



NEWSLETTER

The Kenneth Burke Society

October 1989

Volume 5 Number 2

Autumn in Andover

Recently, I had the pleasure of visiting with Kenneth Burke at his home in Andover, N.J. The brilliant hues of early autumn provided a pastoral setting for what I have come to regard as an exciting experience—chatting with Burke at his kitchen table. As we nibbled at our lunch, the conversation raced from topic to topic. We started with a discussion of a few books that Burke believes “you can have lot of fun with.” From there, Burke led me through a discussion of his research interests, his efforts to set right a few folks who have him wrong, reminiscences of his days in Greenwich Village, his attitudes towards current affairs, and his fondness for the early, lesser Chopin. The time for my departure arrived, as it always seems to do when I visit Burke, much too quickly.

Before I left, I asked Burke if he had any thoughts that he might like me to include in the *Newsletter*. He replied, “I want my corporation to keep working on something.” As he spoke, he moved to his writing table and searched out a page of thoughts that he believes appropriately sums up two poems that were published in *The Legacy of Kenneth Burke*, edited by Herbert W. Simons and Trevor Melia (1989). For the sake of continuity, I include those earlier efforts, followed by Burke’s most recent thoughts on the subject. I share Burke’s wish that these lines encourage others to join the fray.

Dale A. Bertelsen
Bloomsburg University

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Address Correction Requested

After our last mailing, we noticed that several members of the Society have moved without notifying us of their new address. If you know the whereabouts of these people, please ask them to notify James W. Chesebro of their current address. Bessie Ballantine, William L. Benoit, Peggy Byers, Mary Ann Censky, Jack Davis, Paul Evangelista, Michael Feehan, Mary Foertsch, Karen J. Greenberg, Carol Jablonski, Bruce A. McConachie, Robin G. Reese, Roy Skodnick, Romann & Tannenholz, and Stella Ting-Toomey.

Nemerov to preside at Burke-Day Party

Howard Nemerov, poet laureate of the United States, recently agreed to attend the first conference of the Kenneth Burke Society as a special guest. In his letter of acceptance Nemerov said, “I’ll be happy to be in on one more celebration—cerebration?—in honor of the Master.” Nemerov’s primary responsibility will be to preside at Burke’s 93rd birthday party (May 5, 1990).

Nemerov’s 1988 appointment as poet laureate is most appropriate for a man whose vita reads like a reference work for all of the honors and awards that the United States can bestow upon a poet. His first major award for poetry was the Blumenthal Prize from *Poetry Magazine* (1958). Most recently, he received The Aiken/Taylor Prize in Poetry (*The Sewanee Review* and The University of the South) the first time it was awarded (1987). But his most prestigious awards are probably the First Theodore Roethke Memorial Award (1968), National Book Award (1987), Pulitzer Prize (1978), and Bollingen Prize (1981). In addition, Nemerov is a member of American Academy of Arts and Letters, National Institute of Arts and Letters, American Academy of Arts and Sciences; and he holds honorary degrees from nine universities.

Although Nemerov’s honors and awards certainly qualify him for the status of special guest, equally important is his 40 year friendship with Burke which began in 1948 when both were teaching at Bennington College. The thousand miles which has separated them for the past 20 years has not diminished their affections. In fact, when asked several years ago how often he and Burke were in contact, Nemerov replied, “Oh, one of us writes the other every week or so. It’s important.”

Nemerov has reflected on Burke in various writings including a humorous essay entitled “The Winter Addresses of Kenneth Burke” which he presented at Indiana State University in 1977, and “Gnomic Variations for Kenneth Burke,” seven poems which were published in *The Kenyon Review* (Summer 1983). “Gnomic Variations for Kenneth Burke” begins with a quote which Burkeians will quickly recognize from A

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Legacy

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BEING BODIES THAT LEARN LANGUAGE
THEREBY BECOMING WORDLINGS
HUMANS ARE THE
SYMBOL-MAKING, SYMBOL-USING, SYMBOL-MISUSING
ANIMAL
INVENTOR OF THE NEGATIVE
SEPARATED FROM OUR NATURAL CONDITION
BY INSTRUMENTS OF OUR OWN MAKING
GOADED BY THE SPIRIT OF HIERARCHY
ACQUIRING FOREKNOWLEDGE OF DEATH
AND ROTTEN WITH PERFECTION

