

READING WITH THE BODY. BASED ON SELECTED WORKS OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

In the book titled *Rozwoj Kontaktow Malego Dziecka z Literature* I wrote about ways of transfer of a literary text by adult addressees of literature, namely through the visual, auditory and kinetic spheres. Thus one of ways of reception of literature by a child is besides ways to eye and ear the way to the body. Children's contact with literature takes place very early. First literary works pleasing for the child recipient are lullabies, then nursery rhymes and baby wordplay. In the rhyme addressed to infants about the moving and pinching crayfish there are strong emotions connected with the tactile sphere. This manual game with text takes place in an atmosphere of collective joy. However the child feels uncertainty although it bursts out with laughter. It is likely that this is just this sensory thrill that makes the child await the crayfish's further and yet further 'stroll'.

The short rhyme about the crayfish provides the first experience of drama, which through tactual and auditory perception takes place in the infant's body. It creates the spheres of agon (discovering a mystery - the crayfish is going - Where? What for? How?) and ilinx (daze) - When it pinches there will be a mark! (provoking expression as a result of the appearance of feelings of fear and joy). The combination of bodily and auditory spheres in the reception of literature in infancy develops receptive ability and reacting to dramatic values of literary work. From bodily perceptions arises the first image of a literary character (virtual character with certain typical features) here - the crayfish (which in the case of a little child is only a faint consciousness of 'something') which is going (moving fingers on the recipient's body creates the feeling of heading in some direction, which can be associated with 'spinning a story'). While listening about a moving crayfish the child experiences continuity of transfer. The moment of the anticipated pinch (When it pinches there will be...) is the value of surprise, mystery, and puzzle connected with anticipation present in more complex literary texts. Anticipation caused by the story heard is one of the most important feelings developing the need of contact with literature. It is connected with the expectation of a future surprise which can be of various natures - the discovered mystery, fun, or disappointment. In this case it is a token of daze, manifested in a sudden expressive outburst of fear caused by the pinch, mixed with joy because nothing dangerous happened. The rhyme about the crayfish also transmits a humorous and ludic component, as the text is transmitted in a playful atmosphere.

The combination of these associations resulting from reading the rhyme creates a peculiar web of emotions, thoughts and imaginations which enters the layers of child mentality. Further reading provides similar developments.

Pre-school children have plenty opportunities of reception. Popular games among children are: skipping, counting-out rhymes, formula for play or 'ekikiki', which Kornel Czukowski wrote about. These range from rhymes conceived at play and adapted from

regional folklore rhymes to literary works inspired by folk form. An excellent literary example of a 'skipping' poem is the text by Danuta Wawitow titled *Am, stram, gram*. The subtitle - a poem for screaming, suggests that it is about unhindered emotions felt in the bodily sphere and manifested in children's behaviour:

Am stram gram!
Patrzcie, patrzcie, co ja mam!

Ja mam pitk§ ratatam!
Ktora skacze ratatam!
Hop do gory ratatam!
I na chmury ratatam! (...)

Such text types are accompanied by movement patterns generated by child's body especially manifested as jumps, stamping, or lively dance. Formula for play and games are often set in a circle. Then children hold their hands, standing in a circle or in pairs, clap and dance or jiggle around. Body dance accompanied by text causes feelings of joy, madness, fun, and is characteristic of behavioral receptivity.

Around the age of five children turn to fairy tales. At this age there is a strong identification with the main character, children are deeply affected by their fate and perceive it as their own. Such works as *Little Red Riding Hood*, *Cinderella*, *Sleeping Beauty*, *Snow White*, *Puss in Boots*, and among epic folk tales *The Ugly Duckling*, *The Princess and the Pea*, *Thumbelina*, *The Snow Queen*, or *Pinocchio* exert great influence on children's emotional life. According to analytic psychologists they have therapeutic power and help overcome fears. Their bodily reception is reflected in Stefan Szuman's research conducted back in 1920's which showed that a child reacts in a behavioral (see: gestural) way to events in the fairy tale .

When the child becomes slightly older (around eleven years of age) gender becomes important in the development of reading preferences. It is sentimental literature among girls and adventure books among boys that provide emotional reception. Book-reading fulfils the need for dreaming, fantasizing, identity and desire to be the same as the main character and be able to experience what he does.

