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# READING SATISFACTION: IMPLICATIONS OF RESEARCH ON ADOLESCENTS' READING HABITS AND ATTITUDES

Reading for pleasure, which brings satisfaction and is intrinsically motivated, fosters educational achievement at school and in reading skills tests while facilitating second language learning, improving the understanding of one's own culture and foreign ones, and encouraging community participation.<sup>1</sup> Literature offers a simulation of social life through compression, abstraction and simplification, with literary experience providing information on social communication that is translatable into one's own practice. Engagement in simulated social interaction represents an opportunity to take on new perspectives and to understand people who differ from us, increasing our abilities to understand the acts and intentions of others and thus helping to fight prejudice.<sup>2</sup>

A sequence of studies in the social outreach of the book among Poles aged 15 or older<sup>3</sup> shows a decline in readership indicators across all social

- 1 C. Clark, K. Rumbold, 'Reading for pleasure: A Research Overview', National Literacy Trust, November 2006, [www.literacytrust.org.uk/research/nlt\\_research/271\\_reading\\_for\\_pleasure\\_a\\_research\\_overview](http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/research/nlt_research/271_reading_for_pleasure_a_research_overview) [access: 09/11/2016]; C. Clark, J. Douglas, 'Young People's Reading and Writing: An in-depth study focusing on enjoyment, behaviour, attitudes and attainment', National Literacy Trust, 2011, [www.literacytrust.org.uk/assets/0001/0177/Attitudes\\_towards\\_Reading\\_Writing\\_Final\\_2011.pdf](http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/assets/0001/0177/Attitudes_towards_Reading_Writing_Final_2011.pdf) [access: 09/11/2016].
- 2 E. M. Koopman, F. Hakemulder, 'Effects of Literature on Empathy and Self-Reflection: A Theoretical-Empirical Framework', *Journal of Literary Theory*, vol. 9, no. 1, 2015, pp. 79–111, [www.degruyter.com/view/j/jlt.2015.9.issue-1/jlt-2015-0005/jlt-2015-0005.xml](http://www.degruyter.com/view/j/jlt.2015.9.issue-1/jlt-2015-0005/jlt-2015-0005.xml) [access: 09/11/2016].
- 3 I. Koryś, O. Dawidowicz-Chymkowska, *Społeczny zasięg książki w Polsce w 2010 roku: Bilans dwudziestolecia* [The Social Outreach of the Book in Poland 2010: Summary of the Last

groupings. This tendency is particularly evident among men and boys, especially from families with the lowest educational and cultural capital.<sup>4</sup> Reading intensity (the amount of books read) has also declined among adults who have been readers so far. Giving up reading books after completing compulsory education persists as a tendency among Poles. On the other hand, the likelihood of reading longer, complex texts increases among those who grow up in a social environment where books are read, borrowed, bought, collected, and discussed.<sup>5</sup> Empirical research also indicates that reading engagement as an attitude is critical for reading practice to become part of one's "habitus".<sup>6</sup>

This article analyses selected factors informing the reception of books among teenagers and their expectations towards reading that are conducive to reading engagement. Reading engagement, as we understand it, is an intrinsically motivated attitude indicating the intensity of reading practice.<sup>7</sup> This means that an engaged reader is someone who reads books frequently and systematically, with pleasure, believing this practice to be valuable and appealing. The teenage reader's horizon of expectations has been described on the basis of values and attributes associated with enjoyable reading. This description helps to discover certain regularities related to the circumstances in which young readers find satisfaction in reading as well as the modalities of reading they believe to be valuable. The analysis of values and characteristics pertaining to highly esteemed

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20 Years], Warszawa 2012; O. Dawidowicz-Chymkowska, D. Michalak, *Stan czytelnictwa w Polsce w 2012 roku: Transmisja kultury pisma* [The State of Readership in Poland 2012: Transmission of the Written Culture], Warszawa 2015; D. Michalak, I. Koryś, J. Kopeć, *Stan czytelnictwa w Polsce w 2015 roku: wstępne wyniki* [The State of Readership in Poland 2015: Initial Results], Warszawa 2016, <http://ksiegarnia.bn.org.pl/397/Stan-czytelnictwa-w-Polsce-w-2015-roku-wstepne-wyniki.html> [access: 09/11/2016].

- 4 Z. Zasacka, *Czytelnictwo dzieci i młodzieży* [Reading Habits and Attitudes of Children and Young Adults], Warszawa 2014; Z. Zasacka, K. Bulkowski, 'Zaangażowanie w czytanie a osiągnięcia szkolne gimnazjalistów' [Reading engagement and educational performance of lower secondary school students], *Edukacja*, 4 (135), 2015, pp. 107–129, [www.edukacja.ibe.edu.pl/images/numery/2015/4-6-zasacka-bulkowski-zaangazowanie-w-czytanie.pdf](http://www.edukacja.ibe.edu.pl/images/numery/2015/4-6-zasacka-bulkowski-zaangazowanie-w-czytanie.pdf) [access: 09/11/2016].
- 5 G. Kraaykamp, 'Literary socialization and reading preferences. Effects of parents, the library, and the school', *Poetics*, 31, 2003, pp. 235–258, <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.540.8606&rep=rep1&type=pdf> [access: 09/11/2016]; D. Michalak, I. Koryś, J. Kopeć, op. cit., pp. 73–81.
- 6 C. Clark, J. Douglas, op. cit.; Z. Zasacka, K. Bulkowski, op. cit.
- 7 A. Wigfield, J. T. Guthrie, 'Relations of Children's Motivation for Reading to the Amount and Breadth of Their Reading', *Journal of Educational Psychology*, vol. 89, no. 3, 1997, pp. 420–432, [www.cori.umd.edu/research-publications/1997-wigfield-guthrie.pdf](http://www.cori.umd.edu/research-publications/1997-wigfield-guthrie.pdf) [access: 09/11/2016]; J. T. Guthrie, A. Wigfield, 'Engagement and Motivation in Reading', in *Handbook of Reading Research: Volume III*, M. L. Kamil, P. B. Mosenthal, P. D. Pearson, R. Barr (eds.), Mahwah 2000, pp. 403–422.

books formed part of the 2010 youth readership survey results.<sup>8</sup> The present contribution also builds on the analysed results of three editions of nationwide readership survey of a representative sample of fifteen-year-olds from 3rd grade of secondary schools conducted by the National Library of Poland in the years 2003, 2010, and 2013, as well as of a 2013 survey conducted among 3rd-grade lower secondary school and 6th-grade primary school students.<sup>9</sup> All quantitative assessment was conducted on a representative random sample, which makes the results generalizable to the entire population. Additionally, based on nationwide adolescent readership surveys, this article presents the social and demographic conditions for becoming an engaged reader, i.e. someone who reads regularly and with enthusiasm.

### THE PLEASURES OF READING — FORMS OF READING ENGAGEMENT — THEORETICAL CONTEXTS

The studies on youth reading habits and attitudes on which this article is based fall within the empirical research tradition of the Institute of the Book and Reading, where reading is understood as a social practice linked to cultural norms and patterns at a particular time and place, as well as to readers' social roles.<sup>10</sup> This is a socio-cultural approach focused on the social factors shaping reading practice, taking into account its situational and functional volatility.<sup>11</sup> In terms of cultural anthropology and social science, reading practice is also understood as the related habitus, an internalised universe of cultural experience attributed to literacy skills.

