

Who am I really? Contemporary Narratives of Migration as an Inspiration for Self-discovery

¿Quién soy realmente? Narrativas contemporáneas de la migración como inspiración para el autodescubrimiento

Qui sóc realment? Narratives contemporànies de la migració com a inspiració per a l'autodescobriment

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to present the results of a study of children's reception of Sarah Crossan's novel *The Weight of Water* ([2012] 2019). The book shows the process of emotional and social maturation of a girl coming from a Polish family affected by the experience of migration. Letters written by primary school pupils to Kasia, the fictional protagonist, bravely struggling with family problems and peer bullying, were analysed. The cognitive science research we carried out on the reception of literature shows that Crossan's novel serves the self-discovery of the audience, but it also exposes the image of a transnational family, and shows the broader social context of considering the migratory cultural adaptation of a teenage girl. Thus, the case of Kasienska becomes an "element" of building the image of contemporary migrant identity.

Keywords: Sarah Crossan, migration, self-knowledge, affect, contemporary literature for children and young people, cognitive reading

Resumen

El objetivo de este artículo es presentar los resultados de un estudio sobre la recepción de la novela *The Weight of Water* ([2012] 2019) de Sarah Crossan por parte de niños y niñas. El libro retrata el proceso de maduración emocional y social de una niña de una familia polaca afectada por la experiencia de la migración. Se analizaron cartas escritas por alumnos de primaria dirigidas a Kasia, la protagonista ficticia, que lucha valientemente contra problemas familiares y el acoso por parte de sus compañeros. La investigación en ciencias cognitivas sobre la recepción de la literatura que hemos realizado muestra que la novela de Crossan favorece el autodescubrimiento de los lectores, al tiempo que expone la imagen de una familia transnacional y reflexiona sobre el contexto social más amplio de la adaptación cultural migratoria

de una adolescente. Así, el caso de Kasienka se convierte en un "elemento" en la construcción de la identidad migrante contemporánea.

Palabras clave: Sarah Crossan, migración, autoconocimiento, afecto, literatura contemporánea para niños y jóvenes, lectura cognitiva.

Resum

L'objectiu d'aquest article és presentar els resultats d'un estudi sobre la recepció de la novel·la *The Weight of Water* ([2012] 2019) de Sarah Crossan per part dels infants. El llibre retrata el procés de maduració emocional i social d'una jove d'una família polonesa afectada per l'experiència de la migració. Es van analitzar cartes escrites per alumnes de primària adreçades a Kasia, la protagonista fictícia, que lluita amb valentia contra problemes familiars i assetjament per part dels seus companys. La investigació en ciències cognitives sobre la recepció de la literatura que hem realitzat mostra que la novel·la de Crossan afavoreix l'autodescobriment dels lectors, alhora que exposa la imatge d'una família transnacional i reflexiona sobre el context social més ampli d'adaptació cultural migratòria d'una adolescent. Així, el cas de Kasienka esdevé un "element" en la construcció de la identitat migrant contemporània.

Paraules clau: Sarah Crossan, migració, autoconeixement, afecte, literatura contemporània per a infants i joves, lectura cognitiva

None of us has unmediated access to ourselves –
we are forced to interpret ourselves with the cultural tools at our disposal
(Felski, 2016, p. 55).

1. Polish migration identity – literary and sociological perspective

Representations of identity in children's and adolescent literature on migration and transnational families, often considered in the perspective of family studies (May, 2011; Chambers, 2012), refer to images of ideas, beliefs and opinions, certain customs and mores, a particular axiological system, also expose complex family relationships and practices, and the process of adaptation of the child in a new culture and local environment. From Polish perspective this process takes place at various levels, both socio-cultural and economic-political. The perspective of determining the child's place in this process also suggests references to everyday life and draws attention to the sense of belonging and identification. The issue of family migration in Polish literature for children and adolescents also exposes the desire to maintain ties with loved ones across borders in a multigenerational perspective. Therefore, in this case, transnational theories address several important issues: kinship,

identity and ties, interpersonal relationships, attachment to places with which the individual feels emotionally connected, in which he expresses his sense of belonging, finds a sense of his life despite the geographical distance, but also attempts to understand and tame a new culture (Gromadzka, 2022; Wójcik-Dudek, 2019; Kostecka, 2017, 2021).

