

DRAMATISM AND THE THEATRE:
AN APPLICATION OF KENNETH
BURKE'S CRITICAL METHODS TO
THE ANALYSIS OF TWO PLAYS

By

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INTRODUCTION

Kenneth Burke, philosopher, teacher, scholar and author of some seven major critical and philosophical works, remains a stimulating and enigmatic figure in the world of letters. His professional life has been devoted to the task of developing critical techniques to insure "how things are and how we say things are are one."¹

The reaction to Burke's critical theories has been varied. Stanley Edgar Hyman, in a thorough and friendly treatment of Burke's critical position, has viewed him as the motive force for a whole group of young critics. The Hyman appraisal also predicts,

It will probably be the most all-embracing critical system ever built up for turning on a single poem, and we can expect a period of unequalled critical fruitfulness as Burke and his followers turn it on some poems From the brief examples of it Burke occasionally vouchsafes us, we can be sure that it will be literary criticism almost unequalled for power, lucidity, depth, and brilliance of perception.²

¹Kenneth Burke, Book of Moments, Poems 1915-1954 (Los Altos, 1955), p. 40.

²S. E. Hyman, The Armed Vision (New York, 1955), p. 384.

A number of critics have used Burke's approach in their own critical work. Francis Fergusson, whose The Idea of a Theatre is considered an outstanding critical work, is deeply indebted to Burke. He has used the idea of the ritual drama, first propounded by Burke, as a critical tool and central metaphor in his work. His well-known purpose-passion-perception formulation for analysis of the tragic form is directly borrowed from Burke's concept of poiea-pathema-mathema.

The poet-critic Randall Jarrell has also been influenced by Burke. His "Changes of Attitude and Rhetoric in Auden's Poetry," written for the Southern Review, Autumn, 1941, is essentially a Burkean analysis. This he admits in the opening paragraph of the piece, when he states,

I have borrowed several terms from an extremely good book--Kenneth Burke's Attitudes Toward History--and I should like to make acknowledgements for them.³

The extent to which contemporary critics are indebted to Burke has been indicated by Hyman, who states at one point,

Some idea of the spread of Burke's influence in America can be had from noting the wide variety of critics who have at one time or another acknowl-

³Quoted in Hyman, The Armed Vision, p. 358.

edged some degree of indebtedness to him . . . the list would include: Philip Wheelwright, Newton Arvin, Arthur Mizener, David Daiches, John L. Sweeney, Joseph Warren Beach, Ralph Ellison, Morton Dauwen Zabel, and innumerable others.⁴

There are critics, however, who have viewed Burke with suspicion. His habit of creating a new vocabulary, of making new words out of old words by tracing meanings back to their etymological roots, has confused and disturbed men such as George Knox. In his book Critical Moments, Knox appraises Burke as a literary critic and charges that

He has tried to develop a vocabulary as instrument, a weapon that will "strike and retreat, compliment and insult, challenge and grovel, sing, curse and whimper, subside and recover." And he would lash his vocabulary down with a rationale at every turn.⁵

Burke's Marxist and Hegelian proclivities have caused some individuals to place more significance on this association than the system itself would seem to warrant; a sort of literary "guilt by association." Marius Bewley includes a polemic discussion of Burke in The Complex Fate. In it he makes a sweeping attack on the "mechanistic" aspects of Burke's system and assaults what he considers to be an insidious Communist line. At one point he states, "I

⁴ Ibid., p. 358.

⁵ George Knox, Critical Moments: Kenneth Burke's Categories and Critiques (Seattle, 1957), p. 108.

hardly know whether to think of Burke as a literary critic or as the high priest of a new critical liturgicism."⁶

Bewley's conclusion charges that

"Poetry as Act" purports to emphasize the ethical aspects of literature, and to set poetry in the mid-arena of life. As Burke practices the theory the poem itself is too often the flunkey of the Act to whom it administers in a servile capacity, and life ends up by being where Burke would like it to be-- in short, Poetry and Life collide at the enchanted turnstile of Marxism.⁷

Nevertheless, even Burke's detractors have praised him for his ability to stimulate other critics. Yvor Winters, for instance, found it necessary to attack Burke's conclusions on many points, but at the same time he gave him credit for exerting an important influence in his own criticism.⁸

The attitude of the critics toward Burke, therefore, has been characterized by both a mistrust of his grandiose critical scheme, and a genuine appreciation for the brilliance of his critical insights. Perhaps the following appraisal by W. H. Auden comes close to expressing the consensus of that critical opinion.

⁶Marius Bewley, The Complex Fate (London, 1952), p. 242.

⁷Ibid., p. 243.

⁸Yvor Winters, Primitivism and Decadence (New York, 1937).

No isolated quotation can do justice to Mr. Burke's subtlety and good sense, and no doubts that one may entertain about the soundness of his critical position can obscure the fact that he is unquestionably the most brilliant and suggestive critic now writing in America.⁹

While Burke's ideas have served as catalysts in the work of other critics, only rarely has there been an attempt to make application of pure Burkean critical method. Furthermore, Burke himself seems content to theorize, leaving the application of his ideas to others. The purpose of this study, therefore, is (1) to examine the nature of Burke's theory, (2) to translate his ideas into an instrument for the critical analysis of a play, and (3) to test that instrument on two plays of widely different form and content.

The nature of the study is investigative rather than prescriptive. It is posed as an attempt to determine if Burke is successful in supplying the means to "identify the substance of a particular literary act by a theory of literary action in general."¹⁰

Since the examination and application of a concept

⁹W. H. Auden, quoted on the cover of the Vintage Book edition of The Philosophy of Literary Form.

¹⁰Kenneth Burke, The Philosophy of Literary Form (New York, 1957), p. ix.

is a twofold task, this study is divided into two major parts. Chapters I, II and III are devoted to a definition of Burke's critical philosophy, and proceed from general to specific aspects of that critical structure. Chapters IV and V represent the application of the system in the critical analysis of two plays.

Since a critical system is a device for defining or delineating a form, Burke's system can be identified most clearly and most fairly by using the system to define itself. If Burke's procedural concepts and terms of analysis are designed to discover the nature of any form, then they ought to be helpful in revealing the nature of his own critical system. Thus, in the chapters which define the system, the procedures used will also illustrate the function of the system.

The use of the system in its own definition demands that its fundamental terms, and the procedures inherent in it, be understood at the outset. It should be noted, first of all, that Burke makes special use of the word circumference in his system. In the Burkean lexicon, circumference is a positioning term indicating the degree of generality or specificity in which a certain usage of the terms of analysis apply. In applying the terms Burke provides for critical

analysis; as one moves from a general to a more specific usage, he is narrowing the circumference of the terms.

An example of this concept can be found in the application of the familiar appellation "a big fish in a little pond" to the local politician. Within the narrow circumference of the local community, the mayor might be considered a "big fish." In the larger circumference of the national political scene, however, the chances are he would be a "little fish." The term "big fish" would apply only in the narrow circumference. In the larger circumference, it would be inappropriate. In one sense, any circumference is a narrowing of reference. Whenever conditions are set up for the use of terms, the terms are necessarily limited by those conditions.

The act of determining the circumference for a set of terms is called placement. A placement on the most basic level is called synoptic placement. Here, Burke uses the term synoptic in the sense of conveying comprehensively, or getting at the basis of, rather than in the sense of a skeleton or outline of the plot or argument.

The application of these procedural terms in the definition of the system as an instrument of theatrical criticism can be discerned in the organization of the first

three chapters. In Chapter I, the broad boundaries of the whole system are revealed. A general description of the system is provided and its evolution through the writings of Burke is discussed. In Chapter II, the analytic and procedural terms of the system are defined synoptically; that is, the basic principles for the use of the terms are established. In Chapter III, the circumference of the terms is narrowed to their particular application in the area of theatrical analysis. Burke conceives of this stage of definition as the development of a casuistry, which the dictionary defines as "the application . . . of general ethical principles to particular cases of conscience or conduct."¹¹ Thus, a theatrical philosophy of the terms is evolved from the general principles established within the broader circumference of Chapter II.

The fourth chapter, the analysis of Oedipus, represents a further narrowing of the circumference of the terms in order to apply them to the specific problems and content of the play under analysis. The fifth chapter, an analysis of The Road to Damascus, applies the terms of analysis in a more complex, sophisticated way. In this chapter, the full

¹¹Clarence L. Barnhart, ed., The American College Dictionary (New York, 1950), p. 188.

weight of the entire critical system is brought to bear in order to resolve the complexities of Strindberg's expressionistic dream play.

The precedent for this particular method of unveiling Burke's critical system is provided by Burke himself in A Grammar of Motives. In discussing the purposes and procedure of that volume, he says,

Strictly speaking, we mean by a Grammar of motives a concern with the terms alone, without reference to the ways in which their potentialities have been or can be utilized in actual statements about motives. Speaking broadly we could designate as "philosophies" any statements in which these grammatical resources are specifically utilized. Random or unsystematic statements about motives could be considered as fragments of a philosophy.

One could think of the Grammatical resources as principles, and of the various philosophies as casuistries which apply these principles to temporal situations.¹²

In addition to the procedural terms discussed above, it will be helpful to have some acquaintance with the basic assumptions of the system, and the actual terms of analysis evolved from them.

The key metaphor of the whole system is the drama, and the titular word for Burke's criticism is dramatism. In In trying to understand what is implied in Burke's choice of

¹²Kenneth Burke, A Grammar of Motives (New York, 1955), p. xi.

the term dramatism it might be helpful to note that the dictionary definition of drama not only makes reference to conflict but also to the fact that the conflict is "to be acted."¹³ Burke's choice of the dramatic metaphor allows him to approach problems of meaning dialectically while retaining an emphasis on form as action. Burke's dramatic credo can be found in a poem from his Book of Moments. The poem, entitled "Dialectician's Prayer," reads,

May we compete with one another,
 To speak for Thy Creation with more justice--
 Co-operating in this competition
 Until our naming
 Give voice correctly,
 And how things are
 And how we say things are
 Are one.¹⁴

Thus, Burke would discover truth through conflict, an ingredient of the drama. Like the dramatist, Burke sees the essence of reality as action, the product of things in contention. He tells us,

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

¹³Barnhart, The American College Dictionary, p. 365: "a composition in prose or verse presenting in dialogue or pantomime a story involving conflict or contrast of character, esp. one intended to be acted on the stage."

¹⁴Burke, Book of Moments, p. 40.

the analysis of drama, treats language and thought primarily as modes of action.¹⁵

In The Philosophy of Literary Form, Burke explains the function of the drama as the controlling metaphor in his system. Here he notes,

The general perspective that is interwoven with our methodology of analysis might be summarily characterized as a theory of drama. We propose to take ritual drama as the Ur-form, the "hub," with all other aspects of human action treated as spokes radiating from this hub. That is, the social sphere is considered in terms of situations and acts, in contrast with the physical sphere, which is considered in mechanistic terms, idealized as a flat cause-and-effect or stimulus-response relationship. Ritual drama is considered as the culminating form, from this point of view, and any other form is to be considered as the "efficient" overstressing of one or another of the ingredients found in ritual drama.¹⁶

Since this study intends to apply Burke's critical system to the analysis of the literary act, two further items must be considered. Burke believes that there are three basic aspects to the analysis of the literary act: chart, prayer and dream. Chart refers to the sizing up of the form, to the process of finding the appropriate terms and establishing their circumference. Prayer involves a consideration of the communicative factors in a form. More

¹⁵Burke, A Grammar of Motives, p. xvi.

¹⁶Burke, The Philosophy of Literary Form, p. 87.

specifically, it includes an analysis of the assertions and counter-assertions within the form, and an examination of the total communicative impact of the work. The lyric poem, for instance, might be seen as exhortation on the part of the poet. Finally, dream is the symbolic aspect of form. An artistic form, which adds up to more than the sum of its parts, performs a symbolic function--a function which is rooted deep in the subconscious and meta-conscious nature of the human animal.

The direct application of the whole system to the form to be analyzed involves a particular set of terms. To Burke, the essential element of a form is its motive. He postulates that there are five questions which must be answered in any analysis of motives: What is the act? What is the scene? Who is the agent that performs the act in the scene? What is the agency with which he performs the act? What is the purpose? Burke calls these five pivotal terms of his system the Pentad. Since each of these terms affects the other, they are not to be considered individually, but as ratios. Thus a Burkean ratio is established by virtue of the manner in which an act is modified by the scene or a scene is modified by an act.

The terms of analysis will be defined by using the

procedural terms to accomplish a narrowing of their circumference from their broad description in Chapter I, through their synoptic placement in Chapter II, to their placement in a theatrical philosophy in Chapter III. In Chapters IV and V, the terms will be placed specifically with regard to the plays. Thus act will proceed from its generic naming to a statement of precisely what the act is in the play.

It is to be remembered that the particular circumference drawn for each play in this analysis is not to be considered the only possible circumference for that play. The particular placement arrived at by the critic using the system depends on the point of view and the insight of the particular critic. As Burke points out,

In confronting this wide range in the choice of a circumference for the location of an act, men confront what is distinctively the human freedom and the human necessity. This necessity is a freedom insofar as the choice of circumference leads to an adequate interpretation of motives; and it is an enslavement insofar as the interpretation is inadequate.¹⁷

What follows in this study is an attempt to fashion a theatrical circumference for the Burkean critical system. It is hoped that the attempt will lead to a greater freedom in our effort to understand dramatic form.

¹⁷Burke, A Grammar of Motives, p. 84.

CHAPTER I

THE DRAMATISTIC CRITICISM OF KENNETH BURKE

Criticism, to Kenneth Burke, is the investigation of a form in order to extract its meaning and significance. In his book Permanence and Change, Burke gives us an idea of the vast scope of his idea of criticism. In the topic sentence of that volume, he says,

All living things are critics, with the example of the trout, becoming a critic after his jaw is ripped, learning "a nicer discrimination between food and bait."¹

Commenting on the scope of Burke's critical position, Stanley Hyman presents the following summation,

Like Bacon, Burke set out to do no less than to integrate all man's knowledge into one workable critical frame. In the course of that, he has set out to turn psychology on literature, has discovered that he would first have to synthesize one consistent psychology from the warring schools, has done it; then discovered the same need to integrate sociologies; then work both together as a social psychology; then add linguistics and semantics to the formula; still later add philosophies

¹Quoted in Hyman, The Armed Vision, p. 380.

and theologies; finally to turn the whole tremendous mass on a poem.²

That Burke went to all this trouble for the sake of literary criticism alone is debatable. It is more likely that he intended his system to be applicable to the understanding of all forms. In a recent letter to the author, Burke said,

I certainly got into the subject of language in general via my concern with literary criticism in particular. But once there, I found other considerations tending to take over.³

"Other considerations" do, indeed, play an important role in Burke's writings. In A Grammar of Motives, Burke devotes a whole section to the analysis of several of the philosophical schools, rendering a definition and description of them using the Burkean terms of analysis. In addition, a large proportion of his writing is devoted to discussions of political ideas. Marxism, capitalism, and the theory of constitutions also come under his surveillance in the Grammar. Since politics can seldom be discussed without bringing in economics, Burke applies himself to monetary theories as well. For instance, in the Grammar, an essay entitled "Money as a Substitute for God" offers a biting

²Hyman, The Armed Vision, p. 361.

³Kenneth Burke, Letter to the author, November 1, 1961.

indictment of capitalistic monetary excesses. This wide range of interests makes it difficult for evaluators to grasp the entire structure of Burke's criticism when appraising his work. It may be, as Stanley Hyman suggests, that

The reason reviewers and editors have had such trouble fastening on Burke's field is that he has no field, unless it be Burkology. In recent years it has become fashionable to say that he is not actually a literary critic, but a semanticist, social psychologist, or philosopher. A much more accurate statement would be that he is not only a literary critic, but a literary critic plus those things and others.⁴

A critical system which has such a wide range of application must operate from a very broad foundation. Burke's criticism, therefore, is based on a controlling metaphor that is vast enough to encompass the whole field of human action. Discussing his grand design for criticism in an article entitled "The Tactics of Motivation," Burke arrives at the conclusion,

Human affairs being dramatic, the discussion of human affairs becomes dramatic criticism.⁵

Thus, Burke's critical position is based on the metaphor of the drama. Upon consideration, it would appear

⁴Hyman, The Armed Vision, p. 359.

⁵Quoted in Hyman, The Armed Vision, p. 368.

the drama is an ideal form for the application of Burke's philosophy to the analysis of a form. Drama, which is based on the conflict of opposing forces, not only takes into account Burke's idea of the dialectical nature of substance, but places emphasis on the analysis of human behavior as "action." The drama obviously contains a dialectical formulation or statement about the positioning of opposing forces. In addition, however, the drama examines these positions as they interact with each other to make the whole form what it is.

The dramatic metaphor, which is based on a form in which contending forces combine in the action to create the total symbolic statement which is the play, views the nature of all things as the product of contention. Thus, in political action, in literary action, and in other forms of human action, the nature of things is determined by the nature of the interaction among the forces which are at work. American foreign policy, for instance, is actually an uneasy compromise between conservative and liberal philosophies about the nature of America's role in the world.

Burke's word for this concept which expresses the dialectical nature of substance in terms of its action is dramatism. When this concept is translated into terms of

critical analysis the contending elements in any substance or action are seen as participating in an agon which can be resolved through the application of critical insights. The basic metaphor of the whole critical system is, then, the drama--specifically, ritual drama. In The Philosophy of Literary Form, Burke states,

We are proposing it (ritual drama) as a calculus-- a vocabulary or set of co-ordinates, that serves best for the integration of all phenomena studied by the social sciences. We propose it as the logical alternative to the treatment of human acts and relations in terms of the mechanistic metaphor (stimulus, response, and the conditioned reflex). And we propose it, along with the contention that mechanistic considerations need not be excluded from such a perspective, but take their part in it, as a statement about the predisposing structure of the ground or scene upon which the drama is enacted.⁶

The ritual drama, then, is the key to the investigation, not only of the arts, but of all the social sciences. Thus the study of man in all its forms is encompassed by this basic metaphor.

The Evolution of Dramatism

The dramatistic metaphor which underlies Burke's critical system did not come on the scene fully matured. It was the result of a long period of searching, probing evolu-

⁶Burke, The Philosophy of Literary Form, p. 90.

tion which started as early as 1931 with the publication of his first critical work.

In "The Five Master Terms," an article describing the basic terms of his system, Burke said,

Instead of saying, "life is a drama and the world is its theatre," then hurrying on, we tried to ponder this metaphor long and hard.⁷

Burke's preoccupation with this central metaphor of his system can be chronicled through the first four of his seven critical works. In Counterstatement, published in 1931, Burke provided a series of essays in which he examined a number of literary efforts from the standpoint of their rhetoric. He envisioned an artistic effort as a strategy employed by the author to cope with his particular problems; these problems having arisen out of the author's battles with society and with himself. Here Burke's key metaphor was "man as declaimer."

In the second book, Permanence and Change, the key metaphor changed to "man as artist." In this book, which is subtitled An Anatomy of Purpose, Burke began to apply the techniques of criticism to the entire scene of social action. In so doing, he discovered that as man related himself to the world and to other men his strategies and counter-

⁷Quoted in Hyman, The Armed Vision, p. 366.

strategies had an artistic nature. The topic sentence of the book was "all living things are critics," and Burke arrived at the conclusion in the last part of the book that "all men are poets." Thus, Burke discovered that man, the critic, resorted to poetic principles; that he fashioned poetic metaphors to describe the world around him. In relating to the world through the metaphor, man was essentially gaining perspective by incongruity--"the seeing of one thing in terms of something that, to a greater or lesser extent, it is not."⁸ Thus, by seeing man's statement about the nature of substance (his world) as essentially paradoxical, Burke began to deal with problems of substance dialectically. This dialectical approach played a continuing role in the development of Burke's philosophy, culminating eventually in the concept of dramatism.

