Wayne Booth and the Ethics of Argument

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ARGUING AS AN ETHICAL ACT

Wayne Booth's work has been dominated by ethical concerns, from his early *The Rhetoric of Fiction* with its overtly ethical conclusion, in essays proclaiming the need for reasoned discourse collected in *Now Don't Try to Reason with Me*, to his defense of shared literary experiences in *A Rhetoric of Irony*, in his faith that some truth is to be found in the mutual exchange of differing opinions in *Critical Understanding*, and recently by his advocacy of friendship as the metaphor for the interaction of author and reader in *The Company We Keep*. While all of these works are predicated on the assumption that as human beings discourse they make meaning together, they also present a philosophy of argument as primary in the testing and embracing of values. Argument is then the theoretical heart of the ethical pursuit. In 1974 Booth explicitly defined his philosophy of argument in a book written in part as a response to the protests of the 1960s and the "failure of communication" between warring factions (*Modern Dogma* ix). Originally a lecture series at the University of Notre Dame in 1971, the essays presented in *Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent* constitute what is perhaps Booth's most direct explanation of his rhetorical position. Rhetoric, he explains in his introduction, is "the art of discovering warrantable beliefs and improving those beliefs in shared discourse" (*Modern Dogma* xiii).

Why argue anyway? To pursue an answer, we must set two lines of reasoning that render the question pointless. First, if it were possible to address the question through objective observation of available facts,
people would have no need to discuss it, for the answer would be self-evident. Second, if the question is not one of "hard fact" but instead one of "soft faith," then whatever answer is proposed would necessarily be an assertion of "value" or belief, and thus mere personal preference. To go on talking about the question in either case would be to join a "world of futile babblers" (*Modern Dogma* xi). As Booth sees it, these ways of addressing the question assume a passive, almost unconscious acceptance of the "dogmas of modernism," dogmas which have created a rhetorical crisis that is also an ethical one: "We have lost faith in the very possibility of finding a rational path through any thicket that includes what we call value judgments" (*Modern Dogma* 7). And yet, Booth holds out hope for such a rational path. As users and sharers of symbols, and as imperfect beings in an imperfect world, humans act ethically when they reason together toward probable and contingent truths. In the process of discovering assent, humans seek a point of agreement from which to begin a dialogue. The dialogue itself builds the self, so we discover who we are and become who we are through communicating with each other. Through this process the world and truth are both found and made, and the act of finding meaning together supercedes the importance of any particular product. The sense of this stance seems as practical as the humor in the old story about the three blind philosophers and the elephant: The first feels the trunk and declares he's found a snake; the second feels the tail and pronounces it a rope; the third feels a side and knows he faces a wall. Wayne Booth asks us to consider the possibility of discovering the whole elephant: reasoning together, accepting that which we have every reason to believe and no good reason to doubt, we argue in order to agree.

*Assent Instead of Skepticism*

As Booth represents them, the two "sects" of modernism present man as an atomic, physical mechanism, the universe as impersonal and value free, and knowledge as the provable. The first sect of modernism Booth identifies, scientism, posits a neutral universe, inherently impersonal, in which truth exists apart from the individual as a set of facts to be discovered through the systematic doubt of empiricism. The individual in this universe is isolated, the mind a material organ that operates mechanically by chemical and physical laws. Our human responsibility consists, then, of seeking certainty through the examination of facts, of discovering knowledge and truth while avoiding the self-delusion of opinion,
belief, and value by doubting all pending proof. The second sect, irrationalism, recognizes the limit of scientism to be that it fails to cope in other than empirical terms with multiple, simultaneous, even contradictory truths. Since little, as we know, is invulnerable to the probings of empiricism, scientism must eventually disprove all external truths; thus certainty would be found only in self-knowledge. Isolated in a self-constructed reality, the individual seeks truth through the subjective examination of internal feelings, since each person’s truth is uniquely valuable for that person alone. Seeming opposites, the two schools of modernism share the methodological assumptions of science, the mechanical metaphors of technology, the isolation of the individual, and the goal of certainty. Though in one case facing human responsibility means finding the world through objective observation and in the other case creating the world out of our own perceptions and feelings, in both cases individuals seek certain truth through retreat to skepticism—into the corner they find by doubting all pending proof, or into a “self” of preconceived notions and biases.

