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Literary Reading and Emotions – Educational Perspectives

Reading for pleasure is an extraordinary activity. The black squiggles on the white page are still as the grave, colorless as the moonlit desert; but they give the skilled reader a pleasure as acute as the touch of a loved body, as rousing, colorful and transfiguring as anything out there in the real world. (Nell 1988)

Books for children and young adults are an important medium in the process of socialization. Through reading books, children assimilate language as well as literary and aesthetic experiences; they talk about their reception of literature, share their thoughts on books, and try to express their emotions. The sphere of literature and books, which is present in the family life, at school, in the library, and in many social situations and educational institutions creates various opportunities to participate in culture. The category of texts for young readers (as the so-called “fourth literature”) (Cieślowski 1985) is a natural part of literary culture and social literary communication or, more broadly, refers clearly to research on social function of literature. Various social groups are involved in promoting reading, including librarians, publishers, educators, teachers, and parents. At the academic level, research on literature and books for children and young adults is conducted by literary scholars as well as educators, psychologists, sociologists, and art historians. This multitude of views on children’s literature stimulates interdisciplinary studies, with particular emphasis on the theory and practice of reception, as well as encourages exploration of the real experiences with literature by the young reader¹ (Weinrich 1967; Jauss 1970; Iser 1978 ; Wieler 1997; Hoffmann 2011; Mayer 2017).

¹ The issue of reception of the literary work and dialogue between the text and the reader has been considered for many years. It has become a problem analysed by, among others, sociology of literature (cf. the term “literature from the reader’s perspective” as used by

In fact, “among the justifications for empirical research of literature, we observe one important thing they have in common – the desire to shift the focus in literary studies from purely academic knowledge to a pragmatic aspect, i.e. the impact of literature on the individual” (Maryl 2013: 166) including the young reader (such as the school-age student).

Therefore, it seems that the basic recommendation would be to determine and examine the synergy between, on the one hand, the reading needs and horizons of children and youth and, on the other hand, the reading practices at schools. It is also important to study the relationship between reading, experience, and emotions in the context of literature for young readers, and to design specific educational situations.

In this volume, which is based on several years of readership research that we have carried out with primary school students and many years of discussions at conferences organized by the Institute of Polish Studies of the University of Wrocław, partly in cooperation with other institutions like the Institute for Educational Science of the Technische Universität Dresden, or Department of Language and Literature Teaching in University of Valencia (Spain)² research and teaching workshops, panel discussions, and seminars with teachers, we are interested in developing a new form of analysis and language of school education with respect to literature – here, mainly the language of engagement in literary reading, functionalized to satisfy emotional, social, and cultural needs (Rajtar, Straczuk 2012), including young readers. The starting point for us was the specificity of emotional and sensual reception of literary narrative, e.g. vivid mental imaging absorbing many readers (also in the form of intersubjective cooperation) and the issue of describing the practice of literature and its reception from the perspective of the child reader.

It is true that many valuable hints are given by fragmentary research on the relationship between literature and affects, experience of literature, and empathetic and immersive reading. However, they are only contributory in nature. In turn this subject has not yet been taken up in a wider scope in Polish research on the reception of literature for children and young adults, e.g. based on specific literary examples and in-depth analysis of student statements.

Studies on “school reading” (Janus-Sitarz 2009; Janus-Sitarz 2016) discuss, among others, the issues of “literary emotions” (Papuzińska 1995; Zawsacka 2014; Małecki 2016) and “emotional perception”. Zofia Budrewicz even

e.g. Harald Weinrich) and a topic undertaken by representatives of the German school of the reception aesthetics (cf. the terms “horizon of expectations” and “the reader inscribed in the text”) (see: Weinrich 1967; Jauss 1970; Iser 1978).

