

Kenneth Burke's Systemless System: Using Pepper to Pigeonhole an Elusive Thinker

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This article illustrates a method—using Pepper's *World Hypotheses* to isolate the assumptions of often-perplexing thinkers such as Burke—and demonstrates the usefulness and limitations of that method. Focusing on Burke's literary criticism, it approaches him first through his own categories, then relates those to Pepper's schema, to find his root metaphor and the resulting principles, methods, and interpretations of his criticism, along with the major strengths, weaknesses, and affinities of his system of thought. Though some have accused Burke of being irrational or fragmentary in his writings, his thought is actually a very thorough and consistent, even creative, contextualism. In fact, his literary criticism anticipated poststructuralist issues.

The Difficulty of Burke

A novice like myself approaching Kenneth Burke finds himself perplexed. Going to critics and reviewers for guidance, he is reassured—many of them, whether admirers or detractors of Burke, confess to at least some puzzlement. Black (1946) is cruel: "turbid prose," he calls *A Grammar of Motives* (p. 489). Lifelong friend and commentator on Burke, Cowley (1950), can only say, "with a little attention, we finally understand all the chapters"; a second reading helps a great deal, but even then, "there are, it is true, a few sentences that have to be walked around like boulders in the path" (pp. 18-19). Such confessions salve the ego of the bewildered reader, but the reader is likely to become more confused over the critics than he or she was over Burke. While one finds Burke a bit too rational, another dismisses his thought as irrational revery whose continuity builds on random association (Chase, 1950; Ferguson, 1957, pp. 192-204; Hook, 1937). In the first book-length study of Burke, Knox (1957) says he "lies scattered and fragmentary" (p. 108). Rueckert (1969) follows that up by praising Burke's dramatism as a "coherent system" and Burke himself as "a visionary, a myth maker and system builder" (pp. 349, 394, 97n). Bewley (1952) was incensed with him at a fairly early stage for clouding the boundaries of the disciplines, shocked that Burke would sheer from the sacrosanct and well-marked halls of literary criticism into the men's rooms and janitorial closets, the auditoriums and playing fields, of psychology, politics, and more. Burke's (1972) more recent exchange with Welles shows he must still defend himself against those who believe he is sheering off

into irrelevant byways, while other supporters since Hyman (1955) have praised "this synthesis, the unification of every discipline and body of knowledge that could throw light on literature into one consistent critical frame" (p. 375).

The confusion might be explained by accepting, as some have done, Black's (1946) charge in his review of the *Grammar*, that "the vast rambling edifice of quasi-sociological and quasi-psychoanalytical speculation seems to rest on nothing more solid than a set of unexamined and uncriticized metaphysical assumptions" (p. 490)—that, however, is a fairly standard recourse for the dismissal of anyone whose assumptions differ from one's own. Burke's assumptions do differ from those of most of the critics of the earlier part of the century, the new critics or the "Great Tradition" humanists—we must expect some critics, of whom Bewley, already mentioned, is representative, to wax reactionary against Burke, who, following his principles and methods, tends to find no inviolable structure to literary criticism keeping it separate from any other field. To understand those assumptions and thereby to "place" Burke's system, we may turn to the thought of Stephen Pepper and the framework for analysis laid down in his *World Hypotheses* (1942), which sends us in search of the root metaphor guiding Burke's thought, the principles and method that spring from that root metaphor, and the characteristics of his interpretation with its strengths and weaknesses.¹ By that analysis, Burke's root metaphor, principles, method, and results are those of contextualism.

A label like "contextualism," however, is a piece of what Burke would call "administrative rhetoric," designed to get Burke under control. Getting the unwieldy thinker under control is precisely my aim, but our first concern must be to understand Burke on his own terms. The labels I would then choose are "dramatistic" and "dialectician." Burke writes of language as symbolic action, approaching it as dialectician to put language through an alembic to transform terms into their opposites, to generate from one word or idea a whole family of related ideas (some distantly related), all in order not merely to understand the "human barnyard" (Burke, 1945, p. xvii), which is the circus of language, but to go beyond understanding to action: to purify the barnyard, to purify conflict and war, to bring war to a state of such purity that it is no longer war. I've just said five things about what Burke does: Burke, the agent; language as symbolic action, the scene or material; his dialectical activity, the act; dialectic, the agency; the elimination of combat by its purification, the purpose. These five elements of scene, act, agent, agency, and purpose are the points of Burke's pentad, the complex of questions which must be answered in order to have a well rounded understanding of any symbolic act.