Often such spatial remoteness and separation, evoking longing and the memory of the family home, strengthens the bonds between loved ones, and the individual, aware of the distance that separates family members, sustains these bonds himself, while "transnational reality [could be] itself an idea of life" (Krzyżowski, 2009, p. 22), creating new daily practices in this space, cultivating certain values and creating new ways of life.

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Krystyna Slany notes that

migration expands and develops social relations, which are shaped by the place of origin and place of arrival ... is also an indicator of migration capital, generating access to various resources, including useful information, and one of the most important categories becomes the question of "the subjectivity and activity of migrant children as actors embedded in the dynamic process of building practices and managing ties and relationships" (Slany, Ślusarczyk, & Pustułka, 2017, pp. 5-6).

The currently promoted – from Polish perspective – international occupational and spatial mobility of workers, moreover, decent wages increase the smooth movement of people from countries with low wages to countries around the world where they are higher (Kacperska, 2016). Low wages are therefore the primary driver of international migration.

In Poland, the phenomenon of labour migration gained momentum and was even massified after the country's accession to the European Union in 2004. At that time, Poles began to take advantage of the opportunity to earn abroad and stay in attractive environments, including the rich and large cities of the United Kingdom (Bobrowska, 2013; Kaczmarczyk & Tyrowicz, 2007). The change of residence of the migrants meant that both they and the children they left behind in Poland, referred to as the euro-orphans (Kawecki et al., 2015), had to cope with difficulties in their lives, such as loneliness

(Zajac, 2023) and illnesses, causing suffering, stress and even anger. The troublesome and precarious position they found themselves in therefore required that they redefine their identities, their relationships with each other and, importantly, their roles and responsibilities. On the other hand, the undereducated Poles were prompted, firstly, to learn how to function in the new reality, and secondly, to discover themselves, i.e. to reveal their hitherto hidden or unconscious affects and skills. These issues are still relevant, because now the traditional life arrangements that are changing in postmodern world [e.g. appears new models of relations between people as alternative forms of marriage and family life (Slany, 2002; Danilewicz, 2010)]. There are many literary material and family stories for a growing number of recent children's and young people's books in which the authors share with their readers interesting insights and conclusions about the everyday existence of transnational families, and, when applied to school education through literature, provoke lively class discussions on new challenges of XXI century connected with looking for new migration identity, but also prompting pupils to identify with the characters and to self-reflect (Konner, 2010; Woodhead, 1997).

Contemporary Polish migration prose for children and adolescents takes up many issues relating to

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migratory identity, but exposes what seems to be an important, significant moment in the biography of the protagonist, which often becomes the difficult decision to leave the parents (or one of the parents), to go abroad with the family, the moment of arrival in the new country, shows various situations of confrontation, with the new reality, the new country of settlement and attempts to assimilate into the local environment. Images of children and adolescents left behind after their parents' departure in their homeland under the care of grandparents or other family members also occupy an important place in literary texts (e.g., *Moje Bullerbyn*, 2010

by Barbara Gawryluk; *Chłopiec z Lampedusy*, 2016 by Rafał Witek, illustrated by Joanna Rusinek; *Pankaganga. Myśliobieg*, 2013 by Vali Þórsdóttir; *Kasieńka*, 2015 by Sarah Crossan; *Zielone martensy*, 2016 by Joanna Jagiełło; *Dwa domy*, 2016 by Barbara Gawryluk; *Samotni. pl*, 2011 by Barbara Kosmowska; *A w moim mieście jest inaczej*, 2014 by Małgorzata Marmurowicz and Justyna Kukło; *Mateusz w angielskiej szkole*, 2015 by Aleksandra Engländer-Botten; *Pisklak*, 2012 by Zuzanna Orlińska; *Smażone tablety*, 2015 by Agnieszka Tyszką).

The need for a scientific description of the new migration literature has therefore also introduced new concepts into the discourse: mobility, nomadicity, hybridity and dispersed identity, liminality

and, also taken up in this text, transnational families (family in the situation of migratory separation) (Gizicka, Gorbaniuk, & Szyszka, 2010).

2. Theory about reader's implication and self-construction – practice of reading – methods of work

The aim of this study is to provide additional insights into the growing body of knowledge on the school reception of children's and young people's literature, here: *The weight of water* ([2012], Polish title *Kasieńka* 2019) by Sarah Crossan, a work styled as a diary and written in poetic prose, depicting the long and difficult process of searching for and creating oneself, in which the title character participates – a brave, persistent and ambitious girl from a broken family affected by the experience of migration. While overcoming alienation and bad luck, the teenager matures psychologically, as well as acquires and develops high self-awareness. The poignant story of the fate of a young Polish girl became the starting point for a conversation with young people from primary schools located in two provinces of Poland: Lower Silesia and Lublin.

