Seductive Reasoning

Rooney, Ellen

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3 THE LIMITS OF PLURALISM
ARE NOT PLURAL

No reading, however outlandish it might appear, is inherently an impossible one. Consider, for another example, Booth’s report that he has never found a reader who sees no jokes against Mr. Collins, and his conclusion that the text of *Pride and Prejudice* enforces or signals an ironic reading. First of all, the fact that he hasn’t yet found such a reader does not mean that one does not exist, and we can even construct his profile; he would be someone for whom the reasons in Mr. Collins’s list correspond to a deeply held set of values, exactly the opposite of the set of values that must be assumed if the passage is to be seen as obviously ironic. Presumably no one who has sat in Professor Booth’s classes holds that set of values or is allowed to hold them (students always know what they are expected to believe).

—STANLEY FISH, *Is There a Text in This Class?*

To be useful, humanistic study, like any other study, needs to be believed.

—E. D. HIRSCH, *The Aims of Interpretation*

Pluralists have been forced to define the limits of pluralism. As distasteful and intellectually compromising as this enterprise is, the menacing growth of those discourses Booth defines as what “pluralism is not—skepticism, relativism, solipsism, impressionism, subjectivism, Derridaesque glasisme” (B 407), leaves them with no alternative. In “‘Preserving the Exemplar’: or, How Not to Dig Our Own Graves,” Wayne Booth confesses
his reluctance. He claims to find the very phrase "the limits of pluralism" oxymoronic. But the "true pluralist" presses on.

The problematic of general persuasion appears in Booth's work both as a "theoretical ideology," in Althusser's phrase, and as a practice. Booth's position is at once fully elaborated and extremely simple. He would like to exclude from the community of pluralists anyone who refuses to embrace the problematic of general persuasion: he would like to exclude those who would exclude others.¹

Booth's project shares certain features with Raymond Williams's effort. Like Williams, Booth wants to identify the unruly guests who cannot be accommodated in pluralism's community of the Many as One. Williams's aim is to distinguish those strains of marxist and structuralist discourse that support the dominant paradigm of literary studies from those that are incompatible with it; his primary concern is to foster the growth and development of the strains that challenge the paradigm. Booth wants to make the same critical distinction, but he hopes to silence all discourses that prove themselves incorrigibly antipluralist. There is a fundamental flaw in this project. At the very moment that the pluralist polemic comes into existence to defend the problematic of general persuasion, it falls into contradictions.

At one level, what is at issue is the form in which "poststructuralism" will be put into the discourse of Anglo-American pluralism. This formulation necessarily introduces the problem of what post-structuralism is. A "definition" of the term will emerge with more precision in the course of my account of antipluralism, though the former cannot simply be identified with the latter. For the present, keeping in mind Josué Harari's observation that "post-structuralism—like structuralism—invites a plural spelling" and his warning that no unified definition may be possible,² I use the term to designate roughly the same diverse group of contemporary theorists Hirsch indicates with his

¹See "Preserving the Exemplar," pp. 419, 421, 423, and passim.
term "dogmatic relativism" and Booth with his list of what "pluralism is not." The widespread perception that certain critics represent something called "post-structuralism" is more important to my analysis at this point than a rigorous conceptualization of the definitive characteristics of post-structuralism as such. What is crucial is that pluralism has identified (constructed) a theoretical intruder that seems to embody principles antithetical to the pluralist problematic; nevertheless, it is imperative that pluralism incorporate this intruder. That is to say, pluralism must read post-structuralism as a pluralist discourse, must include it.

Pluralist anxiety and the pluralist construction of post-structuralism are thus not the simple effects of an intrusion by a foreign substance that might be isolated and named as the cause of the recent intensity of pluralist polemics. Throughout my argument, I have avoided an inquiry into the justice of any critic's identification (either by others or on his own behalf) with post-structuralism, and I do not want to become involved in the search for the essential post-structuralist position. The critical controversy turning on the question of which theorists most successfully avoid "domesticating" post-structuralism's "original" formulations seems rather ill-considered, given the prominence of the critique of origins and the concept of the trace in at least some of the texts in question. I do argue that Booth, Fish and de Man construct pluralist readings of post-structuralism; I do not mean, however, to imply that these readings can then be criticized from the perspective of the true post-structuralism. The critical struggle is precisely between contending readings. The pluralist polemic only tacitly admits this point. The pluralist cannot acknowledge all those forces that constrain the production of his text; nor can he name his own project properly or fully. (I stress that in this he resembles any other critic.) Foucault has suggested that "power is tolerable only on condition that it mask a substantial part of itself. Its success is proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms. Would power be accepted if it were entirely cynical? . . . would they accept it if they did not see it as a mere limit placed on their desire, leaving a measure of
freedom—however slight—intact? Power as a pure limit set on freedom is, at least in our society, the general form of its acceptability.” Booth represents his project in precisely these terms; he sets out quite frankly, though with suitable misgivings, to set the limits of pluralism. Throughout, his emphasis falls on those freedoms—our individual, “monistic” approaches to the text—which are to be left intact. The plurality of the limits to be named is meant to guard this freedom.

But this setting of limits is a more problematic undertaking than Booth is willing to confess. He owns simply that he will exclude from pluralist discourse those critics who exclude others. The mundane problem that he does not address is the procedure by which he (or pluralism) would carry out a sentence of banishment on any particular critic. How would pluralism prevent the spread of skepticism, solipsism, and the various forms of the Derridaesque? What legislative or administrative move could control the errant productivity of these discourses?

Foucault remarks that the paradox of the juridical model of power as repressive force, the naysaying of the Law, is that such power is “in no condition to produce; capable only of posting limits, it is basically anti-energy. . . . It is incapable of doing anything, except to render what it dominates incapable of doing anything either” (HS 85). As we consider Booth’s dilemma, it is tempting to suggest that his position is even more paradoxically and radically restricted. He appears incapable of doing precisely what he claims to do, incapable even of posting limits that could render post-structuralism “incapable of doing anything.” But Foucault offers an alternative to this juridical model. Perhaps Booth’s posting of limits does result in something other than the paralysis of the outlaw. Perhaps in presenting himself as the patroller of pluralism’s borders, Booth conceals the most substantial part of his power. Thus our question evolves: how does Booth present his project in “‘Preserving the Exemplar’”? What

3Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality (New York: Pantheon, 1978), p. 86. Further references to this volume (HS) will be given in parentheses in the text.
is merely evoked and what actually accomplished? What are the limits of the pluralist polemic?

