Burke and Nietzsche

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The essay examines the “becoming-Nietzsche” of Kenneth Burke by exploring the complex linkages between Burke and Nietzsche, particularly those forged by Burke in the 1920s and 30s while formulating his well-known concepts: perspective by incongruity, motive, terministic screens, and dramatism. An understanding of the ways Nietzsche’s philosophy helped shape Burke’s views on the nature of language (metaphor, writing, poetry), and the effects language produces, enables a different understanding of central passages in Permanence and Change, Burke the critic, and by extension, the development of rhetoric as a discipline. Key words: Kenneth Burke, Friedrich Nietzsche, Permanence and Change, rhetoric, metaphor

KENNETH Burke himself inscribed the “and” that links the figures of my title. From a vantage point in the early 1980s, Burke acknowledged the depth and impact of Nietzsche’s work on his Permanence and Change (first published in 1935): “I can thus not too modestly admit that I seem to have come close to his perspective in some of my points about symbolic action” (“In Retrospective Prospect” 333). Burke also believed the relations among his own writings worked in a similar way to Nietzsche’s, as he wrote in a 1972 letter to Malcolm Cowley: “Modestly: My [1931 novel] T[l]eaf[b]ter L[ife] is to my critical books as Nietzsche’s Zarathustra is to his others. (That is, it’s the ritualized essence out of which comes the existence of my detailed analysis ...)” (Jay, Selected Correspondence 385). Indeed, many of Burke’s writings have a distinctive Nietzschean inflection, particularly those that bear on his monumental term “perspective by incongruity” and those that meditate on metaphor and art.

Despite their pervasiveness, Burke’s connections to Nietzsche are largely ignored among scholars in rhetoric, or at best they are cited in a fleeting manner. Armin Paul Frank briefly mentions Burke’s own crediting of Nietzsche and quickly moves to “the philosophers and scientists who have influenced Burke most: Spengler, Darwin, Bergson, Marx, Freud ...” (87), but not Nietzsche. William Rueckert, who has done so much to delineate Burke’s dramatism, altogether overlooks Burke’s Nietzschean tincture: he elucidates Burke’s multiple faces (Encounters 3–54), compartmentalizes his life into cognizable chunks (Encounters 55–96), and explicates the theory at work in Permanence and Change and Attitudes Toward History (Kenneth Burke and the Drama 48–59), all without mentioning Nietzsche. Jack Selzer’s recent Kenneth Burke in Greenwich Village barely mentions Nietzsche, even though his book covers the early period when Burke was encountering Nietzsche fairly regularly. Celeste Condit, in a rare and admirable attempt to historicize Burke’s philosophy of communication, attributes the production of the “twentieth century’s linguistic reflexiveness” (a trend in which, Condit argues, Burke is a major player) to nineteenth-century “intellectual giants” Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud (212). If linguistic reflexivity “entails constant reflection on the forces of language,” then it seems odd that Condit does not also mention Nietzsche, a philosopher deeply concerned with language as force (see especially “On Truth and Lying”), in her treatment of nineteenth-century thinkers. The general trend in rhetoric’s Burke scholarship, it seems, is to sidle around his connections to Nietzsche.

But the connections are definitely there. Early on, Burke developed a keen interest in Nietzsche’s thought; he read Will to Power and Genealogy of Morals in the late 1920s and
developed his early works using Nietzsche as a model. Also, Burke most certainly read *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, for references to *Zarathustra* are interspersed throughout his works and letters (see, for instance *Permanence and Change* 46, KB to MC 1972, cited above). His allusions to Nietzsche in early letters, his use of Nietzsche in composing his early books, and his recognition, in later autocommentary of Nietzsche’s persistent influence, betray a relentless fervor for Nietzsche. Indeed, Burke’s writing in the 1930s was replete with Nietzsche, both stylistically and philosophically.

Of course, as Jack Selzer demonstrates, there are many Burkes; Selzer’s book alone presents Burke as a complex convergence of political, literary, and aesthetic movements, a dynamic figure indeed. Selzer examines, for example, the “aesthetic” Flaubertian Burke, Burke the avant-garde fiction writer, Burke the critic, and most importantly, an experimental, non-codifiable Burke who both simultaneously articulated and resisted modernist tenets. These Burkes, among others (the dramatistic Burke, mighty creator of the Pentad, socio-political Burke, etc.) populate contemporary rhetorical scholarship, where a Nietzschean Burke is rarely found. Perhaps the careful “sidling around” approach adopted toward Nietzsche’s relationship to Burke’s thinking is more than just mere oversight. What are the “occupational psychoses” cultivated in communication and rhetoric that call for such head-turning? That is, what is it about the discipline of rhetoric that encourages productions of Burke that do not consider Nietzschean dimensions?

In her essay on Burke and Foucault, Carole Blair raises such concerns about Burke’s relationship to disciplinary boundaries:

> It has been our way of reading Burke that has contributed to the settling of the disciplinary turmoil of the 1960s. But, unfortunately, in the process, we have also settled Burke down. We have transformed him into our kind of humanist, our source of precept, and even our (certainly unwilling) advocate for the disengagement of history from criticism. Burke has much more to say to us than we have allowed him to say. (154)

It could very well be the case that a Nietzschean Burke lies outside the comfortable “way of reading Burke” that fosters a sense of disciplinary purpose as well as a safe “line” to other disciplinary endeavors such as sociology, literary criticism, or cultural studies. Furthermore, the Nietzschean Burke emerges most powerfully in his earlier works, and perhaps it is not coincidental that those works often get overlooked as ramblings of a youngster. While it is not the task of this essay to diagnose rhetoric’s trained incapacities, they certainly stand as limits to be pressed upon, as Blair suggests.

Burke is often affectionately referred to in rhetorical circles as “Papa KB,” implicating him as the father of contemporary rhetoric. Herbert W. Simons dubs him “the chief architect of the New Rhetoric” (5), a view which Blair observes is “commonplace” (120). At the very least, because he gave us the Pentad, identification, order, the five dogs, scapegoating, and more, Burke is considered a “toolmaker” for rhetoric (see Brock 12). Nevertheless, as Blair points out, by reducing Burke to a list of conceptual tools, scholars in rhetoric have cultivated “a blindness about many of his important insights” (153). It makes sense to ask, then, what critical and conceptual tools did Kenneth Burke use when producing his own? Understanding the philosophical bases from which Burkean concepts emerged will underscore the depth and breadth of Burke’s thought about language and communication that cannot be captured in a term or two.

This essay seeks to historicize particular aspects of Burke’s thought: to map his notion of “perspective by incongruity” and his views on language and art by reading Burke’s
struggles with Nietzsche in his early letters and published work, particularly *Permanence and Change*. By doing so, I hope to produce a Nietzschean Burke that troubles his status as "our favorite humanist," offering instead a Burke concerned with language as force, a Burke grappling with the ethical challenges of such a view.

