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ABSTRACTS

Anna Chesnokova

Borys Grinchenko Kyiv University, Ukraine
chesnokova@voliacable.com

Vander Viana

University of Stirling, UK
vander.viana@stir.ac.uk

Sonia Zyngier

Federal University of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
sonia.zyngier@gmail.com

Juliana Jandre

Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
julianajandre@yahoo.com.br

Anna Rumbesht

Borys Grinchenko Kyiv University, Ukraine
annaru2001@yahoo.com

Fernanda Ribeiro

Federal Rural University of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
fernandaribeiro9@yahoo.com.br

Real reading: The influence of readers' cultural roots

New and refreshing waters have been flowing over the shores of reader response theories. In the late 1970s and 1980s, Fish (1980), Iser (1978), Rifaterre (1978) among others had shifted the focus from interpreting the page to looking at the reader, but they tended to remain on the theoretical level. This led Reichl (2009: 129) to ask: "How do theoretical conception of readers, implied or other, fit into the agenda of empirical reading research, which is, after all, concerned with providing data about real readers in real reading situations?" Among recent experimental work, Miall and Kuiken (2002) have started to move in this direction. In this line, our study looks away from ideal readers and examines genuine readers' emotional reaction to poetry. The aim is to offer evidence-based data that may clarify whether real readers' response to poetry is universal or culture-specific. To this purpose, 500 Humanities students from two different countries (Brazil and Ukraine) were asked to read Poe's "The Lake" and report their response to this poem through a questionnaire bearing a 15-item semantic differential scale. Participants read the poem in its original version in English or in its translation into the respondents' mother tongues (Portuguese, Ukrainian and Russian). The results point to statistically significant differences within and between the groups. The findings indicate that first-hand responses to poetry are to a large degree culture specific, and that the language and the translation in which the text is written also influence responses.

Keywords: reader response, empirical research, cultural differences, quantitative methods, Poe

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