When pluralism initially perceived the anti-pluralist potential (or threat) of post-structuralism, two possibilities immediately presented themselves. The first was simply to ignore the intruder. This option is the only one which preserves pluralist ideology in an uncompromised form, in a form that successfully conceals its anomalies and sustains its coherence. As practice, ignoring the intruder means silence, without exception.

One might argue that this path was taken as far as possible. The penetration of "French" theory into general literary discourse in this country was certainly slow, in some ways painful, and the resistance to it is by no means dead. But post-structuralism proved capable of producing a flood of texts, and because no ideology allied with democratic capital can long ignore the productive (this being capital's great strength), studied pluralist silence gave way to a second course, albeit one contiguous with the first. Pluralism proceeded to ignore the anti-pluralism of post-structuralism, that is, to treat it as though it were yet one more pluralist discourse. And, as Williams argues, certain forms of post-structuralism cheerfully lend themselves to this accommodation.

This accommodation can take at least two forms: pluralism can either adopt post-structuralism's models or oppose its critique. Jonathan Culler's *Structuralist Poetics* is a classic of the former genre, the adoption and adaptation of critical innovation for an Anglo-American audience, and I would place the work of American literary "deconstructionists" such as Geoffrey Hartman and J. Hillis Miller in the same general category, though their "translation" differs from Culler's. The elisions and contradictions that characterize these efforts reveal the difficulties of

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4See Mitchell, ed., *Against Theory*, and de Man, "The Resistance to Theory." Numerous reflections on the state of the controversy in literary theory have appeared in the mass media, including *Time* and *Newsweek*, the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times*. 
translating structuralist and post-structuralist discourse directly into a pluralist idiom. Coherence is forfeit. But the position of those who would oppose rather than adapt is even more problematic. How can one attack a fundamentally anti-humanist account of the reader, to choose the most obvious example, without acknowledging its anti-pluralism? Most efforts of this kind quickly mutate, transforming themselves spontaneously into pluralist polemics. Hirsch’s work is a fairly good example of this second type of response, slowly fading from theoretical critique into polemic as it proceeds.

But this evolution is not recapitulated in Booth’s essay. He seems to surrender all possibility of convincing his theoretical opponents in argument, alleging that “no demonstration of intellectual or cognitive incoherence or unverifiability will be decisive” (B 417). In this apparently defensive move, the true pluralist polemic is constituted, for the main thrust of pluralist polemic is never theoretical, but always moral or ethical. Hirsch’s text, as we saw, is especially interesting because it is literally divided on this matter; he offers a detailed theoretical refutation of his opponents, then admits that the entire edifice depends upon persuasion rather than epistemology.

Booth seems to retreat, almost to the point of simply abandoning pluralism—and the problematic of general persuasion: “Any argument we might construct to prove that texts are substantive after all, or that the author has or had a self, or that we exist in a way invulnerable to Nietzsche’s critique of our substance—any such argument will easily be dismantled by any confirmed deconstructionist, revealing at the end what was known in advance: that like everybody else we haven’t a leg to stand on, that all the platforms have been blasted away, down down into an infinite abyss” (B 417). But these remarks are not a white flag. Booth’s first priority is to maintain the fiction that the limits of pluralism are plural. Thus, pluralism cannot openly compete with various critical monisms in defense of one master theory.

its own. Pluralism must instead appear a mediator between monisms. The suggestion that pluralism is "just another complex monism, . . . one umbrella to cover the various umbrellas," appears only to be hurried offstage: "You will be glad to know that you will hear no more about this intriguing question today" (414–15).

An adequate theoretical defense of pluralism would require the exposition of the problematic of general persuasion; but this is ideologically impossible. Booth must present his argument on a plane somehow discontinuous with the discourses of literary theory. The parallel with Hirsch’s recourse to the transcendent logic of inquiry is precise. In Booth’s terms, pluralism as such does not defend a theory of the text or a theory of the reader, but embraces many theories, a plurality of limits. Pluralism’s concerns are not “cognitive but pragmatic” (B 418). This distinction allows Booth to appear uncommitted to any ideological position. It is true that he opposes the pragmatic to the cognitive rather than to the ideological, and, indeed, the word “ideological” appears very rarely in his text. But he maintains that his are those practical questions essential to the survival of our community; this is a matter above ideology, a matter too grave for dogma.

To prepare the ground for this move, Booth construes post-structuralism itself in practical rather than cognitive terms: “Many observers have noted in the latest wave, of which Mr. [J. Hillis] Miller is today’s exemplar, a shift of emphasis from cognitive to practical or actional goals, particularly the goal of intellectual or spiritual liberation” (416). This gesture is analogous to Hirsch’s attempt to view the curriculum through any prism save that of post-structuralist theory. It makes explicit the refusal to offer a theoretical retort to post-structuralism and permits Booth to proceed on a level “above” theory as he expounds the ethical principles of general persuasion.

Booth presents a pragmatic catechism of the would-be pluralist. He poses a series of questions that develops the problematic of general persuasion in its two complimentary aspects: as a rule of writing and as a rule of reading. He first asks: “Does [the critic] invite us all into a community of inquiry, or is he simply
exhibiting his own new freedom? . . . Does he, must he, because of his presuppositions, condescend to or exclude this or that reader or group of readers? All criticism will accidentally exclude some readers. But some criticism excludes on principle. How many of those who read and think are ruled out from this new enterprise necessarily, by definition? These three versions are all part of the test of whether the critic is offering life to a community of readers" (419–20). Booth does not elect to name this "new enterprise." His interrogation is imbedded in an analysis that claims to be primarily disquieted by post-structuralism's romance with indeterminacy, which he defines as the "claim that understanding is not in any sense possible or desirable" (B 421). One might assume that these three questions are aimed at the solitary nihilist who persists in believing that truth or right reading is impossible and thereby threatens the possibility of literary knowledge. Yet while some of the rhetoric of Booth's essay is directed at these dark figures6 ("Derridaesque glasisme"), his queries are here specifically concerned with a discriminating discourse rather than with a solipsistic one, a discourse that systematically excludes "some readers" or "group[s] of readers" ("How many?" he demands) while including others. "Accidentally" does not simply mean inadvertently in the sense that a critic might write a text and be unaware of the fact that his reading or theory must exclude a determinate set of readers. Obviously, this happens constantly. Booth means accidentally in the sense of randomly or unsystematically. As Hirsch puts it, "If a Marxist critic construes a text differently from a formalist critic, that is an irrelevant accident. No perspectival necessity requires him to do so. Marxist critics and formalist critics may be equally able to understand what a text means. What they usually differ in is the significance they give to that meaning" (H 44). Hirsch's portrait of the critic conflicts with Booth's vision of

6To be just, the contexts of its presentation have lent a certain plausibility to this rhetoric. The MLA session, "The Limits of Pluralism," which was eventually published in Critical Inquiry, included J. Hillis Miller as the "exemplar" of deconstruction; both Booth and Abrams suggest that solipsism and the end of communication are the primary threats Miller's "deconstructionist principles" present to literary scholarship. Miller seems (more or less) to agree.
the post-structuralist who excludes all potential readers. His no-
tion of accidental differences seems designed to encompass a
much larger number of critics with much less rigidly exclusive
practices, and his example, the marxist critic versus the formalist
critic, suggests a motivation for the discriminations Booth ob-
jects to.

