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Implied Author, Authorial Audience, and Context: Form and History in Neo-Aristotelian Rhetorical Theory¹

Neo-Aristotelian rhetorical theory has been mainly developed by the second and third generations of the Chicago School of criticism. It is widely believed that all three generations of the neo-Aristotelians share a concentration on textual form and a preclusion of the historical context of creation despite the fact that the first generation is concerned with poetics (i.e., the text) while the latter two, by contrast, with rhetoric (i.e., author-audience communication). As far as the critical practice of the three generations is concerned, this belief is well grounded, since no matter whether the concern is the poetic or the rhetorical, neo-Aristotelian critics in general have consciously precluded consideration of the historical context of creation (see Shen, “Neo-Aristotelian”). However, the picture is quite different when we explore the theoretical potential itself. If we examine carefully the relation between the theory of the first generation and that of the latter two and come to grips with the central rhetorical concepts of the “implied author” and the “authorial audience” (“implied reader”), we may discover that the theory of the latter two generations differs essentially from that of the first in that this later theory, in fact, has an “unseen” or unacknowledged contextual requirement, implicitly calling for the consideration of the historical context of literary production and reception.

I will start with a defense of the rhetorical concept of the “implied author” against recent attacks. Based on the defense, I will reveal the implicit contextual requirement

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of this concept and the essential difference of the latter two generations of the neo-Aristotelians from the first in terms of the relation among author, textual structure, audience, and context. Then I will proceed to discuss the contextual requirement of the rhetorical concept of the “authorial audience” and show that some historicized challenges to the rhetorical approach can be viewed as realizations of the implicit rhetorical call for paying attention to the context of literary creation and reception.

Implied Author: Writer of the Text

Neo-Aristotelian rhetorical theory was pioneered by Wayne C. Booth, who, in *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961), put forward the key rhetorical concept of the “implied author” (IA), which has aroused heated critical debate for the past several decades. In 2011, *Style* devoted a whole issue—entitled “Implied Author: Back from the Grave or Simply Dead Again”—to this concept and presented arguments for and against the implied author. The guest editor, Brian Richardson, observes in his introduction to this issue, “Most new concepts in narrative theory either wind up gradually incorporated or quietly ignored; the debate over the implied author, however, has become rather entrenched” (1). As I argued in my paper appearing in this special issue, the entrenchment is to a large extent to be attributed to the misunderstanding of the referent of the “implied author,” resulting primarily from the misinterpretation of Booth’s metaphorical expression in various forms that the real author “creates” the implied author. When putting forward the concept of the “implied author,” Booth writes:

To some novelists it has seemed, indeed, that they were *discovering or creating* themselves as they wrote. As Jessamyn West says, it is sometimes “only by writing the story that the novelist can *discover*—not his story—but *its writer* [the novelist himself in the writing process], *the official scribe*, so to speak, for that narrative.”⁷ Whether we call this *implied author* an “*official scribe*,” or adopt the term recently revived by Kathleen Tillotson—the author’s “second self”⁸—it is clear that the picture the reader gets of this presence is one of the author’s most important effects. However impersonal he [the novelist himself in the writing process] may try to be his reader will inevitably construct a picture of *the official scribe who writes in this manner*. . . . His different works will imply different versions, different ideal combinations of norms. Just as one’s personal letters imply different versions of oneself, depending on the differing relationships with each correspondent and the purpose of each letter, so *the writer sets himself out with a different air* depending on the needs of particular works. (*Rhetoric* 71; my emphasis)

In note 7 of the above quotation, Booth writes, “Miss West continues: ‘Writing is a way of [the writer’s] playing parts, of trying on masks, or assuming roles, not for fun but out of desperate need, not for the self’s sake but for the writing’s sake’” (71). And in note 8, Booth quotes Tillotson’s words in her inaugural lecture at the University of

London: “Writing on George Eliot in 1877, Dowden said that the form that most persists in the mind after reading her novels is not any of the characters, but ‘one who, if not the real George Eliot, is *that second self who writes her books*, and lives and speaks through them.’ The ‘second self,’ he goes on, is ‘more substantial than any mere human personality’ and has ‘fewer reserves’; while ‘behind it, lurks well pleased the veritable *historical self secure from impertinent observation and criticism*” (71; my emphasis). It is beyond doubt that the “historical self” or the so-called “real author” (RA) is “secure from impertinent observation and criticism” for no other reason than that she or he is outside the writing process—not the writer of the text. The writer of the text, in fact, is none other than the “implied author”—“the official scribe who writes in this manner” or “the writer [who] sets himself out with a different air” or the “second self who writes” the text through “playing parts,” “trying on masks, or assuming roles.” The difference between the “implied author” (second self) and the “real author” (first self) is the difference between the person assuming a certain air or a particular stance *when writing* the text and the same person in daily life *out of* the writing process. Since in the writing process, the “writer” may enter into a state of mind quite different from that in everyday life, the writer seems to be “creating” himself or herself when writing. Notice that Booth puts “creating” on a par with “discovering” (“discovering or creating themselves”)—it is in fact a matter of finding oneself in a particular state of mind when writing or a matter of the writing process leading one into a particular state of mind. Interestingly, in his more recent essay “Resurrection of the Implied Author,” Booth calls the implied author “the created self who has created the work” (86)—through writing the text in a particular manner, the implied author becomes a new self (wearing a certain mask) and it is the role-playing implied author who has created the text in this process.

