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THE AUTHOR'S SECOND SELF OR A SET OF IMPLICIT NORMS:
THE CONCEPT OF THE IMPLIED AUTHOR
AND ITS DISCONTENTS

Abstract. Despite being a standard element of formalist poetics, the notion of the implied author actually resists easy conceptualisation. This paper analyses classical Western theorisations of the implied author and relates them to relevant Polish literary-theoretical studies in order to assess the utility of the concept. It demonstrates that the implied author can be construed as an anthropomorphic entity (re-)constructed by the reader on the basis of textual signals. Thus understood, the notion of the implied author throws into sharp relief a lack of straightforward correlation between the real author and the idea of author derived from the text, and therefore proves to be a useful literary-theoretical tool.

Key words: implied author; narrative theory; literary communication.

Self-explanatory as the notion of the implied author might appear at first sight, it does not actually possess an obvious meaning, for almost every theorist seems to understand it in his or her own way, each conceptualisation of the term comprising a particular set of properties, irreducible to one common denominator. The only property all the theoretical models of the implied author share is that they designate the author inscribed in the text and distinct from the real author. However, even this quality has a gradable character: some implied authors are more textualised and abstract than others. Furthermore, a number of theorists question the utility of the notion of the implied author and argue that it is redundant in the study of literary texts. Seeking to assess its validity and usefulness, the present paper analyses classical Western theorisations of the implied author and relates them to major

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Polish studies of literary communication, which discuss problems analogous to those raised in narratological circles, even though they do not use the very term *implied author*.

Wayne Booth, who coined the term in his *Rhetoric of Fiction*, describes the implied author rather vaguely as the real author's second self created by him or her, consciously or not, while writing a text and inscribed in this very text (71–76). A similar definition can be found in Gerald Prince's *Dictionary of Narratology*: "[the implied author is] the author's second self, mask, or persona reconstructable from the text" (43). The problem is that the literary text is a rather unreliable source of information about the real author, irrespective of whether we are interested in his first, second or any other selves. A text, once it is published, begins to "live" and mean on its own, independently of the author's intentions (cf. Chatman, *Coming to Terms* 77–80). This fact is confirmed by writers themselves: Umberto Eco in his *Interpretation and Overinterpretation* lists a number of the elements of *The Name of the Rose* found to be meaningful by the readers, even though he had not intended them to be such (73–74). If the implied author is described as the second self created by the real author while writing a text, it becomes a part of the real author's intentions, which cannot be easily reconstructed from the text (cf. Chatman, *Coming to Terms* 80). That is the reason why the majority of narratologists, such as Seymour Chatman, Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, Patrick O'Neill and William Nelles, relate the implied author to the text itself, which they regard as the source of information about him or her. The implied author thus understood designates, as Seymour Chatman puts it in *Story and Discourse*, "the principle that invented the narrator, along with everything else in the narrative, that stacked the cards in this particular way, had these things happen to these characters, in these words or images" (148). Rimmon-Kenan goes even further and postulates that the implied author should be perceived as a set of implicit norms operating in the text, to which agency cannot be attributed. A similar approach seems to be adopted by Chatman in his later study *Coming to Terms*, in which he stresses an abstract character of the notion (77). William Nelles emphasises one more essential quality of the implied author: he or she has consciously designed all the elements of the text, in contrast to the real author who does not completely control the creative process. It is another correction of Booth's contention that the implied author acts consciously or unconsciously, depending on the reader's reconstruction of the creative process. Such an approach again blurs the difference between the implied author and the real author, as the latter

can equally well incorporate some elements in his or her text in an unconscious manner.