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- 8 Z. Zasacka, 'Teenagers and books – from daily reading to avoidance', *Edukacja*, 6 (131), 2014, pp. 67–80, [www.edukacja.ibe.edu.pl/images/numery/2014/6-5-zasacka-teenagers-and-books.pdf](http://www.edukacja.ibe.edu.pl/images/numery/2014/6-5-zasacka-teenagers-and-books.pdf) [access: 09/11/2016].
- 9 In May 2003, the 'Lower Secondary School Readership' survey was conducted by the National Library of Poland on 1,386 3rd grade school students from 70 lower secondary schools across Poland; in May 2010, a survey entitled 'Readership among Polish Lower Secondary School Students – a Symbolic Community and Cultural Distance' was conducted in accordance with the same methodology by the National Library (on 1,472 students), funded by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education; also, a survey entitled *Readership of Children and Adolescents* (on 1,816 3<sup>rd</sup>-grade middle school students and 1,721 6<sup>th</sup>-grade primary school students from 100 schools) was conducted by the Educational Research Institute (IBE) in collaboration with the National Library within the 'Quality and Effectiveness of Education. Strengthening of Research Capabilities' project co-funded by the European Social Fund within the Operational Programme "Human Capital 2007–2013. Priority III: Quality of the Education System". Cf. Z. Zasacka, *Nastoletni czytelnicy* [Teenage Readers], Warszawa 2008; Z. Zasacka, 'Teenagers and books – from daily reading to avoidance', op. cit.; Z. Zasacka, *Czytelnictwo dzieci i młodzieży*, op. cit.
- 10 K. Wolff, 'Dawne i nowe dylematy czytelnictwa' [Old and new dilemmas of readership], in *Z badań nad książką i księgozbiorami historycznymi* [Research on the Book and on Historic Book Collections], vol. 3, Warszawa 2009, pp. 131–157.
- 11 *Situated Literacies: Reading and Writing in Context*, ed. D. Barton, M. Hamilton, R. Ivanić, New York 2000.

A reader undertakes reading at a certain point in their reading biography, with a particular horizon of expectations in mind. Hans Robert Jauss suggests a reader's literary experience should be sought wherever it "fits within the horizon of expectations pertaining to the reader's living practice, informs the very basis of how they understand the world, thus influencing their social behaviour".<sup>12</sup> By starting to read within a particular social and cultural context, the reader adopts an active attitude, and creates meanings through reading.<sup>13</sup> According to the popular culture theorist John Fiske,<sup>14</sup> what matters is the kind of "use" the reader makes of the texts they read, how they process them, what kind of pleasure they find in reading. While reading, the reader looks for reference and guidance that would be useful in their own life, adapting and processing information in accordance with their needs, "poaches on the text", as Michel de Certeau<sup>15</sup> put it, "constructs meanings" based on their own expectations or anticipation of what they can, are able to, and want to find in the text.

Since reading requires more effort and concentration than many other activities,<sup>16</sup> the reasons why it is undertaken are of key importance. Even a person with highly developed cognitive and reading skills may not be willing to read if they can do something else or use other media such as TV or cinema instead. To overcome such difficulties, relevant motivation is needed in order to choose to read and to become engaged in it.<sup>17</sup> The perspective where engagement is seen as a factor shaping readers' attitudes is focused on intrinsic motivation. It has its origin in studies on the conditions of reading for pleasure which, although implemented within a variety of theoretical and methodological frameworks, take into account one common key characteristic that accompanies intrinsic motivation, namely autotelism, undertaking reading independently for mere enjoyment.<sup>18</sup>

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- 12 H. R. Jauss, 'Der Leser als Instanz einer neuen Geschichte der Literatur', *Poetica*, vol. 7, no. 3-4, 1975, pp. 325-344.
  - 13 P. A. Alexander, E. Fox, 'Adolescents as Readers', in *Handbook of Reading Research: Volume IV*, M. L. Kamil, P. D. Pearson, E. B. Moje, P. B. Afflerbach (eds.), New York 2011, pp. 157-176.
  - 14 J. Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture*, London 2006.
  - 15 M. de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. S. Rendall, Berkeley 1988, pp. 165-176.
  - 16 U. Schiefele, E. Schaffner, J. Möller, A. Wigfield, 'Dimensions of Reading and Their Relation to Reading Behavior and Competence', *Reading Research Quarterly*, 47(4), 2012, pp. 427-463, <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/RRQ.030/epdf> [access: 09/11/2016].
  - 17 P. J. Dunston, L. B. Gambrell, 'Motivating Adolescent Learners to Read', in *Literacy Instruction for Adolescents: Research-Based Practice*, K. D. Wood, W. E. Blanton (eds.), New York 2009, pp. 269-286.
  - 18 J. T. Guthrie, S. Alao, 'Designing contexts to increase motivation for reading', *Educational Psychologist*, vol. 32, no. 2, 1997, pp. 95-105; *Engaging Adolescents in Reading*, ed. J. T. Guthrie, Thousand Oaks 2008.

The circumstances of such gratification are connected with the reader's expectations as well as with the nature and topic of the text. Those characteristics of the reader's reception that keep them interested and curious about the text are an important factor determining such motivation. This is firstly *literary reading*. Studies on literary text reception provide numerous empirical examples of reading engagement.<sup>19</sup> For instance, cognitive psychology research describes it as "being absorbed" by the text, transported into a different world created by the narration.<sup>20</sup> The reader expands their experience by new states of mind often unknown in their everyday life. Living the fiction makes them treat the story they read as an experiment, an exercise in self-distance and in taking the character's perspective, also in terms of moral judgement.<sup>21</sup> Engagement is also described through the emotions awakening during the reading process in relation to literary characters, as well as the reader's participation in the game designed by the plot's author. Such emotions unleash cognitive processes, self-reference memory, and anticipation, such as figuring the personality traits of a character, or empathy-related emotions, for example becoming friends with a literary character.<sup>22</sup> Getting absorbed in a plot helps to stimulate empathetic feelings. Readers follow the narrator to enter a fictional world, which allows them to experiment with their own states of mind, to train their empathy, and to identify with the character, to "walk in someone else's shoes", guess their motivation, anticipate its consequences etc.

### **THE SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CONDITIONS FOR POLISH TEENAGERS TO ENGAGE IN READING**

Empirical research, based on social science tools analysing pleasure reading and reading engagement among young people, mostly consists of studies on attitudes towards reading and their link to educational

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- 19 E. Andringa, M. Shreier, 'How Literature Enters Life: An Introduction', *Poetics Today*, 25(2), 2004, pp. 161-169; D. S. Miall, *Literary Reading: Empirical and Theoretical Studies*, New York 2006.
- 20 L. Zunshine, *Why We Read Fiction. Theory of Mind and the Novel*, Columbus 2006; J. R. Gerrig, *Experiencing Narrative Worlds: On the Psychological Activities of Reading*, New Heaven 1993.
- 21 D. Kuiken, D. S. Miall, S. Sikora, 'Forms of Self-Implication in Literary Reading', *Poetics Today*, vol. 25, no. 2, 2004, pp. 171-203.
- 22 D. C. Kidd, E. Castano, 'Reading Literary Fiction Improves Theory of Mind', *Science*, 18/10/2013, vol. 342, issue 6156, pp. 377-380, <http://science.sciencemag.org/content/342/6156/377> [access: 09/11/2016]; E. M. Koopman, F. Hakemulder, op. cit.; K. Oatley, 'A taxonomy of the emotions of literary response and a theory of identification in fictional narrative', *Poetics*, vol. 23, no. 2-3, 1995, pp. 53-74.

