THE IMPLIED AUTHOR AND THE UNIMPLIED AUTHOR

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The term "the implied author" has commanded approximately the same degree of respect among literary critics as such other venerable New Critical terms as "intentional fallacy" and "personal heresy." The term, if not necessarily the concept, was proposed and made popular by Wayne Booth in his 1961 landmark work *The Rhetoric of Fiction.* Its far-reaching influence is perhaps best attested by the later appearance of Wolfgang Iser's influential book on a comparable concept from the vantage point of reader response, entitled, significantly, *The Implied Reader.* If "to assimilate or interpret something is to bring it within the modes of order which culture makes available . . . by talking about it in a mode of discourse which a culture takes as natural,"[1] the reading strategy "the implied author" is precisely a mode of discourse that has attained the assured status of a convention which, in turn, has been taken as "natural."

The tendency to confuse the conventional with the natural in the attitude toward the concept was, in fact, manifest at the moment the term was advanced. Booth first demonstrated his intended meaning for the term by using it in the following context: "As [a writer] writes, he created not simply an ideal, impersonal 'man in general' but an implied version of 'himself' that is different from the implied authors we meet in other men's works. To some novelists it has seemed, indeed, that they were discovering or creating themselves as they wrote."[2] He then proceeded to assert, dubiously, that the awareness of such an implied author not only is natural to, but constitutes the important effects of, our reading experience:

> Whether we call this implied author an "official scribe," or adopt the term recently revived by Kathleen Tillotson—the author's "second self"—it is clear that the picture the reader gets of this presence is one of the author's most important effects. However impersonal he may try to be, his reader 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 reactions to his various commitments, secret or overt, will help to determine our response to the work. (Booth, p. 71)

A typical reader's reading experience may be a far cry from what is described by Booth as regards the implied author. Normally one is absorbed in the immediacy of narrative flow, verbal play, rhythmic structuring, symbolic suggestion, and a host of other literary effects, without bothering to attribute them to a controlling consciousness, visualized very much like a purposeful creator. True, a reader trained to embrace the category of the implied author as a reading strategy may in effect respond as Booth described, but this should not obscure the fact that "the implied author" is basically a methological convenience employed in a deliberative discipline. To assert the naturalness of a reading method, as Booth did, is to assert its unquestionable validity, and a reader acclimated to the view of the implied author not as a convention but as a natural way of reading is in jeopardy of losing sight of the method's possible limitations. By re-establishing the category of the implied author as a reading convention, we can then reevaluate it within the framework of strategic adequacy and propose tenable ways of improving it as the occasions arise.

We can easily concur with Booth in his view that by equating the controlling consciousness of a work with the author's implied image rather than the author himself, first of all, "we can avoid pointless and unverifiable talk about such qualities as 'sincerity' or 'seriousness' in the author" and, second, "we find a middle position between the technical irrelevance of talk about the artist's objectivity and the harmful error of pretending that an author can allow direct intrusions of his own immediate problems and desires" (Booth, p. 75). In fact we can go one step further by pointing out that the concept of the implied author helps to stave off the expressive orientation in criticism which places the real-life author in the very center of the scheme and sees the ultimate objective of reading in reconstructing the personality of the author from the projection in the work. That is to say, the concept is in tune with the objective theory of literature which treats a work as a universe of discourse, as involving the employment of techniques, conventions, and traditions toward a purposeful end, and as a self-sufficient structure of meanings.

However, other than this broad, negative virtue of cautioning us against "personal heresy," the idea of the implied author lacks any positive virtue of aiding us in the sophistication of making discriminations and judgments in our confrontation with a text. The crux of the problem lies in the fact that the concept, as used by Booth, is sweeping enough in substance to be synonymous with "the book" and hence ineffectual as a critical apparatus:

> Our sense of the implied author includes not only the extractable meanings but also the moral and emotional content of each bit of action and suffering of all of the characters. It includes, in short, the intuitive apprehension of a completed artistic whole; the chief value to which *this* implied author is committed, regardless of what party his creator belongs to in real life, is that which expressed by the total form. (Booth, pp. 73-74)

Booth felt the need to coin the term "the implied author" because he found existing similar terms inadequate or inaccurate for expressing his idea of the author's created second self. "Persona," "mask," and "narrator" commonly refer to the speaker in the work. "Theme," "symbolic significance," "theology," and "ontology" overly emphasize "purposes." "Technique," "style," and "tone" stress too much the verbal aspects. It is nevertheless obvious that if "the implied author" is in effect the sum-total of these and other terms, it precisely lacks the discriminating and descriptive power each of its constituent terms possesses. The only justification for using the term instead of "the book" is then, quite trivially, that the envisioning of a human presence as the generator of meanings is psychologically more appealing.

