

Implied Reader

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Created: 27. January 2013 Revised: 7. April 2014

1 Definition

The term “Implied reader,” coined by Booth ([1961] 1983) as a counterpart of the implied author (Schmid → Implied Author [1]), designates the image of the recipient that the author had while writing or, more accurately, the author’s image of the recipient that is fixed and objectified in the text by specific indexical signs.

Alternative terms are Prince’s (1973: 180) “lecteur virtuel” and Schmid’s ([1973] 1986: 23–25) “abstrakter Leser.”

2 Explication

The implied reader is a function of the work, even though it is not represented in the work. An “intended reader” (in the terminology of Link 1976: 28 and of Grimm 1977: 38–39), who is not fixed in the text but exists merely in the imagination of the author and who can be reconstructed only with the latter’s statements or extra-textual information, does not form a part of the work. Such a reader belongs exclusively to the sphere of the real author, in whose imagination he or she exists.

The relationship between implied author and implied reader is not a symmetrical one, for there is no symmetry between the ways in which the two implied entities are formed. The implied reader is ultimately one of the attributes of the concrete reader’s reconstructed implied author. It follows that the implied reader is no less dependent on the reader’s individual acts of reading, understanding, and reconstructing than the implied author whose attribute it is (Schmid 2010: 51–52).

3 Aspects of the Concept and History of its Study

3.1 Implied Reader as Presumed Addressee and Ideal Recipient

Two manifestations of the reconstructed implied reader must be distinguished on

the basis of the functions they can be thought to have (cf. Schmid 1974: 407; Lintvelt [1981] 1989: 18).

First, the implied reader can function as a *presumed addressee* to whom the work is directed and whose linguistic codes, ideological norms, and aesthetic ideas must be taken into account if the work is to be understood. In this function, the implied reader is the bearer of the codes and norms presumed in the readership. The addressee of Dostoevskij's later novels, e.g., is conceptualized as a reader who can not only read Russian and who knows how to read a novel, but who also has a command of all the language's registers, possesses a developed sense for the stylistic expression of evaluative positions, has at his or her disposal a good knowledge of Russian literature and a high level of intertextual competence, knows the dominant philosophical positions of the century, has an overview of the history of ideas in Europe and is familiar with the social discourses of the period.

Of course, authors may very well err in the assumptions they make about the norms and abilities of their readerships. They may be mistaken about the prevailing philosophical and ideological positions of their contemporaries, overestimate the ability of their readers to decode metaphorical statements or overestimate the public's understanding of aesthetic innovation. It is not unusual for authors to fail in addressing the intended public due to being mistaken about the language, values and norms of that public or to being unable to encode their message correspondingly.

Second, the abstract reader functions as an image of the *ideal recipient* who understands the work in a way that optimally matches its structure and adopts the interpretive position and aesthetic standpoint put forward by the work. Booth ([1961] 1983: 137-44) called this entity the "postulated reader," Prince (1973: 180) the "lecteur idéal," distinguishing it both from the "lecteur virtuel" and the "narrataire" (Schmid → Narratee [2]). The attitude of the ideal recipient, his relation to the norms and values of the fictive entities, are more or less specified by the acts of creation objectified in the work. If contradictory evaluative positions are found in a work, the ideal recipient will identify with the entity that is highest in the hierarchy. The position of the ideal recipient is thus more or less pre-determined by the work; the degree of ideological certainty, however, varies from author to author. Whereas works with a message demand a specific response, the spectrum of readings permitted by the work is wider with experimental or questioning authors. With Tolstoj, the spectrum of positions permitted by the work is undoubtedly narrower than, e.g., with Čexov.

The difference between the two functions, the presumed addressee and the ideal recipient, is all the more relevant the more specific the work's ideology is and the

more it calls for a way of thinking that does not correspond to what is generally accepted in a society. In Tolstoj's later work, the ideal reader is clearly very distant from the presumed addressee. Whereas the latter is conceptualized with very general characteristics—such as command of the Russian language, knowledge of the social norms of the late 19th century and the ability to read a literary work—the former is distinguished by a series of specific idiosyncrasies and Tolstojan evaluative positions.

The concept of the implied reader as an ideal recipient (as put forward in Schmid 1971, [1973] 1986) has encountered objections. In his workbooks of the 1960s and 1970s, Baxtin, commenting on an excerpt from Schmid (1971), expressed criticism of the concept of the ideal recipient current in literary studies at the time: "Today's literary scholars (in the majority structuralists) usually define the listener inherent to the work as an all-understanding ideal listener, and as such he has been postulated in the work. Naturally, this is not the empirical listener and not the psychological idea, the image of the listener in the soul of the author. It is, rather, an abstract ideal construction. It is the counterpart of an equally abstract ideal author. In this conception, the ideal listener is a mirror image who is the equivalent of the author, which duplicates him or her" (Baxtin 2002: 427). Baxtin criticizes the idea that the ideal reader conceptualized in this way does not contribute anything of himself, anything new, to the work and that he lacks "otherness," a prerequisite of the author's "surplus" (427–28).

