Peter Elbow, Kenneth Burke, and the Idea of Magic

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In its recent conventions, the Conference on College Composition and Communication has assembled in the name of diversity and pluralism. These themes reveal a great deal about that organization's sense of itself. As teachers and theorists of writing, we tend to conceive of our collective professional identity as many-sided, with individual members and smaller organizations within CCCC going their own ways under one pluralist banner. Yet, as compositionists we generally think of our work as something more: a common enterprise more fundamental and more comprehensive than its parts. In this second view, the work of CCCC is at least potentially "architectonic," though there are plenty of grounds for disagreeing about what its architectonic purposes might be.¹

The more uncritically an association of professionals dedicates itself to the conventions of pluralist belief, the more it is in danger of becoming indifferent to or devaluing the viewpoints that pluralism is supposed to tolerate and respect, including the idea of pluralism itself. The very notion of a common purpose within the pluralistic association is now problematic. Significant speech about what that purpose is or ought to be is in danger of being vitiated by pluralism's insistence upon the significance of all speech. This is an unfortunate development in a time when the association is splitting into many camps, perhaps most fundamentally into expressivists and those who embrace one or several specialized studies in cultural criticism, hermeneutics, and cognitive psychology.

The works of Peter Elbow and Kenneth Burke are valuable reference points today because they problematize, often in subtle and round-about ways, fundamental assumptions within the field of composition that pluralism and factional perspectives typically elide. Good physicists of composition, they stimulate a collective reassessment of what we are doing because they wonder about the mysteries of rhetorical power. The rhetor's power over audiences and subject matters, the power of audiences and subject matters over the rhetor, the power of particular kinds of discourse—all permutations of interaction within the triangle of discourse—are subjects Elbow and Burke survey with an unusually persistent curiosity that accompanies a naive yet wakeful rediscovery of fundamental issues and ideas.
Elbow focuses on the confluence of and tension between the power of expressive discourse and the compelling claims of specialized studies. For example, his discussions of authentic voice include analyses of his own pedagogical experiments, interpretive theory, educational theory, and research into cognitive psychology and other specialized fields. Kenneth Burke's definition of rhetorical action as hortation or yearning undergoes the test of Burke's application of heuristics drawn from linguistics, sociology, and the study of symbols. These interdisciplinary comparisons draw both Elbow and Burke, as strange as it might sound, to the almost occult yet richly suggestive phenomenon of magic.

Elbow's Rhetorical Magic

A philosophy of rhetorical magic is not Peter Elbow's explicit subject matter. His first book devoted to writing, Writing without Teachers, promotes itself not as a discussion of ideas but as an eminently practical text. He dedicates it to those practical readers who would use it. Appearing eight years later, his Writing with Power carries the subtitle, "Techniques for Mastering the Writing Process." Both works offer writers practical, rigorous, and playful means of breaking inhibitions, particularly those created by misconceived ideas that Elbow argues have stymied the learning and writing processes.

But Elbow's emphasis on gaining power over inhibitions, especially intellectual ones, can easily be misread. His works are not bent on conquering all ideas about composition; indeed, some preconceived ideas that Elbow identifies as potentially damaging he surprisingly rehabilitates, including the idea of grammatical correctness. Certain ideas inform his pedagogy. In fact, the most important techniques Elbow offers to his readers are invisible if we do not take into account Elbow's ideas about them. In this regard, he shares something with those notorious old fogies of the rhetorical tradition: Aristotle, Cicero, and, in a roundabout way, even Plato. His books are how-to manuals that entail a philosophy of rhetoric transcending its applications. And that philosophy, like Aristotle's, Cicero's, and Plato's, draws upon ideas of power that have come to be associated with natural magic.

