
RHETORIC
AND PLURALISM

Legacies of Wayne Booth

Edited by

Frederick J. Antczak

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SHORT TITLES

Full publication information for the works by Wayne Booth listed here can be found in the Bibliography at the end of the volume.

<i>Company</i>	<i>The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction</i>
<i>Critical Understanding</i>	<i>Critical Understanding: The Powers and Limits of Pluralism</i>
"Ethical Criticism"	"Why Ethical Criticism Fell on Hard Times"
"Freedom of Interpretation"	"Freedom of Interpretation: Bakhtin and the Challenge of Feminist Criticism"
"George Eliot"	"The Way I Loved George Eliot': Friendship with Books a Neglected Critical Metaphor"
<i>Irony</i>	<i>A Rhetoric of Irony</i>
"Kenneth Burke"	"Kenneth Burke's Way of Knowing"
<i>Modern Dogma</i>	<i>Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent</i>
<i>Now Don't Try to Reason</i>	<i>Now Don't Try to Reason with Me: Essays and Ironies for a Credulous Age</i>
<i>Reader</i>	<i>The Harper and Row Reader: Liberal Education Through Reading and Writing (with Marshall W. Gregory)</i>
"Revival"	"The Revival of Rhetoric"
<i>Rhetoric</i>	<i>The Harper and Row Rhetoric: Writing as Thinking, Thinking as Writing (with Marshall W. Gregory)</i>

"Rhetoric and Poetics"

Rhetoric of Fiction

"Three Functions"

Vocation

"*The Rhetoric of Fiction* and the
Poetics of Fictions"

The Rhetoric of Fiction

"Three Functions of Reviewing at
the Present Time"

*The Vocation of a Teacher: Rhetorical
Occasions, 1967-1988*

INTRODUCTION

After all is said and done, it is the human aspect that lasts the longest. The scholar, thinker, teacher is merged at last in the human being, the man is the ultimate and everlasting value.

WILLIAM JAMES

THE ENTRY ON Wayne Booth in the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* is full of richly deserved praise. But one can't read it without noting that there's something unusual about it, or perhaps about Booth. The praise is of two kinds, one much rarer in typical assessments of scholarly careers than the other. The first kind of praise, however deeply felt and however impressively true, takes forms that we are used to seeing in reference to prolific and influential authors. This perhaps unavoidably resonates when we hear that "[t]he impressive variety and consistent force of Booth's work have earned him one of the broadest audiences of any twentieth-century critic, and have made him one of the most important voices in American criticism over the past twenty-five years" (51); and "the work is stunning in its range, remarkable in its lucidity, ambitious in its conception and impressive in its execution" (66).

It is clear that these claims for the originality and force of Booth's contributions are as far from perfunctory as they are from dismissive; they are sincere high praise. But in a day when so crowded a curriculum vitae would usually be thought sufficient to chronicle a professional life, Booth somehow proves more complicated, more elusive. He is a scholar whose measure cannot adequately be kenned simply in terms of the arguments he has advanced and the points he has made; it must also be seen in the kinds of activities and intellectual life in which he has engaged people: Booth is "that rare critic whom others read for both his company and his conclusions" (51).

His recent release of two widely acclaimed books, *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction* and *The Vocation of a Teacher: Rhetorical Occasions 1967-1988*, may have brought Booth to the attention of still more audiences. Certainly the kinds of questions he has over the course

of his writing equipped his readers to explore seem of increasing interest in a variety of areas. Booth himself has entered a new stage of his career, taking emeritus status. So the time seems particularly right for reflecting on the reach and the distinctive character of his contributions, not as a retrospective but as a challenge to him for the "conclusions" that come next. But an adequate response to Wayne Booth must also find a way to reflect in appropriate terms the profit and pleasure of his company.

Although in retrospect Booth's work seems strikingly coherent, his life did not unfold in so straight a line. The first surprise was that he engaged in such academic work at all. Wayne Clayton Booth was born in American Fork, Utah, on February 22, 1921. In school he came under the influence of a teacher named Luther Giddings, and went off to college at Brigham Young University with a clear academic aspiration: to become a chemical engineer. But at BYU, his experience with two more excellent teachers, Karl Young and P. A. Christensen, turned his interests to the study of English. After earning his B.A. in 1944 and serving in the U.S. Army, Booth returned to Chicago—the site of his Mormon mission—for graduate school. At the University of Chicago, he earned an M.A. in 1947 and a Ph.D. in 1950 working with Ronald S. Crane, Elder Olson, Richard McKeon, and other members of the "Chicago school" of criticism.

At Brigham Young, Booth had begun to envision a career teaching literature to undergraduates in liberal arts colleges. And for a while, things turned out as he planned. Booth served as an assistant professor of English at Haverford College (1950–53) and then as professor and chair of English at Earlham College until the appearance of his first book, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. After its publication in 1961, Booth accepted the George M. Pullman Chair in English at the University of Chicago.

