

**English 80603: Seminar in Kenneth Burke:  
Rhetoric, Poetics, and Culture  
Spring 2012**

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**What the Course Is About**

This seminar will be a thorough examination of perhaps the most important and interesting American rhetorical theorist of this century. This course will include a careful consideration of Burke's major theoretical and literary work with particular emphasis on his writing before 1940 and the ways in which his rhetorical theory and methodologies grew out of his own literary practice and his engagement in modernist/Depression-era conversations about the function of art (and language, more generally) in culture. That is, we will investigate Burke's overriding interest in how language works -- what effects texts (of all kinds) can have and how they create these effects. While we will be attending to the canonical Burke, the course will also introduce students to little-known or little-read Burke materials (including magazine articles, short stories, and bits from his massive correspondence).

The overarching concerns of this course are two issues at the heart of Burke studies: how to represent Burke and how to study him. By providing an opportunity to explore both Burke's relationships with other thinkers (particularly other American writers of the first half of the century) and Burke's engagement with contemporary culture, this course problematizes the standard representation of Burke as the eccentric hermit of Andover farm. It also argues that while it's important to study Burkean theory as theory (we'll do plenty of that), it's also important to study his theory as addressed—that is, as a rhetorical act—and to explore why he wrote the kind of theory he did given his particular scene(s).

**What I Hope We'll Accomplish (aka outcomes)**

- Students will become familiar with both canonical and noncanonical Burkean texts, with important Burkean scholarship (including trends in that scholarship), and with research sites particular to Burke studies (the bibliographies, archives, Kenneth Burke Society website). This course thus meets the **graduate program theory requirement**.
- Students will develop strategies for reading difficult theoretical texts.
- Students will demonstrate an ability to articulate, analyze, and deploy key Burkean concepts and methodologies (piety, identification, dramatism, dialectic, etc.) in class discussion, weekly memos, and the final essay. This course thus meets the **graduate program methods requirement**.
- Students will demonstrate an ability to critically engage with Burkean scholarship in class discussion and the final essay.
- Students will practice the academic genres of conference proposals and presentations and of journal articles. This meets the graduate program **professionalization outcome of helping students become independent researchers**.
- Students will practice multimodal composing, creating a 2-minute video on Burke. This meets the **graduate program professionalization outcome of asking students to demonstrate competency using technology**.

**What We'll Read** (unless otherwise indicated, all texts are by Burke, published by U of California P)  
*Counter-Statement* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed)

*Permanence and Change* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed)

*Attitudes Toward History* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed)

*Philosophy of Literary Form* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed)

*Grammar of Motives*

*Rhetoric of Motives*

*Language as Symbolic Action*

Ann George and Jack Selzer, *Kenneth Burke in the 1930s* (U of South Carolina P, 2007)

### **What You'll Be Expected To Do**

•**Say something:** The course involves lots of reading, lots of talking, and lots of responding. Given our topic, the nature of the readings, and (of course) how smart we all are, I expect our class discussions to be lively and interactive. Needless to say, this is not a lecture course.

N.B.: Attendance: You can't contribute to the class if you're not here, hence, attendance is mandatory. One absence for illness or emergency will not affect your grade; however, two absences may lower your grade substantially, three is grounds for failure.

•**Weekly Memos (25%):** Your discoveries in, responses to, and/or questions about our readings will serve as the springboard for class discussion. For any EIGHT classes, write a 1-2 pp., single-spaced memo of your reactions to the week's readings (including classmates' memos, which you should read as well). Post these as either Word or pdf files to the Doc Sharing page of our eCollege site by \_\_\_\_\_. You'll find a separate "view" for each week; please post to the correct view and click "share with class." These are informal and ungraded although you get credit for doing all of them; after you've done 3-4, I will give you some feedback and suggestions.

•**Video project (25%):** You will write, produce, and post a summative video on Burke to the 2MinuteThinker [YouTube.com/2MinuteThinker]. These videos are meant to summarize the work of an important thinker, but Burke's corpus defies easy summary, so you may want to focus on one major text, a major term or critical method, or some subset of Burke's work (Burke as poet, Burke as reviewer, Burke in the 1950s, Burkean methodology, Burkean pedagogy, etc.). You may shoot your own footage (the NMWS has video cameras) or use open-source images. You may work individually or in pairs. You may also connect the video to your conference paper; indeed, I encourage you to do so. Requirements for format and what to include are on the site. As the site author notes, the "content must be accurate, substantive, efficient, and creative." **Due May 8 during final exam period**

### •**Four-part, scaffolded research project (50%):**

•**Topic Proposal (required but not graded):** As early in the semester as possible (but **no later than Feb. 16**), you should submit a one-paragraph topic proposal, which does just that: proposes a general topic for your short research project and provides a brief explanation of why you're interested.