The most suspect and interesting ideas that Elbow indirectly attempts to detach from their inhibitive stereotypes involve a type of magic that in premodern times was commonly conceived of as natural philosophy. On the one hand, writers' unfounded beliefs in magic are the most notoriously counterproductive notions among the inhibitions Elbow attacks. When writers cannot free themselves from the charms and curses that have been cast upon their writing, they are eminently vulnerable to what Elbow calls "demons." In Writing with Power, he recounts how such spirits have befuddled him and how they can be warded off. On the other hand, Elbow's references to demons do not merely dismiss the influence of mischievous spirits and shadowy operations. "Magic" appears in the index to Writing with Power and
is the subject of that book's final chapter, toward which, Elbow says, he seems to have "drifted" in his first 356 pages (357). The word appears again in the index of *Embracing Contraries*, which refers the reader to another entry, "mystery." Mystery is the central subject of the first page of that work. The processes of learning and teaching, Elbow says in his introduction, are worth writing about precisely because "there is mystery there" (ix).

Again, there is a false magic that for Elbow is a forbidding and easily corrupting hocus pocus. In *Embracing Contraries*, for example, he condemns (though not without irony) the false magic of grades (168). And he sympathizes with instructors in rigorously self-conscious, competency-based programs who criticize fellow teachers for thinking the "mystery" of teaching is an excuse for not caring about pedagogy. Elbow warns his readers against concluding from his arguments in *Writing with Power* that he has a recipe for creating an ecstatic, magical union of word and meaning when he discusses the possibility of a magic at work in writing with voice.

But the more one works with Elbow's texts, the more complex his apparent distinction between false and defensible magic becomes. As a young student, Elbow writes, he was out of step in school because there was "too much magic, mystery" there, not, it turns out, that school fundamentally deceived him with mumbo jumbo but that he needed to spend decades afterward writing, learning, and teaching his way toward understanding what that magic could be, what its true and best powers are (Power xi). Elbow seems to have been drawn toward the problem of achieving voice and of learning about the power of expression and communication precisely because, as he writes, there is a sense in which real voice is magical (289) and mysterious (312), and in which the nature of "life or power or magic in words" is "a central mystery" (314), which at one point in *Writing with Power* he says is "rooted" in the rich "silence from which [speech] grows" (299).

What then is that magic, according to Elbow? Does he rehabilitate the term only to show that the nature of magical voice is ultimately metaphorical or utterly obscure? Readers of his advice-books find it hard to believe that this is so. Elbow is almost too well known for emphasizing the usefulness of practical routines in developing voice. His writing is full of observations not only of how successful writers depend upon aids that get results, but also of detailed accounts about the ritualistic, ceremonial sides of those techniques. His picture of the writer who is "in voice" is more than a little reminiscent of a winning baseball pitcher's superstitious, vigilant fidgeting on the mound. Not simply free-writing but going through the motions of writing might be, Elbow says, the quickest path to the real thing. It is in this sense that the power of voice owes a great deal to its affinity with chant and incantation (306). Insofar as these processes of writing are rituals, they depend upon certain practices, habits, and powers in the writer or speaker whom they empower. They are operations that resemble the practice of traditional, non-
goetic magic—the kind practiced by Shakespeare's Prospero rather than by
malevolent necromancers.  

A given set of words can be powerful or weak, can "take" or not take, as with a potion,
according to whether the writer did the right dance or performed correctly some other
purification ceremony before writing them down. (Power 357)

Elbow's texts are full of specific discussions of how to work up to something
by the indirect path of ritualistic acts. The fidgeting pitcher might pick off
a runner precisely because his ticks help him attain a wakefulness that
prevents his powers from being fixated upon the runner's lead. In such cases,
rituals that appear to be empty often depend upon a habit and discipline
combining nervous action and restraint. They can entail self-knowledge,
perhaps even insight into the cultural game they play.

In more workaday prose throughout his works, Elbow alludes to an
enlightened path or "way" of writing that involves the writer's often indirect
cultivation of his internal condition: the "mental/spiritual/characterological"
self. The path is a deepening of knowledge, readiness, and character that
make use of and grow out of ludic activities, particularly the doubting and
believing games upon which Elbow bases so much of his pedagogy. When he
defends his invocation of magic, Elbow uses the doubting and believing
games ironically and persuasively as a test of his audience's character as well
as his own:

Could I really believe something this irrational? Surely not.
I guess.
But what if I really let myself take this magical view? What if I persuaded you to
abandon your scruples, too, and give way to the childish or irrational or primitive modes
of thought that lie so near the surface in us all? (Power 357)

Elbow's equivocation amounts to an argument: some remarkably persistent
phenomena in ordinary uses of language do not seem to be sources of
inspiration or self-testing only because we do not entertain the possibility
that what seemed childish might be unjaded; what seemed primitive, primor-
dial; what seemed irrational, more than narrowly rational.