In the pilot study, we obtained 21 letters to Kasia (the fictional heroine of the novel). They were written by students of Grade VII (13 years old). During the empirical research proper, we collected 152 letters addressed to the aforementioned character. They were edited by students from grades VI-VIII (12-14 years old). During the pilot study, the letters were written after reading aloud the entire Crossan novel. On the other hand, the statements, which were the result of a broader study of the reception of a literary work, were written after reading aloud in class only selected passages from the novel. It is worth mentioning, however, that all the students participating in this research received Crossan's book on their own before the start of the series of lessons on *The Weight of Water*. Thus, they were able to read the text in its entirety on their own. It should also be noted that parents gave written consent for their children to participate in the research. In the documents they signed, they were informed that the letters would be analysed for research purposes. At the beginning of the Polish language lesson, the teachers told the students that the research was anonymous, and that the results obtained would be used only for scientific analysis.

The students, after reading selected excerpts from the book, wrote personal sincere and touching letters to the main character in Crossan's book, in which – referring to the story of the girl they met – they showed how they read the literary text. Thus, the analysis (in terms of the impact of literature on the reader, making him think about his own identity) will be subjected to their authentic statements, in which they defined their attitude towards Kasia, then evaluated her complicated family situation, and finally – referred to their private experiences, analysed their own behaviour and family-social relations, and began to discover themselves.

Before discussing the book at school with students, we also pay attention to the social context that determines conversations about the family and emphasize that the present times rooted in people movement, travelling and mobility changing also model of families and seems to be complex and multifaceted (Danilewicz, 2010). Although it opens up developmental perspectives and opportunities for humanity, at the same time it poses threats, probably related to the functioning of the family in postmodernity (or "liquid modernity" (Bauman, 2006) negative transformations taking place in marriages and families, here above all marital breakdowns due to economic problems and seeing the chance for their solution, for raising the standard of living, in travelling abroad).

In discussing the problems, as well as the dilemmas faced by contemporaries, Danuta Łazarska (2012) refers to the findings of the Polish psychologist Jerzy Mellibruda (1980) and agrees with him that every person, throughout their life, participates in the process of shaping their own person and directs their thoughts towards seeking various ways of getting to know, developing and improving themselves. Moreover, the researcher emphasises that literature often inspires such reflections, not only on oneself, but also on others (Łazarska, 2012). This is because it reflects the great dilemmas experienced by people due to, for example, foreign migration, which affects the situation of their families, as well as the related necessity to make difficult choices between the possibility to leave, primarily to earn money, and then to obtain satisfactory remuneration for work and improve living conditions, or to stay in the home country and maintain personal relationships with relatives.

It is also worth mentioning that among the authors of contemporary texts on migration, there have also begun to appear people with new migration experiences, belonging to the generation born around 1980, for whom growing up in times of democracy and freedom of movement between countries or continents has become something natural and obvious. The motivation to leave became curiosity about the world and meeting new people, the search for new perspectives (e.g. interesting work, inspiring studies, attractive places to live, economic or salary considerations), but also worldview convictions (e.g. living in a society with different values than one's native one) (Dąbrowski, 2016).

This is the context in which the protagonists of contemporary Polish children's and youth literature with a migration theme (with the issue of transnational families clearly highlighted) are presented. The challenge for the migrating family in these books at the level of the story world and plot is the cultural differences inherent in the emigration everyday life of the country of settlement, the search for work, the language barrier and difficulties in communication, culture shock, the attempt to confront one's own culture with the foreign culture and to define one's own attitude to the new culture, the attempt to understand it, to enter into dialogue, to exchange ideas, then to tame the

place, to adapt to the new conditions, peer rivalry, but also to win friends (Chambers, 2012; Czaplinski, Makarska, & Tomczok, 2013; Faist, 2000; Gizicka, Gorbaniuk, & Szyszka, 2010; Slany, Ślusarczyk, & Pustułka, 2017).

This concept is corroborated by the research of Beata Gromadzka, who, analyzing contemporary Polish literary works on the subject of migration, draws attention to the departure from the patriotic and nostalgic model of Polish emigration (characteristic of Polish literature in the 19th century) towards the search abroad for new educational challenges, better jobs or simply trips determined by curiosity about the world, getting to know new people and cultures.

