparing two things that are essentially dissimilar. What gives?

What gives is, the subtleties of the drama inherent in language escape the modern “scientific” mind. Contemporary men and women aren’t quite so aware that they are investing rocks, plants, and lower animals with something akin to moral agency in such declarations as:

*The earth revolves around the sun once a year at a 23 ½ degree slant, generating the four seasons.

*The sun shone down on us, warming our bodies.

*Trees grow their branches toward the sunlight to facilitate photosynthesis and stay alive and healthy.

*A pack of African wild dogs ripped the baby zebra to shreds to satisfy their hunger.

Moral agent: a being that has a capacity for self-initiated action that can effect changes in its environment, or itself, for good or ill, for benefit or harm.

Each of the noun-subject “actors” or “agents” in the sentences above are declared to be doing something to bring about changes in their environment for good or ill. The earth “revolves” to give us the four picturesque and productive seasons of the year. The sun “shines” so as to bring warmth and life to us on planet earth. Trees “grow” their branches in a certain direction to make it possible for them to bear the fruit we eat, provide shade and beauty for our body and eyes, and furnish birds and other animals with a safe habitat. African wild dogs “rip” a poor little baby zebra apart, live, to preserve themselves and their pups, yes, but they do so in such a vicious, cruel, and disgusting way, we wouldn’t want them around as house pets or team mascots. These four “agents”--and that’s what the linguists call *any* subject in an active-voice, action-verb sentence, human or nonhuman---are represented as performing four “actions” three of which do “good” and one of which does something “bad,” or at least morally ambiguous. True, African wild dogs have to live, but can’t they display better table manners, we might tend to think?

Persons in primitive or archaic cultures would not have required such subtle analysis to understand that they were investing the nonhuman world of animals, plants, and inanimate objects with moral potencies via their speech. They did it openly, naturally, consciously. Following the cues intrinsic to language more naively than ourselves, they revered, dreaded,

even worshipped rocks and trees, rivers and storms, as magical, living beings. Primitive peoples saw them as gods who could bring blessings or curses upon themselves and their tribe. Their religion was “animism,” the anthropologists and theologians say. In animism, individual animals and plants, nonliving things and natural processes, are seen to possess “souls” and supernatural powers by which to bring benefit or harm to the human realm. Nonhuman beings are conceived to be free moral agents, only more majestic than humans in their might and efficacy.¹⁶

Later, in the great ancient cultures, these powers of divine agency any nameable thing could possess were abstracted and generalized into the gods of polytheism. Instead of the god of this river, there was the god of all rivers. Instead of the god of such-and-such patch of ground, there was the god of our entire national terrain.

Monotheism but carries this linguistic trajectory to its ultimate, logical, perfected conclusion. In monotheism, one God---not a dozen, not a thousand---“acts” in and through the operations of all beings and functions in the universe, giving coherence for believers to our contemporary human understanding of our world. Monotheism does not erase free moral agency from our descriptions of what happens in the natural universe. Our insurance policies still refer to hurricanes and floods, tornadoes and earthquakes, as “acts of God.” Perhaps the perfected modern rendering of this linguistic tendency is found in the credo of historic Presbyterianism: “God doth direct all actions, yet God, the First Cause, ordereth them to fall out according to the nature of second causes, either necessarily, freely, or contingently.”¹⁷

No matter how tinged with ethical and dramatic connotations the basic thought forms of our language may be, however, those basic thought forms, by themselves, do not suit our purposes when we talk about distinctly human activity. The notions of actor, act, purpose, means, manner, and scene, rooted in the definitions of the content parts of speech, require further modification. Humans are explicitly free moral agents, not just implicitly, or so we humans believe. Accounts of what we do require an additional anatomy of verbal action. Acts of speech and writing descriptive of what we girls and boys, we women and men, are distinctively about inevitably bring to the fore an *expressly, explicitly* moral pattern of discourse. Such acts of speech and writing bring openly to mind and utterance terms that are essential to the idea of a moral rule of law. (See Addendum 4.)

Chapter 2

The Specific, Explicitly Moral Pattern of Verbal Action

What Kant Found Awesome

The great German philosopher Immanuel Kant said there were two things that most especially filled him with awe: the starry skies above and the moral law within.¹ The view of language as essentially “dramatic action” that inevitably produces in human life “moral conflict” to repair and redeem perceived moral error sharpens Kant’s focus as to where that moral law is to be found. It is in our mind and heart, as Kant said, because it is most imperiously in our language.

Our purpose in this chapter will be to find the best and most useful expression of this explicit pattern of moral or dramatic action generated by our language. That will be our search. In Chapter 3, we will identify that preferred pattern. We will then show its relationship to the all-embracing, higher-level-of-abstraction, implicitly moral pattern of verbal action we set forth in Chapter 1: actor, act, purpose, means, manner, and scene. What we will arrive at over the next two chapters is a framework that puts together the concepts found in both paradigms of action. The specific terms of the explicit pattern to follow will serve as modifiers of the general terms embodied in the definitions of nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs. The combination of concepts that results, specific adjectives in front of general nouns, will remain the central emphasis of our language, literature, speech, and composition study from beginning to end.

Institutions and Hierarchies

Let's get straight here at the outset of our discussion of the clearly moral nature of human activity and the language we use to describe it, let's get straight the meanings of two indispensable words: "institution" and "hierarchy."² An "institution" is a recognized organization of some kind, of persons in a society. It is usually public in character, or at least publicly noted and approved of. We'll be talking about six such institutions in this chapter, loosely speaking, and the rules that regulate them: the family, the school or college, the church/synagogue/mosque/temple, the company or place of business, "society" as an arena of informal social relationships, and the state or nation. They are all run by rules. Nobody can do whatever he or she wants in these places of human aspiration and "get away with it." That moral order is the ideal we strive for, anyway.

The second important word for our discussion is "hierarchy." The rules social institutions establish for their members to follow so there won't be chaos or disorder in their operations need to be applied and enforced. Persons in "authority" apply and enforce them. Think of the sound of the first syllable in "hierarchy." These authoritative persons are "high" on the ladder of esteem, privilege, and power in the formal or informal organization we may be talking about. Other members of the group are "lower" in rank and influence. In a democratic

institution, one where “the people” rule through voting leaders in or out of “office,” “officials” are no less “one up” on everybody below them during their term of service. Within the constraints of the law, these hierarchally privileged office holders control the levers of power their institutions possess.

The Hierarchal Order of Moral Values and Relationships on the Family/Child Level

In every area of our life, at every stage of our life, we come in contact with the explicitly moral pattern of verbal action phrased in a particular way, depending on which institution or organization we happen to be a part of at the time. For us as children, that moral code of practice might have read, and might still read, something like this: family rules, bad behavior, a tattling brother or sister, a scolding or spanking or grounding or some other restriction on our liberties as a “corrective” to what we, or our brother or sister, did “wrong,” followed after a time by a “hug,” literal or figurative, a “making up,” restoration of privileges and good vibes from Mom and/or Dad once again.

What were, what are, some of the rules of behavior the powers-that-be in your family, namely your mother or father or both, have laid down for you and your siblings? Rules create a “good” order within which everyone under their sway can presumably go about his or her business in a manner that will enhance life and self-fulfillment for all concerned. That’s the ideal we have in mind, to be sure, when we think about institutional rules in any sphere of life.

Obviously, there are often marked differences of opinion about how “just” the going rules are, no matter what province of life we may be dealing with. On behalf of the larger institution, the “big shots” usually make the rules, arbitrarily or democratically, in this case Mom and Dad. The underlings, here the children, have to more or less obey. Grumble, grumble.

What were, what are, the family rules in your house? Name some. Play in the yard or on the lawn, but never go out in the street? Don’t throw sand from the sandbox in your sister or brother’s face? Get home from that Saturday date by 12:00 midnight, or else?

Have you ever broken a family rule and “gotten caught”? (Joke.) How did your parents find out about it? Did brother or

sister “tell on you”? Were you punished? Not allowed to play outside for several days? Sent to your room? “Grounded” for a month? How long did it take for you and your parent(s) to “make up”?

Family rules, bad behavior (nobody’s perfect), perhaps a *snitch* who *turned you in* or *told on you*, a *smack on the backside* or some *withdrawal of privileges*, then, after a while, *making up* with Mom and Dad. We could language the stages family dramas go through in just such a way.

The Hierarchal Order of Moral Values and Relationships on the School/Student Level

Preschool children eventually turn five or six and have to leave the rule-governed enclave called “family,” at least for part of each weekday. They go to school. They go to kindergarten, then elementary school, then middle school, then high school. Maybe later, they go on to college. Talk about tightly-controlled, rule-governed environments! This one’s really a “bite” sometimes.

Take, for instance, the drama of human relations on the high school level. Ideally, a student has to fulfill a set of stated requirements to pass a particular course, based on such things as homework, tests, compositions, and class participation. The student has to pass a certain number of courses to advance to the grade above, and/or perhaps achieve a cumulative grade-point average established by the school directors, principals, and faculty, the “big enchiladas” in this particular institution. Proceeding successfully through all four grades---freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior years---the student graduates with pomp and circumstance, family hugs and kisses, and photographs proudly framed.

Let’s say the general requirement for each course is a 60 percent average on work submitted, and an overall 2.0 grade-point average for one’s entire schedule of subjects. That means: Get an average of 70 percent, or a “C,” on all your schoolwork, and no less than a 60 percent, or “D,” in any one course. Those are the “rules.” They establish a certain “moral order” in school and community. Nobody gets a diploma from Jonesville High without producing work at this level of competence.

In high school, then, the curricular drama begins with “course and graduation requirements.” Things begin to go wrong

for students at Jonesville High when their grades slip below 60 percent in one or more courses at the end of a marking period. “Failure notices” go out to parents. A guidance counselor requests an interview. Athletic coaches admonish about potential ineligibility for sports. Detention hall or extra in-school study time may loom. A period of “probation” might be officially invoked. The “finger of blame” points ever more directly and threateningly at these errant scholars.

If low enough grades continue across two or three or more courses, “failing” students may have to “take the year over.” They are “held back.” Or they are forced to go to summer school when they’d rather be working and earning money, or vacationing at some camp for athletes or cheerleaders or youth-group members at their church or synagogue. They must “pay a price” for their academic missteps.

The “price having been paid,” their “lesson having been learned,” improvement having been shown, formerly “failing” students, students “at risk,” often become successful students in the academic year(s) to follow. Their “suffering” has brought them new perspectives and understandings. They see things differently now. They work harder and go on to better grades and ultimate graduation.

Course requirements, low grades, warning notices and maybe academic probation, a failing effort across one’s academic load of classes, being held back or suffering through summer school, then, one always hopes, improvement and success and eventual graduation: These are the stages of moral drama in the groves of academe, high school point of reference.

The Hierarchal Order of Moral Values and Relationships on the Church/Parishioner Level

We use the term “church” here in a loose sense. We have in mind any religious institution, be it instead a synagogue, mosque, or temple. For many middle-school- or high-school-age youth, joining church or temple is a rite of passage. By way of instruction, confession, and confirmation, they are initiated into the drama of salvation their faith community prescribes.

Slanting our description of this moral drama a bit in the direction of the great religions of Western culture, we can start out by saying that God is the Rule-Giver on this level of human

relationship. The church, synagogue, or mosque is the institution through which God's laws are transmitted. Clergymen and, in some traditions, clergywomen are the hierarchally privileged interpreters and mouthpieces by which God's commandments are proclaimed. Governing boards of lay elders or deacons--in Christian churches they are so labeled--share some powers of governance with bishops and ministers of the Word. On the church/parishioner level of values and relationships, a most "perfect" pattern of dramatic action is often made known.

The Christian drama of salvation, for instance, begins with God's commandments, the *thou-shalt-nots* of the Bible. Thou shalt not ever eat of the fruit of the tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, not even once, or you shall surely die, God said to Adam and Eve. This ordinance, and the sacred laws of the Decalogue (The Ten Commandments), established moral order in human life and in the universe as a whole. Sinful violation of God's edicts brings moral disorder to human relationships, alienation between persons and groups and nations, and a tragic separation between God and human beings.

This drama continues with finger-pointing and blame-laying in the form of guilt for sin, conviction of wrongdoing. Humans are held responsible for their acts of disobedience in the face of God's commands. Some will respond to these charges of wrongdoing with an attitude of repentance and contrition. They will be truly sorry for their sins and want to "get right with God" once again. Others may rebel. They might take up the "satanic strategy" of reveling in their wrongful acts, thumbing their nose at God and the godly social arrangements religious institutions espouse. They will turn their minds toward doing what is bad for the sake of its badness.

Acts of sacrifice of some kind are at the heart of all religious dramas. They are at the heart of all dramas. Atonement through what is called "vicarious" sacrifice for sin is the primary act by which "things are made right again" in Christianity and Biblical Judaism. Some other being or beings are made a "compensatory payment" for the sins at least repentant believers have committed. "Vicarious" means "substitutionary." Another being or other beings take upon themselves, or are accorded, the punishment the repentant petitioners deserve, according to Judeo-Christian doctrine. In the Old Testament, or Hebrew Scriptures, those beings selected for sacrifice were plants and animals. In the New Testament, the distinctively Christian Scriptures, that sacrificial

being is Jesus of Nazareth, called the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God. He is conceived to have been a “perfect” sacrifice, born of a virgin mother, sinless himself in life. The sacrificial animals of the Hebrew Scriptures and Christ in the New Testament are represented as “scapegoats.” They assume and carry away the sins of the human race, leaving believers, at least, spotlessly, morally clean.

Sacrifice that “justifies” believers, gets them “right with God,” however, is a two-way street in most religions. It must be turned inward as well as outward. “Self-sacrifice” is important, too. “Mortification,” sacrifice of the self, controlling one’s physical appetites, saying “no” to some natural impulses, thinking of others as well as oneself, sharing one’s wealth, “doing good” toward the poor and unfortunate---these acts of self-discipline and loving regard complete a believer’s profession of faith, give outward evidence of an inward trust and loyalty.

Acts of saving sacrifice having been made or appropriated, redemption follows. Moral order is restored. God and human beings are reconciled. In the Kingdom of God or in the world to come, in fact, a newer, higher, better, nobler, more perfect set of relationships and identities are said to await the faithful believer. Heaven or Paradise beckons, perfect bliss for a perfect duration: forever and ever. In the Heavenly realm, humans become in body, soul, and action truly Children of God.

Moral order by way of God’s commands; disorder by way of sinful disobedience; guilt; repentance or rebellion; atonement through vicarious sacrifice of some other being or beings and/or mortification, sacrifice of the self; and redemption, moral order restored or enhanced---these are often the stages in the religious drama of salvation.

The Hierarchal Order of Moral Values and Relationships on the Society/Member Level

Whether we can call society in general in a particular culture an institution is a debatable point. It is certainly not a formal organization with written and published rules of behavior enacted into law by hierarchally privileged leaders. “Society” does, though, have rules and it does have leaders. In the late

19th century, when Mrs. Vanderbilt rode in her fine horse-drawn carriage to Mrs. Astor's mansion in New York City to make peace between their two families, everybody knew that social arrangements were being made at their highest levels.

The rule-governed scene of action we call "society" is an informal venue. Many of its rules are unwritten, unspoken, taken for granted. The rules differ somewhat from culture to culture. Many of them are learned by growing youngsters merely by observation. The young see what others are doing in "Rome," so they "do what the Romans do," so to speak.

How close do you stand next to someone during a conversation? It's not the same in the United States as it is in Eastern Europe or West Africa. In the U. S., we stand farther apart, and we are far less likely to put our hands on our talk partners. How long may you look at or stare at a stranger? In the U. S., not very long. What topics are you allowed to discuss with strangers or casual acquaintances? What information or favors should you ask for? Don't ask about their income, bathroom habits, or sexual preferences, that's for sure. Do you bow or shake hands when beginning a talk? Are you Japanese or Western European?

What about rules of courtship? Ought a girl ask a boy for a date? Fifty years ago here in the states the answer would have been "no." Today, girls are allowed to be much more aggressive. Should parents or siblings tag along as chaperons when a girl and boy are dating? In our country, that notion seems almost ridiculous. In Italy and Latin America, it's still a socially-sanctioned option.

Dress codes, dating practices, the forms that structure conversations, the dramas enacted at ceremonies, parties, and other social gatherings---rules of behavior are stipulated for each of these situations. The rules, though, are not found in statute books. They are found, if at all, in books by Miss Manners and Emily Post, or in advice columns at Annie's Mailbox or Dear Abby. Otherwise, social rules are just "in the air."

To repeat: Nobody's perfect. We all break the unwritten rules of social order sometime in our life. These violations are not customarily "crimes." They are mistakes, faux pas, slip-ups. They engender in us not so much guilt as "embarrassment." To set things right once again, they require on the part of offended persons not scapegoating, not banishment forever and a day. They certainly don't call for death to the offender. Mistakes in reference to unwritten social rules are proportionately punished by the "cold shoulder," maybe the "silent treatment." They usually justify the

establishment of “social distance” for a limited period of time, not permanent “social rejection.” The “clown” who acts like a country rube at a grand dinner party is more likely to sustain a “slap on the wrist,” so to speak, not a blow to the head that injures him forever.

The *unwritten rules* of society, a *mistake* or *faux pas* or *slip-up* in violation of those rules, *embarrassment*, the *cold shoulder* or *silent treatment*, and, eventually, the smile, handshake, friendly word, or slap on the back of *social reinstatement* often mark the stages in our dramas of everyday intercourse with neighbors, acquaintances, and strangers.

The Hierarchal Order of Moral Values and Relationships on the Company/Employee Level

We’ve graduated from high school, maybe also college and/or some vocational, technical, or professional school. “No more homework, no more books, no more teachers’ dirty looks.” To some extent, we’re out from under the thumb of Mom and Dad, also, “on our own” maybe for the first time in our life. We’re religious or not so religious now---we have a choice as to whether we remain faithful to the most sacred elements of our upbringing. We can think it through for ourselves in early adulthood, maybe make adjustments in our theological perspectives, “own” our faith in a new and uniquely personal way. The surrounding culture and its *no-nos* we have always with us, without a doubt, but the spirit of rebellion that often grips persons at this stage of life might even extend to society’s “sacred cows.” The “rules” we have lived by now frequently undergo change.

Almost certainly, however, a new set of rules will impinge. And this set of rules will be tight. We have to earn a living. We have to go to work: full time.

We already know about the stringent rules of the workplace from part-time jobs we’ve held during high school. Our first full-time job, though, post high school or college, is a very different animal. This one begins the trajectory, the curve of development toward what society will call, whether we like it or not, the “success” or “failure” of our “career.” Our eventual image as a morally responsible human being will be burnished or blemished by how well we do “on the job,” and by the social value

and utility our line of work affords.

The rules on the company/employee level of relationship are often called the “job description” or “job requirements.” The bigwigs who, at least in substantial part, make them up and enforce them are owner/entrepreneurs, CEOs, vice-presidents, managers, supervisors, department heads, and foremen. Job descriptions are not always arbitrary. In many corporations, they result from intense negotiations between managers and union representatives chosen by vote of the rank and file. However they are formulated in a given company or institution, job descriptions tend to hold an employee to a strict standard of performance.

Generalizing about job descriptions across thousands and thousands of different kinds of employment in a modern economy is hazardous. It is especially so in these transitional times we call the computer age. Lots of wage earners are spending many working hours at home in front of a keyboard and screen. Traditional rules, though, include such things as showing up for work on time, staying busy at one’s assigned tasks until the close of the business day, producing a stated quantity and quality of output, adhering to dress and behavior codes, and satisfactorily cooperating with coworkers.

Employees who significantly fall short of fulfilling the requirements in their job description do “unsatisfactory” work. They are often “put on notice” that their employment is at risk. They might get a dressing down from a foreman, middle manager, or personnel director. After several such admonitions, they might receive an “official reprimand,” a warning in writing that goes into their personnel file for future reference. If they continue to “slack off” at the plant or in the office, these wayward workers will likely get “fired,” terminated, dismissed. An employee who is fired from several businesses or companies sometimes gets stigmatized as one who “can’t hold a job.”

A “grounded” family member, a student who “flunks for the year” at high school or “flunks out of” college, a “sinful” human being or “backsliding” believer who incurs the wrath of God, or a social butterfly shunned and banned by his peers for gauche behavior in public can “get right” with those from whom he is estranged by taking some appropriately self-sacrificial actions, or enduring his “victimization” by others for a limited period of time. Fired, “scapegoated” employees cannot usually do that. Customarily, they have to find “redemption” elsewhere. They have to “set things right” in their work life at another place

of business, or in another line of work. “Reconciliation” through “rehiring” at the firm where one was fired sometimes happens, but not often.

Generally, though, the stages of the drama in the workplace follow the same pattern as dramas in other spheres of life, only, once again, the phrasing is different. A *job description* establishes the rules. An *unsatisfactory performance* in respect to those requirements invites censure from bosses of one kind or another. They put the laggard worker *on notice*. An *official reprimand* may eventually follow. The dilatory worker is *fired* or *dismissed* if his work does not improve. Hope, however, springs eternal. He can still *make it* with another firm or in a different business perhaps more suited to his talents and disposition. He can still be a *success*.

The Hierarchal Order of Moral Values and Relationships on the State/Citizen Level

Human beings are “political animals,” the Ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle said.³ Hardly anybody lives, or ever lived, in what John Locke, an early modern philosopher, called a “state of nature.”⁴ By a state of nature, Locke meant isolated, out in the wild, unconnected to a larger group of humans by regulative laws or customs, at any rate. In such a primitive venue, “The inclination on the part of some men [sic] to violate the rights of others” threatens chaos.⁵

Those regulative laws and legal constraints that were the glory of Ancient Greek and Roman jurisprudence have grown even more complex in today’s world. More and more it seems, citizens have to “go by the book.” They must fill out more forms, wend their way through more “red tape,” take ever greater cognizance of what legal actions a business rival or unfriendly neighbor might take with the help of some smart lawyer. USAmericans live in what has been called a “litigious” society. They often sue first and ask questions later. They do so with roughly half of the world’s legal professionals at their beck and call.

Dramas of moral conflict, then, become very much dramas of legal conflict on the state/citizen level of relationship. Television courtroom spectacles of the Perry Mason or Judge Judy variety reflect only slightly more melodramatically the courtroom

combat played out, “by the book,” in thousands of cities and towns from coast to coast each day. This legal warfare, real or play-acted, has a terminology all its own, but it has a dramatic pattern that mirrors the forms and stages noted in the examples above drawn from other walks of life.

Legal dramas begin with the “laws of government” enacted in a democratic polity by duly elected representatives of the people. Here in the United States, Congress, state legislatures, city councils, and township boards of supervisors pass these laws. Presidents, governors, mayors, and commissioners, elected officials themselves, sign them and enforce them through departments of prosecution, police, and, occasionally, the National Guard. Justices, judges, and juries on various levels of government, elected or appointed, adjudicate disputes between citizens, and between the state and its citizens, pursuant to charges that certain laws have been broken. The laws establish “legal order” in the land, a very formal instance of “moral order.” Violations of the most serious of these statutes are called “crimes.” When a criminal law has been broken, when a crime has been committed, let’s say a murder, prosecutors and police, acting on behalf of the state, try to find the criminal and seek an “indictment.” An indictment is a formal charge that a suspect may have committed the crime at issue, that strong evidence points in his direction. Sought by prosecutors with the aid of evidence uncovered by police, the indictment is handed down by a judge and/or a jury.

A legal “indictment” alleging that a “crime” has been committed in violation of national, state, or local “law” results in a “trial.” A criminal trial, certainly a murder trial, is usually conducted in front of a judge and a jury of citizens selected at random and cleared by attorneys on both sides of the case. Evidence is presented by prosecutors and defense lawyers. Witnesses are often called. “Conviction” or “acquittal” of the “defendant” brings the trial near to a close. “Sentencing” ends the legal ordeal, when the defendant is found “guilty.”

Convicted criminals face “punishment” for their crime. Punishment can range from probation or community service or a fine, on the light side, to imprisonment and perhaps even execution, in serious criminal cases. Certainly a murderer would sustain a long period of incarceration, at the very least, perhaps a life sentence. He might even be put to death by electrocution or lethal injection. The standard in sentencing convicted criminals to a type or period of punishment in the legal realm is an exacting

one: The punishment must fit the crime. It must be proportionate to the level of social disorder the perpetrator brought about, which is to say, it must be severe enough to satisfy society's "sense of justice." It must not, however, be inordinately "cruel and unusual."

"Rehabilitation" follows upon punishment in the drama of human relations on the state/citizen level. "Ex-cons" might benefit from counseling and support at a "half-way house" designed to ease them back into civilian life. They may take advantage of job training, educational programs, and prison ministries experienced during their stay behind bars. "Paroled" or released prisoners sometimes redeem their lives in noteworthy ways. They make a positive contribution to the social order, and a new and better life for themselves.

The drama of legal relations follows a rigidly defined and codified path of development. *Governmental laws, crime, indictment, trial, conviction, sentencing, punishment, and rehabilitation* mark those stages in searingly vivid terms. This pattern of verbal and political action is domain-specific in its terminology. At the same time, it pointedly echoes the overall course of development in any of the myriad dramas persons find themselves enmeshed in every day of their life.

An Attempt at Generalizing the Language of the Specific, Explicitly Moral Pattern of Verbal Action

This recurring and recurring and still persistently reoccurring pattern of linguistic expression inevitably bobs to the surface of our speech whenever we talk about distinctively human activity. We can even say this about it: The ultimate form or pattern of linguistic utterance that results from the trajectory of implications begun by the general, implicitly moral, content-parts-of-speech pattern of verbal action, found in the definitions of nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs, is the specific, explicitly moral pattern of verbal action found in talk about any distinctively human activity: religious, legal, political, social, educational, economic, even scientific. Language as "dramatic action" always and inescapably means language immersed in moral conflict, actual or potential. As we noted in Chapter 1, drama spills over even into discourse about animals, vegetables, and minerals. What human beings say has tended to treat nonhuman beings as

moral agents, as moral actors, in the past. It continues to do so, in a more subdued manner, to be sure, yet today.

We have now taken note of six particular manifestations of this communication pattern in various arenas of human relationship. Can we attempt to generalize the explicitly moral pattern, phrase it in a way that cuts across just about all scenes of human endeavor? Here's a stab at doing that very thing:

- (1) All human beings have a *sense of right and wrong*, or *good and evil* (it may be a perverted sense of right and wrong: I'm always and altogether right, and you're always and altogether wrong; or it may be a perverted sense of good and evil: let's serve the Principle of Evil instead of the Principle of Good; let's do bad things for the sake of doing bad things; let's say "no" to the moral law)
- (2) Embodied in certain *socially-sanctioned rules of relationship* (these rules will differ in significant ways from era to era and culture to culture; the form of morality will remain the same; the content will be somewhat situated in terms of time and place)
- (3) Which, when *broken* (the rules *will* be broken; they tend to be perfect, categorical: thou shalt not *ever*; human beings are not perfect),
- (4) Result in a *bad conscience* and/or a *season of blame-laying* (we certainly point the finger of blame outward at others, but we very often guilt-trip ourselves as well)
- (5) And require a *compensatory payment* of some kind, made *by ourselves* and/or *some other being or beings* (we surely scapegoat others for what's gone wrong, but we often punish, or at least discipline, ourselves, also)
- (6) To *set things right* (this is the goal of a human purpose: to set things right, or at least make them better; or, perversely, to "make things better" by "making them worse," the goal of a servant of human darkness).

Question: Should we use this more or less overarching, generic statement of the features of the human drama as building blocks for our basic paradigm of dramatic action?

Answer: No. We can find a more "perfect" and fitting prototype on which to found our course of study.

Chapter 3

A Paradigm for Invention of Discourse and Analysis of Texts That Combines the Two Patterns

Theology Trumping All Other Dramatic Frames When We're Talking about Human Beings and Their Inherently Moral Discourse

We're going to go with the theological way of expressing in a specific, explicit manner the drama inherent in use of the English language. These "religious" terms state the human drama most "perfectly." They state the drama that is in language in the most "ideal" way. Theological terms are the end game of language.

If the ultimate form or pattern of linguistic utterance begun by the forms of thought generated by nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs is the moral pattern explicitly phrased in a variety of ways, depending on the situation, the ultimate expression of this moral pattern is found in theology, words about God. As the Source of All Being, Most Wise Lawgiver, First Cause and Final End of human life and meaning, the Alpha and Omega, God and His Way of Morality stand at the apex of human speech and thought. All other human dramas can be viewed as pale derivations from this most perfect conception of drama. Or, the theological drama can be seen as a perfected, transcendental projection of the generic human drama. Take your pick. One way or the other, humans as dramatic beings must be defined as theological beings through and through. Studying their theological expressions is like studying language in terms of its biggest picture, its most sharply defined relief map.¹

Let's make it clear right here what we are saying. We are not endorsing any particular religion. We are not even necessarily endorsing religion in general. What we are saying is, this is the way human beings are. Language makes them that way. If, as a result, you want to shout "Hallelujah," great. If your reaction is, "Bah humbug---so much the worse for the linguistic process," that's your affair.² If you are a symbolizing animal, though, you will not, you will *never*, escape from the lure of a "god-term" of some kind that bubbles up from the depths of your mind and being. The "theological motive of perfection" serves as a lure in discourse, even in language used trivially.³ Language will find a way to extrude an overall summary term for human motivations, be it God (as in Christian, Jewish, and Muslim monotheism), a Pantheon of gods (as in Greek and Roman worship of Zeus or Jupiter and his offspring), the State (as in Hitler's National Socialism), the Proletariat (the communist term for the working class), Nature (as in pantheism or, some would say, super environmentalism), "mana" (the animistic force the primitives saw in the trees and the rocks), what you will.

Why this is so will become clearer, we hope, as we proceed.

First, let's look at our all-purpose, fit-all-finger statement of the drama found in human communication and human relations. This hybrid, or synthesis of general and specific notions, will serve as our basic analytical tool for the study of literature and oratory, and the source of ideas for our writing and formal speaking.

We'll get to the fine print later. Here, we will give our all-purpose statement of the features of drama rooted in our use of the English language a title. We will state what those moments of drama are. We will suggest some probing questions each aspect or stage of the drama might recommend for our consideration, as we read and interpret, write and speak. We will put the general nouns in plain text and the specifically moral modifiers in italics. Namely:

The Specific Terms for Dramatic Action Modifying the General Terms:

The Explicit-cum-Implicit Drama in Literature and Other Discourse

(1) *Morally Disordered, Polluted, or Problematic Scene, Situation, or Context, Actual or Potential* (the “when” and the “where” of the narrative or explanatory action; the constraining environment in which the action takes place, harmonized initially in an uneasy fashion by rules that *might* be broken, then, almost inevitably, disrupted by disobedience)

What's gone wrong to start the drama, particularly, but not always, from the main character's, or author's, point of view?
What rule has been broken?

What threatens to go wrong? What dire warning is being sounded, or what frightening risk is being confronted?

For later consideration: How has the moral disorder been compounded, often by efforts to set it right, hide it, or avoid blame for it?

(2) *Guilt-Obsessed Actor vs. a Guilty Opponent or Counteragent* (the “who” did it, does it, or will do it of the action; the beginning of conflict, the offended against the supposed offender)

Who places blame for what's gone wrong and on whom or what? Whom or what is cited as the cause of what's gone wrong?

As a result of the finger-pointing, who's in conflict with whom?

Specifically:

Who is the main character (or hero or protagonist or “good guy”) and who is the opposing character (or villain or

antagonist or “bad guy”)?

Or appear to be, based on the blame-laying?

(3) *Repentant* or *Rebellious*, *Morally Constructive* or *Perverse*, “*Straight*” or *Ironic Attitude* (the “manner” in which the action is carried out, based on the openly displayed, or sometimes hidden or partly hidden, mindset that helps drive the dramatic action, often expressed in verbal and physical gestures)

What stance does the author or character in question seem to be taking toward what you, or most persons you know, would regard as goodness or virtue?

What kind of actions does the language of the narrative, the essay, or a character in the account seem to be preparing for? In what direction does this actor---writer or character---seem headed, based on her dialogic or descriptive cues?

What level of commitment does the author or character exhibit toward the ends and purposes she seems to want to bring to pass?

What is the “tone” of the narrative or discourse? Judging from the connotations or emotional charges of the words the writer, or character, selects to tell her story or make her case, what do you think is her true intent?

(4) *Self-Sacrificing*, *Self-Interfering* and/or *Victimizing* or *Scapegoating Act* (the “what” of the action; conflict continued, setting right the moral wrong that has been committed, or that serves as a potential danger)

Who pays what, who suffers and how, to set things right? Who struggles, strains, strives, makes perhaps a painful effort?

Specifically:

Who punishes himself or herself? Or some other?

Punishment of oneself: mortification.

Punishment of someone else or by someone else: scapegoating.

How is this strategy of sacrifice being presented? As a prescription for living, or not? Is it proportionate, just, and useful? Does the punishment fit the “crime” or the degree of seriousness of the issues the narrative or essay deals with? Have you followed the trail of blame and punishment until you have found the chief actor, the chief benign actor, and his or her opponent, the chief malign actor? Have you found this main axis of conflict? Does the main axis of conflict, the who’s-against-whom, remain the same throughout the story or discourse? Or does it change or shift at some crucial point,

revealing a different antagonist or protagonist, and hence a different meaning? What value is ultimately being debated, is ultimately in dispute, a protagonist (*pro*: on behalf of; *agon*: conflict or argument; *ist*: the person so doing) being the character who argues for, or acts on behalf of, the thesis, moral, or philosophic statement of the tale or polemic, usually up front and at the center of things at the climax?

In sum, whose drama is this?

(5) *Redemptive* purposes and means (the “why” and the “how” of the narrative or explanatory action; the good that comes out of the bad, the gain after the pain, and the preliminary steps, stages, and tools of action required to bring this glorious vision to pass)

What debt has been fairly paid? (a redeemed sense of justice)

What’s been learned? (redeemed understanding)

Who are back together, who are reconciled, or who experience at the end a new and bracing social solidarity after unjust enemies are vanquished? (redeemed relationships)

Whose social image has been improved? (redeemed identity)

What’s been restored or made better? (redeemed conditions)

What strategies of operation did the “hero,” or “antihero,” use to finesse his way around inevitable opponents, obstacles, and resistances strewn in his pathway to redemption and success?

Unpacking the Paradigm a Bit More, Just to Make Sure You Understand

Remember what we’re saying about this pattern of verbal action, this form and structure of discourse, as phrased above. You will find it embedded in all English utterances, spoken or written. It will be at least implied in discourse about nonhuman beings---other animals, vegetables, and inanimate objects---and what they are doing. Often it will surface there in an obtrusive manner, clearly superimposing moral and ethical meanings and notions of free and intentional conduct on what the scientific mind would call the blind and dumb motions of nature.

Take, for example, what linguists call the “agent” in an active-voice, action-verb sentence.⁴ The “agent” takes on something of the aura of freedom, initiative, and benign or malign intent, whether the agent that does the deed is the earth, the sun, a tree, or a pack of wild dogs. From viewing the processes of nature

as acts of a supernatural, animistic force called “mana” in archaic cultures, to construing those same events as “acts of God” in the language of monotheistic religions and commercial insurance policies today, drama rears its head.

In the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, drama rears its head in descriptions of how primordial cells covered themselves with membrane three billion years ago at the beginning of the evolutionary process. They “surround[ed] quantities of these compounds by membranes that made them[selves] into ‘cells.’”⁵ They are depicted as smart little guys. In the writings of sociobiologists like Edward O. Wilson of Harvard University, genes are presented as beings that rule the world: They perform all kinds of actions to sustain their own well being, using animal bodies, including those of men and women, as mere tools for their own self-preservation.⁶ They are exceptionally smart little guys, in the discourse of the sociobiologists.

This all-purpose, explicit rendition of the drama embedded in English utterances becomes overtly, unambiguously manifest, of course, in talk and writing about anything that human beings do. The language of drama and morality enriches---and beclouds---every field of human endeavor. The terms implied in the notion of moral order, cited above, are the “Iron Law of History” and the iron law of all intrapersonal, interpersonal, group, national, and international relationships.⁷ We want to cite some of the many ways these forms of speech, and the physical actions they provoke, separate men and women from nonverbal animals, and demonstrate a theological orientation, broadly speaking, in human thought and life.

But first, we will briefly annotate, or add some more explanation to, each of these five features of drama.

Morally Disordered Scene

We could have divided this first stage of drama into two stages, “moral order,” then “moral disorder.” We collapse these two stages into one by adding the qualifiers “actual or potential” to the concept of moral disorder. Even when things are going fine in an institution---a family, a school, a corporation, or any other large or small grouping---a threat hangs in the air. Children, students, employees, or members of whatever organization we can think of *might* break the rules. “Police” are on guard in the form

of parents, teachers, hall monitors, foremen, gossips, tattletales, surveillance cameras, you name it, to protect against just such a contingency.

Or actual police!

The rules and the rule enforcers are there, governing the group, precisely because humans are both morally weak and/or potentially ambivalent toward a given institution and its goals. Even persons who “belong” might be selfish. They might be uncaring. They might have extraordinary difficulty controlling their physical appetites. They might have a subversive attitude toward the group and its purposes. They might simply lack the personal attributes and abilities it takes to produce, or live up to, what the rules or expectations require. How many earthlings know for sure what’s in someone else’s heart? A sense of “Eden before the Fall” pervades even the most orderly arenas of human action. Remember: According to the Biblical book of Genesis, God put the forbidden tree right in the middle of the garden. Its fruit was tempting and tasty to eat, and beautiful to behold. For “a season,” sin could be fun, right? In the notion of moral order, moral disorder is strongly implicit as a possibility, if not as an eventual certainty.

Guilt-Obsessed Actor vs. a Guilty Opponent

Conflict inevitably develops between those who support the institution’s rules and the values those rules seek to safeguard, and those who violate the rules and flout those values, or align themselves with those who so violate and flout. Keep in mind, of course, that the “correct” interpretation of what those “righteous” rules and values are is oftentimes in the eye of the beholder. Who, for instance, is the more faithful American today, the conservative or the liberal? The citizen who puts emphasis on freedom in economic relationships, or on freedom in social relationships? Or is it the libertarian, the one who stresses both kinds of freedom equally? Is the “strict constructionist” in reference to the United States Constitution more patriotic than the circuit judge or Supreme Court justice who credits more fully the amendment process or adaptation of law to changing circumstances?⁸ Who the “good guy” and “bad guy” are in a spoken or written work will depend most often on whose perspective dominates the discourse. It will depend on who are presented as the protagonist and antagonist in

the story, essay, or speech.

Protagonist and antagonist there will surely be, if only by implication. Or, at least, the “good” forces and ideas against the “bad” forces and ideas. What is moral implies what is immoral. What is “true” or is the case suggests what is “false” or is not the case. Concepts, as “‘hero’ and ‘villain’ terms,” will do battle with each other in a narrative or polemic, if not flesh and blood human beings.⁹

The essentially agonistic nature of discourse is built into it by the negative, the intuition that undergirds all use of language. “What is” hints at “what is not.” You can’t get a hold of the idea of what a tree is without a sense of what it is not, where its boundaries lie. “Truth” has little meaning except as related to “error.” “Beauty” stands out clearly as an image or impression only against the backdrop of “ugliness.” Dictionaries define objects and concepts by way of the negative, *per genus ad differentiam*. They place the thing in question in a larger class or category, the genus, then show how the thing can be distinguished from other entities in that class, the *differentiam* or differential. Novels, short stories, plays, and practical discourses generate moral conflict, that is to say drama, because moral conflict is embedded in the nature of language itself.¹⁰

On the human level, the moral conflict in a story or some other composition can take several forms. It can be man or men vs. man, man or men vs. a group of men, man or men vs. society, man or men vs. nature, man or men vs. the Divine, man vs. himself, etc., necessary changes being made for gender. Don’t overlook the moral warfare taking place within the human mind. Psychiatrists and psychologists often label the “abnormal” person as “conflicted.” Such a designation needs a slight refinement. All humans are conflicted, drenched in mental drama, internal as well as external, the abnormal personality only more so.

Repentant or Rebellious Attitude, Etc.

The word “attitude” has several related meanings. It can, of course, mean a mental “disposition” or “persistent disposition,” “grounded in emotion and expressive of opinions,” “to act either positively or negatively toward a person, group, object, situation, or value.” It can mean, a bit more generally, a “state of readiness to act . . . that may be activated by an appropriate stimulus into

significant or meaningful behavior.” “Attitude,” though, can also mean “the manner in which the parts of the body are disposed,” “posture” or “position” or “bearing” that “indicat[es] action, feeling, or mood,” even “behavior representative of feeling or conviction.” It can mean “a position assumed to serve a purpose.” Dancers strike an “attitude” when they hold a certain posture momentarily. Airplanes are measured for “attitude” in reference to the surface of the earth. “Attitude,” therefore, has to do with both an internal intention or readiness to act in the service of some chosen purpose, and the external physical gestures and bearing that begin to implement the fulfillment of that purpose, and point in the direction subsequent action is likely to take.¹¹

Construing attitude in this larger sense gives it an analogous relationship to the manner in which an action is carried out, the gestural and verbal cues that signal how the actor “really feels,” as well as the prior, intentional content of her heart.

Language considered as dramatic action points directly to the notion of “attitude” as one of its basic qualities. From a dramatic vantage point, language can be seen as primarily a mode of interested, tendentious, value-laden, purposeful moral action in itself, and a call to purposeful moral action in a physical sense, rather than a means of conveying disinterested, objective, value-free information. At its core, language mainly expresses an attitude, creates an orientation toward certain pathways of action, gives cues to action and a command to follow those cues, rather than objectively describes and gives information. Language does give information, but it does so in its own incomplete, somewhat distorted, selective, deflective, prismatic, refractive, concealing as well as revealing, tunnel-vision, fun-house-mirror way.

Language will superimpose drama, moral conflict, on the essentially undramatic forces and processes of nature, as well as on the interactions of human beings.¹² It will express certain attitudes toward the many beings it names and describes. It will select out and discriminate entities and objects in relation to morally-tinged interests and intentions, in relation to morally-colored values and the higher, or perversely lower, purposes those values argue for. All language is connotative, emotionally “loaded,” even so-called “clinical” language. All language is “interested.”¹³ Only the type and level of interestedness is different. Attitude and language work hand in glove, so to speak, to motivate persons toward morally purposeful actions in the service of human needs.

Language as dramatic action expressive of a motivating

attitude can be ambiguous in its effect, however. It can surely goad persons toward physical activity and perhaps the production of the artifacts that human muscular contractions often create. It can also, though, serve as a substitute for “doing the deed.” Rhetorical, or persuasive, expression in itself will sometimes satisfy the human hunger to “act.” The “saying” of the thing, a vocal expression of attitude or feeling, will suffice on occasion as a substitute for pursuing the thing concretely in the outer world of social and political conduct. In some intermediate societies, for example, persons could by custom and statute go out into the wilderness and “curse the king” without fear of reprisal. In this fashion, they could “get it out of their system” by a mere expression of attitude, without reversion to a “sacrificial killing” of the nation’s hated monarch. Indictment, vituperation, vindictiveness against a “villain” can in this way serve as variants of the scapegoat process, without the shedding of blood.¹⁴

The Heart of the Drama: Sacrifice of Self and/or Some Other

We come now to the stage of drama where blood is shed, either literally or figuratively. “The true locus of assertion [in a work] is not in the *disease*,” Burke says, “but in the *structural powers* by which the poet *encompasses* it.”¹⁵ For “*disease*,” read anything that for humans constitutes a disorder, wrongdoing, significant error, or lament, that is, the opening stage of a drama. For “*structural powers*,” read the strategy of sacrifice by which the “poet,” or any other symbolic actor, proceeds from the lament to a glorious vision of redeemed persons and conditions. Here we get to the pith and marrow of dramatic action. It is muscular activity of a kind that, in the physical world, only human beings are capable of. It is symbolic action that, in the realm of narrative and other discourse, goads such uniquely human physical activity into being.¹⁶

This book is about “language, life, literature, rhetoric, and composition,” in philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein’s construction the “word games” people play.¹⁷ When we get to the stage of “action” in the verbal drama, however, the physical and the symbolic so readily bleed into each other, to use a thoroughly fitting metaphor. It’s hard to talk about a “self-sacrificing, self-interfering and/or victimizing or scapegoating act,” explain what

it is as a linguistic strategy in a story, speech or published political tirade, without making some reference to how such a strategy plays out in the arena of morally purposeful motion. Out in the “real world,” such a strategy of sacrifice can take what Burke calls a “suicidal” or a “homicidal” slant.¹⁸ Burke’s language employs hyperbole, of course, when we’re dealing with average, everyday human actions. Sadly, it turns strikingly apropos, way too much of the time, in reports about assaults, riots, murders, and pitched warfare we so often read in our newspapers.

Stephen Toulmin, Theodore Michel, and Charles Taylor have been called philosophers of action of the “rules perspective.” They describe quite well what distinctively human action is in the physical realm. They say it has two parts, an inner part and an outer part. The inner part consists of an intention or purpose rooted in past experience and shaped by, or in some way positively or negatively oriented toward, socially-sanctioned rules of behavior, energized by the negative of command, the *thou-shalt-nots*. The outer part has two aspects, muscular activity and the consequences of that muscular activity.¹⁹

The muscular activity or muscular contractions of humans, though, are not like those of nonverbal animals in one hugely significant way. These contractions do not just do the bidding of natural drives and the neurochemical impulses common to all sentient creatures. Distinctively human muscular motions “interfere” in some way with causes in nature. They delay them, modify them, channel them, divert them, oppose them, even sometimes perhaps intensify them beyond what a lower animal would experience as a state of satisfaction or satiety. Distinctively human physical action “sacrifices,” as it were, what comes naturally to an animal body, to serve some higher moral good, or lower, “immoral” cause, as defined by commonly accepted rules of conduct. Distinctively human physical action comes under the purview of the negative, the *thou-shat-not*. In some way, it says “no” to bodily appetites. Or it “negates the negative,” says “no” to the constraints that a given social order would impose on bodily appetites.

Or so it would appear as we examine how nonverbal animals naturally behave, and how symbolizing animals, by comparison, seemingly unnaturally act.

This distinctively human self-sacrifice, or self-interference, follows normative, unremarkable pathways of endeavor in the routines of daily life. Such low-level “mortifications” would

surely include getting up early in the morning when another hour or two under the covers would feel so much more pleasant. It would embrace “holding it in” during a long chem-lab when you really have to go to the bathroom; skipping scrumptious but fatty cheeseburgers at lunchtime so as to trim your waistline a bit; sitting still at a desk all afternoon when your body aches for motion and a change of position; pushing your body extra hard at basketball, football, or hockey practice later in the day; and “pulling an all-nighter” or something close to it to get a term paper done for next-day hand-in. Oh, you are so, so tired. Your eye lids wearily fall shut, but you keep pounding and pounding the keys on the keyboard anyway, head bobbing in fits of alternate sleeping and waking up.

Some scholars have distinguished human dramatic action from mere animal motion by contrasting a “wink” and a “blink.” A wink has a symbolic meaning. It is communicative. It could potentially violate an unwritten rule and occasion guilt or shame, depending on whom you’re winking at and how she or he responds. Representing perhaps the least onerous, least burdensome form of the self-discipline, self-denial, or self-sacrifice that constitutes human action you can think of, a wink nevertheless does interfere with causes in nature, and does require an “effort” of some kind to stage, no matter how minimal that effort may be.

To be sure, life calls almost everyone on occasion to intense and exceptionally “dramatic” mortifications in the service of lofty redemptive goals. We might risk our life in a frenzied attempt to rescue a straying child from a riptide undertow at the ocean. We might work twelve hours a weekday and much of the weekend at two or even three jobs to support our spouse and children during an economic downturn or family financial crisis. We could be called into the military in time of war, perhaps exposing ourselves to enemy fire and potential death. We could choose what some priests, monks, and nuns have called the “dying life,” one so intensely dedicated to the service of God that marriage, family, and self-indulgence of almost any and all kinds are systematically renounced.²⁰ We could inherit neurotic personality traits whereby overuse of repression and underfunctioning of the ego are standard self-inhibiting responses to the feelings of guilt all humans, dramatic beings that we are, have to live with.

Or, we can project that guilt outward instead of inward, load the burdens of perceived sinful wrongdoing on some other being or beings, and make them “pay the compensatory price”

for what's gone wrong in respect to rules or rightful expectations. The mental skills that language grants us make such a moral transformation possible. Instead of "me," think the opposite, think "him" or "her." Instead of "us," think "them." It's much more comforting and convenient to place the blame on others, in any case, and make them suffer for the ills of society, than to assume those responsibilities ourselves.²¹

And the "dialectics" of language make such conversions of thought easy to inevitable. "Thing" implies "not thing." "Truth" suggests "error." "Us" advantageously conjures up the specter of "them." The concept of the "good guys" points directly and reproachfully at that of the "bad guys."

We won't dwell at length on scapegoating strategies in this introduction. We'll be examining that fundamental human symbolic action again and again in the illustrative chapters to follow. Here, suffice it to say, the cult of "the Kill" is, perhaps sadly, the centerpiece of drama. The all-too-human tendency to load a "sacrificial vessel" with guilt for our own sins and then drive that being away, perhaps forever, recurs in discourse and social and political relationships with metronomic regularity. It seems indeed to be the "Iron Law of History."²²

Redemptive Purposes and Means

We can now sharpen our phrasing of the nub of the human drama, a first draft of which we offered in Chapter 1. It starts with a guilt-obsessed actor performing a self-sacrificing, self-interfering action for a redemptive purpose. That redemptive purpose is designed to make a morally-disordered situation better, or perversely worse, by whatever redemptive means are necessary or at hand. Sacrifice of some other being or beings for moral cleansing may follow upon our personal mortifications. We have to start out, though, by interfering with causes in nature in our own body before we can scapegoat, or "interfere" correctively or destructively in the life of, another.

The good that comes out of the bad, or inconvenient or chaotic or ridiculous or outrageous or merely unsatisfactory--the gain after the pain--is the climactic pay-off toward which the drama moves. Humans feel a need to get back to a state of moral equilibrium and order when things "go south" via the flouting of settled rules or expectations. They don't like to have their

surroundings, or relationships, at “sixes and sevens.” They want to have the various aspects of their life “tied together” in a way that “makes sense.” They will often yearn for a new and *higher-level* state of existence. The old, or current, condition of things is just “not good enough,” not “perfect” enough, even if it does not appear particularly disordered or chaotic to an outside eye. “A man’s reach should outstrip his grasp, or what’s a heaven for?” the saying goes.

All of which brings us to another possible definition or description of drama: the superimposition of *perfected* hierarchal order and *transcendent* moral *meaning* on the partial chaos and potential meaninglessness of life.

Five kinds of perfected, transcendent, redemptive purposes or results we can look for in literature, practical rhetoric, and life are implicit in the analytical paradigm we will be using. They are justice, understanding, reconciliation, improved identity, and better conditions. You can remember them easily if you use this mnemonic device: juri-c (jury-see).

“Justice” is, of course, a basic goal of dramatic action. This redemptive outcome is most formally illustrated in the state/citizen hierarchal order of values and relationships we talked about in Chapter 2. It is only appropriate that the cops get the right man, and that the punishment fit the crime in a detective or courtroom drama. Obviously, the quest for a less austere kind of “justice,” the hope that unruly neighbors, thoughtless acquaintances, and obstreperous strangers “get theirs,” fuels millions of dramas of lower-level intensity throughout the world each day.

“Understanding” is another important “good” that comes out of the “bad” situations we seek to rectify, and the bracing-to-unpleasant-to-bitter sacrifices we might have to make to set right moral wrongs in our life. Sometimes this redemptive benefit is a by-product of our dramatic action, not necessarily what we originally had in mind when we began pursuit of a certain goal or value. Many of the maxims we live by indicate as much: “Live and learn.” “I got my degree from the college of hard knocks.” “Trick me once, shame on you; trick me twice, shame on me.” And so on. The Greeks put a handle on a drama of this kind with the words *poiema*, *pathema*, *mathema*. They mean “action,” “passion,” and “understanding” or “learning.” We gain insight, or we should do so, from our dramatic struggles and the mistakes we make along the way.²³

Two of the novels we’ll be looking at dramatically

conclude with hard-won insights that constitute the redemptive vision or “moral of the story.” Captain Ahab, the protagonist (maybe) in Herman Melville’s *Moby-Dick*, learns that “our topmost greatness lies in our topmost grief.” Reverend Arthur Dimmesdale in Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *Scarlet Letter* discovers that we have to “be true, be true, be true,” that we should show enough of our bad qualities that the worst can be inferred. We should never pretend or cover up, not in any wholesale manner, anyway. Both leading characters pay dearly for their “lesson.”

“Redeemed relationships,” or “reconciliation,” is another esteemed outgrowth of the sacrifices dramatic actors make to achieve their ends. Two kinds of redemption in respect to social solidarity are exemplified by Shakespeare’s plays *Romeo and Juliet* and *Macbeth*. In the celebrated love story, two feuding families, the Montagues and the Capulets, are brought together in forgiving sadness over the dead bodies of their children. They vow never again to quarrel and fight. In *Macbeth*, the warring factions are not reconciled. Rather, one side is defeated: Macbeth is killed and Lady Macbeth takes her own life. Their opponents, though, Macduff, Malcolm, and their supporters and soldiers, come together more closely, experience a new unity. They forge a heightened sense of community by way of common identification, intensely negative or “dissociative” in spirit, with their defeated enemy.²⁴

A “redeemed identity” is one of the most consciously sought-after desiderata in the myriad dramas of human beings. You, as a student---if you are one!---are deeply immersed in such a drama right now. You want a diploma or a degree that will elevate you to a higher plane of social recognition and power. You’re struggling to become a college graduate, “with all the rights and privileges that thereunto appertain,” as these sheepskins tend to ponderously intone. At the climax of *Macbeth*, Malcolm, the restored and rightful King of Scotland, confers on his military officers a new honor and title. Henceforth, you will all be called “Earls,” Malcolm says. Persons who have had their reputation tarnished, by misstep or false accusation, often strive even more mightily to redeem themselves, win back their good name, or make for themselves an even bigger and better one.

“Redeemed conditions” are often the redemptive goal in the dramas of novelists and playwrights, and are virtually universal in those of politicians and ordinary human beings. In Henrik Ibsen’s play *Enemy of the People*, the local spa, a resort

with mineral springs, has become polluted. The town leaders hide this fact from the general public for fear of hurting the tourist business. The protagonist in the drama works to expose this harmful state of affairs and correct it.

In everyday human life, almost any new building, highway, product, garden, or landscape you can name results from a drama aimed at redeemed conditions. What persons think will be better, we know, often brings “unintended consequences” that aren’t so good. The original motive for such dramatic action, though, was to improve things. It was to make a situation that was just “not good enough” better and more useful for human life and habitation.

We human beings are finite, limited creatures, of course. We cannot usually get from the morally disordered and problematic circumstances we might find ourselves in to a redemptive resolution of our problem in one giant leap. We have to employ means, agencies, tools, or instruments. We may have to go by way of steps and stages of development. We may need the help of allies, coagents, with whom we will work and perhaps conspire to achieve our goal. We’ll frequently bump up against obstacles along the way. Obstacles sometimes include physical conditions that block or impede our progress. They may take the form of human opponents, counteragents we could call them, who want to stop us, or take for themselves what we want to have. Such barriers will require strategic maneuvering to overcome or get around them.

The notion of obstructions or impediments that require some reconnoitering strewn along our pathway toward redemptive fulfillment suggests another definition of drama. We can use it to conclude this chapter:

Drama is free, *strategic, goal-directed* striving, within and in terms of a socially-created reality, context, or system, some narrowed and partialized symbolic perspective, *against enemies, resistances, and odds*, to *achieve a valued outcome* that will help to right some wrong, with an incentive to do so in as perfect a way as possible.

(See Addendum 3 for important refinements on the pentad.)

Chapter 4

“Hark Ye Yet Again---the Little Lower Layer” I: The Negativity of Dramatic Action

A More Probing Look for Those with Inquiring Minds

In Melville’s great American novel *Moby-Dick*, Ahab, Captain of the *Pequod*, announces to his crew early in the voyage the *real* purpose they will pursue on the high seas. It will not be to kill whales in general and make money off their oil and blubber. The central aim will be to find and destroy a particular whale, a giant white whale named “Moby Dick.” Ahab explains why: On his last assignment three years earlier, Ahab lost a leg to Moby

Dick. Ahab seeks revenge. He persuades his crew to help him get it.

Starbuck, First Mate of the ship, demurs at such a perversion of the rightful business interests the cruise is meant to serve. To his face, he questions the Captain's morals and mental balance. "Come closer, Starbuck," Ahab replies. "Thou requirest a little lower layer." You need to know more than the common members of the crew about what's behind this adventure. I will tell you, Ahab says.

Ahab does so, and we will do so, in respect to Ahab's pursuit, in several of the chapters ahead.

For now, your teacher may want to treat you like the crew of the *Pequod*, or like Starbuck, the First Mate. He may want you to skip this more challenging chapter, and perhaps the next two, take the paradigm of dramatic action presented in Chapter 3, and run with it by going directly to its first application in Chapter 7. Or she or he may want you to plumb the very depths of language as dramatic action. Your teacher, and you, will decide.

To the fearless and the strong we say, sail on!

What We've Learned about the Negative So Far

In Chapter 1, we talked at some length about the notion of "purpose" as intimately connected to the idea of the negative. To take an action to achieve a purpose requires a sense of going after a state of affairs that does "not yet" exist. In Chapter 3, we noted that to say that anything is a certain thing, has some kind of boundaries that distinguish it from other things, we need to think in terms of "thing"/"not thing." The need for an intuition of "what is not" as the foundation for an understanding of "what is" strongly suggests that the negative is the smelter or melting pot, so to speak, out of which the refinements of all specific terminologies emerge and congeal. The 17th-century philosopher Benedict Spinoza put it this way: "All determination is negation."¹ We can't say what anything is without employing the negatives of the *differentiam*, without stating or implying the differences between this being, entity, object, or idea, and all, or some, others.²

What we want to do now is explore in further detail the nature of the negative as the basis of symbol-using and the drama the use of language generates. We want to see how moral conflict in quest of making a more or less bad situation better gets turned

on in language and human life by the “what is not,” and proceeds toward a “corrective,” or perversely “corrective,” conclusion, almost compulsively.

Negativity, Infinity, Perfection, Spiritual Purpose: The Heart and Soul of Language as Dramatic Action

We start with the **negative**, as humans understand it, and from there simply work out its implications to the end of the line. This means, in English, we start with the “no,” “not,” “nothing,” “never,” and prefixes “un,” “im,” “non,” “dis,” and “a.” The negative is the paradigmatic symbol. (A “symbol” is any device by which we can make an abstraction. Better still, it is an abstract meaning of value.) The negative is the purest example of what a symbol is and does. That is to say, it expresses an attitude, it implies a purpose, it goads to action more directly and insistently than it gives information or conjures up an image of some concrete thing in the world of objects. The negative fulfills those functions better than any other symbol. The negative has no material referent at all. It is pristinely ethereal. In its primary, we can even say necessary, sense as an exhortation, it is the author of guilt and moral anxiety, the great motivators of distinctively human endeavor. It is the ground of all other symbols. It is the beginning of human being.³

Straightaway, the notions of the **infinite** and **eternal** derive from the negative, as humans conceive of it. What is “not there” never ends, is without number, and ultimately is without peer. Or what is “not there” goes on forever, extends to infinity, and puts to shame everything material and mundane. “You can go on forever saying what a thing is not,” Kenneth Burke emphasizes.⁴

Take, for instance, the desk at which you may be sitting. What is “not that desk” extends how far in the “up” direction? Why, it extends infinitely upward. If you could somehow travel upward and keep going and going and going, without stopping, you’d still never come to your desk again. You’d always be in the realm of “not that desk.” The same can be said for what is “not that desk” to the left, to the right, to the front, to the back, to what’s below.

Take also, for example, the point in time at which you are now living. Check your wristwatch or the clock and calendar

on the wall for particulars. How far forward in time can your imagination project the notion of “not now”? Somehow or other, it can take you out there and out there and out there still further, in terms of the concept of time projected forward, and *never* stop. You can theoretically continue to count the seconds, minutes, hours, days, years, decades, centuries, and millennia yet to come, and keep adding ever more zeros. The “not now,” or “not at this point in time,” projected forward, opens up “deserts of vast [and endless] eternity,” to quote the English poet Andrew Marvell.⁵ Similarly, to project backward in time in the same fashion, you hit upon an “infinite regression,” as Immanuel Kant put it, in respect to reason itself, if not in sensibility, temporal sequence, or causality in nature.⁶

The writer of Ecclesiastes in the Bible said, “He [God] has put eternity,” and we can add “infinity,” “into man’s mind.”⁷ If the Biblical author is correct as to its origin, God seems to have put it there through man and woman’s intuition of the negative. The linguistic negative, the negative as conceived and understood by human beings, is an “infinite-negative.”

Both the concept of **perfection**, and the motive to seek perfection, or some state of accomplishment along the pathway upward or downward toward some kind of perfection, arises from our intuition of the infinite-negative. (Humans can seek to do something “perfectly awful” as well as something “perfectly good.” As Edgar Allan Poe says in his short story “The Black Cat,” philosophy has not taken nearly enough note of the role the motive of “perversion” assumes in human life.) Perfection has *no* blemishes. It requires the total absence of flaws and defects or deviations from the ideal. You will *not* (note the negative) find blemishes, flaws, defects, or deviations from the ideal *anywhere* (note the infinite) in the being, object, process, or action that is *perfect*.⁸

Two kinds of perfection can be distinguished. The Ancient Greeks focused on an immantized perfection. To them, perfection tended to mean beings and entities in this world that exhibit no faults or deficiencies. At least, it tended to mean the *idea* of such an immanentized creature or process. The Greeks had a special word for this quality of perfected virtue at doing the thing a given being was uniquely fashioned to do: *arête*. The term meant “the goodness of a thing,” “that at which a thing excels,” “functioning excellence.”⁹

The Christian philosophers of the Middle Ages homed in

on a transcendentalized perfection. To them, perfection tended to mean a Being beyond this world who possessed none of the attributes of worldly existence that limit or constrain, no matter how free of defect those phenomenal characteristics may be conceived. Christian philosophers and theologians defined this Perfect Being, God, in thoroughly negative and ultimate language. Whatever we can see, hear, feel, taste, or smell, or tangibly experience in this universe, that is *not* what God is, they said. God is constrained by neither time (as in the eternal) nor space (as in the infinite). He is the One who is Immortal, Invisible, Unchanging, Almighty, All Knowing, and Omnipresent. God, to them, epitomizes the grandeurs of what has been called “negative theology.”¹⁰

We need to say a little more about how the infinite-negative, a sense of negation that extends outward infinitely in space and eternally in time, how such an instinct motivates toward *doing* something perfectly, as well as discloses what perfection is. The answer is: The human “scene” of action is language, or the human “scene” of action is at least thoroughly infused and suffused with language. Men and women dwell in the house of language, is the way philosopher Martin Heidegger describes it. For him, “Language [is] conceived as the house of Being, even the foundation of Being.”¹¹ Men and women cannot get outside that house, though they can, in a sense, get a glimpse of something beyond language out the “window” of negative intuition, a “clearing in the woods,” metaphorically speaking. Language and its founding sensibility, that of the infinite-negative, is the “situation” in which human beings find themselves. And “situation” is another name for “motive,” Burke says.¹²

Put it this way: We are moved to distinctively human action, morally-tinged action, sacrificial action, by the guilt and anxiety the linguistic situation engenders. We stand condemned and challenged by what we “see” through our innate capacity to use language. We are finite, limited, vulnerable beings, situated, on the one hand, in an animal’s body, with nary a chance of being, in all respects, “perfect.” Yet we are, on the other, infinitely untethered and far-seeing in the gifts of thought and understanding language bestows upon us. Our vision of infinite-negative perfection judges us, and moves us toward judgment of the persons and things around us. It makes us anxious, uncomfortable in our finitude. It goads us to overcome our “powerlessness” if we can, psychologist Mortimer Adler says.¹³ It prods us to control, downplay, even hide our grossest animal attributes, so common and untranscendental.

It prompts us to outstrip and surpass the inevitable death of our evanescent animal body through an ideology of immortality of some kind, found in religious faith, found in offspring, found in making a “mark” that lasts in our workplace or community, social psychologist Ernest Becker¹⁴ and psychiatrist Otto Rank¹⁵ say. (“Man, being a theological rather than [just] a biological being, never lives on a purely natural plane.”¹⁶) Our sense of the infinite-negative as motive and prod impels us to grade and classify all sorts of things in terms of high and low, better and worse, more estimable and less worthy, “perfect” and “imperfect,” then reach for the highest rung on whatever ladder of value we can get hold of. “We are number one”---read: “I am number one”---is the chant all human beings hear echoing, however faint and repressed it may be, deep down in their heart of hearts.

The quest for perfection or some approximation thereof, driven by the dream of infinite possibility the negatives of language prefigure, is the **spiritual or moral purpose** of all dramatic, that is to say distinctively human, action.¹⁷ Burke posits an analogy between the study of language and the study of theology, between words about words and words about God. “Words are to the nonverbal things they name as Spirit is to Matter,” he says.¹⁸ Words give off an incorporeal insight irreducible to, if not incommensurate with, bodily motions, in this way: Word meanings are impalpable to even the most sophisticated instruments. Word *meanings*---even the human consciousness, self-consciousness, and species-consciousness themselves that make the meanings of language possible for human beings---are inexplicable and unmeasurable. “There is on the face of it,” Michael Lockwood of Oxford University says, “absolutely nothing in the laws of physics and chemistry, as currently understood, that is capable of accounting for the extraordinary capacity of that lump of matter that we call the brain---once likened by Alan Turing to ‘a lump of cold porridge’---to sustain an ‘inner life.’ . . . What remains mysterious is why this complex *physico-chemical* activity should be associated with any subjective states at all.”¹⁹ Working from the postulates of 20th-century quantum mechanics, Lockwood sees “the physical world” itself as dissolving into something not that foreign to spirit, a “flux of energy,” indeed frozen energy.²⁰

Let’s make as clear as we can what we are asserting. Given where the world is today in neuroscience, we acknowledge the difficulties in taking sides with any kind of mind/body dualism, despite Lockwood’s caveats centering on human consciousness

and the potential spirituality and immateriality of brain functions themselves. The notion of some kind of “ghost” in the human machine is roundly rejected by contemporary naturalists.²¹ The idea of something “immaterial” acting on something that we still call in common parlance “material,” or vice versa, or existing in a coherent and “parallel” relationship of a kind, one with the other, doesn’t seem to make scientific sense. Yet a self-proclaimed “nonreductive physicalist” like Richard Rorty and an “emergentist materialist” like Mario Bunge,²² both prominent philosophers who have no truck with dualism, trim their rhetoric, hedge their bets, as they promote their own brand of neural “monism.”

Start with Rorty and his nonreductive physicalism. If he goes purely physicalist, a theorist doesn’t need the scruple about being “nonreductive,” does he? Neural monism is reductive. Something is eating at Rorty in respect to his choice of labels, and in his admission that, with a “cerebroscope,” we someday might “know which thoughts pass through a man’s [sic] mind *without understanding them*”;²³ or with Rorty’s favorably quoting Raymond Geuss, “Even when we have a theory of nature which allows us to predict someone’s verbal dispositions for all eternity, we still will not thereby understand what he [sic] *means*.”²⁴

Rorty’s rhetorical sleight of hand comes to a climax in his talk about mind/body “interactionism” as mere “reference to function rather than structure.”²⁵ If the putatively material brain is the “structure” and the only “structure” between our ears, then the “function” of that physical entity is brain waves or electro-chemical discharges at the neural synapses. To label such measurable reactions “mind” is to beg the question. Rorty is finessing his way through realms of mystery and, deep down, he seems to know it. Defining “mind” as brain waves is no less a physical construction, it would seem, as reference to brain structure itself. Going by way of Rorty, human subjective experience remains unfathomed.

Bunge, the emergentist materialist, is even more stingingly critical of mind/body dualisms---autonomist, parallelist, epiphenomenalist, animist, or interactionist.²⁶ Yet even he confesses that, “Although emergentist materialism postulates that the mind is a set of brain functions, it does not claim that neuroscience is enough to explain subjective experience.”²⁷ He passes the buck to “social psychology” without in any way accounting for how it could possibly solve this age-old problem.

The bottom line for this discussion is: Burke’s analogy still stands as a reasonable metaphor. “Words are to the nonverbal

things they name as Spirit is to Matter.”²⁸

Motivated spiritually in this sense by the signifying power of infinitely negative discernment, persons are perfectionistically goaded through symbols to “make things better” materially and otherwise, or “make things worse” materially and otherwise. The rejection of a motive, or “nay-saying,” takes on the aspect of perfection just as readily as the acceptance of a motive, or “yay-saying.”²⁹ For human beings, material nature and its motions are just not “good enough” or “bad enough” in themselves. The mere satisfaction of physical needs is never the sole motive of the symbol-using animal. The question of “whether” these needs are met summons up dimensions of moral concern in and of themselves, as we noted in Chapter 1. Potential shame dogs the persona of one who is trying to make a living in full view of others. The even more obtrusively moral query, “how,” “how well” or “how badly,” these needs are met, how lawfully or licentiously, places fulfillment of the crassest of bodily urges at least partly in a realm of intellect, consciousness, and spirit beyond the lusts of the flesh.

These Four Interrelated Ideas as the Touchstones of All Dramatic Action: A Preview

Awareness of the negative, the sense of limitless infinity it conjures in the human mind, the motive of perfection these twin intuitions generate as mental “scene” of, or “situation” for, human action, and the body-transcending, or at least blind-motion transcending, spiritual purposes these symbolic conceptions superimpose on human physical drives and appetites, inform and account for every aspect of symbolic or dramatic or distinctively human action. To describe the attributes and manifestations of symbolic action as drama, we start with the negative and observe how its unbounded perfections and airy spirituality mark their every feature. Following through on the negative and its associated concepts discloses, also, the attributes of symbols, and the observable motions and artifacts they produce, that distinguish this dramatistic view from scientific theories of language. Following through on the negative and its associated concepts yields the strongest support for the preferability and validity of our interpretive frame.

Accordingly, we offer two propositions:

(1) The negative and the ideas it suggests argue for the approach to language as dramatic action as a sound philosophy of communication by way of the patently metaphysical and empirically inexplicable cast of the *nos* and *nots* of language; the negatively constrained behavior of even the most inactive mental patient; the referential immateriality evident in religious worship, expressive forms of art, and spectator sports, where essentially no pragmatic purpose whatsoever is being served; and the negatively symbolic implications of relativity physics, the reigning model of the macrouniverse during the past hundred years. These are the more obvious manifestations of negativity in symbolic or dramatic action.

(2) The negative and the ideas it suggests explain other metaphysical attributes of symbols that fly in the face of the assumptions of positivism, namely, their creative, teleological, ethical, entelechial, hierarchal, and dialectical-cum-dramatic dimensions. These are the more subtle manifestations of negativity in symbolic action. Symbolic action is here defined as spoken and written symbols and/or the morally-tinged purposeful motions those symbols generate.

Overt Negations in Symbolic or Dramatic Action: The Obtrusive Negativity of Negative Terms Themselves

The most obvious arguments for language, rhetoric, and human relationships as dramatic action emphasize their most clearly negative features. Such arguments sharply contrast the dramatistic view with empiricist theories of communication, to wit:

(1) The negatives in language seem in fact to remain unexplained by positivistic or scientific approaches, which try rigorously to adhere to the “principle of verifiability” or the “saying-saying something” formula.³⁰ Empiricists have labeled negatives (a) mere “subject excluders”; (b) terms that refer to a multitude, even an infinitude, of potentially positive propositions whose referents, taken together, preclude some other positive event; (c) “den[ials] that something has a ‘determinate’ form of some ‘determinable’ quality,” implying that “it has some other determinate form of it”; (d) positive words whose positive

referent is a very real “null set”; (e) references to a generalized but objectively real “otherness,” which affords a possible reduction of complex negatives to simple ones; (f) only expressions of “disbeliefs,” therefore not objectively real assertions; (g) just “convenient abbreviations for complex [logical] forms into which no such [negative] signs enter,” laws of negation being “merely special cases of implication.”³¹

The multitude of inventive arguments positivists advance to “negate,” if one dare say so, a concept they acknowledge is “metaphysically embarrassing” is testimony to the problem they perceive negative symbolization to be.³² We won’t take time here to deal in detail with these heroic extenuations. Suffice it to say, taken as a group, they have all the elegance of the pre-Copernican model of the universe. To the extent that they can be simplified, they build on what philosopher Henri Bergson says about negative terms in *Creative Evolution*. “Whenever anything is denied,” Prior offers in explicit paraphrase of Bergson’s critique, “some positive ground of denial is assumed, and something positive is even an intended part of what is asserted.”³³ Burke himself does not take issue with Bergson’s claim, nor would he gainsay the first part of Prior’s statement. The intuition of “nothing” always in some way bounces off of positive resistances in nature. One says or thinks “nothing” in reference to some *thing*, concretely or imagistically, at least by way of implication.³⁴ The presumed existence of the positive entity the “nothing” says no to, however, does not, for Burke, in any way turn that “nothing” into a positive, nor should it for us. In the explicitly “hortatory negative,” the “idea of No” as a command, Burke says, the immaterial principle of the notion is even more clearly illustrated, and here Burke builds explicitly on the conclusion to Bergson’s³⁵ argument about negative terminology. “One can ‘get the idea,’” Burke goes on, “by merely knowing how to use it. One does not have to ‘see’ some positive No [some assumed entity the “No” bumps up against], like a tree or rock in nature. Its reality as a principle is symbolic . . .”³⁶

Especially the “no” that is an explicitly moral pronouncement, that hortatory “no”---“admonit[ory],” “judgment[al],” “warn[ing],” “correct[ive],” “pedagogical,” “car[ing],” “and “social,” in Bergson’s terms---seems incommensurable with scientific positivism.³⁷

The negative, particularly the negative of command explicitly stated, appears to be not only thoroughly empty of material content. It is also, as Bergson emphasizes even more

strongly than Burke, thoroughly “active.” A “deadened,” “atrophied,” “passive intelligence . . . would have no wish to deny,” Bergson says. In such a subhuman mind, “that which exists may come to be recorded, but the non-existence of the non-existing cannot.” “To reach the point of denying,” Bergson adds, such an intellect “must awake from its torpor, formulate the disappointment of [or “dissatisfaction” with] a real or possible expectation [that is, apply the perfected standards of negative intuition], correct an actual or possible error---in short, propose to teach others or teach itself.”³⁸ And in teaching, the hortatory and informative functions of negation can be seen as one and the same.