progress at schools (such as OECD PISA),<sup>23</sup> the effects of readership promotion campaigns, and the evaluation of didactic teaching methods and strategies. Reading engagement is usually described as a positive emotional attitude towards reading, the key component of intrinsic motivation for reading.<sup>24</sup> Reading engagement and motivation for reading are analysed in relation to other factors such as the socio-cultural context, the students' prior knowledge and interests, and learning strategies, as well as compulsory and voluntary reading activity. In this context, reading engagement is defined as an attitude where reading belongs to one's natural and obvious strategies of behaving (*cultural tool kit*),<sup>25</sup> is taken for granted as a leisure activity, practised systematically – every day or almost every day – and is intrinsically motivated, which means that the will to read results from a conviction that reading brings pleasure and satisfaction.<sup>26</sup>

The category of engaged readers was singled out in the 2010 lower secondary school readership survey in order to comprehensively cover the examined components of teenagers' attitudes towards reading. Engaged readers were understood as those who: declared they read both in and outside of the school curriculum, admitted they enjoyed reading, and were able to indicate a book they found recommendable for their peers to read. Thus, they were active readers making their own choices, without contesting the viability of required reading, with a positive attitude towards books, and with the competencies necessary for enjoyable reading as well as their own idea of what such reading should be like, which enabled them to indicate books worth reading. Hence, following this approach, engaged readers were considered to be 15-year-olds who read and enjoyed reading, readily participating in book-related social interactions. Such students represented 29% of the entire population. The sum of the above aspects revealed significant differences in the attitudes of 15-year-olds towards reading. Gender turned out to be the most influential

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- 23 W. G. Brozo, G. Shiel, K. Topping, 'Engagement in Reading: Lessons Learned from Three PISA Countries', *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, vol. 51, no. 4, 2007, pp. 304–315; OECD, *PISA 2009 Results: Executive Summary*, 2010, [www.oecd.org/pisa/pisaproducts/46619703.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/pisa/pisaproducts/46619703.pdf) [access: 09/11/2016].
  - 24 J. T. Guthrie et al., 'Growth of Literacy Engagement: Changes in Motivations and Strategies during Concept-Oriented Reading Instruction', *Reading Research Quarterly*, vol. 31, no. 3, 1996, pp. 306–332, <https://msu.edu/~dwong/CEP991/CEP991Resources/Guthrie-MotRdng.pdf> [access: 09/11/2016]; A. Wigfield, J. T. Guthrie, op. cit.
  - 25 E. L. Deci, R. M. Ryan, *Intrinsic Motivation and Self-Determination in Human Behavior*, New York 1985.
  - 26 A. Swidler, 'Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies', *American Sociological Review*, vol. 51, no. 2, 1986, pp. 273–286, [http://isites.harvard.edu/fs/docs/icb.topic1458086.files/Swidler\\_CultureInAction.pdf](http://isites.harvard.edu/fs/docs/icb.topic1458086.files/Swidler_CultureInAction.pdf) [access: 09/11/2016].

differentiating factor for attitudes towards reading, as girls outnumbered boys in the group of engaged readers by 25 percentage points – only 15% of boys were categorised in this group. The accumulated impact of gender and place of residence further exacerbated the gap, especially between young people living in rural areas and those living in big cities, which amounted to 30 percentage points. This is also where we found the lowest proportion of engaged readers: 13% of boys in rural areas and 14% of boys in small towns. In this way, a teenager affected by several factors which are negatively correlated with positive attitudes towards reading – namely being male in a rural or small town area – is left with the lowest probability of becoming an engaged reader. Conversely, in big cities every other girl – but only every fifth boy – were categorised as engaged readers. A statistically significant relationship between the parents' educational attainment and the degree of cultural engagement among the teenage respondents was observed. Boys were most affected by their parents' low educational attainment in terms of becoming an engaged reader: for instance, the probability that boys whose mothers had only completed basic vocational training would become engaged readers amounted to as little as 11%.

To capture the tendencies in the reading engagement of Polish lower secondary school students, two indicators were used, as in the three previous editions of the lower secondary school readership survey of 2003, 2010 and 2013.<sup>27</sup> Consequently, the teenage readers were described through a set of indicators relating to their (school and non-school) reading activity and their positive attitude towards reading. In the period between the three surveys, 2003–2013, the number of engaged readers defined this way remained virtually the same. Here too, gender persisted as the strongest differentiating factor for reading engagement. Over the decade, the difference between the proportion of engaged female and male readers among the respondents amounted to at least 25 percentage points. It is notable that the likelihood of becoming an engaged reader for teenagers from families with a low cultural capital (measured by the number of books owned) and a low educational capital (measured by the parents' educational attainment) remained much lower among boys. This picture is supplemented and corroborated by the analysis of reading motivation measurements obtained as a result of the third edition of the adolescent readership survey.<sup>28</sup> This leads to the conclusion that girls

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27 Z. Zasacka, K. Bulkowski, op. cit., pp. 121–124.

28 Z. Zasacka, *Czytelnictwo dzieci i młodzieży*, op. cit., pp. 73–85.

experience stronger motivation for reading, especially in terms of intrinsic motivation – they engage better in reading fiction even if they face challenges. This is proven by the fact that the difference between adolescent girls and boys declaring that they like reading long, absorbing novels and that they imagine the stories they read amounts to as much as 22 percentage points. Another example of this gender-based disproportion is the predilection to get “engrossed” in reading, since as many as 73% of girls responded positively to the statement “when I read, I picture the stories before my eyes”, while only 58% of boys declared this was the case.

### WHAT IS WORTH READING?

The two editions of the nationwide lower secondary school readership survey sought to find out what values and attributes young people associated with enjoyable reading. For this purpose, students were first asked to choose a book they would recommend to their peers, then the book contents and the rationale behind such recommendations were examined and categorised. To describe the evaluative aspect of the teenagers' attitudes towards reading, the axiological sense of their responses was analysed. A sociological understanding of values was adopted in the researchers' approach, whereby values are of a relational nature and refer to “the entire human experience, both intrinsic and extrinsic, to an individual's practical actions as well as their imagination, intuition and moral reasoning”.<sup>29</sup> Values understood as goals represent the preferred state of affairs and sensations. According to Stefan Nowak, they are “certain pictures or visions of desirable situations or processes believed to be appropriate, right or desirable”.<sup>30</sup> In sociological analysis and empirical research, values are operationalized as the principle of choice and assessment of an object.<sup>31</sup> An attitude is defined by its active character, so that “its relationship with values is not a passive reflection of such values, neither is it a creation resulting from projecting subjective, individual reactions outside the individual”.<sup>32</sup>

29 M. Ziółkowski, ‘Wartości’ [Values], in *Encyklopedia socjologii* [Encyclopaedia of Social Science], vol. 4, Warszawa 2002, pp. 289–297.

30 S. Nowak, ‘Postawy, wartości i aspiracje społeczeństwa polskiego. Przesłanki do prognozy na tle przemian dotychczasowych’ [Attitudes, values and aspirations of the Polish society. Premises for a forecast against the backdrop of previous developments], in *Spółczesność polskie czasu kryzysu. Przeobrażenia świadomości i warianty zachowań* [Polish Society at the Time of Crisis. Evolution of Conscience and Variants of Behaviour], ed. S. Nowak, Warszawa 1984, p. 403.

31 A. Kłoskowska, *Socjologia kultury* [Sociology of Culture], Warszawa 1981.

32 *Ibid.*, p. 175.



