



## NEWSLETTER

# *The Kenneth Burke Society*

April 1989

Volume 5 Number 1

## **Kenneth Burke Society National Convention**

**May 4-7, 1990  
New Harmony, Indiana**

The Kenneth Burke Society will hold its first national convention, since its founding in March 1984, on May 4-7, 1990, at the New Harmony Inn in New Harmony, Ind. The theme of the conference, "The Spectrum of Kenneth Burke: In Retrospect and Prospect," encourages participants to submit convention papers as well as a range of ideas for general sessions, seminars, workshops, and special events in traditional or original formats.

The conference has also been conceived by Sheron J. Dailey, Chief Convention Planner, as a "Kenneth Burke Convivium." Dailey selected the May 4-7 convention dates because they enable the Society to host a party in honor of Burke's 93rd birthday on May 5, 1990.

A variety of submissions are invited. Participants are certainly encouraged to submit papers for this convention. In addition, participants are also especially invited to submit proposals for seminars, workshops, special events, and alternative formats which explore issues related to Burkeian analyses.

### **Submission Dates**

Participants can utilize two submission dates. For those at an exploratory stage in the development of an idea or a format, preliminary submissions (due on Sept. 1, 1989) will receive detailed attention and feedback. Final submissions for all convention papers must be received no later than Jan. 1, 1990.

### **The Convention Site**

New Harmony, Indiana is an appropriate site for this conference. It was founded in 1814 by millennialists as an experimental utopian colony. Ten years later Scottish industrialist Robert Owen and philanthropist William Maclure dedicated the community to the pursuit of the highest intellectual, cultural, social, and educational ideals. Today this historic town provides an ideal location for Burke scholars to pursue their own ideas in peaceful and picturesque surroundings.

Many in the Central States can drive to New Harmony which is located 30 miles west of Evansville, Ind. on I-64 in the lower Wabash River Valley.

For others, New Harmony is accessible by air from St. Louis, Chicago, Indianapolis, and Nashville. The New Harmony Inn is located about 30 minutes from the Evansville airport. The Inn provides transportation from the Evansville airport for registered guests free of charge.

### **The Convention Hotel**

Guest accommodations at the New Harmony Inn are excellent and extremely reasonable. New Harmony Inn 1989 room rates are:

Double Occupancy: \$50 per day

Single Occupancy: \$40 per day

Room rates in 1990 may be higher.

Meals are not included in the room rates above. However, depending on the number of people registering with the hotel, an even more attractive room and meal package may be available.

The New Harmony Inn has 90 bedrooms which will accommodate approximately 180 guests. To preserve a sense of intimacy and group identity, the planning committee urges all participants to stay at the New Harmony Inn and to arrange to share a room with a colleague attending the conference if possible. In the event that the conference exceeds the capacity of the New Harmony Inn, motels within 15 to 30 minutes from the inn have offered to provide shuttle service.

Information regarding convention rooms and reservations should be directed to: Mona Black, New Harmony Inn, P.O. Box 581, New Harmony, IN 47631; telephone (812) 682-4491.

### **Preliminary Submissions**

Preliminary submissions allow participants to receive feedback and reactions to an idea or proposal before it takes final form. The planning committee encourages participants to take advantage of this preliminary submission process. Not only will it allow for reactions to new ideas and proposals, it will also permit more effective planning.

All preliminary convention ideas and formats as well as all seminar, workshop, special event, and alternative format submissions should be directed, no later than **Sept. 1, 1989**, to: Sheron J. Dailey, Chair, Burke Society Convention Planning Committee, Department

of Communication, Indiana State University, Terre Haute, IN 47809.

### Convention Papers

Four copies of all *final* convention paper submissions should be directed, no later than **Jan. 1, 1990**, to: James W. Chesebro, Chair, Burke Society Selection Committee, Department of Communication Arts and Sciences, Queens College of CUNY, Flushing, NY 11367. Participants submitting convention papers will also have their submissions automatically reviewed for possible inclusion in the volume to be published following the convention, to be edited by James W. Chesebro.