Once the implied author is freed from the real author's control, the question remains whether he or she is independent of the real reader's interpretation as well. Again, two approaches can be distinguished. Nelles asserts that the implied author is the creator of every possible meaning of the text and consequently the real reader's reconstruction of the implied author, given the complex nature of a literary text, is only partial. However, such an approach turns the implied author into a purely theoretical construct, an ideal being whose existence is just assumed for the sake of theoretical distinctions. Such an understanding of the implied author also entails the assumption that every text has a single ideal implied author. However, Nelles' central argument in defence of the validity of the notion is that two equally competent critics can reconstruct two completely different implied authors. It seems therefore more valid to assume that the implied author is an element of an individual real reader's interpretation, as Patrick O'Neill emphasises: "It will be [...] evident that ultimately every text has as many implied authors as it has real readers" (73). He also points out that if the implied author is an index to an individual real reader's interpretation, his or her projection of the author, then the adjective *implied* is rather misleading since it indicates that the implied author is inscribed in the text and exists independently of the real reader's interpretative activity. The adjective *inferred* would be more precise since it indicates the real reader's active role (O'Neill 73). An analogous point is made by Gerard Genette, who asserts in *Narrative Discourse Revisited* that the concept should be designated "the inferred author" (150) if it is to be meaningful. More accurate as it is, the *inferred* author has not gained as much currency as the *implied* one; the latter remains a standard designation for the author reconstructed from the text, which is the reason why it is employed in the present paper as well.

If the real reader infers the implied author from the text, it is doubtful whether his or her reconstruction is based solely on textual data. Chatman seems to take a commonsensical view on the problem when he admits that readers do and may use other information, other contexts, such as the knowledge of other works by the real author. Still, what they reconstruct is not the image of the real author in his or her act of creation. This issue is related to the problem of the implied author's dependence on the historical context in which the work was created. Of course, in Nelles' model the implied author in his or her capacities of an ideal being transcends time and is the source of

the meanings discovered so far and all those which are yet to come. On the other hand, Chatman seems to suggest that the knowledge of the conventions existing in the times when a given work was created facilitates the reconstruction of the meaning of the text. Critical practice seems to suggest that it not only makes the process easier but is actually indispensable for it. Let us consider as an example Umberto Eco's analysis of "Un Drame Bien Parisien" by Adolphe Allais presented in *Lector in Fabula*. In the theoretical part of this study he introduces the category of model author as a metaphor for "a textual strategy establishing semantic correlations" (*Lector in Fabula* 11), which makes it equivalent to the implied author of narratology. In his reconstruction of the strategies of the text, Eco refers to the semantic conventions of the 1890s, when the text was produced, and on which it relies for its effect. Eco's example thus seems to suggest that the implied author cannot be reconstructed solely from textual data if the text itself refers to extratextual reality.

An interesting approach to the problem of the (implied) author's contextuality, which is also related to the dichotomy between the author's second self and the textual principle, can be found in Aleksandra Okopień-Sławińska's theory of literary communication. She distinguishes two agents on the production side of the text, different from the real author and the narrator: the intratextual addresser (*podmiot utworu*)¹ and the extratextual sender (*nadawca utworu*). She defines the former as the addresser implied by the overall semantic construction of the text, this definition being basically equivalent to Nelles' designation of the implied author. What Okopień-Sławińska emphasises about the intratextual addresser is his or her immanent and ahistorical nature. In contrast, the sender of the text is related to, if not dependent on, the historical context. The term designates the sum of choices made by the real author while composing a given text, the choices involving, first of all, the selection from the existing literary conventions. Paradoxically, the extratextual sender is for Okopień-Sławińska the role of the real author (manifested in his or her choices) and simultaneously the agent encoded in the text and non-identical to the real author. She also suggests that the extratextual sender can be or rather is inferred from the text by the real reader. In his application of Okopień-Sławińska's model to the analysis of literary games Jerzy Jarzębski emphasises this aspect of the concept and postulates

¹ Okopień-Sławińska designates the counterpart of this agent on the reception side the addressee (*adresat utworu*), so the term *addresser* seems the most appropriate English translation of *podmiot utworu*.