It would have been difficult for the boy growing up in Utah, or even the graduate student in Chicago, to have envisioned a more heralded publishing debut, or as widely honored a career. *The Rhetoric of Fiction* won an unusual combination of honors: from Phi Beta Kappa, the Christian Gauss Award; from the National Council of Teachers, the David H. Russell Award. Booth held two Guggenheim fellowships (1956–57 and 1969–70). In 1970 he was named Distinguished Service Professor at the University of Chicago, and the subsequent year won the Quantrell Prize for Undergraduate Teaching, a striking combination. In 1972 he was named a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts

and Sciences. He conducted the Christian Gauss seminars at Princeton University in 1974, held a National Endowment for the Humanities in 1975–76, and was Phi Beta Kappa Visiting Scholar in 1977–78. In 1979 he delivered the Beckman Lectures at the University of California at Berkeley, where he was also visiting professor of English, and that summer spent a term as professor at the University of California at Irvine's School of Criticism and Theory. In 1981–82 he held a Fellowship from the Rockefeller Foundation. He has been awarded several honorary doctorates, as well as the Distinguished Alumni Award from Brigham Young University.

Booth has served his academic communities in a variety of administrative roles. He was dean of the College at Chicago during the turbulent years of 1964 to 1969. He chaired the Committee on Ideas and Methods from 1972 until 1975 and served three terms as chair of the Board of University Publications (1974–75, 1979–80, 1984–85). He assisted Sheldon Sacks in launching the journal *Critical Inquiry*, served as coeditor until 1985, and was subsequently on its editorial board. Booth also served on the editorial boards of *Novel*, *Philosophy and Literature*, *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, *Rhetorica*, and *Scholia Satyrica*. But his service has not only been local. From 1952 to 1956 he served on the National Executive Committee of the College Conference on Composition and Communication, and from 1967 to 1970 on the Commission on Literature of the National Council of Teachers of English. He served on the executive council of the Modern Language Association of America from 1973 to 1976, as second vice president in 1980, first vice president in 1981, and in 1982 as president of the MLA.

In retrospective narration, the arc of this remarkable career seems a smooth line. But as Gary Comstock has observed (253), *The Rhetoric of Fiction* was an act of intellectual independence; it was not only a confirmation of his intellectual inheritance, but an act of self-criticism that shaped his subsequent work by engaging him in the development of distinct notions of pluralism and, more basically, of rhetoric as the historical synthesis that would ground and drive his inquiries.

The Chicago school critics under whom Booth trained had resisted the trend of their day to biographical study, and had insistently called attention back to the text. Their characteristic neo-Aristotelian focus was on the craft with which problems are solved and purposes achieved in the text. A great deal of this respect for the text has obviously stayed with Booth, although his sense of "the text" as a problematic term has developed into something more sophisticated than at least some of his

critics have noticed. But what Booth did in *The Rhetoric of Fiction* went beyond Chicago school concerns, and consequently did much to revive in literary studies the ancient tradition of rhetoric. Booth sought to examine then-popular dogmas about narrative technique—for example, that showing is always “better” than telling, or that good audiences must remain neutral emotionally, or that art ignores the audience. The problem he saw with such dogmas was that they judge literary technique in a kind of vacuum, apart from the contribution it makes to a work’s specific fictive purposes. While Booth clearly never abandoned the Chicago school respect for the text, in order to pursue the issues he thought to be of interest he moved beyond its prevailing approaches, assumptions, issues, and arguments.

In this book, Booth adopted a perspective on texts that has stayed with him throughout his work—an ethical perspective, in that he envisioned literary texts as scenes of human activity and relation, of interaction between people. Booth discussed them not as freestanding aesthetic structures or as eruptions of authors’ bent childhoods, but as rhetorical acts: authors shaping readers into the audiences envisioned while writing, readers attempting to join those implied audiences. Already the pluralizer, Booth sought to multiply the considerations in terms of which critics might describe narrators to include such concerns as degree of dramatization, of self-consciousness, of involvement in the action, and even of the distance from the author’s views. This allowed him to make distinctions that, as James Phelan observes, “have become so much a part of the vocabulary of narrative theory that they are commonly used with attribution” (56): the distinction between the implied author and the narrator, and distinctions among variously reliable and unreliable narrators.

The book also pushed him into lines of thought and discourse in which he still remains productively engaged. Booth closed the first edition of *The Rhetoric of Fiction* with an extensive discussion of the ethical risks and gains of certain sorts of narration. His chapter on “The Morality of Impersonal Narration” drew fire from those who read Booth as flatly condemning all impersonal narration, even though he had continued to discuss techniques in terms of particular purposes. Booth himself has acknowledged both that this chapter was in some interesting sense a failure, and that the roles our moral judgments play in reading are more complicated than he had first represented them; in the second edition of the book he attempted with some success (and still more controversy) to address those complications.

Much of his subsequent work shows the influence of what he learned in these controversies. But even at this stage, ethical concerns were fundamentally connected with Booth’s project of envisioning fictive discourse as rhetorical: Gary Comstock even contends that *The Rhetoric of Fiction*’s greatest contribution may be its insistence that the choice of narrative effects inescapably involves moral choices about the relation of author and reader and the way they may share meaning.

