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Meaning, Intent, and the Implied Author

My interest in the implied author (henceforth IA) dates back to a discussion on the Narrative listserv a few years ago. I have forgotten what started the thread, but I remember that it concerned how the IA of a certain text should be constructed and that all the participants seemed to take the theoretical importance of this notion for granted. Narrative fiction, all seemed to agree, was the product of a six-participant transaction involving an author, an implied author, a narrator, a narratee, an implied reader, and a real reader, though the outermost two participants were considered of no concern for literary criticism. In my earlier work, I had dutifully appended the term "implied" to any mention of the author, partly because Wayne Booth's *The Rhetoric of Fiction* had succeeded in convincing me of the necessity of the IA, and partly for fear of appearing theoretically unsophisticated. But now I could no longer see the justification for building the protective wall of the IA between the reader and the real author, so I butted into the discussion with a post stating my skepticism regarding the existence of this sacred cow of literary criticism.

It was as if I had screamed, "God is dead," in the middle of a church service. The participants in the thread responded with a volley of posts explaining why flesh-and-blood authors must be left out at all costs from literary interpretation, and why they must be replaced by IAs if the text is to be regarded not only as the representation of individual events occurring in a fictional world (a representation which is the job of the narrator), but also as the expression of general ideas, values, and opinions whose domain of applicability extends to the real world. The main argument for attributing these ideas, values, and opinions to an IA rather than to the real author (henceforth RA) is that there is no way to tell whether RA sincerely endorses them or lives by these standards. Many cases were presented of authors being despicable in real life but admirable in their incarnations as IAs, though nobody could come up with an example of the opposite situation. Some contributors went as far as suggesting the purely hypothetical case of an author defending in a novel the exact opposite of what he believes in, not just through individuated characters, but

as the global message of the text. (Why an author would want to do this remained, however, obscure: it seems a sure recipe for spreading the wrong ideas!)

I thought at the time that I was the only IA-doubter in the narratological community and that my arguments were consequently original. But as I started doing research for this article, I made the partly annoying, partly reassuring discovery that the concept of IA has a long history of being under fire. Its critics include narratologists as prominent as Gérard Genette, Mieke Bal, Ansgar Nünning, Michael Toolan, Nilli Diengott, Tom Kindt, and Hans-Harald Müller, all of whom, it should be noted, come from beyond the Atlantic. The proponents of the IA, by contrast, are mainly Americans: Wayne Booth, Seymour Chatman, James Phelan, Peter Rabinowitz, William Nelles, and Brian Richardson. The implied author wars, then, pit American narratology against the rest of the world. (See Phelan 2005 and Schmid 2009 for useful accounts of the IA controversy.) As I read through the pro- and anti IA literature, I soon discovered that the term "implied author" was like William Gibson's concept of cyberspace: "Slick and hollow — awaiting received meaning" (27) — and that the only thing that unites all the users of the term is just that: the use of the term. Every advocate of the IA seemed to have his own conception of what IAs stand for, and every opponent seemed to have different objections.

As the readers of this essay know full well, the concept of IA was first proposed by Wayne Booth in 1961 as a reaction against the rigid "textualism" of New Criticism. In the textualist position, the words on the page are the sole legitimate source of meaning, and any appeal to the author's intention (or to external documents that may explain the text) is considered heretical. It is at about the same time that Barthes proclaimed "the death of the author" and that Foucault, in *The Order of Things*, declared the concept of the human to be *passé*. Booth's notion of the implied author was an attempt to restore to literature the human dimension that structuralism and New Criticism (and afterwards, deconstruction) denied, without falling victim to what Wimsatt and Beardsley called "the intentional fallacy." As Michael Toolan observes, "in subsequent discussions of the implied author, the emphasis has tended to be on the word implied; in Booth the emphasis seems to me to be far more on the word author. There the claim is that we project or reconstruct back, from the text, some sort of version or picture of the author" (77-78).

The notion of implied author regards the meaning of the text as the result of an authorial intent, but at the same time it erects a protective shield between the real author and his textual counterpart that prevents the import of extra-textual information in determining the meaning of the text. The crux of the matter, then, is the notions of meaning and of intent. In the next two sections, I will examine the

relation between these two notions in ordinary language and in literary texts. Then I will probe the arguments that have been proposed for the existence of the IA and the properties that have been ascribed to this theoretical fiction, hoping to show that other explanations can be proposed to the problems that the IA is supposed to solve.

