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"BEAT THE DEVIL, BEAT THE DEVIL, BEAT THE DEVIL, BEAT THE…": KENNETH BURKE ON THE CLEANSING OF TENSIONS, BOTH COMIC AND TRAGIC

Abstract: There is no question but that Kenneth Burke transformed twentieth century scholarship in rhetorical studies—although too often scholars' emphasis on identification has led them to neglect other portions of the Burkean canon with important implications for the theory and criticism of rhetorical discourse. In this essay, therefore, I draw upon Burke's (ultimately unsuccessful) efforts to craft a follow-up to his groundbreaking volume *A Rhetoric of Motives,* and do so in order to focus specifically on his writings on catharsis. However, I do so not in order to provide a definitive account of this stage of Burke's career, nor of his unfinished project on poetics (whatever that might be), but to instead engage a difficult question raised by these writings: are the rhetorical dimensions of catharsis necessarily restricted to the transformation of strictly civic motives? Might, in other words, catharsis act instead upon the troubling byproducts of our existence as "bodies that learn language"—the byproducts that drive our (human) rhetorical existence? In the conclusion of the essay, I flesh out this question through the creation of a "perspective by incongruity"— a juxtaposition between Burke's writings on catharsis and Anne Carson's innovative volume of Greek tragedy combining works by Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, *An Oresteia.* Ultimately, I argue, this planned incongruity might help us complete Burke's account of catharsis, and to thereby outline a kind of pollution and cleansing of vital importance to the study of human social life, in all its vital manifestations.

Keywords: Kenneth Burke; rhetoric; transcendence; catharsis; tragedy; comedy; *The Oresteia*.

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«ПОБЕДИ ДЬЯВОЛА, ПОБЕДИ ДЬЯВОЛА, ПОБЕДИ ДЬЯВОЛА, ПОБЕДИ…»: КЕННЕТ БЕРК ОБ ОЧИЩАЮЩЕМ РАЗРЕШЕНИИ КОМИЧЕСКИХ И ТРАГИЧЕСКИХ КОНФЛИКТОВ

Аннотация: Не приходится сомневаться, что Кеннет Берк преобразовал сложившуюся к XX веку теорию риторики, хотя часто исследователи выдвигают на первый план его концепцию идентификации, пренебрегая другими элементами понятийной системы Берка, что накладывает заметный отпечаток на теорию и критику риторического дискурса. В этом эссе я анализирую попытки Берка (так и не увенчавшиеся успехом) написать продолжение своей новаторской работы «Риторика мотивов» (*A Rhetoric of Motives*) и хочу при этом сосредоточиться на его трудах о катарсисе. Однако моя цель заключается не в том, чтобы представить полноценный отчет об этом этапе творческого пути Берка или его незавершенном сочинении о поэтике (что бы оно собой ни представляло), а в том, чтобы приблизиться к ответу на сложный вопрос, который ставят его работы: действительно ли риторические аспекты катарсиса всегда ограничены переработкой исключительно гражданских мотивов? Иными словами, может ли катарсис еще и воздействовать на тревожные побочные эффекты нашего бытия как «телесных существ, осваивающих язык», – побочные эффекты, направляющие наше (человеческое) риторическое бытие? В заключение настоящего эссе я формулирую этот вопрос, строя свой подход на «сочетании несочетаемого»: я сопоставляю работы Берка о катарсисе с новаторским изданием древнегреческих трагиков – Эсхила, Софокла и Еврипида – в переводе Энн Карсон под общим названием «Одна Орестея» (*An Oresteia*). Наконец, я пытаюсь показать, как эта намеренная несочетаемость может дать нам более полное представление о понимании Берком катарсиса и таким образом определить границы загрязнения и очищения, которые играют ключевую роль в изучении социальной жизни человека во всех ее важнейших проявлениях.

Ключевые слова: Кеннет Берк, риторика, трансцендентное, катарсис, трагедия, комедия, «Орестея».

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There is no question but that Kenneth Burke transformed twentieth century scholarship in rhetorical studies—although this would have seemed quite unlikely at the dawning of his career. As scholars like Jack Selzer have detailed, Burke's earliest intellectual efforts were concerned less with the struggles of public life than with literature, poetry, theatre, and music; in these early writings "he pledged himself to the literary avant-garde, to the invention of novel aesthetic forms, and to an appreciation of form."[1] This is why, as Gregory Clark comments, "Burke is difficult to categorize among American thinkers . . . . just as he was emerging as an important new voice in literary fiction and poetry, he began turning his published work toward criticism of a particularly rhetorical sort."[2] However, within a few short years of this turn toward "an increasingly rhetorical and social criticism,"[3] Burke became known "as a critic who explored the ways and means of rhetorical effect in his literature and music criticism, locating those arts in civic if not political contexts."[4]

Interestingly, in some respects this intellectual journey from the aesthetic to the rhetorical mirrors that of the field that Burke so decisively shaped. Although tracing its intellectual history back to ancient Greece, the American field of rhetorical studies actually originated in 1914, when a group of college speech teachers broke away from departments and programs of English literature. This group, led by notable figures like James Winans, created the National Association of the Academic Teachers of Public Speaking—and thereby established the foundation for a new, independent field of rhetorical studies.[5] The principles guiding research and pedagogy in this new field were formalized by Herbert Wichelns in his widely-cited 1925 essay, "The Literary Criticism of Oratory." The essay was both an attempt to celebrate Winans' pioneering efforts, and to better distinguish the focus of rhetorical scholarship from that of literary criticism: "It [rhetorical criticism] is not concerned with permanence, nor yet with beauty. It is concerned with effect. It regards a speech as a communi-

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[1] Selzer, Jack. *Kenneth Burke in Greenwich Village: Conversing with the Moderns, 1915–1931.* Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996: 19.

[2] Clark, Gregory. *Civic Jazz: American Music and Kenneth Burke on the Art of Getting Along.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015: 5.

[3] Selzer, Jack. *Kenneth Burke in Greenwich Village*: 19.

[4] Clark, Gregory. *Civic Jazz*: 5.

[5] See, for example, Eadie, William F. "Stories We Tell: Fragmentation and Convergence in Communication Disciplinary History." *The Review of Communication* 11 (2011): 162–163.

cation to a specific audience, and holds its business to be the analysis and appreciation of the orator's method of imparting his ideas to his hearers."[6]

By 1948, this view of the field functioned as the taken-for-granted; Lester Thonssen and Craig Baird's influential *Speech Criticism* summarized this "received view" in a prime directive: "The rhetorical critic must have an appreciation of oratory—an effective knowledge of what he is judging."[7] In other words, as Richard Gregg comments, through the first half of the century "critics tended to focus on speakers and speeches. In addition to narrowing the scope of their study to speaking, critics usually restricted themselves to formal speaking occasions, such as those of the law court, the pulpit, legislative assemblies, and other public forums."[8] Rhetorical scholarship, in short, defined itself strictly as the study of oratory—the analysis and appreciation of the quality and persuasiveness of the "great voices" of the public realm—and hewed closely to the concepts and categories derived from the field's ur-text, Aristotle's *On Rhetoric*.

As orthodoxy, then, this was the dominant "frame of acceptance" thrown into question by Burke's groundbreaking work on rhetoric, and especially his now-canonical 1950 book, *A Rhetoric of Motives*.[9] In characteristic fashion, Burke's text expressed a mixture of acceptance and rejection in its attitude toward the field's guiding principles and Aristotelian foundation. He later described his position as follows:

> Not that I would reject the classical study of persuasion. On the contrary, I never cease to marvel at the systematic treatment of "persuasion" in the *Rhetoric* of Aristotle . . . . But the whole process was so deliberate it didn't

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6   Wichelns, Herbert A. "The Literary Criticism of Oratory." Burgchardt, Carl R., ed. *Readings in Rhetorical Criticism*. State College, PA: Strata Publishing, 1995: 22. Although in my citations I have chosen not to alter or otherwise mark original language, my own usage reflects the contemporary recognition that the masculine cannot be taken as universal.