FROM WITHIN OR
FROM OUT OF
THE VAST EXPANSES OF THE
INFINITE WORDLESS UNIVERSE
WE WORDY HUMAN BODIES HAVE CARVED
MANY OVERLAPPING UNIVERSES OF DISCOURSE
WHICH ADD UP TO A
PLURIVERSE OF DISCOURSES
LOCAL DIALECTS OF DIALECTIC

(Legacy, p. 263)

To both of which, as wind-up, add the following observations concerning how Constitutions, at least ours, are constituted:

Non-human tribes, lacking human ways with words, are thus by Nature so constituted that they cohabit, and raise their young in sufficient numbers to survive and in turn propagate without recourse to verbal usages.

The Founding Fathers who framed our Constitution, a masterpiece of verbal prowess, had (like their elders and contemporaries) arrived at a time when their Technology was so developed in Europe that it both induced and enabled them in increasing numbers to sail the Atlantic and to transport slaves from Africa, thereby settling a whole, to them, new continent in ways that constituted the human transformation of a Wilderness into Colonies that became tax-paying real

estate. As that same Technology developed further, the institution of outright slavery was abolished, to be replaced by what the framers of a rival Constitution, "The Communist Manifesto," called, for workers hired in our market economy, "wage slavery." But a friendlier look at our Constitution leads to such considerations as Though but one document, it gives us in actuality TWO.

There gradually developed the TECHNOLOGICAL kind, fittingly defining itself by a mode of Artificial Intelligence, the "G.N.P., Gross National Product," comparing annually the total goods and services turned out by the citizenry as a whole while the Constitution as a POLITICAL instrument pluralistically makes possible the organization of factions which compete by rhetorical devices of persuasion, dissuasion, deflection, deception designed to raise people's hopes, rightly or wrongly, that the policies pronounced in a given campaign platform will bring more profit than any competing policies could to the nation in general and the members of the immediate audience in particular.

Kenneth Burke
Andover, N.J. 1989

Nemerov

(continued from page 1)

Rhetoric of Motives: "An answer can seem wholly radiant only with those for whom the question itself has radiance." Nemerov's first variation:

The only reason I'd care to be a king
Would be to hear the subjects speak their mind
And know that meant their minds belonged to me
"The King's English"—imagine, owning a language!

The growth of Nemerov's imposing reputation has not diminished his charming wit or his unaffected style. Indeed, Nemerov's human qualities are perhaps best epitomized by the first line of a poem he published in 1958 "Trees":

To be a giant and keep quiet about it...

The Kenneth Burke Society is, indeed, fortunate to have Howard Nemerov as "chief conviviator" for its first conference.

Sharon J. Dailey
Indiana State University

Dramatism as an Interdisciplinary Perspective

A review of: *The Legacy of Kenneth Burke*. Edited by Herbert W. Simons and Trevor Melia. Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1989; pp. ix + 331.

This volume seeks to identify relationships between Kenneth Burke's writings and contemporary disciplines and intellectual movements. "Born of a conference on Burke...held March 6-8, 1984"(p. vii), the intent of the volume is clearly to provide "especially needed" essays which "provide rereadings of Burkean theory in light of reconceptualizations of inquiry currently taking place within both the humanities and social sciences" (p. vii) and identify "Burke's contributions to...varied disciplines" (p. viii). More uniquely, the volume seeks to assess "the potential of Burkean theory as a unifying force across disciplines" (p. viii).

Towards the central objective of the volume, eleven essays explore the relationships between Burke's theories/concepts and diverse disciplines including sociology, mathematics, economics, and writers such as Derrida, Coleridge, Cicero, and Augustine. In addition, the volume contains a preface and an introduction which identify themes unifying the diverse essays as well as a new poem on the "symbol-using animal" and "dialectic" by Burke.

The volume's more extended appendix includes a reprint of Burke's 1935 address to the American Writers' Congress in which Burke advocated the use of the phrase "the people" in place of "the masses" as a rallying slogan of the revolutionary movement of the 1930s, followed by a discussion and Frank Lentricchia's analysis of Burke's 1935 speech. The appendix concludes with Richard H. Thames' bibliography of Burke's contributions from 1968 through 1986.