The *sui generis* form of negation---teaching, judging, admonishing---seizes hold of the object world in a manner irreducible to that world, or to merely informative talk of the “things” that comprise it.³⁹

Overt Negations in Symbolic or Dramatic Action: Contenance, Worship and Theater, Sports, Relativity Physics

(2) The “ultimate anecdote” of supposed “nonaction” underscores the reality that physically healthy persons beyond infancy always act in response to negative commandments. Even mental patients who sit all day and stare at walls still tend to eliminate in the bathroom. They interfere with some causes in nature. They do not “behave,” as in “behaviorism,” like animals.⁴⁰

(3) Religious worship and prayer direct words and attention toward nothing material or pragmatic. The wooden or metallic symbol that may appear on the altar is, in and of itself and especially for modern persons, nothing to venerate whatsoever, the air and space into which the petitioner speaks his or her prayer is empty. Only the ethereal symbolism inherent in the infinite-negative can explain such essentially impractical activity.

(4) Spectator sports and expressive art forms are likewise symbolic, spiritual, and pragmatically negative. What is left on the ball field or on the stage of the theater after the sound and the

fury are over? No worthwhile artifact, no tangibly useful product. Positivism and science cannot explain such referentially empty and materially unproductive events, except to dismiss them as “spandrels,” nonadaptive accidents in the evolutionary process.⁴¹

(5) The relativity model of the universe is dominant in contemporary science and is most congenial to a dramatic philosophy of language and to at least a quasi-spiritual understanding of reality. Relativity physics is not mainly about discrete objects in space, but rather about the interdependence of energy and matter and about relationships in time. It is about “events.” An event is:

“An occurrence, phenomenon, or complex of processes occupying a restricted portion of four-dimensional space-time; a happening represented by a point designated by x , y , and z as coordinates of place and t as time in the space-time continuum, it being a fundamental assumption of the theory of relativity that all physical measurements reduce to observations of relations between happenings.”⁴²

“Events” exist in space and time or in space-time even less than do physical objects (as separate entities before language discretely separates them out). No imaginable boundaries appear there. Such a “restriction” can only be imposed by negative symbolism. The relativity model is inconceivable without a spiritual intuition to structure it.⁴³

The conception of language as dramatic action also highlights “events.”⁴⁴ It assesses truth and rhetorical power, in significant part, in terms of the relationship between an act and a scene.⁴⁵ It focuses especially on patterns of rhetorical action over time, not so much on individual speech artifacts.⁴⁶ It accents the concept of “motive,” especially in its symbolic rather than nonsymbolic form, displayed in the verbal, spiritual “energy” that transforms material substances in seemingly blind motion into those recurrent patterns of purposive physical action.⁴⁷

Dramatism as a philosophy of language is consistent with current conceptions of the physical scene in which it presumes to explain communication. That consistency can be perceived only from a metaphysical perspective, from the view provided by transcendentally negative terminology.

Covert Negations in Symbolic or Dramatic Action: An Overview

The specifics of a dramatic conception of language stress the connotative, implicative features of symbols, their nuances and ambiguities, their moral and teleological markings, the negations within their affirmations. They highlight the function of symbols as active shapers of the environment, hortatory agents of social values, not first and foremost instruments of information.⁴⁸

As noted above, in the generation of symbols and symbolic action, the intuition of the negative opens a window on infinity; infinity illuminates a higher, more perfect way of going; and perfection requires transcendence of perceived physical limitation. "The negative 'perfects' nature," Burke says, or at least makes an attempt to perfect it.⁴⁹ It does so in the "no" and the "not." It does so in the putatively concrete "positives" of language. All symbolizations, Burke says, "derive . . . from the ability to use the Negative *qua* Negative." Words always require a negative "discount," words not being commensurate with the things they name. Even baldly "positive" terms are far too essentialized, etherealized, and abstracted to refer to any one object or motion in material reality. They classify phenomena in a way that ideally and utterly transcends the "sheer brute materials of the world as it is,"⁵⁰ deflect attention away from the separate and individual attributes of the things they name toward the commonalities they choose to highlight in the service of human ends and interests.

In irony and metaphor, words are even more insistently "not the thing."⁵¹ As commands and decrees, words implicitly argue for an understanding of "what is not there" and "what should not be done" as well as for an understanding of "what is there" and "what should be done." They each, Burke says, "call attention in the admonitory sense, . . . implying a negative . . ."⁵² "Purpose," admonition's twin, owes its very existence, we have seen, to the operation of the negative, overt in the "no" and the "not," etc., covert in any other term.⁵³

Specifically, symbols call attention in the purposive, admonitory, perfectionistic sense and suggest, if surreptitiously, negative and referential "emptiness." They do so in these ways.⁵⁴

The Creative Dimensions of Symbols

Symbols are “admonitory” as to boundaries, *creative*.⁵⁵ This far and no farther, they enjoin, this configuration of semantic attributes and this one alone, and get it right. One argument that implies this feature of language is that from disparate symbolic environments.⁵⁶ For example, Western anthropologists, missionaries, and explorers have named the same basic object world as the native tribesmen and women they encountered in 18th-, 19th-, and 20th-century America, Africa, Australia, and Polynesia; but for persons from each of these two fundamentally different types of cultures, modern and archaic, different words have synthesized different parts of it for different ends. Via totemic identification, one indigenous clan may perceive a unique common origin between themselves and a certain plant. In the view of those natives, clan and plant are symbolically synthesized and set apart from other objects and beings in a sacred bond a Westerner can scarcely conceive of.⁵⁷ Many archaic aborigines may consider a certain man and a certain leopard one being, a “wereleopard” of a kind.⁵⁸ Around 1700, the Huron native Americans the French traders came in contact with had no general name for animals. They considered animals full-fledged members of the spirit world, like human beings.⁵⁹ Even into the late 20th century, the Humla tribe in Northwestern Nepal still had no word for “love.” In this traditional society, arranged marriages negated the need for romance.⁶⁰ Symbolically and semantically, the Maasai, Kikuyu, and English-speaking USAmericans even look differently at the human body, seemingly a universal constant. For USAmericans, “body” includes head and torso, for Kikuyu torso, for the Maasai the head.⁶¹

As early as the 1820s, von Humboldt attributed such conceptual differences to the creative power of language. “‘Man [sic] lives with the world about him principally, indeed . . . extensively,’” he says, “‘as language presents it to him.’”⁶² In the 20th century, Neo-Humboldtian “semantic field theorists” upheld this view of language and culture in European anthropology. Whorf and Sapir have argued for it in the United States, especially via their famed “hypothesis”: The variables of language specifically influence, even determine, metaphysical visions of the universe, ways of thinking about and organizing phenomena, conceptions of social “reality,” and cultural patterns of action. The syntactic, syntagmatic, “automatic” features of a given language especially

affect and define those understandings and lifeways. Language may or may not regulate “deep structures” of perception of the physical world.⁶³ It does, however, form something of a “closed circle” of interrelationships by which the “things” of that world and their transcendental meanings are framed.⁶⁴

In the annals of history, anthropology, and sociology, hundreds of examples similar to those above point up sharply disparate universes of meaning symbols construct across orientations.

Another argument for the constitutive function of language, its power to shape and form the world human beings inhabit, comes from the paradox of substance, the simultaneous and dramatic union and division all symbols create. No “thing” exists for persons as an object demonstrably separate from its environment, gets noticed by persons via language, “stands out” for them from the crowd of entities as it were, even gets to be recognized as an entity, by itself. Persons discriminate one thing only in relationship to, in contrast to, or as standing out from, something else. By itself, each thing is undefinable and inconceivable as a formal idea. “Genus ad differentiam” is the sole verbal means of definition. Humans describe beings by putting them in a larger “class” and then pointing out how they differ from other members of that class. The more they try to get at the intrinsic nature of something, the more they end up talking about things that it is not. What is a horse? A four-legged animal that whinnys. What is a whinny? A nasal animal sound that

On and on it goes. In definition, the horse is engaged with other animals, the whinny with an animal’s nose. Language discriminates the entities of our universe, partitions them one from another, then binds them inextricably together in networks of definition that ultimately highlight the interact---the negative void of no-thing-ness---between and among them, not the entities themselves. In this way language “binds” the world, to use Heidegger’s term, spiritually and negatively brings order out of the chaos of myriad sensations.⁶⁵

A variant of the argument from paradox of substance, in support of belief in the power of language to “present” the world to men and women in partly imaginative ways, is the one taken from “negative ambience” in general. Here the background of negativity is considered globally, without reference to individual entities or beings with which a given item might be contrasted by definition. What is a thing, an object, an entity, a being? Anything

that it is “not.” A dialectical opposition obtains between “thing” and “not thing.”⁶⁶ In a sense, any call to cognizance of one object directs attention away from *all* other objects, but in another sense, it holds in place and implies all other objects as “ground.” The figure-ground distinction is purely symbolic, made possible by the operation of the negative alone. For Heideggerians, it occasions “Dasein,” “being there.”⁶⁷ The negative, the purest of symbols--in itself, it has no “referent,” no existence in nature---undergirds and orders a person’s conception of his or her world. The negative superintends all symbolic boundaries, all human notions of what a boundary could possibly be.⁶⁸

Symbols thus imperiously organize our world, but not arbitrarily. There is the “recalcitrance” of the material scene.⁶⁹ Symbols, however, do fashion those resistances in often tangible (e.g., a city), always dramatically meaningful, ways.

The Teleological Dimension of Symbols

Symbols are “admonitory” as to purpose, “implying a negative”: That is, they are teleological. This end, not that one, they emphasize. One argument that implies this feature of language comes from the airy abstractiveness and denotative ambiguity of even the most concrete of terms. One word---for example, “tree” or “desk”---discriminates multiple phenomena of different shapes, colors, textures, and overall appearances, yet the wide variety of “objects” so labeled feature the same “what for,” “toward-which,” or “in order to,” to cite Heidegger.⁷⁰ “Trees” in the form of forest, woodland, and wilderness are often mere “bush” country when their fruit, shade, and aviary functions are discounted. “Desks” are often “tables” or “tables” “desks,” depending on whether one eats a meal or writes a letter on them. At dinner time, a tomato is a “vegetable” and rhubarb is a “fruit,” even though botanically their traits are precisely reversed. Explaining how languages originated and operate, Ernst Cassirer says, “The aspects of Being are distinguished . . . co-ordinated . . . guided, not by any ‘objective’ similarity among things, but by their appearance through the medium of practice, which relates them within a purposive nexus.” He adds, “The order of nomenclature does not rest on the external similarities among things or events, but . . . different items bear the same name, and are subsumed under the same concept, whenever their *functional* significance is the same.”⁷¹

For Burke, though, language is still more teleologically rarefied. In his estimation, both words, even “positive” words, *and* the “objects” they name are “summaries” of far larger contexts of meaning. Both are “fragments” broken away from a “tautological” series, “synecdoches” representing a whole network of associations. Words are essentialized “abbreviations” for “situations” that develop and evolve through time, essentialized “allusions,” essentialized “theme songs,” essentialized “universals,” essentialized “trends,” essentialized “slants,” essentialized “general drifts,” essentialized “abstract ideals,” essentialized “perfected forms,” dim essentialized “analogies,” essentialized model “counterparts,” essentialized “transcendental archetypes.”⁷² They are the “title-of-a-title,” the more expanded “title” being an implied sentence that summarizes the “purposive nexus” in question. As abbreviations of an abbreviation, partial cut-outs from a skimpy three-dimensional sketch of the “drift” of a temporal process, so distilled and abstracted, so devoid of necessary detail, symbols defy visual reproduction in nature or in mind. Words in respect to their meaning metaphysically transcend concrete imagery.⁷³

Thus, for Burke, the “correspondence” between word and “thing,” to the extent there is a correspondence, is reversed. The “thing” is the sign of the word. Words do not give or present a picture of any “object” in the material realm. The “object” and the image the “object” impresses on one’s mind are inspirited by and reflective of the universal meaning in the symbol, not vice versa.⁷⁴

Another indication that symbols are fundamentally purposive in character, exhibiting a negatively admonitory vigor, not a mere inclination to objective reference, is the manner in which different words attach sharply different pragmatic meanings to a single “object,” depending on the context or culture in question. The English word “moon” is the Greek derivative for “the Measuring One,” the word “lunar” the Latin derivative for “the Shining One.” In Sanskrit, the elephant is the “Twice Drinker,” the “Two-Tusked One,” or the “Handed One,” depending on the “what for” the particular designation serves.⁷⁵

Symbols place in synthetic combinations sometimes widely divergent features of the phenomenal world to form a unity of human purpose, or they sometimes abstract a singular material “object,” so called, from the continuum of sensations first for one purpose, then another, and perhaps still another, altogether different words used to point to these various ends.

The Ethical Dimension of Symbols

Symbols are “admonitory” as to the goodness, friendliness, or usefulness of the phenomena they have demarcated, “implying a negative”: That is, they are ethical. Accept or reject this entity, they command. Don’t fail to adopt and honor, or don’t fail to refuse and exclude. The argument that implies this directive feature of language springs from the *connotative* dimension of symbols. Different words with the same “referent” can generate different attitudes and feelings toward that “referent,” often strikingly different attitudes, sometimes antipodal ones. Is a given young woman a “damsel,” a “girl,” or a “wench”? Is a government worker a “public servant” or a “bureaucrat”? Is a heavy-set man “portly” or “fat”? All words are not complimentary or disparaging to the same degree, of course. Some are relatively more “clinical” and free from emotional baggage. But not altogether free. Burke says, terms the scientist would offer as disinterested labels, only suggest a different order of interests. Inevitably, in so suggesting, words--all substantive, descriptive, and active words---exude a moral and spiritual elan that transcends denotation, molds opinions, and organizes the world into “good things,” “bad things,” and things shaded along a dimension somewhere in between.⁷⁶

In confirmation of Burke’s emphasis on the connotative qualities of language, Heinz Werner and Bernard Kaplan of Clark University, and other participants in the 1955 Conference on Expressive Language, stress the “necessity of postulating a mode of apprehending language which transcends any bifurcation into cognitive and emotive---a mode of language which involves a fusion of affective, motor and conceptual components.”⁷⁷ Kaplan reports on “psychophysical experiments” performed at Clark that showed the “‘organismic’ character of words physiognomically conceived,” the “atmospheric character” and “affective penumbra surrounding words,” the manner in which “the whole [human] organism is involved in experiencing meaning.”⁷⁸ Language, these psychologists found, casts this penumbra over the symbolic and nonsymbolic alike. “In physiognomic apprehension,” Werner says, “non-person objects and person-objects are undifferentiated as to these [dramatic] qualities.”⁷⁹ Even “scientific” language communicates “values” and “attitudes,” such that “no strict line can be drawn between expressive language and scientific language.”⁸⁰

The Entelechial Dimension of Symbols

Symbols are “admonitory” as to an implied ideal the referent is made to stand for, “implying a negative”: That is, they are entelechial.⁸¹ See this item as a perfect representation of its class, totally distinct from items of a different class, or judge this item in relationship to that perfect representation, they suggest. Moreover, call it by such-and-such a name and you need say no more about it. Don’t bother to notice “irrelevant” attributes an entity falling under this head may possess.⁸² Don’t consider the “both-and.” Stick with the “either/or.” The arguments that imply this feature of language derive from what the general semanticists cite as the human tendency toward “polarizations,” “allnesses,” and “indiscriminations” in the use of symbols.

As to “polarizing tendencies,” between the mid-1960s and the late 1980s, Caucasians in USAmerica were labeled “white,” while persons formerly called “Negroes” were denominated “black,” that is, until the recent shift in terminology to include “African-American.” “White” persons, as George Bernard Shaw reminded us, are at least as much pale pink as they are white. And “black” in American society is a partly cultural, or symbolic, definition of a race, some “blacks” being more than half Caucasian in genetic heritage and exceedingly un-“black” in color. The slogan “America---Love It or Leave It” is another expression of the polarizing mindset of recent fame or infamy. According to the logic of the slogan, a citizen loves and accepts every feature of this country, or she is disloyal. She must see it either as good or bad. She may not stand on middle ground. What is in fact a continuum of entities or attributes---to one degree or another “contraries,” if you will---is radicalized and schematized by language in both these examples into a set of “contradictories.” The general semanticists call this aptitude “polarization,” an inherent symbolic inclination toward “either/or” thinking. Burke labels it the “all-or-none” principle of language at work.⁸³

Similar to polarization and derived from the same absolutizing pronenesses of symbols as ideals, “allness” is innocently indulging in the necessary abstraction from the world of teeming reality the use of language requires, without being aware of that abstraction. Worse still, “allness” is an attitude of certainty that one statement or word “says it all” about a person, an object, or a situation. It is bias toward belief in the finality, completeness,

or definitiveness of one's utterances. For instance, judging an individual solely on the basis of sexual orientation or practice is endemic in USAmerica and elsewhere. If *he* is a "faggot," *she* is a "lesbo," or *some other person* is a "philanderer," nothing more need be added. Those words tell all one needs to know about these citizens. Never mind their professional accomplishments, contributions to their community, or personal integrity. Everything important has been said. "Speech is necessarily block-like," Burke asserts, "pulling bits of reality apart and treating them as wholes."⁸⁴

Again, human beings succumb to the perfecting idealism intrinsic to language when they discriminate via "indiscrimination." Classifying or categorizing very much different persons and objects in an identical way is inevitable. Gross, wholesale stereotyping, however, "hardens the categories." "Negative stereotyping" unjustly attributes to all members of a given group unfavorable characteristics only some of them in fact exhibit. And vice versa, borrowed virtue may attach to undeserving scions of favored social classes. The annals of racial, religious, and ethnic prejudice, memorialized in countless jokes that are often funny only if one does not belong to any of those maligned minorities, affords abundant evidence of this beguiling feature of symbols.⁸⁵

Persons and objects can both benefit and suffer from the idealizing propensities of symbols. "He's a ballplayer" invests even the bench-rider with some of the grand aura of team membership. "And he calls himself a ballplayer," intoned with disappointment and disgust, expresses the contempt of fans who lament that their heroes often fall short of the image of perfection the symbol implies.⁸⁶

The Hierarchal Dimension of Symbols

Symbols are "admonitory" as to an implied ladder of value the "referent" is made to point to and is seen to participate in, "implying a negative": That is, they are hierarchally graded in their hinted relationship with other symbols.⁸⁷ Across any range of subclassifications, strive to attain or at least discover the best and most complete manifestation of the essential unifying quality, they instruct.⁸⁸ And appreciate the symmetrical wholeness of the pyramidal order itself. Don't be satisfied with not being number one, or not striving to get as close to number one as you can, or at

the very least not knowing who or what is number one.

If the idealizing function described above manifests the motive of perfection inherent in a given symbol, the obsession to “grade” related objects or beings, place them in an ascending or descending order, displays that motive in the ways symbols necessarily relate to one another. The argument that implies this feature of language can be discerned in the *Guinness Book of World Records* syndrome, which prompts human beings to find and venerate, if not create and venerate, the “best one of its kind” in the world, whatever kind that may be; and in the “taxonomize your lintballs” syndrome, or “top ten” disease, seen in those higher and lower weightings symbols relentlessly impose on entities, weightings that may have no empirical foundations whatsoever. The same beings as to class, no matter how seemingly trivial their dissimilarities, are denominated different beings as to subclass, different in worth, standing, or attainment, different in location on the ladder of value. Inexorably, a genus is partitioned into more estimable or less estimable species, as it were, often for ethereal reasons unknown to the senses, or for mere purposes of entertainment and pure exercise of the imagination.

This obsession with hierarchal placement is quintessentially the motive of perfection working its will overtime in human actions and relationships. And perfection springs from the negative by way of guilt and the infinitude of possibilities the human mind can thus imagine.

The Dialectical/Dramatic Dimension of Symbols

Symbols are admonitory as to the dynamic evolution of the social hierarchies the “ladder of value” syndrome brings into being: That is, they are recurrently dialectical, then dramatic. Strive to improve or at least maintain your social and ethical standing, or that of your group, over against those who would assail you, demean you, or outstrip you. If there is hope for advancement, do not fall short of being all that you can be. And do not let opponents block your path without a fight, or at least not without forced negotiation.

“Dialectic” may well be the key term in dramatism, the conception of language as dramatic action, more controlling even than “drama” itself. For Burke “dialectic” means the

complementary tendencies of language to generate subordinate terms and concepts from abstract generalities, and to beget higher-level abstractions out of “concrete” terms and ideas. Symbol-users naturally move up and down the scale of abstraction. More specifically, “dialectic” is the capacity of language to produce “polar terms,” paired opposites, on the middle to upper reaches of that scale. Most specifically, “dialectic” is the “union of opposites,” the uncovering of the common ground that ironically and paradoxically fastens foes and oppositions together in “cooperative competition.” On the highest level of language and dialectic, there usually emerges just such an overarching term, a “Rome term” (all roads leading to and from), that subsumes and summarizes the many disparate particulars of the great “chain of being” it represents.⁸⁹

“Polar dialectics,” like the simple or asymmetrical dialectics of thing/not thing, is a product of the negative. In polar dialectics, the negative is, as it were, “wrapped around” a directional divider, benchmark, or locus of measurement. On its most basic level, polar dialectics involves application of the negative to a point of reference as a source of orientation in space or time. Applied in this way, the negative generates up/down, in/out, left/right, above/below, in front of/behind, before/after, earlier than or later than in relation to that point of departure.

Polar dialectical use of the negative differs from the thing/not thing antinomy, where no co-equal directional employment is made of a point of reference as a pole that divides. In polar dialectics, as in the simple dialectics of thing/not thing, one can project infinitely and eternally in one direction or the other, say, in front of or behind, or earlier than or later than, as in Kant’s notion of an infinite regression. Infinite negativity conceptually carries these directional oppositions forever outward from that place of demarcation. Whether in respect to the simple dialectics of thing/not thing or the polar dialectics of up/down, left/right, or before/after, the negative inevitably engenders dialectical thinking, then dramatic action, as it operates imperiously in a real world of material substances in motion through time.

Dialectic is prior to drama and formative of drama. Dialectic is drama looked at as an idea, as a nontemporal logic. Dialectic is drama---based on the polarities of me against him or her, us against them, our land or idea against theirs---considered in a static, spatial, three-dimensional manner.⁹⁰

Drama is the complement of dialectic. Drama embodies in

an historical setting our tendency to divide and unite the things and beings of our world in terms of material and moral benchmarks. Drama is dialectic drawn out in a temporal sequence, a narrative progression. It is dialectic set in a four-dimensional, space-time continuum.⁹¹

Via this dialectical dynamic, symbol-users synthesize hierarchies and oppositions, the negative the author of them all. Symbol-users do this as to structure. Over time, they do this as to process, the “dramatistic process” it has been called.⁹² Hierarchical order yields to disorder, Burke says, “for who can keep the [perfected] commandments?” Guilt leads to sacrifice, of self and/or others, “for who would not be cleansed?” Sacrifice effects redemption, and a new cycle begins. Order, disorder, guilt, sacrifice, redemption, and the establishment of a new order or new regime or new regimen---these are the stages of the guilt-redemption cycle or the “tautological cycle of terms implicit in the idea of order.”⁹³ “Order” is a virtual synonym for perfection. It rounds things out, ties up loose ends, puts everything in its proper place.⁹⁴ Describing how human beings put disordered relationships back into place perfectly is the office of these terms. They constitute the culminating anatomy of human action when viewed in terms of historical development. According to Burke and dramatism, the very patterns of human relationship--intrapersonal, interpersonal, small group, large group, mass---ineluctably and categorically follow the stages, not necessarily the particular generic form, of the Christian drama of salvation.

The argument that most globally supports the crediting of this dialectical-leading-to-the-dramatic feature of language comes from the broad sweep of human history itself, with its wars, conflicts, incessant jostlings for place and preferment, brutal and often unpragmatic victimizations of enemies and minorities, endemic guilt, and frequent athleticism of self-denial or self-aggrandizement. However, a more manageable piece of evidence that human conflict and punishment, self-inflicted or other directed, stems from symbolic and spiritual, as well as material, deficits, is the motivation of the carpenter nailing his boards together to build a house. True, his scene is materially problematic and constraining. He needs to provide food, clothing, and shelter for himself and his family. At night they all get hungry and cold. His context of action is, nevertheless, as we noted in chapter 1, potentially more deeply disordered than that. He faces the prospect of shame. If he does not work diligently and

competently, he could lose his job, go on welfare, forfeit “face” and standing, become a “failure,” not a “success.”⁹⁵ He drives himself onward, mortifyingly, perfectionistically, dramatically, to prevent the moral degradation that threatens. No scientific, materialistic, or positivistic conception of human being can adequately account for those anxieties. Moral drama inheres in the pragmatics of language.⁹⁶

And that moral drama, worked through in the context of time, may have more to do with negation than even the dialectics of language insinuates. If psychoanalysis offers anything close to a useful insight into the human psyche, time itself may be a symbolic schema created and structured by the twin negations of disorder and sacrifice. In the “id” there is no time, Freud says. What then makes persons remember the past (and repress the past), look to the future, and synthesize both past and future into a sense of a “present” moving forward in historical progression or ever round in repetitive cyclical patterns? What other than guilt for what has been done and the hope up ahead of possible atonement for that guilt? Persons negate a commandment through sinful action, then negate the negation via destruction of themselves or others, partial destruction of themselves or others, or symbolic destruction or symbolic partial destruction of themselves or others. They “eliminate it,” as it were, wipe it out of the memory. This sacrificial response appears to Freudians to be a form of “undoing,” undoing the frightful thing that has occurred, a general mechanism of defense. “Therefore time has to be constructed by an animal that has guilt and seeks to expiate,” Neo-Freudian social critic Norman O. Brown says. Such a being must create and dwell on the notions of a “past” and a “future.” “Archaic man [sic, and modern man and woman] experiences guilt and therefore time.”⁹⁷

In sum, creating a “thing” out of “no thing” in terms of an intimated hierarchal ideal that beckons as telos and moral constraint, all symbols participate in what Burke has called the “perfection of the negative,” the negative being but a reification of the sense of eternity in the mind of man and woman. Luring the symbol-user toward ever more refined and rationalized conceptions and activities, the negative and its attendant perfections help structure language in each of its aspects and propel the drama of human relations forward toward spiritual as well as material satisfactions.⁹⁸

Conclusion

Kenneth Burke, author of the notion of language as dramatic action, is at the very least the most influential American rhetorician of the 20th century. Why? Is using Burke like choosing blondes over brunettes, or men with broad shoulders over those with wavy hair, a matter of personal caprice? Is the going wisdom that Burke “cannot be proved or disproved” more than a myth?

It is more, we maintain. Rhetorical proof yields probable truth, Aristotle says.⁹⁹ The field of rhetoric has been saying so for more than 2,300 years. Can even the physical sciences produce apodictic evidence in each and every case? Physicist Werner Heisenberg doubted it, and so do many scholars of the rhetoric of scientific inquiry.¹⁰⁰

This chapter gives a clustering of terms associated with the negative, and eleven major reasons, or sets of reasons, aimed at establishing the probable truth of the proposal that dramatism offers a more compelling view of language and its workings than positivism or empiricism. Those reasons are all based on the reality and the power of negative intuition as it is expressed in symbolic action. Some reasons are overt, obvious, even tangible or observable. The most patent is the existence of negative terms themselves. They can be extenuated, excused, “explained away,” but not eradicated. The convoluted nature of the myriad counter-arguments negatives elicit argues for the “embarrassingly” metaphysical character of those negative terms. Other obvious manifestations of dramas of negation not accounted for by positivist assumptions are these:

Interference with some causes in nature by persons who have seemingly lost all hope and all human capacity: Persons never merely behave like animals while language lives in their mind.

The empirically “absurd” actions of persons worshipping, praying, theater-going, and watching a ballgame, where literally no material being or entity is addressed, on the one hand, and no useful artifact or service of any kind is being produced, on the other.

The metaphysically negative “restrictions” which break up the continuous motions of matter into the “events” studied in relativity physics: “Events” cannot be seen, heard, felt, tasted, or smelled in the world of physical “objects” in flux.

More subtle indications of the negative admonition inherent in symbols and the actions it goads into being are many. They include the power of words to structure disparate “worlds” for different communities of people even within the same epoch, to divide those worlds into often unique things and beings and forces through mutually interdependent networks of definition that highlight symbolic relationships, not concrete articulations with “things.”

Such subtle indications of negative admonition include the often sharply varied nature of the objects and beings subsumed under a given general name, objects and beings that may relate only in terms of the purposes they fulfill; the frequently diverse set of names by which a given item is labeled, depending on which purpose it is being used for; and the now and again contradictory expressions employed to describe identical persons or entities that connotatively cast them in either a good or a bad ethical light. These quirks of language give evidence that morally colored ends and interests are being touted by even the most “positive” scientific vocabularies.

Such subtle indications of negative admonition include the beguiling power of words to pass for ideals, perfected representations of the beings they attach to, so that no more need be said beyond the one spotless descriptive. Polarized conceptions, all-or-none characterizations, and indiscriminate labeling of truly complex persons and situations result. Only the negative can engender such idealism, for it alone is without fault, defect, or limit. Across any broad genus of classification, each species within it succumbs to the perfecting obsession to grade it hierarchally. The world seems driven by the question, who or what is up or down?

Such subtle indications of negative admonition include the dialectical form omnipresent in the logic of language, and the dramatic oppositions and conflicts that evolve over time as language structures historical events. The *ups* and *downs* and *aboves* and *belows* of symmetrical dialectics are as empirically gossamer as the *nots* and the *nothings*. They do not exist in nature. *Goods* and *bads* flaunt the moral tonus the *lefts* and *rights* only connote. Conflicted human beings, by their actions, struggle to assuage guilt and forestall shame, as much as to satisfy biological needs, witness averted eyes when middle class clients notice acquaintances in the charity soup kitchen or at the welfare office. The sense of time itself may be a product of dialectic turned

drama, as guilt fuses remembered disorderliness with a vision of future sacrifice and reform.

Indeed, it would appear, the negative does perfect nature through language, in all its rich variety. Humans reach for, and sometimes recoil from, a vast infinitude of possibilities. A moral purpose that transcends the finite boundaries of this world is both the aptitude and the destiny of man and woman.

Chapter 5

“Hark Ye Yet Again---the Little Lower Layer” II: The Theology of Dramatic Action

The Intimate Connection between the Negative and Theology

We’ve already pretty thoroughly gone into the ways in which a sense of the negative informs and undergirds, how about *produces*, language. We couldn’t have language without a sense of the negative. That should be fairly clear by now. If there’s the negative, we argued at the beginning of Chapter 4, then there follows infinity and eternity; if the infinite-negative,

then a vision and a motive of perfection, a symbol-induced “situation” language-users find themselves in that’s fraught with incentives for doing something impeccably consistent with that boundless scene; if a vision of perfection unlimited by time or space, that transcends the material shortcomings of life on earth and extends forever beyond what the astronomers tell us will be the fiery death of planet earth in another four billion years, then an immortal God, a “person” being more “perfect” than some grand unconscious force; theology, a perfected elaboration of a kind, on the dramatic attributes and activities such a Being implies; and the spiritual purposes those heavenly conceptions inspire. To repeat: What does *not* exist never ends, is without number, and ultimately is without peer. What does *not* exist goes on forever, extends to infinity, and puts to shame everything material and mundane. Dwelling within the borderless expanses of the negatives of language, persons necessarily live in the house of the god-term---a perfected overarching title for human motivations---if not in the House of God more conventionally defined.

In the late stages of his career, Kenneth Burke began to call his dramatic philosophy of language “logology.” He defined “logology” in general as “the study of words as such,” “studies in words-about-words,” or “the study of the way language presents the world to human beings.” More specifically, Burke defined “logology” as “the systematic study of theological terms for the light they might throw on the *forms* of language,” theological terms being the most thoroughgoing, far-reaching, ultimate terms in language.¹ True, studying theological nomenclature is like studying language in terms of its biggest picture or most sharply defined relief map. It is that. You can’t find bigger, broader conceptions anywhere than God and the devil, Heaven and hell, infinity, eternity, the everlasting, the Almighty. Examining language carefully, though, in the light of such words, against the background of the negative and its perfections as motive, we not only see, feel, and take note of such terms as raised surfaces on the “relief map” of language. We sense the inevitability of their excretion, their sure and relentlessly upward extrusion from the “molten” nothingness of our intuition of “what is not there.”²

Kenneth Burke: Theorist of Language as Dramatic Action and “Coy” Theologian

In his study *Kenneth Burke: Literature and Language as Symbolic Action*, scholar and literary critic Greig Henderson says, “For Burke Logology is in some sense a surrogate theology.”³ Reviewing the book, Timothy Crusius of Southern Methodist University takes issue. Logology is “secular and empirical,” he counters, just as Burke says. “If [it] is a surrogate anything, it is . . . analogous in his system to traditional epistemology.”⁴ Logology, as we said, is the name the later Burke gives to his philosophy viewed from the perspective of how language generates knowledge, not from the ontological perspective of what men and women essentially are, the active, “symbol-using animal.”⁵ More precisely, to rephrase Burke’s premier definition, logology is “the systematic study of theological terms” as the way to best perceive what language is up to as it “uses us” as much as we “use it.”⁶

This chapter takes up Henderson’s question of whether, and in what way, Burke is a theologian and in what way dramatism/logology is a theology. I argued this point with Burke in personal correspondence carried on during 1983-84. In his published work, Burke claims not to be a theologian. I claim he is. I offer the following qualified proposition as counter-statement to Burke’s demurrer:

Kenneth Burke should be viewed as a theologian and dramatism/logology as at least a “generic” theology of human being and human communication. “Generic” means that which is “common to or characteristic of a whole group or class; typifying or subsuming”; as “that which characterizes every individual in a category or group . . . a clear and certain classificatory criterion.”⁷ The common, characteristic, typifying criterion of a theology, Burke says,⁸ and dramatism/logology’s “master motive and purpose,” the dean of Burke scholars William Rueckert says,⁹ is the “principle of perfection” as reified in the intuition of the infinite-negative.

Burke the Putative Secularist

Granted, Burke alleges his system is secularist, pure and simple. Introducing the dialogue between “The Lord” and “Satan” at the end of *The Rhetoric of Religion*, Burke says,

“The reader should bear in mind that this dialogue is intended to illustrate the principles not of *theology* but of *logology*, a purely secular subject.”¹⁰ “Our purpose,” he goes on, “is simply to ask how theological principles can be shown to have usable secular analogues that throw light upon the nature of language.”¹¹ “Logology would be a purely empirical study of symbolic action,” Burke continues.¹² Putting the question dialectically, that is, defining his approach by way of direct contrast, Burke emphasizes, “Theology wd. pronounce the term with the accent thus: ‘words about God,’ logology wd. accept it: ‘words about “God,”’” the quotation marks in the second phrasing putting the actual existence of God into very open debate.¹³ Crusius summarizes, “Burke is quite explicit about the differences between logology and theology: the former cannot say anything about God but only the word ‘God.’”¹⁴ It seems clear that Burke does not *want* his readers to believe that dramatism/logology is a theology in the traditional, paradigmatic sense of the term. Van Harvey explains, “Narrowly considered, T. [Theology] has to do only with the EXISTENCE and nature of the divine.”¹⁵

Burke the “Generic” Theologian by His Own Account

In *The Philosophy of Literary Form*, Burke presents, “in nuce,” his approach to the analysis of a text.¹⁶ He warns his readers against being taken in by the official position a speaker or writer pronounces. Note the “clusters” and “agons,” he admonishes, the “what goes with what” and the “what is pitted against what” via predication, synonymy, parallelism, juxtaposition, comparison, and contrast. Consider the message as suasive action, a not-altogether-candid finessing of a problematic situation. Diligent reading and “chart[ing]” of congruities and oppositions may help one breach the inevitable façade.¹⁷

A more or less careful reading up to and around the façade turns up at least ten reasons to regard Burke as a “generic” theologian at a minimum and to view his philosophy of dramatism/logology as a theology. Five of those reasons, or sets of reasons, come from assertions about theology Burke makes that place dramatism/logology within the range and purview of those very same assertions about what a theology is. By Burke’s own construction, features of logology equate with those any “brand-

name” theological system one might conjure.

First off, dramatism fits Burke’s own explicit definition of a theology, that is, any system that “retains in essence the principle of perfectionism.”¹⁸ Dramatism is founded on the notion that, via the negative, language is molded and animated by the principle of perfection. Through language, so are human beings. “You can go on forever saying what a thing is *not*,” Burke observes.¹⁹ What is “not,” we’ve said by now ad nauseam, just doesn’t seem to find, or impose, or suggest, a limitation of any kind. Quite to the contrary. As “scene” of human action, and therefore for finite creatures an incriminating situational motive, the hortatory negative goads us to live up to its pristinely demanding standards.

Second, in *The Rhetoric of Religion*, Burke offers six explicit analogies between theology and his dramatism/logological view of language:²⁰

(1) In the Bible and in Christian theology, God in His creative and redemptive manifestations is conceived of in terms of the verbal, the Words of God calling the world into existence; God being made flesh in the form of the Logos, His Voice of revelation and redemption; and the Gospel being disseminated only through speaking and hearing. Words inextricably relate to “the Word.”²¹

(2) In relationship to the nonverbal things they name, words, in reference to their meaning, are super-natural; they are utterly unreducible and unequivocal to material phenomena or the electro-chemical motions of the brain. We can’t get from the electro-chemical discharges that may, indeed, coincide with specific units of human discourse---not in respect to *meaning*. We cannot read meaning into those brain motions. In terms of such a seemingly spiritual dimension, the symbolic is to the nonsymbolic, as Burke iterates, as Spirit is to matter.²²

(3) Just as the principle of negativity is the very essence of language, so also “negative theology” represents the ultimate, purist, least analogical form in which to describe God.²³

(4) In its insistent drive toward ever higher, more rarefied overarching abstractions, language produces a term that “sums everything up,” a “Title of Titles,” a “god-term,” “analogous to the overall entitling role played by the theologian’s word for the godhead.”²⁴

(5) In a sentence (or a discourse) individual words, which temporally appear and then “die” when spoken or read, relate to their overall unitary meaning or abstracted essence, or status as a transcendent principle or fixed, immutable form, the way “time”

relates to “eternity.”²⁵

(6) A material object, the name that brings it to one’s purposive attention, and the “conformity” or “communion” between the two are analogous in their connections to those between the Persons of the Trinity, the Father (Power), the Son (Wisdom), and the Holy Spirit (Love). Epistemologically, knowledge and the power it can confer through its alliance, via the symbol, with the potent object, are generated by “accurate” naming, accurate in that it fosters serviceable action.²⁶

In themselves, as Burke here explains them, *and without further reference to any passages outside this chapter*, Burkean or otherwise, the six analogies might be construed as ambiguous. Are they six reasons one does not need to go beyond language at all to account for theology? Do they, in a sense, “naturalize” theology? Or are they rather to be read as six reasons theology inevitably makes an appearance among symbolizing beings, *as evidence of a “beyond”* that contains within it the “ground” of the nonsymbolic *and* the symbolic, immanence and transcendence?²⁷ Interpreted either way, can people in the large ever be satisfied with something short of a perfect “Title of Titles,” regardless of what “reality” may or may not reside beyond it?

The third piece of evidence that dramatism/logology is theological in nature, drawn from Burke’s specifically theological statements, derives from passages that give this chapter its original name. Burke calls secularized metaphysical systems and philosophies in general “coy theologies,” purveyors of variously perfected approaches to life reluctant to own up to their essentially transcendental cast.²⁸ On this basis, dramatism classifies as the coyest of the coy theologies, Burke the coyest of the coy theologians. Featuring as the central, generic ingredient in human life the quest for perfection by way of the infinity the negatives of language prefigure, Burke is even more the “generic” theologian than the founders of “brand-name ‘isms”” built fragmentarily on such terms. As a general critique of symbolic action, dramatism/logology is a “meta” system.²⁹ It observes a generality and a pervasiveness of the infinite and the absolute, individual faiths and orientations do not always see.

Fourth, in his writings, Burke again and again refers to religious issues, teaches by way of theological images, uses Biblical language, interprets Scripture, seeks out the insights of the Church Fathers and other theologians, posits the stages of the Christian drama of salvation as the very essence of the way human

relationships develop and conclude, and generally comes down on the side of religion in its debate with scientific positivism. Like his mentor Spinoza, Burke seems to be “drunk with God.”³⁰

Finally, amid his constantly recurring talk about God and his inveterate use of religious language---as with the terms “sin,” “guilt,” “sacrifice,” “redemption,” “god-term” “secular prayer,” and “social worship”---Burke sometimes gives his blessing to specifically theological propositions as truths, not just as illustrations of how language works. The best dialectic is a dialectic of “the Upward Way,” he says. “Theology” is “dialectic in its fullness,” which “empirically, I sanction.”³¹ Only the “full terminologies” of theology can satisfy human beings, in contrast to the “solemn caricatures” of theology this age has produced.³² The dynamics of dialectic force persons to conclude that nature’s “nonverbal ground must have contained the ‘potentiality’ of the verbal, otherwise the verbal could not have emerged from it.”³³ Indeed, “perhaps we here overstate the case,” argues Burke in the *Rhetoric of Motives*, after he says, “We are not discovering ‘God’ here in the theologian’s sense.” Defining God as that which unites “generalization with personification,” Burke goes on to posit the personal or “super-personal” dimension as a dialectical requirement of the “*ultimate*” scene out of which men and women emerge. He emphasizes, “It must be ‘super-personal,’ quite as it must be ‘super-verbal.’ For it contains the principle of personality, quite as it contains the principle of verbalizing.”³⁴ Such assertions take dramatism across the threshold of theology per se. They veritably place Burke’s writings within the scope of Van Harvey’s “paradigmatic” definition. They have “to do . . . with the existence . . . of the divine.”³⁵

Burke the “Generic” Theologian by Implication

Burke equates dramatism/logology with theology not only explicitly, or close to explicitly. (And without discernable irony: The quotations above coincide well with Burke’s clear and forthright denunciations of the “solemn caricatures” of human motivation going by the name of “behaviorism” and “materialism.”³⁶) He also hints at their similarity, offers lines of reasoning that soritically lead to such a deduction.

First, and we say this once more because of its seminal importance, dramatism’s essentially metaphysical aspect derives

from its emphasis upon the negative terms of language---in English, the “no,” the “not,” the “nothing,” and the “never”---as the basis of language and as the fundamental informing and energizing principle in the way language works and human actions occur.³⁷ No negatives exist in nature.³⁸ Particularly as hortatory imperatives, they are supremely “transcendental,” “supersensible,” “noumenal,” and empirically “unexplainable.”³⁹ These are the defining attributes of metaphysics.⁴⁰ Positivist philosophers tie themselves in knots trying to account for them.⁴¹

Dramatism’s metaphysics are evident also in the breach in the framework of “substance” of its featured term “act.” Human experience, or at least talk about that experience, Burke says, is essentially action. The structure of action is manifest in the pentad, or hexad, of terms: act, scene, agent, agency, purpose, and, perhaps also, attitude. Burke thus explains human action partly in terms of itself. To that extent, it is “unexplainable,” “enigmatic,” “magical,” indeed metaphysical. Burke explicitly acknowledges as much: “Dialectical and metaphysical issues *necessarily* figure in the subject of motivation,” he offers.⁴²

Third, dramatism is a theology---a generic theology at the very least, if not a full-blown brand-name theology---in terms of Hans Kung’s definition, finding “the infinite in the finite, the absolute in the relative.”⁴³ Burke has found and has emphasized these generic emanations of the Divine in the negative terms at the heart of all languages. To repeat, what is “not there” goes on forever, extends to infinity, and puts to shame everything phenomenal and mundane. This foundational feature of language culminates, Burke says, in a “god-term” at the apex of any rounded system of values.⁴⁴

Another theological implication Burke’s system of thought invokes is this one: If symbol-using is inherently dramatic *action*, speaking and writing and human-style communicating in general must be *redemptive* actions. Of necessity, they proceed at least in part out of a sense of disorder, threatened if not actual disorder, even in speech that celebrates a major hard-won victory.⁴⁵ Why would a person need further to act, physically or symbolically, if all her problems were solved? Any creature who continues to chat, gossip, or talk heart-to-heart nigh unto the hour of her death, let alone take serious and purposeful physical action, is dramatically very much less than at rest. The logic of the dramatic form, as well as the principle of perfection in the abstract, constrains a linguistic being to seek a redemption beyond

the contingencies of her own earthly life, in which all dramatic resolutions are restricted, incomplete, and short-lived.

Last of all, Burke makes the theological question a rhetorical question, and the rhetorical question a theological question. Who or what do we ultimately address with our words and with the actions those words goad into being? By way of the “pure persuasion” by which symbols in part goad all distinctively human actions, “pure” in the sense of being linguistic rather than plainly biological or crassly acquisitive in motivation, persons inevitably “address,” Burke says, the “Principles of Goodness and Evil” (capitalized by Burke and therefore personified according to the conventions of poetry) in all they purposefully do.⁴⁶ To put it another way, persons address with their words and their actions a morally colored and perfected reality beyond themselves adumbrated in symbols, a “vastness of magnitude, power, or distance disproportionate to themselves.”⁴⁷ No-pragmatic-advantage self-sacrifice and no-pragmatic-advantage self-aggrandizement demonstrate this symbolic drive at work.⁴⁸ The motive of perfection, the “theological motive of perfection,” reified in the negative, comes full circle. It begins and authors language. It serves as the final audience for everything rhetorical discourse generates or accomplishes.

Support for the Theological View from Other Interpreters of Burke

The assertion that Burke is a theologian of at least some kind finds support from several scholars of dramatism. As previously noted, Greig Henderson of the University of Toronto calls Burke a “surrogate theolog[ian],”⁴⁹ and Richard Thames of Duquesne advances basically the same idea.⁵⁰ Trevor Melia of the University of Pittsburgh speculated about “what kind of Christian” Burke is, suggested that the label “secular Christian” can only be the starting point, and concluded that Burke is at least “up to his ears in Christianity.”⁵¹ Wayne Booth, noted literary critic and long-time friend of Burke’s, waxes eloquent (Burke would greet him in letters as “Wax ‘N Wayne”) about Burke’s theological obsessions in their personal correspondence. Booth also calls Burke a “coy theologian,” and uses Burke’s theological extrapolations as tools for rhetorical invention.⁵²

On the other side of the coin, Burke himself has demurred

at such labeling in correspondence I've had with him. In one memorable line, he offered, "I 'gin fear that, in o'er-desecularizing my logological involvements with the negative, you will 'prove' me to be a Manichee, with Mephisto as real as the Logos."⁵³ James Chesebro of Wayne State University speculated to me that Burke did not really get serious about his philosophical legacy until he published his article on dramatism in the *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*.⁵⁴ Before that he was just "playing with ideas," taking a "comic" view. The dialogue between the Lord and Satan at the conclusion of *The Rhetoric of Religion* is, for instance, a "satyr play" that comes after three tragedies.⁵⁵ The resolution of the essay "Philosophy of Literary Form" follows something of the same jocular pattern.⁵⁶ In any case, dramatism as a "cult of comedy" decries the motive of perfection and all its works, it is said.⁵⁷ The quest for perfection in earnest is the source of tragedy, the genre of symbolic action that causes wars and the environmental destruction of planet earth.⁵⁸ To the extent it is possible for humankind, Burke proclaims salvation through a "humanistic philosophy of poetry," a mere immanentized and "anthropomorphic" "art of living."⁵⁹ When Burke officially takes a middle position in his books---language, he says, is both our glory and our sickness, logology neither supports nor depreciates the belief that behind the "god-term" the God of Heaven and Earth actually exists---he is merely dissembling.⁶⁰ Dramatism in fact takes a negative view of language and all its works. Burke is a demystifier, if not a deconstructionist.⁶¹ His program is one of thoroughgoing "linguistic skepticism."⁶² Religious people should approach dramatism with caution.

Two counter-arguments especially undercut these demurrers. To begin with, the reflections I offered in the first and final "implicit" arguments above are decisive. It matters not what Burke believed or Burke had intended. If he was right about how language works in the lives of men and women, if he was right that the sense of eternity and infinity infuses and motivates one's life via the negative, and if he was correct that symbolizers necessarily address in part the Principle of Good or the Principle of Evil in all their actions, then his personal beliefs and the question of theology construed in the narrow sense of the term were and are irrelevant. Whether people are waiting for God or waiting for Godot, they are still waiting. They are still theological beings. And Burke was not and is not ultimately a demystifier in any case. Though it may be chipped or cracked, the "magic spell" of language cannot be

broken, he maintains.⁶³

Thus the term “secular theology” seems something of a contradiction. “Secular theology” may claim to be thoroughly immanentized, but it invariably forces its devotees to reach beyond this realm of universal defect. No earthly phenomena can be perfectly good or perfectly bad.

The second argument that especially undercuts those who, like Crusius, say that dramatism is not a theology of any kind nor Burke a theologian, is Burke’s theological obsession noted in the last point made under Burke, the theologian by “his own account,” and in reports of his private actions by family members. Why the obsession, so strongly emphasized also by Booth?⁶⁴ Burke did not have to talk religion nearly that much to make his points. Henderson notes Burke’s apparently personal need to dwell on religious matters in his comment about dramatism as a “surrogate theology.” Henderson adds, “The analogies he makes for heuristic purposes betray a psychological need for a sense of permanence akin to a religious faith in the curative power of the word made flesh.”⁶⁵

In his comments at the conclusion of the Burke Conference in New Harmony, Indiana,⁶⁶ Burke again talked religion in answer to the questions posed to him by the conferees. Burke’s grandson once told me that he agrees his grandfather is a theologian, that indeed the previous Thanksgiving Burke had written a litany of devotion he and the whole family read before their Thanksgiving meal.⁶⁷ Burke’s writing style alone suggests enough equivocation and eccentricity that we should be wary of any on-or-off-the-record summation of what it all means.⁶⁸ Burke himself has taught us to note the clusters and agons in a work, to spy out “what goes with what” and thereby get around the official position.⁶⁹ Eventually the written work itself will pay off to diligent analysis and offer up the true attitudes of any author. No writer or speaker can be on guard all the time. And the works themselves point to Burke as at the very least a generic theologian, one who claims symbol-users, believing or unbelieving, religious or secular, inevitably seek and address a perfected audience beyond themselves.

A Summary and Characterization of Burke's "Generic" Theology

Devolving from the negative, the "principle of perfection" at the core of Burke's philosophy is the ingredient that transforms it into, at minimum, a generic theology of language and human being. The supersensibility of the negative, dramatism's linguistic focus; the transcendent mystery of "action" at the core of Burke's scheme of things; Burke's notion of a "coy" theology; the imperatives of Burke's six "analogies" and of the dramatic form itself; Burke's preoccupations with religion and his explicit endorsement of some theological propositions in the restricted sense of the term; and the concept of the "pure persuasion," or addressment of ultimate Goodness or ultimate Evil, that words finesse from human beings in all their symbolic actions---these features mark dramatism/logology, at least in a generic, overarching sense, as a theological approach to human being. They demonstrate why the theological motive is present in symbols even when used "trivially," and the way in which Burke emphasizes such usage.⁷⁰

Burke is noted for not pressing his arguments too hard. He explores all angles, then frequently backs off a step so as not to stretch his case too far for his mid-century, potentially positivistic readers. His is a good example to follow. It is worth emphasizing, however, that Burke's derivation of man and woman's symbolicity *and* personality from the Ground of Being is not the sign of a generic theologian alone. It is the sign of a theologian in the paradigmatic sense of the term. To orthodox neo-evolutionists and other skeptics, language and personality are accidents. They came blindly from natural selection. Teleology inheres in the "principle of speech" and the "principle of personality." To place them, or at least their origin, in the "extrahuman ground" is to make an explicitly theological statement in the conventional sense of the word.⁷¹

However correct such an assessment of Burke's scheme may be, a few provisos need recognition as well. Although he may be "up to his ears in Christianity," Burke's approach to language and life appears to challenge Western faiths in terms of their traditional construction. Dramatism/logology might fairly be characterized as a quasi-gnostic universalism friendly to process theology, a three-way heresy to any orthodox Christian.

To begin with, dramatism shares with process theology suspicion toward perfectionism and sensitivity toward the

“embarrassments” inherent in descriptions of “super-drama,” that is, actions performed by an infinitely perfect Being. Indeed, “Drama is dissolved by philosophies of ‘super-drama,’” Burke argues.⁷² Humans can describe God easily, consistently, and perfectionistically in His static, inactive mode, before drama begins: In this mode, God is usually seen as immortal, invisible, infinite, eternal, unchanging, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent. The perfections of “negative theology” appropriately obtain. God is “wholly other,” majestic, all-encompassing.

Humans cannot describe God consistently and perfectionistically in His dynamic, active mode, after drama begins, implies Burke and say Whitehead and Hartshorne, two of America’s most noted process theologians---not if God is conceived of as the infinitely perfected Almighty Other in every sense the mind can imagine. In this mode, God is seen as an “actor,” like a human being. For Burke, Whitehead, and Hartshorne, “actors” are by implication finite, at least in some senses of the term. At this point, traditional theological language “breaks down,” as even many more or less traditional theologians have often noted. Whitehead and Hartshorne overcome these contradictions through reductions in God’s “negative” attributes. For them, a growing, changing God actively creates and nurtures, and passively responds to, a universe suffused with partly free, not completely controllable, beings. Both God and creature are in the precarious process of becoming a yet-unrealized telos. The “dipolar” God of Whitehead and Hartshorne is therefore both perfect and, in terms of credal conceptions, imperfect. The “process” God is both abstract and concrete, active and passive, infinite and finite, eternal and temporal. Seen from Burke’s perspectives, ensuing descriptions of Divine action would seem consistent, or relatively so; dialectic, or the union of opposites, would be integral; and process would be paramount. Dramatism/logology might be friendly to such a view.⁷³

Next, dramatism shares with universalism an antipathy toward an inflexible “us-against-them” dialectic of redeemed versus unredeemed. Like the German philosopher Georg F. W. Hegel, Burke sees dialectic as a fundamental form of human thought. Polar oppositions inevitably develop on the middle to upper reaches of linguistic abstraction, Burke observes again and again. But unlike the Manichaeon he claims he might be, Burke views dialectic as ultimately culminating in a title-of-titles that unites the oppositions and the disparate particulars of the polar

and “positive” levels of language. Merle Brown of the University of Minnesota belabors, indeed caricatures, Burke’s “sense of our ultimate oneness,” “our fundamental unity.” Burke’s “rhetorical tolerance” is “a comprehensive enterprise,” Brown states. Burke is guilty of “identifying the most diverse of things.” His purpose is “to show that even opposites . . . are really the same.” Blown out of proportion by Brown or not, Burke’s undeniable passion “to evoke a state of oneness among men [sic]” precludes belief that any should stand outside God’s love and acceptance.⁷⁴

Finally, dramatism seems to share with gnosticism an almost heretical pessimism toward the creation.⁷⁵ Dramatism does not depreciate the life of the body or the natural world. Quite the contrary. It appears, though, to challenge strongly the spiritual part of the creation it so persistently highlights. It seems dubious about man and woman’s ability to acquire objective knowledge, to preserve their material environment, to live among themselves in even relative peace, indeed to flourish and survive at all for a geologically extended period of time. At the Speech Communication Convention in Boston in 1987, I asked Burke what he thought humankind’s chances of survival were. He replied without hesitation: “Fifty-fifty.”⁷⁶

Worse still, dramatism/logology casts doubt on the authenticity of man and woman’s moral life itself. It intimates that even in our *conception* of what is good and true, let alone our capacity to actualize it, there extrudes an element of falsity, distortion, and exaggeration that brings into question its worthiness and utility. It revels in contradiction and paradox. It conjures up the vision of a dark force, a kind of demiurge, that stands between humans and the Divine Spirit, and the deflections and malign temptations of language are its sign.

A solution of a kind to the putative pessimism of Burke’s system, one that nudges it a bit closer to traditional formulations, is to view it as a radical conception of the Fall. Dialectic would appear to develop out of the intersection of spirit and matter. If so, God may in some fashion or to some extent transcend the divisions of language. The Divine Light may be sent one way, but inevitably be received another by finite, spiritual beings embedded in a material world. This explanation does not dissipate the mystery surrounding Divine action. Nor does it dispel the difficulties inherent in Burke’s moral epistemology. It does, though, confirm the validity and the sanctity of humankind’s spiritual intuition itself. However twisted and hyperbolized be

the “reality” the negatives of language present, that faulty vision betokens contact with a sure and certain Power disproportionate to ourselves indeed. The legend “by language, through language, beyond language” points up a trajectory toward faith Burke’s writings both resist and ultimately sanction.⁷⁷

Burke therefore takes inquirers to the threshold of theology in the paradigmatic sense, and in some passages just across that threshold. There he leaves those inquirers to wrestle for themselves with the questions: How “human” is God? What exactly is the *Imago Dei*, the Image of God in humankind? What, after all is said and done, are the good, the true, and the beautiful?

Conclusion

To one brought up to look for the good and the true in one of the “brand-name” Western religions, Burke does offer some direct instruction. As a scholar from a Southern Baptist seminary sitting at dinner with me the first evening of the 1990 Burke Conference said with a laugh, Burke would not recommend any kind of fundamentalism, Christian, Jewish, or Muslim. A “comic-frame” style of faith would more likely “go with” the “neo-liberal ideal” and “linguistic skepticism” Burke espouses.⁷⁸ A moderate, humane, doctrinally loose-ended spiritual orientation would tend to reflect Burke’s concerns. When I asked him at the 1987 SCA Convention what contemporary theologian he liked best, Burke replied with vigor and conviction, “Niebuhr,” Reinhold.⁷⁹

Whether playing it straight or speaking ironically, nowhere is Burke more eloquently “theological” than in the concluding sentence of *A Rhetoric of Motives*. Exulting in the “thought . . . of the universal order,” he summons from the “symmetry of the Aristotelian metaphysics” the vision of “all classes of beings . . . hierarchically arranged in a chain or ladder or pyramid of mounting worth, each kind striving towards the *perfection* of its kind, and so towards the kind next above it, while the strivings of the entire series head in God as the beloved *cynosure* and *sinecure*, the end of all desire.”⁸⁰

When uncovering motives, Burke says, observe carefully beginnings and endings.⁸¹ (See Addendum 7.)

Chapter 6

“Hark Ye Yet Again---the Little Lower Layer” III: The Anthropology of Dramatic Action

Is There Such a Thing as “Human Nature,” and If So, What Are Its Features?

The very notion of a unique “human nature” has come under assault in recent years. Three sources of attack are ethology, genetics, and postmodern philosophy. Ethologists like Desmond Morris, author of *The Naked Ape*, and Konrad Lorenz, author of *Evolution and Modification*, have put great stress on what they call the similarities between human beings and other primates.

(Ethologists study animal behavior under natural conditions.¹) Geneticists have determined that humans and chimpanzees share 96.4 percent of their DNA. That “small” difference would leave little room for variation, right? Postmodern philosophers like Jacques Derrida,² Francois Lyotard,³ and Michel Foucault⁴ assert that men and women are so pliable, as seen in their disparate cultural attributes, that no, or at least few, generalizations can be made about their essential makeup.⁵

We can answer the ethologists, and we will do so in this chapter, simply by calling attention to the many, many human traits they conveniently overlook, characteristics nonverbal animals do *not* share.

We can bring into question the relevance of the geneticist’s 3.6 by noting that men and women, across all races and ethnic groups, share 99.9 percent of their genes, the recent genome project has indicated. Look at the huge differences persons manifest, one from another, on merely 1/1000th of their DNA. Just take a gander at the wondrous variations among persons in physical size and appearance alone, variation in the proteins produced by those genes as determinative of difference as the genes themselves.⁶

We can answer the postmodernists by making a distinction they usually ignore, that between content and form. Burke would agree that one’s cultural and physical environments radically shape one’s worldview, values, and beliefs. He does not, though, adhere to the notion that the singular content of human thoughts, or the uniqueness of particular lifeways, serves as the be-all and end-all of the study of man and woman. Burke sees universal *forms* in human behavior that function, in his view of things, as the “Iron Law of History” and the means of “avoid[ing] mere relativism” in anthropological study.⁷ Burke underscores the role of *language* in generating these common patterns of action, particularly the effect of the linguistic negative. The “no,” the “not,” the “nothing,” the “never” as moral imperatives: They do, indeed, author distinctively *human* being, Burke would suggest.

Burke sums up the distinction between content and form thusly: “The intensities, morbidities, or particularities of mystery come from institutional forces [peculiar to any one time and place], but the *aptitude* comes from the nature of man [sic], generically, as a *symbol-using animal*.”⁸

Philosophical Anthropology

An anthropologist is a social scientist or philosopher who studies the “origin, nature, and destiny” of human beings, as well as their varied social and cultural adaptations.⁹ Modern scientific anthropologists pay especial attention to the lifeways of particular groups of human beings, in comparative relation to those of other tribes, clans, and nationalities, present and past. “Philosophical” anthropologists deal with “human beings in general,”¹⁰ in terms of their ontological uniqueness. Ontology is a branch of philosophy that delves into the nature of “being,” in this case, the common attributes that all human beings share. H. O. Pappé of the University of Sussex says, “Philosophical anthropology seeks to interpret philosophically the facts that the sciences have discovered concerning the nature of man [sic] and the human condition. . . . It seeks to elucidate the basic qualities that make man what he is and distinguish him from other beings.”¹¹

As such, philosophical anthropology has traditionally taken issue with “Darwin and Freud for allegedly appealing to the forces of primitivism and animality in man [sic].”¹² Though describing himself in some respects as “Freudoid” because of his use of the notions of unconscious persuasion and “transference” as a manifestation of symbolic “identification,” Burke surely describes humans as unique “animals” indeed.¹³ The human species may not be worthy of such “honorific” labels as “citizen[s] of heaven,” after Judeo-Christian theology, or “rational beings,” after Enlightenment philosophy. Humans are definitely not, however, just creatures of the “jungle,” man and woman merely “in nature.” They occupy some midpoint between the eulogistic and unflattering extremes. They are man and woman “*in society*.”¹⁴

A recognized philosophical anthropologist Burke somewhat resembles is the German scholar Arnold Gehlen. Gehlen defines man and woman as essentially an “‘acting, anticipatory, nondetermined, self-delimiting being---a product of culture.’” Like Burke, Gehlen emphasizes the centrality of “unreflective, spontaneous, self-sacrificing action” in the contours of human being, the overriding influence of environmental and institutional forces in shaping the normative pathways that action follows, and the place of the “illogical” and nonrational in human life.¹⁵ Burke prefers to call the fundamentally “dramatic” human being neither rational nor nonrational, but rather “*methodical*,” as a way to benignly “avoid the whole question.”¹⁶

Burke's "Definition of [Human]" and the "Basic Unit of Action"

In delineating dramatism's philosophical anthropology, a good place to start is with Burke's "Definition of [Human]." Burke offers a five-part statement of the innate qualities of being that distinguish men and women from all other creatures. He says humans are, inherently, the:

- (1) Symbol-using, symbol-making, symbol-misusing, symbolically sensitive, symbolically responsive, active, dramatic, theological, self-transcending or mere-motion-transcending animals;
- (2) Inventors of the negative (or invented *by* the negative), or moralized by the negative;
- (3) Separated from their natural condition by instruments of their own making, or separated from nature by actions and artifacts;
- (4) Goaded by the spirit of hierarchy, or moved by a sense of order;
- (5) And rotten with perfection.¹⁷

We can distill these five features of human nature into the notion of the hortatory negative, or negative of command. The negative of command engenders the ability to say "no" to natural impulses and conditions, in some fashion to transform and overcome them (items #2 and #3). It opens wide to a vision of infinitely perfected potentialities (item #5). It therefore makes possible, it even sometimes goads persons to, fits and extremes of evaluation and classification, according to some standards of excellence or obloquy (items #4 and #5). It incites persons to reach for the highest, or lowest, rung on a ladder of value, whatever that value may be, sometimes of trivial practical import (items #4 and #5). It is, as we have seen in Chapter 4, the negative conceptual moltenness out of which other terminologies congeal and divide (item #1).

The negative of command labels the untouched, natural state of things "unsatisfactory" in respect to the fulfillment of human needs, wants, and desires, and presses persons onward and upward toward the organizing, artifactualizing, indeed "bettering" (or "worsening"!) of those environing materials and conditions.

Eventually, according to Burke anyhow, the hortatory negative can beget something of an “illness,” an urge toward completion of human designs, or attainment of human goals, or enhancement of human status and position, sometimes so intense it irrationally threatens the habitat and well-being of persons, groups, and nations, even the viability of life on earth in general.¹⁸

Language itself; the morally purposeful body motion Burke calls the “basic unit of action,” action’s “lowest common denominator”;¹⁹ the tangible products of that action we call “artifacts”; sacred, social, and physical classifications of every kind, from worst to best; and a difficult-to-resist incentive to take our strivings to extremes of self-indulgence or self-denial: They all derive from the infinite-negative, a sense of “what is not” so sweeping and profound, Burke needed poetry to do justice to its hold on human life:

If, to seek its level,
Water can all the time
Descend,
What God or Devil
Makes men climb
No end?²⁰

Men and women “climb” through interference with causes in nature. Language imperiously says “no,” or an unnaturally intensified “yes” via negation of the negative, to those physical impulses. It reigns them in as drives and desires. Or it blows right past them as drives and desires that can be *sated*, *satisfied*, in terms of mere biology. What results is fourteen features of human life that distinguish persons from the lower animals (certainly “lower” in stratified fossil remains), that give evidence for the validity of Burke’s anthropology.

Observe the many ways humans transcend, bend, shape, oppose, hide, or manifestly reject, nature in the raw---in each case in response to negatively informed “rules” of some kind:

Burial of the Dead

Humans bury their dead relatives and friends, other members of their community, esteemed persons from any and every walk of life, even the despised and anonymous. They

don't let the corpse just lie there, discarded on the ground, baking and decaying in the sun the way other animals do. Such callous disregard would offend human dignity. Persons dare *not* do it, not only for reasons of health and hygiene, but also for reasons of respect and honor.

Humans usually bury their dead with added symbolic memorialization of some kind: a gravestone with a religious symbol cut into it, or a wooden marker shaped like a cross, crescent, or star of David; the names of the deceased and the dates of their life span carved into the stone or written on the wooden marker; perhaps with an epitaph, consisting of a verse or laudatory statement about the deceased and their achievements. The symbolic nature of graveyard memorials is their most salient feature.

Of course, at their death great or powerful personages are sometimes accorded monuments to their status in life that outstrip the ordinary in exponential terms. The pyramids of Egypt, the Taj Mahal in India, the tombs of Napoleon and Grant, the cemetery statues that bear witness to important accomplishments or high social standing in sunnier days fulfill the *thou-shalt-nots* of mortuary etiquette to grand, if not excessive, effect.

Nonverbal animals have no culture of death, no moral sensibilities, no rules of recognition or procedure when offspring, parents, or siblings cease to live. They allow nature to take its course in open daylight. They know no better, they have no vision of anything "better." For an anthropologist, burial or memorialization of the dead is one of the primary signs of fully human existence.

Worship

Humans build altars of worship to the Divine, and bow in prayer before them. Or they worship and revere a personalized supernatural force presumed to exist in the objects of nature. This "vastness of magnitude, power, or distance, disproportionate to ourselves," as Burke has called it, is relatively unabstracted in animism.²¹ Animism is a primitive or archaic religion that pays homage to a presumably purposive power separately inherent in a tree or rock or violent storm. That power is called "mana" among some Pacific Islanders.²²

The great monotheisms that evolved out of such primitive and polytheistic religions completed this process of abstraction.

In Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, for instance, one God created the heavens and the earth and rules over all. In monotheism, that personalized “vastness of magnitude, power, or distance, disproportionate to ourselves” takes on a unity and coherence that can potentially subsume all peoples and things, explain all phenomena and processes, and serve as a summary term for every human motivation. This thrust toward a perfected order or dialectic is particularly evident when that transcendent force is bifurcated into both benign and malign manifestations, a God and a Devil. The world of the spirit then mirrors and integrates the polarities of choice and action humans confront in their lives every day. That spiritual world encompasses the good and the bad.

Religions make profound use of the negative. The *thou-shalt-nots* of the Ten Commandments, along with the Genesis story that builds toward them, became, for Burke, the “representative anecdote” of human symbolic action, Burke scholar Robert Wess suggests.²³ Sacred writings, like the Hebrew Scriptures, the Christian New Testament, and the Muslim Koran offer prescriptions and proscriptions for living. Religion and ethics, worship and the negative, go hand in hand. The negative opens up the infinite beyond that serves as the ultimate object of worship. The religious symbol on the altar, for modern votaries at any rate, is *not* the transcendent force being venerated, and is *not* recognized as such. The worship experience serves as the centerpiece and celebration of the highest obligations to which men and women pay homage, or give lip service, in personal and corporate endeavor.

Nonverbal animals do not pray or bow down in worship to a god. They have no conception of God, religion, or worship. Human beings do.

Clothing

Unlike nonverbal animals, humans wear clothes. Even in hot weather, they wear clothes that cover their pudendum, etymologically that of which they are “ashamed.”²⁴ They do so in response to a social taboo and a legal statute that says, in effect, “Thou shalt *not* run around naked. Such behavior is beneath your dignity. It exposes to public view biological equipment for procreation and elimination that functions exactly like that of apes and chimpanzees. You accentuate animality and diminish

personality parading around in your “birthday suit.””

Behavioral exceptions pointedly “prove the rule” in respect to this restriction. Protest movements by the young, like those of the 1960s and early 1970s in USAmerica and in Europe, often featured vulgarities and profanities of a sexual, scatological, or religious nature. In response to the unpopular Vietnam War, crude four-letter terms for intercourse, micturation, and defecation became the shouted argot of the day at mass meetings and marches. “Streaking,” running through crowds without any clothes on, both indoors and out, was the fad of the time, even, on occasion, public copulation at rallies and rock concerts.²⁵

Clothing, of course, not only negatively covers what is forbidden to be shown in public. It “positively” and symbolically identifies persons as likely members of a certain class, practitioners of some profession or occupation, or participants in a purposive team effort of some kind, athletic, social, or commercial. Military personnel wear distinctive uniforms. Physicians put on a white coat and tie. Ministers and priests identify themselves with a long robe and a clerical collar. A business manager dons a three-piece suit and white shirt. Factory workers go to their jobs with the proverbial blue collar around their neck; office workers, a white one. Bellhops and baseball players sport their well-defined garb. These operatives send a message with their clothing that speaks, symbolically, of status and purpose, placement at a higher or lower point on the social ladder of value, and the quest for something “better” that “does not yet exist.” In this way, clothing takes on additional connotations of the negative, as all symbols do, positive or negative connotations as to worth or desirability.

Lower animals know nothing of clothing, either as covering for the morally “indecent” or as hierarchally-charged insignia.

Private Biological Functions

Closely related to proscriptions against public nudity, humans perform certain biological functions in private, not in public, places. They do *not* copulate on the front lawn. They do *not* eliminate in the village square. Such behavior would invite attention not only from police and courts of law. It would summon the men and women in white coats. Thou shalt *not* take actions of this kind in broad daylight, both law and custom enjoin.

Nonverbal animals, of course, express no such inhibitions.

They do what physically comes naturally wherever and whenever nature calls. Mark Twain put it well: Animals show no sense of shame, nor, unlike us, do they have a need to.

They are not “moralized by the negative.”

Symbolic Rites of Passage and Transcendence

Like any other animal, human beings change physically across their span of life. They are born as little, perhaps eight-pound, babies. They eat, drink, and grow larger, learning to walk and talk, run and jump and throw and feed themselves in the process. They experience a second spurt of growth at puberty, usually in their early teens. They grow into adulthood and become ready to “mate” and have children of their own.

A lengthy course of gradual physical decline sets in after the peak exuberance of late adolescence and early adulthood. Half a century or so of aging brings a body to senescence and decrepitude. Eyes no longer focus well, muscles tire easily, brains lose weight and cognitive dexterity. Humans can no longer do what they once could. Disease and injury afflict the elderly as never before. Sooner or later, death arrives. The fleshy parts of the body decompose. Only the bones endure as biological reminders of a once-lived life.

This happy but sad scenario is what the novelist Samuel Butler might call “the way of all flesh.” For lions and tigers, the cycle just happens, without comment or “to do.” For humans, these physiological developments, unritualized, are *not* good enough. They need to be transcended, overcome, invested with a higher symbolic meaning. They need to be celebrated in respect to their beneficial aspects, or “risen above” in regard to their “negative,” restrictive features. The body and its blind motions are *never* satisfactory in themselves for the symbol-using animal.

Humans therefore “christen” or “baptize” new-born babies in one way or another, give them a name and symbolic entrée into a faith of a kind that likely promises eternal significance, if not eternal life. At puberty, the onset of adulthood, they “confirm” the young person in the faith with a “bar mitzvah”-type ritual of some sort, a rite of passage from childhood to more grownup responsibilities. When they reach that stage of sexual *and* social development where they are ready to reproduce themselves, these young adults don’t just copulate willy-nilly, scattering infants

hither and yon for no apparent reason other than biological necessity. Or, if they do, they are looked down upon by the social order as “illegitimate” parents. They “marry.” They present themselves in formal, specialized garb before the altar of God, in the company of formally attired relatives and friends, witnesses all, and pledge themselves in solemn ceremony to a lifetime of faithful, monogamous relationship. Their physical, biological union takes on a transcendent and eternal meaning in accordance with the sacred rules of their religious community.