Meaning and Intent in Ordinary Language

Philosophy of language tells us that meaning is crucially dependent on intent. One of its most prominent representatives, H. Paul Grice, distinguishes between two conceptions of meaning: one he calls "natural" and the other "non-natural" (nn). As examples of natural meaning he mentions: "These spots mean measles" and "The recent budget means that we will have a hard year" (436). The first example is easily recognized as the type of sign that Peirce describes as an index: spots mean measles by virtue of a causal relation between having a certain disease and its effects on the body. While the second example is not an index, it also relies on a causal relation. In neither case were the signs deliberately produced, and this type of signification cannot be captured by the general schema of communication: sender→message→receiver. Non-natural meaning, by contrast, is exemplified by "These three rings on the bell (of the bus) mean that the 'bus is full'" (437) or by a straightforward case of linguistic meaning: "The sentence 'snow is white' means that snow is white" (a standard example of logicians, though not used by Grice). These two examples correspond to the type of sign that Peirce calls symbols: their signification depends on a convention between users to use a certain sign to indicate a certain idea. The ability of symbols to convey meaning is crucially dependent on the intention of the user and on the ability of the interpreter to recognize that intention. Grice produces the following analysis of non-natural meaning: For A (a sender) to mean something by x (a material sign, or signifier in Saussure's terminology), "A must intend to induce by x a belief in an audience, and he must also intend his utterance to be recognized so as intended. But these intentions are not independent; the recognition is intended by A to play its part in inducing the belief" (441).

John Searle's speech act theory offers a more detailed analysis than Grice of the intentions implied by verbal utterances; this analysis allows him to distinguish various kinds of speech acts, or, to quote J. L. Austin, different "things we do with language" (cite?). He defines speech acts as utterances governed by three types of rules, also known as felicity conditions: those affecting propositional content; those specifying preparatory conditions; those concerning sincerity and what he calls the "essential rule": the intent of the speaker. When a speaker S asserts p to a hearer H, the rules are:

Propositional content: any proposition p.
Preparatory: (1) S has evidence (reasons, etc.) for the truth of p. (2) It is not obvious to
both S and H that H knows (does not need to be reminded, etc.) p.
Sincerity: S believes p.
Essential: Counts as an undertaking to the effect that p represents an actual state of af-
fairs.
                                                                                      (66)

These rules specify not only the state of mind of S (S believes p), but also the state of mind of H, as constructed by S (H ignores p). When H interprets the assertion, he not only construes S's state of mind, but also S's representation of his own state of mind prior to the utterance. Moreover, H believes that his own recognition of these states of mind is intended by S.

Needless to say, the existence of rules does not guarantee that they will be observed: in the games of language, just as in sports or strategy games, players may try to cheat in an attempt to get ahead; or they may inadvertently commit fouls. In a lie, the speaker does not observe the sincerity condition; in an error, she violates preparatory condition (1); in a misjudgment of the hearer's knowledge, she violates (2) and produces a useless speech act. In every act of verbal communication, then, the possibility of a split between the actual speaker and the implied speaker exists. This means that the IA and RA of literature have a correlate in the IS (implied speaker) and RS (real speaker) of oral or non-literary communication. Similarly, the IR (implied reader) and AR (actual reader) of literature have twins (or is it merely cousins?) in the IH and AH of speech act theory. In the default case, we assume that the speaker is sincere and that IS=RS; but in many situations, we must construct IS as different from RS. If the possibility of this split did not exist, it would be pointless to distinguish IS from RS, or IA from RA. But even when the speaker fulfills all the felicity conditions, the speech act may end in failure, because S may fail to convince that p is true. Searle calls the effect of the speech act on H the perlocutionary effect.

Meaning and Intent in Literature

I can, at this point, anticipate my implied reader's objection: the literary communicative situation is fundamentally different from that of everyday speech, and the IA of a novel cannot be equated to the IS of Searle's assertion because literature, as a fictional mode of expression (I leave it open whether fictionality is a constitutive feature of literature), does not assert anything: it only pretends to do so or only does so in make-believe, as Searle himself has claimed in his groundbreaking article, "The Logical Status of Fictional Discourse." If anybody in a novel is supposed to respect the pragmatic rules of language and is susceptible

to break them, it is the characters, who are engaging in "everyday speech," just as we are when we interact with real people.

