



Intention & Interpretation

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"What is the connection, if any, between the author's intentions in (while) writing a work of literature and the truth (acceptability, validity) of interpretive statements about it?" With this question, Gary Iseminger introduces a literary debate that has been waged for the past four decades and is addressed by philosophers and literary theorists in Intention and Interpretation. Thirteen essays discuss the role of appeals to the author's intention in interpreting works of literature. A well-known argument by E.D. Hirsch serves as the basic text, in which he defends the appeal to the author's intention against Wimsatt and Beardsley's claim that such an appeal involved "the intentional fallacy." The essays, mostly commissioned by the editor, explore the presuppositions and consequences of arguing for the importance of the author's intentions in the way Hirsch does. Connections emerge between this issue and many fundamental issues in metaphysics and the philosophy of mind as well as in aesthetics. The (old) "New Criticism" and current Post-Structuralism tend to agree in disenfranchising the author, and many people now are disinclined even to consider the alternative. Hirsch demurs, and arguments like his deserve the careful attention, both from critics and sympathizers, that they receive here. Literary scholars and philosophers who are sympathetic to Continental as well as to Anglo-American styles of philosophy are among the contributors. Author note: Gary Iseminger, William H. Laird Professor of Philosophy and the Liberal Arts at Carleton College, has published several other books and many articles in leading philosophical periodicals. He is on the editorial board of the Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism and the board of officers of the American Philosophical Association.

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Nancy Landry:

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