Important note: This is a final draft and differs from the definitive version, which is published in Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, 41 (1982): 65-76. I have been assured by the University of Auckland’s research office that if they have made this publicly available then it does not violate the publisher's copyright rules.

"The Aesthetic Relevance of Authors' and Painters' Intentions,"

The matter of the aesthetic relevance of an author's intentions for the aesthetic understanding and appreciation of his work has provided material for a long-lasting debate in aesthetics. The grounds for such a debate are obvious. Aesthetic interest provides a paradigm for an interest in an object "for itself" and any consideration which leads one away from the contemplation of the work of art might be deemed non-aesthetic. Any concern with the author's intentions, rather than with what was achieved in the work, would lead one away from the work of art. Yet how can we regard an author's intentions as irrelevant to our appreciation and understanding of his work?

Notwithstanding this debate, the relevance of a painter's intentions with regard to his representational paintings has received comparatively little attention. In this paper I will consider the importance to be attached to the painter's intentions with regard to the aesthetic appreciation and understanding of representational art. I will approach this topic by first suggesting a view on the aesthetic relevance of an author's intentions and will then consider the application of this view to the relevance of a painter's intentions and, particularly, to the aesthetic relevance of pictorial representation.

Our primary concern with linguistic utterances is in that which they communicate, but the fact that language is a meaningful medium in which words are bearers of sense apart from their use on particular occasions of utterance provides for the possibility of other interests in the meaningfulness of utterances.1 That is, while one usually is concerned with that which the utterer meant by the words that he used, one might also be interested in the

1 I have in mind Grice's distinction between "utterer's occasion-meaning" and "timeless word-meaning." See "Meaning," The Philosophical Review, vol. 64 (1957).
meanings that can be put upon the words used, and disregard the utterer’s intention to communicate something by his utterance. Now an author’s or poet’s intentions are like those of any utterer in that they determine what he meant by his utterance and they determine the meaning of his utterance given that the utterance can bear that meaning. But the question then is this: Is an aesthetic interest a concern primarily with that which the author or poet meant by his words, or is it a concern primarily with the meanings that may be put upon the words that he used? That is, do an author’s intentions determine an aesthetic understanding and appreciation of his work or do they not? I will maintain in the following that they do not.

An aesthetic interest concerns itself primarily with the most aesthetically rewarding reading that may be put upon the words used, and this reading may well be different from the one that the author intended his work to receive. If several readings are equally aesthetically rewarding, then there is no reason to prefer one reading over the other as giving the aesthetically correct reading. An author’s statements of intention are to be taken as recommendations that the work be read one way rather than another and, in principle if not in fact, his recommendations have no more a claim upon us than do the recommendations of critics and others. The author’s intentions do not determine our understanding of his work because our aesthetic interest focusses upon the meanings which legitimately and coherently the work will sustain, rather than upon that which the author is

In different ways, both Berel Lang (see "The Intentional Fallacy Revisited," The British journal of Aesthetics, vol. 14 [1974]) and Olsen (see "Authorial Intentions," The British journal of Aesthetics, vol. 13, [ 1973]) claim that the artist’s intentions have a different status from those of an ordinary speaker. I do not see how we could possibly distinguish between the aesthetic and non-aesthetic uses of language (which is what they appear to be doing) in this way. The difference resides in the nature of our interest in the utterance and not in the nature of its intentionality.

Clearly a reading which departed far from the meanings that competent language-users would attribute to the text would not be a reading of the given work (however aesthetically rewarding this misreading was). I will argue later that particular cases of misreadings might be of aesthetic
able or prepared to avow as the meaning which he wished to communicate.

The above position does not suggest that an awareness of the author’s intentions is never relevant to an understanding and appreciation of his work. In practice, and quite rightly, we place considerable importance upon those intentions. And it is not difficult to explain why this is so. The fact that we seek objects that will satisfy an aesthetic interest more readily in books of poetry than in telephone directories or car manuals clearly follows from the recognition that poets (unlike compilers of telephone directories and authors of car manuals) set out with the intention of creating works which satisfy such an interest and, more often than not, succeed in doing so. The nature of our interest in art presupposes that the most aesthetically rewarding reading of a work more often than not will be the one recommended by the author. But it