Birthday parties for their children and anniversary celebrations follow. The planet earth spins on its axis at a 23 ½ degree angle and revolves around the sun, making occasion for the symbolic overlay of “days,” “seasons,” and “years.” These natural processes and rhythms of life are not allowed to “just happen,” silently, meaninglessly. They require a “liturgy” of remembrance and anticipation. They demand “significance,” a role in shaping human lives and relationships into meaningful form. We can, in fact, alternatively define “drama” along these very lines, as the superimposition of perfected hierarchal order and transcendent moral, and aesthetic, meaning on the partial chaos and potential meaninglessness of life.

Near the close of a human life, a retirement dinner may mark the transition from productive, able-bodied work at some job or profession, to a more leisurely existence of travel, gardening, golf, or other activities that “sum things up.” One’s body can no longer stay with the daily grind as it once did. Eventually, life in support of personhood expires. The heart stops beating. The brain stops thinking. Electro-chemical reactions up and down the limbs of the body cease *in toto*. Only the micro-organisms that scavenge formerly living cells and tissues continue operation. The “person” is dead, but a funeral service in a church, synagogue, mosque, or mortuary reverently commemorates the passing of the loved one. It sends him or her off in hope of an enduring life beyond the grave, or a lasting legacy in this world of beginnings and endings. In the words of the Melchior Vulpus hymn, this rite of passage says: “O Lord of life, where e’er they be, safe in Thine own eternity: living or dying, they’re with Thee. Alleluia. Alleluia. Alleluia.”

Tools and Other Artifacts

Humans manufacture standardized tools, and tools for making tools, and other artifacts. These tools and other artifacts shape nature's resources into material goods that make human life "better." Use of stones, wooden twigs and branches, and bundles of hay, grass, and mud to fabricate something beneficial is *not*, by itself, necessarily good enough for human beings. It may serve the biological purposes of beavers and birds. Without "art" or artifice, without acquired skill wrought by practice and higher levels of learning, and usually without added symbolic meaning, mere use of materials at hand to build, say, a shelter will *not* suffice for human beings.

Instinctive, unreflective employment of environing materials to fashion nests and dens, as per the works of bobolinks and bears, lacks, also, a capacity for growth, change, cultural development. It leads to no progressive "improvement" over time, creative ramification of product design and modes of operation (except for that occasioned by the macro-evolutionary changes in DNA and resulting animal reflexes over millions of years). Animal instinct creates no cultural forms and formations that, through trial and error and the acquired knowledge that ensues from those experiments, can evolve into new and more complex cultural forms and formations. Standardized tools and the artistically practical products they generate are basic indexes of distinctively human life.

The artistic or symbolic dimensions of human artifacts deserve particular note. They would include the steeple of a church pointing toward the heavens, the stately columns at the front of a courthouse or legislative building, the hood ornament on an automobile, the carved head at the bow of a sailing vessel. These aspects find prominent expression in the friezes and gargoyles on ancient and medieval public buildings. Even the cereal-box simplicity of modern commercial architecture sends its visual message to the passerby: "We're about business here," the structure states, "not social service or ceremony." The towering height of today's skyscraper shouts loudly and clearly its modern message: Commerce rules, not aesthetics or religion.²⁶

For paleontologists and anthropologists, the presence of tools and the practical products they fashion, serve, along with burial of the dead, as one of the clearest indications of the presence of human life.

Art for Art's Sake

Humans not only add on to their practical goods and creations an artistic or symbolic value. Unlike nonverbal animals, very much unlike nonverbal animals, they imitate, interpret, and transcend their life and actions through artistic productions that confer a higher meaning on the events they experience. They regularly do so without reference to any utilitarian benefit whatsoever.

In nature, things just happen. There's continuous flux and change. One darn thing, or complex of things, follows another ad infinitum. No true "events" occur because, in nature *sans* the human mind, there's no negative sensibility, at least no morally imperative negative sensibility, to motivate the separation of one part of the continuum from another. Moral meaninglessness, ultimate insignificance, a dumb, blank nihilism of the kind Melville symbolized by the "whiteness of the whale" in *Moby-Dick*---such spiritual emptiness humans find intolerable, except as they call attention to it and implicitly decry it.²⁷

Humans could therefore very much be labeled not only the "political" animal after Aristotle, the "rational" animal after the Enlightenment philosophers, the "social" animal after Adam Smith, or the "symbolic" or "dialectical" animal after Burke, but also the "artistic" animal. From the murals painted by cave dwellers twenty thousand years ago to the latest popular song, movie, or Broadway hit, humans have been trying to make sense of their life in the face of potential meaninglessness. All of it, or part of it, has to add up to something, we tend to think, or hope. The artist says: I'm going to tell you or show you what that significant something is.

So, we have theaters where dramas are enacted, where imitations and interpretations of human life are played out, live, via spoken words and expressive actions, under lights and against make-believe scenery. We have novels, short stories, and poems to read, that argue for one particular view of experience in opposition to other possible constructions. We have paintings and sculptures that give a visual impression of persons, places, or things that goes beyond mere reproduction. We have music and dance that delight the ear and the eye through pleasing patterns of repetition and change. All of these arts can fill us with emotion, alter our mood, inspire us to heights of aspiration, transform or reinforce our perspectives. In and of themselves, none have a

direct and practical value for the consumer. They entertain. They educate. They uplift. They make some sense of it all, or try to, or at least fill a potential void in the human soul with skillfully satisfying combinations of words, sounds, or images.

Even the practical Romans had their theater and their poets. No human society endures without art for its own sake. No other animal species even thinks in artistic terms.

Irony

Humans express a sense of irony via comic laughter or tragic anguish. Irony is directly related to negative intuition. It can be defined as a reversal of meaning, a negation of expectations, a recognition that what was “right” and proper under the circumstances, or appropriate, or anticipated, or “in character,” did not occur. Rather the very opposite result came to pass, or something sharply at variance. In literature or other discourse, irony is often humor, ridicule, or light sarcasm that adopts a mode of speech the intended implication of which is the reverse of the literal sense of the words.²⁸ To paraphrase Korzybski and other general semanticists, in irony the words are doubly “not the thing,” the map “not the territory.”²⁹

On the comic side, most jokes trade in irony. Standup comedian Henny Youngman used to say, “Take my wife---*please!*” It was his signature joke. At first utterance, the phrase “take my wife” sounded like a transitional expression along the order of, “Take my wife, for instance,” or, “Take my wife, for example.” It appeared to be a lead-in to an anecdote of some sort. The sudden introduction of “please,” spoken emphatically after a short pause, as a substitute for the expected illustrative terminology, changed the meaning of “take my wife.” Listeners were now being invited to literally and physically “take” her away from him, get her off his hands and out of his life, not figuratively consider her as epitomizing some quality or attribute he was going to talk about. The accentuated “please” reversed, negated, the ostensible meaning of “take my wife.”

On the tragic side, the “irony of fate”³⁰ can often fill the human heart with an anguish about “what might have been,” *if* events had *not* turned in ways that just weren’t foreseen, timely, or fit, given the situation. A person might show tremendous promise as a youth. He has talent, intelligence, a winning way with his

peers. He's "going places," everyone in his community says. He'll be a CEO at thirty and President of the United States at forty-five. Yet, he ends up a penniless dope addict on skid row.

Another promising young person with beauty and musical gifts of extraordinary quality, headed without a doubt for the title Miss America and then an illustrious career on the concert stage, gets cut down in an automobile accident in a matter of seconds. She wasn't drinking. She wasn't even driving. She was a passenger in the wrong car at the wrong time. Now her gifts and promise are gone, fatally negated by someone else's careless misjudgment. Death itself, even death at the end of a seemingly long and productive life, is something of a tragic irony. Such personal greatness, such uniqueness---it's all gone so quickly. Human life is "nasty, brutish, and short," philosopher Thomas Hobbes said.³¹ Even in the best of times, it can conjure ironic thoughts "too deep for tears."³²

Nonverbal animals do not laugh, neither do they smile, at the contretemps of life. Nor do they keen in tragic melancholy over the wistful *what-might-have-beens* that fate snatches from them. They have no sense of irony. They have no feel for the infinite-negative, no appreciation of a morally better outcome that a particular intuition, of a limitless beyond and countless possibilities, can summon in the human mind.

Killing for No "Good" Reason

Humans sometimes kill members of their own species, occasionally in massive numbers, for no pragmatic reason. They can kill for non-nutritive, non-procreative, non-territorial purposes. Other animals kill to gain something practical, it seems. Humans sometimes kill only to propitiate guilt.

Male lions, we all know, will kill lion cubs fathered by another animal in order to get their mother to mate with them, start a new "family" that will carry on their hereditary properties. Insects, reptiles, even some mammals, will eat the young of their species to sate their hunger. Animal combat for territory within species is legendary. Even though much of this mayhem falls short of death to the loser, it does not always do so. Animals do get killed in territorial disputes. All such conflicts make some "sense" in terms of physical needs. Complex bodies of every kind need food, sex, and space in which to live.

Obviously, humans kill animals of other species for food, though social and religious sanctions strongly prohibit cannibalism. Many a person has murdered another in a marital dispute. The Simpson trial of the mid-1990s popularized the truism that the husband is always a suspect when a wife is murdered. Marauding bands and armies throughout history have killed male populations and taken their women for themselves. Tribes and nations have gone to war against tribes and nations to expand their frontiers since the beginning of human history. Most lethal human combat is “practical” in nature, at least in substantial part.

But not all of it. Genocidal warfare, compulsive serial killings, murder seemingly for the sake of murder stand out also in the history of this strange species. How do we explain an Adolf Hitler, a Ted Bundy, a Jack the Ripper? The Nazi genocide of the Jews during World War II made little pragmatic sense. It certainly wasn't about food, sex, or territory. Was it about gold fillings and other possessions? What the Germans gained in “goods” from this atrocity didn't come close to compensating for what it drained from the country's war effort. This genocide made no practical sense. Nor do the driven crimes of the serial killer.

Not only Burke has speculated about the ritual, morally purgative, socially solidifying nature of so much of the killing perpetrated by persons and their governments.³³ Literary and cultural critic Rene Girard has built a whole system of sociological theory on the notion of the “founding murder” and its ceremonial reenactments.³⁴ In their religion and politics, humans unite around real and mythic stories of banishment and death. The scapegoat mechanism operates on the personal and on the social levels. Our sins are loaded on the back of the “sacrificial vessel” or vessels, whence they are carried away with their demise.³⁵

Guilt for sin and the purgative cleansing that follows, through a sometimes repeated, ritual “slaying” of someone, some persons, or some thing, derives from the hortatory negative, the negative of command. Thou shalt *not* do such and such, or else. On this point also, Burke waxes poetic:

Here are the steps
In the Iron Law of History
That welds Order and Sacrifice:

Order leads to Guilt
(for who can keep commandments!)

Guilt needs Redemption
 (for who would not be cleansed!)
 Redemption needs Redeemer
 (which is to say, a Victim!)

Order
 Through Guilt
 To Victimage
 (hence Cult of the Kill)³⁶

As Burke says, it's not the killing of the other by and of itself that usually brings moral cleansing. It's the killing *and* the "consubstantiality," the simultaneous "dying and not dying," the identification of some trait in the victim that mirrors oneself, as one wields the knife. The homicidal act then becomes a "vicarious" slaying of the self, a destruction of the impurities one suspects he himself possesses. Those impurities are carried off, at least temporarily, with the passing of the partially similar brother or sister.³⁷

Hitler feared he was part Jewish, some historians have said. His paradigmatic act of genocide may have been a symbolic suicide by a leader with an obviously pronounced "death wish." He ordered his generals to fight to the last man in Africa and at Stalingrad. He engaged in sexual perversions of a disgustingly masochistic bent. He ultimately shot his dog and himself and buried his nation in rubble.³⁸

"Athletic" Self-Denial

Humans frequently discipline themselves, deny themselves physical satisfactions, with an intensity that can justifiably be called "athletic."³⁹ Such extreme self-abnegation--notice the negative in self-*abnegation*---often derives from religious motives.⁴⁰ Sometimes it comes from the hierarchal desire to be "number one" in a sports contest, or in political, social, or economic competition. It may result from a pathological need to make oneself "better" by trimming all fat from one's body, via anorexic or bulimic strategies of diet and exercise.

Lower animals are tempted by no such motivations. When they're hungry, they hunt for food and eat it, or perhaps store a limited quantity for winter consumption. When they're

“in heat,” they copulate. When they’re sated and tired, they rest. They don’t “drive” themselves almost “beyond endurance” in quest of a “perfected vision” of discipleship, championship, or Twigg-like physical “beauty.”

Burke takes especial note of this uniquely human tendency in the section entitled “Pure Persuasion” in *A Rhetoric of Motives*.⁴¹ “Pure Persuasion,” Burke says, is persuasion, incentive, motivation that comes from “the ‘transcendent’ nature of symbolism itself.”⁴² It has nothing to do with animal appetites or practical advantage-seeking. It is “purified” of such base considerations.

Language itself serves as a motive in human life, not just physical cravings and instinctual urges. The linguistic motive centers in negative moralization, placement of human beings in an infinite and eternal “scene” that argues very persuasively for “perfect,” faultless control of one’s carnal desires. Language so motivates on the ascetic slope of the nonpragmatic, anyway. It generates a “pure purpose,” a purpose not corrupted by a lust for things and gratifications of a biologically useful variety alone.⁴³ The “pure” satisfactions of symbolism derive from completion of its formal requirements. Language says, “Don’t ever.” The “athleticism of abstinence” or the “athleticism of self-denial” in general fulfills those commandments to a “T.”⁴⁴

The priestly vow of “poverty, chastity, and obedience” illustrates well the linguistic goad of “pure persuasion” turned inward. It commits the postulant to a life of heroic abstemiousness. He will not accumulate properties, have sexual intercourse with a woman, or assert his own will and ego in opposition to higher religious authority. He will honor the “form” of abstention that language reveals most fully, to “the end of the line.”⁴⁵

Nonsymbolic animals know of no such austerity, or the “freedom” that it can bring.⁴⁶ Their motives are wild, untamed, un-“purified.”

“Athletic,” Nonpragmatic Self-Aggrandizement

The “pure persuasion” of symbolism can be turned inward, yes, in actions of extreme and persistent self-discipline. It can also be turned outward, it can be reversed, in acts of insatiable acquisitiveness. Burke explains:

At the very least, even without intense competitive pressure, any sheer cult of self-denial would be enough, in its austerity, to build up resistances which the body and the mind found gratification in breaking down again. Hence, just as self-denial could come of persuasion, so an acquisitive “negating of the negation” could come from the same source. And for our part, rather than treating the fantastic acquisitiveness of imperialists as a mere “mental replica” of biological desires, we would explain it thus roundabout, as *the dialectical transformation of self-denial into its opposite*.⁴⁷

Dialectic: Among other things, it means conversing across an abyss that divides; looking for, anticipating, dealing with, and even reconciling opposing terms and views, finding the common ground that unites seeming contradictories.⁴⁸

The result:

Even in most “primitive accumulation,” wealth is not sought for itself alone, but for its “transcendent” value as insignnia.⁴⁹

In this way, Burke goes on, “The frenzied human cult of advantage, the quest of many things that cannot bring real advantage yet are obtainable, would likewise seem ultimately to require such a ‘meta-rhetorical’ explanation.”⁵⁰ Or, to put it another way, “A ritual acquisition is no acquisition, hence is intrinsically an interference with the ways of acquisitiveness (though we would not deny that such rituals of the nonacquisitive might themselves, in bringing the performer prestige and other rewards, serve to his [sic] advantage in the most directly acquisitive sense).”⁵¹

Let’s look at some examples of no-pragmatic-value acquisitiveness, accumulation of “goods” as a formal demand of language, not as a practical strategy for taking care of the natural needs of human beings. Many very wealthy persons are collectors of extraordinary things and amounts of such things. Instead of collecting stamps, or ornaments of a certain kind to decorate their homes, like owls or frogs or coffee mugs or “cat’s meows,” however, they amass Rolls Royces or Bentleys or Harley-Davidsons. Jay Leno, host of NBC’s *Tonight Show*, is such a collector of cars, he has told us. What real “good” of a practical kind does ownership of more than one or two vehicles

per person do? It may bring great psychological satisfaction, men and women being essentially symbol-using animals, obsessed with a vision of infinite-negative fulfillment, “goaded by the spirit of hierarchy” and “rotten with perfection.”⁵² Ownership of this kind will fetch prestige and “social reverence” in this world of inveterate symbol-users, no doubt about it.⁵³

Such hoarding, such “lay[ing] up of treasures on earth,” though, generates practical problems, not solutions to practical problems. These conveyances require housing, maintenance, perhaps even protection, even though they may never be used except for occasional “exercise” or mere display.

Ted Turner’s collection affords another illustration. Turner, billionaire founder of CNN and world-wide satellite cable television, collects land, real estate. He owns twenty-two properties in the United States and Argentina. They total “nearly two million acres, or the rough equivalent of the land area of Delaware and Rhode Island combined,” journalist Ken Auletta says.⁵⁴ Those holdings make Turner the biggest private land owner in the United States. They take up roughly half of Turner’s time, or did so, as he tended to them and traveled from one ranch to another.

Turner’s preoccupation with his collection of socially-revered insignia might not have posed a problem---if he had wanted to make land development or conservation his full-time job. He didn’t. He wanted also to run CNN and all the ancillary businesses that were a part of it before he merged his company with *Time Warner*.

That was his life. After his lavish purchases, there was no such luck. Turner was fired from his job, in part because his bosses at the parent company couldn’t get hold of him when they wanted to. He would be off in the wilds of New Mexico somewhere, riding a horse or cataloguing species of animal life. He couldn’t offer advice on many pressing corporate decisions because he was incommunicado. Ted Turner, then at age 62, was “jobless.”⁵⁵

You might not want to shed tears over Ted Turner. His story of no-pragmatic-advantage, even reverse-pragmatic-advantage (at least in the short run), self-aggrandizement might seem extreme. The fact is, though, basic human needs, real needs, are limited. “Biologically,” Burke says, “it is of the essence of man [sic] to desire. By the same token, biologically it is of the essence of man to be sated. Only the motives of ‘mystery’ (making for development towards ever higher degrees of ordination

[or hierarchal attainment]) are infinite in their range, as a child learns for himself when he first thinks of counting ‘to the highest number.’”⁵⁶

Burke offers an eloquent commentary on the final “value” of man and woman’s unending search for “more magic”:

The motive is not “greed.” We could almost wish that it were, for greed might be sated, appeased, or grow weary. But the striving for “more reverence” in the social realm, this unconscious caricature of the quest for the divine, this illusion made “normal,” can have no end. To seek for God in godly ways might be striving enough; all the more must the striving be endless, when men [sic] are “seeking for God” in terms of a social illusion⁵⁷

Culture

All of them in one way or another devolving from the negative of command, the distinctively human attributes we’ve touched on thus far relate, more tightly in some cases, less so in others, to the notion of rules. The last three traits we’ll deal with get increasingly more global and specific in respect to rules. The cultures, sports, and political institutions that characterize human life prominently rest on the *thou-shalt-nots* of language.

By and large, human cultures do so implicitly. Sports and government constitute significant parts of a culture, to be sure. The rules they impose on participants and citizens are usually very specific. Many of the prohibitions that shape a culture, though, are not so clear-cut, nor are they necessarily inflexible. The interplay of limitation and constraint, on the one hand, and elasticity and mobility, on the other, establishes the contours of human social living.

The notion of culture encompasses the normative lifeways or social pathways of a given tribe, region, nation, or other grouping of human beings. These lifeways or pathways are given shape by what contemporary theorists call “ideology.” An “ideology” can be defined as a system of representational practices, discursive and nondiscursive, or verbal and nonverbal, that enable persons to “see” and accept their society’s values and hierarchal structure, and their appointed place in that structure. These communicative practices argue for such acceptance, often,

if not usually, subliminally.⁵⁸

Culture, then, is something of the outworking, unfolding, or concrete expression of ideology in the life of a people. It is the “best” way to live, the patriarchs and matriarchs believe. It is better than other cultures. It is certainly better than life in a “state of nature” with no explicit or implicit rules at all.⁵⁹

Obviously, different cultures define “deviance” and treat deviance in manifestly different ways. In Muslim Afghanistan, women still wear veils and often lack educational and vocational opportunities. In Iran recently, a woman who acted in an adult movie was stoned to death for her “sin.” Culture in US America and Western Europe is far more permissive. It has, in fact, become so marked by disparities, it is now deemed “multicultural” by some scholars. A multicultural society is one in which subcultures, present in almost all social systems, become so numerous and accepted that no one mode of living is judged best or preferable. Alternate lifeways will be accepted as good by many. No one social formation is necessarily singled out as best.

Ideology and resultant cultural preferences are passed on to offspring via education. They change, develop, and evolve over time. Nonsymbolic animals experience neither culture nor cultural change.

Sports

Some nonverbal animals play, that is true. Little foxes and lion cubs wrestle and paw their siblings probably for fun as well as competitive profit. Dolphins apparently frisk and frolic with one another and with human beings as well.

They don’t play “games,” though. None of these animals do. They don’t keep score. They draw no physical lines beyond which the play is “out of bounds” and “does not count,” as per a baseball diamond, basketball or tennis court, or football gridiron. They make no rules that require the judgment of an outside observer, an umpire or referee, to enforce. Such animals certainly don’t make of their play a spectator sport that draws thousands of their kind to witness rule-based competition, and extract hierarchal satisfactions or disappointments from the observed activity via symbolic identification.

Human beings revel in the glory of token victory and the agony of imitative defeat that formal athletic competition brings. At the ballpark, their emotions ride on the very few inches that

separate the four-hundred-foot drive that is “fair” and the one that is “*not* fair.” The negative of command; rule-based conflict of a representative, athletic kind; symbolic allegiance in respect to the teams or competitors at play; “victory” of the sort that wins pennants, trophies, cups, or medals, and that becomes part of the cultural memory and unifying substance of a community or nation--these features of the literal “games people play” distinguish those persons from all other creatures on the planet.

Government, Polity, the “Rule of Law” in Social and Economic Life

“Everything I want to do is either illegal, immoral, or fattening,” the jokesters sometimes say. A similar bromide states, “You can’t legislate morality.” These bits of folklore acknowledge a difference between many of the *no-nos* of culture and the stern and explicit warnings of “the law.” Finally and ultimately, the negative transcends and transforms the animality of human existence through comprehensive systems of legal prohibition. The *thou-shalt-nots* propounded by councils and kings, legislatures, prime ministers, and presidents, and enforced by police and judiciaries, threaten far more onerous penalties than social ridicule and rejection. You can do “hard time” in jail for breaking “Article 2, Paragraph 5,” or what have you, of your state’s or nation’s criminal code, even, perhaps, suffer a lethal injection.

This salient attribute of distinctively human life needs little elaboration. The details of its operation overwhelm our media each day. What the U.S. Senate and House are up to, for example, what the president is doing to steer legislation toward his vision of the nation’s future, whom to tax and by what percent, toward which projects and priorities tax revenues ought to be allocated, whether to suspend the death penalty for capital crimes in one state or in every state, or allow a woman to obtain an abortion in the first and second trimesters or in none at all, whether to legalize or continue to criminalize the use of mind-altering drugs---these questions preoccupy our newspapers and magazines, as well as our television news and internet blogs.

So also do reports of specific lawbreaking and its aftermath in our communities and our country. From high-profile crime and court cases like the “O. J.” saga to the recent wave of vandalism of

automobiles and mailboxes in such-and-such a suburb, our news media focus on the law and its violations with laser-like intensity. They do so because readers and listeners are interested. The law and its legal sanctions cut to the heart of orderly, civilized living of the kind only humans can conjure and establish in even those huge mass associations we call nation-states.

Nonverbal animals do not institute nation-states. They are innocent of laws and the feeling and notion of guilt for violating them. They herd together, if they herd together, on the basis of unconscious instinct. They have no politics or the legal prohibitions that mark the boundaries of political life. Nonsymbolic animals have none because they possess neither language in general nor the moral negative of command that informs and energizes symbolic action and the purposeful motions and artifacts that are their culmination.

Conclusion

Ethologists like Desmond Morris overstate their case. Human beings are far, far more than just “naked apes.” They are embedded in an animal’s body, it is true. Humans experience the same physical drives of hunger, thirst, and sex as do other earthly creatures. They do not feel those impulses, or respond to them, in the same ways, however. They shape them, modify them, channel them, inhibit them, transcend them in the service of “higher” or “lower” ethically-tinged purposes. Humans “dramatize” their life and actions.

Drama involves, as we said, the superimposition of perfected hierarchal order and transcendent moral and aesthetic meaning on the partial chaos and potential meaninglessness of life. It is free, strategic, goal-directed striving, within and in terms of a socially-created reality, context, or system, some narrowed and partialized symbolic perspective, against enemies, resistances, and odds, to achieve a valued outcome that will help to right some wrong, with an incentive to do so in as perfect a way as possible.

Drama is inherent in language and human life. It is a universal form. To repeat: “The intensities, morbidities, or particularities of mystery [or drama],” Burke says, “come from institutional sources [at a time and place], but the *aptitude* comes from the nature of man [sic], generically, as a *symbol-using animal*.”⁶⁰ Language and its products establish and give shape to Burke’s philosophical anthropology.

That anthropology points to the cross-cultural, transhistorical tendencies of human beings to rise above moral meaninglessness and sheer animalism via burial of their dead; worship of the Divine; use of clothing; need for procreative privacy; devotion to ceremonial rites of passage; manufacture of tools and other artifacts; artistic expression for its very own sake; ironic reflection on the tragi-comedy of life; no-pragmatic-advantage slaying of other persons for ritual purification; self-denial or self-aggrandizement that defies the “logic” of biological impulses; development of a culture, a socially-created context of meaning that both strives for the “best” and narrows one’s range of alternatives; invention of games and creation of political systems founded on statutory rules of behavior that prohibit and threaten.

At their core, all of these features of distinctively human life, individual and social, derive from the negative of command. Thou shalt not do, or not fail to do, such and such, or else. Your compliance will, it must, make life “better.”

One more observation: A more recent scientific development poses something of a challenge to the scenario above, more recent than ethology, early Derrida, or the findings on genetic similarities. That theory is sociobiology. Some researchers in the life sciences, like Edward O. Wilson, have argued for what they call “consilience,” or the unification of knowledge, founded on scientific materialism. Like Burke, these theorists support very much the notion of a “human nature.” But like Darwin, they downplay differences between humans and other animals. Brain function of any kind, symbolic or nonsymbolic, seems to be only a matter of “information processing,” they suggest, analogous to the mechanical workings of a very high-tech computer. Study of the arts and the humanities, as well as the social sciences, can ostensibly be conflated with work in evolutionary developmental biology and psychology.⁶¹

Two counterpoints call sociobiology and its implications at least into question: One is the hardly deniable substance of this chapter. Something revolutionary clearly happened roughly 200,000 years ago with the appearance of *homo sapiens*, *homo loquax*, *homo dialecticus*, choose your term. Progress in powers of adaptation, transformation, and transcendence have obtrusively accompanied linguistic facility. Chimpanzees have not made it to the moon, nor have they built cities or composed symphonies. Whether there’s a “ghost in the [human] machine,” a concept psychologist Steven Pinker decries, we can tell from the outside

there's something going on in the human brain and mind that has radically altered the profile of life on planet earth. Evolutionist Ernst Mayr admits as much. He rhetorically asks, "What is the probability that the human species will break up into several species? The answer is clear: none at all." That is, something unprecedented in man and woman precludes further winnowing of the species via the hard knocks of "natural selection." And, as already noted, philosopher Michael Lockwood, as well as cognitive scientists Christof Koch and Susan Greenfield, acknowledges that the human mind is still something of a "black box" when it comes to explaining human consciousness, self-awareness, or species-awareness. Why we're not actually like a machine nobody's yet figured out.⁶²

The second demurrer to Wilson's thesis comes from research in the "hardest" science of all, physics. One hundred years of quantum mechanics has thrown doubt on the whole notion of "materialism" itself. The subatomic quantum world is empty, unstable, unobservable, indeed inscrutable. "Matter" turns out to be mere "frozen energy," and not all that frozen. Particles are in a continuous---let's call it a discontinuous---flux of annihilation and recreation. They can be observed either as a wave or a particle, in their momentum or in their position, but not both a one time. It takes a cathedral-size space to put the parts of an atom, the nuclei and their electrons, into proportionate relationship. As Gary Zukav says in *The Dancing Wu Li Masters*, "In this world view, there is no substance." So gossamer is the idea of "matter" in the new physics, Lockwood conjures the relevance of the radical idealism of Bishop Berkeley in explanation of the world of the senses. Lockwood, to be sure, doesn't go the whole way with Berkeley's concept of "matter" as Divine Mind. He says, though, it's not as far fetched as it one time seemed.⁶³

Lockwood's book title: *Mind, Brain, and the Quantum*. Quantum theory and the manifest discontinuities wrought by human symbolic action problematize the attempted confluations of sociobiology.

Chapter 7

Application of Our “Fit-All-Finger” Paradigm of Dramatic Action to Some Well-Known American-English Literary Texts

Preview of a Few Additional Accouterments We’ll Be Enhancing Our Exemplary Pattern with along the Way

That’s enough background and preliminary support for what we’re now going to attempt. Those of you who actually read the last three chapters may, in fact, be thinking, “That’s more than I ever wanted to know about drama in language and life.” If

you skipped over the “little lower layer” chapters, we’ll now be picking things up where you left off.

What we plan to do here is apply the pattern of dramatic action offered in Chapter 3 to an analysis of *The Scarlet Letter*, by Nathaniel Hawthorne, and to *Moby-Dick*, by Herman Melville. (This pattern of “ritual drama” is rooted, as you’ll recall, in the very nature of language itself.¹) *The Scarlet Letter* and *Moby-Dick* are, by consensus, the two most towering of the nation’s novels written in the 19th century, with the possible exception of *Huckleberry Finn*. *Moby-Dick*, many critics would likely agree, is the Great American Novel, all time. As Charles Walcott puts it, “In *Moby-Dick* . . . Melville went farther into the mystery of man’s [sic] deathbound plight than any other American writer before or since.”² Reading it is like reading Shakespeare. One gets the feeling, how could any human being write this brilliantly and incisively, much less by age thirty-two.

We can learn much about USAmerican life and letters by studying these two books. We can especially learn a great deal about “Literature as Equipment for Living,” as dramatic action that serves purposes, practical as well as artistic, felt by authors and readers alike.³

One potential objection to what we’re proposing needs to be acknowledged and answered at the outset. Sociologist Peter Berger warns that paradigms are surprise-free. By that he means, paradigms are like procrustean beds. They will reveal what they are designed to reveal, but also conceal or cut away perhaps important features of whatever is under study. Like all language, paradigms will “select in” and “select out” aspects of reality simultaneously. In Burke’s words, symbolic constructions, including paradigms of any kind, will “select,” “reflect,” and “deflect,” at one and the same time, from what can potentially be brought to light.⁴ Any symbol or conformation of symbols will therefore “neglect” certain truths that are out there for the taking, rather than nurture them all and call them all to our attention.

Burke is characteristically modest in what he claims for his use of “ritual drama” in the study of both literature and rhetoric in general. He states:

By starting from a concern with the various tactics and deployments involved in ritualistic acts of membership, purification, and opposition, we can most accurately discover “what is going on” in poetry. I contend that the

“dramatic perspective” is the most unifying hub for this approach. . . . I do not by any means maintain that no other or better calculus is possible. I merely maintain that the advocate of an alternative calculus should establish its merits, not in the abstract, but by “filling it out,” by showing, through concrete applications to poetic materials, its scope and relevance.⁵

By the term “poetic,” Burke means all kinds of imaginative, even critical, literature. And, as he has said, “I have elsewhere called this approach to art ‘sociological,’ in that it can usefully employ coordinates bearing upon social arts in general.”⁶

In the preceding chapters, we demonstrated, we do believe, the ubiquity of ritual drama in its many guises and stages in human life. (Ritual: a routine, pro forma, virtually ceremonial pattern of action that is repetitive, symbolic, transformative, nearly compulsive, almost “magical” in its power to cleanse and organize the human mind and solidify some social grouping in respect to common purposes.) In chapters 1, 2, and 3, we uncovered the rootage of ritual drama in the most general, omnipresent paradigm no speaker of the English language can escape: the nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs---the content parts of speech---of linguistic utterance. Language itself, in its very nature, both reveals and conceals. A “calculus,” as Burke calls it, that stretches itself out across the syntactic expanses, such as they are, that symbolic forms open up, is *prima facie* a potentially useful approach to the critical study of communication.

In this chapter and the next two, therefore, we’ll get down to cases with respect to these two stories as exemplary acts of literary drama. Here and in the chapters that follow, we’ll apply our fit-all-finger standard with amplification from several other of Burke’s notions:

- (1) Cluster/agon analysis, especially as centered around guilt-obsessed actor vs. a guilty opponent, the “opposition” part of the “ritual” Burke mentions above. Such an exercise will involve a “filling out” of the dramatistic “calculus” via a careful “chart[ing]” of the linguistic equations, oppositions, and progressions to see “what is going on” by way of “strategies” to finesse the “situation” the author confronts.⁷

- (2) Form, or, as Burke defines it, “an arousing and fulfillment of desires [or expectations]” in literature, culminating in the “purification” referred to in Burke’s statement. The major formal pattern built into the human psyche is, from the dramatic angle, that of order/disorder, guilt, sacrifice, and redemption. This design would be a manifestation of “*syillogistic progression*,”⁸ as Burke calls it. Satisfying form is coupled with ideas and events readers can relate to. Such an apt combination generates “eloquence,” a “frequency of Symbolic and formal effects.”⁹ Symbolic effects in this sense are patterns of similar experience that both literary characters and the reader have had. Eloquence, then, results from a felicitous blend of recognizable content and form, the materials of a narrative and the way they are arranged.
- (3) Identification, both associative and dissociative, positive and negative, the “membership” aspect of the ritual acts. “Identification” is Burke’s key term in rhetoric. It results from a shared sense of allegiance to certain persons, values, or institutions. It can be equally engendered by a shared antipathy toward such agents and agencies, and the courses of action they stand for. Speechmakers in particular, but story-tellers too, will want to play to the loyalties, life experiences, even prejudices of their intended audience as a basis from which to work toward their final vision.¹⁰

I’ll here introduce in passing a few other tools from Burke’s toolbox that will come into play later for *Moby-Dick*:

- (4) Fatalistic foreshadowing that marks an agent or agents fit and eventual vessels for sacrifice, for ritual purification.¹¹ Such “portents” and “auguries” are so relentlessly numerous in Melville’s novel, they serve as the one element in the narrative Melville may have overdone.
- (5) *Moby Dick*, the Whale himself, as the noumenon

of nature and its tangible synecdoche as the “unanswerable opponent” we may, as a species, *homo loquax*, be confronting today. The current climate-change issue might bring Melville’s message to the fore as more ponderable than ever.¹²

- (6) Encompassment of a problematic situation in the century of “New Meanings,” 1800-1899.¹³ Melville was pretty obviously ahead of his time in sensing the challenge the new philosophy, scholarship, industrialism, geology, and science in general posed for traditional beliefs. His masterpiece was, when first published, dismissed by most critics and the reading public, even called “absurd” “trash” by one British reviewer.¹⁴ Not until the 1920s did the public mood catch up to Melville’s prescient tale.
- (7) A mixed motivational recipe¹⁵ that devolves from the . . .
- (8) Optical “double vision” of the Sperm Whale that serves as the informing metaphor in *Moby-Dick*. At a panel at the 1987 National Communication Association Convention in Boston, Burke said he suffered from double vision of the ocular variety, one would presume serendipitously, while he was writing *Permanence and Change*. Burke’s focal interest in *P&C* is “perspective by incongruity,” a strategy for transitioning from a maladaptive situation in the present to a more serviceable set of conditions in the future.¹⁶ What does it take to overcome those truncated blinders that one angle of view, one symbolically-limited vantage point, draws down over our mind’s eye? And is, therefore, *Moby-Dick* kind of Burkean, or quasi-Postmodern, before its time?
- (9) With its double-vision motif, occasioned by the natural physiology of whales, could *Moby-Dick* the tragedy in fact be open to interpretation via Burkean comedy, at least in part? Burke’s favored comedic perspective, or set of perspectives, is built around several features that seem to go with Aristotelian

tragedy: a sense of limitation, a species of fatalism, a call to charitable identification with both protagonist and antagonist in a drama.¹⁷

These nine themes taken from Burke will help us fathom, in particular, the meaning of what's been labeled the Great American Novel. First, though, let's anatomize structure in *The Scarlet Letter* and *Moby-Dick* from the vantage point of basic ritual drama.

Finding the Protagonist, the Carrier of the Drama, in *The Scarlet Letter* and *Moby-Dick*

Whose drama is it, anyway, in *The Scarlet Letter* and *Moby-Dick*? Who is the protagonist, the "good" guy or gal, in each narrative, the person or persons who at least represent or express the "truth" of the matter, as the author sees it? Who is, who are, the antagonists, the counteragents, the "bad" guys, if we may call them that? As in real life, all significant persons depicted in a play, novel, or short story have their own drama. They all interpret the situation and events their own way. Some of them will inevitably have sharply differing conceptions of what's gone wrong, who's to blame, and what should be done to set things right. We're not going to know what's intended to be going on in a work, or, as we read, what's supposed to be happening in our mind, until we perceive whose particular conflict and denouement are meant to determine a narrative's final meaning.

These questions are especially pertinent in interpreting *The Scarlet Letter* and *Moby-Dick*. *TSL* is told from what is called a third person omniscient point of view. That is, the author tells the story in his own voice, and he can look into everyone's mind and inform us what this character and that one are thinking. That narrative device makes it harder to know through which person's eyes we're most especially to construe the developments of the plot.

In Hawthorne's novel, Hester Prynne certainly seems to be the central character, at first glance. The initial 40 percent of the story is almost entirely about her and her travail in the Puritan settlement of Boston in the early 17th century. In the next 40 percent or so, she shares the spotlight pretty equally with her minister, the Rev. Arthur Dimmesdale. Hester is the one who

wears the scarlet letter “A” that makes for the title of the book. Isn’t she the main character?

The events in *Moby-Dick* are told from a different point of view. Melville uses a first-person narrative device. Ishmael, kind of a jack-of-all-trades, seeks employment on a whaling vessel in the New England of the early 1840s. He befriends a pagan harpooner from the South Pacific, finds a job on a ship called the *Pequod*, and tells us what happened on his fateful voyage under the command of the ship’s captain, Ahab by name.

Again, the narrative’s central drama, at the outset, seems to be that of Ishmael, the storyteller, the front-and-center personage of the early chapters. Ahab doesn’t even make an appearance until Chapter 28, one fifth into this 135-chapter book, and makes no significant contribution to the plot until Chapter 36. Can a late-arriving character become the central figure in a novel or play?

Yes, he or she can, or can seem to. Breaking down the term etymologically, a “pro/t/agon/ist” is the role-player, the “ist,” in a story. He or she struggles, argues, or enters into conflict, the “agon,” on behalf of, the “pro,” the redemptive vision or new understanding the author highlights or implies in the resolution of the action. Who, we should ask, is up front and at the center of things, vigorously acting in conflict with an opponent or opponents, in concrete expression of the story’s moral, either positively or ironically, at the climax? Perhaps he or she is actually speaking those words of wisdom.

That person is the protagonist. That “crunch time,” center-stage figure is the chief actor or agent in the drama, the bearer of, if not “good” news, at least “true” or useful insight, as the author would conceive it. In *The Scarlet Letter*, it is the Rev. Arthur Dimmesdale who, at the finish, thrusts aside with his polemics the blandishments of his enemy Rodger Chillingworth, climbs voluntarily upon the public platform of shame in the town square, makes a speech of confession and repentance to the assembled villagers, then rips open his shirt and shows to all the red letter “A” he had branded on his chest in painful self-torture. Dimmesdale becomes the physical and rhetorical embodiment of the philosophic statement Hawthorne offers in the “Conclusion”: “Be true! Be true! Be true! Show freely to the world, if not your worst, yet some trait whereby the worst may be inferred” (Chapter 24).

In *Moby-Dick*, Ishmael, the narrator, turns out to be a most perceptive observer of the central action, not performer of that

redemptive action. His lord and master on the high seas, Captain Ahab, seems to be the protagonist. Ahab defines the problem of the drama, or appears to; names the guilty party; devises a strategy of “cure” for the ills that obsess him; enlists the cooperation of coagents in the endeavor, the mostly savage crew of the ship; brings his attempted “sacrifice” of the enemy to frustrated fruition; and intones the words of revelation---*his* new understanding anyway---as he raises his lance at the climax: “Oh, now I feel my topmost greatness lies in my topmost grief” (Chapter 135). Ishmael offers commentary, analysis, significant support, and implied dissent in respect to the Captain’s actions. Starbuck serves as Ahab’s foil, his philosophic opponent, the counteragent to Ahab in that heroic quest for vindication.

In Outline, the Drama in *The Scarlet Letter*

In *The Scarlet Letter*, the basic moral problem that triggers the events of the drama is one and the same for both Hester and Dimmesdale: Hester gets pregnant out of wedlock and bears a child. They have been clandestine lovers. She’s a young, married English woman whose husband, more than a year after her immigration, had not yet arrived at the New England settlement. Dimmesdale is a popular minister in the town parish. The time, place, and context are early Colonial Puritan America, Boston of the 1630s. The relevant commandment, “Thou Shalt Not Commit Adultery,” is taken very seriously. Hester, obviously, cannot hide her sinful lawbreaking. She is punished: imprisoned, made to stand on the scaffold of shame in the town square with her illegitimate infant in her arms, and display on her breast an embroidered scarlet letter “A” then and in perpetuity as a reminder to her and to all the villagers not to flout any of the laws of God or the community.

Dimmesdale, in contrast, in his public life, plays the coward. To be sure, he frequently confesses to sinfulness in general in his eloquent sermons. His parishioners but love him the more for his noble humility. While Hester endures daily insults and obloquy from holier-than-thou neighbors and clients---she earns her living as a seamstress---Dimmesdale ascends to near sainthood in the eyes of pious Boston.

Privately, though, Dimmesdale desperately seeks redemption. He mortifies himself almost beyond endurance. He

whips himself in the privacy of his apartment with a “bloody scourge” (Chapter 11). He denies himself food and sleep, sometimes conducting all-night vigils. He prepares sermons of confession that he suppresses as soon as he’s in the pulpit. Yes, he even burns or cuts a letter “A” in the skin of his chest, in self-mocking emulation of the demeaning token Hester must exhibit publicly every day of her life. Once, he even climbs up on the platform of the pillory to stand where Hester stood, only he does so in the darkness of night! He grotesquely plays the scene to the hilt by enticing Hester and their daughter Pearl, seven by then, to come up and stand with him. Hester had been out on an emergency assignment, measuring for a burial garment for their deceased governor, and happened to pass by.

In short, Dimmesdale’s anticipatory attitude is both pious and perverse. He wants so much to redeem himself, but not to damage his career in the process. He both honors and flouts his culture’s deepest beliefs at one and the same time, suffering deeply and “laughing bitterly” as he flails himself, literally and figuratively (Chapter 11).

Meanwhile, Dimmesdale has gotten help, of a kind, in his program of self-torture. A “victimizer” has insinuated himself into the minister’s life. Hester’s husband, Roger Chillingworth, does finally arrive in the Boston colony, just in time to see Hester humiliated on the scaffold. Chillingworth is a physician. Incognito, he treats Hester’s near-hysteria in the prison before she is released. He is displeased with her, but does not reproach her severely. A much older person, he realizes his mistake in marrying a young woman.

No, Chillingworth is after bigger game. He seeks to discover, and wreck vengeance upon, the father of her child, whoever that might be. That man is the true culprit, as he conceives it. The male adulterer has no excuse for seducing the wife of someone he has never even met. Something of a devil-symbol or emblem of a bad conscience, Chillingworth finds his quarry, the now-sickly young pastor, moves into an adjacent apartment, and sets about to destroy the minister’s heart and mind.

How does Chillingworth scapegoat the physically failing young clergyman? He does so not by administering poisons or other deleterious substances in his treatments. On the contrary, the doctor wants to keep Dimmesdale alive. He torments his patient psychologically. He constantly probes, or attempts to probe, the “Interior of [His] Heart” (Chapters 10, 11). He offers to

the minister a psychosomatic diagnosis. Your symptoms suggest something is troubling your mind, he tells his patient. That's the true source of your ailments. Tell me what it is!

To his doctor, Dimmesdale alludes to his mental infirmities, but does not tell. Once, he storms out of the room in fevered protest. He confirms the doctor's suspicions, though, unawares. He falls asleep. Chillingworth sneaks to his side and opens his shirt. There the doctor beholds the "scarlet letter A." He laughs with diabolical "wonder" and satisfaction, stamping his feet in "rapture" and "joy" (Chapter 10).

There follows the minister's mockingly "mortifying" nighttime vigil on the scaffold. Hester sees, up close, what terrible damage has been done to her former lover these seven years, and what mesmerizing power Chillingworth has exercised over him. She later goes to her former husband and asks him, unsuccessfully, to desist. She then resolves to accost Dimmesdale in the forest on his return from visiting an Indian mission, and tell him all.

Hester does so. In the forest, a "moral wilderness" (Chapter 16), they argue over the revelation of her husband's identity, then reconcile. They plan to leave together on a boat for Bristol, England, after Dimmesdale preaches his Election Day sermon the next afternoon. Dimmesdale leaves the forest a transformed man, now resolved to turn his life in an altogether different direction.

Back in the civilized, rule-governed world of the village, however, Dimmesdale views his decision with alarm. Changed, indeed "transubstantiated"---Dimmesdale now possesses different "substance," an altered self-"identification," by virtue of the logic of seeing himself in a sharply divergent "scene"---he can neither go back to his former life of deception, nor go forward to a yet "sinful" life with Hester and their daughter. Through the night, he rewrites his sermon. He preaches it the next day with almost preternatural power and eloquence. Then, in the procession past the scaffold after the service, Dimmesdale breaks ranks with the other marchers, commands Hester and Pearl to come to him, deflects the diabolical Chillingworth's objections to what he is about to do, climbs atop the platform, confesses to everyone his long-hidden transgression, tears open his vestment, and dies, apparently of the cumulative strain of seven years of self-torment.¹⁸

The debt for sin having been paid, a compensatory offering having been made, guilt is assuaged and reconciliation, of a kind, begins. Upon his own death, Chillingworth leaves all his wealth

to little Pearl, whose spell of recalcitrance is broken. She grows up into a whole and responsible young woman, after a childhood that had very much reflected, symbolically, the “wildness” of her conception. Hester grows old in the town as a counselor to other troubled women, long since having won the town’s respect for her many good works. Hawthorne’s moral about the need for open, public penance and disclosure comes out loud and clear. Only, when her own days are accomplished, Hester is buried next to Dimmesdale, but not too closely, their remains having no genuine right to commingle. Dimmesdale would not reconcile with her, finally, on the scaffold, in a shared “hope that we could meet hereafter, in an everlasting and pure reunion” (Chapter 13). In this life, anyway, something permanently alienating about sin sours human relationships in perpetuity, Hawthorne seems to be saying.

Each of the three major actors strategically maneuvered, against enemies, resistances, and odds, to achieve their desired ends. Hester could have left the colony after her humiliation, with “curses” on her lips (Chapter 5). She chose to stay, suffer more insults still, and work her way back to almost saintly standing in the community with her fine needlework and charitable aid to the indigent (Chapter 5). Hester, as it were, “paid her debt.” Her goal was an eventual life with her lover and father of her child, the Rev. Arthur Dimmesdale. After her nighttime vigil on the platform with the minister, the peripety, or turning point, in her drama, she decided to strike. It was her first closeup look at his deteriorating condition. She contrived to accost him unbeknownst in the forest on his return from visiting a missionary to the Indians. She revealed to him the secret of her marriage to Chillingworth, but protested passionately and argued insistently that Dimmesdale forgive her. After a moment of rage, he did. She then eloquently detailed how it was time for him to “Preach! Write! Act! Do anything, save to lie down and die,” far from these “iron men” of New England. In the untamed forest, a “moral wilderness” of a kind, she got her man, if only temporarily (Chapters 16, 17).

Chillingworth’s aim was to “ruin” the “soul” of the man who had cuckolded him, whoever that man may have been (Chapter 4). First, Chillingworth had to find a suspect. That suspect emerged in sharp relief at the Governor’s Hall a few years into Hester’s personal and social travail. Pearl, the child, had been acting obstreperously. The authorities believed Hester, a fallen woman, was obviously not a fit mother. They discussed taking her baby away. To stop such machinations as quickly as she could,

Hester, in effect, barged into Governor Bellingham's house and forced a confrontation. Having become something of the town physician, Chillingworth was present, as was his prime patient, he of failing health, the Rev. Mr. Dimmesdale. Hester made her case heatedly, even hysterically. In desperation, she turned to Dimmesdale and practically commanded him to speak on her behalf. "Thou knowest,---for thou hast sympathies which these men lack!---thou knowest what is in my heart," she said. "Look then to it! I will not lose the child! Look to it!" (Chapter 8).

All doubts about Dimmesdale's true identity now erased, Chillingworth bore into the minister's soul as deeply as he could, time and again, even unto one final effort to stop the patient's progress up the steps of the scaffold at the conclusion of the drama.

Dimmesdale's strategic maneuverings to encompass his moral problem and redeem himself are already apparent. They all went for naught until he decisively freed himself from the devil-figure that controlled his life. That moment of transformation for Dimmesdale raises questions of literary form we'll deal with more fully and generally in the next chapter. A "peripety" of his own, to be sure, "a sudden or unexpected change in circumstances or situation in a literary work," paved the way for Dimmesdale's redemption.¹⁹ His trip through the amoral forest and meeting with Hester proved fateful for the minister, for Hester, and for Chillingworth, when Dimmesdale transitioned back into a law-governed community.

The ritually dramatic pattern of moral disorder, attributions of guilt, repentant or perverse attitude, sacrifice of self and/or others, and redemptive ends and means is overtly, even searingly, made manifest in *The Scarlet Letter*. The lesson the novel teaches centers on the very question, what strategies of penance or mortification will cleanse the soul and restore public harmony, and which will not? Humans are social animals, the story is saying. Open disclosure and atonement are the only effective pathways to redemption and healing. *The Scarlet Letter* is meant to be, and surely is, "equipment for living." It is, like much good literature, an elaboration and ramified illustration of a morally useful maxim, aphorism, or piece of folk wisdom.

In Outline, the Drama in *Moby-Dick*, or *The Whale*: Characters and Conflicts

Ishmael, as we have said, relates the events of his voyage and offers much incisive commentary on the other characters and their motivations. A former schoolteacher like Melville, he seems capable of the heightened level of understanding his asides exhibit.²⁰ The philosophical reflections and insights he offers along the way fundamentally shape how we interpret the plot and action of the drama. Those observations are deftly and coherently integrated into technical descriptions of 19th-century whaling. Ishmael draws lessons from the chasing, cutting, boiling, and storing of sperm oil that prepare us for a double-vision denouement.

The terse opening sentence of *Moby-Dick* affords weighty symbolic significance at the outset: "Call me Ishmael." In the Biblical narrative, Ishmael is something of an outcast, a wanderer. He is born to Haggar, the slave of Sarah and Abraham. He is not mainline in the Judeo-Christian scheme of things. He and his mother are cast out into the desert, where, tradition has it, they generate the forebears of the Arabs and Islam. Our narrator seems something of a heretic within Christian civilization from the start. Note beginnings and endings in any work of literature or practical rhetoric, Burke says.²¹ We'll have more to add on this theme next chapter.

Like Melville most of his life, Ishmael lives in New York City. He travels to New Bedford, Massachusetts, in search of a job on a whaling vessel. Arriving there on a Saturday night, he looks for lodging that can hold him over till Monday. The Spouter Inn fits his modest circumstances to a "T." There he finds a room.

Problem: Ishmael has to sleep with a cannibal from the South Pacific. Felicitously, Queequeg, a harpooner by trade, becomes Ishmael's bosom buddy and shipmate. A noble savage indeed, Queequeg magnanimously rescues a tormenter of his from death at sea on their short voyage to Nantucket Island. There, the newly-minted friends plan to ship out together in search of whales.

The ship Ishmael chooses turns out to be the *Pequod*, commanded by a Captain Ahab. Queequeg, with Muslim leanings of a sort, is observing Ramadan at the time. In some kind of trance, he stays back at the Try Pots Inn. The *Pequod*? Captain Ahab? Once again, *Moby-Dick* hints at anti-Christian or non-Christian trajectories of thought and purpose. The *Pequod* were

a tribe of native Americans virtually annihilated by New England Puritans in the 17th century. The crew of their nautical namesake will be substantially made up of “savages,” Pequod-Indian types, “mongrel renegades and castaways,” from many points of the earth (Chapters 27, 41, 46). The other two harpooners, Daggoo and Tashtego, are, respectively, a black African and a native American. Is this impending voyage a metaphorical challenge to the received theological worldview?

The Biblical Ahab played, of course, a negative role in the history of Israel. His wife, Jezebel, “remorseless[ly]” promoted worship of the idols Baal and Asherah, and opposed the righteous prophet of the Lord, Elijah.²² And, in fact, a character named Elijah accosts Ishmael and Queequeg with dire warnings as they head toward the ship (Chapters 19, 21). Was Ahab not a “wicked king,” Ishmael asks of the owners, and “the dogs, did they not lick his blood?” (Chapter 16)? Ishmael, Ahab, the *Pequod*---these names prepare the reader for a contrarian view of the human metaphysical landscape.

Ishmael and Queequeg are hired on as all-around hand and harpooner on the *Pequod*. The ship sets out from Nantucket southward (downward?) on Christmas Day. Is this a further perversion of Christian piety? It will sail around the Cape of Africa and then northward into whaling grounds in the Indian and Pacific oceans.

At this juncture in the narrative, the drama’s complication comes front and center. Burkean translation: moral disorder. What may one, what may some agents, what may some agency not do, or not fail to do; not believe, or not fail to believe; not accept, or not fail to accept; or else---what? The offender in Ahab’s estimate, the rule-breaker---and *Moby-Dick* surely begins to look like the Captain’s drama at this point---is the great White Whale. Or, the wrongdoer is whatever Power lurks beyond the fearsome Whale of the title. Ahab, Ishmael, Melville---the novel---are ambivalent and ambiguous on this point. For his misfortune, Ahab blames the “Whale,” or “some unknown but still reasoning thing [that] puts forth the mouldings of its features from behind the unreasoning mask,” which is the unreasoning, or might be the unreasoning, ocean-going mammal, *Moby Dick* (Chapter 36).

What may this imminent Being or possibly transcendent Force not do to Ahab with impunity? Maim him for life; bite off a leg of his on a voyage near Japan three years earlier. That outrage, that enormity, will not stand, Ahab declares. “Be the White Whale

agent, or be the White Whale principal,” he exclaims, “I will wreck [my] hate upon him” (Chapter 36). This statement of intent articulates the “or else,” the sanction, the coercive intervention to enforce, that goes with any rule-governed hierarchy of values.

Ahab elaborates:

“It was that accursed White Whale that razeed me; made a poor pegging lubber of me forever and a day . . . and I’ll chase him round Good Hope, and round the Horn, and round the Norway Maelstrom, and round perdition’s flames before I give him up. And this is what ye have shipped for, men! to chase that White Whale on both sides of land, and over all sides of earth, till he spouts black blood and rolls fin out.” (Chapter 36)

Here, Ahab assays the disorder, points the finger of blame, and pronounces the “or else” for the “crime” that has victimized him. He does so on the quarterdeck in the presence of the ship’s crew not long after the launch. In perversion of the Christian Eucharist, he invites all the mariners to drink ceremoniously from “the great measure of grog”---“tis hot as Satan’s hoof”---and, in doing so, pledge themselves, one and all, to one overarching mission: “Death to Moby Dick’.” (Chapter 36)

Note the “perfectionism” in Ahab’s putatively tragic scapegoating. He lays *all* the world’s ills on this monster of the sea:

All that most maddens and torments; all that stirs up the lees of things, all truth with malice in it, all that cracks the sinews and cakes the brain; all the subtle demonisms of life and thought; all evil, to crazy Ahab, were visibly personified and made practically assailable in Moby Dick. (Chapter 36)²³

Plainly, *Moby-Dick* the novel is a theodicy of a kind, a theology, or anti-theology, that probes the problem of natural evil. Why do men and women suffer at the hands of forces beyond human control, the narrative asks, leaving them with “half a heart and half a lung”? Starbuck, the First Mate and Ahab’s foil, responds with conventional piety and down-to-earth practicality: “Madness! To be enraged with a dumb thing, Captain Ahab,

seems blasphemous.” Ahab remains unmoved. “Talk not to me of blasphemy, man; I’d strike the sun if it insulted me” (Chapter 36).

Starbuck knows he’s outnumbered. He’s surrounded, he laments, by “a heathen crew that have small touch of human mothers in them.” They have ritually aligned themselves with Ahab. They are his coagents. “Yet will I try to fight ye,” Starbuck says to himself (Chapter 38). And he does so, obeying while rebelling, throughout the narrative.

The “dramatic” equates with “dialectic,” Burke says. “A ‘dramatic’ process” is but the drawing out of three-dimensional, logically conflicting persons, forces, or ideas in four-dimensional space-time. “Dialectical oppositions” inform “every document bequeathed us by history,” fictional or factual. Those antinomies, or apparent antinomies, will be explicit or implicit. At this point, on one level, Ahab pits himself against the Whale, Moby Dick, or whatever transcendental Potency the Whale makes manifest in the phenomenal world. On another, Ahab clashes, and will continue to clash, with Starbuck, the embodiment of normal, sensible, expedient human life. Thus, we must treat *Moby-Dick*, and the chosen actions of its chief character or characters, as “*strategie[s] for encompassing a situation.*” The novel and those actions will be “*answer[s] or rejoinder[s] to [problematic] assertions current in the situation in which [they] arose.*”²⁴

Viewed as a strategic answer to a problematic historical situation, *Moby-Dick* the novel will be addressed in Chapter 9. Within the narrative, both Ahab and Starbuck confront opponents, resistances, and odds they must take into consideration, from this point forward, and try to reconnoiter as best they can; in his own way, Ishmael, too.

After his ritual triumph on the Quarterdeck, Ahab shrewdly assesses the delicacy of his situation. “To accomplish his objective,” the narrator informs us, “Ahab must use tools; and of all tools used in the shadow of the moon, men are most apt to get out of order” in the “long interval [that] would elapse ere the White Whale was seen.” An illusion of normalcy is required, “nearer things to think about than Moby Dick,” “temporary interests and employments,” “food for their more common, daily appetites,” “hope of cash---aye, cash.” Even more than keeping the crew occupied and motivated, quotidian pursuit of other whales would help avert “the unanswerable charge of usurpation.” There was something of a danger that the three Mates---Starbuck, Stubb, and

Flask---and the crew of thirty or so could “violently wrest from him the command.” Ahab had to be “heedful, closely calculating attention to every minute atmospheric influence.” “Ordinary, prudential, circumstantial” activity would more likely keep Starbuck, who “abhorred his captain’s quest,” at bay (Chapter 46).

Starbuck, good Christian and professional seaman that he is, does not incline toward disobedience, and is, in any case, somehow under Ahab’s personal spell. He is even, “shockingly,” something of “a valor-ruined man” in his craven dealings with his superior (Chapters 26, 36, 109, 132). The First Mate could argue, cajole, even beg that the Captain cease and desist from his perverse pursuit. He does so at various junctures, even up to the last day of “The Chase” (Chapter 135). He disputes only once, however, to good avail. Late in the voyage, nearing Formosa and the haunts of Moby Dick, the *Pequod* runs into trouble. “The casks below . . . spr[ing] a bad leak.” Starbuck tells his master they must take up the sails and fix it, or else “waste in one day more oil than we may make good in a year.” Ahab, “all aleak myself,” he says, imperiously points a musket at Starbuck and orders no change in course or speed. Starbuck back on deck, Ahab decides on the “prudential policy,” and relents. A short while later, after a violent storm, Starbuck takes up the musket himself and contemplates murder or mutiny. After all, “Not reasoning, not remonstrance, not entreaty wilt thou hearken to; all this thou scornest,” he privately reflects. “Starbuck seemed wrestling with an angel,” the narrator says, “but turning from the door [of Ahab’s cabin], he placed the death-tube in its rack, and left the place” (Chapter 123).

Starbuck’s drama pits himself against a blameworthy Ahab. The Captain is breaking his contract with the Quaker owners, who have put “some thousands of [their] hard earned dollars” into this three-year enterprise (Chapter 22). More gravely, Ahab “would fain kill all his crew . . . drag a whole ship’s company down to doom with him . . . if Ahab has his way” (Chapter 123). Starbuck comes near to killing his master, then desists.

Ishmael, Melville’s putative stand-in, acts mostly as a detached storyteller and commentator from the Quarterdeck ceremony onward; mostly, but not entirely. Ishmael’s “shouts had gone up with the rest” on that day of dedication. His “oath had been welded with theirs,” those of the rest of the crew. Unlike the others, nevertheless, he has, he says, “dread in my soul”: “I gave myself up to the abandonment of the time and the place, but while

yet all a-rush to encounter the Whale, could see naught in that brute but the deadliest ill" (Chapter 41).

Why the ambivalence? For one thing, Ishmael knew of the "undeniable delirium," "moodiness," even "madness" that had overtaken Ahab with the loss of his leg. Ahab had come back from his physical and mental trauma only part way. His "special lunacy stormed his general sanity." His "natural intellect," "not one jot" diminished, was no longer an "agent," but rather now only an "instrument" of his monomania: "means" "sane," "motive" "mad." Moreover, Ahab had just enough self- and social understanding to successfully "dissembl[e]." "He was intent on an audacious, immitigable, and supernatural revenge" that eludes his employers and friends alike (Chapter 41).

A sense of unease grips Ishmael, also, because of the legends he has heard about the terrible White Whale. They were "wild rumors," to be sure, tending toward the "fabulous" and "fearful." Sailors were often "superstitiously inclined." Yet, who could be certain Moby Dick was not, indeed, eternal, ubiquitous, intelligent, malignantly aggressive, and vengeful. That was the hearsay among some, not all, of the mariners in the whaling industry. Some thought him but "an apparition," or "knew [nothing] of his existence" (Chapter 41).

Then there was the "Whiteness of the Whale" that induced a particular foreboding in Ishmael. For the narrator, that blank, double-edged aspect elicited a "nameless horror," filled him with an "ineffable" dread. Whiteness is at once "the most meaning symbol" of beauty, gladness, royalty, and innocence, he says, "and yet . . . the intensifying agent in things the most appalling to mankind [sic]." White goes with, it enhances, the purity of brides, the "benignity of age," "divine spotlessness and power," the "alb or tunic" of Christian priests. Then again, it shocks and terrifies in the form of the "white-shrouded bear or shark," the "Albino man," the "White Squall," the "pallor of the dead," "ghosts rising in a milk-white fog," "eternal frosted desolateness." Add to this numbing apprehension, the likely colorlessness of all creation, reds, yellows, and blues residing in the mind, not inherent in substances. Add, also, the very colorlessness or whiteness of the medium that is light itself. "Pondering all this," Ishmael concludes, "the palsied universe lies before us a leper; and like willful travelers in Lapland, who refuse to wear colored and coloring glasses upon their eyes, so the wretched infidel gazes himself blind at the monumental white shroud that wraps all the

prospect around him” (Chapter 42).

Ishmael is, therefore, something of a mixed-motive observer. He has “a wild, mystical, sympathetical feeling. . . ; Ahab’s quenchless feud seemed mine,” he allows (Chapter 41). In fact, the narrator sees the hunt for this particular Whale as “lay[ing] the world’s grievances before that bar,” presumably the bar of ultimate justice (Chapter 27). Yet, his attitude evolves, it would seem, in Starbuck’s direction deep into the voyage. While squeezing the lumps out of sperm oil preparatory to storage, Ishmael says:

I forgot all about our horrible oath; in that inexpressible sperm, I washed my hands and my heart of it For now, since by many prolonged experiences, I have perceived that in all cases man must eventually lower, or at least shift, his conceit of attainable felicity; not placing it anywhere in the intellect or the fancy; but in the wife, the heart, the bed, the table, the saddle, the fire-side; the country; now that I have perceived all this, I am ready to squeeze case eternally. (Chapter 94)

This “shift,” as Ishmael calls it, comes right after Pip, the Black cabin boy, loses his mind. Pip had fallen overboard during a chase. He was abandoned for hours on the open ocean before rescue. “The sea had jeeringly kept his finite body up, but drowned the infinite of his soul,” the narrator tells us (Chapter 93). Could this sudden encounter with yet more madness have sounded an alarm for Ishmael? Did it serve as sign and synecdoche for Ahab’s whole, fateful endeavor, a maddening isolation from what is social, normal, routine, earth-bound---a manifestation of the “*Isolato*” theme he attaches to this motley crew of “Islanders” (Chapter 27, emphasis in original)? The juxtaposition of the plot turn and this seeming philosophical transition is intriguing.

Ishmael, in sum, stands between Ahab and Starbuck on the axis of conflict. As the story progresses, he at least intimates at movement from coagent to counteragent in the hunt for Moby Dick.

The Trajectory of Self-Sacrifice in Melville's Novel

So, after "The Quarterdeck," each of the main characters has his drama established, unfolding, or about to unfold. We'll look now at the plot development, what used to be called "the argument," for answers to the questions: Who pays what, who suffers and how, or is made to suffer; who struggles, strains, strives, makes an effort, to set things right; or is urged to do so?

The principal events in the rising action are a series of lowerings and chases after whales of mostly common variety, philosophically-tinged descriptions of the oil-rendering process and the general lore of whaling, encounters with other vessels that may or may not have seen or fought with Moby Dick himself, and the vicissitudes of weather and accidents that impede or facilitate the overriding quest. With "The First Lowering," we get an inkling of the strain and the risk, the self-sacrifice and the odds, of this dangerous enterprise (Chapter 48). Stubb, the Second Mate, exhorts his rowers to "pull, pull, will ye, pull," again and again, "pull with the blade [of your knife] between [your] teeth" (Chapter 48).

The taut exertions of the crew members in all four row boats went for naught in this instance. The whale got away in a squall, knocking Ishmael, Queequeg, Starbuck, and others into the ocean. They spent the night adrift in fog and mist. Fortuitously, the mother ship came by in the morning. Ishmael felt like "Lazarus . . . after his resurrection." He made out his will that very day.

A strange auxiliary cohort of five men rowed Ahab's boat. To the other crew members, they seemed like "phantoms," led by a Parsee named Fedallah. Parsees were Zoroastrian fire worshipers from the nation of India. Ahab, not the owners, had taken these seeming "castaways" on. Ostensibly, Peleg and Bildad, the proprietors of the *Pequod*, knew nothing of them (Chapters 16, 18, 20, 21, 22). Various clues suggest that the stowaways are devil and demon figures, superhuman co-conspirators with Ahab in his "scheming, unappeasedly steadfast hunt of the White Whale" (Chapters 44, 50).

Ahab's scheme is abetted by his "Chart." He laboriously pores over it "till long after midnight," making marks and emendations when he's not pacing the deck in nervous agitation. This record calculates the comings and goings of sperm whales in their seasonal search for food. So self-sacrificial is Ahab in

terms of his “one unachieved revengeful desire,” he endures “trances of torments,” “intolerably vivid dreams of the night,” even “bloody nails in his palms” upon waking with “clenched hands” and a still “tormented spirit.” He’s abed but “three hours out of twenty-four,” Stubb says. Daytime, “Ahab for hours and hours would stand gazing dead to windward,” eyes peeled for the White Leviathan, “sleet or snow . . . congeal[ed]” in his lashes or not. The monomaniac is likened to Prometheus, a vulture of a kind feeding upon his heart incessantly (Chapters 28, 29, 44, 51). As Burke says, “We might almost lay it down as a rule of thumb: Where someone is straining to do something, look for evidence of the tragic mechanism.”²⁵ Ahab strains.

The sightings, lowerings, and chases after whales continue with an ominous nighttime encounter with what appears to be a “Spirit-Spout.” Night after night it is spied in the distance as Ahab et al. despairingly and ironically round the Cape of Good Hope. Typically no one spots “this flitting apparition” more than once of an evening, though “alluring [them] on” in a “practical fatalism” and with a tincture of doubt. Abruptly, “that silvery, moon-lit jet” is gone (Chapter 51). Later in the account, it is confirmed, the Spout was that of Moby Dick (Chapter 133).

Encounters with whales, or what is thought to be a whale, that prompt a launching of rowboats and a chase include a mistaken pursuit of a giant squid, and a kill of a Sperm Whale by Stubb in the Indian Ocean. A successful harvest of a Right Whale follows a bit later. The heads of the two leviathans are hung on each side of the boat for good luck. A mad dash into the midst of a “Grand Armada” of whales results in the capture of but one of them (Chapter 87). Later, Stubb steals, as it were, two dead whales from a French vessel. He gets a little ambergris, or perfume, from one of them, before Ahab commands that they move on. Another successful lowering follows. A Sperm Whale is taken, but Pip, the cabin boy, falls out of a boat and goes insane in the process. He’s left for hours and hours alone in the vast ocean before rescue.

The rendering process from dead whale to stored casks is here most thoroughly described. The leak that troubles Starbuck breaks out. Queequeg takes ill cleaning and repairing. The carpenter makes him a coffin. It will eventually become the *Pequod*’s lifebuoy, after Queequeg recovers.

After passing and communicating with the *Bachelor*, the *Pequod* gets lucky and kills four whales. It is Ahab’s boat that has

taken the one farthest from the mother ship. Out all night with the Parsee, Ahab receives “reassuring” prophecies from this mystical one: Ahab can die only if he sees two hearses, one made with American wood; only by hemp; and only if Fedallah precedes him in death (Chapters 116, 117). Like Shakespeare’s Macbeth, Ahab takes heart at strange and dubious predictions.

A great storm at sea follows. The *Pequod*’s sails are ripped by the gale. Lightning strikes the three masts and sets them aglow in what the frightened crewmen call “St. Elmo’s Fire.” Starbuck implores Ahab to turn “homeward.” “God, God is against thee, old man; forbear!” Starbuck says. Even the sailors, in panic, “raised a half mutinous cry.” Ahab rather worships the blaze in ritual fashion, his foot upon the prostrate Fedallah. He then takes his harpoon, itself aflame, from his wind-shattered boat, snuffs out the blaze with his breath, and cows the crew, once more, into abject obedience (Chapter 119).

Calm weather succeeds the wind and rain, a mild “Symphony,” so to speak (Chapter 132). Ahab, himself relatively “serene” and reflective, speaks of family and a life seemingly wasted in a mad forty-years’ chase at sea. Again, Starbuck enjoins, “Let us fly these deadly waters! Let us home!” Ahab’s fatalism prevails. Fedallah’s diabolical face and influence stare back at him from the ocean’s still water at chapter’s end.

Moby Dick finally comes into view. Three days Ahab and crew lower for him and seek their frustrated revenge, unto a dramatic, catastrophic conclusion.

Tantalizing Intelligence and Fulfillment of Deceptive Prophecies Haunt the Mind of Ahab unto That Fatal End

Those are the active pursuits of whales and buffetings by weather that help configure the developing plotline in *Moby-Dick*. Intense struggling, straining, striving characterize these lowerings and chases. The challenge of the elements complicates the self-sacrifice, piling passion upon action. Interspersed among these demands and exertions, encounters with other ships that may or may not have spotted and gone after the White Whale heighten the drama. A ship named the *Albatross* crosses the *Pequod*’s path right after the sightings of the Spirit Spout. “Ship ahoy! Have ye

seen the White Whale?" Ahab is wont to ask, as the two vessels draw near. Ahab's "trumpet . . . fell from his hand into the sea." He gets no reply (Chapter 52).

After an introduction to the notion of a "Gam," or social visit between ship's crews, the *Pequod* meets and greets the *Town-Ho*. Tashtego, the harpooner, finds out in conversation that this whaler did in fact sight and chase Moby Dick, and that a mid-level officer on board was plucked from his boat and eaten by that fearsome beast.

A similar fate had met the First Mate on board the *Jeroboam*, encountered after "Stub Kills a Whale" and the "Cutting In," etc., are explained (Chapters 61-70). Ahab parleys with the Captain and a strange, crazy oarsman beside him, in this next meeting at sea. Insane "Gabriel"---a voice from God, who blew his horn in warning?---had cautioned against going after Moby Dick, whom he called a "Shaker God incarnated." Officer Macey of the *Jeroboam* wanted the White Whale. His Captain, Captain Mayhew, allowed one boat to go after him. Macey was snatched from the craft by Moby Dick, flung fifty feet into the water, and unceremoniously drowned. Ironically, Ahab hands over a letter from Macey's wife. Gabriel intercepts it and flings it back with the warning: "*Thou art soon going that way*" (Chapter 71; emphasis added).

The next passing brought communication with the *Virgin*, a German ship manned by seamen apparently inexperienced in the fishery. They chase Fin-Backs, virtually impossible to catch. The Germans had not seen the White Whale, nor had the *Rosebud*, next up, a French ship with equally unastute whalers. Stubb finagles a dead whale replete with "ambergris" from the Frenchies via a cock-and-bull story about danger from disease.

Ahab's talk with Captain Boomer of the *Samuel Enderby* of London affords sharp contrast in attitude and the construction of events. Boomer had harpooned Moby Dick, but then lost an arm when a "second iron" in the Whale's side caught him just below the shoulder. "No more White Whales for me," Boomer says, almost with a laugh. Ahab's reply: "'Which way is he heading?'" (Chapter 100).

The *Pequod* quickly convenes with the *Bachelor*, just before the take of the four whales. It is a jolly ship, heading home with a boat-load of oil. The *Bachelor*'s commander invites a gam, brandishing a bottle and glass as he does so, but Ahab wants only one thing, information: "'Hast seen the White Whale?'" "'No,'"

says the other good-humoredly, “only heard of him, but don’t believe in him at all” (Chapter 115).

