

## CHAPTER 4

# Performing Drama

### Theory in Perspective: How Is the World a Stage?

If the twentieth century was *text-centered* as presented in Chapter Three, it was also *drama-centered*. In much social theory throughout this century, “life as drama” was an important orientation for theories that explore and understand human action as dramatic. In this view, humans are “actors” who play roles; human activities are conceived as “action,” “acts,” “scenes,” and “events”; humans are driven by motives, intentions, and purposes to make moral choices; human interaction centers on conflict and moves through a particular form to its resolution. Shakespeare’s claim, “All the world’s a stage / And all the men and women merely players,” is a frequent allusion for theorists who claim that life is dramatically realized and best understood through theatrical language.

Named “dramatism” by Kenneth Burke, the “social drama” by Victor Turner, and “dramaturgical” by Erving Goffman, dramatic theories are an important corrective to two reigning metaphors that described and understood humans as machines and as animals. When the conception is of **humans as machines**, we are “*cogs, or working parts, in economic, social, and political systems beyond our control*.” With the language of the physical sciences, gravity and entropy reign. Humans are machines that break down, wear out, always subject to physical laws.

When the conception is of **humans as animals**, we are *moved, not by physical laws, but by “natural” ones, trapped in the language of instincts, urges, and biochemistry that erases morality, ethics, and choice*. With this metaphor, humans are subject to “conditions” which coerce and control; we are reducible to cause and effect. These mechanistic, physical, and causal metaphors for human interaction in no way account for **creativity, critical thinking, or symbol systems that are unique to humans**. Dramatism and the social drama ask “why?” questions of human action: “Why do people act the way they do, especially when faced with conflict?” Both

theories argue that humans are not animals or machines but are social actors who make moral and ethical choices.

Dramatistic theory enables three claims about the constitutive, epistemic, and critical work of performance. First, language and symbol systems are collective resources for people that constitute group life: “Language and ritual do more than reflect the experience of group life; they create it. To be a member of a community is to share in a name, a history, a mutual consciousness” (Gusfield 1989, 30). Second, as epistemology, the conventions of drama (scenes, acts, actors, motives, conflict) “are our ways of seeing and knowing, which every day we put into practice” (Williams 1958/1983, 18). Through the “dramatization of consciousness itself,” Raymond Williams maintains, “we organize reality.” Third, dramatistic theory provides tools and vocabulary for participating in social and political life that is constantly changing and changeable. Peter Berger (1963, 139) writes, “If social reality is dramatically created, it must also be dramatically malleable.” Molding the world is always a critical endeavor.

The theories of Erving Goffman will be covered in Chapter Six; this chapter explores Kenneth Burke’s dramatism and Victor Turner’s social drama. This chapter begins with Aristotelian concepts of dramatic form, conflict, and action as central to Burke’s critical orientations: language as symbolic action, ritual drama as hub, and analysis of human motives. The chapter then explores Turner’s social drama, its four phases, and performance as integral to the social drama’s unfolding. Each theory of language and social order draws life as drama as its reigning orientation to understand conflict, crisis, and its resolution. Both Burke and Turner utilize Aristotle’s conception of dramatic action and the elements of tragedy as foundations to understand how individuals and groups use language and ritual to forge memberships and drive social action.

## The Drama of a Roller Coaster Ride

There is no middle ground: You either love roller coasters or you hate them. As you wait in line, are you filled with excitement or paralytic fear? During the ride, do you hold your hands above your head? Or do you desperately hang on and coach yourself, “I am *not* going to die, I am *not* going to die. . . .” And, finally, when the carriage rolls back into the boarding station, do you turn to your companion and say, “Let’s do it again!” or do you scream, “Don’t *ever* make me do that again!”

Whether you are a joyful participant or reluctant victim, the ride takes a predictable form: the slow crawl out of the station house, the slow, steady climb upward, then the first perilous plunge downward. Larger and larger twists, turns, and loops will continue to the climax of the ride. The biggest thrill of all—whether it’s the highest drop-off, the biggest loop, or the seemingly endless seconds of free fall—comes close to the end of the ride. The ride then slows, the wind stops, the screams

turn to laughter, and—as at the beginning—the carriage chugs back to the boarding station. It's over.

A roller coaster ride is **dramatic**. This drama can be viewed in three interconnecting ways: (1) as a formal *arrangement* of parts that moves through beginning, middle, and end; (2) as *conflict* that must be struggled with and resolved; and (3) as a series of experiences that invite you to anticipate, participate, and *act* in certain ways. This combination of form, conflict, and action is at the heart of theories that take drama as the organizing principle for describing and understanding human activities.



SOURCE: Photo by Amazing Photos at NBC Universal, Orlando, Florida. Photo courtesy of Schuyler Long.

## Reigning Metaphor: Life as Drama

Clifford Geertz (1980) argues that life as drama is not a new concept. Since Shakespeare, the idea that “all the world’s a stage” has been a commonplace. Two schools of thought, however, have moved past the conception of drama as mimesis, as “faking” and as a “mere show,” to emphasize the ways that drama is a fruitful analogy for understanding “the expressive devices that make collective life seem anything at all” (172). One school is dramatism and the second is ritual theory. Geertz maintains that these two approaches pull in very different directions. **Dramatism** argues for the similarities between theatre and *rhetoric* with drama *as persuasion*. In this view, the orator’s platform is a stage. **Ritual theory** argues for the similarities between theatre and *religion* with drama *as communion*. Here the temple is a stage.

Raymond Williams (1983, 19) claims that we draw from drama—its conventions, its typical characters and scenes, its public participation, its fixed forms—to understand the world. A friend of Williams’ claimed, “France, you know, is a bad bourgeois novel.” Williams understood he was drawing a parallel between a country and the typical characters and conflicts of a bad novel, especially “struggles for property and position, for careers and career relationships.” Williams responded: “England’s a bad bourgeois novel too. And New York is a bad metropolitan novel. But there’s one difficulty. You can’t send them back to the library. You’re stuck with them. You have to read them over and over.” His friend responded, yes, “but critically.”

Dramatistic theory is alive and well all around us in analogies between life and something that is dramatically realized: “Life is a cabaret,” the Broadway musical tells us; World War II was divided into geographic regions—the European, Pacific, and African *theatres*; the film *Wall Street* finds stock traders hollering “Show time!”

at the opening bell. More than metaphors, however, this language describes and explains human actions. James Carey's ritual model of communication, introduced in Chapter One, looks at the world through a dramatistic lens. Carey (1988, 20–21) explains the drama of reading a newspaper:

What is arrayed before the reader is not pure information but a portrayal of the contending forces in the world. Moreover as readers make their way through the paper, they engage in a continual shift of roles or of dramatic focus. A story on the monetary crisis salutes them as American patriots fighting those ancient enemies Germany and Japan; a story on the meeting of a women's political caucus casts them into the liberation movement as supporter or opponent; a tale of violence on the campus evokes their class antagonisms and resentments. The model here is not that of information acquisition, though such acquisition occurs, but of dramatic action in which the reader joins a world of contending forces as an observer at a play. [A newspaper] is a presentation of reality that gives life an overall form, order, and tone.

Like the roller coaster and reading the newspaper, dramatistic theory maintains that life is dramatically shaped and realized through our active and critical participation in dramas—the contending forces—all around us.

#### READ MORE ABOUT IT

##### As Drama Would Like It

*While most everyone knows the first two lines, here's Jaques' famous speech from Shakespeare's As You Like It, Act 2, Scene 7, Lines 139–167.*

*Jaques:* All the world's a stage,  
 And all the men and women merely players;  
 They have their exits and their entrances,  
 And one man in his time plays many parts,  
 His acts being seven ages. At first, the infant,  
 Mewling and puking in the nurse's arms.  
 Then the whining schoolboy, with his satchel  
 And shining morning face, creeping like snail  
 Unwillingly to school. And then the lover,  
 Sighing like furnace, with a woeful ballad  
 Made to his mistress' eyebrow. Then a soldier,  
 Full of strange oaths and bearded like the pard,  
 Jealous in honour, sudden and quick in quarrel,

Seeking the bubble reputation  
Even in the canon's mouth. And then the justice,  
In fair round belly with good capon lined,  
With eyes severe and beard of formal cut,  
Full of wise saws and modern instances;  
And so he plays his part. The sixth age shifts  
Into the lean and slippered pantaloon  
With spectacles on nose and pouch on side;  
His youthful hose, well saved, a world too wide  
For his shrunk shank, and his big manly voice,  
Turning again toward childish treble, pipes  
And whistles in his sound. Last scene of all,  
That ends this strange eventful history,  
Is second childishness and mere oblivion,  
Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything.