The situation of the narrator is more ambiguous: on one hand, literary theory postulates a narrator in order to relieve the author of the responsibility of fulfilling the felicity conditions of the textual assertions: it is the narrator, not the author, who believes that "the marquise left the castle at 5 o'clock" and has evidence for saying so. Yet, when narrators are disembodied, omniscient creatures rather than possible human beings, the truth about the fictional world automatically comes out of their mouths (or pens, or minds), through what Lubomír Doležel calls the authority of the ER-narrator. This authority prevents dissociation of an IS from an AS in the case of impersonal narration. Calling into question the validity of the third-person narrator's declarations of facts would be self-defeating because this would deprive readers of the building blocks which make it possible to construct fictional worlds. The situation is slightly different with first-person individuated narrators: since they are human beings, they may have reasons for not telling the truth. In other words, first-person narrators may be unreliable, a situation which has played an important role in the postulation of an IA.[1] (I will return to this later.) But the possibility for individuated narrators to break the felicity conditions of assertion remains nevertheless limited because the reader must have a standard of comparison for rejecting their declarations. And even in this case, the vast majority of the unreliable narrator's assertions must be taken at face value, for otherwise it would be impossible to follow the story. The felicity conditions are most easily broken when a fiction is told by several narrators occupying the same diegetic level, as, for instance, in *The Sound and the Fury*, or in epistolary novels. In this case, the same situation will be presented from different points of view, and the reader can sometimes decide whose version is the most plausible. When the narrative is told by a single narrator, internal contradictions can provide hints of unreliability; for instance, the narrator of *Le Libera*, a French New Novel by Robert Pinget, contradicts herself so often that the reader concludes that she is either suffering from dementia or that her eagerness to gossip wipes out any commitments to truth.

Most cases of unreliability in individuated narration do not, however, come from outward lying or from being mistaken (i.e., from a failure to fulfill felicity conditions) but rather from the narrator's inability to persuade the reader of the validity of his declarations. In other words, they come from rhetorical failure. Unreliability is usually a matter of perlocutionary effect, and it overwhelmingly affects moral judgments and interpretations, rather than statements of facts. In such cases, there is no reason to distinguish an implied from an actual speaker: the

unreliable narrator stands by what he says — it is just that what he says does not convince the reader. Proponents of the IA account for this situation by postulating dissociation between the IA and the narrator.

On the level of the author, violation of felicity conditions are even more problematic than on the narratortl level because authors of literary fiction are free to make up the fictional world any way they want: how then could they be deceptive or mistaken (cf. Sir Philip Sidney's formula: "Now for the poet, he nothing affirms, and therefore never lieth" [345])? The only felicity conditions that regulate literary communication, other than artistic excellence, are those that link the author to the text: by signing a work, an author commits herself to having written the text and to be presenting original work. Dissociation of RA from IA occurs in hoaxes and fakes, plagiarism, and pseudonyms (a female author writing under a masculine name, such as George Eliot and George Sand, or a well-known author adopting a new pseudonym to give himself a fresh start).[2] In the non-literary, nonfictional domain, one can add ghostwritten autobiographies to this list. But if the concept of IA were limited to such cases, which are the exception rather than the rule in publishing, it would never have reached the prominence it currently enjoys in literary theory.

This examination of the possibilities of dissociation between IS/IA and RS/RA leads to a conclusion that represents the polar opposite of the position adopted by IA advocates: while for literary critics dissociation is a distinctive feature of literary communication, a pragmatic approach based on speech act theory shows that implied/real dissociation is much more problematic in literary communication than in ordinary language. Its only clear manifestations — hoaxes, plagiarism, ghostwriting, gender-switching pseudonyms — have nothing to do with literariness and everything to do with deception.

What, then, are the dimensions of literary meaning that necessitate the splitting of the author into a "real" and an "implied" incarnation? The implied author has been assigned three major functions, which I list below in decreasing order of radicality. Though the three functions do not imply each other logically, they seem to do so theoretically: some critics endorse 1, 2 and 3; some endorse 2 and 3; and some endorse only 1; but I am not aware of anybody who endorses another combination, aside from those who deny all three.

1. The implied author is a necessary parameter in the communicative model of literary narrative fiction.

2. The implied author is a design principle, responsible for the narrative techniques and the plot of the text.

3. The implied author is the source of the norms and values communicated by the text.

The implied author as a parameter in a model of literary of communication

The most forceful advocate of function 1 is Seymour Chatman. In *Story and Discourse* (151), he describes the narrative communication situation as follows (elements in parenthesis are optional;[3] elements inside the square parentheses are "immanent to a narrative" while those outside the box are external to it and presumably of no concern for literary theory):

Real author→[implied author→(narrator)→(narratee)→implied reader]→real reader.
(151)

The distinction between the real author and the narrator is widely recognized as the defining feature of language-based narrative fiction.[4] This distinction is made necessary by the fact that in a fiction, the author delegates the responsibility for fulfilling the felicity conditions of the textual speech acts to another individual:[5] as I have already observed, it is the narrator, not the author, who asserts that "the marquise left the castle at 5 o'clock." Similarly, it is the narratee, not the real reader, who believes this assertion. Possible worlds theory situates the two communicating pairs in different worlds: while the real author and the real reader are located in the actual world, the narrator and narratee are located in the fictional world created by the text (see Ryan).