Booth's reticence concerning this condescending "new enter-
prise" is actually a pluralist inversion of Williams's rigorous at-
tempt to distinguish the diverse forms of post-structuralism.
Booth's work seems to resemble Williams's, but a clarification
such as Williams seeks would damage pluralism to the precise
degree that it would serve the ends of cultural materialism.
Booth blurs his characterization of this threatening new enter-
prise for a purpose.

Nevertheless, though the transgressor appears as a somewhat
shadowy figure, the sin itself is vividly drawn. When Booth asks
if the critic offers "life to a community (my emphasis) of readers"
he assumes that the fact that "we" read welds us into a single
community that the critic—to the extent that he is a pluralist—
must honor. To condescend to or exclude any reader is a viola-
tion of this community. Thus it is that the readers of Booth's
imaginary community have no determinate qualities; it is pre-
cisely their anonymous generality (suggesting homogeneity)
which makes them an adequate test of the critic's commitment
to persuasion in general. To discriminate among them is forbid-
den. In this respect, Booth's representation of the critical com-
community closely resembles Hirsch's.

This term "reader" belongs to a familiar lexicon: "first read-
ing," "the common reader," "the informed reader," even, some-
times, "the reader's experience." This reader has now been chal-
 lenged from all sides. Barthes dissolved him (along with the
concept of first reading, "primary, naive, phenomenal reading,
which we, long afterwards, have to 'explicate,' to intellectual-
ize") into the lexis of S/Z 16. The "resisting reader" accused him
of cultural imperialism or "phallic criticism"7 or (a new epithet)
humanism. Althusser and Foucault, Kristeva and Lacan have

7Ellmann, Thinking about Women pp. 27–54 and passim.
decentered and displaced him (and his author, "a man speaking to men"). Still, this reader abides and with him his community of readers; his persistence is neither accidental nor insignificant, and Booth is committed to preserving his privilege. The defense of this reader is identical to the continued dominance of the problematic of general persuasion.

At the simplest level, Booth merely demands that no discourse confess its exclusionary rule—to others or to itself; silence is sufficient. The reason is obvious. Once a critic defies the generality of persuasion and identifies the ideological limits of his discourse in the form of those readers who, by definition, fall beyond his persuasive grasp, he undermines the human community of readers which grounds the practice of critical pluralism. To name one’s limit is already to declare that some are beyond it, to acknowledge that some readers have distinguishing characteristics that set them apart, qualities that are not "human" in the sense of universal, transhistorical, or general, qualities that exclude them from the community of readers Booth envisions. These readers need not form an elite to trouble pluralism. The pluralist critic must exclude no one; he must aim at the persuasion of the entire community, taking each reader as a potential convert.

This commitment on the part of the critic writing is only half of our compact. Booth’s community of readers is not entirely lacking in determinate qualities, completely anonymous and therefore homogeneous. These readers are in fact uniformly marked by a singular commitment to the possibility that they can be persuaded: the factions they compose erect no barriers to the possibility of persuasion. Booth puts this requirement in the form of a question to the critic as a reader of texts. “I would care even more . . . about whether the critic acknowledges community with the other authors [poets and critics] he treats” (B 420). There are several points collapsed into this phrase, not the least of which is an identification with the authors of the “classic” texts over and against all critical ephemera. M. H. Abrams, one of the exemplary pluralists Booth cites in Critical Understanding, takes a similar view: “Our prepossession is that, no matter how
interesting a created text of Milton may be, it will be less interesting than the text Milton wrote for his fit readers though few” (PR 581). Such an identification (appropriation) suggests questions about the celebratory mode in criticism, about literary evaluation and the cultural values “embodied” in the high art of the English canon. At present I want only to emphasize the form Booth wants the acknowledgment of community to take. No longer is it a question of the persuasive stance one assumes in one’s own writing; the problem of community has now become a question of the a priori consent with which one must read: the pluralist must read to be persuaded.

Booth here offers a negative example. Rather than an instance of right reading, he points to the kind of reading that does not “acknowledge community.” Insisting that the pages of critical journals ("Mayhem" and "Sadiste") are marred by critical knifings and blasphemies, Booth ascribes to the typically bloodthirsty commentator the pose of the bad reader: “What if I find a critic who habitually assumes that the authors of all other texts are less perceptive, less generous, less politically aware, less devoted to truth, justice, and the enhancement of life, than he is?” (B 420). There is a certain heat in this parataxis. And, again, the “Yale School” is not the sole object of Booth’s wrath. Indeed, as a group, Miller and his colleagues do not characteristically charge that other critics are less “politically aware [or] less devoted to truth,” as Miller’s response to Booth demonstrates.9

Yet Booth introduces this bald leading question by alluding to the “strange and destructive new contra-cogito” of the “polysemic” reader: “I invent new readings, therefore, you, the author, are not’” (420). As the question cited above follows close

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8Booth employs metaphors of violence in his characterizations of the negative and meaningless aspects of contemporary critical debate: “slapping down,” “killed off” (409), “slashing” (410), “knifed” (420).
9J. Hillis Miller, “The Critic as Host,” Critical Inquiry 3:3 (1977), 439–47. The most political remark in Miller’s essay is the claim that “‘the impossibility of reading should not be taken too lightly.’ It has consequences, for life and death, since it is inscribed, incorporated, in the bodies of individual human beings and in the body politic of our cultural life and death together” (440). Life and death quite overcome politics as the focus of Miller’s concern.
upon this remark, Booth implies that it is directed at the nihilistic critic after all. This seems even more plausible when we recall the common charge that the “polysemic” critic belongs to just such an exclusive club, a closed circle playing a cryptic, “uncanny,” private game (and writing a prose that is said to be more intimidating than illuminating to the outsider).