## What Is Aristotelian Drama?

To understand the metaphor “drama as life,” it is first necessary to understand drama onstage. This section introduces Aristotelian notions of drama as realized in dramatic form, conflict, and action. For modern performance theory, the interaction of these three constitutive elements of tragedy is crucial to understanding the modern analogy “life as drama.”

### Dramatic Form: Arranging the Parts

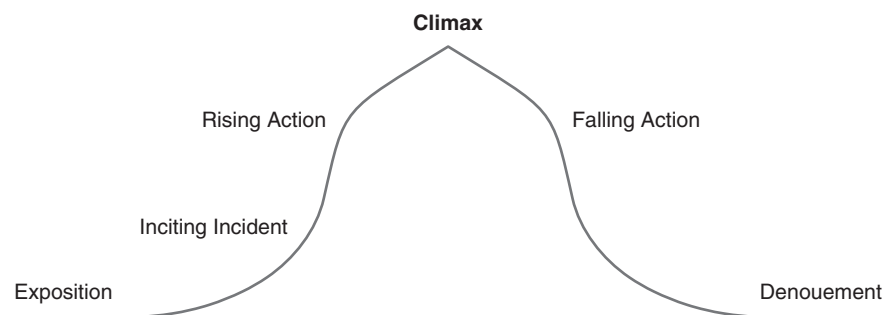
When a newscaster describes the drama of a hostage situation, she uses that metaphor to account for and to describe the unfolding of events. She will narrate the story as having a beginning, a middle, and an end—even when life itself offers no such clear or tidy sequence of events. Stories—whether news accounts, fairy tales, novels, movies, soap operas, stage plays, personal narratives, urban legends, or even jokes—are purposefully and artistically shaped by what Aristotle called “dramatic principles.” Aristotle’s *Poetics* (XXIII) prescribes the drama: “It should have for its subject a single action, whole and complete, with a beginning, a middle, and an end. It will thus resemble a living organism in all its unity, and produce the pleasure proper to it.” Going beyond “beginning, middle, and end,” Gustav Freytag, a German playwright, elaborated dramatic structure in Greek and Shakespearean plays in his 1863 book *Die Technik des Dramas* (*Technique of the Drama*, 1968). He labeled five parts of drama and shaped them in a pyramid: introduction, rise, climax, return or fall, and exodus.

This rise and fall of dramatic action is typical of all conventional stories: from fairy tales to novels, urban legends to Hollywood blockbusters. In conventional narrative structure, the beginning of the action is called **exposition**. Here the storyteller sets the scene, introduces the characters, presents the conflict of the story, and offers a slice of “normal” life. The exposition ends with the **inciting incident**, the event that sets the action of the story in motion. Without this incitement, no story happens. The **rising action** is a series of complications to the conflict of the story, or a series of obstacles the protagonist faces that interfere with his or her plans. The **climax** is the turning point in the story for the protagonist: Either the situation goes from good to bad (as in a tragedy) or from bad to good (as in comedy). In the **falling action**, the conflict between the protagonist and antagonist unravels, resulting in either victory or defeat for the protagonist. The **denouement**, French for “untying,” undoes all the complications, or knots, tied in the rising action of the story. The story ends with the resumption of the picture of “normal” life presented at the beginning (see Figure 4.1).

This form, or imposed structure on events, is by no means a “natural” one, despite the tendency to perceive and language certain events as happening along this curve of dramatic development. Pioneering sex researchers Masters and Johnson, for example, outlined four phases of the “human sexual response cycle” as excitement, plateau, orgasm, and resolution, mirroring Freytag’s pyramid and conventional narrative structure. Indeed, many claims to the “naturalness” of this form are based on perceiving similar patterns in nature: the change of seasons through the year, the rise and fall of the moon in the sky, the development of a thunderstorm.

From nature, we also make claims about *human* nature. Narrative theorist Walter Fisher (1984) claims that this rise and fall of dramatic action is central to all stories, and “narrative probability” is the “inherent awareness of what constitutes a coherent story.” Raymond Williams (1983, 13) also argues that “the slice of life, once a project of naturalist drama, is now a voluntary, habitual, internal rhythm; the flow of action and acting, of representation and performance, raised to a new convention, that of a basic need.”

Whether “inherent awareness” or “basic need,” the human proclivity for structuring events as a rise and fall of dramatic action is tested in everyday life. Think of



**Figure 4.1** Dramatic Form

stories you've heard without a beginning, a middle, and an end. Pointless, rambling, disorganized, and seemingly endless, there is no story, no drama, there at all. Even the much acclaimed "Seinfeld," supposedly a television show "about nothing," is carefully and minutely crafted to fulfill this structure of dramatic form, even as it parodies the typical situation comedy (Morreale 2000).

## ACT OUT

### Shaping Drama

Everyone has a repertoire of personal experience stories. "Hey! Tell about the time you . . ." is often an invitation from friends to relate a first event (date, kiss, sex, drunkenness), an exciting episode or misadventure (broken bone, car crash, getting caught), even encounters with the supernatural. We develop these stories in and through their performances—out loud, before an audience, with often finely tuned and timed phrasing, gestures, and pauses—that develop and improve each time we create the story in performance.

Have a storytelling session in class. Then analyze the action of the stories for how well they fulfill the structural elements of Freytag's pyramid. Or, to really test Freytag's theory, have some students tell their stories out of order. What happens to form and its "naturalness" when it is subverted, inverted, changed, and left open?

## Dramatic Conflict: Struggling With

*Agon*, the Greek root for the English word agony, is central to all drama, although its birth as a concept is much debated. In ancient Greek comedies, "agon" was the term for a *stylized debate* between the actor and the chorus, or between two actors each backed by half the chorus, in which opposing principles in the play are argued.

Sir James George Frazer, in *The Golden Bough* (1940), argues that Greek comedy and tragedy have their roots in seasonal death and rebirth rituals. In this use, agon is the name for the *ritual combat* staged in the rites between the old season (represented as aged king, hero, or god) and the new season (represented as young king).

In Western drama, agon is more generally conceived as the *struggle between opposing forces*. In literary works, conflict is realized within one character (man against himself), between a character and society (man against others), or between two characters (the protagonist against the antagonist). The centrality of conflict, as debate, as combat, as struggle, is crucial to modern conceptions of dramatic form. Teaching screenwriting to college students, Jon Stahl (2002) argues that "the core of any drama is the hero's pursuit of a goal in the face of opposition" (47).

## Dramatic Action: Doing, Making, and Understanding

Intricately tied to dramatic form and conflict is dramatic action. Drama is a Greek word meaning "action," with its roots in the Greek verb *dran*, "to do." Aristotle

writes in the *Poetics*, “life consists in action, and its end is a mode of action” (VI.9). Aristotle details three kinds of action: **praxis** (“to do”), **poiesis** (“to make”), and **theoria** (“to grasp and understand some truth”).

Throughout the *Poetics*, Aristotle uses Sophocles’ play *Oedipus Rex* as his highest example of tragedy, “the imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude.” Oedipus’ discovery—that he has killed his father and married his mother—organizes all the action in the plot, character, and thought of the play. Throughout the play, the tragic hero’s motives revolve around action: as *praxis*, he has a job to do, to *find* the identity of the murderer of King Laius; as *poiesis*, he makes *choices and decisions* based on his growing awareness of the facts; as *theoria*, Oedipus’ *discovery* that he murdered Laius and married Jocasta leads to his decision to blind himself. At the end of the play, the Chorus sees in the self-blinded Oedipus a general truth about the human condition:

Men of Thebes: look upon Oedipus.  
 This is the king who solved the famous riddle  
 And towered up, most powerful of men.  
 No mortal eyes but looked on him with envy.  
 Yet in the end ruin swept over him.  
 Let every man in mankind’s frailty  
 Consider his last day; and let none  
 Presume on his good fortune until he find  
 Life, at his death, a memory without pain.

*Praxis*, *poiesis*, and *theoria*—all forms of human action—are central to a dramatic view of both art and social interaction as process and form.