As we know, communication involves both encoding and decoding. The “implied author” writes/encodes the text, and all the textual choices made by the implied author imply his or her image for readers to infer in the decoding process:

However impersonal he may try to be his reader will inevitably construct a picture of *the official scribe who writes in this manner*. . . . [*H*]is *different works will imply different versions*, different ideal combinations of norms. . . . The “implied author” [in the writing process] chooses, consciously or unconsciously, what we read; we infer him [in the decoding process from all the textual choices he has made] as an ideal, literary, created version of the real man [in daily life]; he is *the sum of his own choices* [made when writing the text]. (*Rhetoric* 71–75; my emphasis)

It is clear that, in Booth’s own formulation, the “implied author” is both the “author” (writer) of the text and the authorial image “implied” by the text (by “the sum of his own choices”) for the reader to infer. This view of the implied author has remained unchanged in Booth’s career (see Shen, “What”).

When Booth advanced the concept of the implied author in the mid-twentieth century, the academic climate was marked by the reign of formalism and the exclu-

sion of the author from critical consideration due to the “intentional fallacy” argument and the privileging of the artistic ideal of impersonality. Indeed, among other purposes, Booth put forward the “implied author” in order to enable rhetorical critics to talk about author-audience communication instead of just focusing on the text. But in that formalist climate, he talked, or was compelled to talk, much more about the decoding process in *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, by which the reader infers the implied author’s image from the text as “a completed artistic whole” (74), rather than from biographical or historical materials. In his recent “Resurrection of the Implied Author” (2005), however, Booth comments much more on the implied author’s role-playing in the encoding process, which he frequently compares to role-playing in daily life (e.g., the teacher teaching in the classroom [analogous to the IA in the writing process] versus the same person outside the classroom; or the waiter serving in the restaurant versus the same person outside the restaurant). He also offers concrete examples to clarify the picture. When talking about Robert Frost’s “A Time to Talk,” for instance, Booth describes the implied author as a man “working hard—probably for hours or days—to achieve effective rhythms. . . . He’s also working hard with meter and line length, so that he can surprise us with the only short line, the final one” (“Resurrection” 80). By contrast, the real author (the “FBP Frost”) is the everyday Frost as “portrayed in his biographies. . . . The first and most influential of the negative exposures called him ‘an appalling man, petty, vindictive, a dreadful husband and parent . . .’” (ibid.).

As I analyzed in detail in my paper published in that special issue of *Style*, Booth’s frequent metaphorical use, in various forms, of the term “create” (the real author “creating” the implied author), coupled with his putting much more emphasis on the decoding process in his earlier work, has unwittingly formed an almost unavoidable pitfall for narrative theorists, who take it that the writer of the text is the “real author,” who, when writing, *literally* creates the “implied author,” and that the “implied author” forms a textual authorial image superior to that of the “real author” who has written the text. This picture of the implied author both deprives the “implied author” of the function of writing the text and leads to theoretical contradiction, which is attributed to Booth’s formulation and which underlies various polemics against the Boothian concept. Summarizing the debate over the concept in the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory* entry for “Implied Author,” Ansgar Nünning states, “Most objections raised against the implied author concern potential theoretical contradictions in Booth’s formulation of the concept. For example, it seems to be a contradiction in terms to define the implied author as the structure of the text’s norms and thus to conflate it with the text as a whole, and at the same time cast it in the role of the addresser in the communication model of narrative” (240). My analysis of Booth’s formulations indicates that the contradiction is not in Booth’s own theory, which is a perfectly logical one: the implied author is the role-playing person making all the textual choices, and the real author is the same person in daily life out of the writing process (for a detailed discussion, see Shen, “What”).

Arguing against the concept of the implied author in the recent special issue of *Style* are four essays, which are invariably rooted in the misconception that in Booth’s view, the implied author is not the writer of the text. In the essay “The Implied Au-

thor: A Secular Excommunication,” Luc Herman and Bart Vervaeck take it that “the implied author is not an author” (14) but an authorial image constructed by the actual reader, and different readers will come up with diversified images of the implied author. They start their discussion by asking, “What does the implied author of *Ulysses* really look like? What are his or her salient characteristics? And so how can we discover these traits?” Notice that even the sex of the implied author of *Ulysses* is regarded as indeterminable (“his or her”). Now, if the “implied author” of *Ulysses* were not the writer of the text but were in the shape of different authorial images constructed by different readers, we would indeed be hard put to answer the questions Herman and Vervaeck have raised. But since the implied author is none other than the role-playing writer of the text, the answer is not far to seek: the implied author of *Ulysses* is the male James Joyce in the process of writing the text in a certain manner (encoding), and “the sum of his own [textual] choices” implies *his* image for the reader to infer (decoding); consequently, we need to examine the text thoroughly and try to come to a more or less adequate understanding of the textual norms in order to discover the implied author’s characteristics (the particular stance, beliefs, attitudes, etc., assumed by the role-playing James Joyce when writing the text). Given that *Ulysses* is such a difficult modernist text, individual readers’ efforts to infer the image of the implied author may not be very successful, and the results of the inferences may diverge.

