



# Kenneth Burke Dies At Home In Andover November 19, 1993

## *KB and Burke: A Remembrance*

Don M. Burks

All of us had been expecting to hear that KB had “cleared out.” Yet when the message came it was somewhat shocking, as the ghost in Hamlet “so assiduously prepared for, is yet a surprise” (CS, 30).

The message came even as I was printing a course handout that crowds onto one page several of Burke’s statements on the dialectical and dramatic. Ranging from 1935 through 1984 the statements demonstrate that for half a century drama is the representative anecdote for Burke’s voluminous works (GM, 60).<sup>1</sup> In different voices, Burke, early and late, expresses consistently his dramatic and perspectival views.

Looking through the printout right after receiving the message of KB’s death, I felt a reassurance that has since become a transcendence I hope to share with fellow Burkeans. Indeed, others may have had similar experiences. The many voices of Burke are as alive as ever there in the text, as differing perspectival views, even though KB’s voice has been stilled. The voices are synecdochic, they are representative of Burke’s perspectivism. Unlike the terms of the pentad where each voice may constitute a complete vocabulary, some of these voices are so playful as to hardly merit the label of a perspective. Nevertheless, the voices all point to a master key in understanding Burke,

who is always the perspectivist. In tribute to KB, I turn to a few of the many voices of the Burke he leaves with us, focusing on the dialectical, the dramatic, as a generating device. KB will never be far away in this brief journey.

Of his friend, William Carlos Williams, “poet and physician,” Burke writes, that he was “An ebullient man” who “had this exceptional good luck: that his appeal as a person survives in his work. To read his books is to find him warmly there, everywhere you turn” (LSA, 282). Could any words better describe the author himself: Kenneth Burke, philosopher of language, poet, and yes, physician, dispenser of potent symbolic medicines as “Equipment for Living.” The Kenneth Burke Society has lost its “eponymous founder,” KB. As we knew we must lose him, we can be equally sure that the Burke of the texts survives. Those who were so fortunate as to know KB can continue enjoying the unique privilege of finding his spirit in the “boikwoiks”<sup>2</sup> at every turn. Future generations of Burkeans will be enriched by those

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works as we are, though it is unlikely that future students can enjoy, so much as we, *l'homme meme* who is so ever-present in the text.

And yet, some most certainly will do so. Just as we do, some of those future Burkeans will come to know the text, and to feel that they know the writer, that his spirit is with them.

In those last sentences you see a feeble attempt to imitate one of Burke's many midstream voice switches. Recall just one of them, for example. Consider the last sentence of a paragraph from "Literature as Equipment for Living," where Burke writes that a person "won't sit on the side of an active volcano and 'see' it as a dormant plain."

Opening sentence of next paragraph: "Often, alas, he will" (PLF, 298). Reader's translation: both voices, in their perspectival way, offer a view of truth.

After all, one sometimes feels as if one knows "two-gun Bill" Williams, or Theodore Roethke, Marianne Moore, William James, Whitman, and

Listen briefly to but a few of the voices of Burke. They are selected almost at random, but see how characteristic and familiar, yet inimitable they are:

But have I not painted myself into a corner? Let's see. . . . To review briefly. . . . Hopefully, I give myself one last chance. . . . Where are we, then? All told, where are we? My point is: . . . . Anyhow, the main point is this. . . . Do not get me wrong. So goes the dialectic!

That last statement, "So goes the dialectic" was as likely to come from KB himself as it is from Burke's text. A key to the charm of KB and Burke alike is that one is treated as an intellectual equal, even when it is painfully clear that one "ain't."

The egalitarian quality of KB is everywhere in the Burke text, even where the going gets tough. Consider the first several pages of RM, where

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# ○ nostra die

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Emerson, or even Coleridge and Kant, when following Burke's lead as teacher into their works. And sometimes one can feel a bit more at ease in the texts of Aristotle, Marx and Freud because of their influence on Burke, despite his many disagreements with and departures from them. Thus, there is the certainty that future students who read Burke, with all his direct address to them, will come to feel they know him, just as we who knew KB, our feelings of privileged access notwithstanding. Undergraduate students who read Burke seriously, though they never met him, sometimes surprise teachers of his works with new insights. This is all the more true of advanced students who undertake serious studies of Burke's work, whether or not they have met KB. A teacher of "boikwoiks" is likely to be taught by students no matter how familiar that teacher may be with the text. One must remain a student when teaching Burke since the only "way in" is through the dialectic. Here is one more reason why the works of Burke, with such rich dialectical qualities, will long remain.

Burke says in the first sentence of the introduction, "The only difficult portion of this book happens, unfortunately, to be at the start." Don't let him kid you; that's the master rhetorician speaking. As all Burkeans know, the book is usually difficult throughout, and yet Burke is talking to you from the first: "Note another result here" (p. 5). "Just what are we getting at here? . . . See what our problem is. We seem to be going two ways at once" (p. 9). At the end of that most difficult opening section, on page 19, just before the beginning of the discussion on "Identification," there is Burke with one of the themes most basic to his works, communication as love. He presents the theme again a few pages later, "communication being, as we have said, a generalized form of love" (37), and yet again, "For love is a communion of estranged entities. . . ." (177).

In the realm of nonsymbolic motion we are "estranged entities," isolated by the "principle of individuation."<sup>3</sup> Yet we can transcend that isolation through symbolic action. As the distinction

between nonsymbolic motion and symbolic action is basic to so much of Burke's work, early and late, so is the related theme, communication as love.

Readers might all agree that our answers to Burke's question, "Where are we, then? . . ." have sometimes been that we have no idea. Seemingly contradictory voices may at times confuse us, yet the more one comes to know the "boikwoiks" the more one sees how remarkably systematic, how balanced they are. In a small class in Burkean critical methods this semester we took the easy "way in" through the theory of form. Some class members are finding this opened a door directly to pentadic analysis, and another is finding that such analysis leads to entelechial patterns of thought.



Others are finding, of course, that Burke is ever the social and cultural critic, distinguishing some very bad medicines from useful kinds that may help us shape our symbolic worlds more constructively. In a "retrospective prospect" the turns of our dramatic philosopher, Burke, may sometimes seem as obvious as the distinction between the clean-cut good guy and the dirty crook in a cowboy movie. "But hold!" "It's more complicated than that." A Burkean cowboy, "an agile youth, wears fool's cap with devil's horns, and a harlequin costume of two colors, dividing him down the middle" (RR, 276).<sup>4</sup> There, indeed, is "perspective by incongruity." However complicated the going may sometimes get when following Burke, it is helpful to remember that in his analysis he

would equate the "'dramatic' with 'dialectic'" (PLF, 109). In reporting his analysis and interpretation of the ongoing human drama, here is a writer who in no aspect of his work would create "an appetite in the mind of the auditor" (i.e. reader/listener) without intending "the adequate satisfying of that appetite" (CS, 31).

For KB the dialogue ended when the motion stopped on XI/19/93 (using the way of dating he sometimes used), but for Burke, "Life is an unending dialogue; when we enter, it's already going on; we try to get the drift of it; we leave before it's over."<sup>5</sup> Thus, Burke is saying the dialogue will go on. "Decidedly so," as KB used to say. Quite literally of course, Burke provides us with many millions of words with which readers may continue to enrich the ongoing dialectic.

Let us turn from the dramatic dialectician for a moment to Burke, the poet, though even here, the loving dialectician is present. In a letter of May 5, 1982, his eighty-fifth birthday, KB

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## mortis

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writes: "Herewith my thanks for the birthday sentiments—also in behalf of Kierkegaard and Charlie Marcus. And that's very important, for my realistic dialectic is halfway btw. Kierkegaard's idealistic brand and Marx's materialistic ditto. (Ever the compromiser!)"

Acknowledging payment for his recent work at Purdue, and my later birthday greetings, KB was also "rounding out" his visit with kind remarks. "Twas much of a mellowness among youenz. . . . I think I had promised to send a copy of the enclosed."

The "enclosed" was a copy of two related poems he had read to an audience as part of his visit. He had brought along only a few copies of the following poems which were quickly passed among eager hands. On this requested copy he had written "the date of Libbie's demise, for I do so love the Latin way of doing such: 'day' in the middle, 'of our' and 'of death' surrounding. At least, that's how I take Latin to be." The date was "V/25/69":

Poems of Abandonment  
(to Libbie, who cleared out)

I. Genius Loci

Until you died, my Love  
Somehow I had belief in fear of ghosts.  
But now, in this lonely place  
that is so full of you  
whereby I am not in my essence over-lonesome,

what lovelier  
than if your spirit,  
the genius of this house,  
did materialize right here before me?

Dear Love,  
always I tried to earn you,  
but now you are the absolutely given

while I each night  
lie conscious

of my loss

After the death of his wife KB produced no more major books. Without her he apparently could not, in his seventies, sustain the great effort required for other books. This is certainly not to say he produced no more important work, for he made significant additions to the Burke text, some of which are cited in this remembrance. Any student of Burke's work would be seriously in error to disregard or even to "discount" these important additions. However, KB seemed to have made a decision to round out his life's work by becoming "his own living text," to use the extraordinarily apt phrase of William Rueckert.<sup>7</sup> What he then gave was l'homme meme with which many Burkeans new and old became familiar. The trade-off of "living text" for less addition to the literal text in his last score of years was for many of us a very good deal. We got to know the man, to carry on a dialectic with him, enabling us then to read Burke in better light. The "living text" could not have been a more helpful addition to the literal text, the text in print.

