

ANOTHER EPISODE IN "THE GREAT  
AMERICAN ADVENTURE"

A Fictional Play by James F. Klumpp  
(based on a speech by Richard M. Nixon  
April 30, 1970, "The Cambodian Strike")

"Distinctions, we might say, arise out of a great central molten-ness, where all is merged. They have been thrown from a liquid center to the surface, where they have congealed. Let one of these crusted distinctions return to its source, and in this alchemic center it may be remade, again becoming molten liquid, and may enter into new combinations, whereat it may again be thrown forth as a new crust, a different distinction. So that A may become non-A. But not merely by a leap from one state to the other. Rather, we must take A back into the ground of its existence, the logical substance that is its causal ancestor, and on to a point where it is con-substantial with non-A; then we may return, this time emerging with non-A instead."

--Kenneth Burke  
Grammar of Motives  
p. xix

"The members of each ratio pair would then be related as potential to actual. Thus, a mode of thought in keeping with the scene-agent ratio would situate in the scene certain potentialities that were said to be actualized in the agent . . . A ratio is a formula indicating a transition from one term to another. Such a relation necessarily possesses the ambiguities of the potential, in that the second term is a medium different from the first. For the nature of the mediated necessarily differs from the nature of the immediate."

--Ibid., p. 262.

R.N., President of the Motion Picture Studio, his jaw set, addresses the writers gathered around the table. Wally sits on his left, a small man who was named to the writing staff despite fears that he would not be his own man. William sits next to him, now balding, a friend of R.N.'s father who is exercising less and less influence on the staff. Melvin sits to R.N.'s right. He is a tall man with a pointed head and a wrinkled forehead extended by his baldness. John, the staff gag-writer sits on the far right.

R.N. You're probably asking yourselves why I called you here today. It has to do with the script for "The Great American Adventure." I've decided to add a new attack to the script.

Wally: Excuse me, R.N. I know we've talked about this problem so many times, but I still think that a 10 hour movie is simply too long.

R.N.: Yes, yes, I agree, it is unfortunate, but you see our resolve is being tested. Others are saying that we cannot successfully finish this picture. I never want them to think that this company, so strong and powerful, and with all our resources and wealth cannot finish producing this epic.

Now specifically, in the new attack, the Duke is to lead his brave troops across the border into that neutral country where the enemy keeps hiding.

William: With all due respect, R.N., I don't see how we can ever introduce this episode into the play. Everyone knows that the Duke is a great defender of justice and liberty, and a great leader of men. But, R.N., what will the audience say when he just turns and charges across the border, and into a neutral country? Why, that's aggression they'll say. To introduce a complication like that when the Duke is supposed to be our hero will really flip the audience.

Wally: Not only that, R.N., but in the last scene the Duke announced that he was going home. How can we have him turning and fighting another battle?

R.N. (Wiping his brow with a nearby handkerchief) That's why I called this meeting. These are the problems that we have to master in writing the script. How can we write the attack into the script while preserving the Duke's image as a hero?

The key, as every good playwright knows, is to make the audience think that these events grow naturally from the drama, that they had to occur. The audience must look at the charac-

teristics of the actor, the scene, the purpose of the drama, and say that this action was inevitable. That is our task, gentlemen, to make the audience realize that this action is no digression, but grows directly out of the dramatic situation. Now, how can we create action that makes the audience see?

John: Well, R.N. everyone knows that wherever the poor, the weak, and the innocent need defending, the Duke will be there defending them. If we can just emphasize that he is really defending innocence, the attack will grow out of his character.

R.N.: (Forming a "V" with the fingers of each hand, and raising them to his side, and toward the ceiling) Sure, it's a natural. What else could the Duke do, given his image? He must go to the rescue of any poor, weak, innocent country under attack.

Melvin: Not only that, R.N., but everybody knows that the Duke would never abandon his men when they were threatened. So if the enemy is threatening the troops that he is planning to leave behind before he returns home he must turn and fight.

R.N.: In fact, we can even have the enemy threaten the success of his flight out of the area.

Melvin: (Snapping his pointer on the table) Sure, then he'd have to fight if he wanted to go home. How could anyone blame him. We'll just make it look like his trip home cannot come-off without his returning to fight.

R.N.: Gentlemen, I think we have it. The attack is merely a manifestation of the Duke's character, his defense of innocence, and his protection of his troops. Faced with this deteriorating situation, he should and would turn and fight.

John: One minute, R.N., the scene has to be written so that the audience, knowing what they know about the Duke, will see that he has no choice but to fight. What kind of scene does the attack require?

R.N.: Well, it's obvious that the audience has to realize that the enemy is out to rape this little country. That shouldn't be hard to write in. We've already had the enemy using that neutral territory for the other 9 hours of epic.

John: But will that be enough R.N.? If the enemy has been in the area for all 9 hours, the audience might wonder why the Duke's honesty, justice and protectiveness, justify an attack now when they didn't earlier.

R.N.: We'll have increased enemy activity against the poor, weak, innocent neutral country. After all, hostile actions against the country are worse than mere enemy presence. We'll have the enemy stepping up attacks against the neutral country.

Melvin: (Again picking up the pointer) R.N., we must have the enemy attacking the Duke's troops from this country again. That way he has to follow the enemy across the border to protect his troops.

R.N.: Excellent suggestion. And we'll have the attack area be a massive storehouse of men, material, and weapons, built-up to attack the Duke's troops. And to climax it all, we'll have the enemy headquarters, the very throbbing center of the enemy's penetration, located in the area so that the Duke has to go into the area to tear it out.

John: R.N., you're a genius. Who could ever believe that an attack that grows so naturally from the Duke's good character, and the situation he is in, is an unjust digression.

William: One thing still bothers me, R.N., the Duke is still going to reverse his course and attack across the border, invading the neutral country. What if the audience forgets that the Duke only attacks to protect virtue and innocence? Someone in the audience may forget how peace loving he really is.

R.N.: Well, we'll have him tell them how he hates to have to fight. He can emphasize how much restraint he has shown and how reluctant he was to attack.

John: Why not have him reaffirm that he wants to leave if the enemy would only let him?

R.N.: Wonderful suggestion.

Well, gentlemen, it seems to me that we have explained to the audience that given the Duke's nature, his high purposes, and the situation he faces, he must take this action. These factors call for attack.

Wally: R.N., I keep fearing this epic will be another "Cleopatra."  
This new attack may move us no closer to the movie's end.  
We'll keep putting millions of dollars into it, and risk our  
best actors trying to make it a success and nothing will help.  
In the end the plot will just collapse.

R.N.: But if we don't try, who will ever trust us to produce any  
more great films. Gentlemen, I promised you and the stockholders  
that this play would be a success, and I will keep that promise.

Melvin: Do you really think we can pull off this new attack with  
audience approval, R.N.?

R.N.: I'm sure of it. That's the nice thing about being a play-  
wright. You can write the script as you want to and no one  
can compare it with any "reality" and accuse you of distorting  
the facts.