¹Pepper does not designate principles and methods. For that essential help, I have applied to Pepper some of the schema of Richard McKeon, from an unpublished manuscript (University of Chicago, 1965).

They are the elements of drama, hence, Burke's label of his approach as dramatism. Drama is his root metaphor.

Pepper to the Rescue

The mention that drama, or an act in its full context, is Burke's root metaphor invites us to consider Pepper (1942), who, writing only shortly before Burke finished his *Grammar of Motives*, also aimed at a comprehensive classification of metaphysical interpretations of reality, though his purpose remains idealistic, to understand metaphysics as systems of interpreting evidence, rather than practical, to recommend or initiate any action or end any conflict that comes of the different interpretations. The theory that Pepper offers is that metaphysical systems originate (temporally, he suggests, and more certainly, logically) from a root metaphor. After impatiently dismissing animism and mysticism, world views that grow from root metaphors of, respectively, spirit and the mystical experience of love, he elaborates on four world hypotheses that have proven themselves relatively adequate as means of explaining experience: formism, with its root metaphor of similarity; mechanism, with its root metaphor of the machine; contextualism, with its root metaphor of "an act in its context"; and organicism, with its metaphor of the integrative development of the organism.

Each of these hypotheses has certain affinities with others. Formism and mechanism, for example, are both analytic systems, meaning that each theory views the universe as composed of discrete units—forms, atoms, or whatever. Contextualism and organicism, on the other hand, are both synthetic systems, claiming that the most basic units must be considered as related complexes and contexts rather than merely as aggregates of particles.

Mechanism and organicism also share an affinity, however, since both are integrative; that is, organicism unites fragments, synthesizing them into more and more inclusive complexes until, as its aim, all reality is seen as one integrated whole, and mechanism analyzes everything, dividing each object into, ultimately, the single indivisible particle that makes up all matter. Both "reduce" experience to a singleness. Formism and contextualism, on the other hand, are both dispersive; the elements or forms of formism are discrete, and the contexts of contextualism may lead from one to another, but never arrive at any overall unity. These dispersive theories are able to deal with any piece of experience as it arises; thus they are stronger in the scope of experience they can explain than are the integrative theories, which must dismiss as "unreal" any fact which refuses to be reduced to the proper atoms or included in the one whole. Nevertheless, the integrative theories, when they can deal with a fact, have great precision, are able to show its exact constituents or its exact place and relationship to other facts. The dispersive theories lack this precision of placement and composition. The four relatively adequate theories can

be most easily characterized then by their principles, methods, and adequacy:

	<u>Principles</u>	<u>Methods</u>	<u>Adequacy</u>
Formism	analytic	dispersive	scope; lacks precision
Mechanism	analytic	integrative	precision; lacks scope
Contextualism	synthetic	dispersive	scope; lacks precision
Organicism	synthetic	integrative	precision; lacks scope

I have said that, given these four classes of thought, I would place Burke's principles and methods in contextualism. *Dramatism* requires seeing language, a literary text, a system of thought, a human action, or even, we may suppose, an object, as a context, a locus uniting several elements all of which must be considered if we are to understand the text or object. In other words, Burke's dramatism suggests that his principles are synthetic. Dialectic, on the other hand, is Burke's label for the way in which he traces the relationships among the elements of the dramatisitic object under his scrutiny, and follows those relationships into other contexts, which lead him into other contexts again, and so on. Burke's dialecticism, then, is a method which is dispersive.

Such hasty and simplistic labelling of his principles and methods can hardly yet be convincing, however. We may consider the dramatisitic pentad as an unalterable and infinitely repeated form, and claim Burke is a formist; we may assert that when Burke's dialectic encounters a divisive pair of terms, merges them, and celebrates their unity or their transcendence into a new term, his method is integrative in the same way as the organicist's method is. Not only must we be wary of a too-hasty imposition of our system upon Burke; we must distrust any generalization about Burke which supports itself with a single instance or quotation from his writing. Reading Burke gives the very real experience of seeing an object from the perspective of a contextualist; for, as long as Burke is our object, we are constantly aware that what we see or read is not a permanent and reliable perception of him, since like flowing water he will change his shape into something else. Thus any quotation may not be representative unless it joins with a cluster of similar statements—that is, unless we make use of the means of interpreting that Burke himself suggests in *The Philosophy of Literary Form*.