It should be noted that Booth was consistently against equating the implied author with the images constructed by actual readers, since actual readers may distort the image of the implied author in various ways:

Another chorus, much smaller, intrudes now to express annoyance at my having dodged the problem of the difference between the implied author and the actual text. How can I go on talking as if the *actual person implied by the text* is the same as the text itself? Well, that’s because I still don’t think there *is* [emphasis original] a real difference, at any moment of reading of the kind Booth₁ has attempted. It is only when we start thinking (Booth₂) about different time frames and cultural contrasts that *we create versions of the IA that the* [implied] *author would never have dreamt of as he or she created the text*. Of course the IA I recreated by reading the text *now* [emphasis original] is not identical with the IA I would have recreated 40 or 20 years ago. But my claim is that what I see as the actual text implies, in every stroke as I read now, *the choices I believe were made by the* [implied] *author then, which in turn imply the chooser*. . . . (I resist offering examples of the appalling flood of current *distortions of texts by readers* who “know” in advance what they are going to find in them—and therefore find it, *regardless of what the IA wanted them to find*.) (Booth, “Resurrection” 86; my emphases, except where noted)

In Booth’s view, the implied author’s image is one “implied by the text” for readers to infer, an image “the IA wanted them to find,” and different readers may infer the image of the IA with different degrees of accuracy or “distortion.” Interestingly, Booth uses the epithet “actual” to modify the implied author (“the actual person implied by

the text”). But this is not surprising since the implied author is none other than the “actual” writer of the text.

In the essay “Six Ways Not to Save the Implied Author,” Tom Kindt and Hans-Harald Müller summarize three dominant ways of modeling the implied author: (1) the implied author as a phenomenon of reception, (2) the implied author as a participant in communication, and (3) the implied author as a postulated subject behind the text (68–73). All three assumptions are based on the misconception that Booth’s implied author is not the writer of the text. I have dealt with the first assumption in my discussion of Herman and Vervaeck’s essay. As regards the second assumption, Kindt and Müller observe, “[T]he underlying idea here is that the communicative tasks in literature are shared between several parties; William Nelles has expressed this division pointedly when he says that ‘the historical author writes . . . ; the implied author means . . . ; the narrator speaks’” (Nelles 22, Kindt and Müller 68). In Booth’s own formulation, however, the historical author is outside the writing process, and the implied author both “writes” and “means”—means by what he or she writes. Since in their view, the implied author is not the writer of the text, Kindt and Müller argue that the implied author is only “a semantic relation” (69). More specifically, while “the author and narrator are to be understood as (fictive) sources of utterances,” the implied author, as a semantic relation, “should be seen not as the source of an utterance but as a placeholder for (aspects of) its meaning” (Kindt and Müller 68–69). No matter whether the implied author is viewed as “a semantic relation” or as “a postulated subject behind the text,” the view misses the real referent of the implied author—the role-playing writer (author) of the text and the image of this actual writer as implied by the text.

In the essay “Revisiting the Implied Author Yet Again: Why (Still) Bother?” Maria Stefanescu argues against the concept of the implied author and subscribes to David Herman’s view of intentionality as expressed in his essay “Narrative Theory and the Intentional Stance,” a view Stefanescu takes to be a good replacement of the useless “implied author” and a suitable alternative understanding of intentionality. In the ending paragraph of that essay, Herman writes:

These considerations likewise throw light on rhetorical theorists’ use of the implied author as a bulwark against anti-intentionalism. On the one hand, as Booth recognized, divorcing textual structures from the intentional stance cuts against the grain of humans’ basic strategies for meaning-making, their evolved disposition to read for intentions, so vividly demonstrated at Runamo. But on the other hand, it is not therefore necessary to postulate an intermediary, intention-filled agent midway between actual author [the writer of the text] and textual structures to make space for intentionality in stories. (257)

It is clear that what Herman argues against is not Booth’s “implied author,” who is none other than Herman’s “actual author” in the sense of being the writer of the text. What Herman wants to get rid of is a misconceived and mystified “implied author”—a different entity created by the writer of the text and existing mysteriously in be-

tween the writer and the text. Once we come into view of the true referent of Booth's "implied author"—the role-playing writer and the image of this writer (including his or her creative purposes) as implied by the text for readers to infer—we will see that the implied author is indispensable to the discussion of intentionality in narrative communication.

The remaining essay in *Style* arguing against the implied author is Marie-Laure Ryan's "Meaning, Intent, and the Implied Author." Ryan challenges Seymour Chatman's explication of the implied author:

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. (Ryan 35)

Chatman's view is at once highly representative and highly influential, taken by many as an accurate explication of what Booth means by the "implied author." But in fact, Booth's view is essentially different—the IA is none other than the role-playing writer of the text and the RA is the same person in daily life outside the writing process. In Booth's view, all words in the text "can be"—or rather can *only* be—"attributed to IA": the words are the IA's "own choices" made in the writing process. Then another question arises: Why not just have the term "author"? What is the point of having the "implied author" in today's critical context?²

The necessity for having the "implied author" today arises, to a certain extent, from the ambiguity of the term "author." Although any dictionary will define the "author" as the writer of a book or an article, the term can cover the whole span of the person's life and writing career:

1. When the author was very young, she . . . (or: When the author was dying, she . . .)
2. She is the author of ten books and fifty essays.