**Burke’s Will to Nietzsche: A Becoming**

“Now looking back to the issues involved in the attempt to settle my quandaries at the time by putting together a statement about motivation, I find the role of Nietzsche much more ‘critical’ than I did then . . .”--Kenneth Burke, “Afterword: In Retrospective Prospect,” 1983

“I am an effect.”

—Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*

Kenneth Burke’s May 1922 review of *The Religion of Plato* by Paul Elmer More reveals Burke’s interest in and knowledge of ancient and modern philosophical frameworks. Here, at age twenty four, Burke pinpoints an “unhappy” effect of More’s “categorical attack on rationalism”: it throws Nietzsche, the sophists, and Spinoza into “one indiscriminate heap” (528). Burke then devotes a page to drawing distinctions between these figures. The deftness with which Burke critiqued More’s representation of these intellectual figures as well as entire philosophical schools (pragmatism, for instance) spawned an enthusiastic reaction from novelist Waldo Frank, which in turn produced a handful of long philosophical correspondences between Frank and Burke during the summer of 1922. In his letters to Burke, Frank challenged Burke’s views on metaphysics, language, and aesthetics. And Burke—in his attempts to articulate, refine, and defend his already complex philosophical leanings—returned to Nietzsche.

On his twenty-fifth birthday, Burke received the first of Frank’s letters. Dated May 3, 1922, the letter had two purposes. First, Frank offered high praise for Burke’s departure from what he considered to be the static tendencies of modernist thought: “It is so rare to find utterance nowadays that extends or depends or weighs beyond the mathematical one dimensional spot! It is a pleasure for it is an encouragement, when one does find such utterance” (Frank to Burke May 3, 1922). Pleased with the complexity of thought that he found in the review, Frank nevertheless also wanted Burke to go further, to explore the metaphysics of his position: “I mean: cant you see that you cant talk about aesthetic beyond that instant-spot-dimension without tracing the presence of a metaphysic? There is no aesthetic without metaphysic....” Frank insisted on the general relevance of metaphysics, concluding adamantly, “if you will allow me to say so, quite impertinently, it is important for you.” The rest of the letter suggests that by metaphysics, Frank meant a kind of absolute truth, a transcendent, Platonic ideal of beauty against which art may be evaluated. Frank referred to metaphysics as “the organic Whole we all need,” contending that “a thought is just as much a part of nature as the objective phenomena that inspire it.” Frank, then, while encouraged by what he “sensed” as “ground” or “stuff” in Burke’s review, attempted to persuade Burke to at least acknowledge the role of metaphysics in his thinking: “Why going so far dont you round the sphere of your thoughts and give out not the mere sense of ground and stuff, but the organic Whole we all need?” This organic whole, an underlying notion of “truth” or static conception of an essence in art, for Frank anyway, constituted a metaphysic. Moreover, by presenting a notion of beauty as inextricably tied to “truth” and a real, traceable world, Frank tacitly
posited a view of the world wherein words correspond to things according to a totalized, spherical notion of truth and reality.

Burke, however, resisted Frank’s appeals. In a prompt but lengthy reply he explained that metaphysics still posits a “formally permanent universe,” and thus leads back to a modern, “one dimensional mind” (Burke to Frank, May 8, 1922). Burke wanted to flip Frank’s proposed relationship—an aesthetic built upon a metaphysic—and to instead suggest that metaphysics can be founded upon aesthetics. Here, Burke hit a sort of impasse or contradiction in his explanation when he proposed that the connecting link between the two is logic, and “There is but one universal logic” (1). Next to a statement about universal logic, Burke scribbled in the margin “I see that I contradict myself at the start. I make amends on page 2.” This gesture at once suggests Burke’s awareness of the problems posed by a metaphysic, and more importantly, Burke’s comfort level with self-contradiction, or his resistance to one whole explanation for his views which would spiral him right back into a structural monism, a metaphysic.

Instead, Burke posits an “organic universal logic” with a difference. That is, he claims that the logic is “tinctured with an element of theory, of intellect, which removes it beyond the realm of a thoroughly spontaneous appreciation….” Rather than a “three-dimensional … organic experience,” Burke favored an “x-dimensional … theoretic experience” (2), hence allowing for differences, contingent valuations, multiple possibilities. Thus, he writes, “the more we can avoid the metaphysical issue the better” (1). A metaphysic, insofar as it ignores the anthropomorphic nature of language and art, was not a satisfactory realm for the young Burke. He explained: “Exactly what I mean by the dismissal of metaphysics, therefore, is that we can, for the purposes of art, situate this sense of order solely in man, as a part of the form of mind” (2). Moreover, he wrote, “The metaphysical system stands, further, as a staunch attempt to ignore man as the measure of all things; but man is the measure of all things human…” (3). Echoing Protagoras’s famous dictum, “Of all things the measure is man” (Sprague 10), Burke aligned himself with the sophistic-Nietzschean position that he distinguished from Spinoza and Plato in his review of More’s book. This particular letter to Frank forced Burke to articulate the assumptions behind his aesthetics, as Burke noted in his May 8 response: “I found my aesthetics psychologically rather than metaphysically…” (2). And though Burke didn’t mention Nietzsche by name in his reply to Frank, Nietzsche’s thought on language, reality, art, and ethics certainly permeate that letter as well.

Frank, in his rambling, admittedly “damn sloppy” reply of June 21, refused to give in, pushing incessantly on the logical/metaphysical distinction. Here Frank maintained his own absolutism and questioned Burke’s unwillingness to recognize his own absolutist tendencies. Burke’s reply put forth a markedly more solid argument, in which Burke again, this time more cogently, refuted the usefulness of metaphysics. Here he argued that to base one’s ethics on a single metaphysical structure is to build a weak ethic, for “when the structure falls apart, the ethics tumbles along with it” (1). His answer, then, still adhered to the sophistic tenet: make humans the measure, “It is my suspicion that if we were to talk of ethics in the terms of man, instead of in the terms of the universe, we should not be subjecting our ethics to the fate of a prior structure” (1). Here Burke supported his claim by invoking Nietzsche: “In a sense Nietzsche did this [talked of ethics in terms of man], and in a sense he is impregnable. Nietzsche is the first exclusively ethical philosopher, the first philosopher to begin on ethical terms, rather than on metaphysical ones” (1). In short, Burke writes, “Nietzsche made the necessary modern
step of starting directly with ethics” (1). Burke chose to follow in Nietzsche’s “step,” to tread the path cut by the German thinker, elaborating Nietzsche’s thought on the nature of language, epistemology, and art.

Eleven years later, on the verge of composing *Permanence and Change*, Burke wrote to Matthew Josephson, “What I believe is that I can deal with fundamentally the same problem (the Bentham-Darwin-Marx-Nietzsche-Veblen problem of the ‘genesis of morals’ . . . )” (KB to MJ 3-29-33). Hence, these summer 1922 exchanges between Burke and Frank mark a new movement in Burke’s becoming. The early exchanges with Frank provided an occasion for Burke to grapple with some of the same issues that Nietzsche did; indeed, these letters contained the germ of thought that would become central to *Permanence and Change* a decade later.

