Kenneth Burke
A brief introduction
Kenneth Burke

Kenneth Duva Burke (May 5, 1897 – November 19, 1993) was a major American literary theorist and philosopher. Burke's primary interests were in rhetoric and aesthetics.

Burke became a highly distinguished writer after getting out of college, and starting off serving as an editor and critic instead, while he developed his relationships with other successful writers. He would later return to the university to lecture and teach.

Personal history

He was born on May 5 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and graduated from Peabody High School, where his friend Malcolm Cowley was also a student. Burke attended Ohio State University for only a semester, then studied at Columbia University in 1916-1917 before dropping out to be a writer. In Greenwich Village he kept company with avant-garde writers such as Hart Crane, Malcolm Cowley, Gorham Munson, and later Allen Tate. Raised Roman Catholic, Burke later became an avowed agnostic.

In 1919, he married Lily Mary Batterham, with whom he had three daughters: the late feminist, Marxist anthropologist Eleanor Leacock (1922–1987); musician (Jeanne) Elspeth Chapin Hart (b. 1920); and writer and poet France Burke (b. ~1925). He would later marry her sister Elizabeth Batterham in 1933 and have two sons, Michael and Anthony. Burke served as the editor of the modernist literary magazine The Dial in 1923, and as its music critic from 1927-1929. Kenneth himself was an avid player of the saxophone and flute. He received the Dial Award in 1928 for distinguished service to American literature. He was the music critic of The Nation from 1934–1936, and was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1935.

His work on criticism was a driving force for placing him back into the university spotlight. As a result, he was able to teach and lecture at various colleges, including Bennington College, while continuing his literary work. Many of Kenneth Burke's personal papers and correspondence are housed at Pennsylvania State University's Special Collections Library.

In later life, his New Jersey farm was a popular summer retreat for his extended family, as reported by his grandson Harry Chapin, a contemporary popular song artist. He died of heart failure at his home in Andover, New Jersey.

Persuasions and influences

Burke, like many twentieth century theorists and critics, was heavily influenced by the ideas of Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, and Friedrich Nietzsche. He was a lifelong interpreter of Shakespeare, and was also significantly influenced by Thorstein Veblen. He resisted being pigeonholed as a follower of any philosophical or political school of thought, and had a notable and very public break with the Marxists who dominated the literary criticism set in the 1930s.

Burke corresponded with a number of literary critics, thinkers, and writers over the years, including William Carlos Williams, Malcolm Cowley, Robert Penn Warren, Allen Tate, Ralph Ellison, Katherine Anne Porter, Jean Toomer, Hart Crane, and Marianne Moore. Later thinkers who have acknowledged Burke's influence include Harold Bloom, Stanley Cavell, Susan Sontag (his student at the University of Chicago), Erving Goffman, Geoffrey Hartman, Edward Said, René Girard, Fredric Jameson, Michael Calvin McGee, Dell Hymes and Clifford Geertz.

Burke's political engagement is evident, for example, in the epigraph A Grammar of Motives in its epigraph, ad bellum purificandum -- toward the purification of (the human spirit from) war.
Philosophy
The political and social power of symbols was central to Burke's scholarship throughout his career. He felt that the study of rhetoric would help human beings understand "what is involved when we say what people are doing and why they are doing it."

Dramatism
Burke called the social and political rhetorical analysis "dramatism" and believed that such an approach to language analysis and language usage could help us understand the basis of conflict, the virtues and dangers of cooperation, and the opportunities of identification and consubstantiality.

Burke defined the rhetorical function of language as "a symbolic means of inducing cooperation in beings that by nature respond to symbols." His definition of humanity states that "man" is "the symbol using, making, and mis-using animal, inventor of the negative, separated from his natural condition by instruments of his own making, goaded by the spirit of hierarchy, and rotten with perfection." For Burke, some of the most significant problems in human behavior resulted from instances of symbols using human beings rather than human beings using symbols.

