

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

WORLD POETICS
PROSPECTS FOR THE APPLICATION OF DRAMATISM TO
STUDIES OF THE INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS OF THE
MIDDLE EAST

By

MATTHEW CASTILLO

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AN ABSTRACT OF THE PROJECT OF

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In the field of international relations many attempts have been made to define the criteria that best suits students and scholars in understanding events past, present, and future. Dramatism continues to attract students and scholars, albeit somewhat outside the lines of conventional studies. In this project I suggest applications for Dramatism to studies of the international relations of the Middle East. Throughout, I spotlight state-of-the-art scholarship in studies of rhetoric, poetry, grammar, and history conducted by scholars from the American University of Beirut. Their compositions make this endeavor far less burdensome than might otherwise be the case, while indicating the way forward for this research agenda now and in the future.

I begin by accepting the common contention that the explanatory powers of language can be overstated. Yet, I argue, if the explanatory powers of language can be overstated they can also be underestimated. I therefore situate my search for analytical clues to studying the international relations of the Middle East in the Arabic language. In the second section, I proceed further by examining the grammar of the Arabic language. In the third section, I proceed beyond language and grammar to the topic of Arab poetry, the poetic tradition, and the often-overlooked importance of eloquence. In the fourth section, I examine the “root system” and its implications for translation and mistranslation. And I conclude with a consideration of the explanatory dimension of theory building in the social sciences.

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“Dramatism” is a technique of analysis of language and thought as basically modes of action rather than as means of conveying information.

— Kenneth Burke

Introduction

Michael Overington asks if perhaps readers of Kenneth Burke find his social science neither important nor interesting. Surveying the field of sociology Overington found Burke “lurking in sociologists’ footnotes” decades later. Dramatism too earned equal status alongside “Symbolic Interaction” in the *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*” (131). So he wondered, “Is the dramaturgic analyst worse off than *any* sociologist engaged in the reconstruction, the representation, of another’s theory? If we restrict the answer to those theories (explanations of action) addressed to a sociological audience, then I believe the answer to be “No” (150).

I therefore raise the question: What factors explain Burke’s obscurity in sociological inquiry decades later? Today, heavy applications of Dramatism are seldom. Overington captures one factor when he came to realize “From the dearth of sociological commentary on Dramatism, it would appear that no sociological audience is yet available for the monographic length that such completeness would entail.” (152). We know Dramatism is not a sociological school. True, without an audience, Dramatism flounders. Even so, we do not yet understand what factors account for such a narrow sociological audience.

I argue, like Richard Brown, that extra answers are found in deeper, epistemological substrata subsuming the conflicts between sociological schools. In his book *A Poetic for Sociology: Toward a Logic of Discovery for the Human Sciences*, Brown zeroes in on the issues

at stake. Each major theoretical group, he explains, bases its work on a different theory of knowledge; yet to be adequate no theory can do without some of the methodological precepts possessed by alien camps. On one hand, positive sociologies imitate the physical sciences and on the other those inclined to more humanistic sociologies stick to empirical data but their conclusions resemble mere matters of interpretation, not truth. Hence, no one school can satisfactorily convey independent theories without reference to opposing schools of thought. Where one school refuses to borrow from others, it may shrink the definition of sociology to match its method, or, by enlarging its method absorbs the type of inaccuracies it begrudges its rivals.

For conflicts between sociological schools upstream bottleneck advanced applications of Dramatism downstream in the international relations of the Middle East. Daniel Levine reached similar conclusions after surveying the field in at length: “The basic divisions among the theoretical traditions in IR persisted owing to basic assumptions that were essentially metaphysical in nature: irrefutable in one another’s terms and both logically and morally incommensurate.” (6). Burke likely remains anonymous to the international relations of the Middle East if such metaphysical stalemates remain intact. Fortunately, Dramatism to a great extent concerns itself with transcending methodological deadlock or metaphysical inertia. I reinforce prospects for applications of Dramatism to the IR of the Middle East by engaging perhaps the most formidable opponent of such an approach and one whose regional credentials are unimpeachable. I refer to Fred Halliday.