In his next book, Attitudes Toward History, Burke carried his analysis of action into the literary realm. Here, he examined works of art as literary or symbolic action. He identified the attitudes or strategies of authors under two major headings: attitudes of acceptance, and attitudes of rejection. Burke also arrived at a further classification

⁸The writer is indebted to S. E. Hyman, who also traces the evolution of the metaphor through Burke's work. See Hyman, The Armed Vision, pp. 328-37.

which combined the opposites into an attitude of acceptance-rejection. This represents an early example of the dialectical combining of opposites which was to find fuller expression as his work progressed. Burke described the artistic expression of these attitudes as gesturing, and the controlling metaphor of the work became "man as gesturer."

In his fourth book, The Philosophy of Literary Form, Burke's metaphor moved into the realm of dialectical action. Borrowing from man's most colossal expression of the dialectical function, Burke seized on the image of war and fashioned the metaphor "man as warrior." At this stage in the development of his metaphor, attitude became incipient action. Conflict became the central ingredient in his philosophy, and both the image of the drama and the term dramatistic made their appearance.

In the book's central essay, "The Philosophy of Literary Form," Burke sketched out a pattern of organization for his maturing critical method. He brought together under one system the rhetorical, artistic and organizational aspects of his earlier work. As he presented the system, its three basic divisions were as follows: chart, the factors of sizing up (organizational or grammatical); prayer, the rhetorical factors; and dream, the symbolic or artistic

factors. In a significant footnote, Burke introduced the Pentad (act, scene, agent, agency, purpose) as something he was working on in regard to a future study of motives.

Now that the critical system had been sketched in, Burke proceeded to an explication and extension of his system in his next work. In this book, A Grammar of Motives, he dealt with the chart division of his system. In laying out the terms and procedures for the sizing up of a form, Burke discussed at length the terms of the Pentad, emphasizing the dramatistic interaction of the terms. In short, dramatism completely dominated the system, and the key metaphor became "man as acter (or actor)."

In A Grammar of Motives, Burke announced his intention of discussing all three divisions of his system in a comprehensive trilogy. In 1950, A Rhetoric of Motives appeared as a sequel to the Grammar. This discussed the prayer division of the system, and examined the ways in which men relate to other men through pleading, demanding, cajoling or hoodwinking. In this broad frame of reference, the communicative aspect of artistic expression also found a place. On the whole, rhetoric was seen as the devices and strategies for overcoming or mitigating the dialectical-dramatistic conflicts of social and literary action.

The projected last volume in the trilogy, A Symbolic of Motives, has yet to appear. It would appear this volume will represent Burke's attempt at fashioning a poetic. It will deal with the dream or symbolic part of the system-- the realm of the work of art itself.

The Pentad

As he developed the basic metaphor for his critical system, Burke also developed the procedures and terms for the application of the system to the form to be analyzed. A major breakthrough in his search for ways to apply the dramatistic concept in actual critical analysis came with his discovery of the Pentad. The Pentad consists of five terms (act, scene, agent, agency, purpose). Burke conceives of these as interacting with each other dramatistically, and, when applied to a work of art, being capable of providing all the necessary perspectives for understanding that work of art.

When Burke wrote the title essay of The Philosophy of Literary Form, he had not yet formulated all the procedures for applying the ritual drama metaphor to the analysis of a form. By the time the essay was published in book form, however, he had made a significant advance in his thinking.

He had settled upon the five terms of the Pentad which he described in a footnote to his discussion of "Ritual Drama as 'Hub.'" "

In a work in which I am now engaged, as a kind of "prolegomena to any future imputation of motives," I have been applying co-ordinates that can, I think, carry a step further the ways of locating and distinguishing motivational elements . . . instead of the situation-strategy pair, I now use five terms: act, scene, agent, agency, purpose.

These five terms, with a treatment of the purely internal or syntactic relationships prevailing among them, are I think particularly handy for extending the study of motivation

The use of this fuller terminology in the synopsis of fictional works would require no major emendations in the methods discussed. But I might, as a result of it, be able to state the basic rules of thumb in a more precise way, thus:

The critic is trying to synthesize the given work. He is trying to synopsise it, not in the degenerated sense which the word synopsis now usually has for us, as meaning a mere "skeleton or outline of the plot or argument," but in the sense of "conveying comprehensively," or "getting at the basis of." And one can work towards this basis, or essence, from without, by "scissor-work" as objective as the nature of the materials permits, in focussing all one's attention about the motivation, which is identical with structure.⁹

With respect to the above statement, it might well be said that it is the manifesto upon which Burke's entire system of criticism is established. The Grammar, the Rhetoric, and the Symbolic of motives can be seen as illumination and extension of the position described above. In

⁹Burke, The Philosophy of Literary Form, p. 90.

A Grammar of Motives, Burke proceeds, by means of the Pentad, to define the structure of the system by illustrating its application to society, to various philosophical schools, and to the work of art. In the Introduction of the Grammar, Burke provides the following detailed description of the terms,

We shall use five terms as the generating principle of our investigation. They are: Act, Scene, Agent, Agency, Purpose. In a rounded statement about motives, you must have some word that names the act (names what took place in thought or deed), and another than names the scene (the background of the act, the situation in which it occurred); also, you must indicate what person or kind of person (agent) performed the act, what means or instruments he used (agency), and the purpose. Men may violently disagree about the purposes behind a given act, or about the character of the person who did it, or in what kind of situation he acted; or they may insist on totally different words to name the act itself. But, be that as it may, any complete statement about motives will offer some kind of answers to these five questions: what was done (act), when or where was it done (scene), who did it (agent), how he did it (agency), and why (purpose).¹⁰

Inherent in these terms, as Burke sees them, is an infinite capacity for merger and transformation. In keeping with his idea of the dialectical-dramatistic nature of substance, Burke points out that, "if you reduce the terms to any one of them, you will find them branching out again;

¹⁰Burke, A Grammar of Motives, p. x.

for no one of them is enough."¹¹ Burke illustrates the possibilities for merger and transformation among the terms in this paragraph from A Grammar of Motives.

Our term, "Agent," for instance, is a general heading that might, in a given case, require further subdivision, as an agent might have his act modified (hence partly motivated) by friends (co-agents) or enemies (counter-agents). Again, under "Agent" one could place any personal properties that are assigned a motivational value, such as "ideas," "the will," "fear," "malice," "intuition," "the creative imagination." A portrait painter might treat the body as a property of the agent (an expression of the personality), whereas materialistic medicine would treat it as "scenic," a purely "objective material"; and from another point of view it could be classed as an agency, a means by which one gets reports of the world at large. Machines are obviously instruments (that is, Agencies); yet in their vast accumulation they constitute the industrial scene, with its own peculiar set of motivational properties. War may be treated as an Agency, insofar as it is a means to an end; as a collective Act, subdivisible into many individual acts; as a purpose in schemes proclaiming a cult of war. For the man inducted into the army, war is a Scene, a situation that motivates the nature of his training; and in mythologies war is an Agent, or perhaps better a super-agent, in the figure of the war god.¹²

There is, then, a certain ambiguity involved in the use of the terms. They have a tendency to blend into one another. Since, according to Burke, the substance of human relationships is dramatic, composed of constantly interacting forces, ambiguity is a necessary factor in the analysis of motives. He tells us,

¹¹Ibid., p. 262

¹²Ibid., p. xiv.

A perfectionist might seek to evolve terms free of ambiguity and inconsistency (as with the terministic ideals of symbolic logic and logical positivism). But we have a different purpose in view We take it for granted that, insofar as men cannot themselves create the universe, there must be something essentially enigmatic about the problem of motives, and that this underlying enigma will manifest itself in inevitable ambiguities and inconsistencies among the terms for motives. Accordingly, what we want is not terms that avoid ambiguity, but terms that clearly reveal the strategic spots at which ambiguities necessarily arise.¹³

If the terms are to be adequate to the job of analyzing the forms of human action, they must have the capacity for interaction. To account for this relationship among the terms, Burke applies the concept of the ratio, which he defines as "a formula indicating a transition from one term to another."¹⁴ Thus, a scene-act ratio would examine the ways in which an act is modified and controlled by the scene in which it occurs, and the ways in which the scene is modified by the act which occurs within it.

The Philosophical Basis of Dramatism

George Knox, in Critical Moments: Kenneth Burke's Categories and Critiques, reaches the following conclusion about Burke's criticism,

¹³Ibid., p. xii.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 262.

I have chosen to name this work, Critical Moments, taking the cue from Burke's recently published volume of poems. His critical work is a collection of "moments" of diverse statements on diverse matters.¹⁵

This opinion of Burke's work is not held by Knox alone. Other evaluators have noted isolated flashes of brilliant criticism, applauded Burke as potentially a critic of enormous insight, even appropriated some of his techniques; but he remains for them, as for Knox, essentially a collection of fragments. The fragments, for the most part, are those pieces of actual literary criticism which he has done.¹⁶

The main reason that these critic-evaluators find Burke's critical stance lacking in coherence or comprehensive organization is that they tend to confine themselves to an examination of Burke's literary criticism. Those that do venture into the other areas of Burke's interest seem to do so with insufficient energy or persistence. Thus they fail to discover the connection between his criticism and his basic philosophy. By not examining Burke's philosophy closely, these critics miss the organizational base upon which his system functions.

¹⁵Knox, Critical Moments, p. 110.

¹⁶S. E. Hyman, in The Armed Vision, provides a fairly comprehensive survey of critical attitude toward Burke. See pp. 354-85.

Searching for a single statement from which to proceed in an examination of this underlying philosophy, we find that Burke has provided such a statement in his recently published book, A Rhetoric of Religion. In his "definition of man," Burke has stated succinctly his basic position regarding the nature and motives of human action. It reads,

Man is the symbol-using animal, inventor of the negative, separated from his natural condition by instruments of his own making, and goaded by the spirit of hierarchy.¹⁷

Burke's position, then, is that man strives to transcend the brute nature of his surroundings, to rise above his surroundings and himself, through the use of symbols. He is motivated to strive for an ever higher position in a vast hierarchy, at the top of which is the god symbol; "god" being whatever a man's conception of ultimate transcendence might be. Man is motivated by hierarchy, which, because God is at the top of it, might also be identified as a God principle. But whatever the struggle, the method or objective, the important fact is the existence of motive.

In Burke's vocabulary, a motive is the generating

¹⁷Kenneth Burke, A Rhetoric of Religion (Los Altos, 1961), p. 40.

principle of a form; its essential matter; its *raison d'etre*. To find out about man, you must find out about his motives. Just as the motive of a man is what "makes him tick," so the motive of any form is the key to understanding it.

The attempt to find the motive in a form is a search for a God term. With regard to man's largest, most comprehensive metaphor, God is often seen as the motive of the universe. Carrying the analogy further, it is possible to discover something of how the God term or motive operates. God, as the motive of the universe, is both cause and effect of the universe. The rationalists, for instance, conceived of God as the creator of the universe and the universe (nature) as the revelation of God to man. Thus, as the universe revealed God to man, or led man to God, it could be considered the cause of God for man. God was the effect of nature's revelation to man. Equating God with motive, God creates nature and is, at the same time, what nature illustrates. Thus, the motive creates the form, and is what the form illustrates.

In keeping with his concept of the nature of man, Burke postulates that man relates to his existence in three ways: (1) He organizes the world as best he can. This

sizing up of the world Burke calls chart. (2) He yearns to be more than he is. He is driven to try to rise above himself. This effort by man to transcend himself, Burke calls prayer. (3) He feels the urge to rise out of himself. This leads man to abstraction, the transcending of the physical. It is this aspect of man's effort which Burke calls dream.

The three books in Burke's trilogy on motives correspond to these three aspects of man. The chart, or organizational aspect, is covered in the Grammar. Prayer, or the problems of striving, with its subsidiary of contention and its goal of resolution is dealt with in the Rhetoric. Dream, the abstraction, the symbolic utterance, is to be dealt with in the forthcoming Symbolic.

Proposing to design a system for the analysis of the motives of all forms, whether literary, political, philosophical or religious, Burke laid out the chart (organizational pattern) for his system in A Grammar of Motives. In this book, Burke introduced the terms of analysis and examined the basic philosophical groundwork of the system. A key aspect of this philosophical system was a concept Burke called "The Paradox of Substance." This concept affirms the dialectical nature of substance, pointing up the ambiguities

inherent in a substance which is made up of forces in dialectical-dramatistic contention. Thus, in discovering the motive of a form, one has to resolve the paradoxes which arise out of its dialectical nature. Any statement about motives must take into account the forces or perspectives which are combined in its substance. The Pentad, then, is an effort to provide all the necessary perspectives which need to be applied in discovering the true nature of a motive's substance by resolving the paradoxes peculiar to it.

Burke describes man's attempts to resolve the conflicts which characterize a field of action as a process of identification. Identification, then, is the name given to the means by which man pulls himself up the hierarchical ladder toward ultimate identification (the state in which all conflicts are resolved). Man's method of resolving the paradoxes which characterize his existence is largely symbolic. The resolution of a conflict on one level is accomplished by finding a term large enough to encompass both sides of the conflict. When the term is found, man moves to a higher level in the hierarchical chain. This is called transcendence, since man has transcended his former state and now exists in a new relation to the situation. To

illustrate, the very word man is a symbolic resolution (the word is a symbol) for all the conflicting physical, mental, emotional states that make up a man. So, each level on this hierarchical chain of substance consists of the warring factions on the level beneath it. Both sides of the paradox exist "at peace" in the term which encompasses them. We put "at peace" in the sentence above in quotation marks to indicate that the opposing forces of the dialectic in the encompassing term have only been resolved symbolically. The ambiguities still exist in the new substance synthesized out of the opposing forces.

Thus, out of our language come the ideas and concepts by which the substance of our environment is understood and manipulated. These "namings" are symbolic resolutions of the mysteries and paradoxes in the world around us. Through symbols brute objects are transcended; the highest form of symbolization being the work of art. A Symbolic of Motives, then, will deal with the symbolic utterance, whose terms "co-operate in modifying one another."¹⁸ This is the dream stage of the Burkean system where brute reality is transcended by the genius of man.

¹⁸Kenneth Burke, A Rhetoric of Motives (New York, 1955), p. 22.

Thus, Burke's critical system becomes something more than "diverse statements on diverse matters." It is a complete critical system, based on a philosophical stance which places emphasis on the dialectical nature of substance and views hierarchy as the central motive force behind man's actions. Founded on the metaphor of drama, the system proposes to examine all forms of human action in order to discover their basic motivation. And, in Burke's vocabulary, a search for basic motivation is a search for the essence of a form.

CHAPTER II

SYNOPTIC PLACEMENT OF THE PENTAD

Because this study is structured around the five master terms of the Pentad (act, scene, agent, agency, purpose), it is necessary to establish a generic description of the terms and their function. To do this, not only is it necessary to chart the movement among the terms, but also the ways of moving from the terms to the form being analyzed and back again. The first problem, that of charting the interaction among the terms, calls for further discussion of the paradox of substance and its relation to the concept of ratios.

The Paradox of Substance

To understand how the terms of the Burkean Pentad interact with each other, it is necessary to understand the philosophical assumptions which underlie their action. In his concept of the paradox of substance, Burke has revealed a peculiar vision of the nature of substance. Burke defines

substance as "something that stands beneath," the substance, as it were.¹ The substance of a thing is that upon which it is grounded, the basis of the form. It was pointed out earlier that Burke views substance as essentially dialectical in nature; that is, the true nature of a substance is a product of a resolution of the competing forces within it. In order to appreciate the full significance of this concept, it is advisable to investigate Burke's precise position. Burke begins his discussion of substance by examining the word etymologically. It is his thesis that

First, we should note that there is, etymologically, a pun lurking behind the Latin roots. The word is often used to designate what some thing or agent intrinsically is, as per these meanings in Webster's: "the most important element in any existence; the characteristic and essential components of anything; the main part; essential import; purport." Yet etymologically "substance" is a scenic word. Literally, a person's or a thing's sub-stance would be something that stands beneath or supports the person or thing.²

The key to the paradoxical or dialectical nature of substance, as Burke sees it, lies in this pun. It becomes a question of how a word can refer to something intrinsic in a form and, at the same time, have reference, at least

¹Burke, A Grammar of Motives, p. 22.

²Ibid., p. 21.

etymologically, to something extrinsic to the form. At the end of the discussion of substance, Burke makes his position clear by saying,

. . .the word "substance," used to designate what a thing is, derives from a word designating something that a thing is not. That is, though used to designate something within the thing, intrinsic to it, the word etymologically refers to something outside the thing, extrinsic to it. Or otherwise put: the word in its etymological origins would refer to an attribute of the thing's context, since that which supports or underlies a thing would be a part of the thing's context. And a thing's context, being outside or beyond the thing, would be something that the thing is not.

Here obviously is a strategic moment, an al-chemic moment, wherein momentous miracles of transformation can take place. For here the intrinsic and the extrinsic can change places. To tell what a thing is, you place it in terms of something else. This idea of locating, or placing, is implicit in our very word for the definition itself: to define, or determine a thing, is to mark its boundaries, hence to use terms that possess, implicitly at least, contextual reference. We here take the pun seriously because we believe it to reveal an inevitable paradox of definition, an antimony that must endow the concept of substance with unresolvable ambiguity³

From this beginning, Burke moves directly to the Spinozan idea that nothing can be considered by itself; that everything is delineated by its scenic context. He goes so far as to rephrase Spinoza's paradoxical statement that "all determination is negation" to read, "every posi-

³Ibid., p. 23.

tive is negative."⁴ This is Burke's paradox of substance in its ultimate form.

The philosophical semanticist's familiar device of creating a universe of discourse will help to clarify Burke's stand. If one were to imagine a completely empty universe with no being or substance in it, and then were to place something in it, he would actually have created not one but two things in that universe: being and non-being. Whatever was put into that universe would be discernible by virtue of its contrast with the emptiness of the rest of the universe. To place a single element in the universe is to create that element, plus all that is not that element.

Returning now to the terms of the Pentad and their possibilities for interaction, it is possible to view the Pentad as a kind of universe which defines the terms within it. As each entity has implicit in it its opposite, so each term of the Pentad implies the other terms which modify it.

To illustrate more clearly the application of the paradox of substance to the relationships among the terms, it is necessary to turn again to a Burkean image,

Distinctions, we might say, arise out of a great central moltenness, where all is merged. They have been thrown from a liquid center to the surface,

⁴Ibid., p. 25.

where they have congealed. Let one of these crusted distinctions return to its source, and in this alchemic center it may be remade, again becoming molten liquid, and may enter into new combinations, whereat it may be again thrown forth as a new crust, a different distinction. So that A may become non-A. But not merely by a leap from one state to the other. Rather, we must take A back into the ground of its existence, the logical substance that is its causal ancestor, and on to a point where it is con-substantial with non-A; then we may return, this time emerging with non-A instead.

And so with our five terms: certain formal interrelationships prevail among these terms, by reason of their role as attributes of a common ground or substance. Their participation in a common ground makes for transformability. 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.⁵

The formal relationships which exist among the terms of the Pentad are expressed in ratios. Thus, an act-scene ratio would identify or clarify the resources of ambiguity which exist between these two terms. In a plea of temporary insanity with regard to an act of murder, for instance, the issue might be said to revolve around the question of whether the crime could be considered as an act, or whether the scenic aspects overwhelmed the act. It could be contended that there was no purposeful activity on the part of

⁵Ibid., p. xiii.

the defendant, but rather that the scene so aroused him that he was no longer responsible for his actions. In terms of the Burkean analysis, this would be a contention that the defendant was no longer an agent, but an agency of the scene. By virtue of his not being an agent, he was incapable of performing an act (a purposeful activity) and, therefore, he should not bear the responsibility for the crime. In this analysis, the scene is responsible for the crime. The act becomes subsumed in scene and the ambiguous relationship between these two elements is revealed.

In another circumstance, the act may be seen as functioning to change the scene. A despotic scene, for instance, might be changed to a democratic scene by the act of the assassination of the despot. The nature of each term in a given context is, according to Burke, determined by the nature of the other terms in the context. Each term, when applied to a specific situation, effects a change in the nature or quality of the other terms. A ratio, in turn, is a formula for indicating a transition from one term to another within this context. Consequently, the terms of the Pentad, by virtue of the paradoxical nature of substance identified by Burke, are capable of defining each other. Each term provides a part of the context by which the other is defined.