**Nietzsche’s Perspectivalism and Burke’s Perspective by Incongruity**

“All seeing is essentially perspective, and so is all knowing. . . . The more different eyes we can put on in order to view a given spectacle, the more complete will be our conception of it, the greater our ‘objectivity.’ ”—Nietzsche, “Genealogy of Morals” (255).

“Perspective by incongruity is a way of seeing two ways at once. . . . And by God, I did start seeing double.”

—Kenneth Burke, “Counter-Gridlock”

William Rueckert characterizes the thirties as a period of “turmoil and intensity” for Burke, citing what he calls “the nearly hysterical middle part of *Permanence and Change*” (35) as an “obvious sign” of this so-called tumult. But the second book of *Permanence and Change* is much more than chaotic, expulsive writing. Indeed, if we take Burke’s word on the Nietzschean “groove” (“Counter-Gridlock” 22) of this section, then perhaps we can—without ignoring the transformative slant—read *Permanence and Change* differently, as Burke’s attempt to ground complex philosophical concepts in rhetoric and apply them to cultural and social forces.

In a 1981 interview, conducted while Burke was composing the “Retrospective Prospect” for the third edition of *Permanence and Change*, Burke spoke of the frustration he felt upon revisiting this work, and his urge to “redo” the “whole thing” (10). As Burke told it, “I finally decided that the middle section, ‘Perspective by Incongruity,’ is the essence of the whole business . . . ” (10). In the Afterword, Burke established Nietzsche as the originator of the concept (310), but Nietzsche’s presence is actually already felt in the 1935 text: “Nietzsche, we learn in his *Will to Power*, was interested in the establishment of perspectives” (88). In the interview, Burke went on to explain that while trying to unpack Nietzsche’s interpretive scheme, he came up with the term “perspective by incongruity.” Almost fifty years later, Burke recognized the profound impact Nietzsche had on his own thinking: “I’d written all this stuff on *perspectives*, and when I got through, it was so much more than the world” (“Counter-Gridlock” 10). Instead of the chaotic, “hysterical” writer Rueckert describes, this Burke was simply performing his later theories: he was creating a terministic screen with a particularly Nietzschean strain.

Nietzschean perspectivalism, as Burke saw it, described not only the multiplicity of interpretive frameworks available to and deployed by humans (*Permanence and Change* 35), but also—and more importantly—the transformative power of the slightest shifts in what Burke would call orientation (*Permanence and Change* 36). Hence perspectivalism is a perspective, insofar as it allows a reflection on the epistemic claim of perspectivism, and not just the claim itself. That is, perspectivalism, as a perspective, seeks to consider not
only the matrix of interpretation at hand, but the consequences or effects produced by perspectivism. An epistemological scheme, perspectivalism emerges from the peculiarly human desire to “grasp a given amount of reality in order to master it, in order to enlist that amount in its service” ([Will to Power] 480). Nietzsche’s epistemology, then, has a hermeneutic slant: “all that exists consists of interpretations” ([Will to Power] 481). In the opening of Permanence and Change, Burke likewise discusses how “all living things are critics” (5) by invoking a trout’s “altered response” to hooks after experiencing a narrow escape from this “jaw-ripping food” (5). For Nietzsche, the world is knowable to an extent, “but it may be interpreted differently, it has not one sense behind it, but hundreds of senses.—‘Perspectivity’” (481). Evident here is the Nietzschean turn, the turn that posits a logic that acknowledges the multiple ways of seeing the world (or worlds). This logic resonates strongly with what Burke called in the letter to Frank “an x-dimensional, theoretic experience” (May 8, 1922). These ways of seeing the world necessarily conform to particular cases, to the specificities of individuals; as Nietzsche wrote, “It is our needs that interpret the world; our instincts and their impulses for and against. Every instinct is a sort of thirst for power; each has its point of view, which it would fain impose upon all the other instincts as their norm” (481). Nietzschean perspectivalism, then, focuses not on the human from which such a perspective comes, but rather the encounter itself from which a perspective emerges.

Implicit in Nietzsche’s perspectivalism is a critique of “absolute” systems, what he called “the dangerous old conceptual fiction that posited a ‘pure, will-less, painless, timeless knowing subject . . .’” ([Genealogy of Morals] 119). Totalizing systems, according to Nietzsche, posit a grand “seer,” a transcendental “eye” that scoffs at any notion of interpretation, for there is only one way of seeing. Nietzschean perspectivalism, asserting instead that “there is only a perspective seeing” (119) seeks to recognize a pushing out of different perspectives as a necessary becoming; in Will to Power, he describes perspectivalism as “looking now out of this window, now out of that one . . .” (410); we look out of the different windows in an attempt to grasp the outside, obtaining what Babich calls “proximate truths” or “perspectival estimates” (96).

Burke saw perspectives functioning as norms, as evidenced in a hauntingly Nietzschean passage entitled “Classification Dictated by Interest” (Permanence and Change 102–103). Here Burke discussed the ways in which different interests, disciplinary or otherwise, “be it in poetry or in the laboratory,” provide different vantage points and thus further “the tendency to characterize events from a myriad shifting points of view” (102). In Nietzschean terms, then, language users learn and develop certain schematizing principles: “The object is, not ‘to know,’ but to schematise,—to impose as much regularity and form upon chaos, as our practical needs require” ([Will to Power] 515). Classificatory systems, then, and this is Burke’s point as well, are at once totalizing and normalizing, as Burke wrote:

When a philosopher invents a new approach to reality, he promptly finds that his predecessors saw something as a unit which he can subdivide, or that they accepted distinctions which his system can name as unities. The universe would appear to be something like a cheese; it can be sliced in an infinite number of ways—and when one has chosen his own pattern of slicing, he finds that other men’s cuts fall at the wrong places. ([Permanence and Change] 103)

Here Burke followed Nietzsche, critiquing the very notion of such a divisible “unit,” a totalized system. Resisting the notion of one truth or one “right” interpretation, Burke opted to view the different “slicing styles”—read, different perspectives—as mutually
informing, and more importantly, as a conscious—and ever artificial—shaping. These distinct perspectives are at times incommensurable, and that incommensurability "prepares for the maximum Perspective by Incongruity" (102). Burke called the multiplicity of slicing styles or perspectives a "Babel of new orientations" (117). Pausing to reflect on the nature of these interpretive schemes, Burke wrote, "Out of all this overlapping conflicting and supplementing of interpretive frames, what arises as a totality? The only thing that all this seems to make for is a reinforcement of the interpretive attitude itself" (118). The interpretive attitude Burke describes here presents a folding-in of Nietzsche's perspectivalism with the will to power.

