

THE RHETORIC OF RHETORIC: THE QUEST FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION.

BY W.C. BOOTH. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004. 224 pp. ISBN: 978-1-4051-1237-6, Pb. US\$23.95, CDN\$28.99.

In 2004, a year prior to his death, Wayne Booth's last book, *The Rhetoric of Rhetoric*, was published. The overarching aim of the book is to examine why rhetoric acquired such a poor reputation, review the attempts to revive it, and examine the various sorts of rhetoric available. Rhetoric, for Booth, "includes all forms of communication short of physical violence, even such gestures as raising an eyebrow or giving the finger" (p. 4). This most general definition results in a range of definitions and stipulations as follows.

First, there is *Rhetoric* itself:

Rhetoric: the whole range of arts not only of persuasion but also of producing or reducing misunderstandings.

This immediately gives rise to two terms of art:

Rhetor: the communicator, the persuader, or (N.B.) the understander;

Rhetorician: the student of such communication.

Next, there are kinds of rhetoric (introduced on p. 43), the main ones being:

Win Rhetoric (WR): rhetoric as eristic to one degree or another.

Listening Rhetoric (LR): the whole range of communicative arts for reducing misunderstanding by paying full attention to opposing views.

Bargaining Rhetoric (BR): forms of negotiation, varying by intent and purpose.

Booth complements this with some neologisms for concepts that help us triangulate in on just what his sense of rhetoric is.

Rhetrickery: the whole range of shoddy, dishonest communicative arts producing misunderstanding—along with other harmful results. The art of making the worse seem the better case.

Rheterology: the deepest form of LR: the systematic probing for "common ground."

Rhetorologist: the rhetorician who practices rheterology, pursuing common ground on the assumption—often disappointed—that disputants can be led into mutual understanding. (pp. 10-11)

What is of most interest from the point of view of Argumentation Theory are the distinctions among WR, LR and BR. The first is eristic, the second heuristic, and the third a negotiation. Each category's sub-cases involve the degree of ability cross-mapped with the degree of concern for the heuristics of the situation. Thus, one form of WR is where a speaker sincerely believes she is correct, and that it is imperative for everyone's good that her position be adopted; i.e., she has good intentions. *Mutatis mutandis* for BR. However, the third form of rhetoric is the one which most interests me: the aforementioned Listening-Rhetoric. This form breaks down in five aspects which range from the (a) purist, which Booth calls rhetorology and I refer to as *heuristic*, (b) the Rhetor who tries to deal with the dogmatist, (c) the strategic Rhetor who hopes listening may improve her chances, (d) the Rhetor who

“gives in” to avoid bad consequences, through to (e) the over-committed Rhetor, who will insist on LR even in the face of certain violent consequences. It is interesting to note that Booth is concerned with rhetoric not only when it is being used badly as a tool for unjust persuasion, but also when it is not being used to achieve righteous goals. Stopping a fanatic is highly unlikely using LR, and one who resorts to it inappropriately is also blameworthy. Similarly, not raising objections to a position due to concerns with political correctness also falls in the LR-e category.

While the book has these potentially useful categories and classifications, it is just their potentiality that left me wanting. In the case of these sub-classes, as well as numerous other subjects, Booth failed to follow through with more detail and precision. The book is far too serial-oriented, with new subjects jumping up one after the other. In point of fact, I am not even sure where one might use the book. It does not seem right for a classroom, insofar as it covers too much in too small a space, and, as a research work, lacks sufficient detail. Moreover, there is a dire lack of cross-pollination. This, a pet peeve of mine, means that there is no reference to work in Argumentation Theory, whether dialectical, rhetorical, or communicative at all. So many of his thoughts mirror those of us working in Argumentation Theory, that it seems a pity that no connections are raised.

All that said, I do not regret having read the book. Booth’s death in 2005 permits me to view the text as, perhaps, an epilogue to his career, or, perhaps, as the construction of sign posts for where the field should go. In that regard—the unveiling of the final thoughts of a brilliant mind—it was a worthwhile undertaking.