Thus, for the purposes of this study, Halliday represents the most thoughtful and rigorously argued foil, thereby amplifying Burke and Dramatism for the reader. Or as Burke might say “not so much for settling issues as for making the nature of a controversy more definite” (ix). This

approach offers the added advantage of simultaneously situating Burke within the broader epistemological conflicts characterizing the state of the field.

I begin by accepting Halliday's major admonition against "overstating the explanatory powers of language." I therefore situate my search for analytical clues in the Arabic language, as Dramatism suggests, but keep Halliday's objections at hand, using one to explain the other. In the second section, I proceed further by examining the grammar of the Arabic language. In the third section, I proceed beyond language and grammar to the topic of Arab poetry, the poetic tradition, and the often-overlooked importance of eloquence. In the fourth section, I examine the "root system" and its implications for translation and mistranslation. And I conclude by considering dimension of theory building important for both Halliday and Burke. Throughout, I spotlight research conducted by the American University of Beirut's Ramzi Baalbaki, Bilal Orfali, and Tarif Khalidi. Their compositions on the Arabic language, Arabic grammar, and Arabic poetry make this endeavor far less burdensome than might otherwise be the case, while indicating the way forward for this research agenda now and in the future.

I. I. APPLYING LANGUAGE

Toward the twilight of his career Fred Halliday wrote a dictionary. He considered himself a “critical student of language” and considered Dr. Johnson the greatest of all English social scientists. He wanted to demonstrate the intersection of words with power in *Shocked and Awed: How the War on Terror and Jihad Have Changed the English Language*, where he demonstrates the “intersection of words with power, studies the order and disorder of words, and illustrated “the linguistic consequences” of world crises. Of his book, he said, “ In a phrase, it is a study of the order *and* the disorder of words” (2010, ix). His “general goal, or intellectual aspiration [was to] illustrate *the linguistic consequences of major international crises.*” (emphasis in original) (2010, xi).

Halliday not only appreciated the importance of language but also at the same rejects methodological approaches regarding the study of language as the smart path to political and social ideas in the region (2003, 203). For Halliday, such an enterprise is fundamentally flawed. Summarizing his point of view, Halliday tells us, “If I have my disagreements with the epistemological assumptions underlying the approach of [Bernard] Lewis and his fellow writers on ‘Islam’, I am equally at odds with the epistemological assumptions of [Edward] Said and the post-modernists.” (2003, 212). Yet, if the explanatory powers of language can be overstated, as Halliday contended any “philosophy of language” approach effected, they can also be underestimated, with similar ramifications, which Halliday overlooks.

True, learning Arabic as a non-native speaker does not make one an expert in Middle East politics, culture, or society. In his attempt to refute such claims he discloses one factor obscuring Dramatism from wider sociological audiences, while simultaneously setting the

proper conditions for applying Burke's method to forge consensus. That is, if one can overstate the explanatory powers of language, one can also presumably underestimate those powers with similarly hazardous consequences. Halliday's refutation aptly applies to non-native speakers but for native Arabic speakers, the situation is otherwise. In this case, particularly Arabic speakers who do not speak a second language, knowledge of regional politics, culture, and society is communicated exclusively in the Arabic language.

Consequently, over thousands of years, the Arabic language, for native Arab speakers constitutes the prerequisite for forming sound bonds, sharing information, and within the discipline of international relations, the major premise underwriting considerations of the Middle East as a regional system. Numerous native and non-native Arab speaking scholars attest to the universal importance of the Arabic language to life as an Arab. Albert Hourani, for one, argues "More conscious of their language than any people in the world, seeing it not only as the greatest of their arts but also as their common good, most Arabs, if asked to define what they meant by 'the Arab nation', would begin by saying that it included all those who spoke the Arabic language" (1962, 1).

Raymond Hinnebusch has similarly argued "The Arab states, mostly successors of the Ottoman Empire, retain a high degree of linguistic and cultural similarity. Similar music and art, food, marriage, and child-rearing practices are recognizable region-wide. Extended family ties frequently cross borders. The common Arabic language - the critical ingredient of nationhood - has, owing to a standard newspaper and media Arabic, become more homogeneous, stunting the evolution of national dialects as the linguistic basis of separate nations" (30).