Emotive character of reception is also not uncommon with adult readers of children's literature. Return to childhood feelings causes inner prickles which are a token of reading with one's body. Such 'reading returns' are often accompanied by states close to catharsis when the reader discovers the true sense of existence and experiences unusual feelings related to the reception of art. It seems that book-reading experience from childhood is not without meaning for further contacts with literature read in adulthood. It happens that tracks and memories of first books come alive and repeat contact brings esthetic and emotional impressions of special character.

Thus in the case of older children and teenager experience there remains no doubt that the readers read with all their heart, reading not only in search of joy and rest but also for the reflection of their own sorrows and suffering. This is because literature for children and young people is literature that stirs up emotions. This emotional character prompts the next sphere of transfer which is the sphere of spirit, broadly understood as inner energy, both intellectual and emotional. This is due to the fact that the reading of 'literary emotions' brings not only images, which reach the conscious sphere of the reader, but it also provides symbols and marks that fall into the deep subconscious layers of the human psyche. They open the field of emotions that are sometimes expressed in bodily reactions. The written word moves the sphere of feelings so much that the reader experiences inner thrills and is overcome with emotion in the process of reading; these manifest themselves in the sensual

sphere as somatic reactions. The problem how this happens is thought-provoking. Carl Gustav Jung's and Maud Bodkin's works have shown that the agent which elicits emotion most probably influences the deep subconscious layers of the human psyche that contain archetypal images. Is such type of experience available to a child? This may be true as far as the work contains archetypes proper for child sensitivity. According to Bodkin both a child and an adult shapes and develops their consciousness employing collective self-knowledge. If then children's consciousness emerged from the archetypal zone, it certainly also bears its distinctive features. Alicja Baluch has shown the existence of the archetypes of garden, princess, book, and guide in literary works for children. A small child is aware of different phenomena than an older child or an adult. It seems that in the case of a few year old child emotional elements refer to the spheres of sense of security, fear of loneliness, unknown animals, darkness or joy evoked by satisfying the need of being loved, promise of a nice surprise, feeling of satisfaction connected with elements of the book content. Book-reading tears the child away from daily matters, and involves it. Books employ a wide range of artistic means of expression to which children's senses react easily, such as rhythm, refrain, repetition, onomatopoeia, nonsense, humour, fantasy etc. An illustrated literary work rich in artistic means of expression evokes emotional experience even with a very young reader.

The need for substitute experiencing of emotions is illustrated by children's folklore texts which children tend to tell one another, such as 'scary stories', spine-chillers or macabre anecdotes with black humour. Fairy tales, especially folk fairy tales, abounding in cruel villains and punishments give children a thrill of excitement. Young age is also characteristic for the need of tearing away from reality through book-reading, and entering new unknown worlds. The popularity of fantasy, where the existence of parallel worlds makes it possible to cross borders in the sphere of inner imaging, can be attributed to this need. Such reading evokes particularly strong emotions which are determined by a total identification with the main character and experiencing deep feelings of different types.

Literature available to the young Polish reader has been gradually changing over the last few years. One can actually state that scary stories are in fashion; the same applying for the props used and range of characters employed. Such characters as: Skellig, Coraline, characters of Roald Dahl's novels, the Baudelaire siblings, or Harry Potter keep experiencing feelings of fear and terror. They certainly infect the readers. The plot is increasingly more often set in gloomy places such as an attic, basement, disturbing house corners or deserted city districts.

The feeling of 'prickles' can accompany not only the process of reading 'scary stories'; it can appear suddenly and unexpectedly for the recipient, at most unusual moments while reading also other types of texts. Michai Januszkiewicz has noted: 'Since time immemorial literature has set certain paradigms of experiencing, emotive patterns becoming a point of reference for the human existence', creating a kind of 'a <literary> emotive pattern'. Similar paradigms also exist in children's literature, and their specificity has not as yet been fully researched and described. Though it may seem that emotions should rather be the domain of psychological research, it is however difficult at present to do research in the field of literature without taking account of this issue. As far as emotional dimension of literature is concerned, two points of reference become important - reference from the point of the text and from the point of the reader. The issue of literary emotions should be presented in this way - on the one hand, emotive qualities of a given text, on the other hand, the impact they have on the readers should be shown. In most probability I will not solve certain conflicts that arise from considering issues connected with emotive character of work. Neither do I undertake to explain whether the type of literary expression influences the characteristic emotional meaning, although this should certainly be done in further research. As an

