Afterword

Let Us All Mount Our Good Chargers, Whatever Their Names, and Gallop Off Joyfully in All Directions, a Mysteriously United Company Serving the Empress of All the Sciences, Rhetoric

WAYNE BOOTH

"The crisis for all honest students of rhetoric comes when they realize that they know too much about too many things about which they know too little."

DIONYSIUS OF HALICARNASUS

"It is good to have friends because they can praise you when it would not be decent to praise yourself."

EUGENE CARVER

I can't think of any writing assignment tougher than this one—except perhaps trying to draft a preface when you feel that a book is not really finished. The plaguey task here is to keep focused on the true point of such a book as this.

I'd love to be able to claim that none of the diverse selves in the chorus that Jost, McOmber, and others describe could be tempted to see that point as the exclusive celebration of "our" work or the correction of careless or hostile misrepresentations. The unsurprising fact is
that among my chorus of selves there is a rather insistent deep bass who keeps his *Who's Who* entry up to date, who on rare occasions has even signed a letter of recommendation as "Distinguished Service Professor of English and Ideas and Methods Emeritus," and who cares far too much about being attended to. This self gets angry or depressed when people misread him, and he is already demanding a voice here. But because to give him his way would be to deflect us from our true business, I'll try very hard to ban him from our company.

To say as much of course implies that there is another self who feels some contempt for what I—we, the other selves—like to call DISTSERPROF: we like to mock him and all others who see the world as little more than a status-race. Indeed, we—that is to say, the I that is *above* all such stuff—recently wrote an utterly sincere satire—so far rejected by only two journals—against the growing practice of citation-counting—the very thing that DISTSERPROF might be guilty of.

*DISTSERPROF:* Oh, come off it. You know you think that our satire is better than just "utterly sincere." Actually it's brilliant, not to say devastating. And while we're at it, surely we should mention that hilarious, published, but sadly neglected satire of ours directed against the national sport of image-building, *The Art of Deliberalizing.* And while I have the floor, surely we should . . .

That's enough of that. Just keep out of this, while we go about our serious work. As James Stephens once exclaimed to his unruly phallus, "Down, wanton, down!" I don't want to hear any more from you or from any of the others I sense clamoring for entry here. I promise that if I come to feel that you have anything really to say for yourself I may, just may, give you a chance later on.

*IGNORAMUSWB:* As the only really honest one among those voices, can I just point out that we are not even sure it was James Stephens; we surely ought to be careful here throughout not to disguise our immense ignorance . . .

Don't you see what you're both doing? You're spoiling the true point. No more, please!

Every alert student of rhetoric must be plagued at times by St. Paul's kind of self-laceration: "I have left undone those things which I ought
to have done, and I have done those things which I ought not to have
done, and there is no [rhetorical] health in me." Reading through these
essays I’ve been struck not so much by what we students of rhetoric
have achieved, since “the great revival,” as by what a wonderful variety
of openings now face us. So, with rhetoric and its study fully legitimated
in the academy, I would like now to imagine the totally unlikely ap­
pointment, in the year 2014, of a carefully selected international Board
for Rhetorical Inquiry in General, twenty scholars authorized to make
unlimited grants to their rhetorical brothers and sisters, using the essays
in this book as one major source of topics, but adding, with the char­
acteristic *bricolage* of rhetoricians, whatever else falls into their hands.

The Board will begin with the task of defining rhetoric, and it will
find, if it prove honest, that it must support studies of *all* human dis­
course. Nothing anyone says about anything, even the weird result when
two is added to two, can be ruled out: we live, as Jost has shown better
than I have ever done, *in* our topics—neither in discursive Pandae­
monia nor in a utopia but in a polytopia. Every utterance expresses
not just the speaker’s character but also the speaker’s culture, including
that culture’s assumptions about what can be said and what should or
should not be said. Even if Board members were to think, mistakenly,
of our subject as the “mere” act of persuading, every utterance could be
shoehorned into their domain.

The point about ubiquity will become more telling when the Board
learns to move “upward” from persuasion in their definition to make
rhetoric include the whole art, or faculty, of discovering what are good
reasons, reasons capable of changing the thought and behavior not only
of rhetors’ hearers but also of rhetors themselves. That definition will
naturally lead them on “upwards” to the heights where the hermeneu­
ticists and theologians dwell (rhetoricians all), finally arriving at the
peak, the comparative study of rhetorics—what I’ve recently been try­
ing, rather unsuccessfully, to get people to call “rhetorology.” And that
will in turn lead them to see their conflicts and irresolutions and reso­
lutions as implying that ultimate Rhetor, master of mystery and silence,
who answers, when we ask “who are you?” with the enigmatical, “I am
that I am.”

With such properly universalized definitions (unargued here), the
Board will quickly see that it cannot organize its allocations according
to current academic disciplines. Name any field and you will almost cer­
tainly find not only laborers who call themselves students of rhetoric—
the “revival” is in that sense demonstrable simply by citation counting.
You will also find under other rubrics innumerable projects that can only be effectively pursued using methods that only a full attention to rhetorical practice will support.

Naturally, every Board member will at times feel a sense of panic at the discovery that the diverse efforts to build a coherent field of rhetorical study prove just as confusing, just as difficult to interrelate, as the ultimate values they seek to serve. One can hope that after considerable debate they will deal with that panic by suppressing the impulse to precision and finality, and simply agree that their problems fall, loosely, loosely, under the three master headings that have outranked all others in the history of philosophy, of religion, and—of rhetoric:¹

*Goodness:* how rhetorical study can improve the world or the souls that inhabit it;

*Truth:* how it can further the pursuit of genuine knowledge;

*Beauty:* how it can assist artists in their creation of alternative, "better worlds," and enable re-creators to embrace and appraise such worlds.

The Board will discover that every applicant has a strong tendency to elevate one or another of these three to become architectonic—the emperor of the sciences. And they will soon find themselves in deep controversy over which of the three is in charge, as the one true and proper generator of the ultimate rhetorology.

What is more confusing, they will find that every applicant they deal with seems committed to one of two absolutely contradictory positions: (1) In the long run, "in principle," given sufficient thought and time for discussion, all such battles about the primacy of goodness, or of truth, or of beauty, or about the primacy of particular goods, or of particular truth-systems, or of particular standards of beauty, can be resolved into general agreement: that's what I—we—once firmly believed, and it seems to be the claim of the study by Callaghan and Dobyns here; (2) in both the long and short run, "in principle," we must accept the ultimate and absolute "incommensurability" of some "values," some goods: that's what many modern thinkers, such as Isaiah Berlin and Bernard Williams, have been arguing. For them, although many controversies can be resolved through the use of a powerful rhetorology that probes to the deepest levels underlying conflicts, some human goods are in permanent and irreconcilable conflict.

Of this second group, some will claim that the incommensurability
demonstrates the ultimate irrationality of the universe; others, I among them, will claim that it is a blessed gift of life itself. We embrace the condition of being inherently limited, unable as human beings to reduce everything to some supreme harmony. The story of the tower of Babel carries a deeper message than is usually recognized: as creatures exercising freedom in manifold and unpredictable patterns, we cannot expect ever to achieve full agreement about any one One as a supreme Good. To have been banned from God’s perspective on Her/His created multiplicities was to have been invited into meaningful debate and inquiry; if instead we had been granted unanimity, all values harmonized, ordered under any one of them, we would have lost one of the greatest gifts of human life itself.

