13

PhD revisited: Poetry: Prima Vista

Reader-response research on poetry in a foreign language context[1]

SIGNE MARI WILAND
University of Agder

ABSTRACT   This chapter reports a doctoral study (Wiland, 2007) that investigates the experience of poetry reading in English and aims at revealing what foreign language students experience cognitively and affectively when they read a poem for the first time. By applying an experimental slow line-by-line reading method, the assumption is that the readers will document more thoughts and feelings than when conventional approaches are used. The chapter discusses some of the implications of this research.

KEYWORDS   Poetry reading | line-by-line reading method | reader-response | reader autonomy

---

1. For the entire thesis and companion volume including the respondents' protocols, see *Poetry: Prima Vista. Reader-Response Research on Poetry in a Foreign Language Context*, Bergen: Bergen University, 2007. The doctoral thesis in its entirety can be obtained through the University of Agder Library, UiA (https://www.uia.no/bibliotek).

INTRODUCTION

No doctoral study had been submitted in English didactics in literature in Norway when I defended my dissertation in 2007. However, response studies had been conducted in native language contexts in many countries, particularly in the USA and Great Britain, where some of the most influential theorists have worked and conducted research. Though different, native and second language research may be informed by some of the same methodological and theoretical approaches to produce their empirical material.

   If the first encounter with the poetic text, often referred to as the primary level of reading, is uncensored and unconditional, the possibility of forming new and secondary level discourses for the joint classroom experience may not prove to be such an ordeal for the classroom readers and teacher. To create a lasting interest in poetry, the teacher must help to make the student into an autonomous and confident reader, so that when literature is presented in the classroom it can work *for* the classroom reader, not against her. Only then will literature become a valuable means of personal growth and language development. Crediting the real readers with the competence they already have was an important and positive premise for my doctoral research, which was motivated by the lack of insight into what students think or feel when they read a poem in a school context. In case they do react to the poem, what is it that they think and feel about it? My doctoral thesis was an attempt to trace, understand, and interpret student readers' thoughts and feelings during the reading of a poem "prima vista", that is, when they read it for the first time. Teachers are often left with the impression that most readers in their classrooms do not respond to poems at all. Despite negative classroom experiences, there is reason to question such assumptions about the linguistic and literary ignorance of student readers and their lack of engagement when they read poetry in English. Therefore, the research questions of my thesis were the following:

1. Do student readers have richer experiences cognitively and affectively than they are able or willing to express verbally in class? If they do, what does this experience consist of, and how can it be described and interpreted?
2. Can students become engaged in a poem even if they do not understand all the language problems connected to lexis, grammar, and syntax?
3. Is it possible, by means of a productive research method, to enable student readers to express their personal and sincere experiences in a way that classroom reading does not?

The first two questions concern the readers and their competence. It is my contention that the reader needs theoretical support to become visible. For this reason, the reader concept used in my thesis is vital for the outcome of the study. The last question taps into the experimental *research method*, which is crucial and conditional to answer the other research questions.

THEORY

Most of the theories I found supportive of my research were taken from scholars who have worked theoretically and/or practically with issues of reading literary texts. The philosophical justification of reader-centred approaches to literature was dependent on hermeneutic theories developed by Hans-Georg Gadamer (1998) in *Truth and Method*. In his discussion of literature, he questions the authority of the author and the text by reassessing the value of the reading, and defines literature both as our common canon of "world literature" and as "the process of understanding" it as an aesthetic experience, where "the capacity to read… is like a secret art, even a magic that frees and binds us" (Gadamer, 1998, p. 162, pp. 164–165).

THE READER

Wolfgang Iser (1978, 1993) and his theory of "aesthetic response" (1978, pp. 20–21) and his notion of "prospecting" (1993, pp. 234–235) as an anthropological approach to literature helped me to understand the reader and define the reader concept constructively. However, to engage in practical classroom based reader-response research, it was primarily the American reader-response tradition with Louise Rosenblatt (1981), Stanley Fish (1980), and David Bleich (1975, 1978, 1988) that I found useful in my empirical study. The theoretical support for the "reader" concept was further based on an eclectic selection of reader-oriented theories in various fields such as philosophy, linguistics, and literary theory, represented among others by Roland Barthes (1973, 1977), Jacques Derrida (1997, 1992), I. A. Richards (2001), Hans Robert Jauss (1984), and Jonathan Culler (1994). The reader-oriented theorists in principle, though not always in practice, attribute the control of the meaning creating process to the reader, not to the literary authorities such as teachers of literature.