educationalist and literary scholar I am mainly interested in what emerges when a literary work and a reader meet. Whether the mechanism of the strong somatic emotions that arise in the process of reading is similar with children and adults? What makes the reader feel prickles or a lump in throat at certain moments of reception? As I mentioned, three or four year old children react in an emotional way to the content of some works, mainly at frightening moments and to humour. It is manifested in their facial expression, sighs, shouting, questions and even tears. An adult reader does not usually burst out into tears while reading, their emotion is rather like an 'inner cry', which expresses itself in such reactions as prickles, feeling of a lump in throat, holding one's breath, numbness ('being held on the edge of the seat'). These and other reactions are the price one pays for the! characteristic catharsis resulting from reading, which is liberating and relieving emotions. As a result of this process there emerge the already mentioned psychosomatic reactions which show deep reaction to the text. This concept may become popular particularly nowadays in the period of increased attention to all therapeutic actions. This is because it tells us that art provokes emotions which are healing for the reader. These values of art were already referred to by Herbert Read who assumed that art is a mechanism bringing harmony, integrating personality and controlling one's life. Irena Wojnar additionally emphasized that art intensifies experiencing the present moment, which becomes important for the future of all the readers. This intensification is definitely dependent on emotions which are let free or relieved through art.

It is worth noting that in many cultures, also in our culture, discovering and demonstrating one's emotional life to the outer world reflects one's weakness. We say 'you must be tough' or 'life is brutal', but paradoxically enough it is actually the last few years, so the times where child's emotions are suppressed by the Internet, and when the screen has become a witness of the deepest confessions hidden in blogs, it is actually now that we ask increasingly more about the role of emotions in life and we notice their importance. We become aware of the fact that the sphere of human psyche connected with emotions is equally important as the rational sphere. Then, the very essence of human life may not solely be the mind but emotions to a greater extent.

One could state that certain children's texts are maintained in some specific emotional tone, e.g. Wanda Chotomska's texts are funny, Anna Onichimowska's lyric poems provoke a reverie and sometimes even sorrow. However, a sudden fleeting sensation of emotional character seems interesting against the overall emotive sense of the work. Thus, although most literary inquiry refers to a virtual addressee, it seems to me that it is essential to make reference to empirical research when considering emotive reception. Among Polish research on children's contact with literature Stefan Szuman's article *Wpływ bajki na psychikę; dziecka* on child reception of literature and published in 1927 is worth noting. It can be easily noticed that the research based on recording changes in facial expression of a child reader was supposed to reveal the specificity of reception of text, although the researcher did not then speak of categories of reception. Facial expressions reflected mental states of a small child, thus showing its feelings. Szuman's work contributed not only to a new perception of the impact of literature on a child but it also turned theoretician's attention to the problem of the child reader and the reception of literary works in general. Of significant importance was also research done by Maria Kielar-Turska and Maria Przetacznik-Gierowska, Alicja Baluch, Joanna Papuziriska, Wiesfawa Limont, or Katarzyna Krasoh as they all developed the problem of reception in connection with a real reader to a greater or smaller extent. I have already referred to this research trend in my works and some reflections are the result of a fragmentary test research on real readers. For example my concept of the method of expressive performance of poetic works was conceived on observation of a children's dance group and a quasi-theatrical group whereas the theory of the so called

warm parts, which I consider in my last book originated through observation of my own emotional states in relation to reading and interviews made with chosen children and adults.

In the area of foreign research Lew S. Wygotski's study titled *Lekki oddech* and research done by Stanley Fish and Norman Holland who attempted to determine how a text influences real readers seem very important. Although these researchers did not strictly consider the subject of feelings, their research opened way for the construction of opinions on certain values of work basing on research on response to a literary work by a specific reader. As a result of observation Holland acknowledged that it would be more proper to join together the two factors of reception - the objective and the subjective, as they merge into one in the process of reception - and he introduced the concept of 'transactive' process, when 'the reader <transacts> the text - by going along and across it - in order to experience within himself'. This is how the concept of transactive theory originated, holding among other things that 'the theory of literature should take into account both text reception and the text itself and that 'for the theory of literary transaction the differences in reception of the same text are not less important than its sameness'. Holland considered his own feelings arising from reading and his own interpretations and these were the basis of the response reaction for him. Such presentation made it possible for me to include into the area of reflections my own mental states provoked by the reading.