Lightning, wind, and rain batter the *Pequod* before the *Rachel* pulls into view. Here transpires one of the most poignant scenes in the book. Captain Gardner, a Nantucket neighbor no less, has lost his only son and a boat full of crew members to Moby Dick. They may still be alive, only disappeared. Gardner begs, implores Ahab’s assistance in the hunt for just a couple of days. Ahab refuses out of hand. He seeks the White Whale and is losing time.

Ahab in the loft himself on lookout now for his nemesis, a final meeting occurs at sea. The *Delight*---how ironic a name!---is at that moment burying a shipmate killed by Moby Dick. Four other oarsmen in that chase are already gone. A stove rowboat sits on deck. A “ghostly baptism” may have “sprinkled” the hull of the *Pequod* as the corpse splashes into the water. A final, dire omen indeed presages the destructive climax of Ishmael’s account.

That turbulent denouement comes after the beguilingly tranquil calm of “The Symphony” (Chapter 132). Who, then, pay what, who suffer and how, or are made to suffer, to set things right, or at least bring new understanding and enlightenment that make the agony all worthwhile? Ahab and his crew sight the Whale, and labor at sea for three days, by way of three lowerings, to gain a precious insight. The first day, Ahab’s boat is wrecked by Moby Dick. The second day, his ivory leg is shattered by the Whale, requiring a new prosthesis. Fedallah portentously disappears during the skirmish. The third day, that same Fedallah, the devil-figure, surfaces on the back and side of Moby Dick, a “hearse” of a kind, his lifeless body entangled in the lances and ropes in and on the Whale’s flank. Fedallah has indeed “gone before.” A “second hearse” made with American wood sinks into the ocean, as the White Whale crashes headlong into the *Pequod*. Ahab harpoons his oppressor, but is yanked from his boat and strangled by a flying turn in the line, the “hemp,” not before, however, he voices his hard-won revelation: “Oh, now I feel my topmost greatness lies in my topmost grief” (Chapter 135).

Tragically, or seemingly tragically, Ahab and almost all those in the boats and aboard the *Pequod* perish at sea. Only Ishmael, knocked from Ahab’s boat before the Whale breaks it in pieces, lives to recount the events. He had been chosen to replace the missing Fedallah. Ishmael crawls up on Queequeg’s coffin, that inauspicious life-buoy, and is rescued by the *Rachel*. In

“her retracing search after her missing children, [she] only found another orphan” (Epilogue).

Ishmael’s ambivalent drama lives on as he survives to tell of his experience in ambiguous terms. His perplexing personal conflict remains for the reader to fathom and resolve. Starbuck’s drama remains unredeemed, as his worst fears concerning what Ahab’s crimes and mad obsessions will bring to pass are horribly fulfilled. Ahab’s drama attains a measure of redemption through its epiphany about life and the summit of human greatness. His quest for vengeance is finally dashed, but his mythic adventure is searingly rewarded with a new vision of human life and meaning.

Moral order, moral disorder, guilt, sacrifice, and redemption: These moments of human drama are monumentally realized, and tantalizingly complicated, in Melville’s *Great American Novel*.

Chapter 8

From a Burkean Perspective, the “Little Lower Layer” of *Moby-Dick* as Dramatic Action I

Those Other Guidelines from the Thought of Our Protean Literary Critic

From a superficial vantage point, Ahab may indeed look like the protagonist in Melville's *Moby-Dick*. This great American novel is, though, if anything, enigmatic. We want to apply in an analytical way several other of Burke's notions to get at the subtler message Melville consciously intended, or unconsciously conjured, in his sweeping narrative.

Let's put to work these additional tools from the Burkean

toolbox, in this order:

- (1) Fatalistic foreshadowing that marks an agent or agents fit and eventual vessels for redemptive sacrifice: We will start this chapter wielding this implement, since its use in the book is so obtrusive.¹ Readers can't help noting, again and again, the myriad ways Melville prepares them for the disaster to come. Burke's notions of repetitive and progressive form play their part in stimulating reader expectancies along these lines.²
- (2) The “mixed motivational recipe” of *Moby-Dick*, based on an optical “double vision” that serves as informing metaphor: This feature of the novel plumbs a depth of meaning few works in literary history have so coherently and relentlessly fathomed. This paradoxical dimension affords the angle or angles of view that summon uncertainty as to who is the protagonist in the story, and what his material circumstances tell us about life's prospects. Is the “Whale” the “hero” of *Moby-Dick*, as one of Melville's contemporary critics stated.³ Terministic “equations” or “associational clusters,” and terministic “agons” or “oppositions,” help tell the tale.⁴ What goes with what, what vs. what, and from what through what to what?
- (3) Encompassment of a problematic situation in the century of new meanings, 1800-1899:⁵ It is common knowledge that Melville's masterpiece was greeted with much derision and incomprehension in mid-19th-century America and Britain.⁶ The book did not come into its own until the Melville revival of the 1920s. Like the play *Woyzeck*, *Moby-Dick* was an attempt to reconcile, or at least recognize the implications of, competing strands of doctrine at a moment of great ideological change. In a sense, it took seventy years for the Western intellectual world at large to catch up to the prescience of Melville's prophetic insight, for maximum “eloquence” to be achieved.⁷
- (4) *Moby Dick*, the Whale himself, as both the noumenon of nature and its tangible representative as what Burke calls “the unanswerable opponent,” “the fatal heckler,” the “sheer brute materials of the world as it

is” in its structure and function: What happens in this novel when Nature itself is brought under assault? What lesson do the consequences of Ahab’s mad and obsessive attack on Nature’s exemplar yield for the self-styled “sapien,” “rational” denizens of Planet Earth in our day of unprecedented global change?⁸

- (5) And finally, Melville’s apparent tragedy as open to interpretation, in part, from the perspective of melodrama, even, perhaps, Burkean comedy? As noted before, Burke’s favored comedic perspective, or set of perspectives, is built around several features that seem to go with Aristotelian tragedy---a sense of limitation, a species of fatalism, a call to charitable identification with both protagonist and antagonist in a drama, if not an ambiguity in determining which is which.⁹

We’ll focus on questions #1 and #2 in this chapter; #s 3, 4, and 5 subsequently.

Plot “Arrows” That Mark the *Pequod* and Its Crew for Doom

Ahab and his cohort “may [or may not] be made worthy legalistically” in *Moby-Dick* for sacrifice on the scales of justice. Such a judgment would depend on whose drama a reader credits as controlling. From Starbuck’s point of view, maybe Ahab himself gets what is coming. In any case, “portents, auguries, . . . and prophecies” surely make Ahab a marked man, the ship and its crew members coagents in the Captain’s perfidy, worthy tokens for votive offering “fatalistically.”¹⁰

These predictive elements in the novel punctuate the plot line again and again. They constitute a kind of form in *Moby-Dick*, repetitive form. Recall Burke’s definition of form: “an arousing and fulfillment of desires.” As these omens of disaster recur with rhythmic regularity, one following another following another, the reader experiences a “consistent maintaining of a principle under new guises,” a “restatement of the same thing in different ways,” that is, repetitive form. After several instances, an expectation is established that this pattern of forewarning will continue. Anticipation precedes, satisfaction succeeds, each subsequent embodiment of the pattern, or is supposed to. A “restatement of a

theme by new details,” it will bring gratification of a kind after the fact, if not before, as one gets a feeling for this forward-driving momentum.¹¹

In Chapter 7, we already cited several instances of this persistent foreshadowing. The featured names themselves--*Pequod*, Ahab, and Elijah---summon early an anticipatory foreboding. Fedallah and his devilishly phantom associates likewise do so. The superstitions rampant in the fishery about an immortal, ubiquitous Whale that malevolently attacks its pursuers, and Ishmael’s alarm at “a dumb blankness, full of meaning,” that invests the Whale’s whiteness with hints of nihilism and despair sustain the pattern. The eerie “Spirit Spout,” followed by the tell-tale fish that turn away from the *Pequod* and go after the *Albatross* when the two ships pass, augments as augury the fall of Ahab’s trumpet into the ocean. The *Town-Ho*’s Story, and that of the *Jeroboam*, both detail death by Moby Dick, with a crazy man named Gabriel reinforcing these warnings.

The *Samuel Enderby* and the *Rachel* further bode a fatal end to the *Pequod*’s endeavor. The fierce Leviathan had taken crew members and a captain’s arm from these whalers. The look-out’s plunge to his death from the *Pequod*, the first day “on the White Whale’s own peculiar ground” (Chapter 126); the sunken life-buoy thrown overboard to rescue him, Queequeg’s coffin as replacement; and Ahab’s storm-shattered boat, continue the trajectory. The ironically christened *Delight* puts a fitting capstone on these predestined meetings, ship with ship. Dead oarsmen, a stove boat, and a burial at sea that splashes its menace onto the *Pequod*’s hull prepare readers for all the horrors of the “Chase.” Those penultimate torments in the final three chapters include the smashing of Ahab’s boat once more, the splintering of his ivory leg, and the prophetic sight of Fedallah fettered in death to Moby Dick’s side. All these portents point like a compass to the destruction that is to come.

These forewarnings do not, however, exhaust the catalogue of signs and omens that help structure the narrative via repetitive form. At the outset of the story, or near it, we can note Burke’s construction of beginnings as prophetic in this brief passage on the novel from *PLF*. Burke is here illustrating perfected, almost redundant, “to the end of the line” elements in poems and prose works that emphasize, without a doubt, a certain mood or stance toward the materials and events at hand and in prospect:

And in *Moby-Dick* there is an especially “efficient” passage of this sort, prophetically announcing the quality of Ishmael’s voyage: After walking through “blocks of blackness,” he [Ishmael] enters a door where he stumbles over an ash box; going on, he finds that he is in a Negro church, and “the preacher’s text was about the blackness of darkness.”¹²

“And,” we could add from the novel, “the weeping and wailing and teeth-gnashing there” (Chapter 2).

This description of Ishmael’s thoughts and experiences his first evening in New Bedford (Chapter 2) follows his lament on “a damp, drizzly November in my soul” in the book’s fourth sentence; his compulsion, when he thus gets “the hypos,” to “pause before coffin warehouses” and “bring up the rear of every funeral I meet”; and his evocation of “those stage managers, the Fates,” leading him onward toward “the undeliverable, nameless perils of the whale” (Chapter 1, entitled “Loomings,” i.e., “tak[ing] shape as an impending occurrence”¹³).

Out of Manhattan and into New England, Ishmael beds down in a hotel run by a proprietor named “Peter Coffin.” He sleeps with a “savage” who sells the “heads” of apparently “cannibal[ized]” humans (Chapter 3). The next day, a Sunday, Ishmael visits a Whaleman’s Chapel festooned with “marble tablets with black borders,” memorializing sailors killed at sea. Ishmael thought to himself, “It needs hardly to be told, with what feelings, on the eve of a Nantucket voyage, I regarded those marble tablets, and by the murky light of that darkened, doleful day read the fate of the whalemen who had gone before me. Yes, Ishmael, the same fate may be thine” (Chapter 7).

It needs hardly be told, we, the readers, are getting the picture.

Father Mapple’s pulpit and sermon, too, bespeak dread and danger ahead. “From thence [the pulpit, built like a ship’s prow] it is the storm of God’s quick wrath is first descried” (Chapter 8). The homily, taken from the Book of Jonah, is about a whale that devours a man, before giving him up by Divine Grace. After the packet cruise to Nantucket, Ishmael and Queequeg check in at the Try Pots for a few days’ lodging. What hangs over the doorway? An “old top-mast [that] looked not a little like a gallows.” Just in case we don’t absorb it all, Ishmael reflects: “It’s ominous, thinks I. A Coffin my Inkeeper upon landing in my first whaling port;

tombstones staring at me in the whalemens chapel, and here a gallows! and a pair of prodigious black pots too! Are these last throwing out oblique hints touching Tophet” (Chapter 15)? Well, I guess.

The appearance of the ship itself Ishmael chooses and its implacable Captain summon “suspicions.” It is “a noble craft, but somehow a most melancholy,” with “darkened,” “barbaric” complexion, “ancient decks,” “a cannibal of a craft” with “wild” whalebone appointments (Chapters 16, 20). The white scar that “scorched” Ahab’s “tawny . . . face and neck” branded him “like a man cut away from the stake” (Chapter 28). At the thought of Ahab’s perverse quarterdeck ceremonial and the “heathen crew” that pledged its allegiance, Starbuck reflects, “Oh, life! ‘tis now that I do feel the latent horror in thee” (Chapter 38). These features, events, and premonitions magnify the sense of impending doom that pervades these early chapters.

Other images, by no means exhausting *Moby-Dick*’s premonitory texts, include the “superstitions” and “portentousness” raised by the white squid (Chapter 59); the prophetic metaphor of “halters round the necks” of “all men [who] live enveloped in [the] whale-lines” of life (Chapter 60); Tashtego’s plunge into the sperm-filled head of a decapitated whale, “coffined, hearsed, and tombed” there until rescued (Chapter 78); the “ghastly” “forking flames” of the try-works, in which blubber is reduced to oil, that prefigure the “sorrow” and “woe” that precedes the “mountaintop” of “wisdom” (Chapter 96); and the recurrent invocation of “fate” as at last the master of our destiny, if not our “soul” (e.g., Chapters 7, 108, 132). When the compass needle goes awry after the lightning storm (Chapter 124), and, soon after, a “black hawk” snatches Ahab’s hat and drops it “into the sea” (Chapter 130), the “constant midnight of the gloomy crew,” “their bodings, doubts, misgivings, fears,” “seemed ground to finest dust . . . in the clamped mortar of Ahab’s iron soul” (Chapter 130).

Their fatal combat so unstintingly foreshadowed, Ahab and his crew finally spot the White Whale and, in three stages, lower to their demise.

Repetitive form can include progressive dimensions, also, “syllogistically progressive,” if the components of the series rise or advance in some discernable step-by-step order or intensity. That is not the case in respect to these many, many premonitions of danger. The death-by-whale-boat implicit in the Chapel testimonials is every bit as dire as the fatality forecast by Fedallah

in the last chapter. The repetitive form in these instances reflects changes in “guise” or “detail,” not stages in a forward-moving argument.¹⁴

Such is not the case for the recurring rendezvous between the *Pequod* and other vessels at sea. Here we can note repetitive and syllogistically progressive form in complementary relationship. By and large, these nine meetings rise toward a crescendo of violence:

Contact with the *Albatross*, at the first meeting, is abortive. When he inquires about Moby Dick, Ahab’s “trumpet” falls into the ocean. The passing ship offers no reply (Chapter 52).

The “*Town-Ho*’s Story” comes indirect. Tashtego heard it during a “gam,” or convivial get-together, between the two ships. It got out only because Tash talked in his sleep. The account became known to Ishmael and a few others, but was apparently not generally bruited about. And the mate on the *Town-Ho* who was devoured by Moby Dick seemed to have it coming morally, diminishing the impact of this death-by-Whale-chase (Chapter 54).

The incident with the *Jeroboam* involved an officer, First Mate Macey, who was innocent enough, but who requested that he be allowed to go after the famous Whale. The captain was reluctant. He allowed only one boat to lower. Thus, Macey brought on his death not by turpitude, as with the *Town-Ho*, but rather by recklessness. On the scale of culpability, the *Jeroboam* shows middling intensity (Chapter 71).

The *Virgin* and the *Rosebud* do not contribute to this upward trend in magnitude. Neither vessel had chased or even spotted Moby Dick. These meetings provide comic relief, of a kind, within the developing pattern. Each craft is led by a captain who doesn’t know quite what he’s doing (Chapters 81, 91).

In Captain Boomer of the *Samuel Enderby*, Ahab meets the highest-ranking whaler yet to suffer the wrath of Moby Dick. Boomer lost an arm to the beast. To Boomer, however, that’s all the Whale is: a dumb animal. Boomer’s attitude? Good riddance. He’ll never chase Moby Dick again (Chapter 100).

The meeting with the *Bachelor* brings the *Pequod* into an especially comic environment. It is a “gay,” “merry,” celebrating ship, heading home and bursting at the seams with oil. The *Bachelor*’s commander, when implored about him, says of the White Whale, “No; only heard of him; but don’t believe in him at all.” The *Bachelor*’s “hilari[ty],” however, underscores, by way

of contrast, the “grave” and sullen demeanor of the *Pequod* and its crew, sailing in the opposite direction physically and existentially. In an oblique way, this passing whaler heightens Ahab’s sense of isolation and loneliness. He takes from his pocket “a small vial of sand, . . . Nantucket soundings” (Chapter 115), seeming to need respite from his growing unease.

Next to last in this trajectory of meetings comes the *Rachel*, with a tale most poignant. Moby Dick had towed out of sight one of four of its boats that had chased him. The boat crew has gone missing for a day, including the Captain’s son. No mate, harpooner, or oarsmen are dead for certain, but many lives are possibly, probably lost. Will Ahab join in the rescue? Monomaniacal Ahab says no, of course. The measure of destruction by Moby Dick is here at its peak, but only in terms of likelihood (Chapter 128).

That climactic measure, a boatload of empirically dead whalers, is realized in the flesh in the final, melancholy encounter between the *Pequod* and the *Delight*. Five mariners have perished. One splashes into the sea before Ahab’s eyes. A splintered boat testifies to the carnage. “Flying bubbles” touch with tragedy the *Pequod* itself. As the *Delight* glides by, a voice hurls back a fitting imprecation: “Ha! yonder! look yonder, men! In vain, oh, ye strangers, ye fly our sad burial; ye but turn us your taffrail to show us your coffin” (Chapter 131).

Plainly, what Burke has called a dialectical “Upward Way” informs Melville’s treatment of these confrontations en route to the devastated *Delight*. They constitute repetitive and progressive form in combination.

In addition, the fire symbolism in the novel can be construed in progressive as well as repetitive terms. The “Try-Works” chapter is horrifying, but routine in its occurrence and indirect as to the *Pequod*’s mission and devilish blasphemy (Chapter 96). In “The Forge,” Ahab most deliberately melts down the metal in his own razors and fashions new barbs for his harpooners. The “savages” “baptizo” and “temper” their points with their own “heathen” blood and “in nomine diaboli” (Chapter 113). At the apex of this series, the fire that constitutes “The Candles” atop the lightning-struck mastheads and the glowing shaft of Ahab’s very own harpoon result from the most dire, dangerous threat of the voyage, a fierce storm at sea. Sails are shredded. Waves wash upon the deck. Sailors murmur in potential mutiny. Ahab stands in extended “prayer,” not just brief incantation, upon the prostrate

Fedallah, invoking, in “haughty agony,” the fire’s power to deliver unto him the White Whale. Ahab quells the insurrection. “The mariners did run from him in a terror of dismay” (Chapter 119). Repetitive form, in the recurring fire symbolism, blends with syllogistic progressive form in sharpening intent and mounting frenzy.

One more example of formal arrangement, a la Burke, deserves mention. Qualitative progressive form involves one “quality” or “mood” or “state of mind” preparing for a successive, but different, quality or mood or state of mind. Burke says, in respect to this formal feature, that it “lack[s] the pronounced anticipatory nature of the syllogistic progression. We are prepared less to demand a certain qualitative progression than to recognize its rightness after the event. We are put into a state of mind which another state of mind can appropriately follow.”¹⁵

The shifts in mood, state of mind, or focal concern we speak of here have to do with the actions in the narrative, punctuated by descriptions of the nuts and bolts and history of whaling and germane lessons that can be drawn from those technical accounts. In at least eight instances during the voyage, from one or two consecutive chapters to as many as five (Chapters 101-105), Melville delves into the arcana of the industry, and/or specifically builds the philosophic framework of the novel ever more richly (e.g., various chapters among 23-105). Chapters like “The Advocate,” where Melville/Ishmael extols the general dignity of whaling (24); “Cetology,” where the narrator offers a zoological taxonomy of whale species (32); “The Affidavit,” in which he recounts true-to-life examples of some of the marvelous feats of cetological mayhem that give credence to this story (45); “Pictures of Whales,” which discriminates between falsified and accurate artistic renderings of the “Leviathan” (55, 56); “The Whale as a Dish,” and how its meat is variously prepared for table (65); the “Sperm Whale’s” and the “Right Whale’s Head[s],” and how they confer unique powers of perspective on this intelligent beast (74, 75); “The Fountain” or vaporous “mist” that attends the whale’s human-like breathing, source of an especially “profound” analogy in the likely “deep thoughts” of the Sperm Whale (85); “The Fossil Whale” and “The Whale’s Magnitude,” which place this unique creature, past, in the “Tertiary Period,” and, future, in likely perpetual endurance, owing to the indestructibility of the Artic Ice Sheet as habitat of last resort (104, 105)---these chapters and others give qualitative counterpoint to those that advance the

narrative action of *Moby-Dick*. In many of them, the philosophic cast of Melville’s tale is amplified and reinforced.

“Truth,” “Double Vision,” and Paradoxical Ambiguity in Meaning and Motive in *Moby-Dick*: The Whale Himself

As we said before, a contemporary critic of Melville’s novel fashions the Great Whale as “hero,” not the fanatically aggressive Ahab.¹⁶ In an introduction to the 1943 Heritage Press edition, Clifton Fadiman also cites the Whale as the protagonist of the story.¹⁷ Fadiman speaks of the “extraordinary ambiguity” of *Moby-Dick*, its “many-leveled” adumbrations, as source for such a deduction.¹⁸ Fadiman’s interpretation corresponds well with Burke’s emphasis on the “double vision” Burke himself experienced in a physical sense as he was writing *Permanance and Change*.¹⁹ Fadiman’s reading fits well with the call Burke makes throughout his work for a form of “perspective by incongruity” to overcome the pinched vision of reality any one categorical symbolization boxes us into.²⁰

Two seemingly peripheral, digressive, change-of-pace chapters in *Moby-Dick*, noted above (74, 75), afford, we submit, the key to unlocking Melville’s mystery, to the extent there is such a key. These chapters are “The Sperm Whale’s Head” and “The Right Whale’s Head.” They serve as something of a philosophic peripety in the work. “Peripety” is a word Burke is fond of using. It refers to a turning point of one kind or another in a narrative’s plot line.

Human eyes, as we know, are positioned together in the front of the head. In concert, they focus in on one object at a time. “Though he [sic] can take in an indiscriminating sweep of things at one glance,” Ishmael says, “it is quite impossible for [a person], attentively and completely, to examine any two things---however large or however small---at one and the same time,” Each eye of the Sperm Whale, by contrast, protrudes way back on one side or the other of the animal’s monstrous head. As a result, the whale “must [receive] wholly separate impressions which each independent organ imparts.” “Both eyes, in themselves, must simultaneously act,” Ishmael adds. Is, therefore, the narrator inquires, “Is his brain so much more comprehensive, combining and subtle than man’s [sic], that he can at the same moment of

time attentively examine two distinct prospects, one on one side of him, the other in an exactly opposite direction,” two “separate . . . impressions,” two “distinct picture[s]” (Chapter 74)?

Ishmael goes on in this chapter to advise us, following the example of the whale, to “subtilize” our mind, not just “enlarge” it. Hence, approximating the subtlety of the whale, we might become more “vascillat[ing] [in] movement,” more “hypochondriac,” show more “perplexity of volition,” even “speculative indifference” (74, 75). Burke virtually plagiarizes Melville. Burke admonishes caution and “hypochondriasis” in our symbolic adjustments, a “speculative attitude,” even “linguistic skepticism” in our sizing up of any given situation.²¹ It will likely be too complex, too formless, for one idealized angle of view.

The Sperm Whale communicates the dialectical tensions he alone can conjure, exactly coincident, with his forehead. “But how?” Ishmael inquires rhetorically. “Has the Sperm Whale ever written a book, spoken a speech? No.” He talks, enigmatically of course, with great “Genius” with his “brow” (Chapter 79). His “Battering-Ram,” as Ishmael calls it (Chapter 76), is a veritable Rosetta Stone, an “awful Chaldee” even a Champollion could hardly decipher. Most eloquently, *Moby Dick* speaks “voicelessly” with his “predestinating head” at the narrative’s climax. There he sinks the *Pequod*, then breaks Ahab’s neck (Chapter 135), delivering with destructive force at least one of Melville’s meanings: Don’t mess with Mother Nature.

Who serves as protagonist in a drama? It is the character who acts, “argues,” and enters into conflict on behalf of the main thesis, particularly at the drama’s high point. The protagonist is front and center, “acting,” even expostulating in whatever way he or she can, at that crucial stage. What evidence is there in *Moby-Dick* that ambiguity, subtlety, enigma, a clashing together of opposites characterizes this saga throughout---the very message implicit in the Sperm Whale’s head? What does Ishmael mean by, “Unless you own the whale, you are but provincial and sentimentalist in Truth” (Chapter 76)?

Let’s start with the vagaries of interpretation in the novel itself in respect to the White Whale’s nature and motives. Is *Moby Dick* a scheming, “intelligent malignity,” as many “superstitious” sailors rumor about (Chapter 41)? Or is he but a dumb animal like any other beast of the sea, Starbuck’s interpretation? Does the Whale “symbolically act,” or “nonsymbolically move,” to put the issue in Burkean terms.²² Is he blind “principle” or “agent”

of a Force beyond, as Ahab construes this dilemma (Chapter 36)? That contradiction pervades the drama throughout.

The naturalistic understanding of *Moby Dick*, as large, fearsome, but ultimately ordinary sea mammal, is forcefully epitomized in the view of Captain Boomer of the *Samuel Enderby*, and Bunker, the ship's doctor. Like Ahab, Boomer had every reason to hate the White Whale and project purposive malevolence upon him. Boomer had lost an arm to the creature. Ever the sanguine personality, though, normal and resilient, Boomer is veritably “good-natured,” even “good-humored” and “facetious,” about it all. “He's welcome to the arm he has,” the Captain says of *Moby Dick*, “. . . but [quite sensibly] not to another one.” Bunker, the physician, puts it all down to indigestion: “What you take for the White Whale's malice is only his awkwardness,” in any case. “What's the matter?,” Boomer asks, astounded, at Ahab's frenzy. “Is your Captain crazy?” he whispers to Fedallah (Chapter 100).

Starbuck's call to Ahab from the *Pequod's* deck the third day of the chase makes the same point at the very climax of events. “Oh! Ahab,” cries Starbuck, “not too late is it, even now, the third day, to desist. See! *Moby Dick* seeks thee not. It is thou, thou, that madly seekest him!” Note, too, that the narrator says a few pages later, “Within a few yards of Ahab's boat, . . . he [*Moby Dick*] lay quiescently.” He didn't appear to be after anybody. And when the Whale did attack, or seemed to, he was ostensibly “maddened by yesterday's fresh Irons that corroded in him” (Chapter 135). Give a suffering animal of any species a break!

Again, during that final chase, Ishmael offers further alternative interpretations of what's going on. “Whether [just] fagged” or possessed of “deceitfulness or malice, whichever was true, the White Whale's way now began to abate” in the midst of that day's mortal combat. In any case, as Ahab's “craft . . . ran ranging along the White Whale's flank, he [*Moby Dick*] seemed strangely oblivious of its advance” (Chapter 135), his malice being, it would appear, only “seeming malice” (Chapter 41). It was a matter, or could be interpreted as a matter, of “identif[ication]” and “personification” for “raving,” “delirious,” “lunatic,” “mad” Ahab, a “transfer[ence]” of a kind (Chapter 41).

Note that other whalers “who by accident ignorantly gave battle to *Moby Dick* . . . were content to ascribe the peculiar terror he bred, more, as it were, to the perils of the Sperm Whale

fishery at large, than to the individual cause” (Chapter 41). I.e., there was a generic phenomenal explanation for what had happened to Ahab three years earlier off Japan. In any case, “In maritime life, far more than in that of terra firma, wild rumors abound, wherever there is any adequate reality for them to cling to,” “wild strange tales of Southern whaling,” about, perhaps, only an “apparition,” invested with “superstitious accompaniments” (Chapter 41). Read: fish stories.

Stubb, the Second Mate, is the source of even-tempered, even jocose, realism on the *Pequod*. To him, “All sorts of men in one kind of world . . . [caution us to be] watching [and be on guard against] all of these interpreters, myself included,” in respect to the doubloon Ahab offered as prize for spotting Moby Dick, or for assessing anything else. “Books,” he says, “give us the bare words and facts, but we come in to supply the [interpretive] thoughts” (Chapter 99).

As to the tragedy of Captain Gardner and his ship, the Rachel (he has lost his son to Moby Dick, probably permanently, as well as other members of his crew), Ishmael notes that it “often happens” that “whale[s] run away with their pursuers” (Chapter 128). It’s not necessarily a sign of anything supernatural or unexpected.

Even in respect to the giant squid the *Pequod* ran into and chased after, Starbuck saw it as “a thing of portents”; Queequeg, as a hopeful indication that “you quick see him ‘parm’ whale” (Chapter 61). Perspective, perspective, perspective.

And what about the “*Town-Ho*’s Story”? Here Moby Dick killed a sailor, yes, on a different ship, but that whaleman, Radney, was a real SOB who “deserved” to be eaten alive. No predatory injustice obtained in this instance, only a rightful and well-earned comeuppance. If Moby Dick be an agent of some transcendent noumenal Intentionality, that cosmic Power cannot necessarily be seen, in this instance, as perverse (Chapter 54).

Recall that the Sperm Whale’s tail goes with “subtle elasticity,” “delicacy,” “gentleness,” “tenderness.” “Kitten-like, he [the Sperm Whale] plays.” Concludes Ishmael, the narrator, in Chapter 86, “Dissect him how I may, then, I but go skin deep. I know him not, and never will. But if I know not even the tail of this whale, how understand his head? much more, how comprehend his face, when face he has none? Thou shalt see my back parts, my tail, he seems to say, but my face shall not be seen. But I cannot completely make out his back parts; and hint what he

will about his face, I say again he has no face.”

Take note of “what goes with” the “malign” and what goes with the “benign,” Burke offers,²³ to get at the “dialectics,” the inevitable “oppositions,” inherent in any work of literature. For Ahab, what Burke calls “equations” or “clusters” of terms, descriptive constructions under the sign of the malign, go with the Whale from the “Quarter-Deck” onward. For the narrator and numerous other observers, the intentions of the White Whale, if we can call them that, are at least as benign as those of uncaring Nature itself. That blank and ambient reality is “ineffable” “horror” enough, as Ishmael puts it in the chapter “The Whiteness of the Whale” (42). There persists the ultimate ambiguity that vexes Ishmael as much as Ahab. In respect to who or what Moby Dick is, in his essence, a malign principle for Ahab, or in cosmic context, a malign agent for the noumenal and supersensible, for many others, not so much: The “double vision” this mammal of the sea physically embodies, suffuses in tantalizing ambiguity Melville’s masterpiece from start to finish.

**“Truth,” “Double Vision,” and Paradoxical
Ambiguity in Meaning and Motive
in *Moby-Dick*: The Equivocal
Context of the Drama**

Just as there is a consistently recurring, dual-faceted, malign and benign interpretation of the character of the White Whale in Melville’s novel, so there is also a consistently-recurring, dual-faceted, malign and benign interpretation of the enviroing scene in which the action of the story takes place. The “Whiteness of the Whale” serves as the guiding application of a perspectivism that alternatively directs our attention toward the beauty, ordinariness, and innocence, sometimes even the majesty, of surface appearances, on the one hand, and the possible, often inescapable, underlying terrors that haunt, or may haunt, human and animal life, on the other.

The most striking contradictions between surface appearances and appalling threats just beneath and/or beyond come in Chapter 132, “The Symphony,” and in the narratives of “The Chase” that follow (Chapters 133-135). The action of the “Symphony” depicts the calm before the storm, so to speak. It takes place on the deck of the *Pequod*. Ahab and Starbuck engage

in conversation. The sky is “steel-blue,” we are told. The air is “gentle.” “Oh, Starbuck,” Ahab feels constrained to say, “It is a mild, mild wind, and a mild looking sky. On such a day---very much such a sweetness as this---I struck my first whale---a boy harpooneer of eighteen!” Ahab speaks of this ambient, bucolic serenity twice more. Yet, underneath the “gentle thoughts of the feminine air,” the narrator notes, “to and fro in the deeps, far down in the bottomless blue, rushed mighty leviathans, sword-fish, and sharks; . . . these were the strong, troubled, murderous thinkings of the masculine sea.” Ahab, too, highlights this vexing contradiction. In the midst of “that smiling sky,” Ahab says, “Albicore[s] . . . chase and fang” the “flying fish” like “murderers.” Indeed, eventually “on the field,” like these slaughtered creatures about us, we all “sleep, aye, [like] rust amid greenness,” deathly decay amid nature’s devious charms. At the end of the chapter, Ahab peers over the side into the calm, pond-like ocean, only to see “in the water there, Fedallah [the devil-figure] . . . motionlessly leaning over the same rail.”

On the first day of the chase, “the ocean grew still more smooth,” Ishmael tells us; “. . . [it] seemed a noon-meadow, so serenely it spread.” “No wonder,” Ishmael says, “there had been some among the hunters who, namelessly transported and allured by all this serenity, had ventured to assail it [attack Moby Dick]; but had fatally found the quietude but the vesture of tornadoes. Yet calm, enticing calm, oh, whale! thou glidest on, . . . no matter how many in that same way thou mayest have bejuggled and destroyed before” (Chapter 133). In the midst of natural tranquility, Ahab’s rowboat is shattered by Moby Dick.

On the second day, an “infinite blueness” is equated with “the thing that might destroy them,” the pagan crew, hanging from the “rigging,” on the lookout for the White Whale (Chapter 134). This time, Ahab’s prosthetic leg is splintered, and his fiendish talisman, Fedallah, is found missing.

On the third and final day of the chase, “again” the weather is “lovely”: “a fairer day could not dawn upon the world” (Chapter 135). Once more, the planet “paints like the harlot” (Chapter 42): Fedallah’s dead body is seen entangled in the Whale’s ropes and irons, the *Pequod* is rammed and sunk by the attacking Whale, Ahab is “voicelessly” garroted and shot from his boat by a “flying turn” in the rope attached to Moby Dick, and all the crew die except for Ishmael, who “only am escaped to tell thee” (Epilogue).

Earlier in the narrative, Ishmael alludes to “the chips

of chewed boats, and the sinking limbs of torn comrades, [occasioned by] . . . the whale’s direful wrath [in the midst of] the serene, exasperating sunlight that smiled on, as if at a birth or a bridal” (Chapter 41). Within the “surrounding serenity” of the accidental squid chase, Ahab “was [in fact] now prepared to connect the ideas of mildness and repose with the first sight of the particular whale he pursued” (Chapter 59). The chilling contrast between the “hideous sight” of “the peeled white body of [a] beheaded whale,” that “great mass of death,” and an “unclouded and mild azure sky, upon the fair face of the pleasant sea,” loses one’s thoughts “in infinite perspectives.” It makes for “a most doleful and most mocking funeral,” this, as “sea-vultures” and “air-sharks,” all dressed “punctiliously in black or speckled,” tear the carcass to shreds (Chapter 69).

The paradox of the malign and benign in the natural world extends in Ishmael’s reflections to the pirates “who still sailed on unharmed” after “murder[ing]” their mate, “while swift lightnings shivered the neighboring ship that would have borne a righteous husband to outstretched, longing arms” (Chapter 70). As the pagans of the *Pequod* try to outwit the German Jungfrau in quest of a certain whale, the narrator notes that “beneath all that silence and placidity [it is a “gently rolling sea” at an “eternal blue noon”], the utmost monster of the seas was writhing and wrenching in agony” (Chapter 81). When “The *Pequod* meets the *Rosebud*” (Chapter 91, ironic entitlement), and the putrifying corpse of a long-dead whale assaulted the nostrils of the crew, Stubb sums it all up: “How like all creation it [the decaying corpse] smells.”

Fatalistic foreshadowing, formal salience, and paradoxical double-vision---all of these constructs central to Burke’s thought and literary theory---illustratively obtrude in Melville’s masterpiece.

Chapter 9

From a Burkean Perspective, the “Little Lower Layer” of *Moby-Dick* as Dramatic Action II

Moby-Dick as a Dramatic, Literary Act to Encompass a Problematic, World-Historical Scene Via “Beliefs . . . Bottomed on the Earth”

Burke says, “The poet”---and by poet Burke means novelist, playwright, even polemicist, too, “All men [sic] are poets”¹---“The poet will naturally tend to write about that which most deeply engrosses him---and nothing more deeply engrosses a man than his *burdens*, We win by capitalizing on our

debts, by turning our liabilities into assets, by using our burdens as a basis of insight.” A burden may be physical. It may be, it often will be, social, intellectual, and environmental. Thus, Burke states, “Confronting the poetic act in terms of the sublime [Burke here means tragedy] and the ridiculous [or comedy], we are disposed to think of the issue *in terms of a situation and a strategy for confronting or encompassing that situation*, a scene and an act, with each possessing its own genius, but the two fields interwoven.”²

A situation, or environing scene for a dramatic act, will motivate our actions, Burke says. It will also motivate or shape our explanation for our actions and, likely, the actions of others. Indeed, “motives,” including verbalization of a theory of motives, that is, a theory of why people do what they do, “are shorthand terms for situations,” Burke adds. Those environmental “stimuli [that motivate us and our accounts of why we and others so act] do not possess an *absolute* meaning,” however. These ambient incentives, these potential grounds for behavior and its construction, are of necessity very complex. Humans tend to “select certain relationships [in their experience] as meaningful,” and to neglect others. That’s just the way language works; it simultaneously reveals and conceals, induces attention toward and induces attention away from.³ “These [favored] relationships [we choose as the basis for action and its justification] are not *realities*, they are *interpretations* of reality---hence different frameworks of interpretation will lead to different conclusions as to what reality is.”⁴ In his chapter on “Motives” in *Permanence and Change*, Burke even goes so far as to use the word “trickery” to characterize the way symbol-users tendentiously credit their own *whys* and *wherefors*, while deprecating the “reasons for” of contrary schemes as mere “rationalizations.”⁵

Burke cites some examples of contending theories of human motivation and their proffered justification: the Freudian, with “sex,” “repression,” and “individualistic neuroses”; the Marxist, with “economic facts and the class struggle”; religions with their theologically “prescribed and proscribed rules of conduct”; even Oriental ancestor worship as prompting behavior aimed at honoring the deceased.⁶

Nevertheless, Burke doesn’t end his discussion of scenic motivation with dismissive and debunking put-downs alone. If he did, Burke would sound like a Postmodern epistemological nihilist. He would be barely distinguishable from Jacques Derrida,

Hans Georg Gadamer, Jean Francois Lyotard, or Michel Foucault. For them, language is a kind of untethered, free-floating balloon, ungrounded in the sheer brute materials of the world as it is in their structure and function. Burke *leans* toward Postmodernism. He’s not a Cartesian representationalist, as Stewart and Williams claim, a theorist who takes language as pretty much a “mirror on nature.”⁷⁷ But he doesn’t go the whole way toward the notion of “truth” as a pristinely arbitrary social construction. On the American landscape, something stands between Burke and, say, Frederic Jameson, for whom language is a “prison house.” That “reality” Burke terms “recalcitrance.”⁷⁸

Burke has been called a “realist,” more precisely a “critical realist.”⁷⁹ A critical realist is somebody who believes the physical universe is real, but does not naively hold to the view that our verbal descriptions interlock with it, “represent” it, one to one, in an altogether accurate and potentially unerring way. I prefer to label Burke an “interventionist realist,” after Ian Hacking’s book, *Representing and Intervening: Introductory Topics in the Philosophy of Natural Science*. The “real” world of air, earth, fire, and water, very much in “nonsymbolic motion,” thrust along by the four forces vouchsafed at the dawn of the cosmos, intervenes in language.¹⁰ Eventually, humans are compelled to adapt their narratives in some way to this pressing, insistent hardness out there, and within us. “Recalcitrance” is a deliberately generalized term. We superimpose on recalcitrant reality a creative, dramatic story line, so to speak. But we do not do so totally willy-nilly. To some extent, at least, “However the world is made, that’s the way language is made,” Burke says.¹¹ We may run our favored dramatic story lines “up the flagpole,” so to speak---and try like mad to stick with them through thick and thin (that’s the “permanence” part of *Permanence and Change*)---but eventually, however reluctantly, we are forced to take note, most of us anyway, whether or not “Nature salutes.”

Burke shows how material recalcitrance changes language with a rather broad, exaggerated example. A person could conceivably stand on the edge of a cliff, shout “I am a bird,” then spread his arms, flap them furiously up and down, and jump off. He would probably make this mistake only once. Next time, or eventually, he’ll more likely say, “I am an aviator,” and take to an airplane or glider to soar through the air. Concrete “reality” will eventually alter his language, or that of future generations of aeronautical experimenters.

Burke puts it this way:

The factor of recalcitrance may force us to alter our original strategy of expression greatly. And in the end, our *pseudo-statements* may have been so altered by the revisions which the recalcitrance of the material has forced upon us that we can now more properly refer to them as *statements*. . . . A statement is a completed pseudo-statement---which is to say that *a statement is an attitude rephrased in accordance with the strategy of revision made necessary by the recalcitrance of the materials employed for embodying this attitude.*¹²

Our verbal constructions of our situation primarily express an attitude, create an orientation toward certain pathways of action, give cues to action, and a command to follow those cues, rather than disinterestedly describe and give purely “factual” information. Attitudes are “incipient acts.”¹³ They are fundamentally shaped by our common interests. That’s what “Language as Symbolic Action” means.¹⁴ It is both a collective and subjective performance, a superimposition of drama, or moral conflict---the “inescapably ethical,” as Burke labels it, an exclusively human concern---on the brute materials and social obduracies of this world.¹⁵

However:

Such a position does not involve us in [just] subjectivism, or solipsism. It does not imply that the universe is merely the product of our interpretations. For the interpretations themselves must be altered as the universe displays various orders of recalcitrance to them.¹⁶

Thus, Burke says, “Our ‘opportunistic’ shifts of strategy, as shaped to take this recalcitrance into account, are objective.”¹⁷ In the end, rigid realities will bring us up short: some of us, at least.

And, it need hardly be added, language reciprocates by intervening in nature. Our cities were planned out, maybe loosely, maybe tightly, by multitudinous words of preparation. Look at what “city language” has done to the original landscape of planet Earth!

All of which brings us back to Melville, *Moby-Dick*, and

the middle of the century of “New Meanings.”¹⁸ Melville had an enviroing scene to take account of, of bewildering change. How to make sense of what was happening in geology, philosophy, theology, industry, society? The old conceptual moorings that had fastened the ship of human life and thought to a secure dock in a tranquil harbor were fraying and snapping apart. Not everyone saw this revolution coming as clear-eyed as Melville. His keen antennae were prophetic.

To sum up briefly, the modern era began in earnest in the 17th century. That’s when empirical science arrived on the scene. Rene Descartes, Francis Bacon, John Locke, Benedict Spinoza, and Thomas Hobbes built the philosophical underpinnings. Isaac Newton adduced testable theory, indeed created a new and predictable universe. Galileo Galilei and Johann Kepler, among others, changed “reality” on the basis of mathematics and material observations. Nascent scientific culture flowered with the 18th-century Enlightenment. Hume, Voltaire, and the devotees of Deism enshrined natural law as the preferred focus of intellectual concern, not supernatural agency. Reason trumped faith as mode of operation, among the Western elite anyway. Empirical scientists by the dozens furthered discoveries in every field.

From theory to innovation to practical application: The 19th century saw the Industrial Revolution, the utilitarian outcome of these sublunary revelations. New power sources replaced wind, water, and muscle. The telegraph and the locomotive sped information transfer. Ideas were “in the air” which eventually yielded the distinctively untheological cast of Darwinism, Marxism, Freudianism, and Nietzscheism. Reform movements of astonishing variety flourished. Abolitionists, suffragettes, and utopian visionaries sought to change USAmerica in response to altered conditions. “New meanings” challenged the old seemingly everywhere.

Melville’s great novel bends to this coercive recalcitrance naturalistically, philosophically, and theologically. The “Fossil Whale” chapter is a good case in point for the author’s up-to-the-decade naturalism. He uses the paleo-lingo of the day to place the ancestry of the whale deep in the geological past. “All the fossil whales hitherto discovered,” he says, “belong to the Tertiary period, which is the last preceding the superficial formations.” Melville doesn’t give us dates. No reference to 63 million years of Cenozoic-Era/Tertiary-Period development fleshes out his presentation. What periods preceded the “last” he doesn’t say,

but he does imply their existence. The “superficial formations” of the 2-million-year-old “Quaternary” Ice Age are not so labeled. Melville does, though, speak of “departed” and “utterly unknown Leviathanic species” and “extinct monster[s]” of divergent yet clearly cetacean structure. He refers to “earlier geological strata,” found in “limestone and marl,” in which one discovers “the most extraordinary creatures which the mutations [eight years before Darwin!] of the globe have blotted out of existence.” The pre-Tertiary is simply “antichronical” time. Yet, Melville is even aware of “those Polar eternities; when wedged bastions of ice pressed hard upon what are now the Tropics; and in all the 25,000 miles of this world’s circumference, not an inhabitable hand’s breadth of land was visible” (Chapter 104). What could he be referring to, if not the Cryogenic Period of the Neo-Proterozoic Era, 850 to 630 million years ago, when “Snowball Earth” was often devoid of exposed landmass---not that Melville or mid-19th-century geologists would have had that dating correct. None of the four major, or dozen or so minor, glacials of the Quaternary got near the equator, or covered every continental surface.

Tertiary historical geology went back to the Italian Giovanni Arduino (1759), and especially to Sir Charles Lyell, whose classification of Tertiary epochs around Melville’s time is pretty much current to our day.¹⁹

The point: Melville knew of earth’s natural history and ancient character, as per the science of the time. He’ll use terms like “antediluvian” and “antemosaic.” He’ll nod in the direction of “those [creatures] whose remote posterity are said to have entered the Ark” (Chapter 104). Put the accent on “said to have.” Melville is strategically adjusting, overall, what have been found to be the “pseudostatements” of the past to the hard recalcitrance of empirically-discovered fossil remains embedded in stratified, sedimentary rock. Other chapters, like “Cetology” (32), “A Bower in the Arsacides” (102), and “Measurement of the Whale’s Skeleton” (103), but further elaborate contemporary whaling scholarship. Melville builds on the findings of an earth science that contradicted the received narrative and dating of our geologic past. Yet, he “socialize[s]” his appeal in the direction of concepts and terminologies that may partly alleviate the cognitive discomfort some of his readers might experience.²⁰ Socialization, a strategy of revision, can take cognizance of disparate audiences.

Melville’s understanding of modern, and some supportive ancient, philosophies and deference to their implications are also

conspicuous. He refers directly to the thought of Descartes, Spinoza, Locke, Kant, Plato, the Stoics, pantheists, and “natural philosophers” in general, no doubt meaning the British empiricists of the 17th and 18th centuries. Those philosophic discernments are spread throughout the book (e.g., Chapters 23, 35, 42, 47, 58, 60, 68, and 85). The insight drawn from these mainly contemporary sources that recurs again and again in Melville/Ishmael’s reflections: “Truth” is ambiguous; the nature of reality is, like the depths of the oceans themselves, virtually unfathomable. Early on, Melville sounds this theme in “The Lee Shore,” as the *Pequod* sets out on Christmas day: “In landlessness alone resides highest truth, shoreless, indefinite as God---so better is it to perish in that howling infinite . . .” (Chapter 23). Of the “young Platonists” on the lookout in “The Mast-Head,” Ishmael says, “Their vision is imperfect; they are short-sighted Every strange, half-seen, gliding, beautiful thing that eludes [them]; every dimly-discovered, uprising fin of some undiscernable form becomes diffused--through time and space; like Cranmer’s sprinkled Pantheistic ashes . . .” (Chapter 35). The “sea” they constantly scan is “an everlasting terra incognita” (“Brit,” Chapter 58). Indeed, “In this world your plain things are the knottiest of all.” If you spot the “canopy of vapor” the whale expels, so shapeless and insubstantial, its “thick mists” but summon “the dim doubts in my mind.” “Doubts of all things earthly, and intuitions of some things heavenly, this combination makes neither believer nor infidel, but makes a man [sic] who regards them both with equal eye” (“The Fountain,” Chapter 85).

In “The Whiteness of the Whale,” Ishmael, as before noted, most profoundly and eloquently plumbs the mystery of life’s uncertainties in a philosophic vein. In doing so, he conjures one of the empiricists’ more arcane points of speculation, “that other theory of the natural philosophers, that all other earthly hues---every stately or lovely emblazoning---the sweet tinges of sunset skies and woods; yea, and the gilded velvets of butterflies, and the butterfly cheeks of young girls, all these are but subtle deceits, not actually inherent in substances, but only laid on from without; so that all deified Nature absolutely paints like the harlot, whose allurements cover nothing but the charnel-house within Wonder ye then at the fiery hunt” (Chapter 42)? Truly, “The mystic-marked whale,” and all he represents, “remains undecipherable” (“The Blanket,” Chapter 68).

Without a doubt---maybe that’s not quite the way to put

it!---Melville/Ishmael adjusts his literary discourse to the religious currents of the time. We're not, of course, referring to the Second Great Awakening of that century's first half.²¹ We have in mind carryover of the religious skepticism of the 18th-century European elite,²² the conclusions of the new historical/critical study of the Bible,²³ New England Unitarianism,²⁴ and the implications of the new science and industry themselves. Again, the narrator modifies his strategy of appeal so as to, in part, mitigate potential offense. Early on, Ishmael identifies himself as a “good Presbyterian Christian” (Chapter 17). He sells Queequeg's heretical paganism to Captain Bildad, one of the *Pequod's* owners, in a uniquely theological way. Bildad was a strict and uncompromising Quaker. He was reluctant to hire on someone who was not a Christian. Ishmael's “better sermon”---Peleg's critique---went like this:

“I mean, sir, [Queequeg belongs to] the same ancient Catholic Church to which you and I, and Captain Peleg there, and Queequeg here, and all of us, and every mother's son and soul of us belong; the great and everlasting First Congregation of this whole worshipping world; we all belong to that; only some of us cherish some crotchets noways touching the grand belief; in *that* we all join hands.” (Chapter 18; emphasis in original)

Ishmael uses that crotchet motif to severely assail Queequeg's practice of Ramadan, even “dyspeptic religionists [who] cherish such melancholy notions about their hereafters.” “I then went on,” Ishmael says, in respect to reproach of his friend:

Beginning with the rise and progress of the primitive religions, and coming down to the various religions of the present time, during which time I labored to show Queequeg that all these Lents, Ramadans, and prolonged ham-squattings in cold, cheerless rooms were stark nonsense; bad for the health; useless for the soul; opposed, in short, to the obvious laws of Hygiene and common sense. (Chapter 17)

Ishmael extracts a lesson from mariners who, from a distance, espy a dead whale carcass, predatory birds flying over it; think it dangerous; and write in their log: “*shoals, rocks, and breakers hereabout: beware!*” Ishmael's admonishment:

There’s your law of precedents; there’s your utility of traditions; there’s the story of your obstinate survival of old beliefs never bottomed on the earth, and now not even hovering in the air! There’s orthodoxy! . . . Are you a believer in ghosts, my friend? There are other ghosts than the Cock-Lane one, and far deeper men than Dr. Johnson who believe in them. (Chapter 69)

Melville’s is a call to “beliefs . . . bottomed on the earth.” In Burke’s terms, those beliefs would be “statements” of greater “adequa[cy]” than relative “pseudostatements.”²⁵ They would bend to the “recalcitrance” of the material world, and the spirit of the times as interpreter of that “fatal heckler,” i.e., the “sheer brute materials of the world as it is,” toward possibly an outworn creed. Those assertions might also, therefore, shade toward “the verbalizations of his [sic] group---for what are his language and thought if not a socialized product?”²⁶ Moses, the Flood, the Ark, anyone?

Obviously, Melville’s rhetorical “socialization” in *Moby-Dick*, his success in articulating his *interpretation* of “reality” with that of even an intellectual elite, was deferred for seventy years. The book was neither a critical nor commercial triumph. It sold few copies. Melville was prophetic. Darwin, Marx, Freud, and Nietzsche had yet to come on the scene, although forces that prepared the way for their “impiety” were picking up steam by 1850.²⁷ More dizzying and dislocative industrial transformations were still on the horizon. Liberal religion in America had not reached its zenith in the mid-19th century. Walter Rauschenbusch and the Social Gospel were only implicit in the Protestant reform movements of Melville’s moment.²⁸ The chaos of the Great War was way off. The Armistice of 1918 and the Melville Centennial of 1919 propitiously intersected to give *Moby-Dick* a fresh reading through a very much different lens. Via that 20th-century framing, the Great American Novel was discovered, the full “eloquence” of *Moby-Dick* came to fruition. Finally, the narrative had both formal and “symbolic” charges of profound power.²⁹

The new screen or filter circa the 1920s was, quite possibly, one that could accommodate a perspective distinctly different from that of Enlightenment thought. The “double vision” metaphor of *Moby-Dick* became plausible. That figure was amenable to the “principle of uncertainty” of the emerging

quantum physics, and Einstein’s relativity construction of the macro-universe. Are micro-elements waves or particles? Well, we can’t tell, Heisenberg said. They could be either. Is “time” the same for all beings and objects? Well, no, it depends on a given being’s relationship to other beings in four-dimensional space-time, Einstein averred. *Moby-Dick* elaborates that uncertainty of interpretation, that focus on the relationship between the perceiver and the perceived, throughout. For Enlightenment thinkers, and those who followed in their wake, “reason,” disciplined “logic” founded on empirical observation, can uncover the “truth.” Modern science can yield discrete “facts.” In *Moby-Dick*, Melville says no. We always, in the last analysis, end up with *interpretations* of “reality,” not reality itself.³⁰ Nature, its noumena, and its final meaning are enigmas. Whether we madly and obsessively quest for an ultimately redemptive understanding and/or vengeance at the unfairness of it all, like Ahab, or settle for conventional piety like Starbuck, or the notion of simple, quotidian pleasures of hearth and home, like Ishmael (Chapter 94), our “topmost greatness” can lie no further up the scale of value than “our topmost grief” (Chapter 135).

One more thing by way of complication of the scene-act ratio, correspondence between the novel and its context,³¹ in interpreting *Moby-Dick*: Burke says in the climactic passage on recalcitrance in *Permanence and Change*, “The ethical bent from which one approaches the universe is itself a part of the universe, and a very important part.”³² That is, language, our source of the ethical, and its recalcitrant incentives toward moral perfectionism, sublunary and transcendental drama, and therefore, we would submit, theotopism (see Chapters 4 & 5 of this volume, above), has to be accommodated, also. We can “discount” and deconstruct, perhaps.³³ However, we cannot obliterate. The theological motive of perfection can be moderated, but not eliminated. Language casts a “magic spell,” Burke says in the opening of *PLF*.³⁴ And magic spells cannot be broken, he cautions near the conclusion.³⁵ Are, therefore, references to “Floods” and “Arks” in human discourses, or their attenuated variants in the articulations of liberal religionists and even agnostic metaphysicians, any less constrained by a universal human recalcitrance?

Statement, pseudo-statement, and socialization of symbols: The issue is complicated by varieties of recalcitrance--material, social, and the very ethical/dramatic nature of *homo dialecticus* himself and herself.

Moby Dick, the White Whale, as Metaphor, Noumenon, and “Unanswerable Opponent”

“Oh! Ahab,” Starbuck cries at the narrative’s climax, “not too late is it, even now, the third day, to desist. See! Moby Dick seeks thee not. It is thou, thou, that madly seekest him!” (Chapter 135). Lay off, already. Play ball with Mother Nature. Harvest other whales in prudent numbers. Live within nature’s constraints. Do not tangle in mortal combat with the Beast that represents the four forces of the universe in their full structure and function. On the day---or in the geologic epoch?---that you do so, you will surely die.

It sounds like Genesis and the First Temptation. Only this time, death comes suddenly on the heels of a great transgression. For so-called *homo sapiens*, the wise guys, now, currently, obsessively in pursuit of industrial expansion and economic growth while on their 200,000-year “*Visit to a Small Planet*,” the demise or diminishment will more likely come in slow, but still painful, increments. But it *will* come, Melville hints and Burke predicts.³⁶ Unless we reign in our tragic striving and settle for the “humbler satisfactions” of “comic” drama and “linguistic skepticism,” dubiety in regard to our insatiable lust for “empire,” we may be jeopardizing the future of multitudes of species, including our very own.³⁷

Melville does not elaborate on this theme, implicit in the rising action and particularly at the climax of *Moby-Dick*. Burke does. We’ll summarize a few of Burke’s congruent teachings and warnings on ecology and its neglect in his day, and ours.

That’s the exact word, “Ecology,” Burke used way before its time. In 1937, Burke admonished, and we quote here at length:

Samson was not the only strong man who pulled down a temple upon himself. Technology, as driven by the necessities of capitalism, can be a vast transmogrification of Samson, amplifying the scope of his act by all the bureaucratic resources of our institutions, the total organization of our productive technique. There is the dubious kind of “profit” that exports two-dollar wheat [1937, remember!] and gets in exchange a Dust Bowl.

Among the sciences, there is one little fellow named Ecology, and in time we shall pay him more attention. He teaches us that the *total* economy of this

planet cannot be guided by an efficient rationale of exploitation alone, but that the exploiting part must eventually suffer if it too greatly disturbs the *balance* of the whole (as big beasts would starve if they succeeded in catching all the little beasts that are their prey---their very lack of efficiency in the exploitation of their ability as hunters thus acting as efficiency on a higher level, where considerations of balance count for more than considerations of one-tracked purposiveness).

So far, the laws of ecology have begun avenging themselves against restricted human concepts of profit by countering deforestation and deep plowing with floods, droughts, dust storms, and aggravated soil erosion. And in a capitalist economy, these trends will be arrested only insofar as *collectivistic* ingredients of control are introduced, as with the comparatively insignificant efforts that have already been organized by our state and federal governments.³⁸

To the “deforestation . . . floods, droughts, dust storms, and aggravated soil erosion” of Burke’s distant era, we can add today: a precipitate increase in global temperatures, the sudden melting of our polar ice caps, receding of our glaciers, lengthening of our summer seasons as measured by blooming and defoliating trees in the U. S. and a growing wine industry in England, appearance of tropical fish in ever more northerly oceans and subtropical plants in the likes of Georgia, heat waves in the “sky islands” of Arizona, a maple sugar downturn in Maine, permafrost problems in Alaska, historic draughts in Australia and in the Amazon, the sharp decline in cod off Nova Scotia and herring in the North Sea, and the shrinking of our tropical rain forests in particular---just to touch the tip of the looming ecological iceberg our Titanic Mother Earth is veering toward.

As we say in greater detail in Chapters 4 and 5, the negatives of language that open up for us infinite vistas of imagination--and motivation---lie behind our seemingly insatiable lust for “more.” “Language is our scene [of action] in general,” Crusius says.³⁹ We stand condemned and challenged by what we behold through our innate capacity to use, and be used by, language. We are finite, limited, vulnerable beings, situated, on the one hand, in an animal’s body, with nary a chance of being, in all respects, perfect. Yet we are, on the other, infinitely untethered and far-

seeing in the gifts of thought and understanding language bestows upon us. Our vision of infinite-negative perfection judges us, makes us anxious, uncomfortable in our finitude. It goads us to overcome our powerlessness and inferiority if we can, Mortimer Adler says.⁴⁰ It impels us to grade and classify all sorts of things, and especially ourselves, in terms of high or low, better or worse, more estimable or less worthy, “perfect” or “imperfect,” then reach for the highest rung we can reasonably attain on whatever ladder of value we can get hold of. The upshot is, somewhat sadly to say: a being “goaded by the spirit of hierarchy (or moved by the sense of order) and rotten with perfection.”⁴¹

Is there hope? I asked Burke that question in 1987. What are humankind’s chances, I inquired. “Fifty-fifty,” he replied, vigorously for a man of ninety at the time.⁴² Burke had proffered dark warnings in the early 1970s. He published two essays sometimes entitled the “Helhaven papers.”⁴³ In them, he envisions a day when industries so pollute our planet that some earthlings will migrate to a “mighty Lunar Dome” or “Culture-Bubble” called by the “developers” Helhaven. These “Lunar Paradisiac[s]” will luxuriate in most of the comforts of home, by way of “virtual reality,” of course.⁴⁴ They will even enjoy a simulated ocean front. Guess who these blessed migrants will be? Howabout the very movers and shakers who wrought most of the destruction back on earth! The vast majority who had far, far less to do with the ecological carnage will be earth-bound, choking and scraping together as much of an existence as they can. Irony of ironies, “the New Technologic Eden” will “solve” the “technological pollution” right there on the Sea of Tranquility via, as one would surmise, Technology itself!⁴⁵ “Technological artificiality would [then] be complete,” Burke says.⁴⁶ “Taking conditions [of technological obsession] that are there already, the satirist [KB, referring to himself] perversely, twistedly, carries them ‘to the end of the line.’”⁴⁷

Burke greatly respects the technologic prowess of men and women. Technology is the consummate expression of human “rationality,” and Burke gives it its due: It “surely is the *non plus ultra*” of human thought.⁴⁸ The issue for Burke isn’t whether symbolizing animals can think their way out of their dilemmas. The question is, what, in the last analysis, actually *motivates* them? It’s their immersion in hierarchic *dramas of redemption* that so skews their strivings. Men and women smart enough to make millions are, circa 2012, still denying climate change. What

prods them to such blinkered excess? It isn't bodily needs that alone spur nonverbal animals, that's for sure. As Burke says in both his Helhaven essays:

Our national welfare depends upon attaining the maximum rate of destruction of our national resources, whereby we could hope for an eternal bull market because the more we learn to use what we do not need, the greater our consumption; the greater our consumption, the greater our production; the greater our production, the greater our prosperity. . . . If people can be taught to waste enough . . . , *business need never face a saturation point. For, though there is a limit to what a man [sic] can use, there is no limit whatever to what he can waste.* The amount of production possible to a properly wasteful society is thus seen to be enormous. . . . The maximum possible consumption is made possible by the maximum possible waste, and therefore . . . *culture depends upon a maximum of waste.*⁴⁹

Most intriguing, Burke is here, in 1974, quoting something he wrote in 1929, *before* the stock market crash!⁵⁰

Is there a Burkean way out? The hesitant answer is yes, if:

If we nurture that “linguistic skepticism” Burke speaks of, a meta-appreciation of language itself as a possibly insidious motive, a blinding, as well as a revealing, taskmaster that uses us as much as we use it, especially in respect to its potentially perverse “perfectionism.”⁵¹

If we probe the resources of “perspective by incongruity,” a clashing together of terms and concepts in an “impious,” untraditional way, or a juxtaposing of notions that “common sense” tells us just “don't go together,” like, say, “trained incapacity” or “methodological laxity.”⁵²

If we studiously develop a “double vision” or “dialectical vision,” a talent for seeing the potential “truth” in each of two contrasting ideas, like individualism and collectivism, creative work and programmatic “indolence,” efficiency and “inefficiency,” a doctrine of facilitation and a “doctrine of interference.”⁵³

If we admit into our debates on policy all of the “parliamentary” voices as possibly worthy contributors to the general good, or avoid the “fanaticism” of trying to impose one

imperial “terminology of motives” on all of humankind.⁵⁴

If we approach our life, individually and collectively, within the framework of comedy instead of tragedy, cultivate a feel for “dramatic irony,” be observers of ourselves while acting, like someone “on stage” and “out in the audience” at one and the same time, foster contentment with imperfect revision, improvement, or mere restoration of the status quo, better not best.⁵⁵

And perhaps most important, if we pay greatest heed to “the *unanswerable* opponent, the nature of reality itself,” the “sheer brute materials of the world as it is,” which “will disobey” our inflated appeals in the service of “empire” and “absurd ambition,” even if “the people would obey” or remain “silent” in response to corporate denials about climate change, as, for instance, the ice caps melt and the oceans rise.⁵⁶

Linguistic skepticism, perspective by incongruity, dialectical vision, parliamentary appreciation, preference for comic drama, and admonitions about the material limitations our powers of eloquence possess---with such multiple avenues into an awareness of our emersion in dramatic action generally, and tools with which to adjust it, we might, just might, be able to partly alter the trajectory of our collective endeavors away from the self-destruction that threatens.

Melville, the proto-Burke, nebulously prophesied a fatal collision between humankind and their natural context as self-generated nemesis. As John Parke (1955) says: In *Moby-Dick*, “Mankind [sic] itself (all races and important nationalities are represented in the crew of the *Pequod*) is fatefully embarked on a pursuit which is, as we have seen, a titanically malicious attack on nature itself.”⁵⁷ Early on in the following century, Burke fleshed out that portentous combat.

Generic Classification of *Moby-Dick*: Tragedy, Melodrama, or a Motley Mixture, with Maybe Comedy Thrown In?

How do we assess *Moby-Dick* as generic drama? On its face, that seems like a simple question. Throughout, the tone is mostly serious, very serious, with everybody but Ishmael and the Whale, at the end, dead and gone. That would sound tragic to most readers.

In 1851, however, the *Literary World* called *Moby-Dick*

a “romance” with “a bit of German melodrama” thrown in.⁵⁸ That same year, *Harper’s New Monthly* said it was “a romance, a tragedy, and a natural history.”⁵⁹ The London *Spectator* at the time tagged Ahab, at any rate, as “a melodramatic exaggeration.”⁶⁰ Contra that English publication, Charles Child Walcutt (1944) thought “Ahab’s constant introspection makes him, more than other tragic heroes, a sort of spectator, experiencing catharsis at his own tragedy.”⁶¹ Clifton Fadiman (1943) marked *Moby-Dick* as “a myth of Evil and Tragedy,” a tale even “border[ing] on black tragedy.”⁶² Newton Arvin (1945) called the book---“the unity [of which] is so masterly that only by artifice can we disentangle its various strands of significance”---“a form of tragedy” on “a higher imaginative plane.”⁶³ Henry Alonzo Myers (1945) veritably entitled his critique of Melville’s masterwork, “The Tragic Meaning of *Moby-Dick*.”⁶⁴

Here, of course, is but a small sampling of the myriad reviews of this protean book. What I want to do is match these mainly tragic-frame assessments of Melville’s narrative with a recent melodramatic estimate. I speak of *Our Faith in Evil: Melodrama and the Effects of Entertainment Violence*, by Gregory Desilet. I choose this work for a close generic look because Desilet, a scholar with two other Burkean publications,⁶⁵ uses Burke throughout his study, including his chapter on a melodramatic reading of the Whale. Employing Desilet and one other essay on melodrama as bases for comparison and contrast, we’ll make our case for *Moby-Dick* as high literary tragedy in the main.

“Melodrama” literally means a theatrical production with music in the background. The idea is, the substance, characters, and plot-line of this play or novel aren’t hefty enough to move an audience to a genuinely tragic response. The drama needs a teary, maudlin “melody” to gin up the feelings. A melodrama is, then, in a sense, a “fake” tragedy, or tragedy-lite. The label “melodrama” pretty much says, don’t take this contrived tale too seriously. It is not to be read on its face, at any rate. Guard against getting caught up or overly involved. It’s not much of a reflection of reality.

In an article on the 9/11 terror attacks, Elizabeth Anker summarizes well the salient features of this genre.⁶⁶ Melodrama highlights, she says, (1) “moral virtue,” signified by outrageous, undeserved suffering that is ethically redeemed through noble retributive action; (2) three central characters, an innocent “victim,” a “ruthless villain,” and a “heroic savior”; (3) hyperbolized, binary “polarizations of good and evil,” that is, narrative “Manicheism”;

(4) somewhat heavy-handed suspense accomplished via cycles of emotion and action, a “dialectic of pathos and action”; and (5) heightened, exaggerated, over-the-top nonverbal gestures in the form of mechanical, insufficiently-motivated aural and visual stimuli. These latter features would be like an overwrought acting style with “mugging” and maybe flailing arms not exactly justified by the situation and dialogue. The acting would be a bit histrionic.

The key ingredient we should point to is the polarization. All the good is on one side, all the bad on the other. We’re dealing with thorough evildoers there, and the really, really good guys or gals here. The protagonist will be an uncomplicated saint of some kind. His antagonist would run over his mother. The main characters look like pasteboard cutouts, devoid of the morally mixed motives of the world as it actually is. Polarization, exaggeration, hokeyness, served in serious tones---they’re four good expressions to sum up melodrama’s gist.⁶⁷

In contrast, Desilet offers a traditionally Aristotelian conception of tragedy. Keep in mind that we are here talking about aesthetic works of stage, screen, and literature. We are not referring to the practical discourse of what Burke calls “the Human Barnyard,” the give-and-take of party conflict in the public square.⁶⁸ That’s for the next chapter. We’ll offer a modified definition of tragedy in respect to that quite different context and set of purposes. Poetics, theater, and fictional literature involve the “imitation of an action” for artistic, entertainment, interpretive, appreciative, perhaps also instructional, aims. They do not usually feature an overt “recommendation of an action.” They often caution an audience to beware of the contradictions of motivation within themselves and without, the unavoidable pitfalls that might blamelessly separate friend from friend, foe from foe. These artistic expressions can allow for “the nonpartisan extension of the emotional response to both sides of the conflict.”⁶⁹ They may suggest a fatalistic inability on the part of persons in straightened circumstances, including audience members, to effectively act. That is hardly ever the posture in fervent, practical speechmaking and pamphleteering.

As a consequence of its complex ambivalence, the tragic theory of Aristotle/Desilet differs from melodrama in that it highlights a “basic inner conflict,” “meaningful identification with both sides (or all sides) of a conflict,” “nonpartisan catharsis” or emotional release, and “mistaken[ness].”⁷⁰ Ideally such intense fictional drama will arouse in an audience “pity,” or “the

[magnanimous and global] sharing of another’s profound grief.” It should engender “fear,” or “heedful awe,” as Desilet translates the Greek terms. Such staged, filmed, and/or literary dramatic tragedy can and often should promote what Desilet labels an “equiprimordial,” “*synagonistic*,” rather than “*antagonistic*,” origin of evil. The dialectical poles in Greek tragedy are, says Desilet, “different, but mutually inclusive,” rather than “different, but mutually exclusive” as in theatrical melodrama.⁷¹

These points of contrast having been acknowledged, Desilet still categorizes *Moby-Dick* as a melodrama. From Ahab’s point of view, the narrative pits good vs. evil, to be sure. As noted, Ahab lays the world’s ills *in toto* on the Whale as representative vessel of global iniquity. Of all that tortures and torments human beings, this likely supernatural beast is the embodiment. Typical of melodrama, it is a “metaphysical” evil Ahab assails. It originates, in all likelihood, beyond the “wall” that separates phenomena from noumena, empirical experience from the Powers Above, if any such Powers actually exist.

According to Desilet, *Moby-Dick* is a melodrama, yes, but a melodrama of a special kind. It is a “reflexive melodrama,” one in which the “melodramatic structure” or “monistic antagonism” or “exclusionary metaphysics” undergoes a transmutation as the story progresses.⁷² Desilet is talking here about the good vs. evil polarity, etc., with “death to Moby Dick” the featured melodramatic purpose. “In the course of the drama,” Desilet continues, “the moral polarity as initially presented from the point of view of the protagonist [assuming Ahab is such] undergoes a hesitant and temporary reversal.” This judgment is based on the several takes on the Whale as an amoral, naturalistic phenomenon, not a supernatural incarnation of transcendent malevolence, that occur between “The Quarter-Deck” and “The Chase-Third Day.” “Finally, . . . the reader/audience realizes the protagonist’s understanding of the creature, himself, and the world is wholly unreliable. The course of events carries the audience beyond a mere reversal of the moral polarity of the conflict to the point of sensing the dangers inherent in passionate adherence to the moral structure itself.”⁷³ That suspect moral structure entails use of the scapegoat mechanism unto a violent demise for the one who thinks he knows the “true” cause for all that’s gone wrong in his life and world.

Recall once more what Starbuck, in the last chapter, shouts out from the *Pequod* just before Ahab hurls his harpoon:

“See! Moby Dick seeks thee not. It is thou, thou, that madly seekest him!” The Whale is just a whale, a dumb brute. And Moby Dick has already been described in that chase as lying “quiescent,” rather than as charging toward Ahab in a predatory mode (Chapter 135).

In being transformed from its melodramatic binaries into a tale of mistaken identity, so to speak, “The conflict has become more like the conflict of tragic drama,” Desilet acknowledges. A resulting kind of “sympathy” toward both sides in the conflict and “heedful awe” toward the “mistaken[ness]” of this terrible and unnecessary clash of titans generates something akin to the attitude that accompanies genuine tragedy. The narrative “shifts from being good versus evil and the identification and elimination of destructive alien agency to being a confrontation with a human being engaged in scapegoating as a consequence of blind adherence to a particular logic of evil.”⁷⁴

If so, it’s hard to see why Desilet can’t denominate *Moby-Dick* full-blown tragic drama. He seems to think that tragedy more specifically has to do with “ruth [that is, sympathy] in response to victims of violence” rather than “ruth in response to the blindness of the perpetrators of violence.”⁷⁵

It appears that Desilet is splitting hairs here. Ahab ultimately comes across as “a complex human being.” Through “partial blindness” and “mistaken . . . orientation,” he “becomes tragically destructive,” Desilet acknowledges.⁷⁶ Ahab’s faulty appraisal was only a partial blindness. As early as “The Quarter-Deck” scene, Ahab realizes the Whale may be just an animal in nonsymbolic motion like any other.

Ahab has, I think, earned our sympathy. He lost a leg. His body is deformed from head to toe. His quest is heroic, even if ill-conceived as a practical enterprise. We have learned a profound lesson in taking this voyage with him. The whale emerges in the end, in all likelihood, as one of those innocent “victims of violence” for whom Desilet reserves the distinction of high Aristotelian tragedy. Moby Dick, we tend to believe by then, is actually just a very large, garden-variety nonverbal being that acted and acts self-protectively out of blind instinct, and no more, when attacked with harpoons and lances. There is no *moral* evil present and embodied in the whale named Moby Dick, at least not likely. From us, he elicits awe and pity. The half-insanity of Ahab diagnosed in Chapter 41 now takes precedence over his half-normality. Still heroic, Ahab’s pursuit seems quixotic, as

well as self- and other-destructive.

