

The Reception of Selected Texts with the Theme of Shoah among Pupils of the 6th – 9th Year in the Primary Schoolsⁱ

Milan Mašát*, Kristýna Šmakalová

Department of Czech Language and Literature, Faculty of Education, Palacky University, Czech Republic

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Abstract The contribution presents the partial results of the probing research survey, which focuses on the reception of selected texts with the topic of Shoah pupils of the second grade of primary schools. The main research tool of the probe was the non-standardized questionnaire, which consisted of questions identifying basic demographics of respondents and three excerpts from literary productions for children and young, as well as publications of non-intentional, while the demonstrations were equipped with a set of questions identifying the reception level and interpretation of the texts. The article shows data demonstrating some popularity of the samples, cross-sectional in all levels of the second grade of primary school. The information presented is about the aspect of popularity both within the individual years; also the data collected are combined and commented on each other.

Keywords Reception, Shoah, Text, Pupils, Literature for Children and Youth

1. Introduction

The aim of the paper is to present selected data obtained by sound-field research focused on the intensity¹ of reception of the selected Shoah-texts by pupils in 6th–9th year of primary school. We believe the Shoah² phenomenon represents a warning to contemporary society about how the definition, stigmatization and the

persecution of selected persons, groups, or entire ethnic groups may result in a phenomenon that can be defined by the term Shoah. Irwin Martin Abrams [1 p not listed] points out that the events surrounding the phenomenon warn of it' who is different' – whether black or white, Jew or Arab, Christian or Moslem – everyone whose orientation differs politically, philosophically, sexually". We believe that the current global events can be seen as a significant timeliness of Shoah events in the phenomenon of migration³. When we look at the phenomenon comprehensively, certain migratory waves have also taken place in the past, with most forms of totalitarian power represented by the representatives of these political establishments in most cases as a reason for relocation⁴.

We believe that citizens of democratic societies should be familiar with the events associated with the Shoah phenomenon as early as possible, particularly because of the ability to recognize (early) efficiently the symptoms of totalitarian power⁵ which can lead to the elimination of its heyday. For this reason, we believe it is important for young recipients not only to present the consequences of the Nazi extermination machinery (concentration and extermination camps, death marches and the like), but it is necessary to focus on the roots of anti-Semitic⁶ thinking (in history and now) and its genesis⁷.

2. The Place of Shoah-theme in Literary Education

We believe that literary texts represent a suitable means

1 In terms of understanding the text, understanding the text in connotation with historical-social facts of a given period or applying updates to themed events to events in the contemporary world.

2 "Shoah is the Hebrew word for „catastrophe“. This term specifically means the killing of nearly 6 million Jews in Europe by Nazi Germany and its collaborators during the Second World War. The English-speaking countries more commonly use the word Holocaust, which is Greek for „sacrifice by fire“. [17 *What is the Shoah?* p not listed]. Compare [12 pp4 - 5].

3 See, for example [4].

4 See [19].

5 To the genesis of Nazism and Communism see [20].

6 "Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities" [27].

7 See [18].

of presenting the phenomenon (not only) to primary school pupils. According to Jordan [11 pp199-200] is literature “one of the best pedagogical tools for educating youngsters about the facts of the Holocaust, for conveying the importance of remembering what happened without explicitly divulging emotionally disturbing information”⁸. Through artistic narratives and literary memories, readers can be conveyed several facts⁹, whose understanding of “only” through performances in the form of frontal teaching can be quite complicated, due to the certain abstractness¹⁰ of the Shoah concept.