This is a different attitude from the painfully felt alienation and desire to return to the homeland – Beata Gromadzka notes – so often expressed in former emigration literature. The contemporary emigrant (also the protagonist of books for a young audience) no longer functions as a Pole detached from the national community, but above all as an individual. He has to create himself anew, his identity is subject to transformation under the influence of life and migration experiences. His own self meets and collides with the self of the Others. These are other members of the migrant and indigenous communities. The migrant has to name his Otherness and accept it. Identity is not a monolith, it is a constantly negotiated multiplicity of aspirations, a set of experiences; it is shaped by a constantly undertaken effort of adjustment (Gromadzka, 2022, pp. 69-70).

The fact that literature has an effect on readers is evidenced by the findings of its researchers – especially those based on student responses treated as empirical material. Louise Rosenblatt distinguishes between two types of reading (receptive reading and aesthetic reading) and points to the associated interpretation of literary texts. The first type concerns the audience's assimilation of only the messages placed in the work. The second, on the other hand, requires creative activity on the part of the readers, as it involves going significantly beyond the content contained in the work (Rosenblatt, 1991, pp. 444-448). The latter corresponds, according to Dorota Michułka, to the needs of readers who, by engaging in a dialogue with the text, externalise their thoughts, experiences and emotions, and not so much explain but co-create – by presenting subjective interpretations as well as referring to extra-literary experiences – the sense of the work. Narratives read in this way foster learning about the self and the Other (Michułka, 2017, pp. 103-107). The particular involvement of pupils in empathic reading, based on references to extra-textual areas, is evidenced by empirical studies conducted so far in Polish schools concerning, for example, the reception of books dealing with the Holocaust. They confirm that engaging children and adolescents in a relationship with the text, stimulating them emotionally, awakening associations, evoking private memories and heard stories about other people's fates deepens the understanding of their own behaviour as well as that

of literary characters, and, what is more, makes them reflect on themselves (Michułka & Gregorowicz, 2018; Zajac & Michułka, 2022). Similar results are provided by the research of foreign literary didacticians, including Lee Galda (2013), who describes the emotional reactions of children and adolescents to literary texts. These findings correspond with the observations of David Miall and Don Kuiken (1998), who point out that the primary function of literature is to provide readers with tools to better explore and understand the world around them. It seems, therefore, that the literary emotions accompanying reading (Papuzińska, 1996), the free expression of feelings (Miall, 2006; Koziółek, 2016) and the independent construction of meanings (Stockwell, 2006) have a decisive impact on the success of the reading process. This, in turn, combined with aesthetic experiences, helps young people to find themselves in reality – not only textual reality, but also the real, closest, objectively existing reality, although often not understood by them.

As mentioned above, the importance of the experiential character of literature, as opposed to specialised (academic) reading practices, is emphasised by many researchers today. This is because they recognise the affective turn that has been taking place in it, especially in recent years, which, as Lucyna Marzec (2017) shows, recognises the genuine, peculiar emotions and violent, emotional stirrings of the audience. Additionally, citing the thoughts of Joseph Hillis Miller (2014), she argues that literary creativity functions similarly to "(new)media virtual worlds" in that it completely occupies readers and allows them to lose themselves in textual reality (Marzec, 2017, p. 184). An analogous view is taken by other prominent scholars interested in the reception of literature, such as Maria Nikolajeva (2014) and Magdalena Rembowska-Płuciennik (2015), who believe that immersion in a narrative can induce intense sensations reminiscent of interactive experiences in readers.

The unique ways in which audiences use literature, involving their interaction with it, is described by Rita Felski, who, insisting on the "individuality, subjectivity and emotionalism of the aesthetic perception of a work" (Winięcka, 2017, p. 39), considers four forms of reading engagement: recognition, enchantment, knowledge and shock (Felski, 2016). Winięcka (2017), commenting on the researcher's findings, notes that the addressees of literary texts

are driven by emotions, are spontaneous and often uncritical of reading, and also use literature to complement their own lives, allowing themselves to be shaped by the works they read, allowing themselves to be seduced by the stories it tells, experiencing sometimes violent and extreme emotions and emotions, and sometimes simply learning about themselves and their lives from it (p. 39).

