

A CASE STUDY OF RHETORIC AND SOCIAL FAILURE

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Presented in partial fulfillment  
of the Master of Arts degree at  
The University of Kansas,  
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August, 1979

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my appreciation to Dr. Wil Linkugel and Dr. Tom Beisecker for their friendship and encouragement in pursuing this study, and for their time in serving on this committee. I would like to thank Dr. Donn W. Parson for his willingness to direct the study, his advice on all matters relating to my professional well-being, and his unwaning patience with my work. I also must express gratitude to Professors J. Robert Hamlin, of the University of Kansas, and Donovan J. Ochs, of the University of Iowa, for the enjoyable and helpful conversations they gave me while completing the study. Their talents convince me that great speakers are also great listeners.

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## CHAPTER ONE

This case study is the record of my research into the actions of a person named Larry Lear on the afternoon of December 29, 1976. These actions constitute a bizarre and brutal example of communication in society and led to Lear's death early that evening when he was shot by law enforcement agents. It is not the purpose of this study to find fault with those who were responsible for Lear's death, nor to affix any sort of blame for the actions which were taken by Lear or taken by those involved. The purpose here is to explore this example of communication in depth and to generate an understanding of the event in terms of communication theory. However, the significance of the case cannot be separated totally from the tragedy it represents, for Lear's death underscores our knowledge that the presence and quality of communication are vital to life itself.

My interest in this case results from my own limited involvement in the events of December 29. I was preparing to leave my parents' home in Haysville, Kansas, where I had visited over the Christmas holiday, to return to my home in Lawrence, Kansas. As I was filling my car with gasoline at

the corner service station, a flurry of police cars swept by en route to the other side of Haysville, a small town of six thousand and a suburb of neighboring Wichita. Such excitement is uncommon in this small town, so, as I drove to the bank, I turned on my car radio to hear if there were reports. KFDI radio, the largest station in the Wichita area, was already broadcasting on the scene from their roving news vehicle. A gunman was reportedly holding hostages in a home on Ranger Street in Haysville. I was unfamiliar with this street, but the teller in the bank window informed me that "it's over in the new section." The news, seconds old, was already the topic of public conversation.

I recall having been thoughtful about the changes in my hometown since my previous visit. There had been a few instances of "big-city" crime and rather bizarre behavior that had made headlines in the state. Whether it was because of this feeling that I had, or because of mere curiosity, I listened with intent to the radio reports during my three-hour drive back to Lawrence. The radio continued the "on-the-spot" reporting for most of that time. The gunman had been identified as Larry Lear, and all they knew of him was that he was a "judo-expert" and that he had been in a mental hospital in Larned, Kansas. Shots had been exchanged with the local police, and one officer had been wounded very slightly. The reports continued to reveal more information

as my afternoon drive progressed. Lear was holding a woman and several children hostage in the woman's home, and, according to the report, Lear was demanding that a psychiatrist, a minister, and an attorney come to the home. The news flashes told of Sedgwick County Sheriff, Johnny Darr, and another officer, Lt. Harry Minor, entering the home and of children being released. Later, a report was issued which said that a minister, an attorney, a psychologist, and Lear's estranged girlfriend had entered the home as hostages and that more children had been released. According to the intermittent reports, police had established a command post in a nearby home and they had surrounded the house. Telephone communications were occurring between persons inside the house and outside, but the nature of the calls was not revealed. Although the reports impressed upon me the danger and chaos of the events, I recall feeling positive about the outcome and the way the case was being handled.

By the time I arrived in Lawrence it was dusk. The reports had stopped at an unnoted time, and I was too far from the Wichita stations for clear reception.

I dismissed the matter from my mind, but not before I had reflected on the event for some time. With friends later that evening, I watched the 10:30 news broadcast from a Kansas City television station. I was informed that "a drama unfolded in the small town of Haysville, Kansas,

today," and that the gunman, Larry Lear, "was shot to death by police marksmen about 8:45 P.M." Very little information was offered in this report about what had happened and why Lear's death had become a necessity. It seemed as if it were natural that violent actions of this sort might end in this way, but I did not agree. My mind could not complete the event I had experienced that day with this new ending. It seemed to me totally incongruous that a person would gather a minister, an attorney, and a psychologist unless he sought their help. It was my natural bent to suspect police incompetence, but there was no hint of evidence to support that in the news report.

I felt somewhat embittered by the whole affair, for not one word of justification had been offered or even deemed necessary that police should take this man's life. The event had truly been a "drama" as the news reported, a drama in which I had been a vicarious participant. I and others with whom I spoke found the incident and the incomplete account of it to be disconcerting.

The accounts of the incident which were carried in The Wichita Eagle and The Wichita Beacon, the largest newspapers in the area (published by the same company), ranged from objective reports of information to the human interest aspects of the case. Stories appeared on the violence of Lear's early life<sup>1</sup> and on the emotional experience of



Undersheriff Sam Davison's decision to shoot Lear.<sup>2</sup> The papers printed maps of the location,<sup>3</sup> and time frames for the afternoon's events.<sup>4</sup> What had taken place, according to these reports, can be summarized as follows:<sup>5</sup>

Shortly after noon, December 29, 1976, law enforcement agencies in the Sedgwick County area were notified that a man, Larry Lear, was holding Mr. and Mrs. John Horinek, their four children, and a neighborhood child at gunpoint. Lear had placed a call to the office of a mental health counselor, Charles Pickard. The call was received by his associate, Dr. Roy B. Henderson. According to Henderson, Lear was demanding that a psychologist, a psychiatrist, and a minister come to his home. By 5:53 P.M. the six original hostages were exchanged for Sedgwick County Sheriff, Johnny Darr, Wichita Police Lieutenants Harry Minor and Bernie Drowatsky, Attorney Warner Eisenbise, Rev. Byron D. Tracy (police chaplain), Mr. Charles W. Pickard, the counselor, and Lear's estranged girlfriend, Ms. Lonnie Bean. These persons were held hostage by Lear and talked with Lear until shortly before 9:00 P.M., when police marksmen shot Lear to death through a window in the home.

Only one of the newspaper articles which reported the incident attempted any sort of explanation for Lear's bizarre actions and requests. The human interest story focused on the violent, alienated, and troublesome life Lear had led during his twenty-nine years, seven of which were spent in a mental institution. The story concluded that Lear "fell back on a familiar response and sought recognition in violence."<sup>6</sup>

In the story quoted above, there was some suggestion that not everything possible had been done to help or

understand Lear, and that his shooting was untimely and unwarranted. This remained the only suggestion of the kind, and no formal complaints were ever made regarding the incident. No explanation ever emerged for the presence or actions of the professional agents in the situation or Lear's motives in having them brought to the home. In my mind, at least, there were many puzzling aspects of the case which had never been discussed in the media reportage. The police officers involved in the shooting of Lear were routinely charged with manslaughter and a hearing set for January 6, 1977.<sup>7</sup> It seemed well understood by all persons I spoke with that this was a routine measure to prevent the officers from being further prosecuted for the shooting. The officers were cleared of all charges.

The very fact of Lear's death seemed evidence enough that somewhere in this story there was a monstrous failure. Either the police had failed in handling the case, the professional hostages had failed to help Lear, or Lear himself had failed in some unexplained goal. At the outset, the media coverage was a failure, for it did not explain or inform, or even pursue the reasons for the event. The reportage did not so much as acknowledge that the ordeal could have ended otherwise. The one human interest story to which I referred had concluded that Lear's history of violence was the key to his motives, and no further justification of

the police actions seemed necessary. Even that one story, slightly empathetic with Lear's life, was offset on the page with a story captioning the "praise" the police had received from the public for their handling of the case.<sup>8</sup> The failure I sensed seemed to have gone unnoticed by everyone but me.

From my very limited knowledge of the case at this point I concluded that a theme of communication was at the heart of the incident and its rationale. Although the presence of guns, force, and violence might tend to obscure the importance of communication to the outcome of the ordeal, there was more than enough reason to believe that the exchange between the hostages and the gunman had significantly affected the outcome; at least this exchange would provide a clue to the motivations for the incident. Lear had reportedly gathered the professional "helpers" by force because he "wanted someone to listen."<sup>9</sup> If Lear had indeed "sought recognition in violence," then it is indicated that he was unable to do so via effective communication. The fact that Lear gathered his audience with guns does not de-emphasize the role of communication in the event, but rather emphasizes that Lear was a communicative failure. Evidently, too, the professionals had failed in their own attempts to bring Lear to reason. Whether or not that possibility existed, the communication strategies they employed failed to do so.

The single feature of the case which allowed me to pursue it was the presence of the professional hostages. Their role in the events was unclear, but their presence there was obviously a crucial part of Lear's motives. Also, their presence as trained observers and their exchange with Lear for over five hours offered a unique opportunity to research the event in greater detail than the media accounts had offered. I decided to interview the hostages during my next visit to the Wichita area.

The interviews were carried out during the summer months of 1977. In the methodological appendix of this thesis I will comment more directly about the experience of interviewing the hostages. Many of my initial assumptions were borne out in talking to these persons, and many were challenged. I left the interviews convinced that the professionals were unable to "help" Lear in the sense of altering his actions, but even more convinced that the case was an example of social failure. I found that the hostages were as confused as I about Lear's motives and the purpose of the episode they had experienced. I have not yet encountered an adequate explanation for many of the things which took place, nor do I believe that such an explanation is entirely possible. Yet I believe that when the facts of the case are viewed critically and with an awareness of the role of communication in our society, the case may be

understood in spite of its bizarre and violent nature. In fact, such incidents may be predictable in a society which demands radical adjustments from its individuals.

Lear's is a case of an individual unable to justify his failure and unable to change the course of his life. As a result, Lear instigated a rhetorical drama which was designed to communicate his failure to society, to locate the blame for his failure in society, and to justify his failure as an individual by defiance of society. The drama which he instigated was itself a rhetorical failure, for Lear did not bathe himself in any sort of heroic glory nor die a martyr of social injustice. Society simply did not understand his message. Lear's actions stand as the defiance of an individual for the whole social system which he saw as directly causing his failure. By denying the agents of society the possibility of persuading and of altering his actions, Lear undermined society's ability to use communication to harmoniously integrate individuals into the social system. In short, Lear's is a case of rhetorical failure.

In the thesis which follows I will be attempting two primary goals. As I have sought to understand the case over the course of eighteen months, I have also sought to develop a perspective on social communication which would allow for such an understanding. The current theories of communication have not been developed in such a manner as

to lend immediate comprehension of this incident. It is my primary purpose to develop a theoretical perspective which allows me to do so. The second task of the study is critical in nature. While I do not purport to give a decided or unquestionable view of the case, I shall try to use the theoretical perspective I have generated to look at the case with insight and understanding. The two goals, theoretical and critical, are merged in the thesis, and account for the somewhat oblique organization the study adopts.

In the sections which follow, I shall begin by advancing the theoretical positions of the study quite independently of the case at hand. Each section, then, shall contain a theoretical discussion and be followed immediately by a critical analysis of the case in light of the theoretical discussion. In the next section, I shall begin with Kenneth Burke's comments in A Rhetoric of Motives which suggest that such incidents might be viewed in their nature as rhetorical actions. I shall then return to the case to verify that Lear's motives were indeed of such a rhetorical nature. In the third section, I shall be dealing with Erving Goffman's work on "adaptation to social failure," which illustrates the communication patterns and options which the individual and society typically encounter in the situation of social failure. Again, the case will be viewed

in light of this development. In the fourth and final section, I will advance and summarize the theoretical position of the thesis in the terms of Kenneth Burke's theory of logology. There I will conclude that such incidents are, in principle, a consequence of a social order which must victimize the individuals it seeks to preserve. I will conclude this section with an analysis of the case which, I hope, will clarify the incident and demonstrate the applicability of critical method to social interaction.

Notes

<sup>1</sup>Carolyn Kortge, "Violence in Life Started Early for Gunman Lear," The Wichita Eagle, Dec. 31, 1976, pp. 1A, 2A.

<sup>2</sup>Tom McVey, "Davison Cried at Death Decision," The Wichita Beacon, Dec. 31, 1976, p. 1A.

<sup>3</sup>John Roe, "Men of Action . . . Waiting," The Wichita Beacon, Dec. 30, 1976, p. 8A.

<sup>4</sup>Tom McVey and Glenda Holder Elliot, "Darr Held in Hostage Exchange," The Wichita Eagle, Dec. 30, 1976, pp. 1A, 12A.

<sup>5</sup>I have summarized the content of several of the above reports and presented them in this fashion for rhetorical purposes.

<sup>6</sup>Kortge, p. 2A.

<sup>7</sup>The hearing was held in Sedgwick County District Court Number 5, Judge James L. Noone, presiding.

<sup>8</sup>The Wichita Eagle, Dec. 31, 1976, p. 2A.

<sup>9</sup>Kortge, p. 2A.



## CHAPTER TWO

Rhetoric is concerned with the state of Babel after the fall. Its contribution to a "sociology of knowledge" must often carry us far into the lugubrious region of malice and the lie.

