

Literary Emotion in Aesthetic Judgment

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Abstract

What makes art special are the cognitive processes that put us iconically in touch with our emotional and sensuous experiences as participants of the world we share. Aesthetic evaluation enables us to determine the extent to which a given work of art successfully simulates those experiences in being iconic of reality. Aesthetics may thus be understood both in its philosophical sense of exploring the conditions of our sensuous and emotional experiences *and* in its artistic sense of appreciating the nature of art in all its forms.

The emotional and sensory effects of a poem lie not so much in the poem's meanings per se, but in its prosody: the combination of its rhythms, its images, the metalinguistic features of pattern and repetition, the inflections of the spoken voice, that are only partially represented by word choice and order and punctuation. Paying attention to interpreting a poem without experiencing its prosody can lead to missing its emotional effect and thus result in a misreading of the poet's intent, understood, not in the sense of communicative intention, but rather in the sense of intensity of attention or intent observation.

Failure to perceive a poem's emotional tone results in critical misreadings and misvaluations. Perceptive understanding and appreciation of literary emotion is thus a necessary prerequisite for aesthetic judgment.