Again, Booth’s equivocation is not accidental, but strategic; it actually begins at the beginning of his essay when he offers those “Un-new Critics, Wellek and Warren,” as exemplars of the “pointless” (408, 410) criticism of the bad reader. They compose an unlikely, almost idiosyncratic illustration. But Booth’s preference for a historical rather than a topical or contemporary example and his choice of a pointedly pre-Derridian discourse are clues that he is not simply concerned with the narrowly construed post-structuralism embodied in the work of Hillis Miller.

We have already observed that the critic Booth addresses on the questions of exclusion and condescension is a discriminating critic, admitting some readers and excluding others according to some unspecified principle. With the negative example of the bad reader, Booth seems to present a true nihilist, an isolato damning “the authors of all other texts” for a variety of intellectual and ethical failures. But despite the force with which Booth suggests his bad reader’s splendid pride and isolation, he has placed an incongruous set of charges in the creature’s mouth, and they fundamentally disrupt the image. Not only does this bad reader seem an unlikely colleague of Miller and company, but finally one cannot help but doubt that such a solitary figure could possibly exist anywhere. Critics given to digressions on politics, justice, and the enhancement of life tend to travel in schools (be they New Critical or marxist), which makes them another kind of problem entirely. Booth wants to solve this “other” problem, but he can only articulate it obliquely, as a corollary to his criticism of nihilistic tendencies within post-structuralism.

Booth weaves together two arguments. One is directed at the

10J. Hillis Miller offers the distinction between canny and uncanny criticism in “Stevens’ Rock and Criticism as Cure,” Georgia Review 30 (1976), 5–33 (part I), 330–48 (part II).
polysemic critic (solipsist, subjectivist) conceived as a loner and (literally) represented in “The Limits of Pluralism” by Miller. I would suggest that Booth recognizes that Miller’s criticism is very far from being a radical threat; it is a neo-romantic assimilation of post-structuralist themes to an essentially idealistic, New Critical model. As Williams observes, this avatar of post-structuralism is the dominant paradigm of literary studies and not in any sense a challenge to it.

The second strand of the argument is covertly aimed at critics who cannot be adequately represented as crusaders against the possibility of understanding. They are anti-pluralists, and they practice “exclusive” or “condescending” criticism. These critics have abandoned the normative pluralism that disables any analysis of the antagonistic struggle by which interpretative systems are put into practice and “literary” consciousness constituted. The dominant paradigm itself has become the object of study; the analyses that result fall “outside the paradigm altogether” (RW 64). In Foucault’s terms, these anti-pluralists are not “afraid to conceive the Other in the time of [their] own thought”; indeed, they are bent upon it.

Booth’s attempt to refer to these anti-pluralists, without actually naming them, gives his pluralist catechism its strangely abstracted quality. (I am aware that I too have drawn these figures in general rather than specific terms; I shall repair this omission

11 Miller employs deconstruction strictly as a method for interpreting literary texts. Perhaps the clearest indication of his unwillingness to carry deconstructive practice to his discipline itself (in a manner that might parallel Derrida’s philosophical intervention) is his position on the status of the canon: “I believe in the established canon of English and American literature and in the validity of the concept of privileged texts. I think it is more important to read Spenser, Shakespeare, or Milton than to read Borges in translation, or even, to say the truth, to read Virginia Woolf”: cited in Carolyn Heilbrun, “Men, Women, Theories, and Literature,” Profession 81 (New York: MLA, 1981), p. 25. One can only ask “important to whom?” Such “beliefs” in “privilege” are precisely the object of deconstructive investigations. In his review of Miller’s Fiction and Repetition (Nineteenth-Century Fiction 38:1 [1983], 97–101), Robert Scholes brilliantly anatomizes Miller’s deconstructive interpretations, which conceive reading as “a process of submission to authority” (97). In Miller’s model, Scholes suggests, “we are grounded. No flights of Nietzschean fancy here. No grand Deleuzeans. Miller’s texts have an outside and an inside, and the outside is forbidden” (100).
as we proceed.) Booth must obscure the identities of the bad reader and the bad writer in order to represent the diverse forms of post-structuralism as a unity or rather, as we shall see, in order to represent all forms of post-structuralism as one (potentially) pluralist discourse.

Neither the “Yale School” nor Wellek and Warren represent Booth’s nemesis; both Miller and the Un-new Critics are monists, critics who “hope to resolve all contests over concepts with a victory for the one true view” (B 410). Booth’s real concern is the threat presented by any anti-pluralist criticism that is not monistic. The pluralist can tolerate (even embrace) the intolerant monist, be he a deconstructionist or an Un-new Critic. But the pluralist must exclude the faction which theorizes its practice as fundamentally and necessarily exclusive, in the sense of being irreconcilably closed to certain readers, and which, consequently, no longer seeks to persuade them. Such a faction is anti-pluralist precisely to the degree that it is non-monistic. The monist seeks to persuade everyone to one (his) way of seeing (reading); he is always already a pluralist because his practice assumes the possibility of general persuasion. He produces the controversy, the free and open debate in the pursuit of conversion, which is pluralism (in the academy as well as in the liberal democracy).

Booth attacks the critic who willingly abandons certain elements (the political overtone is apt here) of the community and theorizes their exclusion. This anti-pluralist believes general persuasion is impossible. But Booth’s anger is not a matter of local sympathy for those individuals who might be excluded in this manner (how is a problem we will return to). The anti-pluralist endangers the entire pluralist community because she undermines the problematic of general persuasion which grounds that community.

The theoretical possibility of general persuasion rests upon a concept of the “human” (reader) as a general or universal category that escapes or transcends the incidental conditions of class, gender, race: an acontextual essence, not unlike the core of determinate meaning. The anti-pluralist claims to expose this
human reader as a creature with determinate and limited interests, “special interests” concealed in a definition of the human that happily incorporates and generalizes them as the “natural.” She suspects the rationality of pluralist debate and the logic of inquiry and posits hidden irrationalities and power relations as the deep structure of the problematic of general persuasion. “Culture” here denotes antagonistic relations of domination and subordination rather than a canon of texts and interpretations that celebrate the essential or the best in “man”; Hirsch’s call for humanists to “humanize and civilize” takes on an “imperialistic” cast he did not intend when he conceded “humane studies have a natural tendency to be imperialistic” (H 137).

This feature of anti-pluralism especially troubles the pluralist. As long as the canon stands as a monument to traditional western values and those values enjoy an unassailable hegemony, those who professionally disseminate and explicate literary texts are perceived as the guardians of a common inheritance. But now that canon and the very concepts of literature and man are being reevaluated as part of a critique of the operations of culture in reproducing social relations; in such a context, the guardians may be accused of complicity or, worse, of playing the leading role in what Balibar and Macherey call the “academic or schooling practice which defines both the conditions for the consumption of literature and the very conditions of its production as well.”12 In this context, Booth’s concern about critics who accuse others of being “less politically aware and less devoted to truth [and] justice” begins to take on a new significance.

