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Read and Do What You Want... Young (E-)Readers in a Classroom on the Outskirts of the Gutenberg Galaxy

Abstract: Emotions have become an increasingly valuable element of reading studies, literary theory and empirical research on reader response. Here, I discuss some new issues in the field of affective studies on literary reading. This article is an overview of some main consequences of digital revolution (e.g. re-definition of reading, reading habits, and reading experiential values). These cultural changes challenge the classroom teaching of literature. I suggest, that the new media and technologies have a deep impact on the traditionally conceptualized ideas of “reader response”, “emotional involvement”, since they activate new forms of reading experiences and new modes for expressing them. The socially-based and interactive environment has been transforming the ways people (young readers) engage in reading texts and this seems to be a newly emerging object of research for the empirical literary studies on reader response.

Keywords: emotions, empirical research on reader response, new media, digital reading, e-reader

1. WHAT TO READ OR HOW TO READ? – BETWEEN ANXIETY AND EXCITEMENT...

Since the birth of empirical research on reader response to literature, one of its most important effects is remodelling of literature teaching. Such study makes central children’s responses to the texts that they read – putting their role as readers at the heart of the process, and hearing their voices as valid interpreters and responders to text, rather than individuals who have merely achieved the skills and are now competent. It also acknowledges the response of children and adults as equally interesting (Maine, Wallker 2011: 358).

The reader’s active engagement – sensual, emotional, self-reflective – with the texts was acknowledged as a valuable feature of literary reading (Mar, Oatley et al. 2010). The fundamental (and revolutionary) turn in literary studies was a recognition that the same importance should be given to reading comprehension as to the quality of emotional attitudes to the text. Emotional response not

only attracts and regulates the flow of a reader's attention, but also affects the general meaning production (Ophdal 2002, Oatley 2011: 107–132). From this perspective, language and text comprehension skills are not enough to make the literary experience satisfactory and effective. What extends mechanical reading skills is a domain of cognitive, emotional, sensual, and aesthetical absorption that magnetizes readers to the literary texts. Thus, multiple reading styles were appreciated indicating that reading for identification with the character, meets to some extent, different needs than reading for the experience of suspense (Miall, Kuiken 1995). That is what creates a strong and positive attitude during the personal act of reading. The new didactic objective was to draw the attention of young readers to the diverse affective dimension of reading. Thus, the key aim of literary teaching was redefined: it is not just to train children language decoding competence, but also to reveal and enhance the individual (or intimate even) procedures of reading involvement. In the long-time perspective, literary competence, considered as correct interpretation strategies, may not be so valuable as the everyday habit of reading for pleasure. Affective studies provided the new tools to discuss the relevance of human emotionality in literary theory and the history of artistic practices (Hogan 2011a, Hogan 2011b, Rembowska-Pluciennik 2014) as well as in the broader cultural context (Dauksza, Nycz 2016, Dauksza 2017). Moreover, current empirical research on emotional response to literature proposes some new directions for bringing the whole discipline of literary studies forward (van Peer, Chesnokova 2019).

The concept of “reading pleasures” has led to the reversal of teaching priorities: first, it is necessary to stimulate the reading excitement, then a teacher can successfully train children in reading expertise (Janus-Sitarz 2009). Such a theoretical turn stimulates the dynamic and multifaceted activity of The Department of Methodology of Teaching Language and Literature at Wrocław University. The department has already organized three scientific conferences focused on the relation between „Reading – Experience – Emotions”.¹ Its members combine the international academic cooperation in the field of research on children's and young adults reading and close collaboration with Polish teachers and students. The scientific achievements of the Wrocław team (publications, a number of workshops and seminars) show, the approach allows for successful application of the empirical studies results (e.g. cognitive research on reader response) to classroom teaching. One can say, that it is here where „theory of response” is successfully practiced (according to the objectives of New Humanities methods). The current volume of *Filoteknos* provides

¹ The reading culture of children and young people can be studied from multiple methodological perspectives and the interest in this topic has been growing rapidly. One could mention in here the series of international conferences held at the University of Łódź. In 2020, the sixth conference on “Reading Cultures of Young Generations” will be held. See also: Antczak, Brzuska-Kępa, Walczak-Niewiadomska 2013; Antczak, Walczak-Niewiadomska 2017.

an overview of the latest developments in school reading, literary teaching and emotional outcomes of reading. Thus, I would like to focus on the new challenges facing academic and school teachers who are interested in the interactions between the text and the reader. The context for my reflections will be the development of new media (Levinson 2010) and communication strategies connected with social media experiences.

