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The Forensic Burke: A For(u)mative Member of the Parlor

by

Courtney J. Wright

Thesis

Submitted to the Department of Communication, Media, and Theatre Arts

Eastern Michigan University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

Communication

Thesis Committee:

Raymond Quiel, Thesis Chair

Jack Kay, Ph.D.

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Michael Marion

November 30, 2012

Ypsilanti, Michigan

Dedication

I would like to begin by remembering my many wonderful grandmothers, Joyce Wright, Gertrude Helfrich, Pauline Wright, Dema Ryan, Aunt Ione, and Great Great Grandma Gardner. These strong, kind, and generous women were all terrific raconteurs whose tales tackled catastrophe with comedy. As I recall, they always had a book nearby and never had a bad word to say. Their sanctuaries ranged from the garden to the euchre table and their mottos ranged from “don’t sweat it” to “ain’t that so pretty,” words I take with me everywhere. This thesis was written in their memory and is dedicated to my entire family. To my parents, Nancy and Marvin Wright, a couple of green-thumbed go-getters: Thank you for your love and support. I continuously draw from your keen insights and strive to embody your magnanimous ways. I could not have done this without you. To my siblings, Josi and Jesse Kauffman, Lori and Ivan Velazquez, and Kelsey and Matthew Wright: I am regularly inspired by your many amazing accomplishments. You all have innumerable talents and skills from which I have learned immensely. Each of you is a jack of all trades. And, as they say, when you’re dealing with a deck full of jacks, you don’t mind being a joker. Thank you. To my nieces, Rene and Isabelle Kauffman, and all the little ones yet to come: thank you for being such bright and loving people. You are a real joy to be around, and I cannot wait to root on your sports teams, coach you in forensics, and get your notes on this thesis! Finally, to my grandparents, Joanne and Byron Wright: I am sincerely grateful for your many wonderful stories, subtle witticisms, and thorough grammar lessons. Over the last twenty-nine years of car trips, lawn mowing expeditions, reunions, and outings, I’ve gleaned endless wisdom about topics ranging from history to horseshoes. I thank you for every lesson and look forward to many more to come.

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Finally, I would like to thank the many members of the parlor that contributed to this project. Specifically, I would like to show my heartfelt appreciation for the dedicated curators of the Kenneth Burke Papers, housed in the Paterno Library at Pennsylvania State

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Abstract

In this study, I detail the forensics education of Kenneth Burke, a leading rhetorical theorist and critic of the twentieth century. After investigating this previously unexamined area, I argue that Burke's competitive forensics experiences pivotally informed his rhetorical schema. Theoretically guided by Burke's pivotal term *the forensic*, I begin by mapping the contours of Burke's educational biography. Next, I analyze and reconstruct Burke's forensics education by focusing on the forensic organizations of Peabody High School, Burke's literary society experiences at Ohio State University and Columbia University, and the literary activities of Greenwich Village. Finally, I proffer connections between forensics and two of Burke's key terms, *the parlor* and *ritual drama*, and discuss illuminations, contributions, and directions regarding the pedagogy, theory, and biography of Kenneth Burke.

Table of Contents

Dedication.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	iii
Abstract.....	vi
List of Figures.....	viii
Chapter One: Introducing the Forensic Burke.....	1
Chapter Two: Listening to the Conversation.....	7
Chapter Three: The Form and Formlessness of Burke’s Formative Years.....	21
Chapter Four: The Forensic Burke Uncovered.....	24
Chapter Five: The Forensic Texture of Dramatism.....	56
Chapter Six: Illuminations, Contributions, and Directions.....	70
References.....	77

List of Figures

<u>Figure</u>		<u>Page</u>
1	Kenneth Burke's senior photo, Peabody High School, 1915.....	1
2	Young Kenneth Burke with his mother and grandmothers, c. 1900.....	25
3	Malcolm Cowley's senior photo, Peabody High School, 1915.....	31
4	James Light, Jake Davis, and Russell Farrell's senior photos, 1914-1915.....	32
5	The Athenian Literary Society, 1914.....	35

Chapter One

Introducing the Forensic Burke

“Where does the drama get its materials?” (Burke, 1941, p. 110).

“The poet is not poeticizing in the middle of nowhere” (Burke, 1973, p. xi).

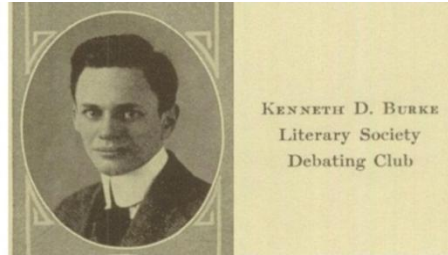


Figure 1. Kenneth Burke’s senior photo, Peabody High School (Burke et al., 1915, p. 3)

Kenneth Burke, the rhetorical theorist and critic responsible for crafting “one of the most important corpora of works of the twentieth century” (Condit, 1992, p. 349), was a debater. And, by all accounts, Burke was quite good. As William H. Rueckert, Burke’s longtime friend and mentee, remembers, “Burke was a fabulous talker and arguer” who, well into his old age, “would take you out for long walks on the dark country roads, talking all the time, as vigorous as ever” (1993, p. 36). According to Rhetoric and Public Address scholar Andrew King (2010), “Burke saw the academy and the public auditorium as a moral arena. He entered the arena as a fighter” (p. 45). King recalls watching Burke at his best, as he entertained an audience of five hundred in the manner of an old fashioned Borscht Belt comedian....with one hand planted on the podium and the other waiving above his head as he compared Walt Whitman’s prose to that of the early Sears Roebuck catalog....His speech bristled with puns....and a kind of hipster baby talk delivered in comic book Brooklynese. (pp. 43-44)

A highly regarded academician, Burke was invited to speak at universities across the country. In step with his feistily comic nature, Burke approached such engagements as an academic

traveling pugilist and would often conclude speaking engagements with invitations for debate. Longtime Rhetoric professor “Barton R. Horvath” remembers cornering Burke after a lecture, infuriated by Burke’s claim that “Thoreau was the last flatulent echo of the Greco-Roman agrarian tradition” (2011, par. 5). After steamily marching toward Burke, Horvath quickly found

The little man was actually delighted by my fury. My objections were like rich wine to him. “I understand you. I fully understand you,” he kept saying happily. His replies were astoundingly civil and good humored. After two hours of argument I was exhausted but Burke was still going....Several people joined us and no matter what observation was made, Burke seemed to have what I can only call “instant context.” (par. 5)

All told, the stories and memories that comprise the lore of Kenneth Burke feature a diverse range of plots, characters, and details. However, for many of his friends, students, fans, and foes, lively and engaging debate is often a central theme in the drama of Kenneth Burke.

Burke’s affinity for argumentation is understandable. After all, during the uproarious times of Burke’s life, there was much to debate. Born in 1897, Burke lived through “the Great Depression, communism taking root in Eastern Europe and Asia, fascism and its devastating consequences in Europe, the formation of labor unions, the rise of radical social protest, equal rights, and rock and roll” (Brummett & Young, 2006, par. 7). Over the years, Burke debated questions ranging from current events to the interpretation of literature, engagements which helped Burke articulate insight regarding rhetorical theory and criticism. According to Communication Professor Don M. Burks (1993), Burke turned to individuals like “[William Carlos] Williams and Malcolm Cowley, who were sometimes adversarial and

quite stimulating to the dialectic from which he generated his writing” (p. 5). Burke also relied on less cooperative debating partners. As Rueckert (1993) notes, Burke’s work stemmed from

a defense of, dramatism/logology as a system and methodology against all comers – against N.O. Brown in an MLA confrontation, against Marshal McLuhan, Buckminster Fuller, B. F. Skinner and Behaviorism; against scientism and reductionism of any kind; against more technology as a solution to the problems caused by Northrup Frye; against archetypal criticism and myth criticism; against any explanation of the human condition and the drama of human relations which Burke considers an oversimplification. (p. 20)

And yet, even amongst the most steamed of parlor mates, Burke resolved to appreciate the mutually beneficial clash of the forum. Such an attitude was exemplified while wrapping up a rather gridlocked debate with Granville Hicks, William Phillips, and Malcolm Cowley, when Burke concluded with the following question: “Can we agree on one thing? Thank God for the enemy” (Young, 1986, p. 91).

Early on, biographers, literary scholars, and friends such as Austin Warren (1933), Malcolm Cowley (1934), and Matthew Josephson (1962) documented the confluence between Burke’s affinity for debate and his production of criticism. However, since Burke’s death in 1993, scholars have increasingly worked to ferret out “the ‘unending conversation’ that [was] going on at the point in history when [Burke was] born” (Burke, 1941, pp. 110-111). This process, what Burke biographers and Rhetoric Professors Ann L. George and Jack Selzer (2007) call “reading Burke carefully against the ideological conversations of the time” (p. 3), has uncovered waves of vivid and fruitful insight. As English Professor M. Elizabeth

Weiser (2009) argues, “Situating Burke’s dramatism within the conversational parlor of its contemporaneous debates” allows for a “fully engaged conversation” and “a much more strongly felt call for engaged intellectual activism” (p. 135). While scholars have gone to great lengths to document the debates that marked Burke’s professional career as a writer, literary critic, and rhetorical theorist, interestingly the educational forums in which Burke learned to debate are completely overlooked. Given Burke’s theory that “the whole nature of word magic comes from learning it” (2003, p. 377), research regarding Burke’s forensics education should provide a valuable perspective of the person “behind the corpus” (Crible, 2003, p. 110).

Competitive forensics, “an educational activity primarily concerned with using an argumentative perspective in examining problems and communicating with people” (First National Conference on Forensics, qtd. in Freely, 1993, p. 21), has long served as an educational laboratory in which individuals honed their rhetorical skill by competing in events such as oratory, debate, and the oral interpretation of literature (Kay, 1990; Potter, 1941; Quiel, 2011; Richardson, 2012).¹ As his senior yearbook photo, shown above, illustrates, Kenneth Burke can be included among the long list of notable individuals who received rhetorical training through competitive speech and debate. The role forensics education played in the development of Burke’s life and work has, to my knowledge, escaped Burke-researchers for roughly ninety-years. Therefore, in this thesis, I reconstruct Burke’s high school and college forensic education in order to better contextualize Burke’s corpus of rhetorical theory. In doing so, I provide support for competitive forensics as an educational activity capable of proliferating dramatic pedagogical outcomes and therefore is worthy of

continued support from the interdisciplinary parlor of Burkean scholars and educators.

Ultimately, this research sheds light on Burke's 1987 comments about switch-side debating.

In the nineteenth century, the principle of the debating society was something that was good education to me. And the idea was that you got the debaters and they didn't know until the last minute...which side they were going to be on in the debate. And it's a toss-up at the end. Therefore, they had to have all this to pour out one way or the other depending upon which side they were on...they had to do both sides! That is, to me, the way the best education should be. (1987, tape 2, min. 2:26)

This declaration, coupled with the esteemed reputation of forensics education, warrants an investigation of Burke's early engagement in competitive forensics, an incursion intended to illuminate the formative educational experiences of Kenneth Burke, a body that learned language.

A Critical Question

While some suggest Burke was dizzyingly eclectic, it seems clear to me, a graduate student and forensic coach, that there was a common thread sewing together Burke's vast array of thought: *the forensic*, the forum or marketplace in which people debate about the past and agonistically produce the materials of justice intended to better guide them in the future. In an effort to develop this argument, I begin by posing the following critical question: In what ways did Kenneth Burke's forensic education help him learn the language of dramatism? To answer this question, I first gauge the tenor of conversations regarding both Burke's education and the history of competitive forensics. Next, I provide a theoretical basis for the investigation by paying close attention to Burke's (1937) term, *the forensic*. After outlining the tenets of this early pivotal term, I turn to various archival materials in an

effort to articulate and describe Burke's experiences in competitive forensics. Such a process should provide the historical context necessary to adequately reexamine two important metaphors for Burke, *ritual drama* and *the parlor*. Finally, I return to my critical question, proffer implications for forensic pedagogy and rhetorical theory, and suggest directions for future research.

Chapter Two

Listening to the Conversation

In 1929, when Kenneth Burke was thirty-two years old, poet William Carlos Williams wrote, “I wish someone would start the American renaissance by publishing brochures to be sold at a low price, where writing like Burke’s might be available for those who appreciate it” (1929, p. 6). Fifty-two years later, the *New York Times* identified Burke as “the strongest living representative of the American critical tradition, and perhaps the single source of that tradition since its founder, Ralph Waldo Emerson” (qtd. in Chesebro, 1993, p. xi). To be fair, over the years, critics did not panegyrize Burke in unison. Some even reviled Burke severely (see European West, 1923, p. E4). However, to be sure, many distinguished scholars, to this day, hold Burke’s critical foresight in high regard. For example, Communication Professor Karlyn Kohrs Campbell (2001) asserts, “The single most important influence on the development of modern rhetoric was the theory and criticism of Kenneth Burke...” (p. 503).

In communication studies, specifically, as Rhetoric and Political Communication Professor Bernard L. Brock (1995) explains, Burke is “the springboard from which to understand other contemporary rhetorical theorists and, in many cases, the standard against which they are evaluated” (p. 1). Burke’s ability to continually provide traction in the conversational grooves of the discipline is uncanny. Perhaps Burke’s modern centrality stems from his historic primacy. Early on, the *Quarterly Journal of Speech* presented laudatory critical reviews from scholars turning toward Kenneth Burke. For example, as early as 1939, Irving Lee of Northwestern University wrote, “It is impossible here to demonstrate the usefulness of [Burke’s book *Permanence and Change*] as an anatomy of rhetoric and for the

processes of symbolization” (1939, p. 688). As departments of speech did not officially emerge until 1914 (Work & Jeffrey, 1989), Burke’s early “contribution to an understanding of the role of communication in our society” (Lee, 1939, p. 688) provided significant influence to the budding discipline. A stalwart writer throughout much of the twentieth century, Burke published nine books of criticism and more than 100 articles on rhetoric. In this large corpus of writing, Burke directs the discussions of communication toward productive enclaves where individuals can agonistically transcend conflict and construct new cooperatively competitive relationships. Such characteristics explain why, as Communication Professor Michael Calvin McGee (1998) explains, “The move in rhetoric and social theory in the twentieth century was really a move away from Aristotle and toward Kenneth Burke” (p. 91).

Across many disciplines, in fact, scholars find Burke’s prolific and provocative insights heuristically generative, ultimately responding with rejoinders, praises, critiques, applications, extensions, reinventions, and rebuttals. In 2007, Communication Professor Clark Rountree collected, dissected, and quantified the generations of secondary research. According to Rountree (2007), over the past ninety years, scholars have produced 1,537 secondary sources regarding Kenneth Burke. This research takes a multitude of forms, according to Communication Professors Barry Brummett and Anna M. Young (2006). Some put Burke’s work in conversation with other theorists such as Jacques Derrida (Chesebro, 1995), John Dewey (Stob, 2005), Michel Foucault (Blair, 1995), Paulo Freire (Winterowd, 1983), Sigmund Freud (Wright, 1994), Ernesto Grassi (McPhail, 1995), and Chantal Mouffe (Meir, 2012).