What kind of meaning can the classroom reader be expected to arrive at? What kind of understanding or experience can be expected during the process of reading? Since the concept was to cover real classroom readers, it must be open in the sense that the range of competences, attitudes, and personalities represented in an

average class were included, and their role as learners, whose main aim was to develop personally and professionally, was taken seriously. The concept coined by me for the study of the classroom reader was the "dynamic prospecting counter-signatory". "Dynamic" indicates movement or development, essential to all learners without requiring a certain standard of linguistic and literary competence. "Countersignatory" implies a restricted freedom on the part of the reader as to how to make sense of the words in the poems and how to express an understanding of them without being hemmed in by the constraints of definitions of the language of poetry as opposed to the language of prose (Derrida, 1992, p. 41). The "dynamic prospecting countersignatory" need not be equipped with the full semantic knowledge of a mature reader and have internalised the properties of literary discourses, according to Fish's definition (Fish, 1980, pp. 48–49), because this definition limits the possibility untrained readers have for experiencing literature through the language they command. "Prospecting" indicates that there is something valuable to be found (but not necessarily is found), without defining the nature and weight of this object more closely. By asking readers to respond to poetry one line at the time, the notion of experience became wide enough to cover a range of reactions from the readers, from a general indifference to a profound aesthetic experience; from a rudimentary command of lexis and grammar to a well-developed competence of language forms and poetic rhetoric.

COGNITIVE AND AFFECTIVE ASPECTS OF EXPERIENCING POETRY

In the context of the study, "cognitive" is understood as the analytical, intellectual approach, pertaining to reason rather than emotion, where thinking is based on concepts and ideas or images. "Affective" is used not only as the emotional reaction or approach to language, but as a way of thinking, comparable to ideas and images (Opdahl, 2002, pp. 59–73). To apply the cognitive/affective continuum does not imply a simplification of the complex way readers make use of their combined personal resources, and neither of them is made an ideal for the reading. Nor does it ignore other concepts such as aesthetic experience and the force of imagination, generally applied in the discussion about poetry. Still less does it ignore the existence of the artistic creation, the poetic text, and poetic rhetoric. In *Aesthetic Experience and Literary Hermeneutics*, Hans Robert Jauss (1984) discusses "aesthetic pleasure and the fundamental experiences of poiesis, aesthesis, and catharsis" (pp. 22–36), saying that "aesthetic experience can be included in the process of the aesthetic creation of identity if the reader accompanies his receptive activity by reflection on his own development" (p. 36). If the reading experience is to be

decisive for the individual reader's aesthetic development, there must be a combination of personal faculties involved in the experience, such as sensitivity to emotions, ideas, and thoughts concerning the primary activity of perception and reception, but not least the reflection about the personal development as a reader.

Affective approaches have been defined in various ways (Opdahl, 2002, pp. 74–96) and often discredited in serious literary criticism (Wimsatt, 1989, pp. 21–39). Both Bleich (1975, pp. 97–105), in arguing for a subjective but responsible approach to literary response, and Richards (*Practical Criticism: A Study of Literary Judgement*, 2001, pp. 73–82, 89–93), in trying to develop a more scientific, objective, and balanced approach to literary criticism, are aware of the inescapability and force of emotional reactions to what we read. The question is not whether affective reactions should be totally embraced or avoided, but how to define what we mean by affective responses, as opposed to cognitive ones, and to be conscious of how cognitive and affective reactions are both part of the reading experience and must be treated accordingly.

To Richards (*Practical Criticism*, 2001), "the interference of emotional reverberations from a past, which have nothing to do with the poem" is listed as one of ten obstacles to successful reading (pp. 22–25). To Bleich (1975), emotions are the primary resource in literary response, and they are essential and necessary to enjoy poetry and to write response statements, defined as "a record of the perception of a reading experience and its natural, spontaneous consequences" (p. 147), which in turn are a condition for writing critical commentaries on poetry, containing what is referred to as secondary or tertiary readings. To embrace all readers, the researcher needs to be aware of these contesting concepts pertaining to the reading activity (Opdahl, 2002, p. 10).

Rosenblatt's distinction between the efferent or non-aesthetic and aesthetic reading attitude is an attempt to define poetry, not by the nature of the text, but by the attitude of the reader (1981, pp. 22–29). In her transactional theory, *efferent* means *carry away* and describes the kind of reading where the reader is carried away from the reading in the sense that the outcome, in the form of information and knowledge, is the most important aspect of reading. "In aesthetic reading, in contrast, the reader's primary concern is with what happens *during* the actual reading event" (1981, p. 24). The awareness of this continuum may help teachers to guide the learners in reading techniques that facilitate aesthetic reading, so that the efferent reading does not take over and thereby helps to undermine literature as an aesthetic expression of a work of art. For very many readers, the efferent reading is the only one they seem to accept. No wonder this is the most frequent approach, as there is usually something to be learnt from a text, even from a poem.

METHODOLOGY

In my doctoral study an experimental line-by-line method was developed, inspired by Short and Van Peer (1989), aiming at opening up for the student readers' personal and sincere experiences, and permitting me as a researcher to find out what the students experienced cognitively and affectively when they read a poem for the first time. The rationale behind the experimental method was to facilitate responses that are otherwise usually lost in the classroom or never communicated to others.