² Interesting perspective of research connected with literature and emotions, reading and experiences is presented by Marta Sanjuán Álvarez (2011, 2014a, 2014b) who analysed the emotional components of literary reading in the childhood and adolescence. Another inspiring works are written by Felipe Munita and Enrique Riquelme (2011, 2013). These Spanish publications are focus on mediation in reading as a tool for emotional literacy.

writes convincingly about a significant turning point in research on school reading and states that “the situation of reception of an artistic work is derived [already, note by D.M.] from anthropology of literature and cultural theory of literature [...] Authors of many works [aiming at learning through experience, note D.M.] associate the operational usefulness of the figure of subjective sensual and mental experience with the possibilities of insight into it by the student reader” (Budrewicz 2012). It also facilitates emotional involvement of the reader, empathic reading, and affects as can be seen in the international research findings (Wieler 1997; Galda 2002; Opdahl 2002; Miall 2006; Paivio 2007; Hoffmann 2011; Koziółek 2016; Mayer 2017; Michułka 2018). In many cases, the starting point is also a discussion – recently emphasised by researchers of children’s literature – of literary conceptualizations and metaphorical specifications of certain concepts and cognitive explorations addressing the issues of “actual minds, possible worlds” (Bruner 1986) as well as the issues of “conditioning of human perception, memories always bearing trace of meaning-forming procedures” (Rembowska-Pluciennik 2012)³ especially in the case of “private reception” and individual interpretations (Seelinger Trites 2014; Nikolajeva 2016; Segal 2016; Oziewicz 2018). Here we should also mention the theory of aesthetic and efferent reading as well as interactional reading, developed by Louise Rosenblatt (1994, 1995), and then used by Lee Galda in the practice of reception of literature (in the text–reader–context relationship), discussed in a broader educational context from the perspective of socialization of the child recipient and their participation in culture (Galda, Beach 2001; Galda, Liang, Cullinan 2016). Also worth mentioning are the large-scale empirical studies on reading literature and convincing publications by David Miall, who considers three aspects of research on affects:

- (1) self-reference (“myself and my world”)
- (2) domain-crossing (crossing of different perspectives of the text overview)
- (3) anticipation (predicting, anticipating results, evoking associations, examining the horizon of reading expectations) (Miall 2006; Miall 2011).

The results of research by David Miall reinforce the conclusions by Keith Opdahl, who views emotions as meanings discovered from the perspective of imagination (Opdahl 2002). However significant publications concerning Polish language school education include the works of Krystyna Koziółek (2014), Marta Rusek (2012) and Zofia Zasacka (2014) and more broadly – the concept of empathy in the perspective of literary studies by Jarosław Płuciennik (2002) or the narrative approach by Magdalena Rembowska-Płuciennik (2009).

³ According to Magdalena Rembowska-Płuciennik, “the term *cognition* encompasses a complex multitude of human cognitive processes, ways of using and accumulating knowledge, treating them also as a conditioning of human perception, memories always bearing trace of meaning-forming procedures” (Rembowska-Płuciennik 2012: 14).

Within the school process of the reception of literature, Louise Rosenblatt's concept of interactional reading assumes a context of extra-literary reality and an individual, even existential, need to read. The reader's focus on the text as an event activates particular elements in his/her past experiences – external references and internal reactions that have merged with symbolic meanings of the words. The meaning arises from a network of relations between symbolic elements according to the reader's intuition. Symbols lead to images, objects, ideas, and relationships through specific associations or feelings formed through related experiences in real life or in literature. To some extent, the choice and organisation of reactions depends on the assumptions, expectations, and recognition of possible structures which the reader has learned over the course of his/her life. That is why the individual world of each reader is built into the very essence of the literary process (Rosenblatt 1994: 8–12; Rosenblatt 1995). In addition, the reading process itself consists, after all, not only of activity with media but also the perception process itself is self-referentially active.

The text is not so much an object, but a projection of the reader's inner mind. And it uses conceptual, imaginative patterns (abstract, conceptual representations) rooted in perceptual bodily experiences, everyday contacts with the outside world. (Płuciennik 2014: 2)

Here, mental images take on the function of conceptual metaphors – experiential gestalt, understood as the activity of drawing on everyday experiences and creating a conceptual framework that affects our way of thinking about a specific phenomenon. Experiential gestalt is like folk wisdom, a multidimensional whole with a specific structure (Lakoff, Johnson 2010). It is a complex image that appears in our minds when we encounter a particular situation, a meme-metaphor that reaches our minds not as a series of isolated observations that we piece together only through the process of “comprehension” or “thinking” but as an “image” that combines our experiences into coherent entities already at the stage of the perception of the world around us⁴ (Lakoff, Johnson 2010: 29–35; Płuciennik 2002; Stockwell 2006; Maryl 2005, 2016). It should be added here that the child's reception of literature can be “enhanced” by the rich world of their imagination, natural curiosity to explore the world, fresh perspective, spontaneity in reacting to a literary work, and, above all, expression of feelings and emotions that is associated with the process of mental development – unrestrained and unbound by social and cultural norms (Galda 2013).