Tacit knowledge is one of Elbow's instances of that unacknowledged
power in ordinary language. Knowledge that is highly functional and yet
often almost intractably unspoken resembles the old non-goetic magic in its
resemblance to an invisible yet formative "structure of thinking" (Teachers
183). The structure is to some degree occult in often being out of sight; yet,
it possesses a clarity not unlike the clarity of a renewed rationality.

As early as Writing without Teachers, Elbow proposes that there is
something commonsensically magical in linguistic experience: the writerly
voice can touch upon and evoke things that elude articulation. We cannot
catch the meaning of such things simply by consulting dictionaries, which are
devices that document piecemeal, acontextual, and retrospective usages. We
learn most about this dimension of ordinary language empirically as well as intuitively, as, for example, in the development of voice. Here, Elbow seems to be thinking of a vocal two-year-old whose language rituals sometimes reflect the nature of speech better than a linguist can articulate them. But Elbow is also saying that into adult life, ordinary language—when adequately used and appreciated—can draw out unforeseen yet resonant harmonies between words, things, audience, and voice if the writer somehow remains on that course (Teachers 153).

Tacitly informed writing is an example of discourse that Elbow associates with the hortatory, conjuring voice. In the language of dreams, he argues, anything can mean anything else; in the language of mathematics, at the opposite extreme, designations are absolute. Ordinary language is “in the middle,” its meanings designated yet “not explicitly set down or agreed to.”3 As a consequence, ordinary language in its betweenness can have a distinct power to convey the unspoken and to draw forth certain kinds of insight more veraciously than the expressive dislocations of dreams or the denotative, austerely scientific purity of mathematics. Such tacit knowledge can be invoked, courted, and persuaded into writing and then sent out to aspiring audiences almost as though the subject and its expression were a climbing, heliotropic plant.

What one begins to notice on this level of Elbow’s presentation is the argument or enactment of the idea that real magic in writing is not only reasonable but philosophically erotic, somehow drawing upon a writer and an audience’s powerful longings in a way that is “moderate.”4 It is, as we have seen, in the middle, between dreams and mathematics (Teachers 153). It is also earnest, as readers of Elbow’s own earnestness repeatedly witness, but it attempts not to be “over-earnest.” A measure of real magic in writing is supposed to be competence, though mere competence when one writes in voice is not truly moderate. In other words, there is an undercurrent of “madness” in expressive writing that is at least residually present in all writing with voice. Elbow’s believing game invites its players to ingest the world by sympathetically embodying alien discourses; his doubting game develops a critical yet prankster-like antiself who delights in showing up the middling conventionalities of false voice. Inhibition, anger, yearning, the sense of vulnerability, the desire to take in the world as a conqueror or a supplicant—all these could not be tempered and hence voiced without the writer’s or learner’s longing for a readiness to undergo something more than mere moderation.

Here the magic of “writing with power” is presented not simply as a technique for releasing energy or getting one’s way or generating ideas. It is a process of yearning for something in the nature of things, and for the means to bring at least some of these things to the fore. Elbow supplies an analogy for this process linking physical and invisible worlds: the toning of a person’s muscles. That exercise, though moderate, is not merely moderate: it is a
stretching toward health. The muscles build as their exercise disdains stasis and almost misuses them irremediably. The toning is a stretching toward a condition between slackness and unrelieved tension. The end of the activity is perhaps most aptly explained as closer to action than stasis—as presence of mind, wakefulness, not the barren middle ground between sleep and mechanical calculation. The slight upward movement of a student's head in a moment of insight is Elbow's empirical and intuitive marker for this alert, stretching, bodily action, as though the toning were almost physically informed by an idea toward which the exerciser aspired (Embracing 16).

