

# English 793: Kenneth Burke's Ethical Universe

11:30-02:20W, PAS 2084

Randy Harris  
Hours: T 9:30-10:30, Th 1:00-2:00

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Kenneth Burke's critical framework, usually conflated with dramatism, usually characterized in terms of motives, usually seen as a mechanism for interrogating literature and other texts, is a bit more than the sum of those parts. It is a new trivium, shifting book to book, chapter to chapter, sometimes even paragraph to paragraph, and never fully realized—indeed, unrealizable—a configuration of personal, animal, and cultural forces in which we triangulate our understandings of ourselves and others. At the heart, is rhetoric, which, he tells, is not only the monologic suasion of the many by the one, but the mode in which we get our equipment for living. Burke is concerned with how we speak and write and hear and read primarily as forms of action and belief. Burke's framework is a machinery for ethical universe building.

We will channel Burke, allowing the methodologies to inhabit us, and disassemble the ethical universes of specific object texts, examining their structure and their implications. "What do they want from us?" we will recurrently ask, and "how are they trying to get it?" We will assemble our own ethical universes in the critiques we conduct of these texts. We will become better readers, better thinkers, better people.

## A note about the readings

I have put a whole whack of Burke books on the Required texts list, and in a shiny happy world, you would read them all, cover to cover. For the purposes of this course, however, I have set up a reading schedule which samples from all of them—about a third of each book. Most of the essays on this schedule are also available in other places. It does not matter at all if you use a different edition of the book than the one the bookstore has brought in, or whether you use another source altogether (many of them can be found via JSTOR, for instance, or Scholars Portal, databases our library subscribes to). The two books where external sourcing is difficult are *A Grammar of Motives* and *A Rhetoric of Motives*, pieces of which did appear elsewhere but often in ways that make them difficult to track.

As for the object texts, all of them are easily accessible for download (both of the movies are public domain, for instance, and available from InternetArchive.com, among other sources. I will not be providing links or citations for these sources, nor for the alternate sources for the essays we take up in class. You are graduate students. You can find them.)

The ethical is ... linked with the communicative, particularly when we consider communication its broadest sense, not merely as the purveying of information, but also as the sharing of sympathies and purposes, the doing of acts in common as with the leveling process of communicating vessels. —KB, *Permanence and Change*, 250.

## Required texts

### Primary Texts

Burke, Kenneth. *Counter-Statement*. New York: Harcourt, 1931.

Burke, Kenneth. *The Philosophy of Literary Form: Studies in Symbolic Action*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1941.

Burke, Kenneth. *A Grammar of Motives*. New York: Prentice-Hall, 1945.

Burke, Kenneth. *A Rhetoric of Motives*. New York: Prentice-Hall, 1953.

Burke, Kenneth. *Language as Symbolic Action: Essays on Life, Literature, and Method*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966.

### Object Texts

CBC, "Just watch me;" CBC, "The Mandela Tapes;" ee cummings, "ygUduh;" Charles Dickens, "The Execution of the Mannings;" gawker.com; Vince Gilligan, "Felina;" Stuart Heisler, *The Negro Soldier*; Ernst Lubitsch, *Ninotchka*; Percy Blythe Shelley, "Ozymandias;" Hunter S. Thompson, "He was a crook;" Visuwords™; Wikipedia, "Ramesses II;" Led Zeppelin, "When the Levee Breaks;" Kansas Joe, "When the Levee Breaks;" Eminem, "Kim;" BYOT (Bring your own texts; the more the merrier.)

### Recommended texts

Blakesley, David. *The Elements of Dramatism*. New York: Longman, 2001.

Brummett, Barry, ed. *Landmark Essays on Kenneth Burke*. Davis, CA: Hermagoras P, 1993.

Burke, Kenneth. *Permanence and Change: An Anatomy of Purpose*. NY: New Republic, 1935.

Burke, Kenneth. *Attitudes Toward History*, 2 vols. New York: New Republic, Inc., 1937.

### Requirements

Essay (10 August)	40 %
Course participation	60 %
Presentations	30 %
Class discussion	15 %
Weekly posts	15 %

### Discussing

Please keep in mind that this is a seminar: you are expected to take an active role in the development of the course. Come to class prepared, contribute to discussions,

participate in our collective growth in understanding Burke and ourselves. In particular, think reflectively about all the readings, and think publicly.

I will use a merit/demerit policy to evaluate your participation. Merit will be awarded primarily on the *quality* of participation: asking relevant questions; making relevant observations; complementing or advancing someone else's contribution; and generally being a constructive rhetor. Quantity of participation is a positive factor to the extent that more quality contributions is preferable to fewer quality contributions, but talking for the sake of talking is not a good idea. Demerit will be assessed reluctantly, and only on the basis of repeated instances. The grounds for the demerit system are:

- absenteeism (you can't participate if you're not there)
- whispering or chatting while other people are talking
- making lengthy, unfocused comments that draw away from the general thread of discussion (verbal wanking)

### Posting (8 response posts required)

**Note:** You need to complete **8 posts over 11 weeks**. Which 8 you submit are solely up to you, but they must be submitted on time.

