



AN ANALYSIS OF WAYNE C. BOOTH'S EMOTIONS, BELIEFS AND READER'S OBJECTIVITY

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ABSTRACT

Wayne C. Booth was an American critic. He was educated at Brigham young university, the University of Chicago. He taught English at Haveford college and Earlham college before moving back to the university of Chicago. His work followed largely from the Chicago school of literary criticism. His most recognized book was "The rhetoric of fiction". "Emotions, beliefs and the reader's objectivity" is one of the essays in his book "The Rhetoric of fiction".

INTRODUCTION

He begins the essay with the statement "Tears and laughter are, aesthetically, frauds". He argues that creating laughter and tears are not the functions of fiction. If a work creates laughter or tears then it is only because of the preoccupation of human content. Booth says that the true art must not only exclude rhetoric but also reality. Reality is made up of human content. Thus according to Booth if a work of art creates tear or laughter then the work would not be considered as true art. He strongly believes that the goal of art is "not to raise laughter nor tears".

Booth tries to emphasise that there must be some gap between art and reality. If there is no gap between art and reality then art would be destroyed. Because according to him true art should exclude rhetoric and reality. He calls this gap between art and reality as "aesthetic distance". Edward Bullough in 1912 coined a new term for this called "Psychic distance". This distance makes sure that the work is neither "over distanced" nor "Under distanced". If the work of art is "over distanced" it would be so artificial, empty, improbable and also absurd. And hence we would not respond to it. If the work of art is "Under distanced" then the work becomes too personal and hence it cannot be enjoyed as art. For example a man who thinks that he has reasons to be jealous at his wife reads "Othello" he would be moved deeply and would take it personally. And thus he fails to enjoy it as an art. What he really feels is that increasing the emotional distance would help readers to involve deeply in social judgement. This idea of Bullough was opposed by many critics

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saying that he is trying to create an “alienation effect” and also he is deploring the demands of a common reader that he should be emotionally and deeply involved in what he reads.

According to Booth the concept of proper reader is quite different. He says that the proper would not demand for hopes and fear rather he would be willing to take his pleasure from “aesthetic” and “intellectual” qualities and also from artist’s skill. He also adds that a proper reader requires intelligence, discrimination and analytical interest.

The second point that he makes is that true art is “anti popular”. A particular work of art is meant for a particular class of people. It is not meant for all men in general.

He then talks about three different types of interests namely intellectual or cognitive, qualitative and practical. Intellectual or cognitive interest is an interest where the readers are intellectually curious about the facts or the true interpretation of a scene. Second is the qualitative interest. Here the reader is interested to see the pattern or development completed. For example cause and effect. The reader wishes to see the effect of the cause. Sometimes the reader might know how it would end but still he would wish to see it performed or enacted out. The third is the practical interest. In this the reader desires success for loved characters and punishment for disliked ones. And here he again stresses the point that our desires concerning the fate of the literary characters like Oedipus, Lear are different from our desires in real life. Art is different from reality. Destruction of a loved character can be accepted in art if it satisfies our other interest. But the same is not possible in reality.

ROLE OF BELIEF

After having said about the different types of interest Booth moves on to talk about the role of belief. He first presents two extreme opposite views on belief made by two different people. One view is by I.A. Richards that “we need no beliefs, and indeed we must have none, if we are to read King Lear.” The other view is by an editor that “ Literature involves assumptions and beliefs and sympathies with which a large measure of concurrence is indispensable for reading literature as literature and not another thing”. This disagreement here is striking.

Booth argues that there must be some shared beliefs or assumptions between the reader and the author to convey a message. But that belief need not necessarily be shared by the real author and the real reader. Booth says that the author creates an image of himself (i.e implied author) and also an image of his reader (i.e mock reader). The author makes his reader as he makes his second self. And there must be some shared beliefs between these two images the implied author and the mock reader. The second self that he makes of himself in his work is called the implied author. Implied author is a character attributed by the reader to an author based on the way a literary work is written. And the image he creates of his reader is called



the mock reader. The mock reader is the one who doesn't regard about the real beliefs and practices. The mock reader subordinates his mind and heart to the book to enjoy it to the full. The most successful reading is the one in which the created selves of the reader and the author, can find complete agreement. But the problem is not yet solved, because sometimes the reader refuses to become the mock reader. He refuses to wear the mask. We may quote Coleridge on the willing suspension of disbelief until we think ourselves totally suspended in a relativistic universe. When we reject a book as bad, it is simply because of the disagreement between the real reader and the mock reader. When we are not ready to put on a mask and take up the role of a mock reader then we reject the book as bad.

Booth then shares about his own experience. He says about the trouble he faces to become Lawrence's mock reader. He describes about his own inability to take up the characteristic of Lawrence's mock reader. He says that he really cannot read Lawrence's *polemic* without smiling when he should be feeling awe or panting.

Booth then raises two questions to show that art can be enjoyed only when there is concurrence of beliefs between authors and readers. He asks whether a Catholic or an atheist, enjoy Milton's "Paradise lost" as enjoyed by Milton's co believers? At the same time can a Protestant or a Jew enjoy Hopkins' "The habit of perfection" as enjoyed by devout Catholics? The answer is inescapable. Thus he makes his point strong that enjoyment of literature as literature inevitably involves our beliefs. The fact is that even the greatest of literature is radically dependent on the concurrence of beliefs of the author and the reader.

CONCLUSION

Thus Booth in his essay "Emotions, beliefs and reader's objectivity" clearly states that art cannot be a reality. There must be proper distance between art and reality to enjoy it to the full. He also talks about the different types of interest and the role of belief. He strongly believes that to enjoy art to the full there must be concurrence between the beliefs of the mock reader and the implied author. A book is said bad only when there is no concurrence of belief between the mock reader and the implied author.

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