Returning again more directly to the dialectical process in Burke's work, those who do not quite

# Tendebantque manus

II. Postlude

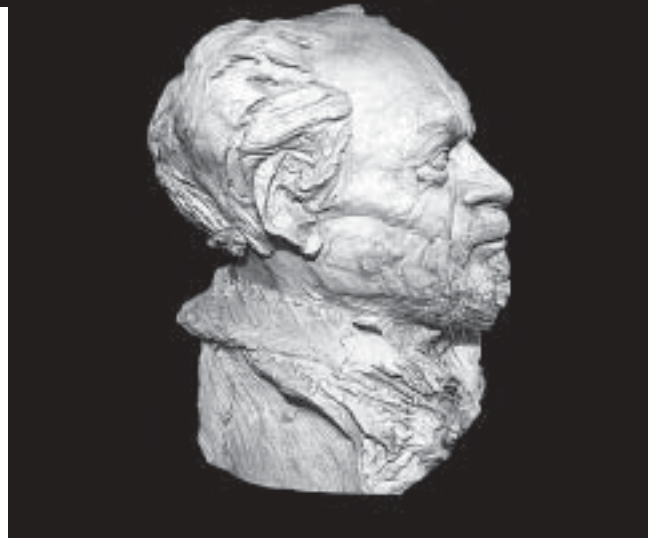
When something goes, some other takes its place.  
Maybe a thistle where had been a rose:  
or where lace was, next time a churchman's missal.  
Erase, efface (Life says) when something goes.

Her death leaves such a tangled aftergrowth,  
By God I fear I have outlived us both.

—Kenneth Burke

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Just above the date of his wife's death KB had written the Latin words, "nostrae dies mortis," which may be translated either "day of our death," or "days of our death."<sup>6</sup> Does not the last line of "Postlude" suggest that KB felt a most important self also died that day? There are at least as many selves, or voices, in Burke the poet as in the dialectician.



appreciate Burke's perspectivism—and there are some sympathetic readers of Burke among them—find no absolute in what they see as his relativism. Yet Burke is clear in contending, "that the dialectic process **absolutely must** be unimpeded, if society is to perfect its understanding of reality by the necessary method of give-and-take (yield-and-advance)."

Rejecting “absolutely and undeviatingly” any dictatorship which would impede the ongoing dialectic, Burke adds strong warning: “Silence the human opponent, and you are brought flat against the unanswerable opponent, the nature of brute reality itself” (PLF, 444). Clearly, the Burke that will always be there in the text thinks of himself as a realist, not as an idealist, as a perspectivist, albeit one of many voices, not as a relativist.

A main point in this remembrance is that the spirit of KB inhabits the Burke text, and that the text remains easily available. In an important sense the text is finally closed since KB will not himself add to it; but, for the past several years, the Burke books have been more available than ever before because of the University of California editions. That being so, it seems appropriate to remember here one aspect of what KB said at the final session of the 1990 convention of the Kenneth Burke Society, when he discussed what he called “operation benchmark.” More than one tape recording was made, and people may have differing impressions, but I take one sentence from the brief

enough.” There was then approving laughter on the part of many in the audience.

That moment represented in a small way the ingenuous ingeniousness that might come even from such a brief exchange between KB and those who cared greatly for him. Rountree’s point was needed to make more clear what KB seemed to be asking for. Even when a conversation is seriously intended to be dialectical, the different voices may be more like ships passing in the night if there are no reference points. A most important part of KB’s “operation benchmark” can be understood quite simply as textual reference. Clearly, there will be much disagreement regarding the meaning of Burke’s text. Nevertheless, the text can always be used as a reference point.

Did KB alone create the works of Burke? Of course not. He had the help of a great many friends, such as Williams and Malcolm Cowley, who were sometimes adversarial and quite stimulating to the dialectic from which he generated his writing. Above all, he had the immense help of an appreciative, understanding and cooperative family.

# ripae ulterioris amore

"And they stretched forth their hands, through love of the farther shore."—Virgil, *The Aeneid*

Whether there is or is not an ultimate shore towards which we, the unburied, would cross, transcendence involves dialectical processes whereby something here is interpreted in terms of something there, something beyond itself.

transcript of James Chesebro in which KB when quoting Burke says, as “eponymous founder” of the Society, “I just want to suggest that the way we do it, is that we call it ‘operation benchmark’ in the sense that we start with what you say, but we only ask that you say, ‘Burke says it this way, I say this,’ with some such reasons.”<sup>8</sup> He was here in perfect accord with his faith in the ongoing dialectic, hopeful that there be a continuing discussion of his work. Soon after KB uttered the quoted words, and others to that effect, Clarke Rountree, with most friendly and respectful deference said, “the problem is difference in opinion about what it is you’re saying.” To which KB responded, “That’s fair

Remember, for instance, that he seriously felt the five terms of the pentad are related to his five children. He had a father’s most genuine pride in those children. In a conversation in 1984 while seated in his kitchen, enjoying his favorite medicine, Absolut vodka (one suspects he liked the entelechial name almost as much as the product), he explained how each term matched a respective child. Then, with characteristic wit, he added that if there had been a bastard child, that would have been Attitude. Why? “Because attitude is everywhere but nowhere, a child that has no home.” The wit is characteristic because it has point, “the double kick” of a KB joke. (Perhaps it should also be noted that such expensive medicine as Absolut was for communion with company. Any generic brand might ordinarily suffice.)

Burke’s work expresses a *Zeitgeist*, which is doubtless one of the reasons there are remarkable parallels with other writers in this country as well as in Europe, though Burke’s work is a most distinctly American blend of influences such as Aristotle, Marx, Freud, Santayana and many others depending



on the perspective needed. Who else but Burke, however, will teach you, as an aside, that “the Hegelian *Zeitgeist* (as per ‘climate of opinion’)” and “*Weltanschauung*, attitudes toward life” are synonyms? (See PC, 304. This is from “Afterword: Permanence and Change: In Retrospective Prospect,” a remarkable accomplishment for one in his mid-eighties.)

Did KB do his work for money? His answer was that he would not have done it for money though he could never have done it without money. Few if any writers would have worked so hard for money alone. No person’s life and work could better illustrate the distinction between necessitous and symbolic labor which is discussed in *Permanence and Change* (PC, 82 ff.). The home where KB did most of his writing is quite modest, although charming in its modesty. Seldom did KB submit himself to a regular salary to which nearly all of us necessarily become addicted. Many years ago, he wrote to Cowley, “I know that one pays

Burke’s text, as for example, when he writes of “codes of literary or musical notation” as “instructions for performing” (LSA, 417), as well as in his essays on Shakespeare. Do not these informal words of KB in reference to the Bard often apply to Burke’s dramatic texts? Surely, KB’s spirit lives in Burke’s texts, one reason being “the guy wrote for speech.” The text will speak to serious readers of “boikwoiks” whether new or old if we will read and remember to listen.

Transforming the jester into a prince, KB was, when he chose to be, a consummate comedian. He privileged the comedic even more than does Burke. For now we have to say “Good night, sweet prince,” to the KB who charmed us with egalitarian good humor. Yet we need never think, “The rest is silence,” where Burke is concerned, as we will continue to find the “spritely spirit”<sup>10</sup> of KB everywhere in the vast text of Kenneth Burke.

KB said he lived long because he always wanted the last word. So we must give our teacher a last

# requiescat

enormously for a berth, and that, when wrenched free of check-bringing, papers-to-be-marked bringing bureaucracy, there really are very many moments when unemployment does equal the most respectable kind of leisure. . . .”<sup>9</sup>

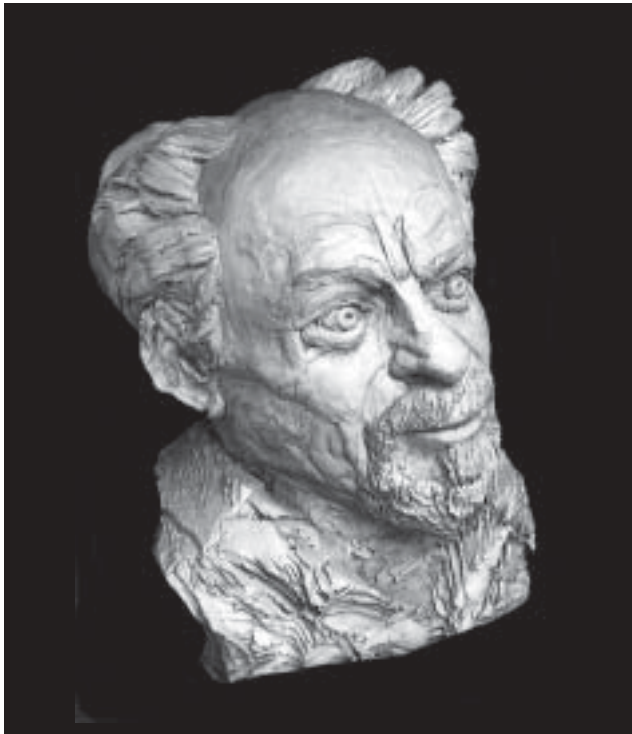
Despite his conflicting views about the political candidates, and his growing frailty, KB voted in the recent Gubernatorial Election in New Jersey as well as in last year’s Presidential Election. One of the women who helped look after KB at his home in these last years, Ginny Brand, sent a picture of KB at the polling place, signing in before casting his ballot. She also supplied a caption, quoting from KB, “Ah hell, Clinton I guess.” Does that not ring true of the old left liberal who must do his duty and vote, even when his many voices make him much less than sure?

