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Bibliography. Book review

## *Love, Friendship and Storytelling. Talking with young people about the best-loved works of their generation*

Norberto González Gaitano, Gema Bellido Acevedo and  
Cecilia Galatolo

Published by EDUSC, Roma (2023), 268 pp

**M**ankind has always told stories “not only to entertain himself, but to understand himself.” This is the premise with which Norberto González Gaitano, professor of Public Opinion at the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross, introduces the volume *Love, Friendship, and Storytelling*. Every narrative contributes to the process of understanding the world, of searching for models and reference points to judge reality, which starts as early as childhood and is solidified in adolescence. The book by Norberto Gonzalez Gaitano, Gema Bellido, and Cecilia Galatolo, published by EDUSC, is the fruit of

a research project of the Pontifical University of the Holy Cross that involved several focus groups of young people between the ages 18 and 35, who were called to profoundly analyze literary works, films, and TV series. The works examined are: the novel *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone*, the films *The Chronicles of Narnia* and *Titanic*, and the TV series *Thirteen Reasons Why* and *The Big Bang Theory*.

In his introductory essay, González Gaitano offers a good outline of the importance of engaging with stories, which, for philosopher Alasdair McIntyre, are how we ourselves conceive our lives. We perceive our existence as a narrative and therefore the form of storytelling is also how we can better understand and interpret the actions of others. PUSC’s research began with a discussion of the classics, which resulted in the publication of *Educating Young People through the Classics: Love, Friendship and Storytelling*. This second stage can be seen as its natural continuation. “No story is ever neutral,” González Gaitano reminds us, but every narrative can be educational. Through the verisimilitude of characters and their actions, we are able to enter into that “voluntary suspension of disbelief” that leads to full immersion in the world of fiction. The Greeks were well-aware of the educational role of theater –as are producers of films and TV series made for the general public today. While it is true that listening to a good story does not automatically make us better, the author concludes, it is undeniable that it can inspire us and push us to do good deeds.

The first TV series analyzed is quite problematic, regarding the impact on young viewers, as Gema Bellido asserts in her essay. *Thirteen Reasons Why* –produced by Netflix and released in 2017– is centered on the suicide of a 17-year-old girl. *Thirteen Reasons Why* saw enormous success upon its release, but stirred up just as much controversy mainly because of the way in which the sensitive topic was handled. In 2019, after the release of research linking the series’ online airing to a 15% increase in suicides in the 10-19 age group in the

United States<sup>1</sup>, Netflix had decided to remove the protagonist's crude suicide scene, but in the meantime *Thirteen Reasons Why* went on for three more seasons. Within the focus group, which was held in September 2021 –see the video summary of these days here– the discussion mainly addressed the issues of group acceptance, the role of school, and communication difficulties, with a focus on issues surrounding bullying. The series was in some respects considered realistic, especially with regard to the dynamics of peer relationships and the role adults play in their lives, which is rather irrelevant, when not downright negative. In any case, this does not have any relevant impact on the protagonists' actions. According to the young people interviewed –and this is a point that will need to be explored further, due to its educational implications–, this role is very similar to what can be found in normal parent-child relationships.

Bellido also examines the comedy series *The Big Bang Theory*, highlighting the influence of media narratives on perceptions of gender roles, professional roles, gender-based violence, and views of ethnic minorities.

Focused on a novel and three films, on the other hand, is Cecilia Galatolo's essay, analyzing J. K. Rowling's book *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* and the films *Titanic* and *The Chronicles of Narnia*. She offers some very interesting considerations regarding the change in the perception of romantic relationships. The author points out that *Titanic* can be considered the last film in which a "romantic" conception of love prevails, where the relationship of the couple prevails over individualism. This is not the case in other later films, like *La La Land* and *Me Before You*, where in the end, individualistic mentalities prevail, and the love between the two has no influence in the protagonists' choices. The purpose of the analysis on the novel and the films is twofold, as the author explains in the introduction to her essay. The first is to understand, through focus groups and questionnaires, whether the young people surveyed are able to grasp the messages these stories communicate and whether they identify the values that are conveyed within such narratives. A second purpose is to understand how to structure a possible activity designed for young people and based on a book, film, or TV series. With a focus on the impact such stories can have on judgments and behavior, this work is as necessary as ever and is quite promising in terms of the results it will produce.

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<sup>1</sup> See Pearce, M., García, L., Abbas, A *et al.* (2022). Association Between Physical Activity and Risk of Depression: A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis. *JAMA Psychiatry*, 79(6), 550-559. <https://www.doi.org/10.1001/jamapsychiatry.2022.0609>.