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Literature as a Manifestation of Our Cognitive Equipment

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This research intends to illuminate the interdependent relationship between literature and neuroscience. In the study of English literature, we use words to illuminate the greater text. A word is charged with the weight of its history; a single use of a word absorbs past meanings that it derives from etymology, context, and past uses. Now we have this external code that we use to understand language, and through this, enhance our understanding of literature. The questions that arise from this are: “Do we have an internal understanding and transcending experience at the moment of reading? Can the history of a word influence our internal perception of the word, distinct from our conscious processing of the meaning of the word?” In sum, how are we affected cognitively by authorial word choice?

I aim to prove that there is a network of associations that we perceive and make use of in the reading of a single word in literature. This study will discern whether multiple meanings in a semantic web are activated upon reading a line and literature, and test whether that activation will remain after successive lines are added to the initial line. Current literature on memory and semantics finds that semantic associations are activated for only milliseconds; however, I believe that our mind is able to comprehend and store these associations for a longer period, in order that we may make use of these associations in the process of literary reading.