--Kenneth Burke,  
A Rhetoric of Motives<sup>1</sup>

In the early portion of A Rhetoric of Motives, Kenneth Burke develops the key term of his contemporary philosophy of rhetoric: "identification."<sup>2</sup> The terminology which is generated in Burke's analysis, the manner in which he develops it, and the perspective which the terms offer are all of value to the present study. This brief essay will treat Burke's work as a beginning point of the theoretical view of the study.

The concept of rhetoric as identification is representative of and central to the perspective on rhetorical motivation which Burke offers. Burke sets out his rhetoric of identification in opposition to the traditional view of rhetoric as "persuasion," and suggests that with this slant on the motives inherent in rhetorical behavior the rhetorical analyst can treat many instances of social interaction which previously would not have been regarded as instances of

rhetoric. The present study, I will show, is a case in point. Whereas it might sound odd to speak of using weapons to achieve rhetorical persuasion (or persuasion via linguistic appeal), it sounds less odd and more promising to speak of using such non-linguistic devices to achieve a rhetorical identification (so as to become a symbol of someone who would use such non-linguistic devices). In a society which is beginning to bemoan the behavioral side-effects of violence in the media, such identifications seem likely.

In addition to providing a rich theoretical starting point for this study, Burke's typically obtuse examples and the critical method by which he introduces the terms of his rhetoric are relevant and useful. While most treatments of Burke's work are content to borrow his conclusions or abstract his methods, and leave the confusing examples to rest, the comments which Burke makes in the early portion of his book are especially enlightening to the case at hand. The analogous relationship between the themes he analyzes there and those of the case study perhaps proves little in terms of providing evidence, but their coincidence lends perspective and method to the case study and affirm that the author has not gone astray in selecting the case to treat as an instance of rhetoric.

Many of Burke's words in the introduction of A Rhetoric of Motives<sup>3</sup> would plausibly sanction the interests of this study. Burke's statements indicate that by viewing rhetoric as that aspect of language use whereby persons become identified to themselves and others, in the symbols they use and adopt, then rhetoric might be seen as an operating factor in actions which have been conventionally regarded as non-rhetorical in nature. Burke writes:

. . . with this term (identification) as instrument, we seek to mark off the areas of rhetoric, by showing how a rhetorical motive is often present where it is not usually recognized, or thought to belong.<sup>4</sup>

Burke further suggests that rhetoric as a discipline should be made applicable to areas or interests to which it has been denied access. In light of his broad perspective on the subject, Burke comments that the classical interests of rhetoric have been subsumed under the auspices of contemporary psychology, psychoanalysis, or sociology.<sup>5</sup>

In making the latter claim, that rhetoric may have at one time occupied a more embracing position in scholarly thought, Burke designates an area of rhetoric where motives are not explicit, and may not have been consciously possessed by the speaker or person. He writes:

But besides this job of reclamation, we also seek to develop our subject beyond the traditional bounds of rhetoric. There is an intermediate area of expression that is not wholly deliberate, yet not wholly unconscious. It lies midway between

aimless utterance and speech directly purposive.  
. . . here is a rhetorical area not analyzable  
either as sheer design or sheer simplicity. And  
we would treat of it here.<sup>6</sup>

It is perhaps this area of "dimly perceived" motives which Burke's philosophy of rhetoric opens to the scholar. While obvious and direct motives appear in social acts, such as political or economic motives, and those motives can be treated explicitly in terms of "advantage-seeking," Burke's theory predicts the existence of motives which are present by virtue of the language act itself. That is, because society and individuals are by nature "symbol-users,"<sup>7</sup> certain motives will be found in the use of symbols which are present due to the nature of society, its design, its individuals, and their proclivity for using symbols. In other words, there exist certain fundamental or essential motives in the rhetorical act, and evidence of these motives might be located in acts of language even if they are not directly perceived by the person who possesses them.

It is with the ambitious goal of discerning the essential motives of rhetoric that Burke introduces his concept of identification. Whereas traditional theories of rhetoric have stressed the persuasive aspect of rhetoric, and have the connotation of "advantage-seeking" or "attack" against an opponent, the view promoted here would understand rhetoric as "the use of language as a symbolic means of

inducing cooperation in beings that by nature respond to symbols" (*italics omitted*).<sup>8</sup> The key term here is cooperation. Rather than viewing the use of language as one whereby a person competes with or commits aggression against his or her neighbor, language use can be viewed with equal justification as a means whereby persons "cooperate" or "hold" each other in the world. In this vein, Burke would wish to renew the classical understanding of rhetoric as an "acting-together" or the achieving of "consubstantiality" ("act" being understood from the traditional realist position as "substance").<sup>9</sup> Stated briefly, rather than taking the competitive view as the central paradigm for rhetoric, the approach adopts the cooperative view as its model. In selecting the cooperative aspect of language use as the primary rhetorical function of language, one must note that the two possible views imply each other. As Burke comments: "one need not scrutinize the concept of identification very sharply to see, implied in it at every turn, its ironic counterpart: division."<sup>10</sup> Thus Burke arrives at a somewhat paradoxical view of rhetoric where both motives, competition and cooperation, can be seen as mutually operating principles. The implications present in selecting cooperation as the dominant motive of rhetoric are found in the strategies of identification which underly all discourse.

In the introduction of his book, Burke advises the reader that he or she might skip the introductory criticism and go right to the discussion of identification.<sup>11</sup> For the purposes of this treatment, however, the beginning criticism in the work is interesting, for Burke's comments there correspond to the subject matter of this case study. In demonstrating that the "hidden" motive of identification can be found in works not normally regarded as rhetorical, Burke analyzes the poems "Samson Agonistes," by Milton, and "Empedocles on Etna," by Matthew Arnold.<sup>12</sup> In the two poems one can detect, or at least Burke is able to detect, the presence of suicidal motives in the selection of imagery. Burke argues that there exists an identification between the poet and the figures which they select for their poems. Why would Milton select the figure of Samson, who commits an act of vengeance in the name of God, as one to express the author's own suicidal drives? According to Burke:

The recurring stress upon the nature of Samson's act (the element of self-destruction in his way of slaying the enemy) can be a roundabout device for sanctioning suicide; yet Milton's religion strongly forbade suicide . . . Milton found in Samson a figure ambivalently fit to symbolize both aggressive and inturning trends . . . the poetic reenactment of Samson's role could give the pretext for admitting a motive which, if not so clothed or complicated, if confronted in its simplicity, would have been inadmissible.<sup>13</sup>

Viewed in this fashion, the poem becomes a rhetorical device for expressing an unacceptable aspect of the author's

personality: Milton's suicidal tendency. The motive behind this "reenactment," in Burke's words, is the "poet's opportunity to conquer ritualistically by writing a poem that used these identifications, whereas Milton as citizen was frustrate."<sup>14</sup>

In the criticism of Lear's case which follows, the presence of suicidal motives in the actions Lear took will be examined (and the final section of this thesis hints at a more ironic relationship between Lear and Samson as "redemptive sacrifices"), but for now I wish to follow Burke's progression in his criticism. In the essay, the "suicide by means of killing" imagery which was disclosed in Milton's poem is compared to the reverse situation in Arnold's poem, where the imagery of "killing" is brought out in an act of "suicide."<sup>15</sup> Burke's footwork in this critical observation is too complicated to retrace, but what emerges from the comparison of the two poems is the possibility that the rhetorical motives for both uses of imagery are identical. In both cases, a hidden or inadmissible motive is expressed by the poets in imagery which conceals and obscures the motive. Thus, by a turn of thought, the analyst Burke is able to reduce the textual evidence to grounds for considering an underlying motive which embraces both symbolic acts.

. . . we might think of a poem which symbolized suicide by imagery of murder, or one which symbolized murder by imagery of suicide. And when

you get to that point, you need one more step to complete your thinking: you need to look for a motive that can serve as ground for both choices, a motive that while not being exactly one or the other, can ambiguously contain them both. . . . A term serving as ground for both these terms would, by the same token, "transcend" them.<sup>16</sup>

With this analysis, Burke introduces the concept of "transformation," which, understood in an oversimplified manner, is the way in which a poet or rhetor "transforms" the underlying motive into images which embody the spirit of the motive.

The concepts of "transcendence" and "transformation" are of great importance to understanding the Burkean scheme of rhetoric,<sup>17</sup> but are only of tangential interest to the current analysis. The point which should be made here is that in Burke's view of language, rhetoric, and dialectic, images or ideas which are opposite in face value can individuate and denote identical principles. It is in this fashion that Burke considers "war" as "a special case of peace." Whereas war is a state of total division, it simultaneously requires total cooperation between and among the factions at war.<sup>18</sup> Thus, when confronted with opposing and contradictory images or actions, the analyst might locate a common principle of transformation at the base of each. So it is with the cases of murder and suicide Burke is critiquing:

. . . by quoting lines from Coleridge that make murder and suicide interchangeable, we went beyond



imagery, to the subject of transformation in general. . . . and we noted that killing, being killed, and the killing of the self might all localize the same principle of transformation.<sup>19</sup>

The possibility emerges, then, that when presented in a dramatic pretext the idea of killing others and the idea of killing the self can denote the same rhetorical motive. If, like Burke, one understands the individual to be a cooperative product of society, it is possible to understand how persons might seek to symbolically kill themselves by killing others (symbolically or literally), or the reverse, killing others by immolation of the self. Such an ironic twist is at the heart of Charles Manson's cultist philosophy, which brought society "love" in the guise of mass murder. To love was to hate; to kill the other literally was to kill one's own ego symbolically.<sup>20</sup>

If it would appear that an analysis of poetry and a poet's "hidden" motives cloaked in images are somehow distinct and separate from the crude and violent actions of rhetorical cripples in society, Burke offers one further idea to make the link. The rhetorical medium of Milton and Arnold, as masters of language, 'is the poem. Yet all persons are subject to the same expressive needs and impulses; all live within the dramatic domain of society. In short, all persons are by definition born into a family of "symbol-users,"<sup>21</sup> and consequently the uses of imagery, transformations, and all the resources of language have implications for human actions.

Taken simply at its face value, imagery invites us to respond in accordance with its nature. Thus, an adolescent, eager to "grow up," is trained by our motion pictures to meditate much on the imagery of brutality and murder, as the most noteworthy signs of action in an ideal or imaginary adult world. . . . His awareness of himself as a developing person requires a vocabulary, and the images of brutality and violence provide such a vocabulary, with the simple recipe of empowering the self by the punishing and slaying of troublesome motives as though they were wholly external. One can surely expect such imagery to have sinister effects. . . . nor should we forget the possible bad effects of the many devices whereby such brutality is made "virtuous" through dramatic pretexts that justify it in terms of retaliation and righteous indignation.<sup>22</sup>

Burke's words bear directly on the case at hand in perhaps more than one way. When confronted by violence and killing in the media and film, it is possible to dismiss the incidents as drama and separate ourselves from it. When confronted with such brutality in "the drama of life," it is possible to dismiss it as the actions of insane and/or malevolent persons. Yet even murder and suicide have their rhetorical motivations insofar as a person may seek the identity that such actions and such vocabularies offer. In the desire to transform the self or to transform society, it is possible that the identifications held with such imagery supply the individual with a dramatic pretext for rhetorical persuasion. It is in this sense which Burke sees the desire to kill someone as "a desire to transform the principle which that person represents."<sup>23</sup> In the following analysis, I will consider the case of a person so rhetorically

ineffective, that the images of murder and suicide are those by which he sought to communicate himself to society.

#### A Rhetorical Motive

The implication which resides in Burke's view of rhetoric is that a person derives and creates a social identity from the labels and symbols with which he or she becomes identified. This view would then suggest that in order for one to succeed in social life one must be constantly engaged in a rhetorical struggle to acquire the kinds of identifications which he or she would wish to possess, and to discourage or transform the uncomplimentary labels which society would thrust upon the individual. An understanding of the self's social activities as such a struggle is perhaps the best way to begin Larry Lear's story.

Lear was twenty-nine years old at the time of his death. He had spent seven of his final eight years in a mental institution and in the last year of freedom had attempted to begin a new life. Lear had been placed in the institution as a result of criminal litigation over a rape charge. A local psychiatrist had determined at that time that Lear was "psychotic," or "psychopathic," and consequently Lear was removed from society. During the last four or five years that Lear was institutionalized, Attorney Warren Eisenbise,<sup>24</sup> later to become one of the hostages, had worked to have Lear freed. The doctors at the mental

hospital where Lear stayed had determined that he was not "psychopathic," as the previous doctor had diagnosed, but rather that he was "sociopathic." Since there was no "cure" for this condition there was no reason for his institutionalization. The doctors at the hospital could not ethically state that Lear had been restored from a condition that he did not possess (psychosis) and he could not legally be released without such a statement. After a long struggle, Lear won the battle of the labels and had been released.