Of Shakespeare, who is so obviously Burke’s favorite dramatist, KB once said, “the guy wrote for speech.” The sentence is memorable as a typically colloquial statement about the greatest dramatist by the then most important living critic. The more formal equivalent is at various places in

word in this remembrance. Since news came in November that the motion had finally stopped in that tired old body, I’ve continued to think of a brief poem that appears to describe another November event at that home-place in New Jersey. Unfortunately the poem has too harsh a title for this occasion since KB enjoyed the best of care through his last minute in his beloved home. His family saw to that. His son Michael reports that KB was sitting in his kitchen when he simply “faded away.” (Michael is of the opinion that if KB had been holding a drink, “he would **not** have dropped it.”) So it should be clear that Burke, as poet, speaks metaphorically in the following poem, which he wrote years ago. If there is, nevertheless, a recalcitrant toughness, one is reminded that Burke often finds that quality in symbolic action as well as in nonsymbolic motion.

Sometimes Burke’s “we” is writer addressing reader, which has been said here in epideictic spirit, as though the obvious needed to be pointed out. Often, and more importantly, this “we” is one of “the many Kenneth Burkes”<sup>11</sup> (to borrow from the title of one of Bill Rueckert’s articles) telling us

that “a way of seeing is also a way of not seeing” (PC, 49). In the following poem one suspects the “we” must simply be KB and his wife, Libbie, the amanuensis to whom all Burkeans owe more than we can know. *Collected Poems 1915-1967*, the book in which this one appears, is dedicated “To Libbie.” On the title page is a line from Emerson, “Our moods do not believe in each other.” However all these Burkean moods, views, or voices may be, let Burke the poet have the typically tough yet loving last lines; but, please let it also be noted, that the last word from this loving, dialectician and magnificent warrior of symbolic action is **peace**:



### MERCY KILLING

Faithfully  
We had covered the nasturtiums  
Keeping them beyond  
Their season

Until, farewell-minded,  
Thinking of age and ailments,  
And noting their lack of luster,  
I said:

“They want to die;  
We should let the flowers die.”

That night  
With a biting clear full moon  
They lay exposed.

In the morning,  
Still shaded  
While the sun’s line  
Crawled towards them from the northwest,  
Under a skin of ice  
They were at peace.

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### NOTES

1. See also, Kenneth Burke, “The Tactics of Motivation,” *Chimera*, I (Spring 1943): 29.
2. I trust fellow Burkeans will indulge my unscholarly use of one of KB’s pet word creations throughout this remembrance. Since this essay had to be written on short notice there is not time to search the text for a formal use of “boikwoiks.” The word certainly appears in KB’s letters. For example, see *The Selected Correspondence of Kenneth*

# in pace

Burke and Malcolm Cowley, 1915-1981, ed. Paul Jay (New York: Viking Penguin, 1988), 384. Given the enormity of Burke’s accomplishment in the major books, not to mention the millions of words published outside them, KB’s reduction of it all to “boikwoiks” is characteristic of his delightful ways. He certainly enjoyed discussing his work; yet, he balanced this interest with comedic humility, as is suggested in his term “boikwoiks.”

The distinction between KB and Burke is now as clear as Burke’s action-motion distinction, since Burke’s symbolic action can no longer meet in KB’s body. Burke writes, “The body of the human individual is the point at which the realms of physiological (nonsymbolic) motion and symbolic action meet” (PC, 309). In this remembrance I choose to mix KB and Burke somewhat in the one instance with KB’s word creation, “boikwoiks.” Otherwise, I try to preserve the distinction, keeping KB and Burke apart. To me the distinction between the two has always been abundantly clear. To talk or correspond with Burke would have been so intimidating that I could never have enjoyed any minute of it. With KB I loved every minute of it.

The statement of Marianne Moore's cited on the dust cover of Burke's *Collected Poems* characterizes KB with the precision of a poet. "His absence of affectation is one of the rarest things on earth . . . unstodgy **he**." Somewhat surprisingly, her letters often address him as "Mr. Burke."

3. See for example, Kenneth Burke, "The Rhetorical Situation," in *Communication: Ethical and Moral Issues*, ed. Lee Thayer (London: Gordon and Breach Science Publishers, 1973), 265.

4. Adding to the incongruity, of course, is that the character's name is SATAN, and he is "obviously on quite friendly terms" with THE LORD, (RR, 276). The following lines from TL have probably occurred to many Burkeans since the news that KB "cleared out" at age 96: "And as one clear proof that, in its way, it's to be the best possible of worlds, we need but bear in mind what a solace death can be, when the ravages of time make men ready to leave life. It's a solace to know that one is not condemned to **have to live for ever**" (RR, 306).

5. Kenneth Burke, "Rhetoric, Poetics, and Philosophy," in *Rhetoric, Philosophy, and Literature: An Exploration*, ed. Don M. Burks (West Lafayette, IN.: Purdue Univ. Press, 1978), 33. Burke's best known development of this theme

Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA. See my article "Kenneth Burke: The Agro-Bohemian 'Marxoid'" in *Communication Studies* 3 (1991): 219-233. See especially pp. 224-231 for a longer excerpt from KB's letter and another view of the man himself in relation to his work. There is some discussion of Burke's distinction between **necessitous** and **symbolic** labor which is mentioned above. Also in that article is reference to the motto from *A Grammar of Motives*, "Ad Bellum Purificandum" or "Toward's the Purification of War" (p. 232, note 29). This motto was so important to KB that it was his choice for the words to be placed on the plaque in front of the pedestal supporting the bust of Kenneth Burke, which is on permanent display in the foyer of the Rare Books Room at Pennsylvania State University. As reported in the *Kenneth Burke Society Newsletter* for October 1991 (p. 3), KB was unhesitant in his decision about what words should be on the



# ad bellum

is in PLF, 110ff, but the statement as quoted above is a succinct mix of Burke being at once dialectician and poet. The phrasing seems somewhat more characteristic of the later Burke than is the discussion of "the unending conversation" in PLF, which is a mixture of Burke and G.H. Mead.

6. Professors Donald Jennermann of Indiana State and Janice Lauer of Purdue University provided the translations. Both read Latin, both know Burke and knew KB. Both are K.B.S. members.

7. William Rueckert, *Kenneth Burke and the Drama of Human Relations*, 2d ed. (1963; reprint, Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982), 229.

8. See *Extensions of the Burkeian System*, ed. James W. Chesebro (Tuscaloosa & London: The Univ. of Alabama Press, 1993), p. vii.

9. The letter, marked "not sent," is dated August 1, 1938, and may be found in the Burke File,

plaque. See Burke's explanation of the motto (GM, 305, 319).

10. The words "spritely spirit" are used by Leland Griffin in a brief letter he submitted for the 1984 conference in Philadelphia where the Kenneth Burke Society was formed. Various people submitted similar letters concerning their experiences with KB, some of which were read at the conference luncheon. The letters were collected by Prof. Phillip Tompkins, who was master of ceremonies at the luncheon, and who presented them to KB. Whether KB liked the phrase—which now, that he "cleared out," seems particularly appropriate—I do not know, though I feel sure he would approve the spelling of "spritely" since the O.E.D. records Shakespeare's use of it.

Prof. Griffin's letter recalled KB's telling of the following story: "There was this man lost at sea in a small boat with only his dog, Rover, for a companion.



Finally, when he was about to starve, the man ate Rover. And when he had finished he licked his lips and said regretfully, ‘My, I wish Rover were here—he would have enjoyed these bones!’ This story is typical of the KB repertory. At Purdue the dog’s name was ‘Bowser,’ and KB delighted in the telling of it, particularly in the sounds of the last line, when he had the former dog owner saying, ‘How Bowser would have loved those bones!’

My own letter for that occasion reported on a letter from KB concerning the adjectival form of ‘Burke.’ I had written him about a humorous note which Robert Scott had published as QJS editor, reporting three spellings, *Burkean*, *Burkeian*, and *Burkian*. Not to be outdone on such a scholarly issue, KB wrote back, ‘As for the adjectival form of ‘Burke,’ I solve the problem by using the

The bronze bust of Kenneth Burke sculpted by Virginia Molnar Burks is housed in the Pattee Library at the Pennsylvania State University. The plaque on the supporting pedestal reads: Kenneth Burke/1897- /*Ad Bellum Purificandum* (Burke’s choice of words).<sup>9</sup> Photos in this issue are of the clay bust from which the bronze was cast. Taken in 1985 and copyrighted by Virginia Burks, they are used with her permission.

essay. First is the obvious difference that KB has ‘cleared out.’ The distinction I emphasize in this remembrance is that between KB, the person, and the Burke text. This distinction happens to be so entirely compatible with Burke’s perspectivism and dramatism, apparently two sides of the same coin, that both sides get into the above act.