interest, but that the fact that we focus our aesthetic interest on works of literature rather than on advertising copy follows from our recognition that such misreadings will rarely be aesthetically rewarding. However, a different and interesting issue is raised by works which are internally inconsistent. A work may contain a sentence or section which is repudiated or contradicted elsewhere in the text. Are the only legitimate readings those which acknowledge the ambiguity of the text? Or can a reading be legitimate although it ignores that part of the text which contradicts those sections of the text on which the reading is founded? Thus, is it possible that the most aesthetically rewarding reading of the work ignores parts of the text which explicitly contradict the interpretation given? The more contradictory is the text, the less legitimate it will be to pursue an interpretation which ignores those parts of the text that contradict it, and the less rewarding will be such an interpretation, since it renders significant parts of the text incomprehensible. But in the case where only a small part of the work (perhaps one sentence) is ignored by a very rewarding interpretation, it seems reasonable to suggest that one could defend the legitimacy of the reading on the grounds that no coherent reading of the entire text is possible and that the reading recommended makes the text as consistently comprehensible as it can be made to be. A legitimate reading will be as consistent with the entire text as is possible, but, where the text is internally inconsistent, a legitimate and coherent reading cannot possibly be consistent with the entire text.
does not follow from this that the author's intentions determine the most aesthetically rewarding reading and that, therefore, a knowledge of the author's intentions is always essentially relevant to an aesthetic understanding and appreciation of his work. It does not follow that, in the case of any particular work, we cannot overrule or disregard the author's avowed intentions.

Let me dismiss one way in which the issues under discussion might be trivialized. It might be claimed that, by definition as it were, anything of aesthetic interest and value which might appropriately be found in a work of art must have been intended, unconsciously if not consciously, by the artist. Psychoanalytic interpretations of works of art sometimes appear to rest on such a view. This position might mistakenly be thought to derive from the following observation: There must be a logical connection between that which one intends and that which one does, so that one could hardly claim to be intending to draw a horse if, quite clearly, one was drawing a bird.

This point can be conceded without accepting that everything that one does and says must have been intended to allow the interpretations and meanings that may be put upon them. It is in the nature of intentions that one may be successful in realizing an intention and that one may fail to realize an intention. If I say "Are any mothers wet?" when I meant to say "Are many others wet?" then clearly I have failed to fulfill my intention. But this need not imply that my utterance was meaningless, nor that it could only have the meaning that it does have because there was some sense in which I intended to ask a question about mothers. Utterances and the products of actions may be intentional while not being intended. In denying that everything of aesthetic interest in art is necessarily intended one is not obliged to say (necessarily) that those things which are unintended are aesthetically interesting merely by a flukish matter of chance. As I have implied above, our interest in art rests on a recognition of its intentionality, but not necessarily as a result of a recognition of the artist's intentions. With the distinction between

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intentions and intentionality in mind, the key point might be made as follows: Of course we are interested in what an artist has "to say" in his work of art, but that may be different from and more interesting than that which he is able to avow as his intention. After all, the artist is in the same position as anyone else when it comes to paraphrasing or describing the work of art.

I take it that few would disagree with the claim that a poet's intentions may be ignored where, manifestly, they are not fulfilled in the work and that, nevertheless, the work may sustain and reward an aesthetic interest. A much more crucial case is the one in which, while the work sustains the reading recommended by the poet, another, more aesthetically rewarding reading is available. Housman's "1887" provides a frequently mentioned example. The poem reads well as an ironic parody of banally presented jingoism, but poorly when read literally, which Housman later claimed was the way in which it was intended to be read. According to the view presented here, we would favor the aesthetically superior reading in this case, even though it was explicitly repudiated by the author.6 That is, I am maintaining that we would reject the reading recommended by the author, although it is obviously a possible reading, on the grounds that it was aesthetically inferior to another more viable reading.

If there is any reluctance to accept this view, it follows, I think, from the worry that its consequences are unacceptable; for example, that we would prefer a poem improved by a misprint to the original, that we could read into works allusions not intended by the author, and that we could attribute to a work meanings that the author not only did not, but could not have intended. In the following I will argue that, while in general we are rightly reluctant to accept such consequences, in particular cases there need be no objections to such readings provided that it is clear that they are no longer readings of the poet's work.