Another researcher, Stanley Fish, introduced the term of affective stylistics and included 'not only <tears and prickles>' and <other psychological reactions> into the category of reception but also all mental processes connected with reading including the formulation of complete thoughts, making (and regretting) judgments, following and creating logical sequences'. Although Fish takes into consideration an ideal reader, a sophisticated and competent reader, thus not a child, his remarks concerning reception become valuable when emotive character of response is concerned.

Concepts mentioned here allow to undertake discussion on the existence of emotive reception in the area of reception of children's literature. It is particularly well-illustrated in the emotional way of response to work which is typical for small children. It is in the children's response that literature ceases to be only a 'subject' but becomes 'kinetic art', and puts on 'moving' features.

Emotional sphere of response also came within the orbit of interest of the already mentioned Michal Januszkiewicz and Anna Martuszevska. The sphere of response is also implied by the categories of description of literature reception signs that appear in scientific reflection of theoreticians researching children's literature. However, in theoretical works treating on issues in children's literature or literature for young readers there appear statements that show the connection of literary work with a real reader, in particular with the sphere of his feelings, such as a path wet with tears, studio of horror, topophiliae, 'dark plot', or warm parts. These names mean that not only a child experiences literature through emotional reactions. Similar emotions, though reserved not for the behavioral but the mental sphere, are close to an adult reader. For example A. Baluch writes about bodily perceptions provoked by Dorota Terakowska's works. Her own feelings are described as proof for a certain reaction to reading. Joanna Papuzihska reflects on *Bash o trzech siostrzyczkach* by Lucyna Krzemieniecka: 'This booklet was for me like some living creature or a tiny living world. I covered it with kisses, spared no hugs (...) In front of me Trzy siostrzyczki are running along the winding paths. Their red skirts once appear once disappear in the greenery - they are leading me. Somewhere from afar, as if through the fog there come faint sounds of reality (...) I am just on a path pebbled with words. In a hurry (...)'. The researcher's remark is reflective in character, but it also shows how deeply literature that one read in childhood interacts with the reader, leaving indelible memories of feelings connected with

reading and specific books for further stages of life. All these justify that adults (also critics) react to a work of literature in an emotive way and incorporate their own reactions to a text in its description. The already mentioned theory of transactive criticism is shown here. The researcher takes into consideration not only the text itself and the expected reader but also his own reactions which in part project on the probable virtual model of a child reader.

Report on the research project

It should be noted that results presented here are the effect of a test research project and not systematic research. Having taken into account the subjective character of reception, I intend to present in this article the typical features of emotive reception of a chosen work of children's literature from the point of view of a researcher and an addressee. I mean to investigate whether my emotional impressions can be related to a child addressee and other adult addressees. I would also like to find the answer to the question: What features of the considered text elicit in the reader emotional response? The area of my interest also lay in the problem of reception of work that was originally addressed to children but read by adult readers.

Holland wrote that 'a critic who does not define his own response to literary work leaves out the information which his reader can well-foundedly consider the most essential in his reception of work (...) In order to fully and openly write for others about literary transaction the critic should speak of the role of a personal factor'. Having taken into account the researcher's viewpoint I decided to employ my own reactions to the literary work that I read. For the purpose of the research I also employed a child, an eleven year old girl, in order to answer the question whether in children's reception reactions to a certain text are similar; and a forty year old woman who acted as a control reader. The choice of control readers was governed by the following factors:

- in the case of a child - the age and related to it ability to read fluently with understanding, ability to verbalize one's own emotions, intellectual capabilities determining the understanding of the idea of the work, interest in reading, sensitivity to artistic values of literature (the child I chose reacted spontaneously a number of times by picturing the literary works it had read);

- in the case of an adult - the age and related to it expected thinking, retrospective in character, interest in reading, sensitivity to artistic values of verbal art (this person was known to me and many times proved her sensitivity to various aspects of literary works), objectivity and understanding for the research conducted by me.