I do not know what Lear's feelings or problems were in building a new life. It was said, though, that the last year had been the most calm in his turbulent life. Lear had developed a relationship with a woman, Ms. Lonnie Bean, who also later would be one of the hostages. They had been living together prior to the incident, and the relationship had begun to deteriorate some months before the "final act." It was during this long and difficult disengagement that Lear conceived of what he called his "master plan," a plan of gaining vengeance against those who had sent him away initially. During these final months Lear had encountered frustration and failure. He had wished to regain custody of his son, and that had not happened. Three weeks before the December incident he had threatened to kill the governor of Kansas unless custody was restored to him. The police had detained Lear during the governor's visit to the area.<sup>25</sup>

The "master plan" which Lear had nurtured in what must have been a state of frustration is a point of some ambiguity in the story. The psychologist, Pickard, knew of this plan but could not divulge information because of professional confidences. Whatever its detailed substance, the "master plan" was a clear indication of Lear's motive to strike back against society for the injustice he felt he had suffered at the hands of its agents. The actions which Lear took on December 29 seem to have been inspired by this plan but were not in fact the original design. The plan had been modified by confusion, compromise, the flow of events, and input from others during the chaos of the day.

Clearly the motives and images contained in Lear's conception of the master plan were homicidal in nature. He sought vengeance and retribution against police and psychiatrists, and perhaps legal officials, who had ruined his life beyond repair. We know from the psychologist that this plan contained future plans for his life with his girlfriend, so he must not have expected to die as a result of his actions. Here confusion occurs. In the court hearings which took place following the incident, a neighborhood woman from Haysville testified to Lear's "suicidal" motive, and the idea of Lear's actions as a suicidal mission seems to pervade all accounts of the situation.<sup>26</sup> The woman claimed that Lear had been at her home a few days prior to the

incident. There Lear had spoken with his son by telephone in a very emotional exchange. According to the woman's testimony, Lear had asked his son if he knew how his great-grandfather died, and told the boy to ask his grandmother (Lear's mother had custody of his son). Lear then told the boy that his great-grandfather had committed suicide, that "he put a gun to his head and blew it off." Lear added, "that's what's going to happen to your daddy," and that "you'll never see me again except on TV."<sup>27</sup>

According to the testimony of the woman, Lear had indicated that he "knew he was going to die soon." Because Lear had lost his woman and his son, he felt that he had no reason to live. Lear made a comparison between himself and Jesus Christ, saying that no one would listen to him now, but that they would after he had died. Lear indicated that when he went, he would take a lot of people with him, people that "had let bad things happen to him."<sup>28</sup> The significance of this testimony to the judgment of the court is impossible to gauge, but it is clear that in some sense the actions of the police in shooting Lear were justified by Lear's expressed suicidal and homicidal intentions. The validity of these intentions and Lear's commitment to them is also impossible to determine, and the issue constitutes the greatest source of ambiguity in any attempt to decide what in fact Lear hoped to accomplish through his actions.

The issue of suicidal motivation in this case is of paramount importance. First, the role of the hostages in the affair is involved. If Lear had indeed been committed to a suicidal act, then they were not there for the purpose of "helping" him, but rather as scapegoats. Hence, the failure of the hostages to help Lear is justified because that was not the reason for their being there. On the other hand, if Lear's motivation were not suicidal, and not primarily that of vengeance, then the hostages failed to provide Lear with a reason for living. The paradox is calmed, from the viewpoint of the hostages, by the fact that Lear's homicidal motives were quite clear and convincing, thus placing unopposable constraints on their actions regardless of the intent or outcome of his actions.

At a methodological level, however, the issue is even more important. If Lear's motives were purely homicidal, then they should be treated with an emphasis on their competitive, aggressive, advantage-seeking nature. Lear would have wished to kill others in order to advance his own state of well-being. In the deaths of the hostages, Lear would be justified for his failures (in a criminally convoluted sense); he would be redeemed and happy. The case would be one of division and divisive actions. The presence of the suicidal motive, however, lends a sense of the cooperative spirit to the event. By virtue of their

collective deaths, Lear and the hostages would all cooperate in justifying and redeeming this failed self. In death, Lear and his tormentors would become equal (and identified). While this did not happen, Lear did initiate the process of cooperation in social agents whereby his death was achieved.<sup>29</sup>

The cooperative aspect of Lear's actions is revealed in his comments to the minister soon after the final hostage exchanges had been made. The minister, who had felt secure by virtue of his profession, had begun conversing with Lear to find out the difficulty:

and I said, "now you've asked me to come in so it's obvious that you want me in here." He began then, as he did a number of times -- he commanded the conversation. He said, "You're in here because I have a plan. This is my plan, I have a purpose in this. I want representatives from law, representatives from psychiatry, from the legal profession, I want a minister here. I want these people, I have a purpose." He said, "You're just a pawn." He said, "I wasn't going to hurt the children, I wouldn't have hurt them." He said, "I brought you in here for a purpose. You all are going to set here and you're going to be the jury, and I'm going to present my case. And you're going to hear me."<sup>30</sup>

Lear introduced at this time the concept which he had of the purpose of the ordeal. The panel of professionals was to be a blue ribbon jury assembled to judge Lear's life. Lear sought justification for his life of failure, and the jury was to provide him with that justification. Throughout the afternoon Lear referred to this proceeding as "Caesar's court," where the "law of the gun" was the source of



decision.<sup>31</sup> In other words, under threat of murder the jury was to bring in an innocent verdict on Lear's failure.

Present in this case, then, is a series of confusing and compounding contradictions which tend to obscure the reasoning behind Lear's actions. The paradoxical statements of Lear, the crudely symbolic nature of his actions, and the constant shift of his moods and actions between a spirit of compromise and one of total hostility, had left the hostages (and me) in a state of bewilderment about the motives he had.<sup>32</sup> It is perhaps at this point that the study should take a hint from Burke's critical strategies. Confronted with images which are opposite in face value, those of suicide and homicide, cooperation and competition, and identification and division, the analysis should inquire into the basis for all these choices. As in Burke's work, this move leads to the consideration of a rhetorical motive in Lear's actions which was transformed into these images, and transcends the paradox they represent.<sup>33</sup>

One does not have to dig deeply into the case to recognize a rhetorical motive at work. Lear expressed several times the need for his story to be communicated to society. Lear presented the situation to the hostages with images of both homicide and suicide as possible outcomes. The purpose of these deaths was to be the publicizing of his story to the world. The minister recalls Lear's words:

He said then, "My story will be emphasized because you will have heard it. And you will make a decision, and the decision you make . . . your lives will hang on the decision you make." Then a little later on he said, "It doesn't really make any difference the decision you make, because I intend to emphasize what takes place here by killing you. You'll all die. I want the world to hear me. Not only do I want to be heard here, I want the world to hear me."<sup>34</sup>

Murder, suicide, and death were to become the dramatic pretext for Lear's actions. The world would somehow understand why Lear had to murder these people, and would approve. The case appears to be much like the one which Burke forecasts, where the many dramatic pretexts which promote brutality by making it "virtuous" and "justify it in terms of retaliation and righteous indignation" supplied Lear with the vocabulary necessary to justify himself. (There is ample subjective evidence to consider Lear as "an adolescent, eager to 'grow up.'")<sup>35</sup>

If the point is not obvious enough, one more "image" from Lear helps to complete the thought. When telling his son of his upcoming death, Lear told the boy that he would see his father on TV.<sup>36</sup> Lear clearly expected that his actions would receive wide publicity and human interest (which in fact they did not). Orin Klapp has written on the impact of an available public medium on the actions of people in society:

One of the peculiarities of the dramatic domain is that a public drama cannot be confined to the billed

performers; almost anyone can steal the show. Nor does it require remarkable abilities or achievement. Even a lunatic threatening a crowd or a desperate man about to jump off a roof is, for the moment, a star, (if not the hero) of the show.<sup>37</sup>

Lear was apparently seeking out the media as a dramatic pretext for telling his story. This is further indicated by the fact that during the afternoon, Lear would listen intently to the radio reports (the reports I heard in my car), and become angry, saying: "They're not getting it right."<sup>38</sup> Lear also was not alone in selecting his method of gaining the public's attention. In the eighteen months surrounding the incident, ten other hostage situations which involved the airing of a personal grievance or complaint received national publicity.<sup>39</sup> Many more were likely to have taken place.<sup>40</sup> Of these, Lear's case is unique in that he was the only person to be harmed or killed as a result of his actions.

Lear's rhetorical motive was quite apparent to all concerned in that he wished his story to be told to society, to be glorified as a heroic individual who defied social pressures, and to become a martyr of social injustice. These apparent motives, however, indicate a deeper level of intention and understanding in Lear's actions, a level of which Lear himself may have been only partially aware. The situation of the individual against society is, in a manner of speaking, a universal situation. All persons are engaged

in the rhetorical struggle of self-definition in their social actions and roles. Consequently, Lear's actions are indicative of the social processes whereby all derive and sustain a social identity. That in this case the process is so miserably and disastrously failed warrants a closer investigation of the processes involved.

The study has noted from Burke's work with rhetoric that there exist motives of a rhetorical nature which inhere in linguistic acts by virtue of the social design. That is, essential and fundamental motives of identification can be located in symbolic choices because individuals are unavoidably engaged in a rhetorical situation whenever they interact with society. A thorough examination of these fundamental motives which exist in rhetorical behavior and are reflected in this case shall occupy the remainder of the study.

Directly, though, I should like to consider the identifications which Lear created in a crudely symbolic fashion, for they disclose Lear's understanding of himself and his actions and the situation in which he found himself acting.

Perhaps the most clearly and continually expressed images offered by Lear during the course of the ordeal was the reference to "Caesar's court" and "the law of the gun." The role of the hostages as an impressed jury signifies the nature of the event as a kind of final judgment of Lear's failures. Throughout the analysis, then, I am admonished to

look for the role of justice and justification as motives in rhetorical acts. I do not know if Lear had any awareness of the historical Caesar, and I suspect that Lear chose the figure as a power emblem which signified his tyrannical rule over the situation and his ability to demand justice on his own terms. There is more than slight irony in the fact that Caesar was killed, by his friends and enemies, for the protection of the state.

Lear's identification of himself with the figure of Jesus Christ might also lend some depth to understanding how he saw himself in relation to society. While the identification with Christ is frequently documented in the psychiatric understanding of "martyr" complexes, this in itself might be significant in examining the individual's role in society. Christ's act was no less suicidal than Lear's, for he allowed the authority to put him to death as a social undesirable. In the crucifixion, all humankind was redeemed and justified by sacrifice. All sins and failings were forgiven. In the last section of the thesis, the religious analogue will be examined more closely as it reveals a cycle of social processes implicit in the human situation.

In the next section, the role of communication behavior in the identity of the individual will be viewed with an emphasis on values, commitments, and beliefs and their role in constituting an individual's social identity. Erving

Goffman's work with the communication patterns of social failure is the key theoretical contribution of the section. The case will then be examined in light of this contribution.

Notes

<sup>1</sup>Kenneth Burke, A Rhetoric of Motives (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), p. 23.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., throughout, esp. pp. 1-46, 55-59.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. xi-xv.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., pp. xiii.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Burke, "Definition of Man," Language as Symbolic Action: Essays on Life, Literature, and Method (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), pp. 3-24.

<sup>8</sup>Burke, A Rhetoric, p. 43.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 21. See also Burke's A Grammar of Motives (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), pp. 21-26, 227-274.

<sup>10</sup>A Rhetoric, p. 23.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. xiii.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., pp. 3-11.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., pp. 7-8.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., pp. 10-11.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., pp. 10-13.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 20. See also, A Grammar, pp. 328-333.

<sup>19</sup>A Rhetoric, p. 17.

<sup>20</sup>See Vincent Bugliosi's account of the Manson case in his book Helter Skelter (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1974).

<sup>21</sup>Burke, Language as Symbolic Action, pp. 3-24.

<sup>22</sup>A Rhetoric, pp. 17-18.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>24</sup>The above and following information concerning Lear's institutionalization is from an interview with Attorney Eisenbise, June 24, 1977.

<sup>25</sup>Bob Heaton and Tom McVey, "Police Warned of Leer (sic)," The Wichita Beacon, Dec. 30, 1976, pp. 1A-8A.

<sup>26</sup>When pushed for an explanation, the "suicidal" motive was the only possibility the hostages could offer, and each expressed this possibility (more or less) independently. The suicidal account was the opinion expressed indirectly by Mr. Pickard's senior associate, Dr. Henderson, in a conversation with Pickard on June 27, 1977. I should note that the interviewees did not assert this interpretation as fact, but as the most likely possibility given Lear's willingness to die. The suicidal account is also strongly suggested in the testimony and questioning during the court hearings of January 6, 1977, quoted in the following paragraph. A suicidal motive is also reflected in the newspaper account which quotes Lear as saying "A man has to have something to live for, and without the things that he lives for he must die." Tom McVey and Glenda Holder Elliot, "Police Slay Gunman. . . ," The Wichita Eagle, Dec 30, 1976.

<sup>27</sup>Transcript of court hearing, Jan. 6, 1977, Sedgwick County District Court #5, Judge James L. Noone, presiding.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

<sup>29</sup>Certainly there was enormous cooperation shown in the whole mechanism whereby the police arrived, set up positions, exchanged the hostages, communicated with Lear, and eventually shot him. More specifically there was great cooperation among the hostages themselves in handling Lear, and cooperation between the hostages and the police in the decision to shoot Lear.