It is necessary to delimit the sense of "the implied author" if it is to be technically effectual. We propose to use "the implied author" to refer to the portions of the book (conceivably they constitute the bulk of the book) which register the conscious efforts of the author toward an foreseen end. That is to say, "the implied author" suggests a chosen image that the author strives to make felt. We can then use "the unimplied author" to refer to the portions of the book where the author makes his inadvertent presence, that is, he is caught unawares. Thus, instead of a two-fold scheme of the author and the implied author, we have a tripartite one of the author, the implied author, and the unimplied author. Both the implied author and the unimplied author are present in the work, and the implied author functions as the normative background against which the presence of the unimplied author is rendered felt. The unimplied

author occupies the middle position between the author and the implied author. It is the biographical author in his unmasked self, but here as well as in the case of the implied author, the biographical author is restricted to those aspects contributing to the profile (and in many cases, problems) of the text. We employ "the unimplied author" within the framework of the objective theory of literature; it is not meant to open the door for viewing a literary work as solely a set of data for reconstructing the temperament of its author.

How is then the unimplied author be identified? Before answering this question, we have first of all to correct some common tendencies in identifying the author (whether conceived as biographical or implied) in a careless or naive fashion. Booth himself provides an example. Stressing that an author may reveal different versions of himself in his different works, he observed, "These differences are most evident when the second self is given an overt, speaking role in the story. When Fielding comments, he gives us explicit evidence of a modifying process from work to work; no single version of Fielding emerges from reading the satirical *Jonathan Wild,* the two great 'comic epics in prose,' *Joseph Andrews* and *Tom Jones,* and that troublesome hybrid, *Amelia"* (Booth, p. 71). As he has emphasized elsewhere in the book that the implied author is not to be identified with the narrator or any character (which, we believe, may well include the fictional author such as appears in *Tom Jones*), it is hard to imagine how the implied author can be given "an overt, speaking role in the story."

John Reichert's "Do Poets Mean What They say?"[3] provides yet another example. Reichert's main intent is to dispute the theory of "indeterminacy of meaning." He differentiates poetry into two kinds: fictive poems and affirmative poems. He argues that external signs do exist to help us make the differentiation. The indications of fictive poems are as follows: 1) titles ("The Nymph Complaining for the Death of Her Fawn") that indicate that the speaker is some one other than the poet; 2) "the implied presence of a specific auditor or auditors"; 3) "an implied situation for the speaker in which the writing of a poem would be an unlikely or impossible activity"; 4) any indication that the speaker is undergoing an experience; 5) the thoughts or feelings are obviously wrongheaded or naive, yet some thing else in the poem indicates an intelligence superior to such thoughts or feelings.[4] To illustrate affirmative poems he gives the following passage by Shakespeare:

> Th' expense of spirit in a Waste of Shame
> Is lust in action; and still action, lust
> Is perjured, murderous, bloody, full of blame . . . .

He goes on to comment:

> What we have here . . . is an important genre of affirmative poems which offer seriously meant propositions. They tend to be aphoristic or epigrammatic, and general in their reference, and they refer to real world, not make-believe, phenomena. They do not imply a specific context of utterance. Teir implied audiences are indeterminate . . . like the audiences of most essays, treatises, textbooks, and editorials.[5]

We quoted Reichert copiously not to argue for or against his main points, but rather to call attention to the fact that an otherwise very sophisticated piece of criticism can contain a very naive idea about the relationship between the author and the work. It is disconcerting that Reichert seems to identify the author with the speaker with perfectly clear conscience. With Booth's "implied author" as part of our critical conscious-

ness, we certainly would feel uneasy to view, for instance, the Shakespearean passage as expressing Shakespeare's thoughts or feelings, even if we are willing to read it as an "affirmative poem," that is, it means what it says.

