UNIT 2: WAYNE C. BOOTH: *"TELLING AND SHOWING"* FROM *THE RHETORIC OF FICTION*

UNIT STRUCTURE:

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2.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to

- discuss W. C. Booth's contributions to narrative fiction
- explain the important concepts of narrative fiction mentioned by Booth in the chapter prescribed
- identify the important ideas contained in the text(s) selected
- use some of these ideas in your own interpretation of narrative texts that you are required to study

2.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit provides a discussion on Wayne C. Booth and the chapter entitled "Telling and Showing" from his much acclaimed book *The Rhetoric of Fiction.* Wayne Clayson Booth (1921- 2005) was an American literary critic based in Chicago, Illinois. He was the George M Pullman Distinguished Service Professor Emeritus in English Language & Literature at the Chicago University. His work followed largely from the Chicago School of Literary Criticism. Divided into three sections,

Booth's discussion of narrative technique in the chapter "Telling and Showing" brings to our notice some of the fundamental conditions of fiction writing. Throughout the whole book, Booth views fictional writing as the art of communicating with the readers. However, for the purpose of this unit, we shall take the introduction and the first section of the comparatively long essay to discuss Booth's ideas on Telling and Showing.

2.3 WAYNE C. BOOTH: LIFE AND WORKS

Born at American Fork, Utah, in 1921, Booth was brought up as a Mormon (A member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints) by his parents. Booth undertook missionary works in his youth for the Mormon Church, which might have influenced his professional life. He was renowned for being an intense advocate of the moral and social value of studying literature. Throughout his career, he had been an outstanding and inspiring teacher.

Booth graduated in English, having switched from Chemistry, at Brigham Young University (a Mormon institution) in Provo, Utah, in 1944. Then, he served as an infantryman in the United States army between 1944 and 1946, before completing both his MA (1947), and his PhD (1950) at the University of Chicago. After a period of ten years or so of teaching in small colleges, Booth was appointed George M. Pullman Professor of English at the University of Chicago in 1962.

Wayne C. Booth played a full part in the American professional arena, acting as president of the Modern Language Association (MLA) in 1982. He was also the man behind establishing the quarterly academic journal *Critical Inquiry* of the 1970s, which soon became the forefront of debates about literary theory and criticism. Like Lionel Trilling, Booth had also to deal with the student protests of the late 1960s. When he was Dean of the College (where the undergraduate teaching took place in Chicago) from 1964 until 1969, he had to undergo one of the most turbulent periods in the history of American universities. Booth believed that failures of communication at all levels were partly responsible for the

problems. As a result, he wrote *Now Don't Try to Reason with Me: Essays and Ironies for a Credulous Age* (1970) and *Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent* (1974), arguing that understanding texts, or people, on their own terms in the first instance is the only respectable intellectual position to adopt. This is also very much the informing principle of both *A Rhetoric of Irony* (1974) and *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction* (1988).

Booth's graduate work at Chicago took place mostly under the supervision of the critic R. S. Crane (1886–1967). Like the New Critics, the Chicago School critics emphasised the need to focus on the text, and to move away from context (history and biography, for example). But whereas the concentration in New Criticism was on language, and hence mostly on poetry, critics such as Crane were equally, if not more, interested in the text as a system of communication in which plot, characterisation, and overall structure played a part. Members of the Chicago School were often referred to as Neo-Aristotelians because, under the influence of Aristotle, they saw every element of the text, and the text as a whole, as mimetic, as an enactment of the experience or reality being represented. Above all, advocating a "Pluralist approach" Crane and his fellow critics argued that there could be no single way of approaching a literary text.

In his influential first book, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961; rev. ed., 1983), Booth presented a detailed examination of narrative technique and introduced such terms as "implied author" and "reliable narrator." In 1974, he produced *Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent*, a plea for reasoned assent in the educational community that was prompted by events on the Chicago campus. *The Company We Keep* (1988), offers a discussion of the place of ethics in literary criticism. In addition to writing further works of criticism, Booth cofounded (1974) and co-edited from 1974 to 1985 the quarterly *Critical Inquiry*. His other books include *Now Don't Try to Reason with Me: Essays and Ironies for a Credulous Age* (1970), *A Rhetoric of Irony* (1974), *Critical Understanding:*

The Powers and Limits of Pluralism (1979), *The Vocation of a Teacher* (1988), and *The Rhetoric of Rhetoric* (2004).

Wayne C. Booth died on 10th October 2005.



LET US KNOW

The Rhetoric of Fiction (1961), his most significant and influential contribution to critical thinking, had been published a year earlier to widespread critical acclaim. It was awarded two prestigious prizes: the Phi Beta Kappa's Christian Gauss Award (1962), and the David H. Russell Award of the National Council of Teachers (1966). In 1970, the University of Chicago bestowed on Booth the title of Distinguished Service Professor.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 1: On what ground, did the Chicago critics differ from the new critics?