And Adeed Dawisha also confirms that "By the middle of the twentieth century, most of these inhabitants had accepted a definition of "Arabness" which emphasized their historical

bonds under early Islamic rule, the proximity of their manners and traditions, and above all their ability to claim “Arabic” as their mother tongue. The nationalist narrators might have disagreed over the relative merits of the other elements, but they all agreed on the centrality of the Arabic language as a unifying force” (14). And finally, Valbjorn and Bank, suggest in their analysis of a possible return to Cold War-style politics, claim, “first that the notion about an Arab world is less obsolete than commonly held” (2-3). They continue, by adding, “We consider Arab nationalism to be the general idea about the existence of special bonds between Arabic-speaking people, who are assumed to be part of a single Arab nation constituted by common language, history, culture and tradition.” (7). Certainly, our studies of the political dynamics of the region and our understanding of current events or interactions at the level of the regional system, become considerably more tenuous, if not precarious, should we underestimate or dismiss entirely the power of the Arabic language to unite or divide the Arab world.

For non-native Arabic speakers the situation is reversed. For instance, Jane Wightwick points out, “Learners of Arabic generally appreciate the difference between the various spoken Arabic dialects and the universal modern standard Arabic. What is not so well understood is that Modern Standard Arabic itself can be spoken and written at different levels of sophistication” (vii). She encourages her readers to keep in mind that “To more advanced Arabists and scholars it might mean the higher-level subtleties of Modern Standard or Classical Arabic” (vii). In this respect, the upshot for approaching studies of the region through the Arabic language are not altogether different from Halliday’s aspirations for his book *Shocked and Awed*: “[To] make a broader contribution to understanding the politics *and* thinking of the contemporary Middle East, linking up with the ongoing discussion of how far culture, religion and ‘Islam’ explain the politics and society of the region today.” (2010, x).

For native Arabic speakers, eloquence in the language amounts to a signature of social distinction. Eloquence in Arabic can elevate one's social status and make or break the fortunes of those seeking political status. And every average speaker of Arabic considers his or herself a reasonable judge of any native speakers level of competency. For in Arabic, how one expresses an idea can measure as significantly as what one wishes to express. Here, Jane Wightwick points out, "Learners of Arabic generally appreciate the difference between the various spoken Arabic dialects and the universal modern standard Arabic. What is not so well understood is that Modern Standard Arabic itself can be spoken and written at different levels of sophistication" (vii). She encourages her readers to keep in mind that "To more advanced Arabists and scholars it might mean the higher-level subtleties of Modern Standard or Classical Arabic" (vii).

I. II. ARABIC LANGUAGE APPLICATIONS: GRAMMAR

Progressing further, for scholars of the region, the significance of grammar offers deeper insights than linguistic competence alone can offer, as grammar remains an independent discipline. In their book, *In the Shadow of Arabic: The Centrality of Language to Arabic Culture: Studies Presented to Ramzi Baalbaki on the Occasion of his Sixtieth Birthday*, the editor Bilal Orfali explains how Ramzi Baalbaki has contributed major findings in the field of Arabic grammar pertinent to the subject at hand. Baalbaki, Orfali explains, throughout his substantial tenure aimed always:

First to demonstrate, by examining early terminology and concepts, that Arabic grammatical thought is a genuine product of Arabs and Muslims, rather than the result of borrowing from other nations. The second aim is to highlight the central position that the grammatical tradition occupied with the breadth of the Arabic and Islamic scholarly tradition, particularly because grammar is firmly linked to exegesis, Qur'anic readings, stylistics, and literary criticism. The third aim is to demonstrate the intricate and subtle analytical methods of the early grammarians, who, unlike most later authors, were keen to disclose the delicate balance between structure and meaning (xiv).