7   Thonssen, Lester; Baird, A. Craig; Braden, Waldo W. *Speech Criticism*. 2nd ed. Malabar, FL: Robert E. Krieger Publishing Company, 1970: 19. Though the citation of this passage is derived from a later edition, it was unchanged from their original formulation of criticism.

8   Gregg, Richard B. "The Criticism of Symbolic Inducement: A Critical-Theoretical Connection." Benson, Thomas W., ed. *Speech Communication in the 20th Century*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1985: 45.

9   By "frames of acceptance," I refer to Burke's discussion of "the more or less organized system of meanings by which a thinking man [*sic*] gauges the historical situation and adopts a role with relation to it" (Burke, Kenneth. *Attitudes Toward History*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984: 5).

seem to cover kinds of situations which were not characterized by the clear, formal purposiveness that classical books on rhetoric were primarily concerned with.[10]

Or, as Burke summarized matters in his essay, "Rhetoric—Old and New," "The key term for the old rhetoric was 'persuasion' and its stress was upon deliberate design. The key term for the 'new' rhetoric would be 'identification,' which can include a partially 'unconscious' factor in appeal."[11]

In an attempt to establish the outlines of this "new" rhetoric, *A Rhetoric of Motives* provided innovative discussion of topics and writers encompassing a range of fields, including literature, natural science, anthropology, psychology, economics, and theology. Prior to that point, such subjects would have been treated as separate from the concerns of rhetorical studies—relevant, perhaps, to a critic's education, but as background knowledge, not as central to the discipline. Burke made a decidedly different claim: "We can place in terms of rhetoric all those statements by anthropologists, ethnologists, individual and social psychologists, and the like, that bear upon the *persuasive* aspects of language, the function of language as *addressed*."[12] At the same time, the *Rhetoric* also challenged the field's narrow focus on oratory, and its primary emphasis upon the linguistic. For example, Burke drew attention to what he called "administrative" rhetoric: "military force can persuade by its sheer 'meaning' as well as by its use in actual combat. In this sense, nonverbal acts and material instruments themselves have a symbolic ingredient. The point is particularly necessary when we turn to the rhetoric of bureaucracy."[13] Similarly, according to Burke rhetoric can be found in Carlyle's "philosophy of clothes," in the goadings of social differentiation that are woven quite literally into one's appearance.[14]

More broadly, however, Burke's contribution in the *Rhetoric* was to demonstrate that rhetoric could not be restricted to persuasion, to the "clear, formal purposiveness" of Aristotle. For example, Burke recognized

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[10] Burke, Kenneth. "The Rhetorical Situation." Thayer, Lee O., ed. *Communication: Ethical and Moral Issues*. New York: Gordon & Breach Science Publishers, 1973: 268.

[11] Burke, Kenneth. "Rhetoric: Old and New." Steinmann, Martin, Jr., ed. *New Rhetorics*. New York: Scribner's, 1967: 63.

[12] Burke, Kenneth. *A Rhetoric of Motives*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1969: 43–44.

[13] Ibid.: 161.

[14] Ibid.: 114–121.

the presence of rhetoric in the "poor man speaking in praise of poverty," or in instances when "men in their businesses, and . . . the families of business men in their social relations attempt to amass and display all the insignia felt proper to their status."[15] Burke thus directed rhetorical scholars to attend not simply to formal situations when a person—woman or man—of status is addressing a crowd, but to moments of spontaneity, when we tacitly assert or ask, alone or with another or in a crowd: how are we to symbolically carve up our experience, to "draw the lines" of similarity and difference that form the boundaries of our world? Such a question is intimately bound with several others, such as: is this the "we" in which I find my "me"? And, if so, who have we been, and who are we to be? This is why, for Burke, rhetoric as a phenomenon is more synoptically captured by the term "identification"—since it allows us to unpack instances of formal, deliberate persuasion, as well as moments when "even without deliberate intent upon the part of anyone, we fail to draw the lines at the right places," when we fail to mark an adequate boundary between similarity and difference, others' interests and our own.[16]

As Burke (and others) have demonstrated in the seventy-plus years since the publication of the *Rhetoric,* this study of rhetoric as identification offers powerful analytical insights into the destructive appeal of the sacrificial scapegoat,[17] the interplay between "the complex material and symbolic divisions that characterize human social life,"[18] as well as the no less powerful (if more subtle) work done by phrases like "in our national interest," or even by the seemingly innocuous pronoun "we."[19] At the same time, as Jaclyn Olson has compellingly argued, Burkean scholars' overwhelming emphasis on identification has led them to focus "too narrowly on his work of the 1940s and 1950s, and especially on *A Rhetoric of Motives*. Moreover, this selective focus, in Burkean fashion, has functioned as a deflection."[20] For Olson, the selective focus on identification has led scholars to overlook the rhetorical dimensions of his early writings; moreover, I would argue that it has *also* discouraged a serious encounter with Burke's writings of

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[15] Ibid.: 126, 131.

[16] Burke, Kenneth. "The Rhetorical Situation": 271.

[17] Carter, C. Allen. *Kenneth Burke and the Scapegoat Process.* Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1996.

[18] Olson, Jaclyn S. "Our Bodies and the Language We Learn: The Dialectic of Burkean Identification in the 1930s." *Rhetoric Review* 38 (2019): 259.

[19] Burke, Kenneth. "The Rhetorical Situation": 271–272.

[20] Olson, Jaclyn S. "Our Bodies and the Language We Learn": 258.

the 1950s and early 1960s—and especially those displaying his renewed emphasis upon the poetic. In other words, just as rhetorical scholarship has too often passed over the "early Burke" as more focused on the aesthetic than the rhetoric, the literature has similarly relegated Burke's post-*Rhetoric of Motives* work to the domain of literary criticism.

Despite this relative inattention, I contend that powerful insights can be found in this later work—insights that not only stretch beyond identification, but, further, transform our understanding of the relationship between the poetic and the rhetorical. In what follows, therefore, I draw upon Burke's (ultimately unsuccessful) efforts to craft a follow-up to the *Rhetoric,* and do so in order to focus specifically on his writings on catharsis. However, I do so not in order to provide a definitive account of this stage of Burke's career, nor of his unfinished project on poetics (whatever that might be), but to instead engage a difficult question raised by these writings: are the rhetorical dimensions of catharsis necessarily restricted to the transformation of strictly civic motives? Might, in other words, catharsis act instead upon the troubling byproducts of our existence as "bodies that learn language"—the byproducts that drive our (human) rhetorical existence? In this essay, I raise this question through the creation of a "perspective by incongruity"—a juxtaposition between Burke's writings on catharsis and Anne Carson's innovative volume of Greek tragedy, *An Oresteia*.[21] However, it is necessary to first lay the groundwork for this argument by describing the nature of Burke's post-*Rhetoric* writings, and his return to the aesthetic.

Completing the *Motivorum* Trilogy

As Burkean scholars have long discussed, by 1945 Burke had formulated a plan to publish a series of three separate volumes comprising a unified whole, each addressing a particular (though interrelated) dimension of the problem of human motivation. As he explained in the first of these, *A Grammar of Motives*, this project arose organically, emerging from his attempt to adequately theorize and analyze the beauty and violence of human social life: "We began with a theory of comedy, applied to a treatise on human relations."[22] As he took notes on the material that would be

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[21]   As will be discussed later in this essay, Burke defines this concept as "A method for gauging situations by verbal 'atom cracking'" (Burke, Kenneth. *Attitudes Toward History*: 308).