Before I had the great good fortune to have a friendship with KB I found the Burke text intimidating. KB, however, was such an unassuming, lovable jester-prince that I had to take courage. Returning to the Burke text I found that KB is there, ‘dancing . . . an attitude’ (PLF, 9), guiding, laughing, and loving. What I’m trying to share in the present remembrance is the transcending experience of finding that the ‘spritely spirit’ of KB is still there, even after KB ‘cleared out’ on XI/19/93. Because of KB’s good work, I trust many *Burkeans* are sharing and will continue to share that experience.

In the ‘Agro-Bohemian ‘Marxoid’’ essay mentioned in the previous note (#10) I write that KB’s life coheres with his message, a point that is easily supported. Even as a very old man his dedication to his work was like religious devotion. So far as I know, however, KB never acknowledged theistic belief. In his article ‘Theology and Logology,’

# purificandum

*Kosenamen* I have for myself, ‘Ignatz de Burp,’ from which obviously one gets ‘Burpian.’” (Letter to the author, August 7, 1974.)

11. The essay is in *Representing Kenneth Burke*, ed. Hayden White and Margaret Brose (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982). It is sometimes difficult to say anything about Burke’s work not already said by others, particularly by Bill Rueckert. When I say Burke is a perspectivist, however, I base the statement on a conversation in which KB said precisely these words, ‘I am a perspectivist.’ He was so emphatic and clear about the point that I recall it vividly. Even so, in the remembrance above I am saying in a brief way certain of the things Rueckert says better and in more depth in ‘Some of the Many Kenneth Burkes.’

There are, of course, differences in what I try to say above and the objectives of Rueckert’s scholarly

*Kenyon Review* (new series, I, 1979, p. 153), he writes, ‘Logology can’t either affirm or deny the existence of God. Atheism is as far from the realm of logology as is the most orthodox of Fundamentalist religions’ (p. 153). This is the position of Burke and was also, I think, that of KB personally.

Nevertheless, in my article, I suggest that KB’s devotion to his work ‘yielded him a paradoxically selfless kind of self-realization, as with the selfless devotion and paradoxical fulfillment of genuine religion’ (p. 230). His comedic outlook, particularly as manifested in his ironic view of most everything including himself, saved him from destructive spiritual pride, which might otherwise have been a problem for anyone of such remarkable accomplishment.

Surely KB would liked to have believed his spirit would finally again be at peace with that of Libbie. Let us hope this is now true.

"BOIKWOIKS CITED" on page 23

Chronology Compiled by David Cratis Williams

. . . beyond these tiny concentration points of rhetoric and traffic, there lies the eternally unsolvable Enigma, the preposterous fact that both existence and nothingness are equally unthinkable.

Our speculations may run the whole gamut, from play, through reverence, even to an occasional shiver of cold metaphysical dread—for always the Eternal Enigma is there, right on the edges of our metropolitan bickerings, stretching outward to interstellar infinity and inward to the depths of the mind. And in this staggering disproportion between man and no-man, there is no place for purely human boasts of grandeur, or for forgetting that men build their cultures by huddling together, nervously loquacious, at the edge of an abyss.

This chronology extends and updates Armin Paul Frank's in the Twayne series volume *Kenneth Burke*. Most of Burke's publications have been omitted to save space and avoid unnecessary duplicating already available bibliographies of Burke's writing.

- 1897** Born to James Leslie Burke & Lillyan May Duva
- 1911-15** Attends Peabody High School in Pittsburgh; classmates include Malcom Cowley & James Light
- 1915** Moves with family to Weehaken, NJ; works briefly as a bank runner
- 1916** Enrolls at Ohio State; publishes poetry and short stories in *Sansculotte*, edited by James Light (Feb). Returns to Weehaken (Jun). Enrolls at Columbia; meets

- 1923** Temporary managing editor of *The Dial* (Jan-Oct); on again, off again in various editorial roles at *The Dial* for rest of decade. "Third editor" for *Succession* mediating between Matthew Josephson & Gorham Munson (Mar-Sept)
- 1924** Publishes "Prince Llan" in *Broom*; issue suppressed by postal authorities as obscene because of short story; *Broom* folds (Jan)
- 1925** Publishes first essay of critical theory, "Psychology of Form," in *The Dial*
- 1926-27** Researcher, Laura Spelman Rockefeller Memorial
- 1927-29** Music critic for *The Dial*
- 1928-29** Staff member, Bureau of Social Hygiene
- 1929** Dial Award (\$2000) for

**BORN V 5 1897 - DIED XI 19 1993**

- Matthew Josephson & Richard McKeon (Fall)
- 1918** Withdraws from Columbia, never taking mid-year exams
- 1918-19** Lives in Greenwich Village, reading and studying; shares quarters with, variously and among others, James & Susan Light, Malcom Cowley, Djuna Barnes, Stuart Davis, & Berenice Abbott
- 1919** Marries Lily Mary Batterham on May 19 (three children: Jeanne Elspeth, Eleanor Duva, & Francis Batterham)
- 1920-25** Publishes short stories, reviews, and translations in a variety of "little magazines," most notably *The Dial*, an association that lasts until the magazine ceases publication in 1929
- 1921** Purchases farm in Andover

- distinguished service to American letters
- 1933** Following divorce, marries Elizabeth Batterham on Dec 18 (two children: James Anthony & Kenneth Michael)
- 1934-36** Music critic for *The Nation*
- 1935** Guggenheim Fellowship Participates in the American Writers Congress (Apr)
- 1937** Lecturer in Practice & Theory of Literary Criticism, New School of Social Research
- 1938** Lecturer, University of Chicago
- 1943-61** Teaches at Bennington College
- 1946** Member, National Institute of Arts & Sciences
- 1949** Lecturer, Princeton University. Fellow, Princeton Institute for Advanced Studies
- 1949-50** Lecturer, University of Chicago

- 1950 Lecturer, Kenyon College  
 1952/58 Lecturer, Indiana U.  
 1957-58 Fellow, Center for Advanced Study in Behavioral Sciences  
 1962/64 Lecturer, Drew U.  
 1963 Lecturer, Pennsylvania State U.  
 1964-65 Regents Professor, University of California at Santa Barbara  
 1966 Visiting Professor, Central Washington State College. Honorary Degree, Bennington  
 1966-67 Rockefeller Foundation Grant (\$10,000)  
 1967 Member, American Academy of Arts & Sciences. Brandeis U. Special Award for Notable Achievement in the Arts  
 1967-68 Lecturer, Harvard U.  
 1968 Poet of the Year Award, New Jersey Association of Teachers of English  
 1969 wife "Libbie" dies on May 25  
 1970 Horace Gregory Award, New School for Social Research. Ingram Merrill Foundation Award in Literature. Honorary Degrees: Dartmouth College & Fairfield University  
 1970-71 Lecturer, Washington U.  
 1972 Lecturer, Wesleyan U. Honorary Degrees, Northwestern University & the University of Rochester  
 1974 Andrew W. Mellon Visiting Professor of English, University of Pittsburgh  
 1976 Walker-Ames Visiting Professor of English, Washington U. Honorary Degree, Indiana State University  
 1977 Award for Contribution to Humanities (American Academy of Arts & Sciences)  
 1979 Honorary Degree, Kenyon  
 1981 Gold Medal for Eminence in Belles Lettres, National Medal for Literature  
 1982 Honorary Degree, Emory U. George Herbert Mead Award from the Society for the Study of Interaction  
 1984 Temple Discourse Conference/ "Kenneth Burke Conference"; Burke Society formed  
 1985 Fellow, Institute for the Arts & Humanities. Doctorate Humane Letters, Queens College  
 1986 "Kenneth Burke in 1986" Conference at Seton Hall U.  
 1987 New Jersey Senate Resolution honoring his 90th birthday  
 1990 1st Kenneth Burke Society Conference, New Harmony, Indiana  
 1993 Dies at farm in Andover

# A BURKE CHRONOLOGY



**To Affect the Quality of the Day  
Is No Small Achievement**

## KB'S LAST DAY

*Ginny Brand is one of the women who helped care for KB these last years. She wrote a report on KB's last day for his oldest son Anthony ("Butch"), a Physics Professor at the University of Victoria in BC, Canada. Through the courtesy of Ms. Brand, and Anthony & Michael Burke her report is excerpted below. She indicates writing at "11/20/93 1am" when she must have been quite tired.*

I arrived at 7:30am. . . . KB was already awake. . . . He requested his new red shirt. He stepped strongly . . . and seemed alert. How are you? . . . "Not bad today," he replied. He wanted oatmeal, had juice and vitamins. . . . Later he went in [to his bedroom] for a nap. He was hungry on awakening, ate a big lunch and then napped again.

We had discussed going for a ride even though it was a gray and misty day. At 3pm he was ready to go. He wore his red outside shirt, hat, gloves and scarf. Who sewed the K.B. on your scarf, I asked, "I don't know." Do you want to ride [in a wheelchair] over to the car or walk? "I can walk," and he did.

*(continued on page 24)*



## LINES FROM OUT MY SCATTERHOOD

It was all there in First-Land  
sweetly sleeping  
peacefully infolded  
the Primal Now all set to linger on  
through Any-When  
the moveless meaning beyond the verbal flux  
the essence within existence  
the Word within the words.

Oh, lead me to the First-Land  
of Primal Any-When.

Word-logged, I praise  
the Principle of Perfect Laudability  
the Absolute Magistrate  
(the Sanskrit HUTA, the Petitioned).

