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Robert Wess, Oregon State University

Abstract: As William H. Rueckert notes, *Essays toward a Symbolic of Motives* is one of the three texts that one must work through to know what Burke's *A Symbolic of Motives* is about. One way to work through these texts is to consider theoretical difficulties Burke encountered in his *Symbolic* project. The chief difficulty revolved around whether to divide the project into two, *Ethics and Poetics*, and to theorize each in a separate book, or to combine both of these into one unified *Symbolic*. Burke seems both to have moved toward such a division and to have resisted going all the way in the hope of finding a basis for unification. In the end, he left us neither two books nor one, but this failure may ironically help us to better appreciate the theoretical rigor he sought to achieve in his "motive" books.

With *Essays toward a Symbolic of Motives, 1950-1955 (ETSM)*, the late William H. Rueckert, long the "dean" of Burke studies, added in his final year a fitting capstone to his long list of contributions to Burke studies. Alone among Burke scholars, Rueckert corresponded with Burke about the *Symbolic* for decades.¹

As Rueckert notes, *ETSM* is the earliest of the three known versions of the *Symbolic* ("Introduction" xi). It is based mainly on a 1955 Burke text listing articles envisioned at the time as parts of the *Symbolic*.² The other versions are unpublished manuscripts: *Poetics, Dramatically Considered (PDC)* and *A Symbolic of Motives (SM)*.³ As David Cratis Williams shows, *SM* follows *PDC*⁴ chronologically. *PDC* seems complete, but the "contents" page does list things "still missing," whereas *SM* is clearly incomplete.⁵ "[T]o know what Burke's never published *A Symbolic of Motives* is all about," Rueckert concludes, "we have to work our way through all three of his versions of it" ("Introduction" xiv).

Burke evidently didn't give up on the *Symbolic* until 1978, after which he thought of it as possibly a collection of essays, like *Philosophy of Literary Form and Language as Symbolic Action*, rather than as a coherent theoretical work (Rueckert, "Kenneth Burke's" 115, *Kenneth Burke* 291). Given all the years Burke devoted to the *Symbolic*, his failure to complete it is no doubt the effect of multiple causes arising in different contexts. There are, moreover, many Burkes, not just Burke the theorist (Rueckert, "Some"). Interactions among these Burkes may very well have played a role in Burke's failure to see the *Symbolic* through to publication (Williams 20, 30; Jay 360; Rueckert, "Introduction" xiii-xiv). How the many Burkes may have interanimated one another over Burke's long career is the task that only a great biographer, with the imagination to invent a new biographical form, is likely ever to complete. Burkeans may have to await such a work for a version of the *Symbolic* story satisfactory to all.

While it's likely that only part of this story can be illuminated by consideration of theoretical difficulties Burke encountered, such consideration can help one to work one's way through *ETSM* and the changes that appear in the later *PDC* and *SM*. Beginning in the early 1950s, the theoretical problem that Burke mentions most often in correspondence (e.g., *Letters* 3 and Williams 8-13) is still with him in 1967, at which time he seems to envision a solution as he observes that the *Symbolic*'s "study of individual identity"

would include both poetic and ethical dimensions, inasmuch as both the character of the individual poem and the character of the individual person embody "equations" (explicit or implicit assumptions as to what fits with what). At some stages along the way, I saw this third volume splitting into two. But now that so many of my speculations about Poetics have been treated in the theoretical and analytical pieces of which *Language as Symbolic Action* is comprised, I dare believe that I can revert to my original plan and finish the project in one more book. (*Counter Statement* 222)⁶

Ironically, moreover, attention to Burke's apparent theoretical failure in his *Symbolic* project may result in greater appreciation of the rigor he achieved in his best theoretical work. An autodidact, Burke operated independently of the protocols of academic writing in general or those of any discipline in particular, so to academic readers Burke often seems undisciplined. Even friendly readers sometimes seem to feel it's necessary to forgive Burke and cut him some academic slack. Examples of this appear in Wayne Booth's 1974 *Critical Inquiry* essay, to which Burke responds, "[I]t's the places where Booth forgives me that make me uncomfortable. At those times Booth makes me scare myself" ("Dancing" 31). But if Burke really needed the forgiveness Booth offers, it's difficult to see why he wouldn't have been content to throw together material from the three versions of the *Symbolic* he left us to round out the *Grammar, Rhetoric, and Symbolic* trilogy that he promised.

Whether the "character of the individual poem" and the "character of the individual person" should be theorized in separate books or together in one thus appears to have been Burke's main theoretical problem. Separation sometimes appeared to be the logical way to go, but a final commitment to it seems to have been difficult. Why separate? Why resist separation? Focusing on the "poem" suggests a possible answer to the first question; focusing on the "person," a possible answer to the second. Each possibility requires a separate section.

"Character of the Individual Poem"

In the middle decades of the twentieth century, debates about the nature of the "poem" were dominated by formalists (preeminently

the New Critics but also the Neo Aristotelians at Chicago), who valorized intrinsic analysis of the literary work over extrinsic analysis of its connections to its author or historical period. This formalism separated “poem” from “person.” During the decades of their ascendancy, formalists transformed the academic study of literature, turning it away from positivistic historical study of the backgrounds of literature to “close reading” of literary works. “The Intentional Fallacy,” the title of an essay dating from 1946 (Wimsatt), became a commonplace term used to sharpen the separation of the work from its author. Even when Wayne Booth advocated consideration of the author in his seminal 1961 book, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, he felt it necessary to do so in the form of an author “implied” by the text that he distinguished from the real person who authored the text (75).