Q 2: Name some of Booth's critical texts.

2.4 ABOUT THE BOOK *THE RHETORIC OF FICTION*

In *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, which is also Booth's most recognised and acclaimed work, he argued that all narrative is a form of rhetoric. He states that beginning roughly with Henry James, critics began to emphasise the difference between "showing" and "telling" in fictional narratives, and have placed more and more of a dogmatic premium on "showing." Booth opined that despite the realistic effects that modern authors had achieved, an attempt to distinguish narratives in that way was simplistic and deeply flawed, because authors invariably both 'show' and 'tell'. Booth observed that the authors appear to choose between the techniques based upon decisions about how to convey their various "commitments" along various "lines of interest."

Booth's criticism can be viewed as distinct from traditional biographical criticism, and the new criticism that argued that one can talk only about what the text says, and the modern criticism that argues for the "eradication" of authorial presence. Booth claimed that it is impossible to talk about a text without talking about an author, because the existence of the text implies the existence of an author. He also argued that it does not matter whether an author—as distinct from the narrator—intrudes directly in a work, since readers will always infer the existence of an author, behind any text they encounter. Besides, the readers will always draw conclusions about the beliefs and judgments (and conclusions about the skills and "success") of a text's implied author, along the text's various lines of interest, as he states:

"However impersonal he may try to be, his readers will inevitably construct a picture of the official scribe who writes in this manner—and of course that official scribe will never be neutral toward all values. Our reaction to his various commitments, secret or overt, will help to determine our response to the work."

This implied author, as Booth would like to use (whom he also called an author's "second self") is the one who "chooses, consciously or unconsciously, what we read; we infer him as an ideal, literary, created version of the real man; he is the sum of his own choices." In this book, Booth also coined the term "unreliable narrator"—a narrator whose credibility has been seriously compromised.

In *Rhetoric of Fiction,* Booth spent several chapters using a series of illustrations that include numerous references to and citations from widely recognised works of fiction, and describing the various effects that implied authors achieve along the various lines of interest that he identifies, depending upon whether the implied author provides commentary, and upon the degree to which a story's narrator is reliable or unreliable, personal or impersonal. He detailed three "Types of Literary Interest" that are "available for technical manipulation in fiction:"

Intellectual or Cognitive: One may have, or can be made to have,

strong intellectual curiosity about "the facts," the true interpretation, the true reasons, the true origins, the true motives, or the truth about life itself.

Qualitative: One may have, or can be made to have, a strong desire to see any pattern or form completed, or to experience a further development of qualities of any kind. One might call this kind "aesthetic", if to do so did not suggest that a literary form using this interest was necessarily of more artistic value than one based on other interests.

Practical: One may have, or can be made to have, a strong desire for the success or failure of those we love or hate, admire or detest; or one can be made to hope for or fear a change in the quality of a character.

It may be important to note that in the 1983 edition of *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, Booth included a lengthy addendum to the original 1961 edition. There, he outlined various identities taken on by both authors and readers: 'The Flesh-and Blood Author', the 'Implied Author', 'the Teller of This Tale', 'the Career Author', and the "Public Myth"; and, the Flesh-and-Blood Re-Creator of Many Stories, the Postulated Reader, the Credulous Listener, the Career Reader, and the Public Myth about the "Reading Public." In the preface to the first edition of the book, Booth writes:

"In writing about the rhetoric of fiction, I am not primarily interested in didactic fiction, fiction used for propaganda or instruction. My subject is the technique of non-didactic fiction, viewed as the art of communicating with readers—the rhetorical resources available to the writer of epic, novel, or short story as he tries, consciously or unconsciously, to impose his fictional world upon the reader. Though the problems raised by rhetoric in this sense are found in didactic works like Gulliver's Travels, Pilgrim's *Progress,* and *1984,* they are seen more clearly in non-didactic works like Tom Jones, Middlemarch, and Light in August. Is there any defence that can be offered, on aesthetic grounds, for an art full of rhetorical appeals?"

From this quotation, we come to know about Booth's main ideas that become explicit in the book *Rhetoric of Fiction.*



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 3: What does Booth state about the concepts of Telling and Showing in his book *The Rhetoric of Fiction*?

Q 4: How is Booth's criticism distinct from traditional biographical criticism and New Criticism?

Q 5: What are the three different types of literary interests as Booth stated?