Other scholars turn from Burke's body of writing to investigations of the body that produced the writing. These biographical studies have investigated much of Burke's life. For example, Selzer (1996b) examines Burke during the 1920s, a decade in which Burke lived amongst a cohort of modernist authors in Greenwich Village. Similarly, George and Selzer (2007) document Burke's life during the 1930s, paying close attention to Burke's political engagements. English Professor Debra Hawhee (2009) centers her discussion on Burke's theorizations of the body, a thoughtful narrative that weaves together formative experiences of Burke's adult life and his writings. Krista K. Betts Van Dyke (2006) utilizes archival research to contextualize Burke's (1932) novel, *Towards a Better Life*; Dries Vrijders (2009) examines the impact of New Deal policies on Burke's work; and scholars such as William Cahill (2011), Scott Wible (2008), and Jessica Enoch (2004) delve into the archives as a means of articulating Burke's pedagogical approaches. Several writers highlight Burke's discursive engagements with his circle of friends and contemporaries (Crable, 2003; Crable, 2012; Selzer, 1996a; Selzer, 1996b; Stob, 2005; Stob, 2008), as well as Burke's career as a researcher for various nonprofit organizations such as the Bureau for Social Hygiene (Crable, 2012; Hawhee, 2009; Jack, 2004; Jack, 2008).

As these biographers and archival researchers are concerned largely with the scholarly insights produced during Burke's adult life, they understandably draw little on his early years. There are a few exceptions. For example, Bryan Crable (2012) discusses Burke's relationship with Ralph Ellison, beginning with a discussion of the racial tensions in the Pittsburgh of Burke's adolescence. Though a valuable contribution, Crable's focus on the pedagogical engagements of Burke's youth is peripheral. Other exceptions include the autobiographies of Burke's longtime friends, Malcolm Cowley (1934) and Matthew

Josephson (1962), which provide several fecund examples of Burke's educational experiences. While these volumes devote valuable pages to the conversation, Burke's life is not the focus. Ultimately, much like Ross Wolin (2001) who argues that few comprehensive examinations of Burke's early years exist (p. 227), I contend that this gap in research regarding Burke's adolescent pedagogical experiences offers researchers an opportunity to renew understandings of Kenneth Burke.

The Myth of the Autodidact

Burke's educational experiences and early years are not completely ignored, of course. Over the years, authors have sprinkled on historical tidbits regarding Burke's high school and college education. Upon examining the array of biographical insight regarding the education of Burke, I was struck by the emergence of a dominant narrative: *the myth of the autodidact*. In this version of Burke's educational biography, Burke is depicted as an academic maverick who renounced formal education and satiated his literary appetite by conversing with the voices that echoed from an endless stack of dusty library books. The notion seems to first appear in the second edition of *Exile's Return*, printed in 1951, and authored by Burke's lifelong best friend, the literary critic Malcolm Cowley. In this revised publication of Cowley's classic memoir, Cowley details Burke's attitude toward education, suggesting that

some fourteen months after we had graduated from Peabody....Kenneth was already a critic and a pundit, although he hated to think of teaching or even of being taught.

After a year of college he was back with his parents, having decided that he would learn more and have more time for writing if he stayed at home. (Cowley, 1951, pp. 24-25)

Interestingly, the original version of *Exile's Return*, first printed in 1934, does not attempt to justify Burke's academic exodus by recalling his contempt for academia. Over the years, however, biographers have continued to reconstitute Burke as an educational loner. For example, according to Communication Professor James Chesebro (1993), Burke's "introduction to language usage was a self-discovery rather than a result of formal education" (p. ix). Sociology Professor Joseph Gusfield (1989) claims that "[Burke's] education was mostly that of an autodidact" (p. 2), and on the jacket of Burke's (2003) book, *On Human Nature*, Burke is identified as a "self-taught thinker..." As I see it, the notion that Burke's autodidactic ventures are solely responsible for his insight stands in ironic contradiction to Burke's approach. After all, according to Burke, "You can't conceive of a single thing by itself. The only thing you can conceive of by itself is everything" (2003, p. 378). Though some turn to the myth more than others, no author dedicates too much time to the discussion. Such is indicative of the scarce attention paid to Burke's early years.

Without contextualized understandings of Burke's academic histories, mythologies about Burke's academic conception become pervasive, molded differently to suite various needs. For some, Burke's autodidactic mythology bolsters his serendipitous thought and perhaps his irrefutability. Others draw more critical conclusions. For example, Burke has faced criticism for the "dizzying array of subject matters—among them anthropology, linguistics, religion, oratory, fiction, history, economics, philosophy, and politics..." which characterizes his work (Simmons & Melia, 1989, p. 4). According to Sonja K. Foss, Karen A. Foss, and Robert Trapp (2002), "Recognition of the fact that Burke largely is self-taught...leads critics such as Arthur E. DuBois to suggest that Burke's motive for including so many topics in his work is simply an eagerness to display his learning" (p. 214). Largely

uncontested, the myth of Burke's autodidactic educational emergence becomes both dominant and impactful. To be sure, the mythology is not unfounded or even completely inaccurate. Burke did not finish college, dropping out of Ohio State University after a semester and Columbia University after a year. As Burke later explained, he left Columbia because "in those days teachers only taught—I wanted to write" (qtd. in Foss, Foss, & Trapp, 2002, p. 188), a goal better realized in Greenwich Village. Moreover, Burke was, at times, critical of his experiences in higher education. Upon deciding to leave Columbia, for example, Burke wrote to Cowley that he was "suddenly becoming horrified at the realization of what college can do to a man of promise." He further lamented, "School is killing us, M.; I am astounded that I should be the one to give it up first" (Burke, 1988, p. 56).

The oversight generated by this mythology originates from its chosen starting place, college. Beginning with Burke's college academic experiences ignores a crucial component of Burke's educational story: Peabody High School. Burke regularly acknowledged Peabody High School as one of the main causes of his high level of academic preparation.

Yes, Peabody High School. It was a great public school. I studied two years of Greek there; you can't always take Greek in a university these days! My Greek teacher was a Harvard man. He taught in the high school because the pay was better than at the Western University of Pennsylvania... (Rountree III, Kostelanetz, Burke, 1987, p. 2)

Remembering Burke's laudatory assessments of Peabody alters the trajectory of his educational biography. In essence, because of Peabody High School, Burke entered college highly prepared and therefore became disgruntled "at having to complete undergraduate courses before he could enroll in the graduate-level courses in which he was interested" (Foss, Foss, & Trapp, 2002, p. 188). As Burke explained,

I didn't drop out because I was disgusted with school....I only expected to take an A.B. degree and many of the courses I wanted to take were available only for postgraduate work. I'd already taken six years of Latin, and I wanted to take Medieval Latin. No, I had to do that in postgraduate school. (Burke, 2003, p. 364)

In sum, Burke entered Columbia ready for graduate work and left exasperated by the novice demeanor of the undergraduate curriculum. Hence, one can conclude that Burke's highly preparatory high school education contributed to his decision to drop out of college.

Additionally, *the myth of the autodidact* assesses Burke's early twentieth century education with twenty-first century standards. To more accurately understand Burke's education, one must adjust the value and meaning of graduating from high school and attending some college to the standards of society at the turn of the century. As History Professor David Nasaw (1979) explains, "In 1890 it made little economic sense to attend high school. There were more direct paths to fame and fortune. In the forty years after 1890 this changed." Born in 1897, Burke predated the emergence of "an institutional path to adult life—from near infancy through adolescence" which, as Nasaw contends, marks the modern educational experience (p. 161). For some professions, college was essential. However, the vast majority of Burke's peers were not college bound. In fact, the vast majority of individuals of Burke's generation were not bound for a high school diploma. In 1910, as Burke was about to enter Peabody, only "8.8 percent of seventeen-year-olds were in high school" (Mintz, Tirozzi, & Hosinger, 2003, p. 2186). Therefore, though Burke left college after just three semesters, he was still amongst the upper crust of educated Americans. As the century progressed, however, the rarity and value of a high school education fell. Industry changed, the government introduced various educational reforms, and more and more young

people began to attend high school. As Nasaw (1979) explains, “In 1920, 32 percent of fourteen-to-seventeen-year-olds were in high school; by 1930, the percentage had increased to 51 percent; by 1940 it was 73 percent” (p. 162). Therefore, in 1916, Burke’s decision to leave Columbia was perhaps less remarkable than some now suggest.

The value of a high school diploma is reflected in Burke’s (1924) short story, “White Oxen,” in which the protagonist, Matthew, ponders his future and takes comfort in the idea that he “would always have a high school diploma to strengthen him in his struggle with the world” (p. 24). However, while contentment with a high school diploma was normal at the turn of the century, by 1951, when Cowley published his revised edition of *Exile’s Return*, attitudes toward education had changed, and Kenneth Burke, an intellectual without a college degree, was increasingly an oddity in need of justification. In sum, as others have suggested, depicting Burke as “a solitary genius and gadfly” is problematic (Selzer 1996a, p. 20). According to George and Selzer (2007), scholars “have taken [Burke’s] autodidacticism and originality as signs of intellectual independence, and have interpreted certain biographical details of his life as additional signs of inspired insularity...” (p. 1). Ultimately, I agree with their warning: viewing Burke as solely responsible for his own education obfuscates our understanding of his educational development and restrains the reach of the corpus.

The History of Competitive Forensics

College literary and debating societies have played a pivotal role in the educational institutions of the United States for the past three centuries (Harding, 1971; Krauss, 1961; Potter, 1954; Sheldon, 1901). The precursor of the modern day competitive forensic teams (Arnold, 1941; Atchison & Panetta, 2009; Branham, 1991; Cowperthwaite & Baird, 1954; Kay, 1974; Kay, 1990; Keith, 2007; Potter, 1944; Potter, 1954; Rarig & Greaves, 1954;

Richardson, 2012), literary and debating societies emerged from the margins of the chartered colonial colleges (Potter, 1954), pre-Revolutionary War institutions, which were then “little more than schools for training clergymen” (Sheldon, 1901, p. 82). Highly strict and pedantic, colonial colleges often barred students from participating in extracurricular activities such as “theatrical performances, billiards, cards, and dice” (p. 88). In response, colonial college students, ensconced in stodgy university halls and threatened with corporally enforced regulations, rebelled by secretly forming literary societies. A typical literary society program of the era, according to Henry Davidson Sheldon (1901), “consisted of prepared orations, debates, declamations, and critical papers treating of literature and science.” Competition was integral, and, according to Sheldon, committees were appointed “to judge the quality of the declamations offered,” and society members faced off in a variety of rhetorical activities, the most popular of which was “extemporaneous speaking” (p. 129). In sum, literary and debating societies began on the outskirts of the early colonial colleges, where students clandestinely colluded to compete, perform literature, deliver speeches, and engage in debates regarding the dogmas of the day. In doing so, they created educational enclaves intended to hone rhetorical skill, create camaraderie, and address emerging scholastic, social, and economic concerns.

The benefits of such rhetorical activities were alluring, and the popularity of literary and debating societies on college campuses quickly spread. According to the *New York Daily Times* of June 28th, 1854, “In every College it is customary for the students to form themselves into a literary society, which holds weekly meetings for debates, reading essays and criticisms....Great rivalry invariably exist between them” (Commencements, 1854, p. 4). Rival societies competitively recruited new members, raced to procure the most elaborate

library collections, and vied for the widest circulation of society newspaper and journal publications (Harding, 1971; Sheldon, 1901). According to the previously cited *New York Daily Times*, though faculty members were “always supposed to favor such institutions,” university administration had little control as literary and debating societies were student run: “Students appoint their own officers, elect their own course, pay their own expenses, and suit themselves” (Commencement, 1854, p. 4). Across the country, literary society activities began as early as the opening day of classes, included amongst the day-to-day activities of the majority of students (Earnest, 1953, p. 82). At many colleges, the activities proliferated, in part, because of the sound pedagogy provided (see McCormick, 1966, p. 14). As Gerald Graff (1987) contends, “No institution better offset the aridity of the college classroom than the cluster of literary societies, debating clubs, student literary publications, and public lectures and lyceums that impinged on college life...” (p. 44). Though they began in hiding, by the early nineteenth century literary societies were embraced by students and faculty alike, publically applauded organizations with significant autonomy and widespread appeal.

In the latter half of the nineteenth century, literary and debating societies began competing against the rival societies on campus. By the late nineteenth century, the competition model shifted again and intercollegiate competition proliferated across the country. In 1874, the Interstate Oratorical Association crowned an intercollegiate oratory national champion (Olson, 1984). Five years later, on March 13th, 1879, “students from Illinois State Normal University who had issued the challenge traveled to Carbondale and engaged in a literary contest that included debate, oratory, essay, declamation, instrumental music, and vocal music” (Kay, 1974, p. 50).

Eventually, the interscholastic head-to-head model of forensics provided inroads for many marginalized groups to prove their intellectual valor through competitive success. As Becky Bradway-Hesse (1998) explains, “Rather than existing only for the elite, or to serve an exclusionary purpose, some of the societies actually opened opportunities for practical rhetorical experiences for both men and women” (p. 178). In her study of “the coeducational literary societies at California State Normal School in the 1870s and 1890s,” Suzanne Bordelon (2012) concludes that “societies were based on assumptions of relative equality between the sexes, fostering the development of teachers who would become powerful public speakers and leaders within the communities” (p. 178). According to Dorothy B. Porter (1934), as early as 1830, literary and debating societies maintained a vibrant discursive pulse among free African Americans. As Bradway-Hesse (1998) concludes, through the college literary and debating society, “students from working-class backgrounds were given the chance to have experiences similar to those at eastern universities” (p. 71).

By the twentieth century, intercollegiate forensics was in full swing. In the footsteps of the Interstate Oratorical Association, national organizations began to form and hold comprehensive national forensic tournaments. Quickly, news of national championships filled the headlines and airwaves, solidifying competitive forensics as a significant part of American popular culture. In January of 1913, Pi Kappa Delta, a national honorary society for intercollegiate competitive forensics, formed in an effort to hold an intercollegiate national tournament in a variety of events such as oratory, extemporaneous speaking, impromptu speaking, the oral interpretation of literature, debate, and student congress (Nichols, 1915; 1987). In 1925 the formation of the National Forensic League (NFL), a high school honor society, “helped to foster enthusiasm for public speaking, debate, and

dramatics” (Gulley & Seabury, 1951, p. 473). In 1934, the *New York Times* reported the existence of “thirty-five State high school debating leagues,” made up of “5,000 high schools with debating teams.” By 1934, forensic education reached “upwards of 100,000 pupils” across the country (Champion Debaters, 1934, p. XX4). Additionally, as radios became a prevalent form of mass communication, colleges and universities began to obtain “their own broadcasting stations through which numerous intercollegiate debates were ‘aired’” (Cowperthwaite & Baird, 1954, p. 273). Competitive forensics began reaching large scale audiences who tuned in to hear “champion debaters and other speech winners from various sections of the country” vie for a national championship, “tests of oratorical skill....broadcast over a nation-wide hook-up” (Champion Debaters, 1934, p. XX4).