that the sender of the text should be described as the reader's projection (33). This quality seems to characterise the extratextual sender in the terms applied to the implied author. As the example of Umberto Eco's analysis suggests, the reconstruction of the implied/model author involves precisely the reconstruction of conventions appearing in the text. Okopień-Sławińska's intratextual addresser, in turn, seems to denote an ideal entity, similar to Nelles' implied author in its being the correlate of universal metalinguistic semantic rules. In view of the ever-changing nature of language, the existence of such rules appears rather doubtful. Okopień-Sławińska herself seems to endorse such a position: in the postscript added to her article in 1984 she emphasises that the information implied in the text should be interpreted in the context of the original communicative situation (Okopień-Sławińska 104 n. 5).

The assumption that the implied author is an abstract construct has made Chatman and Rimmon-Kenan postulate that it should be de-anthropomorphised and designated as *it* (Chatman, *Story and Discourse* 148; Rimmon-Kenan 88). Undoubtedly, the implied author is the real reader's construct and not an actual human being, but such is every other element of the text, including fictional characters. However, it seems natural to talk about characters as if they were human.² That is what Chatman himself does, when he, for instance, discusses characters of Ernest Hemingway's story "The Killers" (*Story and Discourse* 122). As O'Neill points out, the presentation of the implied author and other participants of the narrative communication in anthropomorphic terms is just a convenient convention: "this should be read as meaning that they are conceived of not as persons but as if they were persons" (109). Another argument in defence of that convention can be found in Nelles' study: as he points out, the fact that the participants of the narrative communication use the human language is a sufficient justification for anthropomorphisation (Nelles 13).

The abstract character of the notion of the implied author poses another problem, namely the question whether he or she can communicate directly with any recipient on the other side of narrative transmission. The prevalent answer seems to be "no," for, as Chatman asserts, "unlike the narrator, the implied author can tell us nothing. He, or better, it has no voice, no direct means of communicating. It instructs us silently, through the design of the whole, with all the voices, by all the means it has chosen to let us learn" (122). This statement

² Of course, there exists a small group of ardent advocates of purely semiotic approach to the text, who use the pronoun *it* in reference to fictional characters; see, e.g., Joel Weinsheimer.

emphasises that the implied author is, as if, hidden behind the whole text, with the speaker who is telling the story, that is the narrator, being one of his or her creations. Consequently, even the self-conscious first-person narrator of, for instance, *Tom Jones* cannot be identified with the implied author of this novel. He should rather be called the dramatised author and regarded as a kind of a narrator constructed by the implied author of the text. This is the solution suggested by Wallace Martin (154), who demonstrates that many texts have a very complex and multi-layered communicative structure with the dramatised author occupying one of the layers. Thus in *The Canterbury Tales*, for example, we can distinguish the implied author, who created the whole text, including the dramatised author, who presents the frame story of the pilgrimage to Canterbury, which in turn includes the stories told by respective dramatised narrators.

The indirect nature of the implied author's communication with the reader and his or her status of a construct inferred by the reader call for a modification of the way in which his or her position is diagrammatically presented in narratological studies. A diagram which forms a reference point for further analyses and which is usually reproduced is the one designed by Chatman in *Story and Discourse* (Figure 1):

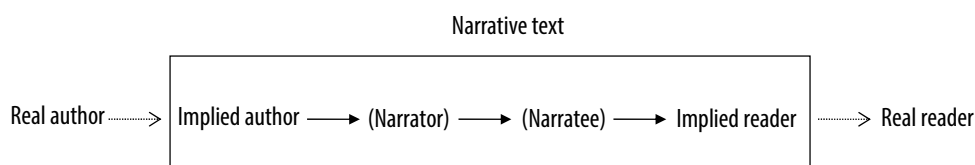


Fig. 1. Seymour Chatman's diagram of narrative communication
(*Story and Discourse* 151)

Chatman's diagram seems to suggest that the implied author occupies an intermediary position between the real author and the narrator and that the real author's message passes through him or her on its way to the real reader. It also implies that he or she is posited by the real author or that he or she actually participates in the text production. However, as Michael Toolan notices, the implied author "is a projection back from the decoding side, not a real projecting stage on the encoding side" (20). This observation makes Toolan exclude the implied author from the description of narrative communication. It seems to be too hasty a move, because the implied author is assigned the projecting role by the real reader and then he or she can be perceived as the producer reconstructable from the text; consequently, even

though the implied author does not perform an actual projecting function, he does perform a postulated projecting function.