The basic prerequisite for the effective presentation of the Shoah phenomenon in literary education is the selection of appropriate literary texts. Although this phase may seem quite simple, the opposite is true. Inappropriate text can have a radically different impact on recipients, for example, it can discourage them from the reception of Shoah themes. There is currently a considerable amount of literary production on the subject¹¹. This fact has a double impact. In the positive case, Czech language and literature teachers with most books for children and young people will be acquainted with the topic and will be able to judge what title to offer or mediate to pupils (passively – in the form of a recommendation; actively – active reading of pupils with selected text¹², for example, in the reading workshops, etc.). In the negative case, teachers are aware of the amount given intentionally literary production, is not actively (i.e. readership) acquainted with the selected title but will provide it to pupils in some way. In this case, the intended purpose of the reception of such oriented texts may not occur. In an extreme case, non-intentional literature may be provided to pupils, which may be incomprehensible to them because this area of Shoah-literature is somewhat of some reader's familiarity with the historical stage of World War II. David H. Lindquist [14 p79] says teachers “must be aware of several unique and potentially troublesome issues that can arise as the Holocaust is presented to students, thus complicating both the teaching of the event and student's understanding of it”. It should be noted here that the reading-books which currently have the Czech Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports clause¹³ do not support the

presumption of the presentation of primarily intentional literature¹⁴ (the reading-books at the level of Shoah-demonstration absolutely do not respect the actual Czech or translation literary production for children and youth in Shoah-text¹⁵).

In summary, the teachers of literary education should acquaint students with the literature on the issue of the Shoah, but they should search for the area of intentional literature, while the teachers should actively acquaint themselves with the chosen title.

3. Research Methodology

The paper presented the partial results of the research probe, the aim of which was to find out the level of reception of three selected Shoah-themed texts, focusing on the popularity aspect of the presented samples. We regard popularity as a two-component aspect of evaluation. The primary component cooperating in popularity is understanding the narrative, the second component that depends first is the process of evaluating the narrative (if the recipient's attitude is negative in the first phase towards the text, the second phase will not even start).

We have chosen to verify our theoretical assumption non-standardized questionnaire whose core consisted of three examples of Shoah books¹⁶: (1) *Somewhere there is still a sun*¹⁷[5] (2) *A girl from another world*¹⁸ [2] (3) *As long as there are tears*¹⁹ [6]. The samples were

14 “Intentional literary works are addressed to creators by children and youth and are determined by external attributes (subtitle, edition, publishing house)” [3 p12]. Compare [15 p29].

15 See [16 pp68 - 78].

16 In the REFERENCES we present the year of publication in Czech.

17 A summary of the story is taken from kosmas.cz [29]: “The thrilling memories written in the first person of the present time follow the ever more horrifying evolution of events in Nazi-occupied Czechoslovakia between 1939 and 1945 through the eyes of young Michael. Initially, in the ten-year-old Misha, there is a growing sense of injustice against which he says: “Every day a new prescription and worse food and no football.” by jumping from the balcony and holding hands until the last moment. Then it's getting worse: ghetto, yellow stars, father's murder, growing sense of danger, hunger, humiliation. All this culminates in the arrival of the family in Terezin. There, Misha joins a group of forty boys who live, work and play under the strict but loving supervision of a young man named Franta, who calls them Nesarsim and leads them to a high morale: “We must not allow anything to deprive us of our humanity. Invention, love for neighbour and the courageous defiance that Misha, his mother, Franta and other characters characterize, portray the eloquent legacy of human resilience against the background of ever-worse circumstances. The jury decided in autumn 2018 to include a book *Somewhere Still the Sun Shines* Among the Best Books for Children and Youth for the Year 2017/2018”.

18 “There is war and the Jewish boys Adam and Thomas have to hide in the woods and wait for them to be safe in the village, and moms will come for them again. They have enough food and can cope, but the stock is thinner, nature is not lubricated with the boys and hunger is ruthless. At that moment, a little girl, Mina, appears as a saving angel. Isn't it really from another world? A touching children's story about the award-winning Hebrew author about extraordinary courage, deep understanding and strength that is hidden where we would not expect it” [29].

