In *Attitudes Toward History* and “Literature as Equipment for Living,” Kenneth Burke explains the traditional literary genres as strategies or equipment for living, that is, frames of acceptance or rejection that permit us to assess our range of possible choices in response to the human condition (*Attitudes*, 3-5, 43-44, 68, 99, 106; *Philosophy*, 293-96, 301-4; Wolin 101-5). These strategies are, moreover, modes of social action, and as such they shape our relationship not only to the human condition but also to other humans (*Attitudes* 4-5; *Philosophy* 293-94, 304). Thus they define our relationships *for or against* other humans and also the variety of ways of being for or against. Insofar as these strategies for living are ways of responding and relating to other humans, they are also rhetorical strategies (George and Selzer 142-43), and as such they encompass not only traditional strategies of persuasion but also strategies of “coöperative competition,” debate, dialogue, and mutual self-correction leading to ideas better than any one person alone could produce (“Linguistic Approach,” 283-90; *Philosophy*, 107-12, 380-81, 448-50; *Rhetoric*, 197-203; “Rhetoric” 203-4; George and Selzer 76-77, 142-43, 167-68; Zappen, “Kenneth Burke” 287-97; Zappen, “US and Russian Traditions” 748-50). These rhetorical strategies evidently are intended to have global reach, as Burke suggests when he complains that Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*, though the greatest of its kind, had but trivial examples to analyze—trivial, that is, in comparison to the problems posed by the great world religions (“Linguistic Approach” 300).
Burke’s strategies for living, as rhetorical strategies for responding to other humans both locally and globally, support educational practices of persuasion, debate, dialogue, mutual self-correction, and reciprocal learning and broadly intercultural approaches to education. In literary study, they encompass global literatures and the lessons that each of these literatures has to offer to the others (Zappen, “US and Russian Traditions” 753-57). As examples, some contemporary Russian and Chinese literatures offer lessons of both acceptance and rejection—both inspiring portraits of resignation and hope for the future and grotesque images of resistance to the abuses suffered by Russian and Chinese people even in the post-Soviet and post-Cultural Revolution periods.

As strategies for living, the traditional literary genres are attitudes toward the world, not sets of formal characteristics (Attitudes 34-91; Wolin 101-5). We develop these attitudes in response to the human condition—anguish, injustice, disease, and death—and thereby develop our view of the universe and of history (3-4). Thus we perceive the world to be either friendly or unfriendly, assess our own resources against the objective resistances in the world, and decide whether or not and how we might combat these resistances (4-5). The traditional literary genres capture these friendly and unfriendly perceptions of the world as frames of acceptance (epic, tragedy, and comedy) or rejection (elegy, satire, burlesque, the grotesque, and the didactic) (34-91). Frames of acceptance emphasize attitudes of fearfulness, a sense of one’s own limitations, and a calm resignation to one’s fate (36-37, 39, 41-42). Epic accepts the rigors of war and requires a realistic assessment of one’s resources and a willingness to see one’s own flaws (35-36). Tragedy requires similar attitudes of acceptance but in response to a more complex but no less hostile world (37, 39). Like, tragedy, comedy requires an acknowledgment of one’s own flaws but sees them as foolish rather than criminal,
mistaken rather than vicious (41-42). To these traditional literary genres Burke adds “the *carpe diem* attitude, which invites us to snatch whatever mild pleasures may be at hand, and call it a day” (43). Each of these genres requires that we recognize our fate and accept it with calm resignation.

Frames of rejection, in contrast, emphasize negative attitudes toward the world, expressed in various kinds of “complaint” (44). Elegy—“the ‘wailing wall’”—exaggerates the difference between our own limitations and the magnitude of the world’s resistances (44). Satire similarly emphasizes one’s own limitations, but the satirist “attacks in others the weaknesses and temptations that are really within him[/her]self” (49). Burlesque (like related forms such as polemic and caricature) resembles satire but emphasizes external behavior, makes no attempt to get inside the psyche of its object, and so reduces it to absurdity (54-55). The grotesque and the didactic are allied as transitional categories, the one mystical and passive, the other propagandistic and active (57, 75). As transitional categories, they address a world in the process of change (Wolin 101). The grotesque emerges in times of collective mysticism “marked by great confusion of the cultural frame, requiring a radical shift in people’s allegiance to symbols of authority” (*Attitudes* 57-58). Like humor, the grotesque emphasizes incongruities; unlike humor, “it is in deadly earnest” (58). The grotesque is symbolic rather than logical, and it “comes to the fore when confusion in the forensic pattern gives more prominence to the subjective elements of imagery than to the objective, or public, elements” (59-60). But while grotesque offers symbolic images of the world’s incongruities, it offers no alternative to this world in the process of change and so is passive rather than active. In contrast, didactic is active insofar as the propagandist recognizes life’s contradictions and seeks to reconcile them by selecting the more
desirable choice in a pair of opposites and combining both choices in a “higher synthesis” (79-80).