Such a position need not diminish our passion for achieving understanding, especially when the alternative to understanding seems to be violence. What the Board must support is those studies that seek to discover just what kinds of encounter avert violence through an understanding of difference and what kinds lead to violence by insisting on an impossible harmony. When should we in effect lock controversialists up in a closed room pending verdict or compromise, and when should we not? What conditions allow the achievements that the jury system manages, at its best, or that President Carter and his team managed at Camp David? What kind simply escalate conflict? To insist that agreement, even loving agreement, is the ultimate purpose of discussion, or of life itself, would in fact destroy life as we value it—and love as we value it would die. Thus, though McOmber is right to say that my rhetoric of assent need not raise all the vexing philosophical problems of the kind that Rorty dismisses, it does plunge us into an eternally inexhaustible supply.

Anyway—as G. K. Chesterton taught everyone to say when a transition is weak—here at last is my memo to that Board, “A Rhetorologist’s Agenda, 2014.”

**RHETORIC AND “GOODNESS,”**
**OR IMPROVING THE WORLD**

Most rhetoricians have, like me, elevated political or ethical or social effect over the other two grand values—though the most penetrating ones, like Cicero, Quintilian, Kenneth Burke, and so on, have recog-
nized that Goodness can't be achieved without Beauty and Truth, and have found ways to embrace them within their "practical" schemes.

What does this world of practice most need from students of rhetoric?

*Studies of Pluralism, Politics, and the Rhetoric of Assent*

Foley, Antczak, Garver, and McCloskey suggest or imply that what we *most* need are studies of the kind that grapple with political or institutional problems in a way that I have only rarely even attempted. I agree. My most overt missionary work, from the time when I was literally a missionary for the Mormon church on, has largely been centered, as they claim, on how persons, characters, and selves, real or literary, are made and improved or debased by rhetoric. In the hierarchy of goods served or harmed by rhetoric, the quality of rhetors and their hearers has indeed been my center. A given utterance (whether a one-word exclamation or a five-volume novel) affects, or is intended to affect, or is likely to affect, any person "taking it in." My emphasis has most of the time thus been one-on-one, and on how various "virtues" are strengthened when the right one meets the right one rightly. Though always in theory believing that politics is more fundamental than ethics (Aristotle is right: "You cannot create a fully good 'man' in a genuinely bad state"), I've done far too little with the rhetorical side of larger political conflicts and influences.

Especially important for our Board, then, is the question of whether a given kind of pluralistic rhetoric implicates a given politics. They should fund someone to work through the widespread charge that a pluralistic ethics like mine is always a covert power play, an effort to reduce all radical and controversial views to an easily accommodated range of possibilities that can be exhibited safely on the pluralist's chart, thus "conserving" the established and disempowering everybody else.

The grantee would obviously get Phelan and Foley together to talk it out. Phelan agrees with Foley that every pluralist's discourse is indeed political in one sense (because it "privileges" pluralism over any specific political claim to do the whole job). But he then argues that discourse need not be thought of as *only* political. To think of it as such is to impoverish our sense of what "conversation" can accomplish.

I think Phelan's argument will be hard to answer, if not impossible. Is it not puzzling that strong arguments like his, of which we have quite a few by now, seem to be ignored by those for whom everything is politics?
At the same time I have to agree with Brinton, whose critique I wish I could have read before *Modern Dogma* was sent to the printer, that my particular version of a rhetoric of assent, with all its professions of pluralism, is indeed in one strong sense conservative: it rejects any habitual "innovationism" that values change for its own sake. As Brinton puts it, it gives "presumptive" power to institutions and beliefs as they are inherited or imbibed, putting the burden of proof on those of us who would change them.

Such a stance is not conservative in the sense of being right-wing. Many of the institutional forces that have constituted me from birth on seem to me quite indefensible. I feel especially threatened these days by the consumer capitalism that most of us are largely mired in, and that the simplifiers tout as having "won against Communism." But since we inevitably "are" (that is, are constituted to some degree as) both what we would criticize and the techniques of criticism that we have inherited from institutions, we should be sure of our grounds when we attack them: we should not doubt everything we cannot prove, but assent to everything that we have no good reason to doubt.

I would still hold to that conserving line, while continuing with my fumbling attacks on the grotesque ravages committed by what some people call capitalism. The rhetoric of assent may be conservative, then, but in itself it need not lead any more strongly to my enthusiasm for (most parts of) Edmund Burke's *Reflections* than it does to my passionate belief that capital punishment is a terrible practice that must finally be abolished.

Still, Brinton is right to claim that if anything like a systematic rhetoric of assent is to survive, it will require extensions and somewhat more philosophically sophisticated articulations than I managed in *Modern Dogma* and have touched on here and there since. I'll return to this point when I get to Truth itself.

*Studies of Fictions Overtly Political*

The Board should approve, as Foley suggests, more studies of how particular fictions perform their reinforcement or questioning of political institutions and social structures; similarly, we should have more careful rhetorical studies of the works that Foley blames me for neglecting. So I must say a bit more about Foley's critique, which is to me the most challenging of the claims, in and out of this volume, that ethical critics fail to do justice to the claims of politics.

Her piece is challenging partly because she has labored to under-
stand my work before criticizing it—not a fashionable practice these days. And she is right to complain that *Company* pays skimpy attention to various minority and protest literatures and critical theories. As I look at *Company* under her tutelage, I do wish that I had addressed more fully the ethical power of works like Morrison's *Beloved* or Silko's *Ceremony*. And she is right to call for studies of works in which the political import is more explicit, even blatant, and the classical status as literary form less obvious. She has forced me to wonder just why, given how much of my reading time is spent precisely with works of the nonestablished or anti-establishment kind, did I address no one of them at length.

It is certainly not, as she suggests, that I don't recognize the crucial importance, especially in America today, of any literary work that genuinely startles complacent readers into assuming "more egalitarian attitudes (anti-racist, anti-sexist, anti-elitist) than they might already espouse: of any work in which "the writer may be the principal 'ethical critic,'" and the would-be emancipated reader becomes "chastened...indignant, even resentful" (142). *Company* stressed—though with insufficient examples—that such challenges are one of the chief values of narrative. I would still want to insist that such chastening is often performed even more powerfully by a deeply probing classic—even a classic that on its surface might seem to be written within the same culture as the reader's—than by a passionate contemporary work that *claims* to shatter but that really just duplicates would-be shattering experiences already comfortably accommodated by the reader or spectator? As Marx claimed, the highly conservative Balzac, with his painstaking reports of just how bourgeois capitalism worked, did more for the cause than any number of aggressively "progressive" arguments could do.