This formalist reasoning was informed by a modernist valorization of the work of art as a transcendent world apart from everyday life. In the world of modernism, the vitality of art takes the place of a defunct religion. Burke expresses a similar view in *Permanence and Change*:

A corrective rationalization must certainly move in the direction of the anthropomorphic or humanistic or poetic. . . . The reference to poetry rather than to religion seems necessary for many reasons. Perhaps foremost of all is the fact that poetry, through never having been institutionalized, does not stand about as the Church does, like a big deserted building, with broken windows and littered doorways. (65)

No doubt because of his early aestheticism, Burke was never altogether immune to formalism’s appeal. In “The Poetic Process,” first published in 1925, Burke makes a formalist argument of his own: “Mark Twain, before setting pen to paper, again and again transformed the bitterness that he *wanted* to utter into the humor that he *could* evoke” (*Counter Statement* 53). In life Twain was one thing, in art another. But Burke also became convinced that there were deep connections between text and author, so deep that through writing a text an author could undergo a “rebirth.” His own experience with his novel, *Towards a Better Life*, strengthened this conviction if it didn’t originate it (*Toward* vi-vii; “Thinking” 338-39). Burke’s analysis of such connections focused on what he called “equations,” as in the 1967 statement quoted above. His interest in these appears at least as early as *Counter Statement*, where it’s argued that art can be “objective” when there is consensus in a culture about “what is heroic, what cowardly, what irreligious, what boorish, what clever, etc.” (192). As such consensus breaks down, art becomes “subjective” because artists can find the “irreducible minimum of belief” they need only in their “personal range of experiences” (194). Each writer develops his or her idiosyncratic “equations.” No longer obvious as in “objective” periods, “equations” become unique to each writer, informing the “personality” of “person” and “poem.” To uncover such “equations,” Burke developed his theory of “indexing” literary works, which is the one specific thing about the *Symbolic* that he mentions in the 1955 statement on which *ETSM* is based. This theory provides the best standpoint from which to see what distinguishes *ETSM* from the later versions of the *Symbolic*. From the standpoint of this theory, moreover, there is continuity between “person” and “poem” so that there is no need to divide one from the other. This standpoint, in other words, represents the side of Burke ready to resist the formalist side that would separate “person” from “poem.”

Burke’s interest in the “personality” of writer and text is in the ascendancy in 1941, in his study of Coleridge in the title essay of *The Philosophy of Literary Form*, where he counters the formalist argument in strong terms:

But to grasp the full nature of the symbolic enactment going on in the poem, we must study the interrelationships disclosable by a study of Coleridge’s mind itself. If a critic prefers to so restrict the rules of critical analysis that these private elements are excluded, that is his right. I see no formal or categorical objection to criticism so conceived. But if his interest happens to be in the structure of the poetic act, he will use everything that is available and would even consider it a kind of vandalism to exclude certain material that Coleridge has left, basing such exclusion upon some conventions as to the ideal of criticism. The main ideal of criticism, as I conceive it, is to use all that is there to use. (23; see also *Grammar* 451)

Formalism is “vandalism” because it limits the range of evidence available to scrutinize for “equations.” The Burke who insists on the continuity from “person” to “poem” is the Burke who insists on using “all that there is to use.”

In its most extreme form, formalism would contend that each individual work is autotelic, an artistic world unto itself, that must be scrutinized independently even of other works by the same author. Burke counters this argument a few years after his Coleridge study in “The Problem of the Intrinsic,” which specifically addresses the Chicago Neo Aristotelians:

Indeed, insofar as the writers do abide by their pretensions, and begin with each analysis anew, their interpretation of the principles by which a given poem is organized is mere “prophecy after the event.” (*Grammar* 473)

“Prophecy after the event,” used dyslogistically here, later becomes, as we’ll see, a eulogistic term for Burke.

A later step in Burke’s response to formalism is a tripartite structure of analysis: For these pages (part of a work in progress, *A Symbolic of Motives*) belong in a section called “Theory of the Index.” . . . [We] plan to take another work as text, Coleridge’s “Ancient Mariner,” for which we have specified three orders of analysis: (1) The sort of observations one might make if one had only the single poem, in isolation, and did not even know its author; (2) the sort of observations that would be in order if one knew the author, and could treat the poem in a context with Coleridge’s other poetry; (3) the sort of observations one might make if he could also consider Coleridge’s essayistic writings, notes, letters, biographical data, and the like. This is part of a project for “The Carving-out Of a Poetics,” that aims to meet the canons of Poetics as a special field, while at the same time considering the wider realm of linguistic action generally. (*ETSM* 77-78)⁷

While this structure appears to make room for a formalist analysis (level one), in practice it stops short of a truly formalist conception of the “poem,” as Burke himself implicitly acknowledges in “Poetics in Particular; Language in General,” an essay to be considered

below.