Root Metaphor: Act

We might begin by isolating Burke's own root metaphor and seeing if it is one that, like the root metaphor of contextualism, requires treatment of experience in terms of synthetic principles and dispersive methods. He introduces his *Grammar of Motives* (1945) by explicitly stating his root metaphor: "The titular word for our own method is 'dramatism,' since it invites one to consider the matter of motives in a perspective that, being developed from the

analysis of drama, treats language and thought primarily as modes of actions" (p. xxii).² Later, after explaining "the fact that we necessarily define a thing in terms of something else," he confesses to a metaphorical understanding of his subject via his approach through "dramatism, which treats of human motives in the terms of verbal action" (p. 33). Verbal action is a particularly good point of departure for dramatism, since Burke has in mind "conscious and purposive" action as opposed to mere motion; it is an action with a complete and vital context—act, scene, agent, agency, and purpose. Thus Burke's root metaphor of drama is very much the equivalent of Pepper's contextualistic root metaphor of the event, which Pepper (1942) describes as "the dynamic dramatic active event," "an event in its actuality," "act," "an act in and with its setting, an act in its context" (p. 232).

Given this root metaphor of drama or total purposive action, we are not surprised to see Burke approach the various philosophic schools as "languages," as complex verbal actions. Nor are we surprised when, in demonstrating how each of these philosophic languages derives from a terminological ancestor which is one of the five terms of the pentad, he throws his own sympathies behind those philosophies derived from a featuring of the term "Act." The root metaphor also controls his view of literature: when "theories of poetry . . . are expressed scientistically, in terms of *knowledge*, rather than in terms of *action*, dramatism admonishes us that they are to be discounted" (1945, p. 226). He is not impressed by thematic literary criticism, which aims at a poem's meaning—as if the poem were a difficult word to be defined: "For 'semantics' is essentially *scientist*, an approach to language in terms of *knowledge*, whereas poetic forms are kinds of action" (1945, p. 240). Lyric verse would at first seem least amenable to the classification of "action," but he gives it particular attention: lyrics image attitudes, which are incipient action, and in their structures we find "a lyric analogue of plot in the progression or development of the poem's imagery." Even when the imagery conveys rest, as in Wordsworth's sonnet "Composed upon Westminster Bridge," it is "such rest as might be a ground, a beginning and end, of all action" (1945, p. 246). Burke is well aware of the way in which a root metaphor determines principles, which, with methods, decide the results of interpretations. Discussing dialectic, he says, "In sum, one's initial act in choosing 'where to draw the line' by choosing terms that merge or terms that divide has an anticipatory effect upon one's conclusions" (1945, p. 415).

Principles: Synthetic

Do Burke's terms merge, or do they divide—that is, does his root metaphor provide him with synthetic or analytic principles? Here again we are fortunate

²Although Burke calls dramatism a method, the following analysis will show that it more properly reveals his principles. The error is perpetuated, however, in Hyman (1955) and others.

in Burke's being explicit. He describes nominalism as being "individualistic" or "atomistic" as opposed to "collectivistic" (1945, p. 129), and thus places nominalism in opposition to philosophic realism, which is the philosophical terminology derived from the term 'Act': "As we have suggested elsewhere, realism treats individuals as members of a group, whereas nominalism treats groups as aggregates of individuals" (1945, p. 248). Burke's synthetic principles show in his literary criticism; his insights stem from his determination to view any given poetic image, not in itself, but as a portion of a "cluster" of images reaching throughout the particular poem, throughout the whole of the writer's works, even throughout the writer's personal concerns, and sometimes beyond that into apparently unrelated realms (1945, pp. 269-270; 1973, pp. 20, 23ff.).

Method: Dispersive Dialectic

The fact that Burke wishes to see any item as a part of its context—and the larger the context, the better—does not mean he aims at connecting all contexts into an ultimate unity. Much rather, he considers such monistic wholes as a threat. He suggests we distrust the urge to integrate all things into a unity, "looking upon the cult of empire as a sickness" (1945, p. 317). The urge to integrate all human actions under a single doctrine of motives he calls "fanaticism," claiming instead that ours is "a world composed of many different motivational situations." That view does not commit Burke to utter relativism, but merely to "ideals of tolerance and resignation" (1945, p. 318). His method, then, leads him to recognize dispersive rather than integrative wholes. His dispersive method is not, however, the oversimplified version Pepper (1942) describes, in which "facts are taken one by one from whatever source they come and are interpreted and so are left" (p. 142). Burke is almost as resistant to "this piecemeal approach to life" as he is to fanaticism. He calls this alternative "dissipation": "the isolationist tendency to surrender, . . . living morally and intellectually from hand to mouth" (1945, p. 318).