<sup>30</sup>Interview with Rev. Byron D. Tracy, July 7, 1977. This is Tracy's recollection of the exchange.

<sup>31</sup>This information comes from the interviews with Eisenbise and Pickard, June 24 and 27, respectively, and was confirmed by the other interviewees.



<sup>32</sup>Again, none of the interviewees was in a position to assert any explanation with confidence. They were truly baffled and quite anxious to engage in hypothetical discussions of the possible motives involved. I'm confident in saying that the hostages also sought a consistent explanation of the experience they had undergone.

<sup>33</sup>It should be noted that the "images" which are available as artifacts for study are themselves dramatic reenactments of Lear's actions. The interviews with the hostages, the media coverage, the court hearings, and even the first chapter of this thesis are all accounts which select and organize the events according to dramatic consistencies and recollections. Since this study explicates the social drama which Lear created in the media, social events (like court hearings), and the minds of his audience, these dramatic reenactments are the true subject matter of the thesis.

<sup>34</sup>Tracy interview, July 7, 1977.

<sup>35</sup>This refers to the quoted material from Kenneth Burke on page 22 (note 22).

<sup>36</sup>Transcripts, court hearings, Jan. 6, 1977.

<sup>37</sup>"Dramatic Encounters," Drama in Life: The Uses of Communication in Society, James E. Combs and Michael W. Mansfield, eds. (New York: Hastings House, 1976), p. 271.

<sup>38</sup>Pickard interview, June 27, 1977.

<sup>39</sup>See "America's Menacing Misfits," Time, March 21, 1977, p. 20.

<sup>40</sup>The citation above notes a psychiatrist at Northwestern University who comments, "These crimes are highly contagious," and the article concludes that "today in the U.S. they are a virulent social illness." Further, The New York Times Magazine, April 17, 1977, p. 33, notes that a team of law enforcement officers specially trained in hostage cases had handled over 80 cases in New York alone over the previous three years.

## CHAPTER THREE

No doubt there are few positions in life that do not throw together some persons who are there by virtue of failure, and other persons who are there by virtue of success. In this sense, the dead are sorted but not segregated, and continue to walk among the living.

--Erving Goffman,  
"On Cooling the Mark Out."<sup>1</sup>

In 1952 the journal Psychiatry published the unique essay by the sociologist Erving Goffman (cited above). The essay is subtitled "Some Aspects of Adaptation to Social Failure." In the work Goffman makes a valuable comparison between the communication situation of a person who has failed in a goal or social involvement, and the underworld confidence game of "cooling the mark out." Goffman has been a prolific author in sociology and communication and has written a number of essays which use the "game" analogy to analyze communication in social settings. In this piece, Goffman is perhaps at his best in outlining the roles, strategies, and motives of persons in a specialized situation, in this instance the problem of consoling a person who has come to view himself or herself as a failure in his or her social life. Here Goffman draws implications from

this kind of communication behavior to describe a perspective on the structure of the self which might be used by social analysts. His ideas reflect those of Burke, but are designed from a view of the self rather than a perspective on society.

According to Goffman, a social situation frequently occurs where some members of society must be helped by friends, relatives, or professional counselors and psychiatrists to adapt to the realization that they have failed in a social role, suffered a personal or financial loss, or in some way have been reduced in social status. This situation can be viewed in its kinship to the game of "cooling the mark" which is practiced by underworld extortionists. These "con-games" are dramas designed to entice the "mark," or victim, into investing money in a bogus "get-rich-quick" scheme. The con artists generally play upon the mark's feeling of self-importance and desire to elevate his or her social status by "making a fast buck."<sup>2</sup> The victim, who has taken a serious loss in money and self-pride, is then in the situation of adapting to the loss. Because the con artists, or "operants," may not wish to leave the victim in a state of fury when he or she might turn to the police, commit violence against them or simply give them a bad reputation, the con artists leave behind one of their operants to console the mark and convince the victim to take the loss quietly and with dignity. The process of adjustment for the

mark and the strategies of the "cooler" are indicative of the kinds of problems and strategies which society and individuals deal with in the situation of social failure.

I consider Goffman's article in some detail because it advances the present study in several directions of importance. Goffman's analysis of the self as one which seeks consolation through a series of communication exchanges is similar to Burke's concept of identification. In the respective analyses, the use of language is viewed as a means of deriving and sustaining the identities of individuals in the domain of social interaction. Goffman advances Burke's treatment by considering the implications of this fact for an understanding of self in relation to society. Goffman further isolates and considers the general condition of social failure as one which is prevalent in society, and one which initiates the use of language to accomplish an essentially rhetorical task of sustaining individuals through strategies of identification.

In my analysis of Burke's concept of identification, the suggestion emerged that persons define themselves and the social reality in which they participate through the symbolic identifications present in linguistic acts. The acquisition of identity is then a process of personal definition through claiming the properties of a specific character or through attributions made by the members of society to one's character.

In other words, beliefs, values, commitments, relationships, social status, or other properties of character are identifications of the individual's personal character. Goffman offers much the same understanding of the role of social involvements in constructing the individual's identity. He writes:

For purposes of analysis, one may think of an individual in reference to the values of attributes of a socially recognized character which he possesses. Psychologists speak of a value as a personal involvement. Sociologists speak of a value as a status, role, or relationship. In either case, the character of the value that is possessed is taken in a certain way as the character of the person who possesses it. An alteration in the kinds of attributes possessed brings an alteration to the self-conception of the person who possesses them.<sup>3</sup>

One of the overlapping areas of psychology, sociology, and rhetoric is perhaps located in this view of values and commitments in the functioning of the self. Rhetorically, the case might be stated more bluntly: values, or personal properties, are the means whereby persons derive, sustain, and change their identities through strategic linguistic appeals.

A rhetorical view of the process of acquiring symbolic involvements in society results in a perspective on change in the individual and the ways in which it is accomplished. The knowledge that identifications of this sort are the manner and means of personal change implies that the process of self-change is intimately bound with the acquiring

or shedding of values. Goffman speaks to this point:

The process by which someone acquires a value is the process by which he surrenders the claim he had to what he was and commits himself to the conception of self which the new value requires or allows him to have. It is the process that persons who fall in love or take dope call getting hooked.<sup>4</sup>

Thus the existence of a person's values and involvements and their susceptibility to change tends to construct the rhetorical arena in which the self operates. Those changes in self which are demanded or allowed by changes in values represent a process of adjustment and strategic communication with other members of society.

Goffman considers what is implied about the "structure of the person" in the view that an individual is defined, changed, and restricted by the values and relationships in which he or she becomes involved. Goffman sees the person as one who must adapt to the socially recognized facts about himself or herself, and who seeks to manipulate those facts to his or her own benefit. He writes:

From the point of view of this paper, a person is an individual who becomes involved in a value of some kind--a role, a status, a relationship, an ideology--and then makes a public claim that he is to be defined and treated as someone who possesses the property in question. The limits of his claims, and hence the limits to his self, are primarily determined by the objective facts of his social life and secondarily determined by the degree to which a sympathetic interpretation of those facts can bend them in his favor.<sup>5</sup>

The rhetorical flavor of this description of self should not be overlooked. Again the individual is viewed as one who must construct, sustain, and defend a viable social identity through making and maintaining effective rhetorical identifications. The manipulation of the symbolic reality of values through rhetorical devices is then a common faculty which all persons possess and exercise continually. The view here is quite compatible with Burke's definition of man as a "symbol-using animal," insofar as such activity is considered basic to human attempts at social survival.

Goffman's analysis of the "cooling" game is a study of the communication exchange which accompanies a personal failure of the type I have described. While the loss or failure may be constituted by any kind of disappointment or in any degree, the principle involved in the "art of consolation" is the same. In cooling the mark out, the cooler gives the mark instruction in the "philosophy of taking a loss." Goffman adds:

In essence, then, the cooler has the job of handling persons who have been caught out on a limb, persons whose expectations and self-conceptions have been built up and shattered. The mark is a person who has compromised himself, in his own eyes if not in the eyes of others.<sup>6</sup>

It should be added that Goffman sees the cooling game as pervading the entire arena of social communication in variant forms. Again, this is because the response of consolation normally accompanies almost all instances of loss and failure

--it is a social expectation to participate in the cooling game. Goffman writes:

So, too, the disappointment of reasonable expectations, as well as misguided ones, creates a need for consolation. Persons who participate in what is recognized as a confidence game are found in only a few social settings. But persons who have to be cooled out are found in many. Cooling the mark out is one theme in a very basic social story.<sup>7</sup>

In recognizing the pervasiveness of the theme in society, wherein one might speculate that cooling is a perpetual function of everyday communication, a view of social communication might be suggested which coincides neatly with Burke's view of cooperation in language use. This view would suggest that in the communication exchange persons tend to cooperate in "sustaining" each other through the failures, losses, and disappointments of life. Insofar as our failures are common and typical of everyday life, others can identify with the failure and assure us that our identities and self-conceptions are not threatened by the failure. To the extent that our failures are personal, and identify us as failures, there will be division between persons. Cooling is a use of language to make competition appear to be or function as cooperation in the individual's situation of failure.

Goffman devotes much of his essay to the investigation of the ways and means of cooling the mark out in a variety of differing social settings. In the Lear incident, this analysis might have been of some use to the hostages had they been aware of it before their experience. The role of



the mark and the experiencing of failure is of more immediate interest, for the process of cooling is a time of adjustment or self change, and here the rhetoric of the process reveals itself. Goffman writes:

For the mark, cooling represents a process of adjustment to an impossible situation--a situation arising from having defined himself in a way which the social facts have come to contradict. The mark must therefore be supplied with a new set of apologies for himself, a new framework in which to see himself, and judge himself. A process of redefining the self along defensible lines must be instigated and carried along.<sup>8</sup>

The strategy of the cooler is then to create the situation wherein a person is able to make such a personal redefinition. It surely must require an approach of acceptance and total identification with the mark in order to defend or validate the "new" self which is being forged. It involves assuring the mark that the loss is not self-destructive, or that the loss does not risk the mark's personal worth. This has been the experience of "rape-victim support workers," who find that they must supply the rape victim with "total support" and can do little else for the victim.<sup>9</sup> In this situation, the cooler must sustain the individual who has been defaced by a violent and personal loss. The victim may see herself as having suffered a loss in status, self-esteem, or even her sense of moral worth. As Goffman said, the situation is an impossible one--for there is no way to regain the lost self-conception. The cooler's job is to

provide support and validation for the adjusted identity which the victim creates or salvages from the victim's former self.

The structure of the cooling game is then a cooperative linguistic venture into sustaining the selfhood of a person who has been confronted with undeniable evidence that he or she is not who he or she has claimed to be. That it is possible for a person to be cooled out or sustained in this fashion is an indication that identity is structured in a manner which allows the option of changing selves and of surviving social invalidation. One implication of this view is that the person is not defined by any one of his or her values or social involvements exclusively, but that an individual is more than the sum of his or her social roles. Goffman adds:

. . . one must take note of what is implied by the fact that it is possible for a person to be cooled out. Difficult as this may be, persons regularly define themselves in terms of a set of attributes and then have to accept the fact that they do not possess them--and do this about-face with relatively little fuss or trouble for the operators. This implies that there is a norm in society persuading persons to keep their chins up and make the best of it--a sort of social sanitation enjoining torn and tattered persons to keep themselves packaged up. More importantly still, the capacity of a person to sustain these profound embarrassments implies a certain looseness and lack of interpenetration in the organization of his several life activities.<sup>10</sup>

The social tendency, or "norm," which Goffman describes here might further indicate the position stated earlier: society

is organized and functions cooperatively to sustain its individuals in the face of inevitable failures. The fact that persons are constructed in a "loose" or pliable fashion emphasizes the rhetorical function of language in the identity of the individual. In what Burke has called "the Scramble, the Wrangle of the Market Place"<sup>11</sup> we find the compromises and contradictions encountered by what Maurice Natanson has termed "the journeying self."<sup>12</sup>

If in Goffman's analysis of failure he indeed has found evidence that persons are constructed such that their communication behavior integrates conflicting elements of their social life and conflicting identifications in social life, then it is perhaps wise to return to the situation which prompts these responses. The condition of failure is the exigence of the kind of rhetorical process I have been defining, and Goffman concludes his essay with a consideration of the implications such a process in society holds for the analyst. Failure, in the terms which Goffman prescribes, can be viewed as a cause of "death of self," although not the death of person. He writes:

A man who requires cooling out is a person who can no longer sustain one of his social roles and is about to be removed from it; he is a person who is losing one of his social lives and is about to die one of the deaths possible for him.<sup>13</sup>

The death of self is a condition inspired by social failure which requires that the resources of language and social

interaction function to promote a symbolic rebirth of self if the person is to survive in a state of relative happiness. Death and rebirth on this symbolic level of interaction indicates that a process of change is present and it is to some extent a codified process. That rhetorical behavior supplies the means of rebirth of the individual affirms that the study has here uncovered a fundamental and essential function of language in the social design. Failure should then be investigated as to its prevalence in society and the mass effects that it has on social organization and the staging of public drama.