### Conference Schedule and Fee

The conference will begin at 3 p.m. Friday, May 4, with a special plenary session and keynote speaker. The last scheduled programs at the conference will end at 3 p.m. on Monday, May 7. The conference fee is \$40, payable to the **Kenneth Burke Society**.

## Promises and Results of Burkeian Rhetorical Criticism

Herbert W. Simons  
Temple University

*Herbert Simons was co-organizer, with Trevor Mella, of the Temple/SCA Conference on "The Legacy of Kenneth Burke," at which the Kenneth Burke Society was founded. A version of this essay was presented at the 1987 CSSA/SSCA convention in St. Louis. Portions of the essay appear in the Introduction to The Legacy of Kenneth Burke, eds. H. W. Simons and T. Mella (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989).*

The question, What has been the promise and the accomplishment of Burkeian criticism since the 70s, has very personal meaning for me for it was in 1970 that I was finally persuaded to read Burke with an open mind. On first reading I'd found Burke to be pedantic, abstruse, disorganized, and worse yet, unscientific. It was not for nothing that I'd spent the first 15 years of my career as an empirically oriented communication scholar. My persuader convinced me to hang loose when I read Burke. Be a conceptual swinger, he said. Allow yourself the freedom of moving with and sometimes beyond his ideas to their logical and imaginative limits.

Later I was to characterize Burke as essentially and ambiguously a maker of scenes.

Essentially that because I read everywhere an attempted triumph of man over situation: the aspiration to assert his own humanness over the shackles of nature and convention. Ambiguously that because Burke makes scenes both in the sense of posing (acting the clown, erecting symbolic masks, relishing in felicitous distortions) and imposing (unmasking, making a mark, defying death).

Having begun on a personal note, let me also take note of the scene of my conversion. It was the Pheasant Run Conference on Rhetoric, and my persuader, a fellow member of the Task Force on the Advancement and Refinement of Rhetorical Criticism, was Richard Gregg. What made Gregg's job a bit easier was that no one else at the time—not the scientifically oriented persuasion theorists nor the classically oriented rhetoricians—seemed at all able to make rhetorical sense of the protests of the time. The only contributor to the earlier Wingspread Conference on Rhetoric who discussed the rhetoric of conflict in any detail was Hugh Dalziel Duncan—and he was a protege of Kenneth Burke! Significantly, the leading Speech types at both conferences didn't so much as breathe Burke's name. The person whom Donald Bryant had earlier called that "famous upstart" was evidently too subversive for those trying to contain an intellectual crisis within their own midsts.

I don't think there is any doubt but that Burke has had enormous influence these last 17 years on rhetorical criticism. Looking back on the Task Force report, we can better appreciate why that is so. Running throughout the report is the call for an expansion of the scope of criticism—from platform address as delimited object of study to virtually all human acts and artifacts. Specifically emphasized was the need to study movement rhetoric, mass mediated messages, and what nowadays is being called the rhetoric of the human sciences. These, it was argued, could best be studied through a combination of personal involvement and critical detachment. Criticism, we suggested, should both inform and be informed by theory. Always it should link the particular with the general, enabling teachers of public address, for example, to learn from criticism in centering upon genres, problems, issues, and rhetorical functions.

Does the foregoing seem unproblematic today? I think it does in large measure because of Kenneth Burke. Said Simons, Mechling, and Schreier in their essay on movement rhetoric for the *Handbook of Rhetorical and Communication Theory*,

Probably the major factor accounting for the shift away from atheoretical, classical-historical scholarship in the study of movements was the belated discovery by rhetoricians of the writings of Kenneth Burke....Burke helped lay the ground-

work for generic theory with his work on literary and rhetorical forms. Burke's theory of dramatism and perspective by incongruity helped critics to forge links between seemingly different movement rhetorics. By extending the scope of rhetoric to its farthest reaches, Burke enabled rhetoricians to glimpse rhetorical motives, methods, and meanings that had previously been ignored. It was Burke who saw in language itself the myriad possibilities for ideological formation and transformation, identification and division, order and disorder, affirmation and negation, mystification and demystification. It was Burke who recast numerous social and political philosophers both as rhetorical theorists and as rhetors and helped show their influence on the history of social movement. In his analysis of *Mein Kampf*, Burke provided a model for rhetorical criticism of a movement's discourse. (1984, p.803)

