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ABSTRACTS

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# Silence is silver, speech is golden.

## Effects of oral/ silent poetry reading

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### Abstract

Literature, including poetry, originates in social orality, in music and voice: these are fundamental for the way it functions. Initially, poetry was public, and in much of the past it was meant to be read aloud, memorised and recited. It is only in 18th century that people started to read silently. Quoting Shklovsky (Vitale 2012: 185–187), ‘the art of the living word, has suffered a great deal from that great invention, the printing press [...]. It’s too bad they [words] have to be killed. They have to be printed’.

Nowadays most poetry is read privately, which, we believe, has deep implications and consequences. At the same time, there are poetry slam festivals, which attract thousands of participants, and the oral performances are watched on the internet by sometimes millions of people. Reading to oneself in private, however, is very different from such social events. Important are both the emotional ingredient in poetry as an *experience* (van Peer and Chesnokova 2022) and the oral and social nature of its delivery and presence. However, we remain largely unaware whether encountering a poetic text silently or aloud makes any difference.

With these ideas in mind, we will report the results of an experiment in which respondents, both university students and staff members, read two poems (one traditional and one modernist) in silence or aloud, after which we probed participants’ cognitive, aesthetic, emotional, social, musical and erotic reactions. The results indicate that the response to the two texts differs more when they are read aloud, but less so in case of silent reading. Results will be discussed and interpreted in the light of literary theory.

### References:

- van Peer, W. and A. Chesnokova (2022), *Experiencing Poetry: A Guidebook to Psychopoetics*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Vitale, S. (2012). *Shklovsky: Witness to an Era*. Champaign, Dublin, London: Dalkey Archive Press.

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