Burke sincerely aims at a middle road between fanaticism and dissipation. Rejecting the temptation to take facts one by one, he looks for the relationship between them. Particularly focusing on language, he is interested in how one term may be transformed by another or into another. From this comes his method, dialectic, which has as its major principles merger, or looking for unity, and division, or not losing sight of differences. There is also a principle of transcendence in his dialectic, by which two terms may be merged, along with their differences, in a greater term—this soon leads to the temptation of uniting all terms in a monistic whole, a temptation Burke also rejects:

But as regards the relation between such transcendent use of the principle of merger and its relation to the principle of division, even though we might in a sense say that such a

universal reduction . . . would provide the generic formula for all motivation, we should note that any such summarizing term would necessarily be dispensed with, in any statement about specific motivational problems For whatever its value as a generalization about the nature of nature, it would be of no value for particular problems requiring description in particular terms. (1945, p. 430)

The point is that Burke's synthetic principles lead him to merge terms into wholes rather than to stress their division by analysis. But his method is dispersive enough to stress that these are separate wholes. They are also shifting wholes. That is the point of his dialectic—to study how terms swell, shrink, or change into something else. The same situation may be explained as a part of several different motivational strategies, and thus, by focusing on one or another element of that situation, we may move from one of its contexts to another, from one terminology set up to explain the motives behind that act, to another terminology. Thus, Burke says of the different philosophical schools, each representing different terminologies and emphasizing a different term of the pentad, that "at every point where the field covered by any one of these terms overlaps upon the field covered by any other, there is an alchemic opportunity, whereby we can put one philosophy or doctrine of motivation into the alembic, make the appropriate passes, and take out another" (1945, p. xix). And "if you reduce the terms to any one of them, you will find them branching out again; for no one of them is enough" (1945, p. xxi).

Strength: Scope

The contextualist principles and methods that lead Burke to view the philosophical systems as related contexts, allow us to predict the strengths and weaknesses of his system, as well as its affinities with other world hypotheses. "Prophesying," as Burke says, "with the inestimable advantage of having looked ahead," we expect great scope, but a lack of precision. Synthetic principles and dispersive methods give contextualism a comprehensiveness that allows, even encourages, it to deal with great breadth of facts. Burke celebrates this strength, devoting a chapter of the *Grammar* (1945) to "Scope and Reduction," in which he urges us through ever widening circumferences for accurately explaining the motive of a single act:

For a man is not only in the situation peculiar to his era or to his particular place in that era He is also in a situation extending through centuries; he is in a "generically human" situation; and he is in a "universal" situation. Who is to say, once and for all, which of these circumferences is to be selected as the motivation of his act, insofar as the act is to be defined in scenic terms? (p. 84)

He follows this up with a strong implication that the wider circumference gives the truer interpretation. Thus, discussing Coleridge's "Ancient Mariner," Burke (1973) works outward, beginning "as though we did not know one

single detail about the author, and had not one single other line written by this author," and progressing to additional insights that could come from other poems, and finally including all that we know about the poet from diaries, letters, and biography (pp. 23-25, x). Nothing is irrelevant, and information from disparate areas of aesthetics, Coleridge's marital discord, political theory, drug abuse, and metaphysics, all converges to give meaning to the poem isolated for understanding (1973, pp. 93-99). In Burke's system, any item that arises can be dealt with, and so order gives way to comprehensiveness as he moves from a novel to the constitution, to semantic theory, to behaviorism, to religious experience, to ritual, to history, and on.

Weakness: Lack of Precision

The threat to the adequacy of Burke's system comes from his lack of precision. As Booth (1980) has noted, in showing what a poem has in common with all other human deeds, as a strategy for symbolic encompassing of a situation, Burke surrenders the possibility of showing how it is unique (p. 104), of accounting for what lifts Milton's treatment of Satan's rebellion in Books V and VI of *Paradise Lost* above a proverb like "You can't beat city hall." Burke confesses that "it may often be the works of wider circumference that give us the faultiest interpretation of a particular motivational cluster," but with a big "however," he throws his weight behind decrying the flaws of reduction (1945, pp. 87-90). When, in aiming at "faithful reflections of reality," individuals "develop vocabularies that are selections of reality," the result most often is "a deflection of reality" (1945, p. 59). Any reduction, he suggests, is a distortion, and thus, in true dialectical form, he persuades us that scope is precision!