- in both cases gender was taken into account - I chose a girl taking into consideration the differentiation of children's interest with relation to gender, and an adult female, having assumed that a woman is more prone to somatic reactions to a literary text. This assumption was based on the premises of feminist criticism according to which a woman makes and responds to art in a 'bodily' way.

The book I used for reading was Tove Jansson's story titled The Fir Tree from the collection of Tales from Moominvalley. The choice of Jansson's prose works was determined by subjective feelings after reading the text, its high artistic values, therapeutic values, the existence of the 'double bottom', and its short form.

The research subjects were given the task of reading the work in private and noting in writing (in the case of child reception I also allowed for expression in painting) the subjective feelings connected with the text which appeared throughout reading the text. I mainly meant perceptions somatic in nature and apart from them all subjective associations, images and thoughts as well, which would allow for the building of individual ideas and be somehow related to reactions to the work. Thus the basis of my analysis were documents created

intentionally and resulting from a free activity of the research subjects.

Each of the subjects acknowledged that they did not read the work just once. It has been noted that despite the similarities in reactions to certain excerpts of the text there appear signs of subjective response. The research subjects' basic task was selection of fragments of text important to them. The reader researcher (RR) identified eighteen fragments, the control reader (CR) - fourteen, and the child reader (ChR) - thirteen. In several cases the research subjects pointed to the same excerpts. Thus RR and CR pointed to six same fragments of text, RR and ChR - two, CR and ChR - two (these were however different fragments of text than the previously indicated). All three research subjects pointed three times to the same fragment as important in their reading process). Altogether, all research subjects distinguished thirty different moments which they considered important.

Documents made by the research subjects were analyzed according to the answers to the following questions:

1. What feelings are provoked by the fragment of text indicated by the reader?
2. What psychosomatic reactions accompany certain reception moments?
3. What digressions arise in the subjects during certain moments of reception?

On the basis of readers' reports several emotional states accompanying reading of Jansson's stories were determined. These emotions range from very pleasant to very unpleasant, with a predominance of the latter. Their accumulation in such a short text is astonishing. Among negative feelings the research subjects enumerated: uncertainty, anxiety, feeling scared, regret, feeling of loss, nervousness, distress, irritation, anger, longing, sadness, and fear; and among positive ones were: pleasure, peace, feeling of security, joy, satisfaction, and relief. Feeling moved emotionally, understood as 'inner thrill' accompanying both positive and negative feelings was often mentioned.

In the area of psychosomatic reactions such feelings were registered: feeling of cold and humidity, tension, feeling of block and tension in chest, stomach cramps, a twinge of anxiety, neck muscle tension, withholding breath, deep breath, prickles, a lump in throat, tears, swallowing hard, excitement, and feeling of relief.

Since the names of some emotions referred to similar feelings I chose those which pointed to a certain emotional reaction most clearly. Thus 'uncertainty' was replaced with the term 'anxiety', 'nervousness' and 'anger' with 'irritation', 'regret' with 'distress', and the negatively tinted 'deep emotion' was put together with the 'feeling of loss'. The result of this was the appearance of ten negative states. The sequence presented here aimed at arranging the feelings from the least to the most powerful strength of impact on the reader, however it must be noted that this classification is purely arbitrary. I did not find any existing psychological research which would prove the diversification of emotion felt according to its impact. In order to establish a certain order I asked the research subjects which of the feelings they considered the weakest and which were the strongest according to them. In this way the following list was made:

- 1- embarrassment
- 2- irritation
- 3- distress
- 4- feeling scared
- 5- anxiety
- 6- sadness
- 7- longing
- 8- feeling moved emotionally
- 9- fear
- 10- deep emotion/feeling of loss

I dealt in a similar way with positive emotional states:

- 1- pleasure
- 2- satisfaction
- 3- joy
- 4- hope
- 5- peace
- 6- feeling of security
- 7- relief

The test research has shown that response to children's literature by an adult can be highly emotive. Emotional reactions develop during the act of reading and at the same time digressions resembling an inner commentary arise referring to the research subjects' individual experience.

The comments of the control reader (CR) were close to child response, there appeared only a single general reflection pertaining to time, the need to have plenty or being out of time. Apart from remarks connected with retrospection the reader researcher (RR) speaks of general emotions, such as:

- irreparable loss;
- possibility of return;
- existence of a natural order of things;
- discovering the essence of Christmas and the Christmas tree;
- the need for a peaceful place;
- the need to give gifts;
- the need for harmony.