2.5 SOME EXCERPTS FROM THE TEXT OF "TELLING AND SHOWING"

In his 1979 study, *Critical Understanding: the Powers and Limits of Pluralism*, Booth argues that there are five ways of approaching novels, or literary texts. The critic James Phelan summarizes these as follows: as an imitation of the world external to it (the mimetic approach), as an event in time (the historical approach), as an autotelic object (the objective), as an expression – and revelation – of its author's psychology or experience (the expressive or biographical), as a communication to an audience (rhetorical or reader-response). (Phelan 1988: 63) The next chapter will concentrate on the first, the mimetic. The New Critics saw the text as autotelic, as a structure of words independent of its context, but Booth's emphasis is on a textual environment of communication and reception. In his 'Afterword' to the second edition of *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, Wayne C. Booth makes it clear that (unlike Trilling's) his project is trans-historical and non-political: 'studying the rhetoric of fiction is one thing and studying the political history of novels…is another' (Booth 1983a: 413). Whether such a project is possible, productive, or welcome is another matter. Booth's entire approach to the novel is determined by his conviction that '[t]he novel comes into existence as something communicable' (1961: 397). It is, or rather should be, an 'essentially public' form (1961: 395). Throughout *The Rhetoric of Fiction* and *The Company We Keep*, the focus is on fiction 'viewed as the art of communicating with readers' (1961: xiii). In terms of our communication

model of narrative (p. 16), itself mainly derived from Booth, it is not just that the key elements in *The Rhetoric of Fiction* are the author, text, and reader; the concentration is on how these interact (or are thought of as interacting) in the process of writing and reading a novel.

As Booth acknowledges, 'James began at a different place entirely, with the effort to portray a convincing mind at work on reality' (1961: 43). It is worth issuing a health warning at this point: an enormous amount of fiction is discussed or referred to by Booth, and there can be no expectation that his readers (or the readers of this book) can have read and assimilated all this material. Everything is to be gained, however, by reading more of the novels that surface in his argument. Booth sees the author's central task as that of transmitting to the reader a clear sense of a fictional world and its moral problems. Crucial to this act of communication is the extent to which the forms of rhetoric it adopts are effective to its purpose. There is no time in *The Rhetoric of Fiction* for what Booth projects as solitary, self-regarding, experimental novels that privilege the complex and meandering visions of idiosyncratic writers. Retreating to a 'private world of values' may be one response to a 'fragmented society', but the purpose of the novel in such a world should be to 'mold a new consensus' (1961: 393). If Trilling's antagonists in The Liberal Imagination are novels committed to social realism and political propaganda, Booth's are works of fiction that offer peculiar and confused social and moral perspectives, or novels that distinguish themselves as 'pure' because they strive for a seemingly impersonal style with no detectable perspective at all. The reader is offered little guidance in a world of moral complexity often intensified, for the sake of entertainment and technical display, by the multiplication of unresolvable ambiguities and interminable symbolism. Booth has in mind novels such as the Austrian Franz Kafka's (1883–1924) The Castle (1937) where '[n]o one tells us . . . what K's goal is, or whether it is attainable, or whether it is a worthwhile goal in the first place' (Booth 1961: 287). He saw 'deliberate confusion' (1961: 285) as a disease of the modern novel, and the Irish writer James Joyce (1882–1941) as one of its first proponents.

Booth also criticizes James's *The Turn of the Screw* (1898) for its muddled and muddling narrative and absence of any clear moral position. It will become clear as the book proceeds, however, that Booth's enduring legacy is less his rather inflexible views on morality, and much more the vocabulary and concepts he developed in order to explore what he sees as the gains and losses of impersonal narration. For Booth, the main tool for the writer and critic of the novel is rhetoric, the means by which a particular author's fictional world. The French novelist Gustave Flaubert (1821–80) is identified by Booth as an initiator of the fashion in the later 19th century for less intrusive narrators in fiction, and for novels (to use Booth's terms) that 'show' rather than 'tell' (Booth 1961: 3–20); a distinction Booth rejects. This is sometimes referred to as a 'dramatic' method because the emphasis is often on scene (or dialogue) and panoramic summary, or pictorial presentation, rather than on narrative commentary and explanation. This fashion hardened into dogma after Percy Lubbock's *The Craft of Fiction* (1921), a book that teased out of Henry James's prefaces (mistakenly, as we shall see in Chapter 4) a systematic theory of impersonal narration. Its moral norms are communicated to the reader. Booth sets out to consider 'whether rhetoric is compatible with art' (1961: xiv) and ends up concluding that every move a writer makes is rhetorical: fiction is rhetoric. Booth demonstrates that despite the claims of the purists, each element of a novel (including dialogue, setting, symbolism, and so on) is part of its system of persuasion. As we have seen, there are two extremes in the spectrum of rhetoric available to the novelist: the use of garrulous narrators who obstruct at every opportunity the reader's own access to the fictional world; and the elimination of such narrators to the point where the reader is left drifting. An example of the former would be the narrator in Henry Fielding's (1707–54) novel, *Tom Jones* (1749), and the French writer Alain Robbe-Grillet's (1922–) *Jealousy* (1957) is offered by Booth as an example of the latter (1961: 62). Although Booth feels able (grudgingly) to 'endure' its 'unmediated, mindless sensation or emotion' because it is 'less than 35,000 words long' (1961: 63), he was generally repelled by the development in the 1950s of the nouveau roman in France. By the mid

20th century, in the culmination of that process which started with Flaubert and others in the mid-19th century, only novels in the 'pure' category were regarded by many critics and readers as 'realistic', or convincing.