In light of the wide reach and laudatory assessments of forensics education, it should come as little surprise that many important political and social actors in the history of the United States emerged from the literary, debating, and forensic societies of their youth. An attenuated list includes U.S. Presidents Thomas Jefferson, John Quincy Adams, William Howard Taft, Woodrow Wilson, Lyndon B. Johnson, Richard Nixon, and William Jefferson Clinton, as well as other notably influential figures such as Barbara Jordan, George McGovern, William Jennings Bryan, Antonin Scalia, Malcolm X, and Lucy Stone. Similarly, for communication studies, the activity is germane. According to G. Thomas Goodnight and Gordon R. Mitchell (2008), “The field of communication’s academic lineage can be traced back to the forensic debating tradition” (p. 80). As speech teachers broke from the Modern Language Association, the popularity of forensics provided the gusto needed for disciplinary survival, and, according to Jarrod Atchison and Edward Panetta (2009), “Intercollegiate debate provided an early justification for specialized training in speech communication” (p.

222). When flipping through the earliest editions of the *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, the discipline's flagship publication, the centrality of forensic education is evident (Keith, 2007). One hundred years later, the effects of forensics are clearly salutiferous. According to Goodnight and Mitchell (2008), competitive forensics cultivates "a specialized laboratory for argumentation" (p. 80), training which "brought some of the leading rhetorical critics of the 20th century to the discipline" (Atchison & Panetta, 2009, p. 322) such as A. Craig Baird, Edwin Black, Bernard L. Brock, James Chesebro, Celeste Condit, Douglas Ehninger, G. Thomas Goodnight, James Klumpp, Michael McGee, Robert Newman, Marie Nichols, David Zarefsky, and countless others. Interestingly, this list of rhetorical critics with forensics training could easily double as a list of Burkean scholars with forensic training.

Conclusion

Kenneth Burke's formative educational career seems to be neglected as a source of insight. Such neglect stems from framing Burke's educational biography holistically through autodidactic terminology. Again, to be sure, my purpose is not to indict the perpetuation of the myth. The image of Burke as an academic maverick is not wrong, per se. It is merely incomplete and therefore illusive. True, when pieced together from ninety years of research, the narrative appears dominant. However, when viewed within one individual piece, it is difficult to identify a single essay in which this anecdote dominates. Amending this oversight merely calls for an increase in the investigation of Burke's formative years. Forensics, as an educational entity that was immensely popular and impactful throughout the history of the United States, but especially during Burke's childhood, ultimately becomes a choice *way in*. Such an incursion, I argue, can expand understandings of dramatism, contextualize Burke's formative years, and identify tools for engaging in dramatistic pedagogy.

Chapter Three

The Form and Formlessness of Burke's Formative Years

Historical investigations enjoy a rich history amongst rhetorical critics. According to Marie Hochmuth Nichols (1963), rhetorical critics should “sufficiently exploit historical and biographical materials” and “struggle with a sense of the times” in a “systematic way” that highlights the dialectic tension between the rhetor and the chronological moment in which the rhetoric was produced (p. 26). For Burkean critics, history is of paramount importance. As Thomas Farrell (1995) contends, “From the very beginning, Burke has maintained the centrality of life-circumstances and situation to the meaning of discourse and its productions” (p. 35). Rueckert (1994) agrees, explaining that Burke viewed critics as “historical counteragents, or counteragents to history, taking what their own time provides them with and subjecting it to the scrutiny of the critical intelligence.” Such scrutinizing, Rueckert explains, is intended to produce future critics with “a critical doctrine free of destructive dogma” (p. 28). In the remainder of this essay, I follow the rich tradition of historical-critical research outlined by rhetorical critics from classical times to today. To do so, I begin with a theoretical discussion regarding Burke's thoughts on the form and formlessness of one's formative years.

Throughout his life, Kenneth Burke weighed in on the importance of one's formative years. According to Burke, one's “formative years are distinguished most of all by their formlessness,” a definition included in Burke's most autobiographical piece, “Auscultation, Creation, and Revision” (1993, p. 91). In this essay, Burke explains that during one's formative years, formlessness acts as “a great curse” which motivates an individual to engage in her or his “first significant explorings in literature” in an effort to appreciate and develop

their form. “If you will follow me no further, you will at least follow me in this,” Burke supplicates, “formlessness, in an eager adolescent reader, is made most painfully apparent precisely by his daily contemplation of much that is well-formed...” Even within literature that is relatively formless, or “fiction so overwhelming to its maker that it was merely slung together,” form will still be present as the story “will generally have a pronounced consistency about its characters...” By engaging these texts, the formless individual traversing their formative stage will begin to develop form because in “each of these characters will be a portion of the young reader, an incipient trend of his own, here expanded into a dominant principle of conduct” (p. 91).

During the formative period, an individual will face hardships as her or his formlessness contrasts with the groomed forms of surrounding peers. Burke writes that, if one “does not always have the same newspaper heroes as the rest” or “if one does not shout always for the home team” the individual will develop “a gnarling...deep within” (p. 91). However, in light of the individual’s formlessness, she or he will be incapable of scotching the cause of this gnarl. Though these troubles become dormant, they eventually reemerge. As one gains form, unaddressed insecurities of adolescent formlessness abound. “And much later, when some public issue arises to which [she or] he can attach [herself or] himself,” Burke explains, the newly formed individual will be “settling the old scores of [her or] his childhood—sallying forth, aglow with intensity, to wipe out his earlier crimes against society.” Though hidden “under the aegis of ‘contemporary realities,’” the formlessness of the formative years continues to motivate formations (p. 92).

With an understanding of Burke’s thoughts on formative experiences, I can now historically contextualize and analyze the rhetorical text, Burke’s articulation of dramatism,

through the historical-critical approach. This vein of inquiry “involves reconstruction of the past in a systematic and objective manner by collecting evidence, evaluating it, verifying it, and synthesizing it to establish facts and to reach defensible conclusions” (Tucker, Weaver, & Berryman-Fink, 1981, p. 68). By piecing together the various acts, agents, scenes, agencies, and purposes that followed Burke through his formative years, I will be able to weigh in on the attitudes undergirding Burke’s critical schema. Therefore, in the following section, I begin by filling in the gap regarding Burke’s forensic education. Specifically, I examine the literary and debating societies of Peabody High School, the Pittsburgh Carnegie Libraries, Ohio State University, Columbia University, and Greenwich Village. Focusing on these various institutions is a productive approach to understanding rhetorical education, in line with “the past decade” of research in which “historians of rhetoric have begun to complicate previously accepted claims about the decline of oratorical culture in the nineteenth century” (Bordelon, 2012, p. 159).

After describing the forensic education of Burke’s youth, I am better situated to provide a uniquely contextualized analysis of dramatism. As Burke’s system is immensely complex, consisting of decades of writings, I limit my analysis to four key terms of his schema: *the forensic*, *bodies that learn language*, *drama*, and *the parlor*. In my analysis of these terms, I look to draw out coherence existing between their definitions, utility, associative terminologies, and historical contexts. This exercise reveals “the value” of a previously unstudied term, the *forensic*, and a previously unexamined influence, competitive forensics, by “revealing their correspondence with some important thing, function, or relationship” (Burke, 1941, p. 113). Ultimately, this procedure allows me to answer the critical question outlined above and draw rhetorical and educational implications. As Tucker,

Weaver, and Berryman-Fink (1981) explain, historical-critical investigations are important because historically contextualized insight about a given rhetorical text “enlarges our world experience” by providing “a deeper appreciation of and more thorough insight into the essential nature and uniqueness of people” (p. 67).

Chapter Four

The Forensic Burke Uncovered

“Why in God’s name should a trait which is to serve a man at forty or fifty—after much reworking—show in a good light at eighteen? The best promise should be in the worst gawk” (Burke, 1993, p. 91).



Figure 2. Young Kenneth Burke with his mother and grandmothers, c. 1900

Kenneth Burke was born on May 5, 1897, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Though little is written about the early life of Lillyan May Duva and James Burke’s only child, pictured above with his mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother, some memories were recalled by Kenneth Burke, himself, over the years. For example, in “Counter-Gridlock,” an interview conducted in the early 1980s, Burke remembers that his mother kept his hair curly at a young age. In turn, Burke relied on his father to rebel on his behalf. “Ironically,” Burke (2003) recalls, “I fared fairly well with bobbed hair, because Buster Brown had bobbed hair—and some time I was called ‘Buster,’ who wasn’t a sissy” (p. 383). In a 1935 book review, Burke opened with insight regarding framed maxims hanging on the way, decorations that left their mark on the young Burke:

One said: “If whiskey interferes with your business, give up your business” (it was evidently an ironic plea for temperance, but I was bewildered because, taking it seriously, I couldn’t make sense of it). There was another about talkative mothers-in-

law. A third...ran as follows: “Laugh and the world laughs with you—weep and you weep alone” (Burke, 1935; 2010, p. 32).

The walls upon which these frames were hung sat in the East Liberty section of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, an early and impactful scene in Burke’s drama. Identified as a “pioneer of ecocriticism” (Coupe, 2001, p. 413), Kenneth Burke grew up wincing at the environmental havoc brought about by industrialization in Pittsburgh (Crabbe, 2012). According to Burke (1935; 2010), “To watch at night, from the Pittsburgh hills, the ‘goblin forges’ by the water’s edge is to wonder at the rage that tore out the natural beauty, putting in its place a smoke-laden clutter...” (p. 369). Of course, the profit margins of industry resulted in an unprecedented demand for labor, trying factory jobs largely filled by European immigrants. During Burke’s early life, the population of Allegheny County, the Pennsylvania county in which Pittsburgh is located, increased tremendously, from 775,058 in 1900 to 1,185,808 by 1920 (U. S. Bureau of the Census, 1931, p. 935). Included amongst the new citizens of Pittsburgh were the grandparents of Kenneth Burke. According to Burke, his parents “were raised in Pittsburgh,” but his grandparents “were immigrants”: “My mother's side was French and German. My father's side was Irish and German” (Rountree III, Kostelanetz, Burke, 1987, p. 2). Factory life was difficult. Burke’s father, James Burke, “worked at Westinghouse,” a Pittsburgh factory “which shadowed the whole town,” and, financially, the Burkes struggled. James Burke “was a minor clerk in a detail and supply department; he had one of those jobs where you were laid off periodically.” As Burke explained in 1987, “I still hate Christmas because all I remember about Christmas is when I didn't get a damn thing because he would be laid off” (p. 2).

For working class immigrant communities, opportunities for literary education and democratic engagement were largely welcomed and valued (Chomsky, 2012). Burke's father exemplified such a posture. Kenneth Burke described his father as "very literary" even though "he didn't write well at all." Despite his failings to publish his fiction, James Burke "was a wonderful raconteur," Burke recalled. "He knew all sorts of people's relationships, I could never get onto. And he was really a wise man in that way" (Burke, 1987, tape 1, min. 09). Burke's mother, Lillyan May, was also instrumental in her son's literary upbringing. Homeschooled by his mother until the fifth grade (Crabbe, 2012), Burke traced his future wordling proclivities back to an early gift from his mother, a dictionary. According to Chesebro (1993), as a child Burke carried the dictionary around "much as other children carry a teddy bear" (p. ix). Eventually, Burke "began to examine the dictionary as a book," and his mother's early gift revealed "the wonders of language to him" (p. x).

In response to the waves of change facing cities like Pittsburgh, many were "fearful that the nation was coming loose from them, that immigrants would not be assimilated, that bossism and machine politics would erode democratic culture." To amend these fears, "progressive leaders emphasized an ambitious program of citizen education at all levels." Such an action demanded "the building of civic infrastructure" and led to "the revival of rhetoric in the early twentieth century" (King, 2006, p. 365). Throughout Burke's childhood, therefore, forensics activities such as oratory, debate, oral interpretation and other rhetorical activities were central to a literary lifestyle, a popular identification that worked to engender civic engagement (Sproule, 2002). Ultimately, competitive forensics was more popular than ever before. The acclaim garnered by competitive forensic success was communally applauded. For example, as Burke began the fifth grade, the *New York Times* (1908) reported

on the newly elected President of the United States, William Howard Taft, applauding Taft's career "as a debater [at Yale, where] he shone all through his course, and won special recognition in that field in election as class orator for commencement exercises in his senior year" (Taft at Yale, 1908, p. SM7). Four years later, Woodrow Wilson was elected president. Similarly, in commemoration of the event, the *New York Times* ran a story proclaiming, "President-Elect Won Enviably Reputation as Orator While Studying at University of Virginia." In this article, the *Times* explained, as "a member of the Jefferson Literary Society," Wilson "took an active part in forensic work and was early regarded as one of the best speakers in the society" (President-Elect as Orator, 1912, p. X12).

By 1900, high school forensics enjoyed national prominence and vibrancy (Gully & Seabury, 1954). Though contest speaking occurred as early as the Grecian Olympics, from 1890 to 1920 forensic competitions were "more popular than ever" (Wilkeson & Gray, 1954, p. 423). From 1902 to 1916, roughly "twenty-eight state associations had sponsored 54,041 debaters in 23,663 debates before 2,602,745 persons in the period from 1902-1916." In addition to debates, literary society contests, which showcased speaking events, now termed *individual events* or *speech events*, were included in forensic leagues. By the time Burke entered Peabody High School, high school forensic students across the nation were competing in a wide variety of "contests in reading, public speaking, and debate... extempore speaking, extempore reading, declamation, interpretive reading... humorous, serious, interpretive, and dramatic reading, in extemporaneous speaking, oratory, and declamation, in one act plays, and acting" (p. 472).

When Kenneth Burke entered Peabody High School, in 1911, Pittsburgh forensics was effervescent, paralleling the national scene. Across the U.S., intercollegiate debating

competitions marked the college experience. Campuses were abuzz with the presentation of contract debates, the hosting of which often involved town parades to usher in, or send off, debating squads, and auditoriums packed with hundreds of spectators eagerly watching the debate. In turn, colleges and universities saw “high schools as an excellent source of college debaters,” and high school forensic tournaments, leagues, and state-wide organizations sprang up “under the auspices of the sponsoring university” (Cowperthwaite & Baird, 1954, p. 267). In Pittsburgh, high school forensics was spurred on by the thriving forensic teams at Allegheny College, and the University of Pittsburgh. By 1906, the University of Pittsburgh’s *Chancellor’s Report* declared that the debate team had “made giant strides,” fielding three debate teams, forming “The Tri-State League” with Wooster, West Virginia, and debating against local rivals, Allegheny College. The Chancellor hoped “that the spirit of debate thus created will develop until it has become a might power in the University” (p. 5). By 1915, the University of Pittsburgh was a national forerunner in public speaking education (Babcock, 1915, p. 92). In fact, during Burke’s junior year of high school, the first issue of the *Quarterly Journal of Speech* (then titled the *Quarterly Journal of Public Speaking*) included an article by Frank H. Lane (1915), a speech and debate instructor and coach at the University of Pittsburgh. In the article, titled “Faculty Help in Intercollegiate Contests,” Lane details his pedagogical approach to competitive forensics, and discusses emergent competitive structures on the high school and college level.