Burke proposed that when we attribute motives to others, we tend to rely on ratios between five elements: act, scene, agent, agency, and purpose. This has become known as the dramatistic pentad. The pentad is grounded in his dramatistic method, which considers human communication as a form of action. Dramatism "invites one to consider the matter of motives in a perspective that, being developed from the analysis of drama, treats language and thought primarily as modes of action" (Grammar of Motives xxii). Burke pursued literary criticism not as a formalistic enterprise but rather as an enterprise with significant sociological impact; he saw literature as "equipment for living," offering folk wisdom and common sense to people and thus guiding the way they lived their lives.

Terministic screen
Another key concept for Burke is the terministic screen -- a set of symbols that becomes a kind of screen or grid of intelligibility through which the world makes sense to us. Here Burke offers rhetorical theorists and critics a way of understanding the relationship between language and ideology. Language, Burke thought, doesn't simply "reflect" reality; it also helps select reality as well as deflect reality.

Principal works
In his book Language as Symbolic Action (1966), Burke defined humankind as a "symbol using animal" (p. 3). This definition of man, he argued, means that "reality" has actually "been built up for us through nothing but our symbol system" (p. 5). Without our encyclopedias, atlases, and other assorted reference guides, we would know little about the world that lies beyond our immediate sensory experience. What we call "reality," Burke stated, is actually a "clutter of symbols about the past combined with whatever things we know mainly through maps, magazines, newspapers, and the like about the present . . . a construct of our symbol systems" (p. 5). College students wandering from class to class, from English literature to sociology to biology to calculus, encounter a new reality each time they enter a classroom; the courses listed in a university's catalogue "are in effect but so many different terminologies" (p. 5). It stands to reason then that people who consider themselves to be Christian, and who internalize that religion's symbol system, inhabit a reality that is different from the one of practicing Buddhists, or Jews, or Muslims. The same would hold true for people who believe in the tenets of free market capitalism or socialism, Freudian psychoanalysis or Jungian depth psychology, as well as mysticism or materialism. Each belief system has its own vocabulary to describe how the world works and what things mean, thus presenting its adherents with a specific reality (no page reference).

His other principal works are

• Counter-Statement (1931)
• Permanence and Change (1935)
• Attitudes Toward History (1937)
• The Rhetoric of Hitler's "Battle" (1939)
• Philosophy of Literary Form (1941)
• A Grammar of Motives (1945)
• A Rhetoric of Motives (1950)
• The Rhetoric of Religion (1961)
• Language As Symbolic Action (1966)
• Dramatism and Development [10] (1972): a description of the contents of the two part lecture devoted to biological, psychological and sociocultural phenomena
• Here and Elsewhere (2005)
• Essays Toward a Symbolic of Motives (2006)
• Kenneth Burke on Shakespeare (2007)
• Full list of his works [11] from The Journal of the Kenneth Burke Society

He also wrote the song "One Light in a Dark Valley," later recorded by his grandson Harry Chapin.[12]

Burke's most notable correspondence were to

Honors

Kenneth Burke was awarded the National Medal for Literature at the American Book Awards in 1981. According to the New York Times [13], April 20, 1981, 'The $15,000 award, endowed in memory of the late Harold Guinzberg, founder of the Viking Press, honors a living American writer for a distinguished and continuing contribution to American letters.'

References

Language As Symbolic Action

*Language As Symbolic Action* is a book by Kenneth Burke, published in 1966 by the University of California Press. *Language as Symbolic Action: Essays on Life, Literature and Method* was Kenneth Burke's sixteenth published work. As indicated by the title, the book consists of "many of Burke's essays which have appeared in widely diverse periodicals" and has thus been regarded as one of the most significant resources for studying and comprehending Burke's ideas.

**Overview of Book**

*Language as Symbolic Action* is divided into three parts: (1) Five Summarizing Essays (2) Particular Works and Authors and (3) Further Essays on Symbolism in General.