By contrast, the term "implied author" refers exclusively to the person in the process of writing a specific text in a particular manner, which effectively distinguishes this "author" of this text from the same person in daily life (the so-called "real author"), as well as from the same person in the process of writing another text (another "implied author"). It should be noted that the term "real author" is potentially misleading, since the person outside the writing process is referred to as "author." To avoid ambiguity or misconception, it is better to use "FBP" plus the person's name,³ as in the distinction between "the implied author of *Ulysses*" and "the FBP James Joyce." The FBP Joyce involves the experiences of Joyce in daily life, but the implied author of *Ulysses* is Joyce in the process of writing this novel in a particular manner, as well as the authorial image implied by the sum of his textual choices in this novel. While our knowledge about the FBP Joyce comes from biographical and historical materials,

our knowledge about the implied author of *Ulysses* comes from the novel itself. In her *Style* essay calling for the discarding of the implied author, Ryan observes:

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 Marllarmé 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 Marllarmé.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. (42)

As discussed above, Ryan's argument against the IA is based on the misconception that the IA is not the writer of the text, and in that light she takes the IA to be "sometimes dispensable." Once we get to know that Booth's IA is none other than the role-playing writer of a text, the picture becomes consistent and valid. Ryan's comment on the literary creation of Rimbaud, Flaubert, or Marllarmé points to the fact that in writing a literary text, the role-playing writer (the IA, the second self) may assume a stance different from that which the FBP assumes in daily life (the historical person, the first self). Even in the case of Voltaire, in writing a literary text, the IA may have engaged in some kind of role-playing, assuming a stance not entirely the same as that of the FBP in daily life. Ryan's "author" refers to the historical person, and her last sentence in the above quotation opens the door to Booth's and my understanding of the IA but in a different direction: the less the role-playing of the IA in the writing process, the more the IA maintains the characteristics of the "author" (the historical person) in making the textual choices.

Sometimes, the FBP outside the writing process may talk about the design of a particular text written by the IA, but if the textual design does not accord with what the FBP says, we have to respect the IA's own choices and take the case as a gap between what the IA actually wrote and what the FBP said. For example, the FBP Langston Hughes once talked about the short story "On the Road" (1952) as "not carefully planned" and stated that when writing the text, all he [the IA, his second self] had in mind "was cold, hunger, a strange town at night . . ." (quoted in Emanuel 93–94). But a careful examination of the implied Hugh's textual choices in "On the Road" enables us to see that the text, in fact, is elaborately wrought, carefully patterned, and highly symbolic.⁴

Interestingly, Ryan's observation implicitly points to the advantage of having the "implied author" in more than one way. Ryan's "author" refers primarily, if not exclusively, to the person in daily life. When a person like Marllarmé adopts a stance in literary creation drastically different from the one he or she adopts in daily life, Ryan can only leave the "author" aside and assume "a purely textualist attitude." This has two consequences. First, we can no longer talk about author-audience communica-

tion. Second, in pitting the “texts” against the “author,” the “author” is relegated to the sphere outside the creation of the texts. In a case like Marllarmé, whose literary creation notably deviates from the FBP, we lose sight of the “author,” as if the texts were autonomous objects. While in Ryan’s theory, “authors [the historical persons] reveal themselves in their texts to variable degrees,” in Booth’s theory, any implied author, as the role-playing writer of a text, equally reveals himself or herself in the text—the textual choices always imply the image of its writer. And we can discuss variable degrees of distance between the image of an implied author of a text and that of the historical person, depending on the degree of role-playing of the implied author in the writing process. Moreover, in Ryan’s theory, there is no way to distinguish Marllarmé on the occasion of writing one poem from Marllarmé on the occasion of writing another poem—that is why she mentions Marllarmé’s poetry or “Rimbaud’s poetry” as a whole. But very often, in different texts bearing the same person’s name, we find drastically different authorial stances. Take Kate Chopin, for an example: contemporary critics tend to hold an overall image of Chopin as an early feminist writer, but the gender stance in her different works varies drastically. Chopin’s “Wiser than a God” (1889) is about how a girl from a poor family turns down a marriage proposal by a young man from a rich family and becomes a famous pianist by means of her talent and effort. The implied Chopin of this narrative unequivocally advocates a woman’s getting free of the bondage of marriage and family to fully develop herself. By contrast, Chopin’s “Regret” (1894) directs irony at a fifty-year-old female planter who has remained single. Through the title “Regret” and the plot development towards the female protagonist’s deepest regret at not having children, the implied Chopin of this narrative clearly advocates a woman’s married life and motherhood. Given such differences in authorial stance among the narratives bearing the same person’s name, it is both desirable and necessary to distinguish the implied author of one narrative from that of another. And all the implied authors of different texts bearing the same person’s name constitute what Booth calls the “career author” (Booth, *Critical* 270–71). The “career author” differs from the overall image of the person in the sense that “no matter how many tales he tells, an immense proportion of what he believed, did, or said [in daily life] will never appear in his fictions” (Booth, *Company* 150). If we follow Booth’s rhetorical theory, we can gain a very clear picture. In the case of Kate Chopin, we can conveniently distinguish among:

- a) the implied Chopin of “Wiser than a God” (the role-playing Chopin in the process of writing this specific text, and the image of this Chopin as implied by all her textual choices in this narrative);
 - b) the implied Chopin of “Regret” (the role-playing Chopin in the process of writing this specific text, and the image of this Chopin as implied by all her textual choices in this narrative);
 - c) the career Chopin (formed by all the implied authors of all her works; and since the implied authors’ stances may vary from text to text, the “career author” may not have a coherent set of norms);
 - d) the FBP Chopin (Chopin in daily life, outside the process of literary creation);
- and

- e) Kate Chopin as a whole person (the combination of the FBP Chopin over the span of her life and the career Chopin).

It is significant that, although Booth's "implied author" has a textual emphasis, it forms a key element in Booth's revision of R. S. Crane's text-oriented position. While Booth aims at distinguishing the role-playing writer of a text from the same person in daily life and in writing other texts, Crane is concerned with the isolation of the text from its very writer. Crane's method is

one which depends on the analytical isolation of works of art, as finished products, from the circumstances and processes of their origin. It is better fitted to explain those effects which would be specifically *the same in any other work*, of whatever date, that was constructed in accordance with the same combination of artistic principles than those effects which must be attributed to the fact that the work was produced by a given artist. (Crane 92; my emphasis)

Compare the following observation by Booth:

Just as one's personal letters imply different versions of oneself, depending on the differing relationships with each correspondent and the purpose of each letter, so the writer [the implied author] sets himself out with a different air depending on the needs of particular works. (*Rhetoric* 71)

In contrast with Crane's emphasis on the same effects "in any other work," Booth's emphasis is on the contrast among the different textual norms created by the different IAs for different rhetorical purposes. While in Crane's poetic theory, we lose sight of the writer and only have in view a timeless and autonomous text, in Booth's rhetorical theory, it is the role-playing writer who forms the focus of attention—the IA makes his or her textual choices in a particular manner according to his or her specific rhetorical purposes and overall textual design.

Since Booth's distinction between the IA (whose image is text-based) and the FBP (whose image is biography-based) is only a matter of the same person in the process of writing and in daily life, we can consider both the difference and the connection between them. If the IA is marked by heavy role-playing or his or her writing is not influenced by what happened to the FBP as in the case of Marllarmé, we do not need to consider biographical information; but if the IA's literary writing is influenced by the FBP's experiences in daily life, we need to consider biography in order to understand the IA's textual choices better. There are various forms of similarity or connection between the IA and the FBP. For instance, the IA (second self) may model characters' experiences on those of the FBP (the first self). As revealed by Ralph W. Rader's investigations ("Exodus" and "Logic"), the implied Joyce of *Ulysses* has modeled some experiences of characters in the novel on those of the FBP Joyce. In such cases, getting to know the FBP's relevant experiences through biographical materials may shed light on the IA's rhetorical purposes and textual choices. Even if the IA does

not base the creation of characters on the FBP, the latter's experiences may still affect the former's rhetorical purposes and textual choices. For instance, in the case of Stephen Crane, the implied author's explicit satire against romanticized heroics in "War is Kind" (1899) and more implicit satire in "An Episode of War" (in print not earlier than 1899) have much to do with the FBP Crane's going to the front to report on the Greco-Turkish War and the Spanish-American War (see Shen, "Overall" 153–65). In such cases, getting to know the relevant experiences of the FBP enables us to understand better the IA's creation of the textual norms. In fact, Booth himself sometimes sees continuity between the two entities although he does not call attention to it (see, for example, his discussion of Henry James in "The Ethics of Forms" and of Rabelais in *The Company We Keep*).

However, I do not mean to suggest that, when putting forward the concept of the "implied author," Booth had in mind both a textual emphasis and a historical requirement. As we know, the first generation of the Chicago School critics consciously ruled out sociohistorical context as a reaction against the long-term prevalent and privileged historical approach to literature. Although the Chicago School and the contemporary New Criticism were antagonistic to each other, they shared the preclusion of the consideration of historical context (see Shen, "Neo-Aristotelian"). Booth followed this ahistorical tradition of the Chicago School when writing *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, in whose preface he unequivocally claims that "in pursuing the author's means of controlling his reader I have arbitrarily isolated technique from all of the social and psychological forces that affect authors and readers." And when discussing the concept of the "implied author," he focuses on cases that highlight the difference between the IA and the FBP, treating the latter as irrelevant to literary interpretation. But as analyzed above, in shifting from textual poetics to author-audience rhetoric, Booth significantly revised the relation between the author, text, and reader. In contrast with the first generation of the Chicago School's treatment of textual effects as "authorless" ("the same in any other work"), autonomous, and timeless ("of whatever date"), Booth emphasized the rhetorical purposes and overall textual design of the IA of a given text, who has in mind a particular type of audience when making the textual choices for producing specific rhetorical effects. Since the IA writes within a historical context and his or her textual choices may be influenced by historical factors and since the type of audience the IA has in mind is one with knowledge of the relevant historical factors (see the following section), Booth's shifting from poetics to rhetoric enabled the theory to take on a contextualizing potential. Moreover, since the IA's textual choices may be modeled on or affected by the FBP's experiences, to gain an adequate understanding of the IA's rhetorical purpose and overall textual design, it is necessary to take account of the relevant experiences of the FBP as discussed above. In such cases, rhetorical theory's requirement for a correct understanding of the IA's rhetorical purposes and textual norms involves an implicit requirement of taking account of the relevant contextual factors and the relevant experiences of the FBP.