Booth is elusive concerning the identity of the bad reader presented above, but candid about the distress he feels reading such self-righteous, divisive criticism. It is a form of “injustice” born of double standards. To restore justice, we must shun “any critical method inviting the use of double standards” and give each critic “his due,” just the amount of critical attention “his statements deserve as they claim a passport into the country of

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debate” (421, 420). If we fail in this, we must “abandon hope for our common enterprise” (421).

Understandably, no example is offered of a method that advocates a double standard, and it is not entirely clear how a method might “invite” (an ambiguous word with its overtones of covert welcome) such a procedure. But an example would not further Booth’s effort to fuse the diverse forms of post-structuralism and thus to incorporate them into his pluralist community. His benign assumption is that critical “mayhem” could only be the result of double standards applied to equally “deserving” authors. The mirror proposition, namely, that many standards are being applied in a community that is doubled and redoubled into many exclusive camps that are in no practical sense equally deserving, is simply unthinkable.

Of course, the unthinkable is a concept Booth cannot articulate within his pluralist discourse. The unthinkable implies a limit, an irreducible boundary beyond which a given reader or group of readers, burdened by historically determinate interests, can never travel. This limit is inadmissible; pluralism produces a persuasive context in which the notion of the strictly unthinkable cannot be sustained.

Booth denounces the idea of a rigid, “single standard” for criticism: “the test of the single standard does not require that all critics be judged by the same standard, only that the critic agree to be judged by the standard he himself applies to others” (421). This could be complicated. One imagines the Freudian critic, reading the “Derridian” critic, trying to judge him not by his own (Freudian) standards, but by the “Derridian’s” own (“Derridian”) standards, which, of course, he (the Freudian) has access to primarily in the form of the very (“Derridian”) essay he is to judge, somehow justly. This is not precisely what Booth means, though literal “justice” would require just such a reading. Booth’s single standard poses as a matter of mere procedure. The bad reader refuses to “acknowledge community with the other authors he treats,” habitually assuming a moral and intellectual superiority (distance). He reads, but he refuses to be persuaded. Booth offers an antidote, though it falls somewhat
short of his own strictures. Presented as a neutral rule for justice, it actually embodies Booth’s own critical program: “All critics, at least all who write and publish, implicitly ask us to understand them and claim that they have understood others. I therefore have a right to be skeptical about any critic’s claim that understanding is not in any sense possible or desirable. . . . Nothing I have said or anyone can say about vitality makes any sense unless we all believe that people can understand each other, sometimes, and that they should always try to understand” (421–22). Booth is elaborating the notion of persuasion as a self-reflexive act. The pluralist must pursue general persuasion when she addresses the community in writing, and she must approach the authors she reads in a self-persuasive mode. Justice, giving “your neighbor’s monism a fair shake” (423), is nothing less than the willingness to be persuaded, to persuade oneself, and the reward is a role in our common enterprise.

The “sometimes” with which Booth qualifies the possibility of understanding—“people can understand each other, sometimes”—operates as an explanation for the disagreements that fill the pages of critical histories. Booth would surely accept the same “some” to modify his universalizing term “people,” but the emendation would have only an “accidental” significance: some people are “accidentally” excluded from the criticism of Daniel Deronda, for example, because they have never read the novel. But all such accidents are contingent and easily corrected. The generality here is absolutely essential; “people” is a euphemism for the general reader.

Booth seeks a general principle that can guarantee our common vitality. Vitality is imagined to be a necessarily common, in the sense of equally shared, possession: “If my continued vitality as a critic depends finally on yours, and yours on mine, it is clear that our life together is threatened whenever either of us fails to attempt justice to the other” (my emphasis; B 420). The anti-pluralist vision of antagonistic, contending systems is ignored; Booth’s is not a zero-sum community.

The standard is neatly circular. Those who ask us to be persuaded by them must, in turn, agree to be persuaded by us. Of
course, success cannot be assured in every case. Nothing I have said is meant to suggest that the problematic of general persuasion requires that every individual who "reads and thinks" be convinced by every critic she encounters. On the contrary, the plural failures of persuasion in particular cases are essential because they represent the freedom of individual critics within the community. The critical commitment to the possibility of general persuasion, to the theoretical availability of each individual to be convinced in argument, is the crux. The critic who attempts justice is one who asserts the possibility of general persuasion. Failures do not bankrupt the undertaking; the effort alone produces sufficient regard, binding each reader to her fellows and sustaining our life together. Yet, despite this optimistic reading, the gap left when persuasion fails and fails, again and again, is problematic for pluralism. It cannot be closed; but its significance can be largely obscured by emphasizing a crucial middle term: understanding. Pluralism requires a fiction that can simultaneously guarantee the homogeneous unity of the community and account for the unbroken stream of disagreements which is the history of literary criticism. The problematic of general persuasion allows for failures of persuasion only. But by enforcing the rules of reading and writing, it assures general understanding without failure.

Because understanding plays a pivotal role in pluralist discourse, misunderstanding is a source of endless fascination. Booth has argued that deconstruction is "plainly and simply parasitical" on "a base of shared knowledge," the obvious or univocal reading of the text it purports to deconstruct.13 Parasitism is a deadly dependence. But "parasitic" connotes, for Booth, a form of bad faith whereby the deconstructive critic recognizes the obvious reading, then fabricates a not obvious reading, essentially as a labored afterthought, and finally attempts to pass off the ersatz version as his reading. Booth accuses deconstruction of perversely manufacturing misunderstand-

standing where once there was none, of producing a distorted object, rather than accounting for the found object, the poem itself.

This productive distortion is one source of Booth’s aversion to meeting the argument of post-structuralism with explicit counterargument on the level of theory. Any method, to the extent that it takes pluralism as an object, generates a discontinuity that cuts it off from debate with pluralism; it has begun to debate pluralism itself in terms both foreign and explicitly hostile to it. Booth’s charge that certain critics “exclude this or that reader or group of readers . . . on principle” (B 419) springs from this conjuncture. The deepest trace of this discursive discontinuity is the figure of misunderstanding.

Misunderstanding is a central topos in the pluralist polemic; it marks the border where theoretical struggle meets political polemic. But it appears in two guises: one a misleading thematization, a red herring of sorts; the other a deep figure that generates the logic of the pluralist attack on post-structuralism.