Drop the *a* (hence HUT)  
change guttural aitch to guttural *g* (hence GUT)  
make unvoiced *t* into its voiced cognate *d*  
(hence GUD)  
allow for the minor ablaut transforming of *u* into *o*  
—and Hail!

from the miracle potencies of speech  
there stands forth

GOD

(revealed by logo-logic)

Oh, lead me to the First-Land  
where all is sweet as dawn

birds singing in the mist in springtime  
their avid taking-in and giving-forth  
and me petitioning HUTA,  
praising the Principle of Perfect Laudability.

Oh, lead me  
to the dew  
at dawn  
in First-  
Land





### THE HABIT OF IMPERFECT RHYMING

Lips now rhyme with slops  
Hips with blobs  
Passion with nuclear fission  
And beauty with shoddy.  
The word for lovely leisure, "school,"  
Is now in line with urban sprawl.  
Are we blunted or haunted?  
Is last year's auto a dodo?  
Let widow be bedded  
With shadow and meadow.\*

All this is necessary  
Says the secretary—  
Else moan, groan, bone must go with alone,  
As breath must go with death.

\*As far back as high school, I decided that widow-shadow-meadow are the most perfect possible imperfect rhymes. Ever since then I have been trying to fit them just right into a poem--and maybe some day I'll succeed.



### AN AUTHOR'S VISION OF THE AFTERLIFE An Intra-Mural Poem

In those Great Days of Perfect Timelessness  
When all will be like one long happy fart  
Some swillin supernatural Scotch  
Some boltin beautified bourbon  
Some guzzlin rye  
Some layin the ladies all over the lot  
Some just catchin up on their heavenly homework  
Some smitin their enemy's other cheek  
Some comin  
Some goin  
Some just sittin there praisin  
Some sellin dear  
Some buyin dead cheap  
At the ultimate auction  
Eternally

And no one in hell at all  
But Myron Boardman\* of Prentice-Hall.

\*Myron L. Boardman, who retired in 1963 as president of the Prentice-Hall trade book division (*PW*, October 7, 1963) has been elected to the board of directors of Hawthorn Books. Since his retirement from Prentice-Hall, Mr. Boardman has been executive director of the Foundation for Christian Living, which publishes and distributes the printed sermons and specialized writings of Dr. Norman Vincent Peale.—*Publishers' Weekly*, vol. 192, no. 6 (October 16, 1967), 42.

### AN ASSERTION TO END ON

Relaxing to the fall  
hoarding accurate acute remembrances  
pronouncing them beautiful  
even as the body leans toward subsidence

saying thanks in principle  
from amidst much befuddlement  
a smile here, a caressing there  
the click of an expression

(for we are sentenced to the sentence)  
and now, with the coming of spring  
coming and coming and coming—  
and the body (pause) . . .

This winter, having stayed north, we earned the  
rights of spring—against snow  
the chickadees learned to fly down  
fly up and eat out of our hands

greedy wild frail bodies  
their cold clutch on our fingers  
they alighted and were proved right  
in trusting us

Yes, by far (I guess)  
the chance to have lived  
outdoes  
the need to die

### ONE LIGHT IN A DARK VALLEY Imitation Spiritual

One light in a dark valley  
and the mist is falling like rain  
One light in a dark valley  
and I'm alone again.

One light in a dark valley  
and I am all alone.  
One light in a dark valley  
is all I can call my own.

One light in a dark valley  
and the darkness movin' about.  
One light in a dark valley  
and now that light has gone out.

No light in a dark valley  
nothin' but darkness and me.  
No light in a dark valley  
for all eternity.

Oh . . .  
Light it up Lord, make it shine, good  
God'll make his heaven bright(i)ly mine  
I'll look through every window and I'll walk  
through every door.  
And there'll be such gladness 'round me I won't  
want for any more.



# REVIEW OF THE 1993 TRIENNIAL CONVENTION

## Burke Society Gathers in Airlie

The Kenneth Burke Society's second triennial conference gathered in Airlie, Virginia on May 6-9, 1993. Kenneth Burke, who celebrated his 96th birthday on May 5, was not in attendance as he had been at the first conference in New Harmony, Indiana in 1990 and the founding conference in Philadelphia in 1984. Though his absence was certainly felt by the international assembly of students and scholars, it did not dampen a Burkeian spirit for joining in the fray during debates, discussions, seminars, and papers nor for enjoying conversation, entertainment, walks, food, and drink during off hours in the somewhat agro- but hardly bohemian surroundings of Airlie House conference center.

Thursday night featured President Donn Parson's keynote speech on "Whole Burkeians & Part Burkeians" and Friday night Celeste Condit's keynote on "ACT II: The Burkeian Legacy for the 21st Century." Friday night the Society presented awards for Lifetime Achievement to William Rueckert, Distinguished Service to James Chesebro, Emerging Scholar to Dale Bertelsen, and Outstanding Graduate Essay to Dina Stevenson.

Friday night also began a shift from the academic to the artistic with the screening of the film on KB that Harry Chapin had been producing before his death. Just completed under the supervision of Chapin's wife, the film was brought to Airlie and presented by Burke's youngest son, Michael. Many expressed interest in obtaining a video copy, the possibility of which is being investigated. (More news will appear in the Newsletter's May issue.) Saturday night saw Sheron Dailey and Mary Mino's presentation of "Towards a Better Life: Burke's Fiction, Poetry, and Music as 'Equipment for Living': A Non-Proforma Performance."

Days were dedicated to seminars (see reports following, pages 17-23), paper presentations (on civil rights; Latino rhetoric; political rhetoric; politics & art; hierarchy, image & form; technology, culture & ideology; philosophy; religion), panel discussions (on feminism, the rhetoric of science, the interdisciplinary nature of Burke's thought, the future of the Society), and a debate ("should Burke be understood as a Postmodern?")

At Saturday's business meeting new officers were elected: Donn Parson, President; Andy King, Vice-President; Star Muir, Treasurer and Chief Convention Planner for 1996; Richard Thames, Editor of Publications. Bertelsen was commended for his work as past editor.

The 1993 convention marked the Society's ninth anniversary. According to Chesebro since the 1990 convention membership has doubled, regional and disciplinary branches have increased, and financial resources grown and stabilized. In April, the University of Alabama published papers from New Harmony in *Extensions of the Burkeian System*, edited by Chesebro.



*Steps preliminary to organizing the 1996 convention are underway according to newly elected Chief Convention Planner Star Muir of George Mason University. "Burke's centenary" is being considered as a theme; sites and rates are being investigated. Plans involve expanding publicity efforts into new areas and fostering interdisciplinary perspectives at the convention. **Members are asked to please fill out and mail in the enclosed survey to provide input into the decision making process.** Muir may be contacted with specific reactions or suggestions by phone at 703-993-1093 or E-mail at [SMUIR@gmuvax.gmu.edu](mailto:SMUIR@gmuvax.gmu.edu).*

# Awards Committee Formed

*Arnie Madsen  
Communication  
University of Pittsburgh*

At the Airlie convention the Burke Society Awards Committee was formed and charged with selecting individuals to be honored at the next triennial. The chair is Arnie Madsen; members are Chris Allen Carter (Oklahoma City University), Mark McManus (Mary Washington College), and Jean C. Miller (University of Maryland, College Park).

The Society currently presents four awards, the last two of which were new in 1993: (1) The Lifetime Achievement Award honors a career of outstanding research, scholarship, and teaching about Burke. Nominees must have academic careers spanning at least 25 years. 1990's recipient: Leland Griffin. (2) The Distinguished Service Award honors individuals with notable professional service at the regional or national level. 1990's recipient: Sheron Dailey. (3) The Emerging Scholar Award honors scholars beginning their professional careers. Recipients must have been actively engaged in full-time teaching and research for no more than five years after

receiving a doctoral degree. (4) The Outstanding Graduate Essay Award honors the superior graduate essay submitted for the triennial convention. (For 1993's recipients, please see the story on page 15.)

The committee will issue a formal call for nominations one year before the triennial convention. Members of the Society are encouraged to nominate any individual who meets the requirements for an award. Recipients must be Society members. A formal letter of nomination is required for each award. Supporting documentation should include a detailed vita of the nominee and letters from colleagues. Other supporting material will also be considered. Material is to be forwarded to the chair who will distribute it to committee members. The deadline for receiving nomination material is December 1 of the year immediately preceding the triennial convention.

To receive more information, nominate an individual, or suggest additional awards, please contact the committee chair: Arnie Madsen, Department of Communication, 1117 Cathedral of Learning, University of Pittsburgh, PA 15260. Phone: 412-624-8531. Fax: 412-624-1878. E-Mail: [madsen@vms.cis.pitt.edu](mailto:madsen@vms.cis.pitt.edu).

## THIS ISSUE AND THE NEXT

Delays involving the Newsletter's November issue made possible this edition on KB's death, devotion to which caused still further delay. Sincere thanks to Don Burks who at the editor's November 22 invitation wrote "KB and Burke" during holidays and finals. Thanks to Don Burks also for Ginny Brand's report, received after he completed his own essay. At the suggestion of William Rueckert this May's issue will be devoted to "representative anecdotes" about KB and reactions to his life and death. Fellow Burkeians are urged to send material, including photos, to the editor by late March. Extra copies of both this issue and the next will be available for \$1.50 each; notice of interest before the May issue would be appreciated.

continued from page 22

In this insistence as in the others, the consideration of Burke and postmodernism generated a field of productive differences, and it was in tracing those differences that the members of the "Burke and Postmodernism" seminar continued to confront most clearly the connections between Burke and the discursive space of contemporary culture, or where we live now.