For Baalbaki, Arabic grammar is an authentic and original Arab invention, which strengthens the premise that Arab language and Arab identity, fundamental rudiments of the Arab political scene, go hand-in-hand. Second, “the grammatical tradition” is closely linked to “literary criticism” furthermore reinforcing the relevance, significance, and open opportunity made available to scholars by incorporating Kenneth Burke’s methods into their analytical toolbox. For according to the Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Criticism an “indispensable resource for scholars and students of literary theory and discourse,” “Kenneth Burke (b. 1897) is one of the most unorthodox, challenging, and theoretically sophisticated American-born literary critics of the twentieth century.”

In addition to the relationship between language and identity, Yasir Suleiman links morality and ethics to language and identity as fundamental rudiments of political and social relations in the Arab world. In his article “Ideology, Grammar-Making and the Standardization of Arabic,” he argues:

The connection between correctness and morality/ethics is present in Arabic grammar-making from its inception. A fundamental principle in Arabic grammar is its view of speech, as a manifestation of language, as behavior that is open to evaluation on ethical/moral grounds. Carter captures this point well when he says, reflecting on Sibawayhi’s views on this matter in his *Kitab* (d. 180/y796): Considered as an act, speech naturally falls under the same rules as all other kinds of behavior, and this is why Sibawayhi uses ethical criteria to express the correctness and rightness or otherwise of utterances. (10).

Finally, Salim Kemal finds, “A plausible and commonly accepted explanation notes a certain attitude of superiority among Arabs towards the non-indigenous literary world, one based on the conviction that the highest degree of human eloquence could be achieved only in their language, perfect in itself *because it is sacred*” (355).

The insight Halliday underestimates, therefore, is that the text itself was not sacred; it was the perfection of the Arabic language that afforded the text sacred status. Of equal importance, by listening to a man or woman speaking, aside from diction and style, the very nature of the Arabic language and its grammatical rules imply standards for judging moral and ethical signatures of personal character. Thus, of major importance here, politics and society are subsumed under language, identity, morality, and ethics through the conduit of grammar rather than vice versa as is normally the case when scholars reject approaches linked to the philosophy of language. What distinguishes Burke from others, Halliday included, can perhaps be summarized by considering Adrian Gully’s book about Ibn-Hisham, when Gully argues, “He [Ibn-Hisham] is more concerned with the language of the sacred text than the secular, but with the following important proviso: that even the language of secular texts can not be overlooked

because it could, and often did, function as a model of data by which sacred language could be interpreted” (xiii). Indeed, Gully encourages his readers to read Ramzi Baalbaki, who, he argues, “gives poetry its deserved status by acknowledging the potential merit of such an inquiry, particularly to deepen our understanding of issues relating to the science of *balagha* ‘rhetoric’”. (xiii). Certainly, our studies of the political dynamics of the region and our understanding of current events at the level of the regional system become considerably more tenuous should we underestimate or dismiss entirely the power of the Arabic language to unite and divide the Arab world.

I. III. ARABIC LANGUAGE APPLICATIONS: POETRY & POETICS

Arabic poetry represents the quintessence of Arabic culture.

—Adonis

Few other individuals in the Arab world commanded a higher understanding of language and grammar while exemplifying the virtues of eloquence than the poet. For this reason, the poet was highly respected, well-known, and elevated social station. Perhaps for this reason, in their volume *Poetry and History: The Value of Poetry in Reconstructing Arab History*, Baalbaki, Agha, and Khalidi argue, “We quickly agreed that the immense riches of Arabic poetry had not thus far been sufficiently exploited for the reconstruction of Arab history” (xi). By considering seriously the relationship between poetry and history in their groundbreaking study Baalbaki, Agha, and Khalidi present safe opportunities for scholars to introduce Kenneth Burke and Dramatism. For those readers requiring additional confidence in such applications, Hourani provides additional assurance when he argues:

For one section of the reading public [history books] were of special importance: for rulers and those in their service, history provided not only a record of the glories and achievements of a dynasty, but also a collection of examples from which lessons in statecraft could be learned (200).

Finally, Charles Hill in his book *Grand Strategies: Literature, Statecraft, and World Order* also encourages readers to consider such links thereby expanding the applicability of Burke’s Dramatism beyond regional international relations to considerations of the discipline of international relations, broadly considered. In his Prologue, for instance, he conveys the following:

The argument of this book is that the world should recognize high political ideas and actions of statecraft as aspects of the human condition that are fully within the scope of literary genius, and ones that great writers have consistently explored in important ways.