Given these assumptions, argument—all discourse about values—will be necessarily divisive, mechanistic, competitive, and isolationist. The only answers to the question “why argue” would either be “to win” or “to assert the self,” and the only way to go about arguing would be to pronounce assertions at each other. Booth regards such a situation a failure of rhetoric resulting from a “radically mistaken conception of the nature and possibilities of argument” (*Modern Dogma* 11), and posits instead a habit of mind that radically alters the epistemological groundings of our process of communicating: a rhetoric of assent. Rather than rejecting hypotheses or approaching them with skepticism, people ought rather tentatively to accept any premise (1) that they have no particular reason to doubt, (2) that they have good reasons to believe, and (3) that others who are educated about the problem also believe (*Modern Dogma* 40). “It is reasonable,” Booth insists, “to grant (one ought to grant) some degree of credence to whatever qualified men and women agree on, unless one has specific and stronger reasons to disbelieve” (*Modern Dogma* 101).

**Rhetorical Communities**

Countering what he has called “dogmas,” Booth asserts that the “primary act of man is to assent to truth rather than to detect error” (*Modern Dogma* xvi). Rather than seeing humans as isolated, material beings
operating by mechanical laws, he presents the self as existing in a community of individuals who build each other through symbolic exchange. Instead of existing in a universe that is value free, found through objective examination of facts or through subjective examination of feelings, Booth's individual operates as a field of selves, both discovering and changing the world through dialectic. The answer to "why argue" becomes then a matter not of asserting positions or winning ground, but of discovering "together, in discourse, new levels of truth (or at least agreement) that neither side suspected before" (Modern Dogma 11). Individuals do this, Booth argues, to exercise responsible judgment, to achieve cooperation, to solve problems, and finally, to survive. "If," Booth asks, "language is not a means of communication but the source of our being, and if the purpose of rhetoric is not to persuade but to meet other minds in the best possible symbolic exchange . . . everything we value, including the achievements of science and mathematics, depends on this fact which is a value: men ought to attend to whatever good reasons are offered them by other men" (Modern Dogma 142). Thus the responsibility placed upon us is clear: "we must build new rhetorical communities, we must find a common faith in modes of argument, or every institution we care about will die" (Modern Dogma 150).

Seen this way, the process of argument is essentially ethical: we ought to attend to whatever good reasons are offered to us by others, and we ought to seek the conditions under which a meeting of minds is likely to occur. As participants in the dialogue, we should react with common sense, accepting only premises that in some way are true to our experiences. We should begin not with doubt, as many theorists of critical thinking would have us do, but with assent, giving credence to a valid, shared position as a starting point in a line of reasoning. We should test our ideas through discourse, listening with understanding to the arguments of others. And we should be willing to change our minds. Thus the process of rhetorical inquiry becomes more important than any possible conclusions, as individuals discover and test not just what they believe, but what they find they should believe, creating a rhetorical community based on shared values.

Community and Good Reasons

Rhetoric is the "art of discovering good reasons," and individuals pursue that art because good reasons provide the only basis for rational behavior. "Good rhetoric" is not what is successful or effective in the
face of “pig-headed” audiences, but what “any reasonable person ought to be persuaded by” (Modern Dogma xiv). Conversely, “bad rhetoric lacks genuine power to move reasonable auditors” (Modern Dogma xv). To argue well, individuals should argue honestly, genuinely, attending to their own assumptions and making sure they have good reasons for believing that to which they would encourage others to assent. Furthermore, individuals should argue critically, listening to the arguments of others with understanding. As Booth explains, “To be genuinely critical—to judge on the basis of thought—is to have no easily predictable relationship with belief or doubt, with yes or no, with joining or splitting. The critical mind does not know in advance which side it will come out on” (Now Don’t Try to Reason 66).

Essential to this process of arguing is the grounding of the rhetorical community in common sense, or those principles agreed upon by “any thoroughly informed and rational—any thoroughly qualified—human being” (Modern Dogma 110). As humans, individuals have more common than different experiences. And because of our common experiences, we share many beliefs or values. In other words, we choose to hold many postulates first because they ring true to our patterns of experience, and further, because they stand up when tested against others’ patterns of experience. Rather than an argument for universal principles, Booth’s position suggests that humans make meaning together and do so through dialogue about shared experiences. Further, the strength of the testing of such agreements rests on the rationality and experience of the testers. Our rhetorical communities then comprise ourselves and those whose empirical testing qualifies them as experts on the question at issue. Such a concept seems to come dangerously close to that of the bandwagon, and Booth acknowledges the comparison. What makes Booth’s explanation of assenting to values in rhetorical communities different is his faith in the credibility of the educated examination of experience. Fanatical groups exist whose beliefs seem based on common experience, but it does not follow that reasonable humans will assent to such beliefs, precisely because the beliefs would contradict their own experiences and those of other reasonable humans.