Just like Toolan, Rimmon-Kenan argues that the implied author should be excluded from analyses of narrative communication due to his or her inability to communicate directly, the inclusion of the implied author as an immanent element being—according to her—the major flaw of Chatman's scheme. As a matter of fact, Chatman's original argument, presented in *Story and Discourse*, was that we need the concept of the implied author to describe narrative transmission in narratorless texts; he, however, renounced this position in his later study *Coming to Terms*. The implied author does not indeed communicate with anybody in the literal sense of telling the story. However, the production of the meaning the real reader reconstructs from the text is attributed to the implied author and in this sense it can be said to be his or her message sent to the reader via a narrator, if there is one. As Monika Fludernik (340) demonstrates, there can be texts without narrators, so if the implied author is also excluded from the description of narrative communication, the text is left in communicative void, with no agent responsible for its production and meaning, assuming that we regard the real author to be unreconstructable from a text.

While Rimmon-Kenan does not question the validity of the notion of the implied author as such, Genette maintains that the distinction between real and implied authors is redundant. In his view, literary communication involves only the real author and the narrator on the production side, with the latter being present in every narrative text. The idea of the author the real reader reconstructs from the text is the faithful representation of the real author, provided the reader who constructs it is sufficiently competent. And if there is a discrepancy between the real author's avowed intentions and those realised in the text, it is a case of involuntary revelation on the real author's part: "obviously, the image of the real author constructed by the (competent) reader is more faithful than the idea that that author had of himself" (143). A similar argument against Polish equivalents of the implied author is put forward by Stefan Sawicki, who asserts that the difference between the real author and the author implied in the text has a quantitative, not qualitative character: the latter is basically perceived as more competent than the former and responsible for the conscious creation of the text. However, as Nelles points out in his refutation of Genette's criticism, the basic difference between the real and implied authors is qualitative: the former is real, the latter fictional. Furthermore, frequently two equally

competent readers (critics) reconstruct two completely different authors from the text, which seems to prove that the idea of the author inferred from the text need not be a faithful representation of the real author. According to Chatman, the basic pragmatic value of the concept lies precisely in its sensitising us to that issue:

positing an implied author inhibits the overhasty assumption that the reader has direct access through the fictional text to the real author's intentions and ideology. It does not deny the existence of important connections between the text's and the real author's views, but it does deny the simplistic assumption that somehow the reader is in direct communication with (1) the real author (with all the troublesome questions the idea raises) or with (2) the fictional speaker, for how could we separate the denotation (what the speaker says) from the connotation (what the text means). (Chatman, *Coming to Terms* 76)

Chatman's acknowledgement of the connections between the real author's and his or her text's views can be regarded as an indirect response to and acceptance of Mieke Bal's and Susan Lanser's criticism directed at his earlier assertion that the real author is not responsible at all for the moral or ideological stance of his or her text (Bal 42; Lanser 50 n. 52). Lanser emphasises that the use of the term *implied author* has often tied in with the avoidance of the problem of the author's ideological stance. That is why she proposes to replace the term *implied author* with *extrafictional voice* (Lanser 122). However, her notion provokes equally unfortunate collocations: it strongly suggests the presence of somebody speaking to the reader, whereas she herself admits that the extratextual voice need not be directly audible in the text.