The excerpts of student work presented below provide an insight into the reading experiences of young people who, as Felski found, show a great sensitivity to the art of words and the truths, problems and questions that emerge from them.

3. Description of research

As Joanna Papuzińska writes, referring to Bruno Bettelheim's theory of reading and the reader, the attention of young audiences can be captured "only by literature that touches upon matters important and intensely experienced by children" (Bettelheim, 1985 in Papuzińska, 1996, p. 10). Therefore, our starting point was the emotional and sensual specificity of the reception of Crossan's work, which belongs to narratives using images, moods and behavioural patterns typical of all humanity (Papuzińska, 1996), and as a result engages the feelings and imagination of many of its youthful addressees.

The school reading of *The Weight of Water* was preceded by an introduction to the students about the social and historical context of the novel's plot and a reminder of the rules of letter writing. During the reading aloud of the book's content, the young people reacted violently and spontaneously to the events described in the book, emphasising above all the topicality and significance of the issues of the reading they were learning about, and stressing that Crossan highlighted in the book the difficulties common to young generations of Poles, such as: emigration and long separation from loved ones, conflicts with parents, distrust of family, peer bullying, driving classmates and/or peers into complexes, low self-esteem, teachers' dismissive attitude towards children and falling into addictions.

During the reading aloud of the book's content, the young people reacted violently and spontaneously to the events described in the book, emphasising above all the topicality and significance of the issues of the reading they were learning about, and stressing that Crossan highlighted in the book the difficulties common to young generations of Poles

The letters, which are students' responses to Kasia's story, contain descriptions of readers' aesthetic experiences and children emotional responses which correspond with Louise Rosenblatt theory of interactional reading (Rosenblatt, 1968). The individualised reception of Crossan's novel –which deals with the issue of migratory identity (Gromadzka, 2022) of the main character, who leaves with her mother for England in search of her father – proves convincingly that for primary school pupils, the novel in question becomes a reason to raise questions about their personal identity. The mental images that appear in it, which allow us to see someone else's perspective (Rembowska-Płuciennik, 2009), in this case the point of view of a teenage girl who has been abandoned by her father because

he has moved to Coventry, where he has started a new family, affect the perception of the literary work, which shows Kasia's difficult experience, and evoke emotions. Although the girl is not alone, she cannot count on the help of those closest to her, as her parents – her father, who has been absent for some time, and her despairing mother – cease to take an interest in and care for her. The determined young Polish girl particularly feels the lack of support from her mother. For this reason, she suffers severely. In addition to this, she faces poor housing conditions in her new environment, as well as oppressive alienation and peer violence. Eventually, however, she overcomes all difficulties. While breaking the bad streak, he matures mentally and discovers himself. The positive changes in her life and the gradual process of initiation into adulthood that takes place, and her eventual triumph over fear and adversity, are noted by the young readers, who see the teenager triumphing despite her earlier failures at family and school. It seems that the mental images in *The Weight of Water*, reflecting the protagonist's inner states, can induce the audience to self-discovery, as they provide them with powerful impressions and feelings, and what is more, stimulate them to deep reflection not only on literature, but also on their own Self.

4. Experiencing literary emotions and self-discovery

Marzec (2017) believes that "as long as the conversation about books continues, the culture and the relational, world-engaged and self-knowing self continues" (p. 185). The various difficulties of life, for example: the abandonment of children by one or both parents, the abandonment of the family neighbourhood and friends, the confusion, alienation and helplessness of young people, depicted in literature, have a therapeutic function, as does the fear depicted in it, which helps young people to talk about their fears, overcome them and find a way out of the impasse (Bettelheim, 1985; Jamesand, & James, 2004; Janik, 2015; Papuzińska, 1996). The aforementioned problems, processed in literature, also enable readers to reveal their own fears and work through them within themselves.

The potential interactions occurring between the reader and the content of the literary narrative, which Felski points out, can be observed in the statements documenting the spontaneous reception of *The Weight of Water*. Emotional reading reactions, conceived as responses "to the various stimuli generated by the linguistic and textual, thematic properties of the work" (Rembowska-Płuciennik,

2014, p. 568), are particularly evident in those parts of the works in which the students, empathising with the protagonist, nourish the conviction that they have found themselves in literature. Recognition, which, according to Felski, allows for the acquisition and deepening of self-awareness, (Felski, 2016) constitutes one of the mental operations affecting the understanding of a work (Rembowska-Płuciennik, 2014) and, as Marta Baron-Milian concludes, combines a cognitive function and affects (Baron-Milian, 2017), which help audiences form value judgements about a book, analyse it and draw conclusions, and process the textual information it contains (Rembowska-Płuciennik, 2014). It is worth emphasising, however, that the cognitive nature of emotions, which, in addition to the knowledge conveyed in works, make up the reading experience, is discernible not only in the readers' adoption of other people's perspectives and the display of empathy towards the different behaviour of literary characters and other people (Ibid.), but also in undertaking self-reflection and discovering their own identity (Felski, 2016).