•**Annotated Bibliography (15%)** covering 8-10 sources you expect to use in your research project. Entries should be arranged in alphabetical order and follow the latest MLA citation format. For each source, provide a paragraph that summarizes the purpose, content, and methodology/theoretical frame (if appropriate) and that locates it in relation to other sources on your list. **Due March 15.**

•**Project Proposal (required but not graded):** A one-page, conference-style proposal outlining the purpose and scope of your research project. (We'll talk about proposal writing in class.) **Due March 15.**

•**Short Research Project Portfolio** [includes (revised?) project proposal, rough and final drafts] **(35%):** The major written project for the course is a conference-length (7-9 pp) original argument on some aspect of Burke studies. Choice of topic/approach is open: you may engage with Burke's theory, fiction, or poetry; write a piece of Burkean rhetorical criticism; trace/elucidate a key term; contextualize a work; do an archival project; develop a Burkean pedagogy; etc. **Due April 12.**

If you don't already have plans for a project, let me suggest that you imagine a paper on "Burke and ..." or "Burke as...." That is, explore Burke "and" someone that he knew or studied or reacted to or explore Burke "as" something or other. Examples: Burke and William Carlos Williams. Burke and the New Critics. Burke and the New Humanists. Burke and George Herbert Meade. Burke and Jeremy Bentham. Burke and Dostoevsky. Burke and Augustine. Burke and Sidney Hook. Burke as Poststructuralist. Burke as Narrative Theorist. Burke as Composition Theorist. Burke as Poet. Burke as Reviewer.

Burke is currently a hot item, and there are vast stretches of unexplored Burkean territory, particularly the first half of his career and his relationships with other prominent writers and thinkers and critical circles. So, there are excellent chances for conference presentations and/or publication. *RSQ* has a soft spot for Burke scholarship, and the Kenneth Burke Society has an online journal—*KB Journal*. Burke always plays well at RSA.

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**Finally, these...**

**A brief note on writing:** It should come as no great surprise that it's important for scholars in English studies to write extremely well. I'm always happy to help. Remember, too, that the Center for Writing is not just for undergrads; writing groups are also a terrific idea. Any published scholar will tell you that one key to success is lots and lots of revision; plan on it. If you need help with standard academic moves integrating sources (or even if you just need to remind yourself of their importance), I highly recommend Gerald Graff's and Cathy Birkenstein's little book, *They Say, I Say* (Norton).

**A brief (Burkean) note on grades:** One of Burke's rhetorical tricks is to use italics to shift the emphasis and, thus, the meaning of a phrase. For example: it goes without saying that *grades are important*; always do your very best work. But it also *goes without saying* that grades are important; grade anxiety is not a conversation that needs to be going on in your head because, ultimately, grad school isn't about grades. It's about professionalization—learning to think, write, and work like an academic. An A paper that gets stuck in a drawer is worth less than a B paper that gets revised and sent out to a journal. And as important as coursework is, lots of your professionalization goes on outside the classroom. Read journals. Present at a conference. Write a book review. Apply to be an RA or Asst. WPA. *Never* miss an opportunity to hear a visiting speaker, to attend a job talk or a dissertation defense or a professionalization brownbag. Make it a point to develop a close working relationship with 2-3 professors who'll become your primary mentors, often long after you've graduated.

**Disabilities Statement:**

TCU complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 regarding students with disabilities. If you require accommodations for a disability, please contact the **Coordinator for Students with Disabilities in the Center for Academic Services, located in Sadler Hall 11**. Further information can be obtained from the Center for Academic Services, TCU Box 297710, Fort Worth, TX 76129, or at 817-257-7486.

Adequate time must be allowed to arrange accommodations and accommodations are not retroactive; therefore, students should contact the Coordinator as soon as possible in the academic term for which they are seeking accommodations. *Each eligible student is responsible for presenting relevant, verifiable, professional documentation and/or assessment reports to the Coordinator.* Guidelines for documentation may be found at <http://www.acs.tcu.edu/DISABILITY.HTM>.

Students with emergency medical information or needing special arrangements in case a building must be evacuated should discuss this information with their instructor/professor as soon as possible.

## Course Calendar (Subject to Change)

**January 19** Introduction to the course

**January 26** •*Counter-Statement*  
•Burke, "Waste --The Future of Prosperity" (eCollege)  
•Wilson, "Appeal to Progressives" and Burke's response, "Boring from Within"  
(eCollege)  
•Burke-Cowley letters (eCollege)  
Criticism: Selzer, *Kenneth Burke in Greenwich Village*, Ch 6 (library reserve); George and Selzer, Ch 2

**February 2** Working the Burkean Archive  
\*Archival packet (eCollege)  
•Introduction (read) and Ch 1 (skim) in Anderson and Enoch, *Burke in the Archives* (eCollege)

**February 9** •*Permanence and Change*, Parts I & II  
•Tate, "Poetry and Politics" (eCollege)  
•Burke-Tate letters (eCollege)

Criticism: George and Selzer, Ch. 3

**February 16** •*Permanence and Change*, Part III  
•Burke, "Revolutionary Symbolism in America" (eCollege)  
  
Criticism: Paul Jay, "Modernism, Postmodernism, and Critical Style" (eCollege), Hawhee, *Moving Bodies*, Ch 2 (library reserve)

### Research Topic Due

**February 23** •*Attitudes Toward History* (through p. 215)

Criticism: George and Selzer, Ch 4

**March 1** •more *Attitudes Toward History*  
•"Twelve Propositions" and "Literature as Equipment for Living" (in *Philosophy of Literary Form*)

Criticism: Kastely. "Kenneth Burke's Comic Rejoinder to the Cult of Empire." *College English* 58 (1996): 307-26.