Similarities that were found in the reactions of adult readers are the following:

- reference to situations and experiences from childhood (they are subjective in nature, e.g. memory of lost mittens or taste of walnut cake);
- image of Christmas as unpleasant experience, connected with the image of a busy, rushing mother;

In the case of the child reader (CHR) - after the first reading the girl said that the tale was so sad that she was unlikely to feel anything but sorrow. Only the second reading resulted in comments related to subjective perception of characters' behaviour and typically ethical which is characteristic for a child feeling without doubt what is good and what is bad (negative assessment of the theft of the fir tree from Gaffsie's garden). The child also showed special sensitivity to the fate of those who were hurt and criticized lazy attitude. For the girl, Christmas was associated with pleasant feelings, treats, a beautiful tree, wrapping presents, and mystery. However, despite focusing on these characteristic for children contexts, she felt strong emotions, and the line of response ran in a similar way as with adult subjects, reaching a climax at the same point.

Response lines of all research subjects run to a great extent on the negative side, showing a growing tendency and reaching the climax at 27th excerpt of the text. In the story this is the moment when Moomins choose Christmas presents from among their favourite belongings, and later give these to the woodies. Feelings of all three readers meet at three points, namely:

Point 1., when Hemulen's mittens are mentioned for the first time:

One of the Hemulens was standing on the roof, scratching at the snow. He had yellow woollen mittens that after a while became wet and disagreeable. He laid them on the chimney top, sighed, and scratched away again .

Point 27. - the culminating point when Moomins are preparing gifts and give them to the woodies:

Moominpappa chose his best trolling-spoon, which had a very beautiful box (...) The Snork Maiden took off her ankle ring and sighed a little as she rolled it up in silk paper.

Moominmamma opened her secret drawer and took out her book of painting, the one and only coloured book in all the valley.

Moomintroll's present was so lavish and private that he showed it to no one. Not even afterwards, in the spring, did he tell anyone, what he had given away.

(...) the small woody who had upset the cup of tea appeared from behind the woodshed. It had brought all its relations and the friends of these relations. Everyone was as small and miserable and frozen.

«Merry Christmas,» the woody whispered shyly.

«You're the first to say some such things,» Moominpappa said. «Aren't you at all afraid of what's going to happen when Christmas comes?.»

«This is It,» the woody mumbled and sat down in the snow with its relations. «May we look? You have got such a wonderful fir tree.»

«And all the food,» one of the relations said dreamingly.

«I have dreamed all my life of seeing this at close quarters,» the woody said with a sigh..

(...)

«You can have it all.»

The woody didn't believe its ears at first. It stepped cautiously nearer to the fir tree, followed by all the relations and friends with devoutly quivering whiskers.

Point 30., when Hemulen's mittens are found:

They laid the Hemulen's yellow mittens on the verandah rail where he'd be sure to catch sight of them, and then they went back to the drawing-room to sleep some more, waiting for the spring .

The excerpt about giving presents starts several pages earlier, when the miserable woody appears at Moomins' («What a beautiful fir,» the small woody cried and swallowed some tea the wrong way from pure shyness, regretting already that it had dared to speak). Already then the reader feels embarrassment and pity on the woody. When Moomins are preparing for Christmas not realizing its depth, the appearance of the weak woodies enhances understanding and experiencing their misery. Gift giving takes on a mythical character. It is the only possible action which unites all. In this way Moomins unconsciously fulfil the idea of a shared Christmas Eve, the time of closeness and sharing with others.

Hemulen's lost mittens become a particularly important prop. They also become a special link in the text, as the work begins and ends with a reflection on Hemulen's mittens. I believe it to be the author's conscious concept. This seemingly unimportant and almost imperceptible requisite accompanies the reader throughout the plot. Due to this the reader experiences the feeling of 'relief at the end, a peculiar catharsis, thanks to which the reader realizes that everything ended well.

The reading of Jansson's text could certainly finish with a generalized statement that the author wished to tell the reader that discovering the mystery through celebration is important. However basing on my test research I would claim that she wanted us above all to realize how important are emotions that accompany the discovery of mystery and provoked by the text.