For Nietzsche, "The Will to Power interprets. . . . It defines, it determines gradations. . . . In sooth, all interpretation is but a means in itself to become master of something" (Will to Power 643). As Nietzsche put it, humans yearn for perfection; an appetite for perfection is intricately connected with the will to power, as a desire for perfection feeds the volition to dominate, shape, or command forces (Will to Power 644).¹⁴ We hear this echoed in Burke's famous "Definition of Man," as "goaded by the spirit of hierarchy . . . and rotten with perfection" (15). When Burke points out that other interpretations (slicing styles) seem "wrong," he articulates what Nietzsche describes as the human "lust to rule; each one has its perspective that it would like to compel all the other drives to accept as a norm" (Will to Power 481). In adopting Nietzsche's perspectivalism, Burke made the first connections between his theories of language and the concerns with hierarchy and order he took up in later works.¹⁵

The quest for perfection is a perspectival one, and Burke's emphasis on "incongruity" stems from the "clashing" of different perspectives. What is produced, then, when humans encounter or hold incommensurable perspectives? According to Burke, "such shifts of interpretation make for totally different pictures of reality, since they focus the attention upon different orders of relationship" (Permanence and Change 36). The result? "We invent new terms, or apply our old vocabulary in new ways. . . . We try to point out new relationships as meaningful—we interpret situations differently; in the subjective sphere, we invent new accounts of motive" (36). Here, Burke laid some important groundwork for his later accounts of motive. Following Nietzsche, he cited language as the shaper of values. According to Burke, humans work linguistically through different perspectives, and this work produces individual and—through communication—social change.

But the movement between perspectives, i.e. the changes themselves, are neither "neat" nor painless. Indeed, both Burke and Nietzsche were interested in the ways metaphors force a clashing of perspectives, another link between the two that I will take up later in this essay. For now I simply want to note how this emphasis on perspectivalism, on the effects produced by language, the transformative power of a shifting or clashing of orientations, is precisely where the fusion of Burkean and Nietzschean thought becomes most apparent.

The Mobility and Violence of Language

"That enormous structure of beams and boards of concepts, to which the poor man clings for dear life, is for the liberated intellect just a scaffolding and plaything for his boldest artifices. And when he smashes it apart, scattering it, and then ironically puts it together again, joining the most remote and separating what is closest, he reveals that he does not need the emergency aid of poverty, and that he is now guided not by concepts but by intuitions."—Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lying"
While writing *Permanence and Change*, Burke found himself tangled in a complex cluster of concepts. As Burke explained in a prologue written in 1953 for its second printing, the book was concerned with crisis and the forcing of new orientations, and this sentiment was most strongly manifested in his notion of perspective by incongruity. By extension, the work wrestled with larger social concerns, encompassing the conditions for the production of cultural practices and the shaping of morals. Or, conversely, one might say that the shaping of morals and practices was the book’s primary focus—the subtitle is, after all, “An Anatomy of Purpose”—and that this larger spectrum kept forcing Burke back to the intricacies of language and its role in the creation and perpetuation of perspectives. Either way, Burke was concerned with the connections between poetics and ethical properties (ii). When writing *Permanence and Change*, Burke kept returning to the role of language and metaphor: “So, all told, concerned with words above all, when things got toughest [I] thought hardest about communication” (“Counter-Gridlock” xlviii). In *Permanence and Change*, when things indeed “got toughest,” when Burke reflected on the violent and tragic nature of language, and when Burke’s proto-poststructuralist leanings became most palpable, the traces of Nietzsche became most apparent.

For Nietzsche, all language is metaphor, as illustrated by the word metaphor itself (from the Greek *meta-* over, and *phora-* a carrying); a carrying over, a transference. Metaphor, then, marks language as a vehicle of thoughts and things, at once pointing out the limits and possibilities of language. In “On Truth and Lying in an Extra-Moral Sense,” Nietzsche, in his characteristic aphoristic style, describes the multiple layers of metaphor inherent in linguistic production:

> First, (the human) translates a nerve stimulus into an image! That is the first metaphor. Then, the image must be reshaped into a sound! The second metaphor. And each time there is a complete overleaping of spheres—from one sphere to the center of a totally different, new one. (248-249)

Here Nietzsche articulates language as double metaphor: language reshapes, recasts things into a completely new edifice. Bound up with this constructed notion is a prevailing view of language in poststructuralist thought, its inherent slipperiness, its inability to apprehend the “thing” entirely, what Nietzsche calls its “groping” nature (“Truth and Lying” 247). For Nietzsche, then, language is mobile, tumbling toward accurate representation, willing to truth. Language moves the will to truth, and though “it leads nowhere to the truth” (“Truth and Lying” 247), language still produces effects by forcing an encounter with the world. As Nietzsche writes in “Truth and Lying,” “What is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, anthropomorphisms, in short, a sum of human relations which were poetically and rhetorically heightened, transferred, and adorned, and after long use seem solid, canonical, and binding to a nation” (150). Herein lies the gist of Nietzsche’s project: to expose language as a deceptive, powerful tool that masquerades as “truth,” thus engendering entire ethical systems. For Nietzsche, then, the metaphorical joins with the rhetorical to produce effects both personal and cultural.

And Burke was just as concerned with the effects produced by language. He contended that scientific language relies solely on metaphor by extending old knowledge and ways of describing scientific phenomena to make new knowledge more accessible (*Permanence and Change* 96). Here, Burke explains that scientists “patiently pursue” these analogues while “the poet uses his metaphor for a glimpse only” (96). For Burke, though, whether providing a glimpse or an extended stare, metaphor carries attitudes
that at once limit and create possibilities. Burke pointed out that speech “is intensely moral—its names for objects contain the emotional overtones which give us cues as to how we should act toward these objects” (177). As Paul Jay argues, words, as the necessary carriers of ideology, produce powerful effects: subjective interpretations, perspectives, orientations (“Burke and Derrida” 353). Moreover, Burke’s statement about speech presents a view of language as action, for the moral leanings implicit in the metaphors with which humans choose to describe the world is a program for action; thus speech can never be neutral, and Burke recognizes, along with Nietzsche, that the poetic and the rhetorical indeed fuse to create action: “these emotional or moral weightings inherent in spontaneous speech tend to reenforce the act itself, hence making the communicative and active aspects of speech identical” (177).

Language’s action, replete with attitude and purpose, is far from predictable, calm, or passive. Indeed, just as Nietzsche’s “mobile army of metaphors” suggests a sense of violence, the space where incongruous perspectives clash, the space Burke characterized as the state of transition between orientation and a new orientation is often violent, rife with trauma. Such trauma springs from what Burke called “the tragic mechanism” (Permanence and Change 244), which he describes as an illness, a hypochondriasis, whereby an artist finds “an unquestioned authority in the reality of his own discomfitures” (244). Burke characterized the tragic illness as “both painful and creative” and tacitly tied it to perspective by incongruity by referring to the mechanism as “the unifying jaundice of the eye” (245). The illness metaphor adheres to the violent suffering of humans in conflict, be it internal or external. In short, Burke conveyed a sense that humans are sick with purpose, struggling towards action. As Burke put it: “We might almost lay it down as a rule of thumb: Where someone is straining to do something, look for evidence of the tragic mechanism” (195).

