

EDUCATING YOUNG PEOPLE
THROUGH THE CLASSICS

Love, Friendship and Storytelling

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EDUSC

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EDUCATION ABOUT LOVE AND FRIENDSHIP THROUGH STORIES

Norberto González Gaitano

INTRODUCTION

With this first chapter of the book, I intend to present the whole research project on *Education about love and friendship through stories*: what the objectives are, on which narrative-epistemological presuppositions the investigation is based, and with what means are we looking for in order to reach the ends. In presenting the means, I will not dwell in detail on the methodologies used—especially in regard to the survey for chapter 2 deals with it—even less on the parts for now only in progress, still being researched.

It must be stated straightaway that the motivation of the entire project is educational. It arises from the awareness that we, in the West, are in the midst of an epochal educational emergency¹ and the project draws strength from the belief, shared by its promoters, that one of the ways out of the crisis is the recovery of *narrative intelligence*. The term “narrative intelligence” is not just a nice word borrowed from Coleman’s successful expression “emotional intelligence.”² It also includes, on the one hand, what Nussbaum calls “narrative imagination,” that kind of “competence necessary for citizens to understand the totality of the world around them,” correlated and complementary to logic and factual knowledge;³ on the other hand, “narrative intelligence,” means the poetic reason is inexorably linked to practical reason. This narrative intelligence enables us to grasp

¹ Many authors, from various academic disciplines and with different worldviews, denounce the educational emergency. I would like to point out some of the best known to me: Ratzinger, Nussbaum, Todorov, and Llovet.

² Daniel Coleman. *Emotional Intelligence. Why It Can Matter More than IQ*. Bloomsbury, London 1995.

³ Martha Nussbaum. *Not for profit. Why Democracy Needs the Humanities*, Princeton University Press, 2016, updated edition, p. 107.

the internal meaning of the actions narrated or represented in the works, but also to judge their correlations to the *grammar* of human action and, therefore, to accept or reject the “poetic judgment” which any works convey as morally right or wrong.

The first to use the expression “educational emergency” was a prominent theologian who became Pope, Benedict XVI, in his *Letter to the Diocese of Rome on the urgent task of education*. It has had a notable impact in Italy. Among other things it led the report *The Educational Challenge*⁴ promoted by the Cultural Project of the Italian Episcopal Conference where all the educational “spaces” in which the crisis is most evident are examined (the family, the school, the Christian community, the labor world and consumption, mass media, entertainment, sports), offering simple suggestions for a possible rebirth.

These and other diagnoses, and the opinion shared by many, highlight a failure that is not only scholastic but also *educational*. It is neither here nor the time in this setting to examine the causes. I tried to trace some of them elsewhere.⁵

I, together with many others, am convinced that a suitable cure to recover from the crisis is found in the education through narratives, in the education of consumers through an intellectual reading of good books or watching good movies and TV series. Some high school teachers or vocational schools in Italy have been dealing with this fascinating commitment for years and with success.⁶ Other professors in many countries, perhaps less strikingly brilliant and out of the public spotlight, work towards the same end with discreet efficacy certainly not recognized in their salaries or by their employers, whether state or private. We, from the *Family and Media* research group, want to give our small contribution to this great common endeavor of undefined contours carried out by “free laborers,” and we will do so through what we know how to do: examine, describe/tell, and propose.

Examine what? Examine which novels young people read in the West and which films and TV series they like most. Then we will share the results and elaborate interpretative hypotheses: is it true that young people prefer

⁴ *La sfida educativa* (The Educational Challenge, Committee for the Cultural Project of the CEI), Laterza, Bari 2009, with the preface by Cardinal Camillo Ruini.

⁵ Norberto González Gaitano. *Recuperare l'immaginazione narrative* (Recovering the Narrative Imagination), in *Chi ha paura della scuola. Nuovi bisogni, desideri, sfide e proposte credibili* (Who is Scared of School. New Needs, Desires, Challenges, and Credible Proposals). Augenti, Antonio N. e Gamaleri, Gianpiero (eds). Armando, Rome 2008, pgs. 22-31.

⁶ Alessandro D'Avenia. *L'arte di essere fragile* (The Art of Being Fragile) Milan 2016. Andrea Monda. *Raccontare Dio oggi* (Telling God Today). Città Nuova, Rome 2018. Eraldo Affinati. *L'uomo del futuro. Sulle strade di don Lorenzo Milani* (The Man of the Future. On the Streets of Don Lorenzo Milani). Mondadori, Milan 2017.

novelties and adapt to the tastes of mainstream critics or instead prefer masterpieces that have stood the test of time? Are there significant differences in their choices according to cultural and linguistic traditions? How do the choices of books, if at all, influence their use of films or TV series? Can we trace readers' profiles, that is, what picture of the average reader is drawn by the data regarding their choices? A first answer to these questions was presented by GAD3, the Spanish company of polls that conducted a statistical survey of young people from nine countries, in the workshop *Educating about Love and Friendship through the Classics* held at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross, Rome, November 23rd, 2018. David Iglesias elaborates on a first examination of the data in the chapter two of this book.

Once we have ascertained which works young people appreciate most, we then want to understand their processes of use and understanding, relating to the representation of love and friendship in the most read or viewed works through focus group discussion with a representative sample out of 3700 young people who answered our questionnaire. This will be the second phase of the research, which will be continued in 2020.

The project not only investigates and describes but also proposes. We have selected six works, six good books that have been adapted to the big screen and that convey well what friendship and love are.

The six distinguished speakers who participated in the aforementioned workshop offer us a reflection on the six great works of literature we have chosen—later adapted also to the big screen—that have addressed these universal themes in every time period, in order to cultivate a taste for great stories and promote an educational culture concerned with the critical sense and the development of thought. All six have a strong educational sensitivity and experience in education, both in teaching and in the dissemination of culture through the mass media. The authors and works mentioned are: Alessandro d'Avenia (*The Odyssey*, *The Divine Comedy*, and *Crime and Punishment*); Natalia Sanmartín Fenollera (*Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen); Armando Fumagalli (*Anna Karenina* by Lev Tolstoj); Travis Curtright (Shakespeare's *Much Ado about Nothing*); Antonio Malo (Somerset Maugham's *The Painted Veil*) and Andrea Monda (J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*). Their presentations are brought together in this volume.