As analyzed above, primarily due to Booth's metaphorical expression that the real author creates the implied author, there has arisen the widely-held misconception that the "implied author" is literally created by the "real author" or "historical author" who wrote the text (see Shen, "What"). So we have the division of labor that

“the historical author writes . . . ; the implied author means . . . ; the narrator speaks.” In this division of labor, the “implied author” tends to be confined within the text, even reduced to a mere “semantic relation.” And the epithet “implied” is taken to be an antonym of “historical,” “real,” or “actual,” thus depriving the “implied author” of any historicizing potential. This fundamental decontextualization of the IA has also played a role in the decontextualization of its counterpart “implied reader”/“authorial audience,” another key rhetorical concept that, in fact, also requires the consideration of the relevant historical context.

Authorial Audience: Contextual Requirement

In the poetic theory of the first generation of the neo-Aristotelians as represented by Crane, we not only lose sight of the particularity of the writer and only see a timeless and autonomous text, but also lose sight of the particularity of the reader. Indeed, to Crane and Sacks, “a twentieth-century reader, taking *Tom Jones* from a drugstore rack, could find himself in immediate contact with its moving aesthetic force, that is to say, with the essential meaning and value of the novel” (Rader, “*Tom Jones*” 49). The case is essentially different with the rhetorical theory of the second and third generations of the neo-Aristotelians as represented by Booth, James Phelan, and Peter J. Rabinowitz. As quoted above, in Booth’s view, the implied author of a given text “sets himself out with a different air” “depending on” the relationship with the particular type of reader he has in mind, and Booth designates this particular type of reader as the “implied reader.” Booth quotes Montgomery Belgion’s words to support his rhetorical position: “Only when the moral beliefs of the reader tally exactly with those on which a story is based will the reader have the whole of the emotion which it is potentially able to produce in him” (Booth, *Rhetoric* 118). In the afterword to the second edition of *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (422–24), Booth subscribes to Rabinowitz’s distinction among “authorial audience” (the IA’s ideal or hypothetical audience, resembling Booth’s “implied reader”), “narrative audience” (corresponding to the narrator, believing that the events of the story are real), and the flesh-and-blood “actual audience” (Rabinowitz, “Truth” 126–28). Rabinowitz defines the “authorial audience” as unequivocally contextualized:

[T]he author of a novel designs his work rhetorically for a specific hypothetical audience. Like a philosopher, historian, or journalist, he cannot write without making certain assumptions about his readers’ beliefs, knowledge, and familiarity with conventions. His artistic choices are based upon these assumptions, conscious or unconscious, and to a certain extent, his artistic success will depend on their accuracy. Demby’s *The Catacombs*, for instance, takes place during the early sixties, and the novel achieves its sense of impending doom only if the reader knows that John F. Kennedy will be assassinated when the events of the novel reach 22 November 1963. Had Demby assumed that his audience would be ignorant of this historical event,

he would have had to rewrite his book accordingly. Since the structure of a novel is designed for the author's hypothetical audience (which I call the *authorial audience*), we must, as we read, come to share, in some measure, the characteristics of this audience if we are to understand the text. ("Truth" 126; emphasis original)

In *Before Reading*, Rabinowitz makes a more comprehensive discussion of the diversified assumptions the IA has in mind when writing the text for his or her particular type of authorial audience: "Some assumptions are historical: Flaubert assumes considerable knowledge of the revolution of 1848 in *Sentimental Education*. Some are sociological: at least one critic has argued convincingly that *The Turn of the Screw* makes proper sense only to a reader who knows something about the conduct deemed proper to governesses in the nineteenth century" (Rabinowitz, *Before* 21).

As the actual writer, the role-playing IA creates the text in history and his or her textual choices are often based on contextual information accessible to readers in that particular sociohistorical period. In such cases, the "authorial audience" ("implied reader") the IA writes to is essentially a contextualized or historicized audience. When the implied Fielding was writing *Tom Jones* in eighteenth-century England, he intended the novel for an authorial audience with the knowledge of "the latitudinarians and eighteenth-century thought" (Rader, "Tom Jones" 49). To borrow Ralph Rader's words (*Tom Jones* 50), they are Fielding's "like-minded" cotemporary audience, and when reading *Tom Jones* in twentieth- or twenty-first-century America or China, we need to take into account the relevant historical information in order to enter the position of Fielding's "like-minded" authorial audience in that socio-cultural context. Similarly, when the implied Edgar Allan Poe was writing "The Tell-Tale Heart" in nineteenth-century America, he had in mind an authorial audience well informed of the insanity debate going on in that historical context, and the historical information is indispensable for entering the authorial audience in order to perceive the ironic undercurrent centering on the narrator-protagonist's self condemnation (see Shen, "Edgar" 339-44). In such cases, unless we enter the position of the implied author's "like-minded" authorial audience in history, we cannot gain an adequate understanding of the implied author's textual choices and rhetorical purposes, and there cannot be successful communication between the implied author and us readers. Seen in this light, the consideration of the historical context in which a text was produced is not only allowed but also required by rhetorical narrative theory. However, this contextual requirement in rhetorical theory has been backgrounded, undeveloped, and very much unacknowledged by many scholars both outside and inside the rhetorical camp.