Insofar as these strategies for living are ways of responding not only to the world but also to other humans, they are social and “inevitably rhetorical” acts (George and Selzer 142-43), and as such they encompass both individual acts of persuasion and multiple acts of persuasion in relation to each other and thus acts of “coöperative competition,” debate, dialogue, mutual correction, and reciprocal learning (“Linguistic Approach,” 283-90; Philosophy, 107-12, 380-81, 448-50; Rhetoric, 43-46, 49-59, 197-203; “Rhetoric” 203-4; George and Selzer 76-77, 142-43, 167-68; Zappen, “Kenneth Burke” 287-97; Zappen, “US and Russian Traditions” 748-50). In its simplest sense, rhetoric is a means of persuasion effected via identification: “You persuade a man [or woman] only insofar as you can talk his [or her] language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, identifying your ways with his [or hers]” (Rhetoric 55). In its more complex senses, rhetoric encompasses multiple rhetorical acts in their varying relationships to one another. Such a complex rhetoric requires a stepping back from the immediacy of individual persuasive acts, encompassing multiple persuasive acts, and seeking mutual accommodations that embrace these individual acts in broader syntheses.

In The Philosophy of Literary Form, individual persuasive acts engage each other in a dialectic process of “coöperative competition” or “‘agonistic’ development”: “Allow full scope to the dialectic process, and you establish a scene in which the protagonist of a thesis has maximum opportunity to modify his [or her] thesis, and so mature it, in the light of the antagonist’s rejoinders” (107-8, 444). In the latter part of the Rhetoric and beyond, these individual persuasive acts engage each other in a similar dialectical
process to become a form of dialogue that, at least potentially, produces outcomes that transcend the limitations of each of them (Zappen, “Kenneth Burke” 290-296). In the *Rhetoric*, this process resembles a Platonic dialogue, which proceeds through “the setting up of several voices, each representing a different ‘ideology,’” to Socrates’ “dialectical attempt to build a set of generalizations that transcended the bias of the competing rhetorical partisans,” to “his vision of the ideal end in such a project,” and finally to “his rounding out the purely intellectual abstractions by a myth” (200). In “Rhetoric—Old and New,” this process is a cooperative competition by which individual participants can transcend the limited point of view of each of them: “A rhetorician, I take it, is like one voice in a dialogue. Put several such voices together, with each voicing its own special assertion, let them act upon one another in co-operative competition, and you get a dialectic that, properly developed, can lead to views transcending the limitations of each” (203).

These various rhetorical strategies suggest a range of educational practices from simple acts of persuasion to more complex social interactions and processes of mutual and reciprocal learning (“Linguistic Approach” 278-300). These practices proceed in a sequence of steps, an “educational ladder,” leading from mere “‘indoctrination’ designed to assert a narrowly partisan point of view,” to knowing something of other points of view in order to combat them, to learning to appreciate other groups “in all their varied habits, strengths, and shortcomings,” to situating multiple voices in relation to each other in search of “ways whereby the various voices, in mutually correcting one another, will lead toward a position better than any one singly” (283-284). At this last step, “one does not merely want to outwit the opponent, or to study him [or her], one wants to be affected by him [or her], in some degree to incorporate him [or her], to so act that his
[or her] ways can help perfect one's own—in brief, to learn from him [or her]” (284). This last step does not end in self-correction only but in a process of reciprocal learning that may lead to better collaborative outcomes than any one individual alone could produce. This collaborative process evidently extends into the arena of international thought and action, for, as Burke explains (and complains), though Aristotle’s formal treatment of rhetoric was “the greatest of its kind, regrettably he had but comparatively trivial examples of verbal wrestling to analyze (trivial, that is, as compared with the symbolic ways of the great world religions . . . )” (300).

As educational practices, these rhetorical strategies of persuasion, debate, dialogue, mutual self-correction, and reciprocal learning support recent trends in intercultural education, which (in contrast to multicultural and transcultural approaches) encourage dialogue for the purpose of enhancing mutual understanding not only in the U.S. and Europe but in the larger international community (Bleszynska 74-76; Portera 18-21; Zappen, “US and Russian Traditions” 753-57). Traditional U.S. approaches to multiculturalism encourage appreciation for multiple cultures and diverse points of view and promote social justice and equal rights, especially but not only in education (Banks 3-22). These approaches are challenged by transcultural (or non-cultural) beliefs in the equality of all persons rather than their unique or special cultural differences (Barry 3-18, 317-28; Kelly 5-15). In contrast to both, intercultural education emphasizes opportunities for dialogical exchanges between and among cultures (Portera 18-21). It “rejects immobility and cultural or human hierarchy, and is meant to encourage dialogue and relationship on equal terms, so that people do not feel constrained to sacrifice important aspects of their cultural identity” (20). Intercultural education offers varied opportunities for interaction, including both exchanges of ideas and attempts to
persuade others to accept one’s own point of view. On the one hand, it invites “direct exchange of ideas, principles and behaviors, with comparison of preconceptions” (20). One the other hand, it invites each of us to present our own opinions “and also try to change (in a democratic and open way) meaning and identity (for any person involved in the process)” (20).