Furthermore, and starting from their relationship to the workshop, the speakers themselves recorded a 15-minute film of an informative nature, which will serve as a teaching aid in schools and through online courses in three languages—Italian, Spanish, and English—through the *Family and Media*⁷ educational platform. So that memorable day is also enriched by a spin off for those who have not had the good fortune to attend the conference.

⁷ www.familyandmediaeducation.eu

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE INVESTIGATION

The stories, whether they are novels of literary value, popular films, or TV series, influence young people's understanding of love and friendship just as they do on any topic that has an educational dimension and therefore a moral one in the broadest sense.

The British moral philosopher Alasdair McIntyre argued,⁸ with considerable follow-up, that people, human agents, understand and interpret their moral life similarly to the characters in a story or narrative.

The revival of the Aristotelian moral philosophy as well as of the *Poetics*, today abundantly used as a guiding text in film screenwriting schools,⁹ is bringing the academic university world to a greater awareness of the educational value of stories.

Surely the writers and producers of the cultural industry have never forgotten the configuring importance of the public opinion of their works, educational or non-educational in the broad sense, and many have used them to change the value criteria, the common ideas, the custom moral, and even political views.¹⁰ As Montagu recalled, "men and societies have formed according to the image they had of themselves and have changed based on the image they themselves developed."¹¹

Anyone who has the plan to leave their mark on society through his ideas, cannot help but rely on stories. Even the most abstract philosophical ideas cannot be understood and disseminated except within a "dialogical narrative of thought," from a history of thought. It could be said, with the metaphor so common today, that even ideas have their own narrative.

The general and constitutive dimension of the narrative is linked to some inescapable facts: that man is a temporal being;¹² he acts, and his action can be the object of *mimesis*;¹³ and that he is not the man (*individual*) to populate the earth but the *men* (plurality).¹⁴ It is not these more general and/or constitutive dimensions of the narrative that interest us in our research project, although we presume them. The project *Education about*

⁸ Alasdair McIntyre. *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theology*, University of Notre Dame Press 2007.

⁹ Aristotle. *Poetica. Ad uso di sceneggiatori, scrittori e drammaturgi* (Poetics for Screenwriters, Writers, and Playright. Introduced, commented and annotated by Armando Fumagalli and Raffaele Chiarulli, Dino Audino, Rome 2018.

¹⁰ Armando Fumagalli. *La creatività al potere. Da Hollywood alla Pixar, passando per l'Italia* (The Creativity of Power. From Hollywood to Pixar, Passing through Italy). Turin, Lindau 2013.

¹¹ Ashley Montagu. *The Nature of Human Aggression*, Oxford University Press, 1976, p. 13.

¹² Paul Ricoeur. *Time and Narrative*, University of Chicago Press, 1990.

¹³ Erich Auerbach. *Mimesis. The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*. Princeton University Press, 1953.

¹⁴ Hannah Arendt. *The Human Condition*. The University of Chicago Press, 1958.

Love and Friendship through Stories intends to continue and expand the relevant recent research concerning the *educational potential of stories for the education and development of moral character and virtues*.¹⁵

I state immediately, not to be misunderstood, that educational here is not for the pedagogical nor moral for the self-righteous. We are not dealing here with the moralizing of fables, one legitimate expression of literary creation, nor of propaganda works, works that are not literary, but borrow their clothes, the embellishments of literature.

Although reading novels or watching movies does not make us any better or worse, just as learning ethics does not make us more virtuous, they widen the space of our theoretical-practical reasoning. As Todorov states, in simpler and more beautiful words: "Literature is denser, more eloquent than everyday life but not radically different. Literature expands our universe, stimulates us to imagine other ways of conceiving it and organizing it. We are all made of what others give us: first of all, our parents and then those with whom we surround ourselves; literature opens up this possibility of interaction with others endlessly and therefore enriches us infinitely. It gives us irreplaceable sensations, such that the real world becomes more meaningful and more beautiful. Beyond being a simple pleasure, a distraction reserved for educated people, *literature allows everyone to better respond to their human vocation*."¹⁶

To put it briefly, and in terms of the pragmatics of discourse in the wake of Aristotle's *Poetics*: Because novels, movies, or television series are "words in action",¹⁷ and specifically *fables* or imitations of a complete action and with *magnitude* (*Poetics* 50b 20-25). There is an arc of transformation in which the character passes from happiness to unhappiness or vice versa. Therefore, the characters exhibit a determined character: a series of virtues and vices that are shown in their words and actions and also in their temperament.

As the moral philosopher Abbà pointed out, "by involving [the reader] in the emotions appropriated to the moral practice, narration and drama reveal his and others' character, unfolding what one feels in deliberating and deciding: the seriousness of what is at stake, the hesitation between uncertain alternatives, the possible conflict between social ethos and personal

¹⁵ David Carr; Tom Harrison. *Educating Character Through Stories*. Imprint Academic, Exeter 2015. Alessandra La Marca. *Educazione del carattere e personalizzazione educativa a scuola* (Education about Character and Educational Personalization at School). La Scuola, Brescia 2005. Karen E. Bohlin. *Teaching Character Education through Literature. Awakening Moral Imagination in Secondary Classrooms*. Routledge, London 2005.

¹⁶ Tzvetan Todorov. *La letteratura in pericolo* (Literature in Danger). Garzanti, Milan 2008, p. 17. Emphasis is mine.