We might still be interested in a poem on learning that it contains a

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6 Anthony Savile ("The Place of Intention in the Concept of Art" in Aesthetics, ed. H. Osborne, OUP, 1972) takes a very similar but a slightly weaker line in that he restricts the "correct reading" to the reading that the author "might reasonably have given" as opposed to the ones he was "able to give."
misprint - Yeats’s Among School Children, in which "soldier" was printed for "solider," can be cited as an example. An aesthetic interest need not confine itself exclusively to the works which may be identified as being written by poets. We could indulge such an interest in any "utterance," whatever the purpose of the utterer (if there was an utterer) and however the "utterance" came into being. Clearly, an aesthetic interest in the misprinted poem would not be an interest in Yeat’s poem and whatever was praiseworthy in the poem as a result of the misprint could not be credited to Yeats. Since the misprinted poem is a different work from the one that Yeats produced, it will be possible to judge the one as more aesthetically rewarding than the other. The aesthetic rewards provided by the misprinted poem are governed by chance, rather than by intentions to produce aesthetically rewarding works, so we can readily acknowledge that it will rarely be the case that the misprinted version will be preferable to the original. If misprints were extremely common in books of poetry then, despite poets' intentions to produce aesthetically rewarding works, we would have no better reason for seeking aesthetic satisfaction in poetry anthologies than telephone directories. But, just as it is possible to take an aesthetic interest in a telephone directory, so we may take an aesthetic interest in a misprinted poem. And just as it is possible that a part of a telephone directory might be more aesthetically rewarding than some given poem, so the misprinted version might be more aesthetically rewarding than the original. There is nothing alarming about the fact that, in any particular case, the misprinted poem might be more aesthetically rewarding than the original. But what would be alarming would be the discovery that, in general, misprints improve poems. If such a generality were realized, the importance that we now attach to poetry as providing aesthetic rewards would be undermined and the focus of our aesthetic interests would inevitably alter.

A case not unrelated to the one discussed above is that in which a change in the meanings of words over the years creates the possibility of readings which the poet could not have intended. Blake’s Jerusalem, in which the word "mills" apparently did not refer to the factories of the industrial revolution, is often cited as an example. Obviously a person who gives "mills" such a reference might be mistaken if he thinks that he is giving the word a reference that Blake would or could have acknowledged. But is he also
mistaken in thinking that there is a statement in the poem about the
desecration of nature by factories which he is entitled to appreciate? I think
not. **He** gives the word this reference in his reading of the poem and he is
entitled to do so by the present public meanings of the words that the poem
contains. In the case of the poem containing a misprint, there was no
difficulty in suggesting that the person interested in the misprinted poem
was interested in a poem other than the original because of the material
difference between the sets of words comprising the poems. In the case
described here a similar suggestion is made—the poem being appreciated is
not the poem that Blake would claim as his own since his poem could contain
no reference to modern factories. But in this case the material object which is
Blake's poem is the same as the material object which is read as referring to
modern factories. (If a person with no knowledge of Blake's poem composed
a poem consisting of the same words then, clearly, he would have produced a
*copy* of Blake's poem and not a different poem.) Without invoking the Idealist
suggestion that the poem is an "object" in the poet's (or the audience's) mind
rather than the words on the printed page,7 how is it possible to say that the
poem read as referring to modern factories is not Blake's? The identity of
Blake's poem is determined not solely by his intentions nor solely by the
words which comprise the poem, I think, but (also) by the public meanings of
the words he wrote at the time those words were written. In this case it is not so
much Blake's intentions as the intentions of any competent English-speaker of
the period when the poem was written which determine that the poem read
as referring to modern factories is not the poem that Blake wrote. It is the way
in which the intentions of the modern reader who provides this reference
differ from the intentions that Blake's contemporaries could have had (as
governed by the public meaning of the words at that time) which make the
readings distinguishable as interpretations of different aesthetic objects which
happen to be materially identical. In one sense, the material sense, the poem
read as referring to modern factories is Blake's; in another sense it is not. In
this latter sense, all poets give up ownership of their poems when they make
those poems public. Works of art presented to the public as such belong to

7 R. G. Collingwood's *The Principles of Art* (first published in 1938)
advocates such a view.
everyone who cares to interpret and interest themselves in them as much as to their creators. Given such an argument, it is possible to see that the case discussed here is acceptable as a genuine case of aesthetic interest in the way that an aesthetic interest in a misprinted poem is acceptable.

A third case discussed in the literature is that in which one poem alludes to another. Allusions are not independent of intention – if an utterer intended A to allude to B and if it is possible to read A as alluding to B, then the utterer did allude to B in A; and if A might be read as alluding to B but the utterer did not intend to allude to B, then his utterance does not allude to B. In this way intentions play a part in determining allusions. With this in mind it has been suggested that a poet’s intentions might be regarded as determining and not merely as recommendatory, so that, if we had a work which might be aesthetically superior if it contained an allusion but it was not or could not have been intended by the poet to contain an allusion, then we would be forced to reject the aesthetically superior reading.8

There are indications that allusions do not determine aesthetic understanding and appreciation in the way suggested above. Where a work would be aesthetically superior if it did contain an allusion and we are ignorant of the poet’s intentions (as is usually the case) but it would have been possible for him to intend such an allusion, we feel justified in reading his poem as if it contained the allusion. In another case we might know that an allusion is intended and, thus, that his poem contains an allusion, but it then remains for us to decide whether or not to take the allusion into account. If the work would be aesthetically superior if the allusion were ignored, we would rightly ignore it.