What *The Rhetoric of Fiction* sets out to deny is the validity of any distinction between 'pure' and 'impure' fiction. For Booth, ultimately, distinctions between 'pure form', 'moral content', and the 'rhetorical means of realizing for the reader the union of form and matter' are arbitrary because novels are 'human actions', and 'moral judgments…are implicit whenever human beings act'. It is almost impossible to detach any move Booth makes on the novel from his overriding moral concerns. It is worth noting here, however, that the inseparability. Novelists in this tradition include French authors such as—Alain Robbe-Grillet (1922–2008), Michel Butor (1926–2016), Marguerite Duras (1914–96), and Claude Mauriac (1914–96). Rejecting explicit moral, social, or psychological commentary, they focus instead on the detailed description of mental states, of form and content and form and morality, as inherent to novels that communicate successfully. This inseparability is formulated in organic terms ('the unions of form and matter') shared by Trilling and that reach back to James's 'The Art of Fiction'.

For those who abhor 'the modern love of generalization' (1961: 29), and Booth is at one with James and Trilling here, the novel is the most appropriate form of art. Booth endorses James's insistence on the absurdity of applying general laws to the writing of fiction. Novelists are not, or should not be, bound by one method. They can create 'peculiar literary kinds', each of which, like James's 'subjects' in 'The Art of Fiction', entails its own appropriate technique. In a biological framework – also occupied, again, by James – a novel is like an organism whose shape is determined by its purpose (not the other way round); a purpose that also includes the effect it is designed to have on its readers. The three main 'variables' of the novel are 'subject-matter, structure, and technique', and these 'depend finally on notions of purpose or function or effect'. In the same way that James refuses to accept any pre-existing,

predetermining ways of writing the novel, and Trilling repudiates Parrington's insistence on political and social relevance, Booth argues that only the novel's purpose within the context of its specific conception can define and shape its form and content. This sense of the limitless possibilities of novels restricted only by their initial choice of subject seems to correspond with Trilling's celebration of the variety to which the form gives rise. However, Booth sees Trilling's recommendation of the 'novel of ideas' in The Liberal Imagination as an example of exactly the kind of extraneous constriction, or 'normative' approach, he wants to resist in favour of being 'descriptive'. There is an incoherence here, however, that comes close to wrecking the whole edifice of The Rhetoric of Fiction, and to which we shall return at the end of the book. Booth is close to rejecting rules established elsewhere in order to smuggle in his own. 'The ultimate problem in the rhetoric of fiction', he asserts, is 'that of deciding for whom the author should write'. But regardless of whether he writes for his peers, or fellow-novelists, 'himself as imagined reader', or his wider audience, he is involved in an act of communication that cannot be other than moral because, again, the human activity of communication can only ever be a moral act; one available, that is, for approval or condemnation. Towards the end of *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, the approach hardens into the normative view that technical innovation should always be subordinate to the 'obligation to be as clear about' the 'moral position' as possible. It seems at this point as if Booth is much more interested in a 'conscious moral purpose' for the novel than either James or Trilling. Booth is certainly a long way here from Trilling's commitment to the liberating potential of ambiguity. Although he shared a belief in the need for novels to conduct a complex investigation of the disparities between illusion and reality, he had a firm view of the moral certainties such an investigation ought to yield. 'Pure' narration has 'fouled' our 'lines of communication': 'we have looked for so long at foggy landscapes reflected in misty mirrors that we have come to like fog'. The task of the novel, as Booth insists on it, is not to create the fog but to issue fog warnings. The 'deliberate confusion' of 'fundamental truths' ought not to be the purpose of the novel.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 6: What does Booth take the novel to be?

Q 7: What is the central task of the author as seen by Booth?

Q 8: Why does Booth laud the French novelist Gustave Flaubert?

Q 9: Why is Booth not ready to distinguish between pure and impure fiction?

Telling and Showing

The text of Authoritative "Telling" in Early Narration

One of the most obviously artificial devices of the storyteller is the trick of going beneath the surface of the action to obtain a reliable view of a character's mind and heart. Whatever our ideas may be about the natural way to tell a story, artifice is unmistakably present whenever the author tells us what no one in so-called real life could possibly know. In life, we never know anyone but ourselves by thoroughly reliable internal signs, and most of us achieve an all

too partial view even of ourselves. It is in a way strange, then, that in literature from the very beginning we have been told motives directly and authoritatively without being forced to rely on those shaky inferences about other men, which we cannot avoid in our own lives.