What's more, Foley does have too firm a notion of just what sort of jolt *all* readers need; she somehow knows that they all need a jolt in the direction of her particular politics. Though my confused politics are closer to hers than to the views of most of her opponents, what the Board should support are studies of how fictions can jolt readers *alive*. I quite agree that in America today, and quite probably in 2014, most middle-class readers need to be jolted from a complacent assumption that the market economy will save the world singlehandedly, and that everything about socialism, including its demand that we take responsibility for the welfare of others, has been discredited. But is that what readers in Moscow most needed, say, in 1960? The politics of fiction turns out to be as complicated, as bound to circumstance and human variety, as the ethics of fiction. A major value of *some* classics is their
capacity to jolt political dogmatists. Every Marxist and in fact every socialist I have known, including Foley (and myself when I thought I was an atheistic socialist) needs the jolt that can result from a genuine engagement with any one of the great philosophies or theologies or religiously oriented fictions. If Foley, who really knows how to dig in, would ever settle into as sympathetic a reading of Augustine or Aquinas or Tolstoy's *Resurrection* or Mauriac's *Knot of Vipers* as she has given Marx, she would be jolted. I can't predict where she would come out, but she would no longer be her present kind of Marxist, or an "ist" of any kind, a bit too readily relying on one political perspective. (We know that she'll reply that she's read these greats—but just "reading" is not quite the kind of digging in that I have in mind.)

This does not mean that we can afford to neglect the ethical and political deficiencies, minor or major, of established works. Of those authors I dwelt on, Rabelais, Lawrence, Austen, and Twain, Austen is the only one who came off largely exonerated. The others survived as powerful and enduring literary friends, but only because they are redeemed by various qualities we readers always will need. They are not cleansed of their ethical faults, most of which do count for Foley as in some sense political: Rabelais's and Lawrence's sexism; Twain's optimistic racial liberalism, misleadingly comfortable to his predominantly white readers; Lawrence's forays into totalitarianism and anti-semitism). The purpose of choosing such classics rather than contemporary works was precisely to convince readers who were inclined to resist ideological criticism (of Foley's kind, say) that the narratives they love ought not to be swallowed uncritically just because they are seen as classics; in other words, my purpose would place me at least in part on Foley's side here.

Indeed I am puzzled by her suggestion that I would take the side of the canonists against the anti-canonists. I can only hope that when she sees Thomas's development here of my thoroughly political article on Hirsch's cultural literacy proposals, and of what Thomas rightly sees as the implications of my way of dwelling with the classics, she will want to change the line of her critique: not my neglect of politics, but perhaps my mistaken way of going about it.

Anyhow, my choice of the four established authors resulted from my reading of the critical audience in 1988—is that not a political, or at least an institutional, choice? I had no sense that feminists, or black aestheticians, or Marxists, needed to be persuaded that narratives should be subject to an ideological critique. The resisters are those who, while rightly insisting that most classics are classics for sound reasons, can-
not see that the very power conferred by classical status cries out for a critical analysis of what that power can do to us as readers.

It is clear that our scene is still full of such resisters. Even those who were ostensibly convinced of our case, even those who claimed to agree that in my special sense "all fictions are didactic" (Company 13, 151–53), still often deny that an ethical fault in a novel can be legitimately taken as a "literary" or "aesthetic" fault. Perhaps in twenty years all such will have been converted, though I doubt it, especially when I see how widespread are "aestheticist" current attacks on what is called "political correctness." In any case, I'm not worried about the classics holding their own in the various battles. What should worry the Board is any temptation to take any established classic (or traditional educational view) as above ethical criticism.

The readers I wanted most to reach were of two kinds: those we have just described, readers who were not already converted to the relevance of ideological substractions when dealing with a classic, and those who were already too strongly converted to the pat application of narrow moral or political criteria in dealing with any work, classic or modern. If I had done a full ethical treatment on Our Nig, say, as Foley recommends, I would in fact have found just as much to question as I found in Huck Finn—but to what end? Every reader who is ever likely to read Our Nig will see it immediately and without question as inviting political and ethical questions: it is in effect about its own quite open protest. Huck Finn, in contrast, has too often been treated as above the battle.

Finally, if Foley had addressed Modern Dogma or some of the essays in Now Don't Try to Reason with Me and The Vocation of a Teacher her case about the neglect of politics would have been more difficult to make. Or if she'd given a careful reading to Antczak's essay here . . .

Ohmigod! What happened? Where was I? Oh, yes, the conspectus for the Board. How did I allow DISTSERPROF to take over like that? Will Foley see that for me to get distracted into petty personal speculation about her actually is a compliment?

Rhetoric and Morality

As rhetoricians have always claimed, all good rhetorical inquiry is embedded in moral questions—provided we use the broader definitions of "morality" to include not just moral demands but what I mean by ethical matters: the creation, improvement, or debasement of persons. So I
can only say to the Board here, go read Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* again, and then his *Politics* and *Ethics*, and put ’em all together with the GOOD on top, and you’ll be ready to make your grants.

*Studies of Rhetoric and Teaching*

All teaching is—as every reader will by now expect me to say—rhetorical, in our definition, which by no means suggests that a teacher must be merely preaching or indoctrinating. The Board should not just read but *study* Thomas’s answer to Hirsch here.

They should also give more support to studies of the best rhetoric for teaching the best rhetoric. Rhetoric as mere persuasion can be taught pretty well by lecturing persuasively, and thus *demonstrating* good persuasive techniques. But rhetoric as inquiry, rhetoric as the dialogical path to mutual understanding, rhetoric as the training of active, growing rather than passive, meandering minds—that rhetoric cannot be taught by even the cleverest of lecturers; it is learned in discussion, in the give-and-take that only a skilled discussion leader can elicit from a fairly small class. Many of us have made this claim again and again, while observing, in anguish, a national increase in class sizes and a growing dependence on clever lecturing—often in mechanical reproduction. Is it not possible that some careful statistical studies of just how little real improvement in *thinking* results from most so-called teaching (including of course inept discussion methods) would lead a statistics-besotted nation to pay attention to what we really need?

For about fifteen years I’ve been contemplating a book on the uses and abuses of classroom discussion, what Bialostosky might call the struggle for “genuine dialogics.” The book just doesn’t get written; the tapes recording successes and failures sit in the drawer unattended. The trouble is partly that most of the advice I try to extract from my experience sounds, when put into a book, frozen and uninventive, or self-dramatizing. Perhaps I can hope that by the time the Board gets to work, Homer Goldberg’s promised book on the subject will be available, and that other scholars will be clamoring for support for similar studies.

Meanwhile I have a totally unrealistic fantasy of the one stroke that would, without waiting for further study, “save” American education: some grand philanthropist, some Ross-Perot-grown-wise, will announce massive grants available to any college or school district that will promise (with appropriate legal guarantees) to spend the money
on one stroke only: cutting by half the enrollment in all courses that are devoted to improving thought through improving writing—that is, to "rhetoric." If this fanciful "Perot" himself (must it be a male?) wants to make doubly sure of success, he will decide to require that every institution receiving the grant install mechanical silencers at every teacher's desk, set to send an electric shock through the teacher's bottom whenever he or she talks longer than eight-and-a-half minutes at a stretch.

Studies of How the "Rhetoric of Assent" Applies to Particular Issues Beyond My Ken

Just as the ethics and politics of fictions need to be extended to a far broader range of texts than I have even dreamed of, so I would like to see the notions of Modern Dogma developed, as McOmber implies, into political and moral areas I've scanted. My hints at just what a genuine "presumptive" rhetoric would lead to are feeble compared with what we need, both in developing methods of argument and analysis and in making public arguments ourselves.