These forms are also salient ways to understand protagonists in contemporary media texts. John Stone (2000) analyzes *Platoon* and *Wall Street* for director Oliver Stone’s uses of form, conflict, and dramatic action as modern morality plays of good against evil. Stone claims (2000, 85), “[Oliver] Stone’s protagonists . . . [go] on journeys of vast discovery and, in so doing, learn something about themselves and the milieu of the world around them.” To do, to choose, and to discover are dramatic actions in social life and artistic accounts of that life. John Osburn (1994) proposes the “tabloid” as a climactic form that raises action and resolves it in a single moment, a useful commentary on the open-endedness of some forms like soap operas and the briefness of instantaneous news.

## Audience and Dramatic Form

The end of tragedy for Aristotle is pleasure; a special kind of pleasure that purges the emotions of fear and pity that have been excited in the audience by the play. Francis Fergusson (1961, 34–35) explains Aristotle’s requirement of both fear and pity in appropriate measures:



Pity alone is merely sentimental, like the shameless tears of soap opera. Fear alone, such as we get from a good thriller, merely makes us shift tensely to the edge of the seat and brace ourselves for the pistol shot. But the masters of tragedy, like good cooks, mingle pity and fear in the right proportions. Having given us fear enough, they melt us with pity, purging us of our emotions, and reconciling us to our fate, because we understand it as the universal human lot.

Aristotle calls this purging of emotions *catharsis* (*Poetics* XIV): “he who hears the tale told will thrill with horror and melt to pity at what takes place. This is the impression we should receive from hearing the story of Oedipus.”

Like that roller coaster with its specific arrangement of events, we also experience a very specific set of emotions on the ride: We anticipate the action, we undergo the thrills, and when we survive the ride, we experience a kind of purging of those emotions. While the comparison is perhaps a silly one, all drama creates a set of expectations in the audience, and dramatic form deliberately manipulates these expectations.

In *Counter-statement* (1931/1968), Kenneth Burke analyzes the ghost scene in *Hamlet* as Shakespeare’s brilliant manipulation of audience expectations. The ghost’s nightly appearance has been spoken of since the beginning of the play, and the audience anxiously awaits its appearance. But not until Act I, Scene 4, do Hamlet, Horatio, and Marcellus meet at midnight, outside on the platform, where the ghost has appeared before. Hamlet asks Horatio the time.

Horatio: I think it lacks of twelve.

Marcellus: No, it is struck.

Horatio: Indeed? I heard it not: then it draws near the season  
Wherein the spirit held his wont to walk.

Burke writes, “Hamlet’s friends have established the hour at twelve. It is time for the ghost. Sounds off-stage, and of course it is not the ghost” (1931/1968, 29). Instead, they hear a blast of trumpets and a gunshot. This is the carousing of the king’s men. Burke calls this “a tricky, and useful, detail. We have been waiting for a ghost, and get, startlingly, a blare of trumpets” (29). When the ghost actually does appear, some minutes later, Hamlet and his friends are deep in conversation about the drunkenness of the king’s men, and the audience has taken its mind off the ghost. “This ghost, so assiduously prepared for, is yet a surprise” (30).

Dramatic structure is the creation and fulfillment of expectations *in the audience*. For Burke, the techniques of suspense and surprise are the same in classic dramatic tragedy and “the cheapest contemporary melodrama” (37). David Bordwell (1985) argues that filmmakers are limited by the typical forms that create expectations and suspense. Changing the form, however, risks altering the argumentative structure of the story.

For example, even though we know that the words “I’ll be right back” signal sure death of any character in a teenage horror movie, we still participate *in the argument through the form* of these films: (1) We enjoy the creation and fulfillment of suspense; (2) we are surprised—even when we know the plot lines in advance; and

(3) we know the argument, “Teenagers who have sex in these movies die.” Elizabeth C. Fine (1984, 86) offers a similar example about form and audience expectations that includes “a knowledge of *how*, as well as a knowledge of *what*.”

Most Americans would not confuse the following rendition with a performance of “The Three Bears”: “There were these three bears who lived in the woods. When they went for a walk, a little girl named Goldilocks came in their house and ate some porridge. She broke one of their chairs. She went to sleep in the little one’s bed. They came home and woke her up. She ran away.” This text, while retaining the basic plot elements, violates the norms of interaction for the performance.

*What* happens and *how* it is performed—on the stage, in film, in storytelling—puts audience center stage in dramatic theory.

## CAUGHT LOOKING

### Dramatic Scenes that Create Expectations

Horror films are particularly good at creating expectations in the audience. Bring in a clip of a scene from a horror film. Then analyze how this scene creates a series of expectations in the audience. Is the killer around the corner? What’s inside the closet? Is someone being stalked?

How are you also surprised when the expectation is *not* fulfilled—that the sound is a door banging in the wind, that inside the closet is a coat and hat, that the stalker is the family cat?

Given the surprise, how is the original expectation then fulfilled when the audience least expects it?

## READ MORE ABOUT IT

### Oedipus Retold

*Poet Muriel Rukeyser manipulates everyone’s expectations, Oedipus’ included, in her poem “Myth” from her collection of poems Breaking Open (1973, 20).*

Long afterward, Oedipus, old and blinded, walked the roads. He smelled a familiar smell. It was the Sphinx. Oedipus said, “I want to ask one question. Why didn’t I recognize my mother?” “You gave the wrong answer,” said the Sphinx. “But that was what made everything possible,” said Oedipus. “No,” she said. “When I asked, What walks on four legs in the morning, two at noon, and three in the evening, you answered, Man. You didn’t say anything about woman.” “When you say Men,” said Oedipus, “you include women too. Everyone knows that.” She said, “That’s what you think.”

SOURCE: Reprinted by permission of International Creative Management, Inc. Copyright © 1973 by Muriel Rukeyser.

## Kenneth Burke's Dramatism: Life *Is* Drama

Kenneth Burke was a drama, music, and literary critic for the monthly magazine *The Dial* in the 1920s, but he soon turned his attention to the wide scope of human affairs. Burke called himself a “word man,” “a student of strategies,” and a “logologist” (Chesebro 1993, p. ix). Scott McLemee (2001, A26) writes of responses to Burke’s work:

Literary scholars who admired Burke’s essays on Flaubert or Mann often found his later work bewildering. They complained that his ideas about “symbolic action” could apply just as easily to advertising campaigns as to *The Divine Comedy*. In other words, Burke may have accidentally created cultural studies.

Burke developed a system he called **dramatism** that maintains that *language is action*. Language is more than simply instrumental: It legitimates, thematizes, and performs social meanings. Even *Webster’s Third International Dictionary* acknowledges Burke’s definition of dramatism: “a technique of analysis of language and thought as basically modes of action rather than as means of conveying information.”

Burke makes an important distinction between motion and action. **Motion** is what happens in the physical world—the growth of crops, the movement of the tides, the workings of a machine. **Action** is a thoroughly human endeavor (recall *praxis, poiesis, and theoria*) and should be “preserved for human behavior which proceeds from motives” that are revealed in choices, commitments, moral evaluations, and responsibilities (Gudas 1983a, 591).

A dramatisitic approach to human interaction mandates *an awareness of ourselves as actors speaking in specific situations with specific purposes*. These motives are revealed in the ways we shape language to meet our needs, and the ways that language—in turn—shapes our identities and affiliations. David Payne and Roderick Hart (1996, 267) analyze the language of “drunk driving” for different actors and the language that reveals motives:

[A] scientist may describe drinking-while-driving as “conditioned behavior,” a phrase that downplays motive, while the libertarian and the religious cleric may highlight motives but do so oppositely (i.e., “drinking as personal freedom” vs. “drinking as sin”). For the scientist, decisions are made by the brain; for the libertarian they are made by the mind; for the preacher they are made by the conscience. . . . [For Mothers Against Drunk Driving] drinking is a social act, often a public act. . . . “Killing while drinking and driving is murder, plain and simple.”

Finding the dramatic conflict, form, and action in a political speech is easy: Speakers deliberately manipulate language, create “us” and “them” versions of the situation, and appeal to the audience’s loves and fears. Finding the drama in a staged play is even easier, especially when playwrights consciously and deliberately adhere to Aristotelian notions of form, conflict, and audience expectations. James Combs and Michael Mansfield (1976, xviii) explain how Burke went beyond “finding” drama in these situations to argue that

life *is* drama. Action means structured behavior in terms of symbols, which implies choice, conflict and cooperation, which men communicate to each other. Society is a drama in which actions, in terms of social symbols, are the crucial events. The difference between “staged” drama and the drama of real life is the difference between human obstacles imagined by an artist and those actually experienced. The realms are homologous: Life and art both deal with the fundamental problems of human existence, and both aim at the symbolic resolution of conflict through communication.