Much of *ETSM* is structured around this tripartite structure. As Rueckert observes, what most distinguishes *ETSM* is its dominant focus on analyses of individual texts and writers; such analysis continues in *PDC* and *SM*, but it is subordinated to an overarching concern with a theory of tragedy and the cathartic process ("Introduction" xviii). All three levels of the structure appear in the Whitman chapter, "Policy Made Personal," which is divided into three parts, with each part focusing mainly albeit not exclusively on one of the three levels. "Vegetal Radicalism" limits itself to levels two and three. "Ethan Brand" limits itself to one and two. Focusing on Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, "Fact, Inference and Proof" confines itself almost exclusively to level one, providing Burke's most thorough example of "indexing" a single work. These essays illustrate how Burke may have, in his initial conception of the *Symbolic*, combined consideration of "poem" and "person" in one structure.

Two essays in *ETSM* that anticipate Burke's later emphasis on tragedy are "Othello" and "The Orestes Trilogy." The "Orestes" chapter actually comes from *PDC*, where it's the only chapter that focuses on a single text. In neither the "Othello" nor the "Orestes" chapters, however, is "the thinking of the body" as prominent as it eventually becomes in the later work on catharsis.

There is one significant new development in the early 1950s in Burke's analysis of the "personality" to be found in symbol-using: the theory of the negative. The negative even seems to be the reason Burke begins using the term "ethics" to refer to this dimension of symbol using. Discussing his progress on his *Symbolic* in correspondence, Burke remarks, "And for the Ethics Character, Personality the Great Lore of No-No, Huh-uh, Mustn't, and the ways of life that congeal about it, or shatter around it" (qtd. in Williams 12). This new dimension of Burke's analytic repertoire appears in *ETSM* in two companion essays: "Language of Poetry" and "Goethe's *Faust*," with the first serving as a theoretical introduction to the second. It's conceivable that the idea of dividing "person" from "poem" may have been occasioned by the emergence of the negative as a way to analyze the "person" to supplement the "indexing" of "equations."

The idea of dividing "person" and "poem" entailed a revision in Burke's conception of language. Instead of three dimensions (grammar, rhetoric, symbolic), there are four (grammar, rhetoric, ethics, poetics), as defined in 1959, in "On Catharsis, or Resolution," which combines material from a number of chapters in *PDC*:

Poetics as here considered is part of a scheme involving what I take to be the four aspects of language. Besides Poetics there are: Logic (or "Grammar"), the universal principles of linguistic placement; Rhetoric, language as addressed, as hortatory, and as designed for the stimulating or transcending of partisanship; Ethics, language as a medium in which, willy nilly, writer and reader express their identities, their characters, either as individuals or as members of classes or groups. The Poetic dimension of language concerns essentially the exercise of linguistic resources in and for themselves, by an animal which loves such exercise because it is the typically language using animal. (340)⁸

The same fourfold appears in "Poetics in Particular" (28-29), where Burke also offers a tripartite structure that contrasts with the one in *ETSM*:

In the cause of method, one must not confuse these three quite different procedures: (1) Saying *only* what could be said about a work, considered in itself [Poetics]; (2) saying all that might be said about the work in terms of its relation to the author, his times, etc. [Ethics]; (3) while meeting tests of the first sort (discussing the work intrinsically, as a poem) also making observations of the second sort (concerning its possible relation to nonpoetic elements, such as author or background). (41)

In this new scheme, there still is a place for personal "equations" linking text to writer, but they are limited to level two⁹.

One can see in concrete terms the difference this new structure makes by contrasting Burke's treatment of Joyce's *Portrait* in "Fact, Inference and Proof" with his treatment of Poe's "The Raven," which is the focus of "Poetics in Particular." Burke concedes that Poe's poem, because it is both built around a beautiful dead woman and is written by Poe, surely calls for attention from the "ethics" standpoint (26), but he insists that these considerations need to be excluded rigorously in poetic analysis, which can give purely poetic reasons for building a poem around such a subject matter (26-27). In the new tripartite structure of levels of analysis, level one (poetic) is rigorously distinguished from level two (ethics). In theorizing this analysis, the term "prophecy after the event" returns but now it's used eulogistically:

I'd simply ask that the original poem be treated as the authoritative intuition which the critic then translates into terms of its nature as a *kind* of poetry, with its corresponding kind of *principles* and *proprieties*. And such a procedure might be profitably pursued, even though it led eventually to the discovery that each poem, like a Thomistic angel, is the only one of its kind. From inspection of the poem, the critic will formulate its principles. Then reversing the process, and prophesying after the event, he will test his formulations by "deducing" or "deriving" the poem from the principles. (37)

It's possible that there is an anticipation of this "angelism" in *ETSM* in "Three Definitions," where each definition is narrower than the one before it, with the last focused on a single work: (1) lyric in general, (2) Platonic dialogue as a literary species, (3) Joyce's *Portrait*. "Three Definitions" is thus a companion to "Fact, Inference and Proof," which focuses on level one in *ETSM*'s tripartite structure of analyses. But even though the focus is on level one, there are still a few places where connections surface to suggest that the "personality" in the text is equivalent to the "personality" of the author (51, 58, 61). "Fact, Inference and Proof" doesn't draw the sharp line between ethics and poetics that appears in "Poetics in Particular" because it conceives even the individual text as a congealed form of "personality." Limiting oneself to level one simply limits the evidence available to "index" the "equations" that define "personality." The Burke ready "to use all that there is to use" is free to use all three levels or to limit himself to two or one, as *ETSM*

illustrates.