RESPONDENTS

My doctoral study included 95 respondents in three reader groups; one group of upper secondary school students from five different schools attending the advanced courses in English, and two groups of student teachers in English didactics; one group training to become teachers in primary school, the other practical-pedagogical education (PPU) group training to become teachers in lower and upper secondary school. I have taught English literature and didactics in all three groups, and the method used to collect data in the study was first used as a teaching method for my own teacher students.

References to the respondent groups were made in the text as follows: S = upper secondary school student (40 respondents, 17–19 years old), TT = student teacher of the Norwegian general educational programme (29 respondents, 25–30 years old), and T = student teacher (PPU) (26 respondents of various ages from their late twenties to practicing teachers).

DATA COLLECTION

The participants read and responded to one of five poems by writing down the responses by hand on a sheet of paper handed out by me in class, later transcribed and printed as a companion volume to my thesis, covering 203 pages. Many of my respondents wrote from one or two to seven pages on a relatively short poem. The poems were "Mid-Term Break" (MB) by Seamus Heaney, "He Wishes for the Cloths of Heaven" (CH) by W. B. Yeats, "A Birthday" (B) by Christina Rossetti, "maggie and milly and molly and may" (MM) by e. e. cummings, and "Infant Sorrow" (IS) by William Blake. The handwritten protocols (Richards, 2001, p. 13) represented the empirical material of my research, were the only documents I had, and the only means to access the thoughts and feelings of the respondents. References to readers' responses, printed in the companion volume, were made as follows in the text: T7: MB, line 5 = the 7th PPU student teacher responding to line

5 in "Mid-Term Break" by Seamus Heaney. S6: IS, line 4 = 6th upper secondary school student responding to line 4 in "Infant Sorrow" by William Blake, etc.

Infant Sorrow (IS), William Blake
1 My mother groan'd! my father wept.
2 Into the dangerous world I lept:
3 Helpless, naked, piping loud:
4 Like a fiend hid in a cloud.

5 Struggling in my father's hands,
6 Striving against my swaddling bands,
7 Bound and weary I thought best
8 To sulk upon my mother's breast.

maggie and milly and molly and may (MM), e. e. cummings
1) maggie and milly and molly and may
2) went down to the beach (to play one day)

3) and maggie discovered a shell that sang
4) so sweetly she couldn't remember her troubles, and

5) milly befriended a stranded star
6) whose rays five languid fingers were;

7) and molly was chased by a horrible thing
8) which raced sideways while blowing bubbles: and

9) may came home with a smooth round stone
10) as small as a world and as large as alone.

11) For whatever we lose (like a you or a me)
12) it's always ourselves we find in the sea

He Wishes for the Cloths of Heaven (CH), W. B. Yeats
1) Had I the heavens' embroidered cloths,
2) Enwrought with golden and silver light,
3) The blue and the dim and the dark cloths
4) Of night and light and the half-light,
5) I would spread the cloths under your feet:

6) But I, being poor, have only my dreams;

7) I have spread my dreams under your feet;

8) Tread softly because you tread on my dreams.

Birthday (B), Christina Rossetti

1) My heart is like a singing bird

2) Whose nest is in a watered shoot;

3) My heart is like an apple-tree

4) Whose boughs are bent with thick-set fruit;

5) My heart is like a rainbow shell

6) That paddles in a halcyon sea;

7) My heart is gladder than all these

8) Because my love is come to me.

9) Raise me a dais of silk and down;

10) Hang it with vair and purple dyes;

11) Carve it in doves and pomegranates,

12) And peacocks with a hundred eyes;

13) Work it in gold and silver grapes.

14) In leaves and silver fleur-de-lys;

15) Because the birthday of my life

16) Is come, my love is come to me.

Mid-Term Break (MB), Seamus Heaney

1) I sat all morning in the college sick bay

2) Counting bells knelling classes to a close.

3) At two o'clock our neighbours drove me home.

4) In the porch I met my father crying-

5) He had always taken funerals in his stride-

6) And big Jim Evans saying it was a hard blow.

7) The baby cooed and laughed and rocked the pram

8) When I came in, and I was embarrassed

9) By old men standing up to shake my hand

10) And tell they were "sorry for my trouble".

11) Whispers informed strangers I was the eldest,

12) Away at school, as my mother held my hand

13) In hers and coughed out angry tearless sighs.
14) At ten o'clock the ambulance arrived
15) With the corpse, stanched and bandaged by the nurses.

16) Next morning I went up into the room. Snowdrops
17) And candles soothed the bedside; I saw him
18) For the first time in six weeks. Paler now,

19) Wearing a poppy bruise on his left temple,
20) He lay in the four foot box as in his cot.
21) No gaudy scars, the bumper knocked him clear.

22) A four foot box, a foot for every year.

PROCEDURE

The poems were physically chopped up in as many lines as each poem consisted of and handed out individually one line at the time, giving each respondent as much time as desired to complete the work with a single line. Gradually they built up the poem until they finally had the entire text in front of them. Before I handed out the first line of the poem, I presented the students with the following information on an overhead projector:

1 Line-by-line reading → line-by-line reactions → interpretation

2 Your protocols → detailed reactions to each line: language, style, rhyme, rhythm, theme, emotions, anticipation, the process itself, introspection.