Synoptic Placement

Placement is the establishing of a context in which to view the whole Pentad. Whenever the terms are used in practice, they are used within a certain prescribed context. This context is the circumference of the terms. Thus, the circumference of a set of terms is the scene in which the terms are to be used.

In this chapter, the concern is with the widest possible circumference of the pentadic terms: placement in the broadest, most basic context. Burke calls this kind of placement synoptic placement. In his discussion of the synoptic placement of the scene-act ratio, Burke identified the terms as "container and thing contained."⁶ Here the terms are seen in their most generic meaning. In a sense, this generic placement of the terms is also the simplest statement of a term's meaning, since the basic meaning of a term exists most purely on its simplest level. As a more specific application of a term is made, it becomes more complex and sophisticated. No matter how complex the treatment of the terms becomes, however, it is always possible to return to the synoptic circumference of the term for clarification.

⁶Ibid., p. 3.

Even in dealing with the terms' more complex aspects, Burke reminds us of their basic simplicity, pointing out that

By examining them quizzically, we can range far; yet the terms are always there for us to reclaim, in their everyday simplicity, their almost miraculous easiness, thus enabling us constantly to begin afresh. When they might become difficult, when we can hardly see them, through having stared at them too intensely, we can of a sudden relax, to look at them as we always have, lightly, glancingly. And having reassured ourselves, we can start out again, once more daring to let them look strange and difficult for a time.⁷

In this section, then, the five basic terms of dramatism will be examined in the widest circumference possible, and their function will be illustrated by dealing with the terms on the basis of their widest, most general and, consequently, most simple application. In order to clarify the definition of terms and illustrate their function, it will be necessary to examine their application to certain common cultural forms. While this application of the terms can be viewed as a narrowing of circumference from the most generic meaning, it should be remembered that it is for the purpose of revealing that generic meaning more clearly. In the course of this examination and application, act and agent will be coupled with scene in order to illustrate the extent to which these two terms depend on the scenic context in

⁷Ibid., p. x.

which they exist. Agency and purpose will be treated separately, however, since they are elements which can best be discussed in terms of their relationships with the whole Pentad.

The scene-act ratio

Discussing this ratio, Kenneth Burke points out that, "Using 'scene' in the sense of setting, or background, and 'act' in the sense of action, one could say that 'the scene contains the act.'"⁸ Implied in this metaphor is the idea that there is a formal relationship between the scene and the act, that the one should be consistent with the other. Since each term of the Pentad derives its nature from its interaction with the other terms, the following illustrations of the ways in which the elements of this ratio influence each other will serve to clarify the essential nature of each term.

Burke would maintain that in the world of business as well as in the world of international politics, the situation (scene) determines tactics (act). Men who are entrusted with the responsibility of determining courses of action must fully understand the scene upon which the act

⁸Ibid., p. 3.

is to be played. This is borne out by the fact that historians note instances where improper decisions result from an inaccurate estimate of the scenic context. The Army of the Potomac's inactivity during the early years of the Civil War, for instance, was based largely on McClellan's overcautious estimate of the enemy's strength.⁹ In this case, actions were not consistent with the real nature of the scene, and the result was a major tactical error.

Stark Young's discussion of Clifford Odet's Night Music is quoted by Burke as an example of the scene-act relationship in a critical analysis. Mr. Young asks,

Can we demand from a dramatist, in an age like ours, scattered, distracted, surging, wide, chopped-up and skimmy, that he provide his play with a background of social conceptions that are basic, sound, organized, prophetic, deep-rooted? Shall he, in sum, be asked to draw the hare of Heaven from a shallow cap?

The answer is no, we can scarcely demand that. In general we should remind ourselves that there is no reason to ask any theatre to surpass its epoch in solidity, depth or philosophic summation.¹⁰

Whether or not the final worth of artistic acts is decreed by the culture is not to be debated here. The implication is clear, however, that the nature of artistic acts is influenced by the age (scene) in which they occur.

⁹Bruce Catton, This Hallowed Ground (New York, 1956), pp. 75-144.

¹⁰Burke, A Grammar of Motives, p. 85.

From these illustrations, it becomes apparent that the scene is the situation or context in which an act occurs. The precise nature of the act which occurs within the scene, however, may be less clear. In the examples of an act cited above, the element of decision has been involved. This element of decision can be discerned clearly in examples of military action. In a more subtle fashion, it inheres in the artistic act as well. The artistic act is the product of a decision on the part of the artist as surely as is a military strategy. The artist is faced with an artistic problem which he must solve in the context (scene) of his medium. He solves it by employing the appropriate strategy, a strategy based on artistic choice or decision. Thus, the play can be seen as a strategy employed by the playwright for the revelation of an action.

Since the element of decision can be established as a characteristic of the act, it follows that the act results from purposeful activity. At this point, one distinction is essential. It must be noted that an event is not necessarily an act. Activity without purpose is motion, not action.

Burke tells us,

As for "act," any verb, no matter how specific or how general, that has connotations of consciousness or purpose falls under this category. If one happened to stumble over an obstruction, that would not be an act, but a mere motion. However, one could convert

even this sheer accident into something of an act if, in the course of falling, one suddenly willed his fall (as a rebuke, for instance, to the negligence of the person who had left the obstruction in the way). "Dramatistically," the basic unit of action would be defined as "the human body in conscious or purposive motion."¹¹

This distinction between action and motion, although not generally maintained in ordinary usage, is a key one in view of the purpose of this study. Burke warns us,

Hence we are admonished that people often speak of action in a purely figurative sense when they have only motion in mind, as with reference to the action of a motor, or the interaction of forces.¹²

Where the above reference to "interaction of forces" applies to nonhuman forces, one may talk about the "interaction of forces" in a play, providing it is remembered that the word "action" always implies an agent, a purpose or will activating it. The forces in a play are the product of the purposeful action of the characters.

The scene-agent ratio

It has been pointed out that both act and agent are related to scene in that both need a scene in which to exist. With regard to this relationship, Burke tells us, "And using 'agents' in the sense of actors, or acters, one could say that the scene contains the agents."¹³ Once again, it is

¹¹Ibid., p. 14.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Ibid., p. 3.

possible to illustrate relationships between the elements in this ratio by examining them in terms of elements in our culture.

To note how the nature or quality of the scene influences the nature or quality of the agents and acts within it, and, conversely, how the quality of the agents and acts within a scene influence the nature of the scene, one needs only to examine modern criminal psychology. In this field, for example, much emphasis is placed on the relationship between agent and scene.¹⁴ Environment is looked upon as a significant factor in determining character. In a psychologist's application of the Pentad, environment and character would correspond to scene and agent. Furthermore, in the analysis of the criminal act, he frequently assigns great significance to the interaction between scene and agent. Thus, the low-income urban environment is viewed as a breeding ground for juvenile delinquency. The interaction of the terms can be illustrated by examining the relationships among the scene, the agent, and the act which foster that conclusion. The agent is a juvenile delinquent because of his acts. A bad scene has

¹⁴See A. H. Maslow, Motivation and Personality (New York, 1954).

a bad effect on the agent who, in turn, authors bad acts. Or, one could say, in reverse, the agent is bad because his acts, performed in accordance with his scene, are bad. It might be noted also that, although the scene "contains" the act and the agent, according to Burke's view of the relationship, it cannot be said that the agent "contains" the act. He says,

To this writer, at least, the act-agent ratio more strongly suggests a temporal or sequential relationship than a purely positional or geometric one. The agent is an author of his acts, which are descended from him, being good progeny if he is good, or bad progeny if he is bad, wise progeny if he is wise, silly progeny if he is silly. And, conversely, his acts can make him or remake him in accordance with their nature. They would be his product and/or he would be theirs.¹⁵

The answer to the old question, "Does the office make the man, or the man, the office?" would be in Burkean terms, "A little of both." The office of the presidency, for instance, could be seen as a scenic context which affects the man (the agent), who, in turn affects the office. In Allen Drury's Advise and Consent,¹⁶ a mediocre man suddenly becomes president and promises to be, in this new

¹⁵Ibid., p. 16.

¹⁶Allen Drury, Advise and Consent (New York, 1959).

situation, a man strong enough to be a good president. The assumption of the responsibilities of office are seen to have made a marked difference in the man. Thus agents react differently in a specific scenic context depending on the mixture of the particular qualities of the agent and the particular qualities of the scene.

Agency

A useful general synonym for agency would be instrument. The agency is the instrument by which the agent accomplishes his act. Agency can also be considered as the tool or method by which something is accomplished.

Agency is related to agent in the sense that the agent provides the purpose of will for the agency. An agency, by itself, is incapable, by definition, of performing an act. Thus, an agency is not responsible for an act; it is just the instrument by which the act is accomplished. If a sword kills a man, the wielder of the sword, the agent, must take the responsibility.

The relationship between agent and agency is not always clear-cut. There are ways in which an agent can be considered as an agency. This interaction between the terms can be illustrated in the situation from the stock melodrama in which a man is given a gun which, in turn, leads

him to consider murder as a solution to his problem. In this case, the instrument (the gun), might be seen as motivating the agent to an act of violence. Thus the agent, in a sense, would be an agency of the agency!

Another clouding of the distinctions between the two terms can be seen in the case of the agent who disclaims responsibility for his acts on the basis that he is really an agency. Thus the man who conceives of himself as an "instrument of God's will" can perform anti-social acts free, at least in his own view, from moral censure. Another example of an agent seeking to disclaim responsibility for his acts by virtue of his being an agency rather than an agent would be the man in a court of law contending that he was "used" by other more powerful interests. Thus, he shifts the responsibility for his actions to the other interests, claiming that, by serving as an instrument of another's motives in the performance of an act, he functioned not as agent, but as agency.

The distinction between agent and agency might also depend on the circumference of the scenic context in which an act is viewed. In the "Get thee to a nunnery" scene in Hamlet, for instance, Ophelia is an agent in the sense that she is trying to discover what has happened between Hamlet

and herself. But, in a larger sense, she is the instrument of Claudius and Polonius who are using her as a device for probing the motives of Hamlet's madness. Thus, when a person acts on the basis of a purpose emanating from within, he can be seen, on this basis, to be operating as an agent. But, insofar as the actions are the result of a larger purpose outside the individual, the individual is acting as an agency.

Agency is sometimes used symbolically to represent the agent and his function in a particular context. This is illustrated in the case of the retiring baseball player who announces that he is going to "hang up the spikes."

Agency, then, refers to the tool or instrument with which an act is committed.

Purpose

Purpose, or the reasons for action, is an essential of all human action. As was pointed out earlier, without purpose there is no action. The difference between action and motion in the Burkean lexicon is that action is purposeful activity, while motion is not. Purpose, distilled, or perhaps enlarged to its ultimate, becomes involved with mysticism. If purpose is the mover behind action, then ultimate purpose would be the "prime mover."

Equating purpose with the action-motion dichotomy on the largest scale, it is possible to say that the scientist sees the universe as motion while the mystic sees it as action. For, to the mystic, the activity of the universe is willed by the prime mover, God.

Purpose, as a generic term, depends somewhat on the circumference in which it is considered. For instance, there are times when purpose and motive (the essence of a form) appear to be synonymous. Thus, in one circumference, the motive--which is the generating principle of a form, that which explains its happening--could be seen also as the purpose or reason of the form. But narrowing the circumference to the scope of the agent operating within the form, the agent's purpose, his ostensible reason for doing something, may not coincide with the essence of his nature (his motive).

To illustrate, the case of the neurotic, anti-social person might be cited. There are people who lash out at society, their ostensible purpose being estrangement from society. But psychologists have pointed out that often their real need, the condition that basically drives them to their actions, is just the opposite--a need to be loved, to be accepted. Thus, an agent's purpose might be estrangement, while his motive is connection.

Having taken the terms apart to a certain extent to examine them more closely, it should be remembered that the terms are inextricably bound up with one another, constantly acting and reacting with each other. In his discussion of the range of all the terms, Burke reminds us that

There is, of course, a circular possibility in the terms. If an agent acts in keeping with his nature as an agent (act-agent ratio), he may change the nature of the scene accordingly (scene-act ratio), and thereby establish a state of unity between himself and his world (scene-agent ratio). Or the scene may call for a certain kind of act, which makes for a corresponding kind of agent, thereby likening agent to scene. Or our act may change us and our scene, producing a mutual conformity. Such would be the Edenic paradigm, applicable if we were capable of total acts that produce total transformations. In reality, we are capable of but partial acts, acts that but partially represent us and that produce but partial transformations. Indeed, if all the agents were adjusted to one another with perfect Edenic symmetry, they would be immutable in one unending "moment."¹⁷

¹⁷Burke, A Grammar of Motives, p. 19.

CHAPTER III

A THEATRICAL PHILOSOPHY OF THE PENTAD

The broad principles of Kenneth Burke's critical system have been examined in previous chapters. It remains now to apply these principles to a particular casuistry-- to adapt the terms of Burkean criticism to the peculiar problems of theatrical analysis. In fashioning this theatrical application of Burke's terms, it will be necessary to extend them into new areas, or areas not specifically considered by Burke. The problem, then, is to provide a new circumference for the terms of the Pentad, one specifically adapted to the theatrical analysis of plays. This chapter represents a narrowing of the circumference of Burke's terms to fashion a theatrical philosophy of criticism based on his dramatistic critical method.

In many cases, the transition from the use of the terms in a synoptic circumference (the terms as principles) to their use in a casuistic circumference (the application of the principles to specific cases of conduct) can be accomplished easily because the function of the terms in

their casuistic setting will be similar to their function in the synoptic setting. In other instances, the placing of the terms in a theatrical context requires a complex transition.

Scene

The scene has been defined previously as the context in which something happens, the container in which something is contained. In an obvious application of the term in the theater, scene would correspond to the stage setting or scenery which serves as a physical container for the action on stage.

It is possible, however, to find other meaningful applications of the term, applications which extend beyond the mere physical environment of the action. When a new character comes on stage, for instance, an adjustment or change is made in the scenic context. With the arrival of the new character, the other characters must adjust to new motives, new information and new ideas, in short, to a new scene. Sometimes this adjustment can be a drastic one, as in a situation where the characters on stage have been talking about the new arrival. For example, in Congreve's The Way of the World, Mirabell can say of Mrs. Millimant

before she is close enough to hear; "Here she comes, i'faith, full sail, with her fan spread and her streamers out, and a shoal of fools for tenders. Ha, no, I cry her mercy!" In the next instant, because of Mrs. Millimant's presence, she shifts from ridicule to polite speech and says, "You seem to be unattended, madam--you used to have the beau monde throng after you; and a flock of gay fine perukes hovering around you."¹

The change in manner and imagery is obvious. Mirabell, in shifting her attitude, was, in essence, adjusting to a new scenic context created by the arrival of Mrs. Millimant. Thus, each time a character enters or leaves the stage, the scenic context of the situation can be changed. Burke's term scene, then, can apply to this variable, human, sociological environment of a dramatic event.

Scene might also relate to the broad cultural environment in which a given theatrical event exists, an environment often as important to the understanding of that event as any of its internal aspects. That the cultural assumptions of an age influence the nature of the play and

¹William Congreve, "The Way of the World," in Four Great Comedies of the Restoration and 18th Century (New York, 1958), p. 115.

its reception by an audience is generally accepted by scholars in the theatrical field. The content of Greek tragedy was, in large part, decreed by the religious and political concepts that characterized the classical scene. For example, Randolph Goodman, in an introduction to Medea, has this to say about Euripides's success as a playwright,

The reason why the judges ignored him is clear: Euripides did not cater to the prejudices of the Athenian crowd.

He did not approve of the superstitions and follies, its social injustices or its moral standards.²

The "superstitions and follies," "social injustices," and "moral standards" of a society help to make up the cultural scene of a drama, a scene with which an author must find rapport.

How an author reveals the action of a play also depends on the cultural values of his time. Sophocles, for example, had to destroy Oedipus or go against the whole mythical base of his society. In Sophocles's culture, the gods were omnipotent and a man, whether a king or a slave, was at their mercy. Euripides, in ignoring or satirizing the cultural values of his time, was a cultural rebel. As such,

²Randolph Goodman, Drama on Stage (New York, 1961), p. 1.

he sacrificed a portion of his appeal to his culturally-bound audiences. Sophocles, on the other hand, used the cultural scene as an aid by revealing the action in terms of the cultural expectations of his audience.

The importance of the cultural scene to the theatrical event is brought out forcefully by Francis Fergusson in the following discussion of the difference between Elizabethan theater and the contemporary dramatic event.

Hamlet (in the charge to the players) was referring to the drama he knew, and to the theatre in which it had its life. He assumed the symbolic stage of the Elizabethans and, behind it, the traditional scene of human life which the stage itself represented; the starry firmament above, the stagehouse facade which could indicate various versions of the human city--market-place or court or castle; and the platform for the players, from which the trap door opened down into Hell or the cellar. If he could ask the players to hold the mirror up to nature, it was because the Elizabethan theatre was itself a mirror which had been formed at the center of the culture of its time, and at the center of the life and awareness of the community.³

To Fergusson, the strength of the Elizabethan Theater lay in its vivid, basic understanding of the cultural scene. Regardless of one's assessment of Fergusson's conclusion, the fact of the close association between the cultural scene and the theatrical event in any age seems obvious.

³Francis Fergusson, The Idea of a Theatre (Garden City, 1955), p. 15.

The theatrical conventions of an age, arising out of the cultural scene, also serve as a scenic context of a theatrical event. To illustrate how theatrical conventions can play a scenic role in an action on the stage, consider the convention of the "aside." In a play in which asides are used, the audience has to accept the convention that lines directed to them cannot be heard by the other characters on the stage. In the case of this convention, two scenic perspectives coalesce. The external scenic context, which includes the relationship between the play and the audience, and the internal context, which includes the relationships among the characters in the play, operate openly in the action. The characters speak directly to the audience in an aside which the other characters cannot hear, while, at the same time, they carry on a conversation with the other characters. Thus, the audience must maintain two scenes side by side in their consciousness. In those theatrical eras in which the aside flourished, this was a perfectly simple thing for audiences to understand since the convention was part of the larger cultural scene in which the play was presented.

Now that the scenic perspectives of a theatrical event have been described from a Burkean standpoint, it

remains to relate the Burkean term to the traditional theatrical term, scene. The traditional theatrical term is related to the Pentadic term in the sense that each new scene is a rearrangement of the scenic context. A conventional scene, for instance, might apply to the Pentadic scene in the sense of a change in the physical setting. The commonly recognized "French scene" applies in the sense of a change in the human environment of the scene--the introduction, or departure, of a character. A scene might also indicate just a passage of time, with all the other scenic elements remaining the same. This would apply to the Burkean usage inasmuch as it represents an adjustment of the conventions which form the scenic context. The audience would accept the interruption of the action as an indication of the passage of time.

By way of summary it may be said that the Pentadic term, scene, as applied to a play, refers to the context of an event on the stage from its usual expression as the setting of the scene, through its human, sociological expression in the scenic aspect of the characters on stage, to its broadest application on the level of the theatrical conventions and cultural assumptions upon which the play is based.

Act

Conflict, the essential element in a dramatic situation, is engendered by the coming together of mutually destructive forces or purposes. In a conflict situation there must be motives or drives which are advanced in spite of opposition. This purposeful effort on the part of agents in the drama constitutes action. The action of the play is, in essence, the combination of all the purposeful efforts which are contained in the form. The action, then, is what the play is about. It was pointed out in the preceding chapter that Burke views the motive in a form as the essence or generating principle of the form. Thus, in this theatrical philosophy of the Pentad, the action of a play might conceivably be viewed as the play's motive or generating principle. To understand the full Burkean scope of the term action and its basic ingredient, act, it is necessary to examine the term in its traditional theatrical context.