The links between Burke's concepts and other disciplines are explicit. For example, in terms of sociology, two essays are critical. In "The Bridge Over Separated Lands: Kenneth Burke's Significance for the Study of Social Action," what Joseph R. Gusfield "finds so vital in Burke's writings is the recognition of unity between art and human action which constitutes the bridge between sociology and literature," because "Burke insists on the paramount importance of language and symbolism in framing and defining the experiences of our world" (pp. 29 and 30). Likewise, in "Ratios and Causes: The Pentad as an Etiological

Scheme in Sociological Explanation," following a superb discussion of causation from a dramatic perspective, Vito Signorile concludes: "A regnant metaphor looms ever more clearly ahead: human societies are far from finely clocked machines. They are, rather, a language expressing itself in many dialects, in poetic imagery, and a vast dance of attitudes" (p. 90).

The relationships between Burkeian concepts and two other disciplines are also explicitly explored.

Focusing predominantly upon mathematics, in his essay, "Scientism and Dramatism: Some Quasi-Mathematical Motifs in the Works of Kenneth Burke," Trevor Melia maintains that "Burke's critique of scientism does not in fact proceed from a flat antipathy to science" but "retains key features of at least some of the statistical procedures it seeks to replace" because Burke's "logological analysis" is grounded in "a qualitative algebra" (p. 56).

And, of economics, Donald N. McCloskey begins in his essay, "The Dismal Science and Mr. Burke: Economics as a Critical Theory," by noting that "Bourgeois economists like other scientists, I say, use methods of persuasion common to poets and litterateurs" (p. 100). McCloskey concludes: "When all is said and done, rhetoric looks like the master critical theory, a sweetly American one, shorn of the fallacious economic history and antique neuroses haunting European Marxism" (p. 112).

Other essays within the volume examine the relationship between Burke and other major theorists.

Three essays compare and contrast Burke's critical posture with that of the poststructuralist or deconstructionist movement, placing primary emphasis on Jacques Derrida as the base for the analysis. In "Writing as the Accomplice of Language: Kenneth Burke and Poststructuralism," Cary Nelson divides Burke's writings into two periods. Of the earlier period through the publication of *The Rhetoric of Motives* in 1950, Nelson views Burke as "humanistic" and one who can "easily be read to support the idealized view of communicative efficacy" (p. 157). The later Burke, holds Nelson, more clearly reveals "Burke's irony and skepticism" (p. 157), a view in which people are "used by language," "often tragic and comic as a result" (p. 158). Thus, argues Nelson, not unlike the deconstructionist posture of Derrida, Burke found it necessary to "expose" the "structured, predictive, mechanistic, and determining efficacy" of communication (p. 159). Similarly, Christine Oravec examines, in her essay "Kenneth Burke's Concept of Association and the Complexity of Identity," parallels between Burke and Derrida. Likewise, in "Under the

Sign of (An)ihilation: Burke in the Age of Nuclear Destruction and Critical Deconstruction," David Cratis Williams finds several "common" perspectives, problems, and techniques shared by Burke and Derrida.

Burke is also compared, in this volume, to Coleridge, Cicero, and Augustine. In "'Magic' and 'Mystery' in the Works of Kenneth Burke," Jane Blankenship identifies a magic=division/mystery=identification "calculus" at work in both Burke and Samuel Taylor Coleridge. In "Burke's Ciceronianism," Michael Leff observes that "one might go so far as to regard Burke as a Ciceronian" (p. 115), for Leff finds "an essential unity in Burke and Cicero: both drive the philosophy of language as action to a point that demands self-reflexive discourse about the theory of discourse" (p. 119). In contrast, in his essay, "The Rhetoric of Allegory: Burke and Augustine," David Damrosch maintains that "Burke makes room for his many-sided, and always autobiographical, critical activity" by "embracing the ahistoricity of Augustinian allegory" (p. 236).