**Five Summarizing Essays**

The first of Burke's five essays is the "Definition of man" which defines man as

\[
... the symbol-using (symbol-making, symbol-misusing) animal/inventor of the negative (or moralized by the negative)/separated from his natural condition by instruments of his own making/goaded by the spirit of hierarchy (or moved by the sense of order)/ and rotten with perfection.\]

The next chapter "Poetics in Particular, Language in General" returns to a discussion of perfection continued from the previous chapter. Burke summarizes this chapter by stating:

The poetic motive does indeed come to a head in the principle of perfection... But the principle of perfection should not be viewed in too simple a sense. We should also use the expression ironically... the motive of perfection may extend to areas far beyond the confines of poetry and poetics.

Osborn explains this concept further: "... a truly rigorous attempt to account for a single work on the grounds of poetics alone should force recognition that it is necessary to go beyond poetics-in-particular to language-in-general..." Perfection, according to Burke and similar scholars, is a motive that exists both in literature and beyond, as an underlying human desire that drives much symbolic action.

The third and often-referenced chapter "Terministic Screens" makes use of many key terms of Burke's "dramatistic" approach to literary and rhetorical criticism. Burke begins the chapter by explaining the "scientistic" and the
“dramaticistic.” “A scientistic approach begins with questions of naming, or definition’(44). A ‘dramaticistic’ approach stressess ‘language as an aspect of ‘action,’ that is, symbolic action’(44).”[6] Burke explains that, through the concept of terministic screens,

“any nomenclature necessarily directs the attention into some channels rather than others.” This can be obvious, such as how different academic subjects direct the attention, or more subtle. Burke illustrates the latter point with an example of how photos of the same objects using different color filters reflected and deflected his attention in different ways, depending on the filter (45). [7]

Terministic screens is significant to the process of rhetorical criticism, as well as understanding rhetoric, because terministic screens are a conduit to understanding reality.

**Particular Works and Authors**

In Part II, Burke engages in a rhetorical criticism, spanning 11 chapters, of many different prestigious authors and texts including, but not limited to, Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, the *Oresteia*, *Faust*, and William Carlos Williams.

**Further Essays on Symbolism in General**

Part III consists of eight chapters. One of the more significant of these is chapter six, entitled “Medium as Message.” Burke takes one of his peers, Marshall McLuhan, to task for focusing too much on the media rather than the symbolic resources of language.

Burke’s main criticism of McLuhan stems from his most memorable slogan and the undue emphasis put on medium. “If the medium is the message, obviously the important thing is not what somebody says in a given medium, but what medium he uses, regardless of what he says. . . The medium is the message.

Hence, down with content analysis” (413).[8]

Burke continues the discussion on the relative importance of medium to message by acknowledging the relationship as significant and stating that certain content can be better delivered by or suited to a specific medium. [9]

**Reception**

Burke’s ideas, through these significant essays, have had widespread influence. Burke scholar Nelson J. Smith III offered this review: “Much of what our current generation of rhetoricians accomplishes will be drawn from the preliminary and pioneer investigations into the sociology of ideology by Kenneth Burke.”[10] Frederick J. Hoffman also writes: “[Burke’s] range and scope are truly remarkable. If there are predecessors and contemporaries in this respect, they are probably Römy de Gourmont. . .and Eric Auerbach. . . His fate is that of a man some years ahead of his time.”[11] The range of critical ideas and practices included in *Language as Symbolic Action* help scholars explore this breadth.

**References**


The Rhetoric of Hitler's "Battle"

_The Rhetoric of Hitler's "Battle"_ was an influential essay written by Kenneth Burke in 1939 which offered a rhetorical analysis of Adolf Hitler's rise to power in Germany. Much of Burke's analysis focuses on Hitler's *Mein Kampf* ("my struggle"). Burke (1939; reprinted in 1941 and 1981) identified four tropes as specific to Hitler's rhetoric: inborn dignity, projection device, symbolic rebirth, and commercial use. Several other tropes are discussed in the essay, "Persuasion" (Burke: 1969).