Such a definition of systematic assent allows Booth to find a starting place for discussion when individuals disagree, thus identifying a rhetorical community in which real dialogue is possible. It is only in real dialogue, Booth argues, that humans create themselves as they propose good reasons for the positions they hold and seriously entertain the good reasons offered by those with whom they disagree. Such a mutual
exchange, on issues important to all participants and discussed on common ground with respect for opposing arguments, promises what Booth calls "improving beliefs in shared discourse" (*Modern Dogma* xiii). Attending to a multiplicity of voices is for Booth inherent in ethical argument. Individuals may choose to ignore what Booth elsewhere calls the "dialogic imagination" (see "Freedom of Interpretation: Bakhtin and the Challenge of Feminist Criticism"). But by doing so they miss opportunities to see the world in new ways, to grow and change consciously as they participate in the exciting social interaction of "being persons together" (*Modern Dogma* 134).

**The Rhetoric of Assent and the Study of Literature**

In many ways, *Modern Dogma* and the *Rhetoric of Assent* shows the coherence of Booth's writings. Though clearly a work about reasoning, Booth's *Modern Dogma* presents a philosophy of good reasons that has less to do with logic than with ethics. The self, Booth argues, is "essentially rhetorical, symbol exchanging, a social product in process of changing through interaction, sharing values with other selves" (*Modern Dogma* 126). In the dialogue with other selves, whether face to face or with the implied author of an artistic work, humans are making and remaking themselves. This process is an ethical one, first because human actions form human character, or ethos, and further because the dialogue Booth describes involves judging good reasons offered by other selves. Booth's philosophy of good reasons rather than being an inquiry into certain truth concerns the formation of character.

Throughout his discussions of argument, Booth explores the way humans change through their interactions with others, whether people or ideas or art, music, or literature. Having concluded *The Rhetoric of Fiction* with a consideration of the ethical dimensions of literary works, Booth comes back repeatedly to the discussion. In *Modern Dogma*, he claims that art "is of fundamental importance in making and changing our minds (or souls or selves or identities)" (168). The study of literature for Booth is less a matter of the attempt to find the meaning of a text than to engage in dialogue with a writer about values. Literary works, he suggests, present positions on questions of value and, further, give good reasons for those positions. Readers engage in dialogue by considering the strength of the reasons and by judging them against their own experiences and the experiences of other careful readers. In *Modern Dogma*, Booth describes this process as one in which the writer
Wayne Booth and the Ethics of Argument presents a position on a question of value by performing a narrative act and in that performance affirming an attitude toward a question of value. Stories are the reasons writers give for their position—the experience of the story expresses a worldview. Readers participate in the constructed experience and judge the validity of the attitude expressed through that experience. When readers participate in the experience, they are in some way changed, and because art has the power to change us, Booth argues, we ought to read critically and examine the reasons writers give for the positions they espouse.

In *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction*, Booth takes on the task of presenting a definition of ethical criticism and giving good reasons for engaging in such an activity. In this book, he explicitly shifts the issue from the determinacy of meaning to the value of the narrative experience and the ways in which that experience is sharable. Booth acknowledges that “the question of whether value is in the poem or in the reader is radically and permanently ambiguous,” but to admit the inherent ambiguity is not to suggest that all judgment is subjective. Booth explains, “Of course the value is not there, actually until it is actualized, by the reader. But of course it could not be actualized if it were not there, in potential, in the poem” (*Company* 89). The process of actualizing the potential value system of a literary work initiates a dialogue between author and readers that develops into a larger critical conversation about the values at issue. While readers may not evaluate the experience in precisely the same ways, they can discuss their judgments and their reasons for such judgments. The ethical inquiry is one conducted in a critical community. For Booth “the most important of all critical tasks is to participate in—and thus to reinforce—a critical culture, a vigorous conversation, that will nourish in return those who feed us with their narratives” (*Company* 136).