As Goffman assays a perspective on the role of failure in social phenomena, he notes that the failures of society are many times earmarked as failures and separated from society by geographically divisive means. He notes:

There is, first of all, the dramatic process by which persons who have died in important ways come gradually to be brought together into a common graveyard that is separated ecologically from the living community. For the dead, this is at once a punishment and a defense. Jails and mental institutions are, perhaps, the most familiar examples, but other important ones exist.<sup>14</sup>

Goffman then lists a series of institutions which can be considered "failure graveyards," such as old-folks' homes, rooming houses, hobo-jungles and so on. Additionally he considers the possibility that not all failure is so labelled and organized, but that failure is so prevalent in society that nearly all positions combine persons who have succeeded

and those that have failed.<sup>15</sup> It is also a feature of the cooling game that many persons successfully cloak or define their failures in such a way that they are not immediately apparent. This would seem to be a key function of the rhetoric of failure.

#### The Mark Refuses Cooling

Larry Lear's life history was one of social failure. Whether the clinical term "sociopath" was accurate in his case I am in no position to judge, but it seems evident that he had been unable to maintain a successful social identity and gain the acceptance from society that he wished to have. Lear had climbed from the "failure graveyard" mental institution and pursued a new life in society. For him to be rejected by the woman he was living with, her family, and his own family, must have constituted a grave failure for his "new self," and one which caused him to see his entire life as a consistent failure. The social game of "cooling" had not effectively sustained Lear; he had not cloaked or disguised his failure, transformed his past, adapted to his loss, or succeeded in finding validation for his changed self. Lear saw himself as a "mark" of society, conned by its agents, and this time no one had been left behind to cool him out.

If Goffman's analysis of the cooling game is accurate, then it might be expected that Lear was quite familiar with

the procedure and outcome of this game. Lear had been in and out of trouble since adolescence, he had demonstrated a pattern of "seeking recognition in violence," and most likely he had been cooled by friends, relatives and professionals many times in his adult life. Most importantly, Lear had spent those years in a mental institution where he was constantly involved with society's most professional coolers --psychiatrists. Lear, then, was experienced in the role of mark and could anticipate the strategies normally employed in bringing the failed individual to a conciliatory frame of mind.

An interesting parallel develops here between Goffman's version of the cooling game and some comments made by Kenneth Burke in Permanence and Change. In a section entitled "Secular Conversions," Burke treats psychiatric therapy in terms of a process of converting the patient to a different world-view. The implication here for the case study is that Lear was not only familiar with, but perhaps conditioned to, the kind of "refocus" which psychiatrists offer to the patient as a means of "curing" their psychological failings. Burke writes:

From our standpoint, psychoanalysis can be treated as a simple technique of non-religious conversion. It effects its cures by providing a new perspective that dissolves the system of pieties at the roots of the patient's sorrows or bewilderments.<sup>16</sup>

As in Goffman's analysis, the process of treating failure is viewed as a kind of conversion, wherein the mark or patient is supplied with a new set of apologies and defenses. Yet this analysis pushes this conclusion even farther, for Burke is suggesting that the conversion involves the supplanting of the old self with a new perspective which redefines the most basic of the patient's convictions. He continues:

We need not be surprised to find evidence that, in the rebirth engineered by the psychoanalytic seer, the processes of recovery from one's effective disorders are closely interwoven with a shifting of one's intellectualistic convictions, one's terminology of cause, purpose, and prophecy. Theory plays a large part, not only in the technique of the physician, but in the patient's response. Psychoanalysis may be described as a new rationalization, offered to the patient in place of an older one which had got him into difficulties.<sup>17</sup>

If we can assert with confidence that Lear had been supplied with the new "rationalization," and that he had incorporated basic psychoanalytic tenets into his reformed self-perspective, then it might also be the case that when Lear's new life failed, the therapeutical substitute which he had acquired through treatment was invalidated. In other words, Lear had converted from the old self to one which included a psychiatric rationalization for his shortcomings. When the new self failed, Lear's failure was not directed towards the self to which he was most deeply committed, but rather the self to which the psychiatrists had converted him was discredited. This would help to explain why Lear had conceived

his master plan as an act of vengeance against psychiatrists, and why he wished to enact his final drama in their presence.

Lear's master plan, so much as I know of it, was a scheme to get revenge against society and in particular, psychiatrists. Although each of the hostages sensed the symbolic meaning in Lear's words and actions and felt that they were taken as representatives of their professions in this revenge scheme, I doubt very strongly that Lear had any of these particular people or their professions in mind when he began the day.<sup>18</sup> I believe that Lear enacted his master plan that day by taking the children hostage and demanding psychiatrists. Mrs. Horinek, knowing no other way to accommodate, offered Mr. Pickard's counseling firm or Mr. Pickard personally. The Sheriff takes credit for beginning the negotiations with Lear and for helping to assemble the hostages there. Lt. Drowatsky volunteered to go in, the Chaplain had just been on duty and the Sheriff suggested to Lear that a minister could be helpful. Lt. Minor had helped Lear in his youth and was a figure of trust and respect for Lear. There is reason to believe that Lear had no symbolic reasons to kill him (Lear expressed regret at the possibility); Lear's desire to kill his attorney, Eisenbise, is not at all clear in his actions; and Lear promised that he would not harm Ms. Bean in any way. I believe these persons were there as the result of negotiations and because they had



potential influence over Lear. I think further that Lear was persuadable at times during the day, and that the symbolic interpretation of his motives must accommodate the input from the hostages. Lear's master plan was the key to his motives in initiating the events of the day, but it was modified and adapted to the chaos of events and persuasions of others.

Goffman's "cooling" metaphor works well to explain a portion of what went on in the encounter between the hostages and Lear. The hostages believed initially that the situation they were going into required them to console and persuade an angry "madman" who was desperately in need of help. Although the possibility that they would be made "sacrifices" was clear, each reluctantly and more or less voluntarily permitted himself or herself to be put in the role of cooler. Each of the hostages was brought because of his or her potential as a "cooler": the Sheriff and the Chaplain had been in several similar situations and had persuaded the agent to submit; Attorney Eisenbise and Lt. Minor had both had dealings with Lear before and had been successful in helping him; Lt. Drowatsky openly volunteered his services in the situation; the psychologist presumably had expertise in such matters as a counselor; and Lear's girlfriend was brought to the scene because she might have the influence over Lear that was needed. The role of the

hostages, as they perceived it and executed it, was that of persuader--they were to persuade Lear that his actions were futile and that giving up would be the best course for him. They did this initially to save the lives of the children and to help Lear; they did it ultimately to save their own lives.

The case of persuasion which resulted can be better understood by recognizing the position of the hostages as that of coolers, and of viewing Lear's actions and motives as those of a failure who sought recognition, acceptance, and self-change through commandeering his own version of the cooling game--one where he would be in charge and would do the persuading. Lear sought to justify and redeem his "old self" by gaining the symbolic adherence of society's agents who had previously rejected him, and through his heroic actions he wished to transform his public self from one of failure to one of heroism and martyrdom. He did not seek the cooperation of society in changing and renewing his self-concept, but rather he sought to resist the forces of self-change to which he had often been subjected. Lear had reasoned that society itself was the con, and that the professional coolers (psychiatrists) that he had trusted were in on the con. He wanted vengeance against them and he wanted to win at their game.

The question of Lear's persuadability and the actual influence of the hostages in the outcome of the ordeal is of some consequence in trying to understand what happened. The hostages, when asked why they were unable to persuade Lear to give himself up, generally responded by remarking about the symbolic motive which Lear expressed, that of gaining vengeance against their professions. Yet they all recalled their own efforts and strategies during the day, many times with pride and a sense of accomplishment, and concluded that they had influenced the events and Lear's actions at times. They all remarked that the mood of the interaction seemed to shift back and forth between success and futility. Lear had periods where he would exhibit great compliancy and others where he would be totally threatening. For the hostages, the encounter was a drama which had an uncertain ending--and they were there to help decide the outcome. They were constantly engaged in a persuasive struggle to define the consequences of Lear's actions in a positive light. They made agreements which would never have held up in court, called judges and signed documents which were meant to appease Lear's requests, and told what the minister called "half-truths" in order to get Lear under control. Although Lear seemed to respond to this kind of placation favorably, the hostages concluded that Lear was only toying with them. They had the feeling of being "pawns" in his scheme.

Perhaps the failure of the hostages to persuade Lear from the tragic conclusion he offered is more understandable in light of Lear's experiences and goals in the situation. Lear undoubtedly considered himself as a misunderstood individual who had been unfairly rejected by society and those persons important to him. This had been a life-long process for him--the significant failure to which his family could point was Lear's accidental shooting of his brother when Lear was an adolescent. Lear had suffered from social rejection (and we might speculate, guilt) throughout his life, and when he was shunned by his woman and his family he considered it as part of the consistent injustice he had always encountered in his dealings with others. Lear had submitted to social expectations in the mental institution, "reformed" himself, and now met with the same familiar rejection. He did not seek the help of society in refurbishing his failed self, rather the success of his life-image depended upon his being able to refuse and control such "help." For Lear to redeem his self-worth in his own eyes and those he sought to convince, he must defy the influence of society's coolers. The only way he could succeed was to go ahead with his plan and kill the symbolic panel he had assembled, even if these were not the hated others he had planned upon. The gesture would still be a way of communicating his life of frustration and abuse to the world.

The interaction which took place was a version of the cooling game that had a strange new twist, but the persuasion which went on reveals some of the strategic ploys which Goffman notes in his essay. The hostages had to promote a view of the situation as one which was cooperative in spirit. They were irrevocably in the position of coolers, and, realizing that they were also the symbolic representatives of the "con" which Lear was avenging, they had to begin by building a position of trust which their professional identities had obscured. The psychologist was never in such a position, simply by his proximity to the psychiatric profession, and he recalls spending most of the time seated quietly or doing innocuous duties like making coffee. His presence was most significant, but he had no persuasive foothold in his dealings with Lear except in matters of fact concerning the possibility of Lear's further treatment.<sup>19</sup> The Sheriff, too, was not in a position to gain Lear's trust. At one point the Sheriff made an attempt to disarm Lear which failed, and he was forced to lie on his front on the floor with a gun at his head for a few minutes.<sup>20</sup> After this incident, it is doubtful if he had any real persuasive input in terms of bringing Lear to a new perspective on his life.

The person who did seem to inspire trust in Lear was the minister. He, of course, had a professional ethos which would make this possible and considerable experience in

dealing with threatening situations. The minister was able to engage Lear in unheated conversation and to disagree with Lear in a more amiable way than the others. They discussed the religious ramifications of Lear's actions and plans, and this discussion led to a telling lack of identification between the hostages' honest values and the extent to which they were willing to compromise those values to identify with Lear. The minister confronted Lear with the "sinful" nature of his actions--God would not condone the murder which Lear saw as justified. To this Lear replied that "God will understand my reasons. . .", and the conversation ended.<sup>21</sup>

The other members of the hostage panel had varying degrees of success in their relationship with Lear. The attorney seemed to have a non-threatening status, but his activities were very much limited to the legalistic duties of convincing Lear that he could arrange for his son's return and releasing Lear from criminal liability. His activities centered upon phoning judges and drawing up documents to provide Lear with the belief that he could in fact survive the event without social retribution. These documents, of course, were not valid and would not have insured Lear's freedom once he had submitted. The attorney felt that Lear knew he was being conned.<sup>22</sup>

The two persons who had Lear's trust and who influenced the events the greatest were Lt. Minor and Lear's

girlfriend. Lt. Minor was instrumental in the whole affair as a liaison between the police outside and the action inside. Minor was perhaps the most aggressive in dealing with Lear and trying to persuade him to submit, but evidently his singular efforts were not enough. Minor knew before the others that the decision to shoot Lear had been made, and during the final minutes he tried desperately to convince Lear to "get on with it," "Let's go." Minor was perhaps the most embittered by the failure to dissuade Lear from his choice. The other hostages, not knowing that the decision had been made, were alarmed at Minor's aggressiveness and were afraid that he would set Lear off in a murderous rage. They all recalled the intensity and fear of the final moments before the shot came through the window.

Lear's girlfriend, Ms. Bean, was the key to the failure and ineffectiveness of the hostage panel. Lear's trust in her was absolute, and rightly so, for she flatly refused to participate in the con. She had been coached before entering the home to try and appease Lear, to say what he wanted her to say or do whatever she must to get Lear to submit. Yet she would not consider or even discuss the possibility of returning to Lear. Lear's comments were something like this: "You had better convince her to come back to me or you're all dead." While we do not know what the outcome would have been had she complied, the hostages

felt that her refusal to cope with the situation and lie to Lear was the greatest impediment to their progress.