And yet, and yet, one other character, not only Ahab and Starbuck, has offered an interpretation of the Whale or whale. We are forced not to forget him. That character is Ishmael. Early on, in “The Whiteness of the Whale,” the narrator reveals “what, at times, he [Moby Dick] was to me” (Chapter 42). Ishmael’s thoughts about the (W)hale are not happy ones. His foreboding interpretation suggests something of a negative theodicy, as we have said, an agnostic conception of natural evil. Like travelers in snow-covered Lapland who forgot to wear their “colored glasses,” the “wretched infidel” with whom Ishmael implicitly identifies gazes himself blind at the ghostly prospect of “atheism,” blank existential meaninglessness, that stretches before him. For Ishmael, of this threat and so much more, the (W)hite (W)hale was the embodiment (Chapter 42).

Ishmael’s possible peripety, or reversal of outlook, might have come in Chapter 92, “The Squeeze of the Hand.” There he reputedly gave up on his metaphysical speculations. There, while squishing balls of spermaceti into more viscous oil, he determined, at last, to seek what little “attainable felicity” a man might find in this world, by “lower[ing]” his sights to “the wife, the hearth, the bed, the table, the saddle, the fire-side; the country,” that is, the physical and mental joys and pleasures, and no other, of this natural world.

Still and all, the drama closes with the sight of that (W)hite (W)hale searingly fresh in Ishmael’s mind’s eye, as he holds on, face down, staring into the pit of death, so to speak, and at the equally undecipherable emblems Queequeg had the carpenter engrave on his coffin.

The “Loomings” that open the narrative of the (W)hale, and the question mark that punctuates the voyage throughout, imprint themselves on the reader to the last:

Live stoically, if not heroically, with your possibly, if not probably, meaningless suffering. That’s all the dignity and consolation you can hope for. The evanescent engrossments and pleasures of this earth may serve as deflection and panacea for a moment. Miguel de Unamuno’s *Tragic Sense of Life* will likely, however, ultimately overwhelm. Meaning, certain meaning, is beyond our scope and reach.

That all sounds ambivalently and ambiguously tragic to me.

Is there a “comic” dimension of a sort to Moby-Dick?

Could there be? We’ll save that question for Chapter 12, after we’ve taken up rhetoric, the practical use of language to explicitly persuade.

Chapter 10

Rhetoric as Dramatic Action I

What Are We Talking about Here?

Burke famously speaks of all symbolic action as being “rhetorical” in one way or another. No such thing as objective, totally nonsuasive speech or writing exists in the universe of human communication. At the very least, even artistic works like *The Scarlet Letter* and *Moby-Dick* call attention to some phenomena or aspects of life, while deflecting attention away from many, many others. Add to these inevitabilities the connotations of the terms employed and the situations presented--the “invisible” adjectives that circle around and the choices the characters make and the outcomes they experience---and we’re definitely confronted with tendentiousness, with arm-twisting of a

kind.¹ We've already noted Hawthorne's "argument" for honesty in our dealings, and Melville's take on faith and skepticism. Can anyone doubt Charlotte Brontë's stance on moral rigor, or the value Jane Austen places on love, money, and marriage?²

As we suggested, though, such appeals are indirect in most plays and novels. These artistic works often emphasize the limitations in human endeavor. Usually, no explicit call to action is sounded. Audiences are frequently, instead, warned against prideful attempts to challenge too radically the solid resistances of earthly existence. Pessimism can be as pervasive as optimism. You're caught between a rock and a hard place, aesthetic works sometimes say. An emphasis on dilemma, not so much an implicit call to decisive enterprise, is often the cautionary note.

Not so with rhetoric in the public, political square. As Lloyd Bitzer,³ following Burke,⁴ has admonished us, fatalism does not go with the rhetorical situation, nor does much complexity in one's response. When it is intensely strong and urgent, or even mildly provocative, an exigence in the political or social world invites action. Call an "exigence" an "imperfection marked by urgency." Rhetoric involves the recommendation of an action for practical, "pragmatic," realistic purposes.⁵ Or, rhetoric will foster an attitude, or orientation toward action, that listeners or readers can later implement. It is founded on the ability of its audience to act on the recommendation it makes, or to prepare for such action. It assumes, encourages, and enjoins a sense of freedom and opportunity.

Burke offers several definitions of rhetoric. This is one of his most representative: "*It [rhetoric] is rooted in an essential function of language itself, a function that is wholly realistic, and is continually born anew; the use of language as a symbolic means of inducing cooperation in beings that by nature respond to symbols.*"⁶ "Rhetoric" can mean the theory that undergirds practical discourse, or the practical discourse itself. It is the rationale for suasive and informative public communication, or the speechmaking/polemics that theory seeks to shape; the "art of persuasion, or a study of the means of persuasion."⁷ Rhetoric says: Come now, let us not only reason together; let us act together, for change, or for continuity, or for justice, or for celebration.⁸

This chapter and the next two will not function as a how-to handbook on giving speeches or writing persuasive essays. The writing, or invention, aspect will come later. Here we want to make you a more discerning consumer and critic of persuasive

discourse from a Burkean angle. We will concentrate on genres of rhetorical drama as indicative of certain levels of intensity in public debate, as reflective of distinctive political and/or social purposes likely being pursued, and as fair reflections or not of the “whole truth” in respect to the situation addressed. What’s going on with this tragedy, burlesque, melodrama, or comedy I’m hearing on television or in the lecture hall or in a place of worship, or reading in the newspapers and the blogs? What should I be anticipating, welcoming, or dreading in the way of social change or persistence of the status quo? And how does this palaver stack up against any fair reality-check? Would it pass inspection? Inquiring minds want to find out!

Rhetorical Genres and Their Seats in Political and Social Life: A Brief Summary of the Polar Genres of Tragedy and Comedy

William Rueckert, often cited as the Dean of Burke scholars, calls “tragedy” Burke’s “representative anecdote” for symbolic action.⁹ By that labeling, Rueckert means that tragic-frame discourse displays in sharpest detail the contours of dramatic action. (Rueckert is *not* saying tragedy is Burke’s cup of tea. Quite the contrary.) All the stages of drama we anatomized in Chapter 3 are perfected in full rhetorical tragedy.¹⁰ They are taken to the “end of the line” via the “‘entelechia’ principle,” as Burke likes to put it.¹¹ Morally-disordered scene, guilt-obsessed actor, sacrificial act, and redemptive purposes and means are stretched to the farthest limits of one’s imagination, or close to those ultimate forms of expression. When we hear speeches or read polemics that take the language of conflict to these extremes, we can sense a call to revolutionary change in the body politic, or radical conversion to a new religious or ideological orientation.¹² Such a call to collective upheaval is “frame transformative,” “new” social-movement theorists say. Such a call to individual transformation is “redemptive expressive,” as both traditional and “new” social-movement scholars put it.¹³

The lineaments of rhetorical tragedy stand out most clearly when contrasted with those of rhetorical comedy. Tragedy vs. comedy: Those are the two antipodes that, in direct comparison and contrast, define rhetorical choices most keenly. Burlesque and melodrama fall between these poles. In comedy, Burke style,

verbal conflict is present, but minimal. Emotions are toned down. Accommodation is sought. The recommended action is palliative, not extremist. Thus, rhetorical comedy goes with reformist social-movement action, and much routine political communication. In the realm of collective action, comedy invites minor changes or adjustments in civil relationships, use of respectful legislative language in the service of an “art of the possible,” or attempts by disenfranchised groups to attain the rights of full citizenship. It is “frame-bridging” discourse, “new” social-movement theorists say.¹⁴ It fosters more facile movement between opposing points of view. Comedy, Burke style, makes for a “bridge” from one side to the other. When geared to reform of individuals rather than groups, comedy assumes the title “alterative expressive” rhetoric.¹⁵ Let’s improve ourselves, “expressive” comedy says, but not trade our current identity for a completely new one.

We can highlight stages of the human drama as follows, in terms of their tragic formulations and their comic tokens of speech:

First, a moral problem arises: In rhetorical tragedy, “crimes” and “evils” are present or possible, with, perhaps, the threat of “total loss” looming on the horizon. These gross malffeasances are caused by guilty persons, not mere circumstances. In rhetorical comedy, “mistakes” or impediments, actual or potential, complicate group or individual life, not base iniquities. Circumstances are usually to blame, not wicked wrongdoers. As the exonerating expression goes, “Mistakes were made.”¹⁶

A problem-maker is identified: In tragedy, a diabolical, larger-than-life, “total cathartic *enemy*,” villain, or group of villains gets the blame, responsible, quite possibly, for all the world’s ills. In comedy, a life-like, error-prone opponent or klutz takes the heat. This guy or these guys are jerks, not devils.¹⁷

A problem-solver is needed: In tragedy, a “noble, god-like,” larger-than-life, mythic “hero” comes to the fore to save the day. In what Northrup Frey calls “mimetic” comedy, a realistic, life-like actor or merely competent leader appears on the scene to set matters straight.¹⁸

A preparatory orientation precedes the redemptive act: In tragedy--- that’s *rhetorical* tragedy---a sense of freedom prevails, along with an attitude of hostility or “enmity.” In comedy, Burkean comedy that is, a “sense of limits” and an attitude of charitableness constrain the action that follows.¹⁹

For a morally-correct solution to occur, action is taken,

self-directed: In tragedy, intense struggling, straining, striving---intense self-denial---nigh unto, or unto, a martyr's death, is usually required. In comedy, a more moderated, modulated, measured---perhaps programmatic, perhaps routine, perhaps even muddled---effort to achieve one's goal characterizes the undertaking.²⁰

Often, indeed regularly, in pursuit of that morally-correct solution, action is also taken other-directed: In tragedy, severe punishment, permanent banishment, or death to the enemy, or "*perfect*" sacrificial friend, transfers and expels the guilt. In comedy, slap-on-the-wrist instruction and correction of the clown suffices, with, betimes, the imposition of a period of social distance between the mistake-maker and the defenders of the collective order.²¹

The morally-correct solution sought and anticipated entails, in general: In tragedy, ambitious, "ideal," perhaps even utopian, goals and strategies, via a "dialectic of the 'Upward Way,'" inherent in the notion of "purpose" as an expression of "negative" perfection. (See Chapter 4 on the nature and power of the negative.) In comedy, realistic, realizable goals and strategies prevail, a pronounced lowering of one's sights to what is practically possible.²²

That anticipated result envisions, more specifically: In tragedy, a perfected redemptive outcome, "total salvation." In comedy, actors settle for imperfect revision, improvement, or mere restoration of the status quo: "better, not best."²³

Rather plainly, Burkean tragedy takes each moment of the drama to "the end of the line." It represents, in Rueckert's terms, "the perfect essence of a tension."²⁴ It would be hard to imagine more ultimate conditions, personas, or eventualities than, for instance, total ruin, super-human opponents, death as price for moral turpitude and its correction, or paradise in this world and, perhaps, the next, as reward for extreme self-sacrifice on behalf of the recommended cause.

Let's emphasize right here: The human drama tragically configured is Burke's bete noire, the symbol-user's "rotten[ness]" writ "perfect[ly]" large.²⁵ What Burke calls the "ultimate" anecdote of action in the *Grammar of Motives*, action taken to the farthest reaches of the imagination, does literally and most rightly apply only to God and His actions, in truth for a theist, "in principle" for a nontheist.²⁶ Such visionary, end-of-the-line appeals, the pith and marrow of what most Burkean genre critics have called tragic oratory, do entail what Burke denominates at

the conclusion of *Attitudes Toward History* “heroic euphemism, with corresponding dislocations of gauging.”²⁷ Such a grandiose, dogmatic, one-sided, humanly overblown discursive idiom is, generally, not a good way to accurately size up how things are in a complicated, earthly setting. That’s why Burke argues continually for cultivation of a “comic” frame of mind, approach to life, and standard for symbolic action.

That qualification out of the way, in this chapter we’ll skim through some illustrations of tragic and comic rhetorical blandishments, with notations on their constraining combination of setting and purpose. Burlesque and melodrama will come later. I’ll stick mainly to my own research, five rhetorical critiques in print, another a convention paper, and a seventh one new to this study. I’ve made genre criticism from a dramatically Burkean slant my focal concern. Rhetorical tragedy and comedy, the two polar opposites, are herewith highlighted.

Why not start with Adolf Hitler? If there has been a paradigmatic rhetorical tragedian, Hitler was it. Were his purposes revolutionary, aimed at transforming the Weimar democracy into a perpetual dictatorship, with you know who at the helm? Indeed. Hitler’s speech at the Burgerbraukeller in Munich, 12 April 1922, is exemplary.²⁸

Adolf Hitler’s Revolutionary Tragedy

In his beer hall speech of April 1922, the moral disorder Hitler addressed could not have been more dire, as he saw it: economic slavery and collapse, wrought by the traitorous surrender of Germany at the end of the Great War.²⁹ The risk of personal destruction was likewise imminent: “To have a head on your shoulders and *not to be a Jew* . . . that will secure the scaffold for you.”³⁰

International Jewish revolutionary capital, the problem-maker, was the cause of Germany’s collapse and ignominious surrender.³¹ Jewish financiers, politicians, what have you, were malevolent, guileful, and ubiquitous. “Great master[s] in the art of lying,” some Jews cunningly “took the side of the Right” just to hoodwink the people, lest the citizenry should “have their eyes open” and “put an end . . . to the entire pigsty,” Hitler charges.³² Jews ravaged civilizations at all times and in all places. They were even the culprits who brought Ancient Rome to its knees.

The exemplary, god-like leader was none other than Hitler himself. He compares himself and his followers to Christ and his disciples. They are all depicted as fellow fighters against Jewish “vipers and adders,” the “Jewish danger,” “Jewish poison.”³³ This blasphemous section comprises 10 percent of the speech. It employs first-person pronouns twenty-one times, a mark of flagrant egocentrism.

The morally-correct solution, other-directed, required a purifying act by “Aryan National Socialism.”³⁴ Taken to the edge of an abyss and endowed with their new name, Aryan, these stalwarts could now recognize their “hereditary foe,” Jewish “blow-flies round a corpse,” and act effectively to thwart them.³⁵ If any one of these “seducers” were to confess openly, “driven by the inner voice of horror at his [sic] crime,” Hitler claims, “he would on the public square or in the public meeting be torn to pieces.”³⁶ Aryan Germans must “bury all petty differences,” renounce the “hesitating and pusillanimous” Right, and perform a “great deed” of commensurate proportion to the one he says the Jews threatened. Aryan Germans must do so with “brutal ruthlessness,” “ruthless brutality.”³⁷

The anticipated result, or redemptive hope, Hitler envisions for Germany after the sacrificial act is viciously accomplished, can be a “paradise” on earth, Hitler says.³⁸ He uses this term three times. Hitler sees a united people energized and consoled at last by a “new faith,” National Socialism.³⁹ Calmed with respect to the changes swirling around them, they must be aroused to action that will decisively purify their beloved Germany.

The moments of drama in this discourse are thoroughly perfected on almost all counts. The guilt-obsessed agent of change (by way of comparison with the Christian Deity, a deified leader), the sacrificial act (implied death to a vile and totally culpable global enemy), and the featured denouement of the drama, a political and social paradise to come, especially mark the address as tragic frame. As a “system of attitudes, of implied exhortations,” it served as harbinger and goad for the tragic holocaust that followed.⁴⁰

Two Tragic-frame Preachers in More Complex Circumstances: First, Falwell, Fundamentalism, and the Moral Majority

“The Perfected Drama of Rev. Jerry Falwell,” as I titled my study of the spokesman for the Moral Majority, derives from an instance of what we might call overlapping movement purposes. Falwell was probably best known by a general audience for his leadership of this political action group in the 1970s, ‘80s, and ‘90s. The Moral Majority had great influence in mobilizing Evangelical Christians to vote en masse for Republican candidates like Ronald Reagan and George H. W. Bush. It helped establish this larger bloc of supporters as, in a real sense, the Republican base.

Falwell’s movement was not, though, “revolutionary” in the customary sense. It did not seek radical change in governing structures or economic relationships. It was, if anything, restorationist, resistant, or “frame-amplifying,” as the “new” social-movement theorists would put it. As such, we would expect a burlesque rhetorical idiom, as we will note next chapter.

What was revolutionary about Falwell’s crusade, however, was, as its name suggests, its ethical dimension. Falwell and his like wanted to remake America in the image of Fundamentalist Christianity, or as close a reflection of such a strict religious orientation as possible. Falwell’s brand of faith is itself, apart from any political cause, a “redemptive expressive” social movement. Fundamentalist religion champions a transformation of individual souls. It wants them “born again.” Tragic-frame rhetoric goes with the five Fundamentals the Falwells of the world insist on: a perfect source of knowledge, an inerrant Bible; a perfect Leader, Immanuel, God with us; a sinless virgin birth and Jesus’ subsequent error-free life; a perfect salvation, bought by a blood sacrifice that atones, potentially, for every evil act past, present, and future; and a bodily Resurrection that overmatches death and serves as a harbinger of the believer’s eternal life to come. These perfections of thought and faith constrain the discourse of the Falwells of the church toward rhetorical tragedy. It’s the fires of hell or the bliss of Heaven, perfect punishment or perfect reward, for every man or woman, bar none. Choose ye this day whom ye will serve! You will do so freely. The stakes couldn’t be higher even within the confines of extrapolitical Fundamentalist preaching.

So, the rhetoric of the Moral Majority, Falwell variety,

would have been revolutionary in at least one important component, redemptive-expressive, frame-transformative, indeed tragic in its substance and forms, one would have expected.

In terms of such generic expectations, Falwell did not disappoint. In June of 1984, in six sermons, he described the scene of consequential action on his nationally-televised program, "The Old-Time Gospel Hour." That context was fraught with the threat of total ruin. The "dark clouds" of tyranny hovered on the horizon, Falwell said. They were brought to the shores and institutions of America by the liberals, the socialists, and the communists. "If we . . . go uninformed to the polls [in Reagan vs. Mondale]," Falwell warned, "if we . . . don't even register to vote . . . , if we continue with that apathy and lethargy, my prediction is that . . . long before the turn of the century, America and El Salvador, like Afghanistan, like Eastern Europe, will be enslaved by Marxism. . . . I do not believe we could be wrong this year, and in four years from now correct it. I don't think we'll be allowed that luxury of reprieve."⁴¹

Mondale, Marxism, and communist enslavement!
They're peas in a pod!

The chief blame-laying actor in this drama was, naturally, Rev. Jerry Falwell. And in his self-projection, he was, well, superhuman. Falwell used 41 first-person references on average in 1000-word samples from two of his addresses that summer (first 250, last 250, and middle 500). That figure contrasts with the 10.3 Thomas D. Clark found in Christian sermons in general.⁴² God personally gave him his vision, Falwell said, his grandiose plan for expanding the religious ministries of Thomas Road Baptist Church, and the educational quality and outreach of Liberty University, his educational ministry. Falwell was so hard-working, so dedicated, so supremely energetic, he told his audiences, his associate Dr. Ron Godwin and even his son Jerry, Jr., could not keep up with him, as he feverishly traveled nationwide "to turn this country around."⁴³

Furious conflict with the forces of evil characterized Falwell's preaching that fateful season, as well as a summons to heroic self-sacrifice. Though he did not directly call for death to his enemies in this world, at least not his domestic enemies, the language of murder and death suffused his discourse. Women who have an abortion "murder" their "little babies," Falwell charged again and again. "Row vs. Wade, 1973, legalize[d] the murder of the unborn." Mainstream Protestant churches are "dead, cold,

liberal religious morgues.” The dead bodies “buried in the back yard” at these apostate churches would “get up and get out” if they could. Liberals of all stripes were beyond the pale, permanently banished, headed for perdition. The “one-world church” was not just outside the Christian fold. It was on its way to hell. Pray God to “sock it to” your enemies, he admonished. “. . . Pray the judgment of God on people,” “Castro,” “Chernenko.” Emblazon the names of errant Congressmen and women “on the marquees of the world”; don’t just oppose them with your vote.⁴⁴

Falwell did skirt to the edge of homicidal scapegoating with this implicit appeal: “Ninety-nine percent of the trouble in this country is caused by liberal preachers. They’re not even worth shooting.”⁴⁵ What if they *were* so worth? A guilty opponent responsible for almost all the nation’s ills merited severe punishment and permanent banishment, if not wholesale slaughter.

An ingredient in Falwell’s motivational recipe was heroic sacrifice on the part of every believer, a staple of the tragic frame: Send money. Join the “15,000 club” at two hundred dollars a year. Work hard, pray intensely, read the scriptures, win souls, and actively promote conservative values. Be a “Champion for Christ.”⁴⁶

And talk about ambitious, utopian goals, and high-flying strategies to attain them: If enough Americans “who know what is right, who know what is wrong,” and “who have backbone,” act, register, vote, pray, and support with their gifts the spread of Falwell’s “prototype” ministries across the country, an epoch of “idealism” can emerge. It will entail and effect a “change in national lifestyle.” It will be “new,” yet “traditional and moral.” “We’ll have a new Congress . . . a new judiciary system.” One thousand Save-a-Baby centers will “stop a half million abortions, and one day all.” Five thousand new “Bible-believing, soul-winning” churches with five thousand new Christian day schools will form the foundation of a global ministry effort. And from the hub of operations in Lynchburg, Virginia, with its fifty-thousand-member local church (still thirty thousand members short of that mark) and its fifty-thousand-student university (someday a “Fundamentalist Harvard”), employing satellite transmission, direct broadcasting, video cassettes, and a cornucopia of books and pamphlets, the Falwell ministries will bring to pass the evangelization of the world in our time.⁴⁷

In sum, the perfected drama of Rev. Jerry Falwell corresponds handily with the constraining context and

purposes of this redemptive-expressive-cum-socially-energized communication system, with its multiple strands of fervent endeavor. Falwell stretched each feature of his political and personal drama to, or near, its farthest limits.

Wallace Fisher, a Mainline Enigma

The sermonizing of the Rev. Dr. Wallace E. Fisher makes for an especially thorny case of generic explanation. Fisher was Senior Pastor at Trinity Lutheran Church in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, seat of my home county. The Lutheran Church in America is, of course, Mainline Protestant. As such, preaching therein tends toward the comic, Burke-style, not the tragic. Threats of hell-fire and damnation; scapegoating of enemies in extreme language; jeremiads against gays, lesbians, and the horrid corruptions of US American culture; and overwrought calls to “hit the sawdust trail,” are muted, if not absent. And the membership of these generally more liberal congregations is usually so ideologically diverse, no homogeneous political-cum-religious movement like the Moral Majority or the Christian Coalition can gain much of a foothold, not across the board. Comic-frame preaching is the generic expectancy.⁴⁸

Wallace E. Fisher broke the mold. His was, it seemed, a rhetoric of tragic striving. A brilliant pulpit orator, internationally-traveled conference lecturer, and author (twelve books, most published by Abingdon⁴⁹), Fisher’s career underscores the elements of choice and personality in the selection of a rhetorical genre, not only the pressures of scene. Burke speaks of “personality types” as being “tragic,” and by extension comic or burlesque.⁵⁰ In all epochs and situations, innate tragedians (choleric? melancholic?), burlesquers, and comedians (sanguine?) can be assumed to exist. Different persons will look at, and respond to, the world as it is in different ways.⁵¹ They may interpret by emphasizing A, B, and C instead of D, E, and F, or vice versa. What ultimately constrains the emergence and dominance of one dramatic genre over another or others is, usually, which strain of symbolic action most listeners and readers rally around. Such a systems-centered approach to rhetorical style reflects a transactional model of communication: Followers create leaders as much as leaders generate followers.⁵²

Usually. That’s the operative word. Fisher’s tragically confrontational posture---it surely appeared tragic---seemed

to be superimposed from the top down. He came to Trinity in 1952 from a professorship, in history, at Gettysburg College. His thirty-year ministry in Lancaster became spectacularly successful. What happened during the first two or three years, though, was upheaval. Some members left. Some initial dissenters came around to Fisher's muscular homiletics, and stayed. New members joined.⁵³ Was it oratorical and intellectual power, the fundamental tragedy inherent in traditional Christian theology itself, the deep-rooted entelechial principle Burke fears ultimately motivates the symbolizing animal, or the eventual fashioning of a congregation of more or less like-minded tragedians (cum melodramatists?), authoritarian personality types perhaps, that brought such growth and zeal?⁵⁴

Whatever, the church prospered. Attendance at worship increased six-fold, annual giving surpassed the proposed budget every year for more than two decades, and such an array of social ministries blossomed and matured as to make Trinity a nationally recognized renewal parish.⁵⁵

Wallace Fisher's putatively homiletic tragedy goes with such obviously intense striving. Formulaically, it started with his constant depiction of death as ultimate context and denouement for life on this planet, along with gross injustices in social and political relationships here and abroad. In his six Lenten sermons, Winter/Spring 1980, Fisher continually invoked the specter of death as life's great problem and the sure and absolute end to all that is human and "natural." In anecdote, in allusion, in ritual invocations that preceded the final deliverance, the "threat of total loss" in the image of "the valley of the shadows" and "that hole in the ground" that is "yours" and "mine" rose up in Fisher's preaching with exceptional regularity. Even his portraits of risks and threats this side of the graveyard leaned toward "blood running in the streets," while "the rich get richer and the poor get poorer," if we don't strenuously seek justice with our votes and political actions.⁵⁶

The focal enemy and cause of indifference to social and economic injustices of ominous import were the Fundamentalists. They were this "twisted religious group" with its "nutty religious expressions" and its "ignorance, ignorance, ignorance." "Casual Christians" in general earned Fisher's opprobrium. Even former members of Trinity were tarred as "sickening," "dead beat," or "weak willed." All they wanted was "a little social enclave," secure behind "stained glass windows." The cross to them was

just a piece of jewelry. Most remarkable, unidentified persons then sitting in Trinity's pews, a "great many" of whom "really ought to get out of the Christian Church," were charged with pretense and invited to depart. What Burke calls "blood-brother" scapegoating reached something of a zenith in the flame-throwing lamentations of Wallace E. Fisher.⁵⁷

Fisher did not call for death to the enemy in his ritual summons to sacrificial action. He did, nevertheless, direct such extreme appeals inward. "Obedient self-discipline" was judged the "Rome-term" of his preaching, the recurrent symbol from which all other features of his drama rippled out. The truly "high cost" of discipleship was epitomized in the presentation of role model after role model who gave his life for the faith, or every ounce of strength to his or her profession. M. L. King, Jr., Archbishop Romero, the Kent State war protesters---these were some of the martyrs for a just cause Fisher held up for emulation.⁵⁸

Short of death, Fisher counseled vehement mortification and noble striving. "Pray for your enemies Give beyond your means," he enjoined, preferably 10 percent of your family income. Give "absolute obedience" to Christ's commandments. With "a strength beyond your own," place the "interests" of the other first, "no matter what it costs . . . and it cost God His life to open up that kind of love to you and me."⁵⁹

The chief actor in Fisher's drama was most worthy of emulation, namely himself. Burke's key term in rhetorical appeal is "identification."⁶⁰ Identification can be "dissociative," as in group solidarity over against the scapegoat, "congregation through segregation." It can be, and will be, "associative" also, a rallying around together behind the leadership of a strong and forceful exemplar, to say nothing of commonly shared values, institutions, and causes. The "hero" in tragic-frame discourse is usually the speaker himself or herself, more likely himself. Fisher's employment of 18.8 first-person singular pronouns in 1000-word samples in the six sermons studied surpassed the Clark average by a factor of almost 2. More to the point, Fisher used these pronouns as part of an elaborate strategy of self-projection. He was incessantly a laborer for Christ beckoning others to his lifestyle of unstinting devotion. First-time visitors to Trinity, unacquainted with Burke, might have thought they were in the presence of one of the world's biggest braggarts.⁶¹

High group purposes and aspiring means by which to make it to those lofty heights ran through Fisher's sermons. The

Christian forgiveness one both receives and bestows, and cuts so violently athwart what is “comfortable” and “natural” for human beings, requires vigilance and near superhuman effort. Ultimately, only God can bestow the necessary grace to live that Christian life. On a more quotidian plane, Fisher extolled “tasks and achievements marked by splendor,” “professional excellence” and the pursuit of excellence, a resolve to become “unbelievably distinguished” at one’s workplace. “There is no worthwhile achievement without hard self-discipline,” Fisher exhorted.⁶²

After the recurrent “swoop toward death,” Fisher often concluded with the transcendent vision of God’s complete and permanent triumph on behalf of the acting believer. “I guess,” Burke says, “the most perfect ending is provided by a sermon in which, after a threat of total loss unless we mend our ways, we are promised the hope of total salvation if we do mend our ways.”⁶³ Wallace Fisher was a connoisseur of that “perfect ending.”

Rampant injustice and looming catastrophe fashion the scene; “twisted,” “nutty,” and “weak-willed” so-called Christians stand to blame; self-sacrifice to the max, if not unto death, summon those who would be faithful to unstinting discipleship; a hero of uncommon achievement will lead the way; nobility of effort at whatever they do, and life eternal beyond the terrors of death, are the signs and rewards of authentic Christian life and faith. Such was the tragic-frame preaching of Rev. Dr. Wallace E. Fisher.

Tragic-frame up to a point. Here’s the kicker in the dramatically unusual and generically complex discourse of this remarkable pulpit orator: Fisher’s sermons operated on two interconnecting levels, the earthly and immanentized, and the transcendental and theological. On the here-and-now earthly plane, akin as it was to typical transformative social-movement appeals, his tragic drama was coherent, complete. It sounded a warning, an “or else.” Fail to do the right thing and “blood will run in the streets.” “The rich will get richer, the poor poorer.” Chaos that jeopardizes your social existence and mine will ensue.

On the dimension of the beyond, no such equivalent and ultimately dire prospects surfaced. No “if not, then what” came to the fore, much less an “or else.” In Falwell’s drama, the fires of hell awaited the rejecting and disobedient. In Fisher’s recurrent vision, that “swoop toward death” and inevitable “hole in the ground” seemed prelude to a glorious resurrection for all. If there was an implicit “if, then”---if you believe and act faithfully, then you’ll be saved---there was surely no “if not, then what,” and nary

anything close to an “or else.” Death seemed just the doorway to eternal life, no exceptions explicitly stated.

Such a truncated homiletic narrative, abridged in terms of tragic, historically orthodox Protestant statements of faith, sounds a bit like melodrama, “tragedy-lite.” Could we even label it “tragi-comedy”? After all, everyone seems to get an up-and-out-of-the-grave-free card, no noticeable exclusions to the contrary. Here’s Thrall, Hibbard, and Holman’s definition:

Tragi-comedy: A play which employs a plot suitable to tragedy but which ends happily like a comedy. The action, serious in theme and subject matter and sometimes in tone also, seems to be heading to a tragic catastrophe until an unexpected turn in events, often in the form of a *deus ex machina* [literally, god in a machine, i.e., divine intervention], brings about the happy denouement [that is, an all-pervading redemptive stage].⁶⁴

And here’s Beaumont Fletcher’s take, from his introduction, year 1610, to the play *The Faithful Sheperdess*:

“A tragi-comedy is not so called in respect to mirth and killing, but in respect it wants [lacks] death, which is enough to make it no tragedy, but brings some near it, which is enough to make it no comedy”⁶⁵

Fisher’s preaching surely brought his listeners “near” to death, searingly and recurrently. At the climax, though, in the Christian drama as traditionally formulated, death is overmatched by life, but not for everyone. In tragi-comedy, a thoroughly happy ending appears to transpire for all concerned.

Frederick Buechner wrote a brilliant tragi-comedy, I do believe, aptly entitled *Telling the Truth: The Gospel as Tragedy, Comedy, & Fairy Tale*. It serves as paradigm against which we might generically assess Dr. Fisher’s preaching. All have sinned, the author tells us, all have grievously fallen short of God’s moral laws, all suffer, in one way or another, the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, “cry into the storm and receive no answer,”⁶⁶ and painfully succumb in dusty death. But in Buechner’s account, in the end, all are apparently saved, the Prodigal Son and his jealous brother, the man who wasted his “talents,” the “tax collectors and whores and misfits.”⁶⁷ The “unforeseeableness of

the election itself,” like for those who said “who, me?” in Jesus’ parable in Matthew 25, promises the possibility of eternal life for everone.⁶⁸

Buechner’s drama begins with what Burke calls “*universal tragedy*.” We’re all in the same boat. No one’s much better or worse. Like famed pulpiteer Henry Ward Beecher, opening anecdote, we all look in the mirror and behold a deeply flawed persona. There’s no “us against them,” no “other” to blame, defame, and drum out of our lodge for causing it all, no “factional tragedy,” as Burke taxonomizes the two kinds. There’s holistic inclusiveness in Buechner’s tragedy as in his, or anyone’s else’s, comedy.⁶⁹

Not so with Fisher. He was careful to delineate the “ins” against the “outs.” Sharp polarities threatened even the less-than-committed then sitting in Trinity’s pews. For those who might answer, “I’m a fairly decent guy. I want only to live a normal life, pay my taxes, support my family, and stay out of trouble. The rest of humanity? They can take care of themselves. As for what this fit we call human life ultimately means, I don’t care. It’s above my pay grade. Take your life of heroic self-sacrifice, even unto death of all things, and shove it.”

In the many, many times I heard him preach, Fisher gave no answer, not in terms of a beyond. It feels a tinge like melodrama to me on that theological plane, ultimately unjustified tragic engrossment.⁷⁰ Any one of Fisher’s sermons was good to brilliant. As an unremitting homiletic style, however, Fisher’s appeals didn’t fit Mainline Christianity, the Lutheran Church, or--and this is the telling point---Trinity’s own doctrinal profile.⁷¹ In practice, they and it abjured, and continue to deflect attention from, the transcendental threats of historic, orthodox Christian faith.

In conclusion: The generically complex preaching of Wallace E. Fisher appears an earthly, expressive, redemptive tragedy and transcendental melodrama, a somewhat mixed-genre accommodation to the “comic” constraints of Mainline Protestantism, wherein the notion of judgment in the afterlife is, by and large, not a topic of polite pulpit conversation. (See Addendum 2.)

The Need for a Skeptical Eye

Burke says in *PLF*, “The true locus of assertion is not in the *disease*, but [rather] in the *structural powers* by which the poet [read: you and I] encompasses it.”⁷² In tragedy, those structural powers of encompassment---that is, the sacrificial act---gravitate toward death. No originality of insight here, but Burke does equate “death” with a “tragic end.”⁷³ Take especial cognizance, then, of the action an orator or pamphleteer asks for, implies, or conjures up as fitting course or likelihood. At the Burgerbraukeller, Hitler all but recommended extermination for Jewish communities at home and abroad. He did so in acrimonious terms and with descriptions of violence. An historically tragic holocaust followed. Falwell exploited images of death and mayhem, and did so with a near-sanction of homicidal scapegoating. Severe punishment for opponents, or radical exclusion of them from the fellowship of the faithful, pervaded his appeals. The murder and suicide of gays, prominent whipping boys of his, at least reflect upon the potential danger of the tragic frame. Wallace Fisher acknowledged that in our day and age, not many Christians or champions of justice in America are called to martyrdom (in the dimension of his very tragic, here-and-now, social-movement mode). Yet, he would then characteristically go on to paint a picture of such an ultimate sacrifice as exemplary, nevertheless. And, of course, Fisher vilified and dispatched his scapegoats in harsh, if not furious, language. Real-world tragedy may have followed upon Fisher’s symbolic invocation of tragedy in a way I don’t feel free to elaborate.

A potential lesson we might take from these examples: Tragedy can happen in the concrete in response to what Burke has labeled the “tragic symbol.” Rhetoric is ambiguous, yes. It can induce physical action, or it can sometimes satisfy as a substitute for material action in the world of objects.⁷⁴ Too often, however, tragedy does beget tragedy. People get killed or injured as a result. Perfection of the moments of one’s proffered rhetorical drama is, in any case, blinkered and suspect. As Burke says, “Insofar as the tragically and epically heroic approaches a purely nonreligious emphasis, it approaches the risks of coxcombr.”⁷⁵ Only God is god-like. Only Heaven is heavenly. Focused on the plane of planet earth, the extremes of tragic discourse yield what Burke calls “euphemism.” The rhetorical tragedian is just not particularly “telling it like it is.”

Put your rhetorical guard up within earshot and eyesight of rhetorical tragedy---and melodrama. Discount for language, as Burke likes to say.⁷⁶ Give those genres some credence, perhaps. They're so "natural" to the symbolizing animal, "rotten with perfection."⁷⁷ But take them both with a grain of salt.

Rhetorical Comedy That Made American, and even World, History

Martin Luther King Day is an American institution by now. We celebrate it the third Monday of every January. I illustrate and endeavor to explain King's use of rhetorical comedy, Burke-style, in his historic leadership of the movement that brought something approaching full participation for Blacks in U. S. American public life. I do so in my article, "The Rhetoric of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.: Comedy and Context in Tragic Collision," *Western Journal of Communication*, Fall 1997. As the title implies, King's discourse did eventually turn tragic. It did so, however, only when King's context and purposes turned from anti-discriminatory and reformist to dire and revolutionary.

King, along with other Black civil-rights protesters of the 1950s and early 1960s, wanted basically one thing: to be included. They wanted the vote. They wanted equal access, on the bus, at the lunch counter, at the employment office, in rest rooms and at amusement parks. They did not attack American democracy per se, or our mixed-economy form of capitalism, not at first. They just asked for their piece of the existing pie. Legal segregation in the South in particular denied African-Americans their constitutional rights to full citizenship.

The movement effort King led was, therefore, a classically reformist endeavor. It rejected violence. It employed the passive resistance of Gandhi's campaign in India.⁷⁸ It sought legislation, and implementation of legislation, routinely drawn up and acted upon, not constitutional revision. King's discourse, 1955-1966, reflected these limited aims. Up to passage of the civil rights bills of 1965 and 1966, King spoke and wrote mainly in the accents of Burkean comedy, as anatomized above.

King came to the fore in Alabama and the nation with his speech at the Holt Street Baptist Church in Montgomery, 5 December 1955. After a hard day at work, Rosa Parks sat in a bus seat up front and got arrested for her temerity. The Black

community had had its fill of back-seat commuting, and a persistent but civil movement began. Providentially it would seem, King was pastor of another church in Montgomery. King spoke this night to 5,000 potential bus-boycotters, some via loudspeaker outside the church. At this point, the protesters asked only for equal access in transportation, not across-the-board desegregation.⁷⁹

Such a modest goal, even the global equality of opportunity they soon added to their agenda, went with the comic frame. "We are determined to apply our citizenship to the fullest of its means," King said at Holt Street, nothing more. He roots their proposed actions in the "Constitution of the United States" as interpreted by "the Supreme Court," as well as in the revealed Will of "God Almighty" and "Jesus of Nazareth." He spoke patriotically of the "glory of America, with all its faults," the "great glory of American democracy" that protects the "right to protest for right."⁸⁰ D. H. Smith properly characterizes King's rhetoric "as a revolt *within* the democratic system rather than *from it*."⁸¹ The moral problem King addressed, then, was the impediment of segregation on the busses Blacks had to ride to get to work, go shopping, etc. King had no quarrel with American ideals or laws in general.

A year later, King addressed the first annual Institute for Nonviolence and Social Change, again at Holt Street Baptist. His speech is entitled "Nonviolence and Social Change." He extols "brotherhood," "mercy and forgiveness," "nonviolence" of course, the "transform[ation] of enemies into friends," and "*agape*," which is defined as "understanding goodwill." He proposes as "our motto for the week, 'Freedom and Justice through Love.'" Peaceful boycotts, a mild, temporary, and ultimately inclusive form of sacrifice of the opponent, may once more be necessary to bring on the day of "unity," and King almost apologizes for their use. Love, in any case, must be the informing attitude for all their protest actions, King says.⁸²

In this address, King himself is not the world-renowned award-winner he presents himself as in his final speeches, 1967-1968, larger than life. And his attitude is one of charitableness to the second power. His opponents are depicted as persons of basic goodwill who, after a season, will become our "friends" in "unity." His goals are mundane, practicable, and nonrevolutionary: "to gain the ballot" and to end "segregation." Only the possible suffering he describes exceeds comic dimensions. Achievement of these results may require not only "going to jail," but also "might even mean physical death."⁸³ Hence, King's early movement rhetoric

is comedy at its core, yes, but comedy tinged with tragedy.

King spoke on “The Power of Nonviolence” at the University of California at Berkeley on 4 June 1957. This speech is remarkable for its explicitly and carefully reasoned comic-frame treatment of the moment of guilt. Like the 18th-century advocates of Sunday Schools, King points no finger of blame at opponents in particular or in the large.⁸⁴ Instead, he puts responsibility for the injustice of segregation on abstract and ambient impersonal forces. In describing how his program of “nonviolent resistance” worked in Montgomery, King says:

We had to make it clear also that the nonviolent resister seeks to attack the evil system rather than individuals who happen to be caught up in the system. And this is why I say from time to time that the struggle in the South is not so much the tension between white people and Negro people. The struggle is rather between justice and injustice, between the forces of light and the forces of darkness.⁸⁵

King adds, “The nonviolent resister does not seek to humiliate or defeat the opponent but to win his [sic] friendship and understanding.”⁸⁶

King could hardly exonerate segregationist Southerners more than to say they just “happen to be caught up in the system.” Nor could King better express inclusion of protagonist and antagonist as properly under the umbrella of sympathetic identification, both of them. Nowhere else does King make clearer his indictment of environing circumstances rather than obdurate human enemies, nor his opponents as potential and inevitable “friends.”⁸⁷ King pictures forth the goal he and his movement are working to achieve: “If there is a victory it will not be a victory merely for fifty thousand Negroes. But it will be a victory for justice, a victory for goodwill, a victory for democracy.”⁸⁸

Perhaps King’s most poignant expression of the comic charitableness he and his movement epitomized is his “Letter from Birmingham Jail,” spring 1963. Obviously, King wrote the message under extreme duress, on the margins of newspapers. White clergymen in the city had criticized the demonstration that landed him in prison. King directly addressed his accusers. His ultimate intended audience, though, was his base of support in the white, Mainline Protestant churches of the North and West.⁸⁹ In

such straightened circumstances, and after suffering eight years of harassment and death threats, King still offers that the “white man [sic]” is not “an incurable ‘devil,’” as “various black nationalist groups . . . have concluded.” He does indict “vicious mobs” that “lynch your mothers and fathers at will and drown your brothers and sisters at whim,” and “hate-filled policemen” who “even kill with impunity” to “preserve the evil system of segregation.” The “evil” King impugns, however, still resides in a “system,” not in the persons who are caught in its grip. More than mistakes now surface in King’s discourse. Circumstances, nevertheless, are still at fault, not evildoers.⁹⁰

Overall, King’s rhetoric of reform ended in 1967. The civil rights acts had been codified. The war in Vietnam had escalated. Pressure from more-militant Black activists was intensifying. Issues of jobs and poverty loomed larger. From his speech “Time to Break Silence” at Riverside Church in New York, April 1967, to his “Mountaintop/Promised Land” address to the sanitation workers in Memphis the night before his murder, King’s drama turned almost thoroughly tragic. He now recited his string of honors, including the Nobel Peace Prize of 1964, by way of glorified self-projection. He ritually mortified himself unto a martyr’s death. He sometimes hurled virulent language at his now none-too-innocent opponents, especially at Riverside. He now called not only for an end to the war in Vietnam, but also for radical changes in America’s economic system.⁹¹

In remarks to the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (“Where Do We Go from Here”), August 1967, King put forward his new economic agenda. It’s time, he said, for “a guaranteed annual income” for everyone, or legislated “full employment” via “new forms of work” provided by the government. Indeed, King envisioned a “state of society where want is abolished.” He idealized the work he had in mind. It “extends knowledge” and “elevates thought.” It “brings security for its own sake.” It diminishes “personal conflicts.” America’s “whole structure must be changed,” King said, to effect such well being. “A higher synthesis” of the best in communism and the best in capitalism was the recommended path. “Who owns the oil,” the “iron ore,” King wanted to know. Presently, not its rightful owners, he strongly suggested. “The movement must address itself to the question of restructuring the whole of American society.”⁹²

King concluded “Where Do We Go” with an extended

list of outcomes that equate with the Biblical dream about that day “when the lion and the lamb shall lie down together.” He envisioned something approaching “the hope of total salvation” Burke speaks of as the “perfect ending” to a “sermon” or other tragic discourse.⁹³

As we said, for Desilet/Aristotle a “basic inner conflict,” “meaningful identification with both sides (or all sides) of a conflict,” “nonpartisan catharsis,” and “mistaken[ness]” go with tragedy.⁹⁴ For Burke, they fundamentally go with *comedy*, not tragedy, at least not rhetorical/“factional” tragedy.⁹⁵ Rhetorical comedy is Burke’s choice for construction of a “full . . . dialectic” precisely because it champions “the collective revelation of [thorough] testing and discussion.”⁹⁶ Comedy more efficiently avoids “heroic euphemism, with corresponding dislocations of gauging.”⁹⁷ It treats with suspicion the good vs. evil binaries of tragedy, melodrama, and, as we will note, burlesque. It is not “sentimental,” like humor, but neither is it “cynical,” like burlesque “debunking.”⁹⁸ Comedy is relatively clear eyed, realistic. Burkean comedy admonishes everyone to become a “student of himself [sic],” since we’re all prone to some forms of foolishness.⁹⁹ It “tests” for “ecological balance” by way of “the perspective of a totality.”¹⁰⁰ It de-emphasizes both fulsome engrossment with “heaven,” and nihilistic obsession with the “*jungle*.” Comedy, Burke says, stays fixed on something in between, men and women in “*society*.” It “transcends” those “antithetical emphases” by effecting a “synthesis” of them.¹⁰¹

Thus---and this is the intriguing question for a Burkean--can *Moby-Dick* be read as a crypto-comic narrative? Take away that death and mayhem, and Melville’s mythic voyage might---might---presage the sage of Andover.

Chapter 11

Rhetoric as Dramatic Action II

The “In-Between” Genres of Political and Social Movement Discourse: Burlesque

Let me reiterate: Styles and intensities of verbal expression derive in some measure from traits of personality. Like the poor, it would seem, irascible persons are always with us. They will yell, scream, and vituperate at the drop of a pin, or display such a tendency. They may even call thunderbolts down on their perceived enemies, deserving or undeserving. These righteous ones see themselves as several cuts above, or tend to do so, and are not loathe to tell us how superlative they are. They are born rhetorical tragedians, so to speak.

Likewise, we all know folks who are naturally mellow and laid back. They are more solicitous toward the foibles of others. They are sensitive of their own shortcomings, as well as the failings of their fellows. Whether they would put it this way or not, they exhibit a bit of “dramatic irony.” They are “*observers of themselves, while acting.*” It’s as though—here we encounter that phrase again—they possess “double vision.” From “out in the audience,” as it were, they can see themselves “on stage,” sometimes acting like a jerk. They appreciate, feel for, the “*stupidity*” and “*mistaken[ness]*” we all get caught up in. To one extent or another, they can forgive. They are denizens of the comic frame.¹

Personality is not the whole story, of course. “Situation” makes for a potent motive, too.² Mild-mannered people have been known to swear. Volcanic guys and gals don’t erupt at every provocation. Like music, tranquil conditions may soothe the savage breast.

Environing conditions do come very much to the fore in determining which communication style or styles predominate. As we said, severe political or social dislocations, accompanied by radical conceptions of the need for change, raise to prominence rhetorical tragedians, or leaders capable of assuming such a role. “*Perfected,*” frame-transformative discourse goes with movement action on a revolutionary scale. Redemptive-expressive preaching and lecturing attends appeals to individual listeners to be “born again.” (See references in Chapter 10, and in the paragraphs that follow.)

Comedy, Burke-style comedy, not the “ha-ha” kind, goes hand-in-hand with political movements aimed at *reforming* the collective status quo. It goes with expressive social movements that advocate improvement, not total transformation, of individual persons. Frame-bridging is the order of the day, finding common ground and extending existing accommodations to include this step forward, and maybe that one.

The “in-between” genres of public address are burlesque and melodrama. Melodrama, like tragedy, is serious in tone. It could be called tragedy-lite. It does not kill people or banish them forever and a day. Burlesque can be said to mediate between the poles that are tragedy and comedy. It will often be mistaken by some as “comic” because of its superficial humor. Burlesque, however, is usually funny only for those listeners or readers who are not being skewered by its mordant barbs.

Even though melodrama seems closer to tragedy, and burlesque closer to comedy, we suggest this continuum in terms of political/social dislocation and change: tragedy, burlesque, melodrama, and comedy. Here's why: Burlesque rhetoric, Burke says, goes with the "breaking of a frame" of reference, or can do so.³ Our research supports this claim. Melodrama, Michael Osborne and John Bakke say, does not. Melodrama is the default genre of discourse in ordinary, everyday, heated political combat. That's just the way rhetors are inclined to go in "significant controversy." They'll likely take the melodramatic route. That's the lens through which symbolizers "tend to see the world," in, for instance, good vs. evil binaries.⁴ We hear melodrama all the time on C-Span, on the cable news channels, in campaigns, in common, civic, back-and-forth political combat.

To put the issue another way, burlesque is often the genre of choice for restorationist movement leaders, those who want to take a people and a polity back to the way things were before liberal "reformers" took control. They want political arrangements put in reverse. They're not going for something totally new, only for something we used to have. Or, burlesque ridicule serves as "resistance" to the blandishments of would-be progressive reformers. These burlesquers stand opposed to significant, liberalizing change. Melodrama, in contrast, is often what you hear or read in legislative debates and campaign speeches and broadsides that have no necessary connection to movement action. It's garden-variety boilerplate. No hyper-campaign, extra-institutional motive need be anywhere in sight.⁵

Buckley, Burlesque, and the Post-War Conservative Movement

In the era of Reagan, Bush 1, Bush 2, and the DLC Democrat-lite of William Jefferson Clinton (remember NAFTA, welfare reform, and "the end of big government as we know it," to say nothing of the gutting of New Deal banking reforms), we forget the depths to which conservative influence had fallen by the end of World War II. By 1945, Democrats had controlled the Presidency and the Congress for a dozen years. In the House, their ranks had even spilled over to the Republican side of the aisle in the 1930s. Democrats would continue to dominate the legislature for another half century.

William F. Buckley, Jr., founded the fortnightly journal *National Review* in 1955. It soon became the leading voice for an intellectual conservative resurgence. In the 1960s, Buckley amplified his influence via a newspaper column and a weekly discussion-and-debate program on PBS television, *Firing Line*. Buckley's numerous books and many lectures further extended his reach. At his death in February 2008, he was hailed as the godfather of the movement that culminated in the Reagan presidency and the Gingrich House of Representatives.⁶

Buckley's burlesque rhetoric reflected the parody, exaggeration, and sarcasm found in so much English literature and polemics, 1650 to 1800. That span has been called the "Golden Age of Burlesque." Such brutal derision went with the "breaking of a frame" of reference. Conservative forces, resistance-style, satirized the changes being wrought by the new scientific culture. A few more-liberal voices mocked those who clung to tradition. Either way, the omnipresent burlesque of the day went with the sundering of a frame of reference.⁷

As an "in-between" genre of discourse, burlesque reflects conditions and purposes where tragic destruction of foes is too extreme, and mere reproof, along with short-term social distance, is inadequately mild. The "exigence," or "imperfection marked by urgency," is severe, but not overwhelming.⁸ As a result, burlesque evinces the following features as per moments of drama, according to Burke:

(1) Scene: Black-and-white, either/or, "all-or-none" schematization of scenic problems in terms of gross violations of, usually, revered traditional principles of life and policy, not quite as ominous as the crimes and evils of tragedy, but more threatening than the mere mistakes or impediments of comedy. A "breaking of a frame" is deemed necessary (customarily restorationist, hence the rhetoric of "frame amplification") or is feared (as in a movement of resistance to threatened change).⁹

(2) Agent: Egocentrism and ostentatious displays of "logic" on the part of an intellectual Gulliver in a land of Lilliputian opponents, not quite as awesome as the god-like mythic hero of tragedy and the epic, but more estimable than the realistic, life-like actor in what Northrop Frye calls "mimetic," as contrasted with "ironic," comedy.¹⁰

(3) Counteragent: "Heartless," "hilarious," "humiliating" "caricature" of bumbling, idiotic opponents, driving their ideas,

proposals, and actions to a “logical conclusion” that becomes their “reduction to absurdity,” clowns in extremis, not quite as dangerous as the diabolical, larger-than-life total enemies of rhetorical tragedy, but more problematic than the loveable klutzes of comedy.¹¹

(4) Act: Public rejection and partial banishment of the retrograde opponents, exclusion and scapegoating of these adversaries in the arena of public policy and debate, but acceptance, or at least potential acceptance, of and by them in the realm of social and interpersonal relationships.¹²

(5) Purpose: Unbridled self-aggrandizement, “cynical self-interest,” as redemptive goal, proclaimed in terms of perfected principles of life and policy---noble, but unclear, unelaborated principles of life and action---that mask the self-serving artifactual realities those ideals are likely to bring into being, at one and the same time a perfected and unperfected corrective vision: perfected by way of glittering generalities, like “freedom,” “family,” “enterprise,” “achievement,” and “self-reliance,” but decidedly unperfected as to a detailed portrait of the way things are going to look when these fine abstractions get fully implemented.¹³

Here’s an itemized illustration of Buckley’s burlesque rough stuff toward his domestic liberal opponents:

Black-and-White Schematization of Scenic Problems:

Buckley construed the dislocations that inaugurate dramas, or most of them, in thoroughly all-or-none terms.¹⁴ Buckley proclaimed, for instance, that “truths, the great dogmas of the West, are totally unchanged,”¹⁵ that “schools ought not to be neutral [about] the great certitudes of the West,”¹⁶ indeed, that “some questions are closed.”¹⁷ He took John Stewart Mill, Oliver Wendell Holmes, John Dewey, Ramsey Clark, Dwight Eisenhower, and John Kennedy to task for “epistemological skepticism” and “ideological toothlessness” of one kind or another.¹⁸

With the unqualified truths of social morality plain to any decently educated, right-thinking Westerner, Buckley characteristically defined the dislocations of the day in black-and-white terms. Regarding “remedies for curbing inflation,” [he said, there are] ‘old-fashioned [free market] remedies’ [and] a totalitarian economy. In fact, there is nothing in between.”¹⁹ As to the transportation problems in New York City, he asked, “Do people have a ‘right’ to public transportation? [His answer:] If

they do, they ought to ride free. If they don't, they ought to pay what it costs."²⁰ As regards legislated equal rights for women, the "legislation . . . would result in at least the loss of as many special privileges (e.g., alimony, maternal leave, protection against rape, etc.) as the ladies would gain."²¹

Wow!

Egocentrism and Ostentatious Displays of "Logic."
 "Sectarianism [Burke's paradigmatic locus of burlesque, that is, in the "purity" wing of any larger, more diverse, orientation] is made negotiable by logic, [the] 'legal tender of the mind,'" Burke says. Burlesquers have it in spades, they claim. Their opponents have it not at all.²²

Buckley presented himself as a cerebral Gargantua, a conservative Gulliver in a land of liberal Lilliputians. He did so via employment of: braggadocio, uncommon or foreign words and phases, formal syllogisms and the technical terms of logic, and that cutting chastiser "sic" at his quarry's slightest solecism. Buckley's public discourse included such unusual terms as *janissaries*, *vaticinations*, *apopemtic*, *cacoethes*, *usufruct*, *algolagnia*, *stercoricolous*, *sciolism*, *propaedeutic*, *ochlocracy*, *meiotic*, and *maieutic*, to recount only a very small part of his rich vocabulary. He flaunted his intellect not only with arcane English, but also with admirable Latin, German, Spanish, and French. He impressed friends and foes alike with such turns as *ad rem*, *seriatim*, *arbiter elegantiarum*, *pari passu*, *hoffahig*, *tant pis*, and *au secours*, and even lengthy foreign phrases and sentences like "*salus publica lex est*,"²³ "*dans l'esprit d'escalier*,"²⁴ and "*que hay que hacer*."²⁵

Buckley's intellectual rigor was manifest, furthermore, in his use of formal "syllogism[s]," and in the parade of logician's and rhetorician's terms that distinguish his books and articles.²⁶ *A prioris*, *a posterioris*, *a fortioris*, *ergos*, *soriticals*, *zeugmas*, *distributive middles*, *tu quoques*, *aposeopeses*, *paralepses*, and *ignoratio elenchis* shine like shafts of reason through the pages of his works.²⁷

"Heartless" *Caricature of Bumbling Opponents*. The way he told again and again the story of his struggle for economic and political justice, Buckley left no doubt there was good reason for his use of those high-toned polemical tools. He believed his liberal enemies were stupid. Buckley said, "Cross a liberal on duty

and he becomes a man [sic] of hurtling irrationality.” Buckley lamented “the helplessness of the liberal mind when face to face with elementary logical problems in which ideological Heroes and Villains are involved.” Chief liberal dunce was the wife of America’s four-term Democratic President, whose “irrationality [was like an] explosive [with a perpetually] burning fuse.”²⁸ Mrs. Roosevelt was not, though, an exception, but rather an epitome. Even Buckley’s favorite liberal, Murray Kempton, was similarly irrational. “Ah, the capacity for systematic thought!---K never had it”²⁹

Less-favored liberals, like Gore Vidal, Norman Mailer, and Kenneth Tynan, were, in Buckley’s view, political “idiot[s]” or worse.³⁰ The liberals who harassed the House Un-American Activities Committee were “a collection of kooks and kook’s lawyers.”³¹ The Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy was “headed for cuckooland.” The *New York Review of Books* was “the last court of appeal for highbrow screwballs.”³² Marlon Brando had an “inflamed ninny-mind.”³³ Professor H. Stuart Hughes of Harvard operated in a “Freak House” perhaps alongside of “political queers” like colleagues Harlow Shapley and F. O. Matthiessen.³⁴ And “[President Dwight Eisenhower was] a renowned ignoramus who, never in his lifetime, so far as is known, . . . generated a single thought that could engage the attention of serious men.”³⁵

Buckley slew his putatively petty foes with the most virile caricature. He severely downsized their reputation as reasonable persons, or attempted to do so. He employed hudibrastic burlesque, “low” or “diminishing burlesque,” with exceptional verve and skill.³⁶

Public Rejection and Limited Banishment of the Retrograde Opponents. Buckley’s caricature and then banishment of the enemy within, his liberal antagonists, was typically burlesque. It lacked the radical exclusion he reserved for the enemy without, the communists. “The Communist [Buckley said] has renounced the bond . . . he [sic] cannot speak to us, and we cannot speak to him, because however deep we reach, we cannot find a common vocabulary.”³⁷ Buckley therefore enjoined that Americans “fight the tyrants [communists] everywhere [and] spit upon them.”³⁸ He wanted them “cast into hell.”³⁹ His scapegoating of communists was thoroughly exclusionary, i.e., tragic-frame.

Buckley’s scapegoating of liberals was firm, but not directly ultimate or violent, not in his signed books and articles. Buckley

wanted to purge the Republican Party, “sectarian”-style, of liberal pollution.⁴⁰ He would have made it pristinely conservative (and eventually he, and others, did!). He wanted to do so by bidding New York Mayor John Lindsay to leave. To Buckley, Lindsay was a rank “interloper,” “an embarrassment to the two-party system.”⁴¹ Buckley wanted to purify Republicanism by ousting Jacob Javits, who had, George Sokolsky said, “‘about as much business in the Republican Party as Leon Trotsky.’”⁴² Buckley also thought New York Senator Goodell was an imposter. Goodell caused “resentment” among true believers. He was “indifferent to what they understand to be Republican Principles.”⁴³ Indeed, Buckley assailed all “those Republicans . . . who, for reasons of personal eccentricity, choose to call themselves Republicans” without first converting to a genuine conservative faith.⁴⁴ Buckley took the same burlesque stance in respect to the Roman Catholic Church.⁴⁵

Yet, socially, Buckley included among his close friends many of the liberals he publicly scolded and scapegoated. John Kenneth Galbraith, Left-leaning economist and Democrat, was a warm and valued Buckley associate for decades.⁴⁶ Kempton called Buckley one of the kindest, most considerate persons he had ever met.⁴⁷ New Right extremists in the 1970s called Buckley’s occasional “deviations [on peripheral issues] contamination by Buckley’s liberal friends.”⁴⁸ On political questions, if not on doctrinal ones, Buckley sought reconciliation with Catholic liberals within the Church.⁴⁹

Like sectarians of old, Buckley wanted to purify the great national Republican Party, the Roman Catholic Church, and the entire spectrum of American politics. Buckley did not banish liberals from the realm of the socially worthy, however. Rather he welcomed many of them.

Unbridled Self-Aggrandizement as Redemptive Goal. Consumers of the Buckley rhetoric must search long and hard to find a concrete redemptive vision. Buckley did not tend to give them a glimpse of what good things will come to pass, in the way of tangible benefits, if they followed the recommended scheme. About the hoped-for future, he traded in airy abstractions and glittering ideals.

One work especially illustrates this generic tendency. Of his fifty-some volumes, *Up from Liberalism* is one of the books Buckley wrote on political and economic questions per se that

sustain an argument throughout and build to a grand conclusion.⁵⁰ More than three quarters of the treatise focuses on “The Failure of Contemporary Liberalism.” Less than one quarter is about “The Conservative Alternative.” Not until one page and eight lines before the end of the book does Buckley come to grips with the question of an anticipated “specific” vision of a redeemed America, as he would have seen it. Buckley then offers this demurrer: “It is *not* the single conservative’s responsibility or right to draft a *concrete* program---merely to suggest the principles that should frame it.” What are they? They are “freedom of the individual to acquire property and dispose of that property [without restraint, with assignment of] responsibility [to] the lowest political unit.”⁵¹ Buckley lists a few other tenets of similarly diaphanous texture. “Is that a program?” Buckley asks. “Call it a No-Program, if you will, but adopt it for your very own.”⁵²

Buckley’s redemptive vision in this volume is eloquently stated. However, it deals with the adoption of *disembodied* ideas. This treatise deflects attention from the artifactual realities some of these rarified principles would likely bring into being: more money, more property, more political leverage for moguls like William F. Buckley, Jr. The material, the corporeal, the objective speak volumes in their absence. (Observe, by way of illustration, what has happened to the disparities in income between CEOs and ordinary employees in the age of Reagan to Bush 2, a quarter century of conservative hegemony. A 1980 ratio of about 40 to 1 had ballooned for top executives to something close to 400 to 1 by 2003.⁵³)

Like rhetorical tragedy, and as we have noted and will again note, like melodrama, there is not much complexity in burlesque. It is truncated, abridged in its vision. It deals, as Burke says, in “the externals of behavior” only. It “obliterates [one’s] victim’s discriminations.” It “deliberately suppresses any consideration of . . . ‘mitigating circumstances’” or nuances of motivation. It is “*disintegrative*.” “The method of burlesque (polemic, caricature),” Burke concludes,

is partial not only in the sense of *partisan*, but also in the sense of *incompleteness*. As such, it does not contain a well-rounded frame within itself; we can use it for the ends of wisdom only insofar as we ourselves provide the ways of making allowances for it; we must not be merely

equal to it, we must be enough *greater than* it to be able to “discount” what it says.⁵⁴

Much the same, we can say, goes for rhetorical tragedy and rhetorical melodrama.

The Restorationist Conservative Movement at Its Climax: The More Complex Case of Rush Limbaugh, Burlesquer-Plus

The “fairness doctrine,” so called, went the way of many other federal regulations in the 1980s. Its demise opened the spigots for talk radio of the most virulent and partisan kind. No need for political “balance” stayed the hand of conservative conglomerates like Clear Channel and Disney/ABC to push their views, and theirs mostly alone, on increasingly nationalized broadcast networks. Rush Limbaugh---Sacramento’s conservative whale in a bathtub, he called himself---went nationwide in 1988. His rise was meteoric, his influence undisputed. Eventually, twenty-million listeners tuned into his daily, three-hour talkshow each week. For his potent support, Limbaugh became an “honorary member” of the Republican Congress of 1995-1996.⁵⁵

What complicates a critique of his movement rhetoric is this: Limbaugh was a mixed-genre polemicist. Like Buckley, Limbaugh chided errant Republicans with sectarian comedy for straying from the straight and narrow, quite normally. And as expected, he splattered his liberal/Democratic opponents with scathing burlesque derision. He lampooned them unmercifully. However, Limbaugh also treated the Dems with tragic symbolic savagery. How to account for such an acrimonious blend? (Buckley, his hero, once scolded Limbaugh for going too far with his bitter broadsides.)

What we can offer as explanation is this: Limbaugh seemed a natural-born burlesquer, to say the least. His Burlesque went with the restorationist movement he helped lead. The history of burlesque confirms it as an appropriately “amplifying” mode of discourse, a style of discourse that raises the ante in terms of emotional intensity and sacrificial vitriol. Less than a revolution was at stake, as per tragedy. More than routine political discussion or combat over legislation and vote counts was in the air, the grounds for comedy or melodrama. Yet, Limbaugh descended

into harshest calumny and tragic, or near-tragic, exclusion of his liberal adversaries. Is there even an oblique reason as to why?

Yes. Cappella, Turow, and Jamieson afford an answer. According to their study, Limbaugh was unique among talkshow hosts. “Only Limbaugh’s agenda does not agree with that of the mainstream media” in their routine description of these broadcasts, they say. Limbaugh adds to “domestic politics” and “political efficacy” another element: “personal responsibility,” “personal efficacy.”⁵⁶ Limbaugh exhorted his listeners to the most arduous effort and highest level of achievement they could possibly attain. Limbaugh’s “movement” repartee was therefore two-pronged in scope: restorationist/frame-amplifying in the collective domain; redemptive-expressive/frame-transformative on the personal side. Limbaugh called his followers to be “born again,” as it were, in their commitment to enterprise, entrepreneurship, and accumulation of wealth. “Be all that you can be,” the slogan of the U.S. military, was touted by Limbaugh in the boldest of terms.

With these generative notions in mind, let’s turn to the rhetoric of Rush Limbaugh, particularly just before and just after the presidential election of 1996. Twenty consecutive broadcasts constituted the heart of my study. Nineteen were recorded. All references without a notation on year pertain to 1996.

Gross All-or-None Violations, to Searing Crimes and Evils. Limbaugh’s penchant for idealized, categorical statements in general was striking. This is the “all or none” feature of “sectarian” burlesque of which Burke makes note.⁵⁷ In the recorded programs, Limbaugh made at least 1,383 categorical utterances, an average of 69.15 times per program. They were expressions intensified in some way by a universal modifier or point of emphasis, like “always,” “absolutely,” “every,” or “totally.” One hundred fourteen different kinds of such intensifiers were noted. This inclination amounted to a categorical utterance every 1.63 minutes. One is tempted to amplify a favored concept in such an ideal way when it has been undervalued and disrespected for decades by spokespersons for an established, heretical political culture, in Limbaugh’s view New Deal liberalism.⁵⁸

Limbaugh’s discourse about points at issue during these autumn weeks featured a cascade of such categorical claims. Soccer moms “believed that if Bill Clinton is not reelected, all the things that are good in their life will vanish” (October 23), he said. Embezzlement of \$120,000 in the midnight basketball program in

St. Louis “is *exactly* what has happened in *every* federal program” (November 8). “Socialism [read: liberalism] says *everybody’s the same*, and if you’re different, we’re gonna make you the same, and *everybody produces the same*” (October 28). In socialist liberalism, “The government define[s] *everybody’s* outcome” (November 7). All, every, everybody---Limbaugh spoke in terms of pristinely pure concepts that highlighted liberal wrongheadedness, welfare corruption, and unnatural egalitarianism. He treated such malfeasances of policy and ideology as serious breaches of tradition and right thinking, not as mere mistakes or slip-ups.

The situation Limbaugh described was in fact one of absolute division between good and bad, right and wrong attitudes toward the pressing problems of the day, and solutions to them, a manifestation of “idealized” burlesque “belief amplification.”⁵⁹ It is the kind of construction a dispossessed, or formerly dispossessed, orientation would especially feature at or near a climactic moment in its drive for power, just before “the old order dies, the old gods go.” It is a time of rhetorical “fullness.”⁶⁰

Limbaugh lived not only in an environment of gross and categorical violation of traditional principles of right thought and action. He contended with genuine and tragic evil. He was surrounded, for instance, by liars and their lies. His fondness for the words “liar[s],” “lie[s],” “lied,” and “lying” places the apparently redemptive-expressive motivations of his address front and center. Merely stupid, unenlightened persons, customary objects of burlesque ridicule, are not called habitual liars, not the clowns found in much reactionary discourse. Really bad persons lie and lie and lie yet again. On 19 programs from October 14 to November 8 (minus election day, when he was on his good behavior), Limbaugh used this caustic descriptive at least 197 times, on average 10.37 times per show, or once every 10.85 minutes.

The tragic-frame immorality Limbaugh found in the politics of the time was disclosed also in the variety of groups and forces that “hated” him and other conservatives, according to the story he told. He ostensibly lived in a dark world of hatred and animosity. A snapshot check of the last three recorded programs, November 7 to November 11, uncovered 21 uses of “hate[s],” “hated,” “hatred,” or “hateful,” for an average of seven times per program. Such terms peppered his exhortations, though, throughout the period under study. Hatred was so huge an enviroing problem for Limbaugh, he labeled it a prime

motivation, perhaps the prime motivation, of his errant enemies (November 4).

“Guilty suspicion,” anyone, projection of one’s own feelings onto one’s antagonist?⁶¹

Egocentric Logician; Even a God-Like, Mythic Hero.

Again, exaggeration, usually mocking and grotesque, is the key concept in identifying burlesque. Limbaugh presented himself as a great leader, commentator, celebrity, performer, and “truth detector” beyond measure. He “could do.” His enemies could not.

First of all, Limbaugh told the “truth,” he boasted, “relentless[ly],” “unstoppabl[y]” (October 31, November 7), unlike the lying liberals he jousting with. As “America’s [foremost] truth detector,” Limbaugh was “meeting and surpassing all expectations on a daily basis,” in respect to braggadocio as well as broadcast brilliance (November 1, October 22). His “views are more insightful and make more sense than those heard anywhere,” he said. He was “recognized by many as the finest, most accomplished talkshow host on the air” (November 11).

References to the air-tight “logic” of his conservative positions and the mere emotionalism that drove his liberal opponents enhanced still further Limbaugh’s ethical projection of himself as a “can do” person. “Its method of engaging people logically is unassailable,” Limbaugh said of a 7-page polemic against President Clinton he had just read. “You need facts, not emotion” like the liberals, he offered while hawking the *Limbaugh Letter*. It was “brimming with logic and analysis” (October 16, 21). Clinton’s post-election call “to work together” was “dishonest, thinking in logic” (November 6). Voting for Clinton was “just the liberal ideology triumphing over common sense, which I guess happens every day,” he added, “because there isn’t any common sense in liberalism at all” (October 28).

Limbaugh presented himself as so outstanding at what he does, and so potent a public figure, he stretched the boundaries of self-amplification toward seeming self-deification, a tragically perfected view of the chief protagonist in Limbaugh’s radio drama. On his program, Limbaugh made “zip, zero, nada mistakes,” he said (October 23). He did so with “half my brain tied behind my back just to make it fair” (November 8). Listen to any other program on the air? “You really don’t need to,” Limbaugh declared (October 18). “When I say something about anything,

there generally and usually is nothing left to be said” (October 24). I am the “man of the age” (1994, January 27), Limbaugh claimed, the “all-knowing, all-thinking, all-caring, all-aware, all-everything Maja Rushie” (1998, February 23; June 8). “I am America” (1994, January 14). “For this we thank God, and me” (October 31).

Limbaugh presented himself as a seemingly god-like, larger-than-life figure, an omniscient, mistake-free man of the epoch, America’s hero. He served, he said, as the role model of efficacy and virtue for his listeners (October 21). Tragic mythos, as well as mere burlesque amplification, characterized his self-portrait.

Heartless, Hilarious, Humiliating Caricature of Idiots; Scathing Assaults on Villains. Much of the time, as per the dynamics of the genre, Limbaugh gave his adversaries the rough-but-funny treatment customarily meted out to the dunces of burlesque---funny, of course, to Limbaugh and his followers. He stripped them of their “dignity,” placed their alleged shortcomings in a bold, exaggerated, and glaring light, would not credit or hear of any “mitigating circumstances,” and often ludicrously distorted their views.⁶²

Standard mock references to “idiot[s]” and “morons” laced the language of this talkshow host (1994, January 20; October 17, 22; November 1). There were “knuckleheads,” “blockheads,” “wackos,” “fools,” “clown[s],” “kook weirdos,” “stupid infantile” reporters, and environmentalists given to “absolute lunacy” (October 14, 15, 16, 22, 30; 1994, January 20; November 22; December 5).

In idealized, stereotypical fashion, Limbaugh caricatured the proposals and programs of liberal “knuckleheads” as adroitly as their persons. He “dr[o]ve those recommendations to a ‘logical conclusion’ that bec[a]me their ‘reduction to absurdity.’”⁶³ His most common ploy was to turn liberal claims about defective conservative policies into charges of an intentional, malevolent conspiracy to harm. For example, summarizing points offered by Democrats, he said: “We [Democrats] have a positive agenda. We want to build a bridge to the twenty-first century. We want to make this country even better, because the other [Republican] side wants to kill you, wants your kids not to get vaccinated, wants them to starve, and wants your air and water to get dirtier” (October 28; see also October 15, 16, 25). Limbaugh had a way

of ridiculing his opponents' positions by stretching them to the farthest limits of nonsense.

Limbaugh frequently crossed the line into malevolent, not just mordant, name-calling in his zealous defense of the "truth." He spouted tragic-frame vituperation, as well as burlesque-frame mockery. The Clinton White House gang was a "lying bunch of skunks," Limbaugh said (October 23). Their ads were "mean and dirty, lying, skunky, stinky, rotten," their ideology "stinking," "Marxist, Nazi, [and] socialist" (October 18, 23, 24, 28, 29, 31; November 7). "Many Clinton supporters" were "just a bunch of barbarians . . . , living a lie . . . , supporting a lie" (October 29). Democratic sign-stealers were "dirty rats" (October 23). Labor leaders were "union thugs" out to smash "your kneecap" (October 18, 23, 25).