Misunderstanding first appears as a minor theme of anxiety. Abrams remarks in a typical passage: “I want, in the time remaining, to present what I make out to be the elected linguistic premises, first of Jacques Derrida, then of Hillis Miller, in the confidence that if I misinterpret these theories, my errors will soon be challenged and corrected.”14 He later confesses that he expects Miller’s reply will “express some natural irritation that I, an old friend, should so obtusely have misinterpreted what he has said in print about his critical intentions” (D 437). The congenial tone that belies the words and insists “we really do understand one another” is characteristic. This thematic invocation of misunderstanding is important insofar as it marks a real anxiety about pluralism’s capacity to comprehend post-structuralist innovations and integrate them into its practice. But the anxiety of misunderstanding remains a minor theme. It sometimes degenerates into bad faith; more often a declaration of misunder-

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14M. H. Abrams, “The Deconstructive Angel,” in “The Limits of Pluralism,” Critical Inquiry 3:3 (1977), 428. Further references to this essay (D) will be given in parentheses in the text.
standing is a theatrical gesture that signifies the general obscurity and arrogance of post-structuralist discourse. (This, naturally, happens less often between old friends, though very old friends can get away with it.)

Pluralism works the theme of misunderstanding into a powerful figure in which misunderstanding is seen to imply the un fading possibility of understanding, even as understanding becomes the logical pivot of general persuasion. Hirsch illustrates the leap from understanding to the ironic trap generated by the figure of misunderstanding: “Whenever I am told by a Heideggerian that I have misunderstood Heidegger, my still unrebutted response is that I will readily (if uneasily) concede that point, since the concession in itself implies a more important point, namely, that Heidegger’s text can be interpreted correctly, and has been so interpreted by my accuser” (H 6). There are countless variations on this analysis, all built on an argument from general persuasion. It locates in post-structuralism (Derrida is the most commonly cited culprit) the argument that language does not “work,” that meanings cannot be communicated, and consequently, that everything is constantly in giddy, relativistic flux. Abrams finds a great contradiction in the fact that in Derrida’s “deconstruction of logocentric language he assumes the stance that this language works, that he can adequately understand what other speakers and writers mean, and that competent auditors and readers will adequately understand him” (D 573). This is not the moment to defend Of Grammatology as a revelation of just this “working” of language, to which Derrida is unceasingly attentive. But however inadequate Abrams’s comment is as an account of deconstruction, his remarks do point (blindly) toward the real threat post-structuralist strategies can pose to pluralism’s ideological problematic.

Hirsch offers an exceptionally apt illustration of the full argument. He insists (sounding uncannily like Booth—the pluralist polemic can exhibit remarkable unity) that “to treat an author’s words merely as grist for one’s own mill is ethically analogous to using another man merely for one’s own purposes,” and he reformulates Booth’s theory of reading as “acknowledging com-
"When you write a piece of criticism, do you want me to disregard your intention and original meaning? Why do you say to me 'That is not what I meant at all; that is not it at all'? . . . It was not surprising that M. Barthes was displeased when his intentions were distorted by M. Picard. Few critics fail to show moral indignation when their meaning is distorted in reviews and other interpretations of their interpretations. But their sensitivity is often one-way, and in this they show an inconsistency amounting to a double standard—one for their authors, another for themselves. [H 91]

The originary moment of this theoretical move is Picard's "misunderstanding" of Barthes's work, identified here as Barthes's intention. The failure of understanding is the essential token of this argument: as one defines this failure, so one establishes orthodox pluralist practice.

We have seen that pluralism cannot tolerate the concept of the unthinkable; all the energy born of pluralist indignation strives to exclude this term. The centrality of the figure of misunderstanding is bound to this exclusion. Pluralism's reader is defined as an essential category, and the critical community is extrapolated from him. His community of readers provides no site for the outsider, the other, and no account of her ontology save personal caprice, deviance. Literary study seeks only to produce "a verifiable truth, what Northrop Frye calls scientific knowledge—that is, a knowledge sufficiently systematic both to cover the territory and to be teachable to all who will take the pains to follow" (B 414, my emphases).

In this context, to misunderstand is to acquire a very problematic status. All readers who take the pains to follow are capable of understanding; whoever fails is at fault. Picard has failed to understand Barthes. But in pluralist polemic, the theme of misunderstanding is quickly turned to advantage, working by inversion to produce understanding. In the pluralist context, everyone understands. Virtually no commentator will write: I do
not understand. Here are my questions. (There is of course a material constraint operating here: journals publish answers.)

The pluralist surmises that misunderstanding is not determinate but accidental, and in that sense, general, accidentally finding expression in a particular individual. Doubtless, Picard has simply not read Barthes closely enough. From an individual instance of misunderstanding, the pluralist infers the possibility of general understanding. The unarticulated step is from understanding as a specific (limited) achievement in a determinate setting to general understanding, universally available without limits. Hirsch’s delight in finding Barthes “indignant” at Picard and his own willingness to confess a misinterpretation of Heidegger both stem from his confidence that Picard—like anyone else—can understand Barthes, and he Heidegger. Similarly, Abrams chides Derrida, not because his language fails and he is misunderstood, somehow “indeterminate,” but because his language works, because Abrams understands.

Understanding always expresses a power relation, in this case, the power to accommodate certain forms of post-structuralist discourse as “diverse approaches to the same object of knowledge, . . . guests . . . of a decent pluralism”; the academy accommodates the “underground.” When Hirsch attributes a hypocritical indignation to Barthes because the latter seems to want to be understood by Picard, he is simultaneously accusing him of acceding to the principle of general persuasion, accusing him of being a pluralist malgré lui. Pluralism incorporates the monistic text by this understanding: the pluralist takes his understanding—or the accusation of misunderstanding, as in Hirsch’s encounter with the Heideggerian—as a sign that the post-structuralist does actually operate within the problematic of general persuasion. The anti-pluralist, outside this problematic, declines all indignant postures in order to claim that understanding is a limited, determinate accomplishment. That Picard misunderstood Barthes does suggest that Barthes can be understood. But it does not follow that Picard is among those who can understand him. The anti-pluralist traces the limit of his dis-
course across the ground of understanding as well as persuasion.

The problematic of general persuasion produces a context in which “everyone understands” by establishing an opposition between the statement “I believe” (“I am persuaded”) and the statement “I understand.” The grammar of pluralism can produce the statement: “I am not persuaded” because it has rendered “I do not (cannot) understand” unutterable. This structure guarantees that understanding and belief will not appear as a single action. The structure of the argument precisely reproduces Hirsch’s distinction between knowledge and value. The opposition between belief and understanding makes it possible to claim “I understand but I am not persuaded.” This sign marks the place of the pluralist subject and prevents the erosion of the pluralist consensus along the deep faults that separate monism from monism. As long as each critic approaches each reader in his audience as a possible convert, the reader will have the option to understand.