[22]   Burke, Kenneth. *A Grammar of Motives*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1969: xvii.

incorporated into this "treatise," its outline grew exponentially, until he found himself with three different sets of notes, and thus three different book projects: some of these notes

> had a "you and me" quality about them, being "addressed" to some person or to some advantage, [so] we classed them broadly under the heading of a Rhetoric. There were other notes, concerned with modes of expression with appeal in the fine arts, and with purely psychological or psychoanalytic matters. These we classed under the heading of Symbolic. We had made still further observations, which we at first strove uneasily to class under one or the other of these two heads, but which we were able to distinguish as the makings of a Grammar.[23]

Having generated these three distinct categories, Burke recognized them as three distinct books, each of which would encompass and analyze a distinct set of materials:

> Theological, metaphysical, and juridical doctrines offer the best illustrations of the concerns we place under the heading of Grammar; the forms and methods of art best illustrate the concerns of Symbolic; and the ideal material to reveal the nature of Rhetoric comprises observations on parliamentary and diplomatic devices, editorial bias, sales methods and incidents of social sparring.[24]

However, as Burke regularly emphasized, these three volumes were not separable, but together comprised a trilogy since ultimately, as he wrote, "the three fields overlap considerably."[25]

In keeping with this plan, the completion of the first of these volumes led Burke naturally into the second, with little time intervening between them. In turn, as William Rueckert comments, "Burke began work on *A Symbolic of Motives* as soon as he finished *A Rhetoric of Motives* in 1950. His intention from the very beginning was to write a dramatistic poetics to go with his dramatistic *A Grammar of Motives* and *A Rhetoric of Motives*."[26] In a letter to his friend Stanley Edgar Hyman in late

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[23] Ibid.: xvii-xviii.

[24] Ibid.: xviii.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Rueckert, William H. "Introduction." Rueckert, William H., ed. *Essays Toward a Symbolic of Motives*. West Lafayette, IN: Parlor Press, 2007: xiii. The story is somewhat

March, 1950, Burke expressed irritation at delays in the publication of the now-canonical *Rhetoric*, but was much more positive about the nascent *Symbolic*: "All told, had an excellent opportunity, during my time at [The University of] Chicago, to try out the various aspects of both the Rhetoric and Symbolic, and feel surer than ever that, as regards the major principles, the enterprise is quite solid."[27] However, by the start of 1951, Burke had begun to see the project differently, talking about his work on the "Poetics" rather than the "Symbolic." Working under this new title, Burke expressed a great deal of confidence that the project could be completed in short order: "winter's work will be a minimum of new stuff, maximum of revising and arranging (of notes already tried in Chicago, Kenyon, Bennington) . . . . If only they don't blow up the world for another year or so, I should get the whole business rounded out."[28]

Despite Burke's confidence, and as scholars know, the proposed follow-up to the *Rhetoric* did not appear in his lifetime, under either title—in part, because his work on the project led him in unexpected directions, and into unanticipated problems. In the *Rhetoric,* Burke outlined a clear focus for the *Symbolic*, that it "should be built about *identity* as a titular or ancestral term . . . The thing's *identity* would here be its uniqueness as an entity in itself and by itself, a demarcated unit having its own particular structure."[29] By this, Burke means that "we are in pure Symbolic when we concentrate upon one particular integrated structure of motives"[30]—the implication being that any complex symbolic act (such as a piece of poetry or literature) implicitly embodies the integrated structure of meanings that constitute an individual's particular orientation, his or her identity.

This description would appear to provide a solid blueprint for the writing of the *Symbolic*, but Burke soon found that he was unable to

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more complicated than this, however; at one point, Burke saw the published version of the *Rhetoric* to be simply the first half of the project. After I called attention to this missing portion of the project (Crable, Bryan. "Distance as Ultimate Motive: A Dialectical Interpretation of *A Rhetoric of Motives." Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 39 (Summer 2009): 213–239), archival materials were used to craft a version of this missing second half. See Burke, Kenneth. *The War of Words*, eds. Anthony Burke, Kyle Jensen, Jack Selzer. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2018.

[27]   Burke, Kenneth. Letter to Stanley Edgar Hyman. 29 March 1950. Box 4. Stanley Edgar Hyman Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

[28]   Burke, Kenneth. Letter to Stanley Edgar Hyman. 4 January 1951. Box 4. Stanley Edgar Hyman Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

[29]   Burke, Kenneth. *A Rhetoric of Motives*: 21.

[30]   Ibid.: 27.

provide a satisfactory examination of individual motives without first clarifying the nature of the symbolic action that points us toward them: poetics. At the same time, Burke became less and less certain that this material was part of the *Symbolic* proper; he increasingly felt that it warranted its own treatment, separate from or preparatory to the dramatistic focus on identity. As David Cratis Williams has painstakingly detailed, the result was thus "not one but two manuscripts that begin in and hover around 'the Aristotelian notion of poetry as *catharsis*': 'Poetics, Dramatistically Considered' and 'A Symbolic of Motives.'"[31] These two manuscripts have long circulated among a small circle of Burkeans, although they have never been published in complete form. During Burke's time at Indiana University in 1958, in fact, he gave copies of the "Poetics, Dramatistically Considered" manuscript to William Rueckert and his students, and even left a copy in the university's library.[32]

Not surprisingly, reconciling and interpreting these manuscripts has proved difficult, although, in 2007, Rueckert combined portions of this work with previously-published essays by Burke to produce a version of the *Symbolic*—under the title *Essays Toward a Symbolic of Motives*. Rueckert justified his approach to the volume by arguing that, by the late 1960s, Burke's "dramatistic poetics was all written in one form or another and complete for anyone who wanted to take the trouble to assemble the different essays and manuscripts and work the theory and methodology out."[33] Despite the confident nature of this assertion, matters seem less straightforward than Rueckert suggests; not surprisingly, then, his vision of Burke's project has not been met with unqualified acceptance by Burkean scholars.

In reviewing Rueckert's version of the *Symbolic*, Robert Wess, for example, argues that "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."[34] Richard Thames, similarly, departs from Rueckert, insisting

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[31]   Williams, David Cratis. "Toward Rounding Out the *Motivorum Trilogy*: A Textual Introduction." Henderson, Greig; Williams, David Cratis, eds. *Unending Conversations: New Writings by and About Kenneth Burke*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2001: 13. In what follows, I will refer to these as PDC and SM, respectively.

[32]   Williams, David Cratis. "Toward Rounding Out the *Motivorum Trilogy*": 15.

[33]   Rueckert, William H. "Introduction": xiv.

[34]   Wess, Robert. "Looking for the Figure in the Carpet of the Symbolic of Motives." *KB Journal* 3 (Spring 2007). Online at https://kbjournal.org/spring2007wess.

that Burke was working on not one, but *two* projects in the 1950s and 1960s: "Had Burke ever published the complete tetralogy, systematically working out dramatism (his ontology) and logology (his epistemology), ultimately there would have in all probability been a *Rhetoric*, a *Symbolic*, and an *Ethics* (to go with the *Grammar*), each volume consisting of two books following a theory-criticism format given the mass of material he had generated."[35] To make matters more complex, in a 1969 afterward to an edition of *Counter-Statement,* Burke himself suggested that a one-volume solution was possible, given his publications of the 1960s: "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."[36] Of course, despite Burke's confidence, the project remained uncompleted at the time of his death.

Yet, that is not to say that Rueckert's volume is the only possible window into Burke's work on the *Symbolic.* Not only have portions of both unpublished manuscripts appeared in edited collections, but Burke also published a number of essays during the 1950s and 1960s that are derived from his work on the project. Moreover, as Thames notes, Burke circulated copies of his manuscripts-in-process throughout and after these decades:

> Sometime in March [1974] Burke allowed me to copy the SM manuscript that he had brought with other papers on which he was working. I also made copies of the SM for Ted Windt and Trevor Melia (who subsequently gave a copy to Barbara Biesecker, who in turn gave one to James McDaniel). Over the years I have been public about having a different version and have believed it was generally known. Sometime in the mid-1990s I even traded Robert Wess a copy of my SM for one of his PDC.[37]

Thames was kind enough to provide me with copies of both the "PDC" and "SM" manuscripts in the early 2000s, and I have since spent time with these

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[35] Thames, Richard H. "The Gordian Not: Untangling the Motivorum (1)." *KB Journal* 3 (Spring 2007). Online at http://kbjournal.org/thames1.

[36] Burke, Kenneth. "Curriculum Criticum." *Counter-Statement.* Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1968: 222.

[37] Thames, Richard H. "The Gordian Not." Thames' extended essay contains several helpful, detailed appendices describing and outlining the contents of these two manuscripts, and comparing them to both Rueckert's volume and extant published writings by Burke.

manuscripts, comparing them to Rueckert's version of the project, and to the essays that Burke published on catharsis and transcendence—and it is this eclectic collection of materials that I draw upon in what follows, highlighting when possible where these texts converge and diverge in their explorations of these key concepts.

