

## **The cognitive aesthetics of reading literature**

Peter Stockwell (Nottingham)

The greatest successes of the cognitive turn in literary studies have largely been in the area of informativity. Cognitive poetics has developed reasonably good accounts at a global level for how readers keep track of character, scene and event, how we render significance and generate thematic meanings, and at a stylistic level for how we identify features such as metaphor or figure and ground, and find them meaningful. However, these matters are not primary either for traditional literary scholars nor the general reading public. Cognitive psychological, cognitive linguistic and neurological applications to the field of literary aesthetics should be highly productive, but advances in this area have been patchy so far. In this paper, I consider some new ways of accounting systematically for ill-defined and impressionistic terms such as tone, atmosphere, resonance, sensation and empathy, matters of texture which are important in literary reading but have been poorly addressed across the history of literary scholarship. In turn, the particular complexity of the literary reading experience has potentially useful feedback for the empirical sciences as well.