But what of the case described above, in which no allusion was intended by the poet although the work would be aesthetically superior if it contained such an allusion? Allusions are determined by the utterer’s intention (given that the utterance can be read as an allusion), whatever the source of his utterance. Thus, the reader’s intentions can confer an allusion upon a poem, even where that allusion was not intended by the poet. The reader (or his audience) may appreciate and understand that which is aesthetically interesting in the allusion and may judge that reading superior

8 See Cioffi, op. cit.
to the one recommended by the poet. Because no allusion was intended by
the poet, then his poem does not contain an allusion and the poem that is
appreciated and understood as containing an allusion is not his, although it is
materially identical with his. His poem is identified, as his, jointly by the
words he wrote down, by the meanings that speakers of his period could
have put upon those words, and, in the case of "private" meanings and
allusions, by his intentions. Once again the case under discussion is one in
which the poet's intentions may be disregarded because the object of aesthetic
interest is distinguishable from his poem. This indifference to the poet's
intentions is legitimate because, in general, any attempt to restrict aesthetic
interest merely to aesthetic objects which can be identified as the works of
artists would be no more than legislative.

In the preceding I have argued that an aesthetic interest in misprinted
poems, in meanings that could not have been intended by a poet and in
allusions that were not intended by a poet are legitimate on the grounds that
the objects of aesthetic interest are not restricted to the works identifiable as
the works of poets. What would be illegitimate in such cases would be the
claim to be interpreting the poet's poem, or that the poet could be held
responsible and praised for the aesthetic rewards following from such
readings. Such readings might well be regarded as offensive to the poet. But
that is not a matter of aesthetic concern at all. The aesthetic concern is with a
public object which belongs to the poet only in the aesthetically unimportant
respect that he caused its existence. One's aesthetic responsibilities are
directed towards the understanding and appreciation of that public object
and not to the reverence of the poet's memory. Nevertheless, as I have already
allowed, the fact that we seek aesthetic satisfaction more readily from the
work of poets than from chance sounds, or marks on paper, or from products
created with no intention of satisfying an aesthetic interest, follows from the
fact that we know that poets aim to satisfy in their poems an aesthetic interest
and succeed more often than not in doing so. This fact alone explains first,
why it is rare that kinds of cases I have discussed are more aesthetically
rewarding than the poet's poem and, second, why we are reluctant to
proliferate "aesthetic objects" by regarding the poet's intentions as irrelevant
and thus ignoring his poem in the search for more aesthetically superior
readings. However, there is no requirement in any particular case that an
aesthetic interest need restrict itself to the poem which is identifiable as the poet's and there are special circumstances in which one might choose to exercise the legitimate right to ignore the poet's intentions, even where those intentions may have been realized. Deplore as we might the gratuitous exercise of such a right in general as undermining the distinction between works of art and non-works of art, there remain particular cases where the exercise of this right is not only legitimate, but also desirable.

I turn now to representation.9 Traditionally a central place was given to resemblance in the analysis of representation.10 More recently, such an approach has come under attack because, obviously, a painting resembles another much more closely than it resembles that which is represented.11 Moreover, resemblance is a symmetrical relationship whereas representation is not. Goodman, who apparently rejects the relevance of resemblance altogether, goes on to analyze representation as a species of denotation, so that representation is significantly analogous to linguistic reference.12 However, Goodman's semantic theory of representation faces some major objections13 and must be rejected as unacceptable. A more promising approach analyzes representation in terms of the painter's intentions as revealed to the viewer through the conventions of pictorial representation.14 So X is represented in Y if and only if the painter intended X to be represented.

But if we accept that the painter's intentions are crucial in determining

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9 Although, in some uses, "represents" may be interchanged with "expresses" or with "symbolizes," I think that these notions are importantly distinct and distinguishable. In my discussion of representation here, "symbolizes" is not substitutable for "represents."


12 Goodman, op. cit.


that which a painting represents, we are not obliged to accept that representation can be analyzed exclusively in terms of the painter’s intentions. It is centrally important that we should allow for the case in which the painter intended to represent X in Y although it so happens that no audience is capable of seeing X in Y. That is, as previously, it is critical that we allow for the case in which the artist fails to fulfill his intention. In such a case I think that we would prefer to say that Y is not representational of X, rather than to say that X is represented although no one else can see X in Y. That is, normally we would accept that there may be unsuccessful attempts at representation. This suggests that, important as the painter’s intentions are, there is more to representation than the painter’s intentions. Accordingly I wish to argue that the notion of resemblance requires a central place in the analysis of representation.