That relation formed the backdrop of *A Rhetoric of Irony*, Booth’s inquiry into perhaps a most elusive kind of sharing of meaning. Again, Booth saw irony as a kind of interaction between people. Booth’s now-familiar distinction of stable and unstable irony depends on the extent to which any given “reading” of an irony may be subverted further in a way that brings both reader and author along: stable irony is intended, covert, fixed in where interpretation is to stop, and finite in application. Of course any irony can be destabilized if its author’s intended meaning and relation to the reader are ignored, but there are benefits that arise from anchoring inquiry in this relation. Booth was able to do a variety of things with irony that no one had done quite so well before; to distinguish irony from other figurings of language that require readers to go beyond literal meaning, to explore the extraordinary literary “knowledge” that irony can afford, to explicate the clues to that knowledge, to analyze distinct levels of evaluating irony, and even to identify handicaps of character that might prevent readers from forming such a relation.

Booth’s persistent emphasis on reasonable and arguable judgments illuminates another aspect of his conception of rhetoric, while it displayed his uncommon intellectual range. *A Rhetoric of Irony* was widely recognized as a distinguished book of literary criticism and, to some extent at least, theory. *Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent* was rather a philosophy of rhetoric. Here Booth took up the problem of subjectivity where *The Rhetoric of Fiction* left it, by putting into question modernism’s antirhetorical split of fact and value. Some commentators have speculated about the extent to which his own experience as dean of a college in a tumultuous time is recapitulated in the two camps he describes, “irrationalists” and “scientismists.” If so, he behaved as he did in his deanship, still refusing simply to pick a side; arguing that facts and values cannot be split, Booth questioned the modernist dogmas of both scientismists and irrationalists, and offered some alternative ways of proceeding.

His “warrants of assent” depend on a new picture of the thing we change when we change minds: the human mind, the human self as a

"field of selves." Our hold on "truths"—be they truths of the wildest heart or truths of the coldest laboratory—is always social, always made in symbolic exchange, always refined in the process of sharing values and facts. James Phelan explains (62) why this emphasis on the social is a key move for Booth's commitment to pluralism, as well as to his interdisciplinary bent: it implies that "there can be no one supreme logic against which all assertions must be tested," and that we must recognize many valid logics, a plurality of domains of knowing.

Modern Dogma was an attempt to found and enact a peaceable, pluralistic community of those readers whose essential assent was an assent to rhetoric—to the pursuit of good reasons together. But in the 1960s and 1970s, Booth saw that his own profession had been riven by increasingly virulent "logomachy," critical warfare. His next book, *Critical Understanding: The Powers and Limits of Pluralism*, developed the pluralistic insights of the rhetoric of assent in a way that applied to critical pluralism.

Critical Understanding takes up issues that needed to be addressed for Booth to extend, and even defend, the conclusions of *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, so in some ways its place in Booth's career is easy to fix retrospectively. Yet in important ways it was a surprise because of the ethically extraordinary turn it took. The opening chapter, expectably, posed the comprehensive philosophical questions that confront such arguments: Is pluralism ever really genuine, or does it always ultimately cloak a deeper monism or lapse into relativism? How might one argue that the meaning of a work might be made determinate in different ways? In what pluralisms is there a chance for these different ways to be reconciled in a critical coexistence, and how in turn might different pluralisms be related to each other?

To answer, Booth discussed in extensive detail three different pluralists: R. S. Crane, Kenneth Burke, and M. H. Abrams. These discussions led Booth to articulate two principles of his own pluralism: that there is no one true definition of the text, but rather something like five major approaches to texts, each of which admits of further variations; and, nevertheless, there are ways in which one can share, test, and try to improve a particular interpretation. The explanation must have its own logic or "coherence"; it must treat accurately with the world outside of itself, which Booth called "correspondence"; and it must show "comprehensiveness," accounting for all the textual features its own principles implicate and all those identified in the object by other modes.

At this point, a reader might expect Booth to use conclusions from

these "case studies" to somehow resolve the philosophical questions he raised. Here instead arose the surprise: even though he would not abandon his commitment to pluralism, Booth's next move was to point out his own inability to carve out a ground from which to argue for it, since none of the three pluralisms adequately passed these three tests.

The measure of a mind often is apparent in what it does after it confronts an interesting failure; so it has been consistently with Booth. The self-avowed "failure" of the last chapter of *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, for example, spawned the whole line of ethical thinking about discourse that would so productively occupy Booth for twenty-five years, to culminate (so far) in *The Company We Keep*. Within *Critical Understanding*, this failure forced Booth to articulate his own privileged assumption, that pluralism is so important a good for criticism that no arguments nor argumentative failures can overturn it. What had to be overturned is the book's apparent purpose, to work out a justification for pluralism on the philosophical level of a *Modern Dogma*. Booth instead took a pragmatic turn: the critical community must be dedicated to the advancement of three inseparable ends that are, when push comes to shove, more important than comprehensive truth: *vitality*, the end of cultivating rather than stilling further discourse; *justice*, which calls each critic to apply a consistent standard; and *understanding*, the capacity to set aside even the strongest convictions and deepest presumptions long enough to enter another's critical framework and mind, to take in another self in a continually enriching field of selves.