The question probing the willingness and ability to choose a book worth recommending to a fellow lower secondary school student<sup>33</sup> has a twofold purpose. On the one hand, the answers can prove the teenager knows and esteems a book, which testifies to a certain self-aware reading competency, and on the other, that they are able to determine the reading expectations of their peers and have an idea of the kind of books that may appeal to them. Each book recommendation was supported by a rationale. The respondents were free to justify their choices and the appeal of the selected book. By analysing such substantiations, it was possible to find out the characteristics and values<sup>34</sup> attributed by teenagers to enjoyable reading worth sharing with others. The selection of recommended reading shows which books are particularly valued by teenagers and, to their mind, appealing to their peers.

#### **THERE ARE NO BOOKS I COULD RECOMMEND, MY FRIENDS DO NOT READ ANY EITHER**

In the 2010 survey, 53% of teenagers were willing to recommend a book to a schoolmate, 29% were undecided, and 18% firmly stated they knew no such book. As for other components of attitudes towards reading, gender was the most important differentiating factor.<sup>35</sup> Girls were more willing to recommend books to their peers, the proportion being 65% and 41% accordingly. The difference amounted to as much as 23 percentage points. It seems also significant that every fourth boy, but only every tenth girl firmly stated they did not know any such book. However, a decline was observed in the number of girls willing to recommend books to their peers as compared to the 2003 survey (from 73% to 65%). This may be symptomatic of certain changes in the youth community, as exemplified by this sample response of a girl: "I would recommend 'Lord of the Rings' by Tolkien. Unfortunately, most people find this book boring".

Teenage girls turned out to be more active readers, made more independent reading choices, and participated more eagerly in the social circulation of books: they were more willing to discuss books with their friends and more keen on borrowing books,<sup>36</sup> and they understood better their fellow students' reading preferences and needs, which made it easier

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33 The question was: *Are there any books you would recommend to a fellow schoolmate?*

34 Cf. Z. Zasacka, *Nastoletni czytelnicy*, op. cit., pp. 79–85.

35 Z. Zasacka, 'Teenagers and books – from daily reading to avoidance', op. cit.

36 Ibid.

for them to indicate a recommendable book. Boys, more often than girls, felt isolated in their reading interests, and were less likely to discuss their reading with friends, as illustrated by this symptomatic response of a teenage boy recommending textbooks in maths, history and physics as well as orthography dictionaries: “because it turns my stomach how ignorant and uneducated my schoolmates are”.

Recommending books was predominately correlated with reading activity: active readers (reading books both in their free time and as part of the school curriculum) were most likely to recommend books (68% of them did so). Only a small proportion (9%) were convinced there was no book they could recommend.

**“I RECOMMEND *TWILIGHT* – IT WAS THE FIRST BOOK I EVER READ IN FULL AND ENJOYED. AFTER THAT, I TOOK TO READING OTHER BOOKS TOO”**

The teenagers were most likely to recommend books of their own choosing which belonged to the titles most read in their community<sup>37</sup> (Table 1). They chose mainly fiction. Required reading also made it to their suggestions, reaching the third rank (Chart 1) among the most recommended books. It is noteworthy that Aleksander Kamiński, the most beloved author of compulsory reading, reached a very high position. He ranked third among the most recommended authors, after Stephenie Meyer, unrivalled in 2010, jointly with the author of the now-classic Harry Potter saga.

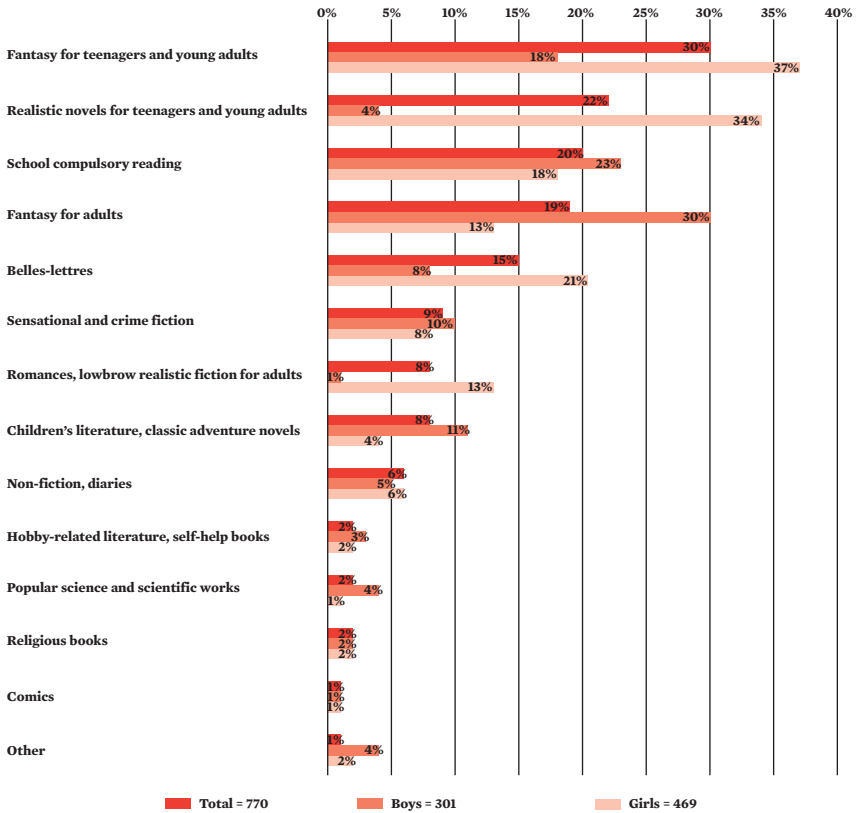
**TABLE 1. AUTHORS MOST FREQUENTLY RECOMMENDED BY LOWER SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS**

Recommended authors	Number of recommending students	N=1472	n=770 (students recommending books)
1. Stephenie Meyer	117	7.9%	15.2%
2. J. K. Rowling	54	3.7%	7.0%
3. Aleksander Kamiński	52	3.5%	6.7%
4. J. R. R. Tolkien	42	2.9%	5.4%
5. Paulo Coelho	42	2.9%	5.4%
6. Andrzej Sapkowski	38	2.6%	4.9%
7. Christiane F.	38	2.6%	4.9%
8. Barbara Rosiek	26	1.8%	3.8%
9. Eric E. Schmitt	21	1.4%	2.7%
10. Anna Onichimowska	20	1.3%	2.5%

Source: author's compilation.

37 Ibid.

**CHART 1. TYPES OF RECOMMENDED BOOKS AND GENDER IN 2010**



Source: author's compilation.

Certain regularities can be observed in the 15-year-olds' reading preferences. The results of the 2003, 2010 and 2013 readership surveys demonstrate that the literary genre most valued by teenagers is fantasy with young characters. The growing availability of fantasy books for teenagers in the literary market has significantly broadened their choices over the last decade. The massive advance of this genre in the book market<sup>38</sup> has made it increasingly successful among teenage readers

38 O. Dawidowicz-Chymkowska, *Ruch Wydawniczy w Liczbach 2014* [Polish Publishing in Figures 2014], vol. 60, Warszawa 2016, <http://ksiegarnia.bn.org.pl/pdf/RWwL.pdf> [access: 09/11/2016]; Biblioteka Analiz, *Rynek książki 2010: wydawnictwa* [Book Market in 2010: Publishing Houses], Warszawa 2011.

from very diverse social backgrounds.<sup>39</sup> A new segment of novels with teenage vampires as protagonists has also become very popular among girls from all social groupings. Fantasy adventure novels, of which the works by J. K. Rowling are the most prominent example, are continually held in high regard by all teenagers, both boys and girls. Still, it was the best-selling vampire novel that sparked a passion for books among many teenage girls. One of the respondents symptomatically stated: "I love it so much... I have already read it a couple of times and never got bored, I could read it endlessly... it's wonderful".