The above findings are also consistent with the results of studies by Polish literary teaching experts (e.g. Jan Polakowski, and later Tadeusz Patrzalek) regard-

⁴ Information about *memes-metaphors* and *experimental gestalt* come from the publications of Marcin Zieliński. See among others M. Zieliński, *Elementy językoznawstwa kognitywnego w dydaktyce filozofii*, „Drogi Edukacji” 2013/1. Zieliński uses cognitive linguistics in practice of school teaching, paying attention to the concept of reality metaphorization, classification of metaphors, gestalt of experience and mental images, among others”.

ing the natural reading reception by children of young school age. These studies lead to the conclusion that the child reads a literary work to satisfy its ludic and compensatory needs. According to the above researchers, a child

likes to recognize well-known things and feels good in familiar situations. He or she notices specifics – events, details, and characters, but does not grasp the whole. They read with subjective, syncretic, and fragmentary thinking typical for their development, perceiving and remembering what they want and what they find interesting through connections to personal experiences or any associations. (Żuchowska 1992: 55; Patrzalek 1980; Patrzalek 1982; Chrzastowska 1987)⁵

Therefore, a noteworthy aspect of research on the phenomenon of involvement in the reading process and the broadly understood concept of literary reception is the emotional response to the text, which is supposed to be “alive” and “personal” for the reader. The reading reception of a literary work should be associated with a feeling of pleasure and satisfaction, which can be expressed by the reader in a very individual way and allows for real involvement, “immersion in the narrative”, which is carefully analysed by, among others, Magdalena Rembowska-Płuciennik:

Focus on literary narratives is associated with [...] the belief that reading fictional narratives satisfies unique emotional and cognitive human needs. The experiential character of literary reception, achieved thanks to the intimacy of silent reading, through psychosomatic resonance with respect to people and events, often with a sense of deep “penetration into fiction” is a unique and intense experience for many readers, comparable to the experience of virtual reality or navigation in an interactive interface environment⁶. (Rembowska-Płuciennik 2012)

One of the increasingly popular avenues of research on the reception of children’s literature is cognitive narratology. Cognitive studies on the reception of literature (including “school reading”) as a subdiscipline of theoretical and literary research focus on the following topics:

- (1) above all, understanding the narrative;
- (2) the character;

⁵ For example, in her analysis of the poetics of reception, Bożena Chrzastowska used specific children’s drawings to distinguish and illustrate factual, reflective, and symbolic reception. Martin Lindauer stresses that the reading process is a psychological process and literature has a cognitive referent because its content and structure evoke in the reader dreams, views on meaning, and a sense of style. To further order the issue of psychological processes during reading, let us also use the definition of interpretation by Jerry Hobbs, a discourse researcher, who understands it as “a function of two arguments: the text and a set of beliefs [of the reader, M.M.]” (Lindauer 1974: 139).

⁶ See: Institute of Literary Research (Polish Academy of Sciences) <http://ibl.waw.pl/rembowskapluciennikautoreferat.pdf> (20.10.2016).

- (3) emotional reading response;
- (4) remembering text;
- (5) visualisation as a style of reception. (Miall 2001; Stockwell 2006; Rembowska-Pluciennik 2008; Oatley 2011; Seelinger Trites 2014; Nikolajeva 2016; Oziewicz 2018).

It seems that visual affects and effects can become a kind of “educational catalyst” – an interpretative “reinforcement” in the process of understanding literary reality.

The emotional impact of a literary work in its structure and reception was previously convincingly demonstrated by Joanna Papuzińska. Her book *Dziecko w świecie emocji literackich*, drawing on the views of Bruno Bettelheim, brought recognition of the importance of the therapeutic impact of “separate” literature and the importance of “playing with literary emotions” in the process of reception in particular to that discussed by the therapeutic researcher (e.g. compensatory or consolation) dimension of literature (Papuzińska 1995; Bettelheim 1997).

In addition to the more theoretical approach of cognitive narratology, there are other, more sociologically oriented approaches that generate theories from empirical studies and became popular in the Anglo-Saxon and German-speaking context for several years. These include biographically oriented studies on reading socialization in the course of life and interaction-oriented studies on reading engagement in social contexts such as kindergarten, family or school.