¹⁷ Antonio Vilarnovo, José Francisco Sánchez, (1992). *Discurso, tipos de texto y comunicación*. (Speech, Text Types, and Communication). Eunsa, Pamplona 1992.

awareness, the irrevocability of the consequences of action or inaction, intensify the attraction toward a good life and friendship, toward the search for God and the truth, but also the scandal of the wrong, poverty, and penalty of ruin."¹⁸

In short, the stories teach us to enjoy the emotion of the good.¹⁹

Here is a summary of the philosophical and narrative conditions underlying the research project

Education about Love and Friendship through Stories

Methodology

As announced before, the plan that we are committed to is: eventually discovering what young people read and watch most to understand the positive or negative educational influence of current works and, eventually, propose alternatively works of the past that are more significant from the moral point of view.

Survey Methodology

To determine what young people read and watch, we selected a sample of 3700 subjects ages 18-29 from five European countries (France, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, and Spain) and four countries from the Americas (Argentina, Colombia, Mexico, and the United States). The method of choosing the samples (around 400 respondents) in each country is the so-called quota method, which ensures good representativeness, no less (for better or for worse) than that of electoral polls. The results were weighted with the known parameters of the population of each country, in order to improve the representativeness of the sample with respect to the targeted subject group. Simultaneously, the same questionnaire was submitted to another sample of young Catholics, in this case not statistically representative.²⁰

The questions included a list of works the researchers selected beforehand on the basis of data available on the market and the best known

¹⁸ Giuseppe Abbà. *Quale impostazione per la filosofia morale?* (What Approach to Moral Philosophy?) LAS, Rome 1996, p. 19-20

¹⁹ Giacomo Samek Lodovici. *L'emozione del bene. Alcune idee sulla virtù* (The Emotion of the Good. Some Ideas on Virtue). Vita e Pensiero, Milan 2007.

²⁰ This is representative by the 7500 young people who, having participated in the World Youth Day in Krakow in 2016, answered the submitted questionnaire on the reasons for their participation, performed by GAD3. A total of 737 young people answered our study's questionnaire, of which 583 belong to the 9 countries of our study and the rest to other 38 other countries, but in too small numbers to enter the analysis.

current works relating to the topics taken into consideration (love and friendship, so stories of love, romance, and friendship). The works that are less current, but that we consider of lasting value have been selected on the basis of our knowledge.

The interviewee had to tick one of the answer options: “read/view,” “unread/unseen,” or “never heard of.” To jog the interviewee’s memory, the book cover or film or TV series cover was added graphically to the work in question. We set aside other memory “joggers” initially considered, such as the summary of the story of the book or film, or the reference to the main actors of the film, because they are less effective. To find the works we did not include in the list, the questionnaire added a question for each category of works, inviting the young person to indicate other books he had read, which were not on the list.

Also included were questions regarding the number of friends and relationships the interviewees had, the idea or perception of friendship in their lives, and their relation to the work that best represented them in their opinion. We also asked questions about the platforms they use to watch movies and TV series. This question proved to be of extraordinary interest to understand one of the most unexpected results and that would have been difficult to accurately interpret: dated movies or series continue to be viewed even though they are no longer broadcast by television stations—like *Lost*, for example—because they can be watched on platforms like Netflix, etc. Most of the public subscribes to one or more platforms (69%).

To the rich information obtained from the answers on the questionnaire, we will add insights from analyses that will allow us to look more closely at the raw data. From the correlations between the primary data, the secondary data will emerge: to what extent does national literature still exist in an increasingly interconnected world? Is there a uniformity of reading inclinations between age groups and/or languages? How do reading habits affect watching a series or movie? Is there a correlation between the concept of friendship, the number of friends, and the works that are read or watched? Are there differences in habits of use of works among young Catholics and other young people, etc.?

It should also be added that there is previous research on the fans of some TV series²¹ and literary works adapted to the movie theatre (*The*

²¹ Ang studied the case of *Dallas*, a famous American soap opera from the 1980s based on 42 fan letters: Ang, I. (1985). *Watching Dallas: Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination*. New York: Routledge. Grandío studied the case of *Friends* by combining online questionnaires, interviews, and discussion groups: Grandío, M. (2009). *Audiencia, fenómeno fan y ficción televisiva. El caso de “Friends”* (Audience, Fan Phenomenon, and TV Fiction. The Case of *Friends*). Buenos Aires: Libros en Red. The same author had used 454 questionnaires online with fans of two Spanish TV series: Grandío, M. (2008). “La recepción de series familiares contemporáneas. *Los Serrano* y *Cuéntame cómo pasó*” (“The Reception of Contemporary Family

Lord of the Rings),²² studies that fall into the wake of “reception research”, but an empirical sample open-research to determine the preferences of readers or viewers had never been performed.

Evaluation of the Educational “Weight” of the Works

To define the scale of educational and teaching values of the works, we turned to 32 communication and teaching professionals, from six of the nine countries where the study was carried out. Nineteen of them answered the questionnaire: seven from Italy, seven from Spain, two from Mexico, one from the United States, one from Colombia, and one from Argentina.

The consulted personnel consists of film critics and literary experts, university film and audiovisual communication professors, and several experts in pedagogy, all with an interest in media’s educational dimension.

As we have just said, they were asked to evaluate on a scale ranging from 1 to 7, the educational and teaching value they attribute to each of the most read or viewed works, without knowing the results of the preferences of the young people interviewed to avoid any bias and influence in the choice.

The definition, description, and tendencies on what might be understood as “educational and teaching value” has been deliberately avoided. We have also avoided the use of terms such as “literary quality,” “popularity,” etc., without assuming *a priori* any relationship between these dimensions. We believe that the formulation “educational and teaching value” is sufficiently clear and common to allow a balanced judgment on a scale of values ranging from a maximum evaluation to a minimum one.

Discussion of General Results

This is the list of the most read books in the nine countries of the sample, in descending order (Figure 1).

Now we examine the opinion of the experts on the educational dimension of these works.