Support for forensics also came from public school administrators such as Dr. Samuel Hamilton, “the gifted and genial Superintendent of Allegheny county” (Pennsylvania State Educational Association, 1916, p. 238). Hamilton was convinced of the pedagogical utility of forensics while serving as a judge for an intercollegiate debate.

The meeting was held in the college town of what proved to be the vanquished team. The faculty, the student body and the audience were naturally interested in the home team. Yet the manner in which the defeated team and its friends applauded the decision of the judges and treated the victors, actually robbed defeat of its humiliation and sting and thus added to the joys of victory. (Hamilton, 1916, p. 243)

In response, Hamilton created structured institutional support for speech and debate activities throughout Allegheny County. A typical literary society engagement most likely resembled the *Criterion's* (1912) description of “the first inter-club debate and oratorical contest between the Forbes Literary Society and the Duquesne Literary and Athletic Club” which, after a piano solo, saw the Duquesne and Forbes orators face off, and then the headline event, a debate over the resolution: “Resolved, that the Principle of Popular Recall of Judges Should Be Adopted by the Several States, Constitutionality Aside.” Duquesne won both the oratory competition and the debate (Irene Kaufmann settlement, p. 16). In sum, the Pittsburgh of Burke’s early years was one in which individuals such as Frank H. Lane, Samuel Hamilton, and countless other educators, embraced competitive forensics as a pedagogical activity, efforts supported and embraced by the larger Allegheny community.

The Literary Crew of Peabody High School

In 1915, Kenneth Burke sat on the editorial board of his senior yearbook, *The Peabody* (Burke, et al., 1915). As an editor, Burke surely came across, and quite possibly contributed to, Anne Waterhouse’s essay, “History of the Class of 1915,” a piece which eerily forecasts the later work of her insipient rhetorical critic classmate, Kenneth Burke.

In September 1911 the curtain rose upon the Class of 1915. Now the final curtain is slowly but surely lowering, and after the last steady descent, the Class of 1915 will

have disappeared into the Past. To record all of the incidents both of tragedy and of comedy that have occurred during these past four years would be a well-nigh impossible achievement....Four years ago the curtain rose on the first act. The scene of the entire four acts is laid in Peabody High School. (Waterhouse, 1915, p. 50)

Peabody High School first opened during Burke's freshman year and Burke was a member of the first graduating class. During Burke's four years, Peabody grew immensely. The enrollment "increased from six hundred sixty-eight to fifteen hundred fifty," and the amount of faculty rose "from twenty-two to fifty-seven" (p. 52). Burke's senior class consisted of 222 students, ninety-two boys and 130 girls (Burke et al., 1915). In addition to Burke, acclaimed alumni of Peabody include Malcolm Cowley, the novelist and literary historian, James Light, who went on to direct several Eugene O'Neil plays as a member of the Provincetown Players (class of 1914), Sue Jenkins, also of the Provincetown Players (class of 1914), John Regis Toomey, film and television actor (class of 1915), and Edith Spurlock Sampson, the first African American U.S. delegate appointed to the United Nations (class of 1915).

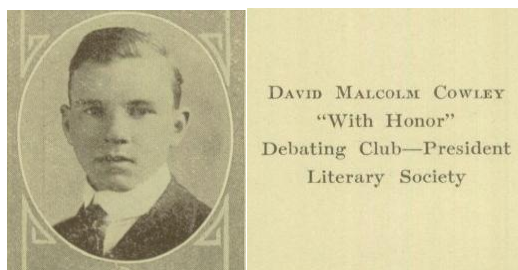


Figure 3. Malcolm Cowley's senior photo, Peabody High School, 1915

Paralleling Burke's ascent into the literati abyss was Malcolm Cowley, the Debating Club President pictured above. As Burke recalls, "I really had known Malcolm Cowley since I was about four years old, but...only my family, our families knew that" (Burke, 1987, tape

1, min. 03). Cowley's father was the Burkes' family doctor and the two were playmates until the Burkes moved across town. The pair reconnected in the eighth grade, and stayed friends throughout their lives. The most in depth study of Burke's time at Peabody High School comes from Cowley's (1934) book, *Exile's Return*. According to Cowley, Peabody "must have been like two hundred other high schools west of the mountains. It was new, it was well-equipped, it was average in size, having in those days about a thousand pupils" (p. 16). Within the student body were "all sorts of crowds..." On the fringes of "the football crowd, the social crowd, [and] the second-best social crowd," existed "the literary crowd," a group which was "composed of boys who made good marks in English Composition, read books that weren't assigned for reading, were shy, noisy, ill-dressed and helped to edit the school magazine. This is of course the crowd to which I belonged..." (p. 17).



Figure 4. James Light, Jake Davis, Russell Farrell, Sue Jenkins, 1914-1915

In addition to Burke and Cowley, the literary crew included James Light, pictured above, the eventual Provincetown Players theatre director. As Burke recalls, "He was an older man and he was an Englishman, originally, and he taught us a lot of stuff that we wouldn't have got onto, you know" (tape 1, min. 04). Other members of the Peabody Literary Crowd included "Russell Farrell (the valedictorian of the class, who didn't become a priest) and Jake Davis and three or four others" (Cowley, 1934, p. 17). Burke (1987) remembers that the group "got into all kinds of stunts there at the school." Peabody High

School had a “high ceiling” and “Malcolm was very proud of his ability to...spit on the ceiling!” (tape 1, min. 8). Malcolm’s father, a doctor, had an office at his home. In this building Malcolm’s parents built “Malcolm a special room” which the literary group used “as a kind of clubhouse” (tape 1, min. 06). The group was literary but mischievous. According to Cowley, “We felt a bashful veneration for everything illicit, whether it was the prostitute living in the next block, or the crimes of Nero, or the bottle of blackberry cordial we passed from hand to hand on Sunday afternoons” (1934, p. 17). When asked about his childhood scrapes, Burke (1987) Burke recalled something a bit less edgy. Burke remembered Malcolm using his sister’s red wagon to steal one of the large dictionaries from the school library. The dictionary was kept in the clubhouse for a time, until one day it vanished. “[Malcolm] accused Jim Light of taking it. And finally, Jim did...admit that he’d taken it. And Malcolm was indignant: ‘How could you steal this thing?!’ and [Jim said,] ‘Well, you stole it!’” (tape 1, 7 min).

In class, the group surpassed their peers. One educator, specifically influential for Burke, was Mr. Ernest C. Noyes, a Shakespearean scholar who taught Latin, Greek, and literature at Peabody. Noyes possibly inspired Burke’s (1924) character “Mr. Norman E. Wilsey,” the school Latin instructor from “White Oxen” who, “being one of those wormy individuals who teach high school not because they have failed in something else but because the good God made them to be high school teachers,...had taken interest in Matthew...” (p. 26). Noyes also had a history of competitive forensic success. While an undergraduate student at Yale, Noyes was a forensic standout, holding membership in the Yale “Classical Club,” and placing highly in several literary society competitions (Commencement at Yale, 1895; Students of Yale University, 1896). According to their collected correspondences,

Burke and Cowley battled for Noyes's praise, literally. A year after graduating high school, Burke wrote Cowley, chiding him to "[remember the] time when I slapped your face for speaking as you did of Elizabeth Browning's poetry. I admit, I had read none of it, and not to this day, and yet my retort to your charge of sentimentality pleased Noyes" (Burke, 1988, p. 12).

As Cowley (1934) recalls, "In the midst of...discussions of life...we had come to question almost everything..." (p. 19). Among the literary group's favorite topics were religion, morality, and literature. Regarding religion, Cowley explains, "we had argued about it so much, Catholics against agnostics against Lutherans against Christian Scientists, that we were all converted to indifferentism" (pp. 19-20). The group identified morality "with chasteness" and concluded that morality "was a lie told to our bodies." As for literature, the group raged against "the authors we were forced to read,...[were] unpleasant to our palate; they had the taste of chlorinated water" (p. 20). As Paul Jay (1988) explains, "Well before either man had established a career or published a single poem or essay, Burke and Cowley were engaged in spirited literary and philosophical debates, where the stakes seemed dramatically high" (p. v).

In such an atmosphere, Burke held his own. Burke's early intellectual proclivities are perhaps best illustrated by Burke's friend, Russell Farrell, the class valedictorian and lead editor of *the Peabody*, who was quite possibly the first in a long line of Burkeans, although he utilized a different term: "Burkse." Debating with Cowley in a letter from Weehawken to Cambridge, Burke explains the neologism:

Farrell, by the way, has...accused you of misunderstanding him. He asserts that my first letter was interesting to him, and that his comments on it were not to proclaim it

dull, but strikingly Burkse. (Burkse is the word he used, god bless him)...My orbit threatens to widen in spite of me....(Burke to Cowley, September 30, 1915)

As self-identified leaders of the literary crowd, it makes sense that Burke and his friends also held leadership roles in the Athenian Literary Society, and the Peabody Debating Club. In 1915, Malcolm Cowley served as President of the Peabody Debating Club, and a member of the Athenian Literary Society. In addition to being a co-editor of *the Peabody*, Kenneth Burke held the office “Judge of Debate” in the Athenian Literary Society, and was a member of the Debating Club. Jacob (Jake) Davis, Burke’s friendly nemesis at the time, was Captain of the Debating Team, and also held the office “Judge of Debate” in the Athenian Literary Society. By their senior year at Peabody, Burke and his friends had risen to the top of the literary hierarchy. In some ways, this translated into positions of prominence amongst the student body since, as Waterhouse concludes, “Among the most important of the [organizations] are the Debating Club, [and] Athenian Literary Society” (pp. 50-51).

Forensics at Peabody

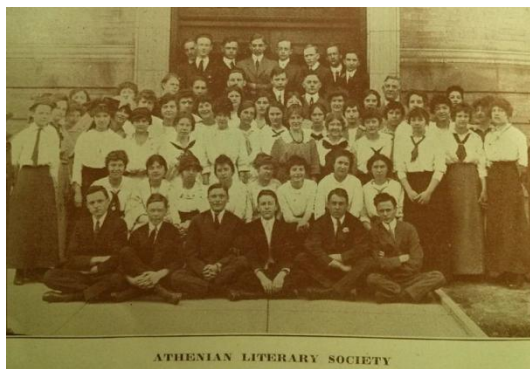


Figure 5. The Athenian Literary Society (Burke on bottom right), 1914

The older of the two organizations was the Athenian Literary Society which, in 1915, experienced its “most successful” year of Burke’s high school career. In that year, the society saw an “increase in numbers, in interest and in general influence upon the school’s activities”

(McKibbens, 1915, p. 58). Amongst Burke's senior class, forty-three students (thirty girls and thirteen boys) were members of the Athenian Literary Society (the *Peabody* does not list the memberships of non-senior students). The society aimed to develop "the love for and appreciation of good literature and to furnish literary ability." Society events included the presentation of

a series of interesting and instructive programs: debates on the war question, biographies of famous men, histories of the nation's songs, readings from great authors, recitations, presentations of scenes from Dickens, music, and discussions of many problems of present day interest. (p. 58)

Membership included Kenneth Burke, Malcolm Cowley, and Jake Davis as members. As an official judge of debates, Burke held a privileged position. As Cowperthwaite and Baird (1954) explain, the debate judge at the turn of the century was viewed as the "'expert' in debate technique and methodology" (Cowperthwaite & Baird, 1954, p. 271). Showcased as experts in front of the often public forensic expositions, debate judges performed a pivotal and analytical role. Throughout the debate, the judge listened carefully, charting out the key terms of the arguments, and attempting to uncover the gist of each side. After discounting the bias of their own personal political beliefs, the judge weighed each the issues as the crowd awaited the ruling. After careful consideration, the judge would, generally speaking, first describe the dialectic clash as she or he saw it. Next, she or he would interpret the competing arguments, and finally, evaluate each side, articulating and defending her or his expert decision in front of a large audience.

Whereas the Athenian Literary Society, an organization open to all high school students, mostly dealt with inner-society competitions and showcases, the Debating Club,

open only to juniors and seniors, largely focused on interscholastic competition. The Debating Club was first chartered during Burke's junior year. By Burke's senior year, 1915, the Debating Club included thirty-four members of the graduating class (fourteen boys and twenty girls). Though the club was young, according to Jake Davis's (1915) review for *The Peabody*, it boasted of "big victories and good times." Pedagogically, Davis explains, the Debating Club differed from typical literary societies where "the greatest complaint against any literary group is superciliousness. This club has none of it. There is no exclusiveness about the organization; therefore the good spirit." Meetings consisted of debates,

extempore talks, arguments, discussions, on all matters ranging from current events to philosophy. The club can show results, for beyond doubt its members are the ablest speakers of the school. In no other place in Peabody is correct English to be heard so generally. (p. 62)

As Kay (1974) documents, a typical debate format for that era consisted of "a two person affirmative team and a two person negative team." The affirmative team spoke first, and "all four speakers were permitted constructive speeches of fifteen minutes each. The first affirmative speaker was allowed a three minute rebuttal. Debate judges were members of the club and were appointed by the president" (p. 76). The Peabody club boasted pragmatic benefits, as their purpose was "to take the raw student, halting, blundering and self-conscious in speech and make him fluent, able, unafraid—this is the work of the club" (Davis, 1915, p. 62).

Competitively, the debating club sponsored two varsity debating teams, won the city "Debating Title" two years in a row, and defeated "Wilkinsburg [High School] in a Literary Contest" (Waterhouse, 1915, p. 50). The Debating Club also maintained several teams of

“reserves” which “won all of their eight contests.” In 1915, the University of Pittsburgh held its first annual “Inter-Scholastic Literary Contest.” According to the University of Pittsburgh *Chancellor’s Report* of 1915, “this very important contest” included contests in Reading, Declamation, Extemporaneous Speaking, Essay Writing, Spelling, Letter Writing, and Latin. Furthermore, as explained in the *Chancellor’s Report*, “Participating schools and the participating contestants are many in number, and the influence of the contest is extending to far distant points” (pp. 45-46). As Davis (1915) recalls, the contest hosted “representatives of fourteen schools” and “Peabody captured four first places out of a possible six....As fine a record is yet to be made by any other school in the Pittsburgh district” (p. 62).

Following the graduation of Burke, Cowley, Davis and others in the class of 1915, the Debating Club would fail “to retain her laurels of last year, when [the team] won four first places out of a possible six” at the University of Pittsburgh Interscholastic Literary Contest. While the club again won first place, they only “secured only one first and five third medals....a commendable showing, in view of the fact that seventeen high schools entered the contest this year. There were in all one hundred and sixteen contestants, and the competition was exceedingly keen” (Smith, 1916, p. 96). Though exact results of Burke, Cowley, Davis and others could not be located, perhaps the commemorations of the Debating Club properly contextualize an existential reference made by Cowley in a 1981 letter to Burke: “And if you present me with the Gold (now plated) Medal, I will bow my head and say, ‘That’s how it ought to be. Peabody High School Redivivus’” (Cowley, 1988, p. 425).