Of course, the concept of the implied reader as an ideal recipient does not mean that an ideal meaning must be contained in the work and has only to be correctly grasped by the reader. The concept does not mean in any way that the concrete reader's freedom is constrained, nor does it require any kind of presuppositions with regard to the legitimacy of the meanings actually assigned to the work, as critics of the concept (e.g., Lintvelt [1981] 1989: 18; van der Eng 1984: 126–27) have argued. The co-creative activity of the recipient can take on a degree and pursue a direction that is not provided in the work. Readings that fail to achieve or that even deliberately resist a reception designed in the work may well broaden the work's meaning. However, it must be conceded that every work contains, to a greater or lesser degree of ambiguity, signs pointing to its ideal reading. This ideal reading is seldom a specific meaning. Only in rare cases does it consist of a concrete ascription of meaning. As a rule, the ideal reception comprises a variable spectrum of functional attitudes, individual concretizations and subjective ascriptions of meaning. In extreme cases, the ideal reading can exist precisely as a contradiction to any predetermined attitude or seemingly overt meaning if an author demands of his or her reader the rebuttal of evaluative positions suggested by the narrator. Examples are Tolstoj's *Kreutzer Sonata* and Dostoevskij's *Notes from the Underground*

, narrative monologues proclaiming provocative positions whose relativization or refutation is required from the ideal recipient. A famous example from American literature of a narration to be refuted is Henry James' *The Figure in the Carpet* (cf. Iser [1976] 1978, 3-10). Essentially, any unreliable narration (Shen → Unreliability [3]) establishes an ideal reader who corrects the narrator's story.

3.1 Implied Reader as Presumed Addressee vs. Fictive Addressee

The implied reader as author's addressee is to be sharply distinguished from the fictive narrator's addressee, called "narratee" (Prince 1971; 1985), "fictive reader" (Schmid [1973] 1986: 28) or, more accurately, "fictive addressee" (Schmid 2007: 175-80). Implied reader and fictive addressee never coincide, as is assumed by Genette ([1972] 1980), who identifies the "extradiegetic narratee" (i.e., the addressee addressed by an "extradiegetic narrator") with the implied reader. Genette later ([1983] 1988: 138) embraces this supposed coincidence as a small simplifying measure "to the delight of our master Ockham." But this economy is only possible on the basis of Genette's system, where the extradiegetic narrator does not appear as a fictive entity, but rather takes the place of the absent implied author. Genette ([1983] 1988: 132-33) states: "the extradiegetic narrator merges totally with the author, whom I shall not call 'implied', as people too often do, but rather entirely explicit and declared." For Bal (1977: 179), distinguishing implied and fictive reader is "semiotically insignificant," while the Russian linguist Padučeva (1996: 216), referring to Toolan ([1988] 2001), explains that there is no need for such a duplication: "The narrator's addressee is not a representative of the reader but the reader himself."

Of course, the more closely the fictive narrator is associated with the implied author, the more difficult it is to separate clearly the ideological positions of the fictive reader and implied reader. Even so, their difference remains absolutely in force. The border between the fictive world, to which every narrator belongs, no matter how neutrally, objectively or "Olympic" s/he may be constituted, and the reality to which, for all his or her virtuality, the implied reader belongs cannot be crossed, barring some structural paradox such as metalepsis (Pier → Metalepsis [4]).

There is yet another essential difference to be considered between the fictive addressee and the implied reader as ideal recipient. Works that are predisposed to function in a predominantly aesthetic way call for a reading which is sensitive to the demands of this predisposition: such works accomplish this by presupposing an ideal recipient who adopts an aesthetic attitude towards the text. By adopting an aesthetic attitude, the reader will not react to the work as s/he would to a situation

in everyday life, but rather regard the work's fabric and structure and, notwithstanding any ethical or ideological reactions to the story, derive pleasure from the interplay of the narrative levels (Pier → Narrative Levels [5]) and artistic devices which constitute the work. An aesthetic attitude can also be suggested to the fictive addressee if, for instance, the narrator sees himself as an artist ascribing aesthetic value to his own narration. However, to the extent that the narrator is dissociated from the author in this regard, the fictive addressee will remain distinct from the implied reader in the attitude adopted towards the narrative.