If the communicative situation of narrative fiction can be efficiently described by a four-term model, what is the point of introducing two additional parameters? The distinction between author and narrator is fixed and easily definable: the author pretends to be the narrator in a game of make-believe. But the relation between RA and IA, or between IA and narrator, is much more problematic. Chatman regards the IA as immanent to the text; this means that the words put on paper by RA create IA, who in turn creates the narrator. But where does the IA reside? Chatman observes (rightly so, for those who regard the IA as superfluous) that IA "has no voice, no direct means of communicating" (148): there are indeed no words in the text that can be attributed to IA, either physically or imaginatively. This voicelessness has led Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan to reject the inclusion of IA in the communication model, though she retains it for functions 2 and 3 (86-89). In Rimmon-Kenan's thinking, if the IA cannot speak, it cannot be a sender. While the IA is excluded from the real world by its lack of means of communication, it cannot be regarded as a member of the fictional world; otherwise, it would fuse

with the narrator. How then can an entity that inhabits a no-man's land between the world of the author and the world of the narrator be regarded as an indispensable parameter of narrative communication? Should one postulate a third world to give it a home — for instance, "the world of the text?" The term "world," in this case, would be taken in a sense so different from "real world" or "fictional world" (both conceivable as spaces that contain individuated objects) that the explanation would be totally *ad hoc.*

Equally problematic is the communicative status of the implied reader. If it has a right to existence, it must differ from both RR and the narratee. It differs from RR in that it is a textual construct rather than a flesh-and-blood human being, and it differs from the narratee in that it is not a member of the fictional world. Whereas the narratee regards the narrator's assertions as true, IR is aware of their fictional nature. As the presumed communicative partner of IA, IR is generally conceived as the ideal reader who reacts to the text in the way intended by IA. IR is therefore something imagined by IA. But since IA is itself a projection supposedly constructed by RR on the basis of the text, IR is nothing more than the projection of a projection. When the reader constructs IA, he will automatically construct IR, since IA is a pure intentional stance with no manifestation or properties other than the meaning it wants to convey. In a model that does away with IA, IR also disappears as a member of the communicative chain, but this does not prevent RR from trying to imagine the effect that RA wants to achieve on his audience. It does not require the postulation of an imaginary individual to take these effects into consideration.

I also find it puzzling that proponents of a communicative model including IA and IR reduce it to a four-term schema by regarding RA and RR as theoretically irrelevant. This exclusion not only prevents the reader from using any kind of extra-textual information concerning RA in interpreting the text (an interdiction that radical textualists would approve of), but it also means that the reader's personal reactions to the text do not matter, since RR is located outside the box of literary relevance. If the only experience that counts is that of IR, who is a projection of IA, it follows that texts must be judged on the basis of the intent of an imaginary participant, rather than on the reactions of a real individual. There is consequently no way to justify a distinction between a text that fails to reach the effect intended by its implied author and a text that succeeds in doing so, since RR, the only person who can tell the difference, has been declared theoretically irrelevant.

The Implied Author as Designing Mind

It would be pointless to include IA in the communicative model of narrative fiction if IA weren't made responsible for at least some concrete textual features. Even though

IA is generally considered to be voiceless, it is credited by many of its proponents with function 2: the design of the text and the creation of the plot. For Chatman, the IA is "not the narrator but rather, 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). Phelan regards the IA as "responsible for the choices that create the narrative text as 'these words in this order' and that imbue the text with his or her values" (216). Extending the notion beyond narrative fiction, Wayne Booth describes the IA of a poem by Robert Frost as "a complex man devoted to poetic form, working hard — probably for hours or days — to achieve effectful rhymes that obey his rule that no reader should be able to claim that a rhyme was determined only by the rhyming" (80).

Why cannot the design of the text and the artistic intent be attributed to RA rather than to IA? Let me first dismiss two light-weight arguments before confronting a more substantial one.

An obvious reason for attributing design to an IA is that its purpose is always a matter of speculation; we know for sure that the author wrote the words of the text, but we can only form hypotheses as to what effect she had in mind in using a certain narrative technique or in creating certain events. Attributing design to an implied author in this sense is mostly a matter of hedging one's claims when discussing intentional features. This gesture bears few theoretical consequences.