In the appendix of The Idea of a Theatre, Francis Fergusson makes a significant contribution to the understanding of the nature of theatrical action. In this discussion, Fergusson emphasizes the difference between action and plot. It will be useful to consider the following excerpt:

Aristotle offers a general definition of plot--the arrangement, or synthesis, of the incidents--but he offers no definition of action. I have already recorded my view that "action" is an analogical concept and that it can therefore only be understood with reference to particular actions. In this study the word refers to the action of which the play is an imitation; to the mimetic acts of the dramatist--plot-making, characterization, and speech--whereby he makes the play; and to the mimetic acts of the performers who reproduce, in the medium of their own beings, individual or characterized versions of the action the author had in mind. Thus the whole book is a study of action in some of its many modes; and at this point I propose to let the instances stand in place of a general definition. If the reader wishes to consider the difficulty of a univocal definition of this term, he is invited to read the symposium entitled "What is Action?" held in 1938 by the British Aristotelian Society. Professors MacMurray, Franks and Ewing read papers; they all saw the distinction between action and the events in which it is manifested; and they all agreed upon the fundamental importance of the concept. But they did not produce a definition which would help us much. It is interesting to note that none of them mentioned the art of imitating action.

If action cannot be abstractly defined, of what use is the concept in the study of the dramatic arts? It is to be used to indicate the direction which an analysis of a play should take. It points to the object which the dramatist is trying to show us, and we must in some sense grasp that if we are to understand his complex art For this purpose practical rules may be devised, notably that of the Moscow Art Theatre. They say that the action of a character or a play must be indicated by an infinitive phrase, e. g., in the play Oedipus, "to find the culprit." This device does not amount to a definition but it leads the performer to the particular action which the author intended. Thus whether one is interested in the arts of the dramatist or the arts of the performer, the distinction between plot and action is essential.⁴

⁴Fergusson, The Idea of a Theatre, pp. 243-44.

Not only Stanislavsky, as Fergusson suggests, but a number of contemporary American directors consider the finding of the action of a play a necessary first step in producing the play.⁵ Finding the essence or super-objective of a play, to Stanislavsky, was as important as finding essence of a character. The actor had to find the super-objective of a character in order to bring him to life, and the director had to find the super-objective of the play in order to bring it to life. Stanislavsky discovered that the essence of a character was what made him act; the motive or generating principle of the character. Thus, if an actor could find that, and state it in an action phrase, he would have found the key to his character. Stanislavsky followed the same procedure in finding the essence of the plays. His objective was to find the generating principle of the play, and state it in an action phrase. It can be seen, then, that Burke, in calling the essence of a form its motive, has followed Stanislavski's theatrical approach and line of thought in his own critical system.

It will be remembered that in the discussion of the

⁵See Harold Clurman, The Fervent Years: The Story of the Group Theatre and the Thirties (New York, 1945); Robert Lewis, Method or Madness (New York, 1958); Charles McGaw, Acting is Believing (New York, 1955).

synoptic circumference of motive, it was pointed out that the motive in a form could be seen as both cause and effect of the form--both what causes the form to happen and what is discovered because of the form. The form illustrates the motive and, in turn, is a result of the motive. It might be noted at this point that Fergusson describes action as "the object which the dramatist is trying to show us," and to recall that Stanislavsky calls it the generating force in a character or a play. Thus, in this theatrical circumference of the terms, their concept of action would appear to perform the same function as the Burkean concept of motive. Action takes on, in terms of the theater, all the qualities which accrued to motive in the synoptic placement. The action of a play, then, is its generating principle--what causes the play to happen, and what is discovered as a result of the play.

Thus, a play is a series of events which illustrate an action, with the events existing for the sake of the action. Or, as Aristotle said it,

Tragedy is essentially an imitation not of persons but of action and life, of happiness and misery. All human happiness or misery takes the form of action; the end for which we live is a certain kind of activity, not a quality. Character gives us qualities, but it is in our actions--what we do--that we are happy or the reverse. In a play accordingly they do not act in

order to portray the Characters. They include the Characters for the sake of the action. So that it is the action in it . . . that is the end and purpose of the tragedy; and the end is everywhere the chief thing.⁶

In essence, then, the end, or super-objective, or motive, of a play is its action. The characters and events in a play exist in order to reveal the action.

It will be remembered that the synoptic placement of the term act stressed the element of purpose as being essential to an act. The difference between action and motion being that an act is purposeful. In a play, characters, acting in response to their motives, purposefully try to accomplish their goals. It was pointed out in Chapter II that purposeful efforts are the result of decisions. The action of a play, therefore, can be seen as attempts on the part of the characters to reach decisions which will resolve the conflict in accordance with their basic desires. Each decision is an act which leads the characters closer to the resolution of the conflict.

The action of a play, then, is a decision-making process consisting of a series of minor decisions which cul-

⁶W. Rhys Roberts and Ingram Bywater, Aristotle's Rhetoric and Poetics (New York, 1954), p. 231.

minate in a major decision which resolves the conflict of the play. Each of these minor decisions involves a separate decision-making process; yet, each of the decisions is an act, and each of the decision-making processes connected with the act becomes an action.

To illustrate the nature of one of these minor cycles of action, it will be helpful to examine an example from an actual play. Just before Oedipus's confrontation of the shepherd in Sophocles's play, there is a small but important action between Oedipus and Jocasta. In it, Jocasta attempts to persuade her husband not to question the shepherd or pursue the quest further. The Chorus introduces the action by stating that Jocasta can identify the shepherd. Oedipus questions Jocasta and this minor cycle of action begins. Jocasta replies by saying, "Who is the man? What matter? Let it be. 'Twere waste of thought to weigh such idle words." The argument continues, building in intensity until Oedipus dismisses Jocasta's pleading with, "I grow impatient of this best advice." At this point, Jocasta has been defeated, and she leaves off her pleading saying, "Ah, mayst thou ne'er discover who thou art!" Oedipus angrily sends her away and she exits with these words: "O woe is thee, poor wretch! With that last word I leave thee, henceforth silent ever-

more." And Jocasta is not seen again. As if to signal the end of this cycle of action, the chorus picks up the questioning which leads to the next action with the herdsman. In this brief action all of the formal elements which occur in the root action of Oedipus's quest can be found. There is conflict between Jocasta's desire for Oedipus to give up the search and his determination to continue. The resolution occurs when Oedipus makes clear that he will continue and Jocasta leaves, defeated. This brief sequence can be seen as a play in miniature.

Each play, then, has a root action, a basic conflict which is resolved by the act of the play. The play also has a series of minor actions, each of which is resolved by an act (a decision on the part of one or more characters). The act of the play is the key moment of the play, the moment for which the play was written. The act of the play is the decision which is the culmination of the total cumulative decision-making process, or action.

Agent

Agent is the term applied to an individual locus of motives which engages in acts in pursuit of a conscious or subconscious goal. The term Agent includes within its

scope the traditional term, Character; but, depending on the circumference in which the term is applied, it also could include other forces. One view of Oedipus, for instance, might hold that the oracle becomes the agent in the sense that it purposefully controls the action.

Each agent in a play has his own private scenic circumference which he may or may not share with the other characters in the play. This disparate view of the scenic situation is often an important factor in understanding a character's acts in relation to those of the other characters. In Hamlet, for instance, Ophelia's scenic circumference is tragically limited. Her private scene is one of love. She loves Hamlet, and she believes he loves her. The scene is lyrical. It reflects a lover's painful, poignant misunderstanding, rather than a scene of black devastation in which a whole kingdom and many lives hang in the balance. Polonius, her father, is playing, however incompetently, on the vast chessboard of state politics. He sees the scene as an incipient power struggle. The King, on the other hand, is preparing for a battle for survival. His guilt makes the scene extremely disquieting and dangerous. Hamlet's private scene is blackened and embittered by his disillusionment over a fallen mother and his commitment to revenge.

All of these aspects of the scenic context are unknown to Ophelia; thus her actions are pathetically inappropriate. She is totally unprepared to cope with the total situation because she does not see it. Her scene is completely unreal. She is, in a sense, disconnected from her environment, and when incomprehensible events fall one upon the other, the detachment becomes complete and she wanders into madness and death.

Another use of the term, agent, is that of identifying the dramatic alignment in a play. When the elemental conflict in a play is represented by an agent/counter-agent relationship, the terms include within their range the traditional protagonist/antagonist dichotomy. Thus, Hamlet might be considered the agent of the play with Claudius being the counter-agent.

The agent might also evoke an inanimate counter-agent. The counter-agent then becomes a kind of reflexive aspect of the agent. In Riders to the Sea, for instance, Maurya's counter-agent is the sea. The sea is not intrinsically capable of functioning as a counter-agent, because it is incapable of purposeful action. But Maurya has "created" it as a counter-agent because she conceives of the sea as her opponent. In Maurya's mind, the sea is a

conscious, purposeful agent which has taken her family away from her. The sea, therefore, exists symbolically as a locus of motives. It acts upon Maurya. It is an agent; in this instance, a counter-agent.

Agency

An agency is the instrument with which an act is performed. The nature of the agency is dependent on the agent in that the agent provides the motive force for the agency. Depending on the circumference of the terms, an agency could be an instrument of an agent within a play, or it could be an instrument of the action. In this instance, the motive force for the instrument is provided by the creator of the form, the playwright.

The most obvious usage of the term would be to represent agency as the instrument by which the agent of the action tries to accomplish his act. In Othello, for instance, the handkerchief is the instrument by which Iago is able to convince the Moor of Desdemona's infidelity.

An example of the agency as instrument of the action can be found in the artistic conventions of some plays. There are instances in which a mistaken identity, or an

overheard conversation, serves as the instrument which enables the action to be revealed. Another example of this kind of instrument would be a super-agent such as the gods in Oedipus. In this instance, the agency (the Oracle), with the circumference expanded to encompass the whole play, functions as an important instrument in the resolution of the conflict in the play.

Finally, it will be useful to discuss a further refinement of the relationship between the agent and the agency. The quality of the agency is determined by the skill of the agent. Thus, the quality of the sword as an agency depends on the swordsmanship of the agent who wields it. The quality of the handkerchief as an agency in Othello depends on the persuasive skill of Iago.

Agency, then, is the instrument which the agent uses in accomplishing his purpose.

Purpose

In terms of a theatrical philosophy of the Pentad, purpose is the most difficult of the five terms with which to deal. In order to fashion a working application of the term to the problems of theatrical analysis, it will be

necessary to identify the distinction which Burke implies when considering purpose and motive.

In A Grammar of Motives, Burke experiences difficulty with the concept of purpose. He states,

All told, of the five terms, Purpose has become the one most susceptible of dissolution . . .

The fact that, in mysticism, Purpose is made absolute, always complicates matters by requiring us to lose purpose at the very moment when we find it. For as we have already noted, doctrines of absolute purpose lead into doctrines of mechanism, since the perfect regularity of nature (such as a thoroughly mechanical universe would exemplify) could be taken to indicate the "design" of its Creator.⁷

Inherent in the idea of purpose is the idea of choice. A man who acts purposefully chooses a course of action in accordance with that purpose. But, if purpose is made absolute, then a man has no choice in his actions. Absolute purpose would lead to acts on the part of man which were not purposeful. If man acts in accordance with a "grand design," then he does not have the freedom of making his own decisions. He is purposeless in the clutches of a grand purpose.

It is not possible, however, to eliminate the idea of an absolute motive force, especially when dealing with

⁷Burke, A Grammar of Motives, p. 289.

an artistic form. The characters in a play, for instance, are driven by the requirements of the action. The form in which artistic agents exist exerts absolute control over their actions. On the other hand, to fully understand and appreciate artistic agents, it is necessary to view them as purposive. They are capable of making decisions and, especially in modern theatrical forms, of controlling their destiny.

It was pointed out in the previous chapter how a man might act from conscious purposes which are in opposition to his basic motivation. Thus, it would seem necessary to make some distinction between such basic motivation and purpose. In the analysis undertaken in subsequent chapters, a distinction will be made between purpose and motive. Motive, as has been pointed out, is the generating principle of a form. In terms of the theater, motive can be equated with the play's action. In the broadest sense, motive can be equated with absolute purpose. Purpose, on the other hand, identifies the conscious effort on the part of an agent to strive for a specific or immediate goal. In the large circumference of the literary act (the whole play), purpose can be seen as the objective or goal of the playwright. A statement of the playwright's purpose might be

fashioned which would say little about the action of the play. Purpose, then, would include within its scope what has sometimes been called the "theme statement" of the play. Thus, a theme statement about Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman might state, "A materialistic view of life is destructive." This kind of "moralizing" about the play has little to do with the play itself, its form, its structure, the nature of its symbolic statement, its generating principle. A statement describing the action of the play (a much more difficult statement to fashion) might read, "A man, struggling to maintain the validity of his vision of life, carries the struggle to the point of self-destruction." The latter statement, regardless of its validity, is an attempt to identify the action of the play. The former, on the other hand, is a statement about a cultural or sociological objective of the playwright. It is a rhetorical judgment based on the action, rather than a statement of the action.

Narrowing the circumference to the province of the agent as a character in a play, purpose would apply to the conscious goals of the agent, goals which may or may not coincide with the agent's basic motivation. For instance, Blanche's revulsion for Stanley in A Streetcar Named Desire is really a way of expressing her basic need for "connec-

tion." Thus, her conscious goals reflect just the opposite motive.

The agent, then, controls his purpose, at a given moment, but his motive controls him.

Burkean Poetics and the Formal Elements of the Play

Now that the tools of analysis, the Pentad, have been defined in terms of their theatrical application, it remains to bring the philosophical framework of Burkean criticism into a theatrical perspective. Burke's idea of the nature of the artistic form must be equated to theatrical concepts of form and their terminology. It is necessary to consider aspects of an artistic form on the basis of the Burkean conception of poetics. Until the publication of A Symbolic of Motives, the full Burkean treatment of this vital subject will not be available. This discussion, then, is based on aspects of the Symbolic which are implicit in the books already published or which can be culled from Burke's lectures and articles on the subject.⁸

⁸See especially, Kenneth Burke, "Othello: An Essay to Illustrate a Method," Hudson Review, IV (Summer, 1951), 165-203; Kenneth Burke, "Fact, Inference, and Proof in the Analysis of Literary Symbolism," in Symbols and Values: An

If, as has been suggested, a play is a process, a series of happenings which contribute to, and culminate in, a single happening, then it should be helpful to be able to discover and identify significant moments in the process. In the series of events which is the play, there are certain events which are of particular significance in the unfolding of the action. Since Burke's critical system is designed for the greater understanding of a form, it follows that it should be helpful to identify these moments.

In the discussion of act, it was suggested that a play is an action, a decision-making process; the root action of the play being the major decision-making process which includes several minor actions. At the heart of each action is a significant moment, a moment of decision. Since each of these decisions should, in a coherent play, be related to the root action, it is important to establish the individual decision's precise relation to the major decision-making process.

The purpose of this discussion is to provide names

Initial Study, eds. Lyman Bryson et al. (New York, 1954), pp. 283-306. The writer has also engaged in personal conversation and correspondence with Mr. Burke on these matters.

and definitions, based on Burkean poetics, for critical moments which occur in a play.⁹ One of the significant moments in a play is that at which the action begins--the moment when the contending forces in the conflict of the play are set in motion. It may occur after the play itself has begun; or, in certain instances, it may be antecedent to the play. There is usually, however, some identifiable moment when the dialectic of the dramatic situation is set up. This is the moment Lawson calls the Inciting Incident--the moment that incites the forces of the play to contention.

Another moment critical to a play's action is the moment after which the contending forces in the play are committed to a showdown. While it is possible to conceive of forces which clash but never reach a showdown, it is a foregone conclusion that when contending forces in a play engage they will battle to a finish. In spite of the fact that a showdown is implicit in the artistic form, there is usually a moment in the play when this fact is made explicit. This moment has been identified as the crisis. In a classical tragedy, with its strong sense of inevitability, this

⁹Theatrical terms and concepts from John Howard Lawson, Theory and Technique of Playwriting (New York, 1960).

moment occurs very early. In a modern drama, it may not occur until immediately before the showdown.

There is often a moment in the play which immediately precipitates the resolution of the conflict. Although the action has been committed to a showdown by the crisis, the exact moment of the showdown is decreed by the catas- trophe. For example, in Oedipus, although the necessity for a showdown is made apparent by Teiresias's testimony, the actual moment of resolution was brought about by the testimony of the shepherd. Although after the crisis (Teiresias's testimony) it is apparent that Oedipus is fighting the gods, Oedipus is able to hope for a favorable solution until the shepherd's testimony (the catastrophe) provides the final and totally destructive evidence. This usage of the term catastrophe is not to be confused with the Aristotelian usage in the analysis of the form of classical drama. The crisis and the catastrophe may occur simultaneously; that is, the same moment may accomplish both jobs.

Finally, there is the moment, in terms of which we have identified all the others, when the resolution of the root action occurs. This moment is the climax. The climax, the moment of resolution, is the most important moment in

the play. It is the moment of "transcendence" when the warring factions of the dialectic of the play are put to rest. This moment infuses the whole play, and becomes characteristic of it. If one were to try to state the whole play (actually an impossibility unless one were to present the whole play) it would have to be done in terms of this moment of transcendence. In terms of Burke's concept of identification, the climax would be seen as the moment of ultimate identification in the play's hierarchical decision-making process. Each decision in the play is a moment which resolves a conflict and leads to a higher level of conflict. Also, the minor conflicts are constantly motivated by the highest level of conflict in the play, the root action, which, itself, is resolved by the moment of ultimate identification or climax. Insofar as the minor conflicts are not motivated by the root action, the play can be said to lack unity of action.

To understand this Burkean vision of artistic form, it might be helpful to view the conflict-resolution process of a play as a direct analogy to the identification process. Identification, as has been pointed out earlier, is a process and a structure. It is the process by which one resolves conflicts by moving to a higher level of generaliza-

tion which can encompass within its scope the warring factions on the level beneath it. It is also a structure in which the dialectical nature of substance can be plotted and resolved. At the top of this structure is the promise of ultimate identification which infuses the whole structure, and acts as a motivating agent in man's effort to transcend himself symbolically. The play is also a conflict-resolution structure, which progresses toward its ultimate resolution in the climactic moment of the play. The basic motivating element in the play form, as in the identification hierarchy, is the root action. At the top of this artistic structure is the moment of ultimate transcendence, the climax, which infuses the whole structure with its promise of ultimate resolution.

Perhaps the most significant aspect of Burke's whole "poetic" stance is his position on the nature of the work of art as a symbolic transcendence. The moment of transcendence in the tragic form corresponds, in Burke's formulation, to the Aristotelian concept of catharsis. In A Grammar of Motives, Burke provides this statement of what happens in a tragedy,

The action organizes the resistant factors, which call forth the passion; and the moment of transcendence arises when the sufferer (who had originally

seen things in unenlightened terms) is enabled to see in more comprehensive terms, modified by his suffering.¹⁰

To Burke, this moment of transcendence is at the center of an artistic form. Like a "God" term, it comes to stand for all that is in the form at the moment of transcendence. He tells us,

Insofar as either history or the work of art obeys a guiding principle of development, the nature of the motivation at any one point is "substantially" the same as at any other point. The ending is implicit in the beginning. And so, all the changing details are infused by an "eternal now."¹¹

The explication of this statement will serve as a summary of all that has been said in this section on Burkean poetics. The climax, or moment of transcendence, as the God term for the form in which it occurs, is the key to the structure of the whole decision-making process which it heads. When the climax is reached in a play, it immediately expands to encompass the whole form. Everything becomes meaningful in terms of the climax. Thus, although the observer is aware of some organizing process which causes events in the play to happen the way they do, the nature of the process is not clear until the moment of transformation

¹⁰Burke, A Grammar of Motives, p. 264.

¹¹Ibid., p. 259.

occasioned by the climax. Then the climax reveals the action which has served as the basic motive force in the play, and which can be seen in every event of the play. With the climax, the action of the play is given symbolic existence because, before the climax, the root action existed only as contending forces. With the symbolic resolution provided by the climax, these forces are transcended and subsumed under one "name." In Burkean terms: the ultimate level of the hierarchical structure of the form has been reached, and the whole structure is revealed. The play becomes a complete symbolic statement.