19 Original title: *Zolang er nog tranen zijn*. “The Holocaust theme has been worked out many times, but it never ceases to shock with its cruelty and absurdity. In addition, in the book *Tears of Tears*, the author convincingly describes the process of growing up in inhumane conditions and offers the Czech reader less known fates of German Jews, for whom

8 Compare [23 pp73 - 74] & “The reality of the Holocaust is the only reason its literature exists, language arts teachers must allow history to drive any literature based-study of the event” [15 p29].

9 Compare: Working with non-literary aspects of a work can “enrich the text comprehension with non-literary contexts: period, thought, biographical” [9 p143].

10 We believe that it is the abstractness of the term Shoah that leads to flattening the interpretation of the not very telling demonstration of the number of murdered persons in an improperly chosen form of presentation of events associated with this term. In our opinion, it is more effective to show the consequences of persecution on the fate of one person (family). This method is, to a large extent, more personal, more acceptable to pupils and, finally, more effective in terms of demonstrating the monstrosity of Nazi ideas.

11 For example, see [13; 24].

12 Compare [7; 8; 9; 25; 26].

13 The list is available on the website of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the Czech Republic [28].

deliberately selected from the intentional and non-intentional literature to see if the inclusion has any influence on popularity²⁰ defined samples for pupils. The selection was verified by the researchers, based on thorough analyzes of the Shoah-based art literature. A total of 150 literary works in the field of intentional and non-intentional literature have been read. The texts were compared with each other and the exclusion method selected works were chosen. The basic factors for assessing the choice of texts were the **narrative dedication** (children x adults) and the **year of publication** (we tried to include contemporary literature - that is, works created after 2010).

Primary intentional literature is represented by the title *A girl from another world* which is predicted by readers from the age of nine. An example from Michael Grunbaum's book and Todd Hasak-Löwy's theme is the inner experience of persecution of Jews, from the perspective of a teenager. Although this assumption would lead to the inclusion of this book in the literature for children and young people, given the certain transcendental overlap of the narrative and some author's assumption of a certain knowledge of readers of the reality of World War II, we are not very inclined to this classification. Publication *As long as there are tears* is a kind of collage of bare factual data (amount of data, transcripts of official correspondence, etc.) and a simple story with a predictable plot. Here we are aware that the book by Grünberg-Klein is NOT intended to be read by adolescents, especially due to the lack of sufficient factual knowledge from young recipients of the World War II and the need for pupils' reading experience when reading the publication and we do not think that the narrative, which is not very interesting to the readers, has much to offer to recipients in the age of respondents, we even think it can be boring to some extent. Due to the complexity of the reception, the publications can be sorted ascending as follows: *A girl from another world* – *Somewhere there is still a sun* – *As long as there are tears*. Due to the cited a similar ranking of the sample by the respondents: all respondents received the same questionnaire to see how (if at all) the reader's preference changes depending on the age of the respondents. *Somewhere there is still a sun* – *As long as there are tears*. Before the start of the probing research, we expected a similar ranking of the sample by the respondents: all respondents received the same

questionnaire to see how (if at all) the reader's preference changes depending on the age of the respondents.

One complete – the word complete means the elementary school, which contains the first (1st–5th year) and the second (6th–9th) degree – primary school in the Vysočina Region was addressed with the intention of the research. The organization fulfilled the required prerequisites – Czech language and literature are taught by all the second-grade students, so it is possible to assume a similar one-hour grant to lessons devoted to grammar, style and literary education and similar pedagogical approach in literary lessons. Another positive assumption was that each grade of the second grade is only once in the given primary school (like the starting position of the respondents). Most respondents managed to fill in the questionnaire during one lesson, the time needed to complete the questionnaire differed mainly depending on the year (of course, the biggest differences were between 6th and 9th grades). We believe that these differences are mainly due to the speed of reading (a higher reading experience among 9th grade pupils).