## Letter from the Editor

Producing the Newsletter has increased my admiration for former editor Dale Bertelsen's accomplishment. My hope is to maintain his standard. Transition to a new editorship has not been without difficulty or expense (mailing lists, computers, software, viruses, etc.) Thanks to my predecessor, my colleague Clark Edwards, my chair Ron Arnett, and my dean John McDonald for their assistance and support.

By tradition the issue after the triennial is a convention report. With prior commitments for other issues, a new editor's mark may not be apparent for a year. Editorial differences then may be only matters of degree—more conflicting points of view, more interdisciplinary representation.

One significant difference cannot be seen but has caused much delay—*the Newsletter's being completely computerized*, a process that will make publication faster and easier and more graphics possible. Another difference will not be seen until next year—*the Newsletter's serving as a clearing house for bibliographic data*. Much has been published since bibliographies appeared in Simons & Melia's *Legacy of Kenneth Burke* and Foss, Foss, & Trapp's *Contemporary Perspectives on Rhetoric* (2d ed.) **Accordingly members are urged to send the editor information on primary and secondary publications in order to correct bibliographies prior to or update bibliographies after 1986.**

The theme for the Kenneth Burke Society's Airlie gathering was "Extensions of the Burkeian System." According to Chief Convention Planner Jim Chesebro, the theme was suggested by Burke himself in his call for "Operation Benchmark" at the end of the New Harmony gathering. Asked by Chesebro what he meant, Burke explained he wanted to develop a scheme whereby one could meet the test of being a Society member. He objected to "guru stuff," seeing no reason for being authoritative. Arguing the need for "some leeway in this business," he recommended that Burkeian studies be governed by a perspective maintaining "Burke said it's this way, I say it's this."

# Extensions of the Burkeian System

In adopting the "Extensions" theme the Airlie convention committee sought to answer Burke's call, to encourage Society members to advance beyond close readings of his text and investigate instead the potential of his ideas. The bases for judging the 1993 convention's success, said Chesebro, should be the degree to which it "promotes the development and evolution of Burkeian studies" by fostering new applications and further extensions, and the degree to which it "generates a self-reflexive re-examination regarding the limits" of Burkeian thought. "We need to go beyond what Kenneth Burke has offered," Chesebro continued. "We each need to assume responsibility for the limitations, extensions, and potentials" of Burke's system.

The diversity of papers presented in programs, arguments articulated during debates, and issues examined during panel discussions and seminar sessions reflects the conference theme. The more than 30 papers cannot be included in the Newsletter.

The best will find their way into journals or a volume representing the conference just as *The Legacy of Kenneth Burke and Extensions of the Burkeian System* represent past conferences. The essential spontaneity of live debate and lively discussion cannot be recaptured in the Newsletter, though points raised may be addressed in future forums. Seminars are another matter. They involve significant issues being studied over months by individuals preparing for the conference and scrutinized over four days in meetings totaling five hours formally and many more informally. They are most representative of the ongoing conversation central for a Society dedicated to the study, understanding, dissemination, research, critical analysis, and preservation of Burke's works. Reports on seminar deliberations were delivered at the convention's close. Their wider dissemination depends upon the Newsletter. They follow, indicative of the rich interaction at Airlie.



# KB As Dialectician

Submitted by Coordinator  
David Cratis Williams  
Communication  
NE Missouri State University

Participants: David Blakesley, Angelo Bonadonna, Dennis Ciesielski, Bob Fulford, Karl Kageff, Jim Klumpp, Arnie Madsen, Mark McManus, Jean Miller, J. Tim Pierce, David Cratis Williams.

In a dialectical spirit, the report of this seminar on “Kenneth Burke as Dialectician” is really two reports: first, and ironically, a report on our discussions about what Kenneth Burke’s theory of dialectics is “in itself”; and second, a report on our discussions about what Kenneth Burke’s theory of dialectics is in relation to other prominent theories of dialectics, notably those associated with Plato, Hegel, and Marx. Two caveats also need to be posited at the outset: first, although the language of this report will talk about Burke’s “theory” of dialectics, his thought about dialectics may not be so singular and contained—there may be multiple, overlapping theoretical perspectives; and second, although the language of this report will talk about “our” findings or conclusions,

and although there seemed to be a considerable degree of consensus, univocality should not be assumed. Not all participants may wish to be implicated in all of the following assertions. We organize our report around nine overlapping assertions concerning Kenneth Burke as dialectician.

(1) Burke’s dialectic is among other things *linguistic* in character. The negative inaugurates an ineradicable

dialectic in language, and the consequent paradox of substance is an example *par excellence* of the Burkean conception of dialectics. From

the dialectical structure of language emerge characteristic features of linguistic processes, e.g. merger and division (identification and difference), transformation, polarization, hierarchy, transcendence, etc. Being grounded in language, Burke’s dialectic differs from those of Plato, Hegel, and Marx.

(2) Burke’s dialectic allows humans to draw distinctions—but not to reify categories. For Burke, the process of definition is not the location or stipulation of what something is, but rather what it is **not**; however, perfectionist or entelechial pressures tend to obscure this ironic condition of language and can create an illusion, or hypostatization, of what is (echoing Coleridge’s notation that linguistic distinctions tend to create categories which do not facilitate thought but rather come to think for us). Dialectic is **empowering** in that it provides for an awareness of the processes of transformation, thereby allowing us to use language and not be used by language. Yet dialectic is also **constraining** in that it promotes a moderation of action: dialectic is not debunking.

(3) Dialectic can be converted to drama via psychological identification with linguistic distinctions. Drama is literally the enactment by human agents of the **agon** of difference, and the **agon** of difference is constituted in and by the processes of dialectic. Psychological identifications with dialectically created, transformed, and re-formed distinctions convert those distinctions into, personally, the drama of self and, socially, what Rueckert has called the “drama of human relations.” That is, internally these processes are creative of individual “identity” and the sense of “self”; externally they are creative of society and sociality itself.

(4) Burke’s dialectic is not one of **opposition** but rather of **betweenness**. Burke’s dialectic does not operate in the realm of the either/or but rather the both/and; the dialectic is in the “margin of overlap” between two terms. The betweenness of the dialectic facilitates transformations of one term into another; it does not promote opposition or polarization. Dialectic “dances” in the betweenness of two terms or concepts. In this sense, the “attitude” or “spirit” of Burke’s dialectic is ironic, not contradictory or



antagonistic: Burke's dialectic is the "essence" of the comic perspective. Through the ironies of the dialectic, comic perspective is enabled as a corrective to the tragic frame (the trajectory of the tragic is toward the elimination of the dialectic in an hypostatization of what is).

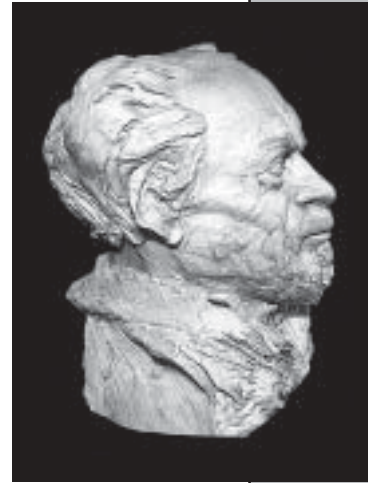
(5) Burke's dialectic neither contains nor aspires toward a determined telos; rather, the telos of Burke's dialectic is undetermined and open-ended. In contrast to the dialectics of Plato, Hegel, or Marx, Burke's dialectic is not method toward a determined telos (e.g., truth, spirit, or classless society); in fact, Burke's dialectic may be conceived of as method to keep from reaching a determined end. In its betweenness, Burke's dialectic is always "middle of the road," always compensated by division. As enacted in drama by human agents, Burke's dialectic is conversational, not resolutive: it may be compared with a "dialogic conversation." Burke's dialectic keeps choice alive; it is the undetermined locus of choice, and such an undetermined locus of choice preserves what may be termed "dialectical freedom."

(6) Burke's dialectic resides "in the slash" between the terms under consideration, and dialectical freedom is enhanced as the slash is "widened." The metaphor "in the slash" derives from Burke's discussion of motives as ratios between terms of the pentad (hexad). Thus, in a "scene/act" ratio, the motive is in the "betweenness" of scene and act, which is to say "in the slash." Dialectical freedom does not arise out of over-turning or reversing dialectically constructed hierarchies (e.g., cultural/natural), even if such over-turning is simply a transitory "revolutionary step" in keeping the hierarchically paired terms constantly revolving; rather, dialectical freedom arises out of a widening of the slash, but the widening is always constrained: the slash never obliterates the terms or concepts under consideration. The metaphor of a rubber band suggests the concept: you may stretch it (widening what is between the sides being stretched), but when released it snaps back to its earlier form, albeit slightly transformed and "relaxed" from the very experience of having been stretched. To achieve "maximum, self consciousness," or dialectical freedom, one must "live in" the slash. "Living in the Slash" is associated with other Burkean

concepts (e.g., "proportionalizing" or "equipment for living"). The slash is the *tertium quid* always lurking between two terms or concepts subjected to dialectical analysis; it is this third part which is the locus of choice, and—to invoke again the metaphor of a rubber band—the wider the space between the two sides, the greater the locus of choice within the space.