Another argument for viewing IA rather than RA as the creative agent is the case of multiple authors. Advocates of the IA claim that, when a work is the product of a collaboration, "readers conventionally impute, at each reading, a unifying agent. That agent can only be the implied author" (Chatman (*Coming to Terms* 91). This strikes me as a gratuitous assertion. In the case of literary works with multiple authors, three possibilities arise: (1) the reader mistakenly believes, on the basis of the pen name, that the work was written by a single author; (2) the writing is so homogeneous that it is impossible to detect who is responsible for what element; (3) the voices are discordant, and the reader can easily identify who wrote each part. Case 1 is a matter of error and falls outside the scope of literary conceptions of the IA, while neither case 2 nor case 3 requires what may be called the "narratological IA": case 2 can be interpreted as a close collaboration between different RAs, and case 3 is the denial of a single consciousness responsible for a global design. Another phenomenon that has been brought up by Chatman in defense of the IA is multi-modal works such as film or opera (*Coming to Terms* 90-97). According to the IA hypothesis, the audience imagines that the same person is responsible for all the semiotic channels: photography, script, soundtrack,

costumes, stage setting, editing, as well as for the direction of the actors. This mode of attention would be like listening to a symphony and imagining that it is the sound of a single instrument; it would prevent spectators or listeners from appreciating the orchestration of the various elements. If we are able to judge how well, or how poorly, image, sound, dialogue and acting work together, this means that the unity of the work is not taken for granted. But the IA concept was proposed precisely in order to safeguard this unity.

The third argument for regarding the IA as the agent responsible for artistic design has to do with the open nature of literary meaning. Earlier in this article, I mentioned Grice's distinction between natural and non-natural meaning. As the art form that uses language as its medium of expression, literature means in the non-natural mode, and the sense of a text is consequently dependent on the intention conventionally encoded in its words and sentences. Yet literature also means in what Grice calls a natural way, the way represented by "these spots mean measles" and "these budget cuts mean that tough times are ahead." When an author creates a story, she designs events whose meaning for the plot as a whole go far beyond their linguistic meaning. This meaning is intentional, since the events were created for a purpose, but it is much more open than the meaning conventionally encoded in the sentences that tell the story. Moreover, while the events of the plot are intentionally scripted by the author, the reader understands that, within the fictional world, they are either random happenings or actions deliberately planned by the characters. It may be purely by accident, for instance, that a character in a novel contracts measles (or more appropriately, tuberculosis), but the purpose of this event from the point of view of the plot is to get rid of this character. The interpretation of fictional events is a natural process because we interpret them through roughly the same mental operations we would resort to if they happened spontaneously in real life, rather than being made up by an author. If the heroine develops red spots, we will wonder if she is going to die; if the fictional world enters an economic crisis, we will wonder if the hero will lose his job. After we find out what happened, we will reevaluate the event in terms of its function for the plot, in terms of its significance for the fictional world, and perhaps even in terms of what it tells us about the real world. The narrator of a fiction is in charge of reporting what happened in the fictional world; but who is in charge of the higher meaning of these events, the meaning that forms the focus of speculative interpretations? It cannot be RA, so goes the argument, because the meanings of literary texts are too rich, too open, and too dependent on the reader's particular situation, culture, and interests to have all been anticipated and determined by the author. It would take

an omniscient, god-like mind to contemplate and foresee the totality of a work's potential signification. If the source of the meaning of a literary work cannot be a real human being, it must therefore be the theoretical fiction of the IA.

William Nelles describes this situation: "the historical author writes . . . the implied author means . . . the narrator speaks" (22). In this formula, the need to ascribe a different function to each of the three sender agents deprives the author and the narrator of a mind: while the author merely puts words on paper (perhaps under the dictation of the IA), the narrator is a mere mouthpiece who utters words without understanding them. For Chatman also, the agent who narrates the story and consequently holds it in its mind is IA. Discussing a TV ad campaign which does not seem to tell a determinate story and leaves it to the spectator to imagine why its script promotes a product, Chatman writes: "But unlike the real authors [who produce an ambiguous message], the implied author, by the very logic of the situation, honors the conventions of narrative textuality" (*Coming to Terms* 105). This means that if the spectator manages to rationalize the ad as a story, he constructs the mind of the IA. By attributing to the IA all the meanings that can be found in a text, this analysis not only makes narrators unaware of the story they tell, it also denies the existence of non-intended meaning. But in life, as in literature, meaning is not restricted to situations of intentional communication, as the example of "these spots mean measles" suggests, and there is consequently no need to postulate a consciousness that foresees all possible interpretations. Why not, instead of making the IA the origin of all signification, recognize that the winged words of literature can fly far beyond the horizon that RA can contemplate?