McCloskey's essay here is a fine start on how a rhetoric of assent could uncover, discipline by discipline, the largely silent ethical and political foundations of scholars at work. We need more studies that plunge us into the precise rhetorical complexities of special issues, studies like Antczak's exploration of Martin Luther King's rhetoric of non-violence. Far too many studies of particular debates fail, as my book did, to give a sufficiently sustained probing of how sheer faith (not unthinking at all and even systematic in the sense of critical, but privileged nonetheless) is depended on by every effort to engage in that controversy.

Studies of Why Mutual Understanding Is Itself a Good

Our Board must grapple with the radical difference between rhetorics that elevate the mere enlivening of a scene through controversy and those like mine that, while not rejecting the importance of sustaining vitality (Critical Understanding), would subordinate it to understanding: the intellectual equivalent of love. Not mere winning, and certainly not mere goading, but a genuine joining is what rhetoric should be about. Because joining need not entail agreeing, some devotees of mere vitality have rejected the very notion of finding an interpretive stopping point—the point, for example, when a reader or listener knows without ques-
tion that an ironic reverse is intended. Is not the whole purpose of interpretation to keep going, to find one’s very own reading, something to say that nobody else would think of saying, because it violates the “obvious” intention of the text?

Studies of both the ethics and the politics of these would-be disrupters should be related to the “goods” of community that are touted by us devotees of stabler ironies. Perhaps all one can hope for from the Board, though, is that they will be smart enough to reject projects that consist of the sort of pretentious padding I mocked in “The Empire of Irony”—the mere packing in of fashionable words in the “irony family.” In a world that exhibits, as I say there, an average of three “ironically”s per article or chapter, surely we need more examples of meticulous deciphering based on careful theory about what is being deciphered. If “everything is ironic,” nothing really is, and nobody can hope to possess that greatest of goods, human understanding.

Rhetoric and “The Beautiful,” or, “How Beauty Becomes a Good”

The Rhetoric of Craft

The Board will want to fund an unlimited number of “rhetorics of” arts other than fiction: of drama, of every variety of poetry, painting or sculpture; of classical or rock music; of such-and-such an artistic period; of cartoon strips; of videos; and so on. They should seek out critics who are willing to attempt not just piecemeal notations but full-scale inquiry into how different makers manage to induce their receivers to join the implicit worlds underlying (or overlaying) the radically different stories told by the different works.

Some projects worth funding will perhaps be described as sciences of fiction, not rhetorics: technical studies that show the strokes, the how, but don’t ask sharply why the strokes are there. (Gérard Genette’s procedure in Narrative Discourse could be a model for anyone working on the “how.”) Needed even more, however, are studies that, while embracing anything that scientific probing can teach about the how of things, dwell on the question “why?” As Rabinowitz proceeds with music here and in his forthcoming book, so might students of every conceivable art or craft help the artists themselves to become better makers.

Such studies will naturally meet head-on any claims, if they are still
around in 2014, that there are no real distinctions of better and worse in matters of art. One would think that the patent absurdity of such claims would long since have extinguished them. Every journal publishing such ostensibly “democratic” or “post-modernist” levelings exhibits on almost every page evidence that the asserters do not believe what they say. Somehow the assertions continue, and efforts to unmask the absurdity, like mine in *The Company We Keep* or Francis-Noël Thomas’s in *The Writer Writing*, are never met as argument, only dismissed as elitist.

Studying with full attention and a fully open mind the rhetoric of various instances of a given art, no post-modernist, however free-wheeling, could continue to say that value judgments are totally contingent or relative. It is in the details of structure and style that one finds overwhelming evidence that some rhetoricians, including those we call artists, are better than others, when judged on any scale except patently arbitrary ones that come into play when we say such things as: “‘Ride-a-cock-horse’ is better than *King Lear*—for two-year-olds” or “A whistled version of a bugle call will mean more, as a work of art, than *Oedipus Rex* means—to a dog.”

*The Ethics of Craft, or One of Many Places Where Beauty and Goodness Meet*

Here we meet not just the “How” and the “Why” but the “Ought.” Having been instructed by the authors in this book, the Board will assume that any invitation to enter any alternative artistic world invites ethical appraisal: my ethos (my character, my psyche, my soul—the terms are by no means identical but they overlap, and they all fit my case) is changed—at a minimum for the duration of any artistic experience, but often enough also after “real life” is rejoined. It is rendered deeper or more shallow, muddier or more vital and down to earth; broader or narrower, more flabbily unfocused or more finely organized; morally improved or corrupted; more or less bigoted, inhibited, alert to injustice—any adjective for any human quality can be added here.

Every change will occur on disputed territory, but the changes are real, and I am puzzled about why so few critics, even now, seem willing to talk about them, professionally and openly: they all in fact have been changed by fictions, and the changes are reflected in their work. But they usually don’t “theorize” ethical evaluation in the ways underlined here by Johnstone, in her honest and revealing struggle with the
vicious Genet, or by Shapiro, in grappling with the quite different test presented by Wiesel and the Holocaust, or by McCloskey in revealing the ethics of economists’ stories, or by Rabinowitz, in uncovering the powers of opera and stories about it.

Fortunately more and more critics have been addressing ethical questions. These too often avoid technical and formal talk about the quality of a total experience, in all its detailed articulations. Too many of them rely on the sort of judgment that would have resulted if Johnstone had said in her piece here, “Genet’s books clearly advocate vicious behavior—therefore they are worthless or harmful, for all readers on all occasions.” May the Board heed our call and fund those who are willing to plunge into the threatening difficulties that underlie moral surfaces.

The word “threatening” leads to one more recommendation, before we leave the subject of rhetoricians as beauticians. The subjects writers choose can be threatening not just intellectually but quite personally to the writers themselves: they are sometimes blessed, sometimes harmed, and sometimes even destroyed by living with their subjects. If the Board cares about the ethics of narration at all, it will fund ethical inquiry into fictional, biographical, and autobiographical writing as it affects those who write it. James Gleick has recently reported—explaining why he will never do another biography—just how much his own behavior was changed by spending five years working on his biography of Richard Feynman: “I wasn’t prepared for what happens to your psyche when you spend that long tunnelling . . . into someone else’s life . . . One gets taken over by this other person to the extent that I would sometimes be getting dressed . . . and I would think, Well, what would my subject wear?”

I offer the Board a title for the first of such studies—Lives Changed by ‘Lives’—without even requesting a grant for my friends or heirs.

RHETORIC AND TRUTH

Studies of Pluralism and Relativism

The quarrel-ridden marriage of rhetoric and truth, or of what we might call philo-logos and philo-sophy, is going to give our Board a lot of trouble. Do we need more philosophers’ claims that truth gets ignored by rhetoricians, all of whom are Sophists?

The conflict of Booth and Rorty with philosophers of various kinds, as carefully traced by McOmber, like the conflict with Bertrand Russell...
and Descartes that Brinton attributes to one “Professor Booth” (close
kin to DISTSERPROF), is almost certainly one of those essentially
contested matters that, like the ancient battle between poetry and phi­
losophy, will always produce incommensurables: you can’t grant total
allegiance to the God of successful practical discourse and at the same
time honor the God of truth.

Brinton’s critique is just the kind that any honest author ought to
take seriously. He teaches us a lot about just how much rhetoric of as­
sent has been practiced by some whom I earlier blamed as excessive
doubters.