They were not simply using political circumstances as a background for their characters' dramas but were instead thinking deeply and significantly about the ideas themselves. The great authors not only reveal themselves aware of statecraft, some are themselves strategists, exploring ideas fundamental to statecraft and international order (7).

This argument he forms out of earlier premises where he found, "The approach is like a poet's, involving the quick recognition of a truth that the mind would ordinarily miss, or would perceive only after long study and reflection." (6). Burke's careful attention to poetics and politics equips scholars with the analytical tools to carry forward the value of poetry in reconstructing Arab history so keenly felt by those scholars, editors, and authors. Thus, if history and literature provide lessons in statecraft, as the scholars above contend, Kenneth Burke is a smart choice for any scholar finding such combinations useful but unsure where to begin or how to develop such an approach.

Returning to the Middle East specifically, others offer additional opportunities for applications of Burke's Dramatism. Muhammad Ayish, for instance, reinforces the link between such elements by pointing out how, "Although poetry has been historically recognized as a form of expression around the world, it is the Arabs who have elevated poetic productions to a highly sacred status." (67). Upon establishing this relationship, we can begin to understand how sacred texts, sacred status, political influence, and social status overlap, each element reinforcing the authority and/or power of each independently and groups when considered collectively. Considering the lot collectively, Burke suggests insights beyond the ken of those currently available to those flatly rejecting their pertinence at the start. This is not so for Kemal who argues rather:

We can easily show the importance of poetry. Words such as *sayyid* and *amir* often designated both the leader of the tribe and the orators who defended the tribe's rights in debate. The pressures of nomadic life relied heavily on a persuasive use of language to achieve unity or to defend rights in disputes among tribes. In this situation, the tribal spokesman's role was greatly respected, and the community venerated its orator,

spokesman, and speaker. As poetry shared these concerns with unity and eloquence, the community revered it commensurately. Ibn Rashiq claims that the emergence of a poet brought congratulations and feasts. People would celebrate the good news, because a poet provided a defense of their worth by ennobling their achievements in art, preserving knowledge of their actions, and praising their good name. It seems that Arabs congratulated each other on three occasions: when a boy was born, when a poet was discovered, and when a mare foaled (5).

Contemporary scholars Arthur Goldschmidt and Lawrence Davidson also offer similar observations while adding additional insights:

Their [the Arabs] constant movement gave them no chance to develop architecture, sculpture, or painting. But they did possess a highly portable form of artistic expression – poetry. Pre-Islamic poetry embodied the Arab code of virtue, the *muruwwah*: bravery in battle, patience in misfortune, persistence in revenge (the only justice possible at a time when no governments existed), protection of the weak, defiance toward the strong, hospitality to the visitor (even a total stranger), generosity to the poor, loyalty to the tribe, and fidelity in keeping promises. These were the moral principles that people needed in order to survive in the desert, and the verses helped to fix the *muruwwah* in their minds. Recited from memory by the tribal Arabs and their descendants, these poems expressed the joys and tribulations of nomadic life, extolled the bravery of their own tribes, and lampooned the faults of their rivals. Some Arabs loved poetry so much that they used to stop wars and raids yearly for a month in which poets might recite their new verses and match wits with one another. Pre-Islamic poetry helped to shape the Arabic language, the literature and culture of the Arabs, and hence the thoughts and actions of Arabic-speaking peoples even now (24).

As a matter of course, on the topic of poetry, politics, and statecraft in the Middle East, at all times one recalls Ibn Khaldun's *Muqaddimah*. An inexact, but nevertheless reliable, estimation encounters over 25,000 words devoted to critical examination of Arab poetry by the author. He devotes lengthy sections of his treatise to this topic alone and also concludes his treatise on the topic. He tells us: The Arabs thought highly of poetry as a form of speech. Therefore, they made it the archive of their sciences and their history, the evidence for what they considered right and wrong, and the principal basis of reference for most of their sciences and wisdom. The poetical habit was firmly established in them, like all their other habits. The Arabic linguistic habits can be acquired only through technical (skill) and (constant)

practice of (Arab) speech” (444).