### Tropes

#### Common enemy

One trope is the idea of the common enemy. Without an enemy with a mindless determination to destroy everything good and beautiful, any state struggles with the economic and social problems of unemployment and poverty. So, the idea of a common enemy is a symbol of the evil against which people must unite, and it distracts the people from politically inconvenient issues by relating all evils to the common rhetorical enemy. According to Burke, this is creating an antithesis. We are born separate individuals and divided by class or other criteria, so identification is a compensation to division. (Burke, 1969, p. 22). He sees this human need to identify with or belong to a group as providing a rich resource for those interested in joining us or, more importantly, persuading us. To promote social cohesion, antithesis makes a simple balancing statement, "We do this" but "They do that". This symmetry creates an expression of conjoined opposites which stigmatises the latter and encourages the former to cohere by only doing "this". At first, the enemy may be local politicians or other voices that might criticise the protagonist's actions. Then, all opposing voices are seen as antithetical to unity: without a united voice, the outside enemies will gain the upper hand. If the nation goes to war, fascism requires that everybody in society and every aspect of society is involved in the war effort and machine, so the society fights as one organism under the one leader.

#### Geographical materialization

_All roads lead to Rome_. In Ancient Rome, this was literally and metaphorically true. All roads did radiate out from the capital of the Empire and all tribute and authority was owed to the Emperors. This is a form of cognitive mapping which associates inspiring ideology and strong leadership with a particular location. Hence, Hitler promoted Munich as the place where all roads must lead – geography materializing the ideology of fascism.

#### Unifying voice

The unification rhetoric demands a unifying voice: the entire nation must speak as one person. This is the essence of the authoritarian ideal and it produces a totalitarian, one party state.

#### Projection devices

Projection devices are scapegoating tactics used to personalise the initially vague threats posed by the common enemy. At a social level, the internal problems of unemployment and poor trading performances are directly attributed to the activities of the "identified others". Simplification is a particularly effective rhetorical device when dealing with an uncritical population, permitting rhetoricians to rise to power through their persuasive abilities, frequently outmanoeuvring those with expert knowledge who do not communicate well. In this context, Burke
(1941) identified Hitler's use of apodictic argumentation where anecdotal experiences are asserted as proof of his social analysis.

**Inborn dignity**

It is usual to define a national ideal or archetype, or class of citizen as a measuring stick by which all other types of people are to be judged. This archetype will be heroic, noble, and dignified to appeal to the vanity in the majority, while the others will be subhuman and easily distinguished by reference to their ethnicity, religion or politics. For this rhetoric to be effective, it must always address existing prejudices. Hitler proposed the Manichean antithesis of superior: inferior through the superiority of *das Volk*, i.e. the Aryan race, over the inferior races ("in particular Jews and Negroes").

**Symbolic rebirth**

Wink and others identify symbolic rebirth rhetoric as allowing a people to aspire towards a new utopian society; when the scapegoat is eliminated, a rebirth will occur. The morally negative action of elimination is justified by a positive goal of symbolic rebirth, where all ideals are realised. It will only occur once in the lifetime.

**Commercial use**

Another trope is Commercial use. Commercial use rhetoric offers a non-economic interpretation of economic problems that appeals to the class that will benefit the most if the competition is removed. Thus, Burke (1941) identifies Hitler's attribution of Germany's economic difficulties to "Jewish" moneylenders, suggesting that if they were removed, "Aryan" finance would be in control.