The hostages sought throughout the day to inspire cooperation and to define the outcome of the situation in terms acceptable to Lear. The cooperation among the hostages, with the possible exception of Ms. Bean, was great. Even the psychologist felt "very much at one with the group." Their cooperative venture failed, however, because they could not make Lear's deviancy seem normal. The objective facts of the situation, Lear's life, and the possible future could not be bent far enough subjectively to warrant persuasion from his original course of action. In Goffman's terms, Lear's "socially recognized character" could not be reinterpreted sympathetically to his advantage. The hostages were not able to define the reality in a way which would absolve Lear's guilt and failure because the objective evidence was simply too great to be overcome--he could not, in society's eyes, be viewed as a success. Society could not approve these actions, remold its view of Lear, nor provide him with the relationships he wished to have. In short, identification was impossible; re-inclusion of Lear into this select social group could not be effected; cooperation could not be had amongst all the members of this social group. Lear had defined the division between himself and the others absolutely in his use of weapons, schemes, and threats of homicide.



Although the analysis of the case seems to conclude that there was no potential for persuasion on the part of the hostages, I must conclude that there in fact was both the potential and presence of persuasion in the events. The hostages can claim a great deal of success in simply delaying Lear's homicidal scheme for a long period of time. They also seemed to have periods where Lear was almost ready to comply, almost ready to believe that there was another way for him to continue on and repair his life. Had Lear gathered psychiatrists for the purpose of murdering them as scapegoats, then that might have in fact happened. Instead, he had gathered friends, loved ones, and well-meaning professionals who were not exclusively identified as Lear's symbolic nemeses. They were able to relate to Lear on different bases than the symbolic roles he had ascribed to them. The hostages developed enough trust and influence to stop Lear from the brutal conclusion he had envisioned.

We do not know what Lear's ultimate choice would have been. The version of the drama which the hostages collectively pieced together was unacceptable to Lear, or at least he did not believe that it would happen in that way. The tragic conclusion which Lear had designed seems to be the only option in which Lear could have succeeded. So long as he was acting the role of the threatening, vengeful madman,

he was in control--the persuader and hero. This, perhaps, explains why Lear would go along with their "defining" only so far; then, realizing his loss of control over the situation, he would return to his threatening posture.<sup>24</sup> Success for Lear was defined in not being persuaded, for he had been persuaded and cooled only to be taken again. The rhetorical motive, that of persuading society to accept him as he saw himself, necessitated his submission to the influence of others, as well as his maintenance of heroic control over others--and that he did. Lear's commitment was to not being persuaded; he refused to be cooled out one more time. By refusing the social ritual of rebirth whereby failures are re-included into the social fabric, Lear condemned himself to death.

Notes

- <sup>1</sup>Erving Goffman, "On Cooling the Mark Out: Some Aspects of Adaptation to Failure," Psychiatry, 26 (1952), p. 463.
- <sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 451.
- <sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 453.
- <sup>4</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 461.
- <sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 452.
- <sup>7</sup>Ibid., pp. 452-53.
- <sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 456.
- <sup>9</sup>Personal discussion with Mary E. Harrison of the University of Kansas and member of the Lawrence, Kansas, Rape Victim Support Service, February, 1978.
- <sup>10</sup>Goffman, p. 461.
- <sup>11</sup>Kenneth Burke, A Rhetoric of Motives, p. 23.
- <sup>12</sup>Maurice Natanson, The Journeying Self: A Study in Philosophy and Social Role (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Pub. Co., 1970).
- <sup>13</sup>Goffman, p. 462.
- <sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 463.
- <sup>15</sup>Ibid. (See the introductory quote.)
- <sup>16</sup>Kenneth Burke, Permanence and Change (Los Altos, California: Hermes Publications, 1954), p. 125.
- <sup>17</sup>Ibid., pp. 125-26.
- <sup>18</sup>Whether or not Lear intended to act out the master plan which he had related in previous weeks to friends is a difficult question to answer and of some importance to this interpretation. The hostages felt that Lear had hostility towards their individual professions because that is

what he communicated to them. Given Lear's situation and history, it is probably true that he disliked police, psychologists, attorneys, and perhaps even ministers. Yet these persons were more or less available or relevant to the situation for other reasons, and it is not clear that Lear requested any of them specifically or their individual professions. It is only clear that Lear wanted psychiatrists and the call went mistakenly to Pickard's counseling firm. The remainder of the hostages were there because they were suggested and Lear agreed. I was able to arrive at this judgment only by comparing the different accounts of the incident given by the hostages and the media, and reconciling the data.

<sup>19</sup>I do not mean to imply that Mr. Pickard was in any way ineffective or unimportant in the incident. He was not able to establish rapport with Lear and seems to have been the most abused in terms of verbal exchanges. Pickard recalls assuring Lear that the laws had been changed regarding the administering of drugs to mental patients without their consent. This was a concern of Lear when the possibility of his giving up was discussed.

<sup>20</sup>The Sheriff recalls that the gun actually went off, which evidently it did not. The other hostages report that the gun "clicked" as if it misfired. Whether or not Lear had intended the gun to go off and kill Darr is a good question.

<sup>21</sup>Tracy interview, July 7, 1977.

<sup>22</sup>Eisenbise felt that he had a "good" relationship with Lear before the incident. He had been active in arranging for Lear's release from the mental institution and in further legal matters. During the incident Eisenbise made arrangements for Lear's divorce (from an earlier marriage), the return of Lear's son, and for Lear's immunity from prosecution. He also talked with Lear and was important to the "cooling" process. Eisenbise said that he was sure at times that Lear was coming around, but that he (Eisenbise) could only conclude that Lear was "toying" with them (the hostages).

<sup>24</sup>I have paraphrased Pickard's comments in the June 27 interview.

<sup>24</sup>Lear's vacillation between compliancy and threat was remarked upon by all the hostages I interviewed.

## CHAPTER FOUR

The implications of a story that proceeds from order to disorder (or from obedience to disobedience) differ greatly from those of a story that proceeds in the other direction. We may say that "success" and "failure" imply each other, without equating the step from failure to success. There are also paradoxical complications whereby, for instance, a step from success to failure is at the same time a step from failure to success in other respects. And there is the possibility of a story so self-consistent in structure that an analyst could, ideally, begin at the end and deductively "prophesy" what earlier developments must have taken place, for things to culminate as they did.

--Kenneth Burke,  
The Rhetoric of Religion<sup>1</sup>

In this section I will examine the role of failure in motivating rhetorical behavior in terms of a general theoretical perspective. The chapter will conclude the study with an analysis of the case study which uses the terms of Kenneth Burke's dramatistic-religious analogue.

Thus far in the study, two theoretical positions have been examined which find a middle-ground in their views on values, commitments, and relationships, and the function of these elements in constituting the identities of

individuals. Burke investigates the structure of society as it is reflected in the structure of language use. He wants to know how language functions to express individuality and produce social cohesion at the same time. Goffman is interested in this process from the viewpoint of the self who must be involved in the social structure. He wants to know what happens when the "cohesion" fails, when an individual is not expressed, when social failure destroys one of the selves possible for a person to possess.

Implied in the two conjoined viewpoints is the notion that persons undergo a process of self-change, and are continually involved in directing and controlling this process. Language and social interaction supply the means of inducing or combatting this change, and there are generalizable situations which accompany the use of language to do so. Failure, understood in a general way as the condition of invalidation of self by society, is one such situation which initiates the use of language to define, alter, or defend the self. The strategic responses to the situation of failure constitute the rhetorical options available to the person to direct or control the inevitable course of self-change. In this view, then, failure is a situation where the individual is divided from society which leads to the necessity of rhetorical behavior to rationalize the division or produce re-inclusion with society.

One indication of the role of failure in producing social division has already been suggested. In the final portion of his essay, Goffman examined the meaning of the fact that society has "graveyards" which separate the failures from the remainder of society. Such places, like jails, mental institutions, old-folks' homes, and so on, are evidence that the identifications and labels of social discourse affect the way in which society is organized. In his comments on this phenomenon, Goffman quotes a passage from a book on the sociology of skid-row bums which describes the city's skid-row as "full of junk, much of it human, i.e., men and women who, for some reason or other, have fallen out of line with the march of industrial progress and have been scrapped."<sup>2</sup> One might note that such failure graveyards each have their own sociology, that is, patterns of communication, whereby the common identity of the failures is recognized and codified into behavioral expectations.

The passage which Goffman cites is interesting, because it is reminiscent of Eric Hoffer's observations in his essay, "The Role of Undesirables."<sup>3</sup> Hoffer had been working as a migrant field hand and had stopped for a few days in a federal transient camp of the kind that were operated in the depression. When looking around at his new environment, noting that this was his first real "group" experience of the kind, Hoffer wondered why this particular

group of people had been assembled in this specific place. He wanted to know what common thread joined the people in this situation. He noticed that many people in the camp were crippled in some fashion, and he began to do a statistical count of the afflictions people there suffered. He writes: "The simile preceded the statistical deduction: we in the camp were a human junkpile," and, "it was [as] though the majority of the men had escaped the snapping teeth of a machine and left part of themselves behind."<sup>4</sup>

This study is not interested in the role of industrialization in crippling, except to the extent that industrialization has crippled the stability of our social patterns. What is of interest, however, is the work which Hoffer began in the camp to study the role of failures in influencing the course of social history. In his book, The True Believer, Hoffer presents a similar essay entitled, "The Role of Undesirables in Human Affairs." There he writes,

The reason that the inferior elements of a nation exert a marked influence on its course is that they are wholly without reverence toward the present. They see their lives and the present as spoiled beyond remedy and they are ready to waste and wreck both: hence their recklessness and their will to chaos and anarchy. They also crave to dissolve their spoiled, meaningless selves in some soul-stirring spectacular communal undertaking--hence their proclivity for united action.<sup>5</sup>

One does not fail to notice the similar motivations of these "inferior elements" and the failures described by Goffman. The willingness to engage in rhetorical actions which seek



change is brought about by the need to repair or remedy a wrecked and ruined self.

This study examines Hoffer's work with mass movements because Hoffer's ideas work well to emphasize the implications of the conclusions I have advanced. I have suggested throughout this analysis that there exists a motive for rhetorical behavior which is present by virtue of an individual's involvement with society. Hoffer's analysis seeks much the same kind of universal motive, and he, too, posits this motive in the need for personal renewal and sustenance. This current thesis analysis attempts to understand the situation of failure as one which prompts and introduces the use of language in a fashion which "sustains" the identity of individuals. Hoffer's analysis suggests that the presence of mass movements is like a social depository for persons who need such sustenance. That movements of this kind are not only frequent, but perpetual, might indicate the importance of this social function.

The theorists examined in this study have investigated the structure of beliefs, values, and commitments, and the individual who constructs or derives an identity from those personal possessions. Hoffer focuses on the role of such ideological attributes and concludes that they are interchangeable in regard to the purposes they fulfill. Regardless of the specific doctrine, values, or faith that

persons cling to, they do so because they require the social identity that such attributes offer. He writes:

He who, like Pascal, finds precise reasons for the effectiveness of Christian doctrine has also found the reasons for the effectiveness of Communist, Nazi, and nationalist doctrine. However different the holy causes that people die for, they perhaps die basically for the same thing.<sup>6</sup>

In Hoffer's work with the structure of mass movements, he offers a taxonomy of the role characteristics involved in a movement's leaders and adherents. The resulting description of the "true believer" is a morphology of the failed and frustrated of society. Movements are forged from the malcontents who desire change, but the real motive for change is found in the need for identity and social status.

Hoffer's analysis suggests that the rhetorical impetus of the great social "dreams" lies not so much in the attractiveness of the doctrine or specific beliefs, but in the need for the self for social integration and self-change. For commitments to be understood as the expressions of weak and failed selves is not to undermine or neglect the factual goals of movements in seeking change. It is rather to understand the structure of a movement's appeal to a mass of followers as a dramatic opportunity to engage in behaviors which will bring about role definition and self-change. The adherent has the opportunity to create a new and more meaningful self by redefining himself or

herself in terms of a new commitment and goal. It is what Hoffer calls a "substitute."

When our individual interests and prospects do not seem worth living for, we are in desperate need for something apart from us to live for. All forms of dedication, devotion, loyalty, and self-surrender are in essence a desperate clinging to something which might give worth and meaning to our futile, spoiled lives. . . . A substitute embraced in moderation cannot supplant and efface the self we want to forget. We cannot be sure that we have something worth living for unless we are ready to die for it. This readiness to die is evidence to ourselves and others that what we had to take as a substitute for an irrevocably missed or spoiled first choice is indeed the best there ever was.<sup>7</sup>

The human past provides continuous evidence that persons who have been outcast, misfit, and socially undesirable have sought change through involvements with ideological and social movements. Many times, the failure of those persons has been defined by their position in a social structure which they are unable to affect. Change in self for these persons is then deeply invested in social change, and thus history reveals a continuous process of revolution among social classes.

