

Literary output of deaf students from the Gallaudet University

The Gallaudet University in Washington has been the first and the only university in the world so far educating deaf students in arts and science. In the University the deaf can study law, education, linguistics of the American Sign Language, social work, psychology, audiology, management and many other fields of knowledge. Among the students there is a group of deaf young artists who create literary works. This small group of literary talented students is well aware of their abilities. The literary works they create show a high level of skills concerning poetry writing. The generation of young deaf artists is aware of their abilities and through poetry they attempt to get in touch with a larger group of hearing and deaf audience.

Poetry was treated as one of the first fields of literary output. In Antiquity it was believed that poetry was a result of inspiration, ingenuity. In the Middle Ages poetry was treated as a prayer, a kind of confession, and it was in the next period – the Renaissance, when poetry was considered to be art again. According to S.Popek, the poetic expression of content and form of a poem depends on the emotional and intellectual condition of the author. For psychologists poetry is a kind of self-reflection and it originates from the existential essence of a man. The period when the originators of the so called New Education were active, is the beginning of young peoples' interest in literary work. C.Freinet introduced literary classes (including poetry) to developmental activities for children and young people¹.

In Poland research on the genesis of literary creation was commenced at the beginning of the 20's of the 20th century by a psychologist - A.Szycówna, who continuing research of J.Piaget and A. Binet worked out typology of young people taking into consideration the way of thinking and expressing oneself in writing. The author distinguished a few types and subtypes concerning the type of personality and form of expression:

- descriptive type with the following subtypes: cataloguing, scholarly, depicting,

¹ Popek S. Twórczość literacka dzieci i młodzieży, [w:] Aktywność twórcza dzieci i młodzieży, red. Popek S., Warszawa 1988.

- narrative type with subtypes: chronicle-reporting, narrative-depicting, dramatic,
- reflective type with subtypes: objective and subjective,
- emotional type².

Other Polish researchers also showed their interest in artistic expression of children and young people, e.g.: S.Szuman, B.Jaślarowa, H.Semenowicz, J.Mikułowski-Pomorski, M.Kucner and S.Popek. B.Jaślarowa using the biographical analysis method suggested a group of factors influencing the appearance of poetic output during childhood and youth, they are the following:

- growing up in an exceptionally high-brow environment,
- early and long-lasting contact of a child with adults showing artistic and cultural interests,
- frequent and intensive pressure of language stimuli,
- care for proper behaviour models and appropriate system of values,
- encouragement to expressing oneself with the use of proper psychical and didactic methods,
- early contacts with literature,
- stimulating influence of a necessity and system of work, mainly regarding edition and stylistic exercises³.

In Poland a comprehensive research program concerning literary work of deaf young people has not been undertaken. It is not easy to get to works created by deaf young people as literary work is not a mass phenomenon. It is also worth emphasizing that in spite of deafness' influence on limited development of speech and thinking, the deaf are able to create and develop various forms of artistic activity, from imitation to spontaneous expression being an individual, even mature artistic work. Proofs of literary output can be found at Internet pages where deaf students from the Gallaudet University publish their works. In this paper I would like to analyse three poems: "Deaf and Dumb" by C. Boggan, „A Credo for Deaf Americans" by Frank J.J. Lala, „Gallaudet" by Shawn D.Barnett⁴. The subject matter and the message of the poems proof the cultural and language difference of the authors and emphasize rights and identity of a deaf person.

² za Popek S., op. cit, s.74.

³ Jaślarowa B. O uzdolnieniu literackim, jego strukturze i warunkach rozwoju, [w:] Prace Naukowe Uniwersytetu Śląskiego Nr 62. Prace Psychologiczne III, Katowice 1974, s. 76-77.

⁴ CizzyCat@yahoo.com; <http://shawndalebarnett.50megs.com/>

Deaf and Dumb

Deaf and Dumb?

I know I am deaf

but the dumb part I don't know about.

Being Dumb is being unable to.

Unable to understand

Unable to accept

Unable to figure anything

You are unable to understand me

You won't accept my disabilities

You can't figure how I managed to live in this world

NOWWWW, WHO is dumb?

The author's name is Cizzy Bogan – she is a deaf student who defines herself as a soulful artist liking to spend her time writing, painting and making films. In her poem "Deaf and Dumb" she speaks it out that in the world of hearing people deafness is stigmatised. According to most opinions of the hearing the deaf have typical negative features as they are intellectually retarded. In the list of features attributed to the deaf there is dumbness. One can presume that the improper perception by the hearing is a result of their showing paternalistic tendencies, audism. This means that an audist accepts only what is concordant with the features attributed to the deaf, which are comprised in "deaf person's psychology" and other types of fiction created by the hearing⁵. In this poem a definition of a dumb person is suggested, i.e. a person who does not understand others, does not accept them and has no idea about issues concerning the deaf. This feature can be attributed to a hearing person. It must be emphasized that for the lyrical subject her unique personality is extremely important and attributing dumbness (or even disability, being cripple) to others means treating such people as worse, strange.