"There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was perfect and upright, one that feared God, and eschewed evil." With one stroke, the unknown author has given us a kind of information never obtained about real people, even about our most intimate friends. Yet it is information that we must accept without question if we are to grasp the story that is to follow. In life if a friend confided his view that *his* friend was "perfect and upright," we would accept the information with qualifications posed by our knowledge of the speaker's character or of the general fallibility of mankind. We could never trust even the most reliable of witnesses as completely as we trust the author of the opening statement about Job.

We move immediately in Job to two scenes presented with no privileged information whatever: Satan's temptation of God and Job's first losses and lamentations. However, we conclude the first section with another judgment, which no real event could provide for any observer: "In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly." How do we know that Job sinned not? Who is to pronounce on such a question? Only God himself could know with certainty whether Job charged God foolishly. Yet the author pronounces judgment, and we accept his judgment without question.

It might at first appear that the author does not require us to rely on his unsupported word, since he gives us the testimonial of God himself, conversing with Satan, to confirm his view of Job's moral perfection. In addition, after Job has been pestered by his three friends and has given his own opinion about his experience, God is brought on stage again to confirm the truth of Job's view. However, clearly, the reliability of God's statements ultimately depends on the author himself; it is he who names God and assures us that this voice is truly His.

This form of artificial authority has been present in most narrative until recent times. Though Aristotle praises Homer for speaking in his own voice less than other poets, even Homer writes scarcely a page without some kind of direct clarification of motives, of expectations, and of the relative importance of events. Though the gods themselves are often unreliable, Homer—the Homer we know—is not. What he tells us usually goes deeper and is more accurate than anything we are likely to learn about real people and events. In the opening lines of the Iliad, for example, we are told, under the half-pretence of an invocation, precisely what the tale is to be about "the anger of Peleus' son Achilleus and its devastation." We are told directly that we are to care more about the Greeks than the Trojans. We are told that they were "heroes" with L Trans. Richmond Lattimore (Chicago, 1951). All quotations are from this translation. "strong souls." We are told that it was the will of Zeus that they should be "the delicate feasting of dogs." And we learn that the particular conflict between Agamemnon, "the lord of men," and "brilliant"

Achilles was set on by Apollo. We could never be sure of any of this information in real life, yet we are sure as we move through the *Iliad* with Homer constantly at our elbow, controlling rigorously our beliefs, our interests, and our sympathies. Though his commentary is generally brief and often disguised as simile, we learn from it the precise quality of every heart; we know who dies innocent and who guilty, who foolish and who wise. And we know, whenever there is any reason for us to know, what the characters are thinking: "the son of Tydeus pondered doubtfully/... Three times in his heart and spirit he pondered turning . . ." (Book VIII, 11.167-69).

In the *Odyssey* Homer works in the same explicit and systematic way to keep our judgments straight. Though E. V. Rieu is no doubt correct in calling Homer an "impersonal" and "objective" author, in the sense that the life of the real Homer cannot be discovered in his work,2 Homer "intrudes" deliberately and obviously to insure that our judgment of the "heroic," "resourceful," "admirable," "wise" Odysseus will be sufficiently favourable. "Yet all the gods were sorry for him, except Poseidon, who pursued the heroic Odysseus with relentless malice till the day when he reached his own country."

Indeed, the major justification of the opening scene in the palace of Zeus is not as mere exposition of the facts of Odysseus' plight. What Homer requires of us is sympathetic involvement in that plight, and Athene's opening reply to Zeus provides authoritative judgment on what is to follow. "It is for Odysseus that my heart is wrung—the wise but unlucky Odysseus, who has been parted so long from all his friends and is pining on a lonely island far away in the middle of the seas." To her accusation of neglect, Zeus replies, "How could I ever forget the admirable Odysseus? He is not only the wisest man alive but has been the most generous in his offerings. . . . It is Poseidon . . . who is so implacable towards him.

When we come to Odysseus' enemies, the poet again does not hesitate either to speak in his own person or to give divine testimony. Penelope's suitors must look bad to us; Telemachus must be admired. Not only does Homer dwell on Athene's approval of Telemachus, he lays

on his own direct judgments with bright colors. The "insolent," "swaggering," and "ruffianly" suitors are contrasted to the "wise" (though almost helplessly young) Telemachus and the "good" Mentor. "Telemachus now showed his good judgment." Mentor "showed his good will now by rising to admonish his compatriots." We seldom encounter the suitors without some explicit attack by the poet: "This was their boastful way, though it was they who little guessed how matters really stood." And whenever there might be some doubt about where a character stands, Homer sets us straight: " 'My Queen,' replied Medon, who was by no means a villain . . . ." Hundreds of pages later, when Medon is spared from Odysseus' slaughter, we can hardly be surprised.