3 Use the line numbers to structure your process of reading, nothing else. Your protocols should reflect the "messiness" of the reading process. Arrows, circling etc. may be used.

4 The title: "Mid-Term Break" (or the title of one of the other poems, where these were used)

Poet: Name not given.
English/English dictionary may be used.

Further instructions were given orally in plenary and students' questions were answered to secure as open and unprejudiced an attitude as possible. To make sure that the respondents would be able to get started, I supplied them with some of the

meta language they knew from their previous study of literature. So, the concepts like "rhythm", "rhyme", and "theme" were not meant as guiding principles for the reading, but simply a possible way into the poem. They did not function as prompts, and only a handful of readers used these concepts in their protocols. Poems of a manageable length for the duration of a double lesson were chosen by me. They were relatively open in the sense that they did not require specific factual information to be understood, at least superficially. This openness did not imply that they were simple, but rather that they were what Umberto Eco (1984) describes as difficult enough to offer resistance and ambiguities. I also used different kinds of poems to elicit responses to various poetic styles and poetic devices. The intention of the method was not to document the optimal reading of the poem, but the realistic first encounter with an unknown text.

DATA ANALYSIS

Since my research took its epistemological point of departure in subjective criticism and the assumption that every reader responds emotionally to a text, it was essential to include a conscious and positive approach to emotion in my interpretation of the protocols. The interpretation of the protocols was based on my knowledge of the school environment and the students, which helped me to understand the language competence of the readers, but also their worldview (Sperber, 1985, p. 16).

My position was also comparable to that of the literary critic in the sense that the textual material was the visible object of study. My long-lasting fascination for students in the process of development and growth made me interpret the misunderstanding of a word like "fiend" (IS), the problems of finding out the identity of the dead person (MB) and line 10 in MM not as weaknesses or mistakes, but rather as interesting information about the emotional aspects of reading. The risk of all hermeneutic practices, of misinterpreting the respondents' conscious intentions, was present, but it would be a greater offence to the writers of the protocols not to give their "language of thought" (Pilkington, 2000, p. 46) the same sincere treatment as any critic does to a literary text. It was necessary to approach the minds behind the language of the protocols with caution and openness, because it was the respondents' first attempt to verbalise an experience of great personal impact, and it was a means to find out what potential learners of English had, to develop their literary and linguistic competence further and to grow personally.

RESULTS

The respondents' attitudes to the reading permeated the protocols and revealed how they looked upon the task of reading a poem. The attitude favoured at the beginning of the reading was not necessarily the one they supported during the entire reading process, as their unexpected emotional reactions often contested with the cognitive wish to understand every word.

ATTITUDE TO THE READING

The explicit initial attitude was important as it signalled the respondents' view of poetry and how they intended it to be approached. A recurring reaction in most protocols pertained to the value of information about the content of the poems, defined here as plot and motif,[2] and knowledge about lexis, grammar, or semantics, either when the respondents' anticipations were confirmed (see first two extracts below); or when it was "difficult to place" the information with what the readers already knew (see third extract):

> *I don't have much more to write now. I still think it is about a baby that has just been born.* (S2: IS, line 6)

> *"Whispers"— typical form of communication when something sad, tragic has happened. No raised voices. Precise information about the main character – eldest in a flock of children. Is there a bit of sarcasm, disapproval from the main person because of how people are reacting?* (T1: MB, line 11)

> *Change of person, scene. Difficult to place this information with what I know already. Mood has changed again. The word "embarrassed" describes uneasiness but whether this is to be understood as totally negative or not we'll not know until we read more of the poem. Is it to do with shame or shyness?* (T1: MB, line 8)

When Rosenblatt (1981) describes the efferent reading attitude as what the reader "will carry away from the reading" (p. 24) in terms of information, this description aptly covers the wish many of the respondents expressed when they tended to

---

2.   Content is a vague concept, often used in schools to denote the dichotomy between form and content. In this context, it comprises both plot and motif in line with the respondents' own understanding of these concepts. Form covers the poetic rhetoric and structure.

postpone what they called the "meaning" or "message", until there was a break in the poem, or when the reading was completed:

Finally I know why this person is so happy. He has found love. And then his heart want to sing of joy. (TT1: B, line 8)

I was right. It all sums up neatly. (TT3: B, line16)

Despite the intention inherent in the line-by-line method, the efferent attitude is the explicit attitude taken by most respondents at the beginning of their reading, and it pertains to all five poems:

What is this? It doesn't look too promising – because of the word sick, I think And I really don't understand what "college sick bay" means We'll see what comes out of it, but the person seems to be in a bad mood/depressed. (T7: MB, line 1)