Ibn Khaldun further enlarges his remarks on Arab poetry further by commenting not only upon the Arab region but also the sum total of world poetics:

Poetry exists by nature among the speakers of every language, since meters of a certain harmonious arrangement, with the alteration of (fixed) numbers of consonants, with and without vowels, exist in the nature of all human beings. Therefore, poetry is never abolished as the result of the disappearance of one particular language in this case, that of the Mudar, who, as everybody knows, were outstanding champions of poetry. In fact, every racial and dialect group among the Arab Bedouins who have undergone some non-Arab influence, or the urban population, attempts to cultivate poetry and to fit it into the pattern of their speech, as much as it suits them. (1967, 413).

In “*The craft of poetry and the way of learning it*” Khaldun suggests a connection between the Arab language and Arab poetry observing, “This discipline is one of the disciplines connected with Arab speech. It is possible that the speakers of other languages, too, find in poetry the things they desire to express in their speech. However, each language has its own particular laws concerning eloquence” (443). For Khaldun the craft of poetry *is* a discipline, one predating the break-up and competition resulting from competing schools of thought producing the type of metaphysical stalemates Levine describes.

But perhaps most importantly he claims the rudiments of eloquence stand out not because they are rules but because they are laws. And with respect to the relationship between Arab poetry and the international relations of the Middle East, Ayish affirms the mutual cornerstones of world poetics and international relations theory when he explains: “Written in rhymed form, the Arabic poem *qasida* amounted to a policy statement for the tribe or the Caliph. In this case, poets were acting as if they were mouthpieces for their tribes in times of peace and war.” (68). Certainly, these are the proper subjects for the international relations of the Middle East and the authors above justify reasons for including poetry within the gamut of this study.

I. IV. ARABIC LANGUAGE APPLICATIONS: THE ROOT SYSTEM

In this section, I shift from Arabic language, grammar, and poetry to examination of the root system, which if underestimated, presents snares for scholars when translating from English to Arabic or vice versa. The root system at the heart of the Arabic language provides a set of criteria for translators to verify their translations and to enrich their appreciation of the language's complexity. If we bypass this resource, we cheat ourselves.

Revisiting Halliday, considering the “the root or original meanings of words...as a means of arriving at an understanding of what they meant to Middle Eastern peoples and of the different meanings ascribed to words in the Islamic and Western contexts” (2003, 206) as Dramatism suggests. And certainly, Halliday was no stranger to translation issues confronting native English speakers fluent in Arabic as a second language but he often approached his task willingly and happily. In his book *Shocked and Awed* he commented:

One of the great joys of studying Arabic is to open [Hans] Wehr's dictionary and to see how *far* words have travelled from their original meaning. The word for economics, *iqṭisād*, derives from the same root as the word *qasida*, a poem. Are we to assume that poetry is a branch of economics, or the other way around?” (2003, 206).

A dramatisitic response to Halliday's objection to etymological reductionism may begin taking shape by suggesting that the root establishing etymological correspondence between the Arabic word for “poem” and the Arabic word for “economics does not reveal itself if considered in terms of modern calculations of high (or low) savings ratios (see footnote below). Rather, the application of Dramatism starts by recalling that the word *qasida* Halliday references is the same *qasida* Muhammad Ayish suggested amounted to a “a policy statement for the tribe or Caliph” (68). Instead, the relationship derives from ancient origins. It is instead

rooted in the deeper value of thrift, whether practiced by individuals or groups. A thrifty individual or group of individuals, is by definition economizing (in the English language). Similarly, the poet is by definition thrifty with words. One could suggest, therefore, from the Dramatistic point of view, that the link between the words “poem” and “economics” describes the relationship between thrift and the use of words. Consider England’s bard for example, “Brevity is the soul of wit.” or “Waste not, want not.” or the American proverb, “A penny saved is a penny earned.” (again, see footnote above.) From this point of view, then, Khaldun lends some credibility to such speculative endeavors when he concludes, “This is what was meant in the following remark by Muhammad: “I was given the most comprehensive words, and speech was made short for me.” (381).