If it is imperative to guard against the slip to identify the implied author with any one speaking voice in the work, all the more so in looking for the unimplied author. We must remember that invariably the unimplied author is reconstructed from large contextual considerations, since it represents deviating elements in the work whose thrust is marked by the norms consciously controlled by the implied author. The presence of the unimplied author is most commonly indicated by artistic problems that can not be easily solved either by attributing them to the writer's incompetence or justifying them in terms of genre or movement characteristics. The problems troubling the readers of James Joyce's a *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* are exemplary.

Over the years there have been three quite different ways of interpreting Joyce's attitudes toward Stephen Dedalus. One camp of the critics, particularly the earlier reviewers of the book, see Joyce as unequivocally approving of Stephen and his triumph. Other critics, represented by William York Tindall, and Mark Schorer, are of the opinion that Joyce wants us to see his protagonist as a priggish egoist. Still other critics—among them, Kenneth Burke and Stanley Poss--maintain that Joyce portrays his protagonist with a mixture of compassion and irony. The controversy becomes sharpened and easy to handle if we confine our attention to the scrutiny of the episode about Stephen writing a villanelle ("Are you not weary of ardent ways") upon his waking from an "inspiring" dream. Is the episode meant to be ironic, sympathetic, or both? Is Stephen here presented as an inspired young artist, or an aspirant with an inflated ego who fails to live up to his own claim? Since here as well as elsewhere in the work there lacks any authorial comments to aid in our judgment, our only recourse is in the assessment of the artistic quality of the villanelle. Is the villanelle good or mediocre? More relevantly, is it intended to be accepted as good or not (it should be pointed out that many of Joyce's published poems, unlike the villanelle, can be accepted as good with certainty). Here, once more, lack of authorial comments renders satisfactory answers to these questions next to impossible. Consequently we have a peculiar, artistic problem on hand concerning the episode (and by extension, the whole book): what gives rise to the implied author's ambivalent attitude toward his protagonist, an ambivalence marked not so much by richness of meaning as by faint hesitancy and confusion?

After examining *Stephen Hero,* the earlier, windier version of *Portrait,* Wayne Booth comments on that replaced version: "A supreme egoist struggling to deal artistically with his own ego, a humorist who could not escape the comic consequences of his portrait of that inflated ego, [Joyce] faced, in the completed *Stephen Hero,* what he had to recognize as a hodge-podge of irreconcilables" (Booth, p. 332). Joyce's only way out, according to Booth, is to "cut all of the author's judgments, cut all of the adjectives, produce one long, ambiguous epiphany" (Booth, p. 333), the epiphany being, of course, *Portrait.* If we accept Booth's explanation, it is then clear that the peculiarity of the implied author of *Portrait* can be accounted for only by considering the author (at least the author as also of *Stephen Hero*). The characteristics of the work attributed to the author as distinguished from the implied author are by our earlier definition indications of the presence of the unimplied author.

Another example of the working of the unimplied author can be found in that portion of Charles Dickens's *Hard Times* expressive of anti-union sentiments. R. F. Leavis has given a fair-minded critique of the antiunionism in the novel:

> Criticism, of course, has its points to make against *Hard Times*. It can be said of Stephen Blackpool, not only that he is too good and qualifies too consistently for the martyr's halo, but that he invites an adaptation of the objection brought, from the negro point of view, against Uncle Tom, which was to the effect that he was a white man's good nigger. And certainly it doesn't need a working-class bias to produce the comment that when Dickens comes to the Trade Unions his understanding of the world he offers to deal with betrays a marked limitation. There were undoubtedly professional agitators, and Trade Union solidarity was undoubtedly often asserted at the expense of the individual's rights, but it is a score against a work so insistently typical in intention that it would give the representative role to the agitator, Slackbridge, and make Trade Unionism nothing better than the pardonable error of the misguided and oppressed, and, as such, an agent in the martyrdom of the working man.[7]

If anti-unionism is bodied forth in the unsympathetic characterization of the labor leader Slackbridge and in the dramatization of Stephen refusing to join the union, these two presentations reveal two different kinds of "author" working.