The title – Capital letters – why emphasize? What is the Cloths of Heaven? Who is he? The line ? a wish, language – "embroidered cloths" ? what does the writer mean? Alliteration – had, heaven. A very nice line – I like it. I am curious about "heaven's embroidered cloths"! I have to get the next line now! I can't wait! (T2: CH, line 1)

rhyme and rhythm About four girls, Kind of "childish" poem, easy to read and to remember. The four girls are probably on theyer way somewhere. (S2: MM, line 1)

Something nice have happened, may be someone has fallen in love, or someone has got pregnant, or become parents. Singing bird is something nice, something you hear in the morning, it her/his heart is like a singing bird he/ she must be happy. (S5: B, line 1)

The frequent use of "understand", "know", and "meaning" in the protocols signals an efferent attitude. However, expressions like *"I don't know what has happened, why they react in this way"* (IS: T1: line 1) do not imply that the readers do not experience the poems affectively or enjoy the poems as sources of pleasure, confusion, and pain. Generally, a lack of enjoyment is not documented in my material, but the way the readers balance the efferent attitude against their cognitive and affective competence demonstrates different personal preferences in their read-

ings. The efferent reading attitude has some obvious positive functions that are a necessary and valuable resource in all reading. At the same time, it has clear limitations, particularly as regards the reading of poetry.

SEARCHING FOR INFORMATION ABOUT CONTENT AND CHARACTERS

How far can the efferent reading attitude carry the readers towards an understanding of the poems as it is displayed in the protocols? The respondents knew that they read poetry, even though they were prevented from taking the traditional approach to poetry reading used in classrooms. The results pertaining to reader identity revealed how this knowledge of reading sometimes made them feel unequal to the task when they experienced problems during the reading. Some of these problems were associated with what the readers defined as "meaning" or "message", and in many cases difficulties were explained as a consequence of poor vocabulary, as in these protocols:

> *Frustrating not to understand this 100%. Am I the only one with this poor vocabulary?* (T5: MB, line 22)

> *Vair? The lines become more difficult, I'm not really sure what this line means because I didn't find the word vair in the dictionary, and this word, I feel, is important to understand what the line is all about. It has to do with the silk.* (TT2: B, line 10)

> *I do not understand the meaning of the word: enwrought. But if I only think about – wrought the line may have something to do with the cloths being forged or prepared with "golden and silver light.* (S3: CH, line 2)

> *What's fiend? Devil...HUH!?!? Why is the baby like the devil hid in the cloud? I'm confused. That certainly was unecspected. I like the rhyme. The language is good, but there are some key words that I don't understand, and that ruins a whole lot. I have to look it up in the dictionary, and that is not something that you want to do when you read a poem. It sort of ruins the harmoni around the poem. I enjoy reading poems. I am curious of what this devil is to do next!* (S7: IS, line 4)

When the explicit attitude is that it is desirable and possible to find a clear semantic meaning, and to understand what happens in the poem, the experience of frustration and confusion is unavoidable. This is a major cognitive challenge to the

readers, as they consider this information necessary to understand, experience, or interpret the poem. In other protocols, success in this respect translates the experience as a combined cognitive and emotional challenge, often sustained from the very first line of the poem, as in this protocol, where the afterthought contains an emotional reaction and an existential conclusion:

> *He did not get old only four years. A victim. It is a very sad poem, it involves a lot of emotions, you can sent (føle) that it's a sad poem from the first sentence. It tells me that there is just a fine line between life and death. Suddenly you can be on "the other side.* (S1: MB, line 22)

Of all the poems, "Mid-Term Break" is the one leaving the readers with the most confused understanding of content and characters, which the frequent use of questions indicates:

> *Who is Big Jim Evans? Big and black? A friend? Why is he saying that? Is he saying it right now, while the father is crying? A hard blow? Blowing his nose? Has the funeral already been?* (T5: MB, line 6)

The respondents invest a lot of cognitive energy in trying to decide the plot they anticipate in the poem, but without being able to sustain a consistent idea during the reading and through to the end. The identity of the dead person causes problems for many students as they try to apply a predominantly efferent attitude to the reading. Even though the wish to make use of an efferent reading attitude is conspicuous in all the poems, the individual poems encourage cognition in various ways. In addition to MB, IS is the poem that makes the readers focus mostly on the story aspect and how important it is for the reader to come to terms cognitively with content and cultural context. Contrary to the case in MB, most of the IS readers generally feel they are able to grasp the content at the end of the reading, as is demonstrated in the two following quotations, with the student teacher (TT1) being satisfied with finally having found the answer, and the student (S2) adding her reflections in her responses to the same line:

> *The last sentence makes the whole sence – it is a birth of a baby. Things fall together, the poem is complete. Partially the sentence can mean lots of things together they mean one thing. Rhyme here, too. Words express different ways to interpret. Maybe the poem has a hidden meaning?* (TT1: IS, line 8)

I was right!!! It's a sweet poem, but I [it] also makes me think of how right it is that we are all very naked and helpless when we are born. (S2: IS, line 8)

As the title of the poem was intentionally left out for a random number of the IS readers, it is likely that this has affected the wish to approach context and content cognitively. It is interesting to notice where the discovery of the birth takes place in the reading process to see what significance this awareness has for the total experience of the poem.