When Booth accuses the anti-pluralist of elusive, condescending discourse, of not trying to persuade, he reads the breakdown in understanding, misunderstanding, as a symptom of the critic’s refusal to try to persuade. The assertion of understanding is identical to the offer to readmit the wayward into a “reconstruct[ed] critical commonwealth” (B 423). As Booth becomes the pluralist-as-host, he affirms his willingness to accommodate post-structuralism, based on a reading in which it too is a pluralist discourse, persuasively pursuing its monism, which everyone understands.

My counter to this line of reasoning will not be to reverse its founding assumption, explaining that Abrams and company do not understand Derrida and proceeding from there with an explication that will finally make them understand. Critics who undertake to make post-structuralism lisible, understandable and persuasive according to the terms of pluralist ideology, play into Booth’s hands, reanimating the problematic of general persuasion. The figure of misunderstanding by which pluralism
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seeks to reconcile post-structuralism to its own paradigm—and which any pluralist effort to render post-structuralism must employ—evades the problem of reciprocity. A reciprocal agreement (or understanding) exists only when two parties have reached an understanding together, that is, when they have agreed to agree. Reciprocal understanding collapses together or weds persuasion and understanding; when a critic succeeds in bringing a reader into agreement with her own understanding of her material, she has persuaded him. Understanding and belief are simultaneous.

However, there is a form of understanding that does not attend to the matter of agreement between parties. In sharp contrast to the reciprocity among insiders who have agreed upon an understanding, we find the critical, sometimes even hostile, understanding of the outsider. This “understanding” bears no resemblance to the submissive act that Booth idealizes as finding “our freedom” by “entering someone else’s mind” or “by molding our minds in shapes established by others” (422). It characteristically appears as a gesture of demystification, aggressively demonstrating that its object is not what it claims to be but something else entirely. In Boothian terms, this strategy of understanding often begins paradoxically with the assumption that the object does not (cannot) understand itself. Analysis proceeds as a symptomatic rereading that explicitly locates itself in opposition to the conclusion or understanding offered by the author of the text or by other critics allied with the author.

Such a procedure plays havoc with certain pieties concerning intention. But it also exposes the incoherence of pluralism’s claims for understanding. Booth argues for the ethical priority of a submissive understanding. Yet the quintessential form of the pluralist polemic is that of demystification. We see this in even the briefest asides; Booth notes drily, “There is a claim to novelty in much of this that puzzles me” (417). The structure of the pluralist polemic conforms to the model of nonreciprocal understanding. Pluralism recognizes post-structuralism’s theoretical protests, its uncanny attempts to decenter, its intentions, only to sweep them aside; despite the determined resistance of post-
structuralism, pluralism understands it. The figure of misunderstanding is an aggressive inversion of (pluralism's interpretation of) post-structuralist theory: pluralism infers general understanding from specific (mis)understanding(s) and accuses post-structuralism of incoherence, of not understanding itself. With this constructed understanding, pluralism exposes (produces) post-structuralism as a pluralist discourse.

I have deliberately avoided locutions that might imply that pluralism only "thinks" that it understands post-structuralism; there is no delusion here. Any such opposition between true and false understanding would undermine my claim that understanding is never the neutral gesture pluralism requires it to be; it can never be evaluated on a simple scale of purity or accuracy. As Derrida points out, it is not a question of true or false but of the play of forces. Understanding is either a reciprocal act based on agreement between parties (critic and critic or critic and text)—in which case, to understand is to be persuaded, and the work of the critic locates itself in continuity with the tradition he takes as an object of study; or, understanding is a demystifying act that claims authority or power over its object—in which case, to understand is to remain unpersuaded, and the work of the critic seeks to interrupt the tradition that she takes as an object of study, to initiate a break with that tradition. The latter practice puts an end to "innocent reading."

My description may seem to imply a preference for understanding based upon persuasion; this is not the case. There is a significant distinction to be made between the two forms of understanding I have described, but at no point is it a matter of the greater truth value of one over the other as interpretation. Nor is that understanding which assumes persuasion in fact less aggressive or productive an act than the hostile understanding of the unpersuaded. The importance of contrasting them is to demonstrate that the concept of persuasion assumed in these two positions differentiates them and thus determines their relative discursive force in contemporary debate.

When a post-structuralist discourse takes the pluralist problematic as an object of study, the "understanding" produced by
the analysis is often not reciprocal. And ironically, pluralism's response to post-structuralism repeats post-structuralism's critique of pluralism. My own account of Booth's essay as a pluralist polemic unconsciously exfoliating the problematic of general persuasion falls into the same category. What differentiates these analyses is their representations of their own practices. Pluralism insists on understanding as a submissive gesture in order to defend the ethics of general persuasion. Yet, under the cover of this idealized version of understanding, Booth offers a radically discontinuous reading of the post-structuralist problematic. To do otherwise, to admit that understanding is marked by reciprocity or to argue that post-structuralism is not a potentially pluralist discourse—this is to become an anti-pluralist. Understanding, detached from belief, from persuasion, must be preserved in order for Booth to generate the theoretical space that contains his reading, thus to escape the powerlessness of the merely negative censor; only this reading of post-structuralism can preserve the pluralist community. Booth insists that critics who in their writings exclude some readers, by definition, and in their readings take their distance and censure some of their peers rather than acknowledging community with them, will be judged by the factional standards they themselves apply and consequently excluded from the pluralist community. But he cannot inflict this ultimate penalty: it is, in practice, impossible and, equally important, it is theoretical suicide for pluralism.

The crisis of the problematic of general persuasion has produced a contradiction in the form of the pluralist polemic. First, "we" who read are defined such that we constitute a critical community that is essentially one. We must protect and nurture "our life together" and "our vitality." Our unproblematic respect for general persuasion renders each of us—from Abrams to Miller—a pluralist. There is no "full romping textual rapist" among us, as Booth remarks (B 413). But belying this definition of the reader and the ethical reading community, the pluralist polemic attempts to discipline and control the not-we, the other, the reader who flouts general persuasion. This legislative or administrative impulse contradicts the essentialism of the definitions
from which it is paradoxically derived. In the very act of recognizing the anti-pluralist, pluralism begins to sacrifice its coherence. Booth is in the compromising position of destroying pluralism in order to save it, and he is not altogether unaware of his peril.