The assertion that action often involves tragedy and struggle once again forced a return to Nietzsche. This time, Burke invoked Nietzsche’s belief in a pervasive “morality of combat” (198). Burke held that Nietzsche “saw that we could not confine the sphere of combat to such activities as war and commercial invasion” (198). Following Nietzsche, Burke asserted that all cultural activity is founded upon warlike patterns, that the teacher, the inventor, the scientist, and the explorer all engage in warfare to a certain degree. Further, he wrote, “These militaristic patterns may sometimes have bad results, sometimes good, but all cultural activity as we know it is erected upon them” (198). Regardless of its goodness or badness, the militaristic clashing of ideologies for Burke “involves a shattering or fragmentation, analogous to the stage of ‘rending and tearing’ (or sparagmos) in tragic ritual” (69). These violent images align with Nietzsche’s description of the restructuring of “truth” as actively created by the “liberated intellect”: “he smashes [the structure] apart, scattering it, and then ironically puts it together again, joining the most remote and separating what is closest. . . . He speaks in sheer forbidden metaphors and unheard of conceptual compounds” (“Truth and Lying” 256). What Nietzsche described here is precisely what Burke called perspective by incongruity, a forceful turning of language against itself, a violent yet productive endeavor. An effect of this clashing? Art.

Poetry, The Poet, Poesis: Burke and Nietzsche on Art

Art played a critical role in Permanence and Change, for Burke’s own perspective relied heavily on the assumption that art can function as a kind of “corrective of scientific rationalization” (66). Here Burke articulated his philosophy around and within a nexus
of art—"art in its widest aspects, an art of living" (66). This move to art consequently forces a return to 1922 when he invoked Nietzsche to delineate his stance on aesthetics, to refuse a metaphysics and embrace a more psychological, epistemological stance toward art. For both Nietzsche and Burke, poetry and the poet remain tied to their Greek root, poein, "to make, produce, or create," hence poesis, "a making or a doing" (Liddell and Scott 650–51). Poetry for both is broadly defined as an act of production, an act that embodies a theory of becoming, a Nietzschean will to power.

As Gilles Deleuze puts it, "Nietzsche demands an aesthetics of creation" (102). For Nietzsche, art embodies the trappings of metaphor, the erroneous nature of language, and symptomatizes humans' crafting of reality to satiate a desire for truth, the will to power. Insofar as all language forces an encounter with the world, art transforms even as it produces knowledge. Deleuze writes, "In Nietzsche, 'we the artists' = 'we the seekers after knowledge or truth' = we the inventors of new possibilities of life' " (103). In a proclamation that presaged Burke's definition of man,19 Nietzsche wrote in Twilight of the Idols, "The man in this condition transforms things until they mirror his power—until they are reflections of his perfection. The compulsion to transform into perfection is—art" (72). For Nietzsche, then, the artist embodies becoming (Babich 279), and art shapes and is shaped by the will.

Likewise for Burke, poetry encompasses all creative acts: "Indeed, all life has been likened to the writing of a poem, though some people write their poems on paper, and others carve theirs out of jugular veins" (76). Hence, all humans, in their use of necessarily metaphoric language, are poets; as Burke wrote, "Insofar as all men are poets, even in those kinds of action generally considered distinct from poetry, he is selecting as his starting point our ultimate motive, the situation common to all, the creative, assertive, synthetic act" (Permanence and Change 259). For Burke, then, the "poem"—again, broadly defined—was a site for perspective by incongruity, or the jamming together of distinctly different ideas, as he writes in Permanence and Change, "The poem is a sudden fusion, a falling together of many things formerly apart—and the very force of this fusion leads one to seek further experiences of the same quality" (158). Considered figuratively, this statement can apply to almost any act: the carving of the veins, for example becomes through the act of materially fusing razor and flesh. Poetry, then, produces effects, effects that, at times, may in turn produce unexpected results, thus creating more and sometimes endless opportunities for becoming.

Rueckert also reads Burkean poetry as symbolic action, but interprets this "fusion" as a process of unification (48–49), a process that produces effects only on or for the poet (66). Further, Rueckert claims that poetry provides "the Way" (49), a place for rebirth (49), a metaphysical answer to the ethical question "how should I live"? Rueckert draws these conclusions from a key passage in Permanence and Change in which Burke elaborates what he terms "our poetic needs" or "our ultimate motive: the creative, assertive, synthetic act" (259). In concluding that poetry strives for some sort of unity, Rueckert overlooks the violence and productive power of these acts, linguistic or otherwise. Read through a Nietzschean lens, the "creative, assertive synthetic act," the desire to master something, to apprehend it, suggests an act of becoming—not just becoming one, as Rueckert might have it, but becoming something else, even becoming many—perpetually. In short, creation, assertion, and synthesis are means, not ends. As A. Wolf wrote of Nietzsche back in 1915, in a book that Burke in fact owned, "Nietzsche holds that, like the rest of the universe, man consists of will to power, or centres of impulse or instinct
struggling for mastery among themselves" (Wolf 81). Indeed, the desire to create, to assert, to bring together, according to Nietzsche, stems from impulses to reach outward, much in the same way Burke described the way he operated in the thirties:

Remember the big traffic jam in New York when the subways stopped? That's when I learned the word *gridlock*. Gridlock means you can't go any way. The traffic is so jammed, it can't go forward, backwards, or sideways. What I had was *counter-gridlock*. I went every which way. ("Counter-Gridlock" 2)

The image here is that of one poet, Kenneth Burke, proliferating in different directions, forging (and being forged by) connections in unexpected places, connections that led him to more connections, then to more. The poet creates and is created by connections; effects are produced, relationships forged, however violently, however blindly. When people make “discoveries,” Burke contends, “they are all, however bunglingly, ‘answering a call.’ . . . They ‘experimentally grope’ for something” (*Permanence and Change* 182). But even while making and taking part in “experimental” connections, the poet simultaneously slices or delimits other perspectives, hence rendering impossible any notion of poetry as unifying.