The Critical Position: A Summation

Having examined Burke's critical precepts, and having equated them to traditional theatrical terms and concepts, it now remains to apply the critical position which has evolved.

Burke's Pentad can be seen as a tool for examining the relationships among the elements of the play form for the purpose of better understanding that form. Viewing the play through the Pentadic perspectives (act, scene, agent, agency, purpose) will reveal these relationships. They, in

turn, will be examined from the viewpoint of Burkean poetics-- an approach to the drama based on the concepts of identification and dramatistic criticism.

In applying the Burkean philosophy of criticism, each play will be placed on two levels. The first, and least important for the purposes of this study, will be the external placement which establishes the play in terms of extrinsic factors. These would include information about the author, and the play's relationship to the cultural context. This level will be dealt with as briefly as possible. The second level of application will involve internal placement, in which the terms of the Pentad are used to examine the relationships within the play.

The play being a symbolic act on the part of the playwright, it is intended, in the analyses which follow, to examine that act in order to discover its unique nature in the vast universe of the drama.

CHAPTER IV

A PENTADIC ANALYSIS OF OEDIPUS THE KING

Sophocles's Oedipus the King is for us, as it was for Aristotle, a prototype of the classical tragedy. As such, it provides an excellent starting place for the application of Burkean criticism to the analysis of plays. Classical tragedy, which is characterized by the overriding importance of action and a relative simplicity of form, lends itself well to the illustration of the function of the Pentad in play analysis.

The Scene

The opening lines of Oedipus are full of scenic import. The suppliants are gathered in lamentation around the altar. Oedipus enters with this question,

My children, latest born to Cadmus old,
Why sit ye here as suppliants, in your hands
Branches of olive filleted with wool?
What means this reek of incense everywhere,
And everywhere laments and litanies?¹

¹F. Storr, Sophocles, Vol. I (New York, 1919), p. 7. This is a rather literal translation with Greek text on facing page.

Physically, the scene is set by these opening words. A group of suppliants (the chorus) are looking to Oedipus for relief from their suffering. In addition to this aspect of the scenic context, these lines pose a question, the key question of the whole play. Why is the city in despair, blighted, and punished by the gods? The Priest answers Oedipus with a description of the whole scenic circumference of the play, starting with the immediate group gathered around the altar, and extending out to encompass the whole kingdom.

Yea, Oedipus, my sovereign lord and king,
 Thou seest how both extremes of age besiege
 Thy palace altars--fledglings hardly winged,
 And greybeards bowed with years; priests as am I
 Of Zeus, and these the flower of our youth.
 Meanwhile, the common folk, with wreathed boughs
 Crowd our two market places, or before
 Both shrines of Pallas congregate, or where
 Ismenus gives his oracles by fire.
 For, as thou seest thyself, our ship of State,
 Sore buffeted, can no more lift her head,
 Foundered beneath a weltering surge of blood.
 A blight is on our harvest in the ear,
 A blight upon the grazing flocks and herds,
 A blight on wives in travail; and withal
 Armed with his blazing torch the God of Plague
 Hath swooped down upon our city emptying
 The house of Cadmus, and the murky realm
 Of Pluto is full fed with groans and tears.²

The Priest goes on to explain that not only the suppliants, but the whole kingdom is waiting for Oedipus, as

²Ibid., p. 9.

the king, to do something about these afflictions. Oedipus must provide the answer to the mystery. Oedipus must solve the riddle posed by these evidences of the wrath of the gods. While the scene is one of despair and great misfortune, it is also one of mystery. A mystery is created by the fact that every aspect of the scene leads back to the question, "Why?" This question is the essential element of the scene. The scene is a riddle which must be solved if the kingdom is to be released from its agony.

Scene-agent ratio

In the center of this riddle is Oedipus, the riddle-solver. In addition, Creon returns from the Oracle at Delphos and, by articulating its pronouncement, emphasizes the riddle which confronts Oedipus. If Oedipus can discover who killed King Laius, he will have solved the riddle and the kingdom will be rid of its blight. This he resolves to do, and referring to his previous success in solving the riddle of the Sphinx, he says,

Well, I will start afresh and once again
Make dark things clear.³

Oedipus, then, is the riddle-solver in a scene which is a riddle. He is faced with a situation similar to the

³Ibid., p. 17.

one which elevated him to prominence in Thebes. He had become king by virtue of solving the riddle of the Sphinx; to remain king, he must solve this new riddle which confronts his kingdom. The situation is clearly stated by the Priest, who cries out,

Upraise, O chief of men, upraise our State!
 Look to thy laurels! for thy zeal of yore
 Our country's saviour thou art justly hailed:
 O never may we thus record thy reign:--
 "He raised us up only to cast us down."
 Uplift us, build our city on a rock.
 Thy happy star ascendant brought us luck,
 O let it not decline! If thou wouldst rule
 This land as now thou reignest, better sure
 To rule a peopled than a deserted realm.
 Nor battlements nor galleys aught avail,
 If men to man and guards to guard them fail.⁴

It is made increasingly clear that to preserve his status as king, Oedipus, the agent, must solve the riddle. But as agent, Oedipus exists in his scenic context, as do all men, on a number of levels. In his case, the other levels are all dependent on his being Laius's proper successor. At one point Oedipus is moved to say,

And now that I am lord,
 Successor to his throne, his bed, his wife,
 (And had he not been frustrate in the hope
 Of issue, common children of one womb
 Had forged a closer bond twixt him and me,
 But Fate swooped down upon him), therefore I
 His blood-avenger will maintain his cause
 As though he were my sire, and leave no stone

⁴Ibid., p. 11.

Unturned to track the assassin or avenge
 The son of Labdacus, of Polydore,
 Of Cadmus, and Agenor first of the race.⁵

It is ironic that Oedipus is able to cite the lineage of Laius, while his own is a mystery. He is unable to say with certainty anything about his own roots. His very origin is a riddle.

In order to clarify this peculiar relationship between the agent and the scene, it is only necessary to recall that the agent, Oedipus, exists by virtue of his being a King, a husband, a father, and a "riddle-solver." The text, quoted above, makes clear that the agent exists in his scenic context because he is all the things in this equation.

The supreme irony of the action is that by the very act of preserving his scenic identity (agent-scene ratio) through solving the riddle, Oedipus destroys every other element of the equation. Thus, at the end of the play, Oedipus is morally neither husband, father, nor king. The result is that there is no possible adjustment of the ratio that could contain him at the end. There is no role left for him to play and, as a result, he cannot relate to the scene at all. He is symbolically dead. Thus, a mighty act

⁵Ibid., p. 27.

of self-preservation leads to symbolic suicide. Oedipus is doomed to wander blind in a wilderness unable to relate to any scene at all.

Scene-act ratio

Oedipus's decision to solve the riddle leads to the act of the play, the solving of the riddle. Oedipus's purpose is "to solve the riddle." The process by which the riddle is solved is the action of the play. Oedipus's concern is to preserve his scenic status by preserving himself as an agent in this particular scene. The decision to solve the riddle is an ironic one, however, since it leads to his destruction. As far as the agent is concerned, the act is incompatible with the scene because it leads to the destruction of all the scenic contexts in which he can exist. The act leads to the destruction of Oedipus's scene. Because the agent cannot exist without a scene, the act also leads to the destruction of the agent.

Oedipus's decision to solve the riddle was based on an inadequate comprehension of the scene. Later, at the climax of the action, the moment of transcendence, Oedipus obtains a new and fuller comprehension of himself and his scene. He becomes aware of the scene in a larger circum-

ference, as a result of the act. Consequently, he cries out in response to the chorus,

Apollo, friends, Apollo, he it was
That brought these illis to pass;⁶

Thus there is a point at which Oedipus becomes aware of the "ritualistic" scene in which the gods have decreed a ritual sacrifice of the agent. The resolution of the action has led him to a new vision of the scene, or, as Burke states the nature of classical tragedy,

The action organizes the resistant factors, which call forth the passion; and the moment of transcendence arises when the sufferer (who had originally seen things in unenlightened terms) is enabled to see in more comprehensive terms, modified by his suffering.⁷

Scene-agency ratio

Since it serves a vital function in helping to delineate the scene, the Oracle can be seen as the instrument or agency of the action. For example, after Creon returns with the pronouncement of the Oracle, the scene becomes dominated by the riddle. In fact, Oedipus has used the Oracle for this very purpose. By sending Creon to the Oracle, he hoped to get a better understanding of the situa-

⁶Ibid., p. 123.

⁷Burke, A Grammar of Motives, p. 264.

tion in order to formulate his strategy. In addition, Oedipus also calls upon Teiresias to interpret the Oracle. Teiresias then acts as an extension of the Oracle and delineates the context of the situation further. He functions as an agency of Oedipus as Oedipus attempts to solve the riddle. Reflexively, Teiresias also functions as an agency of the gods in the ritualistic scene, or ritualistic circumference of the play. Teiresias does, in fact, help Oedipus to accomplish his purpose (to solve the riddle) while, at the same time, as an agency of the gods, he acts against Oedipus in the latter's struggle to maintain his status as agent.

Scene-purpose ratio

The scene is one in which a riddle demands a solution. It is this scenic situation which prompts Oedipus's decision to solve the riddle. Thus the scene, combined with the agent's necessity of preserving his scenic status as king, father, husband, and riddle-solver brings forth the agent's purpose, "to solve the riddle." It has been pointed out, however, that the play exists in a larger, ritualistic scenic circumference; a circumference in which purpose can be seen in a different light. In this ritualistic scene

which reveals the action of the gods in the affairs of men, purpose can be seen as the objective, or theme, of the whole play. In this larger circumference, one might describe the purpose by using the infinitive phrase "to reveal the fact of the omnipotence of the gods over man."

What happens to Oedipus in the play becomes meaningful in terms of this larger circumference of the scene-purpose ratio. Indeed, the destruction of Oedipus would be inexplicable if the action was not seen in the light of the myth-ritual at the base of Greek culture.

The Action

It was pointed out earlier in this study that the action in a play can be seen as a decision-making process--a series of decisions (acts) which lead to the final encompassing act which resolves the conflict of the play. In this section, the act will be examined in terms of its relationship with the other elements of the Pentad.

The act-agent ratio

Oedipus, the agent, being a "riddle-solver," faces the act, which is the solving of the riddle. It has been established that Oedipus must solve the riddle because he

exists in his scenic context by virtue of being the riddle-solver. Ironically, this necessary "decision" leads, in terms of the larger ritualistic circumference, to the destruction of that very existence he is struggling to maintain.

It is interesting to note that the act is "necessary" on two levels. In the narrow circumference of the action in which Oedipus can be seen as an agent struggling to maintain his being, the act is decreed by the interests of the agent. There is, in this circumference, no external compulsive force, no "fate" which directs his actions. Thus, the action, on this level alone, can be viewed as a modern, humanistic statement. In the ritualistic circumference, however, Oedipus can be seen as a helpless victim of the gods, a fated figure led helplessly to destruction; his act having been decreed by the gods. Because both circumferences exist simultaneously in the play, however, neither of these views, alone, represents a true statement of the nature of the action. Since both are true, Oedipus can cry out after his blinding,

Apollo, friends, Apollo, he it was
That brought these ills to pass;
But the right hand that dealt the blow
Was mine, none other.⁸

⁸F. Storr, Sophocles, p. 123.

The act-agency ratio

The Oracle, in its role of agency, can be seen as the instrument used by the gods to precipitate the act.

When Creon returns with the Oracle's pronouncement, he says,

CREON

Before thou didst assume the helm of State,
The sovereign of this land was Laius.

OEDIPUS

I heard as much, but never saw the man.

CREON

He fell; and now the god's command is plain:
Punish his takers-off, whoe'er they be.

OEDIPUS

Where are they? Where in the wide world to find
The far, faint traces of a bygone crime?

CREON

In this land, said the god; "who seeks shall find;
Who sits with folded hands or sleeps is blind."⁹

As an instrument of the gods, the Oracle provides a clear call to action at the same time as it articulates the riddle which explains the scene. Oedipus, informed by the Oracle of the riddle, and directed by the Oracle to solve it, decides to do so, saying,

⁹Ibid., p. 15.

Well, I will start afresh and once again
 Make dark things clear. Right worthy the concern
 Of Phoebus, worthy thine too, for the dead;
 I also, as is meet, will lend my aid
 To avenge this wrong to Thebes and to the god.
 Not for some far-off kinsman, but myself,
 Shall I expel this poison in the blood;
 For who so slew that king might have a mind
 To strike me too with his assassin hand.
 Therefore in righting him I serve myself.
 Up, children, haste ye, quit these altar stairs,
 Take hence your suppliant wands, go summon hither
 The Theban commons. With god's good help
 Success is sure; 'tis ruin if we fail.¹⁰

In keeping with the humanistic circumference of the action, it is important to note that Oedipus does not decide to solve the riddle solely because of the insistence of the Oracle. Personal considerations also come into play. While the Oracle, as an agency of the gods, was responsible for Oedipus deciding to take a certain course of action, it did not force him to do so. Oedipus's decision can be seen as the result of the combination of the Oracle's function and the personal necessity to preserve his scenic status.

The purpose-act ratio

The moment of the play (climax) when the action is resolved (act) is also the moment when the humanistic and ritualistic circumferences come together. As these two planes of reference coalesce, the act of the play accom-

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 18-19.

plishes purpose in both circumferences simultaneously. Thus, the act accomplishes Oedipus's purpose, "to solve the riddle," but at the expense of the destruction of Oedipus. This, in turn, accomplishes the purpose of the ritualistic circumference, namely, to reveal the omnipotence of the gods through the ritual sacrifice of Oedipus.

The purpose-agent ratio

The essence of the agent is his action. It is central to all his wants and drives. Oedipus's purpose is very closely related to this basic drive. Thus, in order to maintain his status as king, husband, and father, Oedipus must solve the riddle which confronts his kingdom. His purpose, "to solve the riddle," arises directly out of his action, "to maintain his status in the scene." In this instance it can be seen that, under Burkean definition, a character's action is more basic than his purpose. Oedipus must maintain himself as king, father, and husband to the queen, or he would have no being in the scene. This, obviously becomes a basic factor in the play. As for solving the riddle, the specific purpose toward which Oedipus directs his energies at decisive moments in the play, it is important to him only insofar as he believes it will aid him

in his action. If he could have maintained his scenic status without solving the riddle, there is the probability it would not have been considered. Thus Oedipus declares,

. . . Right worthy the concern
Of Phoebus, worthy thine too, for the dead;
I also as is meet, will lend my aid
To avenge this wrong to Thebes and to the god.
Not for some far-off kinsman, but myself.¹¹

Ironically, the agent in accomplishing his purpose, frustrates his action and destroys himself as an agent in the scenic context.

The agent also acts upon himself with regard to the ritualistic circumference of the action. Each act Oedipus performed in pursuit of his purpose was also an act in pursuit of the ritualistic purpose of the play. Everything Oedipus does in his effort to solve the riddle and prove himself a worthy king is, at the same time, working to prove him an unworthy king. Every act of self-preservation performed by Oedipus on the humanistic level, is an act of self-destruction on the ritualistic level. Thus, Oedipus, while acting on his own behalf, reflexively is acting against himself.

¹¹Ibid., p. 18.

The agency-agent ratio

The agency is the instrument with which the agent attempts to accomplish his purpose. Oedipus calls upon the Oracle to help him solve the riddle. He calls upon Teiresias, as an extension of the Oracle, to help him interpret it. In the end, the shepherd is called in by Oedipus to complete the solution of the mystery. The Oracle, Teiresias, and the shepherd can all be seen as instruments which Oedipus used in his effort to solve the riddle. Thus they become agencies of the agent. They are at the same time, however, agencies of the gods. They do double duty in that they operate as agencies in both the humanistic and ritualistic circumferences of the action. They work for Oedipus and against him.

It is interesting to note, with regard to Teiresias, that his testimony provides a turning point in the action. Up until Teiresias is persuaded to talk, Oedipus is controlling the action. He is making things happen by pursuing his purpose, thus the action is controlled in the humanistic circumference. After the Seer's testimony, however, the control of the action moves to forces outside the agent, forces which exist in the ritualistic circumference of the action. Oedipus has driven the action to the point where the gods

begin to take over. After Teiresias's testimony, the floodgates are opened and it is inevitable that the riddle will be solved. Oedipus, who has been in command of the action, is caught up short and put off balance by Teiresias. There is little question about who comes out ahead in this, their parting exchange.

OEDIPUS

I knew not thou wouldst utter folly, else
Long hadst thou waited to be summoned here.

TEIRESIAS

Such am I--as it seems to thee a fool,
But to the parents who begat thee, wise.

OEDIPUS

What sayest thou--"parents"? Who begat me, speak?

TEIRESIAS

This day shall be thy birthday, and thy grave.

OEDIPUS

Thou lov'st to speak in riddles and dark words.

TEIRESIAS

In reading riddles who so skilled as thou?

OEDIPUS

Twit me with that wherein my greatness lies.

TEIRESIAS

And yet this very greatness proved thy bane.

OEDIPUS

No matter if I saved the commonwealth.

TEIRESIAS

'Tis time I left thee. Come, boy, take me home.

OEDIPUS

Aye, take him quickly, for his presence irks
And lets me; gone, thou canst not plague me more.

TEIRESIAS

I go, but first will tell thee why I came.
Thy frown I dread not, for thou canst not harm me.
Hear then: . . .¹²

After Teiresias concludes his terrible prophecy, Oedipus has no reply. Thus, the agency of Oedipus is revealed to be an agency of a higher power--a power which seems disquietingly hostile to Oedipus. The action is in the hands of the gods, and the chain of events which Oedipus inaugurated will now drag him to destruction.

The agency-purpose ratio

The agency as an instrument for accomplishing the purpose can be recognized as the Delphic Oracle, which operates in both the humanistic and ritualistic circumference of the action. In the ritualistic circumference, it is the instru-

¹²Storr, Sophocles, p. 43.

ment by which the omnipotence of the gods over man is revealed. In the humanistic circumference, it is the instrument by which Oedipus is enabled to solve the riddle. In this latter circumference, Teiresias, the messenger, and the shepherd can be seen as instruments used by Oedipus to help him discover the answer to the riddle. In a larger sense, however, each of these men represents the Oracle, since they serve to clarify and explicate its pronouncement.

The Anatomy of the Action

Now that the action of the play has been examined from a number of different perspectives, it will be helpful to use the insights gained from this examination to discover the significant moments in the decision-making process.

The first important moment in the action is the one that has been identified previously as the inciting incident, or moment which starts the forces in the play moving toward resolution. In Oedipus, it would seem to be that moment when Oedipus decides that he will solve the riddle posed by the Oracle.

The first exchange between Oedipus and the chorus,

as has been pointed out, is largely scenic in nature. The situation is revealed, the necessity for action made clear. With the arrival of Creon, who brings the pronouncement of the Oracle, the nature of the scene becomes pin-pointed in the riddle and the time for action becomes imminent. Oedipus responds to this further clarification of the scene by rendering a decision to solve the riddle in the speech which begins,

Well, I will start afresh and once again
 Make dark things clear¹³

This is the moment when the forces in the play are set in motion. The reference to his previous success in solving the riddle of the Sphinx, and references to his motives in the speech quoted earlier, make clear that he has arrived at the decision in order to protect his status in Theban society.

Another key moment in the action is the crisis, that moment when the forces in the play are committed irrevocably to a showdown. This is the moment, it will be remembered, when the necessity for resolution, implicit in the form up to now, becomes explicit. In this play, Teiresias's prophecy can be seen as the crisis.

¹³Ibid., p. 17.

It was suggested earlier that Teiresias's testimony caused the action to slip from Oedipus's control. So much was revealed in Teiresias's prophecy that directly concerned Oedipus that he was forced to enquire further, even while aware of the fact that further enquiry could be dangerous. If, however, Teiresias had prevailed in his determination not to tell what he knew about the Oracle's pronouncement, the investigation might have been stopped. The riddle would not have been solved, and Oedipus would not have been destroyed.