The expert judgment shows a consistent pattern. *The Little Prince*, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *Anna Karenina*, and *The Lord of the Rings* are in the highest position on the scale with an average value of about 6 out of 7,

Series. *Los Serrano* and *Tell Me How It Happened*”, in Medina M. (ed.) *Series de televisión. El caso de Médico de familia, Cuéntame cómo pasó y Los Serrano* (Television Series. The Case of Family Doctor, Tell Me How It Happened, and Los Serrano). Madrid: Eiunsa, pgs. 134-163.

²² Sánchez Aranda, José Javier; Bonau, Joseba e Grandío, María del Mar (2008) *Heroism in the Return of King*, in Di Martin Barker, Ernest Mathijs (eds). *Watching the Lord of the Rings: Tolkien’s World Audiences*, Peter Lang, New York, pgs. 191-212.

EDUCATION ABOUT LOVE AND FRIENDSHIP THROUGH STORIES

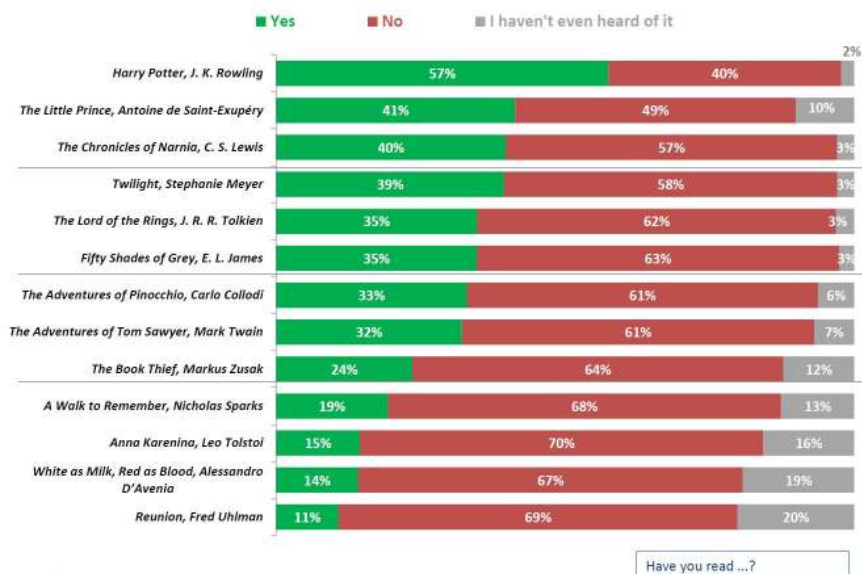


Figure 1.

which is the maximum value as has been said. While *Twilight* (3.1) and *Fifty Shades of Gray* (1.6) have the lowest values. And these last two are the only ones that can be considered non-formative according to the average evaluation of the educators consulted.

The others, and this is a surprising fact for our expectations, positively exceed the average of the scale: *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (5.4), *The Book Thief* (5.4), *White as Milk, Red as Blood* (5.3), *The Adventures of Pinocchio* (5.2), *Reunion* (4.6), *Harry Potter* (4.6) and *A Walk to Remember* (4.6).

The coincidence in the judgment is neither homogeneous nor, of course, unanimous. The books that show the greatest disparity of opinion are *Twilight* and *The Book Thief*. In these cases, the standard deviation among the the consulted experts is 1.3 and 1.1 respectively. As one might expect, the extremes are increasingly clear, for better or for worse: *The Little Prince* and *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* leave no significant doubts about their educational potential (0.6 standard deviation), as well as showing no significant dissent the very low score of *Fifty Shades of Gray* (1.3 on the scale with a SD of 0.7). For *Twilight*, the value is slightly below average on the scale (3.1) and the outcome is more nuanced (SD 1.3).

The most viewed films in the nine countries are those showed in Figure 2.

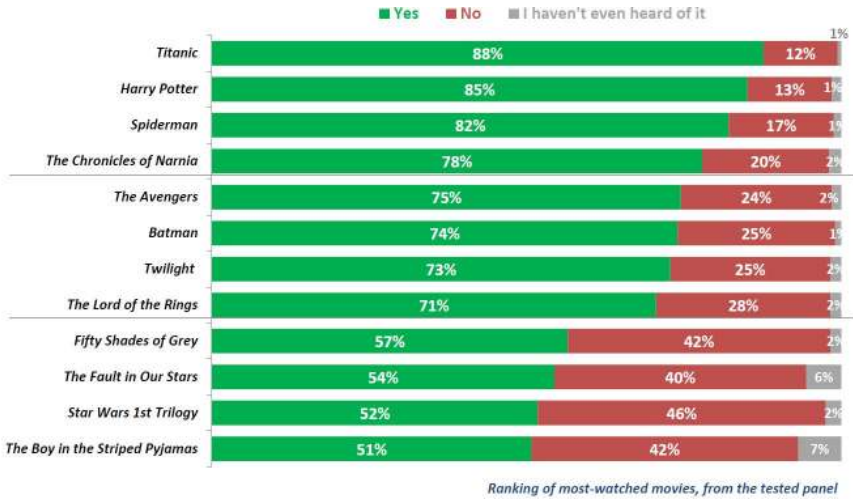


Figure 2.

As for the experts' evaluation of the films, these are the titles that exceed the average value of the scale (3.5) and, consequently, are considered formative by our educators: *Wonder* (6.6), *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* (6.5), *The Chronicles of Narnia* (6.4), *The Lord of the Rings* (6.1), *The Longest Way* (5.6), *All Days of My Life*, *A Walk to Remember*, *Now or Never Again* (all three with 5.5), *The Untouchables* (5.4), *Star Wars-First Trilogy* (5), *La La Land* (4.6), *The Fault in Our Stars* (4.5), *Spiderman* and *Batman* (4.4), *Star Wars-Third Trilogy* (4.2), *Pearl Harbor* (4), *Ghost* and *The Avengers* (3.9).

On the other hand, below the average value of the scale, and can therefore be considered non-formative are: *Twilight* (2.9), *Me Before You* (2.9) and *Fifty Shades of Gray* (1.3).