(7) Burke's dialectic inaugurates/preserves symbolic action. The dialectic is the locus of choice; without the dialectic, choice-facilitated action would turn to motion. The process is exemplified by the paradox of purity (in which the negative—the dialectical "other"—is effaced in an illusion of the pure presence of what is): pure communication (unity) culminates in Silence, for there is no need to speak; conversely, pure division (individuation) culminates in meaningless babble, for there is no common language in which to speak. In each instance, the dialectically inaugurated/preserved realm of symbolic action is transformed into the dialectically bereft realm of non-symbolic motion.

(8) Burke's dialectic, while "grounded" in language, is multidimensional. Although "grounded" in or derived from the linguistic theories of symbolic action, including the paradox of substance, Burke's dialectic attains multidimensionality when enacted by human agents, when converted into drama. The conversion of linguistic dialectic to drama transforms abstract, disembodied ideas into the inhabited, material, and ideological world; these transformations encompass dialectics both with others and with material elements. Similarly, the conversion of linguistic dialectic to drama transforms abstract, disembodied ideas



# KB Ecology, Technology & Critical Practice

Submitted by Coordinator  
Star Muir  
Communication  
George Mason University

Participants: Jane Blankenship (coordinator),  
Dan Bloomingdale, Dan Buehler, Star Muir,  
William Rueckert.

Kenneth Burke's critical system can be cast largely as a response to scientism and technologism in the 20th Century. His notions of piety, satire, discrimination, the organic metaphor, and entelechy, among others that circle around his view of a "little fellow among the sciences" named Ecology, ground his conception of the symbol-using and misusing animal in Nature and Counter-Nature. This seminar addressed central questions about Burke's thoughts on ecology and about critical practice in an age of environmental degradation and evolving ecological consciousness. Our musings and conclusions focused on three areas: the place of the individual, the relationship between Nature and Counter-Nature, and the possibility of extending Burke's system.

Following Burke, a focus on the individual in a technological society places great emphasis on attitude and instills a caution about action. The desire for instant gratification and immediate solutions to environmental problems, can itself be a form of technologism (a solution for action's sake). Burke also provides debunking tools which, while characterized by organic, ironic and poetic perspectives, treat romantic and sentimental claims (i.e., many environmental appeals) with due care and caution. Burke is ever wary of extremes, including both sides of

the coin as represented by eco-terrorism and by the wise-use movement, and he frames his comic corrective as a possibility of action balanced within an appropriately ironic and reflexive mode. Finally, as individuals, Burke enjoins us to act as a community, but never to forget the body, the animality that precedes symbolicity.

It may also be true, however, that in posing his distinction between Nature and Counter-Nature, Burke has set up oppositions that might be read as polarizing good and evil in human affairs. His own emphasis on the speciality of man, the uniquely symbol-using animal, entails a particular placement and an awareness of place within the natural order. Perhaps it is more useful to think of this distinction as really a continuum between Nature and Counter-Nature, and to recognize that there are instances where Counter-Nature can help Nature. Using ultralight planes to reinsert cygnets into the wild and develop migratory patterns, as one example, illustrates the possibility in this regard. Even as he posits this antipathy, however, Burke is drawn to the reversal of his original definition: "Symbol-using Animals" becomes "Bodies that Learn Language." Avoiding absolute polarity is a strength of Burke's ability to dance between positions.

Extending Burke's system in such a way is an essential task as the 21st century approaches. Burke's analytical, essentializing move in his Dramatism and his Logology lacks reinsertion into a historical and temporal narrative that characterizes human existence. Burke stops at the text; his critics must take readers past the point where the text ends. The seminar as a whole agreed that such extension represents one area where Burke needs more attention. With the exception of some passing references, two book chapters, and one early article, there has not been much work on Burke, ecology, and technology at all. This is an important arena, one critical for understanding Burke as well as for shaping critical practice and engaging the common concerns of an evolving technological society.

## & Critical Practice

into inhabited, corporeal, psychological Being; these transformations encompass dialectics of “self” (as with Mead’s “I-me” dialectic), of the conscious/unconscious, and of the mind/body. Burke’s dialectic is thus seen as a complex and multidimensional structure of language/drama/world/being. (Dialectical critique of this multidimensional structure is the work of logology—or words about [symbolic, dialectical, inhabited] words.) The multidimensionality of Burke’s dialectic, notably the conceptualization of dialectic as working on several different levels at the same time, may also distinguish Burke’s dialectic from other theorists; Marx’s dialectic, for instance, seems to operate on only one level at a time. Moreover, the multidimensionality of Burke’s dialectic negates any sense of *telos* for the dialectic: as the dialectic is worked through, as it plays itself out through various dimensions, it is transformed—and an altered or different dialectic emerges. There thus can be no *telos* for the dialectic because

the dialectic changes in non-determined ways.

(9) Burke is a dialectician who uses dialectic in a “strong” sense. A distinction was drawn (a dialectic was established) between a “strong” dialectician and a “weak” dialectician. A weak dialectician, or a weak sense of dialectic, uses the term “dialectic” in a general and often metaphorical sense; a strong dialectician, or a strong sense of dialectic, uses the term “dialectic” as a **generating principle**. In the strong sense, dialectic is seen as generating or accounting for key aspects of the human condition. Burke uses dialectic in the strong sense; dialectic is a generating principle for maximum self-consciousness of the human condition. Burke sees dialectic as a counter-statement to the trope of language which allows humans to use rather than be used by language, which inaugurates/preserves symbolic action, and which thereby establishes the space for human freedom. Kenneth Burke is indeed a dialectician, a strong dialectician.

## KB And Feminism

Submitted by Coordinator  
Sonja K. Foss  
Communication  
Ohio State University

Participants: Sonja K. Foss, Karen A. Foss, Julie Fraley, Cindy L. Griffin, Phyllis M. Japp, Harriet McNeal, Deborah Robson, Martha Solomon, Tilly Warnock, Susanne Williams.

The seminar examined a variety of relationships possible between feminist theory and the works of Kenneth Burke, emphasizing the question of whether feminist communication scholars should make use of Burke’s ideas. Participants suggested a wide range of answers to the question.

Those who believed Burke’s notions could be of use suggested, for example, that Burke, better than any other theorist, explains the socio-political milieu in which women live. He describes very well the systems of domination, the rhetoric that occurs within them, and the ways that individuals use symbols to maneuver within them. An understanding of this milieu is important for feminist scholars.

Others in the seminar saw Burke as aligned

with various aspects of feminism. Burke’s vision comes close to being a feminist one, some suggested, in that it is holistic, connective, open-ended, cooperative, and ecological. But Burke loses sight of his feminist vision as he seeks to implement it, given that implementation requires his adapting that vision to the Western philosophical tradition. The suggestion also was made that feminists might try to read Burke without identifying him with all the theoretical interpretation and critical application that has been produced in rhetorical studies in the last three decades. His ideas then might be freed from some of the anti-feminist assumptions often argued to undergrid his work. Others suggested that other analyses of basic symbolic processes might reveal different motives and structures from those Burke identifies; when combined with these analyses, Burke’s ideas might be more compatible with feminist theory. Other participants noted that Burke is sympathetic to women’s experiences because of his own experience as the “underdog” in almost every situation.

Yet another perspective offered in the seminar was that, although Burke’s contributions to rhetorical theory have been significant, he has little to offer feminist understandings of rhetoric. Some suggested that Burke’s system does not allow for a type of rhetoric, currently being identified and explicated by feminist scholars, in which persuasion is not the central focus. For an explication of such feminist rhetorics, Burke’s notions are largely irrelevant.



# Burke & Feminism

## KB Political Burkeology

Submitted by  
Terry Croy  
Communication (graduate student)  
University of Maryland

Participants: Bernie Brock, James Combs (coordinator), Terry Croy, Cynthia King, Paul Stewart, Paula Wilson.

The seminar examined three questions: What suggests political communication is changing? Why are these changes occurring? How applicable is Burke to these changes?

The appearance of presidential candidates Ross Perot on the Larry King show and Bill Clinton on MTV and the Arsenio Hall show suggests that the channels politicians use as well as the messages they communicate are changing.

How individuals identify with politicians and each other has been transformed. In the 19th century Americans identified with their immediate and extended families, in the 20th century with the work they did or the company for which they worked, and now at the century's end with the skills they possess. With an increasingly mobile lifestyle, Americans carry their skills with them; hence, they view themselves in terms of the expertise provided society. At the same time the multi-

cultural movement appears to be splintering us, increasing the difficulty of our achieving identification with a collective whole.

Americans are seeking more ways to participate in the political process, more ways to express their concerns. They are no longer content to participate

vicariously through journalists or political experts. They are concerned less with politicians' providing solutions for problems and more with their conveying a personal understanding of or concern for the people they represent. To reach this politic, politicians have exploited new channels of communication and modified their messages. They have shifted from providing the electorate with "knowledge" to providing it with therapy or "feeling."

How applicable is Burke to these challenges? First, his emphasis on the importance of the symbolic points to ways of dealing with these problems. "Attitude" has become more important than "fact." Townhall meetings and events like "Take Back the Night" marches or the recent Gay Rights March in Washington, D.C., offer people a way of expressing their feelings and seeing what is possible as opposed to providing concrete solutions to problems.