**Journal citations of The Rhetoric of Hitler's "Battle"**

The following journal articles reference *The Rhetoric of Hitler's "Battle"*:

- Blain, Michael "The politics of victimage", *Critical Discourse Studies*, April 2005, Vol. 2 Issue 1, p. 31-50, 20p; doi:10.1080/17405900500052168; (AN 16669758)
References


Definition of man

Definition of Man, sometimes now referred to as Definition of Human, originated from a summary essay of Kenneth Burke (1897–1993) which he included in his 1966 work, Language as Symbolic Action. Burke's work in communication has spanned many fields and focuses primarily on rhetoric. Perhaps he is best known for his theory of Dramatism, wherein he characterizes life to not just reflect or be like a drama but rather that life is drama.\[1\]

Definition

Burke's definition of man states: "Man is the symbol-using (symbol-making, symbol-misusing) animal, inventor of the negative (or moralized by the negative), separated from his natural condition by instruments of his own making, goaded by the spirit of hierarchy (or moved by the sense of order), and rotten with perfection".\[2\] Essentially, Burke's definition maintains that man is distinct from other creatures by the virtue of his use of symbols to communicate, his understanding of negation, his separation from nature by his own techniques, his existence in differing social structures, and his goal to become better than he presently is.

Symbol-Using Animal

Burke distinguishes man from other animals by drawing an analogy between man and birds. He argues that unlike birds, which cannot use symbols to communicate, man is able to use language towards pragmatic ends. To illustrate this point, Burke recalls seeing a bird trapped inside a college classroom. The windows were open, but the bird kept flying upwards to the ceiling, rather than through the window. If the bird could use symbols to communicate then one could simply inform the bird of the open windows and it could fly out to freedom. Its natural instinct to fly up...
coupled by its inability to use symbols, however, prevents its escape. Burke, also argues that not only does man use symbols, but concedes that man makes and misuses symbols as well.[3]

**Condensation**

One aspect of symbols that Burke points out in his discussion of Sigmund Freud's work is condensation. This explains man's ability to condense symbols into categories that can be understood by others to include a variety of other symbols. The example he gives is using the word furniture to refer to chairs, tables, etc.[4]

Burke's defining of man in these terms leads to man's quest for identity and social belonging.[5] Burke sees all human action as infused with symbols. These symbols are used to help create our sense of who we are and where we fit. In order to accomplish these, man seeks for differences and commonalities respectively.

**Inventor of the Negative**

While Burke struggles with using the word inventor for he feels that language has invented man, he points out that negatives do not exist in nature. He contends that negatives are purely a characteristic of symbol systems, which he has already determined belong uniquely to man. He further refers to morality as being particularly human and based largely on the idea of negatives; that is, there are things we should not do.[6]

Intrinsic to this portion of Burke's Definition is the idea of paradox. Burke explains that the idea of negation is, by its nature, paradoxical. He explains that conditioning a statement with a negative draws a positive image of that very statement. This, he argues, defeats the purpose of negation, yet is an inescapable situation.[7]

**Separated from his natural condition by instruments of his own making**

In this section of Burke's definition he describes man's natural state as being that of basic needs and appetites. However, because of his tools and language, he has taken on a nature completely different than that of his original state. He cites an example of a day when the electricity of New York City went out and how unnatural it seemed for the streets to be filled with darkness; darkness being a state of man's first nature. However, because of man's tools, a state of lighted streets has become natural.[8] One major example of man's instruments is exemplified in technology.[9] Technology has accomplished the task of separating man from nature.

**Goaded by the spirit of hierarchy**

This portion of Burke's description seeks to define man as being drawn to order and status. He points to positions in society that imply this fact. One such example he draws upon is the division of labor that exists in society. Others are titles of nobility and peasantry.[10]

**Rotten with perfection**

This last portion of Burke's definition has particular importance to his other philosophical theories of man. Man being rotten with perfection speaks to the motives that are distinct in man; motives being an intrinsic part of Burke's Dramatism, distinguishing action from motion.