The *Symbolic* and/as the "'Carving Out' of a Poetics"[38]

In all of these materials, Burke consistently describes his task as "the Carving-out Of a Poetics,"[39] but it is clear that he continually found himself moving *beyond* poetics toward other matters—most notably civic tensions, the realm of the no (the hortatorical rather than propositional negative), and the pressures of symbolicity itself. In some respects, this material harkens back to his work in the *Rhetoric,* and especially to his discussion of the rhetorical as the "parliamentary" struggle of voices. Burke attempts at times to hold this material at bay, sometimes indicating that he will postpone consideration of these matters to a separate volume, entitled "On Human Relations" and "stressing the *ethical* dimension of language."[40] At other times, he seems to embrace the link between the rhetorical and the poetic: "since 'words are imitations,' so that poetic and rhetorical diction overlap . . . it is not always necessary that we phrase a proposition in the form most purely adapted to Poetics exclusively. A statement in the spirit of Rhetoric may sometimes be more convenient . . . even when we are considering the poem intrinsically."[41] Yet, in all the texts considered here—and especially in the two unpublished manuscripts, PDC and SM—Burke struggles to neatly separate these areas of inquiry, and, I would argue, one reason for

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[38] Burke, Kenneth. *Essays Toward a Symbolic of Motives,* ed. William H. Rueckert. West Lafayette, IN: Parlor Press, 2007: 5. This same phrasing is repeated elsewhere in this volume, and on page 13 of the PDC and page 17 of the Symbolic manuscripts.

[39] Burke, Kenneth. *Essays Toward a Symbolic of Motives*: 78.

[40] Burke, Kenneth. "Curriculum Criticum": 218 (cf. Thames, Richard H. "The Gordian Not.") As Williams suggests, although the proposed volume never appeared during Burke's lifetime, this material is nonetheless familiar to Burkean scholars, since some portions of it are in *The Rhetoric of Religion*, others in *Language as Symbolic Action*, and still others in his late essays (e.g., Williams, David Cratis. "Toward Rounding Out the *Motivorum Trilogy*": 15–16, 18–19).

[41] Burke, Kenneth. "'Watchful of Hermetics to Be Strong in Hermeneutics': Selections from 'Poetics, Dramatistically Considered'." Henderson, Greig; Williams, David Cratis, eds. *Unending Conversations: New Writings by and About Kenneth Burke*: 57. This chapter represents a previously-unpublished portion of the PDC manuscript.

this lies in the complicated relationship between two of his key terms: catharsis and transcendence.

Although this essay—like others in this special issue of *Literature of the Americas*—attempts to end this relative neglect, catharsis and transcendence are Burkean concepts that have not received the attention they merit from scholars—in part, perhaps, because Burke never managed to publish the definitive book (or books) that would have cemented their place within his dramatistic system.[42] Even so, however, this inattention is quite surprising, since transcendence is a term that appears consistently across the Burkean corpus. Although catharsis does not appear as frequently in the canonical works, it *does* appear.[43] Further, throughout Burke's writings of the 1950s and 1960s, he points to the points of intersection (and divergence) between these two terms—so often, indeed, that it suggests itself as one of Burke's vital concerns of the period.

Note, for example, his suggestion in a 1954 letter to Malcolm Cowley that catharsis represented the central term of the "Poetics," paralleling the role of identification in the *Rhetoric*.[44] Yet, it is clear also that transcendence was always lurking around and within this focus upon catharsis. For example, in the definition of "Platonic Dialogue" offered in his 1951

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[42]   There have been a few (very few) recent attempts to explore the intricacies of Burke's conception of transcendence. Beyond the essays in the present collection, see, for example: Crable, Bryan. "Burkean Perspectives on Transcendence: A Prospective Retrospective." Crable, Bryan, ed. *Transcendence by Perspective: Meditations on and with Kenneth Burke.* Anderson, SC: Parlor Press, 2014: 3–32; Crable, Bryan. "Distance as Ultimate Motive"; Zappen, James P. "Kenneth Burke on Dialectical-Rhetorical Transcendence." *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 42 (2009): 279–301. Yet, since there is almost no work in rhetoric that systematically addresses Burke's conception of catharsis, even that seems like a robust literature in comparison.

[43]   Not surprisingly, in post-1950 works Burke frequently discusses catharsis. See, for example: Burke, Kenneth. "Appendix: On Human Behavior Considered 'Dramatistically'." *Permanence and Change: An Anatomy of Purpose.* 3rd ed. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984: 285, 287, 294; Burke, Kenneth. *Language as Symbolic Action.* Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1969: 18, 88, 92, 94, 96-97, 108, 125, 144, 154, 159–161, 186–200, 308–343; Burke, Kenneth. *The Rhetoric of Religion: Studies in Logology.* Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1970: 35, 49, 137, 234. Yet, even if we confine ourselves to his pre-1950 works, it is clear that catharsis is a term that hovered at the edge of Burke's attention, even prior to his work on the "Poetics" and/or "Symbolic." See, for example: Burke, Kenneth. *Attitudes Toward History*: 188–189, 191, 363, 367; Burke, Kenneth. *Counter-Statement*: 41; Burke, Kenneth. *Permanence and Change: An Anatomy of Purpose*: 266; Burke, Kenneth. *The Philosophy of Literary Form.* 3rd ed. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1973: 133, 136, 281, 311, 320.

[44]   Williams, David Cratis. "Toward Rounding Out the *Motivorum Trilogy*": 12.

essay, "Three Definitions," Burke writes that "A kind of catharsis is got, by refutation of error, and by transcendence."[45] Similarly, in the famous essay from the 1960s, "Fact, Inference and Proof in the Analysis of Literary Symbolism," he notes that "our thoughts about hierarchical tension lead us to watch for modes of *catharsis*, or of *transcendence*, that may offer a symbolic solution within the *given symbol-system of the particular work we are analyzing.*"[46] Most interestingly, in his essay on Emerson and transcendence, collected in 1966's *Language as Symbolic Action,* Burke portrays the two as complexly interrelated: "Since both tragic catharsis and dialectical transcendence involve *formal development,* by the same token both modes give us kinds of *transformation*"; yet, he cautions, "Though dialectical transcendence and dramatic catharsis have many areas in which the jurisdictions covered by the two terms overlap, there are also terministic situations in which they widely differ."[47]

These provocative statements alone would suggest that these two terms, and their relationship, deserve more sustained scholarly attention—but I would suggest that there are other good reasons to revisit them. At a minimum, I believe that catharsis and transcendence contributed to Burke's indecision regarding the final volume(s) of the *Motivorum* project—since both terms have their origin in the poetic, but quickly take us "beyond" that restricted realm, into the wider concerns of life as an embodied symbol-user. More importantly, however, by revisiting these terms (and their intersection), I argue that we can productively engage the tensions arising from the peculiarly human admixture of symbolic and nonsymbolic elements—our existence as "bodies that learn language," and the rhetorical temptations, crises, and conflicts that, Burke argues, incessantly arise as a result.

In other words, attention to these two terms allow us to underscore and extend a significant aspect of Burke's later work—his focus on the lures and pressures endemic to human social life, so that we might better (in Burke's words) appreciate, and thus properly discount, them. In this sense, though Burke might have originally moved from the aesthetic to the rhetorical, his later writings on poetics can also be mined for their insights into rhetorical theory and criticism—insights that go beyond the typical scholarly emphasis upon identification. To further develop this argument,

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[45] Burke, Kenneth. *Essays Toward a Symbolic of Motives*: 23.

[46] Ibid.: 67.

[47] Burke, Kenneth. *Language as Symbolic Action*: 189, 186.

I now turn to a more detailed consideration of Burke's work on poetics, connecting his discussion of catharsis and Athenian tragedy to the complex polarity of action and motion, our existence as the symbol-creating, -using, -misusing animal.

