

# Tribute to Wayne C. Booth

## 1921–2005

Wayne C. Booth, George M. Pullman Distinguished Service Professor emeritus at the University of Chicago, died on October 10, 2005. From humble beginnings in American Fork, Utah, he went on to become one of the foremost literary critics of our time.

Wayne's first book, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, won the Christian Gauss Award from Phi Beta Kappa in 1961. He followed it with *A Rhetoric of Irony*, *Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent*, and *Critical Understanding*. Filling the need for a journal devoted to literary theory he co-founded *Critical Inquiry*. His most important critical contribution, however, may be *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction*. With its publication, he reopened a critical conversation about literature and character that had long lain dormant under the regime of the New Criticism.

After *The Company We Keep*, Wayne focused on applying his brand of ethical pluralism to teaching English. With Marshall Gregory, he wrote *The Harper and Row Rhetoric* and *The Harper and Row Reader*. With Joseph Williams and Gregory Colomb, he wrote *The Craft of Research*.

Wayne was a thoroughly engaging teacher, employing the Socratic method in its ironic power to confront students with their ignorance while encouraging lively and intelligent conversation. He was a supportive mentor, always positive, free with praise, and willing to support his students in their careers. My friends at the University of Chicago considered Wayne the moral conscience of our discipline. When they discovered that he and I belonged to the same church, they assumed he must be one of the most admired and appreciated members of our congregation. In a touch of Boothian irony, I had to admit that to many he was just another less active member. Nevertheless, to me and others who had the privilege to know him, Wayne Booth embodied the truly moral intellectual search for reconciliation and inclusion. We would do well to carry on that Mormon tradition.

NEAL W. KRAMER studied with Wayne Booth at the University of Chicago in the late seventies and early eighties. He has published a number of reviews and articles stimulated by and about Booth's ideas. He currently teaches English at BYU and lives with his wife and some of their children and grandchildren in Provo, Utah.