Yet another, poststructuralist line of criticism of the concept of the implied author has been pursued by Ian Reid, who claims that it "attempts to contain semantic negotiations within the field of a unitary subject" (102). To support his point, Reid analyses a number of texts on which the notion of a unified meaning cannot be imposed. The way in which he proceeds seems to suggest the conclusions opposite to those intended by him: Reid basically hypostatizes the text and writes about its strategies and moves instead of strategies and moves of the implied author, whose aim may be precisely the preservation of the equivocal nature of the text.

If all the above-mentioned definitions, refutations and defences of the concept of the implied author are put side by side, the problem of the author inscribed in the text appears to possess a number of aspects raised and analysed by various theorists of narrative. The facets of the issue can be

grouped into the set of bipolar oppositions, which are enumerated below in Figure 2. For the sake of easy reference and in order to indicate the major disagreements between theorists of narrative, the list includes in parentheses the names of scholars who have concentrated on respective qualities of the implied author.

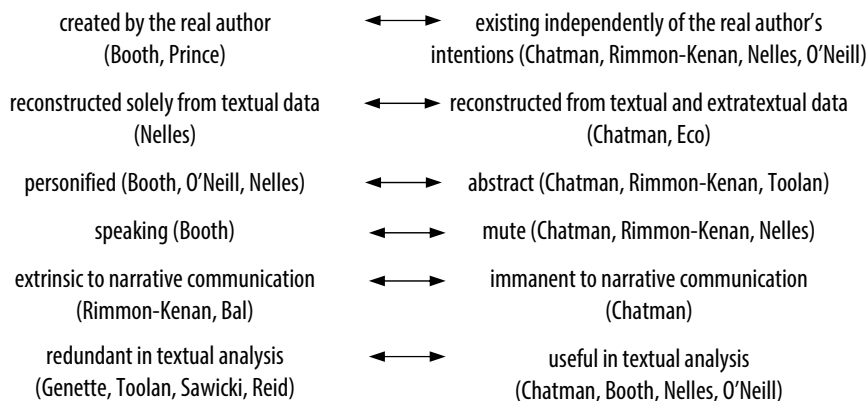


Fig. 2

As my discussion has hopefully demonstrated, the positions grouped in the right-hand column appear to be more defensible and allow one to define the implied author, much as it resists easy conceptualisation, in terms which make it a useful, internally consistent theoretical category. The primary value of the notion lies in its foregrounding of a lack of straightforward correlation between the real author and the idea of the author reconstructable from the text. The difference between the two will be retained and the crucial mechanisms of the reader/critic's conceptualisation of the author figure and literary communication recognised, if the implied author is understood as an anthropomorphised critical construct to which the creation of the meaning of the text is attributed and which is reconstructed on the basis of textual signals and the cultural context of its production.

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DRUGIE „JA” AUTORA CZY ZESTAW IMPLICYTNYCH NORM —
POJĘCIE AUTORA IMPLIKOWANEGO I PROBLEMY Z NIM ZWIĄZANE

Streszczenie

Mimo że pojęcie autora implikowanego jest standardowym elementem poetyki formalistycznej, nie poddaje się ono łatwej konceptualizacji. Niniejszy artykuł analizuje klasyczne, zachodnie omówienia tego pojęcia i odnosi je do zbliżonych polskich studiów historycznoliterackich w celu określenia jego przydatności. Analiza wykazuje, że autor implikowany może być konceptualizowany jako antropomorficzny byt, (re)konstruowany przez czytelnika na podstawie sygnałów tekstowych. Takie rozumienie pojęcia autora implikowanego pozwala na podkreślenie braku prostej korelacji między rzeczywistym autorem a figurą autora wywiedzioną z tekstu i tym samym odsłania jego użyteczność jako narzędzia teoretycznoliterackiego.

Streścił Grzegorz Maziarczyk

Słowa kluczowe: autor implikowany; teoria narracji; komunikacja literacka.