

For a very long time, literary reading has been jailed in a set of conventions already decided by the theorist and said to be accessible by few bright minds capable of violating the obstacles imposed by the intricacies of the literary text. Hence, it goes without saying that ordinary readers, who wish to make an understanding of the literary text from their own perspective, feel alienated by the complexities of the established conventions, contributing once more to the serious decline of literary studies in academic settings. More dangerously is the fate of these readers in foreign language contexts considered most of the time as idiosyncratic to deserve worthy attention. Therefore, the objective of the present research is to examine empirically; through the collection of data; the responses, both cognitive and affective, of thirty three Algerian university students to a literary selection of texts in English language. Indeed, this same study attempts to demonstrate whether literary response springs from capacities that are intrinsic to these readers or from other extrinsic predispositions. It, then, raises four main issues: first, Are all kinds of literary texts able to generate an appreciation in the Algerian reader? Second, Is literary competence necessary for an Algerian reader to appreciate a text of literature in English? Third, Is foregrounding responsible for generating response in Algerian readers of literary texts in English? Fourth, Which kind of feeling does foregrounding generate in these readers? The study is divided into six chapters; the first three chapters highlight the importance of the empirical approach to literary reading at the expense of a review of the major reader-response theories as traditionally conceived and which point out the limitation of literary interpretation. The fourth chapter proposes an empirical experiment on thirty three Algerian university students/readers so as to depict their profile and their potential predispositions in engaging with literary texts in English. In the fifth chapter, readers' depth of appreciation of two short stories, one canonical and one contemporary, is measured and compared in order to demonstrate the importance of possessing a literary competence for a reader of a literary text in English. The sixth and last chapter carries on a last experiment which aims at measuring the impact of foregrounding on Algerian readers of literary texts in English and the kind of affect the latter generates in these same readers. The results of this study suggest that Algerian students/readers of literary texts in English are capable of generating a literary appreciation of all kinds of literary texts written in English and more particularly of short stories. The second main finding shows that these naïve and unsophisticated readers are sensitive to intrinsic values of the literary text that surpass any extrinsic impact, which is an indication that literary competence is not necessary for mere appreciation. Finally, the last finding shows that despite their appreciation of literary texts while responding to foregrounding features, these readers are unable to develop the adequate strategies of interpretation which help them build their own understandings.