Even in the case of films, the consensus in judgment is clearer if we analyze the extreme values: *Wonder* and *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*, which have higher values from the educational/teaching point of view (6.6 in the scale from 1–7) have a greater homogeneity of the criteria (SD 0.5) as well as *The Chronicles of Narnia* (6.5) whose standard difference is 0.9. At the other end of the scale, *Fifty Shades of Gray* (1.3) offers more homogeneity of judgment (SD 0.8).

The following titles are an exception to the common model: *Me Before You* (SD 1.8) and *The Fault in Our Stars*, *La La Land*, *Batman* and *Pearl Harbor* (all with a difference of 1.5); *The Lord of the Rings*, *Twilight*, *Ghost*, *At First*

EDUCATION ABOUT LOVE AND FRIENDSHIP THROUGH STORIES

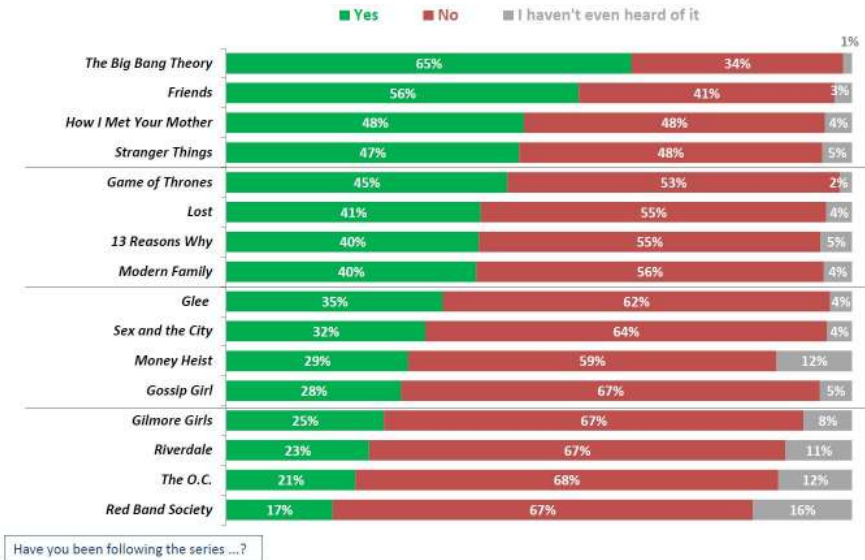


Figure 3.

Sight, Spiderman, The Untouchables, and A Walk to Remember (all between 1.4 and 1.1).

In short, there is a greater dispersion in the judgment of movies than in books. However, with the exception of four films—*The Fault in Our Stars, La La Land, Batman, and Pearl Harbor*—the score differences do not substantially alter the overall judgment on their educational potential; in other words, only these four films do not attract “unanimous” consensus on their ability to educate. In short, the numerical differences in educational and teaching value do not essentially change the overall average judgment of most works.

Now consider the case of TV series. Figure 3 shows the list of the most popular shows.

In regard to the interviewed educators’ evaluation on the educational dimension of the TV series, we can see, to begin with, that the quality is overall lower compared to books and films. The average rating of all TV series is 3.6. The highest value on the scale from 1 to 7 is 5.3, which belongs to *Red Band Society*. The following series are above the average score, namely the center of the scale: In addition to the aforementioned *Red Band Society*, we have *The Big Bang Theory* (4.6), *Stranger Things* (4.6),

NCIS (4.5) *Gilmore Girls* (4.3), *Lost* (4.2), *Gotham* (4.2), *Money Heist*, and *How I Met Your Mother* (both with 3.7).

The following TV series are considered non-educational: *Thirteen Reasons Why* (3.3), *The O.C.* (3.2), *Modern Family* (3), *Glee* (2.9), *Game of Thrones* (2.7), *Gossip Girl* (2.5), and *Sex and the City* (2.3).

The homogeneity of the criteria is more consistent in the TV series than in the movies, and even higher than the books. Not one exceeds a difference of 1.4 (the biggest difference is recorded on *Game of Thrones*). We also find greater variability in *Friends*, *Modern family*, *Gilmore Girls*, *NCIS*, *Sex and the City*, and *Thirteen Reasons Why* (all between 1.3 and 1.2).

At the same time, and perhaps because the extreme values are less “extreme,” the variation in the judgment affects significantly more TV series, which would remain in formative limbo so to speak, if one takes into account the upper or lower margin. These series particularly: *Gilmore Girls* (average 4.3, SD 1.3), *Friends* (average 3.3, SD 1.2), *Thirteen Reasons Why* (average 3.3, SD 1.2), *Modern Family* (average 3, SD 1.3) and *Game of Thrones* (average 2.7 and SD 1.4). *Sex and the City*, on the other hand, would always be below average.

PARTIAL CONCLUSIONS

Clearly, this survey has no arithmetic claims. It is, however, a useful analysis to be able to translate a qualitative judgment into a *measurable* parameter. The social sciences regularly use these numerical conventions, provided they are not arbitrary or unjustified.

It is significant, though, that the perceptions are quite common, despite the inevitable variability of these. A literary and narrative analysis justifying the educational or distorting value of each work is not the subject of this study.

Even more significant, in our opinion, is the similarity of judgment concerning the educational character of the works between the evaluators and the judgment of popular taste. I remember that the evaluators ignored the results of the most read and viewed works among young people. Therefore, their judgment could not be conditioned. This is not the place to interpret this discovery, which on the other hand fits well with a commonly accepted saying in the academic and artistic community: the best critic for literary works is time. Similarly, one could say that the public, the subject from whom authors, directors, etc. constantly seek praise, is difficult to capture and almost impossible to define, but is the true recipient of the works and is the last and true judge.