Of course, the more one waxes eloquent over these phenomena, the more one risks sounding like the self-help artists we see in grocery store book racks. Amidst the array of vegetables and potions, one reads a popular discourse strangely remote from the languages of the academy; but that language offers the means by which many persons begin to develop their own discourses of power. The occult is there too, and one of the advertisers' favorite words, "magic." It seems extraordinarily embarrassing for a modern academic to learn something for himself in this popular place; yet Elbow writes and sells his complex, moving, informative books not only for pure academics but also for those who sometimes linger in grocery stores.

Elbow has in this sense been miscast as the champion of an anti-academic expressivism. His true opponents, those who would benefit most from taking his opposition seriously, are compositionists who have not yet responded to his implicit respect for the intelligibility and drawing power of vernacular, sometimes archaic opinions about the nature of aspiration and persuasive transformation.

Elbow suggests that writing with power is a way of being "reasonably magical" (Power 359). Thus, in the last pages of Writing with Power, he ventures the opinion that writers who are struggling and who cannot yet "make magic" had "better settle for truth." "Or rather," Elbow continues, they "can get magic only through truth" (362). Beyond the discourse of truth, they might experiment with lies; still, something deep and manifest in this magical writing is its yearning for truthfulness. The writer aspires to actualize a genuine voice, to sound and resonate with (or confront) the aspiring voices of others, to say something worthwhile about the world—at least to lie delightfully or mischievously in the light of truth. Voice, the umbrella term, here seems to be the elusive yet resonant union, in that light, of self, object, and audience. Elbow is reluctant to explain the phenomenon of voice in precisely this way. Yet, the power of voice's "reasonable" magic, according to Elbow's formulation, would seem to depend upon a love of something beyond voice and power.

Magic and Symbolic Action

Magic illuminates Kenneth Burke's effort in a similarly suspect, marginal, yet revealing manner. Much like Elbow, Burke creates a philosophy of
expressive, exhortative rhetoric that is informed by inquiries into linguistics, sociology, anthropology, and other specialized disciplines. Like Elbow, Burke says his work has almost forced him to a consideration of magic (Rhetoric 40); he approaches it circuitously because it was not part of his original plan. The topic appears in the middle of his trilogy of works on language, rhetoric, and symbolic action—only after he has initiated his readers into his own sociological/symbolical discernment of the nature of persuasion.

Magic's connections with rhetoric, Burke argues, are almost universally misunderstood. Modern science and poetics have condemned magic as "savage" and irrelevant, calling its defenders ignorant of causes and alien to genuine criticism. The anthropologists study it but do not see its connection with rhetoric. Other academics have no place for it, as they have no adequate conception of rhetoric. Burke himself admits to having taken up the subject "with a bad conscience" in the past, when he did not believe that magic was germane to the study of literature. But in coming to understand rhetoric as "a kind of symbolic action," he began to see that a philosophy of rhetoric that included a reconception of magic as primitive rhetoric might fill the gap between science and poetics (Rhetoric 43).

It is worth recalling that for Burke rhetoric is hortatory action. It is suasion with a potential for inducing action in human beings. Improperly conceived (as it would be in false, goetic magic), suasion is coercion: an attempt to move things rather than people, or to move people as though they were things. Rhetorical suasion, in contrast, is "not fit" for things, which are capable only of motion, not of action (Rhetoric 43). In its misdirected forms, rhetorical suasion becomes coercion through ignorance of the difference between purposive action and mere motion, between motive and inanimate tendency. True rhetorical suasion somehow acknowledges what used to be called animate tendency.

Recognizing the hortatory nature of genuine rhetorical action enables Burke to examine what the unimaginative scientist cannot: "One could confine the study of action within the terms of motion [rather than within the terms of hortatory human motive] only by resigning oneself to gross misrepresentations of life as we normally experience it" (Grammar 56). The rediscovery of the exhortative nature of rhetorical language also helps to rescue poetry's powers from pseudo-scientific critics who treat literature so purely as aesthetic or cultural artifact that they discredit explorations of poets' purposes.