It still remains valid, that the reluctance to engage in reading among young people comes from the discrepancies between young readers' preferences and the requirements of the education system (Zasacka 2014: 113–136, see also in this volume: Latoch-Zielińska; Koziółek). School reading lists have been acknowledged as an effective way to discourage children from reading (Zasacka 2008, Leszczyński 2013). Most often, these diagnoses are made from a sociological point of view. Meanwhile, further research from a psychological perspective is still needed to explore the mechanisms of internal reading motivation or just the opposite: to explain the lack of enthusiasm for books.

However, the current decline of interest in reading is worrying like never before, because a powerful digital competitor has come to take over the mass imagination, mass communication, and children's spare time. We are worried, that especially for young people, free time means escaping into the digital sphere, into the crowded world of social media, and the thrilling domain of video games. The book ceases to be attractive, although we still attach the highest cultural value to reading (Worth 2017) and the promotion of reading. Or maybe it's just difficult for us to acknowledge that the book is no longer a beloved symbol of education and knowledge transfer? We would love to believe the solitary experience of being "lost in a book" (Nell 1988) is the most desirable moment in a teenager's day. Nevertheless, this may not be a realistic assumption. With increasing access to the Internet, a private, focused and quiet reading appears to be a historical convention associated with the medium of print and the physical format of the printed volume (Littau 2006: 29–35).

How does this affect today's literary reading at school? Teaching literature is still preoccupied with a privileged position of print text, in spite of the fact that digital reading has grown into a full-fledged alternative activity or even a main daily routine for a generation born in 21st century. Print literature and the competencies rooted in it (word and sentence understanding, fluidity and accuracy of reading, large text comprehending) still take the lead in the process of knowledge transfer. But in the digital age, a profound diversification of reading practices became one of the most significant factors, that affects the reading competencies and reading habits of the generation at the time of the birth of new literacy (Coiro i in. 2008). Here and now the reader response studies meet the e-reader and e-response processes as new objects of interest – unfortunately, these new phenomena have not been studied extensively enough to be accessible to wide circles of educators. Is a contemporary school (in Poland) prepared to develop the digital competencies of the young or has it left pu-

pils alone in the mist of endless paths to Internet links and content? Obviously, technological innovations have been recognized as beneficial to a teaching context and very useful potential tools for teachers (Świtłała 2018). However, our students are digital readers, although not all of us are digital teachers... As the latest research has shown (Pyżalski, Zdrodowska, Tomczyk, Abramczuk 2018) we overestimate the technological competencies of the older children and teenagers, believing that they are reliable users of new technologies and the media. Accordingly, the young people's stereotypical image of non-digital generations suggests that educators or schoolteachers are not perceived as default guides in the world of media. This means that children acquire key digital competences within their peer group rather, than in the course of school education. If reading-writing has moved to the web, there should be plenty of teachers reading in the same way in classrooms with their students – to share what is the best of the Internet, and to train students, how to avoid the worse of it. So far, we haven't done this generational homework yet. The fact, that the young people's favorite activities have been transferred to the Internet is usually critically assessed. Jacek Pyżalski claims:

The picture of media education at school is indeed pessimistic when we analyze the percentage of “Never or almost never”² responses. It turns out that even in the case of simple media education activities, many students indicate that they have never experienced them. For example, almost 60% of students say that the teacher did not talk to them what they do on the Internet. (Pyżalski 2018: 49)

The transfer of digital knowledge and skills takes place outside professional education, which may only result in the spreading of incomplete information or even ignorance (Tomczyk 2018: 73–78). Young dwellers of the digital world are more or less technologically self-efficient, but they lack critical thinking skills to select and evaluate properly the countless texts published online. They cannot search effectively for reliable sources of information and they do not know how to respect copyright. They have serious problems with selection of key unit of information. Additionally, comprehension of multimedia (interactive, visual) content is much more demanding than reading linear ones and the level of distraction negatively affects student's abilities to perceive longer units of text (Healy 1999: 208–217). We should teach reading of the Internet content from the basic levels at school, because it is a new cognitive and social skill.