In an appropriate conclusion to these essays, in "Rereading Kenneth Burke: Doctrine without Dogma, Action with Passion," William H. Rueckert provides a chronology and overview of Burke's major works, characterizing Burke in each work in terms of a set of progressively evolving metaphors, maintaining that Burke has evolved from a "Counteragent" in 1931 to an "Omniverous Critic at Large" and "Logophilous at Play in the Field of Words" towards the end of his career.

Overall, this is an amazing volume. The essays do, realizing the goal of its editors, assess "the potential of Burkean theory as a unifying force across disciplines." In so doing, they also underscore the tremendous scope and critical power of Burke's thinking. Finally, I suspect that *The Legacy of Kenneth Burke* constitutes a "cutting edge" among Burkean scholars. Quite appropriately, Burke's corpus needs to be set against the thoughts of other major scholars, careful comparisons and contrasts offered, and intellectual assessments made of Burke in terms of the greatest thinkers of human history. Such comparisons are most likely to generate incomplete, challenging, and ongoing intellectual struggles rather than final and definitive resolutions, but as *The Legacy of Kenneth Burke* demonstrates, such an agon is now essential.

James W. Chesebro
Speech Communication Association
Annandale, Va.

Logos Dialecticus

a poem dedicated to the works of Kenneth Burke

A satisfied sperm's striving
has been worth the struggle.
Near-perfect information exchanged in an
orgasm of fertilization.
And nine moons cycle 'til
another birth into
a world of words and
The Word.

The symbol-using animal
is a curious sort.
Ever pondering the mystery
of the first message;
Explaining the beginning
and talking of telos,
as now becomes then in
The Drama.

Talking of borders and baubles and
the price of dirt,
We toll forth rewriting the scripts
and laying down the laws.
We inventors of the good and bad,
the shall and shalt not,
the system of pieties born in
The Negative.

Unsatisfied souls yearn to conform with
the source of all being.
Hence the conspiring
to preserve the covenant;
All keeping the secret while
the king's order remains clothed
in the perfecting of fear we call
Hierarchy.

Separate from each other
by name and by number;
Divided by the doings of our
rage for order;
We seek some simplicity
in weaving our meanings
of the mazes of mana in
The Mystery.

Through this fog of symbolocity
we come a-court'n the unknown;
Imperfectly imitating the communion
of the original message.
And so on we trudge
in the life by death journey,
in the rotting perfection of a grand
Dialectic.

Timothy N. Thompson

Convention Reminder

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 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, The New Harmony Inn, P.O. Box 581, New Harmony, IN 47631. Telephone: (812) 682-4491.

Convention Papers

Four copies of all *final* convention paper submissions should be directed, no later than **Jan. 1, 1990**, to: James W. Chesebro, Chair, Kenneth Burke Society Selection Committee, Speech Communication Association, 5105 Backlick Road, Suite # E, Annandale, VA 22003. 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**.

Convention Notes

The Speech Communication Association of Puerto Rico will hold its annual convention at the Condado Plaza Hotel and Casino, Dec. 8-9, 1989.

The convention will feature a roundtable discussion of *The Selected Correspondence of Kenneth Burke and Malcolm Cowley, 1915-1981*, edited by Paul Jay. Dennis Day, Lawrence Rosenfield, Joan M. Fayer, and James W. Chesebro will serve as discussants. They invite participation from all attendees.

For information about the convention, contact Professor J. Michael Ferri, SCAPR Convention Coordinator, Cond. Astor 11C, 1018 Ashford Ave., Santurce, Puerto Rico 00907. Telephone: (809) 725-6832.

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BLOOMSBURG UNIVERSITY

are encouraged to "join the fray" by submitting letters, abstracts, or manuscripts that promote the study, understanding, dissemination of, research on, critical analysis of, and preservation of the works of and about Kenneth Burke. The Kenneth Burke Society is a nonprofit organization incorporated in the State of New York, 1988.

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Dear Colleague:

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

(Tear off this form and mail it in)

Kenneth Burke Society

Two Year Membership

Name: _____

Address: _____

City, State, Zip Code: _____

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: Dr. James W. Chesebro, Membership Committee, Kenneth Burke Society, Speech Communication Association, 5105 Backlick Rd., Suite #E, Annandale, VA 22003.