3.2 Russian, Polish, and Czech Formalism and Structuralism

In the Slavic area, which has made significant contributions to the study of literary communication that remain largely unknown in the West, the text's addressee was first systematically described by the Polish literary scholar Głowiński ([1967] 1975) as the "virtual recipient." The virtual recipient was not postulated as a pragmatic entity, but as a potential role laid out by the text. For Głowiński, the most important question was "how the structure of the [...] work configures the role of the addressee" ([1967] 1975: 97). He drew a distinction between the addressee of the author and the addressee of the narrator, the former of which breaks down into two differing attitudes to the work's meaning: that of the "passive reader," who needs to reckon only with obvious meanings that emerge from the work; and that of the "active reader," called on to reconstruct meanings encrypted in specific techniques.

Głowiński's approach was adopted and refined by Okopień-Sławińska ([1971] 1975: 145), who distinguished the "work's addressee," or the addressee to whom the author speaks, and the "narration's addressee," the addressee to whom the narrator speaks (cf. Fieguth 1975). Whereas the narrator's addressee can be endowed with personal traits, the work's addressee is characterized only by the use of a specific code: "The work's structure dictates the whole area of his decoding tasks, and these are the only properties that can be ascribed to him" (142).

Červenka, the second-generation Czech structuralist, defined the image of the addressee evoked by the work following Mukařovský's (1937) category of the "subject of the work," used to designate the implied author: "If the subject of the work was the correlate of the totality of the acts of creative choice, then the overall meaning of the work's addressee is the totality of the interpretive abilities required: the ability to use the same codes and develop their material analogously to the creative activity of the sender, the ability to transform the potentiality of the work into an aesthetic object" ([1969] 1978: 174-75).

In Russia, Korman ([1977] 1992: 127) paired the "author as bearer of the work's concept" with the corresponding entity of the "reader as postulated addressee, ideal

principle of reception”: “The method of reception is the process of transforming the real reader into the ideal, conceived reader.” In this definition, however, the different roles of the implied reader as presumed addressee and ideal recipient are merged. Following on from Korman, Rymar’ and Skobelev (1994: 119–21) continue to use the term “conceived reader.”

3.3 Approaches in the West

Booth’s concept of the implied author was influenced by Gibson’s “mock reader” (1950). After the formulation of the implied reader concept by Booth ([1961] 1983), the investigation of reader roles was deepened and concretized in the works of Iser ([1972] 1974, [1976] 1978). His German term, “impliziter Leser,” meaning “implicit reader,” is not completely equivalent to “implied reader” employed in the English editions. Whereas *implied* stresses the real reader’s inferring activity, *implicit* connotes an ontological definition, as though the image of the addressee were an entity independent of the reception process. The English term “implied reader” was not defined by Iser in an entirely unambiguous way and was left to fluctuate between the addressee of the work and the addressee of the narration. In the first German version of *The Act of Reading*, Iser describes the “implicit” reader as a “structure inscribed in the texts,” not having any real existence (1976: 60). He then goes on (to quote his subsequent English version of the text) to say that the implied reader “embodies all those predispositions necessary for a literary work to exercise its effect—predispositions laid down, not by an empirical outside reality, but by the text itself. Consequently, the implied reader as a concept has his roots firmly planted in the structure of the text; he is a construct and in no way to be identified with any real reader [...] The concept of the implied reader is therefore a textual structure anticipating the presence of a recipient without necessarily defining him [...] Thus the concept of the implied reader designates a network of response-inviting structures, which impel the reader to grasp the text” (Iser [1976] 1978: 34). (On Iser’s conception and a critique of it Prince → Reader [6] [§ 9]).

A clear differentiation of the addressees was introduced by Grimm (1977: 38–39) who, alongside Wolff’s (1971) and Link’s (1976) “intended” reader (the author’s “objective”), placed an “imagined” reader (“the conception that the author has of his actual readership”) and a “conceived” reader (“the construction of a reader oriented on the text”). Eco (1979) paired the “model author” with the “model reader,” defining it analogously to Iser’s “implied reader” (Prince → Reader [6] [§ 10]).

Drawing on Slavic theories, Schmid ([1973] 1986, 1974, 2007, 2010) has dealt with the implied reader under the name of “abstract reader,” a notion with affinities to Mukařovský’s concept of the “abstract” entities of the work.

Topics for Further Research

(a) Similar to the topics mentioned for further research into the implied author, there is a need to identify the indexical signs that refer to the implied reader in its two manifestations. (b) The specific image of presumed addressees in different periods, cultural spheres, text types, and genres has yet to be examined in detail. (c) Also, the degree to which ideal recipients are designed by texts needs to be examined historically and culturally.

6 Bibliography

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6.4

Further Reading

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To cite this entry, we recommend the following bibliographic format:

Schmid, Wolf: "Implied Reader". In: Hühn, Peter et al. (eds.): *the living handbook of narratology*. Hamburg: Hamburg University. URL = <http://www.lhn.uni-hamburg.de/article/implied-reader>

[view date:12 Feb 2019]