Limbaugh sank deep into tragic obloquy with his handling of President Clinton. The President was not only an object of biting humor, whose accent and turns of phrase were mocked in live parody and on recordings. He was depicted as a thoroughly evil human being, with no moral substance whatsoever. Clinton was "a lout," "a skunk," and "a snake slithering around in the grass. They know he has no soul" (October 24, 30; November 4). "I despise Clinton," Limbaugh said, "because he's a coward, . . . he lies, he cheats, he steals, what he hasn't done, I couldn't name" (October 31). He is "an absolute pathological human being" (October 30, November 4).

Sometimes Limbaugh treated his adversaries with malicious contempt, not just jeering disdain, a feature of tragic-frame discourse.

Thorough Rejection of Opponents in the Tragic Frame. As we've seen, the central sacrificial act in a drama can be turned inward toward mortification or outward toward victimage or banishment of adversaries. Sometimes, if not always, such acts will occur on both slopes of ritual sacrifice, the repressive and the aggressive tendencies in human striving making pronounced appearances in sequence or simultaneously. In the Buckley study above, we found that burlesque mediated tragedy and comedy in respect to a drama's sacrificial moment. Buckley accepted and rejected his liberal foes, and was accepted by them, some of them anyway, at one and the same time. Ostensibly, Limbaugh shared no such mediation with liberals he had assailed on the air, and even with some he hadn't. Limbaugh acknowledged that Carly

Simon, Bryant Gumbel, Mike Wallace, Andy Rooney, and Charles Kuralt would not speak to him at events, or even left those events, when he was present (1999, November 12).

On the air, Limbaugh certainly did not encourage such reconciliation in private life in any case. On one program, he spoke of the implacable “war” that perpetually rages between conservatives and liberals. In the next breath, he chided President George W. Bush for inviting Senator Hillary Clinton to fly to New York with him. He likened the gesture to “Franklin Roosevelt inviting the Japanese Ambassador to dinner five hours after Pearl Harbor” (2001, July 10; see also 1996, November 7, 11). Limbaugh, in essence, said directly to his liberal foes, be gone forever and a day. On the field of combat, he left no room for them whatsoever. “I could get along with everybody if there were no liberals. I’d love that. . . . I love *conflict resolution my style*,” he said (July 23).

Those Republicans who, after the election of 1996, spoke of “common ground” got the back of the hand from Limbaugh. “So Al D’Amato and William Weld . . . all this talk about moderation. . . . You would have thought we lost [the Congress].” Even Newt Gingrich was joining the “common ground” chorus. “Who’s gonna be revived with that one?” Limbaugh asked (November 7). Typically sectarian, Limbaugh envisioned a possibly new political alignment emerging, with the “conservative Christians,” “the Newt Gingrich-type revolutionary conservatives,” and “the young conservatives . . . say[ing] there are too many dinosaurs in our party . . . we gotta put on a different face” (November 6). Like Buckley, he would purge not only United States politics in general, but also the Republican Party in particular, of liberals and moderates of any stripe.

On his program, Limbaugh “debated” (“with half my brain tied behind my back just to make it fair”) almost exclusively with conservative supporters, perhaps the prime manifestation of his liberals-as-scapegoat mentality. From October 15 to November 11, 290 callers got through “Mr. Snerdley’s” elaborate screening process to talk to the host (October 16, 25). Twelve were liberals with an issue, one a contentious Republican (4.48 percent of the callers); eleven were neutrals or mild, friendly, or bipartisan liberals (3.79 percent); and 266 were actively supportive callers (91.72 percent). In other words, more than 95 percent of the callers to *The Rush Limbaugh Show* posed no threat to Limbaugh’s ideology or ego at all, quite the contrary.

Limbaugh's tendency toward the extremes of tragedy, as well as burlesque, appears to have overwhelmed any hope of general reconciliation with liberals, business associates perhaps being excepted. One can call his or her public opponents "morons" and still find them cordial off duty, but not "liars," "thugs," "skunks," "rats," and "barbarians." Ultimately, from what we can glean from his broadcasts, Limbaugh related to his enemies mainly in the tragic frame.

(Not so) Vaguely-Worded, Self-Interested Purposes; a Perfected Redemptive Vision. In respect to purpose, as Burke has suggested, Burlesque amplification and exaggeration will likely take shape in "cynical self-interest," "opportunism," "individualism," "laissez-faire" economics, and devotion to "private property as *inalienable*."⁶⁴ Limbaugh surely championed self-aggrandizement as his redemptive goal. He was not, however, acutely subtle and indirect about it, as burlesquers tend to be. He did not mask his self-seeking via high-sounding principles, though such nebulous abstractions as "freedom," "achievement," and "self-reliance" were front and center. He directed his listeners toward a fulfillment in life bluntly measured in dollars and cents. At the stage of redemptive purpose, the theme of "personal responsibility" and "efficacy," as Limbaugh would define those terms, came to the fore in a rather crass and materialistic way.⁶⁵

The money motive was so prominent in Limbaugh's exhortations, it drew censure from a conservative Christian critic.⁶⁶ Limbaugh's show was "exclusively tailored to the *Forbes* 400 and those who would like to be" in it, he said (October 15). He held out as focal ambition the image of "driving new cars, or illustrating or exhibiting the trappings of the success that they're enjoying, the prosperity that they have," as a goal for everyone (October 18). He even praised philanthropy as a means to material self-enrichment. When Bill Gates gave "25 million [50 million] to the Harvard computer sciences program," Limbaugh asked: "Isn't it an investment in the future of your business to have a program at a major university that teaches people how to keep the [computer] boom going?" (October 30). Self-love is the key. For example, "He [Ross Perot] also loves himself. He's like all the rest of us. He is interested in himself, and whatever he does you have to first ask yourself, how does it help him?" (October 24).

Just like the "classic liberal[s]" of the early 19th century Burke inveighed against, Limbaugh practiced a burlesque "one-

way,” “truncated” “system of apologetics” that exalted “rights” to the exclusion of socially altruistic “responsibilities.”⁶⁷ Limbaugh proclaimed a raw and greedy desideratum measured in accumulated wealth. It would be honorably achieved, to be sure, yet undisguised, materialistic, and self-serving in the extreme.

Rueckert’s “perfect essence of a tension,” as a definition of tragedy, certainly comes into play at this stage in Limbaugh’s drama. In respect to purpose, it means striving to reach the very top rung of any ladder one climbs. Limbaugh frequently contrasted the low expectations of liberalism, as he saw them, with the stratospheric goals and ambitions of his kind of people.

The “takers,” “[the liberals] are perfectly willing to accept less than the best, because when you get right down to it, liberalism is less than the best,” Limbaugh declared (October 21). The “moral people,” conservatives like him and his listeners and callers, accept no such thing. If they follow his urging, they shoot for the stars, a tragically “transformative” resolution to their life’s story.⁶⁸ “Opportunities are boundless in this country,” Limbaugh said. “If this country is to remain great and get greater,” Americans must take advantage of them. “You all must be as great as you can be” (October 18). When “we [Limbaugh took on the role of a government official here] stay out of your way,” there results “a burgeoning economy that brings everybody along, and opens up opportunities for everybody to do well, *however you define it*” (October 29).

Limbaugh’s narrative about the virtues of self-reliance and individual success was, therefore, a bit more complicated than just accumulating huge wealth. It turned out one did not necessarily have to be a *Forbes* 400 member or even a more run-of-the-mill plutocrat to partake of their virtues. His listeners could define “success” for themselves. In Limbaugh’s rhetoric, “ordinary people became extraordinary people” not only by making a bundle, but also by believing and doing the right things (October 17). “I know there are 20 million of you out there, [Mike], or more, the good people out there” (November 4). “The people who have called this program today are running their own lives. . . Notice how self-sufficient they are” (November 5).

Limbaugh pushed as ultimate goal individual greatness, thoroughly, tragically, transformatively realized, measured in entrepreneurial and financial success. He also promoted the instrumental, amplified value of free-market capitalism, the burlesque side of his redemptive vision. Such *laissez-faire*

economic arrangements constitute the political matrix that makes such greatness possible. Limbaugh artfully ascribed the distinction and moral worth of the wealthy, however, to anyone doing his or her best, standing out from the crowd in self-sufficient enterprise, disdaining government handouts and the whole ideology of welfare “socialism.” With the “right” values, anyone could *vicariously* “make it to the top” in America.

Burke puts this aspect of Limbaugh’s appeal this way: The talkshow host made his ordinary conservative listener “a participant in the perfection of the total sequence” of what is called “making it” in the U. S. of A. He made him or her a player in “the American dream,” a “vessel of the major attribute identified with the ‘superior’ class.” That attribute was vigorous self-reliant enterprise toward individual achievement and success. All conservative high-strivers, then, were, by definition, “successes.” Burke explains: “For if any point, or ‘moment,’ in a hierarchic series can be said to represent, in its limited way, the principle of ‘perfection’ of the ultimate design, then each tiny act [also read: person] shares in the absolute meaning of the total act.”⁶⁹

In sum, in respect to four of the five generic features of dramatic action, marked characteristics of both burlesque and tragedy were noted. In Limbaugh’s rhetoric, scenic problems were schematized and inflated beyond the purview of mere mistakes (burlesque), yet often also criminalized (tragedy); the protagonist was an egocentric logician (burlesque) and a god-like hero (tragedy); antagonists were imbeciles (burlesque) and cunning villains way beyond the pale (tragedy); and recommended goals were self-serving and principled (burlesque), as well as acutely ambitious (tragedy). The sacrificial act appeared to lean toward tragedy without displaying burlesque dimensions, as it almost necessarily would in burlesque-cum-tragic discourse. Limbaugh implied banishment of liberal enemies from the public square, but gave no sign of successfully embracing in interpersonal relations those he explicitly lampooned or vilified, or their sympathizers.

Limbaugh’s rhetoric was powerful and heroic, uplifting and self-confirming, to many of the ideologically like-minded. It illustrates generally the coherence, rather than the confusion, dramatically mixed-genre discourse can sometimes offer and helps account for this rhetor’s demonstrable audience appeal.

Chapter 12

Rhetoric as Dramatic Action III

The “In-Between” Genres of Political and Social Movement Discourse: Melodrama

As a style of theater, melodrama has been around for a long time, to be sure. In rhetorical criticism, melodrama is the new kid on the block. It's only surfaced in the last decade or two as, mainly, a replacement for tragedy as generic tag for the most intense of rhetorical appeals. A growing tension exists, therefore, in the communication field on the question of what to call Hitler-type public address. Such speech highlights, as we've seen, us good guys against their bad guys. It is serious in tone, not burlesque. It points with alarm at crimes and evils, not the mistakes of comedy. It warns of potential ruin, not just

setbacks. It treats policy issues in moral blacks and whites, not in shades of grey. It traffics in heroes, villains, and, often, pristinely innocent sufferers of malignant aggression, not realistically competent leaders in opposition to clowns, klutzes, or the merely persistently wrongheaded. It banishes enemies from the fellowship of the righteous, perhaps counsels their destruction, rather than inclusively invites opponents to “come now, let us reason together.”

The literature that analyzes what it calls rhetorical “melodrama,” in contrast to the more traditional employment of “tragedy” to identify a constellation of such extreme appeals, has now reached critical mass. Herbert W. Simons,¹ Steven Schwarze,² Gregory Desilet,³ and Elizabeth Anker⁴ have critiqued the discourse of George W. Bush, environmental activism, popular culture, 9/11 news coverage, and the dramatism of Kenneth Burke from the perspective of melodrama. Michael Osborn and John Bakke⁵ and Carl R. Burghardt⁶ had previously dissected the “melodramatic” rhetoric surrounding Dr. M. L. King, Jr.’s, assassination in Memphis, Tennessee, and the flamboyant oratory of Senator Robert M. La Follette of Wisconsin.

In response to this evolution, and apparent and resulting contradiction, in the generic labeling of what might be called the extremes of “crisis rhetoric,”⁷ we propose to do five things: (1) review and sharpen the distinctions between melodrama and tragedy, as they might relate to the practical concerns of public suasive rhetoric; (2) probe Burke’s treatment of these themes for generic guidance; (3) attempt a harmonization of these two perspectives on rhetorical criticism, the melodramatic and the tragic, showing why such a harmonization is needed; (4) taxonomize across a range of dramatic genres, from tragedy through burlesque and melodrama to comedy, following the stages of Burke’s guilt-redemption cycle of symbolic action; and (5) offer a brief application of our proposed tokens of rhetorical melodrama to a few speeches made by former U.S. House Majority Whip Tom Delay.

“Melodrama” and Its Range of Reference

We can note at the outset the ambiguity in labeling inferred from Schwarze’s essay, “Environmental Melodrama.” At one point Schwarze refers to “melodrama, as a subset of tragedy.”⁸ At

another, he equates “melodrama” *with* “factional tragedy” in the Burkean scheme of things.⁹ A bit later, Schwarze implies that the term “melodrama” is not to be seen as coextensive with “tragedy,” that indeed his study “seeks to elevate the status of melodrama to that of tragedy as a central concept in rhetorical theory.”¹⁰ Are dramatic critics thus being enjoined to mere relabeling in some instances, or to making more nuanced distinctions along a continuum of rhetorical genres? Schwarze’s text could be seen as promoting more shaded discriminations.

The other six studies noted above, however, neither assert nor imply a distinction between melodrama and tragedy vis-à-vis practical rhetorical discourse in the paradigm sense. Taken together, they seem to suggest, directly or indirectly, that what heretofore has been denominated “tragic-frame” rhetoric has been mislabeled. The term “tragedy” should not be severed from its Aristotelian moorings to fatalism and sympathetic feeling toward protagonist and antagonist alike, one would infer. Fatalism, as we’ve suggested, is not a typical theme in practical rhetoric, invoking the notion that the audience probably cannot accomplish the actions and goals prescribed, or at least has little or no control as to whether they can come to pass. Ergo: out with “tragedy” and in with “melodrama” as generic and critical frame, if we follow through on the terminology and logic of these recent critics.

One way or the other, the indicators of melodrama these mostly recent studies present require further clarification. In Chapter 9, we cited Anker’s traditional properties. In sum, she says, melodrama highlights moral virtue, undeserved suffering, and noble retributive action; a victim, a villain, and a hero; hyperbolized polarizations of good and evil; heavy-handed suspense; and exaggerated, mechanical, insufficiently-motivated gestures of one kind or another.

The definitions of melodrama Schwarze, Osborn and Bakke, Burghardt, and Simons feature are somewhat more general, less reflective of a late-19th-century, victim/heroine-tied-to-the-railroad-tracks stage production. Schwarze stresses four characteristics: “socio-political conflict, polarization of characters and positions, a moral framing of public issues, and development of monopoly,” that is, an exclusive “identification with those who are on the side of virtue or who have been victimized by villains.”¹¹ Osborn and Bakke emphasize “the absolute, emotional, simple, rigid, and class representative nature of melodramatic character.”¹² By rigid and class representative,

they have in mind something like Alfred Korzybski's notion of "frozen evaluation[s]," shorn of humanizing content: People, in this case types of people, never change.¹³ Melodrama, Osborn and Bakke assert, affords "idealized group portrait[s]," "noble," and, on the other side, presumably ignoble, "stereotype[s]."¹⁴

A melodramatic trait Burgchardt,¹⁵ by way of Coleridge, and Desilet¹⁶ add to these lists is the "motiveless malignity" of stereotypical villains. It is a "metaphysical" evil that serves as a "defilement" of an original "goodness." "Evil" malefactors are like the terrorists of 9/11 in the scenario of George W. Bush, as Simons describes that narrative.¹⁷ They are personifications of "evil," no extenuating explanations necessary. Burgchardt brought to the fore the figure of Iago as exemplary villain in Shakespeare's *Othello* and in an interpretive address on that play by the young La Follette. For the Wisconsin Senator, later in his career, that character typified corrupt "machine" politicians and businessmen. They just wanted to do bad things to good people pretty much without rhyme or reason, according to Burgchardt. Simons' definition of melodrama is generally in tune with the features cited above.

In answer to Osborn and Bakke, who, along with Anker, Desilet, Simons, and Burgchardt seem to maintain a relatively negative view of rhetorical melodrama, Schwarze offers an argument in its favor: Melodrama, he says, "*clarify[ies] issues of power;*" often gives voice to marginalized groups and viewpoints, can remoralize the strategically technical language of powerful interests, and, though abridged and perhaps simplistic in its perspectives, can compensate for the equally skewed, truncated constructions of those in authority.¹⁸ In this way, melodrama can promote what Burke would call a full, or fuller, "dialectic process."¹⁹

Tragedy in the Aristotelian sense is, as we noted in Chapter 9, of dubious relevance to participants in the "Human Barnyard" of political and social controversy, when redolent of vitriol and acrimony.²⁰ Such is the case especially when construed according to insights drawn from Burke (and Desilet allows for Burke's relevance on such matters²¹). Again, for Desilet, inner conflict, identification with both sides, nonpartisan catharsis, and mistakenness go with tragedy.²² For Burke, they go mainly with comedy, not tragedy.²³ From a comedic, Burkean vantage point, tragedy disappears entirely as a distinctively *rhetorical* genre---if we reckon by way of Aristotle/Desilet.

In sum, and in comparison, then, the tokens of melodrama presented in the critiques of Anker and others essentially overlap with the attributes of rhetorical tragedy vouchsafed by your present author and myriad other scholars in the communication field.²⁴ Both genres of public, suasive rhetoric, melodrama and tragedy, by and large recapitulate the binaries of perfect “good” vs. perfect “evil,” and the faultless “hero” as opposed to the perverse “villain” or “villains.” They intensify, idealize, and simplify the points of conflict and moral valences (via an “attitude of hostility”) of the issues under consideration, or tend to do so. They conduce to stereotypical characterizations and even metaphysical, theological constructions of what is at stake. They ramify, after all, what Burke calls the theological motive of perfection.²⁵ They allow for a measure of human freedom to act in the face of an exigence, with hope of triumph. The moments of tragic drama, rhetorically conceived, do not, however, take special cognizance of the “victim,” or “damsel in distress.” Neither do they necessarily emphasize the mechanical plot devices Anker, in particular, culls from the traditional tool box of the melodramatists. But then, neither do Osborn and Bakke, Burghardt, or Simons stress those devices. The notion of the perfectly innocent victim, though not explicit in the constellation of dramatic traits listed above (in Chapter 10), is addressed in Burke’s analysis of tragic sacrificial “vessels.”²⁶ Melodrama, as conceived especially by Osborn and Bakke, Burghardt, Schwarze, Desilet, and Simons, basically represents a change in entitlement, not a change in rhetorical forms. It is generally coextensive with the standard definition of tragedy current for decades in the communication field, a derivation from Burke’s “entelechy,”²⁷ and Rueckert’s confirmation of its tragic thrust.²⁸

Let’s turn now to specific references to tragedy in many of Burke’s volumes.

The Validation of Rhetorical Tragedy in Burke

Burke barely mentions the m-word. Still, some evidence can be inferred from his corpus to support a shift from tragedy to the terminology of melodrama. Burke’s often “none-too-distinct separation between literature and [practical] rhetoric” can create “confusion,” in any case.²⁹ Of course, the human drama tragically conceived is Burke’s bete noire, the symbol-user’s “rotten[ness]”

writ “perfect[ly]” large.³⁰ For instance, what Burke calls the “ultimate” anecdote of action in the *Grammar of Motives*, action taken to the farthest reaches of the imagination, does literally and most rightly apply only to God and His actions, in truth for a theist, “in principle” for a nontheist.³¹ Such visionary, end-of-the-line appeals, the pith and marrow of what most Burkean genre critics have called tragic oratory, do entail what Burke denominates at the end of *Attitudes Toward History* “heroic euphemism, with corresponding dislocations of gauging.”³² Such a grandiose, dogmatic, one-sided, humanly overblown discursive idiom is, generally, not a good way to accurately size up how things are in a complicated, earthly setting.

As Burke puts it earlier in *ATH*, “Insofar as the tragically and epically heroic approaches a purely nonreligious emphasis, it approaches the risks of coxcombry.” In other words, it approaches melodrama, which “require[s] villains to make [the] plot work.”³³ Burke illustrates melodrama by reference to “Shakespeare, whose tragedies gravitate toward the melodramatic (notably in a work like *Othello*),” featuring, Burke suggests, the thoroughly evil Iago.³⁴

Doesn’t Burke’s famous critique, “The Rhetoric of Hitler’s ‘Battle,’” make the very same point as these passages in the *Grammar* and in *Attitudes*, to say nothing of the essence of the *Rhetoric of Religion*.³⁵ In *RR*, Burke most explicitly equates the entelechy that underlies “tragedy” with theology.³⁶ “Hitler’s corrupt use of religious patterns,” or, “church thought,” as Burke also calls it, distorts drama on the human scale.³⁷ All or most of the moments and features of Hitler’s address get theologized, blown up way beyond earthly proportions, perfected, stretched to the farthest limits of human imagination. Jewish persons and groups are represented as superhuman, ubiquitous in time and space, like the devil. They are cunningly at fault for all the woes of Germany, if not those of the whole world. “We must,” Burke concludes, “make it apparent that Hitler appeals by relying upon a bastardization of fundamentally religious patterns of thought.” Thus, “Our job . . . is to find all available ways of making the Hitlerite distortions of religion apparent.”³⁸ Those distortions are patently illegitimate, can we say “melodramatic,” in descriptions of the character and actions of merely human agents.

The bottom line is this: Burke seems to view an uncomplicated, pasteboard cutout of villainy, drawn without the often countervailing, semi-estimable motives we might find

in real-life perpetrators of so-called “evil,” as indicative of the superficiality of melodrama.³⁹ Such a narrative thus indeed involves unjustified emotion, unjustified motivation, unconvincing plot “machinery” disjoined from the complexities of human character, pretension and posturing of a kind, a theologization of the earthly, quotidian, and ephemeral.⁴⁰ So, one can infer from selected passages in Burke a measure of support for the melodramatic perspective. Burke’s support for such nomenclature is, though, to the extent that we can glean it, very much mixed.

Burke’s Theory of Tragedy in the Large

First, Burke himself uses “tragedy” again and again as the label of choice for the extremes of rhetorical, as well as literary, appeal.⁴¹ Burke may regard melodrama as a “subset” of tragedy, as Schwarze claims.⁴² The term “melodrama” does not, though, surface often in Burke’s many treatments of genres of drama. Burke presents or implies his theory of dramatic genres in certain passages of his first four books and in several volumes that follow. These are the most accessible of Burke’s writings on this theme. In three of the early books, Burke takes a dialectical approach. He contrasts tragedy and comedy as a means of more sharply defining each type.

In *Counter-Statement*, Burke distinguishes the two genres as to their audience appeal. Tragedy confers “dignity” to those in a problematic, or “danger[ous],” situation. It enobles and magnifies. Comedy suggests “our power to surmount it” and “belittl[e] it.”⁴³ It diminishes the threat, makes it manageable. In *Attitudes Toward History*, Burke points out differences between tragedy and comedy as types of medicine for what ails you---playwrights, cultures, orientations, persons in general. The “feudal Shakespeare” and “tragic” expression in general specialize in a “homeopathic” cure, prescriptions of a “replica” of the disease, “misfortune in small doses.”⁴⁴ They “attenuate a risk,” “accommodate” it, “on the feeling that danger cannot be handled by a head-on attack.”⁴⁵ Comic works and systems, on the other hand, offer an “allopathic” antidote, a spell *antithetical* to the threat of danger.⁴⁶ They feature an “opposite” quality. While “tragic cure” is gotten by the “containing of one’s enemies,” comic cure attempts to “eliminate” them, “abolish” them.⁴⁷ The “threat of danger” is countered with “assurance.”⁴⁸ Burke’s analysis culminates in a well-wrought

“distinction between . . . [two types of] tragedy”: “‘factional’ and ‘universal.’”⁴⁹

In *The Philosophy of Literary Form*, Burke contrasts tragedy and comedy in terms of his solution to the problems of aesthetic theory. Our concept of “beauty,” Burke says, should not start with “notions of decoration,” but rather with “notions of the *sublime*.”⁵⁰ Such sublimity emanates from our “fascination” with an underlying global “*threat*” in our life, “some vastness of magnitude, power, or distance disproportionate to ourselves.”⁵¹ We can bend the knee to that threat, give it its due, award it its beauty. Or we can “cancel off the dread,” “play pranks” on it, “refuse to allow the threat its authority.”⁵² Putting his finger on the fundamental dialectic for all discourse, Burke continues:

Should we not begin with this as our way into the subject--treating all other manifestations of symbolic action as *attenuated variants* of pious awe (the sublime [i.e., the tragic]) and impious rebellion (the ridiculous [i.e., the comic])?⁵³

The tragic Greek “trilogies of pious awe” are contrasted with the comedies that “topped [them] off,” the “great legendary heroes” of the tragic dramas with the “buffoons and boastful asses” they became in the satyr-plays.⁵⁴ Burke concludes with a reprise on the homeopathic/allopathic polarity, the antithesis between “stylistically infecting us with the disease,” or tragedy, and application of an antidote to the disease, or comedy.⁵⁵

For Burke, as well as for his mentor in comedy George Meredith, religions and religious discourses can be construed as tragic or, by extension, comic.⁵⁶ “Since tragedy is essentially concerned with the processes of guilt and justification,” religion, at least Western religion, tends to work out of the tragic frame. Indeed, “every full religious expression touches upon tragedy,” Burke says.⁵⁷ That is, every religious act founded thoroughly upon the “principle of perfection” will manifest the tragic spirit. Burke cites as examples of “tragic religion” the “purgation ceremonies of primitive peoples, the slaying of the god in fertility rites, the religious function of tragedy in Greece,” even “pious” contemplation of and response to the Divine.⁵⁸ He underscores the church’s traditional “‘homeopathic’ style,” based on what he calls the “‘prosperity of poverty,’” as indicative of the tragic impulse.⁵⁹

Burke also conceives of philosophies as tragic-frame or comic-frame. He adverts to the “tragic approach of Nietzsche and Unamino,” and says, “the best of Bentham, Marx, and Veblen is high comedy.”⁶⁰ Assuredly, rhetoric is potentially tragic as well as comic. For Burke, “The tragic symbol is the device *par excellence* for *recommending* a cause.”⁶¹ “How could one better picture an issue in an appealing light,” he asks, “than by showing that people were willing to be destroyed in behalf of it?”⁶²

Burke explains:

Thus, though I felt that a certain measure or attitude was valuable in only the ‘grossest’ sense, in that it would enable men [sic] properly to administer to their most rudimentary needs and appetites, how could I better convey this belief, within the strategy of communication, than by telling of the great difficulties involved in the appreciation of it. . . . Thus, even while the rationalist agitator seeks to commend his cause by picturing the advantages it would bring to its adherents, his poetic allies carry on the same propaganda *tragically* by the picture of heroic sufferings, sacrifice, and death. And similar psychological patterns will manifest themselves in the practical agitator’s relation to his [sic] cause.⁶³

Burke’s essential directive on the matter: “We might almost lay it down as a rule of thumb: Where someone is straining to do something, look for evidence of the tragic mechanism.”⁶⁴ Depending on their constellation of attributes, in Burke’s scheme of things, a pattern of political, social, or personal action of any kind can be tragic or comic. In respect to genres of drama, art by and large imitates life, and vice versa, necessary changes being made for altered situational constraints.

Why an “Exigence” in the Labeling of Rhetorical Melodrama and Tragedy Exists

Plainly, use of the term “tragedy” to denominate humanly over-the-top rhetorical appeals is not limited to Burke himself. By and large, Burke’s interpreters have followed suit. Of equal consideration, the *outcomes* of such discursive “engrossment,” even sometimes that which falls short of the excesses of a Hitler,

include as corollary what Tonn, Endress, and Diamond have labeled tragedy in the concrete. People get killed or seriously injured. Property gets destroyed. How many deaths, dismemberments, and rapes, how much damage to buildings and infrastructure, did Hitler's mere "melodrama" bring to pass? Incalculable human and physical destruction.

Not just scapegoating unto symbolic death induces violence. Victimhood toward homosexuals is part of a system of rhetorical mayhem that at least relates to the beating death of Matthew Shepard and the suicide of many teenage gays.⁶⁵ M. L. King's recurrent, symbolic mortification unto martyrdom the last year of his life stemmed from the bombing of his home in the 1950s and multiple death threats throughout his career.⁶⁶ Are we to say such malign events do not go with what can justifiably be called "tragic-frame" rhetoric? King was assassinated in Memphis in April 1968 in the midst of what Osborn and Bakke downplay as ambient "melodrama," even as they acknowledge "this tragic denouement."⁶⁷ These are the anecdotal connections suggested by one arbitrary program of research. There is doubt, however, that such associations between these kinds of words and these kinds of deeds are isolated. What do we rightly call that which begets tragedy?

Burke holds that "spontaneous speech is not a naming at all, but [rather] a system of attitudes, of implicit exhortations."⁶⁸ What does the term "melodrama" exhort a listener or reader to, with its culturally-conditioned, "invisible adjective[s]" circling round?⁶⁹ It says, this message is not to be taken too seriously. It is not to be read on its face, at any rate. It is something of a tear-jerker. Guard against getting caught up or overly involved. This interpretation is not much of a reflection of the real-life scene it purports to portray. Do not worry your head too much about, say, *Mein Kampf*. It is, after all, mere melodrama. "Melodrama" as generic title does not adequately prepare us for, or implicitly exhort us to, appropriate action in response to the extremes of "crisis" rhetoric.

A Proposed Rapprochement between Tragedians and Melodramatists

Osborn and Bakke point the way toward a harmonization of these two taxonomic schemes. This field has been searching,

it appears, for a serviceable generic label for the standard, heated rhetoric of the kind we find in congressional debates and electoral campaigns (and the media “shout shows” that grace/disgrace our cable news networks). This sharp verbal jousting does not often highlight the charitable ambivalence of Burkean comedy, tokens of which go so naturally with reform social movements like those of Gandhi and the early King, and the often sober, moderated, routine political discourse of accommodation and compromise.⁷⁰ Nor does it feature quite the level of egocentrism and “hilarious” ridicule found in the burlesque counter-reaction of resistance or restorationist rhetoric.⁷¹ Neither does commonplace political oratory of an intense variety exploit the extremes of tragic victimage, calling for, or implying, death, dismemberment, or permanent banishment of party opponents to the far reaches of the earth. Ordinary deliberative debate often does, however, tend to traffic in moral absolutes, ideological simplicities, policy rigidities, hyper-emotional characterizations, black-and-white schematizations, and our-heroes-against-their-villains as narrative scheme.⁷² It wants to throw the rascals out, but not beyond the bounds of private social acceptance. We could call this abridged form of Burkean tragedy, “tragedy-lite.” After Schwarze we could call it a “subset” of Burkean tragedy. Perhaps better still, we could, and should, call it “melodrama.”

Osborn and Bakke put it this way:

These various characteristics [of melodrama, listed above] drive us to an inevitable thesis: *Melodrama is the most rhetorical mode of narrative*. Heilman has already noted the close affinity of melodrama and politics, that melodrama is the realm of social action, public action, action within the world.⁷³

That is to say, melodrama can be construed as the natural mode of typical, heated, political discourse in a free-wheeling democracy. Osborn and Bakke elaborate:

Brooks argues, melodrama offers “the emphatic articulation of simple truths and relationships,” and underscores, he says, “the need to recognize and confront evil, to combat and expel it, to purge the social order.” To achieve this need, “There is a forced unifying of life by a single value---a concentration of good on one side and of

evil on the other.”⁷⁴

In sum, Osborn and Bakke say, “It is clear . . . that melodrama in public life is not so much a strategy selected by rhetors as it is a way of living through conflict. Caught up in significant controversy, we tend to see the world in melodramatic terms.”⁷⁵

Taking Burke’s reading on its face, we should look for the fundamental distinction between rhetorical tragedy and rhetorical tragedy-lite, or melodrama, in the described or recommended sacrificial act, not in the morally-disordered scene or setting for the drama.⁷⁶ In full-blown rhetorical tragedy, mortification, or sacrifice directed inward, will highlight intense struggling, straining, striving---intense self-denial---nigh unto, or unto, a martyr’s death. This kind of symbolic self-flagellation characterized Dr. King’s speeches the last year of his life. In rhetorical tragedy unalloyed, the sacrificial moment is often and obviously directed outward. Burke calls this strategem “victimage,” purification by “scapegoat.”⁷⁷ Tragic scapegoating will, as suggested above, prescribe severe punishment, permanent banishment, or death to the enemy.

Rhetoric whose intensities reach this level of symbolic force cannot accurately be labeled “melodrama.” Its potential for physical destruction is too strong. Rhetoric is ambiguous, as Burke concedes.⁷⁸ It can serve as a substitute for physical action as well as an inducement to physical action. The connections, however, between the bellicosities of some public address and the history of human warfare are too intertwined to ignore. All too often, rhetorical tragedy begets real tragedy. Let’s not call a spade a trowel.

Other tokens of rhetorical tragedy, besides the sacrificial stage, will likewise moderate in the melodrama of routine political combat. Star champions of the recommended action will tend to be not quite god-like, larger-than-life mythic heroes. The villains who lead the cohort on the bad side of the policy ledger will usually fall short of diabolical dimensions. Theologization of agent and counter-agent will probably diminish. Redemptive purposes in the melodrama of democratic party squabbling will, too, be a bit less grandiose: not quite so perfected, less than utopian. Those visions will be grand. We will not hear often, though, about the likes of a Thousand-Year Reich or heaven on earth.

It will not always be easy to separate tragedy-lite, or

melodrama, from the fully-minted variety. Nevertheless, the surest sign of this more quotidian genre of political talk will be a sacrificial element of limited consequence: Throw the bums out of office. Don't kill them, maim them, or expel them from the human race.

When speaking of revolutionary, restorationist or resistance, and reformist social movements, with corresponding constraints toward tragic, burlesque, and comic rhetorical accompaniment in that order, one is employing the terminology of traditional, classical social-movement theory.⁷⁹

“New” or “Frame Alignment” social-movement theory would substitute the terms “frame transformation,” “frame amplification,” and “frame bridging” for tragic-revolutionary, burlesque-restorationist, and comedic-reformationist rhetoric.⁸⁰

Congressional/campaign political discourse of the fevered kind is, thusly, not thoroughly rationalized via the theological motive of perfection, despite its many categorical schematizations. Call it melodrama. Revolutionary movement discourse of the Hitler ilk is so rationalized. We can call it tragedy. Potentially, it is far too pernicious for scholarly euphemism.

A Proposed Taxonomy of Four Rhetorical Genres, Dramatistically Considered

One more point needs to be made as prelude to coordinating tokens of tragedy, burlesque, melodrama, and comedy in a dramatic and rhetorical vein: There has been no hard-and-fast theory of tragedy over the millennia, even for the poetic situation alone. As Morris Weitz says, “A true statement of the necessary and sufficient properties of all tragedies, their common, essential nature,” does not exist.⁸¹ “The fundamental disagreements among the theorists themselves about the nature of tragedy seriously call into question such a formula, for, as we have seen, the theorists disagree not only about the essence of tragedy but even about its necessary properties.”⁸²

Herewith are generic attributes in modified form, combined with components of rhetorical melodrama, in a series from tragedy to burlesque to melodrama to comedy:

Morally-Disordered Scene: crimes and evils (tragedy), gross violations of revered traditional principles (burlesque),

binary polarizations of the good and the bad, with the bad often less than consummately evil (melodrama), mistakes or impediments (comedy).

Guilt-Obsessed Agent: god-like mythic hero (tragedy), egotistic “intellectual” giant (burlesque), hero, but not so god-like (melodrama), realistic competent leader (comedy).

Guilty Counteragents: diabolical total enemies (tragedy), bumbling idiots (burlesque), villains, but not devils (melodrama), mistake-prone klutzes (comedy).

Sacrificial Act: severe punishment, permanent banishment, or death (tragedy), public ridicule, partial public banishment (burlesque), categorical defeat of opponents and their policies, in the legislature and at the polls, expressed in the idiom of moral outrage or offense, often on behalf of innocent victims (melodrama), slap-on-the-wrist instruction and correction, temporary social distance (comedy).

Redemptive Purposes and Means: utopian goals and strategies, total salvation (tragedy), unbridled self-aggrandizement via “noble” abstract ideals (burlesque), triumph of transcendently virtuous values, materially embodied, not just pragmatically serviceable ones (melodrama), imperfect improvement, or mere restoration of the status quo, better not best (comedy).

This series of classifications progresses more or less from most perfectly schematized to least perfectly schematized, as per Burke’s philosophy of motivation---and tragedy. Burlesque is placed before melodrama on this continuum because that dramatic genre, Burke says, goes with the “breaking of a frame” of political and/or social orientation.⁸³ Melodrama, Osborn and Bakke suggest, does not. Melodrama’s goal of “moral virtue” is denominated “transcendental” because of the metaphysical nature of the exclusionary, as opposed to interdependent, good-vs.-bad, or evil-lite, axis of conflict in that constellation of symbolic forms. Melodramatists “know” what is right and what is wrong almost by way of revelation, as it were. The appearance of an innocent victim in political melodrama is deemed optional, as long as the good-vs.-bad polarity is maintained across programs, positions, and advocates.

Tom DeLay: A Paradigm Case

Of the many examples of melodramatic, or in some cases so-called melodramatic, discourses the scholars of melodrama have proffered, those in Burghardt's study seem most representative of this genre. One hundred years ago, Robert M. La Follette took the domestic malefactors of his day to the woodshed via the binaries of such sharply-intensified discourse, without calling for their head on a spike. Who does so as conspicuously today? We nominate former U.S. House Majority Whip Tom DeLay as exemplar.

Three of DeLay's recent speeches illustrate many of the differences between rhetorical tragedy and rhetorical melodrama proposed in this chapter. Those notable disparities point up the need for a generic distinction. Two of these addresses deal mainly with foreign affairs, ("The Imperative for Action [in respect to Iraq]," "To the Israeli Knesset"), the other primarily with national politics ("Farewell Address"). As one might surmise, the House leader handled international adversaries tragically, domestic opponents melodramatically.

The three speeches were each of considerable moment. The first, "Imperative for Action," was presented 21 August 2002 in Houston, Texas. It made a major and influential statement on the need for war against Iraq as a response to the attacks on America of 11 September 2001. The second address was delivered 30 July 2003 to the Knesset in Israel. It assured the Jewish state of America's support against what DeLay termed Palestinian aggression. The third speech, the most intriguing, marked Representative DeLay's departure from Congress. It took place in the House chamber 8 June 2006, the day before the Leader's resignation. Under an ethical cloud--he had just been indicted for association with the Abramoff scandals---DeLay bid farewell to his colleagues in a most unorthodox fashion. Early on in his remarks, he set forth the generic expectations of the day and his motive for ignoring them:

"In preparing for today," DeLay says in his Farewell Address,

I found that it is customary in speeches such as these to reminisce about the good old days of political harmony and across-the-aisle camaraderie, and to lament the bitter, divisive partisanship that supposedly now weakens our democracy.

Well, I can't do that because partisanship, Mr. Speaker, properly understood, is not a symptom of democracy's weakness but of its health and its strength, especially from the perspective of a political conservative.

Which is to say, prepare yourselves not for the comedy of reconciliation traditionally called for on an occasion like this one, but rather for the hard-nosed, belly-punching attack that is the form and substance of political melodrama. Not surprisingly, Democrats walked out, said an Associated Press dispatch.⁸⁴

We will cull from the three discourses illustrative tokens of tragedy and melodrama as DeLay employed them in each stage of his proffered drama. Note the tragedy directed at the foreign enemy, and the melodramatic treatment, particularly conspicuous in such a customarily benign discursive context as a farewell oration, of the enemy at home.

Morally Disordered Scene: Tragedy: crimes and evils, present or threatened: We must "destroy the coalition of terror before it strikes again" ("Action"), a combination of tragic scapegoating and dire warning; "the longer we wait, the greater the danger" ("Action"). We are "in the midst of a great global conflict against evil" ("Knesset"), certainly a tragic claim. "Freedom and terrorism cannot coexist" ("Knesset"), binaries being an aspect of tragedy or the tragedy-lite of melodrama. "Democracies do not starve their citizens, nor torture their dissidents, nor threaten their neighbors" ("Knesset"), a tragic indictment of the Muslim/Arab/Palestinian world in general, along with their use of "guns," "fear," and "violence."

Of parenthetical interest in the Iraq speech at Houston is its dialectical aspect as a counter to potential vulnerability, embarrassment, or weakness of argumentative position: The polluted scene the speaker describes is fraught with evidentiary ambiguity. DeLay acknowledges "the overwhelming supposed missing body of evidence against Iraq's dictator." He answers with the claim, "The case [for such weaponry and for war] is self-evident." DeLay simply begs the question on Saddam's putative "developing and manufacturing [of] nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons." He does so again and again.

Melodrama: binary polarizations of good and bad: "Consensus" is the domestic danger in the Iraq speech ("Action"). Such a middle-of-the-road, split-the-difference concession on the

home front would compromise the “good vs. evil” polarity toward our foreign enemies. Consensus appeasers may abet evil, but they are not necessarily evildoers of the worst kind themselves, worthy of death or permanent, categorical banishment. In the “Farewell Address,” the environing villainy is “liberalism[‘s]” insatiable quest for “more---more government, more taxation, more control over people’s lives and decisions and wallets.” It is a dire danger, but not a capital crime.

Guilt-Obsessed Agent: Tragedy: god-like mythic hero: DeLay does not present himself in the mythic mold of a Falwell or Limbaugh in the two speeches that exploit tragedy in the moments of scene, act, counteragent, and purpose.

Melodrama: hero, but not so god-like: “We lead the forces of good in the battle between freedom and fanaticism,” DeLay says in his Iraq speech, a binary, melodramatic-enough claim for himself and his coagents. “The House [of Representatives] will be there for the President because he is right” (“Action”), the Leader says of his supreme compatriot. “The principled partisan [i.e., DeLay himself], however obnoxious he may be to his [sic] opponents, . . . [does not] degrade our public debate” (“Farewell”), again, categorical and self-flattering as a man true to his ideals. “For the true statesman, Mr. Speaker, we [meaning Tom DeLay] are not defined by what they [sic] compromise, but by what they don’t” (“Farewell”). “True statesman” that he is, he acts “honorably and honestly” (“Farewell”), as contrasted with the “timid, docile” characters of the formerly “permanent Republican minority” (“Farewell”). “Compassionate” I am, DeLay suggests, because “compassionate is as compassionate does” (“Farewell”).

DeLay, the “compassionate,” “principled,” “true statesman,” leads the “forces of good.” His ethical self-projection is middling heroic in the melodramatic style.

Guilty Counteragents: Tragedy: diabolical total enemies: Saddam is a “madman,” a “vicious predator” (“Action”). “This much is certain,” DeLay adds: “Saddam Hussein is evil,” Saddam’s coagents “terrorists, tyrants,” “practitioners of despotism,” “forgers of the chains of despotism” (“Action”). “No tyrant or wicked regime can exert [should be allowed to exert] their brutality” (“Knesset”). Such terrorism and terrorists are “a lie” (“Knesset”).

Melodrama: villains, but not devils: The temporizers

in Congress on the Iraq situation are “nothing but a coalition to forestall action” (“Action”), a categorical indictment, “nothing but.” “You’re either with us or you’re with the terrorists” (“Action”), DeLay says of these “apologists of idleness” and “architects of complacency” (“Action”). He laments “the impertinence of some government officials” (“Action”), who, apparently, have no right to voice a contrary opinion on the matter of war and peace, as DeLay sees it. “These critics are dead wrong” (“Action”), again a portrait in black and white. They are purveyors of “wishful thinking and appeasement” (“Action”), a loaded description to be sure, harking back to Chamberlain at Munich. “Terrorism cannot be negotiated away or pacified [our opponents are “negotiators” and “pacifists,” DeLay seems to suggest]” (“Knesset”). “My adversaries,” DeLay says, are each one a “preening, self-styled statesman who elevates compromise to a first principle” (“Farewell”). DeLay invokes the names of “Washington,” “Lincoln,” “Junipero Serra and Jack Swigert” as heroes and co-conservatives who chose “to live, to fight and even to die in the service of freedom” because “of their refusal even in the face of danger or death to compromise the principles they served” (“Farewell”). These were heroic agents, but serve here to point up, by contrast, the disreputable character of unprincipled liberal compromisers. Such faint-hearted fence-straddlers are the foils of America’s genuine heroes.

Preparatory Attitude, or Insipient Act. Tragedy: enmity, hostility: DeLay calls for “unceasing hostility” toward the perpetrators of 9/11 (“Action”). And, he adds, we “stand with Israel in defiance of evil” (“Knesset”). Be an “enemy” of “tyranny,” the Leader says, apparently of the adversary beyond our borders (“Farewell”). “Lincoln’s left hand [on the statue at his memorial] still stays clenched because tyranny will always need an enemy” (“Farewell”). DeLay’s orientation toward the opponent abroad remains tragic-frame in his final speech as Majority Leader.

Melodrama: antagonism, with a disposition toward division, but something less than seething hatred: “Compromise and bipartisanship are means, not ends, and are properly employed only in the service of higher principles [meaning those of his own side]” (“Farewell”), DeLay avers. Those predispositions should be regarded as only strategic tools in the promotion of “truth” as DeLay knows it. “Conservatives often attempt to soften that stereotype [of being “insensitive and mean-spirited”]”; they should not do so,

because “conservatism isn’t about feeling people’s pain, it’s about curing it” (“Farewell”). “I say goodbye today, Mr. Speaker, with few regrets, no doubts” (“Farewell”). I’m right and you’re wrong, Mr. DeLay implies. He draws the lesson of “a dutiful sentry at attention” from “Washington’s obelisk,” a seeming allusion to DeLay’s rejection of “peace and reconciliation” with any of his enemies, except on his own terms (“Farewell”). An attitude of belligerence, rigidity, and self-certainty is the order of the day.

Sacrificial Act: Tragedy: severe punishment, permanent banishment, or death: “Destroy the coalition of terror,” DeLay enjoins, “despite the certain heavy costs in lives and treasure” it will surely entail (“Action”), tragedy self- and other-directed. “Destroy international terrorism” (“Action”). After all, “We have no choice” (“Action”). “War has already been thrust upon us. The only choice we have is between victory and defeat” (“Knesset”), a categorical, either/or construction of the task ahead. “Saddam must be replaced”; “only a regime change” will suffice, no longer the “deterrence of containment” (“Action”) of the dilatory Clinton years. “Terrorism will either destroy free nations [tragic scenic danger], or free nations will destroy it [tragic victimization of the other]. Freedom and terrorism will struggle---good against evil---until the battle is resolved. These are the terms Providence [a transcendent value is at stake] has put before the United States, Israel, and the rest of the civilized world” (“Knesset”). An all-or-none choice faces us: kill or be killed. “Israel’s fight is,” after all, “our fight. And so shall it be until the last terrorist on earth [a perfected sacrificial act indeed] is in a cell or a cemetery” (“Knesset”).

Melodrama: categorical defeat of opponents and their policies, in the legislature and at the polls, expressed in the idiom of moral outrage or offense, often on behalf of innocent victims: “Our friends on the other side of the aisle lost every one of those arguments over the last 22 years” (“Farewell”). We categorically defeated the liberals and the Democrats during my tenure in this legislative body, DeLay is asserting. On every issue, we were right and they were wrong. As for accomplishments, we did it all: “And the results since the first great conservative victory in 1980 speak for themselves: millions of new jobs, new homes and new businesses created, thanks to conservative economic reforms; millions of families intact and enriched by the move from welfare to work; hundreds of millions of people around the

world liberated by a conservative's foreign policy's victory over Soviet communism; and more than 50 million Iraqis and Afghans liberated from tyranny since September 11th, 2001" ("Farewell"). Tax increases under Bush 1 and Clinton, widely credited with generating the only Federal budget surpluses in the past 30 years, go unremarked, as do, to say the least, uncertain outcomes in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the effects of 45 years of containment of the Soviets inaugurated by Democratic President Harry Truman.

"I have caught and thrown spears of every sort," a rather bellicose image for a speech under such generic constraints. "Over the course of 22 years . . . , I have scraped and clawed [enhanced self-sacrifice] for every vote, for every amendment, every word of every bill ["every," as in Burke's entelechy] I believed in my heart would protect human freedom and defend human dignity," DeLay boasts ["Farewell"]. "Mr. Speaker, as God is my witness [transcendent abstractions transcendently undergirded] and history is my judge" ("Farewell"), "there's only one thing I would change: I would fight even harder" ("Farewell"). The tragedy-lite that is melodrama encompasses such mortification, even as it falls short of actual or potential martyrdom.

The "innocent victims" of traditional melodrama come front and center in the second half of Mr. DeLay's "Farewell Address." These guileless sufferers fall prey, of course, to liberal "bureaucracies," heedless time-servers in "government foster care," not to volunteer, private-sector "foster parents" like DeLay and his wife, "Christine." The "catastrophe," the "national outrage," that is "America's child welfare and foster care system" is a "government failure, and a bipartisan embarrassment" ("Farewell"). These unfortunates have been "abused," "neglected," "beaten and betrayed" as they are "routinely tossed from one temporary placement to another" ("Farewell"). "Once in . . . our abusive and neglectful foster care system, [this "broken system"], . . . things often get worse." "Children are dying, Mr. Speaker. . . . For God's sake, help them" ("Farewell"). DeLay skirts the edges of tragedy full blown, or seems to, in his depiction of the suffering innocents, the "*most perfect*" sacrificial victims that Burke delimits in *The Philosophy of Literary Form*.⁸⁵

The innocent victims of melodramatic lore, here identified in the Majority Leader's lament, might more justly be treated under the heading of scenic disorder. DeLay and his party are not the perpetrators of their torment. Conservatives do not afflict them. With intent or not, liberals do. Nevertheless, a narrative about

the pain of guiltless martyrs, slain on the altar of an iniquitous ideology, has its sacrificial/redemptive dimensions.

Redemptive Purposes and Means: Tragedy: utopian goals and strategies, total salvation: “We fight,” says DeLay, “for . . . the liberation of all mankind [sic] from oppression,” even for total “victory” (“Knesset”). “One day Israel . . . will live in freedom, security, and peace. And terrorism will perish from the earth” (“Knesset”).

Melodrama: triumph of transcendently virtuous values, materially embodied, not just pragmatically serviceable ones: The “metaphysical” quality of the melodramatic quest that Burghardt and Desilet describe is limned in the “timeless truths” DeLay and his orientation serve (“Action”). Heavenly ideals are more perfected than sublunary ones. “Our foundation,” DeLay maintains, is “a set of enduring, defining values: Faith in God, the sanctity of human life, the existence of right and wrong [note the binary], and the certain knowledge that we’re all ultimately accountable for our actions” (“Action”). From these ultimate and abstract aims in life, “democratic values” emanate: “free speech; a free press; free elections; the rule of law; and the right to change our government peacefully. . . . the bulwarks of liberty” (“Action”). Ergo: “America has a solemn obligation to stand with countries that share these principles” (like Iraq), that is, let us make war against Saddam, the dictator, and on behalf of those opposed to Saddam, who are assumed to be democrats, small “d.” Our “solidarity,” DeLay declares, “. . . goes to the very nature of man [sic] It transcends geography, culture, and generations,” those “God-given rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” and “freedom” (“Knesset”).

Theological principles translate into procedural guideposts that are then embodied in a superior legislative agenda, sanctioned on high: “lowered taxes to increase freedom,” “reformed welfare programs” to promote “the dignity of work and personal responsibility,” and “the spread of democracy” in opposition to “terror,” in affirmation of “the inalienable human right of all men and women and children to live in freedom” (“Farewell”).

Conclusion

In sum, Representative DeLay's three speeches demonstrate a significantly sharp distinction between two kinds of rhetorical appeal. Conflating these two genres into one by way of a "melodramatic" entitlement alone would obscure these differences:

Scene: The threat of "terrorism," "torture," "guns," and "violence" is different from, more dire than by far, the danger of "consensus" politics and "more government taxation" and "control" in contravention of citizens' "freedom."

Counteragents: An "evil," "wicked," "brutal" "madman" in league with "terrorists" and "tyrants" is distinct from, more threatening than, "preening," "complacent," "consensus"-mongering "compromisers," "appeasers," and "tax"-hounds, bent on "controlling" your life via an uncaring governmental "bureaucracy."

Attitude: "Unceasing hostility" and "defiance" by way of a "clenched fist" makes ready for a more ruinously altered program of action than "insensitivity," even supposed "mean-spiritedness" if need be, behind a strategic and devious use of "compromise and bipartisanship," if required, to further conservative "principles" and their transcendental "truth" in legislative, not fight-to-the-death international, combat.

Sacrificial Act: "Destruction" of "terrorism," consignment of "the last terrorist on earth" to "a cell or a cemetery," even at the cost of the "lives" of Americans, can hardly be equated with mere "scraping," "clawing," and "fighting" for "every vote," "amendment," and "word" in a piece of legislation, but not dying for them; or acting so that opponents only "lose" on every argument, vote, or election, as in "1980" and beyond, or to forestall "outrageous" victimization of children by "bureaucratic" "bipartisan" "foster care" through voting and political campaigning, even though these efforts are all directed at serious offenses.

Redemptive Purposes: The "total salvation" inherent in the quest for "liberation of all mankind [sic]" when "terrorism

. . . perish[es] from the earth” represents a more perfected outcome from one’s actions than “lowered taxes,” noble “work,” “personal responsibility” shouldered by every American, above all “freedom” from bureaucratic interference, even as those ends and goals derive from a transcendent “faith in God” and “the very nature of man [sic].”

Agent: Only Representative DeLay’s depiction of himself as chief actor in behalf of conservative aims and goals takes what we here call a melodramatic route throughout the three speeches. Boastfully and tendentiously to be sure, he presents himself as a “compassionate,” “principled,” “true statesman,” leading the “forces of good,” not as a seemingly super-human icon of the Right. His ethical projection in the two addresses on foreign policy is enhanced, but not mythically overblown.

Bottom line: The label “melodrama” not only fails to warn listeners and readers of the violence and mayhem the extremes of “crisis rhetoric” can incite. It cannot just lull its audience into a false sense of inconsequence in respect to the public address in question. In addition, it inadequately combines and confuses two styles of discourse with strikingly different rhetorical properties, dramatically configured. Without excessive exaggeration, one might say, it’s a difference between life and death.

U.S. military dead in Iraq: 4,439. U.S. military wounded in Iraq: 32,987. U.S. contractor employee deaths in Iraq: 1,487. Estimated Iraqi deaths, owing to the U.S. invasion that DeLay championed via the “Cult of the Kill”: 1,421,933.⁸⁶ Rhetoric can induce devastating material action, as well as serve as its substitute.⁸⁷

Addendum: Tying Up One Loose End

Now that we have examined thoroughly enough four genres of drama, the manner in which circumstances, attitudes, and purposes, societal and personal, shape in specific ways and imbue with various intensities the stages of our basic guilt-redemption cycle, we can return to our lingering question: Is there a comic dimension, Burke-wise, to Melville’s *Moby-Dick*? Burke offers a hint, I believe, in something he says in *Attitudes Toward History*:

The progress of humane enlightenment can go no further than in picturing people not as *vicious*, but as *mistaken*. When you add that people are *necessarily* mistaken, that all people are exposed to situations in which they must act as fools, that *every* insight contains its own special kind of blindness, you complete the comic circle, returning again to the lesson of humility that undergirds great tragedy.⁸⁸

Note the “complet[ing of] the comic circle,” as one “return[s] again to the lesson of humility that undergirds great tragedy.” I interpret Burke here to mean that comedy, as Burke sees it, circles round to embrace not the content, but rather the attitude, of the observer of the tragedy in the Aristotelian/Desiletian sense. We’re talking here not about rhetorical or “factional” tragedy, but rather about the theatrical or literary tragedy of the Grecian and Shakespearean kind. The same “lesson” and implementation of “humility” that characterize comic framing reflect and infuse the stance of the putative “tragedian.” Comedy is seen as the master trope or narrative of Burke’s approach to life and critique in general. Comedy serves as an all-embracing theme, end, or entitlement for the recommended critical endeavor.

These sympathetic attitudes and charitable attributes of mind and discourse that shape the dramatically ironic perspective of the once-removed observer of tragic events veritably define the “comic spirit,” to borrow the phrasing of George Meredith, Burke’s mentor in comedy.⁸⁹ This sympathetic, charitable observer with the meta-view that enables him or her to discern the complexities of conflict between persons and groups that hold selective, truncated, self-serving conceptions of the issue at hand, will sometimes address dramas fraught with crimes and evils, real or so-called; sometimes, those featuring mere mistakes or impediments. We can call that blessed-with-grace observer, if we want, a tragedian, on the one hand, or a comedian, on the other, based on the intensities of the conflict in question. But he or she is the same person, attitudinally. And Burke, in his own quixotic way, places that *Attitude* toward history, if you will, and its myriad depictions, in the bin he calls “comedy.”

In that sense, from the Burkean viewpoint, not the content, but rather the orientation Melville assumes, especially at the end of his drama, could be called “comic.” Isn’t the above-the-fray tragic poet something of a critic of human life and folly? Doesn’t this observer describe, analyze, interpret, and evaluate

from something of a distance, the veritable definition of the work and stance of any critic? As Burke says, “Whatever poetry may be, criticism had best be comic.”⁹⁰

Chapter 13

Putting One Word, One Thought, after Another, Burke Style

Burke, the Writing Instructor: Really?

I once received a review of a journal submission of mine that began, “You write like Kenneth Burke. Believe me. That is not a compliment.”

John McGowan of the University of North Carolina calls Burke a “buffoon,” whose one disjointed lecture he heard he had to leave before the man “made an utter fool of himself.” “Burke’s constant attempts to be systematic, as well as encyclopedic, to keep the main point in view while allowing himself any and all digressions,” in his books as well as in his talks, “are slightly comic, but also seem desperate. Descent into nonsensical babbling

never seems far away.”¹

Another critic says you will read Burke for awhile and are about to “dismiss him,” when suddenly a nugget of insight appears that you’re compelled to mine and explore.² Is, though, the required investment of time and often tedious attention toward such payoffs worth the trouble? More to the point, could such an apparently undisciplined, self-described “word man” have anything useful to say about writing as a craft and subject for pedagogy.³

Let’s come at the question from the angle Tilly Warnock suggests in the title of her influential article on Burke’s writing style, “Reading Kenneth Burke: Ways In, Ways Out, Ways Roundabout.”⁴ Let’s go really roundabout. Burke published his first treatise on literary theory and criticism, *Counter-Statement*, at the beginning of the Great Depression.⁵ As the title implies, he advanced a position “counter” to received wisdom when received wisdom was suddenly very much in doubt. In his chapter “Program,”⁶ Burke promoted the “indeterminate” and “aesthetic” against the “practical” and “industrial” which were then giving our nation a lot of grief.⁷ He commended “democracy” as opposed to what he called “fascism.”⁸ He gloried in “inefficiency,” “irresponsibility,” the “lethargic,” the “Bohemian,” as antidotes for the “undeviating certainties” and “high degree of perfection” required and enjoined by the “bourgeois” “technolog[ism]” of the day, the likely cause of the then-current distress.⁹ Burke phrased his unlikely “Program” in memorable, and instructive, ways, to wit:

“Certainty is cheap,” Burke said, “it is the easiest thing of which a man [sic] is capable. . . . Convictions spring up like Jacks-in-the-box. . . . We can depend upon it that even a world rigorously schooled in doubt will be dogmatical enough.” He lauded “democracy” as “organized distrust, [necessary] ‘protest made easy,’ a babble of discordant voices, a colossal getting in one’s own way.” “The democrat, the negativist, the man who thinks of powers as something to be ‘fought,’” Burke goes on, “has no hope in perfection---as the ‘opposition,’ his nearest approach to a doctrine is the doctrine of interference. There is no absolute truth, he [the democrat, the negativist] says, but there is the cancellation of errors . . . , [the] throw[ing] into confusion the code which underlies commercial enterprise, industrial competition, the ‘heroism’ of economic warfare” If there is to be an “ideal” of some kind, make it “vague, bungling adjustment,” “intellectual

vagabondage.”¹⁰

Burke, of course, went on to elaborate on “ways in” and “ways out” of received “certainties” in *Permanence and Change*. He called his approach “perspective by incongruity.”¹¹

Like his novel term “transcendence downward,”¹² Burke’s anti-systematic “Program” makes for something of a perspective by incongruity. It juxtaposes concepts that don’t usually go together, implied “order,” as well as “plan” or “system,”¹³ and studied disorder, that articulate a contradiction both sides of which we may have to hold in tension to get a glimpse, if only a glimpse, of the “whole truth,” if that’s what we’re after. And Burke’s 1931 “Program,” such as it is, serves as fitting entree into his style of writing and whatever it may teach us about useful discursive practice.

Two Guideposts Set Side by Side

Two excellent articles on what Burke’s style of composition is and what it can mean as model are “Increasing Response-ability Through Mortification: A Burkean Perspective on Teaching Writing,” by Michael Hassett, and the Warnock piece. Taken together, they highlight the dual trajectories of Burke’s thought and prose: both the indeterminate and the determinate, the anti-clustering and the clustering, language as counterforce as well as generative force. Hassett elaborates on the dis-orderly “interference” aspect, highlighted above. That’s the feature of Burke’s talk and exposition, the seemingly disjointed cultivation of counter-statement digressions and complications, that’s most singular and obtrusive, and most vexing for the McGowan types. Burke himself is hardly averse, however, to following the “logological” leads language affords unto something very close to “the end of the line.” Dramatism/logology wouldn’t exist without those leads and the “logical” trajectories they point up. What is implied by an “act”? Burke has asked.¹⁴ What is suggested by the notion of “order”?¹⁵ Inquiring minds want to know, and Burke has told us in ever “radiating” detail.

First, composition as “interference,” “dis-order,” “perspective by incongruity.”

Hassett's Take

We're all inmates, Fredric Jameson says, in what he has called the *Prison-House of Language*. Burke would seem to agree. "Speech pull[s] bits of reality apart," Burke emphasizes, while at the same time "treating them as wholes."¹⁶ Language abridges as it abstracts, and idealizes those abridgments, in one seamless process. It "selects" out from reality, "reflects" or ostensibly points to those selective partialities, and in so doing "deflects" attention away from other, complicating angles of view.¹⁷ Standards of "truth" as we conceive them, our favored terms shimmer with perfection. As Korzybski would say, words addict us to the illusion of "allness" where an "etcetera" is, in fact, the constant requirement.¹⁸ We think we've said it "all" with our one summarizing "entitlement" when we haven't come close.¹⁹ Since the "is" implies a "should" and the "is not" suggests a "should not"---the hortatory is always furtively present in the "negative" as ubiquitous scene in which language holds forth---how do we get around the seductive temptation to act like a bossy, yet at least partially mistaken, "know-it-all"?

Hassett's prescription, borrowing terminology from Burke himself: "*Mortify* the goads toward perfection that arise in my [our] symbolizing."²⁰ Here's Hassett's list of mortifications,²¹ or sacrificial resistances to the "natural" gratifications of symbol-using, illustrated in or implied by Burke:

- (1) Use non-sexist language. Given patriarchal traditions and English lexical forms, it is something of a strain to do so. Be expansive and inclusive. Take the trouble to go plural, employ double pronouns, alternate genders, avoid the generalized "man."
- (2) Use the pronoun "I" to soften your assertions. The thoughts are yours alone, you are making clear. There's no obligation on the reader's part to assent. The "I" opens space for free reflection and "counter-statement."
- (3) Put your commitment to "process" rather than "product" front and center. Label what you are doing as something of a rough draft surely in need of, or open to, revision. Invite your opponent, if you have one, to a joint collaboration. Write to enhance negotiations, not to slap down those with a different opinion. Follow the "parliamentary," not the "unifying," form.
- (4) Fairly summarize and play back to the other what you interpret him or her as saying. Have your draft read and responded to by others. Listen openly to what they say.

(5) Create an active reader by inviting response. Invite him, her, or them to participate in the construction of meaning.

(6) Or, fantasize your own dialogue with the other, or an imaginary other. Even a “self-dialogue” can further the same end.

(7) Intervene and interfere with your own prejudices. Look for ways to do so. Write two contradictory statements, for example, not just one prejudicial piece. Be open to self-reflexively discounting what you say, critically commenting on what you say, correcting what you say, especially at points of summary and transition. On the kb listserv, this strategy is known as “burking yourself.”

(8) Use a yes-no-maybe approach to the issue at hand. Admit to a “dialectical muddle.”

(9) Use “metadiscourse”: Call attention to your own terms, their potential weaknesses as “screens,” and your struggles with them.

(10) Correct, or at least evaluate, one terministic screen by the juxtaposing of an opposite screen. Cultivate contradictory concepts to break frozen linkages. Acknowledge that your positive terms are really only questions. Think potentially contradictory, or complexifying, footnote or endnote. That’s an especially Burkean plan of appeal.²²

(11) Or, prepare a traditional argument, analyze it, and note contradictions, problems, and limitations so as to enhance negotiation.

(12) Problematize your argument in your conclusion. Note your own system’s intimidations.

Through Burke-style writing, revising, and self-problematizing, the reader learns and is encouraged to do the same. Employ and invite “no-ing,” not just “knowing.”

Warnock’s Additions

Anyone familiar with what James Chesebro, in *Extensions*, has called Burke’s “*System*” knows that Hasset has not given us quite the whole picture. Not everything in Burke is disorder and chaos. True, as characteristic of Burke, Warnock obliquely puts her stamp on many of the strategies Hasset works up into prescriptions for writing, though Warnock herself is more homed

in on “reading theory” than instruction in college composition classes.²³ She, like Hassett, is most sensitive to the “collage”-like style of Burke’s thought, its often “nonlinear” trajectories, its “appositional” and “elliptical” gropings, its “qualitative” rather than “syllogistic” progressions, its many times “indeterminate” meanings. But Warnock puts emphasis, in addition, on the “radiating material” that gives some shape to what we can call Burke’s *philosophy* of language, life, literature, and rhetoric---the subject of the present volume. There is a “generative force” there, a “tracking down of symbols,” a drive toward the “determinate” as well as the “indeterminate,” indeed a “legitmat[ion] of the aim of recovering authorial intention.”²⁴ Warnock declares:

Whatever the origin of Burke’s attitudes, the time would now seem to be right to recognize with him that determinate and indeterminate meanings do not exclude each other, and they are not all inclusive. Burke moves his readers to attitudes appropriate to both kinds of meanings. The reciprocity between determinate and indeterminate meanings is an important lesson about human discourse in general that readers of Burke are all but required to learn.²⁵

Warnock finds her Burkean imprimatur for the “determinacy” of more or less coherent, discursive “radiation” in the same book that touts the unprogrammatic “Program,” *Counter-Statement*.²⁶ At the conclusion of the chapter “The Poetic Process” in *CS*, Burke says of the work of any creative writer:

The symbol becomes a generative force, a relationship to be repeated in varying details, and thus makes for one aspect of technical form. . . . The originating situation makes for *emotional* consistency within the parts; the symbol demands a logical consistency within this emotional consistency.²⁷

In the chapter of *Counter-Statement* that refines and extends Burke’s theory of poetic, artistic, indeed expository composition, the “Lexicon Rhetoricae,” Burke hammers the point home, and refines it in the process:

The Symbol as Generating Principle: When the poet [that's really any creative or expository writer] has converted his [sic] pattern of experience into a Symbolic equivalent, the Symbol becomes a guiding principle in itself. . . . As the Symbol is ramified, Symbols within Symbols will arise . . .

Again, Symbols will be subtilized in ways not contributory to the pattern. The weak King cannot be too weak, the manly Peasant cannot be too manly [in this specific manifestation of the more "universal" pattern of experience that could also be reified in "The Man Against the Mob" or "The Saint Dying of Neglect"²⁸]---thus we find the Poet "defending" to an extent the very character whom he would denigrate, and detracting from the character who is to triumph.

The Symbol is [thus] a generating principle which entails a selection of different subtilizations and ramifications.²⁹

Note the need, Burke says, for both "subtilizations" and "ramifications," a "denigrat[ing]" and a "defending" of one's own position or point of view.

One final notation on determinacy/indeterminacy, though: We're dealing here with authorial intension, our ability as readers more or less to discern it, and I would submit, Burke's belief in determinacy as to some extent a potential discursive outcome. In strict postmodern-speak, indeterminacy precludes determinacy of any kind. They don't mix. In the view of Timothy Bahti, "It is not just literature but also the *interpretation* of literature that is fraught with uncertainty."³⁰ That's one possible reason why, when asked at the New Harmony Conference in 1990, "Are you a postmodernist?" Burke replied, "I hope not."³¹

Some Examples of "Burking Oneself"

We're ready now to illustrate a few of the ways Burke's complexifying and radiating approaches to composition can be put into practice. Obviously, an author will not be implementing all of Hassett's suggestions listed above in any particular essay or article. Use of even one or two of those prescriptions can, though, somewhat "demystify" our language, loosen its hold on us and

others a bit as a vehicle for tunnel-vision analysis and argument.

As case in point, I'll recount an online discussion several of us Burkophiles had just before and after the 7th Triennial Conference of the Kenneth Burke Society at Villanova University.³² One focal topic was Herbert Simons' notion of "Warrantable Outrage" as a sometime requirement for effective action in the face of extreme conflict in a world of often very hard knocks. Simons affirmed, with much merit it seemed to me, that Burke's preferred "comic" approach to human dramas doesn't adequately deal with any and every variety of warfare. Charitableness and deference are fine up to a point. They lack, however, the power to sufficiently mobilize audiences at a Pearl Harbor moment. Simons had previously expressed his view, contra Burke, in a paper presented at a convention of the National Communication Association, "Burke, Marx, and Warrantable Outrage."³³ His Villanova presentation expanded on the theme in "Iraq, Kenneth Burke, and the Issue of Warrantable Outrage."³⁴ Greg Desilet, author of *Our Faith in Evil: Melodrama and Entertainment Violence*, defended comedy. In "Kenneth Burke, Outrage, and Competing Economies of Order" presented at Villanova, Desilet argued against outrage as justifiable attitude or discursive style.³⁵ One claim he made was that action is pretty much reducible to motion, that human beings are not so free as to warrant our symbol-driven faith that their destructive deeds are evil rather than mistaken. In any case, "truth" and "virtue" rarely locate on only one side in a dispute.

In our back and forth, I aligned myself with Simons. I gave support to a measure of human freedom and tragic, or melodramatic, mobilization of forces in some instances. In mock-comic fashion, I even revised the opening of Franklin D. Roosevelt's speech of 8 December 1941³⁶ to cast doubt on Desilet's position:

"Yesterday, December 7, 1941, a date which will live, we sincerely hope, in the annals of international negotiations, the naval and air forces of the Empire of Japan brought to a head, we have to at this point admit, a long-standing and pressing need for productive dialogue between our two nations.

"We regret that the Japanese felt a need to resort to such extreme measures to underscore existing differences between our two peoples. We do, though, acknowledge, however intemperate their actions at our base of naval operations in Hawaii, that neither side, theirs or ours, has all the answers on what separates us, on

trade, territorial needs, and the balance of influence in the Pacific region.

“Accordingly, I am instructing our Secretary of State, Cordell Hull, to prepare for a meeting between Prime Minister Tojo and myself, as quickly and expeditiously as possible.”

I don’t think I was far off when I said that calls for Roosevelt’s impeachment may have followed such a rhetorical misreading. Our navy in shambles, except for our carriers at sea, the west coast of the United States was open to invasion.

And yet, there is another way to interpret our situation in the Pacific, 1941-’42. I gave that contradictory reading in a subsequent post. I “burked” myself:

“I’ve got my Unitarian Universalist T-shirt on,” I offered. “It says, ‘War, What Is It Good For? Absolutely Nothing.’ I’m dressed in style for the ballgame this evening. Our choir is singing the National Anthem before the Atlantic League Lancaster Barnstormers do battle with the Southern Maryland Blue Crabs. I want to be there. Can’t watch the Phillies. Doctor’s orders. Don’t have the emotional stability or ego strength. Unlike the Phillies, what the ‘Stormers do, win or lose, is less than galactic. Even I can handle it.

“My pacifist attire prompts me to burke myself on things I’ve written on FDR’s war address, and on America’s military strategy ’41-’45 in general. How many of you have been following the current, revisionist PBS documentary on the wars of the 20th Century? The documentarian, forget his name, seems to take his cue right out of ‘Argument by Analogy’ in *P&C*. He’s dislogistic where the regnant U.S. myth of the ‘good war’ is eulogistic, he maximizes where we minimize, and vice versa. He foregrounds what our side did to Hiroshima, Nagasaki, Tokyo, Dresden, Berlin, etc. He gives voice to testimony that we, not just our enemies, shot prisoners in many theaters of the war. He lends credence to the story a friend once told me about his experience in France and Germany. ‘We didn’t take prisoners,’ he said. How generalized such action may have been, I don’t know. That’s what I heard.

“And the documentary doesn’t stint on our complicity in the support of one of the most predatory armies in the history of warfare. The trauma that has seared the social psychology of Eastern Germany and Eastern Europe probably to this day, chronicled by Helke Sander, Barbara Johr, and Norman Haiman,

stains our hands as well as Russia's.

“So, the ‘righteous indignation’ and ‘righteous might’ FDR spoke of on December 8 may have fallen short in practice, via ‘bureaucratization’ no doubt, 60-some years ago. Was there an alternative, maybe ‘tragicomic’ or ‘tragedy-lite,’ to the president’s perfected pledge of ‘absolute victory’ to be achieved, the administration later emphasized, through ‘unconditional surrender’? Was a program of ‘containment,’ successfully pursued during the so-called ‘Cold War’ (the documentary claims this conflict was actually World War III fought by proxy, and almost as barbarously, via our support of tactics like ‘death squads’ in Latin America), a viable option in the early 1940s? Could we have pushed Japan out of the central Pacific and let it go at that? Could we have rescued England, and let the two totalitarian states destroy and exhaust each other on the continent? How many millions of lives might have been saved? How much property? Would the world have been worse off?