The Implied Author as Source of Values

By far the most widely held conception of the IA views it as the image of the author projected by the text. It would be naïve, so the argument goes, to view this image as a self-portrait because authors do not necessarily live by, or even endorse, the norms and values defended in their works. This conception of the IA is often defended by pointing out the differences between how authors present themselves through their fictions and who they "really" are. Here are a few examples of these arguments: "The late Tolstoj [sic] was much less convinced by many of his ideas than his implied authors; the latter embodied and took to extreme one aspect of Tolstoj's thought." (Tolstoy's late novels preached poverty and chastity, but his wife quipped that he was gifted for neither.) Conversely, Dostoyevsky developed in his late novels "a remarkable understanding of ideologies that he vehemently attacked as a journalist" (both examples from Schmid 168). Jonathan Swift satirized in *Gulliver's Travels* the frivolity of going to war on the basis of minimal religious differences; this

progressive attitude supposedly clashes with Swift's generally conservative ideas and real-life loyalty to the Church of England (Nelles 43 ff). The implied author of Tom Jones is "genial, ironic, easy-going and magnanimous," while the real man (Henry Fielding) could have been "petty, unforgiving, improvident, prickly, cheap, or obtuse when it suited him" (Richardson 115). The gap between IA and RA grows into an abyss in Wayne Booth's presentation of the case of Robert Frost: while the IA of Frost's poem "A Time to Talk" is both a "friendly farmer" and a "complex man devoted to poetic form," the real-life Frost, according to his biographer L. Thompson, is "an appalling man, petty, vindictive, a dreadful husband and parent" — the antinomy of a man Booth would like to have as a close neighbor (80). In all these discrepant portraits, the IA comes out as a much better person than RA. But how do the critics quoted above know who RA "really is?" Their rigid oppositions between RA and IA ignore the complexity of human subjectivity and reduce identity to a stereotype defined by a series of too easily labeled properties. Rather than branding authors as "conservative" or "liberal," "generous" or "acrimonious," "tolerant" or "narrow-minded," and rather than opposing a "true self" of life with a fake self presented through fiction, why not recognize that the self is the product of diverse moods, emotions, ideas, desires, and attitudes, and that it creates itself though imaginative activity as much as through interaction with physical reality? In such a perspective, the self that expresses itself in literary texts is one of the many aspects of the author's identity and the distinction RA/IA collapses.

While adherents to position 1 tend to emphasize the difference between IA and RA, some of the critics who limit their view of IA to position 3 make the concept so thin that the only feature that distinguishes it from RA is the difference between a representation and that which it represents. Consider, for instance, this definition by James Phelan: "*the implied author is a streamlined version of the real author, an actual or purported subset of the real author's capacities, traits, attitudes, beliefs, values, and other properties that play an active role in the construction of a particular text*" (45, italics original). Or this one, by H. Porter Abbott: "Neither the real author nor the narrator, the implied author is the idea of the author constructed by the reader as she or he reads the narrative" (235). In the thin view represented by these definitions, IA is simply RA as imagined by RR — just as IR can be described as the RR hoped for by RA (and reconstructed by RR as part of his image of RA). The only difference between RA and the thin view of the IA is the basis on which it is built: IA is an author-image derived by the reader from text-internal clues, while RA can be constructed through any kind

of data relating to this author. The text-specificity of IA may very well be the only feature endorsed by all the supporters of the concept.

One may wonder at this point why it is necessary for readers to relate values and opinions to an author image, rather than building the text's ideological or ethical message by simply passing judgment on the narrator's declarations or by evaluating the characters' behavior. IA advocates answer this question by arguing that it is only against the background of the values endorsed by IA that the reader can detect whether the narrator can be trusted or which of the characters express the "true" (=intended) values of the text. In other words, we need the IA because without it we would be unable to detect narratorial unreliability or to tell which characters can serve as role-models. But how do we get the values of the author if we can neither trust the narrator nor build these values on the basis of extra-textual evidence? The answer, I believe, is that we first decide whether the narrator is reliable and then construct the author's values on the basis of this judgment, rather than the other way around. How then, my implied reader will ask, do we diagnose unreliability in the first place? One possible basis is common sense: when I read Ring Lardner's "Haircut," I judge the narrator unreliable because the tricks of his friend Jim, which he reports with admiration, are just too nasty, too destructive of the victim's reputation to be funny; the author would have to be a monster to propose either Jim, or the narrator who thinks highly of him, as a role-model. In addition, the text is more entertaining if the narrator is the target of satire. Another possibility is using extratextual information: it is in large part because we know that the author is the child of a culture that no longer approves of the rigid class distinctions and of the repression of emotions typical of traditional British society that we regard the narrator of Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* as unreliable. We would most likely come to another conclusion if the author were Rudyard Kipling. In this case, we would regard the narrator as the spokesman of the author, and we would either dismiss or embrace both.

