
THE RITES OF IDENTITY

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The Religious Naturalism
and Cultural Criticism
of Kenneth Burke and Ralph Ellison

Beth Eddy

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TO IDA WALLER POPE

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. . . all symbolism can be treated as the ritualistic
naming and changing of identity. . . .

Kenneth Burke, *Attitudes toward History*

Here upon this stage the black rite of Horatio Alger was performed to God's own acting script, with millionaires come down to portray themselves; not merely acting out the myth of their goodness, and wealth and successes and power and benevolence and authority in cardboard masks, but themselves, these virtues concretely! Not the wafer and the wine, but the flesh and the blood, vibrant and alive, and vibrant even when stooped, ancient and withered. (And who, in face of this, would not believe? Could even doubt?)

Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*

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