

Research Network:

Feeling and Understanding. The Role of Empathic Emotions in Understanding Persons and Literature

Workshop: Empathy, Understanding, and Appreciation

Georg-August-University Göttingen, February 21st-23rd, 2019

Íngrid Vendrell Ferran (Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena):

Emotion and the Appreciation of Fiction

My talk aims at exploring the question if emotions play a role in the appreciation of fiction. The talk is structured in three main parts.

In the first part of my talk, I will present two opposite views about the function of emotions in the appreciation of fiction. A) According to the „intellectualized view of appreciation“ emotions play a negative role in the appreciation of fiction because they take the attention away from the important aspects of the work. Put it briefly: appreciation must be devoid of emotion. B) According to the „emotional view of appreciation“ emotions are essential for the appreciation of many works of fiction. A strong version of the emotional view claims that appreciation is itself an emotion (for example, a kind of aesthetic pleasure or displeasure). A weak version of the emotional view claims that emotions are an instrument to understand and appreciate some aspects of the work.

In the second part of my talk, I will give some arguments for the weak version of the emotional view. My aim is to argue that emotions are crucial to obtain relevant information about the fictional work, to understand aspects of it and to evaluate their importance. In order to develop my position I will discuss three main claims of the emotions: a) the idea that emotions are based on cognitions; b) the idea that emotions might prompt cognitions; and c) the idea that emotions have a cognitive function.

In the last part of my talk I will discuss some problems related to the last mentioned claim according to which emotions have a cognitive function. A clarification of what means that emotions are „cognitive“ is crucial in order to explain their role in the appreciation of fiction.