Digital text turns the concept of readability upside down because access to text is no longer dependent on student's word recognition or fluency levels. [...] Student may use text-to-speech (TTS) or recorded human voice to have the text read aloud on the word, sentence, or passage level. For digital text, listening comprehension may well be a better indicator of readability of the text (although listening or viewing a written text is different form, and perhaps

² These are the answers to the question “Has your teacher ever talk to you about what to do if anything in the Internet bothers you?”

more productive than listening to a text alone, and the two should not be considered interchangeable constructs) (Dalton, Proctor 2008: 303).

This issue concerns key competencies for an open and digital global society: how to verify information, how to understand digital and multimedia texts, how to control the distractive, nonlinear mode of processing the interactive information. E-books or mobile apps are hardly present in school reading. Only one of five pupils could bring their own technological devices to use it actively during a school lesson (so called BYOD method – *bring your own device*) (Pyżalski 2018: 44).

The problem is more complex. There is no agreement whether the use of the term “reading” to describe the compound process of perceiving non-verbal/ multimedia messages is still legitimate (Mangen 2006: 51–62). Furthermore, digital reading has a completely separate course or dynamics and can give entirely different cognitive effects. Additionally, it offers diverse pleasures and creates a unique experience of *multisensory reading*, as explained by Ann Mangen:

As such, reading verbal text is but one sub-category of a more general psycho-physiological process involving attention, selection, filtering, perception, bottom-up and top-down processing, listening, (possibly) kinesthetic and haptic feedback, recognition, cognition, inference-making, memory and recall, mental model building, hypothesizing, sensation, engagement, expectation, comprehension, and interpretation – in short, all experiential processes which are in action when we read GUI narrative fiction³. (Mangen 2006: 55–56)

Yet, appreciation of this cultural change could contribute to the promotion of *new ways of valuable reading* (see: the methodological suggestions of Latoch-Zielińska in this issue). Additionally, it could be a good opportunity for young people to obtain digital competences in school under the guidance of a teacher. Verbo-centric model of reader response studies on young readers should be adapted to the changed situation to give us an answer to the question: what do the young readers enjoy in digital reading and what would they find applicable in class literary teaching?

These “complex relations of literacy and technology, as they co-develop as social practice in unpredictable ways with unpredictable effects” are now being investigated by researchers. (Marshall Arnold 2006)

2. INDIVIDUAL EMOTIONS OR SOCIALLY SHARED EVENTS? – TOWARDS NEW CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR READER ENGAGEMENT STUDIES

The digital revolution also forces changes in the methodology of research on literary reception. The concept of literacy has changed; the concept of reading has evolved, the idea of response to literature developed into new remarkable

³ According to Mangen, GUI is “graphical user interface” (Mangen 2006: 11).

directions. One can read a simulation of a print text on the screen (a digital book for a reader e.g. Kindle). However, it is a completely different experience from reading an interactive text (e.g. a hypertext novel or augmented reality book). It is also incomparable with reading a text fully submerged in the environment of new social media! Link connections have their own rhetoric, which conditions the semantic effects of the reading process. There is no doubt the process of digital reading triggers specific modes of engagement. The understanding of reading as a personal, silent activity affected by past experiences and actual predilections ceases to be valid. Literary reception today takes on forms unknown a decade or two ago and is situated in the context of open information and open society (or diverse social groups in mutual two-way relationship). There are many different databases collecting the reading selection and evaluation trends (Lubimy Czytać.pl, BiblioNETka, personal literary blogs). Until recently, the researchers dealing with literary response dreamed of such a source of actual readers' declarations.