Sometimes, to end a disagreement about the inevitable differences of opinion about such an artistic work, it is customary to say that *there*

is nothing written about tastes. To this rhetorical argument, in turn, one responds with another not less rhetorical argument: "There is much written, it's just that people don't read it." The classics, on the other hand, said that *de gustibus, disputandibus*, that is to say, it is necessary to discuss tastes not for the sake of polemicizing but to learn, to form one's taste. This is what we intend in this work without any gimmick: to reflect and to debate with arguments on the formation of narrative taste, with the help of numbers, too, because even the numbers are arguments, all the more so in a society still fascinated by the scientific experimental paradigm.

TV SERIES: THE TOP OF TODAY'S AUDIOVISUAL PYRAMID AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE

David Iglesias Pérez

1. INTRODUCTION

TV series have become a magnet and new audiovisual reference for many young people recently. 72 % of young people acknowledge watching TV series several times per week and three out of ten watch them every day. These are just some figures of the data revealed by an international study about the preferences of young people in the Western world regarding movies, TV series and books. The study was designed by Family and Media (F&M), a think tank based in Rome, and conducted by GAD3, an international research firm based in Madrid.

What films and TV series do young people like most? Which are the preferred books among current young people? What attitudes do they have towards friendship? How do these attitudes influence their reading and watching behaviors?

A quota sampling of 3 964 people between 18 and 29 years old was formed and interviewed in May-June 2018 to discover the answers to these questions in nine Western countries: Argentina, Colombia, France, Germany, Italy, Mexico, Spain, the UK and the US.

An additional sample of 737 Catholics who attended World Youth day in Krakow (2016), not randomly selected, was also chosen to compare their reading and watching behaviors with the general population: Are Catholic young people different to their peers when it comes to the tested preferences?

These questions became the starting point of this vast-reaching project, aimed to find out what kind of stories drive their cultural and entertainment preferences among youngsters and, simultaneously, to discover their reading and watching audiovisual attitudes.

With this goal in mind, F&M approached GAD3, a company with vast experience conducting sociological surveys and research, with the task of carrying out both the fieldwork and the statistical aspects of the project. The first meetings occurred in summer 2017, and the final proposal was approved in May, 2018.

To meet all the requirements of the project, two anonymous online surveys were designed. The first was run among people from the general population; the second was conducted only among Catholic youths. Both surveys included the same questions, in order to cross-reference data and draw conclusions later. The results of the research were presented in Rome in November 23, 2018.

It is the main goal of this chapter not only to describe the main conclusions of this study, but also to explain in detail other essential aspects, such as how the questionnaire was designed, how the sample of respondents was selected, etc. The following pages will follow a chronological account of the steps taken to conduct the project, in order to help readers and researchers develop and understand the account of the study by rebuilding the phases, stages and decisions taken.

2. QUESTIONNAIRE

Thousands of interviews were to be conducted in several countries. It was an ambitious research project with an extensive layout that had to be designed carefully in order to produce valuable and scientifically strong results.

For this purpose, an interdisciplinary team was set up, involving scholars in communication studies, researchers specialized in quantitative data, sociologists and communication consultants. To accelerate decision-making processes between the Italian and the Spanish teams, a researcher from Family and Media traveled to Madrid. From GAD3's headquarters at the capital of Spain, the main lines of the project started to be designed, in a research effort that would end up surveying more than 4 000 young people in the Western World.

A questionnaire was to be designed and translated into five different languages: English, Italian, Spanish, French and German. The aforementioned nine countries would be targeted.

Shortening and simplifying the initial draft of the questionnaire prepared by the Family Media team researchers was of the utmost importance for two reasons. The first is that young people rarely devote much time to the same activity or web page on the Internet. The second reason is that the questionnaires were expected to be answered by young adults who

would complete them on-the-go, such as commuting to the workplace or to the university, for instance.

Synthesizing questions in a short questionnaire became quite challenging, but not the only obstacle to overcome. Furthermore, the set-up and flow of the questions had to be simple to avoid distracting the participants. At the same time, the design had to be visually enticing, in order to get respondents hooked to the questionnaire and avoid them leaving the survey incomplete. For these reasons, much time was devoted to craft a straightforward yet captivating interface.

This creative effort translated into several key decisions. One being the inclusion of a picture of the cover of the films, TV series and books that were going to be tested. People may not remember the title of a movie they watched five years ago, but showing them the cover may help them remember it.

Eventually, thirty-eight questions were included and answering them took more than ten minutes. At first researchers thought it would have to be shortened. However, the test trials proved otherwise, while uncovering a rather interesting fact. While the questionnaire was time-consuming the topic was so appealing to the participants that a great majority of respondents completed the interview. Answering the questionnaire was enjoyable due to the questions about favorite movies and TV series. The engaging display of the questionnaire proved to be an essential factor for the successful outcome.

Questions were divided into five sets. The first set comprised three basic aspects regarding the respondent's profile: gender, age and state or region of residence. These were essential to control the flow of completed interviews and manage quotas.

After this introductory block, sections two (movies), three (TV series) and four (books) came up. Each block had the same order. First, an easy-going introductory question: What was the last title you watched/read? It was an open-ended question. Answers were obviously conditioned by the movies and TV series that were being screened at that moment, among other short-term variables. However, this first question served an important purpose: help the respondent have a good experience and provide a smooth introduction into the questionnaire. Who does not like mentioning the last movie he watched? Furthermore, it was an interesting means of collecting a good sociological taste of the most watched movies at that moment.

Then a panel of films, TV series and books was tested. This was the core of the research, in terms of frequency, since it was a close-ended question, with just three options: YES / NO / I HAVEN'T EVEN HEARD OF IT.

Questions could not be skipped; the system did not allow respondents to proceed to the next screen without having marked every item.

To minimize scrolling and seemingly never-ending screens, films, TV series and books were displayed in a set of two columns and divided into various screens. Titles were randomly assorted for each respondent automatically to avoid having any kind of bias.