Poetry or art, then, broadly defined as the effects produced by our encounters with the world, *becomes* a life force, what Burke calls a “‘concentration point’ of human desires” (*Permanence and Change* 66). Poetry signifies a becoming, the furnishing of what Burke calls a “master-purpose” (163); hence, for both Burke and Nietzsche, ethical systems are built from poetry. Burke made this assertion in almost enthymematic form: “Action is fundamentally ethical, since it involves preferences. Poetry is ethical. Occupation and preoccupation are ethical. The ethical shapes our selection of means” (*Permanence and Change* 250). With this, Burke effectively “unpacked” an assertion he made to Frank at the end of the 1922 summer: “Ethics is the aesthetics of living, or aesthetics is the ethic of art” (Burke to Frank, Sept 4, 1922). In other words, poetry, broadly defined, is a locus for perspective by incongruity, a place where incongruous metaphors can be pushed together to create new ways of viewing the world—a counter-gridlock, a hypertext (in contemporary metaphorics). Indeed, Burke asserted in *Permanence and Change* that “Life itself is a poem in the sense that, in the course of living, we gradually erect a structure of relationships about us in conformity with our interests” (254). With this analogy, Burke articulated a theory of production that extended from art to life. He believed, for instance, that “you do get hooked to a vocabulary. If you really do live with your terms, they turn up tricks of their own” (Counter-Gridlock 10). Thus language, for Burke, is a productive force, a tool for making connections, turning up “tricks.” Further, he proclaims that the creation of new terminology is the ultimate producer of effects: “When you finally get down to where you’re making your own terminology, then by god, you’re making your own destiny too” (10). This architectonic theory of language and art, a theory he built from his study of Nietzsche, pervades the pages of Burke’s work, particularly *Permanence and Change*.

For Burke, the poetic metaphor serves as a corrective for what he called the “mechanistic” metaphor. The mechanistic aims at a metaphysic, something Burke resisted for years, and in *Permanence and Change* he justified this choice: “The exclusively mechanistic metaphor is objectionable . . . because it leaves too much out of account. It shows us merely those aspects of experience which can be phrased with its terms. It is truncated.” In other words, a metaphysic or mechanistic way of viewing the universe
posits the universe in almost a predeterminded way—as a uni-verse—as one body, one cause, one truth. The mechanistic perspective Burke rejected was also rejected in the same way by Nietzsche in the *Will to Power*. Nietzsche writes, “Of all the interpretations of the world attempted heretofore, the mechanical one seems to-day to stand most prominently in front” (618). After Nietzsche connected the mechanical interpretation to prevailing views of science, an interpretation that strives for regularity (620) and stability, he then proceeded to dismantle the mechanistic view, to expose its own constructed nature: “In order to understand the world, we must be able to reckon it up; in order to be able to reckon it up, we must be aware of constant causes; but since we find no such constant causes in reality, we invent them for ourselves and call them atoms. This is the origin of the atomic theory” (624). If the mechanistic view denies the constructedness of nature and posits science as the art of discovering rather than creating reality, then, Nietzsche claims, it is the most deceptive view of all. A more apt interpretive scheme would be one that acknowledges its constructive powers and seeks to create. And who better to inhabit this perspective than the artist?

That the artist presents a point of departure from the mechanistic perspective was precisely Burke’s point when he opted for the poetic metaphor, which he claimed allows “liquidity” (260), and which “considers the universe as a *Making* rather than as a *Made*, discussing it from the ethical, creative, poetic point of view” (260). The choice—provoked by Nietzsche—of the poetic over the mechanistic led Burke to the culminating point of *Permanence and Change*, wherein Burke concluded with “a belief that the ultimate metaphor for discussing the universe and man’s relations to it must be the poetic or dramatic metaphor” (263). He explained that the poetic metaphor proffers a “vocabulary of motives,” a set of tropes to account for human behavior. Further, the poetic metaphor suggests the possibility for catharsis, leading people to question what ways catharsis might arise (266).

In this Nietzschean framework, humans are considered, as Burke put it, “possessed” by social forces and norms, but at the same time are “inventors of new solutions” (267). Further, these solutions must negotiate two conditions: one a *being*, a permanent state of possession, and one a *becoming*, an ever-changing emergence of force. It is therefore the space between permanence and change—Burke’s own perspective by incongruity—that provides a cathexis for what Burke called “the eternally unsolvable Enigma”: namely, that “both existence and nothingness are equally unthinkable” (272). An easy humanism is rendered problematic in the Nietzschean-Burkean frame, as the process of becoming renders various points—social forces, individuals, discourse—indiscernible. The Nietzschean forces in Burke’s thoughts on art suggest an alternative reading to Rueckert’s: Rueckert’s assertion that “Between 1924 and 1941 [with the publication of *Permanence and Change* and *Attitudes Toward History*] Burke moved from writing poetry to theorizing about poetry to converting a theory of poetry into a philosophy of living” (51) might be turned around to say that during this time Burke converted *philosophy* into a theory of *poetry*.

**Conclusion: Nietzsche as Ideal Poet**

Nietzsche’s work, it seems, performed a twofold function for Burke. First, Nietzsche’s ideas on language, metaphor, aesthetics, and ethics permeated Burke’s thought. But Nietzsche also worked on yet another level for Burke, as an embodiment of the ideal poet whose poetry embodies the very acts Burke called poetry. Nietzsche can be seen as
“ideal poet,” just as Demosthenes embodies many of the characteristics of the ideal orator for Cicero, a touchstone or illustrative figure. According to Burke,

The position of Nietzsche in this genealogy of morals is remarkably complex. Whereas the other writers were essayists, he was a tragic poet. He was not interested simply in discussing the transvaluation of values, he wanted to *sing* of it, to give this great historical movement its prophetic, ritualistic accents. (*Permanence and Change* 46)

For Burke, Nietzsche *enacted his own principles*. Nietzsche’s style embodied the ideas Burke drew from his perspectivalism, and Burke noted the violence of Nietzsche’s writing:

> In reading Nietzsche, one must be struck by the pronounced *naming* that marks his page.... His sentences are forever striking out at this or that, exactly like a man in the midst of game, or enemies. They leap with a continual abruptness and sharpness of naming.... Nietzsche’s pages are certainly a battlefield of thought. (*Permanence and Change* 88)

Nietzsche, as tragic poet, carved up the world with his “dartlike style” (*Burke, Permanence and Change* 88). Nietzsche mobilized metaphors, exploiting at once the generative force and inherent erroneousness of language; in short, Nietzsche (or the configuration of forces called “Nietzsche”) was a *doer*, engaging the *agon* of art, building fortresses out of words. Sarah Kofman explains that “Nietzsche, strategically, turns himself into a poet” (102). In order to perform the very actions he invoked, he diversified and multiplied metaphors, and by doing so provided both a theory for and enactment of Burke’s perspective by incongruity.

Pressing further on the essayist/poet distinction when discussing Nietzsche’s notion of transvaluation, which Burke renamed reorientation, Burke wrote of Nietzsche:

> His subject-matter was specifically that of reorientation (transvaluation of *all* values)–yet in facing the *problematical new* he spontaneously felt as a poet that he could glorify such a concern only by utilizing the *unquestioned old*. The essayist can be content to *name* a cause heroic. The poet can make it heroic only by identifying it with assumptions already established as to what the heroic is. (87)

Once again, Burke examined the complex ways in which Nietzsche’s style *performed* his philosophy. One of Nietzsche’s points was that forces survive only in relation to the forces with which they struggle, borrowing from each other, clashing with, sliding around, connecting with yet pulling away from each other (*Deleuze* 5). As such, Nietzsche enacted his critique of language by *using* language, by demonstrating metaphor’s residue (“Truth and Lying” 251), by deploying metaphor after metaphor, comparing perceptions to spider webs (253) even as he spun his own.