The result of all this direct guidance, when it is joined with Athene's divine attestation that the gods "have no quarrel" with Telemachus and have settled that he "shall come home safe," is to leave us, as we enter upon Odysseus' first adventure in Book Five, perfectly clear about what we should hope for and what fear; we are unambiguously sympathetic toward the heroes and contemptuous of the suitors. It need hardly be said that another poet, working with the same episodes but treating them from the suitors' point of view, could easily have led us into the same adventures with radically different hopes and fears.

Direct and authoritative rhetoric of the kind we have seen in Job and in Homer's works has never completely disappeared from fiction. But as we all know, it is not what we are likely to find if we turn to a typical modern novel or short story.

Jim had a great trick that he used to play w'ile he-was travelin'. For instance, he'd be ridin' on a train and they'd come to some little town like, well, like, we'll say, like Benton. Jim would look out of the train window and read the signs on the stores.

For instance, they'd be a sign, "Henry Smith, Dry Goods." Well, Jim would write down the name and the name of the town and when he got to wherever he was goin' he'd mail back a postal card to Henry Smith at Benton and not sign no name to it, but he'd write on the card, well, somethin' like "Ask your wife about that book agent that spent the

afternoon last week," or "Ask your Missus who kept her from gettin' lonesome the last time you was in Carterville."

And he'd sign the card, "A Friend."

Of course, he never knew what really come of none of these jokes, but he could picture what probably happened and that was enough. . . . Jim was a card.

Most readers of Lardner's "Haircut" (1926) have recognized that Lardner's opinion of Jim is radically different here from the speaker's. But no one in the story has said so. Lardner is not present to say so, not, at least, in the sense that Homer is present in his epics. Like many other modern authors, he has effaced himself, renounced the privilege of direct intervention, retreated to the wings and left his characters to work out their own fates upon the stage.

In sleep she knew she was in her bed, but not the bed she had lain down in a few hours since, and the room was not the same but it was a room she had known somewhere. Her heart was a stone lying upon her breast outside of her; her pulses lagged and paused, and she knew that something strange was going to happen, even as the early morning winds were cool through the lattice. . . .

Now I must get up and go while they are all quiet. Where are my things? Things have a will of their own in this place and hide where they l i k e . . . . Now what horse shall I borrow for this journey I do not mean to take? . . . Come now, Graylie, she said, taking the bridle, we must outrun Death and the Devil. . . .

The relation between author and spokesman is more complex here. Katherine Anne Porter's Miranda ("Pale Horse, Pale Rider" [1936]) cannot be simply classified, like Lardner's barber, as morally and intellectually deficient; the ironies at work among character, author, and reader are considerably more difficult to describe. Yet the problem for the reader is essentially the same as in "Haircut." The story is presented without comment, leaving the reader without the guidance of explicit evaluation.

Since Flaubert, many authors and critics have been convinced that "objective", "impersonal", or "dramatic" modes of narration are

naturally superior to any mode that allows for direct appearances by the author or his reliable spokesman. Sometimes, as we shall see in the next three chapters, the complex issues involved in this shift have been reduced to a convenient distinction between "showing," which is artistic, and telling, "which is inartistic." "I shall not *tell* you anything," says a fine young novelist in defence of his art. "I shall allow you to eavesdrop on my people, and sometimes they will tell the truth and sometimes they will lie, and you must determine for yourself when they are doing which. You do this every day. Your butcher says, 'This is the best,' and you reply, 'That's you saying it/ Shall my people be less the captive of their desires than your butcher? I can show much, but show only…You will no more expect the novelist to tell you precisely *how* something is said then you will expect him to stand by your chair and hold your book."

However, the changed attitudes toward the author's voice in fiction raise problems that go far deeper than this simplified version of point of view would suggest. Percy Lubbock taught us forty years ago to believe that "the art of fiction does not begin until the novelist thinks of his story as a matter to be *shownf* to be so exhibited that it will tell itself." He may have been in some sense right—but to say so raises more questions than it answers.

Why is it that an episode "told" by Fielding can strike us as more fully realized than many of the scenes scrupulously "shown" by imitators of James or Hemingway? Why does some authorial commentary ruin the work in which it occurs, while the prolonged commentary of Tristram Shandy can still enthral us? What, after all, does an author do when he "intrudes" to "tell" us something about his story? Such questions force us to consider closely what happens when an author engages a reader fully with a work of fiction; they lead us to a view of fictional technique which necessarily Mark Harris, goes far beyond the reductions that we have sometimes accepted under the concept of "point of view."

2.6 READING THE TEXT

The chapter called "Telling and Showing" in W C Booth's book *The Rhetoric of Fiction* is divided into three sections. In these sections, Booth

with the help of a series of illustrations, provides a discussion on narrative technique and brings to our notice some of the fundamental aspects of fictional writing. Booth's view is that when we read creative texts, the way things are narrated often hides the processes through which the author creates the effect. Following this, our attention is fixed on the story element, theme and content. Therefore, Booth tends to argue that a work of fiction effectively directs the attention of the readers to the story or the protagonist through different elements of artifice which are at work. Thus, the impression created by the author is carefully done through a systematic arrangement of words on a page to suit the sequences of the plot. This means that there is always a method involved in the process of writing a fiction.