Burke refers to Aristotle's notion of entelechy, which states that we seek to reach the perfection of our kind. This, however, is not present in nature. Burke points out that a rock and a tree are perfectly acceptable as being what they are, but not so with man for he aims to be higher than he is.[11]

While man's striving for perfection may afford him to reach admirable goals and progress, Burke also sees man's goal of perfection as one rife with danger. He points to our concepts of perfection in accordance with other terms. One particularly clear example he gives is the perfection for which was strived by the Nazis thus alluding to the consequences to which such ambitions may lead. Lastly, Burke explains that such dichotomies of perfection give
credence to man's belief in God and Devil and Heaven and Hell.\[12\]

**Modern-day applications**

Feminist scholarship has shown a use of Burke's definition as a framework by which a definition for woman can be derived. Their definition is as follows: "Woman is the symbol-receiving animal, inventor of nothing, submerged in her natural conditions by instruments of man's making, goaded at the bottom of hierarchy, and rotten by perfection."[13] This particular definition clearly conveys a perception that views man as the suppressor of woman and the cause for her restrained condition.

One notable scholar, Celeste Condit, has written in an effort to modernize Burke's works and his "definition of man" in particular by calling for a Post-Burkean philosophy that takes Burke's ideas and transports them into what she calls the new scene, or modern day. She calls particularly for a restructuring each part of Burke's definition into terms that are founded on but surpass radical feminist ideologies as seen above. Condit defines people as those who play with symbols, invent the negative and possible morality, changed from nature by tools that men and woman have collectively made, struggling for equality, and at times rotten and perfect. Condit seeks to transform Burke's emphases of race and class into gender and culture.

J. MacLennan has used Burkenian ideas, particularly his dramatistic pentad, in analyzing criminal behavior and offering an understanding of criminal behavior that is often at odds with the ideas of many criminologists and psychologists.[14] Of particular interest to MacLennan is Burke's first clause in his definition of man as a "symbol-using animal". MacLennan maintains that this clause, coupled with Burke's ideas of motive, help explain criminal behavior. Burke posits that man uses symbols to obtain his goals, thus his motives are often carried out as acts based on his intentions. Thus Burke maintains that man's actions (use or misuse of symbols) are based on choices and not a compulsion or sickness. This has great implications for modern psychology which often views abnormal and criminal behavior as an illness that is forced upon those who act out in unacceptable ways.

**References**

**Dramatism**

"All the world's a stage."

William Shakespeare

**Dramatism**, an interpretive communication studies theory, was developed by Kenneth Burke as a way to analyze public speaking. Dramatism focuses on the role of the critic and their responsibility of uncovering a speaker's motives. In this theory, Burke discusses two important ideas – that life IS drama, and that the ultimate motive of rhetoric is the purging of guilt. There are three key concepts associated with dramatism – identification, the dramatistic pentad, and guilt-redemption.[1]

**Key Concepts**

**Dramatistic Pentad**

The Dramatistic Pentad is an instrument used by the critic to discover how the speaker convinces the audience to accept his view of reality. This is done through the five key elements of human drama – act, scene, agent, agency, and purpose.[1]

- Act: What was done
- Scene: Where it was done
- Agent: Who did it
- Agency: How the speaker did it; methods or techniques
- Purpose: Why it happened

While it is important to understand each element of the Pentad on its own, it is more important to understand how the elements work together. This is called a *ratio*, and there are ten possible ratios within the Pentad. Burke maintained that analyzing the ratios of a speaker's presentation would allow the critic to realize why the speaker selected a certain strategy and what this means about their worldview.