The argument mentioned above against the relevance of resemblance, that one painting resembles another more closely than it resembles anything else, clearly invokes an impersonal notion of resemblance. This is the sort of resemblance that a physicist might seek to measure. But a more appropriate and sophisticated account of resemblance is available. The resemblance required is between the general viewer’s perceptual experiences; for example, between the perceptual experience of a weathered rock and of a whale. Similarly, one’s perceptual experience of seeing a man in a painting is obviously founded on the experience of a resemblance between the appearance of the painting and the appearance of real men. The first-order properties of a painting (patches of paint) do not resemble people, but the perceptual experience of a man in the painting emerges from the perception of the painting’s first-order properties.

However, while the discussion of resemblance in terms of analogous perceptual experiences provides for a suitably general account of the notion of resemblance, it is soon apparent that such an account of resemblance is inadequate fully to account for the perceptual experience of seeing a man in a painting. To say of a portrait of Churchill merely that the man in the painting resembles Churchill would be to imply that the attempted representation was largely unsuccessful; it would not normally be appropriate to say that a good likeness merely resembled the sitter. Talk of resemblance would normally only be appropriate where one was relating one’s visual experience of the
man in the painting to the visual experience of some man (or man-picture) other than the sitter. A realistic portrayal of a man does not resemble that man any more than, when he looks happy, the man resembles himself looking tired. Like the man himself, the portrayal can only resemble some other man (or picture-man). Similar considerations maintain when one deals with a "genre" painting; that is, where a man is pictured but no actual man is portrayed. One does not merely recognize through one's perceptual experience that something in the painting resembles a man (as one might notice that a weathered stone resembles a whale); one sees a man in the painting. The picture-man does not resemble a man in the way that a hat-stand or a tree in the painting might resemble a man (or a picture-man). Of course one is aware that it is a picture-man and not a real man that one is seeing, but the notion of resemblance is hardly adequate to cover the similarity between the perceptual experiences of seeing a real man and seeing the man in the picture. One thing is not experienced as becoming some other thing merely in virtue of resembling it, but the man in the painting is experienced (without belief) as a real man. One does not say "Look! A picture-man" or "If this were a man these blue bits would be his eyes and these dark lines would be creases in his skin." Instead one says "Look at the man!" or "That man is gazing over his shoulder and looking worried." One does not take the pictured "man" merely as resembling actual men, one takes the painting as what one might call the *representational instantiation* of a man.15 "Gazing" and "looking worried" are things that men, and not "blue bits" or "dark lines," no matter how much they are experienced as resembling men, do.

The contrast with the case of noticing a resemblance between a stone and a whale is perhaps instructive. If I noticed such a resemblance I could go on to "vivify" my perceptual experience and see in the stone a whale. That is, I could *adopt* the same attitude to the stone as I have when viewing an

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15 With this point apparently in mind, Charlton, op. cit., p. 62, talks of "representational quantification" which is to be contrasted with existential quantification. In *Art and Imagination* Scruton describes the experiences of seeing a man and seeing a man in a painting as "irreducibly analogous," and there is no doubt that he would reject, in particular, the attempt to reduce the analogy merely to a resemblance between perceptual experiences.
unambiguously representational painting. I could treat it as if it were representational. But, when confronted with an unambiguously representational painting, the "vivification" of one's perceptual experience is apparently compelled, rather than adopted. One does not treat representational paintings as if they are representational although one might choose to treat them (without belief) as if they are not. If such experiences are "compelled" by representational art, it is because one could not be said to understand such paintings (and not just understand them aesthetically, either), unless one experiences the representational instantiation of the pictured subject. Obviously the difference between the experience of weathered stones and representational paintings stems from the recognition that, whereas the former are created by painters who intend us to see, for example, a man in the picture and not merely patches of paint which resemble a man nor even merely a picture-man, the weathered stone has no such creator. To see the whale in the stone is to entertain without belief the thought that the stone has been shaped with aesthetic intentions; to see men in pictures as thinking and acting is to believe, in general, that painters intend us to have such experiences of their works.