In this chapter, Booth is perhaps trying to relate to an understanding of the method through which effect is created. And, that is created by a careful organisation of information relating to characters' lives, circumstances in which the characters live, besides orchestrating things in a way that spans across the narrative plane of the text. This is also a process of making things real, but, which does not adhere to our experience in actual life, because in a fictional work, everything is controlled by a sense of authority which in turn grants credibility to the narrative. It is in against this background that Booth is seen discussing how 'showing' and 'telling' work. In the first section entitled "Authoritative 'Telling' in Early Narration", Booth brings in the reference of the Bible and the Iliad together. His purpose is to suggest that there is something common in all narratives—that is the making the 'story' credible to all the readers.

The book *The Rhetoric of Fiction* starts with the idea that Henry James, Lionel Trilling, and Wayne C. Booth shared an interest in the relation between fiction and the world, especially in the moral and artistic values of the novel and its effects on senses of the self. If the novel is to be considered a communication process, consisting in part of a real author, text, and reader, then there is also the question, as Booth seeks to explore, of what version of the author (the 'implied author') is projected in the text, or what composite sense ('career author') we develop as we

read two or more novels by the same writer, how the story is told (what kind of narrator or narrative method is used), any characters who may 'listen' to or 'read' the story in the text (the 'narratees'), and the type of reader constructed or implied in the text, as distinct from any actual reader. Framing all this are the societies inhabited by author and reader. After *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, Booth calls the real author and the real reader the 'flesh-and-blood author' and the 'flesh-and-blood reader' in order to detach them even more emphatically from their 'career' and 'implied' versions. In *The Rhetoric of Fiction* and, later, in *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction*, Booth makes explicit many of the elements involved in the production and reception of fiction implicit in the criticism of James and Trilling.

Significance of Booth's Ideas

Peter Rawling, in his book *American Theorists of The novel: Henry James, Lionel Trilling*. Wayne C. Booth provides important readings of three American theorists from which we can find access to the some larger issues of narratives. Rawling's book is anchored in Henry James's *The Art of Fiction* (1884) and his prefaces to the New York Edition of his *Novels and Tales* (1907–9), in Lionel Trilling's *The Liberal Imagination* (1950), *The Opposing Self* (1955), *Beyond Culture* (1965), and *Sincerity and Authenticity* (1972), and Wayne C. Booth's *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961) and *The Company We Keep.* A reading of this book may provide a comprehensive understanding of concepts of these three critics, which shall help you to understand the aspects of narrative fiction in a far better way.

The following reference to the chapters of Rawling's book shall help us to discuss the contributions of Booth to the discussions of narrative fiction.

Chapter 1 "Three Perspectives on the Novel" make a survey of the ways in which James, Trilling, and Booth define the novel and its purpose, and on how all three attempt to rescue the form from its compromising popularity by elevating it to the level of an art.

Chapter 2 "Realism and Representation" makes a reference to Booth who wanted to ask a few important questions:

- What role can the writer have if the main purpose of a novel is faithfully to depict experience? Can there be any agreement about what 'faithful depiction' amounts to?
- What happens if a novelist abandons realism?
- Is it possible to strike a balance between being excessively concerned with formal, structural properties, in fiction and the commitment to some form of representation?

Chapter 3 deals with ideas about 'Authors, Narrators, and Narration' and the views of James, Trilling, and Booth on the troublesome boundary between life (including the lives of authors) and fiction are sought to be explored. How far, should authors obtrude in their fiction? Is their detachment necessarily healthy for the reader? Should fiction, or critical approaches to it, be biographical?

Chapter 4 deals with 'Points of view and centres of consciousnesses', where Booth opines that the all-important narrative device for James is point of view. Booth explores if James advocated restricting the point of view from which the story is told to one character. Are there any correspondences here with the early twentieth-century fashion for relativity and multiple perspectives? Is Booth right to be concerned about the moral consequences of multiplied perspectives and narrative ambiguities, or confusions?

Chapter 5 concentrates on 'Readers, reading, and interpretation'. The important issues that Booth deals with are: Should the writer aim for a wide readership if the responsibilities of the novel are seen in social and political terms? What conflicts might there be between more artistic, aesthetic, approaches to writing fiction? Can interpretation be controlled? Should it be controlled? Is this what Booth means, for example, by 'understanding?' What responsibilities, if any, does the reader have when it comes to interpretation and criticism?