Burke sets the scene for his distinction between genuine rhetorical action and mere motion by suggesting, just before his discussion of magic in A Rhetoric of Motives, that there is a kind of magical operation in "complete" education, which he distinguishes from mere indoctrination:
The individual person, striving to form himself in accordance with the communicative norms that match the cooperative ways of his society, is by the same token concerned with the rhetoric of identification. To act upon himself persuasively, he must variously resort to images and ideas that are formative. Education ("indoctrination") exerts such pressure upon him from without; he completes the process from within. If he does not somehow act to tell himself (as his own audience) what the various brands of rhetorician have told him, his persuasion is not complete. Only those voices from without are effective which can speak in the language of a voice within. (*Rhetoric* 39)

Here, Burke's emphasis on identification is almost a surrender to conformity; but it maintains a distinction between coercion and persuasion, a distinction that problematizes the meaning of conformity. The external pressures of the persuading agent are unpersuasive and coercive unless the one to be persuaded acts "to tell himself." The power to tell oneself depends neither upon mimicry of an imposed voice nor upon self-absorption, but upon the "act" of a person who "strives to form himself" in cooperation with "communicative norms." In that process, the learner not only hears but awakens to an outer voice. The learner identifies with its formative powers in a way that animates it in his or her internal vocalization. What is outside calls to what is inside, which is capable of calling out in turn. Rather than being subverted or coerced, the learner speaks resonantly from within.

Burke maintains that the term "rhetoric" is not a substitute for "magic," that rhetoric "is not derived from 'bad science,' or 'magic'" (*Rhetoric* 43). But he insists that there is an easily missed "function" or "ingredient" in rhetoric that magic can illustrate. One gets a taste of what Burke is doing by pondering his choice of the verbs suited to certain magical operations as well as to rhetoric. For example, rhetoric forms and induces: "The basic function of rhetoric [is] the use of words by human agents to form attitudes or to induce actions in other human agents" (*Rhetoric* 40-43; emphasis added).

Aristotle's term *energeia*, which Burke uses to describe this process, suggests that rhetorical induction actualizes human yearning by bringing to light, in a more than purely metaphorical sense, something of what that yearning yearns for. In the archive of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, one finds the meaning of induction in actions not unlike those that characterize nongeotic, magical persuasion and rhetoric. Inducing is akin to "enduing" and "endowing," which draw their objects toward a certain "state or condition" in keeping with their capacities to take on endowments that complete or finish their beings. In this constellation of terms, the induced are clothed (a favorite Burkean metaphor), furnished, and invested not necessarily in the sense of being falsely or arbitrarily costumed but of being offered garments they can most characteristically take to themselves.

Burke is acutely conscious of the "gloomy route" that suasory actions can take. Suasion that is "putting on" is lying. Rhetoric is akin to "pantomime." Clothing is disguise. The tragedy of zealous costuming in the almost inescapable "human barnyard" is the sacrifice of the scapegoat. But Burke keeps returning to the principle that rhetoric is an action imbued with
“consciousness or purpose” (Grammar 14) and capable of bringing something and someone to actuality (energeia, actio [Language 54]). His discussion of the ratios of the dramatistic pentad depends upon his entertainment of possibilities of energeia that he says modern science reduces to “mere” magic:

The agent is an author of his acts, which are descended from him, being good progeny if he is good, or bad progeny if he is bad, wise progeny if he is wise, silly progeny if he is silly. And, conversely, his acts can make him or remake him in accordance with their nature. They would be his product and/or he would be theirs. (Grammar 16)

Burke’s analysis blurs the relation between cause and effect in an attempt to describe the process of actualization: effects (acts) not only become causes; they can also be understood to emanate from their causes and to form them in turn, as though they were one another’s progeny: “The agent does not ‘contain’ the act, though its results might be said to ‘pre-exist virtually’ within him” (Grammar 16). Certain responsibilities, even the garb of office, can draw the character toward a higher version of itself: “The sheer nature of an office, or position, is said to produce important modifications in a man’s character.... There seems to be something about the judicial robes that not only hypnotizes the beholder but transforms the wearer” (Grammar 16). Burke of all people is suspicious of posturings and delusions; but here he adverts to the vocabulary of magical action to explain the power of garb to induce valued, plausible changes as well as fraudulent ones—changes that have tended to elude conventional, contemporary explanation. Not merely by will or coincidence, but because certain offices have a communicable “something” that answers to and extends human capacities to fill them, their vestments can contribute to the actualization of the office in the office-holder.