“We had to stop the Germans before they got the Bomb, you might say. The Soviets had the Bomb by 1949. Would the Germans have acted less rationally in the face of decades of MADness, Mutually Assured Destruction?

“In *ATH* Burke limns the virtue of William James’ philosophy in comic accents. Burke says of James, ‘So strongly did he need the concept of better rather than the concept of best, as a way of equipping himself for action, that he rejected absolutism always, preferring even the symmetry of “pluralism,” a doctrine that outraged his form-loving colleagues.’³⁷ ‘Containment’ in the ‘40s might have been only the ‘better,’ not the ‘best’ denouement that ‘absolute victory’ could, and eventually did, bring. Was the ‘tragic rejoicing’³⁸ the Allies experienced in 1945 worth the depredations ‘absolute victory’ brought to pass?

“I ask, by way of Burke’s cautionary demurrer in *RM*, ‘Perhaps we here [in my last post on the topic] overstate the case.’”³⁹

“Containment,” of course, was the approach devised and implemented by way of the Truman Doctrine in the late 1940s. Soviet Communism wasn’t to be obliterated. Its spread was arrested by second-hand means and an arms buildup. I asked in my personal “counter-statement,” could we have done the same thing with regard to earlier Japanese and German aggression? Use of the first person singular, intervening against and interfering

with my own previously stated take on the issue, self-reflexive “discounting,” cultivating contradictory concepts, adducing specific supports for Desilet’s side of the argument---this post complexified, subtized, indeed problematized my formerly dogmatic defense of Simons’ “warrantable outrage” stance and the tragic or melodramatic discourse such a bellicose attitude implies.

I made another foray into self-critique on kb just before Villanova. Again, I debated with Greg Desilet. In our discussion of Melville’s novel *Moby-Dick*, we differed on the terministic scope of the labels “tragedy” and “melodrama.” Desilet took an Aristotelian view. Real “tragedy” sees good and bad on both sides, he said. Chiming in, Herb Simons agreed. He had long favored “melodrama” as title of choice for the rhetoric of intense and ultimate victimage.

I said lots of things in opposition to both debaters. Application of Aristotle’s notion alone would prescind tragedy from rhetorical studies. It would contravene Burke’s use of the label “tragedy” and that of most of his interpreters.⁴⁰ “Melodrama” lacks the gravitas, the power to sufficiently warn and alert, in the face of Hitler-style appeals. Etc. My full case for the Burkean nomenclature was being published just that season in the *Southern Communication Journal*.⁴¹

Then I “burked” myself. There was another way to come at this question neither I nor even Desilet and Simons had noted. This is what I said on kb:

“It’s time now to ‘burke myself,’ shift into reverse, take a cue from *RM* where Burke says, ‘Perhaps we here overstate the case,’⁴² argue the other fella’s point of view, reach behind my truncated screen to the excluded. I’ll take a cue, also, from my high school basketball coach, who once said, in respect to how a team captain might best be selected, why not just play the game and see who takes over. Let things develop naturally.

“Tragedy in Burke seems to go with ‘gravity,’ ‘sublimity,’ ‘the grandiose,’ ‘the heightened,’ ‘the . . . heroic,’ ‘the superhuman,’ ‘nob[ility],’ ‘dignity,’ ‘importance,’ fervent ‘purposiveness,’ intense striving and ‘straining’ to achieve those lofty ends, the ideal.⁴³ But, as Joseph Wood Krutch said long ago in *The Modern Temper*, the ‘death of tragedy’ characterizes contemporary theater and cultural life in general.⁴⁴ Modern science and the resulting metaphysical skepticism have eroded the stable state of human

self-regard that nurtured the ‘tragic spirit’⁴⁵ that allowed for tragic drama. Burke resisted Krutch’s conclusions. A lot, though, has happened since Burke wrote in tragedy’s behalf.

“If we credit the likes of Derrida, Foucault, Lyotard, and Jameson, we’ve gone from the proto- or quasi-postmodernism of Burke, to postmodernism full-blown. We’ve gone from capitalism to late capitalism. We’ve gone from the semi-teleological evolutionary thought of Bergson, Whitehead, and Teilhard to the *Blind Watchmaker* (1996) of Dawkins. We’ve gone from the possible steady-state cosmology of a Hoyle to a finite/infinite ‘runaway’ universe that will disintegrate into a particle fog after eons of black skies, devoid of any other visible stellar bodies.

“We live in a society now where everything is commodified, every value reduced to dollars and cents. The Municipal Stadiums of the past are now the Lincoln Financial Fields; the Civic Centers, now the First Unions or the Wachovias [or Wells Fargos!]. (It’s hard to keep up with which corporate funder is presently debasing a once-thriving community élan.) High culture collapses into middle, middle into low. A Madonna equates with a Sills, or whatever. Gossip and sleaze overwhelm what’s derided as ‘wonkery’ in our supposedly elite news organs and venues. The post-Christian has become the post-theological in the attitudes and orientations of the high priests of the regnant religion, scientism.

“Etc.

“Going with the flow of language change---not, in the words of William F. Buckley, Jr., ‘standing athwart history and shouting stop!’---a rhetorician might just watch academic discourse develop, like public discourse, and passively see what terms take over. Stage drama in its fullness, and now explicitly rhetorical drama in its fullness, may be mere ‘melodrama.’ They may both be mere ‘melodrama’ because human life in general may now be mere melodrama. Human life in postmodern, late-capitalist society seems currently to lack ‘nobility,’ ‘gravity,’ ‘sublimity,’ in fact ‘importance.’ Burke may be but a transitional figure, like one of his heroes, Spinoza. Spinoza, Burke says, greased the skids in the move from theology to naturalism.⁴⁶ Burke, who introduced us to the symbolizing animal, with the accent decidedly on symbol-systemology, may have served as a convenient ‘*man[sic]-in-society*’ way-station between the ‘citizen of Heaven’ and ‘man in nature’ or ‘*man in the jungle*.’⁴⁷ Maybe the now-diminutive human is only capable of diminutive discursive forms.

“Welcome to this Brave New World of middle-to-low

rhretorical style, indeed!

“Have a fine but, of course, ultimately meaningless Mothers Day.”⁴⁸

In this exercise in self-sacrifice, I gave the other guys their due, yielded significant credence to the case they made, and did so with a trajectory of thought they hadn’t even explored.

Some Avenues of Consistent Burkean “Radiation” toward the “End of the Line”

In terms of originality, learning how to break away from potentially pinched and narrowed thinking is the most salient feature of Burke’s discursive practice, to be sure. As noted above, however, Burke’s dramatism/logology would hardly exist without a more or less faithful follow-through on terministic leads and implications. Let’s look at three such tools of invention we can cull from Burke: clustering via the pentad/hexad and terms for order, with an additional nod toward “freewriting”; elaborating one’s ancestral, geometric, and directional identifications; and doing dramatic self-reflection, or criticism, via the terms of the guilt-redemption cycle in temporal sequence.

Clustering or Brainstorming. This device for invention of ideas to develop, or trajectory to follow, in writing an essay is hardly new with Burke. It’s a standard tool for generating thoughts to put on a page. As we referenced above, Burke has famously said, if there’s an *act*, there’s got to be an *actor* or *agent* to perform it and a *purpose* it aims to fulfill. Humans being finite and in need, and hardly more than a cog in a vastly larger machine, *means* or *agencies* to move the process along, and a *scene* or *context* of some kind to reconnoiter, in which the act is conceived to take place, are implicit requirements. *Attitude* can color or modify the act in directions of piety and cooperative intensity, or impiety, perversion, and rebellion. The what, who, why, how, when, where, and in what manner inform Aristotle’s causes, Medieval analytical procedure, and Kant’s fundamental questions of life.⁴⁹

Burke’s singular addition to these “basic forms of thought” is his notion of “ratios,” the way symbolic abridgment results in our favoring one term over the others in our attributions of motive or cause.⁵⁰ A scene-act ratio goes with *materialistic* or

environmental explanations for human conduct. Jane and John Doe were brought up in a slum. That's why they went wrong. An agency-act ratio stipulates a *pragmatic* correspondence between the tools at hand and the likelihood to use them. If you pack a gun wherever you go, you're much more likely to use it sometime to make a point. The "Test of Success" in pragmatism is, do our actions work to the good of as many as possible for as long as can be.⁵¹

Karl Marx's dialectical *materialism* went with scene. William James' *pragmatism* went with means. Plato's *idealism* featured conceptions of the agent. Aristotle, the *realist*, was big on act. The religious *mysticism* of Thomas Merton highlighted an ultimate purpose for all human striving. *Attitude?* Burke doesn't treat this final term of his hexad in "The Philosophic Schools,"⁵² but I'm wondering whether Buddhism, with its pro-active, maybe we should say pre-active, emphasis on suppression of *desire*, wouldn't fit the profile nicely. (Burke here puts "attitude" under the heading of "agent."⁵³)

Anyway, in *RR* Burke offers a full page of terministic implications if we start off with the notion of "order."⁵⁴ I think we can put conventional cluster balloons around our rendering of the terms of the guilt-redemption cycle. What conceptions imply each other as we proceed from moral problem to redemptive solution? How will maximum intensity of action and acute hostility, on the one hand (tragedy), and more moderated, measured, maybe programmatic, perhaps even routine effort, tempered by charitableness (comedy), on the other, bifurcate the terminology under each moment of drama? Here's the take I've used, anyway, in the teaching of Burke. See Appendix A. This is just one example of using radiating spokes and balloons to "brainstorm" terministic implications.

Burke doesn't explicitly speak of free-writing or self-consciously illustrate it as a way of putting one thought after another. One can think of what is often his seemingly digressive style as, nevertheless, a kind of free-writing. Burke appears to go with the flow in something of a loose-associational, anti-soritical fashion of his own devising, leaving out one, two, or three steps in his "logical" progression along the way. That's pretty much what free-writing is: Quickly letting one idea or observation suggest another, then another, then another, without worrying how they fit together.

In teaching composition, I used free-writing a lot.

The whole class and their instructor would write together. I'd announce the topic. I'd be at the chalk board scribbling away furiously, while students would sit at their desks doing the same. The rules: Don't fret over spelling, grammar, or punctuation. Just get your thoughts down on paper as fast as they come to mind. Tell the truth. When time is up, read over what you've written and underline your best sentence. That statement can serve as the opening for a first draft of a formal essay.

Being the teacher and exemplar, I didn't altogether follow those rules. I would write rapidly, to be sure. But I wrote with grammatical and mechanical accuracy, as well. Of the couple dozen free-writes of mine I copied down and kept on file, I note some that pertained to literature study ("Who's Right in the Debate over What They Should Do, Hester or Dimmesdale, and Why?---Give Reasons"; "William Cullen Bryant's View of Death: Comforting or Inadequate?"; "Following up on Emerson and Thoreau, Am I an Individualist or Nonconformist?"; "My Project for Arriving at Moral Perfection: Can Franklin Be My Guide?"). Many others had to do with public issues of the day ("Should We Start a War with Iraq?---Support Your Opinion"; "Aids and Guilt"; "Aids and Society"; "My Reflections and Feelings On and About This Election"; "Whom Do You Believe, Clarence or Anita?"; "Farmland Preservation"). And there were others that prompted contemplation of personal matters ("An Important Decision in My Life That Looms Up Ahead, or One I Just Made"; "My Most Difficult and Vexing Human Relations Problem at the Moment"; "What Makes Me Most Determined, and Why?").

I'll put my Iraq War free-write in Appendix B for show and tell.

Getting to Know Oneself through "Identification." Burke has famously said, "Identity is not individual, . . . a man [sic] 'identifies himself' with all sorts of manifestations beyond himself . . ." You can't "cure" [symbol-users] of this tendency." "The so-called 'I,'" Burke goes on, "is merely a unique combination of partially conflicting 'corporate we's.'"⁵⁵ And, I think we've said, "identification" is Burke's key term in his philosophy of persuasion.⁵⁶ It operates unconsciously as well as consciously, and in hum-drum ways as well as through eloquent oratory. "Often we must think of rhetoric," Burke says, "not in terms of one particular address, but as a general *body of identifications* that owe their convincingness much more to trivial repetition and dull

daily reinforcement than to exceptional rhetorical skill.”⁵⁷

The following is an introduction I’ve used to the invention of points of identification that a public speaker or would-be persuader of any kind might employ in preparation for formal or informal appeal:

“From your reading, you’ve been able to define ‘identification’ as establishing ‘common ground’ with your audience. Establishing common ground enhances, among other things, your ‘ethos’ or credibility as a speaker your audience will more likely want to pay attention to. You will appear more like ‘one of them,’ a ‘good guy’ or ‘gal’ who can be trusted. Let’s get down to cases as to how that’s done.

“Let’s start by asking this question: How do *you* identify *yourself*? For example, how would you answer these questions?---

“What institutions or *agencies* do you belong to, or have a positive attitude toward? (E.g., the Roman Catholic Church, Lock Haven University, the theater club, Planned Parenthood on campus, the Republican Party, the Democratic Party, Campus Crusade for Christ, such-and-such a sorority or fraternity, the university football team [pick your sport], the Phillies or Eagles, Pirates or Steelers, the Sierra Club, etc.)

“Who are your heroes? What persons---Kenneth Burke calls them *agents* or *actors*---do you especially favorably regard, present or past? (E.g., George W. Bush, Hillary Rodham Clinton, Donovan McNabb, Kent Roslisberger, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Russell Crowe, Brittany Spears, the Williams sisters, etc.)

“What *actions* or lifestyles are you into or in sympathy with? (E.g., conservative or progressive, religious or secular, traditional or contemporary, straight or gay, hard-hat or high society, etc.)

“What kind of *purposes* or causes do you support? (E.g., free-enterprise business or economics; environmentalism; putting prayer, intelligent design, and abstinence education in public schools; low tuition at public universities in Pennsylvania; gender, racial, and ethnic equality in education and employment; freedom of expression in American media; promotion of ‘family values’ in American media, etc.)

“What *scenes* or locales do you hail from (presently or via your ancestors), take pride in, or want to visit or live in? (E.g. Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Lock Haven, Clearfield, the good old USA, New York, Africa, Italy, Mexico, Korea, LA, etc.)

“Or, to come at the question of your own identity another way, how do you define yourself ‘ancestrally’ and/or ‘directionally’?⁵⁸ That is, what’s the heritage from which you’ve come, and where are you now going, in terms of your intensions, anyway? (E.g., do you come from an Hispanic, Black, White, or Oriental background? Did you grow up on a Western PA mountain, in South Philly, or in rural PA farm country? Were your parents working class or professional? Are you headed for a business position, a career in education, the high status of a doctor, lawyer, or engineer? Do you see yourself married with children and living comfortably in a suburb someday? Even more profoundly, are you a product of a Divine Creation with a faith trajectory that will take you to eternal life in Heaven? Or were you blindly and accidentally thrust into life by an evolutionary life force that doesn’t know or care anything about you, and that will turn you into a pile of dust and nothing more in but a few decades? Etc.) Your familial background, earthly and transcendental, and your social, occupational, and religious goals and expectations help define who you are, too, help form your self-image and potentially persuasive self-projection.”

See the worksheet in Appendix C for further tips on how to invent identifications for your rhetorical appeals.

Using the Stages in the Guilt-Redemption Cycle to Analyze Any of Life’s Dramas. We need hardly reiterate what’s obvious by now. Humans crave order in their life, with all persons, things, and ideas pretty much in their proper place, vertically and horizontally. Through rules of relationship, written and unwritten, symbolizers hold their hierarchies together, or try to. Verbal animals are, however, often weak, indifferent, perverse, or committed to an alien social or political arrangement. They break the commandments, or one of them. Others take offense. The moral order needs restored. The sacrificial principle kicks in. Guilt-tripping and victimizing, of self and/or other, ensues, as night follows day. When “justice” is done, as one or more of the parties at odds conceive it, order may prevail again. Good feelings return, on one (read: *Macbeth*) or on both (read: *Romeo and Juliet*) sides of the divide, at least for the time being. Order, disorder, guilt, sacrifice, and redemption: Burke’s “Iron Law of History” strikes again.

I’ve used this dramatic pattern in teaching interpersonal

relations and composition. For interpersonal, I handed out the following guidelines:

Stages of Dramatic Action in an Interpersonal Relationship

1. Moral problem: miscommunication, serious disagreement, relationship breakdown, a falling out, or alienation.
2. Cause of this disruption: Blame or fault belongs to whom?
3. Action taken: self-sacrifice, punishment, humbling, or abnegation of oneself; scapegoating of, punishment of, or aggression toward the other.
4. Resolution of the conflict: redemption, reconciliation, back together again; or is this drama still unredeemed, are you and the other person still at odds?

Could any of the principles of a supportive communication style have helped prevent or solve this relationship problem---descriptive rather than judgmental, problem-and-solution oriented rather than control oriented, spontaneous rather than strategic, empathetic rather than neutral, characterized by mutuality rather than superiority, provisional rather than dogmatic?

In writing instruction per se, I went with Burke's terms for order more generally stated. Here's a brief example of student writing goaded by Burke's terms for order, courtesy of a writer we'll call Jen:

Morally-disordered scene, situation, or context: "One day early in the season, Sarah, my co-trainer, and I were watching football practice. Earlier, I had asked Sarah to stop making vulgar comments around me because I don't like swearing. She had apparently forgotten, and jokingly called me a rude name. I became extremely angry; and when she told me that she was only kidding, I yelled at her. I really had some very strong words with her."

Guilt-obsessed actor vs. a guilty opponent, whichever direction blame is laid: "Because Sarah had so easily ignored or forgotten my request not to use bad language, I blamed her for

being rude, insensitive, and mean. She at first told me that I was too serious. She said that I was touchy and could not take a joke. Then she changed and said she was sorry, but I was still angry.”

Sacrificial act, self- and/or other-directed: “Because I was still miffed, I walked away and refused to talk to Sarah. After trying to speak with me for a few minutes, Sarah walked away in the opposite direction. Eventually, I cooled my temper and went over to apologize to Sarah. I told her that I was sorry that I had over-reacted. She apologized for forgetting about my distaste for foul language, too.”

Redemptive goal realized: “Our friendship was quickly restored, and we were soon speaking as though nothing had gone wrong between us. We actually work together better now because Sarah understands the strength of my feelings about swearing and I understand her forgetfulness. Sarah and I still argue sometimes, but we haven’t had any more full-blown fights. Nor has she sworn around me since that incident.”

My students have used this scheme in analysis of literary works as well. See Angie’s treatise on *The Scarlet Letter*, Appendix D.

Conclusion

Indeterminacy coupled with determinacy: the thoroughly dramatic requirement to continually nurture “linguistic skepticism,” even in respect to one’s own assertions and terminologies, let’s say *especially* in respect to one’s own assertions and terminologies; while at the same juncture taking account of “time’s winged chariot hurrying near,” as Andrew Marvell put it, and the often pressing need to decide and act *now*---before all the evidence could possibly be in: Put those polar motivations in balance, if you can!⁵⁹ Burke’s hyper-dialectical prescriptions could tie the “comic” symbol-user in knots. His seemingly pronounced emphasis on “*be[ing] observers of [ourselves] while acting*” threatens to complexify the brain not a little. His caveat that comedy prompts toward “not . . . *passiveness*, but [rather] *maximum consciousness*” may ring hollow for some timorous personality types.⁶⁰ Those with a native tendency to dilly-dally have leave, from Burke, so it seems, to let nature take its course, say, to the “end of the line”?

The regnant temptation for humankind as a whole, however, is to put their thumb most heavily, it does appear, on precipitate, cock-sure, my-way-or-the-highway political procedure. Burke's admonitions and example stand athwart this so-often sad and destructive history of "righteous" conflict and warfare. They offer, in even tones, counsel to stop, reflect, consider alternatives, discuss, doubt, take cognizance of what's "around the corner," not merely the *of courses* that are up ahead in full view.⁶¹

Burke's project of "purification of war" can begin with pencil and paper, keyboard and screen.⁶² (See Addendum 5.)

Chapter 14

The Broad Sweep and the Pith and Marrow

So Where Are We?

That query serves as appropriate transition into a final chapter on Burke's thought and style.¹ Burke maneuvers around many bends and, without always clear connection, peers around many corners at what, for the reader, might otherwise be out of view. Characteristically, he pauses to sum it all up, sometimes transparently enough, sometimes not. Consequently, half of those who have read deeply in Burke have wanted to write a book that answers the question, "What'd he say?" *Language, Life, Literature, Rhetoric, and Composition as Dramatic Action: A Burkean Primer* is my answer to that often drolly-intoned query.

Let's summarize most of the main points this observer has mined and applied from Burke's many veins of thought. Then we'll offer what you and I might be *especially* attuned to take away.

Burkean concepts to recall, note in discourses encountered, use, or be on guard against in your own symbolic action, and prescriptions for life and criticism, to take with you:

*The general pattern of verbal action, the pentad or hexad (agent or actor, act, purpose, means or agency, manner or attitude, and constraining scene of the action), rooted in the definitions of the content parts of speech (nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs);

*The *implicitly* moral nature of this general pattern of verbal action, in its references to *all* beings and processes, even those that have to do with the nonhuman animal, vegetable, or mineral world of mere "motion," as we especially follow through on the implications and connotations of the term *purpose*;

*The *explicitly* moral pattern of verbal action that results from the trajectory of implications begun by that general pattern, namely, what Burke calls the "cycle of terms implicit in the idea of 'order,'" or "terms for order," or "terms of the guilt-redemption cycle" (order, disorder, guilt, piety or impiety, sacrifice of self and/or others [mortification or scapegoating], and redemption);

*The moral valences, yes, and motivations in the concept of *purpose* by which these two anatomies of action are intertwined, a purpose naming a linguistically modified, hortatorily negative, rule-governed good or value, end or goal, that participates in a serially-progressive transformation of ends into means, the "what is not" or "not yet" of a purpose beckoning, constraining imperfect symbolizing beings, potentially, toward infinite, insatiable striving for the "better" if not the "best" (the "what is not" never ending, being without number and ultimately without peer);

*The ubiquity of moral disorder, present or potential, in all scenes of human action or contemplation, guilt attendant upon human agents in one sense or another always; sacrifice of a kind, of self or other, inherent in human actions; a morally salutary dimension to all human purposes, whether piously "corrective" or perversely "destructive," etc.; the necessary projection of such moral drama, no matter how attenuated, onto the natural and biological entities and processes of this universe, dramatically-charged and colored language being the only medium available to describe and deal with them;

*The "negative" as originating symbol, linguistic paradigm, coordinating conception, and master motivator, pure in

the “nothingness” that other abstractions share less obtrusively;²

*The “motive of perfection” that derives from the negative as global human “scene” of thought and action, and the “theological” imperative that dialectically drives “Upward” toward a “Title of titles,” “Rome-term,” or, indeed, “god-term” the negative impels toward and energizes;

*Overt and covert manifestations of the power of negative sensibility in human continence, worship, theater, sports, relativity physics, and the twisted semantics of those who would explain that intuition away, and in its creative, teleological, ethical, entelechial, hierarchal, and dialectical/dramatic dimensions;

*The omnipresence, if variously labeled, of dramatic stages of development and unfolding in all walks, venues, and institutions symbol-users experience, at home, school, house of worship, job, and in community, state, and society;

*The multiple reasons Burke himself offers, or that his philosophy implies, for construing dramatism/logology as something of a “generic” theology, even a quasi-gnostic universalism friendly to the process thought of Whitehead and Hartshorne;

*Following through on dramatism anthropologically, especially in respect to codicil #3 in Burke’s definition of the human (“Separated from their natural condition”), the lifeways, actions, and artifacts that sharply distinguish *homo loquax* from nonverbal animals, including burial of the dead, worship, clothing, private copulation and elimination, symbolic rites, tools and their products, art, irony, “ritual” killing, “athletic” self-denial and self-aggrandizement, and the rules of culture, sports, and government;

*Cluster-agon analysis, indexing through attention paid to the “what goes with what,” “what vs. what,” “from what through what to what” in messages of all sorts, noting particularly beginnings and endings;

*The “ratios,” correspondences that tend to obtain between two pentadic terms, one controlling, the other more passive, like scene-act, the scene here reckoned and touted as chief motivator in rhetoric, literature, or life;

*The critique of philosophic systems as privileging one term over the others, e.g., materialism (scene), idealism (agent), realism (act), pragmatism (means or agency), and mysticism (purpose), and the way these truncated tendencies carry over into political debate and dialogue;

*The psychological definition of “form,” literary or

rhetorical, as an arousing of desires or expectations and the satisfying of those desires or anticipations;

*Particularly “repetitive” form, “syllogistic progressive” form, and “qualitative progressive” form, as marked in *Moby-Dick*, with repetitive forewarnings and foreshadowings of peril and doom ahead, syllogistically upward and escalating premonitions of danger in the *Pequod’s* encounters with other ships that have dealt with the White Whale, and one mood or state of mind progressively giving way to another in the recurrent change-of-pace chapters that pause to explain the nuts and bolts of the industry this ship and crew undertake;

*“Eloquence” as a frequency of formal and “symbolic” effects, symbolic in the sense of having to do with content that a reader or audience member recognizes, relates to, accepts as his or her own, “identifies” with;

*Indeed, “identification,” “associative” as in “I like and follow this leader and her program,” “dissociative” as in “I oppose this leader and his program,” and “implied” as in tendentious use of the pronoun “we” to rope in listeners and readers in behalf of “our” (read: *my*) agenda, as key term in practical rhetoric and basic strategy even in the rhetorical dimensions of literature;

*“Identity” politics and persuasion of this kind suffusing all employment of pentadic or hexadic terminology, styles of “action,” types of “agencies” or institutions, particular “purposes” or causes, even geographic or historical “scenes” of human endeavor touted and exploited preferentially;

*The philosophic notion of “substance,” or “what stands under,” as the basis for Burke’s key rhetorical term, “identification,” as in familial or ancestral substance (where we come from), directional substance (where we’re going), geometric substance (what in our environment are we connected to now), and dialectic substance (what are we and our tribe against, as in the query, “What are we being Christians [pick your label] *against?*”;³

*The centrality and employment of the scapegoat, prime exemplar of dissociative identification, as universal strategy in rhetorical appeal, way-too-frequent basis for social formation, theme of Burke’s “Iron Law of History,” and his lifelong *bête noire* and lament;

*The “unanswerable opponent,” the “sheer brute materials [and processes] of the world as it is,” as source of the “recalcitrance” that tames, modifies, sublizes our often fanciful terminologies in the direction of “realism,” some measure of “reflection,” if not

The Broad Sweep

representation, of the world as it actually is, the universe in its mysterious imperatives as “dialectical” conversationalist doing back-and-forth with our “symbolic action”;⁴

*The 19th century, with its revolutions in industry and science, as the “century of new meanings,” serving as a fit example of symbolic “encompassment” of a problematic situation, Melville-style, in the Great American Novel, *Moby-Dick*;

*In literature, a “mixed motivational recipe” as a more accurate reflection of real human life, the protagonist or “hero” with his faults, the counteragent or “villain” not altogether that villainous;

*The persistent requirement of “double vision” in life, literature, and rhetoric, seeing from two angles at once, taking note of what’s customarily out of sight “around the corner,” in fact, “perspective by incongruity,” a programmatic, “impious” clashing together of terms and concepts that just “do not go together,” offend propriety, turn the world upside down, and, in so doing, just maybe, facilitate salutary “change”---like the optics of Melville’s cunning Sperm Whales!;

*The symbolic journey to an “abyss” as paradigm for rhetorical transformation of identity and motive as “peripety,” or turning point, in a novel, play, or speech, powerfully modeled by Dimmesdale’s descent into “lawlessness” in the “Forest,” and subsequent coming to his moral senses back in the civilized “Village”; and by Wallace Fisher’s recurrent invocation of “that pit in the ground,” that grave, down and through which believers must first precariously journey in their pilgrimage upward to salvation and everlasting life;⁵

*The notion of genres or types of dramas, “poetic categories” Burke calls them in *ATH*, as “stylized” or “ritualized” responses to time-and-place historical circumstances, frames of “acceptance” or “rejection,” as it were, by which the general stages or moments of drama---morally disordered scene or situation, guilt-obsessed agent or actor, guilty counteragent or opponent, morally-constructive or perverse attitude, mortification of self and/or victimage of the other, and redemptive purposes and means---are altered, modified, differentiated along an axis or continuum from more “perfect” to less “perfect” moral action, more “intense” to less “intense” moral action;

*“Tragedy,” the “song of the [scape]goat,” theatrical, literary, and rhetorical, as Burke and most of his interpreters seem to construe it, centering on severe punishment, permanent

banishment, or death to the enemy, with the other moments or features of the drama taking on similarly ultimate dimensions;

*“Burlesque,” bitter, sardonic ridicule, “heartless,” “hilarious,” “humiliating” “caricature” of bumbling, idiotic opponents, driving their ideas, proposals, and actions to a “logical” conclusion that becomes their “reduction to absurdity,” coming to a head in sharp public rejection of adversaries, but potential acceptance of and by them in social, interpersonal relationships;

*“Melodrama,” or “tragedy-lite,” sharing the black-and-white, either/or, all-or-none schematizations of political and social issues that characterize tragedy and burlesque, but serious in tone unlike burlesque, and more moderate in its rejection, banishment, or punishment of opponents than either---in rhetorical melodrama, adversaries are not bid to be gone “forever and a day” from the public square;

*“Comedy” as the most moderated, modulated, measured response to environmental disorder, treating rule-violations as “mistakes,” not “crimes,” rule-breakers as “clowns,” not “villains,” settling for reproofs and scoldings and mere, temporary social distance between moral agent and the “klutz,” no banning, shunning, or ostracism;

*The tendency for the rhetoric of tragedy to surface in revolutionary, or frame-transformative, political or social movements; burlesque, in restorationist or resistance movements, those that highlight frame-amplification; comedy, in reformist movements, with frame-bridging the likely rhetorical goal and scheme; and melodrama, as well as comedy, in the ordinary, heated give-and-take of wrangling in the daily political “barnyard”;

*The cautionary note that political and social conditions do not necessarily generate certain genres of drama altogether directly, that naturally tragic-frame, burlesque-frame, or comic-frame personality types, given to their level of dramatic intensity by internal, perhaps biological, as well as external, environmental forces, may tend to surface as public figures and leaders when times are ripe for their preferred brand of discursive comity or invective;

*The Burkean standard of “truth” as the “serviceability” of our symbolic actions, the “satisfaction” we find in the lifeways they promote as motives, the “success” they achieve by way of the “collective revelation of testing and discussion,” augmented by the “full dialectic” afforded by participation of all the “parliamentary voices,” based on the prospects for the long-term survival of the

species *homo dialecticus* and all other life forms on earth---

These are summary points of importance we've taken up, explored, applied, and/or exemplified in our winding tour through the mind and work of philosopher, rhetorician, critic, yes, even theologian, Kenneth Burke.

What Especially to Take Away in Respect to the Focal Issues of This Study

We've entitled this foray *Language, Life, Literature, Rhetoric, and Composition as Dramatic Action: A Burkean Primer*. What should we accent under the heading of these five terms? What one admonition for each should you particularly take with you for recall and application in your day-to-day endeavors as a symbolizing, symbolically-sensitive, symbolically-responsive being on this finite planet in this rhetorically-overloaded era?

Since Burke defines dramatism as first and foremost a critique of language or philosophy of language, let's take up our five titular topics in reverse order, saving "language" for the climax. ("Dramatism . . . 2: A technique of analysis of language and thought as basically modes of action rather than as means of conveying information"; Burke wrote that definition for Merriam-Webster.⁶)

In *composition and invention of texts generally*, keep the "selective," "deflective," even "neglective" aspect of your discourses always in view. "Speech is necessarily block-like," we've emphasized, "pulling bits of reality apart and treating them as wholes."⁷ We're prone, each and every one of us symbolizers, to the "allness" disease, Korzybski has stated. If we've said the one thing we deem most important on an issue, we've said it all, we tend to think with pride and certainty. Not so. Not nearly so. Build some sign or measure of "comic" awareness, reflexive self-consciousness, cognizance of your finite mentality, into your assertions, written or oral. Follow the prescriptions offered in Chapter 13, or at least a few of them. Give the other side or sides their due. Listen. Play back honestly. Don't attack "straw men." Invite dialogue.

This does not mean you can't choose, assert, and act on incomplete evidence. We always choose, assert, and act on incomplete evidence in one sense or another. The norm should be, widen your horizons of discourse and points of view as much as

you can, and show that breadth of mind in what you say. If your standards or supports for judgment are “reliable” (is this a fact, or are these facts?), “recent” (are these still facts?), “representative” (are these all the facts needed on this question?), “relevant” (do these facts and this line of argument relate to the issue at hand?), and “contextually referenced” (are these facts and the case they suggest valid for the long term as well as the short term, and for global values, not just limited ones?), home in especially on the “representative.” Give as much heed as you can to all the “facts,” real or so-called, all the lines of reasoning they imply, all the “parliamentary” voices. Keep the paradigm “full dialectic” constantly in view. On examination, not every claim and its evidentiary support will merit further attention, quite obviously. The “collective revelation of testing and discussion,” the “college of hard knocks,” the “recalcitrance” of the world as it is, material and social, will prune the vineyard of nostrums and false turns.

But keep an open mind, and show it. All questions are “complicated.”⁸

In your role as consumer of *rhetoric---practical, persuasive discourse---* beware of tragedy, burlesque, and melodrama. These are the genres of discourse that trade in the black-and-white, either/or, all-or-none. We’re the good guys, they’re the bad guys. This is the “truth.” Over there, they speak only the “false.”

Don’t be sucked in. Ayn Rand’s extreme conservatism at least highlights self-reliance. We all need a lot of that, whatever our ideology. Marx and Lenin’s rigid communism extolled collective group effort in spades. We’re experiencing now what programmatic individualism, radical deregulation, and contempt for the collective can do to political economy and the social fabric, and it isn’t altogether good.

Enjoy the burlesque-cum-tragedy of a Rush Limbaugh as entertainment, if you must, but do listen with a critical mind. Tom DeLay’s melodrama may express your overall point of view, but still take much of it with a grain of salt. Hitler’s loathsome brand of rhetorical tragedy brought immeasurable and lasting harm to Europe, America, Canada, Australia, and other parts of the world. The British journalist and U.S. television host Alistair Cooke still called Hitler the greatest orator he ever heard. Yet be perpetually on guard anytime the scapegoat mechanism turns toward death or its substitutes, severe punishment or banishment forever, by explicit directive or implication.

Rhetorical tragedy and melodrama do have their

legitimate uses in times of dire threat. I say that reluctantly, but I think it's true. Think 8 December 1941. After effectively and tragically mobilizing America for war, however, and motivating that effort with continued tragic accents, by 1943 and '44 Franklin D. Roosevelt had infused his speeches with "comic" appeals, held out to Germany in particular the olive branch of reconciliation after their nation had been purged of Nazism.⁹ All genres of discourse possess some utility, Burke says, as long as we "discount for language" (self-reflexively take stock of our exaggerations, realize the deflections and potential pitfalls of what we're rhetorically up to). "By proper discounting, *everything* becomes useable," Burke says.¹⁰

First and foremost, though, be on guard. Bring to bear Korzybski's advice: Think "etcetera." There's more to the story.

See *literature*---novels, short stories, and plays---Burke says, as "equipment for living," elaborated maxims or aphorisms, wise, or in some cases perhaps, not so wise but still of cautionary use; rules, precepts, or proverbs that may illuminate your way through inevitable trials and difficulties.¹¹ Life is a struggle for even the charmed and well-born. The heroes and heroines of fiction and theater elaborate and epitomize coping strategies against enemies, resistances, and odds. Learn from these role models. Live their life vicariously, where the shoe fits, and sometimes where it doesn't.

Maxims succinctly "name typical, recurrent situations." They afford "consolation or vengeance, . . . admonition or exhortation."¹² Literary works likewise embody a "method of adjustment" to "a particular selection of universal experiences [or "patterns of experience"] . . . to face specific environmental conditions" at a time and place.¹³ You're not going to confront the issue of faith and doubt in the middle of the 19th century, like Ahab, Ishmael, and Starbuck. You will, though, sometime in your life, stand up to similar questions. You're probably not going to deal with the dilemma of adultery or fornication in the public way Dimmesdale had to, before as censorious a social fabric as that in Puritan Boston. But you will, inevitably, contend with temptations to lie your way out of one predicament or another. It happens to us all. You're not going to be bearing and bringing up what's called an "illegitimate child" in anything like Hester's circumstances, but you may have to suffer through a spell of public humiliation in, hopefully, a brave, resourceful, and ultimately redemptive manner. Ms. Prynne did it. You can, too.

Literature is, indeed, equipment for living. Use it as signposts along your partly unique, but substantially typical, lifelong pilgrimage.

View your *life* itself as a composition in the early stages of writing, on which misspellings, malaprop diction, digressions down a fruitless cul-de-sac, and errors in arrangement of parts, so to speak, are judged mistakes, not crimes or black marks that spoil the work forever. We should look at “our own lives as a kind of rough first draft,” Burke says, “that lends itself at least somewhat to revision, as we may hope at least to temper the extreme rawness of our ambitions, once we become aware of the ways in which we are the victims of our own and one another’s [linguistic] magic.”¹⁴

In other words, construe your life as a comedy, not a tragedy. “The comic frame,” Burke says, “should enable people *to be observers of themselves, while acting*. Its ultimate would not be *passiveness*, but [rather] *maximum consciousness*. One would transcend himself [sic] by noting his own foibles.”¹⁵ And foibles they would be, flaws, faux pas, missteps along life’s way that serve to instruct, not destroy.

Be an observant “bookkeeper.” “The comic frame, in making a man [sic] the student of himself, makes it possible for him to ‘transcend’ occasions when he has been tricked or cheated [or when she or he has simply messed up, no “help” from outside sources required], since he can readily put such discouragements in his ‘assets’ column, under the head of ‘experience.’ Thus we [you!] can win by subtly changing the rules of the game---and by a mere trick of bookkeeping, like the accountants for big utility corporations, we make ‘assets’ out of our ‘liabilities.’”¹⁶

“Don’t cry over spilt milk,” is an aphoristic way of putting it. However, make sure to *benefit* from the spill. Or, back to the notion of a rough draft, don’t just proofread. Substitute, alter, revise. Action changes the conditions of action. Act anew without regret, with a genuine sense of profitable discovery via trial and error, in those “eureka” moments.

Language intones the siren song that can lure us chatters toward a “cult of empire” and excess.¹⁷ Think of language as a “magic decree” that tugs and coerces, rather than as a detached, fair, and balanced representation.¹⁸ Note its power to create an impression or construction, from maybe just one angle at that, while looking very much like the “big picture.” Sense its interpretive influence and authority, its role as moral arbiter, not just insightful reporter. Feel its hierarchal undertow, its pull toward an infinite

ocean of aggrandizement and power.

Still and all, beware the extremes of fashionable postmodernism. There is a sense in which, “However the world is made, that’s how language is made,”¹⁹ a passage in Burke communication scholar Trevor Melia makes much of. We symbolizers are in dialogue with that material scene.²⁰ We verbally, indeed proactively, superimpose our constructions upon it. Nature answers back. We adjust our terminologies to its resistances in the service of our own purposes, wise or unwise, strategizing our way around its obstinate laws and “decrees” as best we can. In the process, our common nouns, etc., do not “represent” objects in the natural world, nor, in their ideal purity, do they hook into, interlock with, any beings whatsoever. In a real sense, common words are about “nothing,” no one thing out there in space and time. As Burke says, “I hasten to admit that my own five terms [the pentad] are about nothing, since they designate not this scene, or that agent, etc., but scene, agent, etc., in general.”²¹

In sum, within hard, sometimes brutal, constraints, our symbolic frameworks seek to shape, and do shape, our world, earth-bound and cosmic, what with our landings on Mars and the Moon. They do infuse the stuff of nature in its flux and flow with the “pageantry” and “mysteries” of moral drama Burke speaks of.²² Our discourse is, in fact, creative, as postmodern philosophy highlights. “Reality” is, in part, a social-symbolic construct.

But only in part. Constant dialogue, so to speak, between our words and that world, and recurrent adjustment of our frames of meaning to its urgencies, very much tether that supposedly “free floating” language balloon to terra firma.

And a Final Drama, Burke Our Exemplar

Burke concludes *The Rhetoric of Religion* with what he calls a “satyr-play.”²³ The closet drama at the end of *The Philosophy of Literary Form* is likewise a bit of whimsy.²⁴ Burke opines that “terms are *characters*, that an essay is an *attenuated play*,” featuring “‘hero’ and ‘villain’ terms, with subsidiary terms distributed about these two poles,” doing battle throughout.²⁵ Following Burke’s lead, and following through on our final emphasis on dramatism/logology as most fundamentally a critique of language, we’ll offer a “theater” review of a book chapter on Burke that gets it wrong, we think, but serves to foreground

the straight and narrow of Burke's philosophy via dialectical "substance," definition by counter-statement.

"Language" Calls Burke a
 "Cartesian Representationalist":
 A review of *Language as Articulate Contact:
 Toward a Post-Semiotic Philosophy Of
 Communication*, by John Stewart
 And Karen Williams

The drama in this clearly written vehicle occurs in two acts. In the first five scenes, Stewart explains his position, a solidly postmodern one, drawn especially from the thinking of Hans-Georg Gadamer. In the last three scenes, he applies his paradigm to the philosophies of Vladimir Volosinov, Kenneth Burke, and Calvin O. Schrag. Karen J. Williams co-wrote the Burke action, first staged at a Kenneth Burke Society panel at the Speech Communication Association Convention in Atlanta in 1991.

The hero of Stewart and Williams' mystery is Language as Constitutive Articulate Contact, Language for short. By constraining them toward constructive dialogue with one another, Language uses generally passive persons as means for creating a "world" out of social materials to be sure, but also apparently out of a strange something-or-other that doesn't seem to exist in early parts of the play, but turns up later in Act I to be a very real item in the argument, a prop called "facticity," a label loaded with as much ontology as Burke's term, "recalcitrance," ever had.²⁶ This "worlding" talk, as Stewart and Williams call it, which Language pressures humans to engage in, calls into being only "one world," it seems, a linguistic world. Yet references to those materials that are "not simply 'made of language,'" that have "existence separate from the viewer," pop up apologetically in the dialogue as though they really are real, like some crazy aunt in the basement the major players would rather ignore.²⁷

Those major players, close friends of Language, decidedly the in-crowd, have names like Heidegger, Gadamer, Bakhtin, and Derrida. They say glowing things about their champion, but still make him out to be a rather drab fellow. His features, the face and character of Language even when he's on stage, are indistinct. They seem shapeless, undifferentiated, even though he himself is said to produce "differentiation" and "categorization."²⁸ By what

dynamic he does so, we have no clue. As a personality, Language is anything but a man of many parts, especially for one who just recently turned on himself and discovered himself for the first time in history, as the drama seems to allege. Language does raise some challenging points, however, about the ontology of mental states in their relation to discourse and about levels of intention in conversational dialogue.²⁹

Like any other protagonist, Language has problems, and enemies. His chief antagonist is Symbol Model. This oldster has been around since Plato and Aristotle, and got a new lease on life in the 17th century with rehabilitation from Descartes and Locke. Recent retainers have been Kristiva, Osgood, Elias, Motley, and Eco. Even brighter luminaries like Humbolt, Pierce, Sausure, and Cassirer, long thought by many to be tight with Language, took their stand for Symbol Model when the going got tough, the authors suggests.

The problem with Symbol Model, as the playwrights see it, is five-fold: She posits (1) a *two-worlds* ontology, a linguistic world coexisting with a nonlinguistic one. The linguistic world necessarily (2) “stands for,” more or less “*represents*,” aspects of the nonlinguistic world, not, perhaps, on a “simplistic,” “one-to-one,” “true copy” basis, but on some basis.³⁰ The playgoer is not given further details. They are apparently not needed. The word “symbol” means “stands for,” we are told, so anyone who uses it is, *ipso facto*, a representationalist. Division of language into (3) *units* of representation, (4) a *system* that holds these units together in some fashion, and a conception of language as some kind of (5) *tool* humans use to achieve their ends, inevitably follow upon the use of Symbol terminology. Language, upper case, by contrast, is one-worldly, constitutive, holistic, event- and interaction-oriented, and noninstrumental.³¹ Language can’t be pushed aside. He uses much, much more than he’s used.

Why Language doesn’t care much for Kenneth Burke is the deepest mystery of all. Burke isn’t the meanest opponent of Language, the dramatic action of this theater piece demonstrates. Burke grudgingly and occasionally acts kind of nonsemiotically, we are told: when he speaks of language as action;³² calls language constitutive;³³ treats nature as inspirited by magic, “gods,” “fantastic pageantry,” “guildlike mysteries”;³⁴ says language is “not . . . in its essence a tool,” because “you can lay a tool down”;³⁵ etc. Burke nullifies these stray insights, though, when, for example, he says in “What Are the Signs of What,”

“*might* it not follow that . . . ,” or “*might* words be a mediatory principle . . . ?”³⁶ You see, Burke is just wildly speculating here, making perhaps free association, not earnestly employing a characteristically “soft” style of argumentation in the face of a mid-century positivist audience.³⁷ Therefore one wouldn’t accuse Stewart and Williams of a perverse literalism so as just to make a point. Nor would one call their four selections from Burke’s writings tendentious merely because they skip thirty years (1931-1961), five books, and the heart of Burke’s career, except for a few references to his intervening use of the word “symbol” to make their case.³⁸

Even Burke’s early position, Brock says, was one of “*critical realism*,” which Hirst says “should not be confused with representational realism.” More specifically, Burke seems to be an “intervention[ist]” realist, one who renounces “representation,” but who “counts as real what we can use to intervene in the world to affect something else, or what the world can use to affect us.”³⁹

Burke has toadied up to Language, it would seem, in so many obsequious ways. You need to discount for Language, Burke has admonished, assume a posture of “linguistic skepticism.”⁴⁰ “Linguistic products” are “not *realities*, they are *interpretations* of reality,” “practical simplifications . . . inadequate for the description of reality as it actually is.”⁴¹ “Language itself does as it were *think* for us,” Burke offers.⁴² We look at the “positive events of nature” only through the “eyes of moral negativity,” drama, the ultimate drama of theology, he enjoins.⁴³ We come under the spell of “magic, verbal coercion,” “management by decree,” “secret commands and exhortations” with each utterance we make, hear, or read.⁴⁴

Abstractions are in fact divinities, with an origin as “momentary gods.”⁴⁵ Words, names, terms are inherently entelechial, schematizing, classifying, “pulling bits of reality apart and treating them as wholes.”⁴⁶ They are teleological, uniting various bits and pieces around a common negation or purpose;⁴⁷ ethical, superimposing goodness and badness on them as though inherent qualities;⁴⁸ hierarchal, relating all things to one another in terms of a ladder of value or worth;⁴⁹ dialectical and dramatic, engaged in battle with one another as “fields and methods of action” in behalf of principles of right or wrong.⁵⁰ Most noticeably, words are linguistically created “positives” only as embedded in, and verbally undetached from, a negative environmental matrix,⁵¹ rarified beyond possibility of representation except representation

in reverse, the “thing” being the “sign” of the word.⁵² For Burke, symbols---dare we call them that?---get their “substance” from what is “not.”

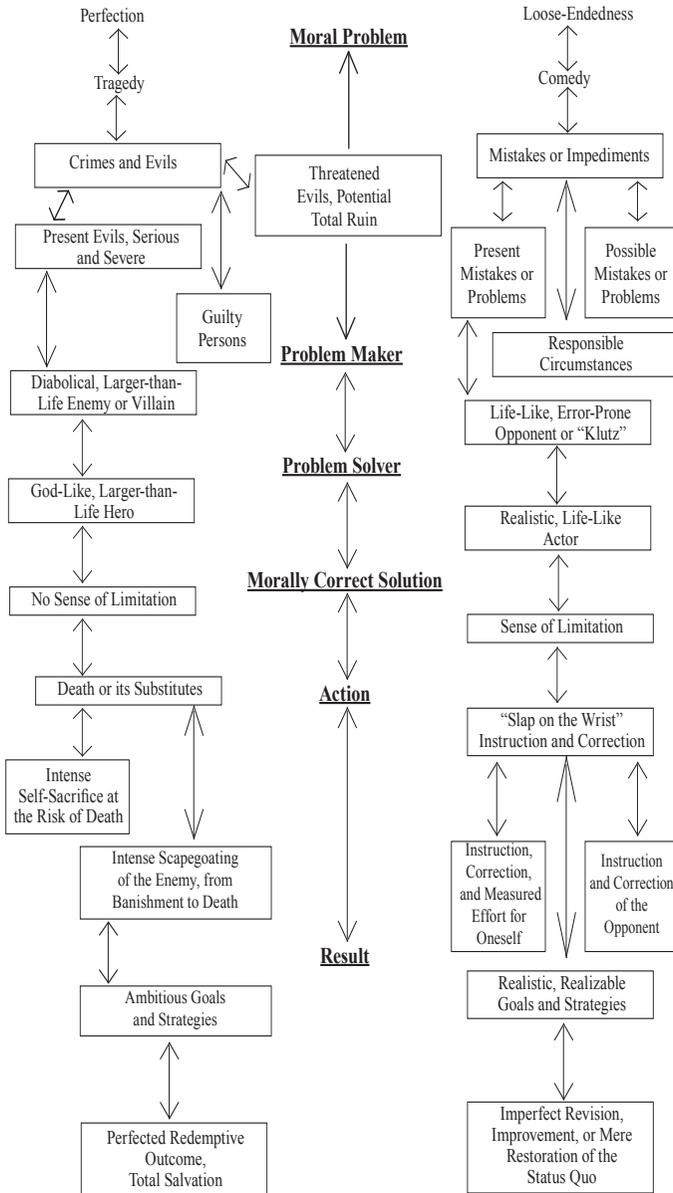
No wonder Burke applies a “serviceability,”⁵³ “adequa[cy],”⁵⁴ or “curative”⁵⁵ standard of truth, not the “correspondence” standard the playwright properly associates with representation.⁵⁶ No wonder Burke says naming is “accurate” only in terms of “encompassing the situation” as gauged by “the ‘collective revelation’ of testing and discussion.”⁵⁷ Could Burke’s realism, in essence, be better characterized as a “*pragmatic realism*”?⁵⁸

Language looks like an ingrate. He scourges Burke for his supposed “representation” at a website or library near you.

Ad bellum purificandum: Toward the purification of war!

Appendix A

Terms for Order



Appendix B

Free Write

Should We Start a War with Iraq? Support Your Opinion

Today, January 15, 1991, we stand on the brink of war with the nation of Iraq. Tomorrow, we are told, our President may order 400,000 troops of ours, stationed in and around Saudi Arabia, to attack this Arab nation.

Would this be a wise course of action for our country? Will this decision to precipitate war have been made in a democratic fashion? What are the likely results of such a conflict, even if we “win” the war militarily?

First off, invading Iraq with forces of the United States of America is dangerous in the extreme. Such a precipitate action is like striking a match to a block of wooden row houses doused with gasoline. The whole Middle East could blow up in our face. Saddam Hussein has vowed he will start a war with Israel if his country is attacked. Israel, agreeing not to launch a pre-emptive strike, has promised massive retaliation if assaulted. What will a full-scale Iraq-Israeli war do to the fragile alliance against Iraq, President Bush has stitched together in the Middle East? Will the leaders of moderate Arab nations like Egypt and Jordan, much less Arab firebrands like Assad of Syria, Qaddafi of Libya, and Rafsanjani of Iran, restrain themselves in the face of certain violent pressure from large segments of their populace to fight the Jewish nation in a “holy war”? I doubt that very much.

Though perhaps not at all justified, let’s assume, however, that an Iraqi-Israeli conflict does not escalate into a Jewish-Arab fight to the death in the region. Suppose only that we cannot bring Hussein to his senses with a few “surgical” air raids against a few military targets. Assume that, in order to “win” the war, we have to fight for an extended period of time and destroy a great deal of that country, as well as its fighting forces. How will patriotic, ethnocentric, America-hating Arabs in Syria, Libya, Iran, Jordan, and Egypt react to that? What will be the short-term and long-term

effects of such a humiliation being visited upon the Muslim East by the Yankee invader, particularly if Iraq goes down heroically and self-sacrificially?

Appendix C

An Identification Taxonomy

A General Way or Approach: “PAIVE”

P Via our “PIETIES,” our beliefs, religious, political, or social

A Via our ALLEGIANCES, our sense of loyalty or belongingness to, official or unofficial

I Via our INTERESTS, our occupation, social or economic class, or areas of curiosity, fascination, or concern

V Via our VALUES, our overarching and guiding principles of life

E Via our EXPERIENCES, what we’ve done in our life, what we’ve seen, heard, and felt

A Grammatical Way or Approach: the six common analytical questions and the PENTADIC answers to them

Via the WHO, the ACTORS or AGENTS we admire as heroes, heroines, or exemplars

Via the WHAT, the customary COURSES OF ACTION or STYLES OF LIFE we favor or participate in

Via the WHY, the PURPOSES or CAUSES we espouse or promote

Via the HOW, the AGENCIES or INSTITUTIONS we belong to or favorably regard

Via the WHEN and the WHERE, the LOCALES or PLACES or HISTORICAL ERAS we reside in, hail from, or find attractive

A Temporal Way or Approach: Where did we come from and where are we headed?

Via the ANCESTRAL or FAMILIAL

Via the DIRECTIONAL

(See Addendum 2.)

Appendix D

The Drama in *The Scarlet Letter*

Angie

Disordered Situation. The disordered situation in the *Scarlet Letter* began with the adultery committed by Hester and Dimmesdale. Other problems emerged from this problem. Dimmesdale, for one, hypocritically let Hester take all the public blame for their wrongdoing. Chillingworth selfishly made Hester promise not to tell anyone that he was her husband. The townspeople unfairly punished Pearl, excluding her from society, even though she was not guilty of sin. The townspeople also punished Hester in making her wear the scarlet letter and made her stand upon the scaffold in ignominy. Chillingworth also decided to find and punish the father of Pearl, Dimmesdale. He mentally tortured Dimmesdale and drove him to his death.

Guilt-Obsessed Redemptive Actor vs. a Guilty Opponent. The townspeople place all the blame on Hester and Pearl, although Pearl is innocent and did nothing wrong. Chillingworth finds Dimmesdale and blames him ultimately for what has gone wrong. As a result, Chillingworth and Hester are at conflict, because after years pass and Dimmesdale is looking worse and worse, Hester feels sorry for him and decides to try and get Chillingworth to leave him alone.

Also, Dimmesdale and Chillingworth are opposing characters. Dimmesdale feels some sort of demon or devil in his life, but is never quite sure it is actually Chillingworth until Hester tells him he was her husband. Pearl, at this point, is more or less in conflict with everyone. She does not obey adults, nor her mother, and hates most of the townspeople for their staring and meanness toward her all her life.

The main characters of the story would be Dimmesdale as the protagonist and Chillingworth as the antagonist. Dimmesdale is the protagonist since he changes from the beginning of the story until the end, he is the main character at the time of the climax, and he acts upon the moral of the story, "Be true! Be true! Be

true!”

Sacrificial Act or Series of Acts. Many of the characters in this story are punished by others, or punish themselves. Starting with Hester, she is punished first by the public, being put upon the scaffold, put in jail, and instructed to wear the scarlet letter. She then begins a form of self-sacrifice as she sews and makes things for the poor, comforts the sick and dying, and just tries to always help out. She also says that Pearl is a way of punishment, that every day she looks at Pearl and remembers her mistake. Dimmesdale, on the other hand, is quite private with his actions. He decides to punish himself by starving himself, not allow himself sleep, beat himself, whip himself, stand upon the scaffold at nighttime, and carve the letter “A” on his bosom. He is also punished every day by Chillingworth, who made Dimmesdale move into a house with him where he could mentally torture him until his death. Chillingworth’s torture is not acceptable morally, nor is Dimmesdale’s form of self-punishment.

Redemptive Purposes and Means. Chillingworth and Dimmesdale had a redeemed relationship, because right before Dimmesdale died, he said, “May God forgive you,” which probably meant Dimmesdale forgave him, too. Chillingworth forgave Hester, since although Pearl is not his daughter, he left her everything when he died, which also means Chillingworth and Pearl have a redeemed relationship as well. Dimmesdale and Pearl become close finally at the end when Pearl kissed her father goodbye before he died, showing him she did love him.

The only relationship left unredeemed was Hester’s and Dimmesdale’s. She wanted to go to England, but he thought it would be better to follow the moral “Be true.” Throughout all this, Hester’s and Pearl’s social images were the only ones that were improved. Dimmesdale and Chillingworth were probably only thought of as less of a person than what they were before Dimmesdale confessed.

This story shows that no matter if you’re afraid of what people will think of you, you should always be true and show your real self.

Notes

For complete publication data on the sources referred to below, see “Works Cited.”

For abbreviations of the most cited books by Kenneth Burke, see the “Introduction.”

Introduction

1. 105-106.
 2. Combs & Mansfield.
 3. Burke, *Literary Form* 110-11; Henderson & D. C. Williams.
 4. Malmkjaer.
 5. Malmkjaer 477-82, Gucker, Warriner et al., Hale, Strumpf & Douglas, Lester & Beason, Taggart & Wines.
 6. Appel, “Dramatic Elements,” Vol. 1 266-74.
 7. *Communication Quarterly* 41 (Winter 1993).
 8. *Communication and Religion* 16 (September 1993).
 9. *Communication Quarterly* 35 (Winter 1987).
 10. *Journal of Communication and Religion* 10 (March 1987).
 11. *Western Journal of Communication* 61 (Fall 1997).
 12. *Western Journal of Communication* 60 (Summer 1996).
 13. *Southern Communication Journal* 68 (Spring 2003).
 14. *Southern Communication Journal* 73 (April-June 2008).
 15. 272.
 16. “(Nonsymbolic) Motion/(Symbolic) Action.”
- 1. The General, Implicitly Moral Pattern of Verbal Action**
1. Malmkjaer 479.
 2. Warriner et al. 3-37, Malmkjaer 477-82. Hale 88, Taggart & Wines, 88-91.
 3. *GM* xv-xxiii, 20, 236-38.
 4. *P&C* 283-86, *PLF* 87, *RR* 4-5.

5. *RR* 4-5, 174-96.
 6. *GM* 3-20.
 7. *RR* 17-24, *LASA* 419-79.
 8. Rush & Denisoff, Snow et al. 239-43, Snow & Benford.
 9. *RR* 19, *LASA* 419-20.
 10. See Chapter 4.
 11. *GM* 294-97.
 12. See “The Black Cat.”
 13. Osborn & Osborn 106-112; Maslow, *Motivation*.
 14. *Presentation*.
 15. Pinker, *Thought* 159.
 16. Cassirer.
 17. *Westminster Confession*.
- 2. The Specific, Explicitly Moral Pattern of Verbal Action**
1. *Pure Reason*, “Conclusion.”
 2. *P&C* 278-86, *RR* 40, 231-32, *RM* 138-4, *LASA* 15-16.
 3. *Politics*, Book 1, Chapter 2.
 4. *Law of Nature*.
 5. Clapp 499.
- 3. A Paradigm for Invention of Discourse and Analysis of Texts That Combines the Two Patterns**
1. *RR* v-vi, 1-5, 7-42, 273-316; Rank, *Psychology* 55, 64, 194-201; see also Chapter 5.
 2. *RM* 276.
 3. *RR* vi, *RM* 290-91.
 4. Aitchison.
 5. Beer et al. 991-92.
 6. *Sociobiology*.
 7. *RR* 4-5.
 8. For Burke’s take, see *GM* 323-401.
 9. *ATH* 312.
 10. See Chapter 4.
 11. Gove 141.
 12. *LASA* 378-79.
 13. *P&C* 102-107, 188-94, 257, 289.
 14. *PLF* 39, *LASA* 93.
 15. *PLF* 18, emphasis in original.

16. Cushman.
 17. *Investigations*.
 18. *P&C* 290.
 19. Cushman.
 20. *P&C* 289-90.
 21. *P&C* 285.
 22. *PLF* 45-51, *RR* 4.
 23. *GM* 264-65.
 24. *RM* 149-54.
4. **“Hark Ye Yet Again---the Little Lower Layer” I:
The Negativity of Dramatic Action**
1. Qtd. in *GM* 295.
 2. *GM* 21-35.
 3. *RR* 17-23, *LASA* 419-79, “Dramatism” 14.
 4. *RR* 19.
 5. Qtd. in C. Brooks, Purser, & Warren 360.
 6. *Pure Reason*.
 7. 3:11 RSV.
 8. Rueckert, *Drama* 261-62, 241, 243-44, 264, 275, 282.
 9. Angeles 17, Foss.
 10. *LASA* 453-57.
 11. Grene 462.
 12. *P&C* 29-36.
 13. Kauffman 202, 251-57; Ross 65-67; Adler.
 14. 119-24, 150-58, 255-85.
 15. *Therapy* 74, 155; *Beyond Psychology* 194-201; *Art* 86, 370, 376.
 16. Rank, *Psychology* 196.
 17. *GM* 295-97, Foss 8-9.
 18. *RR* 16-17.
 19. 1; see also 169, 311; emphasis added.
 20. 170, 125-71. See also Christof Koch and Susan Greenfield, “Consciousness”: “How brain processes translate to consciousness is one of the greatest unsolved questions in science The scientific method . . . has utterly failed to satisfactorily explain how subjective experience is created” (76).
 21. Rorty 21-22, 29-32, 69, 81-83; Pinker, *Blank Slate* 1-3, 9-11, 30-58.
 22. Bunge 75, 169-70.

23. 123.
24. 355 n, 24; emphasis added.
25. 82.
26. 179-82.
27. 183.
28. *RR* 16-17.
29. *ATH* 3-107.
30. Alston 69-83, Mundle 24-40, Hacking 93-102.
31. Owen 346-48, Wiggins 273-75, Rosen 120, Prior 458-63, P. L. Heath 554-55.
32. Prior 459.
33. 459.
34. *RR* 19-21.
35. Bergson 296-98.
36. *RR* 20.
37. Bergson 288-95.
38. Bergson 292, 297.
39. Bergson 296-97.
40. *GM* 57-72, Cushman 35.
41. Gould & Lewontin. These scientists note as nonadaptive, female orgasms, religion, and music. To call female orgasms nonadaptive seems on its face perverse, as well as sexist, especially given the economy of fetal development. To put religion and music in the same bin is to betray a gross misunderstanding of what language---presumably very adaptive indeed---does to the symbolizing animal. See Chapter 5 on “The Theology of Dramatic Action” and the sections on “Worship” and “Art for Art’s Sake” in Chapter 6, which addresses “The Anthropology of Dramatic Action,” for more particulars.
42. Gove 788.
43. Sachs 53, Capra 166-67.
44. *PLF* 73.
45. *GM* 3-20; *PLF* 1-8, 64, 83-84, 103, 108-11 including notes, 124, 129-30.
46. *PLF* 18-19.
47. *GM* 15-23, 440-41.
48. *LASA* 44-47, 361-62; *PLF* 1-8; *GM* xviii-xx; *P&C* 173; Gove 685, Burke’s own definition

- provided in the *Merriam-Webster Unabridged*.
49. *LASA* 376 n.
 50. *LASA* 420, *GM* 100.
 51. *LASA* 17-19.
 52. *LASA* 420, 424; *RR* 17-18, 24; *PLF* 3-8.
 53. *GM* 285-97; Bergson 273, 297-98; see L. Griffin and Betz on the connection between perfection and redemptive purpose in social-movement rhetoric and human life in general (L. Griffin, "Dreams" 112, 123; "Dramatistic Theory" 457-61, 463, 468, 472; Betz 28-35).
 54. *LASA* 361, 369-71; *RR* 23, 25.
 55. *LASA* 378, *RR* 11.
 56. *LASA* 373.
 57. Roth 141-48, Tylor 58-61.
 58. Levy-Bruhl 158-84.
 59. Page.
 60. Maybury-Lewis.
 61. Burton & Kirk 396-97.
 62. Trans. and qtd. in Waterman.
 63. Pinker 124-51.
 64. Trager; Waterman; Whorf 134-59, 233-45; Sapir 162; Hooton & Hooton 355-57; for more recent support for the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, in one form or another, see Lakoff 319-37; Friedrich 6-7, 10-14, 19, 43; Schultz 3-19, 41-48, 143-51; Muhlhausler & Harre 1-9, 227, 234-37; and, most recently, Deutscher.
 65. *RM* 21-26; *CS* 154; *LASA* 44-47, 84, 373; Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Vol. 1 239-43, 310-99, Vol. 2 2-51; Lentricchia 139-40; Biemel 90.
 66. *RR* 23-24, including n.
 67. Heidegger 32-40, 65-90; Southwell 10-28, 69-70.
 68. *RR* 17-23.
 69. *P&C* 255-61.
 70. 109, Poggeler 117, Kaelin 77-88, *GM* 188-89.
 71. 39-40; *ATH* 4, 20; *P&C* 19-36, 176-77; *RR* 8-10, 18, 24, 273-75, 305; *GM* 235-38; *LASA* 361, 371; Alston 87-90; emphasis in original.
 72. *LASA* 73-74, 361, 368, 372-73, 378; *CS* 153-54.
 73. *LASA* 371-72, *RR* 27-29, *GM* 188-89.

Whitehead's "fallacy of misplaced concreteness" as temptation to take abstractions too literally fits here nicely, too: Sherburne 195.

74. *LASA* 361-62, 372, 378-79; R. L. Heath 121-22.
 75. Cassirer 30-31.
 76. *ATH* 3-4, 21; *P&C* 176-78, 257; *LASA* 45, 376; *RR* 41.
 77. Werner & Kaplan 1.
 78. Werner & Kaplan 22-23, 26.
 79. Werner & Kaplan 12.
 80. Werner & Kaplan 47, 52.
 81. *LASA* 73-74; *P&C* 292-94; *RM* 183-294; Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 267-69; Foss 8.
 82. *DD* 49-50.
 83. Haney 408-46; *ATH* 102-103; Mackey-Kallis & Hahn 7-9, 13-14.
 84. Korzybski 469-90, Haney 338-85, *P&C* 93, Bergson 291.
 85. Haney 386.
 86. *LASA* 73-74.
 87. *RM* 183-294, 301-16, 332-33; *P&C* 274-83; *LASA* 15-16, 73-74, 361; *RR* 40-41.
 88. *RM* 118, *RR* 37.
 89. *RM* 183-333.
 90. *RR* 182-241.
 91. *RR* 182-241.
 92. Chesebro, "Communication, Values" 483.
 93. *RR* 1-5, 172-241; *P&C* 274-94; "Dramatism" 14-16; *PLF* 107-109.
 94. Foss 12, 25-29.
 95. Goffman, *Presentation* 1-16, *Interaction* 5-25.
 96. *LASA* 361, 376.
 97. N. O. Brown 274, 276, 278, 87-109.
 98. *LASA* 376 n.
 99. Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 13-14.
 100. Simons, "Chronicle"; Lyne.
5. **"Hark Ye Yet Again---the Little Lower Layer" II: The Theology of Dramatic Action**
1. *LASA* 47, *RR* 2.
 2. *GM* xix.
 3. 105.
 4. "Literature and Language" 342; see also Burke,

- “Dramatism and Logology” 89-93.
5. Burke, “Dramatism and Logology,” [*Times*] *Literary Supplement* 859; *LASA* 3-24; think of epistemology as having to do with “knowing”; ontology, as having to do with “being.”
 6. Crusius, *Conversation* 153.
 7. Gove 945, 2501.
 8. *RR* 301-302.
 9. *Drama* 262.
 10. *RR* 5; Rueckert, “Many Kenneth Burkes” 7; emphasis in original.
 11. *RR* 2.
 12. *LASA* 47.
 13. Letter to the author; emphasis in original.
 14. “Literature and Language” 342.
 15. 239; emphasis in original.
 16. 1-137.
 17. 5-8, 145-72; Burke, “Fact, Inference, and Proof”; Rueckert, *Drama* 83-111; Berthold 302-309.
 18. *RR* 302.
 19. *RR* 19; emphasis in original.
 20. *RR* 7-42.
 21. 11-16.
 22. 16-17; see also *LASA* 373.
 23. 17-33; see also *LASA* 453-57.
 24. 24-27.
 25. 27-29.
 26. 29-33, *P&C* 100-102, *ATH* 4, *PLF* 4-8.
 27. *RM* 290-91.
 28. *LASA* 46, *RR* 301.
 29. *RM* 274.
 30. *RR* v-vi, 1-316, especially 301-304; *PLF* 191-220; *GM* 78-80, 59-124; *RM* 183-313; *P&C* 17-18, 274-94; *LASA* 15-22, 44-57, 453-57; see also Booth, “Religious Rhetoric,” “Many Voices.”
 31. *RR* 303.
 32. *RR* 301.
 33. *RM* 290.
 34. *RM* 180, 276-77, 289; *LASA* 373; emphasis in original; Southwell 65-68.
 35. 239.

36. See especially *GM* 78-79, 272-73.
37. *LASA* 9-22, 419-79; *RR* 17-23; "Dramatism" 14.
38. *RR* 19-20; *LASA* 376; Bergson 281, 292, 294.
39. *LASA* 276.
40. Gove 1420; Walsh 300-307; Southwell 29, 33-34, 40-41, 65-66, 68, 71, 73.
41. Owen 246-48, Wiggins 273-75, Rosen 120, Prior 458-63, P. L. Heath 554-55. See Chapter 4.
42. *GM* xx-iii, 59-85; Southwell 32-34; emphasis in original.
43. 82-83.
44. *RR* 24-27, 33, 175; *GM* 105; *RM* 188-89.
45. Bergson 297.
46. *RM* 267-94, particularly 275.
47. *PLF* 61.
48. *RR* 267-79; cf. Becker 173-75, Rank, *Art* 235-431 for similar concepts.
49. *Literature and Language* 105.
50. "Spinoza."
51. "Response."
52. "Burke's Religious Rhetoric," "Theologian and Prophet."
53. Letter, 9 January 1984.
54. Burke, "Dramatism."
55. 5, 273-316.
56. *PLF* 130-37.
57. *LASA* 16-22.
58. *LASA* 16-22; *DD* 51-55; *OHN* 54-95; Rueckert, *Drama* 208, 210, 212; D. C. Williams 208-209; Melia, "Scientism and Dramatism" 56-57.
59. *P&C* lvi-lviii, 65-66.
60. *RM* 275-77; *RR* 2.
61. Bloom; Freccero 52-53; Crusius, *Conversation*.
62. *GM* 441-43.
63. *PLF* 4, 119; *RM* 121-23.
64. "Burke's Religious Rhetoric," "Theologian and Prophet."
65. 105.
66. Interview, 7 May 1990.
67. Chapin.
68. See Chapter 13.

69. *PLF* 68-79, "Fact, Inference, and Proof" 145-72.
 70. *RR* v-vi.
 71. *RM* 180, 276-77, 289-91; Southwell 65-68.
 72. *GM* 441.
 73. Hartshorne, *Whitehead's Philosophy* 63-97, *Natural Theology* 126-37; Gragg 78-102; D. D. Williams 164-80.
 74. M. E. Brown 265-70, *RM* 183-333.
 75. Henderson.
 76. Queens College reception, 6 November 1987.
 77. Rueckert, *Drama* 162.
 78. *ATH* 166-75, *GM* 441-43.
 79. Queens College reception, 6 November 1987.
 80. 333; emphasis in original.
 81. "Fact, Inference, and Proof" 161.
6. **"Hark Ye Yet Again---the Little Lower Layer"
III: The Anthropology of Dramatic Action**
1. Stevenson, Vol. 1 870.
 2. *Grammatology*.
 3. *Postmodern*.
 4. *Archeology*.
 5. Tarnas 395-410.
 6. "Cracking the Code of Life."
 7. *RR* 4, *LASA* 52; see also *P&C* 271 on Burke's "anhistoric position."
 8. *RM* 279; emphasis in original.
 9. Mish 49.
 10. Bunge 19.
 11. 160.
 12. Pappe 161.
 13. *RM*; *PLF* 19-46, 55-65; *LASA* 63-74.
 14. *ATH* 170; *P&C* 234; *OHN* 75, 78, 88-89; Crusius, *Conversation* 141-74; emphasis in original.
 15. Pappe 274-75.
 16. *P&C* 234; emphasis in original.
 17. *LASA* 3-24, *RR* 40-42.
 18. *GM* 317-20, 441-43; *DD* 49-55; *OHN* 54-65.
 19. *GM* 61.
 20. *RR* 42.
 21. *PLF* 61.

22. Gove 1372.
23. 225, 230, 232.
24. Gove 1837.
25. Stewart, Smith, & Denton.
26. *RM* 186-87.
27. Melville Chapter 42.
28. Gove 1195.
29. Haney 230-33.
30. Gove 1195.
31. *Leviathan*.
32. Wordsworth 234.
33. *P&C* 274-94, Gusfield 1-49.
34. *Things Hidden, Violence*.
35. *PLF* 39-51, *GM* 406-408, *P&C* 274-94, *RR* 172-241.
36. *RR* 4-5.
37. *RM* 260-67, *GM* 406-408.
38. Waite 229-49, Becker 249 n.
39. *RM* 271-72.
40. *RM* 266, *P&C* 289-91.
41. 267-79.
42. 271.
43. *RM* 270, 273.
44. *RM* 271-72.
45. *P&C* 289-91.
46. *RM* 269.
47. *RM* 272; emphasis in original.
48. Gove 623, *RM* 183-333.
49. *RM* 272.
50. *RM* 274.
51. 273.
52. *LASA* 15-22, *RR* 40.
53. *RM* 268.
54. 138.
55. Auletta 138-42.
56. *RM* 275.
57. *RM* 260.
58. Kavanagh 306-20.
59. Kavanagh 306-20; Greenblatt 225-32, Childers & Hentzi 149-51, 64-68.
60. *RM* 279; emphasis in original.
61. Wilson, *Consilience*; Pinker, *Blank Slate* 128-35

62. Pinker, *Blank Slate* 121-35; Mayr 261; Lockwood 170, 125-71. For Koch and Greenfield's conclusion, see Chapter 4, n 20.
63. Zukav 192, 191-251; Lockwood 149-57.
- 7. Application of Our "Fit-All-Finger" Paradigm of Dramatic Action to Some Well-Known American-English Literary Texts**
1. *PLF* 103-107.
 2. vii.
 3. *PLF* 293-304.
 4. *LASA* 45.
 5. *PLF* 124.
 6. *PLF* 122.
 7. *PLF* 5-8, 66-132; "Fact, Inference, and Proof" 145-72.
 8. *CS* 124, emphasis in original.
 9. 165.
 10. *RM* 19-46.
 11. *PLF* 40.
 12. *PLF* 107, 112, 131, 444; *GM* 100-101.
 13. *P&C* 80-88; *PLF* 1-3, 144-45.
 14. *Athenaeum* 546.
 15. *CS* 157-58.
 16. 97-124.
 17. Desilet, *Melodrama* 58-88, 153-64, 200-209; *ATH* 39-44, 166-75.
 18. *GM* 21-35; *RM* 19-29, 55-59.
 19. Gove 1681.
 20. Mumford 26,
 21. *PLF* 78, "Fact, Inference, and Proof" 161.
 22. D. W. Harvey 906.
 23. See also *P&C* 286-94; Rueckert, *Drama* 210-14, on "tragedy" in Burke as "the imitation (or exploitation) of the perfect essence of a tension."
 24. *PLF* 109; emphasis in original.
 25. *P&C* 195.
- 8. From a Burkean Perspective, the "Little Lower Layer" of *Moby-Dick* as Dramatic Action I**
1. *PLF* 30-31.
 2. *CS* 124-25.
 3. Duyckinck 540.
 4. *PLF* 20, "Fact, Inference, and Proof" 150-67.