Booth then worked out the implications of a pluralism based on vitality, justice, and understanding, a pluralism for which truth is less important than the way of life critics create for themselves and each other when they talk. A pursuit of truth that violates these values in its interactions—with literary authors or with other critics—is for practical purposes an ethical contradiction, in that it subverts the community of discourse in which it seeks to claim or carve a place. A cultivation of vitality, justice, and understanding that falls short of the whole truth will nonetheless enhance the critical community and the possibilities of the lives we can live together in it.

In addition to editing *The Knowledge Most Worth Having*, Booth subsequently published collections of his own essays and occasional addresses, *Now Don't Try to Reason with Me: Essays and Ironies for a Credulous Age* and *The Vocation of a Teacher: Rhetorical Occasions, 1967–1988*. The seriousness with which Booth has always taken teaching is reflected and refracted in the occasional pieces he produced all along

and collected in these works. The variety of those occasions, the inventiveness and flexibility in perspectives, and the gentle irony that make those books cohere grace all his work. But perhaps because of their subject matter, those books have not received much attention. In a scholarly generation not noted for such concern, no retrospective on Booth can afford to understate how seriously he has always taken his teaching; nowhere is this seriousness more variously, resourcefully, convincingly, and even buoyantly represented than in these works. Most recently, he has chosen from his own compendious reading a poignant and bracing anthology of selections on *The Art of Growing Older*.

Among his most widely noted books is *The Company We Keep*. Thomas Conley points out that Booth shares the conviction that literature is equipment for living with contemporary political critics, both Marxist and feminist. But characteristically, "Booth's ethical criticism is based not on universals but on particulars, not on theoretical demystifications but on our experience of literature" (162). In coining the critical concept of *coduction*, Booth opens a way to address ethical problems left untouched, it seems, by the traditional categories of logic. Criticism neither follows deductively from premises held above the fray nor does it arise inductively from a series of all-authoritative instances, but emerges "coductively," in comparing one's experience with other more or less qualified observers in acts of reading that are always "reciprocal and responsive," part of a "continuing conversation."

Ethical conversation about narrative texts is worth pursuing, Booth argues, because narratives embody norms that may be accepted, rejected, tolerated, negotiated; because evaluations of a narrative can be rational if they are based on accurate descriptions of a narrative's power to elicit responses; because the inevitable diversity in ethical judgments does not by itself undercut the legitimacy of such judgment; and (in a move reminiscent of *Modern Dogma*) because in practice we live as if some judgments qualify as shared knowledge.

If we regard narratives, as some contemporary critics do, under the metaphors of games or puzzles, ethical criticism seems inappropriate. But Booth provides an alternative metaphor: texts may be seen as acts of personal relation; implied authors claim to be not just companions but friends. So instead of asking what future effects a story will have on a reader, Booth wants to discern the kind and quality of company it offers while the reader is engaged with it. Booth uses the rhetorical tradition to set up criteria for friendship that can be applied to the evaluation of literature. Then he applies them, with some surprising results, to

some of his own favorites: Rabelais, Austin, Lawrence, and Twain. In fact, Booth introduces this project with the story of a decades-old controversy about teaching Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*. The objections that Booth once discounted, he now takes more seriously; characteristically, he has learned from the discourse in which he has engaged, has been changed by it, though not in the ways that any of his interlocutors might have foreseen. And in this insight as well as any might be captured part of Booth's intellectual and ethical legacy.

In our day's academic bestiary we are more than familiar with Old Boars who have closed their minds, or at least their ears. Booth surely was in a sufficiently cushy position to have done that, to have defended himself, as some contemporaries have, behind a palisade of academic honor and power. Instead, he has been persistently hard on himself in print, not for the sake of public penitence but to push his own thought further in original ways. In *The Rhetoric of Fiction* he criticized the assumptions that might have been his professional gravy train, and pushed himself beyond them. In *The Vocation of a Teacher* he mocks the sexism in an earlier essay with "Is There Any Knowledge a Woman Must Have?" And the whole introduction to *Company* depends on Booth's having continued to think about Paul Moses's objection to *Huckleberry Finn*, thought that leads him not to Moses's position but to one more fully his own.

Booth has taken a certain amount of flak for this bothersome habit of continuing to think from those who wish him to champion Determine Meaning in Texts, who see him as having recanted what he knows or, at least, knew. It is true that he has continued to reshape certain of his conclusions. But he has done so not as a literary Galileo, bent to the corrupt papacy of the politically correct, but (what some might find more subversive) because he has listened, learned, and changed his mind. Booth talks in *The Vocation of a Teacher* about teaching by modeling; what he has modeled in his writing about good reasons is the capacity to change his mind in response to good reasons. To an extraordinary extent, Wayne Booth has been living in his critical discourse the kind of critical life that he has been writing about. By the way he has "taken in"—although I'm sure he'd tell me to use that phrase advisedly and with due irony in this context—other selves into his field of selves, he has not only practiced what he's preached; he has "preached" it in an even more persuasive way in the quality of his intellectual company, and in the critical life in which he has engaged others.