Much the same could be said about Burke's contribution to other arenas of rhetorical theory and criticism. Clifford Geertz credits Burke's writings on dramatism, rhetoric, and dialectic with having had a major influence on the current "refiguration of social thought," a shift, as he puts it, "in analytical rhetoric, the tropes and imageries of explanation." At my conference on Case Studies in the Rhetoric of the Human Sciences, Dilip Gaonkar characterized Burke's "Traditional Principles" essay in *A Rhetoric of Motives* as a rescue operation, an attempt at extending rhetoric's reach and reclaiming its history without at the same time depriving it of its "mereness," its lack of epistemic or substantive grounding, its status as a Derridean supplement. Other contemporary writers, says Gaonkar, have found rhetoric's formal emptiness intolerable, but in seeking to provide it with a grounding, they have denied it its unique potential as a critical perspective on other disciplines. Gaonkar singles Burke out as one who has not sought to remake rhetoric into something more respectable. To the contrary, his rescue operation involves "a return of the repressed," a confrontation with rhetoric's sophistic side. Said Gaonkar, Burke has helped insure a future for the "rhetorical turn" in the human sciences by giving it a past. Without considering Gaonkar's intriguing case in detail, I think it can be said that Burke's reconceptualization of rhetoric's nature and scope, as well as his reconstitution of its history are far more compatible with current thinking about the human sciences than is the traditional view. The reconceptualization takes rhetoric well beyond the artificial confines imposed upon it by those neo-Aristotelians who have sought to tame it, Platonists who haughtily dismissed it, and post-Enlightenment scholars who generally managed to ignore it or emasculate it.

Closely related to Burke's contributions to the "rhetorical turn" in the human sciences has been his influence upon contemporary critical theory. Practically

everyone agrees that Burke has been, in Hayden White's terms, a "critical pathfinder," although not everyone agrees on what paths he has found. Burke has been credited with being the chief architect of the New Rhetoric, the inventor of dramatism, a forerunner of French structuralism, and a prefashionable deconstructionist. Lentricchia recently likened Burke to Roland Barthes' critical structuralism, and praised him as well for his exemplary sense of the relationship between criticism and social change. Far from being the ideologist-turned-methodologist whom Philip Wander chastised, Burke remains for Lentricchia the ideal literary intellectual, testimony to the power of criticism as a Gramscian counter-hegemonic tool.

Whatever Burke's place in the pantheon of contending critical theories, I think it safe to say that an understanding of Burke provides a route into those theories, a vehicle through which to render them intelligible. For many of us at least, Burke has been the middleman, the bridge between traditional rhetorical theory and criticism and the difficult but nevertheless important ideas of Paul Ricoeur, Jurgen Habermas, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, Paul de Man, and the like. Years ago, for example, at a conference on metaphor organized by Michael Leff and Gary Cronkhite, I had occasion to hear Paul de Man discuss the tropological character of truth claims. De Man's arguments immediately brought to mind Kenneth Burke's paradox of substance and master tropes. Incidentally, de Man was not surprised when I brought up Burke's name. It's astonishing, he said, that while Europeans seem rarely to have heard of Burke, in the United States it is Burke they most often name in connection with his own ideas.

All this is not to say that the world of literary/rhetorical theorists and critics has been thoroughly Burkified, or that the general run of Burkeian criticism compels serious attention. While Burke has for many of us been a route into other difficult theories, the fact is that his own ideas are anything but simple to comprehend. Although Burke's credentials as a virtuoso reader have been vouchsafed by the likes of Auden, Hyman, Bloom, and Booth, readers of Burke express difficulty at putting his ideas together coherently, let alone figuring out how to do what he does so well. A source of endless frustration for Burke is the charge — levelled by Jamieson and others — that he is idiosyncratic to the point of being eccentric or perverse. The problem, perhaps, is not that Burke is lacking for system; rather, that he has invented too many of them, often blowing to smithereens ideas that he had earlier been at pains to construct.