Still, throughout *Permanence and Change*, Burke was ambivalent about his Nietzschean methods. Always wary of Nietzsche’s tragic nature (174) or outright decadence (134), he suggested that Nietzsche’s writing exhibits a restless insanity (88), his humor “grotesque” and “sardonic” (134). Elsewhere, Burke refused to side with what he calls “the dyslogistic choice of the Nietzscheans” (235). While addressing Nietzsche’s “morality of combat,” Burke devotes a rather lengthy footnote to the potential dangers involved in a Nietzschean view: “Various remarks which we have already made should serve to provide the necessary qualifications for approaching the Nietzschean formula with safety” (198). These precautions suggest that Burke was precisely the kind of reader who, according to Daniel Conway, Nietzsche sought to cultivate. Burke maintained a critical distance from
Nietzscheanism, thus selectively perpetuating Nietzsche's thought while resisting unabashed idolatry. As Conway puts it, Nietzsche constructed his “ideal readers” as “fearless warrior-genealogists” (192), and the Burke portrayed in Permanence and Change—self-described genealogist, champion of combative metaphor—fits this description. Burke, then, became Nietzsche’s “ideal reader,” and Nietzsche Burke’s “ideal poet.”

Nietzsche’s thought and work served to doubly enforce Burke’s own points. It was Nietzsche who posited and employed a perspective by incongruity, and as Burke writes, it is this very enactment of his thought that made Nietzsche exemplary: “Nietzsche’s radical proposal to ‘transvalue all values’ in his incongruously perspectival ways of reinterpreting the taxonomy of human vices and virtues marks him as the ‘most perfect’ of such enterprises” (Permanence and Change332). Nietzsche laid much of the groundwork for Burke’s theories on poetry, art, and life, particularly as articulated in Permanence and Change; Nietzsche also served as the mark of perfection toward which Burke strove. In order to posit a new philosophical idea about how perspectives change from old, habitual frames of reference through a juxtaposition of old and new to a different orientation, Burke performed this philosophy, using Nietzsche as the radical new to challenge the “one dimensional” old mechanistic frame described in his early exchanges with Waldo Frank.

Burke’s encounters with Nietzschean philosophy produced his perspective by incongruity, a notion of language-encounters which captures much of his thinking on language, metaphor, and art. In Nietzsche Burke found a poet—that is, one who does things with language—a model for agonistic writing, a guide to the transformative capacities of language, centered in metaphor. Burke thus found in Nietzsche several critical stances and conceptual tools which he adapted and modified to fit into his own toolbox, the contents of which, many would agree, have helped carve out a discipline.

Notes

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1Burke’s comparison here cuts two ways. First, like Burke’s Towards a Better Life, Zarathustra was not well received initially. According to Anthony M. Ludovici, “The reception given to Thus Spake Zarathustra had been so unsatisfactory, and misunderstandings relative to its teaching had become so general, that, within a year . . . Nietzsche was already beginning to see the necessity of bringing his doctrines before the public in a more definite and unmistakable form” (“Translator’s Preface,” vol. 14, vii). Likewise, Burke claimed that he spent the rest of his career elaborating theories of language as manifest in his unsuccessful novel. Second, when Burke wrote the aforementioned letter to Cowley in 1972, Zarathustra was enjoying remarkable popularity among the generation that had been creating massive social change during the 1960s. Burke certainly wished for this sort of belated success, as indicated in the same letter, where Burke conveys an overwhelming sense—albeit in a playful, joking tone—that he had been overlooked or misunderstood, or, at the very least, that he was writing before his time: “For reports are coming in now from France, Germany, Japan. Give me a few more years, and the things will get done. Honest to God, Malcolm, those Pharisean Review CIA shits have shot their wad. Give me but two more years and I’ll prove my point. The world is catching on. And my novel is the ritual initiation. And I’ll prove it” (KB to MC, Jay 385-386).

2There are, however, some important exceptions. Carole Blair, for example, notes that the Burke-Nietzsche connection enables an understanding of the similarities between the perspectives on history and change taken by Burke and Foucault (see especially page 146 and note 21). Two rhetoricians have discriminated important differences between Burkean and Nietzschean concepts. Douglas Thomas turns to Nietzsche and Lacan to develop Burke's conception of ‘order,” and Gregory Desilet argues that Nietzsche and Burke diverge in their conceptions of “the negative,” suggesting that “Nietzsche’s differing view exposes the possibility of an alternative dramatism” (65). Both Thomas and Desilet use Nietzsche as a tool for rethinking Burkean terminology, a move that has merits of its own. These scholars engage Burke “contra” Nietzsche, and they (understandably) bracket Burke’s other important connections to Nietzschean thought. Literary critics Paul Jay and Frank Lentricchia perhaps do the most work to begin to unravel pieces of the complex relationship between Burke and Nietzsche. Both Jay and Lentricchia use the Burke/Nietzsche relationship to link Burke to Derridean and poststructuralist thought (Jay “Burke and Derrida,” 351–354; Lentricchia, 60, 115, 160).

3Burke gives a few indications of what works of Nietzsche’s he read and used. It seems certain that he read Will to
Power, a posthumous publication of Nietzsche's notes (Ludovici, viii), before or while writing Permanence and Change, for his text contains direct references to Will to Power (88). In addition, a couple of passages suggest that he knew Genealogy of Morals: “The position of Nietzsche in this genealogy of morals is remarkably complex” (Permanence and Change 46); and perhaps more convincingly, a reference to Nietzsche's “blond beast” as an example of tragedy (174)—a central image in Genealogy of Morals (essay 2, section 17). Furthermore, Burke writes in “Retrospective Prospect” that he owned a book called The Philosophy of Nietzsche, a collection of lectures by A. Wolf, published in 1915. This book is a digest of Nietzsche’s thought, full of quotations from Will to Power, Beyond Good and Evil, Zarathustra, and other works, elaborating on Nietzsche’s method and thought. It is unclear to what extent this work impacted Burke; in 1983 he wrote that he “had no knowledge of having read” it (333). Still, the parallels between Wolf’s lectures and the ideas presented in Permanence and Change are remarkable. For example, Wolf, voicing Nietzsche, points out that while scientists create a sense of “permanence,” “change . . . is the essence of the cosmic process” (64-65). This discussion in Wolf falls under the rubric of purpose, the subtitle of Permanence and Change: “An Anatomy of Purpose.” All these passages suggest a probability that Burke did indeed read Wolf closely while composing Permanence and Change. Indeed, a close reading of Wolf’s book points up the possibility that Burke relied heavily on Wolf’s reading of Nietzsche to formulate his own views.