Affinities with Mechanism and Organicism

Nevertheless, the autonomy of Burke's contextualism still is threatened, despite his attack on reduction, by the ironic affinity contextualism shares with reductive mechanism. Pepper (1942) explains the tendency and the contextualist's recourse to save his system from being swallowed into another:

Contextualism is constantly threatened with evidences for permanent structures in nature. It is constantly on the verge of falling back on underlying mechanistic structures, or of resolving into the overreaching implicit integrations of organicism. Its recourse in these emergencies is always to hurry back to the given event, and to emphasize the change and novelty that is immediately felt here. (p. 235)

Burke is vulnerable here, for the nature of a grammar is to analyze its subject into its constituents. Again he openly confesses to the "kind of reduction . . . contained in our formula: the basic unit of action is the human body in

purposive motion. We have here a kind of 'lowest common denominator' of action, a minimal requirement that should appear in every act. . . . This is the nearest approach which dramatism affords to the 'building block' kind of reduction in materialistic philosophies" (1945, p. 61; see also p. 441). The threat of such atomistic absolutes as even his own root metaphor may be what keeps Burke rhetorically compensating, as if with a guilty conscience, by constantly shadowboxing at reductive, materialist, or debunking philosophies.

Meanwhile, it is his pentad that provides the cover for his defense, for though it may appear to be a single permanent structure, it is fluid. When he focuses on a single term of the pentad, such as *act*, the whole pentad dissolves into background as elements of neighboring contexts to *act*. Then, just as *act* threatens to assert itself as "god-term," capable of explaining the other terms of the pentad, Burke returns our focus to the whole pentad, and the single term becomes no more than one texture contributing to the total quality of the motivational structure of the pentad. Or, from one term of the pentad he may spin out the other terms, slipping from one term to another, or from single term to whole pentad, enjoying the analysis possible in a permanent structure but without the permanent structure, toying with the tentacles of mechanism, yet leering back at us, "Catch me if you can."

Interpretations

In this discussion of Burke's root metaphor, principles, methods, strengths, weaknesses, and affinities, the characteristics of his literary theory and practical criticism have been dealt with along the way, embedded in the discussion as illustrations of the effect of his principles, etc. Here I will only rapidly review those categories of his interpretation and dwell on them just long enough to make their basis in contextualism explicit. I see four elements of his interpretation that result directly from his contextualist world hypothesis: (1) his definition of literature as a symbolic act of the author, re-enacted by the audience; (2) his pragmatic view of form based on the quality to be communicated; (3) his pragmatic analysis, controlled always by purpose; and (4) the agency of his analysis—gathering clusters, sheering into wider or tangential contexts, or associational reverie.

(1) As mentioned earlier, Burke's definition of a poem follows from his root metaphor. In his essay on Keats, he proposes to consider the language of the "Ode on a Grecian Urn" as a mode of action: "For a poem is an act, the symbolic act of the poet who made it—an act of such a nature that, in surviving as a structure or object, it enables us as readers to re-enact it" (1945, p. 447). Our experience of that act is crucial to a contextualist definition of art, because unlike a New Critic who begins with the ontological integrity of the poem apart from author or reader, a contextualist stresses the experience of art, the

intermittent interlocking of the two textures of perceiver and poem in a single context (Pepper, 1942, pp. 265-267; Pepper, 1949, p. 69). Burke, in *Permanence and Change*, is more lucid than Pepper (perhaps because he is describing the contextualist perspective from entirely within the system): No stimulus or stimulus situation has its meaning or its final ontological value in itself; rather each stimulus gets its value from the perceiver—only the relationship of stimulus and stimulated has meaning. Moreover, “these relationships are not *realities*, they are *interpretations* of reality—hence different frameworks of interpretation will lead to different conclusions as to what reality is” (p. 35).