5. *P&C* 87.
6. *Harper's* 543-45, *Athenaeum* 545-46.
7. *CS* 153-67.
8. *PLF* 444-45, *GM* 100.
9. Desilet, *Melodrama* 76-88, 100-101, 118-21, *ATH* 39-44, 166-75.
10. *PLF* 40.
11. *CS* 124-25.
12. 88.
13. *Mish* 688.
14. *CS* 124-25.
15. *CS* 125.
16. *Duyckinck* 540.
17. v-ix.
18. ix.
19. Queens College reception.
20. *P&C* 67-163.
21. *GM* 318-19, 443.
22. "(Nonsymbolic) Motion/(Symbolic) Action."
23. *PLF* 22, 97, 101, 120; the "loathsome" and the "blessed," 24.

9. From a Burkean Perspective, the "Little Lower Layer" of *Moby-Dick* as Dramatic Action II

1. *P&C* 259.
2. *PLF* 17, 64; emphasis in original.
3. *LASA* 45.
4. *P&C* 29, 35; emphasis in original.
5. 20.
6. *P&C* 19-29.
7. Rorty 12-13, 42 n, 390. For more on Stewart & Williams' take on Burke, see Chapter 14.
8. *P&C* 255-61.
9. Brock, *Kenneth Burke and Contemporary European Thought*.
10. *OHN* 139-71.
11. *RR* 272.
12. *P&C* 255; emphasis in original.
13. *GM* 235-37.
14. *LASA*, the book title.
15. *P&C* 257.
16. *P&C* 256.
17. *P&C* 257.

18. *P&C* 80.
19. Dunbar 395-99.
20. *P&C* 256; emphasis in original.
21. Ahlstrom 504-20.
22. Durant & Durant 116-61, 323-93, 472-786.
23. Goguel 37-69.
24. Ahlstrom 471-88.
25. *ATH* 4, *P&C* 255.
26. *P&C* 20, *GM* 100, *PLF* 445.
27. *P&C* 71-79.
28. Cauthen xiii-lxxiii; Ahlstrom, Vol. 1 593-614, Vol. 279-115.
29. *CS* 163-66.
30. Cf. *P&C* 3-66.
31. *GM* 3-11.
32. 256.
33. *ATH* 244-46.
34. 3-8.
35. 119.
36. *GM* 442, *OHN* 54-95.
37. *GM* 317, 441; *ATH* 39-47 n, 166-75.
38. *ATH* 150 n, emphasis in original; on "efficiency" as chimera, see also 248-52, *CS* 110-21.
39. "Literature and Language" 341.
40. Kaufmann 173-286, Adler.
41. *LASA* 16.
42. Queens College reception.
43. *OHN* 54-95.
44. *OHN* 80, 83-84.
45. 81-82.
46. 80.
47. 77.
48. *OHN* 78, 88; emphasis in original.
49. *OHN* 54-55, 68-69; emphasis in original.
50. "Waste---or the Future of Prosperity" 228-31.
51. *GM* 441, *LASA* 16.
52. *P&C* 7-9, 97-124; *ATH* 6, 308-14.
53. *RM* 263, "Kenneth Burke: the Iowa Interviews," *CS* 111-15.
54. *PLF* 107, *GM* 442-43.
55. *ATH* 5, 39-44, 166-75; Appel, "King," 381.

56. *PLF* 444-45; *GM* 100-101, 317-20, 441-43; emphasis in original.
 57. 563.
 58. *Literary World* 541-42.
 59. 544.
 60. [London] *Spectator* 548.
 61. 592.
 62. viii.
 63. 552.
 64. 573-76.
 65. "Nietzsche contra Burke," "Choosing a Rhetoric of the Enemy."
 66. "Villains" 24.
 67. *Mish* 552.
 68. *RM* 23.
 69. Desilet, *Melodrama* 77, 121.
 70. Desilet, *Melodrama* 77, 120-21, 160.
 71. *Melodrama* 78, 86; emphasis in original.
 72. *Melodrama* 160, 164.
 73. 307.
 74. *Melodrama* 160.
 75. *Melodrama* 160.
 76. *Melodrama* 160.
10. **Rhetoric as Dramatic Action I**
1. *P&C* 192.
 2. *Eyre, Pride*.
 3. 387.
 4. *RM* 50.
 5. Bitzer 384, 386.
 6. *RM* 43; emphasis in original. An aspect of this essential function of language: if language, then meaning; if meaning, then persuasion; if persuasion, then rhetoric. *RM* 172-73.
 7. *RM* 46.
 8. Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 33-39.
 9. *Drama* 208-209.
 10. Rueckert, *Drama* 210, 212.
 11. *PLF* 84, 86; *OHN* 74; *LASA* 73-74.
 12. Blumer, Smelser, Rush & Denisoff, Mauss, Mayer.
 13. Snow et al. 245-47, McAdam & Snow xix-xx.
 14. Snow et al. 238-39.

15. McAdam & Snow xix-xx.
16. *P&C* 195; *LASA* 21; *PLF* 39-40, 46-51, 60; *ATH* 39 & n, 41.
17. *P&C* 286-89, *RR* 224, *PLF* 209, *ATH* 41; emphasis in original.
18. *CS* 199-201; *PLF* 62; *ATH* 35-37, 43, 95.
19. *P&C* 288; *GM* 84; *RM* 50; *RR* 187-88; *PLF* 204, 215; *ATH* 41-42; Bostdorff 5-6.
20. *P&C* 195-97, 289-90; *RR* 206-212; *ATH* 39-40, 170-73; *GM* 318, 442.
21. *P&C* 286-91; *GM* 406-408; *RR* 4-5, 183-241; *PLF* 39-51 & n; “Dramatism” 14-16; *ATH* 41-44, 188-90; emphasis in original.
22. *P&C* 195, 197; *GM* 294-97, 306, 441-43; *ATH* 5, 73, 90.
23. *LASA* 21, *RM* 441-43, *ATH* 5. See also Appel, “‘Tragedy-lite’ or ‘Melodrama’” 182-83, for this taxonomic scheme.
24. *Drama* 210.
25. *LASA* 16-24.
26. *GM* 59-85.
27. 344; see also *P&C* 286-89; *LASA* 21, 54-55, 380-409; *ATH* 225-29.
28. Baynes 4-21; Appel, “Hitler.”
29. Baynes 4-6.
30. 12; emphasis in original.
31. Baynes 6-9.
32. 8, 14.
33. Baynes 19-20.
34. Baynes 9-20.
35. 7-8, 12.
36. 10.
37. 12.
38. Baynes 18.
39. 21.
40. *P&C* 177.
41. Appel, “Falwell” 36. One possible caveat to the label “rhetorical tragedy” here: Falwell’s discourse was surely “tragic” within the symbolic universe of Evangelical Fundamentalist Protestant Christianity, and potentially tragic as to concrete motivated

outcomes toward gays and other enemies. For persons outside this religious orientation, though, the sermons examined in this study might be construed as “melodramatic,” at least around the edges.

Reason: For an unbeliever, Falwell’s intense polemics and the traditional theological undergirding of them may have appeared “insufficiently motivated” theoretically and empirically. I merely raise the question of context as an ingredient in generic labeling. In this part of our study, we’ll work from within the huge American communication system that Falwell, Billy Graham, and a host of other prominent evangelists help to define. For more on melodrama, see especially chapters 9 and 12 and, below, the critique on Rev. Dr. Wallace E. Fisher.

42. Clark.
43. Appel, “Falwell” 32-33.
44. Appel, “Falwell” 34-35.
45. Appel, “Fisher” 42 n.
46. Appel, “Falwell” 33-34.
47. Appel, “Falwell” 35.
48. Chesebro & Hamsher 17-18.
49. Fisher, *Affable Enemy*; *All the Good Gifts*; *Because God Cares*; *Because We Have Good News*; *Can Man Hope to Be Human?*; *New Climate for Stewardship*; *Politics, Poker, and Piety*; *Preaching and Parish Renewal*; *Preface to Parish Renewal*; *Stand Fast in Faith*; *Tradition to Mission*; *Who Dares to Preach?*
50. *RM* 15-16.
51. Eysenck & Eysenck 194-212; Kagan; Pinker, *Blank Slate*. As Burke says, “The strategies of comedy, tragedy, satire, burlesque, and the like are formed by the relationship between the writer’s private situation and the general situation.” *ATH* 343.
52. Smith & Williamson 31-57, D. R. Smith, Rasmussen.

53. Fisher, *Tradition* 48-69.
54. Adorno et al.
55. Fisher, *Tradition* 55-69, 121, 129-32; Appel, "Fisher" 34-35; Appel, "Dramatistic Study."
56. Appel, "Fisher" 39.
57. Appel, "Fisher" 38-39; *GM* 406-408.
58. Appel, "Fisher" 39.
59. Appel, "Fisher" 39.
60. *RM* 19-46.
61. Appel, "Fisher" 38.
62. Appel, "Fisher" 38.
63. Appel, "Fisher" 39; *LASA* 21.
64. 490-91.
65. Qtd. in Thrall, Hibbard, & Holman 491.
66. 40.
67. 58-71.
68. 58.
69. *ATH* 188-90 n.; emphasis in original.
70. Rueckert, *Drama* 210-14.
71. Chesebro & Hamser.
72. 18; emphasis in original.
73. *RM* 15.
74. *GM* 236, 242, 245; *RM* 90; *LASA* 91-94.
75. *ATH* 36 n.
76. *ATH* 244-46.
77. *LASA* 16.
78. Carlson, "Gandhi."
79. Appel, "King" 391.
80. Appel, "King" 391; King, "Holt Street" 1-2.
81. 12-15; emphasis in original.
82. Appel, "King" 389; King, "Social Change" 2, 9-13; emphasis in original.
83. Appel, "King" 390; King, "Social Change" 12, 15, 18.
84. Smith & Windes.
85. Appel, "King" 393-94.
86. Appel, "King" 394; King, "Power" 12-14.
87. Appel, "King" 394.
88. Appel, "King" 394; King, "Power" 13.
89. Fulkerson, Hoover.
90. Appel, "King" 386-87; King, "Letter" 91-93, 98-99.

91. Appel, "King" 386-96; King, "Break Silence" 233-41; "Drum Major Instinct" 261, 266-67; "Promised Land" 285-86.
 92. Appel, "King" 388-90; King, "Where Do We Go" 248, 250-51.
 93. Appel, "King" 390; King, "Where Do We Go" 251; *LASA* 21.
 94. *Melodrama* 77, 120-21, 160.
 95. *ATH* 39-44, 166-75, 188-90 n.
 96. *PLF* 4, 444.
 97. *ATH* 344.
 98. *ATH* 43, 167, 170.
 99. *ATH* 171.
 100. *ATH* 173.
 101. *ATH* 166-70; emphasis in original.
11. **Rhetoric as Dramatic Action II**
1. *ATH* 41, 171; emphasis in original.
 2. *P&C* 19-36.
 3. *ATH* 102.
 4. Osborne & Bakke 224.
 5. Rush & Denisoff.
 6. Appel, "Buckley" 273-74.
 7. *ATH* 102, 104; Appel, "Buckley" 270-71; Richards; Kitchin.
 8. Bitzer 386; emphasis in original.
 9. *ATH* 99-105; Appel, "Limbaugh" 218, 221; Snow et al. 239-43.
 10. *Anatomy*; *ATH* 35-37 & n, 54-56, 93, 101.
 11. *ATH* 54-56, 93.
 12. Appel, "Buckley" 272, 279-80; Appel, "Limbaugh" 217-21.
 13. *ATH* 93-95.
 14. Rossiter.
 15. "Kohlberg" 259.
 16. *Rumbles* 138-39.
 17. *Quotations* 43.
 18. *Cruising Speed* 248; "Eisenhower" 57-59; Appel, "Buckley" 274-75.
 19. "Economic Issue" 1315.
 20. Hunt 54.
 21. "Women's Lib" 965.
 22. Carlson, "Limitations" ; Moore; Richards;

- Wilders; *ATH* 101.
23. “Newsplay” 1230.
 24. *Cruising Speed* 192.
 25. Mayer 270; Appel, “Buckley” 275.
 26. *Liberalism* 27-28.
 27. Appel, “Buckley” 275.
 28. *Liberalism* 24, 28.
 29. *Rumbles* 171.
 30. *Rumbles, Governor, Inveighing* 60.
 31. “Investigation” 875.
 32. *Quotations* 252, 201.
 33. “Brando” 487.
 34. “Hughes” 131, “Harvard” 487.
 35. “Harvard” 487.
 36. Bond 12, Wilders, Richards.
 37. “Inviting” 345.
 38. *Quotations* 40.
 39. “Kohlberg” 258-59.
 40. *ATH* 100-103.
 41. Mayor 6-7.
 42. Qtd. in *Governor* 28.
 43. “Nixon” 805.
 44. *Quotations* 242.
 45. “Paul VI.”
 46. “Galbraith-hating . . . Impossible,” *Cruising Speed*.
 47. Rose.
 48. Crawford 176.
 49. *Rumbles*.
 50. See also *Four Reforms*, which takes a similarly ethereal tack at the climax.
 51. 218; emphasis in original.
 52. 219.
 53. Daines, Nair, & Kornhauser. “When compared to the pay of average workers, the increase [in executive pay] is even more dramatic. In 1992, CEOs were paid 82 times the average of blue-collar workers; in 2004, they were paid more than 400 times those salaries.”
 54. *ATH* 54-55, 93; emphasis in original.
 55. See Appel, “Limbaugh” 217-30, for more detail on what follows.

56. 20.
 57. *ATH* 103, 101.
 58. Snow et al.
 59. Snow et al. 240.
 60. L. Griffin 466-67.
 61. Burke, "(Nonsymbolic) Motion/(Symbolic) Action" 833.
 62. *ATH* 55.
 63. *ATH* 54.
 64. *ATH* 56, 93, 101-102, 104; emphasis in original.
 65. Cappella, Turow, & Jamieson 20.
 66. Ewearitt.
 67. *ATH* 55-56.
 68. Snow et al. 245-49.
 69. *RM* 191, 195, 27.
12. **Rhetoric as Dramatic Action III**
1. "Post-9/11," 2007.
 2. "Melodrama," 2006.
 3. "Melodrama," 1989; *Melodrama* 2006.
 4. "Melodrama," 2005.
 5. "Melodramas," 1998.
 6. "Melodramatic," 1985.
 7. Simons, "Melodrama" 185.
 8. 241.
 9. 240.
 10. 240.
 11. 245.
 12. 223.
 13. Haney 447-63.
 14. 223.
 15. 443.
 16. *Melodrama* 58-88.
 17. 185-86.
 18. 246; emphasis in original.
 19. *PLF* 443-47.
 20. Burke, *RM* 23.
 21. E.g. *Melodrama* 118-21, 155-60.
 22. *Melodrama* 77, 120-21, 160.
 23. *ATH* 39-44, 166-75.
 24. See Chapter 10. Also, e.g., Bostdorff; Brummett, "Symbolic Form," "Burkean Scapegoating," "Burkean Transcendence,"

“Burkean Comedy and Tragedy”; Christiansen & Hanson; Condit; Crusius, *Conversation*; Geist; L. Griffin, “Dramatistic Theory”; Haynes; Ivie; Leff.

25. *RR* 1-42, 297-304.
26. *PLF* 40-41.
27. *DD* 33-55, *OHN* 74.
28. *Drama* 210-14.
29. Appel, “Buckley” 279; *ATH* 39 n, 47 n.
30. *LASA* 16-24.
31. 59-85.
32. 344; see also *P&C* 286-89; *LASA* 21, 54-55, 380-409; *ATH* 225-29.
33. 36 n, 41.
34. See also Burgchartd.
35. *PLF* 191-220; see also Chapter 10 above.
36. V-vi, 1-42, 273-316; see also *DD* 33-60.
37. *PLF* 201.
38. *PLF* 219.
39. *CS* 157-58.
40. Thrall & Hibbard 280-81.
41. See, e.g., Burke, *CS* 153-55, 162, 198-212; *P&C* 195-98, 283-94; *ATH* 34-105 & n on 44-47, 166-75, 188-90 n, 313; *PLF* 39-66, 191-220; *GM* 38-41, 59-77, 317-20, 406-408, 514-17; *RM* 260-67; *RR* v-vi, 1-5, 172-272, 295-316; *LASA* 16-22, 81-94, 189-192, 380-409. Burke tends to use generic labels more explicitly in his first four books on literary theory, criticism, and communication. Many of the passages above are implicitly about tragedy or comedy, etc. A careful reader can infer generic references after extensive exposure to Burke’s thought. For example, the first chapter in *ATH*, especially pp. 5-21 on James, Whitman, and Emerson, is replete with comedic insights not always directly labeled as such.
42. Schwarze 241.
43. 154-55.
44. 45-47 n, 190 n; emphasis in original.
45. 45 n; emphasis in original.
46. 45 n; emphasis in original.

47. 47 n; emphasis in original.
48. 44-47 n.
49. 45 n, 188 n.
50. 60; emphasis in original.
51. 61; emphasis in original.
52. 61-62.
53. *PLF* 62; emphasis in original.
54. *PLF* 62.
55. 65.
56. *P&C, ATH*.
57. *P&C* 195.
58. *P&C* 195.
59. *ATH* 45 n.
60. *P&C* 199-200, *ATH* 42; see also *ATH* 172.
61. *P&C* 196; emphasis in original.
62. 196.
63. *P&C* 196; emphasis in original.
64. *P&C* 195.
65. See, e.g., Johnson; Burford; Friedrichs.
66. Garrow.
67. 231.
68. *P&C* 177.
69. *P&C* 192.
70. Carlson, "Gandhi"; Appel, "King" 381.
71. Appel, "Buckley," "Limbaugh."
72. Osborn & Bakke.
73. 223; emphasis in original.
74. 223.
75. 224.
76. *PLF* 19.
77. *P&C* 283-91; *RR* 4-5, 183-96, 215-16.
78. *GM* 242-43.
79. Blumer, Smelser, Rush & Denisoff.
80. Snow et al.
81. 160.
82. 160.
83. *ATH* 102.
84. Gamboa.
85. 40-41; emphasis in original.
86. Griffis.
87. *GM* 243-43, 236, 245; *RM* 90; *LASA* 93.
88. *ATH* 41, emphasis in original.

- 89. *Essay on Comedy*.
- 90. *ATH* 107; see also 172, 144.

13. Putting One Word, One Thought, after Another, Burke Style

- 1. "Liberal Pragmatist."
- 2. Adams.
- 3. E. Griffin, "First Look" 276.
- 4. 62.
- 5. 1931.
- 6. *CS* 107-22.
- 7. 108-13.
- 8. 114-16.
- 9. 111-12, 120-21.
- 10. *CS* 113-21.
- 11. 69-163.
- 12. *ATH* 337-38.
- 13. Mish 992.
- 14. *GM* xv, xxii-xxiii; "Dramatism" 7.
- 15. *RR* 184, "Dramatism" 14-16.
- 16. *P&C* 93.
- 17. *LASA* 45.
- 18. Haney 338-83.
- 19. *LASA* 359-79.
- 20. 486; emphasis added.
- 21. 471-88.
- 22. See, for instance, *ATH*.
- 23. 67.
- 24. 63-68.
- 25. 64.
- 26. Warnock 66-67.
- 27. 61; emphasis in original. For an especially obtrusive example of Burke's use of symbols as a "generative force" leading to "logical consistency," see Burke's famous chart, "Cycle of Terms Implicit in the Idea of 'Order,'" in *RR* 184.
- 28. 150, 153.
- 29. *CS* 157; emphasis in original.
- 30. 165; emphasis in original.
- 31. Intervieww.
- 32. 30 June-2 July 2008.
- 33. Chicago, 5 November 1999. See *ATH* 344 for

- what amounts to Burke's concession to Simons' claim.
34. 30 June.
 35. 30 June.
 36. Roosevelt, Cambridge Editorial Partnership 105-106.
 37. 5; emphasis in original.
 38. *ATH* 90.
 39. 277; <<https://lists.purdue.edu/mailman/listinfo/kb>> 20 July 2008.
 40. See Chapter 12, n. 24.
 41. Spring 2008.
 42. 277.
 43. *CS* 198-212, *P&C* 195-97, *ATH* 34-39, *PLF* 60-66, *GM* 294-97, *RR* 17-23.
 44. *CS* 198-204.
 45. *CS* 200.
 46. *GM* 139-40.
 47. *ATH* 170; emphasis in original.
 48. See <<https://lists.purdue.edu/mailman/listinfo/kb> may 2008> for possible entrée to the kb listserve.
 49. *GM* 227-29; "Dramatism" 9; Kant, *Practical Reason*,
 50. *GM* 3-20.
 51. *P&C* 100-102.
 52. *GM* 125-320.
 53. *GM* 20.
 54. 184.
 55. *ATH* 263-64; emphasis in original.
 56. *GM* 21-35, *RM* 19-46.
 57. *RM* 26; emphasis in original.
 58. *GM* 24-33.
 59. *GM* 319; qtd. in Brooks, Purser, & Warren 392.
 60. *ATH* 171, 343; emphasis in original.
 61. *ATH*.
 62. *GM* Title Page, translation.
14. **The Broad Sweep and the Pith and Marrow**
1. *GM* 191.
 2. *GM* 189.
 3. *GM* 34; emphasis in original.
 4. "Theory of Terms."

5. *GM* 243.
6. Gove 685.
7. *P&C* 93.
8. *RR* 292.
9. Desilet & Appel.
10. *ATH* 244; emphasis in original.
11. *PLF* 293-304.
12. *PLF* 293.
13. *CS* 150-52.
14. *GM* 442.
15. *ATH* 171; emphasis in original.
16. *ATH* 171; see Gruening for a possible source of Burke's corporate allusion.
17. *GM* 317.
18. *PLF* 1-8.
19. *RR* 272.
20. Burke, "Theory of Terms."
21. *GM* 189.
22. *LASA* 379.
23. 5.
24. 132-37.
25. *ATH* 312; emphasis in original.
26. Stewart & Williams 117, 124-25.
27. Stewart & Williams 117.
28. Stewart & Williams 121-24.
29. Stewart & Williams 16-28.
30. Stewart & Williams 12, Gove 1926.
31. Stewart & Williams 6-13, 103-26.
32. Stewart & Williams 213-14.
33. Stewart & Williams 208-209, 212.
34. Stewart & Williams 218, *LASA* 379.
35. Stewart & Williams 224.
36. Stewart & Williams 219; emphasis in original.
37. Southwell 65-68.
38. Stewart & Williams 205-206.
39. Brock 8; Hirst qtd. in Brock 81; emphasis in original; Hacking 146.
40. *GM* 319.
41. *P&C* 35, 92; *GM* 104; *CS* 154; emphasis in original.
42. "Dramatism and Logology" 859; emphasis in original.

43. *RR* vi, 195.
44. *PLF* 2, 4.
45. *LASA* 378-79, Cassirer 35, 85.
46. *P&C* 93, *LASA* 73-74, *GM* 240.
47. *GM* 294-97; *RR* 8-10, 18, 273-75, 305; *P&C* 176-77; *LASA* 361, 371.
48. *ATH* 3-4, 20-21; *LASA* 45, 376 n; *RR* 41.
49. *LASA* 15-16, 74, 361-62; *RM* 183-333; *RR* 41-42.
50. *ATH* 312, *RR* 172-241, *P&C* 374-94.
51. *GM* 21-35.
52. *LASA* 359-79; see Chapter 4 for elaboration.
53. *P&C* 21-23, 101-102.
54. *ATH* 4.
55. Booth, "Way of Knowing."
56. Stewart 117; see also Levine 4, 6.
57. *PLF* 4, 8.
58. Putnam 114; emphasis in original.

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Addendum 1

Alternative Paradigm for Tragic Striving

On May 19, 2006, a graduate student named Emily Donahue submitted at her university a “Non-Thesis Project” paper. The essay was entitled, “Analysis of Extreme Makeover: Home Addition.” In it, she applied the nine indexes of “dramatic intensity” or “tragic striving” offered in my articles on Falwell and Fisher. Since this putatively tragic-frame paradigm differs somewhat from the one offered early in Chapter 10, and since Donahue’s application came nineteen years after my Falwell and Fisher publications, and since therefore these Falwell-Fisher indexes obviously have had some legs, I think it useful to reproduce that alternative paradigm, with explanation as then constructed, here, to wit:

For analysis of this “rhetoric of tragic striving,” so appropriate a title for the Falwell-Fisher style (on its face, at any rate), I intensified correspondingly each of the elements---of the pentad, the terms for order, and Irving Goffman’s emphasis on the notion of risk---according to the following dialectical rationale. In discourse as in physical or even mental activity, the grammatical and formal features of an action can be turned down low or turned up high. Speakers can strain to reach their goal with ever tauter “rhetorical muscles,” as it were, just as athletes, inventors, salespersons, and engineers can “sweat” longer and more arduously than the next guy or gal to win their respective prizes. For each of these fundamental characteristics of symbolic action, as anatomized in the pentadic terms and the terms for order, Burke points the way, either directly or indirectly, toward those opposing ideas that constitute, on the one hand, the lower or less perfect end, and, on the other, the higher or more perfect end of human symbolic striving. Therefore, in the analysis of Falwell’s and Fisher’s heightened discourse, the pentadic terms and the terms for order, etc., were in each case altered in an upward direction along the continuums created by these polar concepts:

- (1) *Act*: Unconsciousness to consciousness, unawareness to awareness, determinism to freedom. Free, conscious act was therefore heightened to: The call to emulative action in the context of radical freedom.

- (2) *Scene*: “Uncharged” by the listeners’ situation outside to “charged” by the listeners’ situation outside, unmodernized to modernized, unsocialized to socialized. Scene became: Modernized or socialized scenic placement of the dramatic action.
- (3) *Agent*: No identifying references to an agent-exemplar to many identifying references to an agent-exemplar, unheroic illustration of action to heroic illustration of action. Agent consequently became: Management of identification through heightened presentation of the speaker as an heroic agent-exemplar.
- (4) *Agency and Purpose*: Easily achieved, unambitious goals to difficult, ambitious goals. Agency and purpose metamorphosed into: High group purposes and aspiring means.
- (5) *Disorder and Guilt*: Stupidity to criminality, mistakeness to viciousness, innocent error to profound evil, the peccadillo to the outrageous violation, mild reprimand for wrongdoing to verbal warfare. Disorder and its concomitant ascriptions of guilt were seen as: Furious conflict with the forces of evil.
- (6) *Mortification*, or sacrifice of the self: Request for a token surrender of time, effort, or substance to a call to give to the cause one’s life or possessions in toto. Mortification was thus raised to: Heroic group or individual sacrifice.
- (7) *Victimage*, or sacrifice of the other: A “slap on the wrist,” mildly invidious reidentification, or mere social distance for a time, to a call for death to the recreants; selection of an almost total stranger to selection of a “blood brother” as sacrificial vessel; characterization of the scapegoat as a weak opponent responsible for one limited wrong to characterization of the scapegoat as a powerful insidious enemy responsible for all that is evil. Victimage became: Blood-brother, severe-punishment, or total-enemy scapegoating.
- (8) *Redemption*: One life-affirming, hope-inducing, dignity-conferring insight alone, to total understanding, total healing, total restoration, total vindication, total harmony, total forgiveness, total reconciliation, total salvation. Redemption was rounded out by simply using the concept of: The perfected redemptive vision.
- (9) *Risk*: Little at stake to everything at stake, probable

success to looming failure. Risk suggested as its ultimate embodiment: The threat of total ruin.

These critical constructs can be called the “nine indexes of dramatic intensity” or the “nine indexes of high tragedy.” To one extent or another, they will presumably be reflected in the discourse of the radical revolutionary. “Relative perfection” along the axes of drama cited above, as gauged by these nine standards, should characterize the typical leader “straining” communicatively on behalf of such a “hyper” social, political, or expressive movement.

Addendum 2

Paradox of Pure Substance

Another afterthought:

Anybody paying attention will note the relationship between Burke's notions of "substance" and "identification." Persons, things, and ideas are defined, that is to say identified, via reference, even self-reference, to other persons, things, and ideas. That's the "paradox." To get linguistically at the intrinsic, we have to involve the extrinsic.

Let's tack onto substance Burke's concept of the "paradox of purity," or paradox of "pure substance." This terminology references how language finesses our thoughts as we move up and down, particularly up, the ladder of abstraction in hierarchical progression. As something or someone is identified on ever higher levels of abstraction, motives change, and justifications for, indeed rules governing, those beings and motives change, in addition.

Take, for instance, the commonplace, "Rank has its privileges." The boss can come to work late, but you can't. Presidents and governors can pardon for crimes committed, but you cannot.

Or, in a court of law, people are "judged by a jury of their peers." This phrasing echoes the class distinctions between ordinary folks and nobles. Only fellow nobles were allowed to judge nobles, because only they lived on the same plane of privilege and responsibility. Only they knew, and would respect, the relevant "rules."

Or, in the late 1880s, the rich guys in the Hunt Club near Johnstown, PA, could get away with mass manslaughter in the famous flood because, well, they looked down on those plebeians in the valley from the highest landing on the social hilltop.

Or, normal, individual citizens wouldn't seriously think of killing their personal enemies, nor would they be allowed to commit such homicide, but when they don that soldier's uniform, they can kill without a qualm. Motives change, rules change, on that higher level of abstraction, "soldier," no longer garden-variety guys or gals minding their own business back on Main Street. They've been accorded a "role" on a higher-grade of abstraction. Or, to alter the image, a new "substance" stands under them, with

all the extraordinary purposes, privileges, and obligations that now undergird that very special persona.

Where's the "purity," and what's the upshot of all this for us today? The "purity" comes from the increasing negativity and referential emptiness of terms of a higher degree. That's why this notion can also be called the "paradox of the negative." Note this ever-rising series and where it culminates: soybean/legume, legume/vegetable, vegetable/plant, plant/being, being/not being. These pairs are comprised of "unequal" terms. The second term in each case does not stand in equal, polar opposition to the first. It transcends it, rises above it, surrounds it, envelopes it. The second, ever-more-abstract term is relatively pure, relatively negativistic in respect to the first term, until we arrive at the "absolute purity" of the second term in the climactic pair, defined by the categorical "not." That's where ever-higher ordinations of abstraction are headed: toward abstracted, idealized attributes that are "not" coextensive with any class member below it, until such attributes evanesce into the pure negative. And as Burke says, socially we are "class conscious" creatures only because we are symbolically "classifying" creatures first and foremost.

Russell and Whitehead's "theory of logical types" fits right in: As they say, a class cannot be a member of itself, and the rules are different for the class than for the members. Or, to state their case more accurately, that's the way symbolizing animals tend to think, not the way they "ought" to think, as such "logic" is so naturally applied in social and political life.

The lesson: Beware of the paradox of purity. Remember the linguistic "discount." Both Burke and Coleridge warn that we're lost in a hierarchal fog as we look upward at the privileged few standing on the higher and highest landings of the spiral social staircase. We have difficulty "seeing" who they are and what they're up to. We're likely to buy into the canard that "they" can, and maybe "ought" to be able to, "get away with it," whatever "it" is. To paraphrase Jefferson in the Declaration of Independence, ordinary people will put up with all kinds of abuse from above before they finally get fed up and rebel.

Any current applications?

Addendum 3

The Pentad as Separate Critical Tool

And yet another afterthought, a vital one:

I've never been what's called a "pentadic critic." That's one who detaches that high-level-of-abstraction, only-implicitly-moral pattern of dramatic action (scene, agent, act, purpose, and means or agency) from what Burke calls the more "morbid" pattern it will eventually bring to mind (the guilt-redemption cycle), if you follow through, via implications, from thought to thought. My "morbid" personality, I guess, seems always to propel me toward the thunder and lightning of full-blown conflict, on stage or in the wings.

Following through, as you'll recall: A pentadic purpose suggests a negative, something *not* yet accomplished; that negative, even the so-called informative negative, conjures a command, even if ever so slightly, an exhortation to do or not to do, believe or not to believe, accept or not to accept, whatever; the rules, explicit or implicit, on those counts of proposed attitude or behavior, that human purposes must confront and reconnoiter in almost any venue you can think of, invite obedience or disobedience, in the face of possible sanctions, and are therefore ethically or legally tinged; and from that contingency of rules and threats, definitive drama, drama fully realized or hovering, continually troubles the symbolizing animal.

In *LASA*, Burke puts this trajectory of implications in characteristically elliptical fashion: "There is a gloomy route, of this sort: If *action* is to be our key term, then *drama*; for drama is the culminative form of action (this is a variant of the 'perfection' principle discussed in the previous chapter [culmination: the climax of the trajectory]. But if *drama*, then *conflict*. And if *conflict*, then *victimage*. Dramatism is always on the edge of this vexing problem, that comes to a culmination in tragedy, the song of the scapegoat" (54-55; emphasis in original).

Ellipsis: Some steps are missing, but we get the idea: The pentadic terms imply, find their consummation in, the guilt-redemption terms.

You can, however, cut the pentad loose from its trajectory of implications. You can use it as a flexible and independent

analytical tool. Burke wrote a whole book about why and how to do so, *A Grammar of Motives*. Other works of his touch on this theme, also. Burke acknowledges that his pentadic concepts are not new. Especially in *GM, LASA*, and his essay “Dramatism,” he credits, and finds intersubjective support for the pentad in, the Bible, Aristotle, other Greek philosophers, Medieval philosophers, Taoism, Islam, Immanuel Kant, William James, and sociologist Talcott Parsons. Even the standard questions newspaper reporters are taught to answer in their lead paragraphs---tell the reader, up front, who, what, why, how, when, and where---reflect pentadic concerns. And *why* wouldn’t they? These queries are rooted in the grammar of the language journalists use.

Burke’s creative contributions to the long-standing conversation on the word “act” and its associated notions, by way of his “grammar of motives,” are at least three:

In philosophies, ideologies, orientations to life and human relationships, ways of thinking in general, one pentadic term, one of these basic forms of thought, tends to get emphasized. Here’s where Burke’s obsession with the motives of “perfection,” “hierarchy,” and what he calls “entelechy” come into play. There’s a human inclination, inherent in the idealizing predispositions of language itself, toward crediting one motive, one term, one angle of view as *primus inter pares*, first among equals. In attributing causes, explaining why persons do what they do, humans are constantly tempted toward “tunnel vision.” We asked in Chapter 1, for instance, what causes poverty and homelessness? Some will emphasize free “act” or baneful personal, or “agential,” traits. The poor choose to be shiftless and unproductive, or haven’t the moral fiber to be other. They are primarily responsible for their dire condition. Or they lack the attributes to do better. Others point to “scene.” A bad neighborhood, downtrodden parents, a deprived upbringing are to blame.

You’ve read a great deal about “hierarchy” in Chapter 2. You may learn more about “perfection” and “entelechy” in chapters 4 and 5.

Second, another pentadic term will often be coupled with this source of overarching explanation in what Burke calls a “ratio.” A “scene-act ratio,” or correspondence, purports to show how a given context, large-scale or very small-bore, prompts a given action or whole series of actions. Obviously, different historical epochs and various cultures within those time-frames are often cited as major causes for what the sociologists call “normative

orientation of actions.” For example, women in the Western world did not often seek or achieve professional prominence in the mid-19th century. They rarely even went to college. Now, women excel in virtually all professions and comprise 56 percent of college undergraduates.

Women in Middle Eastern cultures today? Don’t ask.

Any ratio you can think of, agency-act, act-agent, scene-purpose, or whatever, will likely find expression in some rhetorical appeal. In *GM*, Burke extensively examines and classifies philosophies according to which pentadic term each highlights. You’ll read about those philosophies in Chapter 13.

And, third, here’s the kicker in Burke’s insightful “grammar”: These basic forms of thought that imply one another are, in each case, not tied down to any particular entities or processes whatsoever. They are eminently flexible. Burke cites “war” in illustration. It can, of course, be an “act,” as in the often iterated “act of war.” It can be a “scene,” as in Ernest Hemingway’s *Farewell to Arms*, where war serves as backdrop to a tragic love story. War can be an “agency,” a means to an end, as per the German general who, circa World War I, famously characterized armed conflict as diplomacy by another means. It can be an end or “purpose,” surely the implication of the biography, *Adolf Hitler: Man of Strife*, and Napoleon’s reported and infamous statement that he found nothing more exhilarating than a battlefield strewn with the bodies of dead soldiers. War can even be an “agent.” How else do we construe the Roman deity, Mars, god of war?

What is the human body, but a “scene” for the Apostle Paul, whose soul was constantly in conflict with its depraved temptations; an “act” by its Creator in the Western religions; a “purpose” for the woman or man on the machines at the athletic club; a “means” or “agency” for football or baseball players in quest of a lucrative career; even a very-much-diminished “agent” for contemporary materialists like Steven Pinker, who prescind the “ghost in the machine,” i.e., any sort of immaterial spirit, from their motivational calculations.

In *GM*, Burke uses the image of a furnace to account for these linguistic/pentadic transformations. Terms “congealed” in their reference in one manifestation descend into the cauldron, there become molten, liquid, and pliable, and then emerge and harden into terminologies suited for quite different attributions and generation of motives. The relationships and meanings of these pentadic concepts, however, remain, on that high level of

abstraction, the very same. Start with any of the terms, and it implies the other four. The “symmetry of the pentad,” as Burke puts it, drives symbol-users onward in “development,” and upward toward a “Title of Titles,” that one pentad-related “Rome term” toward and from which all roads lead.

As I said, I have no pristinely pentadic wares to put on display. I recommend as exemplar the book by Clarke Rountree, cited in our list of references. *Judging the Supreme Court: Construction of Motives in Bush vs. Gore* will give you an excellent introduction to this salient facet of Burke’s thought and critical practice.

Addendum 4

A Gloss on "Acting," "Being," and "Identifying"

Now wait a second, you might say. We get the idea that we can call language dramatic "action" in the sense that there are no negatives out there in the real world, only "positive" things that we access through our five senses. We ourselves bring the "not" and its variations, like "never," to our descriptions and characterizations of those tangible objects, and to our narrative accounts about them. There are no negatives on that landscape and in its storied depiction that we can see or physically sense. We surely are "acting," not just describing, when we say that something is *not* the case. The negative comes from "in us," not from "out there." Got that.

We note, however, your saying that merely "asserting that something *is* the case"---forget about what kind of verb we're using, action or linking---is, in itself, an "act" of some kind. Would you please elaborate? The verb "to be" and its variants are, in fact, distinguished *from* "action" verbs, are they not, in those grammars you speak so highly of?

Very true. "Is" is a linking verb, or being verb, unlike "run." "Run" plainly is a word that describes an action that somebody or some thing is doing. "Is," "was," and "will be," all by themselves, in contrast, just seem to sit there, inert. There's no "action" inside those terms.

But: The symbolizer, or person making that "being" statement, is, herself or himself, performing a linguistic or dramatic "act" in making that "being" assertion. Burke puts it this way: "*To be* is the act of acts. [Etienne] Gilson makes much of the fact that the copulative [or linking] verb is grammatically in the active voice. Sociologically, we may note how well this identification between act and being served a feudal society built upon the maintenance of fixed social status" (*GM* 227, n. 7; emphasis in original).

Why, for Burke in particular, is that so? It is so because a "being" statement, or the linking together of a noun subject and a noun predicate complement, or a noun subject and an adjective

predicate complement, actively puts that noun subject in its “place.” “Placement, by the selection of some specialized theme,” Burke says, “. . . is a kind of ‘partial Creation’” (*GM* 86). And “Creation” is Burke’s consummate term for “Act.” The purest, “*most complete*” Act, as the Western theologians conceive it, is God’s Creation, for there was no context constraining it, other than God Himself (*GM* 59-72; emphasis in original).

In addition, though traditional grammarians would, or might, make a distinction between an “is” followed by an identification and an “is” followed by a categorization, Burke would not do so. “Identification,” you’ll find out, is Burke’s key term in persuasion, or rhetorical appeal. Identifications, or “placements” on the good side or bad side of moral worth (dependent, of course, on which audience you’re addressing) can be made in all sorts of ways, via predication of any kind, synonymy, comparison or contrast, apposition, stated or implied juxtaposition, what have you.

What are the “linkages,” the “what-goes-with-what,” that a speech, essay, literary work, or back-fence conversation is fashioning (*P&C*)? Inquiring minds *do* want to know, because those identifications, those linkages or juxtapositions, explicit or implicit, made by action verbs or linking verbs, are the very stuff of dramatic “action,” Burke style.

Addendum 5

Reconciling “Warrantable Outrage” And Burkean Comedy

Gregory Desilet and I picked up on Simons’ theme of “warrantable outrage.” In “Choosing a Rhetoric of the Enemy: Kenneth Burke’s Comic Frame, Warrantable Outrage, and the Problem of Scapegoating,” we proposed a way of transcending the divide between rhetorically tragic or melodramatic outrage, on the one hand, and the charitable attitude and actions of Burke’s comedy, on the other (see under Desilet in Works Cited). Follow the form of an arpeggio, so to speak. Produce in temporal succession the tones of a discursive chord that makes for ultimate harmony, rather than doing so simultaneously. Abide the discord of tragedy, or melodrama, which is to say, really hard-nosed political belly-punching, in the early stages of a crisis, as circumstances require. Emphatically identify and censure, as well as forcefully oppose, destructive wrongdoing. But as the drama unfolds, maintain, or renew, a fundamentally comic disposition.

Like Burke in his essay, “The Rhetoric of Hitler’s ‘Battle,’” nurture a “meta-perspective” (*PLF* 191-220). Assuming a “metaperspective” means looking at a question on a higher plane, or from a vantage point above the ordinary. Scapegoat the Others’ scapegoating, but not the Others themselves, in their essence. Pass the details of the conflict through the filter of Burke’s “comic” screen. View with some skepticism your own points and premises, not just those of the other side. Come at the searing clash of interests and values from many angles, as time and altered conditions permit. Cultivate self-criticism, not just blind fury toward supposedly thoroughly guilty adversaries. In the end, abjure the characterization of any *persons*, if not their acts, as ontologically “vicious.” A refined, evolved attitude then in place, you make your defensive outrage “warranted,” not merely primal. At the propitious moment, you can treat seemingly “evil” wrongdoers and their violent actions as “mistaken.” Do so via pretense, if need be. Let go of the stark contraries of war and atrocity history vouchsafes. Pragmatically, no good comes from prolonging, *beyond the necessary*, a cycle of tragic retaliation. As

Desilet and I conclude:

Assuming the attitude of the comic frame as a strategy works to apply a brake to the destructive cycle of emotions that fuels scapegoating victimage. The comic frame [ultimately] works against the worst ravages of scapegoating by forcing communities to think in new ways about human agency [how “free” do we actually seem, now, in the age of the genome?] and by strengthening due process through the double-visioning required for all [“accura(te)”] assessing and assigning of wrongdoing. (359; *PLF* 219)

“Double-visioning” means being systematically “fair and balanced” to all concerned, to whatever extent practical.

Our exemplar from the annals of combat was Franklin D. Roosevelt. Roosevelt rallied the United States in tragic accents at its Pearl Harbor moment, 8 December 1941. He used such terms as “infamy,” “treachery,” “dastardly,” “sought to deceive,” and “grave danger” in the face of enormous naval losses and an American West Coast open to possible invasion. He spoke of intense striving, “righteous might,” and “absolute victory.” He rhetorically and successfully mobilized a vast response to the real threat of ruin that confronted our nation (see Roosevelt, *Speeches*).

Yet, as the war approached its climax, the President reached out to the enemy with words of hoped-for reconciliation. In late 1943 and 1944, in two speeches in particular, Roosevelt described the opponents in this way: “In all peoples, without exception, there live some instinct for truth, some attraction toward justice, some passion for peace.” The Germans, especially, were “buried under a brutal regime. We bring no charge against the German race, as such, for we cannot believe that God has eternally condemned any race of humanity.” In these addresses, Roosevelt “envisioned the day when . . . Axis powers . . . would once again join the community of nations in a cooperative and constructive manner” (C-Span Presidential Library Series, 2008, DVD; *New York Times*, 22 October 1944).

It need hardly be added that after the war and his passing, Roosevelt’s humane call was reified in the inclusion of Germany in the Marshall Plan in Europe, and a democratic occupation, free of brutal revenge, in Japan.

The discursive and reified “comedy” of late- and post-

World War II, however, followed, not preceded, tragic appeals and actions.

Addendum 6

More on Purpose as a Negative And as a Command

On further review, the transition from the notion of a “purpose” and its implicit connection with the “negative,” on the one hand, and the inevitable trajectory of purpose-as-a-negative toward a “morally-tinged good or value,” or a “perversion” thereof, on the other, may require elaboration. I say “may require,” because you might not read Chapter 4 on the “Negativity of Dramatic Action.” That chapter should sufficiently connect the dots.

Here’s the problem that may require insertion of another step or two from purpose-as-a-negative to Maslow’s list of human purposes or motivations as inevitably “dramatic,” as admonitory, as implicit inducements to corrective action, as fraught with the potential for “moral conflict.” Two kinds of negative statements are typically cited. One can be called the “semantic” negative, or “scientific” negative, or “informative” negative: “It is not.” The other is labeled the “hortatory” negative, the negative of “command” or “admonition”: “Thou shalt not,” or, “You must not,” or, “You should not.” From a “positivist,” “empiricist,” or strictly “scientific” point of view, these two kinds of negative assertions are usually sharply differentiated. “It is not” just states a fact, with no ethical connotations, no editorial slant, no tugging at our sleeve or whispering in our ear to take this “fact” and make it our own, “or else.” That’s what so-called “positivists” and some scientists tend to say. We’re dealing here, when we claim that something “is not” the case---we’re dealing here with just a “factual” statement, pure and simple.

Burke says no, that’s not how language works. The “it is not” piggybacks onto the “thou shalt not.” That’s where the negative in human life got started, in fear and trembling, in warning and threat, Burke theorizes (*LASA* 419-79). The “it is not” is a moderated version of the original, “Watch out,” “Don’t do that,” or, “Thou shalt not,” but *only* a moderated version, not a distinct and separate rendering. “It is not” is different in intensity, not in kind. It makes an implicit command, or an implicit appeal, to “look at things this way,” or your rejection will likely have, or

may have, some kind of downside.

Burke's dramatism has been called a "magical" view of language, as opposed to the "scientific." Dramatism says that both "it is not" and "it is" as well function in the human mind as a kind of "spell." And do note that, as a "magic spell" that acts sort of coercively, the "it is" can be more accurately worded as an implied negative, "Don't fail to note, believe, or accept that it is, or *this is*, the case," whatever the point being made may be. "We *command* you to so credit, assent to, what we are declaring." Or, "We *implore* you to do so."

In *The Philosophy of Literary Form*, Burke uses the terms "decree" for "command" and "prayer" for "implore." A statement of fact works kind of like something lifted from the Ten Commandments, or, if you wish, a plea or urgent request on the order of a "secular prayer." "Please, please take what we are saying to heart. Do it!" "Ordinarily," these "ingredients [the "decree" and the "prayer," are] interwoven in a given utterance," Burke says (*PLF* 5).

Burke illustrates this imperative of language via a passage he takes from another source:

Neo-positivism [not "positivism"] has done much in revealing the secret commands and exhortations in words---as Edward M. Maisel, in *An Anatomy of Literature*, reveals in a quotation from [Rudolf] Carnap, noting how the apparent historical creed: "There is only one race of superior men, say the race of Hotentots, and this race alone is worthy of ruling other races. Members of these other races are inferior," should be analytically translated as: "Members of the race of Hotentots! Unite and battle to dominate the other races!" The "facts" of the historical assertion are but a strategy of inducement; apparently describing the *scene* for the action of a drama, they are themselves a dramatic *act prodding to a further dramatic act*. (*PLF* 5; emphasis in original)

Just one more step is needed: Maslow's list of human purposes or motivations is not here expressed in explicit sentences, only in one- or two-word headings. There are, in this listing of Maslow's objectives, no full-blown statements that can be rephrased as, "Don't fail to note, believe, or accept that physical well-being, safety, belongingness, esteem, and self-fulfillment are

needs and requirements for a good and respectable human life; you'd better heed what I say and work to attain these goals." Burke's theory of "entitlement" and stress on "connotation" come to the fore, in this instance. Even in mere listing or outlining, these titular terms imply the "decree" and the "prayer." Burke says, "The overtones of a usage are revealed by 'the company it keeps'" (*PLF* 35). We're prodded to fill in the missing parts ourselves by way of the "company" these principles tend to keep. Put another way: If there's *language*, there's *meaning*; if meaning, *persuasion*, or a go at it; if *persuasive appeal*, then *potential conflict*, if the entreaty suggested by a term goes unrequited. An inevitably suasive potency inheres in symbols, however they are employed, elliptically or expansively.

A noted Burke scholar once said, we can sum up what dramatism is about with the word "connotation."

In sum, that's why we can say, "Examined in terms of its implications . . . , a *purpose* not only names a negative and thus epitomizes language as verbal action. It also names a morally-tinged good or value" that serves, in so many words, as a "rule" that undergirds the social order. These needs really have to be met, in one way or another, or blame will be laid.

See page 59 for more on Burke's theory of "entitlement."

Addendum 7

Correspondence with Burke: On Theology

You'll note that in Chapter 5, on Dramatism/Logology as a "generic theology," I quote from correspondence I received from Burke on this question. On the back cover of this tome, you might also have read the summary response Burke gave to the back and forth I had with him just prior to the Burke Conference, sponsored by Temple University, March, 1984. There, Burke is quoted as having said, in respect to his putative status as a theologian, "Well, Ed Appel has made a powerful argument that I am."

If you are interested, what follows is that correspondence in its entirety. Some of the points I make found their way into my article and chapter on the issue, but not all. Here are my three communications, and Burke's two.

November 19, 1983

Dear Mr. Burke,

Enclosed is the first chapter of the dissertation about which I spoke to you on the telephone a few days ago. I plan to submit a version of this chapter to the "Burke Conference" coming up in March at Temple University [actually at the Bellevue Stratford Hotel in Philadelphia]. What I am asking for is your view of the validity of my inferences from your philosophy in the construction of the critical method I propose. I know you are busy on your own work. [Burke told me so in the phone call.] Any response you can give to my paper at whatever time, even if it's only a few words spoken at the meeting in March, I would profoundly appreciate.

I would like to emphasize and clarify a few of the points I make in the proposal. First, when I suggest that Dramatism is a "theology," I am not saying it is a theology in the same sense that, for example, Augustine's system is a theology. I state that Dramatism may best be understood as an "incarnational theology *in principle*." That is to say, it centrally features the effect that the *idea* of God, or if you will the "god-term," produces in our

language, therefore in our minds, therefore within our bodies, and therefore in the social interact as we communicate with others. I'm not making a claim that Dramatism's emphasis on this dynamic counts in any conclusive way on one side or the other of the question whether a Divine Reality exists beyond human beings and their language. As you note at the outset of *The Rhetoric of Religion* (quoted on page 32 of the chapter) and in the climactic passage I take from *The Rhetoric of Motives* (quoted on pages 34 and 35), Dramatism is neutral on this question, insisting only that nature's "nonverbal ground" must have contained the "potentiality of the verbal." That is a strong insistence. But the point I am making, nevertheless, is simply that to understand what Dramatism is saying about the way human beings are and the way human beings act, individually and in concert, conceiving of Dramatism as a theology *in principle* is helpful and perhaps necessary.

Second, my deducing from the principles of Dramatism the "nine indexes of dramatic intensity" as a critical tool is not tied to the debate as to whether or not one should or should not use the word "theology" when speaking of Dramatism. On page 302 of *The Rhetoric of Religion*, you define a "theology" as a "system" that "retains in essence the principle of perfectionism." Since Dramatism most emphatically "essentializes" or rationalizes the principle of perfectionism, it would seem to me that the word "Dramatism" eminently "goes with" both the terms "theology" and the "essentializing of the principle of perfectionism" in an associational cluster. But I can still concede that point without sacrificing the nine indexes. For rhetorical purposes, I can give away the subject and claim just the predicate in that definition on page 302. If one will merely grant that Dramatism is a system that essentializes or rationalizes or works out to the end of the line the principle of perfection, that is all I ask. The proposal of the nine indexes of dramatic intensity [see Addendum 1, pp. 367-69, below] as critical standards will then, I submit, be reasonable, as will the proposal of the "Dramatistic standard of truth" made on page 39.

Thank you again for your kind attention, and for the gift to us all of your great books. The legacy you have given the world we are only beginning to fathom and appreciate.

Sincerely,
Edward C. Appel

November 24, 1983

Dear Mr. Appel,

Your Ms recd. I'll be a while getting around to it. But a glance at your letter suggests that you might read my Letter to the Editor in the London *Times Literary Supplement* of August 12 (anent "Dramatism and Logology"). I think that my analogizing of Dramatism with Ontology and Logology with Epistemology might be useful. Also, the two definitions of the term "logology" in the OED. Or for a first rough approximate: Theology wd. pronounce the term with the accent thus: "words about *God*," logology wd. accent it: "*words* about 'God.'" And in Dante's set-up, Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise would each have its particular kind of "perfection." Perhaps, if any of this suggests a modification of your position, you might write me a page or so to that effect, before I read your pages.

Best wishes,
K. Burke

December 28, 1983

Dear Mr. Burke,

Thank you for your kind reply to my letter and for your acknowledgment of the receipt of my manuscript. As you suggested, I have read your letter to the *Times Literary Supplement* and have looked up the definitions of "logology" in the OED. To the other points you mentioned in your reply I have also given due consideration. Am I then prepared in any way to modify my position on the question of the alleged theological dimensions of Dramatism and/or logology? I approach the issue from these angles:

(1) One side of me argues that, as I press my case with you and prepare to bring it before the discipline of speech communication, I ought to drop the theology claim. In this day and age, it's a rhetorical red flag. What does it matter anyhow? The heart of my proposal is the nine indexes of dramatic intensity that I suggest as critical criteria. In the presentation of six of the nine indexes as at least rough standards of measurement of rhetorical power, no soritical synapses have to be leaped in any case. These six indexes come directly from Kenneth Burke, already pristinely perfected, as I have documented. [Remember what Burke says in *RR*, p. 291: "An ultimate 'error' is as important in rhetorical appeal as an ultimate 'truth.'"] Why not therefore take Occam's

razor and cut away a gratuitous and counter-productive assertion? As long as others grant that Dramatism and logology retain in essence the principle of perfection, or the principle of entelechy, what could be the problem? Let sleeping dogs lie [all five of them?---*LASA* 73-74].

(2) An even better reason for abjuring the theological claim is the patent fact that neither Dramatism nor logology can be deemed “theological” *in the traditional sense of the term*. Van Harvey, in his *Handbook of Theological Terms*, defines *theology*, “narrowly considered,” as having to do “only with the existence and nature of the Divine” (p. 239). Theology so construed requires a belief system centered upon assumed transcendent realities. Such a definition leaves the logologer, as logologer, outside the fold.

(3) But the narrow, traditional definition of theology, what one might label “brand name” theology, provides not the only avenue of approach, nor necessarily the most promising. Harvey hints at another definition: “Broadly considered, theology covers the entire range of issues concerning man’s [sic] relationship to God” (p. 239). Though he doesn’t get us the whole way there, in this construction Harvey at least nudges us toward a *generic* conception of theology.

Hans Kung, in his recent and acclaimed book *On Being a Christian*, takes us the whole way there. Summarizing and adapting a formulation of Heinz Zahrnt’s, Father Kung lists five “presuppositions” of the “present-day understanding of God” no theological enterprise can ignore without, as the Dramatist would put it, foreclosing on successful “socialization” of one’s symbols. The five recalcitrant realities are, in outline:

- (a) The modern scientific explanation of the world.
- (b) The modern understanding of authority.
- (c) Ideological criticism of social misuse of religion by state or church.
- (d) The modern shift of awareness from the hereafter to the here and now and toward this “opportunity”:

Life, which perhaps has lost something of its depth, might now gain in intensity. Have we recognized how God in this very life thus comes closer to man [sic], challenging him now in the midst of his secularity? Or have we simply turned secularizing into secularism, into a world

view, and lost sight of God as the One with whom we are involved unconditionally at all times in the present life: the immanent Transcendent? (p. 82)

(e) The modern orientation to the future, suggesting that God is the One who is to come, not the One to Whom we look longingly Upwards.

From these recalcitrant presuppositions, Kung fashions a new and apposite definition of God and talk about Him. He [He/She] is “not a naïve, anthropological projection: God as ‘supreme being’ dwelling, in a literal or spatial sense, ‘above’ the world; not an ‘enlightened,’ deistic projection: God ‘outside’ the world in a spiritual or metaphysical sense, living in a realm beyond this world (‘hintersworld’), as an objectivized, hypostasized Opposite; but a coherent understanding of reality: God in this world and this world in God; God not only as part of reality---a (supreme) finite alongside finite things---but *the infinite in the finite, the absolute in the relative*, God as the here-hereafter, transcendent-immanent, most real reality in the heart of things, in man [sic] and in men’s history” (pp. 82-83).

Into such a generic framework, Dramatism/logology seems snugly to fit. The Original, Number One logologer has discovered the “infinite in the finite, the absolute in the relative,” and has pronounced it the essence of human being. The “intuition of the negative” he has called it. Since “you can go on forever saying what a thing is not” (*Rhetoric of Religion*, p. 19), or project in any direction infinitely and negatively from what a thing positively is to what it is not, you have found infinity when you have found the negative, and vice versa. Indeed it is the “infinite negative.” The concept of “perfection” inherent in the notion of the “infinite-negative,” as adumbrated in the phrase the “perfection of the negative” (*LASA*, p. 461), makes possible, the Dramatist would say makes inevitable, the absolutizing of the relative, contingent, and transient phenomena and events in which human life begins and is emersed.

(4) Thus the question seems in part a semantic one, but even more so a matter of socializing our conceptions of what, in 1983, a “theology” can be deemed to consist in or not consist in. Still closer to the point than Kung’s generic definition of theology is that of Burke himself, which I quote in footnote 54 in the paper and which I cited in my first letter, namely, any “system” that

“retains in essence the principle of perfectionism.” That’s even more “secularized” and generic a definition than Kung’s, witness the illustrative “theology” that is presented with it, atheistic communism (*Rhetoric of Religion*, p. 302). Covered with adumbrations of the negative, that definition recognizes even more incisively “how God in this very life thus comes closer to man [sic], challenges him now in the midst of his secularity,” even if Burke at this stage would prefer to call that god “Atheos” (*Rhetoric*, p. 291). Not that I’m suggesting that’s the case.

Refuge therefore can no longer be found within the redoubt of the “secular” nineteenth-century definition of “logology,” “the science of words,” not when that science bends the knee to the perfections of the infinite-negative. Or, to put it another way, when theology is conceived of in the contemporary generic sense, then the metasystem, the “science of words” that spies the theological motive at work even in “language” used “trivially” (*Rhetoric of Religion*, p. vi), must be viewed a *fortiori* as a theology itself. In terms of Harvey’s first and traditional definition, such a metasystem is not theological. In terms of Kung’s and Burke’s contemporized definitions, it is even more theological than the “brand-name” “ism” that vies for our hearts and minds. It sees a generality and pervasiveness the other does not.

(5) Which gets us to the nub of the matter, the reason why I’m not of a mind to chuck the theology claim for extraneous reasons of convenience. I’m a Dramatist. I read messages like a Dramatist. I’ve been taught by the master Dramatist. I follow the arc of the symbolic action. I note “what goes with what.” I ferret out the internal consistencies. I expose the connections by which a logic is progressively and selectively created by the rhetor *unconsciously*, as Burke has advised us (somewhere in *Literary Form*). Categorical assertions like, “My aim is to be secular and empirical” (*Times Literary Supplement*, August 12, 1983, p. 859), and, “This dialogue [at the end of the *Rhetoric of Religion*] is intended to illustrate the principles not of *theology* but of *logology*, a purely secular subject” (*Rhetoric of Religion*, p. 5) are to be taken as ponderable parts of the set of equations, but not necessarily decisive ones, particularly when the second quotation above is followed immediately by this tell-tale advisement:

Basically, it is designed to uphold the position that, in the study of human motives, we should begin with complex theories of transcendence (as in theology and metaphys-

ics) rather than with the terminologies of simplified laboratory experiment.

Again and again and again, Dramatism/logology is depicted in Burke as “going with” and featuring a transcendent, metaphysical view of language and human being. The logologer sees the relationship of words to things as one of “Spirit . . . to Matter” (*Rhetoric of Religion*, p. 16). And these metaphysical views of reality are conceived to be but “coy theologies” (*LASA*, p. 46; *Rhetoric of Religion*, pp. 16-17). Who’s the “coy theologian?” I ask.

(6) I am now deep into a rehash of the argument I present in the paper in question. In that argument I have used extensively the text of Burke’s books. I quote from them liberally and fairly. I will yield to any counter-argument that successfully rebuts my explication of those texts---or that successfully assails the texts. They were written in the English language. Rich and dense without a doubt, they are not out of reach for the diligent reader, despite the often unlinear arrangement, elliptical style of presentation, and esoteric vocabulary. The author cannot overlook them. He sold them to me. They must count as the basis, or point of departure, for any discussion of his philosophy and its implications.

Do I, for example, misconstrue the passage from the *Rhetoric* from which I derive four principles---from which I take four quotations really---that by themselves alone can support, I contend, everything I do in my prospectus (pp. 34-36 of the paper)? Have I misread and misquoted? Multiply that passage by ten, twenty, fifty.

(7) But in answer to your question about the “modification of my position” in the light of your response, yes, I will modify, to this extent:

(a) I now base my proposal on this: on Dramatism as presented by Burke in his nonfiction and nonpoetic books from *Counter-Statement* to *Language as Symbolic Action* (p. 5 of the paper).

(b) I have altered and rewritten a portion of p. 30 of the treatise, now averring only that Burke *implies* that Dramatism/logology is a theology. My original draft was far too exuberant on that score. In it I was using the phrase “says explicitly” in the Dramatistic sense of “that’s what the equations plainly add up to.”

(c) Perhaps in subsequent drafts I should call Dramatism/

logology a “generic theology” rather than an “incarnational theology in principle.” That phrasing may be a more neutral, less tendentious way of putting it. The two definitions [of “generic”] in Merriam-Webster are certainly apt:

a: Relating or applied to or descriptive of all members of a genus, species, class, or group: common to or characteristic of a whole group or class: typifying or subsuming: not specific or individual: general.

b: Available for common use: not protected by trade-mark registration: nonproprietary. (p. 945)

Even more apropos is the definition given for “generic” in the list of synonyms for “universal”:

Generic applies to *that which characterizes every individual in a category* or group and may suggest further that what is designated may be thought of as *a clear and certain classificatory criterion*. (p. 2501; emphasis added)

That is surely it, the certain criterion being, in this case, the essentialization of the principle of perfection, the rationalization of the infinite found in the finite, the subsumption of all that is relative under the authority or purview of an ultimate absolute. For the Dramatist/logologer that ultimate absolute is most simply denominated “the negative” and all its works.

One more thing. I’ll be reflecting on your distinction between Dramatism as ontology and logology as epistemology made in your letter to the *Times*. Since the distinction is one that has been traditionally made in theology and metaphysics, I do not see it detracting from the argument above.

Thank you again for your reply to my letter. I’ll thank you ahead of time for any attention you may be able to give to my paper. I look forward to meeting you at the “Burke Conference” in March.

Sincerely,
Ed Appel

January 9, 1984

Dear Mr. Appel,

You have done plenty of conscientious, observant work

on your presentation. Yet I do believe that the whole issue can be reduced to a few points.

First, Logology my style is in line with William James on “the will to believe.” Though one might *personally* be a theist or an atheist, my analysis of how the *word* “God” behaves can provide no such judgment. You undertake to show how it fits if the term refers to an actual entity so called.

Two, since I claim that it should fit, be there or be there not a God, I “naturally” welcome your testimony to the effect that you find my analysis in keeping with a belief in God.

Three, how outright, downright atheists might respond I don’t yet know. But with those who are agnostics or tepidly along the slope of disbelief, I mostly confront comments to do with the sheer dialectics of the case.

But in all fairness I should point to this consideration with regard to the “principle of perfection.” Logology uses the term not just “straight,” but *ironically*. Satan in his way is as “perfect,” as “to the end of the line,” as God. Hell is as “perfect” as Heaven. I ‘gin fear that, in o’er-deseccularizing my logological involvements with the negative, you will “prove” me to be a Manlichee, with Mephisto as real as the logos.

Best luck,
Kenneth Burke

February 3, 1984

Dear Mr. Burke,

Thank you for your reply to my second letter. I truly appreciate your taking time out from your busy schedule to reflect on my ideas. In this letter I want to say one last thing on the theology question, and then to give a reminder.

You said in your letter that you do believe the whole issue can be reduced to a few basic points, and you proceeded to do so. I suggest it may finally be reducible to one point, this one:

Isn’t symbolic action a “counter-statement”? Isn’t language invariably “addressed” in answer to a problem? If so, then what or whom are we addressing with our *no-pragmatic-advantage self-sacrifice* by way of our succumbing to the “pure persuasion” symbols have the power to bring effectively to bear upon us? Who are we addressing---each one of us always, at least in part, in “pure persuasion”---if not the “Principles of Goodness and Evil in general”? (That’s *your* phrasing and *your* personified

capitalization, not mine. See the *Rhetoric*, p. 275.) What are the “Principle of Goodness” and the “Principle of Evil” if not Perfect Goodness and Perfect Evil? What is Perfect Goodness if not Divine Goodness? And what is Perfect Evil if not Satanic Evil?

According to Burke and Dramatism, language catches us all up, even unawares, in our response to the principle of “hierarchy in general” (*Rhetoric*, p. 270), in synecdoches of religious sacrifice, in acts of obeisance to the Divine or to the Satanic at least indirect and once removed. We are a strangely self-sacrificial creature, “strangely” because we are not compelled by instinct to be so self-sacrificial. In us, kinship alone does not produce social behavior. In the inner recesses of our heart, we choose a path of self-interference that aggrandizes those we do not even know. We respect wealth, but inexplicably, in terms of atom-of-self-interest scientism, we worship poverty.

The theological question, then, as a Dramatist/logologer would necessarily construe it, is a *rhetorical question*, a *question of addressment*, not a question of the existence of the ears being addressed. You say I “undertake to show how logology fits if the term refers to an actual entity so called.” As a logologer and at bottom, that is not what I am up to, even though I am personally a theist as you inferred from my letters. The Burke of the “motive” books not at all subtly implies, and I say Dramatism/logology coherently maintains, that we address trivially or profoundly, irreverently or penitently, obliquely or directly, a “vastness of magnitude, power, and distance disproportionate to ourselves” and beyond ourselves. This “vastness” we conceive to be infinite and perfect. Along with the view that such a notion of rhetoric can be labeled a “generic” theology, that is my only claim.

The reminder I wish to give you is that I covet your response to my “nine indexes of dramatic intensity” and my “Dramatistic standard of truth” as tools of rhetorical analysis and evaluation. Their utility, I maintain, is not dependent on whether or not one calls Dramatism a “theology,” but rather on whether Dramatism essentializes the principle of perfection. Those critical criteria are explained in the chapter I sent you from my dissertation. Whatever appraisal you might give them and whenever, I will be most appreciative of your kind attention.

Thank you again for all your consideration. I am looking forward to meeting you at the “Burke Conference.”

Sincerely,
Ed Appel

P.S. I am enclosing the three-page summary of the paper I am submitting to the “Burke Conference.” That summary effectively distills the dissertation chapter I have referred to.

Some short takes on this exchange:

Wayne Booth averred even more strongly than I, I think, that “Burke is best thought of as a theologian, or even a prophet.” Yet Booth acknowledged, also, Burke’s “claims to be an unbeliever” (“Kenneth Burke’s Religious Rhetoric” 25).

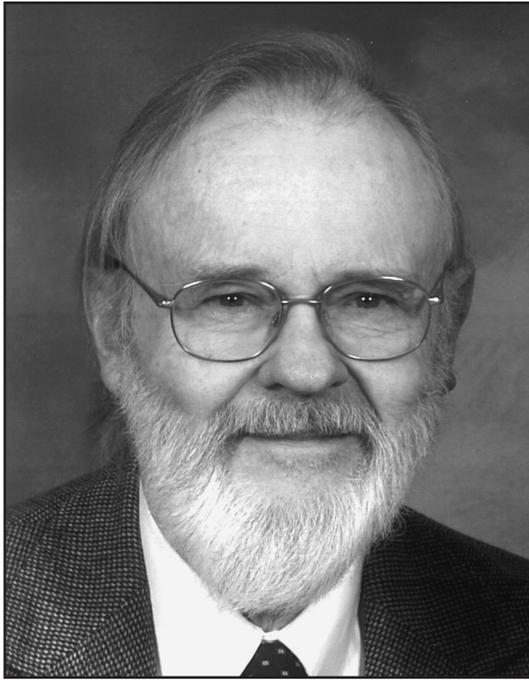
What Burke actually believed or didn’t believe is immaterial. Nontheist, agnostic, or ambivalent seeker after a Transcendence of the kind his view of language often seems to intimate, some measure of “theotropi[sm]” resonates and remains (Steven Mailloux, “Under the Sign of Theology: Kenneth Burke on Language and the Supernatural Order,” Ghent Conference, May, 2013). To paraphrase the title of one of Moliere’s plays, Burke may have been a theologian “In Spite of Himself.”

In addition, Burke was surely right in cautioning me in his last letter about the “irony,” as well as gross explanatory power, inherent in his take on the theological motive of perfection. He may have been incomplete in respect to that irony. The notion of the “perfectly good” as motive can forecast danger or excess, as well as the “perfectly bad.” One way or the other, even denizens of the “comic frame” do not altogether escape perfection’s pervasive inducements. “Comedians” only moderate that vital linguistic, indeed human, force. The hold of language and the negatives on the hearts and minds of the humblest of self-reflective symbolizers still works something of its “magic spell” (*PLF* 1-8, 119).

Finally, a basis, at least a basis, for theology in perhaps its paradigm form, beyond the merely generic, can be drawn directly from Burke in terms of this definition: Theism is the belief that human being, or the “ethical,” is “part of the universe” (*P&C* 256). More specifically, theism is the belief that what is unique about human beings, namely, the verbal and all that the verbal generates and represents, including the “ethical,” is an integral, inherent “part of the universe,” not just a wildly eccentric, accidental excrescence. It is the belief that “in its totality it [“nature,” and nature’s “extrahuman ground”] encompasses verbal and nonverbal both; and its ‘nonverbal’ ground must have contained the ‘potentiality’ of the verbal, otherwise the verbal could not have emerged from it” (*RM* 290).

Something of a genuine theology can be spun from those

leading points of departure, I do believe.



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“I have had the benefit of helpful responses on initial drafts from a number of knowledgeable scholars. Chief among these is Ed Appel” Clarke Rountree, University of Alabama Huntsville, *Judging the Supreme Court: Constructions of Motives in Bush vs. Gore*.

“A special note of thanks for *your* service [to his “honor roll” of 20 Associate Editors from his large Editorial Board] as a vintage of these desperate years, and still extra appreciation to **Ed Appel** and **Keith Ericson** who have written fluent, rapid, brilliant reviews and who have taken up difficult manuscripts that made other reviewers wring their hands.” Andrew King, Louisiana State University, Editor, *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 1999-2001.

“The article [on the rhetoric of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.] was a tremendous help to me as a literary critic. It gave me a deeper understanding of Dramatistic theory,

and how it relates to discourse. The subject matter was inspirational, in and of itself, but more so after reading the critique.” Nathan Fisk, Chairman, Ironwood Public Relations, in “Nate’s Writing Samples.”

“To what extent does the rhetorical criticism published within these pages meet the criteria outlined earlier? Some of the articles are exemplars of discovery research. For example, in ‘Kenneth Burke: Coy Theologian,’ Appel argues that despite Burke’s claim to the contrary, the noted rhetorical critic was at least a generic theologian. . . . To support his contested claim, Appel uses his encyclopedic knowledge of Burke’s writing plus a command of metaphysical thought.” Em Griffin, Wheaton College, in the *Journal of Communication and Religion*.

Question: “Are you a theologian?” Answer: “Well, Ed Appel has made a powerful argument that I am.” Kenneth Burke, at a gathering of scholars the first evening of the Kenneth Burke Conference on Discourse Analysis, Philadelphia, PA, March 1984, as reported by Herbert W. Simons, Temple University.

Edward C. Appel, Lock Haven University, holds an M.A. in Communication (University of Delaware), an M. Div. (Lancaster Theological Seminary), and a Ph. D. in Rhetoric and Communication (Temple University).