Dramatism is a theory that accounts for human symbol use and misuse to resolve conflict through collective performances.



SOURCE: U.S. Marine Corps photo by Lance Cpl. James Green, 2006. From U.S. Department of Defense, [www.defenselink.mil](http://www.defenselink.mil). Home Page photos.

## THEORY MEETS WORLD

### I Know a Gal in New Orleans

Jeff Parker Knight (1990) explores performances of Marine Corps “jodies,” the marching chants familiar to us in films like *An Officer and a Gentleman* and *Full Metal Jacket*. Knight learned and performed the chants in the summer of 1982 at Camp Ushur, in Quantico, Virginia.

Kenneth Burke maintained that “literature is equipment for living,” for it presents strategies for understanding and engaging typical situations. In “Literature as Equipment for Killing: Performance as Rhetoric in Military Training Camps,”

Knight argues that the collectively chanted rhymes are performances that serve to socialize and indoctrinate; as ritual, participatory performances, they “alter our perceptions of reality, and thus our actions” (1990, 162).

As indoctrination and socialization, the jodies perform attitudes toward Marine Corps loyalty and power:

I had a wife and she was keen  
I traded her for my M-16

\*\*\*\*

Running through the jungle with my M-16  
I’m a mean motherfucker, I’m a U.S. Marine

\*\*\*\*

I want to be a Recon Ranger  
I want to live a life of danger

The jodies also desensitize recruits toward killing others and their own deaths:

Flying low and feeling mean  
Fire a family by a stream  
See them burn and hear them scream  
Cause Napalm sticks to kids

\*\*\*\*

If I die in the old drop zone  
Box me up and send me home  
Pin my medals on my chest  
And tell my Mom I did my best

Many of the jodies perform attitudes toward women as sex objects, nameless and interchangeable, as a means “to demonstrate masculine dominance and prowess” (163):

I got a gal in Kansas City  
She’s got gumdrops on her titties  
When I get back to Kansas City  
Gonna suck those gumdrops off her titties

\*\*\*\*

(Continued)

(Continued)

I got a gal in New Orleans  
Kisses sailors and she blows Marines

Knight writes of the last couplet, “the woman serves both as an oral receptacle and as instrument of inter-branch rivalry” (163).

As ritual, chanted performances, jodies were one of the “few pleasures in an atmosphere designed to induce stress” (164), while they socialized the recruits into a new world. Knight writes:

I am still sometimes surprised, and horrified, at the words I said and the way I thought during and immediately after a brief stint in a military training camp. The jodies were part of the change we went through. By laughing at the unpleasant realities of war, we no doubt were hardening ourselves to our own squeamishness and fear. Such hardening was to make us efficient soldiers, willing to kill or die on command (and, as officers, willing to give such commands). . . . The humorous and cathartic aspects of the songs help to make the training experience bearable. At the same time, they indoctrinate the recruits into sharing the attitudes suggested by the songs. . . . Jody songs in the military, to modify Kenneth Burke, have become literature as equipment for killing, a tool of socializing civilians into soldiers. (166)

### Ritual Drama as Hub: Two Kinds of Sacrifice

Burke argues that “symbolic resolution of conflict” is available in the form of ritual drama, which he calls “the hub” of human activity. While the origin of Western staged drama in ritual is a theory that is both highly contested and never provable (Rozik 2002; Schechner 2002b), Burke was not interested in origins. He was interested in the way that ritual drama provides an Ur-form, a “test case” or “paradigm,” for all human social interaction: “that the ritual enactment of struggle, suffering, sacrifice, and the appearance of new light and new life, is at the root of the tragic form” (Fergusson 1961, 39).

Burke writes in a series of “if/then” clauses that begin with Aristotelian notions of action, drama, and tragedy to explain social interaction: “If *action* is to be our key term, then *drama*; for drama is the culminative form of action. . . . But if *drama*, then *conflict*. And if *conflict*, then *victimage*. Dramatism is always on the edge of this vexing problem, that comes to a culmination in tragedy, the song of the scapegoat” (1966, 54–55). Burke maintains that when humans come together—to live, to work, to love, to war, to cooperate, and to compete—our greatest tendency is toward sacrifice. That is, we tend to solve our conflicts in one of two ways: by sacrificing others through **victimage** or by sacrificing ourselves to a greater good through **mortification**.

The ritual drama enacts victimage. Victimage, also called **scapegoating**, is the symbolic heaping of sins or bestowing of guilt on an individual and destroying him

or her through sacrifice. The symbolic vessel is then purged, or cast out, from the community. In early Greek rituals of purification, this “vessel” was often a goat; hence, the “song of the goat” or scapegoat. In early Judaic rites related in the Old Testament, a priest confessed the sins of the community over the head of a goat that was then driven away into the wilderness, symbolically carrying the sins away. Fabian Gudas relates how Burke analyzed literature for this same pattern:

Inevitably, guilt, felt as a painful attitude, must be cleansed. This is done through some cathartic means, usually involving victimage or scapegoat-ism. If successful, the individual or the social group is purified and redeemed, and the problematic situation has been transcended. This is the drama of human relations in its most abstract form. Literature is the symbolic expression of these relations. (1983a, 594)

So how to manipulate that guilt? Robert Adams (1983, 716) explains the many resources humans have according to Burke: “We may repress our guilt, transfer it to a scapegoat, sublimate it to an ecstasy, placate it in a ritual, seek forgiveness in prayer, mortify it in an actual or symbolic suicide, or normalize it as part of a structure.” In Burke’s famous essay, “The Rhetoric of Hitler’s Battle” (1957), he analyzed Hitler’s scapegoating of European Jews for the economic ills of Germany. Today, the urge to blame through scapegoating is rampant, whether immigrants from Mexico for economic woes, people from the Middle East for terrorism, feminists for destruction of family values, or gays and lesbians for the decline of marriage.

Manipulation of guilt, however, needn’t always be tragic. Comedy also operates, with a Burkean lens, through the purging of guilt. Brian Ott (2003, 72) analyzes “The Simpsons” for Homer’s constant overconsumption. Ott writes:

Homer, then, is more than a cartoon character; he is a symbol of a shared guilt and a comedic tool for coming to terms with it. Comedy teaches the fool and hence the audience, explains Brummett, “about error so that it may be corrected rather than punished. Comedy does this through dramatic irony, in which audience members are placed in a position where they see behind the facade of the sins and errors that bedevil the fool” (Brummett 1984a, 219–20). By the end of each episode, Homer is publicly embarrassed for his consumptive practices, thereby revealing the error of his ways and reintegrating him into the social hierarchy.



SOURCE: Photograph by Cindy Mosqueda. Copyright © 2006 by Cindy Mosqueda.

Blaming oneself through **mortification**, or *self-punishment*, is also a tragic urge in the dramatic view of human action. Indeed, sacrificing oneself for others is often seen as the highest human motive: the soldier who throws himself on a hand grenade to save a group; the mother who dies rescuing her child; the one who stays behind to light the fuse. This urge to sacrifice oneself for the good of others is epitomized for Burke in the Christian tradition: Jesus Christ died on the cross for mankind so that all who believe can achieve eternal life.

While these individual actions are seen as heroic, noble, and selfless, contemporary group acts of mortification are less easy to categorize or understand. Jim Jones, in 1978, shocked the world when he and his followers in Guyana, South America, committed group suicide. Nine hundred and fourteen people, including 276 children, drank a soft drink laced with cyanide and sedatives after investigations of the People's Temple began by the U.S. Congress. In 1997, thirty-nine members of "Heaven's Gate" committed group suicide in Del Mar, California, supposedly ready to leave the Earth with aliens arriving behind Comet Hale-Bopp. A news account ("Mass Suicide" 1997) of the event relates: "The mass suicide likely took place over three days and involved three groups, proceeding in a calm, ritualistic fashion. Some members apparently assisted others and then cleaned up, then went on to take their own dose of the fatal mixture, mixed with apple sauce or pudding."