It is unnecessary, however, to consider alternatives in order to understand that after Teiresias's pronouncement Oedipus was placed in a defensive position which offered two unattractive alternatives. Either the seer was lying at the behest of Creon, as Oedipus contended, or Oedipus was, indeed, the culprit. Because he could not easily condemn his wife's brother, one of the leading citizens of Thebes, Oedipus was committed to a further investigation of Teiresias's story. Thus, the die was cast; the climax was inevitable.

Another significant moment is the moment that immediately precipitates the resolution of the action. This is the moment which John Howard Lawson has identified as the

catastrophe. Although the certainty of Oedipus's guilt has been building steadily since the scene with Teiresias, he cannot be positively condemned as the murderer of his father and the husband of his mother until the mystery of his origin is cleared up. Jocasta, who knows more of the story than Oedipus, is certain of his guilt before the shepherd arrives. Consequently, she begs him not to take the final step in his investigation. Oedipus persists, however, and the shepherd is brought in to fill in the final pieces in the puzzle. Oedipus is now clearly guilty. This is the moment that precipitates the final agonizing decision of the play. Oedipus roars offstage, discovers the hanging corpse of Jocasta, and, at some point in that brief space of time, all is made clear to him.

This moment of revelation, in which Oedipus sees clearly that he is a sacrifice of the gods, and that he is also responsible, represents the resolution of the action. Here is the key moment of the play. As such, it represents the climax. At the moment of understanding, Oedipus realizes that he is destroyed, that he has been the instrument of his own destruction, a destruction decreed by the gods. He blinds himself, an act that symbolizes his "death." This is the outward event that symbolizes Oedipus's catharsis--

his moment of understanding. He returns to the stage blinded but with new insight and says,

Apollo, friends, Apollo, he it was
 That brought these ills to pass;
 But the right hand that dealt the blow
 Was mine, none other.

Oedipus: A Statement of Position

The examination of Oedipus The King from the several perspectives afforded by the Burkean Pentad has led to certain conclusions about the structure and meaning of the play. In many cases, these conclusions are similar to those arrived at in most other examinations of the play. In some cases the structure of the action has been viewed in a slightly different light due to the Burkean perspective.

A central and unifying metaphor in this discussion of Oedipus was the concept of two circumferences of the action operating simultaneously, each providing an ironic counterpoint to the other. The larger circumference, the one unperceived by Oedipus until the moment of transcendence, was the ritualistic circumference in which the gods had decreed the ritual sacrifice of Oedipus in order to reveal the gods' omnipotence over man. The other, narrower, circumference, in which Oedipus struggled to maintain his status as riddle-

solver, king, father, and husband, was identified as the humanistic circumference. In this smaller circumference, Oedipus, the man, as agent, was all-powerful, driving the action and controlling his destiny. But, superimposed on this circumference was the ritualistic scene of the action in which Oedipus's acts to preserve his status were ironically turned to his destruction.

The two circumferences were seen to have coalesced at the climax when the agent, reduced in agony to a state of symbolic nothingness, was able to see, for the first time, both circumferences of the action, and to achieve a deeper understanding of the situation.

In Burkean terms, the moment of transcendence enabled the agent to transcend his immediate conflict and view the whole scene of the action. In this respect, Oedipus can be seen as a prototype of the Burkean formula for classical tragedy,

The action organizes the resistant factors, which call forth the passion; and the moment of transcendence arises when the sufferer (who had originally seen things in unenlightened terms) is enabled to see in more comprehensive terms, modified by his suffering.

CHAPTER V

A PENTADIC ANALYSIS OF THE ROAD TO DAMASCUS

In 1898, after an agonizing bout with madness, August Strindberg again turned to writing for the theater. His purpose was to try to reveal the insights he had gained from his person Armageddon, his "inferno" period.¹ Although Strindberg had regained peace of mind, the scars of his madness were still fresh. It was in this mood, and with these insights, that Strindberg sat down to begin work on the vast autobiographical trilogy, The Road to Damascus. Its title was aptly chosen. Strindberg, the realist, like Saul, the persecutor, had been reborn by his experience; and the new Strindberg, like Paul, became instrumental in leading his fellow man in new avenues of thought. The Road to Damascus, in form and content, is the product of Strindberg's own personal Pauline revelation.

¹For a personal account of Strindberg's insanity, see August Strindberg, Inferno, trans. by Claud Field (New York, 1913). For an objective account of Strindberg's insanity, see L. Lind-Af-Hageby, August Strindberg, The Spirit of Revolt (London, 1913), pp. 233-87.

In order to communicate this intensely personal experience on the stage, Strindberg sought an intensely personal means of expression. The distant objectivity of naturalism did not suffice. Since Strindberg hoped to reveal the torturous progress of his own mind in its journey through madness to revelation, the dream presented itself as an appropriate means of expression. The dream, after all, is intensely personal in that it is entirely the product of the mind of the dreamer. It is unhindered by the conventions of reality since anything is possible in the world of the dream. Thus, Strindberg made The Road to Damascus a dream play and introduced to the world a new stage technique which came to be known as expressionism.

In the introduction to an edition of The Road to Damascus, Gunnar Ollen provides this evaluation of Strindberg's contribution.

The Road to Damascus abounds with details from real life, reproduced in sharply naturalistic manner, but these are not, as things were in his earlier works, viewed by the author a priori as reality but become wrapped in dreamlike mystery. Just as with Lady Julia and The Father Strindberg ushered in the naturalistic drama of the 1880's, so in the years around the turn of the century he was, with his symbolist cycle The Road to Damascus, to break new ground for European drama which had gradually become stuck in fixed formulas. The Road to Damascus became

a landmark in world literature both as a brilliant work of art and as bearer of a new stage technique.²

The Road to Damascus, like most of Strindberg's plays, is extremely autobiographical. Authorities have spent much time linking events of Strindberg's life with those in his plays and novels. This effort is certainly of value in understanding Strindberg, and in clarifying his intentions in these works. It is the position of this study, however, that constant linking of the events in the play with the events in Strindberg's life, although useful in the external placement of the play, can create confusion with respect to internal placement. In the first place, the life of the author is only incidentally pertinent to the analysis of a particular literary act. The act must also be considered on the basis of its form and content. In the second place, the artist, particularly Strindberg, is not necessarily reproducing actuality. There is much in his work that may be dictated by the necessities of the action, rather than the facts of his life. This problem is doubly confusing in a dream play in which the agent, as dreamer of the play, acts as the controlling force over all the other elements of the play. In The Road to Damascus, obviously,

²August Strindberg, The Road to Damascus, a Trilogy, English version by Graham Rawson (New York, 1960), p. 19.

Strindberg is the agent of the literary act. In the large circumference which includes the author and the play, Strindberg can be seen as the dreamer of the play. This, however, makes it necessary to equate Strindberg's life to the events of the play--a situation which not only tends to deny the play as an imaginative and creative work of art, but which fails to take into consideration certain obvious discrepancies between what happens to the agent in the play and what actually happened to Strindberg. Strindberg, for instance, did not end up in a monastery. Furthermore, the details of his personal life which are used are telescoped and rearranged to suit the requirements of the action. Consequently, in the analysis to follow, the agent of the play will be seen as the "dreamer of the dream," but not as the writer of the play.

Perhaps this position can be clarified by an examination of the nature of a dream and its relationship with Strindberg's structuring of The Road to Damascus. A dream is a fantasy which is absolutely controlled by the dreamer. The dreamer's conscious and subconscious control every character and every scene in a dream. The dreamer, then, is the locus of motives (the agent) of a dream. In clarifying this position, it will be useful to turn to Strindberg himself.

In a foreword to his later dream work, The Dreamplay, Strindberg said,

In this dream play, as in his former dream play To Damascus, [sic] the author has sought to reproduce the disconnected but apparently logical form of a dream. Anything can happen; everything is possible and probable. Time and space do not exist; on a slight groundwork of reality, imagination spins and weaves new patterns made up of memories, experiences, unfettered fancies, absurdities and improvisations.

The characters are split, double and multiply; they evaporate, crystallize, scatter and converge. But a single consciousness holds sway over them all--that of the dreamer.³

The characters in the dream play, as in the dream phenomenon itself, are all aspects of one agent. Some of the characters, however, function reflexively in that the agent acts upon himself through them. A reflexive act in this sense is similar to the one described earlier in this study regarding Maurya's relation to the sea in Riders to the Sea. The sea, it will be remembered, was able to act as an agent because Maurya invested it with these powers. Because Maurya thought of the sea as an agent, it, reflexively, became an agent. In the dream play, this process is more acute. The agents thus reflexively created by the dreamer-agent appear as flesh and blood. Thus, as in an

³In August Strindberg, Six Plays of Strindberg, trans. by Elizabeth Sprigge (Garden City, N. Y., 1956), p. 192.

actual dream, some of the characters are alter egos of the dreamer, through which the dreamer acts; others are recipients of the act. Nonetheless, all are creations of the dreamer's own mind. Sometimes, a particular creation of the dreamer's mind acts both as actor and person acted-upon. At one moment, the dreamer is acting through the character; at another moment, he is acting upon the character through another character. In The Road to Damascus, the Doctor is this type of character. Early in the trilogy, the Doctor has the Lady stolen from him by the Stranger. The Doctor, at this point, is presented objectively as the recipient of the Stranger's act. Later in the cycle, however, the Doctor reappears as an element within the agent. When he speaks, he is speaking the Stranger's thoughts. One might say that he changes from an "objective" aspect of the agent to a "subjective" aspect. In The Road to Damascus, the Stranger, the Beggar, and at times, other characters, are subjective aspects of the agent, while the Woman, the Mother, and others, are objective or reflexive aspects of the agent. In order to clarify the shifting and charismatic form of this play, the terms, and indeed the whole philosophical construct of Burke's system, will have to be extended to their limits. The Road to Damascus, as a dream play,

presents a unique challenge for Burke's critical system.

Before proceeding with the analysis of the trilogy, it will be helpful to provide a brief resume of the plot of the collective drama. Part I of the trilogy contains seventeen scenes. The action proceeds through eight scenes culminating in the pivotal ninth scene in the convent. Then the action retraces itself back through the same eight scenes, ending where it began, at the street corner. The plot is concerned with the Stranger's affair with the Lady. This proceeds from their initial confrontation, through his taking her away from her first husband (the Doctor) to their guilty flight to the home of her suspicious and unfriendly parents. The first half of Part I is concluded by the scene in the convent after the Stranger's "accident." He is nursed back to health by the Abbess and a Confessor, and returns to his wife's home. They once again resume their journey, returning over the same ground until they again arrive at the street corner. At this point, the Stranger has gained new insight through the agony of his troubled Odyssey. As Part I ends, the Lady is leading the Stranger toward the church on the corner, but he approaches it with misgivings and the curtain falls before they go in.

Part II is divided into four acts. Act I, which

takes place outside the mother-in-law's house, provides a resume of the action in Part I, sets the stage for the Stranger's further struggles with the Lady, and the Mother, and prepares for his abortive efforts to seek recognition by making gold from baser metals. Each of the subsequent acts represents efforts on the Stranger's part to "achieve reconciliation with mankind through woman."⁴ Each act ends with a scene in the "rose" room. In each of these scenes, the Stranger recognizes a defeat, and the scene ends with the implication that he is about to renew the struggle. At the end of Act III, the Stranger, having been reduced in stature considerably by the action of Part II, leaves with the Confessor. It should be noted that, regardless of the manner in which the scene ends, it is by no means certain that he has embraced the church.

Part III is in four acts. Scenically all of these acts take place in the presence of the mountain, at the top of which is the monastery. The first act is "on the river bank," where the Stranger makes the decision to cross over the river to the mountain. Act II takes place at a "cross-roads in the Mountains." Act III consists of three scenes

⁴Strindberg, The Road to Damascus, p. 243.

which occur on the mountain where the monastery stands. Essentially, these represent stations in the climb up the mountain. Act IV takes place in the Monastery, moving, by scenes, from the Chapter House to the Picture Gallery to the Chapel. Part III, then, is concerned with the Stranger's decision to cross the river and climb the mountain to the monastery, where he finally is to reconcile his conflicts and find peace.

It is obvious that the scenes are arranged carefully to symbolize moments in the action of the play. The problem is to assess correctly the meaning of the symbols in terms of Strindberg's message in the trilogy. Obviously, there is a strong religious implication in the action. But the play, in spite of its many references to it, cannot be considered orthodox Catholicism. Critics have also pointed to the influence of Kierkegaard on Strindberg, and have found an analogy with the stages of Kierkegaardian development (Aesthetic, Ethical, and Religious) in the play. The influences of Swedenborg and Nietzsche have also been noted.⁵ All of these interpretations are capable of throwing light on the meaning and sources of Strindberg's symbolism.

⁵For examples of other interpretations of Strindberg, see McGill, V. J., August Strindberg, The Bedeviled Viking (London, 1930); and Lind-Af-Hageby, August Strindberg, already cited.

Since these efforts reveal that the play permits more than a single interpretative approach to its symbols, this study will examine the symbolism in terms of the Burkean critical-philosophical construct. It is not merely by chance that this analysis is undertaken, for the writer, even on a first reading, became aware that Strindberg's Road to Damascus trilogy gave the appearance of an artistic rendering of the Burkean construct--a kind of elaborate metaphor illustrative of Burke's philosophical stance. Conversely, it is suggested that if the play is approached from the point of view of Burke's dramatistic method, new insights into the meaning of the trilogy may be acquired.

Burke's approach to criticism, it will be remembered, was based on three elements, chart, prayer, and dream. Chart referred to the process of finding the appropriate terms for delineating a situation. Prayer involved a consideration of the rhetorical factors which serve to communicate a form. Finally, dream was the symbolic aspect of form. An artistic form, which adds up to more than the sum of its parts, was seen to perform a symbolic function--a function rooted deep in the subconscious and meta-conscious nature of the human animal.

It is suggested here, then, that The Road to

Damascus can be seen as an artistic rendering of Burke's critical construct based on the elements of chart, prayer, and dream.

Part I opens on a note of indecision. The scene is at a "street corner," or perhaps crossroads would be more appropriate. The stage directions say, "A Stranger is standing on the edge of the pavement and seems uncertain which way to go." The opening lines continue the theme of uncertainty.

STRANGER

It's you! I almost knew you'd come.

LADY

You wanted me: I felt it. But why are you waiting here?

STRANGER

I don't know. I must wait somewhere.

LADY

Who are you waiting for?

STRANGER

I wish I could tell you! For forty years I've been waiting for something: I believe they call it happiness; or the end of unhappiness⁶

Thus, the agent (Stranger-dreamer) is uncertain. He

⁶Strindberg, The Road to Damascus, p. 25.

can discover no meaning in his surroundings or in life. In Burkean terms, he is unable to chart his environment. Nevertheless, he is beginning to feel the glimmerings of understanding. He senses he is about to start on a journey of understanding. Later in the opening scene, he says,

For some time I've noticed a great deal; but not as I used to. Once I merely saw objects and events, forms and colors, whilst now I perceive ideas and meanings. Life, that once had no meaning, has begun to have one. Now I discern intention where I used to see nothing but chance. (pause) When I met you yesterday it struck me you'd been sent across my path, either to save me, or destroy me.⁷

The Stranger, then, is about to begin on a journey of understanding--an agon through which he will begin to understand the terms of his existence. The Lady is to play an important role in that agon because it is through her that the Stranger hopes to become reconciled with mankind. By marrying the Lady and "becoming one" with her, he hopes to discover the meaning of his existence, or to become one with life. Although his affair with the Lady begins idyllically, it soon becomes bewildering and frustrating. It is this very failure, however, which helps to lay the groundwork and define the terms for the Stranger's subsequent struggles.

⁷Ibid., p. 27.

Part I, then, is the Chart portion of the trilogy, where the terms are defined and made clear. After having gone through the first eight scenes, the Stranger wakes up in a convent, where an Abbess is tending him. He asks about the strange people around him,

I seem to know them, all of them. I see them as if in a mirror: they only make as if they were eating Is this some drama they're performing? Those look like my parents, rather like . . . (pause) Hitherto I've feared nothing, because life was useless to me Now I begin to be afraid.⁸

The Stranger becomes afraid because life is beginning to have meaning. In the last half of Part I, he goes back over the scenes leading up to the sojourn in the convent and begins, by means of this second look, to understand that life seems to have some order. Finally, by the time he reaches the Doctor's house again, he is certain that life has meaning. He concludes that, if he discovers that meaning, he will be reconciled with mankind. He tells the Doctor,

STRANGER

One station more, and I shall reach my goal.

DOCTOR

You'll never reach your goal. Farewell!⁹

⁸Ibid., p. 80.

⁹Ibid., p. 107.

The Stranger now has a goal. As a result of his experience up to this moment, he has found something to strive for; he is entering the stage of Prayer, or supplication.

In Part II, the Stranger, who did not achieve his goal in Part I, continues his quest in earnest. He goes into his laboratory in an effort to be reconciled with mankind by discovering how to make gold from base metals. There he meets with failure and is mocked by his fellow men. Through it all, he struggles for reconciliation with the Lady in order to be reconciled with mankind through her. Everything fails.

Most of Part III takes place on the mountain, symbolizing supplication and the mounting frenzy of his efforts to be reconciled with life. His life, his values are in chaos. The image of the mountain symbolizes his effort to transcend the chaos, to rise above it to a higher meaning. The ultimate of Prayer or Rhetoric comes when the agent reaches the stage of pure persuasion. Pure persuasion, as defined by Burke, is the state of absolute communion, a condition in which persuasion is no longer necessary. In keeping with the paradox of substance, ultimate (or pure) persuasion is achieved when the agent no longer feels any

need for persuasion--when there is no necessity for bridging a dialectical gap. Thus, the Stranger is prepared for the achievement of understanding by no longer striving for it. The Stranger is, therefore, ready to become one with the final mystery.

In Act IV of Part III, the agent, having crossed the river and ascended the mountain, finally enters the monastery. All his conflicts are resolved by a symbolic marriage with God. The agent, having effected a symbolic resolution, is no longer beset by the conflicting forces within him. He has transcended them by faith.

In this state of resolution, the agent is taken to the picture gallery where two-headed portraits of famous people are displayed. Here is the answer to the final mystery. Although the agent does not understand, he believes in the answer. He has transcended his struggle and has entered the dream or symbolic stage of his development.

Not only does the process followed by the Stranger in reaching his revelation parallel the Burkean chart, dream, prayer process, but the final answer is remarkably like Burke's conclusion. In setting the stage for the climactic scene, the stage directions in The Road to Damascus read: "Picture Gallery of the Monastery. There are mostly por-

traits of people with two heads."¹⁰ The Stranger is conducted about the gallery viewing portraits such as that of a two-headed Napoleon or a two-headed Martin Luther. Melcher, his guide, explains how the two heads on the figures represent the conflicts within men. Each of those represented is a paradox, composed of contradictory philosophies and contradictory actions. At the end of the scene, Melcher sums up the message of the gallery,

. . . Hegel, the philosopher of the present, himself dimorphous, for both a "left"-minded and a "right"-minded Hegel can always be quoted, has best explained the contradictions of life, of history and of the spirit, with his own magic formula. Thesis: affirmation; Antithesis: negation; Synthesis: comprehension! Young man, or rather, comparatively young man! You began life by accepting everything, then went on to denying everything on principle. Now end your life by comprehending everything. Be exclusive no longer. Do not say: either-or, but: not only--but also! In a word, or two words rather, Humanity and Resignation!¹¹

It will be remembered that a key term in Burke's philosophy is identification. Identification is the process by which man attempts to resolve the conflicts which characterize any field of action. Man's method of resolving the paradoxes which characterize his existence was envisioned by Burke as being largely symbolic--the resolution of a conflict on one level being accomplished by find-

¹⁰Ibid., p. 277.