Conclusion

Kindt and Müller observe that virtually all critiques of the IA have been from the side that I call "textualism" (and that they call anti-intentionalism) — a side characterized by total commitment to the doctrine of the intentional fallacy (168). This is not the case with the present article. My problem with the IA does not lie in an *a-priori* rejection of all things authorial as a tool of interpretation, but in a proliferation of parameters which would not, as Genette argues, stand the test of Ockham's razor (138). I regard IA as a lame compromise between radical textualism and reading texts as the expression of a human mind (a view widely rejected by

critics as biographism). I see nothing wrong with constructing an author-image; but if readers are interested in the author as a whole person, there is no reason to exclude other data in the construction of this image. We can build an image of Kafka on the basis of *The Trial*, but we will build a better image by also reading his correspondence and diaries. In the IA model, every text projects its own IA, and the author-image built on the basis of *The Trial* exclusively would be considered an autonomous and self-sufficient product, rather than a draft in a work-in-progress. But as Richardson observes, the process of author construction is not equally important nor even possible for all texts (126-27); readers can be pretty confident of what Voltaire wanted to satirize in *Candide*, but it is much harder to construct IA (or RA for IA deniers) in the case of Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*. Similarly, I find it difficult to read Rimbaud's poetry without keeping in the back of my mind the person of the historical author, but with Mallarmé I am much more inclined to adopt a purely textualist attitude. Richardson claims that the distance between IA and RA is variable. Extending this idea, we can imagine that the distance between the two is near zero for Voltaire, moderate for Rimbaud, wide for Flaubert, endless for Mallarmé.[6] This observation, which I find very pertinent, creates difficulty for a theory that regards IA as a constitutive element of literary communication because it makes IA sometimes necessary and sometimes dispensable and does so in rather impressionistic fashion. But we can restate it without resorting to IA by saying that authors reveal themselves in their texts to variable degrees. This seems to me a much more intuitive and economical approach than postulating an IA who is sometimes the identical twin of RA and sometimes a total stranger, but is always obligatory as a target of interpretation.

The litmus test for the theoretical importance of the IA lies in the difference it has made in the practice of criticism. Are there valid interpretations of texts that would not be possible if the term "implied author" was replaced with "author"? Actually, most advocates of the IA do not bother to use the term, taking it for granted: in his analysis of *The Remains of the Day*, for instance, Phelan tells his readers that when he uses "the author," this means the IA of the text, and that he will use "the flesh and blood author" to refer to RA (49). Since it is obvious to the reader when a critic is speculating about an author's rhetorical intent (as in "x wants the reader to recognize that the narrator is fooling himself") and when he is referring to objectively verifiable facts about this author ("x's sentences average 350 words"), the use of "implied" is largely redundant. It would not make any difference for the reader if she skipped Phelan's defense of the IA and read his analysis of *The Remains of the Day* believing that "Ishiguro" refers to the artistic

goals of a real person. (This may very well be what Phelan has in mind, since he seems to believe in a rather thin version of the IA.)

Whether the obvious difference between the inferred and the objectively observable aspects of an author's performance merits a theoretical distinction between IA and RA is a rather byzantine question. The concept of the IA is far more interesting for the debates it has generated than for the difference it has made in the practice of criticism. According to legend, when Byzantium was attacked by the Turks, its leaders were busy discussing the sex of the angels. Let's hope that while we are enjoying debating the IA, our narratological Byzantium will not fall to a new theory that will plunge the whole discipline into oblivion.