Burke's incorporation of a formalistic poetics into his theorizing coincided with his theorizing of a "poetic motive," equated to an "unmotivated motive" ("Poetic Motive" 54). An anticipation of this motive, albeit a bit roundabout, appears in *ETSM* in "A `Dramatic' View of Imitation," a key essay for the related terms "perfection" and "entelechy" that play such an important role in Burke's later writings. These terms appear earlier, but they take on a new significance after this essay.¹⁰ Furthermore, as Rueckert notes, this "imitation" essay is notable because it reappears in both *PDC* and *SM* as well (xvi). Burke uses "entelechy" to interpret Aristotle's conception of mimesis or imitation. Burke's argument is that imitation isn't a photographic copy of life but a "perfection" of it. Literature doesn't give us copies of real villains or heroes, but of the "perfect" villain, the "perfect" hero, etc. From this conception of imitation, it is but a short step to ask, "what exactly would be the `perfection' of a symbol using animal?" The answer is "the poetic motive": "If man is by nature the symbol using animal, then it should follow that, for the full manifesting of his essence, he must find some intrinsic satisfaction in the use of symbols simply for the sake of symbol-using" ("Poetic Motive" 54). "The Poetic Motive" thus adds a new level to the "person": in addition to the level of "personality" (ethics), there is the level of the entelechial perfection of the symbol using species (poetics).¹¹ But as we'll see, the "poetic motive," by adding a new dimension to the "character of the individual person," also helps to create a new theoretical possibility in which language and body can join to house ethics and poetics together.

Chapters entitled "The Poetic Motive" appear in both *PDC* and *SM*.¹² It's the final chapter in *PDC* and the first in *SM*. This reversal parallels one that occurred in the writing of the *Grammar*. In correspondence, Burke writes, "The five terms with which the work now begins were settled upon toward the end of the first version, and the book was turned around accordingly" (letter to Cowley: see Jay 292; see also "Questions" 333).¹³ It is hard to imagine why Burke would have taken such trouble if, as has been suggested, his basic mode of writing was "parataxis" (Booth, "Many Voices" 179) or "fragmented" and "nonlinear" (Condit 207). How important could the order of the whole be if his mode of thought was paratactic, fragmented, nonlinear, etc? It makes more sense to think that Burke "turned around" his whole manuscript to find the architectonic structure that he needed to make his theoretical case. The shift in the position of the "The Poetic Motive" in *PDC* and *SM* suggests that he tried to do something similar for the *Symbolic* but in this case the shift didn't work. That, however, may simply be another sign of his commitment to theoretical rigor in his major works. Nothing less than "perfection" would do. We'll return to this point in concluding.

So much, then, for the reasoning that might have led Burke to consider dividing the poetic and ethical sides of his *Symbolic* into separate theoretical categories, each with a book of its own. But instead of completing this division, he seemed to resist it.¹⁴

"Character of the Individual Person"

Burke started his work on the *Symbolic* with the conception of the "individual" that appears in the prospectus included in the *Rhetoric*:

our third volume, *Symbolic of Motives*, should be built about *identity* as titular or ancestral term, the "first" to which all other terms could be reduced and from which they could then be derived or generated, as from a common spirit. . . . The *Symbolic* should deal with unique individuals, each its own peculiarly constructed act, or form. These unique "constitutions" being capable of treatment in isolation, the *Symbolic* should consider them primarily in their capacity as singulars, each a separate universe of discourse (though there are also respects in which they are consubstantial with others of their kind, since they can be classed with other unique individuals as joint participants in common principles, possessors of the same or similar properties). (21-22)

Problems with this conception are implicit in this statement of it. "Identity" is to be the "ancestral" term from which everything can be "derived or generated" yet the "unique individual," presumably equivalent to "identity" as the central focus, is "constructed" and "constitut[ed]," thus derived not ancestral. And in the end, the unique individual is not independent of "consubstantiality" with others, so how unique is it? These problems have their source in changes in Burke's thinking about the individual, particularly during the 1930s. As Burke tells us in recounting the development of his thought, he came to stress

interdependent, social, or collective aspects of meaning, in contrast with the individualistic emphasis of his earlier Aestheticist period. (The earlier individualism had itself been modified by association in a pranksome kind of literary "gang morality" loosely linking several young writers who liked to think of themselves as a monster-loving "advance guard."
Counter Statement 214 15)

This earlier "individualistic emphasis" appears in extreme form in John Neal, Burke's "hero" in his novel. In the first paragraph of his narrative, Neal alerts the reader, "When finding that people held the same views as I, I persuaded myself that I held them differently" (*Towards* 3). Preoccupied with setting himself apart, Neal in the end cuts himself off from everyone and his narrative disintegrates into unconnected fragments.¹⁵ In *Attitudes toward History*, Burke proposes that the "so-called `I' is merely a unique combination of partially conflicting `corporate we's'" (264). This would explain why the "individual" he initially anticipates theorizing in the *Symbolic* is not independent of "consubstantiality" with others. Furthermore,

Bourgeois naturalism . . . [believed] an individual's `identity' is something private, peculiar to himself. And when bourgeois psychologists began to discover the falsity of this notion, they still believed in it so thoroughly that they considered all collective aspects of identity under the head of pathology and illusion. That is: they discovered accurately enough that identity is *not* individual, that a man "identifies himself" with all sorts of manifestations beyond himself, and they set about trying to "cure" him of this tendency.