He and I agree that for practical purposes the question of truth boils
down to the question of just what kinds of argument offer good reasons
for changing one’s mind. Like most philosophers since Kant, he wants
good reasons to be subjected to a systematic doubt, and then rejected
if they cannot offer hard proof for themselves; all my selves, except
IGNORAMUSWB, believe that such privileging of doubt will finally
destroy even the best of our reasons—in all of the matters that matter
most to us.

I agree that what I called systematic assent is not systematic in any
sense that would be recognized by Brinton’s philosophical schools: I
should perhaps have used a different adjective: “persistent,” or “ha­
bital,” or “privileged.” The point was to privilege assent, or as Brinton
puts it, to show that our assent to what we know already puts the bur­
den of proof on doubt. Our “common sense”—that is, whatever our
deepest intuitions tell us is true—should be assented to unless and until
we are presented with reasons to doubt, reasons that seem stronger than
the reasons to assent. Such a view could never be systematic in the way
that analytical philosophers try to be systematic; as Brinton says, the
problems of determining, in theory, just which “intuitive” or commu­
nal assents to assent to are immense. But these new problems do not
leave us, like the problems a habitual doubter faces when forced to
make practical choices, convinced that all of our reasons for choice are a
bit shameful. And McOmber is right to distinguish my problems from
those raised by Rorty’s or Feyerabend’s kinds of rootless freewheeling.

I do wish that my rhetoric of assent had been less catch-as-catch-
can. Further work like McOmber’s would show that such a rhetoric
need not lead, as Brinton claims, to “exactly the same incoherent re­
results as a real procedure of systematic denial” (p. 259). Systematic denial
leads, as he says, nowhere—or as I would say rather, to Nowhere: it
leaves us without a leg to stand on, and, as all of the great pursuers
of where it leads have shown (Descartes, Hume, Santayana . . . ), it leaves the doubter forced to find some way out of nothingness: either to total silence (often that has meant suicide), or to the employment, more or less shamefacedly, of the methods the unsystematic folk have been practicing all the while. Is that not where the most influential of recent skeptics, Jacques Derrida, tells us we are forced to return, relying on the very language with which he has conducted his annihilations and deferrals?

Brinton shows that Bertrand Russell, one of whose three major personae I used as whipping boy in Modern Dogma, readily assented in many of his works to forms of reasoning that resemble what I call the rhetoric of assent. Almost all professional philosophers who’ve seen my little gambit have, like Brinton, resented it as if it were an effort to deny Russell’s greatness, which it is not. My claim was only that Russell, taught by philosophical history and his own failed attempts to believe that values could not be “proved,” was always plagued, sometimes even tortured, by the belief that when he turned to “probabilistic” or “everyday” reasoning (of the kind quoted in Brinton’s conclusion) he was in effect betraying his own standards of rationality. He also believed, as the quotation shows, that unless we could harmonize all our instinctive beliefs, they have no intellectual standing.

Still, Brinton’s concluding quotation from Russell could almost make an epigraph for Modern Dogma, which was only one of many attempts, neither “modern” nor “post-modern,” back beyond Shaftesbury and Bishop Berkeley and the Bacon uncovered in Garver’s fine digging here, and on back to Cicero, to claim full intellectual respectability for a communal pursuit of where our sensus communis leads.

The battle between the apodeictic and the just plain reasonable will inevitably continue, perhaps forever, regardless of the cogency of anyone’s rhetoric of assent. I do hope that professional philosophers, as they continue their work in rehabilitating what they call informal logic and rediscovering the relevance of the basic virtues to philosophizing, will begin to incorporate the work of traditional rhetorical theories, supplemented nicely by the current discoveries of just how “rhetorical” was the work of the great Wittgenstein.

Studies of Metaphors as the Key to All the Mythologies

The Board should study Richter’s piece carefully, not for what it says about me but for what it says about how to analyze metaphors. It is true
that much of his method in exploring me is implicit in the teaching of that recent grand invasion of French rhetoricians (raiding under other banners, of course). Close attention to an author's or movement's metaphors, and especially their macro-metaphors (or metaphorical "worlds" that I grappled with in *Company*) is one of the three best paths to full understanding of any rhetorical practice (the other two, which after full probing tend to merge with metaphor, are—as everyone still with us "here" knows—*invention*, as dealt with by Jost working on the topics, and *arrangement*: the choice of hierarchies, whether vertical (as in Burke's *Rhetoric of Religion*) or horizontal (as in the long history of advice about how best to organize a speech).

The fashionable study of metaphors under the "rhetoric of suspicion," in the search for a foreordained and inherently disempowered incoherence (or, as with some French feminists, an inherent drive for patriarchal dominance) is radically different from Richter's practice, which would suggest for our masthead the slogan: Metaphors are inherently constructive, not deconstructive.

*Studies of the Rhetoric of Silence*

Board members: Read Garver. Read him again, then go read Bacon. Fund studies of silence, of *What Goes Without Saying*. This piece of Garver's is original.

*Studies of Dialectic, Dialogics, Pluralism, and the Threat of Relativism*

Among the essentially contested, eternally irresolvable conflicts the Board must face are two that, as Bialostosky shows, Bakhtin and I wrestle with. (1) How can we interrelate or choose among our dialogics or pluralisms? (2) How can we harmonize our dialogics or pluralisms with the demands of practical decisions in the world?—or even better, make use of them, a problem Phelan addresses.

(1) If the Board does its work properly, it will take massive steps to break down the isolation among various universalist "specialists in generalities." It will fund lots of studies like Bialostosky's. And it will work to persuade every field in which specialists make a claim, in principle, to "cover everything," to appoint at least one rhetorologist to serve as reconnaissance and liaison officer to the other groups: "cognitive science," linguistics, structuralism, deconstruction, "informal logic," "critical thinking," and so on. A lot of wasted efforts at refutation could thus be avoided.
(2) The charge of relativism—or its genuine threat—will not go away. The Board should plan to fund Phelan (after all, he'll still be perking in 2014) and others like him, to continue the search for persuasive routes through the Scylla of dogmatism and the Charybdis of skepticism. We can be sure that dogmatists will continue to label efforts like ours as utterly relativistic, and that utter relativists will continue to show (as would be easy to show about Bakhtin), that we are in fact "not total pluralists" but actually committed to certain "values" (in my other terms, "assentings") that remain finally—in our sense of the word—indubitable.

The Board need not feel uncomfortable about this unresolved battle about and among pluralisms: it is both the case that no statement is true except as relative to other statements, and that there are genuine (though multiple) standards of taste, of moral judgments, and of truth. And this means that there are many assertions about such matters that have to be rejected by anyone who thinks hard about them.6

Studies of Rhetoric and Religion

If they do things right, the Board must spend a good share of their unlimited budget on the rhetoric of religion. The whole enterprise of criticism, and particularly of rhetorical criticism, is pointless unless it has a point—to return to the key word of my opening paragraph. And to me it has become increasingly obvious that to claim a point to any human activity is to see it in one or another cosmic perspective, leading to the kind of inquiry Shapiro exhibits here. Everything we do, if it has a point, can be shown to relate to some notion of a cosmos that, however "chaotic," validates its making. A real point is a point that matters, and to matter, unless one thinks of mattering as only private, personal, and hence entirely relativized, is to matter in some scheme, or world, or pattern, or dimension of reality, larger than any one person's vision.