The tested titles included the most popular genres: love, action, adventures, comedies, musicals, thrillers and sitcoms, among others. They had been selected according to several criteria: mixing classical titles (such as *The Little Prince* or *Anna Karenina*), famous titles (*Titanic* or *The Lord of the Rings*) and other powerful stories displaying strong values (such as *The Bucket List* or *Wonder*). More recent titles were included, with *White as Silence*, *Red as Song* by Alessandro D’Avenia, as the most contemporary example.

Box office revenues and figures of audience in public available market sources were the first and main criteria for sorting out the lists for all countries among the limitless titles offered by the entertainment industry.

For those stories being told in more than one film or one book (for example, sagas), having watched or read at least one item was enough to mark the YES box. Regarding TV series, respondents were kindly reminded that having watched at least three episodes from the show that was being asked for was the minimum requirement to give a YES answer.

The majority of movies, TV series and books tested in the panel were included in all questionnaires for all the surveyed countries and translated into each language. One or two titles were included for each country that was being surveyed, on a criterion based on local production or special interest in that geographical or cultural area. For example, in Italy *La vita è bella* was the “special” movie asked for; in France, it was *Les choristes*.

Common movies: *Titanic*, *Harry Potter*, *Spiderman*, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *The Avengers*, *Batman*, *Twilight*, *The Lord of the Rings*, *Fifty Shades of Grey*, *The Fault in our Stars*, *Star Wars* (the 1st and the 3rd trilogy), *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*, *The Untouchables*, *Ghost*, *Pearl Harbor*, *Me Before You*, *La La Land*, *A Walk to Remember*, *The Longest Ride*, *Wonder*, *The Bucket List* and *The Vow*.

Movies for each country: *La vita è bella* in Italy; *Les choristes* in France; *Campeones* in Spain; *Good Bye, Lenin!* In Germany; *Bridget Jones’s Diary* in the UK; *The Patriot* in the US; *Relatos Salvajes* in Argentina; *Los viajes del viento* in Colombia; and *El laberinto del fauno* in Mexico.

Common TV series: *How I met your mother*, *Friends*, *Glee*, *Gossip Girl*, *Game of Thrones*, *Gilmore Girls*, *Money Heist*, *The Big Bang Theory*, *Modern Family*, *Lost*, *13 Reasons Why*, *Riverdale*, *Sex and the City*, *Stranger Things* and *The O.C.*

TV series for each country: In Argentina, *Los Simuladores* and *El Marginal*; in Colombia, *El Cartel de los Sapos* and *Narcos*; in Mexico, *Infames* and *Los Serrano*; in Spain, *Los Serrano* and *Águila Roja*; in France, *Marseille* and *La Famille Serrano*; in Germany, *Dark* and *In aller Freundschaft*; in the UK, *Downton Abbey* and *The Crown*; and in the US, *NCIS* and *Gotham*.

Common books: *Anna Karenina*, by Lev Tolstoj; *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* by Mark Twain; *The Chronicles of Narnia*, by C. S. Lewis; *The Adventures of Pinocchio*, by Carlo Collodi; *Fifty Shades of Grey*, by E. L. James; *The Book Thief*, by Markus Zusak; *White as Silence, Red as Song*, by Alessandro D'Avenia; *Harry Potter*, by J. K. Rowling; *Reunion*, by Fred Uhlman; *The Little Prince*, by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry; *The Lord of the Rings*, by J. R. R. Tolkien; *A Walk to Remember*, by Nicholas Sparks; and *Twilight*, by Stephanie Meyer.

Books for each country: *El tiempo entre costuras*, by María Dueñas in Spain and the three other Spanish-speaking countries: Argentina, Colombia and Mexico; in Italy, *Tre metri sopra il cielo*, by Federico Moccia; in France, *Les Misérables*, by Victor Hugo; in Germany, *Tagebuch der Anne Frank*; and in the UK and in the US, *The Heartbreakers*, by Ali Novak.

Once the panel was completed, a new screen came up with another open-ended question: Can you name a film/TV series/book that you believe really portrays true friendship? That question had not a quantitative nuclear scope, but it illustrated what works would be more suitable in the next phase of the study. This next phase will involve focus groups to be conducted in Rome later on for discussing the most watched and relevant movies or books depicting friend relationships.

Then respondents were asked to answer some questions regarding habits and frequency of film and TV series-watching, as well as reading books. Queries such as "when was the last time you went to the cinema" or "how many hours a day do you spend watching series" were asked.

Other questions inquired more deeply about watching behavior and habits: *To what degree do you choose to watch a series via...?: I search on paid streaming platforms; personalized recommendations (Netflix, etc.); whatever is on at home at any given time; friends' recommendations; I search online TV channels*

were the different answers. Respondents had to score each option, in a one to five scale, where the minimum value was 1 and the maximum was 5.

Questions also asked which devices were more likely to be used to watch TV series and movies: cinema, tablet, PC/laptop, TV and smartphone. Regarding books, researchers also wanted to learn about the popularity of e-books among young people.

It is also important to mention that the TV series section included a specific question: *Are you subscribed to a paid streaming platform to watch the series? (Whether you are the titleholder of the account or if you use the household account)*. If respondents checked the YES option, a new screen came up, with the name of many streaming services. A few were common to all markets (Netflix, Amazon Video and HBO), while the rest varied depending on each country: Virgin and Sky in the UK; Vodafone and Movistar in Spain, etc.

Just before finishing the survey, a final section, more brief than the three previous, asked some questions about friendship. For example: *To what extent do you agree/disagree with the following statements about friendship: You cannot live without friends; It's hard to find true friends; I take into account the opinions of my friends when making a decision; My friends help me to become a better person; Social media sites enable people to make new friends; Social media sites allow me to stay in touch with my friends.*

Respondents were also asked which forms of social media sites they use more often, and for the number of friends they have on those channels. Beyond the Internet, they also had to say how many friends from the “gang” they had (the kind of friends one goes out with, play sports together, have a pizza together or just have fun together). And finally, they were asked how many “true friends” they thought they had (best friends one shares everything with).