Adult fantasy literature has also consolidated its position as a fiction genre valued by teenagers; however, this is mostly as a result of choices made by big city youths from families with the highest cultural and educational capital. As in the case of reading choices and preferences, fantasy for grown-ups is most esteemed by boys,<sup>40</sup> who expected their peers to be impressed by fantasy books written with an adult reader in mind, or by historical novels; as a result, they recommended such titles most often. As many as 30% of boys who did indeed recommend books chose fantasy novels. They listed a variety of authors: J.R.R. Tolkien, Stephen King, and Dmitry Glukhovsky, as well as Polish writers such as Andrzej Sapkowski, Marcin Ciszewski, or Jacek Komuda.

As girls were dominant among those who did recommend books, due to their choices, problem novels for young adults came second. Their recommendations, however, were widely scattered. Only two authors of such novels can be found within the ten most recommended authors, and lower in ranking: Christiane F. and Anna Onichimowska, with similar books on drug abuse among teenagers. Yet another edition of the youth readership survey<sup>41</sup> demonstrated that novels focusing on social pathologies affecting young people have a strong position among the reading preferred by teenagers, for instance in 2003,<sup>42</sup> where every tenth teenager who recommended books chose works of this kind (16% of girls and 1% of boys).

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39 Z. Zasacka, *Czytelnictwo dzieci i młodzieży*, op. cit.; Z. Zasacka, 'Lektury szkolne i pozaszkolne – ciągłość i zmiany w postawach czytelniczych gimnazjalistów' [School and out-of-school reading. Continuity and evolution of lower secondary school students' attitudes towards reading], in *Polonistyka dziś – kształcenie dla jutra* [Polish Studies Today – Education for Tomorrow], vol. 2, K. Biedrzycki, W. Bobiński, A. Janus-Sitarz, R. Przybylska (eds.), Kraków 2014, pp. 214–225.

40 Z. Zasacka, 'Nastolatki i ich przyjemności czytania książek' [Teenagers and their pleasures of reading], in *Kultura czytelnicza dzieci i młodzieży początku XXI wieku* [Reading Culture among Children and Young People in the Early 21st Century], M. Antczak, A. Brzuska-Kępa, A. Walczak-Niewiadomska (eds.), Łódź 2013, pp. 95–116.

41 Z. Zasacka, *Czytelnictwo dzieci i młodzieży*, op. cit.

42 Z. Zasacka, *Nastoletni czytelnicy*, op. cit., pp. 147–150.

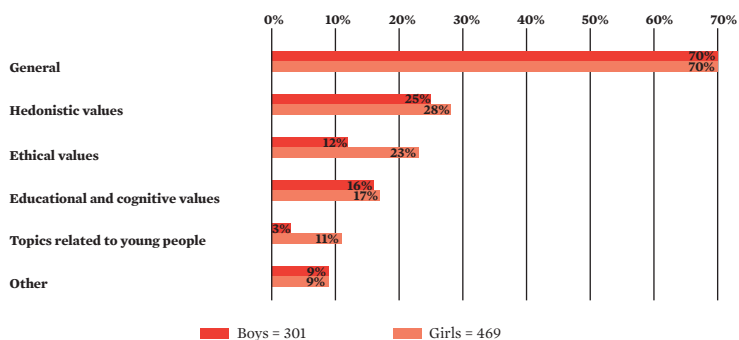
A clear decline in school compulsory reading being recommended represents a major change between the two survey editions of 2003 and 2010.

**“SO ENROSSING, PLAINLY WRITTEN AND INTERESTING YOU,  
JUST CAN’T STOP READING”**

The respondents explained their choices by trying to list the qualities that make a book worth reading. They usually justified their decisions in general terms (Chart 2), often also accompanied by more specific explanations. Such general statements mainly referred to the subject matter of the recommended books: appealing, interesting, dealing with important matters, informative. Nearly half of the teenagers recommending books used such terms.

Among such general descriptions, there were also ones used to recommend books for their reading-related qualities, i.e. a form and language that facilitated reception. General terms indicating involvement in reading appeared most often: “it is engrossing, you just can’t stop reading, it is easy to read”. The language made a book recommendable only if it was *easily understandable*, *plain* and *reader-friendly*. Here are the typical ways teenagers used the above terms, for example one girl recommended the novel series by Stephenie Meyer: “because it is interesting and very absorbing, written in plain language anyone can understand”.

**CHART 2. THE TEENAGERS' GENDER AND THE SELECTION CRITERIA USED BY THOSE WHO RECOMMENDED BOOKS IN THE 2010 SURVEY**



Source: author's compilation.

### QUICK ACTION, UNPARALLELED ADVENTURES, HUMOUR, THRILLS, A ROMANTIC CHARACTER

Hedonistic and recreational values were mentioned in 27% of the recommendations. This suggests the teenagers were reading mainly for entertainment, emphasising the features that make reading a relaxing, recreational activity filling their free time. What we find here is the escapist function of literature, engaging the reader's emotions, accompanied by characteristics specific to literary reading<sup>43</sup> and reading engagement. The teenagers especially valued those literary techniques that "transport" the reader into an imaginary world,<sup>44</sup> allowing them to escape from their daily routine and plunge into a different universe. They listed literary features that helped them to identify with a character and follow an exciting plot full of suspense. An example of such assessment is this response of a lower secondary school girl who recommended novels by Joanna Chmielewska, a Polish author of detective stories: "these books are funny, full of complex scheming and crazy ideas which are extremely absorbing for the reader. Great, universal entertainment. Anyone can read them and find something for themselves".

Below is another typical description provided by a girl recommending fantasy novels, books by J. K. Rowling and *The Chronicles of Narnia*: "interesting, absorbing, you can read them for hours non-stop, they make you forget about earthly life. It's a nice way to spend your free time".

Entertainment through escaping into a new, imaginary world is a function of reading fiction associated with various genres and sub-genres. Most teenagers did not explain, however, which literary techniques made this possible, as what mattered was the effect: *The Chronicles of Narnia*, "because they let you break away from our world". This group also included responses (not too numerous) praising the author for creating an original, complex fictional universe, like this sample recommendation of Tolkien's prose: "it's a very demanding book. The human brain struggles to imagine such a variety of situations"; or this opinion from a boy recommending *Metro 2033* by Dmitry Glukhovsky: "because it offers an ingenious imaginary world and one of the best endings I have ever known".

Every tenth respondent recommending books chose them due to a plot where a lot goes on – quick, animated action, suspense, adventures, mystery, a criminal or sensational story or a thrill. This is an example of such

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43 D. S. Miall, op. cit.

44 R. A. Mar, K. Oatley, 'The Function of Fiction is the Abstraction and Simulation of Social Experience', *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, vol. 3, no. 3, 2008, pp. 173–192.

argumentation, where a girl who avoids required reading, opting exclusively for popular fiction, recommends the novel *Jennifer's Body* by Audrey Nixon: "I have read it several times and never got bored. It is highly recommendable: the plot is full of twists and turns, and some scenes really give you the chills".

Here are two other examples conflating the above attributes: "*City of Bones* by Cassandra Clare is an incredibly thrilling, greatly entertaining and absorbing book full of action". Such features were found in many different genres: detective and sensational novels as well as fantasy, the most recommended books being romantic thrillers with vampires as lead characters (2.5% of all recommendations). What mattered most was the enjoyment of playing a game with the text, as illustrated by the following recommendation of several books by authors such as Meyer or Tolkien: "I like the way the plot develops, the nature descriptions and puzzles. I felt curious about what would happen in the next chapter, what the ending would be, what conclusions the character would reach". Classic adventure novels, such as Alfred Szklarski's works, were also recommended.