Burke distances himself from the implications of such examples by reporting them within the frame “it is said,” but he incorporates these ideas into his discussion of cooperation as something more than coercion or arbitrary coincidence. The notion that there is a worthy “substance” that is shareable in rhetorical suasion—hence, that suasion can be more than a purely metaphorical transaction or a forced exchange—is crucial to Burke’s intimation that rhetorical cooperation is philosophically defensible.

“Substance” is elusive, being “an abstruse philosophical term, beset with a long history of quandaries.” Yet, substance has a dramatistic “function”: “For substance, in the old philosophies, was an act; and a way of life is an acting-together; and in acting together, men have common sensations, concepts, images, ideas, attitudes that make them consubstantial” (Rhetoric 21). Even if it turns out to be mistaken, Burke argues, the idea of a valuable consubstantiality in the rhetorical exchange “is so fertile a source of error, that only by learning to recognize its nature from within could we hope to detect its many disguises from without” (Grammar 57).
Despite and even because of the coercion and class struggles of verbal combat, human beings can climb by means of their competitive exhortations into a “realm of the idealistic”: “Out of this idealistic element [in rhetorical competition] there may arise a kind of magic or mystery that sets its mark on all human relations.” Later in the *Rhetoric of Motives*, Burke argues further that there is consubstantiality in all “human effort” because that effort is “grounded not in the search for ‘advantage’” but rather “in a form in the persuasiveness of the hierarchic order itself” (46, 276).

The influential sociologist Karl Mannheim’s error, Burke contends, was to eliminate the grounds of suasion and the ladder of cooperation from social life by campaigning for the elimination of suasion as mere bias. Such a goal, Burke argues, would “deprive society of its primary motive power.” For “though bias is false promise, it is promise. Hence if you eliminate bias (illusion) from men’s social motives, where do you find an equally urgent social motive?” Mannheim’s bias against bias in fact inadvertently points, later in Burke’s argument, toward a higher rhetorical purpose. It is an exhortation that “brings us to the edge” of considering higher terms and ideas such as *myth* (*Rhetoric* 201).

When Mannheim vainly attempts to “eliminate the mystery” of “the traditional function of rhetoric,” he gives too little credence not only to rhetoric but to myth. His denial of the possibility that there is a legitimate basis for mythic suasion blocks what Burke calls the interpreter’s “disciplined arrival” at myth. Here Burke goes so far as to invoke Plato (*Rhetoric* 202). Without a graduated testing of the interpreter’s credulity and aspiration in a series of initiatory stages of interpretation—without a testing under circumstances that lend a degree of credence to the claims of ordinary opinions as well as the climbing experiences of being influenced by it—the suasory myths so important to exhortative life tend to disappear, or return as the sort of goetic, coercive, propagandistic hallucination that Burke finds most dangerous to the human prospect.

**Beyond Conventional Conflicts**

The question remains how much Elbow and Burke have their hearts in what they say about magic and persuasion, since so much of their discussion of magic seems to compromise their conventional reputations as new rhetoricians. In Elbow’s commendatory references to magic, there is an irony or furtiveness that makes some convention-goers giggle and drives others away. He can hearken back to the ingratiating audacity of Chaucer’s lying Pardoner (the central subject of his first book),6 a master at playing both ends against the middle. The very attractiveness of Elbow’s tentativeness and posturing is a temptation for him to stand aloof.

On another level, the “believing game” Elbow recommends for writers and audiences is a method of breaking down his readers’ aspirations rather than cultivating them. It elicits sympathy for a subject, a text, or an author by
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going the sympathizer into the rigorous, self-abnegating habit of suspending or giving up opinions and ideas that were the engenderings of his aspirations. Conversely, the “doubting game” can be seen to impose a skepticism so systematic that it scourges all belief except faith in the inviolability of doubt. In these harsher modes, the two games grind down and metastasize belief. “Voice” amounts to an operatic or ventriloquizing vanity unless the speaker can turn inside out.