Such a claim seems self-evident once one sees it clearly—as Anselm said of his ontological proof. The steps to its self-evidency, however, are difficult and manifold. In other words, the field/fields of rhetoric require the Board to fund lots of hard argument about religion—lots of theological study, most of it under different names. Let us hope that many will follow Shapiro and Jost here in pursuing leads that have been largely mere assertions or wonderings.

In "Are Rhetoric and Religion Permanently Wedded?" I argue that "the student of rhetoric will be led, inescapably led provided that he or she pushes the inquiry with full rigor, to religion"—not just, with
Kenneth Burke, to religious language but to religious belief itself. I can’t argue that case here, but I do hope that the Board will fund studies of the entire history of religious rhetoric, and rhetorics of religion, to demonstrate, in the languages of diverse schools, just why rhetorical inquiry and religious belief of some kind are inseparable.

Studies of the Rhetoric of “Secular Religions”

The Board should also pursue just how this or that current social movement or academic discipline might be treated as a “secular religion,” since it claims to provide the grounding for legitimate point-making that any true religion must provide. Our confusing culture provides innumerable claimants who offer some sort of “cosmos,” some picture of the whole of things that legitimates, or commands, certain forms of behavior. When cosmologists, artificial intelligence enthusiasts, psychologists, deconstructionists, rational choice theorists, economists claim to offer us the picture of the world and our place in it, and when they then rehearse, often unwittingly, the topics that traditionally belonged to religion, it should be obvious that students of rhetoric are called on to attempt some high-powered translating and evaluating. We can be sure that between now and 2014 other secular religions will rise, claiming at last to tell us just what the world is made of and just what the making demands of us.

These secular religions usually do not put their Thirty-Nine Articles up front, but they exhibit kinds of devotion and expression that traditionally marked religious devotion and inquiry. Be generous, oh, Board, in funding those rhetorologists who engage in comparing the strengths and weaknesses of our many secular religions. And while you’re at it, you should fund unlimited studies of how conversion stories work and what they reveal—both conversions to “real” religions and to the secular religions that pretend to be freed of religion.

To talk of religion leads us inevitably back to systematic assent, and to my lament about how few critics are really pursuing a full rhetoric of inquiry. Assent is in the air all right, if we mean by it only the habit of saying yes to whatever doctrine happens to seem appealing or provides temporarily the line of least resistance or most plausibly profitable results. But though by systematic assent I did not mean to suggest the kind of systematic philosophising that Brinton rebukes me for failing to achieve, I did mean something more than the blind unmethodical faith that McOmber sees in Feyerabend and that he helpfully distinguishes from the faith that I had in mind.
Afterword

Studies of the "Self," of Just Who "We" Are as We Engage with One Another in our Rhetoric

Having done a fair job of suppressing a chorus of voices who could have made this a decidedly silly response, I must urge in conclusion that the Board fund . . .

DISTSERPROF: The only proper summary here will be about US: pull us together, man. You can’t deny that the five of us (no doubt along with others that we scarcely acknowledge) live together daily, happily united under my tutelage and without too many hours spent in quarreling. Let’s make the point of this response, and thus of this book, what I’ve wanted it to be all along, an intellectual triumph . . .

THE "I" OF THIS RESPONSE: But if we do that we’ll be not elevating but lowering ourselves to your competitive world, not only making US the center, as we should not be, but pretending to a clear harmony that would be a downright lie. I’m sure that we should maintain my tone—not that of a defensive, pedantic fool like you but of one who is calmly, open-mindedly inquiring . . .

DISTSERPROF: Nonsense! If we really want that Board to fund—but let’s drop the weak fantasy about what they might do in 2014 and come down to earth here and now: if we really want any reader to undertake studies of why and how the self is always a rhetorical society, and of what to do about our quarrel with individualism, we MUST end on this problem of voices. And in doing so we could unify our two points and impress everybody with . . .

Oh, all right, let’s give it a try. But we simply must drop that cruddy effort to defend on every point . . .

In fact, knowing the rebellious voices as I do, I must advise all high-minded folks just to skip now to page 306. You’d just be annoyed by the next few pages.

Let’s see now . . .

DISTSERPROF: This whole piece has been much too polite. You’ve simply silenced me at many points where it would have been highly appropriate to complain about the grotesque distortions our work has been subjected to. You’re always going around quoting Aristotle, and any other polyanna you can find, such as Anatole France’s M. Bergeret on the Dreyfus affair, claiming that since truth has a natural power to endure, a power that error lacks, we should not worry about petty
misunderstandings. Maybe. But that's true about truth, at best, only in the long run. Truth has that power only when someone like us has the guts to . . .

IGNORAMUSWB (henceforth IWB for short): Darn it, we just don't KNOW enough, any one of us or all together, to accomplish what we're trying to do here. We have read not a single classical rhetorician in the original language. We can't keep up with the journals, not even those explicitly in our . . .

TRUTHGOODNESSBEAUTYW (Henceforth TGBWB for short): I must insist, once and for all, that I deplore interruptions from either of these rebels. On the one hand, DISTSERPROF's ego-stroking-and-protecting stuff provides a wonderful opening for those who would like to whip us by practicing "motivism"—reducing everything we've done to our motives. On the other, we are really doomed if we must follow IWB, and confess to every yawning gap in our knowledge. Are you ALL going to claim that I am not the most important one of us, as I speak here for Truth, Goodness, and Beauty? Are you really going to let our readers think that we are speaking for anything other than those three supreme goals, which as I've said everyone from . . . ?

THE "I" OF THIS RESPONSE ("I" for short): I don't know yet. I feel thrown off balance by all this nattering, especially the boasting of DISTSERPROF. My only comfort, as I have expunged his pontifications from a first, second, and third draft, is that I have never yet encountered any member of our citation-counting, prize-seeking culture who was completely beyond all petty defenses of ego, completely freed of all fear of being discovered as a fraud. Even those who work hard to appear above the battle turn out, when we get a chance to see their diaries or letters, to have spent too much of their time cursing or correcting reviewers, or lamenting the prizes awarded to others, or nagging their publishers about inadequate publicity.

How sad it is to read the self-absorbed laments of aging celebrities angry about being neglected, or echoing Heidegger's (possibly apocryphal) deathbed lament: "Only one reader ever understood me—and even he didn't understand me." A recent biography of Philip Larkin reveals, among many other Larkins, one who convinced his public, including me, that he was not just indifferent to fame but contemptuous of it, above the battle, wise, mature. All the while he was living intimately with another Larkin, a would-be distinguished professor of poetry, as it were, who never turned down an offered honorary degree or invitation for a public reading; he was miserable and furious when criticized. Another
example: Derrida's reputation is being slightly tarnished, in my view, by his spending so much time, in journal after journal, worrying the bones of fame. "What he seems to be saying," one friend said, "is that everyone is plain stupid not to grasp the importance of his utterly clear, straightforward, unambiguous, undeferred meanings." I just don't want us to sound like Karl Popper in his later years . . .

A child's voice, whining: What IS truth, anyway? Who cares about it? Why doesn't anybody pay attention to ME? It's not truth we should care about but getting people to love us, unconditionally. I never get the love we deserve. I'm always . . .