Humour is one of the most valued entertainment qualities in the recommended books. The teenagers (4.5% of those who recommended books, with boys slightly prevailing in this group) found it in all kinds of works, often accompanied by action-filled adventures. Some examples include a boy recommending *The Witcher* by Andrzej Sapkowski due to its "quick action and good jokes", or the *Discworld* series by Terry Pratchett: "because it's a very funny series"; another person recommending the same author says: "an interesting fantasy book with a good dose of black humour".

What teenage readers who recommended books found attractive (3.3%) were descriptions of a mysterious world, magic and witchcraft, which often accompany adventurous action and a smartly depicted fictional universe. Naturally, this was generally the way to recommend fantasy books, for instance: "*The Witcher* is a very interesting book, full of magic and incredible adventures"; or books by J.R.R. Tolkien: "because they show the most splendid universe created by human imagination, planned to the smallest detail. There are elves, dwarves, etc."

Fantasy for adult readers is the most notable reading preference among teenage boys – as many as 29% of boys who declared they liked reading indicated such books, as opposed to only 13% of girls.<sup>45</sup> Three quarters of all boys who liked reading said fantasy features were an indispensable

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45 Z. Zasacka, 'Nastolatki i ich przyjemności czytania książek', op. cit.

condition for deciding to read a book in the first place! Boys were also more numerous in recommending fantasy for adults to their peers.

Every twentieth person (girls only) who recommended books based their choices on the presence of a romantic plot or themes. Emotional response was associated with love stories, which were recommended for being poignant and moving; readers also sought self-reflection and links with their personal experience. This was for example the way the novel *Dear John* by Nicholas Sparks, an author much read by teenage girls, was recommended: "I think it explores a topic that sooner or later affects everyone – it tells about love. We can learn how strong this feeling can be, and how fate can thwart our plans to completely change our lives. The book is full of emotions and very touching to any reader".

Responsiveness involving these kinds of emotions is particularly typical of girls. Apart from "reflections on life", they needed the emotions literature is able to provide. This recommendation of *Dead Poets Society* by Nancy H. Kleinbaum is an example of using literature in this way: "it tells about young people (boys) of our age who face similar problems with their parents, their first loves and their passions. It's great food for thought and can make you shed a tear".

Recreational values are more linked to an urban mode of reading. Teenagers from big cities, although diverse as readers, valued literature for adults to a greater extent, especially fantasy books, while being much less attracted to prose for teenagers, especially general fiction. It is among big city readers that we find the highest number of popular literature connoisseurs, especially those fond of fantasy, crime, and romantic fiction. This is an example of a typical big city recommendation: "I recommend *Metro 2033* and *The Witcher* because of their interesting plot and an amazing imaginary universe". Another example showing how familiar urban teenagers are with various genres of popular literature and with selecting its particular specimens is this response of a girl recommending the *Sandman* comic book and the novel *American Gods* by Neil Gaiman, as well as Stephen King's novels: "because I read them myself, with pleasure. They would probably appeal more to boys or adults, but I don't trust stereotypes. *Sandman*, especially, is a comic book with a unique atmosphere. Other books by Neil Gaiman are full of action and thrills with a little bit of (mostly black) humour".

This group of readers was at ease with finding out about bestsellers, knew which books were in vogue, and certainly had better access to them. They often diversified their reading choices, without necessarily limiting them to a single genre.



### HOW TO LIVE – WARNINGS, MORAL GUIDANCE, MODELS OF PERSEVERANCE AND TOLERANCE

Ethical and moral values were mentioned in every fifth recommendation. Those who found ethical and moral values and messages in books usually saw them as important guidance for the reader on how to live, what choices to make in difficult situations, how to make important life decisions, and what values one should stand by. In their reading, the teenagers looked for words of wisdom and philosophical thoughts, as well as a means to reflect on themselves and their own lives. They recommended books dedicated to the fight between good and evil, friendship, and the quality of interpersonal relationships. Various works were referenced, often also compulsory school reading, such as *The Little Prince*, recommended as “a book that teaches us to value friendship”. *The Old Man and the Sea* was recommended because it is “a book about fighting adversities”.

Axiological messages were also found in the works by Eric E. Schmitt, a popular author among teenagers, especially in his novel *Oscar and the Lady in Pink*. It was recommended as “a poignant tale teaching us how to accept death and enjoy every single day of our lives”. Books by Paulo Coelho were often praised for their “words of wisdom” and ability to inspire philosophical reflection. For example, a boy who recommended one of his books provided the following explanation: “it’s a good read and teaches us to pursue our own goals”. One book particularly valued by teenagers for its moral teachings is *Veronika Decides to Die*; one of the female readers pointed out that “thanks to this book, I learned to look at things from a new perspective”. Another 15-year-old girl says: “the book tells the story of a young woman who decides to kill herself. But after a failed suicide attempt, she rediscovers life. I think every young person should read a book like this, which inspires deep thoughts and teaches how to value what we have in life”.

Novels by J.R.R. Tolkien, much loved by teenagers, were also recommended for their ethical messages, because – as stated by a middle school boy – “you can find your role models in them”.

Some of those who recommended books (3.3%) highlighted the values such as heroic attitudes, patriotism, bravery, valour or perseverance that they promoted. Such books usually referred to Polish history. In this context, compulsory reading was often mentioned, specifically *Stones for the Rampart* by Aleksander Kamiński or *Squadron 303* by Arkady Fiedler. This is a sample response recommending the latter: “it tells about brave Polish soldiers. A good read for those who love war literature”. In this

context, books about World War II, including sensational fiction, were often recommended, mostly by boys. This is a representative response of a boy from a big city who reads a lot of sensational literature and recommended: “*HMS Ulysses*, a book that tells about a convoy sailing from the UK to the USSR during World War II. The lead characters are sailors on the eponymous vessel, repeatedly attacked by German troops. In the face of danger, they are all capable of great effort and sacrifice for others. It’s due to their attitude, heroism and courage that I would recommend this book to others”.

Fantasy fiction may be read in a similar way, as illustrated by this response of a teenage boy recommending Polish fantasy books by authors such as Marcin Ciszewski and Magdalena Kozak: “Interesting and absorbing Polish fantasy books, some with a patriotic message”.

Reading fantasy can also be a source of ethical experience related to one’s own life. Below is a typical example of boys’ literary fascinations, where a fan recommends the fantasy trilogy by Trudi Canavan, finding there the following deep contents: “even though the book is set in a fictional world, it tells about people just like us, and helps us to find answers to the questions that haunt us”.

This recommendation of *His Dark Materials* by Philip Pullman is another example showing how a philosophical message can be found in fantasy fiction: “because it helped me expand my imagination and develop my interpretative skills. Such books are perfect for those who continually seek happiness, but cannot find it for themselves”.

A similar group of teenagers, this time mostly girls, recommended books that show us how to act in situations of crisis such as addiction, drug abuse, serious illness, or the death of loved ones. The teenagers looked for lessons that can be learned from descriptions of social pathologies and for models of how to act in difficult circumstances. Such books were read in accordance with the implied reception of problem novels.<sup>46</sup> The readers argued such books provided useful knowledge about the consequences of teenage problems. Below, a sample response of a girl: “reading *Monkey Taming* can be clearly beneficial to those who are obsessed with their diet and calories”.