Does this mean that Burke's ideas don't add up; that Burkeian theory is inconsistent? Very possibly, though few rhetorical critics have put that question to a test. Typically they draw upon some small part of Burkeian theory for their critical purposes, and they do so uncritically.

cally. Sometimes Burkeian concepts are used formulaically, and not uncommonly they are employed as mere substitutes for simpler, more familiar vocabularies. These, I suspect, are complaints that can be leveled at applications of every critical theory.

Still, the best of our criticism is worthy of far-reaching attention, and it tends, more often than not to draw sustenance from Burke. While any number of Burke-oriented critics could be cited as exemplary, I want to pay special tribute here to the work of Janice Hocker Rushing, for it illustrates a number of things that in my mind need greatly to be encouraged.

First, Rushing has engaged in a consistent program of criticism, one, moreover, that justifies the extended attention she has given to it by the significance of the issues she addresses and the value of the insights she has accrued. Rushing has been concerned most centrally with our idea of the frontier as manifested in Hollywood films. Her selection of media artifacts might seem mundane, even trivial, but she uses them expertly to tell us a good deal about ourselves as a culture, and about the relationship between culture and politics. We learn, for example, about the cultural logic that unites *Urban Cowboy* and Ronald Reagan. We learn why both are ultimately wrong for our culture, just as, in another context, we discover why *The Right Stuff* offered the wrong vision of our place in space. We learn also how the rhetoric of SDI is poised on an ambiguity between new myths of space-as-frontier and old ones, a juncture which in Burke's terms, provides all manner of alchemic opportunities.

Second, Rushing moves synecdochically between the general and the specific, theory and practice, deep structure and surface structure, macrocosm and microcosm, *langue* and *parole*. No choice is made between theory for the sake of criticism or criticism for the sake of theory because none needs to be made; each informs the other.

Third, Rushing makes judicious use of Burke and she does so creatively and reflexively, calling attention to her methods. Unlike too many Burke-oriented critics who treat the pedantic terms ambiguously, Rushing, like Burke, has been interested in them as "resources of ambiguity." By implication, she seems to suggest, the pentad is best used as a comparative tool. Likewise, Rushing is willing to make only limited application of Burkeian dialectics, apparently taking issue with the master on the necessity of dialectical transcendence. This, I will suggest, is as it should be. Whereas Rushing's assessment of what she calls the "new" space myth is Burkeian enough, the Western myth, she insists, cannot truly synthesize and thus transcend its polar oppositions.

By way of conclusion, I offer three suggestions for future Burkeian criticism. First, we need re-readings of Burke in light of recent writings by other critical theo-

rists, this so that his contributions and theirs might better be understood and evaluated. This may well be the main contribution of our own book on Burke's legacy.

Second, we need more essays like Rushing's that are self-conscious about methods without getting formulaic. I am reminded in this connection of a conversation with Bill Rueckert's former editor at the University of Minnesota Press. He insisted that what the world needs most is not more talk about Burke, but a book of exemplary essays of Burkeian criticism that can teach others how to do what KB does so well.

Finally, we need more essays that don't simply apply Burkeian concepts but also test them in the process. Burke himself has fairly begged to be co-haggled with, but he has had few takers from within Speech Communication or, according to Victor Vitanza, from within English departments as well. Is the Burke of dramatic theory consistent with Burke the logologist? Is the scientific Burke of his *International Encyclopedia* article on dramatism consistent with his Introduction to dramatism in the *Grammar of Motives*? Is the comedic Burke consistent with the morally outraged Burke who declaims about "counter-nature"? Is the tropological Burke consistent with the Burke who insists on the literal status of dramatism? Where in Burke's scheme of things is power, other than symbolic power? Where are other conditions of existence that are not simply constituted by symbols? Where is communication of the interactive kind, as opposed to speeches, writings, and the like? How representative are Burke's representative anecdotes about movements and religion? Do they tell us more about Burke's upbringing than about language or culture in the large? How applicable indeed are Burke's concepts to other cultures?

