



# IGEL Conference 2024

at RWTH Aachen University

Booklet of Abstracts

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### **Willie van Peer and Anna Chesnokova -- Individualistic vs. collectivistic perspectives: silent vs. oral poetry reading**

Literature, including poetry in particular, is rooted 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 then recited again. It is only in the 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. Recently, however, thanks to the digital revolution, the oral dimension seems to have been rediscovered, partly through public performances of poetry at slam festivals, which attract thousands of participants, but even more so through its availability over the internet, with literally millions of people witnessing poets delivering their work. Both the

emotional ingredient in poetry as an experience (van Peer and Chesnokova 2022) and the oral and social nature of its delivery have thus been revitalised. Reading to oneself in private, however, is very different from such social events. Crucially, we remain largely unaware whether encountering a poetic text silently or aloud makes any difference. We assume that the difference relates to individualistic vs. collectivistic values, as documented by Hofstede (1984).

With these ideas in mind, we will report the results of an experiment in which respondents read poems, both traditional and modernist, in silence or aloud, after which we probed participants' reactions (van Peer and Chesnokova, in press for 2024).

The experiment consisted of several stages. At a preliminary phase, random adjectives associated with poetry reading per se (for example, 'beautiful', 'depressing', 'stimulating', etc.) were independently contributed by the two authors of this paper. This resulted in a total list of 182 items, which were subsequently cross-evaluated by each of us on a 7-point scale. Adjectives that scored lower than 4 by one of us as well as quasi-synonyms were deleted. The list was thus reduced to 66 items, which we offered to 15 students for an evaluation on the same scale. We then calculated the average score for each adjective and selected the 30 items that scored the highest. These were categorized across 6 dimensions: cognitive, aesthetic, emotional, social, musical and erotic.

In Study 1, two poems were used: 'Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night' by Dylan Thomas and 'Do Not Stand at My Grave and Weep' by Mary Elisabeth Frye. The rationale behind the choice was to read two texts focusing on the same topic (death) and possessing superficially similar textual patterns for the readers to notice (the imperative 'do not' plus verb, etc.). At the same time, the poems are significantly different in their style: the former text may be described as Modernist while the latter is a more traditional poem. The first text is a difficult one by an established author; thus, the power of the voice, we thought, might carry over aspects of the meaning which may remain largely hidden when read in silence. The poem by Frye is a very accessible one, written by the author who remained unknown for most of her lifetime.

Participants were randomly allocated to either of two conditions. Group 1 consisted of 22 respondents (students and staff members in the Faculty of Romance and Germanic Philology at Borys Grinchenko Kyiv University; 91 % female; mean age 33) who read the Thomas poem silently and the Frye poem aloud emphatically. Group 2 (26 students and staff members; 92 % female; mean age 28) read the first poem aloud and the second one silently to themselves. All participants of both groups were non-native speakers of English, but their level of English proficiency was minimum C1, so we assumed they would have no difficulty in understanding the language, nor in grasping the implications of the poems.

In Study 2, 52 participants from the same Faculty, comparable to the respondents in Study 1 (81 % female; mean age 26.9), read 'I Wish You Were Here' by Joseph Brodsky. Similar to Study 1, 27 did so silently while 25 read the poem aloud expressively.

The results indicate that the response to the texts differs more when they are read aloud: the text is remembered better, and musicality and eroticism in the reception prevail, regardless of the kind of poems. Additionally, we noticed a considerably stronger delightful and pleasurable mode of experiencing the more traditional accessible forms of poetry (those by Frye and Brodsky, in contrast to the Modernist one by Thomas) in the auditory sense of reading. The statistically significant differences in the response will be reported and discussed in line with the theory of psychopoetics.

## References

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## [Parallel Session 3: Room PHIL](#)

### **Cullin Brown – Moral Residue: Philosophical and Literary Foundations to Develop a Typology**

This paper has two aims. The first is to introduce the philosophical foundations of moral residue (MR). This is an important task because many who subject MR to philosophical scrutiny come to the conclusion that it is ultimately mistaken—that even though it is understandable that we sometimes hold ourselves responsible in ways that go beyond our blameworthiness, we are not really responsible in these ways. Against these views, I draw on a sentimentalist philosophical framework that vindicates many experiences or MR. This is not to say that we (i.e., other parties) should hold people who experience MR responsible in the same way they