The students (S) and student teachers (TT) that identified with the narrator at an early stage during the reading referred to the birth at an early stage in their protocols. This implies that most of the youngest readers (five out of eight students, and six out of ten student teachers) find out that the poem is about a birth. The youngest readers (S) draw their conclusions on average at an earlier stage than the older students (TT) do. The young readers seem to need less evidence in the text than the older readers do to follow an inkling that perhaps can be explained as a non-rational and emotional reaction. They are greater risk-takers than the student teachers, who seem to need more textual proof to conclude in a similar way. Of the three older student teachers (T) that were given the title, only one suggested the birth after reading line 6, and the two other readers did not even mention it.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Regardless of the difficulties the readers expressed in understanding the semantics, the content, and context of the poems, the efferent reading attitude was fruitful for its insistence on understanding these elements and for the effort the readers were willing to invest, also when they felt there was little to "carry away" (Rosenblatt, 1981, p. 24) from the reading. A comparison of the first and last line responses gave interesting perspectives on the readers' approaches to poetry as the last line was often a summing up of content, as opposed to the more complex and richer cognitive and affective experience the respondents revealed during the process itself. The readers themselves often attached such great value to the information to be had at the end of the reading, that other important aspects of the reading experience were underestimated and neglected, particularly the affective aspects, sense impressions, and the aesthetic value of reading poems. This applied to all the poems, but "Mid-Term Break", "Infant Sorrow", and "maggie and milly and molly and may" encouraged and challenged the efferent reading attitude particularly clearly because of the expectations raised by the use of finite verbs, which promised a story to be told. In "He Wishes for the Cloths of Heaven" and "A Birthday", the students' frequent complaints about difficult vocabulary did not seem to

prevent them from enjoying the poems. Still, their engagement in all these aspects far surpassed the level seen in the poetry classroom.

DISCUSSION: CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE ENGLISH DIDACTIC FIELD

The doctoral study presented in the present chapter explored and documented the train of thoughts and feelings of English language students that to my knowledge had never been conducted academically before.

EMPIRICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

It is evident that the readers' reactions confirmed the problem associated with trying to apply a firm but false distinction between what is cognition and what is emotion in response (Opdahl, 2002). It is also evident that the readers themselves experienced that the efferent reading attitude contested with the aesthetic attitude when they clearly enjoyed the poems, despite problems of understanding lexis and semantics. The empirical data discussed in my doctoral thesis showed sincere commitment to the task of reading poetry and great enjoyment in the encounter with the texts. Despite the fact that the self-awareness of many readers was low, they still experienced pleasure, reflected existentially on what they read, and were able to express their ideas in a personal discourse. Their protocols are what I would call examples of interliterature, students' documented authentic encounters with poetry in an average class without peer pressure and teacher expectation to direct and disturb individual reactions.

METHODOLOGICAL AND THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS

The methodological and theoretical contributions of my doctoral study concern the line-by-line design, specifically offering an alternative to efferent reading attitudes, and possibilities for authentic reader responses. The three aspects of the method I used – that the readers read a poem prima vista in privacy without discussing it with anyone; that they read it line-by-line in a slow process where they were deprived of an overall view until the end; and that they wrote down their immediate reactions to each individual line – have proved an effective means to understand more of the complex reading process of students of English. First, the readers in this doctoral study lacked certainty of cognition and therefore hesitated to decide the meaning of the poems, even though they had clearly experienced emotions worth while expressing in their protocols earlier during the reading.

According to Rosenblatt (1981), this tendency is typical of non-aesthetic or efferent readings, as "the reader's attention is focused primarily on what will remain as the residue *after* the reading – the information to be acquired, the logical solution to a problem, the actions to be carried out" (p. 23). From her description of the efferent or non-aesthetic reading attitude, it is easy to get the impression that this is something negative and that an efferent reading attitude destroys the possibility of enjoying a poem as an expression of art. In principle, this initial attitude contests with the slow "reading event" (p. 24) inherent in the line-by-line method, but reveals more clearly how the readers balance the two attitudes.

Second, the line-by-line design encouraged authentic reader responses. In this respect, my research differs from other response studies. Usually, the readers are given optimal conditions during the reading, in the sense that they are presented with the unity of the text and are explicitly or implicitly assessed according to a master interpretation. The students are commonly given ample time to read, study, and discuss the poem to get the most out of it (Richards, 2001, pp. 13–14). Even in more recent research, where the form of response differs from the traditional form of academic poetry analysis, the objective is to find out how much the readers can get out of a text when given optimal conditions. However, optimal reading conditions do not necessarily result in the most advanced understanding of a poem, and my concern has not been the optimal reading conditions, but the first authentic approach. Therefore, the development of my new reader concept, the "dynamic prospecting countersignatory", as well as my concept of "interliterature" (see *Implications* below) have been decisive for the constructive view of the respondents and their protocols.

IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHING ENGLISH LITERATURE

Making students literate is one of the primary objectives of the school system. Some students seem to find the forms of literacy that the school system prioritises difficult and fail in their attempts to move from an oral discussion of texts to the kind of literate community that literary analyses presuppose. The protocols in my doctoral study represent a crossbreed between orality and literacy, a written dialogue between poem and reader (Ong, 1999) that teachers of English can use in their own instruction. Students of literature need a field of experimentation, a field of interliterature, comparable to interlanguage (Selinker, 1972), where they should be allowed to experiment with reading on their own premises. Therefore, my intention was not to document the optimal reading of the poems, but to examine how the students' realistic first encounter with the text might be conducted.

The protocols reveal uncertainty about what knowledge of poetry implies, most of all through the fact that the student teachers (T and TT) do not show more analytical and cognitive approaches to the reading than the upper secondary school students (S). In many classrooms, students and teachers have vague notions about what kind of knowledge is necessary or desirable when reading poetry and for what purpose. The findings show that the respondents reveal little need for an understanding of poetic rhetoric when they write their protocols, even though it has been demonstrated that the protocols contain secondary level responses, where cognition and reflection ought to encourage the use of critical vocabulary. However, knowing literary rhetoric and meta-language is perhaps not the only way to expand knowledge cognitively and to increase reflectivity. The protocol findings suggest areas, pointed at below, where such knowledge can be developed in English classroom teaching.

The study of literature requires conceptual frameworks as a means of orientation and memory. The most motivating way of introducing students to theoretical questions is to let them see the need for concepts to describe their experience through the reading of texts. Some of the issues taken up by the respondents in this doctoral study are complex, such as the relation between the poet and the voices of the poem, the address of the poet, the function of poetry, the function of metaphors, what is a good poem, how to respond to poetry, and how to write about it. Even though the respondents do not discuss these issues in an academic way, they point to them as crucial to the experience of different aspects of the poem they read. If teachers introduce their students to the line-by-line reading, the slow method gives the readers time and opportunity by induction to voice these issues in a personal way, which is the first step towards increasing knowledge about poetry cognitively. Perhaps the challenge of literature teaching cannot be ascribed to the students' lack of cognitive curiosity, but to the fact that the student readers are not given time to process their reflections properly and become confident readers. If teachers of literature do so, knowledge, including useful conceptual frameworks, might not be a stumbling block to the students, but a natural extension of their own reflections. In this way, knowledge would be more than the rote learning of interpretations conveyed by the teacher.

The most important motivating factor in education is the students' own need and wish for knowledge (Simensen, 1998). Knowledge of literary theory does not necessarily mean quoting well-known academics for their opinions on literary texts. If teachers plan their lessons in such a way that the students can contribute from personal need to defining some of the aspects of literary knowledge in their first encounter with a text, as is demonstrated in my research, perhaps their will-

ingness and ability to accept the conceptual frameworks of traditional poetic and general literary rhetoric may become greater.

Measured against the findings concerning reader identity, there is reason to believe that all readers would profit from a greater consciousness about their own attitude to reading and how this attitude can decide or guide, but also restrict the outcome and enjoyment of poems. It is necessary to accept the conflicting attitudes to reading as a natural part of a reader identity and to realise that the efferent reading attitude is not enough to enjoy poetry and develop a positive and confident identity.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

In my more recent work, I have argued that, "Considering the extensive place English has had for more than a century in Norwegian schools and at universities, relatively little research has been conducted into the effect of teaching" literature, but also culture in the English foreign language classroom (Wiland, 2013, p. 13). One study that has looked into this field is Juliet Munden's (2010) doctoral study, *How students in Eritrea and Norway make sense of literature* (see Chapter 14 in this anthology). She suggests an interesting field of research, where literature and multicultural issues overlap to inform the readers of similarities and differences between students from two ethnic groups when they approach the same literary text and seek to interpret it. Aspects of these doctoral studies could be replicated with new student groups to inform educators about the function of literature in the present multicultural classroom.

The multicultural communities in Norway have likewise challenged me to conduct a response study in the overlapping fields of American literature, religion and feminism based on protocols written by female students of English from the majority and minority cultures in Norway, representing Christian, Muslim, Buddhist and atheist backgrounds (Wiland, 2013). The project was initiated with an equal number of female readers from the majority and minority cultures and with an equal number of representatives from university and upper secondary school students. They responded to books thematising various versions of Christianity, Islam, Judaism and Hinduism. My aim was to "start exploiting the potential there may be in literary texts for achieving some of the subtler aims and general objectives of the national curriculum, such as tolerance and international understanding in a research context" (Wiland, 2013, p. 14). Although interesting findings were documented, the empirical material was difficult to produce. Reading two books in addition to their regular schoolwork proved to be beyond the capacity of most

of these upper secondary school students. Moreover, some of the interesting voices from minority cultures dropped out of the project at an early stage for various personal reasons. I urge future researchers to exploit this field further, perhaps covering more minority students and showing greater geographical spread than my research displays in order to examine whether literature still matters and can make a change in the lives of young people.