¹¹Ibid., p. 283.

ing a term large enough to encompass both sides of the conflict. When the term is found, man moves to a higher level in a hierarchical chain. In talking about the ultimate ground of this identification hierarchy, Burke says,

Language being essentially a means for transcending brute objects, there is implicit in it the "temptation" to come upon an idea of "God" as the ultimate transcendence

Our point is: Here in this conclusion of dialectic (a dialectical God), one should look for the ultimate rhetorical motive of homo dialectus.¹²

Thus, to both Strindberg and Burke, the ultimate answer is somehow tied up with the dialectical nature of substance. The paradox of substance, in which "A" is also "non-A," is, then, fundamental to Burke's philosophy and to Strindberg's symbolism. To Strindberg, the urge for ultimate reconciliation or transcendence was symbolized by the institution of marriage. The Stranger hoped to be able to become one with the mystery through the Lady, but he met with continual frustration. Finally, near the end of Part III, in the last meeting between the two, the Stranger understands the impossibility of "becoming one" with woman. At that point the scene reads:

¹² Burke, A Rhetoric of Motives, p. 276.

STRANGER

I must be a certain distance from you, if I'm to see you. Now you're within focus and your image is unclear.

LADY

The nearer, the farther off!

STRANGER

Yes. When we part, we long for one another; and when we meet again, we long to part.

LADY

LADY

Do you really think we love each other?

STRANGER

Yes. Not like ordinary people, but unusual ones. We resemble two drops of water, that fear to get close together, in case they should cease to be two and become one.

LADY

This time we knew the dangers and wanted to avoid them. But it seems that they can't be avoided.

STRANGER

Perhaps they weren't dangers, but rude necessities; laws inscribed in the councils of the immortals . . . 13

Here, then, is the suggestion by Strindberg, of an eternal paradox by which the nearer one becomes to another, the further they are apart. Thus, ultimate reconciliation

¹³Strindberg, The Road to Damascus, p. 254.

in this world is impossible. The agent must transcend the brute objects of this world and achieve a symbolic one-ness through marriage with "God" through the church.

Thus, the agent moves into the dream or symbolic stage and the action has come full circle; it has come to the point where the agent began the play. If one is to know what is to follow after the end of the play, one must look at the play itself; for, having reached the symbolic stage, the agent is about to dream the play. He has arrived at the point where the dream he has been in began.

To put it another way, the play can be seen as the symbolic statement of the whole process by which the agent reached what Burke has called the symbolic or dream stage. This aspect of Strindberg's dream play is illustrated clearly in his later experiment with the form, the Dream Play. In this case, the secret of the play (the secret of life) is behind a door which the agent tries to open all through the play. At the end of the play, it is finally opened and there is nothing behind it because the play is over. The secret of the play is the play, or one might say, the action of the play is the whole play. To reduce the concept from the symbolic to the real world: the secret of life is life.

It has been suggested in the preceding pages that there is a certain philosophical affinity between Strindberg and Burke; that, some forty years before Burke formulated the critical construct, Strindberg had reflected the idea artistically. It now remains to be seen how well the Pentad serves in an examination and explication of the internal structure of Strindberg's literary act.

The Dreamer and the Dream:
The Agent as Core

In a dream play, as has already been pointed out, the agent becomes the most important element of the five Pentadic factors. The agent, as the dreamer, exerts control over all the aspects of the drama through his conscious or subconscious mind. In this play, the central representation of the agent is in the character of the Stranger. At moments in the play, however, the Doctor, the Beggar, Caesar, and even the Confessor, also represent the agent (the consciousness which is dreaming the play).

Strindberg brings this relationship out in an early scene in Part I between the Beggar and the Stranger. As the two talk, the Stranger finds that he is unaccountably parroting the words of the Beggar. The Beggar briefly evaluates

his life, and it is obvious that he is talking about the Stranger's life. Finally, the Stranger says, "Now you frighten me! Are you real? May I touch you? (he touches his arm.) There's no doubt of it" ¹⁴ In a later confrontation with the Beggar, the relationship is made completely clear.

STRANGER

(as if to himself) Who is it reads my secret thoughts, turns my soul inside out, and pursues me? Why do you persecute me?

BEGGAR

Saul! Saul! Why persecutest thou Me?

(The Stranger goes out with a gesture of horror.) ¹⁵

The implications of this line are great, not only in terms of the Pauline imagery which pervades the play, but also with regard to the Stranger's later discovery that he is, in truth, persecuting himself throughout the trilogy.

The Stranger also has an alter ego in Caesar.

Caesar is a madman who lives with the Doctor. The Stranger's first meeting with Caesar proceeds as follows,

(The Doctor blows a whistle. The Madman comes into the garden. He wears a laurel wreath and his clothes are curious.)

¹⁴Ibid., p. 32.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 97.

DOCTOR

Come here, Caesar.

STRANGER

(displeased) What? Is he called Caesar?

DOCTOR

No. It's a nickname I gave him, to remind me of a boy I was at school with.

STRANGER

(disturbed) Oh?

DOCTOR

He was involved in a strange incident, and I got all the blame.

LADY

(to the Stranger) You'd never believe a boy could have been so corrupt.

DOCTOR

Caesar, come and make your bow to our famous writer.

CAESAR

Is this the great man?

LADY

(to the Doctor) Why did you let him come if it annoys our guest?

DOCTOR

Caesar, you must behave. Or I shall have to whip you.

CAESAR

Yes. He is Caesar, but he's not great. He doesn't even know which came first, the hen or the egg. But I do.

STRANGER

I shall go. Is this a trap? What am I to think? . . .¹⁶

The Stranger, of course, is the boy who was the Doctor's schoolmate. Caesar, in calling the Stranger Caesar, is making the obvious clearer. It would appear that Caesar represents the Stranger's mad youth--an element of which still exists in him.

The Doctor, the Lady, and all the other characters in the play are also part of the central consciousness, since they are created and manipulated by the mind of the agent. Thus, when the Stranger wants to be alone with the Lady, he says,

STRANGER

This werewolf never leaves us.

DOCTOR

(looking at his watch) You must excuse me for about an hour. I've a patient to visit . . .¹⁷

The Doctor is not supposed to have heard the Stranger's comment, yet he immediately acts in response to

¹⁶Ibid., p. 49.

¹⁷Ibid.

it. As is characteristic of the dream, the dreamer-agent manipulates the actions of the characters. As is also characteristic of the dream, the battle between the conscious and subconscious does not always allow the dreamer to manipulate the characters in ways favorable to him. Although the dreamer may create the monster that chases him in the dream, he is powerless to stop the chase until he wakes up or the dream takes another tack.

The agent-scene ratio

The consciousness (both conscious and subconscious) of the agent, as the prime mover in the play, controls all the scenic aspects. Thus, the scene, as well as the characters, is the product of the central agent. Although there are constant evidences of this control by the agent-dreamer, the banquet scene in Part II is exceptionally representative of this aspect of the scene-agent ratio. The scene is set for a banquet to honor the Stranger for his scientific discoveries. The stage directions read:

The tables are so arranged that the first is furthest to the left and the fourth furthest to the right, so that the people sitting at the fourth table cannot be seen by the Stranger. At the fourth table Caesar and the Doctor are seated, in shabby clothes Dessert has just been handed round and the guests have golden goblets in front of them. . . .¹⁸

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 147.

The banquet proceeds with the Professor making a speech extolling the virtues of the Stranger as a great man of science. As the cheers at the end of the speech die down, the stage directions tell us,

band plays chords from Mendelssohn's Dead March. During the last of the foregoing speech servants have exchanged the golden goblets for dull tin ones, and they now begin to take away the pheasants, peacocks, etc. . . .¹⁹

As the Stranger responds to the presentation, the scene takes on nightmarish qualities. All the pomp and glitter is removed, the well-dressed, frock-coated gentlemen "creep away" and all that is left are the people in rags who were originally sitting out of sight at the fourth table. These shabby figures move into the center of the room and the scene gradually takes on the appearance and feeling of poverty and hostility. At this point, stage directions note that,

During this scene a wall screen, charmingly decorated with palm trees and birds of paradise, has been taken away, disclosing a wretched serving counter and stand for beer mugs, behind which a waitress is seen dispensing tots of spirits. Scavengers and dirty-looking women go over to the counter and start drinking.²⁰

This disintegration continues until the Stranger finds himself in the midst of a pack of slovenly, sneering

¹⁹Ibid., p. 149

²⁰Ibid., p. 153.

barflies. He is presented the check for his drink, cannot pay, and is carted off to jail. From a scene of glitter, pomp, and glory, the situation degenerates before the audience's eyes to one of filth, degradation and hostility. The scene, at each instant, reflects the state of mind of the dreamer. All other considerations of probability and realism in scene are subordinated to this one consideration. The effect of the scene, even in reading it, is much like that of a nightmare. Nothing, at the end, is what it seemed to be at the beginning.

Another aspect of the non-realistic manipulation of scene is found in the treatment of time. In the dream context of the play, the logical laws of time and space do not exist. In one scene, three months transpire.²¹ In another, winter and summer are depicted in the same setting.²² Often the agent is confused about whether it is night or day.

The agent's control over the appearance and disappearance of characters is another indication of the dreamer's dominance over the scenic aspects of the play. In this case, the human, sociological aspect of the scene is seen to be a pawn of the agent-consciousness that is in control of the play.

²¹Ibid., p. 78.

²²Ibid., p. 175.

The agent-act ratio

The act of the play is the resolution of all the chaotic elements of the agent (Stranger, Beggar, Caesar, Doctor, Confessor, etc.) into a cohesive whole. The process of accomplishing this act is the action of the play. Thus, the action could be stated as, to achieve identification, or, to restore the agent's status as a symbolic unit by resolving the conflicts within him which are fostering diversity.

The agent's action, then, might be described as "pulling himself together." The agent seeks this resolution through the Lady and through his experiments, but he finally finds it by giving up the search and effecting a symbolic resolution through the church.

The agent's agon is the struggle to achieve some kind of synthesis out of the warring forces within him. He finally manages this, not by achieving a synthesis in the Hegelian sense, but by transcending the conflict through moving to a higher symbolic order.

The agent-purpose ratio

In his discussion of purpose and absolute purpose, Burke notes that two levels of purpose can exist; that men may conceive of their activities on the basis of a purpose

which is not an absolute purpose. While absolute purpose is something which is basic or essential to the man (i.e., "motive" equates with theatric action), he may consciously act on the basis of motives which are more superficial than this absolute purpose.

Thus, the Stranger's purpose is the overt force which moves him in his search for resolution, while the base impulse beneath his purpose for his efforts is his action-- the necessity to resolve the conflicts within himself. In pursuit of his purpose, the stranger seeks reconciliation (resolution) with mankind through woman. At the end of the play, he discovers that he really wants to reconcile the conflicts within himself. While the basic goal of both his purpose and his action is the same, his purpose leads him on the false trail of seeking resolution with his fellow man.

This discrepancy between purpose and action, implied in Burke's discussion of purpose and absolute purpose, and extended in Chapter III of this study, is illustrative of the two levels of motive which might exist in a person or a form. Thus, an agent's purpose and his action may be the same or they may be different, the action being the basic motive and the purpose being the superficial motive.

The battle between the agent's purpose and his action in The Road to Damascus is clearly stated in Part III. The Stranger is making his way up the mountain. On the way, however, he is met by the Tempter who leads him to believe that reconciliation with man may still be possible. The Stranger then meets the Confessor who has been trying to lead him up the mountain. He informs the Confessor that he has decided to remarry the Lady and try again. The Confessor tells him that if he feels the way he does, he should try again. The Stranger replies,

STRANGER

Then I'll risk it. And I'll try to begin life all over again.

CONFESSOR

Then you'll go down?

STRANGER

Out of the clouds. Below the sun's shining, and up here the air's a little thin.

CONFESSOR

Good! Then we must part -- for a time.

STRANGER

Where are you going?

CONFESSOR

Up.

STRANGER

And I down; to the earth, the mother with the soft
bosom and warm lap

CONFESSOR

Until you long once more for what's hard as stone,
as cold and as white . . . Farewell! Greetings to
those below!

(Each of them goes off in the direction he has chosen)²³

The Stranger effects an idyllic reunion with the
Lady, but their happiness is short-lived. They part for the
last time. The Stranger reviews with the Tempter what he
has learned about women, has a discussion with the Woman,
his first wife, and again reaches a moment of decision.
The Tempter speaks,

TEMPTER

So . . . So you're ready to go. Who will go first?

STRANGER

I shall.

TEMPTER

Where?

STRANGER

Upwards. And you?

TEMPTER

I shall stay down here, in between²⁴

²³Ibid., p. 248.

²⁴Ibid., 267.

Thus, the Stranger makes the final decision, renouncing his purpose, no longer struggling, but resigned to what awaits above. Contrast this with Scene II of Act III when the Stranger, seeing his Mother on the mountain climbing above him, says,

(The Stranger stops bewildered.)

STRANGER

Oh, Mother, Mother! Why are you leaving me? At the very moment when my loveliest dream was on the point of fulfillment!

TEMPTER

(coming forward) What have you been dreaming? Tell me!

STRANGER

My dearest hope, most secret desire and last prayer!
Reconciliation with mankind, through a woman.²⁵

The Tempter, in asking the Stranger what he has been dreaming, is actually asking for a statement of the play's action up to that point. The Stranger provides such a statement because up to that moment, that which the Stranger had conceived of as his purpose was dictating the actions. At this "pre-climax" stage of the action, it can be described in terms of the Stranger's vision. At the moment of climax, however, the true nature of the action comes clear. Subsequent events prove the inadequacy of the Stranger's

²⁵Ibid., p. 243.

vision. After his subsequent defeats, the Stranger is prepared to give up the battle and go up to the mountain to the peace of the monastery. There, he is no longer controlling the action, for he is no longer struggling.

It is clear, the agent's struggle to discover his symbolic unity through the lady is constantly frustrated. Each frustration leads him inexorably to a lack of confidence in his ability to achieve reconciliation. As he loses faith in his own powers, he is prepared for the final renunciation of the struggle, at which time he will no longer seek to resolve the conflicts that beset him, but will place his faith in the higher power of symbolic resolution. In pursuing the purpose fostered by his limited vision, the agent reduces himself to the state of being ready for symbolic resolution. Each defeat, then, is a triumph in the sense that it is another step on the road to redemption.

The agent-agency ratio

As such, it becomes the instrument or agency of the action. The church, as the vessel of faith--the place in which one is led to faith--is the instrument through which the agent finds the way to the resolution of his internal conflicts. The ritual and dogma of the church in The Road

to Damascus appear to be that of the Catholic Church. In the final analysis, however, it is more than that. When the Stranger arrives at the Monastery, he is met by the Confessor who responds to his questions about the order in the following manner.

STRANGER

Is this a large building?

CONFESSOR

Endless! It dates from the time of Charlemagne and has continually grown through pious benefactions. Untouched by the spiritual upheavals and changes of different epochs, it stands on its rocky height as a monument of Western culture. That is to say: Christian faith wedded to the knowledge of Hellas and Rome.

STRANGER

So it's not merely a religious foundation?

CONFESSOR

No. It embraces all the arts and sciences as well. There's a library, museum, observatory and laboratory--as you'll see later²⁶

The agent, as dreamer of the dream, is always connecting his struggle to find reconciliation with the church. At the end of Part I, the Stranger is left before the church, about to enter. At the end of Part II, the Stranger is about to start on the journey to the monastery with the

²⁶Ibid., p. 269.

Confessor. At the end of Part III, the Stranger has finally entered the church willingly, symbolizing his acceptance of a symbolic resolution based on faith rather than knowledge.

Once inside the monastery, the Stranger is led before the chapter by the Prior. The Prior relates the story of some of the members of the chapter, telling how they reached the point of entering the monastery. At one point, having finished the story of one of the members, the Prior turns to the Stranger and says,

You see, he wanted to know, but he failed! And therefore he now believes. Is there anything else you'd like to know?²⁷

Dream Context: The Scene

The scene of The Road to Damascus, the context in which the action occurs, is dream. Since the scenic aspects of the play are all extensions of the agent-dreamer's consciousness, they are not controlled by realistic necessities. As in a dream, things appear and disappear at the whim of the dreamer. This aspect of scene has already been discussed with regard to the scene-agent ratio. In this section, the dream context will be discussed in relation to the other elements of the Pentad.

²⁷Ibid., p. 275.

The scene-act ratio

It has already been suggested that the act of the trilogy is the resolution of the paradoxical elements within the agent. The action is the process of reaching this resolution. The agent was seen to have moved through a stage of definition in which understanding began (chart). Then the agent resolved to be "reconciled" with mankind, to effect some kind of harmony with respect to the puzzling paradoxes of existence. This quest was seen as the prayer stage of his development. Finally, the agent achieved symbolic resolution by going into the monastery. In essence, by transcending the paradoxes of life, he had entered the symbolic or dream stage. The whole play, then, was seen as a symbolic or dream statement of the process by which the agent reached the dream stage of his development. With this concept of the action in mind, it will be useful to note how each stage in this process is expressed symbolically in the setting.

In Part I, which is largely devoted to charting the nature of life as a series of apparently unresolvable paradoxes, it will be remembered that there are eight scenes on each side of a pivotal scene which takes place in a convent. The last eight scenes are repetitions of the first eight,

but with significant changes in scenic context. Each scene is seen in a different perspective when it is revisited by the Stranger and the Lady. In the first and last scene, which are basically the same, the scenic context is altered physically by mood music. In the first scene, a funeral march is heard; in the last, the sound of singing comes from the church.

Another example of a scenic expression of paradox can be discovered in the contrast between scene IV and scene XIV, both of which took place in the same basic seaside setting. The first scene occurs shortly after the Lady and the Stranger have run away together. They are happy and the Stranger feels he may be finding a solution to the riddle of his life. The setting is described as,

A hut on a cliff by the sea. Outside is a table with chairs. The Stranger and the Lady are dressed in less sombre clothing and look younger than in the previous scene. The Lady is doing crochet work.²⁸

On the return journey, the same scene is again encountered. But this time, the Stranger and the Lady have been disillusioned by their experiences. The setting now is described as,

The same landscape as before, but now winter. The sea is dark blue, and on the horizon great clouds take on the shapes of huge heads. In the distance

²⁸Ibid., p. 54.

three bare masts of a wrecked ship, that look like three white crosses. The table and seat are still under the tree, but the chairs have been removed. There is snow on the ground. From time to time a bell-buoy can be heard²⁹

From this, it can be seen that, as the agent discovers his life is characterized by a chaotic state in which apparently unresolvable conflicts exist, the scenic context physically reflects the situation. A pleasant scene, by the changing of scenic elements, is made grim and unpleasant.

In Part III, where the agent reaches the culmination of the prayer stage and moves into the dream stage, the whole struggle is symbolized in the setting. At the beginning of Part III, the complete setting is in view.

The foreground represents the bank of a large river. . . . The background represents the farther bank, a steep mountain slope covered with woodland. Above the tops of the forest trees the Monastery can be seen; it is an enormous four-cornered building completely white, with two rows of small windows. The facade is broken by the Church belonging to the Monastery, which is flanked by two towers in the style favored by the Jesuits. The Church door is open, and at a certain moment the monsternce on the altar is visible in the light of the sun Only the Monastery is lit by the sun.³⁰

In Part III, then, there is a river to cross and a mountain to climb, with the promise of the Monastery lit

²⁹Ibid., p. 98.

³⁰Ibid., p. 191.

by the sun at the top of it all. In terms of the analysis of the action previously discussed, the river can be seen as a symbolic dividing line between resolution with mankind and symbolic resolution. The crossing of the river becomes a significant moment in the action. The mountain can be seen as symbolizing supplication or prayer, and the climbing of the mountain is a physical representation of the agent's struggle to rise above or transcend his conflicts. The white, sunlit Monastery at the top symbolizes, in terms of this Burkean analysis, the object of the quest--symbolic resolution.

The state of the action at any time is revealed symbolically in the physical context of the action. Perhaps the clearest expression of the scene supporting the action is in Act IV, Scene II of Part II. The Stranger and the Beggar have come upon a scene in a ravine. In the foreground there is snow; in the background the green of summer. As the Stranger seeks understanding from the Beggar, the Beggar launches into a long speech which ends as follows,

BEGGAR

. . . One of the seven-- and-seventeen Wise Men said that the greatest victory he ever won was over himself; but foolish men don't believe it, and that's why they're deceived; because they only credit what nine-and-ninety fools have said a thousand times.