(2) The relation of poet to poem and then of poem to reader makes the poem a medium. Burke (1973) encourages the “tendency to consider literature, not as a creator’s device for self-expression, nor as an audience’s device for amusement or instruction, but as a communicative relationship between writer and audience, with both parties actively participating” (p. 329). Poetry is rhetoric, and form is pragmatic. Form is the vehicle for communicating a quality; in it the poet embodies the emotion the audience is to experience and, according to Pepper (1949), “the more vivid the experience and the more extensive and rich its quality, the greater its aesthetic value” (p. 57). In “The Poetic Process,” Burke (1931) describes the poem’s genesis in the poet’s desire to embody a mood so as to produce it in the audience, and so the mood dictates the form and the details which will communicate it most vividly. Thus in an essay on *Twelfth Night*, Burke (1973) characterized the opening lines of the Duke as “suggesting the *quality* which the subsequent events are to *quantify*” (p. 344). Twenty-five years before Crane’s (1953) essay “Toward a More Adequate Theory of Poetic Structure,” Burke was seriously working with a rhetorical approach to poetry, basing poetic form on the state of mind the poet would convey.

(3) If purpose controls the creative act of the poet, it more strongly controls Burke’s interpretive act. Because the contextualist believes there is no ultimate top or bottom to the world, that is, because no amount of integration will arrive at an ultimate whole, nor will any amount of analysis finally isolate the absolute, universal, and indivisible building block at the bottom of things, “the contextualist rather disparages analysis for analysis’ sake Serious analysis for him is always either directly or indirectly practical” (Pepper, 1942, p. 250). Burke’s purpose, as a rhetorician with Marxist inclinations, is social. In his criticism, “art forms like ‘tragedy’ or ‘comedy’ or ‘satire’ would be treated as *equipments for living*” (1973, p. 304). In *Attitudes Toward History* (1959) and in his schematization of the book in the essay “Twelve Propositions” (1973), an agrarian Marxism guides his criticism toward “analyzing formal works of art and applying the results of our analysis to the ‘informal art of living’ in general,” especially to the problem of alienation (p. 308). When less concerned with lambasting business and healing alienation, he turns his analysis to levelling conflict: he may merge conflicting terms, as when he

demonstrates that an act "allows for free will *and* determinism simultaneously, rather than requiring a flat choice between them"; or he may muddle conquering monists by showing division within their dogma, as when in "Hypergelasticism Exposed," he examines a doctrine that traces all laughter to origins in a combative snarl, in order to show how laughter also has origins in the desire to be loveable; or as when he shows how one thinker's protected and censored democracy, without dialectical opposition, would itself become its own counter-dictatorship (1945, pp. 74-75; 1973, pp. 416-417, 444). That pragmatic aim, the purification of war, guides most of his work, and is the motto of the analysis in his *Grammar*.

(4) Therefore, the cluster analysis, or the trains of association that exasperated critics have called arbitrary or mad, are consistent with the assumptions of contextualism. According to contextualism, "there is no final or complete analysis of anything." Because of that, "all contextualistic analysis has [a] sheering effect As we analyze a texture, we move down into a structure of strands and at the same time sheer out into its context. A bottom is thus never reached" (Pepper, 1942, pp. 249-250). Burke delves into the analysis, which may sheer out into any number of contexts, and lets himself be guided by his purpose. To inspire humility and a broader second thought in idealistic metaphysicians, he embarks on a reverie of definitions of *substance* that ends by equating the metaphysical with the cloacal, the eschatological with the scatological (1945, pp. 21-35). Similarly, with a few passes through the alembic, "Beauty is truth, truth beauty" is transformed to "body is turd, turd body" (1972, pp. 9-27).

Contextualistic analysis leads to apparently random association which actually is reined by purpose; other features of Burke's interpretation, as already mentioned, follow from his synthetic principles. The necessity of seeing any item in a poem as part of a context controls his study of the poetry of Marianne Moore: "For, if you single out one moment of a poem, all the other moments automatically become its context" (1945, p. 490). Not only must the rest of the poem bear on the interpretation of the single image; all the author's other poems may color our view of the image: "For though a usage in any given poem is a finished thing, and thus brilliant with surface, it becomes in effect but 'work in progress' when we align it with kindred usages . . . in other poems" (1945, pp. 497-498). Likewise, his study of Keats's "Ode" looks first at the poem "in itself," then "as an enactment in a particular cultural scene," and finally, using "whatever knowledge is available" (1945, pp. 450-451). Burke's interpretations aim at ultimate scope.

"The main ideal of criticism, as I conceive it," says Burke (1973), "is to use all that there is to use" (p. 23). Unlike Burke's analyses, which exhaust possibilities, our discussion has left his richness mostly untouched. Like a pygmy with his lasso around the toe of a giant, I may claim to have contained Burke by placing his thought in contextualism. I believe I have accurately

labelled his principles, methods, and the characteristics of his interpretations, but it is not this discussion which has gobbled up Burke, but rather Burke whose hypothesis daily swallows the world.