Digital reading has another aspect that is difficult to eliminate if we want to include it in school reading practices and achieve the best results. Reading on the Internet and interactive environments turns much more often into participation in a social event. As Jacqueline Marshall Arnold openly states, "the silence of traditional classrooms can be replaced with the 'noises' of students engaging and supporting each other's learning". (Marshall Arnold 2006: 6) The new media have created a space of unlimited communication in real or close to real time (on-line chat, streaming, sharing the content, emotional reactions via emoticons, on-line multiplayer gaming). The Internet users have the ability to access multimedia content of various types, created by the users themselves, who easily share or re-edit it. Tablets and smartphones can turn into a large personal library for those, who actively participate in the virtual readers' communities (as commentators, fanfiction readers and writers; authors and readers of blogs devoted to reading) (Maroń 2005). Co-reading includes co-writing as a new form of communication (forum discussion, fanfiction production). Stimulating students' abilities of engaged reading requires today groundbreaking changes in the course of a lesson and demands radical modification of a teacher's toolkit (e.g. innovative repertoire of forms of expression, new creative tasks and methods of knowledge dissemination) (Świtała 2018). Innovative pedagogical projects based on new technologies are becoming increasingly popular (Pezda 2008, Nowak, Winkowska-Nowak, Rycielska 2009, Kasprzak, Kłakówna, Kołodziej 2016, the magazine "TIK w Edukacji")⁴. However, I would like to point out that even the newest conceptual and technological tools applied to anachronistic texts will not change the situation radically.

⁴ I would like to express my gratitude to dr Aneta Jamiołkowska-Pabian who suggested me some significant publications on digital tools for enhancing children's learning and reading.

Today, schools face a requirement of redefinition of “engaged reading” or “response to literature” concepts. The model of silent reading generating emotional or bodily reactions of the reader is no longer the dominant environment of literary response. Engaged reading should be orchestrated with the new ways people engage within on-line global communities or groups. Emotional response to on-line content generates shared reactions – it is multi-personal, and addressed openly to the collective of other readers, which enriches the scope of reader response processes.

While working collaboratively in response to the literature, students established a community of inquiry in which their sundry literature prompts elicited divergent responses inspired by multiple opinions and diverse perspectives. [...] classroom observations and online discussion transcripts clearly support that engagement in an asynchronous online literature discussion encouraged students to respond deeply to the literature, share their ideas with others, and carefully consider multiple perspectives and thoughts. (Larson 2009: 646)

For young people, such a mode of private reading is strongly related to social communication activities. In this situation, a student has an opportunity to play a more active role – reading means collaborating with the peer group and it is not limited to merely processing the text in silence. Increasing the opportunity for such reading at school may be needed today to enhance the reading habits and reading practices in general. Co-participation in collective communication and collaboration with peers seems to be an important framework of young people reading practices. If the various modes of engagement with the electronic content attract young people to this degree, it is rather inefficient to promote a particular model of immersive experience: literary immersion (as defined by Ryan 2003). We should realize, that classical books on literary immersion (Nell 1988, Gerrig 1993, Esrock 1994, Ryan 2003) are decades old! Ages in the time of the digital revolution. Studies on reader’s engagement still conceptualize immersion as an internal experience, a private „imaginary projection” that new technology does not radically change but can intensify (like in case of video games). Previous studies on absorption and different scales of measuring it (Kuijpers 2014: 91–96) investigated mainly the experience of print texts readers and – narrowing the scope of texts – narrative texts! In the past, this line of research provided the strongest inspiration for the didactic practices of engaging students in reading for pleasure. As Moniek Kuijpers explains, attention, transportation, emotional engagement and mental imagery were frequently considered the focal aspects of Story World Absorption Scale – SWAS. The discussion on how these issues relate to multimodal or interactive content has just begun and the empirical studies on transmedial narratives calls for reassessment of the complex relation between media and engagement (Kuijpers, Hakemulder 2017).