"All Hail to Mighty Aeschylus."[48]

Although Burke's work and correspondence from the 1950s and 1960s indicate his indecision regarding the final volume of his *Motivorum* project, they leave little doubt that two ancient authors, Aristotle and Aeschylus, played central roles within all of its various incarnations. The focus on Aristotle, as Burke repeatedly explains, is rather straightforward: "such a project [on poetics] should be developed with Aristotle's *Poetics* in mind. Not that the extant parts of that old text should be taken either as authority or as 'the enemy.' But I consider it an ideal point of departure, or benchmark, a handy spot from which to locate any survey of the field."[49] Indeed, in multiple texts sketching the outlines and nature of his project, Burke is very clear in his insistence that it takes "Aristotle's treatise as its point of departure."[50]

Yet, it is not simple historical primacy that leads Burke to claim Aristotle as an ancestor. The decision to begin with Aristotle's conception of tragedy also reflects Burke's choice to engage poetics *dramatistically*, which is to say from the standpoint of *action*, not *knowledge*, with all that this entails.[51] In other words, Aristotle's text serves perfectly as Burke's point of departure, since the former's study of tragedy relies upon terms that are dramatistic (action-centered) rather than scientistic (knowledge-centered). Aristotle, Burke argues, describes poetics as a *making*, an action, and not as a matter of sensory perception or representation. Indeed, Burke comments, "Unless we have overlooked it, the word 'truth' does not appear in the *Poetics*. It does, however, appear in many scientistically tinged translations."[52] By highlighting the dramatistic nature of Aristotle's

[48] Burke, Kenneth. Letter to Stanley Edgar Hyman. 10 April 1951. Box 4. Stanley Edgar Hyman Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

[49] Burke, Kenneth. "On Catharsis, or Resolution." *The Kenyon Review* 21 (Summer 1959): 337.

[50] Burke, Kenneth. *Essays Toward a Symbolic of Motives*: 5. This insistence is even more clear on page 1 of PDC and pages 20-21 of SM.

[51] Ibid.: 5. Burke even comments in the unpublished manuscripts that Aristotle's focus on action makes his poetics "doubly" dramatistic (page 1 of PDC, page 21 of SM).

[52] Ibid.

Poetics, Burke underscores the internal consistency (and genius) of the former's approach; all of Aristotle's poetic terms are derivable from its starting point: "these terms all share in common Dramatistic logic (if action, *therefore* plot, *therefore* character, *therefore* choice, *therefore* passion, etc.)."[53]

For these reasons, Burke begins his discussion of tragedy with the definition provided in Aristotle's *Poetics,* though Burke both extends and complicates it. Burke first offers a compelling summary of Aristotle's view of tragedy: "A tragedy, then, is the imitation of an action that is serious and also, as having magnitude, complete in itself; in language with pleasurable accessories, each kind brought in separately in the parts of the work; in a dramatic, not narrative form; with incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish its catharsis of such emotions."[54] As Burke sees it, this means that there are three central elements to emphasize in Aristotle's definition: "(1) He would deal with a making (*poiesis*). (2) A making of what? The making of an imitation (*mimesis*). (3) An imitating of what? The imitating of an action (*praxis*)."[55]

Yet, as Burke emphasizes, Aristotle's dramatistic approach to poetics continually points beyond itself, towards the extra-poetic function of this mimesis. In part, Burke notes, this is because of the tantalizing definition Aristotle gives for Attic tragedy: "'through pity and fear'" tragedy produced "'the catharsis of such emotions.'"[56] Indeed, Burke suggests that this unexplained statement, the missing account of tragic catharsis, is "among the greatest attractions of Aristotle's text."[57] Burke here points to the "sheer word for 'tragedy' itself, the 'goat-song,' [as] a term that could also have led to such concerns with curative victimage by scapegoat as are in the idea of tragic *catharsis*."[58] Aristotle's all-too-brief invocation of tragic catharsis thus directs Burke to the purifying possibilities of the poetic act:

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[53] Burke, Kenneth. "'Watchful of Hermetics to Be Strong in Hermeneutics'": 39.

[54] Burke, Kenneth. *Essays Toward a Symbolic of Motives*: 19.

[55] Burke, Kenneth. "'Watchful of Hermetics to Be Strong in Hermeneutics'": 35–36. This is also on page 48 of SM.

[56] Burke, Kenneth. "On Catharsis, or Resolution": 337. This quotation of Aristotle is repeated on page 38 of PDC and 134 of SM.

[57] Ibid.: 337.

[58] Burke, Kenneth. "'Watchful of Hermetics to Be Strong in Hermeneutics'": 39. This is also on page 52 of SM.

If there is a certain tension in human relations, the artist may exploit it dramatically by analyzing it into parts, "breaking it down" into a set of interrelated roles (a device that permits the tension to be "processed"; for whereas in human relations it just is, the breaking of it into parts permits these parts to act upon one another, in in a series of operations that, when followed in exactly the order they have in their particular whole, lead to a "catharsis").[59]

For Burke, then, the dramatistic study of poetics points toward the power of the aesthetic to carry out the function of *purgation*, as well as toward "the 'pollution' for which tragedy concocts a remedy."[60]

Yet, it is also this purgative function of tragedy that, for Burke, requires the incorporation of a second ancient Greek author into the dramatistic study of poetics—Aeschylus, and, specifically, his famous dramatic cycle *The Oresteia*. In part, Burke justifies this attention on Aeschylus' *Oresteia* by pointing to its uniqueness—that, since this is the only surviving example of the tragic trilogy, this set of plays "offers special opportunities because Aristotle does not treat of the trilogy as a form, hence does not consider a 'dialectical' progression whereby each play grows out of the preceding, or into the one that follows."[61] Burke further points out that "the great Greek tragedies were devices for treating of civic tensions (read: class conflicts), and for contributing to social amity by ritual devices for resolving such tensions."[62] In this way, Burke not only identifies Aeschylus as a dramatistic complement to Aristotle, but also moves beyond the familiar analysis of the trilogy as providing both mythic origins and divine sanction for the Athenian democracy that had so recently triumphed over the Persian monarchy. For Burke, in other words, Aeschylus' plays offer an opportunity to more deeply engage the term invoked (but not definitively explained) by Aristotle: tragic catharsis.[63]

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[59] Burke, Kenneth. *Essays Toward a Symbolic of Motives*: 16.

[60] Burke, Kenneth. "Catharsis—Second View." *The Centennial Review* 5 (1961): 107. Similar language is on page 26 of SM.

[61] Burke, Kenneth. *Essays Toward a Symbolic of Motives*: 104. He emphasizes its importance to his project also on page 26 of SM.

[62] Burke, Kenneth. *Language as Symbolic Action*: 137. Similar language recurs on pages 55–56 of PDC.

[63] He makes this argument at some length in the unpublished manuscripts (e.g., page 41 of PDC).

In gauging the importance of Aeschylus' trilogy to Burke's poetic project, we should note that not only did Burke choose to include his analysis of it in *Language as Symbolic Action,* but nearly eighty pages of the unfinished *Poetics, Dramatistically Considered* focuses on the *Oresteia*. Williams thus calls "Burke's long, close, creative, and brilliant analysis of the text of the Orestes trilogy" the "critical centerpiece" of the "Poetics" manuscript.[64] Although these pages were removed from Burke's "Symbolic" manuscript, even in this text he contends that Aeschylus' plays offer the best possible route into the study of poetics, catharsis, and transcendence.[65]

Burke's reading of *The Oresteia* centers upon Aeschylus' tragic cleansing of the civic tensions existing in the Athens of his day, through the moving of the audience to pity, fear, and pride. Thus, Burke's analysis goes beyond the "sociological" reading that reads the celebratory symbolization of a political transformation, from blood justice to democratic justice. He argues instead that the Athenians of his time were experiencing the "miasma" of social tension, a state of pollution. Such a state could be approached medicinally by endowing it with direction: "though in Aeschylus' day civic conflicts had already become sufficiently intense to seem miasmatically swampy, as conceived in terms of a contrast with feudal justice this very *problem* took on the quality rather of a *solution*."[66] Aeschylus confronted, then, the need to cleanse the polluted state generated by the conditions of Athenian democracy. He did so through the mythic tale of Atreus:

> Aeschylus's trilogy would be a diplomatic way of saying, in effect, "Fellow-citizens, you think conditions are bad now. But you don't know how well off you are. Just remember how harshly justice was administered in the old days. Then you'll realize the advantages of our civic enlightenment." Thus

[64] Williams, David Cratis. "Toward Rounding Out the *Motivorum Trilogy*": 27. Recognizing the importance of this material to Burke's overall project, Rueckert collects much of it within his *Essays Toward A Symbolic of Motives*.