Postscript

So what? How does pigeonholing Burke in Pepper's grid serve him or us? As I've suggested, there is great value for the neophyte in knowing what to look for in Burke. But placing Burke serves not only pedagogical purposes; it can demonstrate his own significance. Burke's contextualist assumptions give him more in common with Barthes than with Brooks. The development of criticism in the last halfcentury has been away from the reductive and analytical mechanism of the New Criticism toward the contexts, traces, and subjectivity of the current theoretical plethora. Burke is a harbinger, out of the New Critical wilderness, preparing a way of the poststructuralist prophets who now are upon us. Lentricchia (1980, pp. 103ff.) asks how a conservative bastion like the MLA could bestow honors on *Structuralist Poetics*, and flock to Foucault. I think Kenneth Burke was warming our minds to that reception forty years ago.

Yet another postscript. What would Burke do with all I've said? Two years ago, he was here in Buffalo and could have answered for himself. But if our shearings through his contexts have led us into his mind, we should be able to prophesy his response. I believe that, as soon as he felt the confines of his pigeonhole, he'd fly the roost. He'd smile: "Contextualist? No, the unalterable and infinitely repeated forms of dramatism and my sophist-clobbering dialectic make me an aristotelian formist, don't you see? Why else does Wayne Booth warm so to me? But then again, I may well be a mechanist, at least throughout the *Grammar of Motives*, as you nearly pointed out, but didn't, because it would mar the neatness of the context into which you were forcing me at the time. And yet, my work, after all, unites all metaphysical divergences under the god-term dramatism; Hegel's own path to Spirit is no more organicist." He'd make some such suggestions. And you know what? He'd probably convince us, whatever line of reasoning he traced.

Maybe, then, Burke is a pluralist. Maybe he's an eclectic. Or maybe our own categories are so broad, they cease to be meaningful when we use them to erase individuality and melt thinkers back into the still-congealing mass of hardly differentiated modes of thought. That is, though, where Burke wants to return, again and again to the metaphysical womb to gestate and be reborn, Proteus rising from the sea in ever new shapes. The flaw that I think, that I hope, Burke would find with what I'm doing is that I am probably not increasing tolerance and understanding, I am not erasing the political and cultural boundaries that divide the human barnyard into warring factions; I am probably only re-drawing the boundaries, subdividing the world into four

simple nations, making "mechanist!" a slur equivalent in tone to "pig!," "formist" a label like "fuddy-duddy," "organicist" a synonym for "naive romantic."

When Burke unites us all under dramatism, or when he slips Marx from materialism or dialecticism into realism under the aegis of *act*, I think he is reminding us to start to depoliticize our speech and return to the area Foucault (1973) calls the middle region between "the ordering codes and reflections upon order itself," the area where we achieve "the pure experience of order" (p. xxi).

Now I've made Burke into a poststructuralist. Well, as a fellow contextualist, he is bound to share similarities with them. Again, I find it interesting that he seems to have presupposed our contemporary notions. So, there is both value and danger in pigeonholing Burke, value in making him accessible to us, value in our knowing what questions to ask if we wish to discover his system, value in seeing his relationship to other critics of his time and now, which we find is more than ever his time. But the danger comes in using Pepper to make Burke easy, in dismissing Burke with a label, in classing him in a huge group without explaining how he differs from Derrida, thus robbing his individuality. (And how is he different? Burke, I think, really believes that meaning is determinate; he just isn't interested in the determinate meaning, but in the play and possibilities of meaning and in what he can do to level conflict thereby. He doesn't go all the way with contextualism.)

If we can remind ourselves of the dangers of labelling, we can learn a lot from putting Pepper and Burke together. Now that I have placed Burke in the world hypotheses, one of us needs to place Pepper using Burke's pentad. Then we should compare the two thinkers—two men, like McKeon, who devise immense analogical frameworks explaining metaphysics, two men whose major work includes on the one hand several volumes on motives, and on the other hand, on values, men who both arrive at a world hypothesis above and yet in addition to and yet including all the other schools of hypotheses, men whose metaphor for those megahypotheses is, in both cases, "purposive action." Lots of fruitful comparison needs to be done. I wish I had more than the first step to offer you.

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