TEACHING ETHICAL ARGUMENT

If it is ethical to argue, to seek shared understandings regarding values, then it is also good to promote rhetorical inquiry. We should ask “what ‘rhetorical communities’ can be discovered that may in fact unite seemingly warring factions, and what are the real conflicts that separate rhetorical communities based on conflicting assumptions?” (*Modern Dogma* xiv). We study rhetoric to learn to argue “ethically,” to increase the possibility that we can reach shared understandings with others. As teachers,
we are in a position to create communities of inquirers in our own class­
rooms, and yet we often have to work against the traditional authority of writing texts based on the dogmas of scientism, which have taught “that the goal of all thought and argument is to emulate the purity and objectivity and rigor of science, in order to protect oneself from the errors that passion and desire and metaphor and authority and all those logical fallacies lead us into” (Modern Dogma 88). We also have to work against the traditional authority structure of the classroom, which inhibits notions of community and sharing.

Two textbooks by Booth and Marshall W. Gregory, the Harper and Row Rhetoric and the Harper and Row Reader, help teachers and students consider the value of thinking about ideas together. The Rhetoric, subtitled Writing as Thinking, Thinking as Writing, introduces the choices writers must make in the symbolic exchange as they attempt to change the minds of others, while the Reader approaches the symbolic exchange from the recipient's perspective and thus examines the ways other writers share their intentions, values, and meanings. The distinctions are, of course, not so neat as the contrast might make them appear. One way the authors of the Rhetoric discuss the various choices student writers might consider is by analyzing the strategies that were employed in completed essays. Likewise, in the Reader, Booth and Gregory ask students to participate in the dialogue invited by the essays they read, not merely to analyze the strategies of argument. Throughout both texts, the dialogic nature of the processes of reading and writing, as well as the importance of those arts, is reinforced. Writing is treated as a ‘conversation’ with potential readers” (Rhetoric xiv), a conversation that will involve students in a process of inquiry through which they will repeatedly be making themselves—finding, testing, evaluating, and frequently changing their beliefs, and thus it is clear that the composition course is not a service course but potentially the most significant college experience.

As in Modern Dogma, the emphasis is on the importance of finding common ground. The process of becoming educated, the authors say, is “in part, learning to take in the contrasting perspectives of other lives” (Rhetoric 157), and writing itself “is one of our most effective ways of learning, for it not only forces us to attend to other people's arguments and opinions, but also forces us to think through our own views” (Reader 12). Unlike in other introductory writing texts that include the inevitable warning of the danger of discussing controversial and apparently irresolvable issues (for example, Maxine Hairston’s Contemporary
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In which she argues in chapter 4, “Where Rhetoric Starts and Stops,” that communication is impossible when a priori premises conflict, Booth and Gregory demonstrate ways to discuss and even sometimes resolve apparently irresolvable issues. In analyses of pieces of completed writing, Booth and Gregory put the reader in the mind of the writer, most importantly by making them consider the rhetorical context that compelled the writer to write.

An early example from the Rhetoric illustrates their approach. The authors reprint a letter written to the editor of the New York Times in which the writer recounts the martyrdom of Sir Thomas More, an act of conscience claimed inspirational by many politicians, such as New York’s Governor Cuomo. In his narration of the events leading to More’s martyrdom, the writer emphasizes the consistency of More’s private principles and his public actions. Today, the writer concludes, public officials claim private disapproval of abortion while publicly defending laws that allow its practice. Such officials, he suggests, have not learned the lesson the martyr’s death ought to teach. The analysis that follows the letter demonstrates the kind of critical understanding Booth and Gregory advocate. Why did the writer compose his letter, they ask; what was the situation that compelled him to write, and to whom was the letter addressed? Given his particular rhetorical situation, what strategies did he employ—strategies of argument, design, cohesiveness, character, and style? Throughout the discussion, Booth and Gregory withhold judgment as to the correctness of the writer’s position, taking on the task as if it were their own. If you were to tackle this situation, they seem to say, how might you choose to proceed? By taking the reader through the writer’s hypothetical thinking process, they encourage the reader to consider the writer’s concerns, beliefs, ways of approaching the task—to examine the issue from his perspective and thus enter into real dialogue with him.