[65] Burke's detailed study of *The Oresteia* roughly comprises one fourth to one fifth of the extant "Poetics" manuscript. By contrast, although the unpublished "Symbolic" manuscript indicates that the study of Aeschylus will form an important part of the argument, this is likely a holdover, not yet edited out, from the earlier PDC manuscript— since the *Oresteia* appears only in a scattering of places across the text. Burke may well have excised this material from the SM manuscript after deciding to include an altered version of this material in *Language as Symbolic Action.* It is also possible that, as Thames suggests, the material on the *Oresteia* would have been incorporated into a later section of the SM manuscript, had it been completed (Thames, Richard H. "The Gordian Not.").

[66] Burke, Kenneth. *Essays Toward a Symbolic of Motives*: 143–144. This also on pages 273–274 of PDC.

. . . the dramatist contrived to consider uneasy *conditions now* in terms of drastic *conditions then*.[67]

Through such symbolic maneuverings, then, Burke argues that the Athenian audience was able to experience the cleansing purgation they desperately desired through their vicarious participation in the action of Aeschylus' tragedy.

To this end, then, Burke reads *The Oresteia* as a perfect embodiment of Aristotle's conception of tragic catharsis—since we can infer from existing passages of the *Poetics* that, in the missing portions*,* "the kind of 'purge' produced by tragedy may have been specifically considered from the 'civic' point of view (as a species of purge)."[68] Yet, Burke simultaneously points to the importance of the missing satyr play by Aeschylus that would have followed the trilogy in its public performance at the Athenian festivals. He contends that "tragic solemnity itself, as a literary species, needs a solution beyond itself . . . . If tragedy (with its peculiar modes of dignification) makes for catharsis, there is also a sense in which it leaves us in still further need of catharsis."[69] For Burke, it is only the introduction of the comic retelling of the story of the House of Atreus that would "complete the completing perfectly."[70]

Yet, Burke goes to great pains to stress that even the full performance of the four-play cycle—the tragic trilogy plus the "completing" satyr play—would not effect a complete cleansing of its audience. As he notes, even the "radical solution" of the satyr-play, the catharsis for the tragic catharsis, "requires that the chase begin all over again. For the group needs its solemnities, quite as it needs its hilarities. So, six months later: three more trilogies, in turn 'corrected' by three more satyr-plays."[71] In part, this is attributable to the nature of the purge accomplished by these tragic plays. Although *The Oresteia* afforded the Athenian audience a "pageant-like solution" to the troubles generated by their democracy, it did not simultaneously eliminate the source of the troubles addressed by the tragic

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[67] Ibid*.*: 143. This is also on page 272 of PDC.

[68]   Burke, Kenneth. "On Catharsis, or Resolution": 337. There is an extended discussion of this on pages 284, 299–300 of PDC.

[69] Burke, Kenneth. *Essays Toward A Symbolic of Motives*: 146. This is also on page 279 of PDC.

[70] Ibid.: 146. This is also on page 279 of PDC.

[71] Ibid.: 147. This is also on page 280 of PDC.

playwright.[72] As Burke suggests, "insofar as the underlying situation itself remained disordered, such purely symbolic modes of cleansing could not be permanently effective."[73]

More importantly, however, Burke argues that the tragic catharsis generated by *The Oresteia* necessarily remained incomplete insofar as the tensions it addressed were local to the Athenian context. It is necessarily the case, as he remarks, that we should view "Greek tragedy as a *civic* ceremony," and therefore its form of purgation can be "specifically considered from the 'civic' point of view (as a species of political purge), in contrast with the stress on intimate, family relationships in Freud's views on the cathartic effects of psychoanalysis."[74] However, Burke simultaneously contends that such an approach cannot exhaust the subject of catharsis in its full sense.[75] Although tragic catharsis addresses, and temporarily purges, the tensions generated by a particular social order, Burke emphasizes that these civic motives are themselves only a *portion* of the motives that characterize human existence.[76]

Therefore, Burke emphasizes that an individual's participation in a particular social order is never reducible to the experience of the group—if for no other reason than "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."[77] As a result, Burke argues, the "body politic" is hardly the only body relevant to the study of catharsis:

> The vocabulary of tragedy, like all vocabulary, has three empirical non-linguistic sources to draw on: the human body, the "world's body" (the natural scene), and the body politic. (The last would include the whole range of personal and social relations, as between parents and offspring, ruler and subjects, doctor and patient, teacher and student, employer and employee, the area of relationships in which are interwoven such conditions

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[72] Ibid.: 144. This is also on page 274 of PDC.

[73] Burke, Kenneth. "On Catharsis, or Resolution": 352.

[74] Ibid.: 342, 337. A more extended version of this discussion can be found on page 152 of SM.

[75] Burke emphatically makes this point on page 174 of SM.

[76] Burke, Kenneth. "Catharsis—Second View": 107.

[77] Ibid.: 107. Similar reflections appear on pages 320–322 of PDC and 188–189 of SM.

as authority, obedience, disobedience, service, exploitation, co-operation, competition, in brief the vast tangle of motives implicit in the nature of a complex social Order.[78]

Although the tragic catharsis of civic tensions addresses a portion of our human existence, we must also recognize that catharsis draws upon and reflects the nature of human symbolicity itself. Since, as Burke writes, "problems of 'catharsis' are situated precisely at that point where analysis of language in terms of Poetics both sums up the field of Poetics proper and through sheer superabundance inclines to 'spill over' into the other areas of linguistic action," we must attend more broadly to the tensions generated by the embodied symbol-user who is directed toward, though distanced from, a world simultaneously inherited and constituted.[79]

According to Burke, in other words, the study of catharsis necessarily points beyond the confines of a particular social order, beyond the purging of civic tensions local to a specific audience, place, and time. The ambiguous connection between, for example, the human body and the body politic suggests why Burke's extended meditations on purgation and the "Demonic Trinity" are necessary for a complete dramatistic analysis of tragedy.[80] And yet, Burke cautions us not to overly-literalize this emphasis: "the subject of Catharsis could by no means be reduced to the imagery of bodily behavior."[81] Instead, he argues, it points toward something far more fundamental to human existence:

> Weeping or laughing are *end-products*. They have the finality of a ship coming into port. 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).[82]

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78 Burke, Kenneth. "On Catharsis, or Resolution": 338.

79 Ibid.: 340. Burke's argument on this point is also on page 188 of SM.

80 See, for example, Burke, Kenneth. "On Catharsis, or Resolution": 342; Burke, Kenneth. "Catharsis—Second View": 107.

81 Burke, Kenneth. "'Watchful of Hermetics to Be Strong in Hermeneutics'": 53.

82 Burke, Kenneth. "Catharsis—Second View": 108.

To this end, Burke indicates that catharsis requires attention to a shifting, imbricated set of motives: individual or bodily, factional or civic, and universal or existential.