The "vivification" of one's perceptual experience of the man in the painting rests on an appreciation of the intentionality of the painter's work as revealed to the viewer through the conventions of pictorial representation adopted within the painting. Those conventions serve to make manifest the painter's intentions. But, of course, the painter may always fail to realize his intentions in any particular case without thereby destroying those conventions, although in general the conventions are formed and sustained by painters' successful realization of their intentions. So it is the recognition that any particular work falls within some such set of conventions, rather than a recognition that the artist has succeeded in realizing his intentions within that particular work, which leads to the experience of representational art described above. To the extent that the visual experience of seeing a man in a painting is grounded in, yet goes beyond the experience of a resemblance, that experience is an experience of what I will call the "representational character" of a painting. The representational instantiation or "vivification" of one's perceptual experience of representational paintings that is an appreciation of the representational character of a painting arises from one's
recognition in the painter’s work of the conventions of pictorial representation. Representational character goes beyond mere resemblance in experiences in that visual resemblance only becomes representational instantiation within the conventions by which representation is effected. Thus, resemblance is crucial to representational character, but the recognition of representational character involves placing resemblance within the framework of conventions which permit representation. (This “placing” may be done with belief, as when one sees an unambiguously depicted man in a representational painting, or without belief, as when one sees a whale in a naturally weathered stone.)

To say that a painting has representational character is not to praise it. A painter may intend to represent a man being crucified, but the painting may have the representational character of a wax dummy of a man being crucified. That is, the appropriate perceptual experience may come alive as a wax dummy rather than as a flesh and blood man. The appreciation of this representational character may provide grounds for a criticism of such a picture.

The above discussion suggests the following analysis of representation. A represents B if and only if A was intended to represent B and the representational character of A is rightly believed to be such that it is a public matter that B may be seen in A. This definition permits that the viewer can be interested in the life-likeness of B in A, but does not, of course, commit him to such an interest. Nor will it be necessary, in providing for the resemblance in experiences implicit in the notion of representational character, that B exists; so representations of fictional characters do not create problems for the definition. If a painting is intended to represent Hercules, and if it is not possible for us to see Hercules as a seven-stone weakling, then the painting does not represent Hercules if it has the representational character of a man who is a seven-stone weakling. The commitment in the definition is to the weak claim that the only B’s which can be pictorially represented are the B’s which one can see or imagine seeing. Moreover, the definition pays no special regard to degrees of resemblance. Thus, a painting of John might look more like a painting of his brother, but, nevertheless, the intention determines that John is represented provided that the picture resembles John in some respects so that John may be seen in it. And if John cannot be seen in it, the definition
disallows the claim that the painting represents his brother instead.

The conventions of representation allow the possibility that a painting might be seen as having more than one representational character. Obviously one’s perceptual experience of X in a painting may be analogous in different ways to one’s perceptual experience of different objects and events or of their features. This provides for the possibility of the following: One might, while recognizing that it was intended that B be represented in A and that A has the representational character of B, consider other of A’s representational characters. That is, one might consider other aspects of one’s visual experience of A which are analogous, within the context of the representational conventions adopted within the painting, to visual experiences of C’s, D’s, and so forth. (Similarly, while recognizing that B is represented as x, where x is a property or feature and not an individual or particular, one might concern oneself with B as y, B as z, etc., given that, within the conventions, B as x is experienced as analogous to B as y etc.) The conventions of pictorial representation make manifest to the viewer the painter’s intentions when those intentions have been realized and thus allow the viewer to recognize what is represented. The conventions are established and maintained by the successful realization of painters’ intentions. But those conventions do not disappear when one concerns oneself solely with the representational character of the painting rather than with the painter’s intentions and, hence, with that which is represented. However it may be that, primarily, the conventions interest us insofar as they make the painter’s intentions manifest, the existence of the conventions permits the possibility of an interest in representational character which ignores both that which the artist intended and that which is represented.

The distinction between an interest in that which a painting represents and an interest solely in the representational character of a painting parallels the distinction drawn earlier between an interest in what was meant by an utterance and an interest in the meanings that may be put upon an utterance. The parallel is extensive. Just as the semantic system of language depends upon a primary interest in utterances as vehicles for communication, so the conventions of pictorial representation presuppose a primary concern with the painter’s intention to represent something in his painting. Just as the semantic system allows that utterances may have meanings apart from the
meanings that they are intended to bear upon particular occasions, so the
conventions of pictorial representation allow that paintings may have a
representational character apart from that which they are intended to
represent. Just as the "utterer's occasion-meaning" is determined (in
conjunction with the rules of the semantic system) by the utterer's intentions,
so that which a painting represents is determined (in conjunction with the
conventions of pictorial representation) by the painter's intention. Just as an
utterer may fail to say what he meant to say, so the painter may fail to
represent that which he intended to represent. Just as, sometimes, we may
recognize what an utterer meant to say although the words used were
inappropriate, so, sometimes, we may recognize what it was that a painter
intended to represent although he failed to do so. Just as the utterer's
intentions on any particular occasion do not determine the meanings that may
be put upon the words used when one is not concerned with what he meant
by his utterance, so the painter's intentions do not determine the
representational character(s) of a painting when one is not concerned with
that which the painting represents.