Biographical research on reading takes a developmental and socio-psychological perspective and considers reading in the context of the course of reading socialization. This biographical research on reading usually refers to interview studies in which readers often talk about their own reading socialization in narrative interviews. The research focus is either diachronically oriented towards the meaning of reading and the change in the reading process during the course of life (Fry 1985; Appleyard 2008; Graf 2011; Langer 2011) or synchronously aligned to the current moment, often from a social or linguistic-cultural comparative perspective (Pieper et al. 2004; Volz 2005; Jakubanis 2015). In these studies, on the one hand, the importance of reading for children’s and adolescent’s identity formation becomes apparent, and on the other hand, the influence of the social environment (educational institutions, family, peers).

While biographical research on reading socialization is generally more focused on the individual person, interaction oriented research takes a more sociological perspective on the reading process: It is not the cognitive reading process of the individual that is considered, but the joint appropriation of literature in a social context. Accordingly, this approach draws on empirical studies that deal from the perspective of language pragmatics with the actions of the participants during the reading process and reconstruct the meaning constructions of the participants out of the linguistic interactions. Studies on read-

ing aloud situations in early childhood (Wieler 1997; Elias 2009), on discussions about literature in school lessons (Wieler 1989, Christ et al. 1995; Wieler et al. 2008; Hoffmann 2011; Boyd, Galda 2011; Ziesmer 2012; Pellegrini, Galda 2019) and literary conversations at university (Mayer 2017) are groundbreaking for the sociologically oriented perspective. They all stress the importance of social exchange and the common construction of meaning and imagination for the acquisition of language and literature, of self and world.

In recent years, research on reader response to picture books, which examines the appropriation of language and visual literacy, has particularly gained strength. Especially noteworthy are studies that focus on reading engagement with multimodal literature in its different variations (Jantzen, Klentz 2013; Kruse, Sabisch 2013; Arizpe, Colomer, Martínez-Roldán 2014; Ritter 2014, Evans 2015; Arizpe, Styles 2015; Scherer, Volz 2016; Hoffmann 2019; Uhlig, Lieber, Pieper 2019). These studies show the potential that transformation processes between images and language have for language acquisition and literature understanding.

Some of these sociologically oriented studies take an international comparative perspective or focus on the migration situation of today's societies (Pieper et al. 2004; Volz 2005; Wieler 2008; Hoffmann 2011; Ziesmer 2012; Arizpe, Colomer, Martínez-Roldán 2014; Jakubanis 2015; Arizpe, Cliff-Hodges 2018), thus addressing currently socially relevant issues. Their findings emphasize the importance of literature on social integration and mutual understanding through literature in a Europe struggling to grow together. Overall, it is shown that reading children's literature in a social context evokes and allows emotions to be processed and leads to gaining experience.

The articles published in this volume implement the theoretical issues discussed above by skilfully combining theory and practice, referring to reading experiences, reading commitment, contemporary extra-literary reality, and thinking in images and metaphors. They are also very firmly embedded in the methodology of research on the reception of literature.

The volume *Reading – Experiences – Emotions* begins with an article by Magdalena Rembowska-Płuciennik, which invites discussion on the subject of reception and considers the issue of e-readers in school reality: *Read and Do What You Want: Young (E-)Readers in a Classroom on the Outskirts of the Gutenberg Galaxy*.

The articles brought together in this collection have been organized by theme and problem. The first chapter is entitled *Experience of Literature and Engagement in Reading* and refers to the basic questions related to the practice of engaged reading (Zofia Zasacka), discussion of examples of affective narratives in contemporary literature for children and young adults (Małgorzata

Chrobak and Katarzyna Wądołny-Tatar), reader preferences and free choice of books by young readers (Małgorzata Latoch-Zielińska), the issue of excessive and insufficient reading (Krystyna Koziółek), reading literature and building space for empathetic understanding of the youth of African-American descent (Pennie Gray), the issue of emotional text as a cross-generational dialogue (Maciej Wróblewski), emotions of childhood spent with books in the memories of contemporary seniors (Renata Aleksandrowicz), reader's emotions towards the visual layer of the book and literary represented world (Marcin Czerwiński) and *Reading Books as Shared Events. A Performative View on Early Literacy Practices* (Johannes Mayer).