This volume is evidence of just how true and how high a compli-

ment that is. A few of the authors included here have been students in Booth's classrooms. But in pursuing their own very diverse projects, all have found it important to keep his company in reading, and each in distinctive ways and degrees has clearly been shaped in that interrelation. Each—whether investigating logic or literary criticism, Bakhtin or Bacon, economics or music—shows at least this much of his influence: each genuinely and rigorously engages Booth's work and grapples seriously with Booth's evolving notions of rhetoric and pluralism; each, however, extends his work in a productive new direction. Reflecting on what Booth brings to their areas of inquiry, each responds with the "yes, but . . ." that Booth regards as the most welcome of critical responses; striving to understand and to do justice to his work while vitalizing the critical conversation further, in an intriguing variety of directions.

First come two chapters that attempt to resituate Booth, both within contemporary controversies and within the life experiences and roles where such controversies matter most for human character.

Booth has taken on several roles in his illustrious career, most intriguingly the simultaneous roles of generalist and specialist in rhetoric. Walter Jost looks for a way to integrate the roles without demoting or denigrating either one. He finds it in a discussion of the formal and special topics of rhetoric, and the argument that Booth makes about them: that the duty of liberal education is to provide a base on which specialties might be built without losing sight of the foundations on which they rest. Jost finds in this approach to considering specifics while attending to the whole an essential characteristic of Booth's life, beliefs, and work.

One peculiar aspect of that work is the distinctive continuity—in which Booth takes great pleasure—between what Booth has done and what teachers of elementary literacy, grade school teachers of reading and writing, do. Francis-Noël Thomas enlists Booth's continuity with those who are on the front lines of teaching to make a revealing critique of current dogmas about literacy. To say more risks giving away too much, but Thomas's argument is a most ingenious, and perhaps the most devastating, contribution to our ongoing discussions about "core" knowledge—and as such is a meaningful mobilization of (and tribute to) Booth's specific excellences as a teacher.

Booth's work as a literary critic shapes the second section. These chapters focus what the authors take to be Booth's key ethical questions on literature and the criticism of literature. Monica Johnstone takes up two related topics: the first to explicate Booth's version of ethics as heuristic, the second to demonstrate what his ethics offers that other explic-

itly ethical rhetoricians do not. While two more prescriptive approaches fail in application to Jean Genet's *Querelle*, she shows how Booth's more descriptive criticism makes conversation possible even among critics of differing disciplinary commitments who are bound into community by their very activity as critics.

Susan Shapiro examines an intriguing limit case—a case involving the breakdown of narrative community and even the possibilities of discourse—in reading Elie Wiesel's "true fiction" on the Holocaust through Booth. Shapiro sees Wiesel confronting a dilemma: How could Wiesel narrate such an event—seemingly the end of all history and God's presence in history—as stories, accounts that have beginnings, middles, and ends? Yet how could he remain silent, and fail to witness? What seemed to be demanded was no less an enactment, in fiction, of some sort of "postcovenantal religious praxis." Shapiro uses Booth to explicate how Wiesel found the authenticating possibilities of true fiction risked in friendship.

Don Bialostosky examines Booth's revision of his notions of rhetoric in light of Mikhail Bakhtin's works on Dostoevsky and on feminist criticism. Bialostosky characterizes Booth as shifting from a monologic Chicago school perspective toward Bakhtin's dialogic perspective, demonstrating how rhetoric and dialogics have a symbiotic relation worth further analysis. But Bialostosky also argues that Booth, in his response to Bakhtin, effectively shifts the grounds of argument from technical attacks to something like moral differences, confronting directly the problem of evaluating the number of critical voices implied by pluralism, given that neither rhetorical nor dialectical means can fully answer all critical objections.

David Richter examines the evolution in Booth's sense of pluralism—a critical approach that grew and deepened from originally championing instrumental pluralism to revealing an inherent weakness in it, its peculiar and distorting reliance on aligning critical methods as competing rather than as complementary. Richter notes how Booth's move from instrumental pluralism to a pragmatic scheme embroils him in the debate over textual meaning: can Booth reasonably search for inherent meanings in a text—the values of vitality, justice, and understanding—while at the same time not limiting the meaning of the text to the inherent, the predetermined? Although Booth has not yet offered a full solution for this problem, Richter notes a sense in which Booth's emphasis on the social and practical aspect of criticism has enabled him to elude it.

As a University of Chicago dean during the tumultuous 1960s and as

the president of MLA and a national figure during difficult times for literary study, Booth has surely had a public life. But Booth's greater public significance may lie in the implications of his writing. Part 3 pushes Booth further on various aspects of the politics of his work. James Phelan probes Booth's conception of pluralism by elaborating its connection with politics. By examining Gilbert and Gubar's work in feminist criticism and their critique by Toril Moi, Phelan suggests that committed pluralists do indeed have standards by which they judge critics, standards by which he can show how Moi's arguments fail, and how Gilbert and Gubar also fall short. Phelan notes the political implications of his choice of texts, which allow him to conclude "though there is no getting outside of politics, there is also no good reason to treat discourse only as political."