Secondly the motion/action relationship remains central to understanding rhetors. As Celeste Condit postulated in her keynote address at the Airlie convention, identity may be based on physicality in the 21st century. Identity may come back to biology as our ability to regulate motion increases. The physical may be made rhetorical.

Finally, poetic humanism suggests hope for diverse groups achieving unity. Burke states, "our thesis is a belief that the ultimate metaphor for discussing the universe and man's relation to it must be the poetic or dramatic metaphor." The advantage of his approach lies in treating humans as "participants in action," stressing their cooperation rather than competition. As Bernard Brock proposes, "Burke's poetic humanism stresses language, values, and action. So scholars of rhetoric should not only play a central role in implementing this shift [from the modern orientation], but the poetic humanistic orientation should have a significant impact upon the nature of future theory and methods within the field."



## Burke & Politics

# KB & Postmodernism

Submitted by Coordinator  
Thomas Carmichael  
English  
University of Western Ontario

Participants: Bill Balthrop, Lisa L. Barley, Paul Berry, Dale A. Bertelsen, Tim Borchers, Thomas Carmichael, James W. Chesebro, Kathy Garvin Doxas, Greig Henderson, Dina A. Stevensen.

The postmodernism seminar at Airlie was not the first time that participants in the Kenneth Burke Convention considered the question of Burke and postmodernism. But in contrast to the initial discussions at New Harmony, this seminar was devoted to relationships that might be drawn between Burke and specific figures in the quickly canonized tradition of postmodern thought, or to the ways in which Burke might be aligned with particular postmodern questions. Conclusions to a series of discussions such as this are always premature, but at the end of four days of meetings, members of the seminar had effectively mapped the network of interconnecting and often competing impulses that link Burke with the discourse of postmodernism.

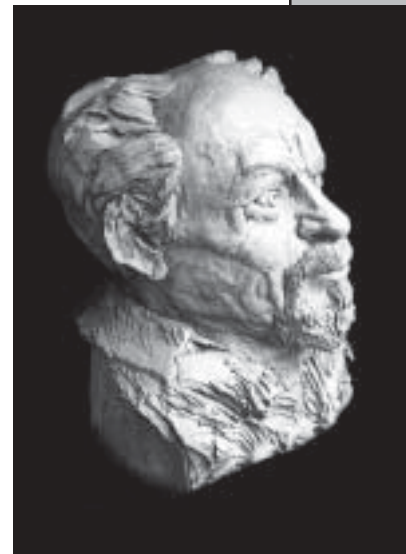
While recognizing that postmodernism and post-structuralism are by no means synonymous, seminar members adopted the linguistic turn in post-structural thought as the point of departure for examining Burke's relationship to postmodernism. Specifically, the seminar began by addressing the relationship between Burkeian notions of debunking and terministic screens and Derridean **differance**. Discussion quickly focused on the extent to which Burke hedges on debunking, in contrast to the Derridean effort of employing **differance** to unveil the inevitable problematics of the sign and all its attendant traditional metaphysical baggage. In a similar fashion, the seminar then considered Burke's understanding of hierarchies and the negative in connection with Michel Foucault's conception of power as both an institutional and discursive formulation. Here again, seminar

members found Burke's sustained efforts to read the dynamics of symbol to be at odds with Foucault's insistence upon recognizing every discursive formulation as a disciplinary strategy designed to constrain the subject or to construct the subject as a well-disciplined network. Much the same argument applies to Burke's relationship to Lyotard and the politics of postmodernism. Burke much less problematically than Lyotard considers the contest of discourses to be open to transformation that could bring about communities of identification and accountability, whereas Lyotard defines rigorous skepticism ("incredulity toward meta-narratives") as the ground of postmodern politics and the *petit recit* (the micro-political) as the only means of legitimating knowledge without a concomitant claim to mastery.

The seminar then addressed the status of the subject in Burke and in the discourse of Lacanian psycho-analysis. There is much in Burke, particularly in his discussion of the role of Freudian substitution in "Definition of Man," that might be said to anticipate the post-structural understanding of the subject, arguing for a strong link between Burke and the specifically linguistic ground of Lacanian psycho-analysis. Of course, one would have to consider this affinity in the light of Lacan's insistence upon a fundamental alienation of the subject in the realm of the symbolic.

The discussions concluded by returning to the question of language through the relationship that might be drawn between Burke and Paul de Man. Again seminar members agreed that Burke would dissent from the post-structural/postmodern position. For de Man, the grammatical function of language is always ultimately subverted by its rhetorical dimension, while Burke would insist that this subversion is by no means fatal to the project of meaning.

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# & Postmodernism

# KB And the Sacred

Submitted by Coordinator  
Andrew King  
Speech Communication  
Louisiana State University

Participants: Edward C. Appel, Kathleen Edelmayer, Camilla J. Kari, Jim Kimble, Andrew King, Peggy McGee, and J. Clarke Roundtree. (Membership was "fluid," the core growing and being joined by visitors.)

The seminar raised the following questions:

If Burke's logology is an epistemology and a grammar, is it also a theology? Answer: Burke qualifies as a process theologian in a technical and rather arid sense.

If Burke is a theologian, what kind of a theologian is he? Answer: An admirer of Paul Tillich, Burke is hardly the God-haunted Augustinian of Blauwald.

How adequate is Burke's logology for non-Christian, non-patriarchal, non-Western religious conceptions? Answer: Considerable explication, translation, and editing was not a very satisfying process. Only in the western literary tradition can Burke be wholly Burke.

What about Burke's sacred praxis? Does he propose a model of moral conduct apart from his logology? Answer: Burke's reluctance to abandon dialectic (the "free play" of ideas in suspension and the delight in a rich array of views) weakens the moral power of his views.

Can the inadequacies of Burke's logology be remedied by linguistic extension (new expansion of vocabulary or "sheer words") to accommodate a greater variety of religious experience? Answer: This is a daunting task.

What is Burke's heuristic value for sermonizing? Does he have a way of conflating dramatism and logology to produce a sacred discourse? Answer: The seminar noted Burke's compositional or inventional uses.

Does Burke believe in a wholly secular moment? This would be an epiphany in reverse. Answer: No.

Is guilt a missing religious ingredient in a culture that features shame? Answer: The question was unresolved.

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# Burke & the Sacred



## DUQUESNE UNIVERSITY

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**Editor—Richard H. Thames, Duquesne University**  
**Assistants—Kim McKelvey, Mai Neo, Tracy Irani**

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### To Affect the Quality of the Day . . .

He got into the car and pointed right, toward Sparta. "That way!" Do you want fish for supper? "Yes." Do you want me to cook fresh fish or do you want your shrimp dinner? He prefers the latter. He was demanding all the signs be read to him as usual as we drove along: "What does that say? stop, stop!" We went past the Chinese restaurant in Newton. "Stop, stop, what's that?" It's a Chinese restaurant, K.B., you don't care for Chinese food, do you? "Oh, yes, I like it." Me, kind of exasperated, well do you want to have shrimp for dinner or Chinese food. Pause: "Well, I'll have Chinese shrimp." He laughed at his joke. . . . We went to Fu's restaurant and ordered vegetable and shrimp stir fry. KB drank an orange juice while we waited for the take out.

We arrived back at Amity Road about 5, and it was growing dark. Again he chose to walk from the car to the back door. Once inside, he removed his

hat and tossed it on the bench. I helped him with the rest of his gear. . . . Once in his room he decided on a nap. He lay down and checked the clock, 5:30. "Is this Friday?" Yes, Nov. 19.

Awoke hungry. [In the kitchen] I gave him a bowl with rice and the Chinese food. Is it good? "It's good." I made tea for KB and myself and put on his ear phones [to aid hearing]. We watched McNeil-Lehrer, Washington Week in Review and finally Bill Moyers, with the gay debate in Colorado Springs.

While seated in his kitchen, watching television, his earphones still in place, KB suffered respiratory problems. Despite the immediate care of Ginny Brand and later of an emergency medical squad, she writes, "KB was pronounced dead at 10:10[pm]." In Manhattan, Michael Burke, in telephone contact with the scene, concluded that KB simply "faded away," having lived more than six months into his 96th year.

Near the conclusion of her report, Ginny Brand notes that Steve Chapin arrived about the time of KB's death. Observing the scene in the kitchen where his grandfather had died, he "then went in [to the living room] and played the piano." What he played, of course, as later confirmed by Michael, was "One Light in a Dark Valley."

To her handwritten report, Ginny Brand carefully attached a small printed statement, then closed with a final comment to Anthony:

From KB's future cookie:

To affect the quality of the day  
is no small achievement.

Butch: Thought you might like to know some of the details of Nov. 19. —Ginny

KB was in luck to the end, spending his last years in his own home, much of the time with family present, and frequently accompanied by a lady with unusual insight and sensitivity, even to his last moment. To name the situation at the scene of the death of a great person in itself "is no small achievement." In recognizing the significance of the complete statement from KB's fortune cookie (she writes "future cookie") and carefully citing it, that is precisely what Ginny Brand did. A certain spritely spirit, freed from the tiresome limits of "nonsymbolic motion," yet loving the ironic much as ever, might be pleased with her citation as an epitaph, a way of "rounding things out." —Don Burks