

On the Concept of "Implied Author"

1. According to Wayne Booth, "[the] implied author is always distinct from the 'real man' --whatever we may take him to be--who creates a superior version of himself, a 'second self,' as he creates his work" (The Rhetoric of Fiction [Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1961], 151). "As he writes," Booth argues, the author "creates not simply an ideal impersonal 'man in general' but an implied version of 'himself' that is different from the implied authors we meet in other men's works" (70 f.). Booth quotes Kathleen Tillotson, who in turn quotes Dowden's comments on George Eliot as follows: what persists in the mind after reading one of 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, n. 8). Elsewhere Booth refers to "the core of norms and choices which I am calling the implied author" (74); and he states, "the 'implied author' chooses, consciously or unconsciously, what we read; we infer him as an ideal, literary, created version of the real man; he is the sum of his own choices" (74 f.).

2. This idea of the "implied author" strikes me as potentially fruitful in several different directions--or for several reasons. First of all and fundamentally, taking seriously the idea of the "implied author" enables one to avoid "the intentional fallacy" in any and all interpretative situations. (By "the intentional fallacy" I understand the fallacy of inferring from the fact that nothing that expresses meaning comes into existence by

accident, or without a plan or design or "intention," that the design or intention in the meaner's mind is a standard for determining what is, in fact, meant.) But, beyond that, one could say, it seems to me, that the "distinction between author and implied author" (75), or between the "real man" and the "second self," illumines--because it precisely parallels--the distinction between the actual Jesus who is the object of the old quest and the Jesus who is the object of a truly new quest of the historical Jesus. The Jesus whom the new quest properly seeks is the "implied author" of the sayings, etc., that can be reliably identified as belonging to the oldest layer of the Synoptic tradition. Consider the statement of Wimsatt and Beardsley in "The ^{Intentional}~~International~~ Fallacy": "We ought to impute the thoughts, the attitudes of the poem immediately to the dramatic speaker, and if to the author at all, only by a biographical act of inference." The Jesus of a new quest is "the dramatic speaker" of the earliest Synoptic materials.

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