In the case of immersion, recent surveys on digital reading focus primarily on the importance of physicality and the feeling of agency: “the second characteristic delight of electronic environment” (Murray 1997: 126). Agnieszka Przybyszewska (2015: 72–76), analyzed multiple forms of digital books (game-books) and pointed out to newly emergent ways of reader involvement; she mentioned *engaging* the reader *through readers’ decisions* and *gestures*. These immersive strategies enable the reader to actively co-participate in the unfolding story – depending on readers’ choices; the story may unfold according to alternative scenario (see also in this volume Ramos). Reading such a book (or rather: operating on such a text?) has a lot in common with a gameplay (see Wittig’s article in this volume). This conceptual frame forces those conducting reader response studies to search for completely new factors to be considered as potentially appealing for young people. Digital reading or multitasking reading-writing on mobile device is rooted in haptic experience – transparent (to some extent), but profoundly different from the non-digital readers’ embodied experiences. Social interactions between readers of texts in new media is supplemented by technological interactivity with the hardware and software. “Social” (Thon 2008: 29–43) or “collaborative” immersion (Ensslin, Bell 2019: 320–342) seems to be more and more appealing. The new definition refers to the reader’s experiences of video games and literary hypertexts. It enables the player/reader to participate in interaction with the group.

The utilization of technological tools such as on-line threaded discussions provides another such context for literacy groups to talk and socially co-construct their understanding. [...] Technology applications that enhance communication such as the threaded discussion board, electronic mail, and chat rooms could enhance the motivation and opportunities for students to engage each other in these written conversations about their reading. (Marshall Arnold 10)

The collaborative aspect of contemporary digital reading calls into question both the individual authorship and the finality of the product. As Barbara Wołek writes, „the act of reception in connection with the functioning of Internet links becomes a networked act, both in the literal sense and in the metaphorical sense” (Wołek 2005: 476 – my translation). Thus, digital literacy requires some new strategies of writing, reading, and teaching, in order to extend the level of language decoding skills.

Since 2010 (the moment when the iPad was introduced to the market) we are able to observe the dynamic development of publications for smartphones and tablets. What is important, the publications are not merely the digital copies (scans) of traditional books, but they offer to their users many divergent multimedia and interactive experiences. [...] However, their most important feature seems to be the application of interactive possibilities – of adapting the content to the individual requirements of the user and a chance to co-create the content. (Gmiterek 2015: 61)

Studies that are based only on the textual features of absorption, ignore this aspect. It is significant that the authors of the SWAS scale only 5 years after its development proposed its modification. They found it appropriate to introduce engagement measurements into online reading practices (Kuijpers 2019). These limitations notwithstanding, such approaches open a new and interesting path for further empirical research on reader response. New methods go beyond the actual interests in traditional printed literature/ digitalized printed text/ solitary reading, for reading is more and more immersed itself in multiple technology-oriented and socially-oriented activities.

3. EMBODIED MEANS GENDERED – CHILDREN'S READING OR GIRL'S/BOY'S READING?

A fundamental methodological assumption of the empirical studies on reader response was the concept of reading as rooted in bodily experience. The strong emotional response to the text has its bodily symptoms that we associate with reading pleasure: shivers, sensual imagery, excitement or even tears of joy/sadness. However, the body is always a sexual/gender category, which means that boy and girl readers may prefer different reading strategies and even diverse genres/text types (see also in that volume: Gromadzka)! The paradox or problem lies in the fact, that the preferred genre for reading campaigns and classroom teaching is usually a novel (and a story, a short story). In contrast, teenage boys are more interested in comics and non-fictional (nonnarrative even) genres: e.g. journal articles. Ignoring these preferences puts us at risk of further losing their interest in reading. As European reading research shows, however, today we encounter the readers' gender differentiation surprisingly similar to the 18th century book market (Wróblewski, Zatora 2017: 121–138). From the boy reader's perspective, reading for pleasure may be negatively evaluated as a stereotypically girls' attitude to literature. As a side-effect of such a gender-oriented prejudice, the decrease in boy's reading can be observed across many European countries. Poland is not an exception to the rule, unfortunately (Zasacka 2017).