Previously I have argued that the fact that language is meaningful,
apart from its use in conveying meanings intended by utterers, permits the
possibility of the sort of interest in literature and poetry which would be
described as aesthetic. While I acknowledged the relevance of the author's
intentions, I have denied that these determine an aesthetic understanding and
appreciation of his work. The possibility of distinguishing an interest in that
which a painting represents from an interest in its representational character
opens the way for a similar account of the aesthetic relevance of the painter's
intentions and of representation. The resulting position would be as follows:
Since an aesthetic interest in representational art involves a concern with its
representational character, and since a concern with representational
character is not primarily or essentially a concern with that which is
represented, an aesthetic interest in representational art is not determined by
the painter's intentions. The painter's intentions play a crucial role in
determining that which the painting represents. Usually the most
aesthetically rewarding viewing of the representational character of a
painting will correspond to a viewing of that which the painting represents,
but it need not do so necessarily. Although, in general, the fact that we seek
aesthetic satisfaction from representational paintings more readily than from architects’ drawings rests on the belief that the most aesthetically rewarding viewing of a painting corresponds to a viewing of that which it represents, an aesthetic interest in any particular painting is concerned foremost with the representational character of the work rather than with that which it represents.

In the following I will attempt to defend the above view against the main objection that might be brought against it. This objection maintains that the painter’s intentions can never drop out of account when one takes an aesthetic interest in a representational painting, however it may be that an author’s intentions drop out of account when one takes an aesthetic interest in literature or poetry. As a prelude to this discussion it is worth commenting that it should, at least, strike us as very strange if it turned out to be the case that a painter’s intentions should have a different status from those of an author in connection with aesthetic interests in these two forms of art. Quite possibly those who might argue for the essential relevance of a painter’s intentions in determining an aesthetic understanding and appreciation of his work would also wish to argue that an author’s intentions have a similar essential relevance.

In an interesting paper, one argument produced by Roger Scruton against the view that music can truly be described as representational is as follows: One could not be said to understand a representational work of art (aesthetically) if one was ignorant of the fact that it is representational, but one could understand a musical work while remaining ignorant of that which, supposedly, it "represents." 16

One would understand certain passages in Debussy’s La Mer if one recognized the power and tension in the musical line, even where one was ignorant of the fact that the music supposedly "represents" the power and tension of the sea. That is, one could understand a musical work which was intended to be representational even though one believed it to be abstract. However, we would be disinclined to allow that a person could understand a representational painting if he believed it to be an abstract painting. Scruton concludes that, where one might say "the work of art expresses X” as easily as

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one might say "the work of art represents X," as is the case with music, then true representation is not involved. To deny this would require an undermining of the important distinction between representation and expression.

As an argument against the view that music is representational this point is very forceful. However, it would be hasty to assume (as Scruton appears to do) that this point commits us to saying that, insofar as the painter's intentions determine what is represented, then those intentions determine an aesthetic understanding and appreciation of the painting. Because it is not yet clear whether it is ignorance of the representation or of the representational character which undermines the viewer's claim to understand the painting. If A was intended to represent B and if it is possible to see C in A, then A does not represent C and it would be inappropriate, knowing this, to regard A as if it represents C. Intention determines representation in this way. But does representation, in its turn, determine aesthetic appreciation and understanding? That is, is it possible to understand and appreciate the painting aesthetically if one concentrates on the representational character of the painting (viewed in which way C is more aesthetically rewarding than B) when one knows that it was B which the artist intended to represent? This is the question at issue.

Consider two cases: (1) A painter may intend to paint Kutuzov on the eve of Austerlitz and he may portray a worried-looking old man in military uniform seated before a fire to which painting he gives the title "Kutuzov on the eve of Austerlitz." (2) It may be a recognized convention of Tierra de! Fuegian line drawings that a robed character is a priest and a figure wearing sandals and carrying a bowl is a disciple. An indigenous artist draws a picture of a priest talking to a disciple.

Now, of course, it is the case that the artist has a right to expect his audience to bring to his work all the knowledge, experience and cultural heritage which they possess. But is a person who is ignorant of Kutuzov, Austerlitz, and nineteenth-century military history, or the conventions of Tierra de! Fuegian art, incapable of understanding these paintings aesthetically? We would be inclined, I think, to deny this (even if we feel that his aesthetic appreciation would be enriched by such knowledge). Yet the person is ignorant of that which the artists intended to represent; namely,
Kutuzov on the eve of a crucial battle, and a conversation between a priest and a disciple. If the person understands the painting aesthetically, this is because he recognizes and appreciates its representational character and not because he is aware of that which it represents as governed by the painter's intentions.