Barbara Foley nonetheless wishes for the connections between Booth's work and politics to be stronger. *The Company We Keep* has evoked in several quarters a similar kind of critique—that the book is apolitical to a fault. Since Booth himself comments extensively in response to Foley's essay, suffice it to say that it is a resourceful and rousing challenge to Booth's choice of putting ethics before politics.

In my own chapter, on Martin Luther King, Jr.'s rhetoric of non-violence, I may be offering a partial response to Foley's criticisms. I argue for an inherently political (if as yet not fully explicated) strain in Booth's ethical approach to rhetoric, and explore its character by using it to open up aspects of a particular text that is wonderfully problematic, both ethically and politically.

Booth's "interdisciplinarity" provides the unifying (or, perhaps the plurifying) theme for part 4, where his influence is stretched from music to economics to philosophy. First, Peter Rabinowitz imports Boothian insights into the musical variant of the rhetorical situation. He constructs at least the foundations of a theoretical framework for understanding how people derive spiritual and emotional messages—essential material for ethical stances and systems—from music. Rabinowitz shows us how to seek such messages not "in the music itself" but in the listener's attributions, made via recollections and interpolations of life experience, to which Booth gives him an original and interesting angle of access.

Few disciplinary worlds are more apparently different from Booth's, if Donald McCloskey is to be believed, than economics, which sustains a kind of academic tradition of divorcing itself from ethics. Nonetheless, McCloskey insists that "modern economics would do well to recog-

nize its Aristotelian *ethos*"; he points to important ways that a Boothian pluralism can speak ethically to economics, and even to a few reciprocal ways in which economics is needed to teach students of literature "a thing or two about ethics." The economist who can make the realization that she is, after all, "a teller of tales" a part of everyday practice will become more valuable company to keep, and thus can teach us more interesting senses of valuable company.

Eugene Garver brings Booth's perspective to a kind of discourse he charges Booth with having scanted, at least in *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (a charge of selectivity to which Booth will choose to respond): discourse in which neither the author nor the reader is abstracted—at least quite so fully as in fiction—from specific political and ethical context. Garver shows how this may be true of discourse that is didactic by design. In this, Garver takes on an interesting burden, for we have all read dreary species of the bludgeoningly didactic kind. And in many instances of this kind of discourse, the purpose of which is to teach, we have seen authors seeking actually to reduce the moral activity of the reader. But for Garver, the genre need not be so bankrupt; he sees in Francis Bacon an intriguing alternative, and uses concepts from Booth to make it accessible, and to allow us to explore how reading didactic discourse can make us better people.

Part 5 explores the problematic and promising relation among assent, ethics, and pluralism. Patsy Callaghan and Ann Dobyns explore that relation as it arises in teaching ethical argument. They place argument at "the theoretical heart of the ethical pursuit," in that region of contingency between the unbending certainties of "hard fact" and the easy relativism of "soft faith" where characters are made. They explicate provocative implications for the purpose and status of the basic course in composition. Booth's notion of assent emerges from their analysis as a prime resource for retheorizing critical thinking for this essential component of education.

Alan Brinton approaches Booth's notions of systematic assent from an analytic tradition, and raises challenging questions about the nature of systematicity. He argues both that Booth's foils in *Modern Dogma*, especially Descartes and Russell, were not as systematically dubious as he characterizes them, and that a truly systematic assent—endorsing the diametric opposite of these foils—would confine Booth to the same intellectually barren ground that rejecting all propositions would. If Brinton can hang Booth on this hook, then systematic assent turns out neither a method of assent, nor systematic. Rather, it would be revealed

as an ethically conservative method, favoring established beliefs and relying on authorities for matters of belief—not a systematic assent, but a system of presumptions and burdens, ironically like the program put forth by Bertrand Russell.

James McOmber regards Booth as in pursuit of a rhetoric of inquiry that is also an ethic of inquiry, urging and enabling persuaders “to attend carefully to the kinds of persons they make of themselves and their followers as they inquire together.” McOmber explores the special connections Booth has forged between argument and character in our pluralistic context, and assesses the value of such connections for the life of the mind and the possibilities of continuing discourse.

Of course it would be an impoverished version of “pluralism” that read it as a mandate for Booth to just stand up and take hit after hit. In the afterword, Booth reflects on these essays and their relative reasonableness; the understanding and the force with which he does so is itself instructive of how he has characteristically engaged in critical discourse. For while Booth has, throughout his career, been willing to correct himself, admit failure, and learn, he has also engaged in strenuous debates with his critics, as much in this volume as elsewhere, and has devastated many of the attacks made upon him. Booth again makes clear that pluralism entails not an uncritical passive acceptance, but a greater responsibility to argue actively (see, for example, the second edition of *The Rhetoric of Fiction*); he continues to teach us here in the critical and ethical qualities with which he makes his counterarguments.

I find consolation in the belief that this book is not the last we will be hearing about, or from, Wayne Booth. This eases my apprehension that full perfect justice has not yet been done to all sides of him—say, to Booth the ironist (has one of our authors missed the irony in Booth’s call for “inventionics or arrangementistics”?); to Booth, the still-aspiring cellist; or to the Booth whose attention, teasing, and practical jokes convinced at least one dubious graduate student of the humanity of the scholarly life, and thus almost singlehandedly kept him in it. After all is said and done, it may be this human aspect that is most elusive. Yet the merger of scholar, thinker, and teacher into the human being is perhaps the ultimate realization of value that makes all the rest of his virtues and insights so enduring and persuasive.