Forensics and the Carnegie Libraries of Pittsburgh

Perhaps the most significant champion of Pittsburgh literary societies was Andrew Carnegie, the wealthy industrialist pictured above. In his autobiography, Carnegie attributed

his rags-to-riches lore to the preparation gained from involvement in the Pittsburgh literary and debating societies of his youth.

The “Webster [Literary Society]” was then the foremost club in the city and proud were we to be thought fit for membership....I know of no better mode of benefiting a youth.... Much of my reading became such as had a bearing on forthcoming debates and that gave clearness and fixity to my ideas. (Carnegie, 1920, p. 61)

For Carnegie, “the rich were morally obligated to practice bountiful and altruistic philanthropy.” As such, Carnegie “engaged in unprecedented philanthropy toward educational institutions and public libraries” (Carnegie & Roell, 2004, p. 146). The first of what would become hundreds of Carnegie Libraries opened in Pittsburgh in 1890. By 1917, Rudolf Tombo, a writer for Berlin’s “Internationale Wochenschrift,” wrote, “It would be difficult to find in the whole world another library which is of such benefit to all the people of a great city as is the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh” (qtd. in Willard, 1917, p. 12).

Literary and debating societies were the dominant club activities. Each branch employed “five to thirteen assistants,” tasked with “not only...providing [the people who come to the branch] with books, but making sure the Library serves as a community social center for its district” (Willard, 1917, p. 4). At each of the branches, “auditoriums or club-rooms” existed “for community uses,” specifically designed to “furnish meeting places for clubs conducted by the Library” (p. 4). In the reference rooms, “at any time during the school year would see eight or nine tables with long rows of books....The debate tables are especially much frequented by groups of young men, who retire to the small rooms near the Reference Room for their discussions” (Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh, 1915, p. 19).

Clearly, research is an integral component of debate. As Claudia J. Keenan (2009) explains, “The debater’s success has always rested on the views of experts that s/he cites and, in turn, those experts derive authority from their credentials in education and experience.” In response to the need for debate research, the Pittsburgh Carnegie Libraries were filled with books about debate. Eventually, in order to streamline the demand placed on the reference department by college and high school debaters, the Carnegie Library introduced one of the first published debate indexes. The popularity of the text demanded the publication of supplements in 1912, 1913, and 1915. In 1919, a third edition, collecting the original documents with the supplements, was printed. According to the forward,

This index was begun as a card index to the debaters’ manuals in the Reference Department of this Library. The increasing number of such manuals and the frequent requests for material on debates made it seem desirable to combine in one list the indexes to all the manuals, thus bringing references to all the material on one subject together and saving the time required to consult the index of each book. The card index has been so useful here that it has been printed, in the hope that it may also be useful elsewhere. (Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh, 1919, p. 4)

In the early 1900s the debater encountered an explosion of citable evidence due to “the consolidation of new fields of study like public speaking, as well as sociology, anthropology, and economics in the social sciences, led to a proliferation of academic departments and scholarly journals...” This phenomenon, coupled with “the desire for expertise raged through American culture....energized intercollegiate debate by increasing the volume of source material and advancing new ways for debaters to retrieve it” (Keenan, 2009, p. 91). Therefore, debate indexes, such as the one published by the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh,

placed eager debaters at the forefront “of modern research technology” (p. 95), key tools for “learning how to gather information proficiently and distill it into arguments” (p. 94).

Among the many Pittsburgh youth drawn in by the forensic aura of the Carnegie Libraries were Kenneth Burke and Malcolm Cowley, a fact relayed by Burke and Cowley over the years. According to Cowley (1934), “Reading, we imagined boys in other cities, beneath the green lamps of public libraries, scheming like ourselves to get hold of the books ‘not to be issued to minors’” (p. 22). Burke (1987) illuminates the literary crew’s “minor restriction” tactic. As Burke explains,

in high school, we began to read very good books. And nobody had taught us, nobody had any idea how we got onto them. We found out that the library, the main library, they had the minor restriction list. . . . And we got our education because certain of the librarians would give us that, the others wouldn’t. The ones that would, we only asked them. And we got a good education that way. (Burke, 1987, tape 1, mins. 8-9)

According to Donald W. Faulkner (1989), “on long evening walks home from the Carnegie Library (where they studied until its closing), [Burke and Cowley] developed a colloquy that was continued in their letters for the next seventy years” (p. 482). Ellsworth Avenue, the name of the pathway connecting two educational institutions, Peabody High School and the East Liberty Carnegie Library, appears frequently in the Burke Cowley correspondences. On Ellsworth, Burke and Cowley dialectically digested their intellectual intake, replayed and charted their past debates, and practiced new lines of argumentation for future discursive engagements, always stayed with them. As Burke wrote in a 1971 letter to Cowley: “The probable fact is that, implicit in all our work, there somehow survives the common

experience of our walkie-talkie days back and forth on Ellsworth Avenue” (Burke, 1988, p. 379).

Weehawken versus Cambridge

After graduation, the Peabody literary friends parted ways. Malcolm Cowley and Jake Davis enrolled at Harvard University, and James Light, a year ahead of the others, was already taking classes at Ohio State University. The Burke family had long considered moving east, and when James Burke landed a job “with an outfit...dealing in accessory parts of automobiles...in Hoboken,” the Burkes moved to Weehawken, New Jersey. For the first year, Kenneth Burke put off college and worked as a bank clerk (Rountree III et. al, 1987, p. 3). In addition to working, Burke frequented the public libraries and literary society gatherings in New York, and strolled about Weehawken. As Burke (2003) explains, “There used to be many old German beer halls in that area, lovely old places....If you walked out from Boulevard East half a mile, you were in the country” (p. 345). Missing the dialectic camaraderie of his Peabody debating partners, Burke channeled hours into letter writing, sending hundreds of letters to Cowley at Harvard. Burke begged for glimpses of life at Harvard, requesting reading lists, and sending poems. At first, Cowley responded with play-by-play enthusiasm about his triumphs, newfound friendships, and emergent popularity. As Burke explains, “Cowley tried to get me to go to Harvard where he was going. I went up there with him to see him once, but apparently they didn't take to me at Harvard” (Rountree III et. al, 1987, p. 3). When Burke purchased a typewriter, his verbosity abounded just as Cowley's responses began to trail off.

As Burke jumped from project to project in Weehawken, desperate for a new groove to traverse, Cowley and Jake Davis tapped into the competitive forensics tenor at Harvard

with much success. The birthplace of the North American college literary society (Richardson, 2012), competitive forensics at Harvard was held in high esteem, especially in regards to intercollegiate debate. At the time, Harvard participated in the Triangular Debate League, squaring off with Yale and Princeton throughout the year. Merely earning the opportunity to represent Harvard in intercollegiate competition demanded that one defeat their entire class, and then defeat the winning debaters from the other three classes of students. Of course, such an accomplishment was not beyond the reach of Peabody's finest. As explained in the *Criterion* of January 21st, 1916,

Jacob Davis, a son of Mrs. Barnett Davis, of 318 Aiken avenue, was a member of the freshman debating team at Harvard College, which defeated both the sophomores and the seniors and won the inter-class championship of the University. This is the second time in the history of Harvard College that a freshman debating team has beaten a senior team for class championship.... The other members of the team were J.

Brownell and Malcolm Cowley, who is also of Pittsburgh. (p. 14)

As a star debater and skilled poet, Cowley increasingly gained prominence amongst the literary circles at Harvard, occasionally showcasing his oral interpretation skills by reading the poems Burke included in his letters. For example, at a meeting of the Harvard Poetry Society, Cowley selected poems from the letters of Burke "for reading to the society." Burke's poetry, as Cowley pedantically pointed out, received less than an enthusiastic response. The problem was not "that they didn't like it," Cowley assured Burke, the problem was "I had to explain some of it, and apologize for some of it, and at the end, they came to the conclusion that you were a most interesting fellow who wrote most interesting, amusing poetry" (Cowley, 1988, p. 31).

Hours away, Burke traversed the vibrant literary society circuit of New York City, attending the readings, lectures, and debates held at public libraries, coffee shops, private residencies and elsewhere. As Burke gained traction amongst the New York literati scene, his letters to Cowley started to fill with recapitulations of his own literary triumphs. Burke's most renowned acquaintance, it seems, was with acclaimed author Theodore Dreiser. Having published one of his more successful novels, *Sister Carrie*, seventeen years before meeting Burke, Dreiser was an established author, now regarded as "one of the key figures in the tradition of realistic novels in America" (Nia & Baghbaderani, 2012, p. 52). Although separated by several years, both Burke and Dreiser shared an affinity for the Pittsburgh Carnegie Library (Dreiser, 1965). For aspiring authors, Dreiser was an important gatekeeper, renowned for hosting the literary society gatherings. As Malcolm Cowley once wrote, Dreiser's literary gatherings drew in "almost everyone in the literary world..." a group that only "Dreiser could have assembled" (1979, p. 491). Moreover, Dreiser's gatherings were quite literary and it was not uncommon for participants to perform literature, deliver prepared and extemporaneous orations, and engage structured discussion and debate as the evening concluded.

In November of 1915, Burke attended one of Dreiser's parties which included poetry readings and debate. For the eighteen-year-old Burke, "the evening was an epoch." As the literary debates raged through the night, Burke's honed forensic skills helped him rise in popularity. Burke's description of the event is so rich that I can do no better than quote his letter to Cowley at length.

Once or twice I managed to say something noticeable....One fellow, for example, said that when Mark Twain wanted to think he would lie with his head near the fire. I

made the unfair but effective reply that often he did not get close enough. I made the horrible blunder of picking out what Dreiser evidently considers his best book technically as an illustration of a fault. I brought the house down, but I had the good sense to immediately acknowledge myself beaten, although I am still quite certain that I am right....As [Dreiser] talked, I made a very gratifying discovery; you and I could give him kindergarten-lessons in convolutions. He calls things subtle which are plainer as Hell – he talks about religion as though it were bread – he admits that the Easterners are in possession of greater brains, greater intellectual development, than the Westerners, and then adds that he can not understand the more Eastern type, without seeming to be aware of the conclusion that was implied. (Burke, 1988, p. 7)

From Columbus to Columbia

In 1916, Burke left his Weehawken home and Greenwich camaraderie and headed to Columbus Ohio to attend college at Ohio State University (OSU) where he joined his former Peabody classmate, James Light. Burke decided on OSU, in part, because, according to Burke, “A teacher at Peabody studied under a man in the English department out there and put me on to him. I took six courses and got the highest marks in all of them except from this man in English” (Rountree III, Kostelanetz, Burke, 1987, p. 3). Light was ecstatically hopeful about his new roommate’s decision to join him in his OSU literary society adventures. Upon learning of Burke’s decision, Light wrote to Burke, “We’re going to be a tradition or better yet, arch devils of degenerative egoism.” After a year at OSU, Light had connected with a literary society, the members of which told Light that he had “‘evidently thought very much deeper on literature than one has any right to expect of a college student.’” Light was also involved with the Ohio State Lantern, the literary society

responsible a dominant publication on campus. In the letter to Burke, Light brags about “crush[ing] Billy Graves in a Lantern article,” an act supported by the “literary bunch” who “assure me that they’ll back me; apropos of the Graves article, to the last” (Light, J., 1915-1916, Light to K. Burke, January 22, 1916).

As the noted literary critic Austin Warren (1933) explains, along with a “small group of intransigents,” Burke published “The Little Magazines” described as “tractates of revolt” decorated in “highbrow...terminology” (p. 227). Specifically, Light and Burke published *The Sansculotte*, which was “dedicated to ‘literature for its own sake’” (Josephson, 1962, p. 40). In 1926, Milton L. Farber and Robert C. Dickson published *The Ohio State University Anthology of Verse* which, according to the preface, written by William L. Graves (Light’s antagonist ten years prior), the anthology was “long the subject of conversation in various groups and societies interested in literary ventures about the university” (p. 7). The collection republishes poetry from *the Sansculotte*, *the Lantern*, and four other OSU literary society publications, including early poems by Kenneth Burke, Malcolm Cowley, and James Light. Though the editors “hoped to include much of the verse written in the early days of the university,” upon examination of the archives, they “found little [early poems] of genuine merit,” leading Graves to conclude that “not until a few years preceding the World War did we notice a marked increase in quality and a gradually perceptible seriousness creeping into the verse” (1926, p. 7). The only pre-World War I poetry in the collection comes from Light and Burke’s publication, *the Sansculotte*, suggesting that the Peabody alumni’s stay in Columbus was brief but impactful.

At OSU, Burke “gathered around Ludwig Lewisohn” who “put me on to *Death in Venice*” (Burke, 1987, tape 1, min. 11), the novel by Thomas Mann that Burke would later

translate and publish while working for *The Dial*. According to Graff (1987), Lewisohn, a Jewish literary scholar, was relegated to teaching in German departments because of anti-Semitism which “was all-pervasive in universities, and more pervasive in English departments than anywhere else” (p. 61). In Lewisohn’s company, Burke was immediately suspicious: “Lewisohn was teaching in the German department, so, of course he was under the cloud” of suspicion afforded to anyone tied to Germany. At the time, Burke, who is of German ancestry, was in favor of a German victory in the war. “So we all gathered around Ludwig Lewisohn, we all felt, not that they were all in favor of [a German victory in] the war as I was, but just that they felt, just in that attitude, of rejecting the whole works” (Burke, 1987, tape 1, mins 11-12). Tied in with Lewisohn, Burke and his friends were considered “dubious” by the university administration (tape 1, min. :11). Eventually, Burke’s publishing venture “was stopped by the officers of the college at its third issue, on the usual charge of pornography” (Warren, 1933, pp. 227-228). The political climate was increasingly heated on campus and, as Matthew Josephson (1963) explains, by the time “war was declared against Germany” Burke had left Columbus and transferred to Columbia University (p. 40).

Fiscal concerns also prompted the move. According to Burke, Columbia “cost less money” and Burke could live at home, in Weehawken. The commute called for “three cents to cross over on the ferry, a walk up Forty-second St., and then take the subway for five cents” (Rountree, III, Kostelanetz, & Burke, 1987, p. 3). At Columbia University, Burke met Matthew Josephson, his “second oldest friend” (Burke, 1988, p. 414). Then a first-year-student from Brooklyn, Josephson, like Cowley, eventually became an esteemed author, publishing over eighteen books. In his memoir, *Life Among the Surrealists*, Josephson (1962) dedicates substantial space to his chance encounter with Burke. Fittingly, the literary

partners-to-be met in the midst of a “collision” between “a few of us who pretended to be literary rebels” and “the legatees of the old regime.” Both Burke and Josephson were attending the opening “meeting of the Columbia College literary society quaintly called—and well named—The Boar’s Head...” (p. 30).

