

ARE PHYSICISTS LYRICISTS OR IS READING STILL ALIVE?

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Francis Bacon, a British philosopher, said «Books are ships which pass through the vast sea of time». Even in his epoch (XVII century) people appreciated books and writing for the ability to carry one's thoughts through the centuries and millenniums. Owing to this curious object – the book – one can read the ideas of Aristotle, apperceive Confucius's wisdom, enjoy Shakespeare's plays and argue to Darwin today, in the 21st century.

However, currently reading and literature seem to be less demanded and give their positions to new trends such as mass media, cinema and internet. Especially there is a big concern about new coming generations. Young people are considered to have lost interest in literature. It does not appear to be a value for them.

So the aim of this article is to find out whether those worrying opinions are just opinions or reading and literature as social-cultural values are being in decline. For the sake of greater rigor the scope of the observed group was narrowed to students of technical specialties commonly known for their obduracy, senselessness and incredulity.

Thus 48 students of technical specialties aged 18-22 were polled. 36 of them were male and 12 female students. The test offered included 19 questions covering classical and modern literature as well as common ones.

The first part of the test was aimed to reveal personal reading interests. It was estimated depending on students' age and gender. The first question determined the position of reading as a preferable activity. The answers obtained didn't differ greatly among 18-19 old and 20-22 years old students. About 70-80 % of positive answers were obtained. Next two questions were to define favorite genres and branches of literature. The ratio of personal preferences and respondents' gender is illustrated in Fig. 1.

b)

Fig.1 - The ratio of personal preferences and respondents' gender: a – about literature branches, b – about literature genres

Number of read books was questioned as well. It is revealed that 23% of students haven't read at all for the last month. 32% have read just one book and 45% have read more than one book (the biggest number was five books per month – Fig. 2a). From the other side approximately a half of students have read from one to four books for the last year. About a third have read ten books at least and only fiftieth haven't read even a single book (Fig. 2b).

b)

Fig. 2 – The number of read books: a – per month, b – per year

The second part of the test was focused on classic literature preferences. As a result, 72% of student responded positively about classics, 26% - indifferently. On the other hand 62% said that they don't make difference between native (23%) and foreign (15%) literature.

The next question had to determine the books which are mostly read by students. So respondents were offered a list of 30 books based on «The 100 Best Books of All Time» (the internationally created not rated booklist) and BBC's «The Big Read» (contains 200 rated

best-loved by British audience novels). The survey showed that four most read classic books are all of the Russian origin:

92% of respondents have read «Dead Souls» by Nikolai Gogol (1842),

75% have read «Crime and Punishment» by Fyodor Dostoevsky (1866) which is on the 60th place of «The Big Read»,

69% have read Mikhail Bulgakov's «The Master and Margarita» (1940), the 130th place,

65% have read Leo Tolstoy's «War and Peace» (1869), the 20th place.

It is worth mentioning that all of those four books are taught in school program. The fourth place (56%) took a little girl Alice and her journey («Alice's Adventures in Wonderland» by Lewis Carroll, 1865, the 30th place).

The next fact seems a pity to point out. A book specially dedicated among the others in «The 100 Best Books of All Time» is «The Ingenious Gentleman Don Quixote of La Mancha» by Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra. According to the data it has been read only by 27% (less than a third) of students. Fig. 3.

Altogether respondents have read all the books in the list at least once except for Boccaccio's «The Decameron» which is supposed to be unknown to the students. And all the books in the list were picked up 397 times what is about 8,3 read books per student. However, it has been counted that 10% of respondents have read 1-2 books from the list, 27% - 3-5 books, 31% - 6-10 books and 31% have read more than 10 books.

Alexander Pushkin and Leo Tolstoy were named as the greatest classic writers by most respondents. Gogol, Dostoevsky, Bulgakov and Lermontov were also mentioned but much less.

Fig. 3 – Popularity of various classical books

Modern literature has been positively considered by 52%. 44% have revealed their indifference to it. The Russian literature is preferred to the foreign one, 8% to 23% respectively while others enjoy both. Here a list of 30 best contemporary books was given. So (Fig.4):

63% have read books about Harry Potter written by J.K. Rowling. That does not seem strange since from 400 and 450 million copies have been sold, what has made the books the best-selling book series in the history, and besides they have been translated into 73 languages;

52% have read an epic high fantasy trilogy «The Lord of The Rings» written by professor J.R.R. Tolkien which is the second best-selling novel ever written with over 150 million copies sold;

33% had read Chuck Palahniuk's «Fight Club» published in 1996.

The counting illustrates that six or more books from the list have been read by 33% of students, and 61% have read five or less.

Among modern authors four names are mostly mentioned: J.R.R. Tolkien, George R.R. Martin, J.K. Rowling and Max Frei.

At the end of the test there were four general questions. One of them was about widely-spread idea that even one book can change someone's life. 57% said they have met such a book. They are opposed by 43% of those who haven't.

The second question asked to name an iconic literary character. Here they are: Eugene Onegin, Rodion Raskolnikov, Harry Potter, Frodo Baggins and Sherlock Holmes. A dandy, a murderer, a legend hero, a hobbit and a consulting detective – an interesting company!

Fig. 4 – Popularity of various modern books

Further, students were proposed to define their preferences in the way to read – printed edition, computer or eBook. In this case the first variant was picked up by 44% of students while the other two by 28%. The choice of each of them was argued by their convenience. Printed editions have been defined as the most «tasteful» and healthy sort of reading. Whereas computer and eBook have been complemented for availability, diversity and cheapness of books in electronic form.

And finally there was a question concerning reading and literature's future. The most part of respondents (89%) stated that both have their place tomorrow because «literature has always been and it will always exist» and «books can teach things that nothing or nobody else can». However 11% noticed the decline of the reading and literature and chose «No». That brings us to the beginning: does literature have the right and ability to exist in the third millennium together with globalizing network, multidimensional cinema and never ending TV-series?

Thus, taking into account the obtained test results some conclusions can be made.

1. Students like reading, especially fiction, and they do read! Whereas men prefer adventures, women would rather read romantic novels.

2. Classic isn't dead, it is still alive. Although it owes a lot to the school educating program.

3. The modern literature isn't accepted as positively as classical. At least it isn't done negatively. The leaders are Anglophone books, what proves the tendency of global English-speaking culture.

4. Literature has its future whether it is classical or modern, though it will definitely take a new form.

Literature is a guide through the life. It is a unique way of making mistakes and tempting fate right on your couch not worrying about possible harm. It can teach one anything possible to be experienced: from making a right Columbian coffee to bluff at the card table with alliance in the open space.