Spending time with a book and reading for other than informational purposes remains in opposition to, for example, sport practicing, which is the domain of men [...]. It is also worth emphasizing that (according to gender approach) the emotions in reader's engagement are perceived as feminine, while a man should be (according to the patriarchal pattern) distanced and show only emotions resulting from competition. The socio-cultural depreciation of emotionality combined with the men's tendency to subordinate themselves to stereotypical gender roles [...] means that reading for pleasure is received negatively by them. (Wróblewski, Zatora 2017: 122 – my translation)

The *Boysreading* project is one of many European educational assignments aimed at strengthening the habit of reading and independent search for reading among teenagers and young adults. The practical conclusions presented on the basis of data from various countries illustrate many established tendencies in literary teaching that can be an obstacle in boys' education. Making reading and writing relevant to boys means understanding boy's learning and reading styles (texting, using social media and social media communicators, blogging, live streaming, sharing the contents). Gamification and acceptance of game-like conditions for learning connect boys' out-of-school practices with desirable attitudes towards reading. Male teenagers are obviously more interested in using new technologies during their school lessons – a book as an artifact does not stimulate deeper engagement as much as teachers would hope it does. Boys prefer working in groups, interacting or competing. What may seem totally inappropriate in Polish schools – they like to move while working on some tasks given. Would it be acceptable in a typical Polish classroom? In Finland, for instance, it is completely understandable and acceptable. In their article, Wróblewski and Zatora present some Scandinavian projects aimed at promoting male readers some boys find attractive: reading athletes, artists, and scientists. These positive models prove that a book is not just a feminine gadget. Moreover, a deeper change in cultural habits and gender roles is needed: fathers should take over the role of a model reader at home, if they want their sons to have a positive approach to reading. Read what and how you like – but read...

4. READER RESPONSE OR E-READER E-RESPONSE? – NEW CHALLENGES FOR ENGAGED READING STUDIES

In conclusion, I would like to point once again to new phenomena in the study of reader response that are born within the “in between” zone: at the crossroads of print culture and digital culture. I consider these three factors as demanding much more attention in current reader response studies: continuous Internet connection, the context of social media and its use as a basic form of reading-writing communication, a predilection for multipersonal interactions or participation in social events (gaming, conversation).

The younger generation of readers is more and more often immersed in the sphere of socially shared experiences – of global network and peer groups. There is no indication that we could reverse or stop this revolutionary process. It is therefore necessary to find and preserve in the digital space those forms of engaged reading that have the cultural and educational values we would like to co-create with this generation of younger readers. The economy of school reading emotions should certainly not be divided into boredom over damaged printed books borrowed from a library and the excitement of audiobook listening or texting about a favorite book via Snap Chat. When studying child

readers (at grammar or secondary school) we need to include a social factor in today's reading competencies and preferences. Social media people read in collaboration with a peer group – in a digital crowd. If the crucial factor in developing confident and devoted readers is to point out the attractiveness of reading, then we cannot overlook the magnetism of participation in collaborative reading activities today. The challenge for literary theory, empirical studies of literary reception, for pedagogy is to establish the foundation for a new e-response approach. As new literacy arrives, the teachers should include into their methods and curricula new technology-driven strategies for reading and responding. Theoretically unlimited access to texts on the web, imposes completely new requirements on the teacher when it comes to choosing recommended books. The democratization of new media and empowering of their users do not go hand in hand with the custom of imposing a specific canon of reading content. Of course, this does not mean that we have to agree on all the students' choices – but certainly the status of digital reader gives the individual a stronger position in articulating what they want to read for pleasure. Another challenge is the necessity to face the consequences of digital reading habits. Due to changes in habits of reading online (dispersion of attention, thematic distraction, and the dynamics of changing links), the need to read a novel is quite a challenge for the young reader. Meanwhile, the novel as a genre is treated as a tool for enhancing empathy, for recognizing important social and psychological situations. Today, the usefulness of the novel to achieve these goals seems to be at least doubtful. Long narrative texts may exceed the emotional needs of children! Can we imagine/propose/create a comparable digital genre for self-reflection and a development of social skills?

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