**March 8** •*The Philosophy of Literary Form*: title essay, Longer Articles, and "Dialectician's Hymn" (in Appendix).  
•"Semantic and Poetic Meaning" handout (eCollege)

Criticism: Weiser, " 'As Usual I Fell on the Bias': Kenneth Burke's Situated Dialectic." *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 42.2 (2009): 134-53.

- March 15**      •A *Grammar of Motives*: Intro, Part I, Part II (skim one section), and “Means & Ends”  
 (pp. 317ff)  
 •GM handouts (eCollege)

Criticism: Weiser, *Burke, War, Words*, Ch 5 (library reserve)

### **Annotated Bibliography and Project Proposal Due**

**SpringBreakSpringBreakSpringBreakSpringBreakSpringBreakSpringBreakSpringBreak**

- March 29**      •more *Grammar*, Part III and “Four Master Tropes”

Criticism: Crusius, “A Case for Kenneth Burke’s Dialectic and Rhetoric.” *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 19 (1986): 23-37 OR Tell, “Burke’s Encounter with Ransom: Rhetoric and Epistemology in ‘Four Master Tropes.’ ” *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 34 (2004):

33-54.

- April 5**      •A *Rhetoric of Motives* Parts I & II (only pp. 49-110, “Carlyle on Mystery,” and “Metaphorical View of Hierarchy”)  
 •Burke-Cowley letters (eCollege)

Criticism: Gregory Clark, *Rhetorical Landscapes in America*, pp. 1-11 and 147-62

(eCollege)

- April 12** •More *Rhetoric of Motives*, Part III (stop at p. 294)

•“Prologue in Heaven” from Burke, *Rhetoric of Religion* (library reserve)

Criticism: Crable, “Distance as Ultimate Motive: A Dialectical Interpretation of A Rhetoric of Motives.” *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 39.3 (2009): 213-39.

### **Research Project Due**

- April 19**      •*Language as Symbolic Action*: Ch 1-4; “A Dramatistic View of the Origins of Language,” Section One.  
 •Burke, “(Nonsymbolic Motion)/(Symbolic) Action.” *Critical Inquiry* 4 (1978): 809-38.

- April 26** Burkean Pedagogy:

•Burke, “Linguistic Approaches to Education” in Smudde, *Humanistic Critique of Education* (library reserve)  
 •Burke, “The Responsibilities of National Greatness” (eCollege)  
 •Burke, “Reading While You Run” (in *PLF*)  
 •Burke, “Questions and Answers About the Pentad.” *CCC* 29.4 (1978): 330-35.  
 •Comprone, “Kenneth Burke and the Teaching of Writing.” *CCC* 29.4 (1978): 336-40.  
 •Enoch, “Becoming Symbol-Wise: Kenneth Burke’s Pedagogy of Critical Reflection.” *CCC* 56.2 (2004): 272-96. OR Wible, “Professor Burke’s ‘Bennington Project.’ ” *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 38.3 (2008): 259-82.

**Video Presentations during final exam period: Tuesday, May 8, 11:30-2**

**EXTRAS:** Of the many overviews of Burke's work, I call your attention to these (books are on library reserve):

- Gunn, Giles. *The Culture of Criticism and the Criticism of Culture*, Ch 4
- Jay, Paul. *Contingency Blues*, Ch 5 AND "Kenneth Burke" in *Dictionary of Literary Biography*
- Warnock, Tilly. "Reading Kenneth Burke: Ways In, Ways Out, Ways Roundabout." *College English* 48 (1986): 62-75. OR see her entry in the *Encyclopedia of Rhetoric and Composition*.
- William Rueckert, "Rereading Kenneth Burke" in Simons and Melia, *The Legacy of Kenneth Burke*; "A Field Guide to Kenneth Burke" in *Encounters with Kenneth Burke; Kenneth Burke and the Drama of Human Relations*.
- Foss, Foss, and Trapp. *Contemporary Perspectives on Rhetoric*.
- Burke on Burke: "Curriculum Criticum" in *Counter-Statement*, pp. 213-225. Like all writers' comments about their own work, it's a bit unreliable.

**NB:** The definitive (but not flawless) Burke bibliography is that of Armin Paul and Mechthild Frank, published in *Critical Responses to Kenneth Burke, 1924-1966*, ed. William Rueckert (on reserve). It was supplemented by Richard H. Thames, "The Writings of Kenneth Burke, 1968-86" in Simon and Melia's *The Legacy of Kenneth Burke* (also on reserve). Recently, the website for the Kenneth Burke Society offers bibliographies of works by and about Kenneth Burke—this may now be the place to go to for info.