The linking of drama, tragedy, ritual, and motive is at the heart of Burke's dramatism—a perspective on human action as drama, a conception of language itself as symbolic action. Combs and Mansfield (1976, xviii) elaborate the symbolic relationship between language and action: "Humans do not simply mate, they marry; they do not simply kill for food, but for gods and country; territory is not simply defended, it is named."

## Analyzing Motives: Beyond the Pentad

Most summaries of dramatism feature the dramatic **pentad**, the five questions to ask in any study of motives in human dramas: *agent* (who), *scene* (when and where), *act* (what), *agency* (how and with what materials), and *purpose* (why). This model can be a fruitful route to *begin* asking questions. Settling for simple answers to these questions, however, "dissolves" the drama—the conflict (struggle, sacrifice, and rebirth), action (doing, choosing, and discovering), and structure (rise and fall) of the drama itself. The pentad is a "calculus," not an "algebra."

Many scholars of oral interpretation were introduced to the pentad through Don Geiger's *The Sound, Sense, and Performance of Literature* (1963, 62): "In finding answers to these questions—Who? What? How? Where? When? and Why?—we are discovering the situation-attitude relationships which comprise the piece's 'drama.'" Textbooks in performance of literature have made Burke's pentad a centerpiece (Long and HopKins 1982; Pelias 1992; Stern and Henderson 1993). When performers use the pentad to begin their analysis of a literary text, they return the drama to the words on the page. Wallace Bacon and Robert Breen (1959, 7) write, "all literature is dramatic: There is always a conflict expressed or implied, and a prevailing emotional state. Such are the conditions of drama, and such are the conditions which give all literature the semblance of life."



Burke suggests several other methods to understand and to explore human motives. In addition to the pentad, Burke utilizes perspective by incongruity, cluster agons with their God and Devil terms, and the representative anecdote. **Perspective by incongruity** asks critics to depart from traditional ways of seeing, “pieties” in Burke’s term, by turning ideas on their heads. Naomi Rockler (2002) suggests looking at gender roles in media and reversing them. On “The Price is Right” for example, cast a woman in Bob Barker’s role and men in the roles of “Barker’s Beauties.” This new perspective reveals how naturalized these gender roles are in the drama of consumerism. Elizabeth Bell (1999) uses perspective by incongruity to argue that weddings and pornography are complementary and necessary to each other, not opposites of each other, in cultural performances in the West.

Language is a grammar of motives. Words “cluster” with other words in a “what goes with what” system of usage that characterizes the conflict in particular ways. Burke calls these **cluster agons**. Related to cluster agons are **God and Devil terms**. In vocabularies of motives, certain words stand for ultimate good and ultimate evil, and we often use these terms as “shorthand” for affiliations and ideologies: pro-life and pro-choice, freedom and tyranny, Democrat and Republican, free trade and protectionism, gay rights and family values.

In 1973, members of the Speech Communication Association debated a name change for one of the association’s journals. Wayne Brockriede (1973, 12) wrote:

The selection of the god-word that most accurately names what we are primarily about is something for SCA members to think about and to debate about. At one time the best word for our discipline was “rhetoric”; from about 1915 to about 1960 it was “speech”; since then we have stood at the waystation



SOURCE: Photograph by Danny Hammtree (www.digitalgrace.com). Copyright © 2006 by Danny Hammtree.

of “speech communication.” Today’s word is “communication” without any encumbering adjectives.

David S. Olsen (2001) analyzes the use of God and Devil terms in the polarized reactions to Martin Scorsese’s controversial film *The Last Temptation of Christ*. For defenders of the film, the God-term was censorship—something to be fought at all costs. For detractors of the film, the God-term was the “American way,” cast as “most Christians” in the United States and their biblical interpretation of the life of Christ. God and Devil terms organize and condense arguments.

The **representative anecdote** is a tiny story that both stands for and encompasses larger societal concerns, fears, and desires. Barry Brummett (1984b, 161) explains how the representative anecdote is a critical tool: “by examining what people are *saying*, the critic may discover what cultures are celebrating or mourning—and the critic may recommend other ways of speaking which may serve as better equipment for living.” So political elections are “horse races,” celebrity lives are “soap operas,” famous trials are “media circuses.”

Folklorist Roger Abrahams also approaches performances of verbal art through a dramatic lens. Expressive folklore is often centered on a problem, a problem Abrahams (1968, 148) describes as

“magically” transferred from the item to the recurrent problem when the performance operates successfully, sympathetically. Because the performer projects the conflict and resolves it, the illusion is created that it can be solved in real life; and with the addition of sympathy, of “acting with,” the audience not only derives pleasure from the activity but also knowledge.

Going beyond the pentad to analyze motives means paying attention to language and its performances (1) by turning ideas or practices on their heads; (2) by isolating oppositional terms that shape and name the conflict; (3) by exploring how performance enacts the problem and its solution “magically” as a guide for action; and (4) by examining how audiences are invited to participate—with sympathy, pleasure, and knowledge.

## ACT OUT

### Dramatizing Competing Products

Check out advertisements for mattresses. If health is the pitch, certain medical terms will follow. If luxury is the pitch, certain economic terms follow. The conflict will be created in language and resolved in the drama of purchasing and sleeping on a new mattress.

Divide the class into groups and have each group collect numerous print advertisements for a product: homes, shampoos, internet servers, shoes, power tools, cars. Find the “God” and “Devil” terms, the agon clusters, and the representative anecdote presented in these different dramas, then stage them using the advertising copy as script.

**READ MORE ABOUT IT****A Representative Anecdote**

*Eugene Robinson creates a representative anecdote in the 24-hour news cycle's fascination with some women. "(White) Women We Love," (2005, A2) is a potent analysis of what American culture is celebrating and mourning.*

Someday historians will look back at America in the decade bracketing the turn of the 21st century and identify the era's major themes: Religious fundamentalism. Terrorism. War in Iraq. Economic dislocation. Bioengineering. Information technology. Nuclear proliferation. Globalization. The rise of superpower China. And, of course, Damsels in Distress.

Every few weeks, this stressed-out nation with more problems to worry about than hours in the day finds time to become obsessed with the saga—it's always a "saga," never just a story—of a damsel in distress. Natalee Holloway, the student who disappeared while on a class trip to the Caribbean island of Aruba, is the latest in what seems an endless series.

Holloway assumed the mantle from her predecessor, the Runaway Bride, who turned out not to have been in distress at all—not physical distress, at least, though it's obvious that the prospect of her impending 600-guest wedding caused Jennifer Wilbanks an understandable measure of mental trauma.

Before the Runaway Bride, there were too many damsels to provide a full list, but surely you remember the damsel elite: Laci Peterson. Elizabeth Smart. Lori Hacking. Chandra Levy. JonBenet Ramsey. We even found, or created, a damsel amid the chaos of war in Iraq: Jessica Lynch.

The specifics of the story line vary from damsel to damsel. In some cases, the saga begins with the discovery of a corpse. In other cases, the damsel simply vanishes into thin air. Often, there is a suspect from the beginning—an intruder, a husband, a father, a congressman, a stranger glimpsed lurking nearby.

Sometimes the tale ends well, or well enough, as in the cases of Smart and Lynch. Let's hope it ends well for Holloway. But more often, it ends badly. Once in a great while, a case like Runaway Bride comes along to provide comic relief.

But of course the damsels have much in common besides being female. You probably have some idea of where I'm headed here. A damsel must be white. This requirement is nonnegotiable. It helps if her frame is of dimensions that breathless cable television reporters can credibly describe as "petite," and it also helps if she's the kind of woman who wouldn't really mind being called "petite," a woman with a good deal of princess in her personality. She must be attractive—also nonnegotiable. Her economic status should be middle class or higher, but an exception can be made in the case of wartime (see: Lynch).

Put all this together, and you get 24-7 coverage. The disappearance of a man, or of a woman of color, can generate a brief flurry, but never the full damsel treatment. Since the Holloway story broke we've had more news reports from Aruba this past week, I'd wager, than in the preceding 10 years.

I have no idea whether the late French philosopher Jacques Derrida hung on every twist and turn of the Chandra Levy case; somehow, I doubt he did. But I doubt

(Continued)

(Continued)

the apostle of “deconstructionism” would have analyzed the damsel-in-distress phenomenon by explaining that our society is imposing its own subconsciously chosen narrative on all these cases.