Analysing another poem, "A Credo for Deaf Americans" by Frank John Lala, one can learn about what other values are important for deaf young people.

A Credo for Deaf Americans

⁵ Lane H., *Maska dobroczynności. Deprecjacja społeczności głuchych*, Warszawa 1996, s.69.

We don't choose to be the common silent minority.....

It is our right to be the uncommon and noble silent minority.....

If we can, we seek opportunity, not security.....

We don't wish to be "kept" citizens, humbled, dulled by.....having the state look after us.....

We want to take the calculated risk... to dream and to build, to fail and to succeed.....

We want to abolish stereotyping, and to remove the.. prevalent public mentality toward prejudice.....

We will not tolerate biased perceptions, criticisms or censures of our beloved American Sign Language.....

We will not accept abuse of our Deaf identity by oppressors, nor our rights to self-determination.....

We refuse to barter incentive for a dole.....

We prefer the challenge of life to a guaranteed existence;... the thrill of fulfillment to the stale calm of Utopia....

We will not trade freedom for benefice, nor our dignity.... for a handout.....

We will never cower before any master, or paternalistic..... attitudes, nor bend to any threat of discrimination.....

It is the heritage of our Deaf Culture to stand erect, proud, and unafraid; to think and act for ourselves; to.. enjoy the benefits of our creations, and to face the hearing world boldly and say, "This we have achieved.".....

All of this is what it means to be Deaf Americans.....

In Frank John Lala's poem "A Credo for Deaf Americans" the list of values treated by the deaf as most important is long, and the following values appear there: the sense of one's own identity (like in the preceding poem), language, culture, freedom, independence. Moreover, the deaf are proud from their achievements so far, proper fulfillment of social roles and participation in many important fields of life. They feel prepared for deciding about themselves, they have dreams which release their creativity and the will to succeed in their private and professional life. In this poem the lyrical subject also speaks critically of

Gallaudet

Oh, Gallaudet
(Let your love light, light your way)

Don't you know
that a million mothers hearts
cry for you?

A million fathers arms
yearn to encircle you,
to shield you from all
the pain.....

Gallaudet

Oh, Gallaudet
(May your love light, light the way)

Don't you know
its all gonna be alright?

Don't you know
its all gonna be ok?

For love for you abounds,
across this great wide world.....

Soaring across
heavens great divide,
and touching the face of
God.....

Gallaudet.

Oh, Gallaudet
(Let your love light, light your way)

Gallaudet.

Oh, Gallaudet
(May your love light, light your way)

Don't you know its
gonna be alright?

Don't you know its
gonna be ok?

Gallaudet,
Long may you keep
your
love light lit.....

The author of the last poem: "Gallaudet"- Shawn Dale Barnett presents the highest level of literary skills. The lyrical subject tries to show the audience what the University of Gallaudet means to him, how important this very university is in his life. The poem is a kind of song, hymn. The emotional mood is worth emphasizing – it is very dynamic, from zest to despair. Gallaudet, by personification, became a friend of the lyrical subject someone very close to him the loss of whom terrifies. This coexistence – this means studies undertaken by deaf young people at this university makes them aware of their abilities and prepared for self-development like "shining diamonds". This staying at the university is touched with love which allows the deaf to endeavour their life goals with a "lighted way".

The presented poems are a reflection of the mature artistic personality of their young deaf authors. By their spontaneous expression they carry out in an aware manner specific artistic tasks, they also aim at self-creation. Their literary output has a deeply personal character, it is very sincere, very direct. I am convinced that these examples of literary expression are an interesting research material for linguists, psychologists and educators, as they are a source of knowledge about the Gallaudet University student's personality and abilities concerning communication competence.

References:

1. Jaślarowa B. O uzdolnieniu literackim, jego strukturze i warunkach rozwoju, (On literary talent, its structure and conditions for development) [w:] Prace Naukowe Uniwersytetu Śląskiego Nr 62. Prace Psychologiczne III, Katowice 1974.
2. Lane H., Maska dobroczynności. Deprecjacja społeczności głuchych (The mask of charity. Depretiation of the deaf community), Warszawa 1996.
3. Popek S. Twórczość literacka dzieci i młodzieży (Literary output of children and young people), [w:] Aktywność twórcza dzieci i młodzieży, red. Popek S., Warszawa 1988.
4. Tomaszewski P., Dobrowolska, Włodarczyk K., Wzmacniamy się nawzajem (Let us strengthen each other) , [w:] Świat Ciszy IX, X, 2002.