Before the start of the research, it was found out whether the pupils were familiar with the selected publications; the opinion was negative both by the respondents and by the teacher. Through the procedures outlined above, we tried to at least partially ensure the respondents' starting position. We believe that subjective factors (interest in reading as such, etc.) cannot be fully understood and reflected - the questionnaire included an item focusing on pupils' leisure time reading - the dependence between the interpretation of certain excerpts and the positive answer to this question was very interesting – at this point, unfortunately, there is no room for comment on this issue.

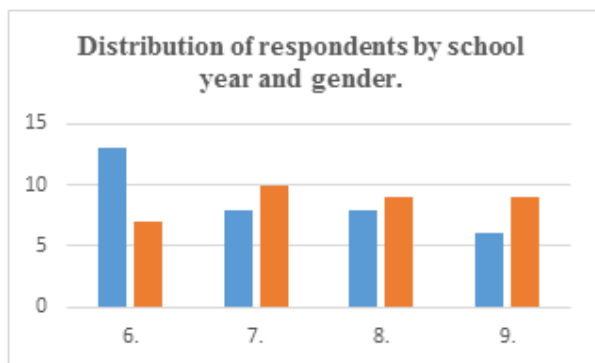
The questionnaire survey was anonymous, the parents of all pupils signed their consent to participate in this probing research.

The total number of respondents participating in the research was 70²¹. Graph 1 shows the distribution of respondents in the level of attended primary school and gender. A total of 20 readers participated in the 6th year, 18 pupils in the 7th year, 17 individuals in the 8th year and 15 respondents in the 9th year.

Terezin was not the first stop on the road of horror, but on several occasions crossing the Atlantic Ocean. For Hannelore, adolescence was determined by the political situation. In front of his reader, he grows up - and matures in a world of bizarre ordinances and barbed wires - from a confused and shy girl to a decisive young woman who has not only been lucky but also instanced to helped survive" [29].

20 We perceive the concept of popularity as a combination of two aspects: primarily the recipient must understand the book in the sense of understanding the recorded narrative; at the reception, they enjoyed the text in some way (this may not be the privilege of only humorous narratives). We perceive the result of these two basic components as so-called popularity.

21 These years are, in a way, exceptional un relation to the presentation of the Shoah theme. The teacher of Czech language and literature is interested in the issue, so she tries to introduce pupils to various Shoah-texts. The inclusion in the school year is important for a given sample of respondents regarding the focus of the research (the degree of transformation of the selected Shoah-texts in relation to the school year membership).



Graph 1. Distribution of respondents of sounding research by year and gender. The blue column indicates the representation of the girls, the orange the representation of the boys

4. Results and Discussion

In the presentation of the partial results of the exploratory exploration survey, we will first focus on the popularity of demonstrations for pupils of individual grades²². The presented values are given in absolute numbers. The respondents had the option of more choices, while all pupils' answers were counted in the resulting sum. The first sample is from the book (1) *Somewhere there is still a sun* (2) *A girl from another world* (3) *As long as there are tears*. Within a certain definition of the individual texts (see above), the results are quite expected. The most popular example of respondents from the 6th, 7th and a little surprisingly the 9th is from Aharon Appelfeld's book. Exception in total unitary representation is "disrupted" by 8th year respondents who chose the most popular excerpt from the book *Somewhere there is still a sun*.

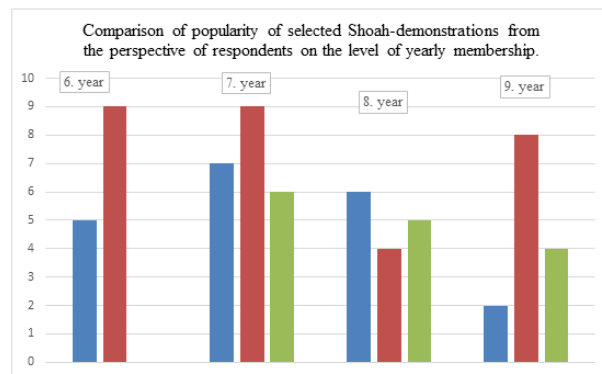
Placing a work, *A girl from another world* in the first place in terms of popularity is not surprising given our working version of the popularity definition (see above), the book is particularly attractive for pupils, especially with a clear but, not surprising storyline. The question remains as to what depth in the reception area pupils are able to penetrate a defined level of institutional education, because Appelfeld's text is full of philosophical questions of being, questions of the destiny of the individual at the level of human destiny determined by a strong faith in God. In the narrative there are numerous biblical illusions (for example, the names of the main boy characters of the novel – Adam and Thomas), which in our opinion are not in most cases able to be detected by the students. In our opinion, this is the disappearance of the mission of the book, which in our opinion is not expressed in the description of the suffering of children caused by one line of events of World War II, but the presentation of how faith can help a person to cope with the obstacles caused