Burke for his part is capable of violently alchemizing his vocabulary and subject matter, as though he were indifferent to distinctions between sheer force and motive power. He sometimes questions the basis of all distinctions, to the point of offending or perversely delighting many of his most dedicated readers with his air of dogmatism and his almost adamantine refusal to follow through. There are many passages in which Burke is quick to condemn hortatory motives that are the least tainted with the ambition to compete or to think hierarchically. There is some question as to whether his methodological enthusiasm for moving through the permutations of his heuristic “pentad,” and up and down the scales of grammatical, rhetorical, and symbolic hierarchies, turns all human aspirations into sheer movement; or whether, conversely, his protean discourse becomes a monolithic doctrine that makes purposive action mandatory everywhere and therefore meaningless, or so ineluctable and suspicious that any attempt to inquire into its meaning is inevitably defeated. This may in fact be the comic revelation (about the otherwise tragic human barnyard) that Burke says he seeks in the opening of his researches into grammar.

Having observed all this, it is difficult to erase the impression that both Elbow and Burke are more than double personalities. Amidst Elbow’s contradictions, there is a manner of indirection that attempts to “embrace contraries” in homage to the complexity of writing about the grounds of persuasion. He is interested in “a larger, more inconclusive conception of rationality” to which is added “what has traditionally been felt as primitive and irrational” (Embracing 300). And Kenneth Burke, within the Brownian movement of his moltenness and the wrenching reversals of his dialectic, persists in courting what he calls “vivid and appealing” lucidity—an almost shockingly old-fashioned, exhortative, Ciceronian clarity that he rarely achieves but that in one place he acknowledges as the goal of his most fully realized discourses of dramatism (Rhetoric 207). Burke once wrote of himself as dancing between hierarchy and conflict. But in doing so he was expressing an ability to philosophize about what it means to move between the aspiring and the abnegating modes of persuasion.7

The power of rhetoric, which has recently been too much taken for granted or discussed on a level almost entirely beyond the powers of common sense, is now in danger of seeming deceptively self-evident or occult. Elbow and Burke suggest ways of resisting these trends. In their discussions of rhetorical magic, in which they bring to light serious contradictions in their
own work, they shed light on some of the profession's most important foreshortened debates. They are implicitly asking an important question: Is persuasion best understood in terms of older ideas about inductive, *energeic* actualization or according to an almost mechanically dialectical scourging and dispersal of desire?

The answer to this question, which the work of Elbow and Burke does us the service of going beyond itself in asking, would be of utmost importance to our pedagogy as well as our conception of what compositionists do—if we pursued it. That sort of inquiry would perhaps draw us toward a more naive yet revealing consideration of rhetorical power in terms of the nature of persuasive, persuadable human beings, the nature of persuasive subject matter, and the dramatic setting of the persuasive act. It would give us another way of approaching the problem of defining genuine rhetorical literacy. And it would help the profession move beyond conventional conflicts between expressivists and specialists, practitioners and theorists. The pursuit of these matters, and other questions radiating from them, was once what drew more than a few of us, I suspect, toward the profession of composition.

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Notes

1. The term *architectonic* was made current a generation ago by McKeon.
2. See the discussion of non-goetic, "Timaeic" magic" and its relation to rhetoric in Briggs, chapters 2 through 4 and *passim*.
3. See Polanyi.
4. See especially Elbow's approach to the problem of discovering true moderation in *Embracing Contraries* 145-58 and *passim*.
5. For evidence of Elbow's preparation for this apparently isolated maxim, see *Writing without Teachers* 148, 176, 181-83; and *Writing with Power* 299 and 319.
6. See Elbow's *Oppositions in Chaucer*, *passim*.
7. Kenneth Burke, "In Response to Booth."

Works Cited


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Yet the idea of the female witch was not new to Kramer. Throughout the fifteenth century, the number of women tried for sorcery and witchcraft was significantly higher than the number of men, and the special association of witchcraft with women appeared in authoritative literature fully fifty years before the publication of the Malleus. In his Formicarius, written around 1437, the Dominican theologian and religious reformer Johannes Nider was the first clerical authority to argue that women were more prone to become witches than were men. After outlining what he has to say on the subject of female witches, and how he explains the particular proclivity of women for this crime, I will contrast his writings with certain earlier clerical accounts of magic and sorcery.