Letters from a number of readers, addressed directly to the protagonist, attest that "a literary work can often provoke a vivid self-analysis" (Ibid., p. 32). This is because the recipients recognise themselves in the carefully read book and present in-depth reflections on their own lives in written works. They also reveal their problems with self-acceptance. Subject 1 writes:

Unfortunately, some of the unpleasantness seemed familiar to me. I am a person who is susceptible to the opinions of others, so a few people take advantage of this fact by teasing me and humiliating or calling me names. When I look in the mirror, instead of seeing myself as a normal girl, I only see an ugly, fat and undeserving creature¹.

At the same time, however, the students point out that literature has the power to overrule their hurtful beliefs about who they are. Through reading *The Weight of Water*, they begin to see themselves and their situation differently (Ibid.). Subject 1 also writes:

Through this book, I was able to see that I am not alone and the people who are horrible to me are desperate to invoke my anger and grief. (...) After reading, I was able to see that I have people who care and worry about me. I also matured that my past persecutors were mentally bullying me because they couldn't appreciate themselves, so they were doing it in the hope that former self-esteem would come back to them. After some time of knowing this fact, I was able to forgive them.

Referring to the prose text made available to them, the young recipients confide in the letters not only their feelings but also their family troubles. Subject 2 writes:

¹All quotations from the Polish language were quoted in translation by the authors of this article.

I must confess to you that I am facing similar problems. Admittedly, my parents haven't separated and continue to live in the same house, but at the moment I would prefer things to be different. My parents argue all the time and then take their nerves and emotions out on me (...). Thanks to your story, I have noticed that even though [my] father is the 'worse' parent, I would prefer to continue living with him and not with my mother. I think it's because my mother is constantly at home urging me against my father. Honestly, I feel like my life is a trap in a way. On the one hand a mother who is constantly shouting at me, and on the other hand a father who keeps leaving me when I need help and who under the influence of stimulants is quite aggressive. Reading your story, I noticed that there is someone in the world who could probably understand me. What particularly caught my attention was how your mum sort of took offence at you when she found out that you were starting to rebuild a relationship with your dad. I feel that the reason for this is that my situation is actually similar. Whenever I talk to my father, like for my mum I might not come home.

It seems that the author of this letter feels misunderstood and rejected by her parents. The literature she learns about helps her to self-identify and makes the girl, by identifying with the protagonist, gain acceptance (Ibid.). In addition, she feels that she belongs to a larger community and finds herself in the world around her.

As Felski argues, reading implies recognition, which involves the audience noticing parallels between their lives and the stories presented in literary works. The latter evoke readers' personal, in this case painful, memories. And this recognition takes two forms in the students' statements. The first, self-intensification, is brought about by recreating the details of everyday life in a book. The second, self-extension, allows elements of the self to be discovered in what is (only seemingly) alien and strange. In the course of reading, young people explore what they have not known before. Thus, they can not only see themselves in other people's biographies, but also look at given events from different perspectives (Ibid.). It follows that "reading children's literature in a social context evokes and allows the processing of emotions and leads to experience" (Hoffmann, Michułka & Mínguez-López, 2020, p. 19). After all, the students state that it was only after analysing Kasia's position that they understood what the abandoned person was feeling. Some also admit that they were not previously aware of the lack of tolerance for otherness. Meanwhile, the majority of respondents perceive the problem of hate speech and can even foresee the consequences of making hostile statements about other people.

The emotional involvement of the pupils, evident in the letters, especially in the kind advice given to Kasia by the young people and the warm wishes for success and success offered, undoubtedly helps them to identify with her. What seems important, however, is that each time the young recipients

direct their attention to themselves. Although the subject matter of the piece they learn about leads them to consider the girl's circumstances and, at times, to generalise, they also reflect on their own lives, constantly seeking self-reference. Subject 3 shares extensive reflections in a letter to Kasia:

At first, I was appalled at how cruelly you were treated by your classmates. However, I soon found that you were a strong person and that you coped brilliantly with your school troubles. I then came to the conclusion that no matter where we are, people act the same way. Everywhere we face jealousy, envy and exclusion. Everywhere there are spiteful people full of complexes and, brave and clever people who are able to stand up to the former.

