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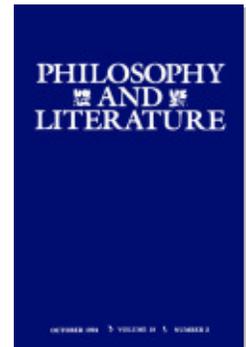
The Intentional Fallacy

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Philosophy and Literature, Volume 18, Number 2, October 1994, pp. 337-338
(Article)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/phl.1994.0021>



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THE INTENTIONAL FALLACY

by LAURIE CALHOUN

SOMETIMES we find ourselves believing in the existence of an object which provides the basis for a new investigation. Its provenance is irrelevant. The properties of the source of an artwork are irrelevant to our reception of it. We find ourselves confronting the work, and it provides the material for further investigations. The artist's intentions are irrelevant to the identity of a work. Similarly, an author is only the source of a text. He has no other properties. The investigation is about the nature of the text.

No, that's all wrong. This text is a palimpsest. But in this instance I will not hide it from you. I will not annihilate the printed expression of my former view. The reason that "the intentional fallacy" is a fallacy is not that the author's intentions are irrelevant, it is rather that the very notion of some determinate object, "the author's intentions," is incoherent. Suppose that I had written this explanation over that one. Would my "intentions" have differed? I would have left you a different text. Could you have discovered the hidden layer, effaced by this paragraph? What would you have been looking for? How would you have known when you had found "it"?

No, that's not it. This text is a palimpsest. But I'll not hide it from you. I will not efface the printed expression of my former view. The reason that "the intentional fallacy" is a fallacy is not that the author's intentions are irrelevant, it's rather that the very notion of some determinate object, "the *author's* intentions," is incoherent. Suppose

that I had written this paragraph over that one. Would "I" have been the same? How could you ever find "me"? You cannot determine the properties of an object without having located it. You must first believe that it exists. . . .

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