It can't be "cured," for the simple reason that it is *normal*. (*Attitudes* 263). The "I," then, is not "ancestral," but derivative, the effect of

putting the multiples “we’s,” in their varying proportions of importance, into some kind of order. How is that done? Through the act, as theorized in the dialectic of constitutions. Burke almost says as much in speaking of individuals as “unique `constitutions.”” As I’ve suggested elsewhere, the *Grammar* and the *Rhetoric* together provide Burke all the theoretical tools he needs to account for the “individual” envisioned for the *Symbolic* at the time of the writing of the *Rhetoric* (Wess, *Kenneth Burke* 136, 190, 228). Hence, it’s not surprising to find Burke, in his work on the *Symbolic*, developing a new way to conceive the individual. In “Catharsis Second View,” the second of his catharsis essays based on material from *PDC*, Burke begins:

In our first view of Catharsis, because we were working primarily with Greek models we stressed the *thæivic* nature of the “pollution” for which tragedy concocts a remedy. But there is a sense in which even elations or sorrows shared by us as members of a collectivity are experienced by us as *individuals*, quite as each person at a public banquet derives a particular gratification from the particular food that is eaten by him in particular. The centrality of the nervous system is a *principium individuationis* whereby, no matter how collective the nature of our symbol systems and of the socio political structures that go with them, our pleasures and pains are our own naturally inalienable private property. (“Catharsis Second View” 107)¹⁶

In his debate with Fredric Jameson, Burke reiterates this point in a context in which he contrasts it with customary conceptions of “individualism”:

as I state at the start of my essay on “(Nonsymbolic) Motion / (Symbolic) Action” [we’ll turn to this essay later]. . . I locate the *individual* (as distinct from the kind of “ideological” identity that is intended in a social term, such as “individualism”) in the human body, the “original economic plant,” distinct from all others owing to the divisive centrality of each body’s particular nervous system. (“Methodological” 404; see also 413)

In “individualism,” individuals are “consubstantial” with one another in a culture that valorizes the attributes of individualism, and such individuals are not “ancestral” but “constituted” as they acquire these attributes. Contrastingly, at the level of the unique body, there is no consubstantiality (my food goes into my stomach and no other even if the food I eat is a sign of the culture that shaped me) and this body, in its biology, is independent of culture.

With (1) the “body” thus serving as the principle of individuation combined with (2) the “poetic motive” as the linguistic principle distinguishing the symbol-using “species” of animal, Burke had in place a theoretical framework that could conceivably have produced a *Symbolic* to complete the trilogy he originally promised. The *Grammar* “deals with a level of motivation which even wholly rival doctrines of motives must share in common” (442), as illustrated by the way rival doctrines of “substance” can be derived linguistically from different pentadic choices. The *Rhetoric* deals with language in its partisan uses: the “Human Barnyard” (23). And the *Symbolic*, by theorizing the combination of motion (body) and action (language) in each individual symbol using animal, would give the trilogy an ontological rock on which to stand. This rock would privilege poetics (“poetic motive”), but it would be too foundational simply to stand besides ethics, as if the two could be equal partners requiring independent theorizing in separate books. In a *Symbolic* based on this model, ethics would be subordinated to the ontological conditions that make possible the “equations,” appearing in both “poem” and “person,” that define personality.

Signs appear in correspondence that Burke did indeed see the *Symbolic* as the place to complete his thinking, stretching over decades, about the relation of motion and action in the symbol using animal (*Letters* 1/24/78, 5/11/78). As long as this possibility seemed conceivable, Burke might very well have resisted going ahead with theorizing ethics and poetics in separate books.¹⁷

But the most important sign is the prominence in *PDC* and *SM* of both the “poetic motive” and “the body.” From the standpoint of the poetic motive, the assumption is that the intrinsic satisfaction in symbol using is enhanced when symbol using is deployed to resolve, through the cathartic process, social tensions that resist easy resolution. From the standpoint of the body, the assumption is that catharsis involves the body, but Burke’s thinking about the precise nature of this involvement seems inconclusive insofar as he leaves us with two competing formulations. The irony is that the formulation that is most convincing is the one that gets the least attention by far.

In conceiving the cathartic process, Burke draws heavily on Aristotle’s theory of tragedy, but he also touches briefly on comedy and lists comic catharsis among the things “still missing” in *PDC*, so he envisioned a poetics that theorized at least two genres and possibly also the lyric, conceived as a variant of Platonic transcendence (“Catharsis” 132). Burke’s theorizing of genres in this poetics differs from his approach in *Attitudes toward History*, where a chapter is devoted to “poetic categories.” In the context of that work’s focus on historical change, literary genres or “categories” are distinguished on the basis of whether they promote “acceptance” or “rejection” of reigning symbols of authority. By contrast, in the context of his concern with catharsis, Burke’s theorizing of genres is best seen from the standpoint not of historical change but of the “purification of war.”