What paralysed me most, however, was your loneliness. At times I had the feeling that you were trapped between the rain-weeping, alien England and the tears of an absent, equally alien mother. In fact, it was you who had the greatest right to cry, and yet you proved stronger than your mother!

I can't imagine it, what is it like to be invisible to a loved one? What is it like to be abandoned by a loved one? I have been under the impression many times that you are the parent to your mother. I don't know if I would have the strength to forgive mine if she treated me like that? Would I have been able to forgive my father if he had abandoned me? You were, in a sense, abandoned by both parents, and yet you forgave them. And that is impressive!

Focusing on Kasia's difficult experiences, young people read her emotions. The novel also encourages them to think about their own feelings as a reaction to the text they read. Therefore, they subject them to a meticulous analysis. This is evidenced, among other things, by the excerpts from three different statements quoted above. Unfortunately, the results confirm the perceptive readers' conviction about who they are and how they would behave towards a parent who had failed their trust. It must be said, therefore, that recognition in literature often brings with it uncertainty and a sense of not being able to know oneself fully. After all, as Felski (2016) writes, "(...) the state of intersubjectivity precludes any programmatic attribution of essential qualities to oneself or others" (p. 55). It is worth adding, however, that the literary-inspired attempts of the student-analysts to penetrate the protagonist's mental state and their own emotions lead to fundamental changes in their attitudes and behaviour towards others: "Under the influence of this book I looked at my mother's situation, that sometimes it can be hard for her and I sometimes don't see it" (subject 4); "I have to admit to you that I had a bad outlook on new people e.g. at school, but thanks to you I

respect and support people who are trying to find their way in a new group" (subject 5); "By reading this book I saw what I was doing wrong and how I can change my life"(subject 6).

The students, concerned about the girl's fate, ask directly about her family situation: "Is your mother still crying after losing your dad?" (subject 7); "(...) have you forgiven him for leaving you?" (subject 8); "Did you expect this decision? Did your parents argue before, were there arguments, quiet days?" (subject 9). The sample questions published above, which appear in the letters, are another manifestation of the young people's emotional involvement. They reveal her immersion in the novel world and are a clear indication of a genuine interest in Kasia's life.

Significantly, young audiences feel enchanted by Crossan's work. Indeed, they state: "There are books to which one does not return. And there are books that take years to reflect on. You have captured my heart with your story. I admire you for the way you conveyed emotions" (subject 10); "When I read this book, I felt that I could trust the author and I drifted away with my mind" (subject 11); "I couldn't tear myself away from each of the letters you wrote because they were very interesting and touching. I'm glad you described all the emotions you were feeling. Therefore, the longer I read the more I felt that I was in your world" (subject 12). On the basis of these statements, it can be affirmed emphatically that "reading leads to self-immersion and detachment from reality" (Marzec, 2017, p. 190), as it gives readers a sense of total immersion in the world depicted in the work and an insight into the privacy of literary characters, which, as it turns out, becomes available to the audience, here transcending the individual experiences of the protagonist and being incorporated into the sphere of intersubjectivity.

The effect of real engagement in reading is intensified by empathising with the moods expressed in the text (mostly Kasia's sadness), as well as by referring to one's own emotions (Rembowska-Pluciennik, 2014). The analysed novel arouses a gamut of feelings in the young addressees – from anger and despondency through horror to joy and pride. Students, judging the protagonist by her actions, want to show her understanding and empathy, so they write: 'You are really brave and I admire you' (subject 13); 'I would like to hug you and help you in that difficult moment' (subject 14); '(...) I feel very sorry for you' (subject 15); 'Your story can be a support for people in a similar situation' (subject 16); 'May you be happy' (subject 17).