The posts are 300-to-500-word opinionated summaries: synopses of the week's theoretical readings (*not* the object texts), inter-larded with some evaluation of their cogency, relevance, and value. I want to see (1) that you have read them, and (2) that you have thought about them; and (3) that you have something to say about them. I want the discussion started before we get into the classroom. They should be posted on the D2L course page by **6:00 PM on the Monday before the class**. Everyone is expected to read all the posts before coming to class; I also encourage commenting on one another's posts, as I will be doing occasionally myself, but it is not required.

The discussion papers will not be graded: you will get the full 15% simply for doing them all and submitting them on time, 10% if you miss one deadline, 0% if you miss more than one--yes, you read that correctly: 0%. I consider the discussion papers integral to the life of the course.

### Presenting

There will be two presentations, a critical application and a lexical explication. These presentations may be in dyads, but students may participate in only one dyad (the following conditions include the division of labour for any dyadic presentations).

The critical application will examine a given object text utilizing the pentad, situate that text and your critique culturally, and pass judgment on the text.

The conditions of the critical presentations are as follows:

- 10 minute absolute cap
- 5 minutes (one presenter) laying out the artifact, the circumference and the pentadic relations
- 5 minutes (one presenter) applying a chosen ratio to the artifact
- no digital aids (handouts and board fine, e.g.; power-point not)

Grading will accord with the following rubric:

Articulation of your critical analysis: 20%  
Defence of your critical analysis: 20%  
Quality of argument (coherence, soundness): 20%  
Use of evidence: 20%  
Style and performance (clarity, professionalism, aids): 20%

The lexical explication will chose a term/phrase from the “Dictionary of Pivotal Terms” (*Attitudes Toward History*) relate it to some literary, rhetorical, or media theory you know, and pass judgment on Burke’s value in that light. The theory should be drawn from your current repertoire, something you have deployed in other work in the department or previously. You are not expected, or even encouraged, to do any additional reading in the ‘external’ theory.

The conditions of the lexical-explication presentations are as follows:

- 10-15 minutes talking, with 15 as an absolute cap
  - c5 minutes on the term/phrase (one presenter)
  - c5 minutes on the relation to an external theory (one presenter)
- 5-10 answering (either or both presenters)
- 20 minutes total as an absolute max
- no digital aids (handouts and board fine, e.g.; power-point not)

Grading will accord with the following rubric:

Articulation of your term: 20%  
Application of your term: 20%  
Quality of argument (coherence, soundness): 20%  
Use of evidence: 20%  
Style and performance (clarity, professionalism, aids): 20%

### Essaying

The research essay is not only your major project of the term (40%), it should be your major learning instrument of the term. In many ways, all the rest of the course is a support system for the essay, and everyone else in the class, the professor and the students, are resources for the development of *your* essay. The research and the way

you explore, marshal, and extend that research in the writing process, is what defines your understanding of the course. You should start thinking from very early on about which texts, which aspects of Burke's framework, and which other theorists you might want to develop arguments around and about, and test drive some of those arguments in class, or in discussion with the rest of us outside of class, in person, by email, or by phone.

In case this does not go without saying: While your work will rest on the foundations we build up throughout the course, do not rely solely on the course readings and the presentations. You will need to do more research both on any object texts you are considering and on the relevant aspects of Burke's approach you will deploy, as well as on any related literary/rhetorical/media theory.

Word counts are not an especially good measure of when you should stop writing your essay, or how far you should prune back your ramblings. Let the matter determine the vessel. But if it's under 3000 words, you probably haven't developed enough matter for an appropriate graduate research essay; over 6000 and you've probably been either too ambitious or too undisciplined, or both. **You also need to target a publication with this essay:** find a journal, write the paper with that journal in mind, and submit a memo with the essay outlining why your essay fits the journal. (Journals often have word-count criteria, by the way, along with citation requirements, formatting conventions, and so on; you will be graded in part on how well your essay suits the journal you target.)

Grading will accord with the following rubric:

- Articulation of your claim: 5%
- Suitability of the essay to the selected journal: 10%
- Quality of argument (coherence, soundness): 30%
- Use of evidence, 20%
- Summary of relevant research: 10%
- Grammar and style (sentence and paragraph structure, diction, spelling, punctuation, agreement, ...) 25%

Due: 10 August 2014

Note: all submissions must include a digital copy.