by contemporary events. As shown in the graphical representation²³ appreciable the second place no longer shows such a level of uniform elections. The 6th and 7th respondents received the second highest rate of election publication *Somewhere there is still a sun*. This fact is completely understandable given the theme of the Shoah phenomenon. For the remaining higher grades of the second level of basic institutional education, the second highest rate of elections is shown in *As long as there are tears*. This fact is somewhat surprising, given the structure of the narrative (see above). It is worth mentioning the number of "no dislikes" options. The distribution of these responses to individual years demonstrates a downward trend in understanding selected texts. Most of these options were chosen by 6th grade students. This situation can be explained by the considerable receptive intensity of selected snippets. This choice expresses certain helplessness of readers that they have chosen to express through the choice of option. Certain maturation at the level of understanding in the connotation with the increasing reading experience can be traced back to the fact that the choice "I didn't like any" in the 8th and 9th grades was chosen by only one respondent, in the 7th year no pupil²⁴.

Graph 2 shows the summary results in the comparison of the popularity aspect of individual samples.

Table 1. Popularity of demonstrations for pupils of individual grades

School year	Number of choices of sample 1	Number of choices of sample 2	Number of choices of sample 3	Number of choices "I didn't like any"
6.	5	9	0	6
7.	7	10	10	0
8.	7	5	7	1
9.	2	8	5	1



Graph 2. Comparison of popularity of selected Shoah-demonstrations from the perspective of respondents in the level of annual membership. Blue (1); red (2), green (3)

²² See table 1.

²³ See table 1.

²⁴ See table 1.

5. Conclusions

The theoretical assumption of a two-component level of popularity affecting the depth of interpretation of texts has come true in the case of respondents of 6th year: students who do not yet have enough historical knowledge and logically lag in the field of reading experience in comparison with the higher grades of the second level of institutional education²⁵.

The research survey largely verified the assumption of the difficulty and certain abstractness of the Shoah theme for primary school pupils. This fact confirms our belief in the necessity of a precise selection of the presented texts with the given topic (the difficulty of the reception, the necessity of certain factual knowledge, etc.).

The exploratory survey showed that the key aspect for selecting a Shoah-themed text that we would like to introduce to pupils is the text itself (i.e. the teacher of the Czech language MUST complete the text). Based on the evaluation of the teacher, the selection of methods for mediating the selected text to pupils should follow (in knowledge of facts should be based on the preconceptions of pupils²⁶, mainly due to the considerable non-correspondence of the curriculum in the Czech language and literature and History²⁷) because of the effective educational process and, last but not least, a very modest representation of Shoah themes in literary reading-books²⁸.

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25 As part of the Czech educational reality, the history of the oldest history and the newest history is discussed at the second level of primary school. This means that pupils first get to know prehistory, antiquity and the Middle Ages (6th - 7th grade), followed by modern history (8th - 9th grade). This is the reason why the 6th grade students did not meet the history of the 20th century in institutional education (except for marginal references from primary school). Of course, we do not include pupils' interests in this thesis (visiting leisure time clubs, etc.). See [10 pp52 - 57].

26 See [21; 22].

27 See [10 pp14 – 24 & 52 – 56].

28 See [16].

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