The faculty sponsor of the Boar’s Head literary society was John Erskine, who Josephson describes as “an accomplished lecturer who then wrote poetry profusely, if not well” (1962, p. 30). According to Josephson, the society was filled with “very proper and, I daresay, very soulful young men....Those students were going to become teachers, journalists, advertising agents, and, in one or two instances, Hollywood playwrights—in other words they were really down-to-earth fellows” (p. 30). Also at the meeting that night was Kenneth Burke, a year older and roughly five inches shorter than Josephson. According to Josephson, Burke wielded “a voice like a barrel organ, in which he would boom out his aphorisms, the aggressiveness of his tone evidently compensating for his stature” (p. 32). It was Burke’s first semester and he was enrolled in Erskine’s class, English 25. As he later wrote to Cowley: “I was feeling lonelier as hell (to recall Jake’s fun with langwitch), I saw news of a poetry club” (Burke, 1988, p. 414). At the meeting, each of the established Boar’s Head members “read their poems one by one, then had these subjected to some critical discussion in rather polite terms” (Josephson, 1962, p. 30). That night, the last speaker to perform was Kenneth Burke,

At length, a short, thin, bespectacled youth of pale and intellectual appearance, and a shock of black hair, spoke forth in very different voice from the others; he was a young *révolté*, reading harsh unrhymed verses that described a dream carrying overtones of repressed and melancholy sexual desire! John Erskine at once rounded

upon the poet, declaring himself firmly opposed to experiments in free verse, and to a “realistic” treatment of subjects he characterized as “ugly.” (p. 30)

As Burke (1988) recalls, “I went to a meeting, and got trampled on.” Not one to back down from a debate, Burke fought back “in desolation.” Just as Burke began thinking he “was destroyed,” he heard the “flute-voiced voice” of Matthew Josephson (p. 414). As Josephson writes, he felt the urge to “come to the defense of the luckless poet, arguing that, in the light of Freud’s teachings, we moderns no longer write of love or sex in terms of Elizabeth Barrett Browning” (1962, p. 30). Such a claim infuriated Erskine who turned his wrath toward Josephson,

shouting that Freud was but a charlatan who perverted young minds with his unwholesome theories about the common ordinary progenitive functions. Several years later Erskine was to reverse himself and write some rather risqué novels, such as *The Private Life of Helen of Troy*. But for the present, he used all his artillery to crush out the freshman rebels at his literary tea party. (pp. 30-31)

As the heated debate devolved into barnyard chaos, Burke and Josephson were forced to escape ““out the window”” (Burke, 1988, p. 414). As they trekked across the nighttime campus, Burke and Josephson “commiserated.” When Josephson suggested that they stop to “have an ice-cream soda together at the drug store on Broadway and 116th,” Burke “grinned with all his teeth, and said sardonically and with a pronounced drawl: ‘Ice-cream soda! No, not ice-cream soda; but I’ll have a beer with you’” (p. 31). As Burke (1988) writes, “When I left there that night, thinking I was destroyed, I will never forget, nor be ungrateful for, the difference in my life that I owe to Matty’s decision, an intuition of almost ‘fateful’ implications” (p. 414). Burke and Josephson became “most esteemed cronies” to each other.

Josephson “aped the attitude of extreme world-weariness assumed by...Kenneth Burke—sworn foe of ice-cream parlors” (Josephson, 1962, pp. 31-32), and the two identified themselves as “outsiders’ among the pack of collegiate Philistines all around...” They were “adolescent egoists...exalted by feelings of snobbish pride, now cast down by self-doubt, and pining to see our bad verses in print. But we helped each other” (p. 32).

Forensics: A War-Time Casu(istr/alt)y

By the time Burke arrived at Columbia, the First World War had erupted across Europe for the better part of three years. Tensions ran high. Burke was living in Weehawken “right over where the tunnel goes through.” As Burke explains,

There was the risk that the Germans would blow up the tunnel because of the war goods going through there. We had an old German music box, a wonderful old Regina music box, beautiful old structure. My dad and I were sitting in the back room. All of a sudden we heard my mother put on Die Wacht am Rhein. We rushed in and turned it off as fast as we could (2003, p. 345).

In Europe, three years before the U.S. entered the war, according to Howard Zinn (2005), “patriotism bloomed, class struggle was stilled, and young men died in frightful numbers on the battlefields—often for a hundred yards of land, a line of trenches.” In all, “ten million were to die on the battlefield; 20 million were to die of hunger and disease related to the war.” Under President Woodrow Wilson, the United States entered the war in April of 1917. James Wadsworth, a New York Senator, “suggested compulsory military training for all males,” a tactic intended to “let our young men know that they owe some responsibility to this country” (p. 360), and “in June of 1917...Congress passed, and Wilson signed...the Espionage Act” which, according to Zinn, “was used to imprison Americans who spoke or

wrote against the war” (p. 365). At Columbia University, specifically, war-time tensions between professors, students, and administration were high. According to Graff (1987), the Columbia administration “had the power to get rid of offensively heterodox professors and students and did not hesitate to use it, and the patriotic hysteria of World War I and its aftermath led to frequent persecutions of suspected subversives” (p. 60). The most well-known event, occurring during Burke’s tenure at Columbia, was the firing of “J. McKeen Cattell, a psychologist, a long-time critic of the Board of Trustees’ control of the university, and an opponent of the war...” In response, “the famous historian Charles Beard” turned in his resignation in protest, “charging the trustees with being ‘reactionary and visionless in politics, narrow and medieval in religion....” (Zinn, 2005, p. 371).

War was especially detrimental to forensic activities. In his study of the literary and debating societies at Southern Illinois University (SIU), Jack Kay (1974) found that after the United States entered the war in April of 1917, “one-half of the members were in service before the beginning of the next term....In the years of ’17 and ’18, therefore there were not enough members or sufficient interest to foster organization” (pp. 71-72). Forensic teams across the nation suffered similar losses (Arnold, 1941), taking its toll on the health of the activity. For example, at SIU, “during the early years of the societies, 1874-1887, virtually every member of the student body belonged to one of the two organizations” however, by 1922, “25 percent of the student body belonged to one of the two societies” (Kay, 1974, p. 28).

While Malcolm Cowley enlisted and was shipped off to France, Burke was exempt from service for medical reasons. Throughout the rest of Burke’s time at Columbia, Burke stayed close to Josephson, philosophizing, debating, and keeping close contact with the

literary societies of Greenwich Village. As Burke recalled, “In our capacity of super-intellectuals we...roamed about aimlessly enough from Columbia down to the German library in the bowls of Second Avenue, and then we had a war argument that entertained for blocks around” (1988, p. 52). According to Josephson (1962), “the issue of American intervention was debated as passionately in Greenwich Village as on the Columbia campus” (p. 53). Burke and Josephson were especially keen on debating the war. In addition to debating pro-war ideologues, the two took on what they considered to be problematic approaches of the anti-war crowd. For example, Burke and Josephson once attempted to join the Guillotine Club, a radical organization that was increasingly militant in its orientation. After the first meeting however, Burke and Josephson learned that the members would soon “vote on the proposal of the leaders that we prepare for a dangerous struggle and the risk of imprisonment by accepting henceforth an autocratic discipline imposed from above” (p. 54). Though weary of the club’s direction, Burke and Josephson “counted on putting up a fight against such undemocratic procedures and hoped for a chance to debate the issue” (pp. 54-55).

Peabody in Greenwich and the Anti-Logrolling Society

After Burke dropped out of Columbia, the Peabody literary clique reassembled in Greenwich Village. As Cowley (1986) explained, “As you know, Burke and Sue Brown [formerly Sue Jenkins] and Jimmy Light, of the Provincetown Players, and I all went to Peabody High School in Pittsburgh, and that led to a sort of reassembling of the Peabody High School group in Greenwich Village in 1919” (p. 169). The group submerged into the collaborative habits of the past with James Light, the oldest member of the group, and “the one who made friends easily” helping them get connected with the Greenwich Villagers,

especially the Provincetown Players circle, where Light would go on to direct the plays of Eugene O’Neil. As Burke explains, the Provincetown Players “were giving these shows all the time and naturally they always needed a paper audience to keep them filled up...I got a good education out of the whole thing that way (Burke, 1987, tape 1, mins. 17-18). By the time Cowley returned from the First World War, the Peabody connection was so strong that he was “immediately...more or less friends with the old Village characters, including Gene O’Neill and Dorothy Day, besides many others whose names have passed out of currency” (Cowley, 1986, p. 169).

Adrift amongst the waves Greenwich, the forensic crowd of Peabody maintained their forensic escapades. Together with Josephson, Burke and Cowley began to return to the competitive antics so closely aligned with their days at Peabody. According to Josephson (1962),

Kenneth, Malcolm, and I at about this period also formed what we called our Anti-Logrolling Society....[where we] engaged in rather collegiate competitions with each other: to write a sonnet within a time limit of twenty minutes or forty minutes upon a common theme....After working against the clock, we would stop and read aloud what we had produced. Thereupon we were in honor bound to begin our critical comments upon each other’s verses, by emphasizing what was worst in them or pointing out all that might be held to be vulgar or trite or “adjectival.” Burke, a master of this vinegarish sort of criticism, would say: “Well, of all the stinkin’ rotten lines...!” (p. 51)

Though Greenwich life was perhaps more social and celebratory than one might expect of a college literary society event or forensic competition, Burke maintained his serious

commitment to criticism. Josephson recalls “one evening” spent with “a group at the ‘Hell-Hole’ in the ‘Village...’” That night, Burke was delivering an address regarding literary criticism, “but everybody else was shouting drunkenly at the same time—and several persons cried that they could not understand what Burke was saying and would not listen to him anyway” (pp. 64-65). In response, Burke “arose and said: ‘Very well, then I will give my lecture on Robert Louis Stevenson in the corner for myself.’” Burke then walked to the “corner of the café, turned his face away from the rest of us, and talked to himself, moving his lips rapidly like an old priest saying his prayers” (p. 65).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I draw from a range of archival and secondary sources in order to historically contextualize and articulate the forensic education of Kenneth Burke. Burke came of age when competitive forensics was reaching a new height of popularity in the United States, and especially in Pittsburgh, Burke’s hometown. Burke attended Peabody High School, a newly formed high school which was, much like Burke during his tenure at the school, undergoing formative years. At Peabody, Burke met his lifelong friend, Malcolm Cowley, and fell in line with a group of friends that self-identified as the literary crowd. Along with Burke and Cowley, many of the members of the literary crowd doubled as members of the Athenian Literary Society and the Peabody Debating Club. During their senior year, Burke served as one of three Judges of Debate for the Athenian Literary Society and Cowley was elected as President of the Debating Club. Burke and his friends also spent a vast amount of time frequenting the Pittsburgh Carnegie Libraries which led the country in several aspects of forensics education, especially in regards to the creation and organization of debate research guides. Bolstered by the rich opportunities available at the Carnegie

Libraries, and enlightened by the tutelage of Mr. Ernest Noyes, the Latin and Greek instructor, Shakespeare scholar, and former literary society standout at Yale University, members of the Debating Club soared. Burke and Cowley's senior year, the Debating Club, which competed in both debate and individual events, was the most competitively successful team in the city.

Following high school, Burke continued to engage in various types of forensic activities. In Weehawken, New Jersey, while working and living with his parents, he trailed the literary society gatherings that populated Greenwich Village while his former classmates, Cowley and Davis, garnered practically unheralded success as freshmen members of the Harvard Debate Team. During his one semester at Ohio State University and year at Columbia University, Burke made several attempts to engage in the literary activities on campus. Amidst the cloud of political strife accompanying America's involvement in World War I, the literary and debating societies that so heavily influenced college life during much of Burke's youth began to fade away. However, before Burke famously left college for the Village, literary society involvement produced another of his lifelong companions, Matthew Josephson. Alongside Josephson, a fellow iconoclast, Burke engaged in various political debates strewn about the societies and clubs of New York City. Eventually, several members of the Peabody literary crowd reconvened in Greenwich Village, associated with the Provincetown Players, formed the Anti-Logrolling Society, and continued engaging in the forensic activities of their formative years.

Chapter Five

The Forensic Texture of Dramatism

In his acclaimed literary memoir *Exile's Return*, Malcolm Cowley (1934) asserts that the Peabody days he shared with Kenneth Burke were important because they “reappeared in what we wrote” and “help to explain what followed.” For individuals like Cowley and Burke, Cowley explains, “what we felt at seventeen is an explanation and criticism of what we should later believe” (p. 19). As such, both of the former-forensic-teammates-turned-authors drew upon their Peabody forensic education throughout their career. For example, in his first book of fiction, *White Oxen*, Burke includes a short story, “Mrs. Maecenas,” based on his encounters with an oral interpretation teacher at Peabody. In this tale, the ethical credibility of the protagonist is demonstrated by her fairness as a debate judge:

There is no greater tribute to her tact than the fact that she was honorary head of both the Athenian Literary Society and the Society of Fine Arts, two organizations which were always facing each other with backs hunched and teeth bared....In the course of her five years at the university Mrs. Maecenas had judged twelve debates on the single tax, fifteen on the inferiority of women to men, and nine on various phases of prohibition, state, national, and locally optional; and to her credit be it said that her verdicts were not always the same on the subjects. (pp. 71-72)

Later, when writing his novel, *Towards a Better Life*, Burke (1932) named his characters after classmates from Peabody. “Genevieve was the name of one girl I knew in high school,” Burke (1987) recalled during *Conversations with Kenneth Burke*. “And Florence was the same way. I had a great crush on Florence....Malcolm, he [became Anthony] at moments” (Burke, 1987, Tape 2, min. 1:06). Not only were Genevieve, Florence, and Malcolm students

at Peabody, they were also members of the Athenian Literary Society and the Peabody Debating Team (Burke et al., 1915).

Burke also referred to speech and debate activities in his essays and books about rhetorical theory and criticism. For example, in *Permanence and Change*, Burke (1935) discussed debate as a means of illustrating the way in which “the *demonstration* is derived from the *demonstrandum*” (p. 130):

From what we want to arrive at, we deduce our ways of getting there, although the conventions of logical exposition usually present things the other way round. The debater suggests that [her or] his “facts” lead to [her or] his “resolved,” but we know that [her or] his position was assigned [to her or] him, and that [she or] he selects [her or] his “facts” accordingly. (p. 130)

Given the high status of competitive forensics in the 1930s, especially for the kind of erudite readership that included Burkean texts on their bookshelves, it is tempting to view Burke’s use of debate as little more than an example for his larger points within a given passage. After all, as I demonstrated in previous chapters, by the time Burke was writing his critical theories of rhetoric, speech and debate was well established as popular culture thanks, in part, to emergent radio broadcasting technology and the formation of national championship forensic leagues. However, in light of the aforementioned archival research in which I document the importance of forensics during the formative experiences of Burke’s youth, one cannot help but reconsider Burke’s writings. In addition to his mentioning of debate in several texts, it is important to also question Burke’s pivotal term *the forensic* as a possible allusion to his days in the Athenian Literary Society and Debating Clubs of Peabody High School.

