

Editorial

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Recent research shows that the study of fiction books increases empathy, further contributing to the development of social relationships. Reading books helps us to understand ourselves and others better. As we become captivated by reading, we become more and more emotionally engaged in the lives of others, thus exercising a wide range of emotional manifestations and feelings in a safe area, ourselves not being affected. Fiction is otherwise processed at the level of the brain, compared to commercial messages, scientific articles, or articles in newspapers and magazines, producing a much stronger impression. For example, an article about how harmful alcohol is to our health only temporarily changes the reader’s perception of alcohol. Still, a novel about an alcoholic and the problems caused by alcohol consumption will make such strong impressions that it could permanently change the reader’s attitude towards that dependence. This is for the simple reason that we are much more willing to accept the assertions of some novel characters that we feel close to us by reading their life story than of some real people, which we do not know directly, such as an expert or a journalist who writes an article.

We are less and less affected by the problems that affect a mass of people, but we can be influenced to tears by a person’s sufferings, even if he is just a fictional character. Fiction develops empathy due to the reader’s immersion in the metaphor represented through that fiction; in other words, its transposition into the character, it’s as if all those things happen to him, it’s as if all those emotions, states, and feelings are his. The reader loses track of time and sometimes does not even notice what is happening around him.

Precisely this mental journey in another time and space, the identification with another character, facilitates the change of attitudes, beliefs, confidence in the reader. Fiction, perhaps more than any other category, represents a real treasure of knowledge and information, having a power that no other form of communication has. It has the role of making you penetrate someone else's mind to see how he thinks and what mental connections he makes. When you read a story, an event, you have to see the world through the perspective of the characters and observe how it interacts with its environment, a fact which can be an interesting experience. It is one thing to read a history book and another thing to read a historical fiction book. The latter will put you in the middle of the action and force you to interact with your contemporaries to live in that period, which will make you happy you understand it better. Thus, fiction is a kind of simulator of situations that helps us weigh many experiences and cause-effect relationships without having to live them on our own experience. Just as computer simulators can help us deal with complex problems, in the same way, books can help us understand the complexity of social life. Books will teach you to read reality correctly, said Mircea Horia Simionescu, and this should be the thought in our desire to prepare and develop for life.