Chapter 6 "Moral Intelligence", consolidates much of the previous deliberations by exploring, and encouraging debate about how James, Trilling, and Booth discuss the moral and ethical dimensions of the writing and reading of fiction. If rule-bound, didactic novels are condemned as inartistic, are the alternatives moral relativism and

anarchy? James and Trilling seem to argue that the best guarantee of responsible behaviour lies in the cultivation of individual intelligence, of flexible thinking, whereas Booth is often more interested in advocating a much less flimsy framework of clear moral principles in which communication and consensus are among the controlling elements. Is a resolution of these conflicts between Booth on the one hand, and James and Trilling on the other, desirable, or even possible?



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q 10: How does Booth make a distinction between 'showing' and 'telling'?

Q 11: What are the questions that should occur to us 'when an author engages a reader fully with a work of fiction'?



2.7 LET US SUM UP

From this unit, you have learnt that with *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, Booth became established as a "Chicago Critic". The neo-Aristotelian critics such as R S Crane and Booth himself believed that art must contribute something to life beyond immediate pleasure. Art has a function to both instruct and entertain. *The Rhetoric of Fiction* finally discusses the way in which the author's meaning in a narrative fiction is expressed and conveyed to the reader. You have learnt that in this influential book, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* Booth presented a detailed examination of narrative technique and introduced such terms as "implied author" and "reliable narrator."



2.8 FURTHER READING

Booth Waine C. (1983). *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. (2nd Edition). University of Chicago Press.

Choudhury, Bibhash. (Ed). (2010). *Different Strokes: A Prose Selection.* Papyrus.

Rawling, Peter. (2006). *American Theorists of The novel: Henry James, Lionel Trilling*. Wayne C. Booth. Routledge.

Web Resources :

https://www.britannica.com/biography/Wayne-C-Booth

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wayne_C._Booth



2.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS (HINTS ONLY)

Ans to Q No 1: The New Critics concentrated on the language of poetry… …but the Chicago critic like Crane was interested in the text as a system of communication in which plot, characterisation, and overall structure played a part… …unlike the New Critics, the Chicago School saw the text as a whole, as mimetic, as an enactment of the experience or reality being represented.

Ans to Q No 2: *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961; 1983)… … *Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent* (1974)… …*The Company We Keep* (1988)… …*Now Don't Try to Reason with Me: Essays and Ironies for a Credulous Age* (1970)… … *A Rhetoric of Irony* (1974)… …*Critical Understanding: The Powers and Limits of Pluralism* (1979)… …*The Vocation of a Teacher* (1988)… …*The Rhetoric of Rhetoric* (2004).

Ans to Q No 3: Roughly with Henry James, critics began to emphasise the difference between "showing" and "telling" in fictional narratives… …Booth viewed that despite the realistic effects that modern authors had achieved, an attempt to distinguish narratives in that way was simplistic and deeply flawed, because authors invariably both 'show' and 'tell'.

Ans to Q No 4: Traditional biographical critics and the New Critics argued that one can talk only about what the text says… …Booth's claim is that the existence of the text implies the existence of an author… …Booth viewed that the author intrudes directly into a work, since readers will always infer the existence of an author.

Ans to Q No 5: Intellectual or Cognitive… …Qualitative… …Practical.

Ans to Q No 6: Novel is the art of communicating with readers… …novel is 'essentially public'… …novel comes into existence as something communicable.

Ans to Q No 7: Booth sees the author's central task as that of transmitting to the reader a clear sense of a fictional world and its moral problems. Crucial to this act of communication is the extent to which the forms of rhetoric it adopts are effective to its purpose.

Ans to Q No 8: For Booth, the main tool for the writer and critic of the novel is rhetoric, the means by which a particular author's fictional world. The French novelist Gustave Flaubert (1821–80) is identified by Booth as an initiator of the fashion in the later 19th century for less intrusive narrators in fiction.

Ans to Q No 9: For Booth, ultimately, distinctions between 'pure form', 'moral content', and the 'rhetorical means of realizing for the reader the union of form and matter' are arbitrary because novels are 'human actions', and 'moral judgments…are implicit whenever human beings act.'

Ans to Q No 10: Booth states that **'**Showing' is artistic, and 'Telling' is inartistic

Ans to Q No 11: According to Booth, the way things are narrated in creative texts, often hides the processes through which the author creates the effect. Thus, the attention of the reales is fixed on the story element, theme and content. The author creates this effect through different elements of artifice which are at work. This means that there is always a method involved in the process of writing a fiction.



2.10 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

Q 1: In the chapter "Telling and Showing" Booth brings to our notice some of the fundamental conditions of fiction writing. Discuss.

Q 2: How is the idea of a 'text' conceived by the Chicago critics? Write a note on the contributions of the Chicago critics to the interpretations of the narrative texts.

Q 3: How, according to a critic like Peter Rawling, James, Trilling and Booth could address the larger issues associated with a narrative?

Q 4: W. C. Booth invariably states that 'the novel comes into existence as something communicable or fiction needs to be viewed as the art of communicating with readers.' Justify your views with reference to Booth's essay "Telling and Showing."

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