An obvious objection to the above is the following: The person may appreciate the aesthetically important features of the painting that an old man with an imperious bearing looks worried, etc. - without knowing anything about Kutuzov. But clearly the painter intended to paint Kutuzov as an old man with an imperious bearing looking worried and, thus, the painting represents these things as well as Kutuzov. The viewer, in responding as he does, recognizes that the painting is a representation of such a man, because he recognizes that it is intended as such. However, this objection can be challenged. Intentions are referentially opaque. The painter may have believed that Kutuzov was a young woman rather than an old man and failed to represent "her" as such because of his technical incompetence. However unambiguous is the representational character of the painting, this remains a real possibility. (In sketching a bird that is a gannet, the drawer may produce what, to the practiced eye, is unambiguously a drawing of an albatross.) Or, to take a more likely case, the painter may have intended to represent Kutuzov as puzzled rather than worried. In that case, if anything is represented, it is a puzzled-looking rather than a worried-looking old man (assuming that the face might be seen as presenting either aspect). Where it is more aesthetically rewarding to see the expression as one of worry rather than puzzlement one would rightly favor such a view of it, even though puzzlement rather than worry is represented. However, it may be that, usually, the most aesthetically rewarding viewing of the painting will be the one intended (and will therefore be a viewing of what is represented), and, allowing that the fact that we seek aesthetic satisfaction more readily from paintings than architects' plans depends upon this, we cannot license the move which maintains that the most aesthetically rewarding viewing(s) of the picture must necessarily be the one(s) intended by the artist. Such a position makes no allowance for the fact that painters may fail to realize their intentions and that, even where this occurs, their paintings may merit understanding and appreciation.
To ignore what a painting represents obviously is not the same as believing falsely that the painting is abstract. An aesthetic interest in a representational painting is, foremost, an interest in what I have called the representational character(s) of the painting. As it has been described, an interest in representational character is grounded in a recognition of the analogy between various perceptual experiences (seeing men and seeing men in paintings). To return to Scruton’s argument, one could not understand a representational painting aesthetically if one believed it to be abstract. But rather than indicating that we must be aware of what is represented in it, this assumes only that we must be aware of its representational character. Given this awareness, one can of course concern oneself with pattern, form, and technique, and an appreciation of such matters may well be vital to an aesthetic understanding and appreciation of a painting. But the aesthetic relevance of such interests is predicated on an awareness of the representational character of the painting. Clearly we distinguish between the case where one believes wrongly that a representational painting is abstract and where one views a representational painting (without belief) as if it were abstract with a view to the appreciation of its structure and of painterly technique.17

Painters frequently intend to represent individuals who actually exist or have existed. Inevitably then, an interest in that which a painting represents will sometimes involve a concern with a reference. An aesthetic interest in paintings is, it would generally be accepted, indifferent to the existence of the represented subject. Had more importance been attached to the painter’s intentions, so that those intentions determined the nature of aesthetic understanding and appreciation, it would have been necessary to admit that, often, an aesthetic interest would concern itself with the referential use of art. However, an interest in the representational character of art pays

17 Similarly an interest, especially in poetry, in the sounds and rhythms of words is aesthetically relevant only where an awareness of the meanings that may be put upon the words is presupposed. Usually it is the appreciation of the way in which such matters complement or conflict with the meanings of the words which is aesthetically relevant.
no regard to such intentions or to a possible referential use of art. An aesthetic interest in art depends upon the possibility of pictures' having representational character which may be distinguished from what they represent as determined by the painters' intentions. What should be allowed, I think, is that an aesthetic interest in representational art parasitises an interest in art's possible referential use, just as an aesthetic interest in literature and poetry parasitises the primary interest in language as a vehicle for communication. This can be accepted, I think, even though the prime function of paintings now may not be referential. Before photography, it is certainly arguable that painting primarily served the function of recording objects and events and that aesthetic concerns were secondary (if not unimportant). But now that the recording function has been taken over by other media, we can see paintings in more purely aesthetic terms.

In this paper I have argued for the view that an aesthetic interest in representational paintings confines itself to their representational character rather than to that which they were intended to represent, as a similar interest in literature restricts itself to the meanings that can be put upon the words used rather than upon that which they were intended to convey. So the aesthetic understanding and appreciation of a painting is no more determined by the painter's intentions than is an aesthetic understanding and appreciation of literature and poetry determined by the author's intentions. This is not to say that artists' intentions are never aesthetically relevant, but it is to deny to them the essential relevance that sometimes they have been claimed to possess.

Note that the existential reference similarly disappears from utterances in which particulars or individuals are mentioned when one concerns oneself with the meanings that can be put upon those utterances rather than with that which the utterance was intended to convey.