In the case of Booth, although his "implied reader," like Rabinowitz's "authorial audience," has both a textual emphasis and a contextual requirement (the IA's "like-minded" reader in history), Booth focuses on the former when discussing the concept in *The Rhetoric of Fiction*:

But the implied author of each novel is someone with whose beliefs on all subjects I must largely agree if I am to enjoy his work. Of course, the same

distinction must be made between myself as reader and the often very different self who goes about paying bills, repairing leaky faucets, and failing in generosity and wisdom. It is only as I read that I become the self whose beliefs must coincide with the [implied] author's. Regardless of my real beliefs and practices, I must subordinate my mind and heart to the book if I am to enjoy it to the full. The [implied] author creates, in short, an image of himself and another image of his [implied] reader (*Rhetoric* 137–38)

In this book published at the height of formalist criticism (1961), since Booth “ha[s] arbitrarily isolated technique from all of the social and psychological forces that affect authors and readers,” he does not consider, let alone mention, the contextual requirement that implicitly exists in his “implied reader”: if present-day readers do not have the necessary historical knowledge (such as the knowledge of the revolution of 1848 when reading *Sentimental Education*), the reader's beliefs cannot “coincide with the [implied] author's” and cannot therefore come to an adequate understanding of the textual norms created by the implied author.

In the afterword to the second edition of *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1983), Booth becomes much more open to the historicist approach, and he praises Bakhtin for his ideological and historical criticism of literary works (414–15). However, in his response to the criticism of historicists like Fredric Jameson, Booth insists on his “trans-historical” (not antihistorical) position (“Afterword” 413). Booth is talking about the nature of his rhetorical project—one concerned with uses of “rhetoric in fiction” across the history of the novel rather than a historicist project that will make historical categories such as “Victorian” and “modernist” primary. When Booth introduces Rabinowitz's “authorial audience,” he discusses two kinds of difference between the actual readers and the authorial audience. One is how a reader's reading of a text changes in the course of the reader's development, such as “the changes the years had produced in [Booth's] reading of *Anna Karenina*” (420). And the other is how different actual readers, such as male versus female readers, would come up with divergent readings of a text. But his concern with the “transhistorical” leads to the backgrounding of the historical in the “authorial audience”:

Rabinowitz's way of talking about the authorial audience underlines a complicating fact that my discussion does not make clear: the reader whom the implied author *writes* [emphasis original] to can be found as much in the text's silences as in its overt appeals. What the [implied] author felt no need to mention tells us who he thinks *we'll* be—or hopes *we'll* be. “Demby's *The Catacombs* . . . takes place during the early sixties, and the novel achieves its sense of impending doom only if the reader knows that John F. Kennedy will be assassinated when the events of the novel reach 22 November 1963.” Precisely because the novel remains silent about this fact, we can infer that members of the “authorial audience” already know it. The same thing holds for our beliefs about values: what the [implied] author feels no need to mention, of the values the story depends on, tells us who he thinks *we* are *before we start to read*. (“Afterword” 422–23; my emphases, except where noted)

Here we can see the essential similarity between Booth and Rabinowitz in terms of the historical requirement: both regard the historical knowledge of John F. Kennedy's assassination on November 22, 1963, as a prerequisite for entering the position of the authorial audience of Demby's *The Catacombs*. But instead of stressing that readers must have or gain the historical knowledge in order to enter the authorial audience (in which case the historical requirement will be foregrounded), Booth assumes that readers all know this historical event "before [they] start to read." Booth does not consider the fact that the authorial audience the IA has in mind is often situated in another historical context, and that when reading the text in a later period or in a different socio-cultural context, readers may need to gain the relevant historical information so as to enter the position of "the reader whom the implied author *writes to*." Needless to say, this is a point that Booth would wholeheartedly endorse if there were such a lack of historical knowledge in actual readers.

When Booth was writing the afterword, what he called "reader-critics" dominated the scene, and the concern with the textual techniques the implied author uses to persuade the readers was under attack. Booth took a defensive stance and stressed "the relatively stable audience postulated by the implied author—the readers the text asks us to become" (420). This stress also played a role in backgrounding the contextual requirement of the "authorial audience." Indeed, from the 1970s up to the present, many scholars have believed that "all knowledge is relative to analytical frameworks, epistemological perspectives, subject positions," and rhetorical critics have continued to see the need to argue for the point that "knowledge and understanding can be shared across frameworks, perspectives, and positions" (Phelan, *Living* 183; see also Phelan *Experiencing*). I fully subscribe to the rhetorical argument. But at the same time, we need to emphasize that readers in different sociohistorical contexts may not be able to enter the authorial audience and share reading as intended by the IA unless they have and consider the relevant historical information, or in Vera Nünning's words, unless they take "into consideration the values that were current during the period when a specific text was written" (248). This contextual requirement is inherent in "authorial audience" but has remained backgrounded and undeveloped in rhetorical theory, and has been neglected and unacknowledged by scholars outside the rhetorical field.