This kind of reception was particularly typical of girls, frequent readers of problem novels – mostly books dealing with the issue of drug abuse among teenagers such as *Pamiętnik narkomanki* [Diary of a Drug Addict], *Kokaina* [Cocaine] or *We Children from Bahnhof Zoo* – who recommended

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46 M. Cart, *Young Adult Literature: From Romance to Realism*, Chicago 2010, pp. 21–36.

these kinds of books to each other as a warning against addiction that should be read: “to learn about life, that things do not always turn out the way we want, and to warn young people against wasting their lives through drugs and having sex with adults, which is against the law”.

The moral message in literature mattered more to girls than to boys. What they seemed to appreciate most was guidance on how to cope with difficult life situations. This is why books by Paulo Coelho, providing much “life wisdom”, were highly popular among this group: “*Eleven Minutes* provides plenty of interpretative options and helps to understand many issues teenage girls find difficult”; or: “it offers an important message for young people and words of wisdom that can be helpful in our affective life”.

Girls who found axiological messages in literature discovered ethical senses and model behaviours, like this teenager who recommended *Poczwarzka* [Chrysalis], a novel by Dorota Terakowska: “it teaches tolerance, shows that we are all equal, that we must not discriminate against others because of their disease”.

There are several distinguishing features in reading fiction that show the reader is able and willing to play a game with the text. Depending on the genre and type of text, literature offers a simulation of the social world through compression, abstraction, and simplification – a simulation of social interaction. Such literary experience provides knowledge about social communication which is transferable to one’s own practice.<sup>47</sup> Engagement in simulated social interaction represents an opportunity to take on new perspectives and to understand people who differ from us, increasing our abilities to understand the acts and intentions of others and weakening prejudice. Teenagers are open to such a response as they try to understand how intentions are formed and why characters make the decisions they make – through experiencing the literary text. According to Martha Nussbaum, this style of literary reception takes place whenever readers who adopt an ethical perspective<sup>48</sup> not only discover an ethical message or a “moral truth” in the text they read, but are also able to experience and figure out the literary situation, getting involved

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47 R. Mar, M. Djikic, K. Oatley, ‘Effects of reading on knowledge, social abilities, and selfhood: Theory and empirical studies’, in *Directions in Empirical Literary Studies: In honor of Willie van Peer*, S. Zyngier, M. Bortolussi, A. Chesnokova, J. Auracher (eds.), Amsterdam 2008, pp. 127–137; M. Djikic, K. Oatley, M. C. Moldoveanu, ‘Reading other minds: Effects of literature on empathy’, *Scientific Study of Literature*, 3 (1), 2013, pp. 28–47.

48 M.C. Nussbaum, ‘Reading for Life’, *Yale Journal of Law & the Humanities*, vol. 1 (1), 1989, <http://digitalcommons.law.yale.edu/yjlh/vol1/iss1/10/> [access: 09/11/2016].

in a process that engages their emotions.<sup>49</sup> The questions Nussbaum asks are: how does one read and internalize text in order to unearth new layers of ethical meaning from it? Does text offer its readers nothing but aesthetic delight, disconnected from any “here and now”, or does it teach them how to take the right steps in life and inspire responsibility for its interpretation, thus making us assume greater responsibility for our own lives? As interpreted by Anna Gołąb, Nussbaum believes it is rewarding if the action develops in the reader’s mind as they struggle with the conflicting choices made by literary characters, thus requiring the reader’s assessment.<sup>50</sup>

The analysis of students’ recommendations demonstrates that every fifth student able to choose a book worth suggesting is also capable of adopting an ethical perspective. Some of them focus on the instrumental functions of reading, looking for guidance and moral knowledge, however, most experience reading in an emotional way (often at the same time), sympathizing with the literary character, but also trying to judge them. Such modes of reading require further in-depth qualitative assessment of adolescent readers’ literary reception.

#### **AUTHENTIC, DESCRIBING OUR REALITY, SHOWING WHAT LIFE USED TO BE LIKE IN THE PAST**

Educational and cognitive values formed the third group of values attributed to the selected reading. They were referenced by 18% of those who recommended any books at all. This time, there was no disparity between the choices made by boys and girls. In this context, fiction was specifically highlighted, especially its mimetic function, describing the real world with its problems, as a source of knowledge and information. This group of teenagers used literature instrumentally. Literary texts were mostly treated as resources of knowledge about the past, especially about Polish history, culture and old-time ways of life (8.3% of teenagers recommending books). These were the reasons why, for example, *Noah’s Child* by Eric Emmanuel Schmitt was recommended: because it “shows what life was like for a Jewish boy living in a hideout during World War II”. Cognitive values seemed to be particularly discernible in compulsory reading such as *Stones for the*

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49 M. Djikic, K. Oatley, M. C. Moldoveanu, op. cit.; K. Oatley, ‘A taxonomy of the emotions of literary response and a theory of identification in fictional narrative’, *Poetics*, vol. 23 (1–2), 1995, pp. 53–74.

50 A. Gołąb, *Rozum w świecie praktyki. Poglądy filozoficzne Marthy C. Nussbaum* [Mind in the World of Practice. The Philosophy of Martha C. Nussbaum], Warszawa 2010.

*Rampart* by Aleksander Kamiński or *Szybyfowe prace* [Labours of Sisyphus] by Stefan Żeromski, but also in communist era adventure novels such as the *Pan Samochodzik* [Mister Automobile] series by Zbigniew Nienacki, as “it is very interesting with its historical features”. Girls who read classic fiction recommended for example Jane Austen’s novels, which they valued for “telling about life in a different time”.

Some teenagers (3.6%) recommended books due to their documentary value, the picture of social life they offered. Here is a typical opinion: “they tell about young people, their lives, difficult, real-life problems, are authentic, reflect reality”. In such responses, literary texts were treated as bearing testimony to certain issues, without reference to any moral contents.

When recommending books for their cognitive value, some teenagers did not look for depictions of gruesome problems, but appreciated their authentic and honest representation of reality, as in this response: “I would recommend these books because they are very interesting and describe people who live right next to us”. Some female readers were also able to find realistic narration in a fantasy thriller. They chose *Twilight* by Stephenie Meyer, because, in their opinion: “this novel was so interesting, telling about the life of an ordinary girl just like us”.

This kind of recommendation was more typical of teenagers living in rural areas, as in this opinion on a general fiction novel submitted by a girl from a rural school: “topics one enjoys reading about. There are some realistic features, things that can happen to any family”. Young people from rural areas were also more likely to recommend required reading because schools sanction the value of such books due to their informative aspects.<sup>51</sup> It was also typical of readers from rural areas to look for instrumental, usually cognitive values, even in popular literature, as in this recommendation submitted by a female student: “*Sherlock Holmes* by Conan Doyle and *The Name of the Rose* by Umberto Eco – these books are challenging, but help us expand our knowledge in various areas”. Such recommendations anticipated the “horizon of expectations” of other teenagers from a rural background where “pragmatic” functions of literature, also attributed to popular fiction, tend to justify the time dedicated to reading. This remains a characteristic feature of reading in rural areas.<sup>52</sup>

51 K. Wolff, *Książka w życiu i kulturze współczesnej młodzieży wiejskiej* [The Book in the Life and Culture of Contemporary Young People in Rural Areas], Warszawa 1988; K. Wolff, *Książka wśród młodzieży wiejskiej (w dziesięć lat później)* [The Book Among Young People in Rural Areas (ten years later)], Warszawa 1991; K. Wolff, *Losy wiejskich czytelników książek: Studium porównawcze* [The Trajectory of Rural Readers: A Comparative Study], Warszawa 1993.