Such speculation, Halliday would likely claim, amounts to “etymological reductionism, the attempt to explain politics in terms of the meaning of words and, even worse, to explain the meaning of words in today’s discourse by reference to their classical roots” (2003, 206). True, my speculations above may turn out not quite ripe upon further scrutiny. Be that as it may, and perhaps more importantly, when Halliday asks whether or not we should assume poetry is a branch of economics or the other way around, Burke, who again assumed the latter, could raise a offer a more concrete answer bearing fruit by calling the readers attention back to the root system. In this instance, to the fact that, logically, economics is a derivative of poetry, not the other way around. Therefore, by exercising our knowledge of the root system, we can at least observe how poetry comes logically prior to economics. First poetry (at the root), then economics second (as derived from). Otherwise put, if poetry, then economics. This logical relationship does not hold if we attempt to reverse the order. Hence, though Halliday asks the question rhetorically, the root system does imply a possible credible answer that does not fall

victim to reductionism or dissolve into absurdity.

The grammatical resources of the Arabic language, i.e. the root system, allows for a more comprehensive translation that alleviates the tendency for non-native Arabic speakers to mistranslate Arabic words and phrases resulting from disregard for literal, logically sound translations. Adonis, in his *Introduction to Arab Poetics*, tells us of remarks from al-Jahiz, who said, “The best kind of discourse is that whose meaning is present in the literal meaning of the words” (11). Thus, literal and logically sound translations, may alleviate the tendency toward etymological reductionism while at the same time illustrating the underestimation of the explanatory power of words. Or otherwise put, the great resourcefulness of words perhaps simply cannot be overstated.

I. V. CONCLUSION

Thus, after a lifetime spent in the social sciences and with a specialization in the Middle East, Halliday ultimately concluded that “The task of social science, IR included, is something else, and richer, namely to *explain*, in as persuasive a manner as possible, what has occurred and to identify what constitute significant contemporary trends. This explanatory function, rather than grabbing at superficially sage but, on closer examination, banal platitudes about a reified ‘Islam’, the specificities of the ‘region’, and the atavistic and irremediable ways of its inhabitants, is the appropriate touchstone for social science work on the Middle East. It is this explanation and the major social science works of regional study, seek to address” (2005, 6). And in the pursuit of explanation, I propose a meeting of the minds between Halliday and Burke. For Overington has similarly concluded from Burke’s corpus that to his “understanding of motives, to the language of explanation, explanation in language, language as explanation, that Burke turns his attention” (147).

Overington also provides an excellent synopsis of the methodology of Dramatism and comments that “As a method, Dramatism addresses the empirical questions of how persons explain their actions to themselves and others, what the cultural and structural influences on these explanations might be, and what effect connotational links among the explanatory (motivational) terms might have on these explanations, and hence, on action itself. Dramatism turns from common sense explanatory discourse to that of the social scientist, in an effort to analyze and criticize the effect of a connotational on social scientific explanations of action. Thus, Dramatism attempts to account for the motivational (explanatory) vocabulary of ordinary and its influence on human action and for particular sociological vocabularies when they are

used to explain human action.” (133). Finally, briefly consider the following thought experiment formulated by Robert Wade Kenny asking the reader to consider an audience’s reaction to the threat of violence :

Let us imagine that a patron shouts “Time to die!” and jumps up in a movie theater with a chainsaw. Sociologically speaking, running from a movie lobby is not a norm, however, it is quite normal, under the specified circumstances. What then would be the sociological vocabulary for explaining such subtleties of human motivation? This is precisely the question that Kenneth Burke answers (Kenny, 2008).

In the discipline of international relations many attempts have been made to define the criteria that best suits students and scholars in understanding events past, present, and future. Dramatism continues to attract students and scholars, albeit somewhat outside the lines of conventional studies. That does not mean his insights are irrelevant or superficial and his contributions to many fields of academic endeavor will continue to find connections with the latest and greatest scholarship as exemplified by the studies of rhetoric, poetry, grammar, and history conducted by flagship scholars by the American University of Beirut.

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