This change of self which is sought through various types of symbolic behavior can be viewed in terms of rhetorical and psychological theory. The process whereby a self must die and be reborn is understood as "conversion" in both religious doctrine and persuasion theory. The religious analogy to social behavior, as Kenneth Burke is fond of

demonstrating, can be used to illustrate the process. The theoretical assumption is that so long as society is effective in sustaining its individuals in a purely harmonious, cooperative integration, there is no conflict and no need for rhetoric. Such a condition of complete harmony is an ideal state, and serves only as a mythic paradigm for society. When failure occurs for an individual, failure occurs for the ideal society as well. Since all persons, as individual selves, are necessarily separate from the ideal collective, there is a kind of universal division among persons which produces conflict. For this reason, Burke writes: "Stated theologically, the divisive condition which all men share is called 'original sin.'"<sup>8</sup> Original sin, perhaps restated as "ontic failure," is then seen as "the rhetorical motive indigenous to all men, not local to their social position, but characteristic of the human situation universally."<sup>9</sup> It is for this reason, too, that "rhetoric is concerned with the state of Babel after the fall."<sup>10</sup> The idea runs thus: division and conflict are the typical invitations to rhetorical behavior, and because the autonomy of the self creates universal divisiveness, there exists a corresponding universal motive for rhetorical behavior. This motive is found in the failure of the self to achieve "perfect" integration in the ideal society.

Burke's dramatistic application of religious formats to the structure of social interaction provides an intricate critical method for observing the common bases for motivation which Hoffer has noted. Burke develops this viewpoint most fully in The Rhetoric of Religion, which advances what he calls a theory of "logology."<sup>11</sup> In this elaborate criticism of the narrative structure of Biblical myth, Burke compares the structure of religious "order" with the hierarchical structure of social order. This implication is that man has fashioned social order after the hierarchy of religious symbols, and through social ritual persons participate in and fabricate the symbolic order of society.

The concept of "original sin" is central to the logological comparison of religion and society. I have described Burke's interpretation of original sin as "ontic failure," because, for Burke, the presence of original sin is implicit within the social hierarchy as a "hierarchical psychosis." That is, guilt always accompanies the inevitable division of the individual from society. The primordial guilt that is created by the futility of an individual's religious commitment to social order leads to a recurring social pattern which includes rituals of "mortification," "victimage" or "scape-goating" (religious sacrifice), all leading to potential redemption, or the re-inclusion of the individual into the social fabric. Burke states the case thus:

Insofar as all complex social order will necessarily be grounded in some kind of property structure, and insofar as all such order in its divisive aspects makes for the kind of social malaise which theologians would explain in terms of "original sin," is it possible that rituals of victimage are the "natural" means for affirming the principle of social cohesion above the principle of social division?<sup>12</sup>

In the Burkean view, then, order necessarily involves the potential for disorder,<sup>13</sup> which results in a divisive state which all persons share. Unity is then sought through rituals of victimage, or the practice of projecting one's own ills on a "substitute" which is identified with those ills. The rhetoric of this process involves a dramatic form which is patterned from the Biblical paradigm.

Burke's analysis of one of the principal terms in his logological scheme, "mortification," is crucial to understanding the cycle of behaviors implicit within the existence of a universal guilt. The necessity of an individual's self-control is grounded in the commitment to social order. It is a natural outgrowth of the conditions of governance.<sup>14</sup> The necessary failure of self-control (temptation) leads to frustration, which in turn leads to self-victimage or scapegoating. Burke describes this process:

The principle of Mortification is particularly crucial to conditions of empire, which acts simultaneously to awaken all sorts of odd and exacting appetites, while at the same time imposing equally odd and exacting obstacles to their fulfillment. For "mortification" does not occur when one is merely "frustrated" by some external interference.

It must come from within. The mortified must, with one aspect of himself, be saying no to another aspect of himself--hence the urgent incentive to be "purified" by "projecting" his conflict upon a scapegoat, by "passing the buck," by seeking a sacrificial vessel upon which he can vent, as from without, a turmoil that is actually within.<sup>15</sup>

The relationship of "scapegoating" and "passing the buck" to the study's interest in failure responses should be apparent. Burke sides with Goffman that this form of response is the product of an inner conflict in which one's self-control is at stake. Such responses are symptomatic of the struggle which all persons share to direct the course of their life-activities, to maintain control of the possible changes the social environment requires.

Burke's and Goffman's analyses also coincide in their views of failure as a kind of death. For Burke, the religious analogue provides the necessary logic to pursue the meaning of this idea to a more dramatic completion:

The step from conscience-laden guiltiness to a regimen of mortification can be narratively translated into terms of the step from "sin" to "death." It is important, because the principle of mortification is integral to the idea of redemptive sacrifice which we have associated with the idea of Order. The secular variants of mortification, we might say, lie on the "suicidal" slope of human motivation, while the secular variants of redemption by sacrifice of a chosen victim are on the slope of homicide.<sup>16</sup>

The ideas of mortification, self-sacrifice, and suicide, and those of victimage, redemptive sacrifice, and homicide, are integral to the existence of social order. They are

behaviors which are a natural consequence of an individual's failure to maintain "perfect" relationships with society. Once again, homicide and suicide are viewed as expressions of a more fundamental and essentially similar rhetorical motivation. That motive, in its essential form, is found in the individual's frustrated attempt to adapt to a social structure he or she cannot control.

The implications of Burke's theorizing offer some depth of understanding to the conflicting themes found in the case study analysis. Further, it continues and expands Goffman's intuition that the ritual of adaptation to failure constitutes a fundamental theme in the social drama. Society is organized symbolically, and often geographically, in divisions which reflect the level of the individual's integration into the "ideal" society. The divisions and individuals thus divided are earmarked by their failures and successes, and find common stations in life with others who share their social frustration. If the failed are to succeed, they must produce evidence of their conversion; they must undergo and exhibit their self-change just as a prisoner must be "reformed" or a mental patient must behave "normally."<sup>17</sup>

We should anticipate, however, that there is more at stake in this social drama than the incidental problems of persons who, for some reason or another, have missed their



mark in society. The great emphasis placed on success in society might be taken as an indicator of the great prevalence of failure in society. When persons cannot succeed in finding a role in the ideal mythic society, and this includes all of us, then they will locate or design a society (a sub-culture, cult, or profession) in which they can succeed. Thus the very existence of crime might reveal a larger social network which is made attractive because of the convoluted success it offers its practitioners. And each of the different social frameworks, professional societies, or social roles with which we typically become involved also define success in terminologies which insure rewards for correspondingly correct social behaviors. Thus the rhetoric of failure may be viewed as more than a response to a given situation for a given purpose. In its most fundamental and complete form, this rhetoric is a universal response to a universal situation which is motivated by a universal sense of purpose.

#### Conclusion

"He was consumed by his act."

--Reverend Byron D. Tracy

In the introductory quote of the foregoing section, Kenneth Burke comments that it is possible that a symbolic act could be so consistent in structure that an analyst might ideally "prophesy" the sequence of events which led

to the act. Because the available evidence for this thesis is of such a nature that standard textual analysis is impossible and judgments are recognizably speculative, this "ideal" route is perhaps the best means for analyzing the case. Admittedly, the "self-consistent" nature of Larry Lear's story has been the central question of the research and analysis I have conducted. From the beginning of my interest in the case and throughout the interviews the remarkable feature of the case was its incomprehensibility. The conflicting themes in Lear's thoughts and actions between a desperate cry for help and a threat of murderous revenge seemed to obscure the possibility of a complete and consistent analysis. Yet viewed from the theoretical perspective which I have offered in this thesis, it is possible to discern a consistent structure in Lear's story and pursue its implications. That is the goal of this concluding section.

We know that Lear was a deeply troubled individual who felt that he was forced to take desperate actions in order to regain control over his life and well-being. In Lear's "case history" there are no doubt many items of psychiatric implication which would be viewed as consistent in terms of psychoanalytic theory. But the kind of consistency sought here is a dramatic consistency in Lear's words and actions (while not denying that psychiatric models may

themselves characterize dramatic consistencies). Larry Lear left a story, a social drama; an event which he composed and directed and caused to occur for an audience which he called "the world." To understand the sense of his story one must understand it as an enactment which was generated by deeply symbolic motives; motives which might only reveal themselves in the self-consistent structure of the story itself.

Although Lear's master plan appeared to have been conceived in the spirit of retribution and victimage against psychiatrists,<sup>18</sup> who had fostered in Lear a new perspective on self and a new piety for society which did not find validation in social life, as the plan was enacted there is evidence that Lear sought compromise, acceptance, and identification with those he must victimize. There is a distinctive paradox in the roles of the hostages as both "witnesses" who must examine and judge Lear's life and testify to his mortification, and as "vessels" who must be sacrificed as symbolic representations of his failures in order to atone for his guilt. Both routes lead to justification and redemption which are the needs of the discredited individual.

In the preceding theoretical essay I have noted Kenneth Burke's characterization of this dramatic paradox. For Burke, victimage and mortification, and their corresponding cyclical counterparts, suicide and homicide, are

conjoined as coeval responses to the guilt of the individual who has failed to embrace the social hierarchy. In the second chapter of this thesis, I noted from Burke that suicide and homicide can be viewed as equivalent strategies which at base have the same rhetorical motivation. The theoretical evidence, then, should be enough to consider Lear's drama as embodying both motives simultaneously in a more transcendent and unifying motive which Burke might characterize as "sin"--and I have characterized as failure. Indeed that is the paradox with which Lear has confronted us and which constitutes the comprehensibility of his actions. Thus there is a consistency to Lear's choices which makes his case both possible and fruitful for analysis.

The symbolic coherence of Lear's actions is reflected in the structure of his enactment. Throughout the afternoon the scene shifted from a mood of compliance to one of threat. It reflected positions of compromise and division among the actors gathered there. Lear had set the dramatic possibilities in motion with his initial act and the symbolic roles of the actors were implicit within the structure of the drama. Lear had placed himself in a situation where he must choose between life and death, the comic or the tragic, and in his mind the choice was to have profound consequences for those whom his story would reach. The crucial element in Lear's story, for him, was that he was to have the choice

--he would have control over the situation and others' lives  
--and in this position of total power he could mete justice according to his own values; he could direct the events; he could be the lawgiver; he could be the rhetorical hero.

What Lear perhaps did not plan on was the agonizing difficulty of his choice. He had come to see his life in terms of death and his death in terms of life, and such inversions are probably common in the minds of the depressed and alienated. But the dramatic tensions involved in making such a tragic and futile resignation real were, in my judgment, beyond his ability to control. During the incident Lear vacillated between the possibilities of life and death as his desire for life and belonging was made to compete with his commitment to death and murder. Thus his panel of hostages must be both witnesses and victims simultaneously and simultaneously he must be both mortified and vengeful. Simultaneously he must be homicidal and suicidal, and his confrontation with that paradox constitutes the sense and failure of his act.

Burke has defined the desire to "kill" as the desire to transform the object of murder in principle. Likewise, motives of mortification and victimage also seek transformation: transforming one's self into an ideal or transforming others into an idyllic version of one's own shortcomings. In Lear's dual motive of suicide and homicide, what

transformation(s) did he seek? The evidence is clear that Lear sought to transform his personal identity into that of a martyr of social exclusion, and further that he wished to define the hostages in terms of an ideal scapegoat for revenging that unjust exclusion. It is precisely in these two rhetorical goals that Lear failed. Lear was unable to find validation in the drama for his martyrdom, and he was unable to establish a consistent rationale for considering these persons as ideal embodiments of his failings. The principal difficulties in his doing so were imposed by situational constraints and Lear's own human persuadability (which one might view as Lear's consistent failure; his "sin" or hamartia). Rather than gathering psychiatrists together in order to control them, argue with them, and ultimately murder them, Lear had gathered a group of well-meaning professionals and loved ones. Their role as sacrificial vessels could only be sustained in the most tortured and irrational sense. In the story which Lear told of his life, these persons could not feel so direct a sense of guilt and failure for his suffering; society could not understand the symbolic relationship between these persons and those who had mistreated and abused Lear. Lear's failure to complete his drama in the mode he had designed for it opened him to the possibility of persuasion, and this proved to be the weakness that he had planned against.

The dramatic fallacy of Lear's actions can perhaps be best understood in terms of identification. The identifications which he wished to sustain in the drama were those of martyr and scapegoat. That was to be the telling consistency which was communicated to the world and with which we would identify. Yet, as the story was told in the media, the audience learned only that Lear had gathered a psychologist, a minister, and an attorney at gunpoint and that he had to be shot to prevent him from murdering his hostages. The identification of Lear and his hostages in the media version of the story emphasized Lear's violent and irrational qualities and suggested, at least to me, the desperate and confused nature of his cry for help. No suggestion emerged of his symbolic motives in heroizing himself or victimizing psychiatrists. Lear was decidedly unsuccessful in communicating his motives, and this is shown in his angry responses to the radio reports and his frustration that they "were not getting it right."

An inspection of the identifications which were present in the story helps to clarify the course of events. Lear's identifications with society prior to the incident can be located in the values he expressed. Obviously psychiatrists were key figures, in a negative way, in that he held them responsible for his failure to succeed in social relations. But Lear's basis for his social identity strongly

revolved around his girlfriend and their relationship and in the desire to have his son reinstated to him (thus reinstating Lear in his role as father). Both of these identifications had been refused to him. The loss of those identity-validating roles was such that Lear began to perceive a consistent persecution of society towards himself as the consistent theme in his life's failures. Whatever the psychiatric terminology for such a mental state, when Lear began this conceptualizing he had begun to conceive of social life in dramatic formulas. In other words, Lear's already precarious social identity having been surrendered, he idealized the dramatic tensions present in his situation. The resultant view of the situation as self-against-society spawned his rhetorical response.