In this chapter, I begin a discussion that attempts to connect Burke's formative experiences in competitive forensics with some of the key terms that comprise his larger critical schema, *dramatism*. This exercise is, in essence, cartographic as I am attempting to map the contours of Burke's key terms in order to retrace the route Burke traversed when navigating the forest of words that comprised his contribution to rhetorical criticism and theory. In other words, in this chapter I reconsider Burke's terms in light of his forensics experiences. Of course, the approach is *forensically* oriented: I am *interpreting* Burke's prose in order to present a *public address* that contributes to the unending *debate* about the function, etymology, and definition of Burke's words. Burke himself describes this as a forensically oriented task, suggesting that

A writer may "exploit" a set of terms in the lawyer's-brief manner. He [or she] may advocate a "cause" as the barrister pleads a "case." But insofar as she [or he] is concerned with the "definition of terms" *per se*, [she or] he is denied this procedure (the "polemic" procedure of logical cogency, that is, "compulsion"). His [or her] main emphasis is lexicological, and [she or] he "reaches conclusions" merely as a by-product of definition (that is, a "decision" on a particular issue of controversy is itself offered as one more way of defining a term). (Burke, 1959, pp. 293-294).

With Burke's judicial approach in mind, I now lay out my argument in which I construct lexicological linkages between Burke's terms and the terms imbued upon him through his forensic education. I begin with Burke's term *the forensic*, as outlined in *Attitudes Toward History*. I then discuss *the forensic* as an unnamed component of the *dramatic agon* and, by extension, *dramatism*. I conclude by identifying the parlor metaphor as an allusion to a policy debate round.

The Onslaught of the Forensic

In the final section of his 1937 book, *Attitudes Toward History*, Kenneth Burke includes a brief expose discussing “the forensic,” a “pivotal term” used throughout various areas of the book. According to Burke, “the forensic” refers to “material supplied by the forum, the marketplace.” As one would expect, Burke’s definition grooves with the Latin roots of the word. Etymologically, the term *forensic* is derived from the term *forum*, a word which “came to be used for any outdoor open space or public place, and in particular for a market place (the most famous of which was the one in Rome, where public assemblies, tribunals, etc. were held)” (Ayto, 1991, p. 238). Upon these public forums, individuals engaged in “forensic oratory,” a form of public address “concerned with the justice or injustice of past acts” (Burke & Zappen, 2006, p. 334). As Communication Professor and former Director of Debate Catherine Helen Palczewski (2005) explains, “The forensic opens the present to consideration of the past,” through a process of “accusation, defense, and justification” (p. 126).

For the most part, Burke’s definition coheres with the traditional definition provided by Palczewski. As Burke explains, in striving to attain justice, rhetors create “public, ‘forensic’ material [which] is formed about strategies of ‘argument,’ ‘evidence,’ ‘plea.’ It is a way of ‘checking’ by assertion” (1959, p. 165). However, it is important to note that Burke’s definition stresses *the forensic* as a *material*. For Burke, the term *forensic* identifies both a discursive process and a material product. While it is tempting to write off Burke’s definition as the byproduct of his own inventiveness, by drawing upon the language of debate education that Burke most likely encountered while competing in forensics at Peabody High School, it becomes clear what motivated Burke’s usage of this term. As explained in the 1913 high

school debate textbook, *Elements of Debating: A Manual for Use in High Schools and Academies* by Leverett S. Lyon, in debate circles during the early twentieth century, “the forensic” was a term identifying the transcription of a debate. *The forensic* was made of the first affirmative speech, often prepared prior to an upcoming debate, along with a reconstructed transcription of the remainder of the debate based upon briefs and notes. As Lyon (1913) writes, “The forensic is nothing but a rounding-out of the brief. The brief is a skeleton: the forensic is that skeleton developed into a complete literary form” (p. 48). The forensics of past debates were often collected annually and published, especially popular materials for the eager high school students yearning to learn the arguments and styles of successful college debaters. Therefore, based on the contextual definition of this term, one can see how Burke’s later definition in *Attitudes Toward History* casuistically stretches the older debate terminology of his high school days. In doing so, Burke presents a critical term that describes the symbolic materials produced in forums throughout society. In other words, Burke’s term, *the forensic*, much like the high school debate term identified by Lyon, works as a social document that reports the resolutions passed in the forum. The purpose of such a document is legislative and educative, intended to create shared understandings and social orientations.

Burke’s term *the forensic* is interesting for other reasons as well. In addition to Burke’s definition of *the forensic* as a material product rather as well as a rhetorical typology, other points of uniqueness abound. First, Burke identifies an individual’s initial realization of *the forensic* as a point of transformation from the “pre-forensic” child to the forensically aware adult. According to Burke, “the perspectives of adult orientation are largely...made of ‘forensic’ matter” (1959, pp. 211-212). As such, “One’s mind is made largely of forensic, or

public materials, as grounded in language and in the patterns of social cooperation of which language arises” (qtd. in Quandahl, 2001, p. 650). For Burke, the term “mind” refers to “the genetically endowed ability, the physiologically endowed ability, to learn an arbitrary conventional symbol system such as a ‘natural’ language” (Burke, 2003, p. 381). While the adult is forensically aware, “the child necessarily develops without much awareness of this forensic material. He [or she] is concerned with [her or] his immediate relatives and playmates, [her or] his toys and animals” (Burke, 1959, p. 254). The child is in a “pre-forensic” state, and is therefore concerned “with ‘formative events (accidents, illnesses, Christmas, excursions, dreams), and with intimate relationships (parents and other relatives, nurses, teachers, priests, doctors, policemen, etc., incipient manifestations of the authoritarian relationships)” (p. 209). Eventually, the child “becomes ‘socialized’ in forming [her or] his mind by the incorporation of public materials” (1959, p. 165). In passing from “pre-forensic” childhood to mature adulthood, the individual encounters “the onslaught of the forensic” and undergoes “the ritual of ‘transcendence,’ whereby [she or] he adjusts [herself or] himself to [her or] his adult responsibilities as [she or] he sees them...” In this “dramatic change of identity,” the individual “is at once the same [woman or] man and a new [woman or] man...” In essence, by being able to “see” the forensic contours and logics operating in society, the mature individual is able to grasp “a greater complexity of co-ordinates,” and therefore becomes “prophetic, endowed with ‘perspective.’” When analyzing the literary works of an author, such a moment of transformation is important because the process in which one learns to encounter the forensic “forms the basis upon which the ramifications of his work are based” (Burke, 1959, p. 209). In other words, learning the language of the forensic becomes a locus for the motivation of future rhetorical acts.

Upon first reading *Attitudes Toward History*, Malcolm Cowley, then the book review editor for *New Republic* (the publishing company that originally published the book) made an interesting observation. In a letter to Burke, Malcolm wrote, “You are presenting a philosophy that starts out as a book review and ends as autobiography” (Cowley, 1988, p. 219). Such a comment is important because, as Burke’s longtime best friend, Cowley was in a position to recognize moments of autobiographical detail that might otherwise be hidden. Interestingly, in reviewing the end of *Attitudes Toward History*, it seems to me that Burke’s most autobiographical moment comes when he is describing of the “onslaught of the forensic.”

The onslaught of the forensic must always come somewhat as a shock. In our own case, the shock was paralleled by a purely physical phenomenon. Your correspondent was near-sighted. As a result, the world was composed of soft, blurred edges. Just at the time when he was making his first “cynicizing” acquaintance with the sophisticated lore of the forensic (as embodied in the vast comic literature developed since the rise of capitalism) he was sent to an oculist. As he emerged, with glasses, he came suddenly into a world of harsh outlines. He had not been immunized to the sight by small homeopathic doses. It “hit” him. He saw the lines and blotches on peoples’ faces, and the discomfiture was *alienating*. We submit that this same process prevails, in subtler ways, when one first begins really to understand the documents of the forensic. (Burke, 1959, p. 255)

Whether or not this autobiographical expose is the source of Cowley’s reference, the tale described is significant. First, this story places Burke’s pivotal realization of “the forensic” in the halls of Peabody, when Burke was “making his first ‘cynicizing’ acquaintance with the

lore of the forensic.” Also, this story illustrates an understanding of symbolic realms as elucidating affection on bodies that learn language, the language of the forum, the forensic. As Burke learned to literally see the forensic logics motivating action throughout society, he was reborn, and rebirth, as Burke notes, is “a process of socialization...whereby the poet fits [herself or] himself to accept necessities suggested to him by the problems of the forensic” (1959, pp. 209-210). For Burke, such an encounter paralleled a bodily shift in sight. After visiting an “an oculist,” Burke reemerged with new “frames” through which he could see more clearly. As a body that learned language, Burke engaged in transformative rituals of rebirth in which he readjusted to meet the formative challenges of his experiences. These experiences helped Burke articulate rhetorical theories that would prepare him to more aptly size up his situations and comically confront conflicts. In the end, though Burke’s term *the forensic* goes almost completely overlooked within Burkean studies, as I see it, the term is exactly what Burke calls it, pivotal.

The Forensic and Dramatism

Kenneth Burke’s philosophy of language, dramatism, uses the critical terminologies created to understand drama in order to understand human relations in general. At the time Burke first names dramatism, the influence of positivism was gaining ground throughout much of the social science academic community. In critique of the many social scientists who would look to laboratory rats in a maze in order to understand human behavior, Burke crafted dramatism. Burke drew from William Shakespeare’s play, *As You Like It*, specifically “Jacques’ speech on the seven stages of man” (Burke, 1959, p. 240). In this address, Jacques says, ““All the world’s a stage, And all the men and women merely players; They have their exits and their entrances; And one man in his time plays many parts, His acts being seven

ages” (qtd. in Burke, 1959, p. 240). In essence, dramatism suggests that, as far as human relations are concerned, all the world *really is* a stage. Therefore, in order to understand human action, scholars should study human behavior in the same manner in which they study dramatic texts.

Though dramatism is not named until his 1945 book *A Grammar of Motives*, the first germinal forms of the methodology arrive in his 1941 book *A Philosophy of Literary Form*. Specifically, in his chapter, “Drama as Ritual Hub,” explains that at the root of the drama exists the “agon,” a term identifying the “competing principles, of protagonist and antagonist. Their competition sums up to one over-all cooperative act” (1941, pp. 76-77). As I see it, the agon is quite synonymous with the forum. According to Lloyd (1992),

The agon basically consists of a pair of opposing set speeches of substantial, and about equal, length. Other elements are often present, such as angry dialogue after the speeches, or a judgment by a third party, but the opposition of two set speeches is central to the form. (p. 1).

For Burke, the agon, which showcases “the clash of the partisan rivals, each of whom seeks to overthrow the others” (Burke, 1950, p. 207), is at the root of dramas. Fittingly, also at the root of *drama*, according to Burke, is *the forensic*. To be sure, many interpret *forensic* as a term that is limited to the realm of the judiciary. This definition stems from Aristotle’s identification of *forensic* as one of three types of oratory (the other two being *deliberative* and *epideictic*) in *Rhetoric*. However, as Burke explains, in *Rhetoric*, Aristotle is “talking about certain specific judgments.” In other words, Aristotle is “telling you to say are the things that represent the kinds of things people think are good and bad, desirable or undesirable, the promissory and the admonitory, in that particular society” (p. 376).

Recognizing the temporal and cultural specificity of Aristotle’s rhetorical prescriptions, Burke’s definition of *the forensic* understandably differs by extending beyond responses designed to sway the judiciaries of ancient Athenian democracy. Before codified laws, courtroom trials, magistrates, and lawyers, forensic justice was played out through ritual drama. Burke elaborates on this idea in *Conversations with Kenneth Burke*, when describing the tragedies of Aeschylus, a pre-Aristotelian playwright whose life “spanned a period which marked the flowering of Greek democracy” (Karanikas, 1955, p. 7). In the taped interview, Burke discusses *Oresteia*, Aeschylus’s famed play which “begins with the building of justices, the forensic.” Such pre-Aristotelian tragedies served as “complex trials by jury, with the plaintiff, defendant, attorneys, judges, and jury all rolled into one—or otherwise stated, we get in one piece the offence, the sentence, and the expiation” (p. 48). As Enders (1992) explains, from “classical antiquity” to “the Middle Ages” scholars have identified the “conflation of forensic rhetoric and drama that is of the utmost relevance to the origins of drama itself.” As such, rhetoricians “looked to the theater for guidance, many going so far as to assert the equivalency of orator and actor” (p. 2). Ultimately, Burke’s term *the forensic* is connected to his larger system of *dramatism* because it is connected to the *drama*.

Perhaps the most acclaimed component of “Ritual Drama as Hub” is the oft-cited Parlor Metaphor. In the metaphor, Burke (1941) begins with the question: “Where does the drama get its materials?” In response, Burke identifies the parlor. Therefore, the material of drama arrives from “the ‘unending conversation’ that is going on at the point in history when we are born.” (p. 110). To set the stage, Burke begins,

Imagine that you enter a parlor. You come late. When you arrive, others have long preceded you, and they are engaged in a heated discussion, a discussion too heated for

them to pause and tell you exactly what it is about. In fact, the discussion had already begun long before any of them got there, so that no one present is qualified to retrace for you all the steps that had gone before. You listen for a while, until you decide that you have caught the tenor of the argument; then you put in your oar. Someone answers; you answer him; another comes to your defense; another aligns himself against you, to either the embarrassment or gratification of your opponent, depending upon the quality of your ally's assistance. However, the discussion is interminable. The hour grows late, you must depart. And you do depart, with the discussion still vigorously in progress. It is from this "unending conversation"...that the materials of your drama arise. (Burke, 1973, pp. 110-111)

The forensic goes unmentioned in this chapter. However, one can identify veiled forensic references through a careful analysis of the words chosen within this metaphor. To begin, notice the opening question: "Where does the drama get its materials?" This question begins with an emphasis on materiality, the product of the forum, the marketplace, *the forensic*. Again, in *Attitudes Toward History*, the "proliferation of the *forensic*" led to "the great writers of tragedy that preceded [Aristotle]. Their plays, we might say, are complex trials by jury, with plaintiff, defendant, attorneys, judges, and jury all rolled into one" (Burke, 1937, p. 48). Clearly, when read together, Burke's drama seems to get its materials from *the forensic*. Second, the metaphor employs the term "heated discussion," "the argument," and "defense," terms which echo the explanation posited in *Attitudes Toward History* which suggests that "[t]his public, 'forensic' material is formed about strategies of 'argument,' 'evidence,' 'plea.' It is a way of 'checking' by assertion" (Burke, 1959, p. 165).