These are but a few of the questions that need to be addressed by critics as anxious to test Burkeian theory as to apply it. Addressing them will not undo the greatness of Burke's contribution, and it may well serve to enhance it.

## New Publications

The editors of *Horns of Plenty*, Bill and Yolanda Butts, announce that their issue "Kenneth Burke: Writer, Critic, Philosopher," is now available. This special issue includes a review of new "Burke" books, a Burkeian lexicon, and a number of essays from established Burkeian scholars. Subscription rates for *Horns of Plenty* are \$15 for individuals and \$20 for institutions. The single issue price for the special Kenneth Burke issue is \$4. Checks or money orders should be made payable to Horns of Plenty and mailed to: Horns of Plenty, 2041 West Farragut Ave., Chicago, IL 60625.

## Clarification of Address for Membership Fees

Perhaps the membership form in the last newsletter brought about a bit of confusion. Although membership fees sent directly to the treasurer will always be credited, bookkeeping is expedited if membership fees, whether from new members or from those who are renewing, are sent to: Professor James Chesebro, Chair, Membership Committee, Kenneth Burke Society, Department of Communication, Queens College of CUNY, Flushing, NY 11367. Checks should be made payable to the Kenneth Burke Society.

Professor Chesebro maintains the K.B.S. mailing list, and relays the checks to the treasurer. Appropriately, we strive to be a well ordered organization!

On behalf of the Kenneth Burke Society, I take this opportunity to thank Professor Mary Evelyn Collins for her work in editing the K.B.S. newsletter for the past three years, and to thank Professor Dale Bertelsen for succeeding her as newsletter editor.

Don Burks  
Treasurer

You are cordially invited to join the Kenneth Burke Society. Formed in 1984, the Kenneth Burke Society now has branches in the Speech Communication Association, Central States Communication Association, Eastern Communication Association, and Southern States Communication Association. The Kenneth Burke Society annually sponsors convention programs and seminars at all of these conventions.

In addition, this is a particularly exciting time to join the Kenneth Burke Society. The *Newsletter* is moving to a biannual publication schedule, and the May 4-7, 1990 national meeting of the Kenneth Burke Society is currently being planned.

I look forward to hearing from you.

James W. Chesebro  
Chair, Membership Committee

## Regional News

The Central States Chapter of the Kenneth Burke Society will offer two panels Friday, April 14, at the Central States Communication Association Convention in Kansas City, Mo.

Morning Panel Session:

"Burkeian Interpretations and Applications"  
(competitive papers)

Afternoon Panel Session:

"Burkeian Analyses of the 1989 Inaugural Address"

Karlyn Kohrs Campbell

David Ling

Bruce Gronbeck

Moderator: Don Parson

The Eastern Communication Association Chapter of the Kenneth Burke Society will offer two panels at the Eastern Communication Association Convention in Ocean City, Md.

Friday, May 5, 2:30 p.m.-3:45 p.m.

"Burke's Concepts of Scene, Motive, and Reality"

Dale A. Bertelsen

Janis L. Edwards

Walter Jost

Chair: Judith S. Trent

Respondent: James W. Chesebro

Sunday, May 7, 10:30 a.m.-11:45 a.m.

"Kenneth Burke: First of All, A Poet"

Marcla Godich

Dale A. Bertelsen

Mary Mino

James Perry

Chair: Marcla Godich

(Tear off this form and mail it in)

## KENNETH BURKE SOCIETY 1989-1990 Membership

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

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For a two year membership in the Kenneth Burke Society, please mail this form and a check for \$5 made payable to the Kenneth Burke Society to: Professor James W. Chesebro, Chair, Membership Committee, Kenneth Burke Society, Department of Communication, Queens College of CUNY, Flushing, NY 11367.

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NEWSLETTER

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