Another place where Burke’s writings hold striking similarities to Nietzsche may be found in Burke’s essay “Four Master Tropes” in The Grammar of Motives. Here, Burke delineates the three tropes found in Nietzsche’s lecture entitled “The Relation of the Rhetorical to Language” (Gilman, Blair, and Parent 21-25): metonymy, metaphor, and synecdoche; only Burke adds irony. Both Nietzsche and Burke present tropes as perspectival; Burke writes about metaphor that “to consider A from the point of view of B is, of course, to use B as perspective upon A” (504), and Nietzsche writes that tropes offer a “subjective impulse”: “It is not the things that pass over into consciousness, but the manner in which we stand toward them” (23). Perhaps Burke had access to one of the German editions of Nietzsche’s lecture notes, which were published in 1912 and 1922 (Gilman, Blair, and Parent ix). Many thanks to Carole Blair for this insight.

4“Counter-Gridlock,” “In Retrospective Prospect,” Permanence and Change 311, and Attitudes Toward History 410.

5Perhaps this “silding,” as strong cultural/historical grounding. That is, the appropriations of Burke in emergent “new rhetorics” took place in a period when Nietzsche (for various reasons) was not considered fashionable. Thanks to Jeffrey Walker for this insight.

6Nietzsche should, of course, be allied with the Sophists, in that he made man the measure of all things, in that his attitude involved the death of God, and in that he could neglect any spiritual (read, ‘inhabitory’) principle. But if the Sophists were smart, Nietzsche was pathetic, while Spinoza is a monument to his own philosophy, the contentment and constancy of his pursuit of it arguing that the intellect had given him his mastery. It is, in fact, just this emphasis on reason which Nietzsche lacked and which places Spinoza, the rationalist, within such close range of Plato “(526–529). Here Burke, if too cleanly, draws the rational/emotional line, and creates a continuum of sorts, placing Nietzsche furthest from Plato, Spinoza closest, and the sophists in between the two.

7In a May 5 letter to Malcolm Cowley, Burke wrote, “Today is my birthday; twenty-five. For a present, I received a letter from Wando Frank, praising my review in the last Dial” (KB to MC, in Jay 118). For permission to quote letters from Kenneth Burke in this essay, I thank Michael Burke. Also, special thanks to the caretakers of the Kenneth Burke letters at Penn State and the Waldo Frank letters at the University of Pennsylvania.

8Perhaps a notion of “one universal logic” isn’t a contradiction at all to Burke, for he connects it to “an x-dimensional mathematics…” “Nevertheless,” he writes, “we are limited and compelled by an immovable something that exists outside the mind” (1).

9Nietzsche, too, resists Western philosophy and metaphysics, particularly in Will to Power, which, according to Heidegger, comprises the final stages of Nietzsche’s overcoming of metaphysics (Nehamas 16).

10As we shall see in this essay, the following excerpt from Burke’s May 8 letter to Frank is remarkably Nietzschean: “thus, beauty would exist in the formation of that chain which exists between the see-er and the seen. Which is to say, it is the translation of the exterior world into the terms of one man’s will, the giving of a personal, biased meaning” (3). Nietzsche certainly concerned himself with the will of human beings, wills that create truth according to particular needs or interests; that is, rather than looking at the exterior world as an object of discovery, Nietzsche viewed it as a product of creation (Nehamas 174).

11Is our difference perhaps that I avow an absolute and that you are caught in an implication of a denial of it, or at the least in an unwillingness (a nineteenth century atavism) to avow one? No one however who feels as finely as I think you do for Spinoza can be called definitely dualistic” (3).

12I draw the term perspectivalism from Babette E. Babich, who uses it to distinguish Nietzsche from the perspectivists. According to Babich:

I employ the adjectival noun form of perspectivalism in an attempt to avoid the relativistic confusion inherent in the word perspectivism. As I construe the term, perspectivalism (a perspectival philosophy) is not an instance of perspectivism (a perspective philosophy) but rather a reflective collection of perspectivisms, that is, a philosophy built up on the idea that the world is replete with different viewpoints and different from every perspective. In another word, where perspectivism expresses the perspectival condition, perspectivalism both reflects and reflects upon the perspectival condition. Thus,
perspectivalism does not, as perspectivalism seems to, connote the view that all knowledge is no more than interpretation, the representation of a particular perspective. . . . However, perspectivalism comprises reflection on the consequences of this claim concerning knowledge (which for its part is a knowledge claim) and not merely the expression of the claim itself. Thus articulated, perspectivalism suggests the properly philosophic, higher-order viewpoint or thinking of the question of perspective that advert to the primacy of perspective and its implications. In the critical spirit of Kant, a perspectivalist philosophy reflects the epistemic fact of perspective and traces its origins and seeks to outline its critical consequences. (46)

Furthermore, as Babich contends, perspectivalism as a mode of analysis, as a philosophical position, may be distinguished from relativism, a charge often leveled at both Nietzsche and Burke.

Perfection, as defined by Nietzsche, is “Greater complexity, sharp differentiation, the contiguity of the developed organs and functions, with the disappearance of intermediate members” (Will to Power 644).

I’m thinking here in particular of Grammar of Motives and Rhetoric of Religion; see Thomas.

Much in anticipation of Thomas Kuhn’s notion of paradigm shifts in The Structure of a Scientific Revolution, which Burke later lamented “wasn’t on the market when I was shopping around for terms” (“Retrospective Prospect” 313).

Here, Burke presaged the speech act theories of the mid-twentieth century whereby J.L. Austin and John Searle articulated the performative nature of language (see Austin’s How to Do Things with Words and Searle’s “What is a Speech Act?”). Burke also described the yoking of poetics and rhetoric in Attitudes Toward History: “poetic image and rhetorical idea can become subtly fused—a fusion to which the very nature of poetry and rhetoric makes us prone. For the practised rhetorician relies greatly upon images to affect man’s ideation . . . and a poet’s images differ from sheerly sensory images precisely by reason of the fact that a poet’s images are saturated with ideas” (“Introduction”).

Of course Burke inserts here a cautious qualifying footnote, emphasizing the degree to which the combat principle holds. He wrote:

Various remarks which we have already made should serve to provide the necessary qualifications for approaching the Nietzschean formula with safety. But in the interests of clarity, we shall repeat them here. By showing the underlying element of combat in all action we do not thereby obligate ourselves to glorify a philosophy of combat. Action can be something qualitatively very different from combat; and it is perhaps only in moments of great stress, as in extreme personal anguish or under the present disorders of our economic system, that the purely combative expressive must come to the fore. “(198)

See “Definition of Man.”

De Oratore I, xx 89. Note that, as in Cicero’s case, many orators embody parts of the ideal he invokes; so this is not to say that Nietzsche is the only poet functioning in this manner for Burke. Indeed, Mann, Gide, and De Gourmont immediately come to mind. Curiously, Burke points out their Nietzschean inflection as well, referring to Mann and Gide as “Nietzsche’s two most thorough disciples” (Permanence and Change 87), and contending a propo of Gourmont, “there is Nietzsche in every sentence he wrote” (Counterstatement 27).

For an exceptional discussion of Burke’s critical style a la Nietzsche and Derrida, see Jay’s “Modernism, Postmodernism, and Critical Style.”

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