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I

Situating Booth

1

Teaching the Topics: Character, Rhetoric, and Liberal Education

WALTER JOST

Betwixt genius and dilligence there is very little room left for art.

CICERO, *DE ORATORE*, 2.35

TOWARD A UNIFIED FIELD THEORY

CONSIDER HOW, AT first glance (and for some time thereafter), Wayne Booth impresses one not so much as a single Booth than as a complex field of Booths: teacher, dean, member of university and national seminars-colloquia-committees uncountable, MLA president, visiting lecturer, author of works on fiction, criticism, film, education, irony, rhetoric, ethics, religion, teaching. . . .¹ In a recent address Booth calls himself a rhetorician, and in a recent book a generalist: a closer look will reveal to the initiate that for Booth these mean the same thing, but a set of questions will have occurred to the longtime Booth reader well before this: Is there a center to this widening (or at least fluctuating) gyre, is there some doctrine, activity, character, that pulls these pursuits together? Is calling oneself a generalist only an unsuccessful dodge of the more obviously demeaning label "dilettante" (however brilliant this

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dilettantism may be)? Or is there a unified field theory to account for these many Wayne Booths?

Such a unified center does exist, I believe, though my aim in this chapter is not personal praise. Instead, I am interested in arguing that Booth's version of rhetorical generalism is relevant to understanding—Booth, to be sure; in my view an essential perspective on Booth—but, more importantly, to understanding the very enterprise of rhetoric itself, as a dynamic, changing basis for liberal education—an education precisely to a specific, coherent, intellectual and moral character.² Booth has never been content with whatever ethical order or identity he may have managed for himself (as real-life author or act-er) over forty-odd years of multiform activity. Explicitly in most of his writings, more or less implicitly in the rest, Booth has not only written about rhetorical education, he has urged it on his readers (and exemplified it in doing so) as an ideal that will organize us—both our own individual characters, and the collective character of the communities we share. My question about Booth, then, is at the same time a question about the unity of rhetoric, ethics, and education: Just what is the unified activity of a rhetorician (qua generalist) such that we should attempt to fashion ourselves, our communities, and this very fashioning itself, in accord with it? My emphasis, it will be clear, is not on Booth the man or “Booth” the implied author, much less on anything like a real “theory” (certainly as metaphorical a concept here as “center” and “gyre”), but on the rhetorical activity of educating to a “rhetoric” that can be named and identified and studied in performance, but not frozen in historical time or place.

An inquiry that would begin to do justice to these themes would range further and penetrate deeper than the limits of this chapter allow, but within these limits I seek to offer some insights into these related matters. My thesis is simple but works on two levels: first, character, rhetoric, and the cultivation of these in liberal education constitute the very center of Booth's concerns—both the subject of his writings, and the activity exemplified in those writings and in his other activities—and I am concerned on this level with the coherence of the two together. Second, and more broadly, I believe that we can all gain a coherent and compelling view of what liberal education should be, precisely through an understanding of what a rhetorical character should be. I might set up my argument more clearly by dispatching (if not disproving) a few common misconceptions.

First, as Aristotle (and the subsequent tradition in which the likes of Cicero, Vico, Newman, and Booth stand) makes clear, rhetoric is

not a principled inquiry into a determinate subject matter, but rather a “faculty” or “power” or (loosely, as in Cicero) an “art” or method. This power or method in turn, however, is to be equated with neither those interminable, barren lists of tropes, or commonplaces, or rules, or argument-types, that rhetoricians have regularly accumulated in the past, nor again with those “good reasons” or “warrantable assents” that theorists (like Booth, partly following Dewey) have rightly championed against various positivisms in our own time. Booth's stress on “good reasons” has been right, no doubt, given the dogmas he was trying to remove, but throughout his works implicitly, and explicitly in *The Vocation of a Teacher* (1988), Booth reminds us that rhetoric involves not only proof or judgment, but discovery or *inventio*. In diverting our attention from judgment to invention, I am suggesting that earlier campaigns in the rhetoric war, particularly those fought to establish the nonfoundationalist nature of reason (excellently chronicled by Richard Bernstein, among others³), are now widely seen to have been successful. On the other hand, we have not yet begun to fight for the changes in education our earlier gains require if they are not to be wasted. More than twenty-five years ago, in “The Revival of Rhetoric” (1965), Booth had observed (not entirely tongue-in-cheek): “I find it interesting . . . that with all our modern passion for inventing new studies with proper labels we do not even have words in our language for the sciences of invention and arrangement. . . . [S]urely it is time for someone to make himself a professor of inventionics or arrangementistics . . .” (42). For Booth, as for Aristotle and Cicero, rhetoric involves inquiry as well as proof; and for Booth and Cicero, Vico and Vives, Newman, Kierkegaard, and Kenneth Burke, rhetoric comprises the building of character, community, and truth by cultivating the ability to discover warrantable assents in all areas of knowledge (or, across the curriculum), because all knowledge is more or less rhetorical, more or less bound up with the interests, values, beliefs, expectations, and the like of inquirers.