The portrayal of Slackbridge as a slimy union agitator is an artistic choice, and to the extent that the characterization and the events issuing therefrom are artistically plausible—which they are—they register the controlling consciousness of the implied author. By contrast, confusion and imbalance pervade in the presentation of Stephen's refusal to join the union, as is evident in the exchange between Stephen and Bounderby:

> "Ah!" said Mr. Bounderby, with his thumbs in the arms of his coat, and jerking his head and shutting his eyes in confidence with the opposite wall: "how it happens."
>
> "I'd leefer not coom to 't, Sir; but sin you put th' question—an' not want'n t' be ill-manner'n—I'll answer. I ha' passed a promess."
>
> "Not to me, you know," said Bounderby. (Gusty weather with deceitful calms. One now prevailing.)
>
> "O no, Sir. Not to you."
>
> "As for me, any consideration for me has had just nothing at all to do with it," said Bounderby, still in confidence with the wall. "If only Josiah Bounderby of Coketown had been in question, you would have joined and made no bones about it?"
>
> "Why yes, Sir. 'Tis true."
>
> "Though he knows," said Mr. Bounderby, now blowing a gale, "that there are a set of rascals and rebels whom transportation is too good for! Now, Mr. Harthouse, you have been knocking about in the world some time. Did you ever meet with anything like that man out of this blessed country?" And Mr. Bounderby pointed him out for inspection, with an angry finger.
>
> "Nay, ma'am," said Stephen Blackpool, staunchly protesting against the words that had been used, and instinctively addressing himself to Louisa, after glancing at her face. "Not rebels, nor yet rascals. Nowt o' th' kind, ma'am, nowt o' th' kind. They've not doon me a kindness, ma'am, as I know and feel. But there's not a dozen men among 'em, ma'am—a dozen? Now six—but what believes as he has doon his duty by the rest and by himself. God forbid as I, that ha' known, and had'n experience o' these men aw my life—I, that ha' etten an' droonken wi' 'en, 'an' seet'n wi' 'em, an' toil'n wi' 'em, and lov'n 'em, should fail fur to stan by 'em wi' the truth, let 'em ha' doon to me what they may!"

He spoke with the rugged earnestness of his place and character—deepened perhaps by a proud consciousness that he was faithful to his class under all their mistrust; but he fully remembered where he was, and did not even raise his voice.

"No, ma'am, no. They're true to one another, faithfo' to one another, 'fectionate to one another, e'ev to death. Be poor among 'em, be sick among 'em, grieve ammong 'em for onny o' th' monny causes that carries grief to the poor man's door, an' they'll be tender wi' yo, gnetle wi' yo, comfortable wi. yo, Chrisen wi' yo. Be sure o' that, ma'am. They'd be riven to bits, ere ever they'd be different."

"In short," said Mr. Bounderby, "it's because they are so full of virtues that they have turned you adrift. Go through with it while you are about it. Out with it."

"How 'tis, me'am," resumed Stephen, appearing still to find his natural refuge in Louisa's face, "this what is best in us fok, seems to turn us most to trouble an' misfort'n an' mistake, I dunno. But 'tis so. I know 'tis, as I know the heavens is over me ahint the smoke. We're patient too, an' wants is general to do right. An' I canna think the fawt is aw wi' us."[8]