Situated in a society in which the forensic crust is drastically under reconsideration, in which the citizenry face a changing ecological scene that calls for a corresponding forensic alteration, a dictum of new governing modalities, Burke calls for cooperative competition: “we believe that such a state of affairs would require more of the ‘Augustinian’ stress upon the *agon*, the contest, with knowledge as the Hamletic preparation for the ac required in this agon” (p. 123). In the essay, Burke proposes drama as a dialectic, “concerned with the maieutic, or midwifery, of philosophic assertion, the ways in which an idea is developed by the ‘cooperative competition’ of the ‘parliamentary.’ Inimical assertions are invited to collaborate in the perfecting of the assertion” (p. 123). Without this cooperative competitive atmosphere, fascism abounds. And, as Burke notes, “The greatest menace to dictatorships lies in the fact that...they deprive themselves of competitive collaboration. Their assertion lacks the opportunity to mature through ‘agonistic’ development” (p. 123). As Barry Brummett (1995) explains, the cooperative attitude can be seen in Burke’s use of the word “tenor.” As Brummett explains, “[t]enor is a word of concord, of shared purpose and goals, in other words. Neither a shouting match nor a brawl has a tenor.” According to Brummett, such a quality creates movement, and “[b]y the time one leaves the parlor, what started as “heated” has turned into a “discussion still vigorously in progress,” in other words, a dialogue that is getting somewhere. (p. 224). In essence, in the germinal stages of dramatism, Burke employs a competitive agon that demands cooperation. Such a system encourages *the forensic* by encouraging the competitive voice of opposition. Moreover, dramatism comes with a warning: without such cooperative opposition, individuals “bring themselves all the more rudely against the *unanswerable opponent*, the opponent who cannot be refuted, the nature of brute reality itself” (p. 124).

The third piece of evidence, as I see it, provocatively links dramatism to *the forensic* to competitive forensics. To uncover albeit much more veiled clue, it is important to return to Brummett's (1995) article, *Speculations on the Discovery of a Burkean Blunder*. In the article, Brummett identifies "an objectively demonstrable error in the sentence beginning "Someone answers;"

This "someone" is key; imagine him sitting in a chair over there. "You answer him," says Burke, and "another comes to your defense"; imagine this ally of yours sitting in a chair next to you. Then "another aligns himself against you," and this one who aligns against you must be an ally of the "someone" who began the sentence attacking you, for this alignment against you is "to either the embarrassment or gratification of your opponent." So imagine that this second opponent of yours sits down over there, next to your original tormentor. Here comes the error: "depending upon the quality of your ally's assistance." But this is not your ally who has offered assistance; it is the ally of the "someone" who started attacking you, the someone over there, the someone who experiences embarrassment or gratification. It is the quality of "someone's" ally's assistance that causes "someone" his embarrassment or gratification. The sentence should end by saying, "his ally's assistance." (Brummett, 1995, p. 221)

Brummett identifies two possible explanations for the apparent gaff in this sentence: first, "Burke may have intended the error," and second "[t]he error may have been unintended, yet escaped detection from what must have been many readings by Burke himself and thousands of readings by Burkeans" (p. 222).

I would like to advance a third possibility for this conundrum: perchance Burke committed no error at all, but rather is presenting the Parlor Metaphor as a team debate round in which the arguments of the person who “aligns himself against you” can only be confronted with “your ally’s assistance.” In such a scenario, no blunder exists (on Burke’s part, at least) as the person who joins your opponent will be proven to either gratify or embarrass “your opponent, depending upon the quality of your ally’s assistance” (Burke, 1973, pp. 110-111). Or, perhaps the scene reflects the after-debate discursive practices typical of the forensic societies of the late nineteenth century. As Brummett (1995) notes, “Burke was a careful, intentional writer” and this metaphor “occurs in a book, *The Philosophy of Literary Form*, that is in its third edition; Burke had more than fifty years between its original publication and his death to ‘correct’ it” (p. 222). Perhaps there was nothing to “correct” but rather something to “uncover.”

Chapter Six

Illuminations, Contributions, and Directions

In 1945, Burke published his most cited work, *A Grammar of Motives*, the book in which he names and articulates dramatism. Quite notably, Burke writes in this text, “Ad bellum purificandum” a Latin phrase meaning “towards the purification of war” (pp. 319-320). As documented by James P. Zappen, S. Michael Halloran, and Scott A. Wible (2006), Burke’s wife, Libby, made a hand written welcome sign that hung in the Burkes’ library. Beside “ad bellum purificandum” sits another Latin phrase, “potius convincere quam conviciari.” As translated by Zappen, this phrase means “better to debate than to berate” (2006, par. 1).

In this thesis, I examined the forensic education of Kenneth Burke in order to proffer connections between Burke’s early rhetorical training and his later rhetorical scholarship. I began this investigation with the following critical question: In what ways did Kenneth Burke’s forensic education help him learn the language of dramatism? In his forensic education, Burke became friends with Malcolm Cowley and Matthew Josephson, learned to engage in discursive practices which would mark his scholarship throughout his career, and began to question and interpret literature in a way that would help him develop as an author and critic. As a critic, Burke returned to forensics, discussing debate in *Permanence and Change*, and utilizing *the forensic* as a pivotal term in *Attitudes Toward History*. While Burke continued to use *the forensic* throughout his career, he shifted his emphasis to other pivotal terms such as *drama*, *the parlor*, and *bodies that learn language*, all of which, as I show in this project, are informed by his earlier term, *the forensic*. In sum, Burke’s early education came at a time when he was experiencing the formlessness of his formative years.

As such, the activities in which he engaged molded his mind, helped him engage in the ritual of transformation from his pre-forensic adolescence to adulthood in which he gleaned discomfiting forensic sight. Competitive forensics, a dominant activity of Burke's youth, provided Burke the forum in which he gleaned form. Ultimately, as is illustrated by these various connections, Burke's engagement in competitive forensics helped him learn the language of dramatism.

Contributions

By mapping his early forensic education, I fill a void in the literature regarding the persona of Kenneth Burke. Though scholars have written about Kenneth Burke for the past nine decades (Rountree, 2007), very little research has focused on Burke's early years. Amongst the tidbits of lore regarding Burke's adolescence, a common narrative depicting Burke as an autodidact, far removed from the influence of educational institutions, obfuscates the formative importance of the educational activities and institutions that provided the forensic materials that shaped that formed the mind of Kenneth Burke. To amend this misstep, I detailed Burke's forensic education at Peabody High School, the Pittsburgh Carnegie Libraries, Ohio State University, and Columbia University. By understanding the pedagogical forensic activities of Burke's youth, as well as the institutional forces working to shape those activities, I contribute a more nuanced understanding of Burke's education.

This contribution connects Burke to previously unacknowledged forces motivating his construction of dramatism, illuminating new ground upon which scholars can dig up information about Kenneth Burke. Specifically, by viewing Burke as a body that began to learn the language of dramatism while participating in competitive forensics, scholars can

better understand the attitudes, motivations, and quirks of Burke. Such insight can inform many discussions regarding Burke and his rhetorical theory.

In order to exemplify the possibilities awaiting this newly marked confluence, it is appropriate to revisit a common critique of Burke, his referential verbosity and disciplinary prolixity. Burke tended to cite a vast array of examples, drew upon authors from a disparate range of times and disciplines, and contributed to a wide variety of academic fields. For many of Burke's respondents, this approach was baffling. For example, in his review of "Acceptance and Rejection," Arthur E. DuBois (1937) criticizes Burke because

in the course of about thirty pages, Mr. Burke speaks with something like the authoritative voice of a last word on Aquinas, Aristotle, Augustine, Baudelaire, Belloc, Bentham, Bunyan, Blake, Lewis Carroll, Cowley, the Communist Manifesto, Darwin, Defoe, Dewey, Dickens, Dostoevsky, Emerson, Empson, Gay, Gray, Goethe, the Greeks, Hardy, Hegel, Heraclitus, Hobbes, Homer, Wm. James, Joyce, Juvenal, D. H. Lawrence, W. Lewis, Machiavelli, Marraux, Mandeville, Mann, Marinetti, Marx, Meredith, the Niebelungenied, Nietzsche, New Testament, Piers, Plowman, Pound, I. A. Richards, Lola Ridge, *Saturday Evening Post* advertisers, Savonarola, Schopenhauer, Schiller, Shakespeare, Adam Smith, Caroline Spurgeon, Spencer, Spengler, J. J. Sweeney, Swift, A. Tate, Trotzky, Veblen, Virgil, Wagner, Whitman, Yeats. (p. 346)

Like many of Burke's critics, DuBois is perplexed by Burke's seemingly inimitable approach. In turn, DuBois interprets this trait as a sign that Burke is, in some way, overcompensating (Foss, Foss, and Trapp, 2002). While DuBois senses folly behind Burke's method, Herbert W. Simons and Trevor Melia (1989) draw different conclusions. For them,

because Burke contributed to “a dizzying array of subject matters—among them anthropology, linguistics, religion, oratory, fiction, history, economics, philosophy, and politics,” his thought is incomparable and therefore “it would be a mistake to think of any of his writings as purely disciplinary contributions” (p. 4).

To be clear, both interpretations draw understandable conclusions. It seems reasonable to me to think that Burke was insecure about his academic status, and therefore drew from a wide range of sources to compensate. Moreover, suggesting that Burke was a disciplinarily monolith is clearly a slipshod allegation. However, by drawing on scholarship regarding the impacts of forensic education, one could make a case that both interpretations build upon a mistaken premise, that Burke’s approach is unnatural or unique to him. In fact, one could argue that Burke’s habit spreading a vast amount and wide variety of sources throughout his arguments stems from his training in debate. According to Claudia J. Keenan (2009), “During the first few years of the 20th century,” the increasing popularity of debate, and the subsequent invention and mass publication of debate manuals and research guides, such as the ones published by the Pittsburgh Carnegie Library during Burke’s high school years, “enabled debaters to become highly skilled researchers by teaching them how to locate evidence within the growing literature. Such proficiency put them in the vanguard as information became an essential commodity in many fields” (pp. 80; 81). Given that a “debater’s success has always rested on the views of experts that s/he cites” because “when debaters quoted experts, they invoked authority,” it seems quite possible that through his forensic education Burke would develop attitude towards knowledge that left him hungering for an increasing dearth of wisdom with which to debate. After all, as Keenan explains, “when [debaters] searched periodicals and books for evidence they were seeking to become

experts themselves” (p. 95). Ultimately, by beginning the conversation regarding Burke’s forensic education, I hope to add to reignite dormant discussions regarding Burke’s persona. In light of Burke’s forensic education, scholars can now turn to research concerning forensics education and forensics oratory as a means of better illuminating the life, research, and legacy of Kenneth Burke.

Directions

By documenting the confluence between forensics and Kenneth Burke, two major influences on the study of rhetoric and communication, I hope to provide motivation to educators to continue the strong tradition of drawing upon Kenneth Burke to inform forensic pedagogy, and utilizing competitive forensics to elucidate the rhetorical theory of Kenneth Burke. To understand, it is important revisit Burke’s forensic pedagogy. Burke calls for competitive forensics as a means of empowering students’ ability to view conflict through a comic frame. For Burke, a comic frame allows individuals to view their rivals as mistaken, not evil. In *Attitudes Toward History*, Burke is very clear about the forensic skill necessary to engage this cooperatively competitive comic corrective. According to Burke (1959), “Comedy requires the maximum of forensic complexity” (p. 43). Unlike tragedy, “Comedy must develop logical forensic causality to its highest point...completing the process of internal organization whereby each event is deduced ‘syllogistically’ from the premises of the informing situation. Comedy deals with *man* in society, tragedy with the *cosmic man*” (p. 43). In *Conversations with Kenneth Burke*, Burke was asked:

If we as critics were to follow some of the advice you offered in *Attitudes Toward History* about comic framing, how can we at the same time resist dogma and still appreciate all points of view? How is this done?

Burke's answer, stated earlier in the introduction of this thesis, is worth repeating because it connects the "maximum of forensic complexity" needed to utilize the comic frame with competitive forensics. According to Burke,

we have to shop around in this world and we finally get into a groove sooner or later, and just keep limber as long as you can. I think in the 19th century, the principle of the debating society was something that was good education to me. And the idea was that you got the debaters and they didn't know until the last minute...which side they were going to be on in the debate. And it's a toss-up at the end. Therefore, they had to have all this to pour out one way or the other depending upon which side they were on. But they had to do both sides. That's, to me, the way the best education should be (1987, tape 2, min. 2:26).

According to King (2010), "Burke often spoke to students who had been trained in debate. They were adept at exposing contradictions in an argument..." (p. 53). Therefore, Burke's support of switch-side debating, a modern forensic activity that dates back to the literary and debating societies of the nineteenth century, is fitting. In fact, in Burke's (1955) essay, "Linguistic Approach to the Problems of Education," his most direct treatise regarding pedagogy, Burke prescribes switch-side debating as one of three possible activities capable of fulfilling his dramatistic pedagogy:

were the earlier pedagogic practice of debating brought back into favor, each participant would be required, not to uphold just one position but to write two debates, upholding first one position and then the other...the ultimate value in such verbal exercising would be its contribution toward the "suffering" of an attitude that pointed toward a distrustful admiration of all symbolism, and toward the attempt

systematically to question the many symbolically-situated goods that are now accepted too often without question. (p. 287)

While Burke applauded forensics, he maintained a critical posture when addressing specific forensic pedagogies. For example, Burke admonished the tendency amongst debate oriented students to not look past refutation, what, according to King, Burke called “a ‘trained incapacity’ that tended to interfere with deep analysis” (2010, p. 53). Regardless, Burke’s dramatic pedagogy embraced the forensic by “reaffirming the parliamentary process” as a means for achieving “an ‘extended comic treatment of human relations,’ of the ‘foibles and antics’ of ‘the Human Barnyard...’” Ultimately, this pedagogy developed the ability to navigate “the maximum of forensic complexity” and taught students to follow “forensic causality to its highest point...” (Burke, 1937, p. 43), so they could join Burke (1955) in the quest to “see how far conflict (war) may be translated practically into linguistic struggle and verbal struggle may be made to eventuate in a common enactment short of physical combat” (p. 268), perhaps translating the means of fighting through “forensic competition” (Burke, 1945, p. 147).

Burke’s positive assessment of forensic pedagogy is echoed by many scholars. As Ede Warner and John Bruschke (2001) assert, “debate can help students become critical consumers of knowledge, social critics, and agents of change, while also developing traditional academic skills” (p. 18). Engaging in competitive forensics, as David Zarefsky (2012) points out, provides “the prospect of competitive success [which] motivates people to participate and work hard...” Moreover, “the adversarial nature of the competition assures critical scrutiny of one's opponents by one's interlocutor; and the presence of a third-party judge enhances self-monitoring by advocates hoping not to lose face” (p. 177). In light of this

confluence, Burkean educators from across the disciplines can begin to look to competitive forensics in order to facilitate a dramatic pedagogy. Moreover, forensic educators hoping to “ground their research interests in matters which simultaneously serve to the community of forensic and the community of scholars who are dedicated to the understanding of human communication” (Kay, 1990, p. 61), can continue to draw upon the rich theoretical guidance available in the corpus of Kenneth Burke’s work.

Like Kenneth Burke, competitive forensics bridges a multitude of disciplines from literature to communication to Political Science. Therefore, I find it fitting to conclude this project with a poem, “Dialectician’s Prayer,” in which Burke “Hails to Thee, Logos” asking: “May we compete with one another,/ To speak for Thy Creation with more justice—/ Cooperating in this competition/ Until our naming/ Gives voice correctly,/ And how things are,/ And how we say things are/ Are one” (qtd. in Frank, 1969, p. 125).

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