Burke’s conception of the cathartic process is built around “pride,” “fear,” and “pity,” with “pride” standing for the quality in the tragic protagonist that is on the slope toward “war” because of the resentment it arouses in others. It is the source of the social tensions that the protagonist embodies. It might be more precise, Burke suggests, to name this quality after each protagonist: “oedipism,” “antagonism,” “promethean,” etc. (“On Catharsis” 348). While this quality is a source of social tensions, when it is embodied in a complex protagonist, it can be mixed with enough positive qualities, so that the tragedy “make[s] us fear for the very class of citizen against whom we might otherwise feel angry,” and this fear, in turn, prepares us to feel pity when catastrophe befalls the protagonist (“Catharsis” 131-32). Tragedy ends with pity, but pity is on the slope toward love. Comedy, by contrast, moves farther toward peace and love (“Catharsis” 132).

In one of Burke’s formulations of the role of the body in the cathartic process, the process completes itself in a bodily response:

So far as the body participates directly in the producing of catharsis by the organizing of symbol systems, its two typical expressions are laughter and tears. The striking thing about both these modes of release is their nature as *completions, fulfillments*. . . . Also, although as responses to works of art they arise out of purely *symbolic* processes, at the same time they are both intensely physical. Thus, there is a sense in which they perfectly bridge the gap between man's nature as sheer animal and his nature as sheerly 'rational' or 'spiritual' (as symbol-user). ("Catharsis" 107-8).

Surprisingly, however, the attention Burke gives to this integration of motion (body) and action (language) is dwarfed by the far more extensive attention he gives to his other formulation, which is based on "the thinking of the body," and which, in Rueckert's judgment, results in "some of the most tortured and absurd analyses [Burke] ever wrote" ("Introduction" xiii).¹⁸

"The thinking of the body," a phrase Burke borrows from Yeats, first appears in the *Grammar* in the "'demonic trinity,' the three principles of the erotic, urinary and excremental" (303, 302; see also Yeats). These bodily functions become a big part of Burke's theorizing of catharsis when they become cathartic purgings correlated to the tragic trinity of pride (excremental), fear (urinary), and pity (erotic).¹⁹ But investigation of these correlations leads Burke to stress,

Please note that in pursuing such a line of thought we should *not* be deriving tragic catharsis from bodily processes. Our theory would be turned in exactly the opposite direction. We should be saying simply that, when catharsis attains its full poetic statement (as it must if it is to be thorough), its terminology may also be expected to re enact some or other of these bodily analogues. . . . For our purposes, the imagery of bodily catharsis is viewed not as "causative," but simply as a *language* that is naturally available to poets who would "give body" to ideas of purgation. ("On Catharsis" 355, 358)

Ironically, in the context of catharsis, the phrase "the thinking of the body" thus turns out to be something of a misnomer. If the body is not "causative" but simply the source of imagery of bodily catharsis that the poet should use "to be thorough," the "thinking" is really the poet's not the body's.

By contrast, examples of genuine "thinking of the body" appear in *Somnia ad Urinandum: More Thoughts on Motion and Action*, where Burke modifies Freud by considering some dreams that seem not to fit his theory of dreaming. Burke's main examples are dreams involving urination that prompt the dreamer to awake to the urgent need to urinate as quickly as possible. In such a dream, there is a genuine "thinking of the body" in which the body communicates its need by sublimating it in the form of the dream. If the "demonic trinity" sublimated itself similarly during the cathartic process, there would be a profound integration of motion and action. But while it is easy to imagine oneself witnessing a tragedy, experiencing catharsis, and in the end wiping away a few tears, it's a stretch to imagine the body, during the same process, causing sublimations of defecation, urination, and orgasmic release. That is why Burke stresses that the "demonic trinity" is not causative of cathartic imagery, but in doing so, he moves away from integration of motion and action to disintegration. "The thinking of the body" appealed to Burke profoundly, but it seems, in his theorizing of catharsis, to have led to a theoretical dead end, with cathartic imagery appearing only in "analogues" to the body that are separate from the body. Such analogues conform to the principle in "(Nonsymbolic) Motion" that Burke emphasizes by repeatedly spelling it out in capitals: "DUPLICATION."

"(Nonsymbolic) Motion," also included among the texts Burke mentions in one of his discussions of the *Symbolic* (*Letters* 1/24/78), begins with Burke putting his "motion action pair" in competition with "such distinctions as body mind, spirit matter, superstructure substructure, and Descartes' dualism, thought and extension" (140). At this philosophical level, "the thinking of the body" is left out of consideration, but the body as Burke's principle of "individuation" is front and center. The "self," Burke argues, must be "defined in terms of *polarity*," grounded on one side in "the centrality of the nervous system" and on the other in cultural identifications (144-45). The two sides can be linked by "DUPLICATION" (145), but evidently nothing more. Transcending the division between the two sides would require something "like that which orthodox Western religious imagine, in promising that the virtuous dead will regain their 'purified' bodies in heaven" (162-63). Some "art heavens" try to do something comparable (163-64), but one is hard pressed to find in this essay any way to move beyond duplication to genuine integration.