Writers also are obliged to do all they might to seek understanding of others’ positions as they attempt to discover the best possible reasons in support of their own arguments. As the letter to the Times illustrates, purposes consist of both writers’ motives and the changes writers hope to make in their readers. While considering strategies, the authors argue, writers must explore issues in light of the positions their readers might hold—they must, in other words, “bring in the voice of the opposition” (Rhetoric 82). The processes of discovering arguments then involve critically questioning one’s own principles and thus, potentially, changing one’s mind. But while there are no infallible rules for
judging good reasons, Booth and Gregory establish some principles to help writers consider their options. To argue well, writers should know the variety and kinds of reasons available to them because the modes of argument, shared as they are by humans, provide the most obvious common ground (or commonplaces, in Aristotelian terms) from which to argue. Further, writers should spend time thinking about their audience’s beliefs and needs, should strive to meet their readers’ standards as well as their own, and should adjust the strength of their own claims to the strength of their reasons. Keeping these principles in mind could make it less likely that writers would fall into the dishonest practice of trying to “get readers to follow without thinking about the cost, the direction, or alternative paths” (Rhetoric 241). To do so is, according to the principles espoused in Modern Dogma, dishonest to both writer and reader because such a practice misses the point of argument. “The supreme purpose of persuasion in this view could not be to talk someone else into a preconceived view; rather it must be to engage in mutual inquiry or exploration. In such a world, our rhetorical purpose must always be to perform as well as possible in the same primal symbolic dance which makes us able to dance at all. If it is good for men to attend to each other’s reasons—and we all know that it is, because without such attending none of us could come to be and questions about value could not even be asked—it is also good to work for whatever conditions make such mutual inquiry possible. Whatever imposes belief without personal engagement becomes inferior to whatever makes mutual exchange more likely. The purpose of mental change is thus to fulfill one’s nature as a creature capable of responding to symbolic offerings” (Modern Dogma 137).

These texts, then, explicitly endorse Booth’s vision of argument as coming face to face with human responsibilities. Booth and Gregory offer students reasons for writing that appeal not to their desire for better grades or better wages, but to their personal, social, and cultural identities, reasons that reinforce the notion of argument as the basis of human existence. Writers write to gain greater control over their own lives, and “to help create the kind of world—presumably a ‘better’ one—that [they] want to live in” (Rhetoric 11). Writers discover that “[l]earning to think critically about the way powerful language is used in our culture is really the same as learning to think about the culture itself: about freedom and community” (Rhetoric 244). And they find that language, rather than being something they inherit like property, is “more like the air we breathe, the medium that sustains our very
life” (Rhetoric 28); it is, Booth and Gregory point out in their introducto­
ry comments in the Reader, the form of behavior that characterizes humans.

Thus the textbooks, in admitting, even insisting on, the discussibility of values, clearly include an agenda of ethical beliefs. In addition, the authors provide the best model of their teachings, refusing to allow readers to adopt that agenda uncritically. The dialogic process is reinforced both in the manner and the matter of the approach. As the authors observe in the Rhetoric, “Instead of leading you like sheep, we keep inviting you to think critically about our claims and our arguments” (241). In fact, at the end of the first chapter, they list some of the claims about writers and writing they have made so far—claims that assert the uncertainty of “truth,” the social and dialogic nature of the self and language, and the value of seeking assent—and ask that students “argue” the claims, finding good reasons to support their truth or falsehood.

Teachers, following the model of the authors of the Rhetoric and the Reader, thus have a dual role: they act both as participants in the rhetorical community, exhibiting their own “high excitement about learning steadily toward higher standards for their answers” (Rhetoric 22). To establish the dialogic nature of the classroom, teachers are advised to start modeling “active learning” on the first day, getting students to talk, read, and write together; to hold personal conferences early; to use editorial teams and workshop sessions; and to practice discussion, a difficult art in an environment plagued by naive relativism and a constant devaluing of “opinion” in favor of “fact.” They are asked directly to follow in their teaching the same rhetorical ethics they would encourage in their students, exhibiting openness, tolerance, and liberality of mind and heart. As Booth and Gregory put it, “we address each other, and try to change one another’s minds, because we all know that nobody is perfect, either in knowledge or behavior. In learning to write better—without hope of perfection—we join the age-old, never-ending human project of trying to make life better for us all” (Rhetoric 467).