It should be noted that neo-Aristotelian rhetorical theory with the concepts of the "implied author" and "authorial audience" has a stronger requirement of considering the historical context of literary creation than the theories of "reader-critics." If what matter are only "analytical frameworks, epistemological perspectives, subject positions," we can ignore the IA's rhetorical purposes and thematic design in history and subject the text to present-day frameworks, perspectives, or positions. Precisely because rhetorical theory requires actual readers to find in the text "what the IA wanted them to find," we need to take into consideration the historical context in order to enter the IA's like-minded audience in history, otherwise there cannot be successful communication between the implied author and us readers.

Interestingly, some challenges to the rhetorical approach from a historical or cultural perspective implicitly and unwittingly affirm the rhetorical contextual requirement. Within the neo-Aristotelian Chicago School, Ralph Rader is a good case in

point. In his “*Tom Jones: The Form in History*,” Rader criticizes Crane, Sacks, and also Booth for failing to consider the historical context of literary creation and reception. Rader does not notice that through shifting from textual poetics to author-audience rhetoric, Booth’s theory takes on a historicizing potential that does not exist in the theory of Crane or Sacks. Rader’s historicized investigation of Fielding’s *Tom Jones* can be regarded as an explicit realization of the implicit historicizing requirement in Booth’s theory. Although Rader does not use the rhetorical concepts “implied author,” “authorial audience,” or “textual norms,” what he investigates and reveals is what the rhetorical concepts are (implicitly) concerned with: the implied Fielding wrote *Tom Jones* for an authorial audience with the knowledge of “the latitudinarians and eighteenth-century thought,” and when reading the novel in twentieth-century America, readers need to take into account the historical information to become Fielding’s “like-minded” audience in order to gain a more adequate understanding of the textual norms.

Outside the Chicago School, a good case in point is Vera Nünning’s “Unreliable Narration and the Historical Variability of Values and Norms,” which is regarded as a representative work of what Bruno Zerweck calls the “second fundamental paradigm shift, one toward greater historicity and cultural awareness” in the discussion of narratorial unreliability (151).⁵ But Nünning’s essay is in fact an affirmation of the contextual requirement in rhetorical theory. It begins with the following words:

“The history of unreliable narrators from *Gargantua* to *Lolita* is in fact full of traps for the unsuspecting reader.” This statement by Booth has certainly proved to be an accurate prediction. . . . Booth’s statement is also relevant in another respect, because the history of the reception of the individual unreliable narrators is not only a minefield for critics, but for the unsuspecting reader as well. (236)

Unwittingly adopting a rhetorical yardstick, Vera Nünning tries to reveal the various traps of interpretation—how different historical contexts affect readers’ conceptual schema and consequently distort the original meaning. It is in essence a matter of the failure of actual readers in different historical contexts to enter successfully the position of the IA’s like-minded “authorial audience.” Nünning claims that “we can at least eliminate one possible trap of interpretation by taking into consideration the values that were current during the period when a specific text was written” (248). Formulated in rhetorical terms, the claim could be: we can at least eliminate one possible trap of interpretation by trying to enter the position of the authorial audience the implied author had in mind, a reading position informed of the values that were current during the period when the implied author made the textual choices.

To conclude, as far as the theory of the first generation of the neo-Aristotelians is concerned, there is no room for the consideration of the biography of the author or the historical context of creation, since what matters is only the timeless, autonomous, and “authorless” artistic structure of the text itself. However, when it comes to the second and third generations of the neo-Aristotelians, the “rhetorical”-oriented theory with the key concepts of “implied author” and “authorial audience” (“implied

reader”) not only leaves room for the consideration of historical context, but also (at least implicitly) requires this kind of consideration. But for the various reasons discussed above, the historical requirement in rhetorical theory has been very much backgrounded, undeveloped, or blocked from view, hence unacknowledged. It is time to bring to light the historical requirement in neo-Aristotelian rhetorical theory and to perceive that it is, in essence, a theory well balanced between form and history, with at once a textual emphasis and a historical emphasis.

Endnotes

1. I am very grateful to James Phelan and an anonymous reader of *Narrative* for helpful comments on an earlier version of this paper.
2. See Shen, “What” for a discussion of the reasons underlying Booth’s advancement of the concept half a century ago.
3. In his recent essay “The Resurrection of the Implied Author,” Booth consistently uses “the FBP” (the person in daily life, outside role-playing) or the FBP plus the person’s name, instead of “the real author.”
4. See Shen, “Internal” for a detailed textual analysis; see also Phelan 127–28 for a discussion of the difference between the view of the FBP Hemingway and that of the implied Hemingway of “A Clean, Well-Lighted Place.”
5. The so-called “first paradigm shift” in the discussion of narratorial “unreliability” is from the rhetorical to the cognitive/constructivist, which is regarded by many scholars as a desirable replacement of the rhetorical with the cognitive/constructivist (see my defense of the rhetorical approach in the entry “Unreliability” of *The Living Handbook of Narratology*).

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