Just before ending the questionnaire, four final questions regarding each respondent’s profile: level of education, current occupation, who they were living with and country of residence.

3. ONLINE PLATFORM

The survey was to be conducted by means of a computer-assisted Web interviewing (CAWI) procedure. Once the questionnaire was built, it was projected onto an online platform specifically tailored for survey-answering. Questions were placed on consecutive screens, to create an easy answering interface.

Then a link was produced, and the system was adjusted to allow researchers to see how interviews were coming in. The dashboard also had the capability of displaying graphs and showing percentages of the answers. This allowed researchers to constantly monitor the survey and

introduce adjustments if needed. For example, if many young people marked the field "Other" when being asked for the streaming services with which they watched TV series, it could be included as another answer of the list of operators displayed in each country.

Images of titles of movies, TV series and books were introduced, as it has already been mentioned, to create a more inviting and attractive interface. However, beyond these images, colors and pictures were kept to a minimum, to avoid flooding the screen with visual resources that may distract respondents from each question.

4. SURVEY METHODOLOGY

After the questionnaire was completed, tested and built into the online software, the sample was designed. The target audience was young people between 18 and 29 years old.

Two sets of people would be interviewed: the general population and the young adults who had attended the 2016 World Youth Day in Krakow.

4.1. Survey to youths from the general population

What movies do young people in the Western world prefer watching? How many hours do they devote to reading? In order to answer these and other wide questions, a well-adjusted sample had to be designed.

Young adults to be interviewed had to be representative of the population of their age in each country surveyed, while being anonymous and completely random in order to have statistical validity. At least 400 representative young people had to be interviewed in each country to have a sample big enough to later draw conclusions and conduct a scientifically fair study.

Several quotas were designed according to the distribution of the population in each surveyed country. The factors for weighing up the quota sampling were sex, age and geographical area of residence.

The age factor was particularly relevant. In order to have a representative sample from three segments of age—from 18 to 19 years old, from 20 to 24 years old and from 28 to 29 years old—further breakdowns and quotas were established. This division was also important because preferences among those segments of population could greatly vary.

The sampling error was $\pm 1.7\%$ for the whole sample ($n = 3600$), and $\pm 5\%$ for each country ($n = 400$), for a 95.5% level of confidence (two sigma) and in the most unfavorable hypothesis of $P = Q = 0.5$.

The duration of the interview ranged from 12 to 15 minutes, approximately, and interviews were conducted between May and June 2018.

Respondents were randomly selected from an international panel, according to the designed quotas explained above. They had rewards for answering the survey.

Spain was the first country where the fieldwork was carried out. Then questionnaires were launched to the rest of the countries selected. The whole fieldwork was completed in a month and a half.

4.2. *Survey to Catholic youths*

In addition to the survey on the youths from the general population, a second fieldwork of committed Catholics was implemented. In this case, neither quotas nor randomly selection samples were in place. Out of an available database of more than 5000 young people who had attended 2016 World Youth Day in Krakow, 737 gave a complete answer.

Respondents came from a wide geographical range; specifically, from 47 countries: Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Croatia, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, France, Germany, Guatemala, Honduras, Indonesia, Ireland, Italy, Lebanon, Macedonia, Malaysia, Malta, Mexico, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Netherlands, Panama, Paraguay, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Saudi Arabia, Saint Lucia, Singapore, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom (UK), United States (US), Uruguay and Venezuela.

Italy, France, Spain, Germany, Poland, Portugal, the US and the UK were the countries where more young people answered the interview.

Once again, respondents were sent the questionnaire in the language spoken by the majority of their country. Three out of ten interviewees were girls, and respondents tended to be younger than those interviewed for the general population.

For logistical reasons, only respondents coming from Europe were offered a specific reward: to be included in a raffle to win a trip to Rome to take part in the second phase of the study. This new phase would be a discussion forum about series, films and books in focus groups, aiming to get a better insight on the main stories preferred by young people in the Western world.

The margin of error for this survey, in the postulation of simple random sampling, would have been higher. Specifically, $\pm 3.6\%$ for the whole sample ($n = 737$).

The remaining variables (time to complete the interview, dates when interviews were conducted, etc.) were the same as the ones explained for the general population.

5. RESULTS OF THE SURVEY

Once the fieldwork was completed, consultants at the Research department downloaded all the data and started processing and analyzing.

Thousands of pieces of data emerged showing fascinating patterns about audiovisual and reading preferences. Below are presented the main findings, as well the most significant conclusions drawn by the vast-reaching research conducted. These were presented in an international conference in Rome in November 2018.

A deeper discussion of the results, through cross analyzing some of the variables and looking for further understanding of the reading and watching behavior of young people is covered in another chapter of this book. That chapter shows the general outlook of the whole research and its educative aim. Here my task is a general description of the results and some more evident conclusions.

5.1. TV series

Researchers knew beforehand that TV series were important among the target group. However, data from the study shows even stronger consumption figures than expected.

The fact that 72 % of youths from the general population watch TV series several times per week was remarkable. Only one in ten youths (12 %) did not watch series monthly or more frequently. These figures reveal how widespread the entertainment audiovisual industry audience is and how influencing its content outcomes can be in cultural terms.

In the country analysis, US respondents watched TV series more often with 38 % watching every day. From that group of young people who watch series every day, Americans displayed again the highest consumption with 86 % of participants watching TV series more than two hours a day (Figure 1).

Sitcoms emerge as the TV series genre most watched internationally, with two specific titles produced in America ranking on top: *The Big Bang Theory* and *Friends*. The most watched internationally is *Adventures/Thriller*, highlighting the success of productions such as *Stranger Things*, *Game of Thrones* and *Lost* (Figure 2).

In general terms, similar patterns in preference of titles can be seen worldwide. Both these patterns and the ability to view foreign productions reveal the extent to which young people are exposed to a globalized audiovisual culture.

A novelty, among the findings, is the fact that certain local titles, not produced in the traditionally largest markets, can also be exposed