If the enactment of his master plan was indeed the full intention of Lear's actions on December 29--and this we do not really know--then the negotiations which resulted in the hostage exchanges were the downfall of the plan and served to change the dramatic setting to Lear's disadvantage. While the negotiations and exchanges might be criticized in terms of general police methods and were quite dangerous for those involved, the strategy of confronting Lear with persons who had past identifications with him was a rhetorically valid ploy to alter Lear's intended actions. Attorney Eisenbise, Lt. Minor, and Lear's girlfriend were



there because they had been successful in helping him in the past--they were coolers for whom Lear had some vestige of trust. The negotiations which allowed them to join the hostage panel were most likely a process of finding Lear's identifications and convincing him that he could be helped by their presence. Lear's choice to allow them in reveals his desire for an audience with whom he could identify. Even if Lear knowingly allowed these persons to be brought simply to kill them (except, of course, his girlfriend), even if his antagonism for "other" was totally vengeful, these persons were not suitable candidates for scapegoats. Nor were any of the others truly qualified for the role. The minister was quite successful in sustaining an identification with Lear and several persons remarked on Lear's moral piety. The other police officer and the Sheriff, while having no former relationship with Lear, were only potential scapegoats in the most ambiguous sense. The psychologist, who in the interaction received the scapegoat treatment the most fully, was in fact a family counselor who knew Mrs. Horinek, a friend of Lear's, and had some friendly identification in that respect. In short, they were a group of persons who had direct and personal identifications with Lear and those identifications were exploited to provide a basis for compromise and persuasion.

I believe that Lear's drama was complicated the most by the presence of his girlfriend. She was the strongest if not the sine qua non of Lear's social identifications. Her presence and the residual possibility of her returning to him made it especially important that Lear remain mortified and rational. Lear claimed that he would kill the hostages (and himself) to prove his love for her. At the same time, he claimed that if she came back to him he would spare the lives of the others. Lear's version of the drama which represents the mortification strategy, where the hostages would serve as witnesses in Caesar's court and pass judgment on Lear's life and her leaving him, would seem to have been engineered because of her presence there. Caesar's court would have made little sense had she not been there to witness the proceedings and accept their judgment.

Because Lear had surrounded himself with persons who were identified with his life and well-being, rather than with his failure and demise, the possibility of persuasion existed and was to some extent carried through. The possibilities of his girlfriend's return, their marriage, the reinstatement of Lear's son to him, and the arrangement for Lear's legal freedom, were potential dissuaders from the sacrificial murder he planned. To maintain control of the situation, Lear must "toy" with these offerings and the coolers' attempts at persuasion; to survive and possibly

start a new life, Lear had to open himself to them; in order to make his final rhetorical appeal effective, Lear had to kill his hostages. The drama which resulted from Lear's confrontation with these constraints shows a desperate and confused individual choosing between life and death. Life in this scene, however, was defined as a series of "half-truths": illusions which the hostages were incapable of disguising and which Lear was incapable of sustaining. The choice of life in this instance would have been submission to others' influences, and that was the life of which Lear wished to rid himself. The choice of death that Lear had made in isolation must now be made again in the presence of this particular audience. Lear was again caught negotiating between self and society in the same paradoxical terms which had always confounded his happiness, and his failure to choose one way or the other is probably a suitable metaphor for his entire life.

Regardless of what Lear's choice would have been had not the social machinery made it for him, his drama would have been a master failure. Had he submitted, none of the promised life-symbols would have become reality. He would have been sent to prison or a mental institution for more "treatment." If he had carried through with his plan, he would have either been killed or sent away. His story would carry none of the meaning with which he had invested it.

Lear's failure to choose is indeed symptomatic of his life's struggle. He was an individual who could not manage the tensions of social life and maintain control over his well-being. He was ineffective in finding acceptance and belonging.

Our theory predicts that a failure for an individual is also a failure for society as well, and in this regard Lear's story confronts society with a mandate for social criticism. Society has grown painfully familiar with brutality and deviance, but in this case and others like it there is an emphatic message that persons shroud their attempts at communication in the language of aggression and division. The fact that persons could rest their hopes of identification with society in eschatological immolations is one which finds increasing evidence and little understanding. It means that we must seek to understand the nature of motive.

The theoretical essays of this thesis advance certain ideas about critical method and its applicability to incongruity and paradox in the social realm. One cannot demonstrate that Lear suffered from "primordial guilt" caused by social alienation, but surely such an explanation can be offered. For it is apparent that Lear's motives were generated in a situation which, in its essential structure, is typical of the human situation. Further, the behavior which Lear exhibited can be construed as a representative,

albeit extreme, response of individuals to the tensions inherent in social life. That Lear's actions reflect the paradoxical complications of mortification, victimage, suicide, and homicide, in a unique and direct manner makes his case worthy of notice and explication.

Larry Lear's actions and character do not, however, deserve applause or aesthetic marvel because they so symptomatically represent the predictions of social theory. Rather, his actions were crude and malevolent and are to be disdained. Moreover, the drama that he composed was not significant from any artistic or critical perspective of appreciation, it was significant only in that it was a weak and ineffective attempt at self-expression in ways that are artistically and critically significant. Lear's effort to finalize his life and sufferings in the pretext of a socially acknowledged form emphasizes for us the genuine applicability of critical method and the relevance of dramatic form to the lives of individuals who must cope with the social reality we construct. Lear's actions warrant only somber reflection and an attempt by society to understand his communication. I have tried to supply him with a capable audience.

Notes

<sup>1</sup>Kenneth Burke, The Rhetoric of Religion (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), p. 182.

<sup>2</sup>Erving Goffman, "On Cooling the Mark Out," p. 463.

<sup>3</sup>Eric Hoffer, "The Role of Undesirables," The Norton Reader, Shorter Edition, 4th Edition (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1977), pp. 546-54.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 548.

<sup>5</sup>Eric Hoffer, The True Believer: Thoughts on the Nature of Mass Movements (New York: Time Incorporated, 1963), pp. 25-26.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. xxviii. Hoffer prefaces his book with a quote from Pascal which bears repetition here:

Man would fain to be great and sees that he is little; would fain be happy and sees that he is miserable; would fain be perfect and sees that he is full of imperfections; would fain be the object of the love and esteem of men, and sees that his faults merit only their aversion and contempt. The embarrassment wherein he finds himself produces in him the most unjust and criminal passions imaginable, for he conceives a mortal hatred against that truth which blames him and convinces him of his faults. (Pensees)

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., pp. 15-16.

<sup>8</sup>Kenneth Burke, A Rhetoric of Motives, p. 148.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>11</sup>Burke, The Rhetoric of Religion, pp. 1-5.

<sup>12</sup>Burke, Permanence and Change, p. 286. See also The Rhetoric of Religion, p. 224, where Burke writes:

Insofar as there is guilt intrinsic to the social order, it would not in itself be "actual," but would be analogous to "original sin," an offense somehow done "in principle." Here the sense of

"criminality" could induce to the kind of crime that would "rationalize" it in terms of the subject's individual responsibility. The offender would feel guilty first, and afterwards commit the crime that justifies the guilt (or, more often, the crime that defies the guilt). Much "spirited" crime of the sort that characterizes "juvenile delinquency" would probably arise in this way.

Lear's desire to "justify" or "defy" the guilt which he felt indicates, perhaps, that his "sin" was done "in principle."

<sup>13</sup>Rhetoric of Religion, pp. 181, 186.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., pp. 180-81.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., pp. 190-91.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 208.

<sup>17</sup>See Goffman's "Presentation of Self in Everyday Life," pp. 68-72, and Messinger, Sampson, and Towne, "Life as Theater," pp. 81-82, in Drama in Life, James E. Combs and Michael W. Mansfield, eds.

<sup>18</sup>Again, the "master plan" as conceived and communicated in weeks prior to the incident, so far as I know of it, included only psychiatrists in the revenge scheme. It is possible that Lear had planned to victimize other social agents but that is not certain.

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Presiding; Delmar Selzner, Court Reporter.

## APPENDIX

In the text of this thesis I have purposefully avoided direct discussions of my methodology, organization, or implications for future research, and I would like to deal with these matters here. It has become cliché in academic theses to conclude by calling for more studies "such as the present one," either as a means of self-justification or self-appraisal. I confess that I cannot call for more studies like mine, at least in the same spirit that these other pleas are made. Although the study has been rewarding and heuristically useful for me, and I hope for others, it has also been difficult and uncertain. Certain matters of method and evidence were and remain problematic, and I should like to comment on those matters for anyone who feels that he or she should pursue such a study.

As I write in the first chapter, my interest in the study began with my own experience with the incident itself. As I followed the stories surrounding the incident I became certain that some aspect of this incident and its significance had been overlooked entirely--and I can safely conclude that it was. For a period of some months I toyed

with the idea of studying the case, but was unsure that such a study would result in a thesis. I was still unsure that it would result thus as recently as August, 1978. My task, after collecting what data were available, was to find a rationale for approaching the incident in terms of rhetoric and social theory, and a rationale for considering the case significant for rhetoric and social theory. The effort I expended toward those two goals is truly what has been valuable in the execution of the thesis.

I interviewed the hostages in the summer of 1977. The professionals involved in the case were more than pleased to talk with me about the case and were interested in the study. They were inclined to believe, as I did, that communication was central to the incident, but I'm sure they had no real idea of the kind of approach I would ultimately take. I spoke with only four of the hostages, Mr. Pickard, Mr. Eisenbise, Sheriff Darr, and Rev. Tracy. I did not attempt to contact any of the others: Lt. Minor, Lt. Drowatsky, or Ms. Bean. Initially I had in mind to study the "professional" efforts of these men in helping Lear; I had no idea of the symbolic, revenge motive that Lear had in the incident. I spoke with each of these men only once for a period of about one hour each. They all assured me that they would be happy to continue our discussions, but I felt no need to do so. The kind of information that they provided me with

was frank, honest, and open, but also very perplexing. The questions which I had after our individual discussions were not questions which they could answer.

There was much in the individual accounts of the men which was contradictory and apparently modified by their own individual experience and role in the incident. The kinds of things that they found interesting about the incident were different and local to their professions and personalities. While the diversity of their accounts made my job more difficult, in terms of judging and accounting for the discrepancies, the variety of perspectives made the "data" more useful and revealing in the long run.

While there was diversity in the accounts of the interviewees, there was also a kind of collusion which was difficult to trace. The gentlemen had experienced the event together, had spoken with each other after and since the incident (although not as much as one might expect), and had gone through the procedures of filing statements, being interviewed and re-interviewed by the legal authorities. Most important in terms of unifying their understanding of the case was probably the court hearing, which heard the various accounts of the case, and events which had happened prior to the incident. The court hearing had a legitimacy and fairness in its appraisal of the incident and the views expressed there no doubt had some effect on the way in which

all of the interviewees remembered and explained the incident. For this reason, and because the hearing records had testimony unavailable to me, I acquired selected portions of the hearing records. It should be remembered that the hearing did not decide what happened nor why in the incident, but only determined that the police were justified in shooting Lear.

I take this opportunity to remark about the interviews because they provide the basis for many subtle judgments I had to make in relating an account of the events. I have tried to note in the text and footnotes those places where these judgments could affect the reliability of my conclusions. While conceivably I could have spoken with more people and at greater length, I feel that the evidence and the kind of evidence I draw from the interviews is reliable, and, for my purposes, complete.

The methodology of the thesis in terms of theoretical materials also deserves some mention. Naturally, the credibility or usefulness of the theory I use is ultimately demonstrable only in its critical application. To this extent, I feel that the selections from Burke, Hoffer, and Goffman are not only applicable to the case but uniquely so. I know of no other study which puts these particular sections of Burke to such a detailed application in a critical example, and certainly not one of this sort, and to the

extent that these concepts and ideas have been used by other critics or theorists, their reliability is enhanced. The selection by Goffman, "On Cooling the Mark Out," is a theoretical assay which I'm quite certain has not been used critically and finds a nearly unique application in the present study. Goffman's piece draws from the assumptions of social theory and makes them useful for understanding specific transactions in communication. This is the usefulness that it finds in this thesis and one which I do feel it can perform for other critical efforts. The conception of the self and its identity-maintaining activities which Goffman's essay promotes is of tremendous interest to rhetorical theory and should be explored and expanded in further research.

I conclude that the truly significant contribution of this thesis, if it is to find one, is in the integration and application of the theoretical positions on social life offered by these select authors. I am convinced that social theory must find its salient usefulness in interpreting, clarifying, and predicting the experiences of individuals in social life. If one begins with the assumption that "society" is the composite experience of individual persons and that the constructs of social theory (if they are "real") must be experienced by individuals in day-to-day life, then what those constructs are, how they are made composite, and

when they are experienced, becomes a profoundly rhetorical problem. It means that the various perspectives on social life must be integrated to account for real experiences and actions of individuals which are documented in discourse at all levels in society. Towards this purpose, I can and do call for further research and I, for one, turn my future attention in that direction.