52 Z. Zasacka, *Nastoletni czytelnicy*, op. cit., pp. 169–174.

There is a discernible group of male readers who read fantasy fiction as historical books, as in this example of reception by a teenage boy who loves to read and does it every day. He recommended books by Andrzej Pilipiuk and Jacek Komuda: "I was fascinated by these books. Komuda's books tell us about the beautiful era of the Polish noblemen. Certainly absorbing to those who are at least a little interested in Polish history".

Such reception combines entertainment qualities with cognitive value, as illustrated by this response of a teenage boy recommending fantasy novels, being a connoisseur of this genre: "*Metro 2033*; Komuda, Pilipiuk, Ćwiek, Sapkowski – they are the best in their genres; *Metro 2033* is an excellent piece of sci-fi in a Slavic version, full of deep thoughts and observations; *Samozwaniec* [The Pretender] conveys the atmosphere of the Polish nobility better than any history textbook and is written in a fluent language; the *Oko jelenia* [Deer's Eye] series is an adventurous mixture of fantasy, sci-fi and history, light and engrossing".

### YOUNG ADULT FICTION

Some of those who recommended books highlighted their topics relating to young people, teenage problems and young characters. It was more frequent for girls than for boys to find books on young people and teenage protagonists appealing, so – aware of those common preferences – they recommended such works to each other. As an example of such an awareness: *Zapałka na zakręcie* [The Match on the Cusp] and *Pejzaż sentymentalny* [Sentimental Landscape], "because they are absorbing, and as far as I am aware, other girls of my age also like these kinds of books".

Fewer teenagers chose specialised literature or books relating to their hobbies, e.g. works on music or biographies of artists or athletes. These were usually highly individualised, specific reading preferences.

### CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The analyses of readership surveys among teenagers indicate that attitudes towards reading depend on socio-demographic conditions in terms of reading activity as well as the emotional approach to books or the expectations towards the selected texts. Differences mostly stem from the young people's gender – girls tend to be more active readers and to find satisfaction in reading more easily. This characteristic of Polish teenagers is corroborated by the measurement of reading motivation, which shows that girls tend to have more reasons to read books

and to choose longer texts, are more optimistic about their own reading skills, and are able to get involved more easily in reading fiction. Female and male readers have a different conception of a good read: girls more often than boys look for an ethical message, information on how others experience the problems of growing up, how they manage their interpersonal relations and their first romantic relationships. Girls use fiction in a different way, looking for psychological and romantic themes as well as for teenage characters. They consciously seek role models, especially in terms of building relationships with others. Boys display a more selective attitude towards literature, and some topics discourage them from reading, such as psychological and romantic themes as well as female protagonists. What is characteristic for their way of reading is a search for great adventure, such as wartime battles or the fantastical feats of a true hero.

While the analysis of teenagers' book recommendations points to a large variety in their preferences, it also indicates some common features of their literary reception. Even if they do not share the same interests or preferences, young readers expect their reading to be absorbing and to stimulate curiosity, while the form of communication should be simple. Easily understandable, plain language is paramount. The book should read smoothly, which for most teenagers means easily. The measurement of reading motivation also confirmed that complicated literary language is a major obstacle for most 15-year-olds, irrespective of their gender.<sup>53</sup> Hence, reading should be easy and absorbing, although not necessarily light, as even terror and cruelty may offer entertainment.

The teenagers indicated three basic ways of using literature. The first and most frequent one is an escapist, recreational approach where the reader plays a game with the text conforming to the rules of the genre. When reading is experienced in this way, what matters is a range of emotions, such as fear when reading a thriller, imagination in the case of fantasy, or affection in romance or general fiction. The second one consists in looking for ethical values and a moral message. It is more frequent for girls to use literature in this way, especially in the case of problem novels, which are their frequent choice, but boys also look for reflection in a great variety of texts. There is not one genre that motivates them towards "deep" thoughts, as even reading fantasy, specifically in the case of boys, provides an opportunity to find role models, especially exemplary heroic attitudes, loyalty, or even patriotism.

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53 Z. Zasacka, *Czytelnictwo dzieci i młodzieży*, op. cit., p. 81.

The third way of using literature is related to its cognitive function. In this context, readers value its mimetic properties, looking for a representation of the real world. Whereas girls are more interested in pictures of the contemporary social world, boys are more likely to look for historical information and records of the past.

The ability to apply any of the above literary experience modalities is conducive to reading engagement understood as finding a variety of pleasures in reading.

The above analyses demonstrate certain regularities in interpreting literature, making one feature particularly evident. This feature is individualisation, which consists in a relative character of reading satisfaction, as the same books can be used differently by various young readers. It is also noteworthy that aesthetic values are seldom consciously present in the book assessment.

We have noted that genre fiction strongly competes with original, artistic literature. Required reading is also seriously rivalled by books eagerly read outside school obligations. From all the books read in literature classes, only *Stones for the Rampart* by Aleksander Kamiński is more widely acclaimed by middle school students, apart from Tolkien's novels, which are also sometimes discussed in the classroom.<sup>54</sup> An important conclusion for teaching Polish at school seems to be that it is a good idea to supplement required reading lists with ambitious fantasy fiction.

Another challenge for educators is the enormous success of popular fantasy fiction, as proven by the years-long common enthusiasm for vampire novels, sparking a passion for reading in many teenage girls. Another issue that emerged is the discrepancy between the readers' expectations towards books and the way fiction is approached at school. The task for educators and librarians is now to use students' hobbies and passions to encourage reading, and subsequently discuss literature at school. Teenagers' attitudes can also represent a challenge, as illustrated by this response of a boy, an active reader: "I like reading books, not *Master Thaddeus* or *Hamlet*, but ones I find interesting: historical books". It is up to teachers and librarians to learn about teenagers' out-of-school reading experiences and interests in order to take them into account when designing lists of supplementary school reading in collaboration with the students.

The social and cultural environment clearly influences the choice of book recommendations. Some examples include fantasy for adults versus required reading as recommended reads, which clearly differentiated

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54 Ibid, p. 134.



young people from different backgrounds. Fantasy for adults is most appreciated by 15-year-olds from big city families with the highest educational capital, while compulsory reading is particularly valued by teenagers from rural areas. However, it is precisely rural schools that have the highest number of non-readers, usually boys who avoid both required reading and making their own book choices.

Finally, when trying to encourage reading among young adults, librarians, teachers and booksellers themselves need to understand and support teenagers' preferences and ways of approaching literature if they are to offer books that can appeal to them.

### SUMMARY

The article analyses the factors shaping the reception of books among adolescents and their expectations towards reading that are conducive to reading engagement. Reading engagement, as understood here, is an intrinsically motivated attitude indicating the intensity of reading practice. This means that an engaged reader is someone who reads books frequently and systematically, with pleasure, believing this practice to be valuable and appealing. The teenage reader's horizon of expectations has been described on the basis of values and attributes associated with enjoyable reading. This description helps to discover certain consistencies related to the circumstances in which young readers find satisfaction in reading as well as the modalities of reading they believe to be valuable. The analyses of values and characteristics pertaining to highly esteemed books presented in the article formed part of the nationwide adolescents readership survey results. These analyses demonstrate consistencies in interpreting literature by adolescent readers - three basic ways of using a literary text: the first is an escapist, recreational approach; the second one consists in looking for ethical values and a moral messages, and the third way is related to its cognitive function and to looking for a representation of the real world. Additionally, based on three editions (2003, 2010, 2013) of nationwide adolescent readership surveys, this article presents the social and demographic conditions for becoming an engaged reader, i.e. someone who is an active reader making their own choices, without contesting the viability of required reading, with a positive attitude towards books, and with the competencies necessary for enjoyable reading as well as their own idea of what such reading should be like, thus enabling them to indicate books worth reading.