However, Burke also indicates that attention to the last of these complicates, and even redirects, his project on poetics. Further, I would suggest that the ambiguity of critical focus that emerges as a result of this insight expresses itself in Burke's brief but suggestive meditations on the difference between tragic and comic catharsis. Indeed, attention to Burke's statements on this distinction indicates no small amount of uncertainty on his part:

> we should match "laughter" not with "tears," but with "weeping." This alignment reminds us that *both* laughter and weeping can terminate in tears—but whereas mild weeping can cause tears, the same effect is produced only by intense, hysterical laughter, a distinction that must have a great deal to do with the relation between tragic catharsis and comic catharsis, though we're not quite sure what it might be.[83]

He adds, "Nor are we quite sure just how the difference between tragedy and comedy is aligned with the difference between tears of sorrow and tears of joy."[84] Therefore, following his extended discussion of tragic catharsis, Burke muses, "Throughout the inquiry, the author has been tentatively asking himself just how to present the other two major cathartic devices, epitomized in Aristophanic comedy and Platonic dialectic."[85]

Although these asides from Burke are not themselves completed through a detailed study of comic catharsis or Aristophanic comedy, it does appear that Burke increasingly saw this material as central to his dramatistic study of poetics. As he notes, despite beginning with the Aristotelian emphasis upon tragedy, Burke himself advocates comedy, since "the analysis of tragedy is itself essentially comic."[86] For those familiar with Burke, this claim reflects not only his familiar emphasis upon the superiority of comic approaches to the study of human social life,[87] but also his initial intention to generate a comic treatise on human social

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[83] Ibid.: 108. This is also on page 321 of PDC.
[84] Ibid.: 108. This is also on pages 321-322 of PDC.
[85] Ibid.: 132.
[86] Burke, Kenneth. "On Catharsis, or Resolution": 339.
[87] See, for example, Burke, Kenneth. *Attitudes Toward History*: 106–107.

relations. Yet, despite these statements promising a move from the civic catharsis of tragedy to the (ambiguously) individual, civic, and universal catharsis of comedy, none of the extant manuscripts deliver a substantial section devoted to this material. Indeed, although he acknowledged the incomplete nature of the "Poetics, Dramatistically Considered" project in 1958-59, it appears that the greatest portion of the missing material involved this shift to the comic: "The table of contents of the manuscript concludes parenthetically: 'Still missing: Section on Comic Catharsis; further references to individual works, illustrating various observations by specific examples; batch of footnotes indicating various other developments; appendix reprinting various related essays by the author, already published in periodicals."[88]

Of course, in *Attitudes Toward History,* we have an extensive account of the "comic frame," which, Burke argues, "should enable people *to be observers of themselves, while acting. Its ultimate would not be passiveness,* but *maximum consciousness.*"[89] Described as an attempt to create "a total vision of reality" by a humble recognition that "*every* insight contains its own special kind of blindness," the comic entails "seeing from two angles at once."[90] Burke therefore offers "perspective by incongruity" as a means of implementing the comic frame; this term he explains as "a methodology of the pun," a systematic attempt to generate insight by violating established associations, to deliberately be " 'impious' as regards our linguistic categories established by custom."[91] In Burkean fashion, then, I suggest that through the device of a perspective by incongruity we can shift the category of catharsis from the tragic to the comic—thus constituting a new (comic) vision of catharsis as a cleansing accomplished through the beyonding of transcendence, a cleansing aimed not at a personal or civic pollution, but a universal and symbolic one. Although such a project cannot be fully accomplished in the present essay, by way of conclusion I engage Anne Carson's *An Oresteia* in the spirit of Burke's "methodology of the pun," and thereby start to highlight the rhetorical implications of Burkean catharsis, in its comic incarnation.

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[88] Williams, David Cratis. "Toward Rounding Out the *Motivorum Trilogy*": 22.

[89] Burke, Kenneth. *Attitudes Toward History*: 171.

[90] Ibid.: 40, 41.

[91] Ibid.: 309.

"**Beat the Devil, Beat the Devil, Beat the Devil, Beat the…**"[92]

Carson introduces her unorthodox trilogy by admitting it was not her inspiration. Instead, she confesses, it grew somewhat inadvertently. Nearly twenty years passed between her translation of Sophocles' *Elektra* and Euripides' *Orestes,* but a year after the latter's appearance an artistic director asked her to complete the cycle, as it were: to translate Aeschylus' *Agamemmnon* and present the three works together as *An* (not *The*) *Oresteia*. As Carson comments, she was not inclined to assent: "I said, 'Who needs this?'—meaning, Aiskhylos has already given us an *Oresteia* richer than rubies, of which lots of good translations exist. Why monkey around with it?"[93] Her colleague persisted and she ultimately assented, agreeing with him that "To hear the same legend (the story of the house of Atreus) told by three different playwrights at three different vantage points of Athenian history would offer 'a unique perspective on the Athenian moment.'"[94]

From a Burkean perspective, Carson's nontraditional grouping perfectly exemplifies the generation of comic insight through "planned incongruity." Carson violates established categories linking the Orestes cycle to Aeschylus alone, and, further, violates the traditional emphasis upon the defining nature of authorship rather than subject matter. Further—and more importantly—though Carson and her colleague recognize that *An Oresteia* releases new insight into Athens, I contend that it simultaneously releases new insight into the nature of catharsis, and into its rhetorical importance. I suggest that this collection not only allows us to explore Burke's work on catharsis in a new way, but also to speculate on what Burke was ultimately unable to complete—that is, to sharpen the outlines of its comic and tragic forms, and to thereby trace the link between catharsis and transcendence, cleansing and the beyond(ing) of symbolicity.

We might begin by applying Burke's insight that "the great Greek tragedies were devices for treating of civic tensions (read: class conflicts), and for contributing to social amity by ritual devices for resolving such tensions."[95] Such an approach might entail focusing upon the civic tensions existing within Athens when Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides wrote—attending specifically to the varying "local conditions" engaged by these three authors' retellings of the Atrean myth. In this way, we might be

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[92]   Burke, Kenneth. Letter to Stanley Edgar Hyman. 10 April 1951.

[93]   Carson, Anne, trans. *An Oresteia*. New York: Faber and Faber, Inc., 2009: ix-x.

[94]   Ibid.: x.

[95]   Burke, Kenneth. *Language as Symbolic Action*: 137.

moved to contrast the conditions lived by Aeschylus' audience—expressed in a work that celebrates (and provides foundation for) the democratic institutions of Athens—with those lived by Sophocles' audience. The latter's *Electra* (whose date is indeterminate, though likely at the end of his career, thus at the time of Athenian empire, and the threat to democracy represented by the oligarchic conspiracies) might thereby be taken as a set of poetic admonitions on the need to maintain faith in justice under conditions of tyranny—a reflection of democracy living under terror. And we might further contrast both of these with the conditions lived by the audience for Euripides' *Orestes* (performed first in 408 BC, between the overthrow of democracy by the 400 and the Terror of the 30), reading this work as a dramatic portrayal of democracy as a tormented, tortured figure, one betrayed by the ambitious and disingenuous.

However, read as a perspective by incongruity, I submit that Carson's volume suggests something even more significant for rhetorical scholarship. I argue that it reveals the presence of a different kind of catharsis than that accomplished by *The Oresteia*, one that sheds light on the catharsis of *universal*, and not simply *factional*, motives. In some respects, Burke's work already argues that such a shift is analytically necessary. As he writes, "The social tensions which a cathartic drama thus exploits and releases are not ultimately resolved by such purely symbolic means. Insofar as the civic 'pollution' which they are designed to ritually cleanse is intrinsic to the nature of the state, the semi-annual purges in the theatre could not bring permanent relief."[96] Here he emphasizes that there is no permanent relief provided by the tragic catharsis of Greek theatre, but *not* because of the nature of a particular social order; the kind of pollution he points to here is intrinsic to the nature of the state because it is more radically rooted in *the nature of the human being as symbol-user*.