ETHICAL ARGUMENT BEYOND THE WRITING CLASSROOM

If the limited “vision” of the three blind philosophers is obvious enough to be the basis of the old story’s humor, then why is it that a similar absence of common ground so often seems to muddle public discourse
about issues? Booth’s own observations of the complicated entangle-
ments characterizing campus rhetoric in the 1960s prompted his concern
with the ethics of arguing, but our own experiences offer little evidence
that, twenty years later, a discussion about values is less likely to result
in an impasse. On the national front recently, a row of senators with
furrowed brows contemplated the testimony of Clarence Thomas and
Anita Hill at hearings concerning Thomas’s nomination for Supreme
Court Justice. The senators’ puzzlement was painfully obvious. They
sought diligently and hopefully for the fact, the single witness, the piece
of news that would take the situation out of the realm of probability
and into the empirical science of certainty. Without that missing fact,
they seemed to lack even an awareness of how to go about regarding
the information they had. It was obvious from both the questions and
answers that the senators had not articulated, much less agreed upon,
assumptions about the nature and seriousness of sexual harassment, the
qualifications of the candidate, or the relevance of the charges to their
understanding of the qualifications for the job. Because they had not
undertaken the chore of articulating their positions, of defining their
common ground, of establishing the nature and limitations of their task,
they were left with the impossibility of determining who was telling
“the” truth. Given this example of public discourse, it is obvious why
students have difficulty accepting that it is even possible, much less
desirable, to make decisions in a situation where the facts aren’t enough.

In the 1992 presidential elections, media personalities made much
of the difference in the candidates’ “styles.” George Bush, it seemed,
was more “decisive.” Clinton, the continuing story asserted, was “inde-
cisive.” Time and time again what the examples illustrated was that
Clinton, unlike Bush, not only changed his mind when confronted with
new knowledge or good reasons, but was willing to admit such changes
publicly. Far from considering the possible ethics of the strategy, many
regarded this openness as a lack of character: a suspicious weakness.
Given this assumption, it is no wonder that students presume in their
courses that their task is to assert their preconceived ideas—that they
have a right to say only what they can assert with certainty, or what
they can assert with pretended authority. We think of one student who
came to class in tears on the day a paper was due. “I’m sorry,” she said.
“I have to write about something else. While I was reading about my
other topic, I changed my mind.”

In our public involvements beyond the writing classroom, we also
witness the frequency with which discussions of values result in an
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impasse. With the help of an administration practiced in the art of collaborative dialogue, a local school district recently extricated itself from what could have been a devastating crisis. It began when a parent objected to some of the contemporary stories included in a recently adopted anthology of short fiction. Some teachers joined in the call for review of the decision; others were appalled at the possibility of self-censorship among their ranks. Suddenly and without warning, tempers flared. Anger divided long-term colleagues. Assumptions about knowledge, training, learners, aesthetics, responsibility, and public trust were articulated as if permanent, paramount, and uncomplicated by situation and particulars. Though the issue seemed hopelessly polarized, an administrator asked the faculty to name and invite a panel of parents and university faculty to participate in a dialogue on the decision. He required that the meeting continue until the participants reached some agreement, and agreed to support that decision to the school board. The panel was instructed to establish, first, a list of criteria for selecting literary texts, and then to evaluate the anthology in light of those criteria.

In the end, no one, it seemed, questioned the quality of the literature included in the anthology. Second, everyone accepted the principle that the appropriateness of the material depended on how a good teacher might handle it. Third, and this was an essential discovery, many of the teachers, already overworked, admitted that their stance was influenced by their fear of having to prepare to teach literature they had not "mastered" in their university training. Having identified this common ground, the panel proposed a resolution acceptable to all parties: Because no one should have to teach a text with which they are unfamiliar, and because no one should be prevented categorically from using a text they can justify professionally, the story anthology should remain available as an optional text for teachers to use depending on the needs and backgrounds of their students and the specific teaching goals.

The warrant is simple. It recognizes and acknowledges matters of value, even though it may not resolve them permanently. It recognizes that solutions to problems are contextual, and yet that people can agree on the ethical grounds of the answers. But possibly more important than the particular wording of the resolution were its other effects: a release in the tension surrounding the issue that allowed more honest inquiry, a greater understanding of purpose and goals among the language arts professionals, and the survival of dialogue in an essential teaching community far in time and space from Booth’s Chicago cam-
pus, but identical in its need for ways to arrive at shared understandings through the art of discovering warrantable beliefs.

If we argue to agree we must also agree to argue. Understanding, justice, even our existence as a human community depend upon our ability to keep critical interchange vital: "The Babel of critical voices is transformed at the moment when each critic decides that his survival depends not on shouting down all the others but on granting them a hearing" (Critical Understanding 232). Thus Booth enjoins us all to employ the ethics of argument, to create community through rhetoric, to discover warrantable beliefs, and to improve those habits in shared discourse.

Bibliography