The Pentad is a simple tool for seeing and understanding the complexity of a situation. It reveals the nuances and complications of language as symbolic action, which in turn, opens up our perspective.[2]
Guilt Redemption

According to Burke, Guilt Redemption is considered the plot of all human drama, or the root of all rhetoric. In this perspective, Burke concluded that the ultimate motivation of man is to purge oneself of one's sense of guilt through public speaking. The term guilt covers tension, anxiety, shame, disgust, embarrassment, and other similar feelings. Guilt serves as a motivating factor that drives the human drama. Burke claimed that the speaker could purge their guilt in one of two ways:

The first way is through *victimage*, or the process of scapegoating. Here, the speaker blames an external source for his ills.\[^1\] According to Burke, there are two different types of scapegoating, *universal* and *factional*. In *universal* scapegoating, the speaker blames everyone for the problem, so the audience associates and even feels sorry for the victim, because it includes themselves. In *fractional* scapegoating, the speaker blames a specific group or a specific person for their problems. This creates a division within the audience.\[^3\] The victim, whoever it may be, is *vilified*, or made up to violate the ideals of social order, like normalcy or decency. As a result, by people who take action against the villains become *heroized* because they are confronting evil.\[^4\]

The second way the speaker purges their guilt is through *mortification*. This is a confession of guilt by the speaker and a request for forgiveness.\[^1\] Normally, these people are sentenced to a certain punishment so they can reflect and realize their sins. This punishment is specifically a kind of "death," literal or figuratively.

Many speakers experience a combination of these two guilt-purging options.

Application and Uses of theory

- Ideas studied by scholars in a variety of fields, including English, communication, political science, psychology, sociology
- Analyze public address (why a speaker selects a certain strategy to identify with audience, like a Malcolm X speech)
- Religious themes
- Political advertising and political campaigns
- Corporate realm, business influence on federal policy agenda
- Used in writing courses to help students understand how language produces knowledge, professional communication, case studies
- Examine the nature of texts and narratives
- Study to test and compare other Burkeian methods
- Diplomacy as an example of stagecraft

Notes


References

Dramatistic pentad

The **dramatistic pentad** forms the core structure of dramatism, a method for examining motivations that the renowned literary critic Kenneth Burke developed. Dramatism recommends the use of a metalinguistic approach to stories about human action that investigates the roles and uses of five rhetorical elements common to all narratives, each of which is related to a question. These five rhetorical elements form the "dramatistic pentad." Burke argues that an evaluation of the relative emphasis that is given to each of the five elements by a human drama enables a determination of the motive for the behaviour of its characters. A character's stress on one element over the others suggests their world view.

Burke introduced the pentad in his 1945 book "A Grammar of Motives". Burke based his pentad on the scholastic hexameter which defines "questions to be answered in the treatment of a topic: Who, what, where, by what means, why, when". Burke created the pentad by combining several of the categories in the scholastic hexameter. The result was a pentad that has the five categories of: act, scene, agent, agency, and purpose. Burke states, "The 'who' is obviously covered by agent. Scene covers the 'where' and the 'when'. The 'why' is purpose. 'How' and 'by what means' fall under agency. All that is left to take care of is act in our terms and 'what' in the scholastic formula".

The pentad also closely follows the journalistic 'Five Ws': who, what, when, where, why. 'Who' maps to agent. 'What' maps to action. 'When' and 'Where' map to scene. 'Why' maps to purpose. There is no direct mapping from the Five Ws to the pentad's category of agency but Geoff Hart states "Some authorities add a sixth question, "how", to this list, but "how to" information generally fits under what, where, or when, depending on the nature of the information."
Rhetorical elements of the dramatistic pentad

The dramatistic pentad comprises the five rhetorical elements:

**Act**

Act, which is associated with dramatic action verbs and answers the question "what?", is related to the world view of realism; What happened? What is the action? What is going on? What action; what thoughts?

**Scene**

Scene, which is associated with the setting of an act and answers the questions "when?" and "where?", is related to the world view of materialism and minimal or non-existent free will.

**Agent**

Agent, which answers the question "whom?", reflects the world view of philosophical idealism.

**Agency**

Agency (means), which is associated with the person or the organization that committed the deed and answers the question "how?", implies a pragmatic point of view.

**Purpose**

Purpose, which is associated with meaning and answers the question "why?", indicates that the character seeks unity through identification with an ultimate meaning of life. Reflects the world view of mysticism.

Notes

License

Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported
creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/