Here, I suggest, we begin to see the possibility of distinguishing comic from tragic catharsis. After all, note that Burke's discussions of tragedy continually point to motives that lie below the level of civic or sociological motives:

> The character, or personality of a work may touch upon such ultimate discordancies natural to a given society; or it may to varying degrees transcend the culture in which it arose, and may "permanently" engage the human tribe in general (for in proportion as we perfect our understanding

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[96] Burke, Kenneth. *Essays Toward a Symbolic of Motives*: 117.

of these processes, surely we shall see how all great works are feeling their way through much the same astounding labyrinth).[97]

This use of the term "labyrinth" is not merely a sly Hellenistic reference, but instead reflects what Burke defines as the ultimate foundation of tragedy:

> when [Nietzsche] speaks of attempting to find his way through "the labyrinth of the origin of Greek tragedy," we should only add that not only is the attempt to trace its origins a labyrinth, but also its place of origin is itself a labyrinth, a labyrinth of the inarticulate, *as brought into being by the ability to articulate*. Our qualification in italics is most important here. A labyrinthine tangle is not a mere jungle. It is a *confusion of paths already formed*. The calculus we are using implies the assumption that only symbol-using animals experience the Daedalian motive.[98]

Burke goes on to flesh out this Daedalian motive in other terms: the *Oresteia*'s *Amphisbaena* [to go both ways] is described as a "'prelogical' monster . . . the mythic representative of the ultimate dreaming worm, the sheerly vegetating digestive tract, that underlies all human rationality, and out of which somehow emerge the labyrinths of human reason."[99]

In other words, as Burke suggests, what we begin to see is another dimension to the Greek tragedy, one that complements (and even lies beneath) its civic dimensions:

> a notable respect in which the logic of symbols would transcend the very material body by which symbols are made usable (and in the tragic idiom, this moment of transcendence is figured in terms of victimage, of an ultimate slaying . . . . terms so biologically absolute that, in the last analysis, they are concerned but with the unresolved conflicts between the verbal and the nonverbal out of which it arises and in which it is necessarily grounded.[100]

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[97]   Burke, Kenneth. "Catharsis—Second View": 127. This is also on page 352 of PDC.

[98]   Burke, Kenneth. "'Watchful of Hermetics to Be Strong in Hermeneutics'": 75. This is also on page 371 of PDC.

[99]   Burke, Kenneth. *Language as Symbolic Action*: 135.

[100]   Ibid.: 136.

In this way, then, might Carson's collection allow us to read Greek tragedy not simply as a dramatic attempt to cleanse its audience of civic tensions, but of tensions more universal in nature, those linked to our existence as embodied symbol-users? If so, we should look not simply to the themes of the plays that reflect civic motives, but also those that relate more directly to the conflicts, interrelationships, and tangled translations between the verbal and nonverbal realms. Taking as our source, then, not the orthodox trilogy of Aeschylus, but Carson's incongruous *An Oresteia*, we can see fascinating reflections on (and, befitting a trilogy, dialectical development of) this theme of the verbal and nonverbal, our Daedalian motive.

First, we should note that Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* dramatically portrays a direct link between verbal and nonverbal realms, word and world—there is an emphasis upon language as inseparable from action, from reality. Words are, for example, equated with weapons, and with deeds; words directly bring into being the conditions (verbal *and* nonverbal) that they invoke. However, Sophocles' *Elektra* begins to subject this direct relationship to critical interrogation, identifying a possible slippage or distance between word and deed, verbal and nonverbal.

In the unfolding action of the play, I argue, this relationship is troubled in three ways. First, in and through the character of Klytemnestra, we see embodied a central claim: one can speak reverently without acting reverently, without being reverent. Further, I suggest, the play indicates that one can speak as if obedient to authority without obeying authority, without truly *being* obedient to authority. We recognize this in Chrysothemis' surface acceptance of the rule of Klytemnestra and Aegisthus—which lies in stark contrast to the open revolt displayed by Elektra, in her contempt toward those two figures who will her capitulation. Finally, it is clear from the dialogue and plot that one can speak without acting; Elektra's contempt for Orestes' many letters, not immediately matched by action, testify to this point. More radically, though, we see this insight expressed by the character of Orestes, whose death is falsely spoken of twice within the play—and who simply asks, "what harm can it do/to die in words?"[101]

Within Euripides' *Orestes,* however, I contend that this relationship achieves comic maturation. Not only might there be slippage between the verbal and nonverbal (as in *Elektra*), but Euripides suggests that such a slippage is necessarily part of the human experience—indeed, that it is *even ordained by the gods.* In this play we thus see the full severing of

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[101] Carson, Anne. *An Oresteia*: 90.

word from deed, appearance from reality. This is reflected most fully in the actions and character of Helen, who is not only saved from Orestes by Apollo, but is elevated into divine status, where she will serve as "queen of the deep running sea."[102] Here the confusion of verbal for nonverbal, surface for depth, appearance for reality, confounds an attempt to not simply enact democracy, but even to account for the effectivity of language—beyond simple corruption or self-interest.

Yet, as Burke would emphasize, this is an analysis of the poetic, and thus not simply the representation (in the scientistic sense) of social inter-action, but the *imitation* (*mimesis*) of social interaction—its fulfillment, its entelechial end.[103] As a result, to engage these three plays adequately means we must view them in terms of catharsis, as symbolic means of cleansing pollution. However, I suggest that the perspective by incongruity afforded by Carson's trilogy allows us to move beyond the civic motives of Athenian audiences, and toward something more appropriately (comically) universal. Or, to rephrase this Burkean point as a question: in what way are not only the ancient Athenians but *we*—as befitting the universal motives addressed by this trilogy—cleansed by *An Oresteia*?

In part, I would suggest, through a kind of comic *mimesis*. Like Orestes—although not as perfectly, as entelechially—we are caught between symbolic action and nonsymbolic motion, the free and the determined.[104] Like Helen, but not as perfectly or entelechially, we are consumed with appearances, not reality, the verbal but not the nonverbal grounds toward which we reach. Here I would suggest the importance of Helen's eleva-tion to the skies, toward which our eyes raise, toward which our hands stretch, suggesting the love of the further shore that Burke discusses as transcendence. Further, by converting a miasmatic state to the action of a plot, a development, we are cleansed through the introduction of *design*.

Like social or civic tensions, the tension between verbal and nonver-bal inherent to human existence, the Daedalian motive lying labrynthine at the roots of tragedy

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102   Ibid.: 255.

103   Burke, Kenneth. *Essays Toward a Symbolic of Motives*: 283.

104   Although outside the scope of this essay's focus, for more on this relationship, see, for example, Burke, Kenneth. "(Nonsymbolic) Motion/(Symbolic) Action." *Critical Inquiry* 4 (1978): 809–838.

just *is*; it has no natural divisibility into parts. But once it has been translated by a poet or a philosopher into a set of differentiating terms variously interrelated, this stagnant *state* can be experienced rather as a *process*. And within the conditions of the terminology, such transforming of a state into a process can be in effect a *cleansing*. Things can be so separated out, that a part of the tangle can be left behind (at least within the conditions of the terminology).[105]

In this way, Carson's trilogy—treated as a comic "planned incongruity"—might help point toward the cleansing of the tensions emerging from our primordial state, from the nature of our all-too-human condition. Thus, by engaging not simply *An Oresteia*, but also the universal conditions, the Daedalian motive, disclosed by these works, we might be better prepared to confront more than the tensions arising from local conditions, more than the forms of civic pollution addressed by tragic catharsis. An attention to these late writings by Burke might help equip us to "size up" and address the tensions arising from conditions much more universal—to address the rhetorical temptations produced not by a particular social order with its corresponding set of motives, but by the more permanent conditions of our hybrid existence.

Such a view of catharsis might entail the humble (though not humiliating) resignation of Burkean comedy—the kind of engaged, conscious action which might produce correction rather than cruelty. This would represent the kind of action toward which Burke urged us—the collective, comic appreciation of the insights and blindnesses of the human symbol-user, of the symbolically-generated promptings toward transcendence, when "either rightly or wrongly, either grandly or in fragments, we stretch forth our hands through love of the farther shore."[106] The comic, I suggest, thus entails commitment to a different kind of catharsis than that of tragedy, the necessary and ongoing cleansing of the ineradicable, of the "old Adam" of symbolicity lying within us. Though Burke did not provide us with a full account of this process, he did suggest its motivation, as well as what it might look (and sound) like: "Beat the devil, beat the devil, beat the devil, beat the…(it sounds like a train, going steadily on, towards nowhere)."[107]

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[105] Burke, Kenneth. *Essays Toward a Symbolic of Motives*: 143.

[106] Burke, Kenneth. *Language as Symbolic Action*: 200.

[107] Burke, Kenneth. Letter to Stanley Edgar Hyman. 10 April 1951.

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