One can conclude that what Burke had in mind for the *Symbolic* is evident from what he left us, but it is doubtful that one can determine from this material what he would have found satisfactory enough to publish. We only know for certain that he worked and reworked his material to try to satisfy himself, just as he did with the *Grammar*, as noted earlier. The *Rhetoric* seems also to have undergone similar major revisions before Burke was satisfied. In a letter to Richard McKeon in November 1947, Burke writes that he is headed to Florida with ample material for the *Rhetoric*. He writes McKeon again the following February to report that he has completed 100,000 words and that happily everything seems under control. The book, at that point, had two parts structured dialectically: one devoted to the upward way, covering rhetoric and dialectic, the other to the downward way, covering what he dubs the "world of publicity." Obviously major changes occurred between this substantial draft and the book we know. Burke thus wrote for both the *Grammar* and the *Rhetoric* a great deal of material that could conceivably have ended up, like the extensive material he wrote for the *Symbolic*, fragmented in articles and incomplete manuscripts. But in the case of the first two, Burke solved his theoretical problems and found the architectonic structure he needed the latter dependent on the former whereas in the case of the *Symbolic* he evidently did not.

No doubt there are playful features in Burke's writing, but they should not obscure the figures in the complex carpets of his major works as well as the evidence that he took considerable pains to perfect them. Such figures may be difficult to grasp, because perceiving them depends less on noting evidence supporting particular ideas advanced along the way than on noting how an overall structure is crafted like a plot in which one part prepares for another. When Burke speaks of ideas as functioning like characters advancing a plot (e.g., "Poetic Motive" 60 61), he has such structures in mind.²⁰

Burke's main focus was devising methodologies of interpreting textual material. He seems to have worked by going back and forth

between (1) interpreting specific texts in extraordinarily close detail and (2) reflecting on and developing the theoretical assumptions underlying his interpretations.²¹ This combination is unusual: people good at detailed interpretation are often suspicious of abstract theory and theorists often never get very detailed in applying their theories. Burke, by contrast, seemed to rely on an ongoing dialectical interplay between theory and practice to strengthen his work at each level. In the case of his “motive” books, Burke undertook to develop not only elaborate methods of interpretation but to justify these methods with architectonic structures of complex, philosophical argument. Such grounding requires the “plot” structures he found for the *Grammar* and the *Rhetoric*, but evidently not for the *Symbolic*.

Notes

¹ For Rueckert’s list of all the Burke letters he received discussing the *Symbolic*, see “Kenneth Burke’s” 114-15. For these letters, see Burke, *Letters*. Some details from these letters also appear in Rueckert’s comprehensive list of texts that might have been incorporated into the *Symbolic* (Kenneth Burke 288-92).

² The list appears in Burke’s “Bibliographical Note” at the end of “Linguistic Approach to the Problems of Education” (302). Rueckert’s “Introduction” reproduces this list (xi), but mistakenly omits one article on it: “Comments on Eighteen Poems by Howard Nemerov.” Two other titles on the list are not in ETSM: “Mysticism as a Solution to the Poet’s Dilemma” and “Form and Persecution in the Oresteia,” though in the case of the latter, ETSM publishes for the first time “The Orestes Trilogy,” which is the chapter in PDC of which “Form and Persecution” is an abbreviated version. The texts on Burke’s list that do appear in ETSM are “‘Dramatic’ View of Imitation,” “Ethan Brand,” “Fact, Inference and Proof” “Othello,” “Three Definitions,” and “Vegetal Radicalism.” Drawing on his many discussions with Burke about the *Symbolic*, Rueckert also includes four other texts from the 1950-55 period: “Language of Poetry,” “Goethe’s Faust,” “Policy Made Personal,” and selections from “Linguistic Approach.”

³ Throughout, “SM” will be used to refer to the *Symbolic of Motives* manuscript, while “*Symbolic*” will refer to the whole project encompassing ETSM, PDC, and SM, but never completed in a book Burke published.

⁴ Williams’s recounting of this chronology is based on extensive consideration of Burke’s correspondence from the 1950s and 1960s. Rueckert’s “Kenneth Burke’s ‘Symbolic of Motives’ and ‘Poetics, Dramatistically Considered’” presupposes that SM was written before PDC, but in an Appendix, Rueckert generously recounts that Williams’s essay, written without the benefit of a copy of the SM manuscript, convinced him that SM is the one that comes later (“Kenneth Burke’s” 113-14). Internal evidence adds additional support for Williams’s argument. On SM 106, a reference to *The Rhetoric of Religion*, published in 1961, presupposes that it has already appeared. By contrast, Burke sent Rueckert a copy of PDC in 1959 (Letters 8/8/59; Rueckert, “Introduction” xii).

⁵ For the “still missing” list, see Williams 22, or Wess, Kenneth Burke 244. Portions of both PDC and SM have been published. In addition to the “Orestes Trilogy” chapter from PDC in ETSM, see *Unending Conversations* 35-80 (from PDC) and 81-98 (from SM). See Williams 22-29 for PDC’s table of contents along with a valuable discussion of the revisions Burke made in most of the chapters he published in article form. See Rueckert “Kenneth Burke’s” 117-19 for the table of contents in SM.

⁶ I assume Burke’s intended meaning is that he hopes to incorporate both poetic and ethical dimensions into the *Symbolic* he envisioned in 1967, though his statement is not altogether without ambiguity. The idiosyncratic nature of Burke’s notion of the “ethical dimension” is evident in his equation of it to “the character of the individual person.” By “ethics,” then, Burke has in mind something close to Aristotle’s “ethos,” or the use of character to effect rhetorical persuasion. Burke sometimes makes this connection explicit (“Language of Poetry” 41) but usually he does not. If one loses sight of this connection, it’s easy to misconstrue what Burke means in his references to his work on an “ethics.”