Let me conclude this discussion with an argument borrowed from the incisive literary of mind of Jorge Luis Borges. In "Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*," Borges satirizes the efforts of a fictional early twentieth-century French author who devotes his life to an absurd project:

> Pierre Menard did not want to compose *another Quixote*, which is surely easy enough —
> he wanted to compose *the Quixote*. Nor, surely, need one be obliged to note that his goal
> was never a mechanical transcription of the original; he had no intention of copying it.
> His admirable ambition was to produce a number of pages which coincided — word for
> word and line for line — with those of Miguel de Cervantes.   (91; italics original)

At first Menard considers a simple method: becoming Cervantes by learning Spanish, returning to Catholicism, fighting the Moors, etc. But he soon realizes that this would be a cheap solution: "Being, somehow, Cervantes, and arriving thereby at the *Quixote* — that looked to Menard less challenging (and thereby less interesting) than continuing to be Pierre Menard and coming to the *Quixote through the experience of Pierre Menard*" (Borges 91). Borges tells us that the meaning of the *Quixote*, when produced by Menard, is significantly different from the meaning of the original text: for instance, when Cervantes writes "truth, whose mother is history," this is "mere rhetorical praise of history"; but when Menard writes the same words, "the idea is staggering. Menard, a contemporary of William James, defines history not as delving into reality but as the very fount of reality. Historical truth, for Menard, is not 'what happened'; it is 'what *we believe* happened'" (94). The overall ironic tone of the story lets one suspect that Borges is satirizing interpretations of literature that grant exaggerated importance to the historical person of the author. Still, the same words written in 1600 and in the twentieth century do not have the same resonance, because they are uttered in different contexts. Under the influence of the work of David Herman, narratology has recently become much more aware of the *situated* nature of acts of narration. It is precisely its historical context that makes Menard's

literary speech act different from Cervantes'. Rather than interpreting "Menard" as a satire of a mode of reading overly concerned with the person of RA, I propose to read it as a demonstration *ad absurdum* of the limitations of an approach that attributes all meaning to IA. Cervantes' and Menard's *Quixotes* obviously have the same IA, since they consist of the same words; if indeed they differ in meaning (or maybe in significance), as Borges convinces me they do, then RA must be brought into the equation. This anti-IA reading was certainly not intended by the historical Borges, since "Menard" was published in 1941, while Booth's implied author was born in 1961. Should I legitimate it by attributing it to an IA? I don't know what Borges would have thought of Booth's brainchild, but he would have loved the paradox of an IA arguing against the usefulness of its own existence.

Notes

[1] Dorrit Cohn (*Distinction*, chapter 8) argues that the nameless, faceless third-person narrator of Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice* expresses views that are not representative of the author, thereby suggesting that unreliability is not limited to first-person narration. She observes, however, that the narrator's penchant for dispensing comments, judgments and nuggets of conventional general wisdom give him a clearly defined personality. The possibility of unreliable narration is more a matter of narratorial individuation than of first- vs. third-person status; yet individuation is much stronger in first-person narration, and cases like *Death in Venice* are at best borderline phenomena.

[2] Note that IA/RA dissociations in the case of pseudonyms is a particularly thorny matter for the defenders of the concept of IA: nowadays everybody knows that George Sand and George Eliot were women, so it makes little sense anymore to postulate a male IA for these writers, as does Nelles (26). This example suggests that the concept of the IA, if it is to be maintained, is not an invariant feature of the text, as is RA, but a reader construct highly dependent on contextual features.

[3] Chatman's designation of narrator and narratee as optional does not stem from an adherence to the "no-narrator theory of fiction" promoted by Ann Banfield but from his seeing no point in assigning a global narrator to polyvocal texts such as epistolary novels. Paradoxically, he does postulate a narrator for film even in the absence of voiced-over narration.

[4] A question raised by Chatman's schema of narrative communication is whether the concept of IA is also valid for nonfictional narrative, where the author is the same person as the narrator. Since I am not an IA advocate myself I cannot really answer this question, but I would imagine that in the case of non-literary nonfictional narrative, such as conversational storytelling or historiography, IA

would not be necessary because the text is a much more direct expression of the beliefs of the author. On the other hand, when a nonfictional text is read as literature — as is the case with many autobiographies — then an IA might be postulated. Since the distinction between literary and non-literary texts is much fuzzier than the distinction between fiction and nonfiction, this would make the inclusion of an IA extremely subjective.

[5] Whether narrators are necessarily individuals is a matter of debate. I personally regard invisible heterodiegetic narrators as logical placeholders rather than as embodied human beings. They may have some opinions, but they lack the kind of physical features that would situate them in a particular context and individuate them as members of the fictional world. The same holds of narratees; in the vast majority of cases, the narrator's utterance is addressed to nobody in particular, not even to an audience of readers, because the narrator's discourse does not reproduce a type of "natural" (=nonfictional) communication.

[6] Only the Voltaire example comes from Richardson.

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