Extended into the arena of global literatures, Burke’s strategies for living invite a range of possible responses to the world and to the human condition, from simple acceptance to simple rejection, from a sense of one’s own limitations, a calm resignation to one’s fate, and occasional glimpses of hope for the future to bitter complaints and protests in the form of grotesque images of the world’s incongruities and injustices. As rhetorical strategies, these strategies for living also encourage a range of possible interactions with others, from simple cases of persuasion to more complex processes of debate, dialogue, and mutual and reciprocal learning. In the case of contemporary Russian and Chinese literatures, these strategies invite us to grapple with both personal abuses and political atrocities on a grand scale—from the uncertainties following the collapse of the Soviet Union to the Chechen wars to the still repressive political regimes in both countries—and to assess our responses of acceptance or rejection, not each of us alone but in interaction with others.

These literatures present vivid portraits of worlds in the process of economic and political change and a range of possible responses to these changes. From Soviet Russia, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn’s *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* provides a classic portrait of an individual’s acceptance and calm resignation in the face of insurmountable political and social forces, captured in Ivan’s summation of his day as a kind of *carpe diem*—“A day without a dark cloud. Almost a happy day” (167). From the
post-Soviet period, Victor Pelevin’s *The Yellow Arrow*, written shortly after the collapse of the former Soviet Union, presents a dark portrait of a train headed nowhere, carrying passengers who do not even know that they are passengers, but ends with a note of hope as the narrator, Andrei, steps off the train and so hints at the possibility of a new beginning for the Russian people. But war and the old politics persist. The recent *Rasskazy* collection chronicles the Chechen wars, with portraits ranging from resigned acceptance of forced military service and imprisonment to grotesque images of wanton and callous devastation and destruction (Arkady Babchenko’s “The Diesel Stop”; German Sadulaev’s “Why the Sky Doesn’t Fall”; and Zakhar Prilepin’s “The Killer and His Little Friend”). More recently, Vladimir Sorokin’s *Day of the Oprichnik* offers grotesque images of rejection in a biting satire of a Russia projected two decades into the future, when the czars are back in power and the dreaded oprichniki engage in scenes of brutal murder, gang rape, and homosexual orgies.

In the post-Cultural Revolution period, Chinese literature offers similar images of acceptance and rejection. Dozens of stories create images of women who accept their fate with silent (if not calm) resignation: they lose the men they love to political reform and broken promises (“The Woman Who Waited Forty-Five Years,” in Xinran’s *The Good Women of China*; Yiyun Li’s “Love in the Marketplace,” in *A Thousand Years*); they accept spousal abuse as a fact of life (Zhu Tianxin’s “Nineteen Days of the New Party” in *City Women*), and they marry homosexuals to help them to hide their *criminal* behavior (Ha Jin’s “The Bridegroom,” in *The Bridegroom*; and Yiyun Li’s “Gold Boy, Emerald Girl,” in *Gold Boy, Emerald Girl*). Other stories convey grotesque images of bitter protest and rejection of the current political order. Ma Jian’s *The Noodle Maker* depicts an entrepreneur who operates a crematorium and incinerates his mother (with
her blessing) while she is still alive; an actress who commits suicide by performing a play in which she is eaten by a tiger; a man who beats a woman who pretends that she is pregnant with his child and in turn is beaten by his wife; and a Communist Party illustrator with a talking three-legged dog who calmly watch a gang rape in the streets beneath their room.

In educational practice, students can engage these literatures in processes of persuasion, debate, dialogue, and mutual learning. In conventional classroom settings, they can seek to persuade their instructor and other students of merits of their readings of these stories. In addition, where these classroom settings include mixed groups of both men and women, both national and international students, they can engage each other directly in processes of debate, dialogue, and mutual learning and reciprocal understandings, especially in small-group discussions where they can converse freely with minimal instructor oversight and intervention. Of their own accord, they will accept differences of gender, ethnicity, or nationality, each having its own perspective to offer and hence its own measure of credibility. They will, moreover, question and challenge and, where necessary, correct each other, with little oversight except perhaps occasional reminders of the need for professionalism and courtesy toward others and a similar posture of respect and courtesy in the instructor.

Burke’s strategies for living provide a constructive framework for the study of literature, a way of focusing not only and not primarily on the traditional literary qualities of literary works but on their attitudes of acceptance or rejection toward the world and toward the human condition. As educational practices, these strategies also provide a framework for developing one’s own attitudes toward other humans and other
cultures, not alone but in processes of persuasion, debate, dialogue, and mutual and reciprocal learning.
Works Consulted