It’s the meta-narrative of something seen as precious and delicate being snatched away, defiled, destroyed by evil forces that lurk in the shadows, just outside the bedroom window. It’s whiteness under siege. It’s innocence and optimism crushed by cruel reality. It’s a flower smashed by a rock.

Or maybe (since Derrida believed in multiple readings of a single text) the damsel thing is just a guaranteed cure for a slow news day. The cable news channels, after all, have lots of airtime to fill.

This is not to mock any one of these cases (except *Runaway Bride*) or to diminish the genuine tragedy experienced by family and friends. I can imagine the helplessness I’d feel if a child of mine disappeared from a remote beach in the Caribbean. But I can also be fairly confident that neither of my sons would provoke so many headlines.

Whatever our ultimate reason for singling out these few unfortunate victims, among the thousands of Americans who are murdered or who vanish each year, the pattern of choosing only young, white, middle-class women for the full damsel treatment says a lot about a nation that likes to believe it has consigned race and class to irrelevance.

What it says is that we haven’t. What it says is that those stubborn issues are still very much alive and that they remain at the heart of the nation’s deepest fears.

SOURCE: “(White) Women We Love” by Eugene Robinson © 2005. The Washington Post Writers Group. Reprinted with Permission.

## Performing Tragic and Comic Attitudes

For Kenneth Burke, dramatism names a critical orientation toward the world: Language and symbol systems are made by us and are in evidence everywhere humans congregate, segregate, and are urged to rise above our stations—physically, economically, socially, politically, and spiritually. Burke (1966) claims we can adopt two attitudes toward these dramas: A **tragic attitude** is one that succumbs to the inevitability of the tragic song of the scapegoat, our fatedness, and inability to change, or influence, a course of events (Lentriccia 1983, 62). A **comic attitude** does not succumb to inevitabilities, limitations, or fate, but instead appreciates the often ironic ways humans are *creative* with language, are critically *aware* of their choices, and *perform* these meanings every day of their lives.

Communication scholars have used Burke’s “comic” and “tragic” attitudes to explore performances around us. Adrienne E. Christiansen and Jeremy J. Hanson (1996, 158) analyze the ACT UP activism of AIDS protests through Burke’s “comic perspective,” as “humans’ capacity for laughter, reason, and action rather than scapegoating [of AIDS victims] and paralysis.” Elizabeth Bell and Linda Forbes (1994) use Burke’s comic frame to explore cartoons posted in workplaces as creative and collective responses to organizational restraints on workers. Conversational analysts use dramatism to break down the lines between life and art to

argue that ordinary conversations, scripted like plays and performed anew, are valuable resources for exploring the forms, aesthetics, and drama of everyday life (Hopper 1993; Stucky 1993).

In her ethnography, *A Space on the Side of the Road: Cultural Poetics in an "Other" America* (1996), Kathleen Stewart explores one community of coal miners in the "hollers" of West Virginia. When a dog bit a child, the members of the community became very concerned about their legal responsibilities and liabilities. A "tragic" view of this incident might emphasize the community's poverty, its lack of access to the legal system, and its members' unfortunate readiness to be cast as victims in a legal system outside their control. Stewart relates the community's solution, which is a wonderfully "comic" perspective. It is creative and critically aware, and it performs an ironic reversal of legal and social meanings.

Finally Lacy Forest announced that he had heard that "by law" if you had a NO TRESPASSING sign on your porch you couldn't be sued. So everyone went to the store in Beckley to get the official kind of sign. Neighbors brought back multiple copies and put them up for those too old or sick or poor to get out and get their own. Then everyone called everyone else to explain that the sign did not mean them. In the end, every porch and fence (except for those of the isolated shameless who didn't care) had a bright NO TRESPASSING, KEEP OFF sign, and people visited together, sitting underneath the NO TRESPASSING signs, looking out. (Stewart 1996, 141)

While the temptation is to approach our attitudes and performances as comic or tragic, mortification or victimage, Burke was not locked into these *either/or* approaches. Instead, he advocated a *both/and* approach. The West Virginia community performed their solution to the problem with a "both/and" comic perspective.

Dramatism is an amazingly influential and rich perspective for understanding human interaction. Fabian Gudas (1983b, 10) writes, "My own commitment to dramatism derives from the remarkable manner in which it has enabled sociology, philosophy, language study, rhetoric, and poetics to illuminate each other." Communication scholars of performance have utilized Burke's dramaturgical concepts to do the work of critical analysis, pedagogy of performance, and performing texts to return the dramas of human relations to felt experience. As a theory of symbolic action and method of analysis, dramatism is a rich perspective for accounting for conflict, choice, and action in human beings' unique capacity for symbol use.

## From Dramatism to Social Drama

Just as Kenneth Burke is difficult to pin down to a precise set of ideas, the theories of Victor Turner are similarly wide-ranging. A British-trained anthropologist, Turner summarizes his own work as moving "widely through geography and history, over India, Africa, Europe, China, and Meso-America, from ancient society through the medieval period to modern revolutionary times" (1974, 17). Turner's

theories of liminality, *communitas*, and reflexivity will be explored in depth in Chapter Five, "Performing Culture," but here Turner extends Burke's notions of "dramas of living," to understand "how the living perform their lives" (Turner 1982, 68, 108).

In his fieldwork in Central Africa with the Ndembu people in the early 1950s, Turner became fascinated with the preponderance of conflict in this community. For Turner, these conflicts erupted in very public ways and followed a predictable structure. He found parallels between the Ndembu village and Greek drama "where one witnesses the helplessness of the human individual before the Fates, but in this case the Fates are the necessities of the social process" (1957, 94). Turner theorized that instead of Oedipus doing, choosing, and discovering (*praxis*, *poiesis*, and *theoria*) as a tragic victim of fate, the Ndembu performed these same dramatic actions; the community, not fate, become the critics of actions and arbitrators of justice.

Turner named this processual unfolding of social events the **social drama**, "a sequence of social interactions of a conflictive, competitive, or agonistic type" (1988, 33). Simply put, the social drama is Turner's label for what happens in a community when someone breaks a rule, how the community then takes sides for or against the rule breaker, and how the community works to resolve this problem. Turner utilizes Aristotelian notions of dramatic form, as well as Burkean notions of language as symbolic action, to explore how communities deal with and resolve conflict.

All social dramas are centered in **conflict**, unfold in a predictable four-stage **process**, and involve public forms of **communication**. In Turner's definition of the social drama, *conflict* is central:

Conflict seems to bring fundamental aspects of society, normally overlaid by the customs and habits of daily intercourse, into frightening prominence. People have to take sides in terms of deeply entrenched moral imperatives and constraints, often against their own personal preferences. Choice is overborne by duty. (1974, 35)

From the eruption of conflict to its resolution, the sequence of events is *processional* in that it unfolds in predictable, observable ways. This emphasis on process is important to understanding culture and its institutions, not as "bundles of dead or cold rules," but as "dynamic processes" that become visible as the action of the social drama "heats up" (1974, 37).

This study of conflict and process necessarily involves studying *communication* and the "sources of pressures to communicate within and among groups; this leads inevitably to the study of symbols, signs, signals, and tokens, verbal and nonverbal, that people employ to attain personal and group goals" (1974, 37).

Examples of events around us can be fruitfully explored as social dramas from small scale, community affairs to national scandals that elicit media frenzies: from the opening of a neighborhood X-rated bookstore and the teaching of Annie Proulx's short story "Brokeback Mountain" in a high school English class to a hunting accident involving the vice-president of the United States, the Michael Jackson trial for child molestation, and radio commentator Don Imus calling the Rutgers

women's basketball team "nappy-headed hos." These events can be explained and understood as conflictual, processual, and always centered in communication. The social drama unfolds in **four stages**, or phases, of public action. The stages are breach, crisis, redress, and resolution or schism.

### **Breach: Cutting the Tie that Binds**

The first stage of the social drama is the **breach**, the *breaking of a rule* by a member of the community. This rule breaking is publicly visible, "the breach of a norm, the infraction of a rule of morality, law, custom or etiquette in some public arena" (Turner 1982, 70).

For this rule breaking to constitute a breach, the rule must be held by the community as "binding." That is, the rule is important to the maintenance of the group, subgroups, or relationships between people within the group. As binding, the rule can be seen as a key link to the integrity of the entire community (1988, 34). Turner offers several metaphors for this breach: cutting the knot in the rope that binds a community together; a tear in the social fabric of daily life; an eruption (think pimple or boil) on daily interaction. "Village, chiefdom, office, factory, political party or ward, church, university department" are just some of the examples Turner offers as groups that can be thrown into turmoil when someone has broken a rule central to that community's social cohesion and operations (1974, 38).