TGBWB: Ohmigod! We're surely not going to let that one in, that whiner, that eternal Id who never grows up. I say "Ban him!" He predates, and radically corrupts or misrepresents, all the rest of us . . .

whiner: Well, I should have at least this one chance, and I want to complain about . . .

distserprof: Tais-toi! You're embarrassing all of us. The point is not to be loved but to get credit for the truths of Booth, as straightened out in the public mind by me, and . . .

"I": I'm taking over here, for now. We've already spent far too long on this family quarrel. Do I have to say again that the point of a volume like this should be to invite our readers to join the field of inquiry that has been the most interesting and important of all fields, from ancient times to the present? We should be thinking about how one struggler's unfinished and inevitably inharmonious and vulnerable projects could help him and others improve our study of rhetoric and thus our chances of understanding one another—and thus help us all to turn from physical violence, first at least to bloodless logomachy, and then hopefully from logomachy to serious debate, and then from debate to dialogue, and then on, even perhaps to achieve the dialogics that Don Bialostosky derives from Bakhtin? And—to complicate the case—how can we develop, as part of that ultimately practical project, a philosophy of comparative rhetorics, what DISTSERPROF insists—perhaps justifiably—that we call a "rhetorology," one that would adequately "theorize," though never "finalize," the whole of humankind's communicative endeavors? There's our proper summary and . . .

distserprof: If that's our only kind of point, we'll lose this chance, probably the last we'll ever have, to set the world straight—to choose only one example from this book—about how Bialostosky misleads readers by writing as if, in Critical Understanding, we ourselves embrace
the battle metaphors we use in deploving the world's way of handling conflict. Are you going to let even your friends' misreadings go uncorrected?

"I": Yes, certainly I am. What YOU will choose to do is another matter. But you know as well as I do, arrogant one, that Aristotle's picture of the magnanimous man is one of my, and I would wish "our," many ideals. What would he think of your way of thinking, foul lackey of Lucifer that you are? Yes, indeed, I've changed my mind, we're going to rule out petty cavils, including this conversation, leaving nothing but pure, disinterested inquiry. Only thus can we maintain our "hypocrisy upward" as generous-spirited, disinterested inquirers.

IWB: It makes me feel embarrassed when you refer to Aristotle when we don't even know any Greek . . .

DISTSPR0F: Well, I certainly agree that you should cut all the dissenting voices—except mine. Do you really believe that our readers, or even Bialostosky himself, will see what a powerful challenge all this open-spirited dialogue gives to his critique?

And speaking of what makes us vulnerable, take as one sad example your invention of that silly Board for Rhetorical Inquiry in General. Don't you see that your enemies will immediately spot that the acronym is BORING? Why not—if you insist on the sort of game-playing that besmirches our ethos—why not something safe, like POROI, echoing that outfit at The University of Iowa that McCloskey and Antczak are running? Or RUN, for Rhetoric-Universal, or UNIRHET, or even something that will resist mockery, like RFA (Rhetoric For All), or simply UR, for Universal Rhetoric?

And while I've got the floor, I have to say that you exaggerate how fully we're legitimated by widespread recognition of rhetorical studies. Why not acknowledge the plight "rhetoric" is in—precisely the plight it has been in since at least the time of Plato's attack on the Sophists? You talk as if our study, as distinct from persuasive practice, were triumphing, but it's not. Worried about where we stand, I've just done a quick survey of the listed titles and ads in The London Review of Books for April 8, 1993, The New York Review of Books for April 22, and The Times Literary Supplement for April 2. The word "rhetoric" occurs not even once in all those titles! Looking back a bit, and "rising" to the quarterlies, in the one issue of Critical Inquiry that I happen to have with me in London I find at last, among all the titles, all the advertisements, and the index of the entire 1992 volume, one appearance of "rhetoric"—and that in a
subtitle! One appearance only! I about gave up. But then, reading casually in a movie review by Terrence Rafferty in *The New Yorker*, what do I find? "Lucille heads off to college, which, in the rhetoric of growing-up stories, means she'll be fine." Does that sound as if Rafferty were au courant in rhetorical studies? Meanwhile President Clinton is quoted using the word "rhetoric" twice in one speech, in exactly the sense we've been fighting against all our lives. If "rhetoric" is still languishing, what about its half-synonyms that are popular? I've made a long list . . .

"I": Sorry, but I'm cutting two pages of your so-called research, and I want to insist . . .

ALL THE OTHER VOICES TRY TO INTERRUPT, BUT DISTSERPROF SHOUTS LOUDEST: What I want to insist on is that you make far too little of the misunderstandings even your friends exhibit of your conception of rhetorical studies. Are you just listening to WHINER when you tread so lightly on Garver and Bialostosky, both of whom saddle our later views with earlier talk that made mere persuasion too central? If they had taken the pains that Richter takes to trace a development, they would not have frozen us into relatively authoritarian poses. And while I'm at it, surely we must tell the world that Garver's fine original essay on Bacon, on "What Everybody Knows," and on the uses of silence, understates (while politely acknowledging) just how much we have recently done with the rhetoric of silence!

AGAIN THE CHORUS TRIES TO INTERVENE, UNSUCCESSFULLY: And why not reveal the absolute scandal in the world's neglect of our admirably few and tastefully chosen neologisms? I'm pleased that you managed to bring in "rhetorology" without too much apology, but you really ought to flaunt it, man! It's true that some people find it absurdly ugly on first encounter, but so was "socio-logy" when it first appeared. "Bio-logy" was unheard of until early in the nineteenth century. And surely "theo-logy" offended many when it first offered to take over all talk about God. You know perfectly well that our rhetorology is a more useful term than Kenneth Burke's "logo-logy," because, though his term was useful for his study of "The Rhetoric of Religion," it is too narrow for our purposes: it covers only comparative religious languages. Rhetorology covers the theoretical interrelationships of all rhetorics about anything. That would be clear to everybody by now, if you weren't such a pussyfooter . . .

WHINER: Who cares about all that? I care a lot more about the nasty, silly attacks we've been subjected to. For example, we absolutely must get
in here a reference to our annihilating and witty response to S’s mutilation of *A Rhetoric of Irony*; it has been largely ignored, perhaps because our ironies against him were just too subtle. F himself has shrewdly ignored it, reprinting his own inane and uninformed attack without mentioning our refutation. Get in there and gut F again, once and for all . . .

**DISTSERPROF:** As for me, that is the ONLY one of WHINER’s points worth preserving. It’s important to include such evidence that will counter the misconception of friends like Callaghan and Dobyns who, careful as they are, seem to say that we say that everybody should “argue to agree,” as if like Habermas we thought all reasonable arguers would agree if given enough time. Though we did once believe that, we no longer see ultimate harmony as either possible or desireable, especially with careless folk like F. Look again at what I said earlier and . . .

**CHORUS:** But . . .

**DISTSERPROF:** But me no buts. The question of easy or final agreement brings up the question of politics. You have been much too polite with those who accuse us of ignoring it. You could at least mention the range of our actual explicit wrestlings with politics—for example our recent defense of Amnesty International’s program, “Does Amnesty Have a Leg to Stand on?” with its extended refutation of the very notion of an isolated, indi individual distinguishable from his or her political or social surroundings, what we are now calling “philiations”—another neologism the world is neglecting!