REFERENCES

Barthes, R. (1977). *Image, Music, Text*. London: Fontana Press.

Barthes, R. (1973). *Le plaisir du texte*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil.

Blake, W. (2000). *The Complete Illuminated Books*. London: Thames and Hudson.

Bleich, D. (1978). *Subjective Criticism*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Bleich, D. (1988). *The Double Perspective. Language, Literacy, and Social Relations*. Urbana: National Council of Teachers of English.

Bleich, D. (1975). *Readings and Feelings. An Introduction to Subjective Criticism*. Urbana: National Council of Teachers of English.

Council of Europe. (2003). *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Culler, J. (1994). *On Deconstruction, Theory and Criticism after Structuralism*. London: Routledge.

Cummings, E. E. (1998). *The Kingfisher Book of Children's Poetry*. Ed. Michael Rosen. London: Kingfisher.

Derrida, J. (1992). *Acts of Literature*. London: Routledge.

Derrida, J. (1997). *Grammatology*. Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Eco, U. (1984). *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Fish, S. (1980). *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities*. Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press.

Gadamer, H.-G. (1998). *Truth and Method*. New York: The Continuum Publishing Company.

Heaney, S. (1990). *New Selected Poems*. London: Faber and Faber.

Iser, W. (1978). *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Iser, W. (1993). *Prospecting. From Reader Response to Literary Anthropology*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Jauss, H. R. (1984). *Aesthetic Experience and Literary Hermeneutics. Theory and History of Literature, Vol.*3. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Kunnskapsløftet. http://odin.dep.no/filarkiv/254450/Laereplaner06.pdf

Miall, D. S. (2007). *Literary Reading. Empirical and Theoretical Studies*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing.

Munden, J. (2010). *How Students in Eritrea and Norway Make Sense of Literature*. Oslo: Oslo University.

Ong, W. J. (1999). *Orality and Literacy*. London and New York: Routledge.

Opdahl, K. M. (2002). *Emotion as Meaning*. London: Associated University Presses.

Pilkington, A. (2000). *Poetic Effects. A Relevance Theory Perspective*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Richards, I. A. (2001). *Practical Criticism. A Study of Literary Judgement*. London: Routledge.

Richards, I. A. (2001) *Principles of Literary Criticism*. London: Routledge.

Rosenblatt, L. M. (1981). *The Reader the Text the Poem*. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press.

Rossetti, C. (1999). A Birthday. In M. H. Abrams. (Ed.). *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*. Vol. 2. New York and London: W.W. Norton and Company.

Selinker, L. (1972). Interlanguage. In *International Review of Applied Linguistics*. 10, 209–231.

Short, M. and Van Peer, W. (1989). Accident! Stylisticians evaluate: Aims and methods of stylistic analysis. In M. Short (Ed.), *Reading, Analysing & Teaching Literature.* London and New York: Longman, 1989.

Simensen, A. M. (1998). *Teaching a Foreign Language. Principles and Procedures*. Bergen: Fagbokforlaget.

Sperber, D. (1985). *On Anthropological Knowledge. Three Essays*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Van Ek, Jan. (1986). *Objectives for foreign language learning*. Strasbourg: Council for Cultural co-operation.

Wiland, S. M. (2007). *Poetry: Prima Vista. Reader-Response Research on Poetry in a Foreign Language Context.* Bergen: University of Bergen.

Wiland, S. M. (2013). *Female Voices and Religious Identity. Dialogues with Students of Literature.* Kristiansand: Portal Academic.

Wimsatt, W. K. (1989). *The Verbal Icon. Studies in the Meaning of Poetry*. Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky.

Yeats, W. B. (1991). *Yeats's Poems*. In A. Norman Jeffares (Ed.), *Yeats's Poems.* London: Papermac.

14

PhD revisited: Content in Nordic pupil narratives in instructed EFL
A Norwegian Perspective[1]

ANNELISE BROX LARSEN
UiT Norges arktiske universitet

ABSTRACT In this chapter, the results of a doctoral study (Larsen, 2009) of thematic content in Nordic pupil narratives in EFL[2] are presented. A literary analysis of pupil texts focussing on intertextual references was applied. The findings suggest that the pupils' narratives formed a discourse in which these narratives explored the power aspects of the parent–child relationship, rebelled against teachers, and ridiculed the perfectionism ideals of popular culture. Implications for teaching English in Norway and suggestions for further research will also be discussed.

KEYWORDS Pupil narratives | Instructed EFL/ESL | English as a global language | Intertextuality

---

1. This chapter presents some of the results of a doctoral dissertation (Larsen, 2009) from the University of Tromsø, Norway. https://munin.uit.no/handle/10037/11035
2. The term EFL was used in the doctoral thesis on which the present chapter is based and is therefore used throughout, even if it has often been replaced by the term ESL in more recent research.