Infidelity in a marriage, for example, may be particularly egregious if the couple took their marriage vows as "binding." This interpersonal breach reached a national stage in the Bill Clinton/Monica Lewinsky affair. Laura Kipnis writes how Clinton's infidelity stood for "all broken promises, intimate and national. . . . It's about the fear that adultery puts things at risk: from the organization of daily life to the very moral fabric of the nation" (1998, 294).

### **Crisis: Contagion and Participation**

The second stage is **crisis**, and crisis, according to Turner, is "contagious." In this stage, the members of the community participate in talk that is incessant, escalating, and divisive, as "people will be induced, seduced, cajoled, nudged, or threatened to take sides" with or against the rule breaker (1988, 34). This stage may involve physical violence, or threats of violence, and moments of danger or suspense.

The content of the talk in the crisis phase will involve members of the community debating exactly what went wrong. Again, the talk during the Clinton/Lewinsky social drama epitomizes Turner's claim. Just what "rule" did President Clinton break? Clinton lied under oath. Clinton had an extramarital affair. Clinton obstructed justice. Clinton suborned perjury. Clinton engaged in sexual relations with an employee. Clinton dishonored the office of the presidency. Pick a breach, any breach. In Turner's conception of the social drama, the *exact nature of the breach* will become one of the many debates during the crisis period.

Important to the social drama is that this talk takes place in *public forums* and “dares the representatives of order to grapple with it. It cannot be ignored or wished away” (1974, 39). In short, the crisis is a challenge to the entire community to repair the “order” that has been broken or torn by the breach.

### Redress: Repairing the Social Order

The third stage is **redress**, or employing procedures to repair or remedy the breach. This machinery of repair can take a wide number of forms: from personal advice or counseling; formal, legal, judicial machinery; to the performance of public ritual. Turner (1982, 71) claims that this “ritual often involves a ‘sacrifice,’ literal or moral, a victim as scapegoat for the group’s ‘sin’ of redressive violence.”

No doubt thousands of couples have experienced breaches of wedding vows in their relationships. Most often the repair is informal advice given by friends and family members or marriage counseling. If this doesn’t work, then redress, too, escalates: The couple moves its conflict into the court system through divorce proceedings, seeking redress through formal and judicial machinery. In the case of Bill Clinton, the breach led to an impeachment trial in the U.S. Senate, a mechanism mandated by the U.S. Constitution if a president is charged with “treasonous offenses to the nation.”

Turner calls the redress stage the most **reflexive**, or self-conscious, part of the social drama. Turner defines reflexivity as “the ways in which a group tries to scrutinize, portray, understand, and then act on itself” (1981, 152). This stocktaking or plural self-scrutiny involves a community looking at itself—as a community—to measure what one member has done in relation to agreed-upon standards of behavior, and to ask if the machinery of repair is sufficient to restore peace.

The redress phase also involves moments of **liminality**, a “betwixt and between” of suspended knowledge about the outcome in the social drama. Courtroom verdicts of guilty or not guilty are exemplary of liminal moments in the redress phase of the social drama. Whether our focus was O. J. Simpson, President Clinton, or Michael Jackson, we were all “betwixt and between,” in those long minutes between the jury announcing it had reached a verdict and the reading of the verdict itself.

### Reintegration or Schism: Back to Normal. Or Not

**Reintegration** or schism is the fourth stage of the social drama. If the repair works, then the rule-breaker is reintegrated into the community. The community moves on, back to its quotidian life. Life has changed, however, because, as Turner maintains, “Every social drama alters, in however minuscule a fashion, the structure of the relevant social field” (1988, 92). New rules, laws, interpretations, and ways of seeing and relating often arise out of the old conflict. These alterations, Turner notes parenthetically, are not a “permanent ordering of social relations but merely a temporary mutual accommodation of interests.”



If the machinery of redress doesn't work, then the community splits or breaks apart into factions. Turner calls this phase **schism**. "In large-scale, complex communities, continuous failure of redressive institutions may develop into a revolutionary situation, in which one of the contending parties generates a program of societal change" (1988, 35).

Turner's social drama recalls all the ways that Kenneth Burke operationalized Aristotelian drama: (1) the processual unfolding of events—breach, crisis, redress, and reintegration/schism—parallels the rise and fall of dramatic action; (2) conflict is central to the event as the community creates an antagonist and protagonist and takes sides in and through language; (3) resolution of the drama is achieved through cultural mechanisms, often involving symbolic action of sacrifice—victimization or mortification—that cleanses and reunifies the community.

### GO FIGURE

#### Social Dramas on Your Campus

The Stanford University Marching Band is known for their playful parodies of opposing schools during their halftime shows. At the Stanford v. Brigham Young University football game on September 11, 2004, five members of the Stanford band appeared on the field dressed in wedding veils, mocking the Mormon tradition of polygamy. The incident quickly evolved through Turner's predictable stages of the social drama with all the characteristics of breach, crisis, redress, and reintegration as the Stanford band apologized formally and publicly to the Brigham Young community.

Can you name episodes on your campus, perhaps the firing of popular professors, episodes of hate speech, charges of sexual harassment, or fraternity pranks "gone awry"? How is Turner's lens valuable for understanding the conflict, processes, and communicative forms during the unfolding of the events?

## Analyzing Social Dramas

While Turner studied small, homogeneous societies across the world, he also listed examples of social dramas from Western societies as well: the Boston Tea Party, the Dreyfus affair, Watergate, U.S. "urban renewal" of the 1960s, and the 1979 seizure of the U.S. embassy in Teheran and the holding of more than seventy American hostages. Turner's claims about conflict, process, and communication are particularly revelatory for understanding "drama in life" as "political processes, that is, they involve competition for scarce ends—power, dignity, prestige, honor, purity" (1982, 71).

Communication scholars utilize the social drama to explore these competitions. Thomas Farrell (1989) analyzes the broadcast of the 1984 Olympic games as the social drama threatening "America First" norms in the advertising, narration, and spectacle of the two-week media broadcast. Leah Vande Berg (1995) uses the frame of the social drama to analyze "remembrances" broadcast in and around November 22, the anniversary of the assassination of John F. Kennedy. Paul Edwards (1999, 38)

writes of the “Sextext” battle within the National Communication Association as a social drama in which the organization took sides over academic “values,” the proper canon for the discipline, and the future of Performance Studies in Communication.

Elizabeth C. Fine, in *Soulstepping: African American Step Shows* (2003), explores the potential for eruption of conflict among African-American college fraternities and sororities. The step shows that members learn and perform are ritual acts of membership and unity with an Afrocentric worldview. Because many of the step shows involve “cracking,” “dissing,” or “cutting” other groups, critiques that create the unity and camaraderie of one fraternity or sorority come at the expense of others. Fine (2003, 63) relates how Alpha Phi Alpha cracked on the Kappas with a popular refrain: “I say we’re laughing at you and you don’t know why . . . I say we’re laughing at you cause you ain’t A Phi!”

While most African-American audiences understand the playful tradition of cracking and playing the dozens, many white audiences do not. In 1990 at East Tennessee State University, Fine relates how Kappa Alpha Psi President David Harvin spoke to the mixed-race audience of the Southern Dance Traditions Conference: “I want to make it clear that while we do step and while we talk about other fraternities and they talk about us . . . that we do get along with other black Greeks, that there is unity on this campus” (2003, 141–42).

Theatre scholar Diana Taylor (2003) analyzes the “life, death, funeral, and after-life as quasi-sacred relic on display” of Princess Diana as a social drama that played out on global and local stages. Taylor ties each stage to different theatrical and performance frames:

The breach—her divorce from Charles and her estrangement from the Royal family—was pure melodrama. . . . Her death—the crisis—was tragic drama. The redressive action—the funeral—was a theatrical performance. . . . The phase of reintegration, the period of reordering social norms, played itself out in multiple, less cohesive, less centralized dramas. . . . Diana’s ghost became a site of intensive renegotiating among various communities. (137, 140–41)

All of these explorations of contemporary social dramas show how communication and performance are resources for languaging the breach, garnering support for and against the protagonist, resolving the drama through cultural mechanisms, and returning the community to normal.

