Jenefer Robinson. *Deeper than Reason, Emotion and its Role in Literature, Music and Art*

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REFERENCES

This book sets out to examine the role of emotion in both the construction and reception of art. It begins by a survey of recent theories of emotion and then applies them to the action of emotion in the fields of literature, music and, to a lesser extent, painting. Part One thus addresses the question of what emotions are and how they operate. It considers in particular the theory of emotions as judgements as argued by philosophers Robert Gordon, Gabriele Taylor, Robert Solomon, and William Lyons. This perspective is enriched by insights from the research of psychologists Richard Lazarus and Andrew Ortony.

The second part of the book is devoted to literature. In order to show how emotion participates in the understanding of literature, Robinson offers a reading of Edith Wharton's *The Reef* as “an education of the emotions”. On her path, she encounters classic issues such as that of the author's intention and that of the authorized reading. Broadly speaking, her approach defends a reader-response theory of interpretation. Using again the findings of Richard Lazarus, Robinson considers literary form as a “coping mechanism” to deal with highly-charged material. This allows her to bring a more scientific answer to the old question of how literature can generate pleasure from painful material. She here re-examines the Freudian perspective of Norman Holland who considered content as *impulse* and form as *defense*. Holland’s analysis of Matthew Arnold's *Dover Beach* provided a model investigation of the work of denial in the poem's focus on the sea, the shingles and Sophocles; it also revealed the ways in which the formal arrangement of Arnold's poem “manages” the feelings of threat and abandonment. Robinson proceeds to similarly analyse Shakespeare's Sonnet Number 73 and again Wharton's *The Reef*.

There follows an exploration of the expression theory of art illustrated with examples from literature but also from Romantic and Expressionist visual art — Friedrich, Delacroix, Munch, and Kirchner. Finally, and perhaps most convincingly, Robinson explores with subtlety the domain of music where she considers the theories of Aaron Ridley, Kendall Walton and Leonard Meyer and crosses them with those of John Sloboda and Jerrold Levinson. Of particular interest is her report on the experiments of psychologist Carol Krumhansl. Clearly, music, as it affects us physiologically, offers the best testing ground for analysing the role of emotion in art. In this final section, Robinson concretizes her arguments with nicely described instances from Brahms, Mahler, Mussorgsky and Barber.

In order to arrive at an encyclopedic formulation of general truth, *Deeper than Reason* elaborates a logical, step-by-step demonstration. To this end, the prose is clear and simple. The systematic formulation of results, however, sometimes produces a re-expression of the obvious (as when one is given to read, for example on p. 202 that...
“One of the hallmarks of most great literature is an emphasis on form”). In other words, Robinson’s painstaking demonstrations are not for the art-lover in search of striking illuminations, brilliant formulae or deeply-felt examples. (Deeper than Reason seems deliberately devoid of passion.) The book will be more relevant to the patient student of philosophy who will be interested in the insights from contemporary psychology and the systematic sifting of diverse aesthetic theories.

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