thorough examination of the many theoretical uses of dialogism. The breadth of her research suggests a new direction for the field, and is, in fact, an impressive beginning. Graduate students will find Literacy Ideology and Dialogue: Towards a Dialogic Pedagogy a valuable reference, and composition theorists working toward a synthetic, functional dialogism will undoubtedly build upon this work.

—Julie Drew  
University of South Florida


William H. Rueckert’s Kenneth Burke and the Drama of Human Relations (1963) is a landmark study of Burke’s theory of poetics, and contributed largely to Rueckert’s designation as the dean of Burke studies. In Encounters with Kenneth Burke, Rueckert collects articles and seminar papers he wrote from 1965 to 1991 in an effort to go beyond Burke’s poetics and discuss his “larger aims”—namely, his lifelong occupation of studying man as symbol-using animal and his related concerns as critic of (or “counteragent” to) American society.

In addition to profiling Kenneth Burke the aphorist, “comedian,” dialectician, “logologer,” “dramatist,” poet, fiction writer, performer, and “Word-Man,” Rueckert gives some account of Burke’s personal life and idiosyncrasies. (And this is valuable since there is, to date, no book-length biography of Burke.) Having been acquainted with the critic since the early sixties, Rueckert knew Burke as a “fabulous talker and arguer,” a lover of walking, a drinker, as well as a man deeply committed to his family, especially his second and last wife, Libbie (for whom, Burke reveals in a letter to Malcolm Cowley, he wrote all of his books to prove himself worthy of her love.) Rueckert writes that, in addition to naming one of his sons after the critic, he had named his dachshund “Burke.” Accompanied by his children and the dog, Rueckert visits Burke at his home in Andover, New Jersey. When Rueckert yells at his dog, Burke (the man) answers. This, for Rueckert, is an illustration of Burke’s great capacity for self-irony.

Rueckert is clearly among Burke’s most enthusiastic (and important) devotees: the words “genius” and “great” applied to Burke and “amazing” and (hyperbolically?) “sacred texts” applied to his writings,
among others, may be found on virtually every page in the book. There is nothing wrong with this—he more or less qualifies this high praise, and such adulation has certainly been heaped on much less deserving persons—but Rueckert’s admiration may begin to wear on any but the most frothy-mouthed of Burkeans.

The three essays that make up the first of the book’s four parts summarize Burke’s work and life. One may wish that Rueckert had rewritten this section to consolidate his ideas and give readers one, grand “A Field Guide to Kenneth Burke,” (as the last of the three essays is entitled), for there is a considerable amount of overlapping information between the three essays. Nevertheless, these essays, taken together, are (along perhaps with Marie Hochmuth Nichols’ “Kenneth Burke and the ‘New Rhetoric,’” Joseph R. Gusfield’s Introduction to On Symbols and Society, and a handful of others) as good a brief introduction to Burke and his thought as we are likely to get.

Even as Burke’s fundamental system and his belief in the role of the critic as counteragent to his or her culture begins with Counter-Statement (1931) and remains consistent over a very long career, Burke’s critical inquisitiveness is nothing if not catholic, and Rueckert provides an overview of Burke’s changing concerns and terminologies. Burke’s genius, he asserts, is first evident in Attitudes Toward History (1937), where he works out his comic/ironic view of history and displays his ability to ask essential questions, provide pivotal terms, identify the primary psychological responses, determine “brute” realities, propose a corrective, and “give us ways of developing our own attitudes toward history so that we may move, knowingly, toward a better life.” Burke’s “central” period would see the publication of A Grammar of Motives (1945), A Rhetoric of Motives (1950), “A Symbolic of Motives” (which Burke wrote as a series of essays in the late fifties), The Rhetoric of Religion (1961), and Language as Symbolic Action (1966). This period, Rueckert acknowledges, is the one for which Burke is and will continue to be best known; it is in these books that he works out his theories of dialectics, rhetoric, dramatism, and logology (to name only a very few of the most essential of Burke’s operations).

Though Rueckert gives these important works (especially A Grammar of Motives and The Rhetoric of Religion) a considerable amount of treatment throughout the book, he gives a surprising amount of space to Burke as poet and as novelist. In the book’s second section, devoted to analyses of individual texts (including A Grammar of Motives and Attitudes Toward History), Rueckert employs Burke’s theory of symbolic action (as laid out in The Philosophy of Literary Form) to show how Burke’s only novel, the critically ill-received Towards a Better Life (1932), is (as Burke himself has said) in fact essential for an understanding of the man and his work.
Rueckert posits that the novel is, to some degree, autobiographical, and that its main character, John Neal (who more or less represents Burke), purges himself of his negativism so that he can show himself worthy of Genevieve (who represents Libbie Burke).

Rueckert’s most in-depth look at Burke as poet is found in the book’s third section, “Logology, Ecology, and Technology,” and shows how some of Burke’s poetry is influenced by and a response to that of Walt Whitman. Careful not to oversimplify the relationship between Burke and Whitman, Rueckert shows that where Whitman, in poems such as “Song of the Open Road,” celebrates the seemingly infinite plenitude of natural resources and its exploitation in the name of progress, Burke, in his poems “Tossing on Floodtides of Sinkership, a Diaristic Fragment” and the Helhaven satires, ironically appropriates Whitman to show the destructive end of the human technological entelechy. In this essay and throughout the collection, Rueckert underscores the idea that after Burke had written his theories of dialectic (in A Grammar of Motives), rhetoric (in A Rhetoric of Motives), and poetics (in the uncollected essays that make up his “Symbolic of Motives”), he turned to logology, a system of the study of words about words that encompasses rhetoric, poetics, and dialectics. Within this system Burke came to see that “Man is rotten with perfection,” and that it is through the humans capacity for symbolic action that we have not only learned to study and exploit, but also to destroy, the natural world and thus ourselves. Rueckert shows that though ecology had been one of his concerns very early on, it came to be one of his primary concerns later in life.

The last section of the book (perhaps added as an afterthought) collects two unessential early essays, one an examination of the “shared assumptions” of Burke and the Geneva School, and the other a Burkean reading of John F. Kennedy’s “Inaugural Address” (which is reprinted in an Appendix). Though Encounters is largely devoted to analyses of the more marginal writings of Burke, and Rueckert’s insights on Burke from essay to essay become repetitious, Rueckert consistently shows that he is a studious, careful reader of Burke through his lucid, though unreductive, explanation of Burke’s thought. Any text that can make the often difficult and even obscure writings of Kenneth Burke more accessible to a wider academic audience is a welcome addition to the large, growing collection of secondary works on Burke, and a full two-thirds of Encounters with Kenneth Burke is a solid contribution to this work.

—Bryan L. Moore
Texas Christian University