Why not refer to your many anticapitalist digs, especially in that unpublished speech you gave in Moscow, arguing that the very principles of free speech we all depend on are now seriously threatened by the control over “speech”—that is, over the media—exercised by commercial exploiters? You’ve said a lot about the increasing debasement of our lives, especially in the direction of legitimated violence, sexual and otherwise, committed by the exploiters. And why not mention that idea of ours about a special “education” tax on all who make fortunes by miseducating us, in “An Arrogant Proposal” and “Self-Making in Imaginative Art”?

And how about that unpublished talk, “The Crazy Canon Controversy”, different versions delivered at half-a-dozen campuses as an effort to see behind the false issue of pro-anti-classics? Besides, we could show that some reviewers of *Company* have accused us of selling out to various current political movements that question the canon and thus of politicizing criticism.
IWB: I'm so embarrassed I could die. You're both concealing the fact that we haven't read more than a fraction of what would be important to any one of these matters. We have scores of unread books on our shelves, to say nothing of those we should have bought to put on those shelves, read or unread. Are you really willing to imply that in any sense we "keep up" on what is going on in ANY of this stuff? We don't, even in fields that travel under the word "rhetoric." Why don't you throw in the towel? We'll never know enough to do the response we're attempting here . . .

DISTSERPROF: Well, we surely know enough to complain about "I"'s not even mentioning the current neglect of formal and technical literary questions, or our recent defense of the Poetics. Even the friendly authors in this book don't often look at any one work with the kind of loving attention to detail that . . .

TGBWB: Doesn't it shock you more to have us ignore the whole question of philosophical truth. You write as if Brinton's penetrating critique doesn't deserve a respectful demolition. You . . .

DISTSERPROF: What we should do is just point out that if Brinton would only admit the influence of his upbringing as an analytical philosopher, he would see that his response to certain kinds of philosophy and to our questioning of Russell's coherence were foreordained. Move in there and do some punching for a change. For example, he seems to suggest that we are ignorant of Descartes's constructive side. Well, dang it all, I once even reported in print how much trouble I had trying to teach students of Descartes to respect his—to me—persuasive proof for the existence of God. . . .

And while I'm at it, I have to say that it really burns me to see how lightly you deal with those French raiders. Here's our one chance to insist that they've been getting credit, because of their fancy Greek vocabulary, for a lot that we said earlier, and for even more that Richard McKeon and Kenneth Burke said more forcefully. And they are so awfully reductive: beneath their fancy surfaces there is a reduction of rhetoric almost as maiming as what Renaissance writers did when they turned the whole thing into lists of figures. By the way, on "listings," see Jost: he's good on their use and abuse—and you don't even mention it.

As for pluralism, which you hardly touch on, at the very least you could refer the Board to our essay in the Encyclopedia of Poetics and the recent answer to Nussbaum, "On Relocating Ethical Criticism."
CONCLUSION I

Who, then, is the WB who, like everyone else in the world, exhibits, for all who look closely, unlimited multiplicity? If Jost's "topics" won't quite hold him together, will anything?

The question would seem a strange one in most historical periods, because until modern times nobody was troubled by the search for unique identity: it was enough to be simply a person practicing a variety of roles—not an identity at all, but a character employing "hypocrisy upward" in an effort to do or be better. It is the history of individualism, with all its triumphs and woes, that wills upon us this strange desire to get our act together. Today, instead of just doing what needs to be done, we all struggle to find someone inside, someone already made and waiting to be discovered, the real me.¹¹

I find all the unity I need in the simple continuation of the very drama among my selves that I have reflected here—one that is, like yours, oh, reader, far richer than my little game could hope to reflect. That continuation builds a story-line with a unique pattern of more or less untrustworthy but precious memories. We all plot out a little life-story, a play that contains many "plays-within-the-play." Much of the story, like the stories of heroes in drama, is beyond our control, even on the rare occasions when our various characters act in harmony. But if we are born lucky we are able to plot a good deal of it. Uniqueness is no longer a problem for us because nobody else's plot is exactly like "mine," "ours." In that sense, and that sense only, "I" am an "individual." Just about everything I'm made of can be found in other people—both the defensible and the indefensible parts.

As a rhetorical society, throwing my various roles into dialogue with one another, I find that many modern and post-modern anxieties simply evaporate. It is true that DISTSERPROF can still become very anxious indeed about doing an adequate response to essays as diverse and challenging as these; he fears that we are in danger of ending a career with a whimper instead of a bang. IWB can, especially in the late afternoon, panic because of how little we know about all this. WHIMPER can whimper about not getting enough loving admiration. TGBWB can pretend to a clearer and fuller conspectus than he has a right to, and "I" could wish that most of their deflections would just not occur. But as soon as we call them together they demonstrate the essentially comic point of it all. The comedy is by no means in itself divine, but once they start laughing together at one another, the life-story can continue vigor-
ously—sometimes even happily—without much worry about whether it/we/they are modern, post-modern, or simply guilty of radical traditionalism.

CONCLUSION 2

I simply cannot accept that conclusion, which sucks us back into the very “point” I rejected in my opening paragraphs. The true point of all this is to give the best possible boost to humane studies, conceived as studies of how to improve our inquiry into how we inquire together. To deflect us back to the effort to pull various Wayne Booths together is exactly the wrong way to go about that task. When things seem, as always, to be falling apart, surely we should not encourage the world to see each self as in any way a fiction. Surely we should . . .

Notes

1. For Plato, truth, goodness, and beauty; for Aristotle, inquiry into three kinds of activities and problems: theoretical, practical, and productive (the arts and crafts); for Kant, the three Critiques; and so on.

2. Yes, I am thinking of a specific work here, one that recently bored me while in effect claiming to startle: Joe Orton’s *What the Butler Saw*. The anti-institutional clichés of 1960s revolt, turned into a skilfully constructed farce, do not undermine the destructive complacencies of American theatergoers in 1991, whatever their political views. But then I suppose that Foley could admit, without hurting her case, that the play does not offer the kind of “political” challenge she would hope for.

3. Discursive, non-narrative prose, the kind most often treated by traditional rhetoricians, will still deserve funding, though it has been somewhat better served than the arts have been. See, for example, Antczak’s piece in this volume and his book, *Thought and Character: the Rhetoric of Democratic Education* (Ames, IA, 1985); Gary Saul Morson’s emerging works on what he calls “Prosaiics”; and indeed a long history of rhetorics of “rhetoric,” “rhetorologies.” But I don’t know of anyone who has come close to exhausting our needs.


5. For a sign of just how much of a return to the “virtues” recent philosophers have been showing, see the *Times Literary Supplement* for 18 June 1993.

6. Many current philosophers have embraced incommensurability theories that are not utterly relativistic. For a recent example see Isaiah Berlin, *The

8. See the series of letters, pro and con, in the New York Review of Books through the spring of 1993.
9. For a defense of "hopefully" in this absolute construction, see the third edition of The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language.
10. See my "A New Strategy for Establishing a Truly Democratic Criticism."
11. The best critique I know of this mistaken direction of the quest for authenticity is that of Charles Taylor, in Sources of the Self (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1989), and, in somewhat more "popular" form, in The Ethics of Authenticity, same press, 1992.

Bibliography