### Academic Integrity

Members of the University of Waterloo community are expected to both **follow and promote principles of honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility**. That includes me as much as you, which is one of the reasons I spell things out in this much detail in our syllabus. If you think any aspect of my conduct, including teaching, marking, and counseling, is unfairly detrimental to you or the class in general, you have not only the right but the obligation to let me, the English Department Chair, or the Dean of Arts,

know about it, whomever you are most comfortable speaking with or you feel most appropriate for hearing your views and their reasons. I will, in turn, endeavour to ensure your conduct is ethical and professional, towards me, each other, and all relevant texts.

**The late policy is simple: don't be.** If personal concerns, including health issues, prevent you from meeting a deadline, contact me ahead of time to make arrangements; if unforeseen circumstances prevent you from meeting a deadline, contact me when you are able and we can work something out. Please note that bad planning, conflict with assignments in other courses, and video-game addictions (to list a few attested reasons offered by students in the past) are not interpretable as personal concerns.

**Discipline:** You are expected to know what constitutes academic integrity [check *Academic Integrity at UW*] to avoid committing an academic offence, and to take responsibility for your actions. A student who is unsure whether an action constitutes an offence, or who needs help in learning how to avoid offences (e.g., plagiarism, cheating) or about “rules” for group work/collaboration should seek guidance from me, an academic advisor, or the graduate Associate Dean. But ignorance is not a defence. For information on categories of offences and types of penalties, refer to Policy 71, *Student Discipline*. For typical penalties check *Guidelines for the Assessment of Penalties*.

**Appeals:** A decision made or penalty imposed under Policy 70 (*Student Petitions and Grievances*) (other than a petition) or Policy 71 (*Student Discipline*) may be appealed if there are grounds. If you believe you have grounds for an appeal refer to Policy 72 (*Student Appeals*).

**Grievances:** If you believe that a decision affecting some aspect of your university life has been unfair or unreasonable you may have grounds for initiating a grievance. Read Policy 70, *Student Petitions and Grievances*, Section 4. When in doubt please be certain to contact the Graduate Coordinator who will provide further assistance.

**Note for Students with Disabilities:** The Office for AccessAbility Services, located in Needles Hall, Room 1132, collaborates with all academic departments to arrange appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities without compromising the academic integrity of the curriculum. If you require academic accommodations to lessen the impact of your disability, please register with the OPD at the beginning of each academic term.

## **Remember**

It's your ethical universe, whether you like it or not. Make the most of it, for yourself and for the rest of us.

## Schedule

<u>Date</u>	<u>Burke texts</u>	<u>Object texts</u>
7 May	<i>A Rhetoric of Motives</i> : "Persuasion" <i>A Grammar of Motives</i> : "The Five Key Terms"	Charles Dickens, "The Execution of the Mannings"
14 May	<i>Counterstatement</i> : "Psychology and Form" <i>A Grammar of Motives</i> : "Four Master Tropes"	Two versions of "When the levee breaks," (by Kansas Joe & Led Zeppelin); "Kim" (Eminem)
21 May	<p><u>Please note</u>: there will be no official class meeting this week and no office hours, but you are still required to do the reading ("Literature as Equipment for Living") and to post your response on time. Your posting obligations remain the same, though I would naturally expect a bit more cross-talk among the posts, since you won't have a chance to discuss your opinions in class. I will monitor the posts from Poland, if possible, and will add my own chatter as appropriate.</p>	
28 May	<i>Counterstatement</i> : "Lexicon Rhetoricae"	Visuwords™
4 June	<i>The Philosophy of Literary Form</i> : "Semantic and Poetic Meaning"	Wikipedia, "Ramesses II" Percy Blythe Shelley, "Ozymandias"
11 June	<i>The Philosophy of Literary Form</i> : "Rhetoric of Hitler's Battle"	Stuart Heisler, <i>The Negro Soldier</i>
18 June	<i>The Philosophy of Literary Form</i> : "The Philosophy of Literary Form"	ee cummings, "ygUduh"
25 June	<i>A Grammar of Motives</i> : "Container & Thing Contained"	gawker.com
2 July	<i>A Grammar of Motives</i> : "DIALECTIC IN GENERAL"	"Just watch me" (CBC archives)
9 July	<i>A Rhetoric of Motives</i> : "TRADITIONAL PRINCIPLES OF RHETORIC" (pp. 55-78)"	"The Mandela Tapes" (CBC <i>Ideas</i> )
16 July	<i>Language as Symbolic Action</i> : "Definition of Man," "Poetics in Particular, Language in General"	"Felina" ( <i>Breaking Bad</i> 62)
23 July	<i>Language as Symbolic Action</i> : "Terministic Screens," "Rhetoric and Poetics," "Medium as Message"	Ernst Lubitsch, <i>Ninotchka</i>
30 July	"Logology and Theology" (1979)	Hunter S. Thompson's eulogy for Richard Nixon ("He was a Crook")