## Social Drama: Raw Material for Performances

If the social drama follows a predictable unfolding of events, then it also generates performances as part and parcel of the action. The social drama is the “raw material” for performances that reflect critically on the community. Turner (1988, 41) utilizes a linguistic analogy, the “moods of culture,” to characterize social life as moving between the indicative (“it is”) and the subjunctive (“may be,” “might be,” even “should be”). For Turner, the social drama is “indicative.” The breach

happened. Newspapers report the facts. Heated public debates argue the facts. Courtroom performances re-create the facts of the case. The social drama *is*.

“Most cultural performances,” Turner argues on the other hand, “belong to culture’s ‘subjunctive’ mood.” In the subjunctive, performance reframes the indicative “is” to imagine “*what if?*” For example, in the indicative social drama of the Bill Clinton/Monica Lewinsky affair, President Clinton claimed on September 26, 1998, “I did not have sex with that woman, Ms. Lewinsky.” On the Internet, however, one parody imagined Clinton’s State of the Union Address on September 27, 1998, as beginning, “Members of Congress, people of America, I banged her. I banged her like a cheap gong.” This cultural performance imagined a very different “what if?” for the State of the Union address.

Turner argues that social dramas provide the “raw material” for aesthetic performances. These performances, “aesthetic” for their deliberate and artful shaping of conventions, include ritual, festival, Carnival, folk stories, ballet, staged drama, novels, epic poems; in short, a multitude of culturally recognized genres. Aesthetic performances also feed back into ongoing social dramas, influencing the way that politicians, orators, preachers, and opinion leaders communicate in real contexts. Turner calls this “a constant cross-looping” between the social drama and aesthetic performance genres. Richard Schechner (2002b, 68) describes this interplay as a mobius strip: The conflicts and characters in social dramas fund the content of aesthetic performances, and aesthetic performances, in turn, color and inflect the unfolding of the social drama.

The social dramas of the O. J. Simpson trial, the Clinton/Lewinsky affair, the Michael Jackson trial, Vice President Cheney’s hunting accident, the Don Imus/Rutgers conflict all gave rise to aesthetic performances that critiqued, commented on, and parodied the actual events. “In Living Color,” “Saturday Night Live,” “The Daily Show,” “The Chappell Show,” “Mad TV,” “The Colbert Report,” even “South Park” are all forums that demonstrate Turner’s claim (1988, 39): “what began as an empirical social drama may continue both as an entertainment and [as] a metasocial commentary on the lives and times of the given community.” When the infamous “South Park” school mascot election pitted a *turd sandwich* against a *giant douche* as the two candidates, the creators of “South Park” were clearly commenting in entertaining ways on the 2004 presidential race between George W. Bush and John Kerry.

Kirk Fuoss, in *Striking Performances/Performing Strikes* (1997), analyzes performances that blossomed during the 1936–37 Flint, Michigan, autoworkers’ strike, a social drama that pitted strikers against management, and pro-striker against anti-striker among the workers themselves. Strikers staged kangaroo courts acting out the parts of management, held parades, created dancing picket lines, and sang popular songs with new parodied lyrics. These performances were integral parts of the actual social drama, commenting in entertaining ways “in the subjunctive” on the “indicative” events. Elizabeth Bell (2006) analyzes performances on the Internet that critiqued, commented on, and parodied the Bill Clinton/Monica Lewinsky affair. Through jokes, parodied songs, and photoshopped pictures of Monica and Bill, the “folk” on the Internet weighed in with their own entertaining and biting performances that critiqued the social drama.

The social drama gives rise to performances; the performances themselves are integral parts of the social drama. Through these performances, communities reflect on, critique, and participate in the unfolding of actual events. Dwight Conquergood (1986, 58) describes the relationship between social dramas and their performances as both centrifugal (throwing out) and centripetal (pulling in):

Cultural processes both pull towards a moral center as social dramas are enacted while they simultaneously express themselves outward from the depths of that symbolizing, synthesizing core. That is, cultures throw off forms of themselves—literally, “expressions” that are publicly accessible.

Turner’s work is extremely important to performance theory for its characterization of life as drama. Richard Schechner (1988b, 8) claims, “Turner’s gifts were many and he spent them generously. . . . He taught that there was a continuous, dynamic process linking performative behavior—art, sports, ritual, play—with social and ethical structure: the way people think about and organize their lives and specify individual and group values.”

### **RETHINKING DRAMA**

Critiques of Aristotelian conceptions of dramatic form, conflict, and action come from two overlapping camps: feminists and postmodernists. Early critiques from feminist theatre scholars centered on the absence of women in the theatre and from the *polis* of Greek citizenship. Susan Melrose (1998, 134) writes, “Aristotle institutionalized the tragic poets and projected through this institution then-prevalent attitudes to men, women and ‘slaves.’ Character, as Aristotle construed it, was action-based, and always performed by a man for other men. . . . Real women were simply (and politically) not there.” Sue-Ellen Case (1988) argues for “a new poetics” that would “abandon the traditional patriarchal values embedded in prior notions of form, practice and audience response in order to construct new critical models and methodologies for the drama.” In *Unmaking Mimesis* (1997), Elin Diamond imagines just such a new model. She argues that mimesis in performance can be a valuable place and practice for postmodern feminists, not to confirm or succumb to “truth-models” of mirror representation, but to generate many “truths” in history and time of women in performance.

Postmodern critiques and revisions of Aristotle often take mimesis as a place to explore the gap between appearance and reality, especially for notions of identity. Anne Duncan (2006) traces the historical and political routes by which actors were marginalized and stereotyped for the threats they posed to stability of the “self,” government, and society. Bertolt Brecht and Augusto Boal, theatre theorists and practitioners, found new ways to intervene in the inevitability of Aristotelian action—for audiences, texts, and performers alike. Their works will be covered in detail in Chapter Eight, “Performing Resistance.”

Critiques of Kenneth Burke’s dramatism focus on how difficult his theory is to understand, its inaccessibility to many audiences, and his now dated and unfamiliar

examples. The complexity and scope of Burke's thinking is exacerbated by the difficulty of applying Burke's "elusive" concepts (Geertz 1980, 172). Some argue that only Kenneth Burke can *really* do dramaturgic analysis.

Critiques of Turner's social drama have come from many quarters in anthropology and performance studies. Geertz (1980, 173) argues that Turner's insistence on form, especially the stages of breach, crisis, redress, and reintegration, is "a form for all seasons," making cultures and performances as different as Caribbean carnivals, Icelandic sagas, and 1960s U.S. political protests "look drably homogeneous." Schechner (2002b, 67) also critiques this homogeneity to argue that Turner *imposed* "a Western aesthetic genre, the drama" on non-Western communities with no such genre in their performative repertoire. Moreover, the social drama sets beginning and ending points to action, as manageable units for analysis, even when the conflicts themselves have no closure. Schechner (2002b, 67) writes, "Perhaps today's world of terrorism, guerrilla warfare, prolonged civil wars, and economic espionage are better modeled by performance art. . . ."

Kirk Fuoss (1993) maintains that performance theorists fail to consider *how* performances can pull in different directions during the social drama. Some performances work to maintain the status quo in a community and others work to subvert it. Fuoss maintains that all performances center on contestation, *especially* those that mask their political agendas as supporting the status quo.

Life as drama is an important critical perspective for twentieth-century social theory. Utilizing Aristotelian notions of conflict, form, and action, Kenneth Burke and Victor Turner developed theories of symbolic action and dramatic form that explain, describe, and account for human social interaction. Dramaturgic theories claim that (1) drama, not animal behavior or machine motion, is the best metaphor for describing, analyzing, and predicting human action; (2) language and symbol systems are collective resources for creating group life and knowing the world; and (3) through drama, we can participate ethically in decision making that molds the world of opposing forces around us.

The "danger" in dramaturgism is always the urge to scapegoat and to mortify—to solve our collective problems through sacrificing others or ourselves. The social drama also operates by resolving conflict through repairs that often involve sacrifice—real or symbolic. A tragic attitude succumbs to these urges; a comic attitude appreciates how humans creatively perform "both/and" choices in their lives. Dramaturgic theories are lenses for exploring social interaction and models for analyzing, critiquing, and creating performances—onstage and in real life. The performances that unfold, in political and entertaining forums, are part and parcel of the drama of social relations. In this view, humans are creative, critical, and active agents of change in and through performance.