The full significance of the exchange has to be sought by viewing it in the larger context of the whole book. The novel shows a deep concern about the socio-economical and environmental problems that came together with the nineteenth-century industrialism. It is as clearly compassionate about the hard lot of the working people as it is clearly indignant about the ruthless avarice of their bosses typified by Bounderby. However, the book concludes without offering any vision of the social contradictions being solved. The only action described in the book that comes closest to a concrete measure for ameliorating the workers' situation is the union movement, but then it is presented in an unsympathetic light. Stephen, unique among the working people, is reflective and perceptive, constantly trying to puzzle out the nature of the socio-economical ailments besetting him and his fellow men. One would have expected him, by the force of character consistency and logic of narrative, to join the union movement, if not to be among its very leadership. However, as it turns out, he rejects the movement and accepts instead ostracism by his fellow workers. His motives as revealed in his exchange with Bounderby are at best confusing and unconvincing. He does not in principle deny the need for unionization against the likes of Bounderby (and the book provides no other industrialists who are the betters of Bounderby). He is in earnest solidarity with his fellow workers, even after the rough treatment from them. His stated reason for refusing to join the union ("I ha' passed a promess.") is so weak that it is tantamount to offering no reason. In fact, as no further elaboration on the promise is to be found in the book, we do not know to whom (even though it seems a good guess that it is to his beloved, Rachel) or why it is made at all.[9] The "reason," as it stands, sounds absurd and perfunctory amidst those by far more eloquent arguments for a different form of action. The episode thus reveals the voice of the unimplied author: here Dickens, "the author," with his antagonism toward unionization (or whatever appears to him as radicalism) intervenes and averts the natural flow of the narrative dictated by artistic demands.

It is not invariably artistic problems that alert us to the presence of the unimplied author. Whenever we encounter in a work socio-cultural assumptions that have been taken for granted by its author (and target audiences) and yet are in conflict with our assumptions, we become aware of the presence of a historically specific consciousness, which may or may not matter in our response to the work as an artistic form. Obvious-

ly, we are more likely to have this kind of experience when we read works of a different culture or period from our own. We will use an episode from the eighteenth-century Chinese novel *The Dream of the Red Chamber* to illustrate our points.

Many critics have praised the novel for the social critique it purportedly makes. There is no doubting some awareness of social injustices in the work, but the reactions to some of these injustices may be disappointing, for example, to modern readers who take for granted the principle of equality for all before the law. Witness, for instance, Chapter 4. Hsueh P'an, a close relative of the illustrious Chia family, is a young rascal spoiled by riches and powerful family connections. He is irresponsible, licentious, and violent. Competing for the ownership of a young servant girl, he orders that his rival, also a young man, be beaten to death. He takes the matter lightly, as reported in the words of another character:

> Now long before any of this happened, young Hsueh had made arrangements for journey to
> the capital. So after killing Feng and carrying off the girl, he set off with his family, calm as
> you please, on the appointed day. There was no question of his running away because of the
> killing. In his eyes a trifling matter like another man's life was something for his minor
> clansmen or the servants to clear up in his absence.[10]

There is no mistaking an implicit condemnation of Hsueh P'an's behavior in this report, although it is from the point of view of a detached third party. And as the story unfolds, Hsueh P'an has every reason to take the matter lightly, for the local official in charge o the case promptly manages to lay it to rest in order to curry favors from the powerful Chia family. Again, there is no mistaking some measure of implicit criticism in the exposure of such obnoxious protectionism. What, however, comes across to modern readers as the sorry evidence of less than absolute moral indignation is in the depiction of the reception of Hsueh P'an and his family by his aunt Lady Wang upon their arrival at the Chia Mansion. First, we are shown what is in the mind of Lady Wang: "Lady Wang had just breathed a sign of relief on learning that the affair of Hsueh P'an's manslaughter charge had been retrieved through the good office of Chia Yu'-ts'un, when the news that her elder brother had been promoted to a frontier post plunged her once more in gloom at the prospect of losing her main source of contact with the members of her own family" (p. 121). We are then shown the emotional meeting of the relatives: "The sudden reunion of the two sisters was, it goes without saying, an affecting one in which joy and sorrow mingles" (p. 121). In the description of this scene charged with spontaneity of emotion, the narrator, no less than Lady Wang or for that matter Hsueh P'an, seems to have put the manslaughter out of mind altogether.

Obviously, what we detect as moral callousness in the presentations does not result from the deliberate working of the implied author as failed irony or shocking perversion; on the contrary, it is brought about by the unimplied author. The presentations register the value system of a historically conditioned mind, the value system whose presence in the episode is inadvertent and artistically gratuitous. More specifically, the presentations point to the unimplied author who holds a *typical* view that, for instance, while Hsueh P'an is foolish, dangerous, impudent, and hence to be condemned, the killing per se need not horrify one's moral sense. Hsueh P'an is to be condemned, it seems, not so much because he has caused the irrevocable loss of a human life, as because his "impudent" conduct may bring misfortune, or at least inconvenience, to his family and

relatives; as far as no such undesirable practical consequences ensue, the matter is over.