We have observed Booth's attempts to blur the faces of those critics who seem to be dangerously close to expulsion, the objects of his scolding analysis. Are they Wellek and Warren? Hillis Miller? Barthes? Booth is loath to name his opponent because in the act of purifying the community, in the act of expulsion, the common enterprise is betrayed. The limit of pluralism, once it is invoked to exclude any critic, denatures pluralism itself. The equivocations and inconsistencies in Booth's identification of these critics save him another precious piece of ideological territory. He avoids the implication that any historically determinate conditions might cause a group of critics to break away from the pluralist community of readers. The sole exception is Booth's use of the word "bourgeois." It appears only twice, first in the phrase "bourgeois political control" (416) and then in the remarkable suggestion that "We can expect a criticism that is 'democratic,' anti-bourgeois in the worst sense: egalitarian, reductionist, egocentric, self-indulgent . . ." (423). Booth's vision of the bourgeois is not developed; the term is essentially a label that does very little intellectual work in the course of his analysis. Nevertheless, with these qualifications, its presence suggests that Booth has an inkling that his opponent is "anti-bourgeois." This is not a hunch he can pursue. He limits his analysis to the ethical practice of the individual critic; the inevitable result is that explanation is forced to the level of personality and, as such, in keeping with professional conventions, must be ignored. This silence implies that only irresponsibility or ego or perversity could cause the bad reading and the condescending, exclusive writing of the anti-pluralist. Still, there is no hint as to the kind of writing that can successfully exclude readers, for the obvious reason that such writing cannot

15The latter haunts Booth's essay, inevitably chosen to illustrate a general point, but always with the studied casualness of one who wishes to appear to be taking the example nearest to hand.
exist within the terms of the problematic of general persuasion. Finally, the anti-pluralists are as anonymous and homogeneous as the general readers who have remained within the community; Booth ends by shrugging them into facelessness: "Those critics—whoever they really are" (423). The corrosive impact of the social and political critique of pluralism inherent in the anti-pluralist’s rejection of the problematic of general persuasion is tightly contained.16 Above all, the road home is left open.

Booth finishes by propping the door open, inviting all the recalcitrant to enter a “reconstructed critical commonwealth,” a commonwealth to include “deconstructionists and mysreaders [sic] and intentionalists and cognitivists and various other monists” (423), indeed, any monist, so long as she is committed to a contentious criticism founded on the generality of persuasion. But

if they are to show us something they must themselves count on our sense of justice, our belief in the possibilities of understanding, and our openness to many modes.]

It is by no means easy to decide which new flames will fatally consume that which they were nourished by. But we can be sure that those critics—whoever they really are—who live by the sword of injustice [sic] and misunderstanding [sic] will perish by that sword. If the first commandment issued by my commonwealth is “Pursue some one chosen monism as well as you can,” the second is like unto it: “Give your neighbor’s monism a fair shake.” [B 423]

This musing over the biblical sword of injustice is slightly incongruous, a peculiarly violent image for the peacemaker and

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16This is one aspect of the generally ahistorical and abstract cast of Booth’s argument. In this it is typical of pluralist polemics. The most cogent illustration of this strategy appears in Booth’s survey of historical skepticisms (pp. 417–18). The multiplication of skeptics from the past—Socrates, Hume, Santayana, Burke, Peirce, Dewey—serves the anti-historical claim that post-structuralist “skepticism” is simply more of the same, and, consequently, neither threatening nor politically or socially significant. We’ve weathered such storms before; the sky is not falling. Anything that is specific to post-structuralist discourse is painted over, and the possibility that deconstruction/post-structuralism is a determinate, coherent phenomenon of a specific historical conjuncture is ignored.
an oddly bleak note given that even the mysreaders have been welcomed into the ethical commonwealth. Ultimately, the sword seems to threaten oblivion: the anti-pluralists, "whoever they really are," will be ignored, which is death to the critic. But Booth recognizes that he cannot post the limits of pluralism with the edge of his sword. The oblivion imaged by the sword of "dysjustice" vows a return to an option pluralism long ago abandoned, the attempt to ignore the intruder. This threat depends upon a shade, the homogeneous critical community that would act with a single impulse to preserve a life together.

"'Preserving the Exemplar'" discloses the tremendous cunning and productivity of pluralism and the discursive strength inhering in its capacity for innovation. With a single creative misunderstanding—the figure of misunderstanding—it generates a place and a voice for post-structuralism within pluralism, a reading of post-structuralism as a monism that conforms to the problematic of general persuasion. The refusal to counter post-structuralism as a theoretical rival appears as a ploy. Booth has reinscribed the theoretical argument he seemed to disdain. His practical position as a pluralist is identical with the familiar account of the cognitive status of the reader and of the text, a traditional account absolutely challenged by many who speak in the idiom of post-structuralism. Booth regains everything he seemed unwilling even to argue, but under the rubric of pluralism's ethical community rather than than of literary theory. Booth's critical community is nestled in a tautology: the persuasive critic is the critic who has been persuaded. One demonstrates that one is willing to be persuaded by having been persuaded. By this perverse turn upon itself, the hegemony of pluralism is reasserted over the commonwealth of deconstructionists, mysreaders, and intentionalists. Pluralism reappears as a monistic insistence on the general reader, on an image of the unity and homogeneity of the critical community, and on respect for intention, which is construed as the author's original meaning.

Booth only seems to be in retreat: "If you can't beat 'em, join 'em" (418). But "to join" has a transitive use: to put or bring
together; to unite or make continuous. The post-structuralist can accept the joint Booth has fashioned (as Hillis Miller is strategically present to do in "The Limits of Pluralism"); he can refuse the role of the parasite and attend to the objects that have traditionally populated the field of literary criticism, rather than to the processes by which that field is determined and its limits produced and reproduced. The problematic of general persuasion requires only this contending; this is our life together.

The alternative is sketched by Williams: one can refuse the place set for the unruly guest. Booth, in a sense, is less anxious about this prospect than Hirsch. The latter closes his essay with a warning: "To be useful, humanistic study . . . needs to be believed" which has the unmistakable overtones of a plea. Hirsch demands that his readers be persuaded to a particular logic; Booth's discourse clarifies that we need only to cling to the ethics of persuasion. But Booth projects the reassuring image of a stable community that will deal harshly with those who decline to honor its rules; the commandments are handed down with an equally unmistakable tone of authority. Booth is as conscious as Hirsch of the crucial role played by the community. Those called "post-structuralists," as diverse and contradictory as their practices are, will either accept the place offered within the pluralist paradigm or move the critique of the problematic of general persuasion forward. We shall now consider one post-structuralist response, a response that has the form of an argument for persuasion and yet takes pluralism as the object of its own polemic.