STRANGER

Enough! Tell me; isn't this snow here on the ground?

BEGGAR

Yes. It's winter here.

STRANGER

But over there it's green.

BEGGAR

It's summer there.

STRANGER

And growing light! (a clear beam of light falls on the foot-bridge)

BEGGAR

Yes. It's light there, and dark here.³¹

Another instance in which the scene supports the action can be found a moment later when, in the background, the Stranger's children frolic and laugh in the light and summer, and ignore him as he calls to them. The whole scene is too much for the Stranger. He falls on his face and then, raising himself up, he says,

Where am I? Where have I been? Is it spring, winter or summer? In what century am I living, in what hemisphere? Am I a child or an old man, male or female, a god or a devil? And who are you? Are you, you; or are you me? Are those my own entrails I see about me? Are those stars or

³¹Ibid., p. 176

bundles of nerves in my eye; is that water, or is it tears? Wait! Now I'm moving forward in time for a thousand years, and beginning to shrink, to grow heavier and to crystallize! Soon I'll be re-created, and from the dark waters of Chaos the Lotus Flower will stretch up her head towards the sun and say: it is I . . .³²

It would appear that the scene, with its physical expression of paradox, has led the Stranger to his moment of deepest insight thus far. For a moment he sees the whole action of the play unfold before him. He is suddenly aware of the chaos of his own nature with its unresolved conflicts, and is given a brief glimpse of the fact that resolution must be, not with mankind, but with himself.

The scene-agency ratio

The physical setting also acts as a reminder of the church, the instrument by which the agent finally makes peace among the warring factions within him. The prevalence of religious symbols is notable. In the very first scene of the trilogy, the church is prominent. It is visible in the setting and is referred to numerous times. At the end of Part I, the Stranger and the Lady exit into the church.

In addition to the Monastery, which dominates the

³²Ibid., p. 177.

setting all through Part III, there are a number of other symbolic reminders of the church. In Part II, Scene I, Act I, the scene described is that of a house with its surrounding terrace and walk, a garden and climbing vines. The description continues, noting, "Fruit trees are planted along the road, and a memorial cross can be seen erected where an accident occurred." Throughout the scene, no mention is made of the cross or of an accident which occurred on the road. The cross merely stands there throughout the scene, almost as a "subliminal" reminder of the constant presence of the church in the consciousness of the dreamer-agent.

The banquet hall scene in Part II, which was described for its scenic interest in an earlier section, dissolves into a prison cell which contains another reminder of the presence of the church. It is described as follows,

On the right a door; and above it a barred opening, through which a ray of sunlight is shining, throwing a patch of light on the left-hand wall, where a large crucifix hangs.

The Stranger, dressed in a brown cloak and wearing a hat, is sitting at the table looking at the patch of sunlight.³³

Here again, the crucifix is not mentioned in the

³³Ibid., p. 157.

dialogue. But the physical presence of it in this scene and other scenes serves as a constant reminder of the influence of the church.

The scene-purpose ratio

At times the scene appears to act as the physical representation of the agent's desire to seek reconciliation with mankind through woman. At the end of Part I, for instance, the Lady takes the Stranger by the hand and leads him to the door of the church. The fact that the Stranger has placed himself in the Lady's hands is expressed physically in the movement of the characters.

Perhaps a more significant example of the scenic representation of the agent's frustrated purpose is in Act III, scene I of Part III. In this scene, woman is put on trial and her sin is traced back to its Edenic source. The Stranger's hope of reconciliation with mankind through woman is actually being put on trial in the scene, and the setting suggests this possibility. The scene takes place on

A terrace on the mountain on which the Monastery stands. On the right a rocky cliff and a similar one on the left. In the far background a bird's-eye view of a river landscape with towns, villages, ploughed fields and woods; in the very far distance the sea can be seen. Down stage an apple tree laden with fruit. . . .³⁴

³⁴ Ibid., p. 233.

The Stranger is now high up on the mountain. The world he left behind can be seen stretched out panoramically below him. The symbolism of the apple tree is obvious. Even though woman is condemned at the trial, the Stranger still elects to try to be reconciled with that world below him through the Lady, but he is doomed to failure for the scene dissolves into one which symbolizes the frustration of the Stranger's purpose. It becomes the scene in which the Mother is seen climbing out of sight into the clouds while the Stranger cries out,

STRANGER

Oh, Mother, Mother! Why are you leaving me? At the very moment when my loveliest dream was on the point of fulfillment!

TEMPTER

(coming forward) What have you been dreaming? Tell me!

STRANGER

My dearest hope, most secret desire and last prayer!
Reconciliation with mankind, through a woman.³⁵

Here again, the physical scene is symbolic of the frustration of the agent's purpose.

³⁵Ibid., p. 243.

Agency, Purpose, and the
Quest for Symbolic Unity

In this section, the agency employed by the agent (the church), and his purpose (to effect reconciliation with mankind through woman) will be considered in terms of the act-agency, act-purpose, and agency-purpose ratios.

The act-agency ratio

The agent's ultimate act is the reconciliation of the warring forces within him. He endeavors to do this, first, by reconciling himself with mankind. In doing this, the agent conceives of woman as the agency, the instrument by which he will achieve reconciliation. In reality, however, the church is the agency of his reconciliation. It is the church, as the vessel of faith, that enables the stranger to rise above the brute objects of his existence. The Stranger is led, by the church, to an attitude of faith which allows him to resolve symbolically the mysteries and frustrations of his existence. Thus, it is the church which enables him to satisfy his absolute purpose (action).

The act-purpose ratio

The agent, in pursuing his purpose, to achieve reconciliation, is constantly frustrated. Each failure, however, brings him closer to the state of mind which is necessary for his symbolic transcendence. In the end, when the agent is reduced to the state that he no longer seeks reconciliation with mankind (this is the state of pure persuasion) he achieves it. The moment of symbolic transcendence, when the agent resolves his conflicts symbolically, is the act or climax of the play.

Stated another way, when the agent performs the ultimate act of humility, when he no longer seeks to establish himself as an agent, he is able to achieve his goal.

By replacing the quest for knowledge with belief, and by replacing the struggle for understanding with faith, the Stranger is able to transcend the conflicting forces within him and become one. This is made clear in the Picture Gallery of the Monastery. Pater Melcher is showing the Stranger the paintings of famous men with two heads, explaining that the heads represent the conflict within the men between good and evil, right and wrong, innocence and guilt. When the Stranger asks his mentor what his view of the men is, he replies,

We have no views here; we've faith, as I've told you already. And that's why we've only one head--placed exactly above the heart.³⁶

The agency-purpose ratio

The agency is inimical to the agent's purpose. The church keeps insinuating itself into the Stranger's struggle, but he continues to reject it in the hope that he can be reconciled through the Lady. This struggle is epitomized in the first scene of Part II. The Mother is talking to the Dominican and she suggests that there will be no end to the miseries her daughter (the Lady) and the Stranger are going through. The Dominican replies,

DOMINICAN

Oh yes, there is. Wait! He's had dealings with higher powers, so that we've gained a hold on him; and our prayers will be more powerful than his resistance. Their effect is as extraordinary as it is mysterious. (The Stranger appears on the terrace. He is in hunting costume and wears a tropical helmet. In his hand he has an alpenstock.)
Is that him, up there?

MOTHER

Yes. That's my present son-in-law.

DOMINICAN

Singularly like the first! But watch how he is behaving. He hasn't seen me yet, but he feels

³⁶Ibid., p. 281.

I'm here. (He makes the sign of the cross in the air.) Look how troubled he grows Now he stiffens like an icicle. See! In a moment he'll cry out.

STRANGER

(who has suddenly stopped, grown rigid, and clutched his heart). Who's down there?

MOTHER

I am.

STRANGER

You're not alone.

MOTHER

No. I've someone with me.

DOMINICAN

(making the sign of the cross) Now he'll say nothing; but fall like a felled tree. (The Stranger crumples up and falls to the ground.) Now I shall go. It would be too much for him if he were to see me. But I'll come back soon. You'll see, he's in good hands! Farewell and peace be with you.³⁷

Even though the Stranger and the church appear to be mortal enemies, the church calmly waits for its chance to be the instrument of the Stranger's reconciliation. Actually, the Stranger's purpose functions to serve the designs of the church, for by his constantly being frustrated in the pursuit of his purpose, the Stranger is being reduced to the

³⁷Ibid., p. 119.

state of humility that is necessary for symbolic resolution. Consequently, the Stranger, in one of his last confrontations with the Lady, beside the river on the bank of Farewell, can express these sentiments,

STRANGER

No, one knows nothing, hardly even that one knows nothing; and that's why, you see, I've got as far as to believe.

LADY

How do you know you can believe, if belief's a gift?

STRANGER

You can receive a gift, if you ask for it.

LADY

Oh, yes, if you ask; but I've never been able to beg.

STRANGER

I've had to learn to. Why can't you?

LADY

Because one has to demean oneself first.

STRANGER

Life does that for one very well.³⁸

³⁸ Ibid., p. 210.

The Road to Damascus:
A Statement of Position

In this analysis, The Road to Damascus was seen as the precursor of a new dramatic form, Expressionism. Its form and structure, based on the dream, were not bound by the conventional necessities of realism. The Burkean Pentadic perspectives, as well as the whole Burkean critical-philosophical construct, were brought to bear on the trilogy in order to illuminate the meaning of the cycle.

The problem in this analysis was not so much to prepare the cycle for production (the trilogy, as it stands, is much too long and unwieldy for stage presentation), but rather to apply a Burkean theatrical analysis to the problem of understanding a form which is unique to contemporary drama.

The attempt was made to illuminate the structure and progression of the action by viewing it as an artistic expression of Burke's critical philosophical construct. The action was seen as a struggle by the agent to chart the situation, followed by his subsequent effort to resolve the paradoxes of life (prayer). Having been frustrated in his attempt to destroy the conflicts that characterized his existence, the agent transcended them through symbolic

resolution (dream). The Burkean concept of identification, formulated some forty years after Strindberg's play, was seen to be inherent in the structure of the play.

The Pentadic perspectives also allowed for a clear statement of the dependence of the structural elements on the agent-dreamer of the play. The Pentadic elements were as easily applied to the sometimes vague and mysterious form of the dream play as they were to the classical form of Oedipus. But the intricacies of Strindberg's dream structure brought out greater sophistications in the use of the Pentad.

Finally, one can note the element of "ritual drama," basic to Burke's dramatisitic criticism, which pervades The Road to Damascus. In effecting his transcendence, for example, the agent must go through the monastic order's ritual of death and rebirth. Here then, is Strindberg's statement of what Burke calls ultimate identification when all conflicts are resolved; the symbolic state, when the individual is "at peace."

(The Confessor and the Chapter appear in procession)

TEMPTER

(disappearing) Farewell!

CONFESSOR

(advancing with a large black bier cloth). Lord!
Grant him eternal peace!

CHOIR

May he be illumined with perpetual light!

CONFESSOR

(wrapping the Stranger in the bier cloth). May he
rest in peace!

CHOIR

Amen!³⁹

³⁹Ibid., p. 286.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS

This study of Kenneth Burke's critical philosophy has been dedicated to a threefold purpose: to examine the nature of Burke's theory; to translate his ideas into an instrument for the critical analysis of a play; and to test that instrument on two plays that differ widely in form and content. The nature of the study was investigative rather than prescriptive. It was posed as an attempt to determine if Burke is successful in supplying the means to "identify the substance of a literary act by a theory of literary action in general."¹

An extensive application of Burke's dramatic criticism to complete works of art is attempted for the first time in this study. The writer, therefore, has been committed totally to the Burkean approach throughout the work. It must also be remembered that the emphasis has

¹Burke, The Philosophy of Literary Form, p. ix.

been on the application of Burkean principles rather than on the analysis of plays. Thus, the play analysis becomes important only insofar as it illustrates the application of the Pentadic perspectives.

With respect to the two analyses, the Burkean approach has been found to be workable with both the classical form of Oedipus the King, and the expressionistic form of The Road to Damascus.

In the case of Oedipus, the analysis provided illuminating insights into the nature of the play's irony. As the concept of circumference was applied to the action, revealing a ritualistic circumference in which the gods had decreed a sacrifice of the agent, and a humanistic circumference in which the agent struggled to preserve himself in his society, certain facts became apparent. It was seen that the agent's acts, conceived for self-preservation in the humanistic circumference, led to destruction in the controlling ritualistic circumference. The two circumferences also pointed up the relationship between fate and free-will in the tragedy. This would suggest that Oedipus can be viewed as an example of both "wollen" and "sollen"; that the tragedy represents a combination of fate and free will.

The interplay of the Pentadic elements clearly revealed not only the nature of Oedipus's decisions, but the reasons for them. This fact is especially important to the producing director. The director must not only understand the forces at work in a play, but also the reasons for the characters' actions in order to insure that the actors will offer a proper interpretation of their roles. For example, the Pentadic relationships brought into focus Oedipus's basic desire to preserve himself as an agent in his scene. They also revealed that Oedipus's decision to solve the riddle was based on this basic desire. Thus, the analysis produced a solid basis on which an actor could build a believable portrayal of Oedipus. As a further aid to the actor, the ratios also clearly established the nature of the action as a struggle for self-preservation. Not only were the stages in Oedipus's battle revealed, but the reasons for each of his new attacks were articulated. The two great forces at work in the play were clearly indicated by the two circumferences of the action. By identifying and characterizing action on the basis of circumference, its multi-dimensions are available for simultaneous or joint reference. The forces in the play can be viewed in terms of the over-all action, as well as that of the individual

characters. Thus, the director, who must bring the action into life on the stage, was provided with a dynamic statement about the nature of the action. Furthermore, this statement, being dynamic, may translate readily into stage movement and characterization.

The Road to Damascus provided a far greater challenge. The problem of illustrating the progression of the action is made particularly difficult by Strindberg's subjective treatment of the material. When the play's action was examined in the light of Burke's chart, prayer, dream sequence, its confusing elements could be resolved. Not only did this Burkean perspective clarify the form and meaning of the cycle, but it provided a clear statement of the motives of the characters. This can be illustrated in terms of the system's clarification of the character of the Stranger, a character which presents one of the greatest challenges in the theatre for the director and the actor. If the actor is to play the character, and if the director is to fit him properly into the action, the Stranger's pattern of motivation must be understood. It is necessary to discover, not only his conscious purposes, but his basic motivation. The Pentadic ratios, combined with the Burkean statement of the progression of the action, brought the

combination of energizing forces into sharp focus.

Since the Pentadic ratios demanded that elements in the play be described in terms of each other, unique insights into the relationships within the play were achieved. This is of particular importance since everything in the play must be defined in terms of the consciousness of the agent-dreamer. In a dream play, it is difficult to establish an objective standard by which to measure what happens. The Burkean concept, in which the parts of the form are measured by each other, overcomes this handicap.

On the basis of the analyses attempted in this study, it appears that the application of the Pentad offers something useful to the play director who must discover important moments in the action and focus the audience's attention upon them. The Pentadic elements also seem to be appropriate to contemporary concepts of analysis. Analyzing a play or a character on the basis of the Pentadic perspectives appears to be helpful in leading the director or actor to the "spine" of the play or character. This effort to find the dramatic essence of a play or a character through analysis seems to be central to the work of both Burke and Stanislavsky. For example, Stanislavsky's "super-objective" seems to be roughly synonymous with Burke's concept of "motive."

The process of translating Burkean theory into an effective instrument for theatrical analysis presented a number of problems. Basically, dramatism offers excellent opportunities for application to theatrical analysis because the system is evolved from the dramatic condition. The problem was complicated, however, by Burke's terminology. Not only are the terms difficult to define because of their wide range of meanings in the Burkean context, but several of them had counterparts in traditional theatrical terminology. In those instances in which the Burkean terms had an equivalent in the theater's traditional critical methods, it was difficult to bring the terms together without creating confusion. It might be that subsequent efforts to apply Burkean concepts to theatrical problems should develop entirely new terms to fit the concepts. This might, however, tend to complicate things even further.

Another problem in fashioning the Burkean construct into a tool of analysis was to make peace between the terms purpose, absolute purpose, and motive. In the Burkean analysis, motive was seen as the essence of a form. This could be readily equated with action since, traditionally, action has been seen as the essence of the play form. Burke, however, did not make a clear distinction between this

term (motive) and purpose. His definition of purpose required that free choice and the element of decision be present. However, in carrying out the implications of the term, he came upon the idea of absolute purpose--a condition in which man relinquished free choice to an absolute power. Thus, in carrying purpose to an absolute form, purpose was lost. For the purposes of this study, which deals with the artistic form only, the problem was solved by viewing the absolute power in a form as its essence. Thus, absolute purpose could be equated with motive. To apply Burke's critical theory to the actual process of theatrical analysis, it was necessary to deal with motivation on two levels. One level reflected the absolute power or essence of a form or character which was recognized as action. The other level was characterized by the agent's free choice and decision; as such, it reflected the character's purpose. It would seem that this distinction is of value in play analysis, since the demands of the form must be considered along with the demands of the various characters who are pursuing their objectives within the form. It is entirely possible, however, that it can be stated more effectively in other than Burkean terms. Perhaps in the future, Burke will resolve the basic difficulty surrounding the terms, purpose,

absolute purpose, and motive. Until such time, however, these terms will create difficulty for anyone attempting a pure Burkean analysis.

In terms of critical attitude, an important conclusion can be drawn from this study. It would appear that, contrary to the opinions of George Knox and others, Burke does not "lie scattered and fragmentary."² His work represents a vast, cohesive critical construct which can be applied in toto to the problem of critical analysis. However, the danger is that the very vastness and complexity of the system will tend to make it, in the hands of some, a mechanical monstrosity. There is the danger, perhaps evident in this study, that the Pentad will become more important than the play. The director or the critic may become so involved in the magic of the formulae that the form will be obscured. In terms of its practical value in the theater, the study suggests that dramatism can lead to new insights and a clearer understanding of a play's structure. But the vast construct, taken whole, may be too unwieldy for the needs of the practicing director. Used selectively, however, it would seem to be an extremely valuable aid in

²Knox, Critical Moments, p. 108.

analyzing the play for production purposes.

Finally, Burke's critical system can only be as good as the person who uses it. In the proper hands, it can do much to reveal the true nature of an artistic act. In the hands of the unimaginative, it can become a machine that will enslave the analyst; or, as Burke has suggested,

In confronting this wide range in the choice of a circumference for the location of an act, men confront what is distinctively the human freedom and the human necessity. This necessity is a freedom insofar as the choice of circumference leads to an adequate interpretation of motives; and it is an enslavement insofar as the interpretation is inadequate.³

³Burke, A Grammar of Motives, p. 84.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

John Wayne Kirk was born March 30, 1932, at Sewickley, Pennsylvania. In June, 1950, he was graduated from Garfield High School in Akron, Ohio. In June, 1954, he received the degree of Bachelor of Arts from The College of Wooster, Wooster, Ohio. In August, 1955, he received the degree of Master of Arts from The Ohio State University. From 1955 to 1957 he served in the United States Army. He was assigned to Special Services, Entertainment Branch at Fort Sill, Oklahoma. Following his discharge from the army in September, 1957, he joined the faculty of the Department of Speech at the University of Florida. In September, 1958, he enrolled in the Graduate School of the University of Florida. From June, 1960, until August, 1961, he took a leave of absence from the staff of the Department of Speech in order to be a full-time student. From September, 1961, until the present he has been on the faculty of the Department of Speech.

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This dissertation was prepared under the direction of the chairman of the candidate's supervisory committee and has been approved by all members of that committee. It was submitted to the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences and to the Graduate Council, and was approved as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

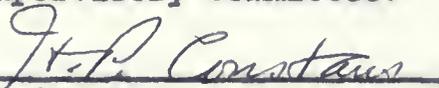
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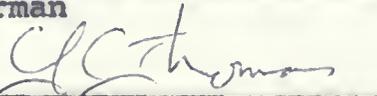
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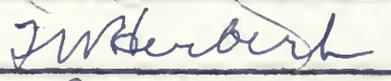
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