Every literary work embodies a set of moral assumptions. In the confidence that its readers share the same attitudes, it feels no need to make explicit these assumptions. Thus, it is taken for granted by the author and his target audiences that Lady Wang, a "decent" character, should behave as she does. It is we modern readers, whose moral assumptions may be occasionally at odds with those of the novel's, that may feel jolted, that is, the implicit assumptions become explicit to us. These assumptions, culture-bound and historically conditioned, may appear to us as morally peculiar. When we are aware of such moral peculiarities, we are also aware of the presence of an unimplied author. It does not matter whether it be Ts'ao Hsueh-ch'in, or Kao E. or both as a team; what is of concern to us is that th episode points to, among other things, the value systems of some historical person or persons.

The main purpose of this paper is to argue for paring down the range of reference of "the implied author" as employed by Wayne Booth and then complementing it with the concept of "the unimplied author." What remains to be done is to come up with a more systematic way of characterizing and classifying the various forms of unimplied author. Even at this stage, we feel that by establishing the concept of "the unimplied author," we at least have an explanatory framework for dealing with some of the anomalies in a literary work which tend to be the despair of those who regard the principle of organic unity as sacred. In fact, although starting from a totally different frame of reference, our enterprise comes to share many of the concerns in Robert B. Heilman's cocept of "two-tone fiction," that is, "novels in whose impact we sense some inconsistency or discrepancy or variation or departure from the expectation established by the apparently controlling devices employed by the novelist."[11] Many of the tonal discrepancies he refers to seem to lend themselves to be described within our scheme:

> The issue [of tonal inconsistency] may arise from a not wholly lucid or consistent communication of the narrative substance, possibly the case inPynchon's *V.* It may arise because the author has, so to speak, different "intentions" that are in control at different times, or because he is overtaken, half unawares, by a subtle change in attitude. It may arise because he has unstable responses to a character or situation, or, at a deeper level, has emotional contradictions that express themselves in fictional elements of not wholly congruous impact. It may be that he is operating within conventions that we do not understand and that can accommodate tonal results in which only we of another era or culture see disparties.[12]

NOTES

1. Jonathan Culler, *Structuralist Poetics* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1975), p. 137.
2. *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), pp. 70-71. As there will be frequent references to the book, subsequent references will be given in the text, indicated by "Booth" and page numbers in parentheses.
3. In *New Literary History*, 13, No. 1 (1981), pp. 53-68.
4. Reichert, pp. 60-61.
5. Reichert, p. 58.
6. For an overview of the controversial readings of *Portrait*, see "Editor's Introduction" in Chester G. Anderson, ed., *A Portrait of the Atrtist as a Young Man: Text. Criticism, and Notes* (New York: Viking, 1968), pp. 446-54.

7. "Hard Times: An Analytical Note," *The Great Tradition* (1948; rpt. New York: New York Univ. Press, 1963), p. 245.

8. *Hard Times: A Norton Critical Edition* (New York: Norton, 1966), pp. 112-14.

9. Here is an explanation from the editor: "In [the] original version, Stephen makes a 'promise' to Rachel that he will refrain from meddling in controversies about industrial problems." See *Hard Times*, p. 279.

10. David Hawkee, trans., *The Story of the Stone*, vol. I (New York: Penguin, 1973), p. 133. As subsequent references are all to the same volume, they will be indicated by page numbers in parentheses and will be given in the text. For the convenience of the Taiwanese readership, I have changed the romanization of the Chinese names from the pinyin system, which is adopted by Hawkes, to the Wade-Giles system.

11. "Two-Tone Fiction: Nineteenth-Century Types and Eighteenth-Century Problems," in John Halperin ed., *The Theory of the Novel: New Essays* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1974), p. 305.

12. Robert B. Heilman, p. 306.