From this perspective, secondly, we can conceive of liberal education, after Booth himself, not so much in the first instance as a doctrine, a “knowledge most worth having,” than as a method, a knowing most worth *doing*, that shares with rhetoric three characteristics: first, it concerns all areas of knowledge, not a single determinate subject matter; second, it is mediated (in varying degrees) by the “whole person”; and third, it involves a critical inquiry or invention not reducible to algorithmic methods—it involves a rhetorical power of discovering, as Booth says, what really warrants our assent (not only within a stable frame-

work of truths, as in Aristotle, but also among competing frameworks or paradigms). To be sure, this view of liberal education as rhetorical is not unique to Booth, nor is it free of tension with several contrary currents in his thought. Still, it is a view in eclipse in recent discussions of liberal education, though there are stirrings on the right and the left respecting rhetoric and education.⁴ But it has been little observed and less remarked that Booth illuminates this matter in rich detail in both his discussion and his critical practice, and for the remainder of this chapter I pursue his type of rhetoric of liberal education, in part by reference to his works, but first by picking up a discussion among rhetoricians over what I take to be the heart of rhetorical invention (and thus liberal education): the role of rhetorical topics (*topoi*) in teaching and inquiry.

PLACING THE TOPICS

The history of the topics is notoriously slippery (as is well known, the term has a dozen or more meanings and applications) but we might try to simplify: *topics* are “places” the rhetor turns to—or, less metaphorically, ideas, terms, formulas, phrases, propositions, argument forms, and so on that the rhetor turns to—to discover what to say on a given matter. Topics as determinate formulas of one sort or another, what Bacon called “promptuary devices” and others “commonplaces,” ranging from a memorized word or line to entire prefabricated passages, are of no concern here since they are peculiarly nonrhetorical (fixed and determinate when the supposition of rhetoric is the opposite). What is of interest are those topics that are more or less indeterminate verbal resources useful for discovering (or “inventing”) what is relevant, arguable, persuasive in a given case (let us call them *inventional* topics). The *inventional* topics belong to rhetoric as an intellectual faculty oriented to “action” (to practical effect, to nonexpert audiences or expert audiences considering nonexpert aspects of their expertise, and to the “practical” generally), and to “indeterminacy” (the concrete and contingent nature of rhetorical issues).⁵ But how, more specifically, are topics to function, and how is the teaching of topics to proceed? To answer these questions we need to do two things: first, by an act of (topical) “placement,” in Kenneth Burke’s terms, we need to identify how topics have been understood historically; and secondly, by a further act of placement, we need to turn to specific examples (the exemplary work of Wayne Booth), to the *application* of an otherwise abstract knowledge of rhetoric, to ap-

preciate that *only* such concrete knowledge of topics can provide what has long been understood to be genuine liberal education.

The most comprehensive schema in the literature on topics distinguishes between *material* and *formal*, that is, topics that express or generate substantive issues and warrants of various sorts, and those that provide only the “forms” of arguments.⁶ Aristotle is a case in point (Cicero, Quintilian, and later theorists would do as well): the twenty-eight inferential “forms” (the *topoi enthymematon*) listed in Book II of the *Rhetoric*, arguments from definition, cause, sign, similarity, circumstance, and so on (which have never ceased to reappear in one guise or another in textbooks on composition, speech, rhetoric, and criticism) are formal topics. Material topics (in Aristotle at least) are of two types: the *koina* or “the commons” applicable to all subjects (more/less, possible/impossible, past/future fact, and the premises that derive from these headings); and the *eide* or “special topics” belonging to specific substantive areas. To be sure, the distinction between material and formal topics is relative: formal topics seek to help generate material but are themselves empty, and material topics naturally have some formal dimension to them, inferential or otherwise, though their utility is substantive, not formal.

Of the material topics there are several types or forms that can be found in Aristotle, Cicero, and other theorists: in particular, special topics (though common also) can be (1) general substantive headings or categories of knowledge (in Cicero “act” and “person,” or again the *utile* and *honestas*; in Aristotle “ways and means,” “imports and exports,” “motives,” “laws”); or substantive concepts (and groups of concepts), or indeed verbal structures of any sort (a law case, a character in a narrative, a narrative itself, an image), whose meaning is to be (re-)negotiated in a given case; (2) propositions used as major premises in arguments (vid. *Rhetoric*, Book I, 5–15); and (3) background information—assumptions, truths, and so on—that the rhetor can use to generate arguments of various sorts based on such information (e.g., Aristotle’s analyses of the emotions in *Rhetoric*, Book II). With respect to the greater importance of special as compared to common topics, John Henry Newman observed, “To say nothing else, common-places are but blunt weapons, whereas it is particular topics that penetrate and reach their marks” (338). And Bacon was equally impressed by the special *topoi*: “. . . *topics* are of two sorts, general and special. The general we have spoken to; but the particular hath been touched by some, but *rejected generally as inartificial and variable*. But . . . I do receive particular topics, (that is,