The issues of *Reading Difficulties and Pleasures* are the subject of another chapter. Its authors include Igor Borkowski with an article on the subject of thanatic literature, Hanna Dymel-Trzebiatowska, who presents *A Few Reflections on Beauty, Art and Artistic Creation in the Moomin Books by Tove Jansson*, Marta Nadolna, who focusses on the continuation of *Szatan z siódmej klasy* by Kornel Makuszyński in a book by Konrad T. Lewandowski, Beata Gromadzka, who analyses the concept of “anti-Jeźycjada”⁷ on the example of *Fanfik* by Natalia Osińska (2016), and Grażyna B. Tomaszewska, who considers dilemmas found between the indifference of the world and the desire for meaning in the poem *Dęby* (“Oaks”) by Zbigniew Herbert.

Another thematic area of the volume is represented by the chapter *Emotions in the World of Fairy Tales*, which contains texts dealing with the following issues: exploring fairy tales in reception by students (Marta Rusek), fairy tales and stories of Hans Christian Andersen in the process of socialization of contemporary girls (Sabina Świtała), and the concepts of “the Other” and winning over through love, based on the practice of reception of the fairy tale *Hans My Hedgehog* by the Brothers Grimm and *Jeż* by Katarzyna Kotowska (Dorota Michułka).

The chapter *Emotions Entangled in History* consists of three articles: *Memory Boom and Imaginarium of Holocaust in Polish Literature for Young Readers* by Małgorzata Wójcik-Dudek, *When Victims Become Victimizers: Abuse and Neglect in Sapphire's The Kid* by Mateusz Świetlicki, and *Kto lepiej rządził Polską, czyli na tropie królów, historii i... smaku landrynek (o emocjach w powieści Jadwiga kontra Jagiełło Grażyny Bąkiewicz)* by Magdalena Jonca that fit perfectly in the category of issues related to representations of the past and emotional entanglement in history.

Another chapter in this volume, *Emotions in Picturebooks*, is devoted to articles dealing with emotional aspects in picturebooks and includes *When Reading Becomes a Game: Parallel Narratives in Portuguese Picturebooks* by Ana Margarida Ramos, *Robinson Crusoe i problem bohatera: opowieść obrazkowa Ajubela* by Grażyna B. Tomaszewska, and *Reinterpretacja pamięci emocji*

⁷ Literary antithesis of the book series nicknamed “Jeźycjada” by Małgorzata Musierowicz.

z własnego dzieciństwa w trylogii „Wild Things” Maurice Sendaka by Małgorzata Cackowska.

The final chapter of the book, *Literature – Emotions – Education*, is devoted to the relationships between literature, emotions, and education and consists of another three articles: *A Tree in Her Backyard: Literary-aesthetic Classroom Settings during Second Language Acquisition with Picturebooks* by Farriba Schulz, *Reading and Playing Graphically Narrated Stories in a Live Audio-Play* by Caroline Wittig, and *Reception of comics as a multimodal experience – Approaches to (Suitable) Writing Practices in German Secondary Schools* by Carolin Führer.

As previously noted, literature for children and young adults, considered in the perspective of experiences and emotions, functioning in the relationship between text, reader, and context, filtered through the contexts of individual readings, educational perspective (here: school reception), contemporary controversial topics, and, more broadly, socio-cultural and historical contexts, fits perfectly in the spectrum of issues referring to fragmentation of literature, literary affects, socialization (e.g. of girls), and empathic reading. In addition, many articles also address the issues of artistic creations of the hero with whom the reader identifies, the subject of narrative strategy and potential (e.g. in fairy tales), and the reading influence of visual narratives, mental imaging, and metaphorization of the literary world.

As observed in the texts contained in this volume, which refer to analyses of statements made by child readers, expressive portraits of the protagonists, relevance and topicality of the themes undertaken in children's books, visualisation of effects and affects, and metaphorization of images enhanced by real-life experience can affect the emotional commitment of the reader and influence their construction of new meanings and ideas of a literary work.

Combining aspects of aesthetic reading with efferent reception through e.g. reading fragments demonstrating a “specific” narrative (e.g. visual, poetic, fairy-tale, etc.) strengthens the power of interactions that occur between the word, image, and emotions, which in this case translates into assistance with understanding, shaping of imagination, and formulation of an aesthetic and ethic reflection on the world.

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