The reading therefore stimulates the sensitivity of the respondents and additionally equips them with knowledge of the migration experience of Polish families. In the analysed statements, the comparison of leaving one's home country and living in a foreign country to growing crops seems particularly noteworthy. Subject 18 writes:

When you buy a new plant it is usually in a pot. It is comfortable in that pot, it is used to it. (...) Once you have bought such a plant, you put it in the ground. At first, the plant will wilt and look poorly, because it has not got used to the new conditions. Different soil, strong winds, frosts, nasty pests, all new. However, if you are patient, take good care of it, it will eventually get used to its new living conditions and function as it did in the beginning, when it lived in a comfortable, unfamiliar pot. What's more, it will grow even bigger, stronger, and bloom beautiful flowers. In such a small pot she did not have the opportunity to develop in this way. This is also the case with emigration.

Juxtaposing emigration and caring for plants, the same student alludes to Kasia's plight:

Before emigrating, you lived in your home country, nothing was foreign to you, you had friends. It was comfortable because you felt secure. However, when you went to another country, you noticed that everything was different, foreign. People behaved differently, a different language, unpleasant teasing girls. You felt weaker, like the plant when you put it in the soil. But, after a while, you made friends, familiarised yourself with the new environment, established new rules. Because of this, you became even stronger than before, you gained experience (...).

The reader refers, as it were, to two opposing concepts: rootedness and uprooting. The first of these corresponds to Kasia's situation before she left for England. At the time, the girl was living in Gdansk – a city where she felt safe and with which she identified. On the other hand, the second term aptly characterises her situation after her move to Coventry, where she felt alienated from the society, misunderstood, publicly ridiculed and degraded as her standard of living deteriorated. It should also be mentioned that the process of rooting Kasia in the local community, especially in the school environment, as indicated by the student, conceived as a basic condition for the existence of an "open to diversity, inclusive, *school for all*" (Tersa, 2017, p. 75), became a guarantee of success in life for the young Polish girl, who discovered a swimming passion that gave her oblivion, became accustomed to the different reality around her and built strong relationships with newly met people. These included Kanoro, who in a way replaced the heroine's guardian and cared for her mother, and William, whom Kasia fell in love with.

Although the respondents are mostly familiar (either personally or from stories) with the situation regarding the problems of migrant families presented in Crossan's book, they are often very surprised by the passive attitude of the girl's mother. Abandoned by her husband, the woman, experiencing disappointment with her man's decision and suffering from loneliness, neglects her parental duty. Young people do not hide their bitterness at her behaviour and value it negatively. The

family problems presented in the work seem important to the young audience, as they remind them of their own problems: feeling discriminated against at school, having difficulties communicating with their parents, showing aggression and becoming addicted to drugs.

Readers, although relating to the situation of a literary character, are constantly looking for personal connotations. The narrative, divided into short chapters, reflecting the ethical sensitivity of the protagonist, showing the girl's self-discovery, prompts them, as has been shown, to self-analysis. The addressees externalize personal, usually unpleasant, experiences. Sometimes, however, they come to positive conclusions when assessing their situation: "It was only after reading your story that I found out that things are not as hard in my life as I thought" (subject 19); "You made me realise how lucky I am that we all live together at home and for that I am grateful to you" (subject 20).

5. Conclusions

The students' responses fit perfectly into Felski's "reader/reader (or user/user of literature) project" (Marzec, 2017, p. 187), as they show that the subject of particular interest for each of the respondents became their own self. The authors of the letters thus went beyond the interpretation of a newly discovered text. Rather, they tried to describe themselves and their loved ones convincingly. The analysis of their written work proves that the selected literary material served as a basis for their self-identification and thus for their understanding of the individual characteristics inherent in a person. This confirms Felski's initial thesis that literature becomes a "cultural tool" used to – by experiencing it, by relating to it, by trying on the deductions of its authors to the lived (or experienced) life situations of the recipients – gain an in-depth insight into one's own personality (Felski, 2016, p. 55).

[...] The Weight of Water Crossan, depicting unpleasant scenes from the life of a migrating family and, importantly, a psychological portrait of an emotionally and socially maturing heroine, provokes self-reflection and thus can become a valuable source shaping not only the reading competences of young readers, but also

The educational activities presented here implement the postulate of "'micro-aesthetics', exposing the affective and cognitive dimensions of reading" (Winięcka, 2017, p. 40). They emphasise "the need to restore to professional reading its experiential dimension" (Ibid., p. 39). It is worth noting that *The Weight of Water* Crossan, depicting unpleasant scenes from the life of a migrating family and, importantly, a psychological portrait of an emotionally and socially maturing heroine, provokes self-reflection and thus can become a valuable source shaping not only the reading competences of young readers, but also their sensitivity and the attitudes they manifest.

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