

The neuropsychology of literariness

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If we are comparing Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* with a Mills and Boon romance, what prompts us to see one as literary and not the other? Are there intrinsic signs of literariness to which we respond in the text? There appear to be two classes of features in particular to which we have an immediate response: feelings in response to foregrounded aspects of language (stylistic effects, such as metre, assonance, metaphor) and what I will call qualified empathy (taking on the feelings of a main character while remaining alert to the character's potential for error). Both call on, and often serve to modify, readers' feelings. In this paper I will review the evidence for an early response (< 500 msec) to both kinds of textual feature, prior to any conscious, cognitive construal. Although as yet we have no direct neuropsychological evidence for a distinctive mode of literary response, I suggest how this early phase of response in reading may motivate our sense of literariness through contrasts and conflicts in feeling. More specifically, such feelings constitute what I will term intention variance effects, moments during which complexes of feeling promote alternative responses prior to awareness.