⁷ This passage does appear on ETSM 77-78, but it contains some errors, so my quotation comes directly from page 45 of the original: “Ethan Brand: A Preparatory Investigation,” *Hopkins Review* 5 (1952): 45-65.

⁸ An anticipation of this fourfold conception of language appears in ETSM in “The Language of Poetry,” which builds on Cicero’s three “offices of the orator” (inform, please, move) to which Burke adds a fourth to deal with the ethical, which he relates to Aristotle’s conception of the speaker as one of the means of persuasion (41). By the time Burke gets to “On Catharsis, or Resolution,” however, he seems no longer to need Cicero to provide a framework for its presentation.

⁹ Burke uses level three, which shifts back and forth between “poetics in particular” and “language in general,” in “Formalist Criticism: Its Principles and Limits,” where he settles scores with some of his formalist antagonists, principally Cleanth Brooks, but also Rene Wellek and R. P. Blackmur.

¹⁰ In a 1979 essay, Burke traces anticipations of his uses of the terms “perfection” and “entelechy” all the way back to *The Philosophy of Literary Form*, where, as he puts it, “I hadn’t yet quite got to it” (“Symbolism” 220).

¹¹ The “poetic motive” also appears in the later “Poetics in Particular,” which separates the poetic motive from the other uses of language more sharply (28-29) than does “The Poetic Motive,” which centers the poetic motive in literature, but seems to find a degree of symbol using for the sheer pleasure of symbol using, the defining characteristic of the poetic motive, in other dimensions of language as well.

¹² The published article entitled “The Poetic Motive” is essentially the same as the version in PDC. The version in SM is unchanged for the first two thirds (54-61 in the published article) and for the final two paragraphs (63). The changes (bottom of 61 through the top

of 63) strengthen the note of caution that in the original is largely limited to the closing paragraphs. This revision is closer to Burke's recognition that "perfection" can also be "rotten" and that "entelechy" can lead to "Helhaven."

¹³ Some evidence of this reversal survives in the book itself. Burke tells us that he started with material under the title "The Constitutional Wish," envisioned simply as an introductory chapter to his "material on rhetorical strategies and symbolic acts" but that he started working backwards as he found that he needed to justify starting with the constitutional material so that the chapter grew into a book with the constitution material appearing toward the end (Grammar 323). The pentad itself, Burke tells us, "seemed to cluster about our thoughts about the Constitution as an `enactment'" (Grammar 340), thus emerging last of all. The whole manuscript was then reorganized to arrive at the book we know today.

¹⁴ Remarks in PDC indicate that Burke saw that work as part of the Symbolic, not as one book separate from a book on ethics. By contrast, SM begins by presenting itself as a poetics separate from ethics, but it is never completed.

¹⁵ Looking back retrospectively at this earlier individualism Burke can see how it exemplifies a "gang morality." Neal may try to distinguish himself even from those who share his views, but he can't distinguish himself from those who, like himself, similarly do all they can to distinguish themselves from those who share their views. Individuals who do all they can to so distinguish themselves are, in this respect, all alike, loosely linked members of a "gang." In the Rhetoric, especially in his material on Veblen Burke shows how such individuals are really conforming with one another in trying to "out-imitate" one another in being the "perfect individual" who is different from everyone else (131).

¹⁶ Anticipations of this formulation appear in the Rhetoric (e.g., 130).

¹⁷ A possible complicating factor is the shift, as Rueckert argues, in Burke's interest from poetics to logology (Kenneth Burke 235 36). The relation of motion and action is, of course, as relevant to logology as to poetics, but the Symbolic was for Burke always the place where literature would be the focus, so this shift in interest may have diminished the importance of the Symbolic in Burke's mind.

¹⁸ In PDC, a chapter called "The Thinking of the Body" takes up 104 of the manuscript's 391 pages; this chapter is the basis for "The Thinking of the Body" chapter in Language as Symbolic Action. In SM the topic of "the thinking of the body" takes up the final 49 of this incomplete manuscript's 269 pages.

¹⁹ An example of the "demonic trinity," independent of its later matching with the tragic trinity, appears in ETSM (94-95). This matching evidently begins while Burke is working on the Oresteia. As noted earlier, ETSM includes "The Orestes Trilogy," which is the chapter in PDC that is the basis for "Form and Persecution in the Oresteia," published in 1952 and among the essays in Burke's 1955 list on which ETSM is based. While "Form and Persecution" is shorter than "The Orestes Trilogy," it also adds a passage, in both the 1952 original (378) and the later reprinting (126), in which Burke sketches where his work on the Oresteia fits into the work in progress that became PDC, and this passage indicates how the matching occurred when he wondered what might be bodily analogues for pride, fear, and pity. He calls this matching a "calamity" initially. In SM he renames it a "break through," which is the term Rueckert uses ("Introduction" xviii ix).

²⁰ For an attempt to trace the "plot" of the Grammar, see Wess, "Kenneth Burke's `Dialectic of Constitutions.'"

²¹ Even Burke's notorious interpretation of Keats's "Beauty is truth, truth beauty" as "Body is turd, turd body," which Burke concedes he probably should have saved "for fun at a drunk party" ("Dancing" 24), is an interpretation deploying methodological assumptions Burke could defend with rigor ("As I Was Saying" 20-24).

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