I’m really interested in literature. No wonder I spend a lot of time reading not only literature but also about literature. That’s how I came across an article on BBC website written by Hugh Montgomery. It was titled “Can reading really improve your mental health?”

The article was based upon a discussion between book authors held during the Hay Festival whose main goal is to bring readers and writers together. During this discussion the authors in unison stated that reading books can be really beneficial to our mental health. They backed their opinion up with arguments and examples.

First of all, reading can be understood as a form of escapism. We all know the feeling when we are so gripped by a book that we cannot think about nothing else – and it was the case with Alex Wheatle, one of the authors who took part in the discussion. He mentioned his previous experiences; as a child he was brought up in a brutal home and only while reading a book could he feel calmed.

What’s also mentioned in the article is the way that books are written – the narrative is organised as a sequence of logical assumptions. That’s exactly why a novel can bring order to disordered minds helping to organise a person’s own thoughts.

Books always bring up some issues as it is nearly impossible to write about nothing. While reading novels people, especially the younger readers as mentioned in the article, can see how fictional characters deal with problems. Maybe the same problems that readers have to tackle – no wonder reading can help us solve our own problems and find solace.

Worth mentioning is also re-reading favourite novels as it can be one of the kinds of bibliotherapy. When we read the same book after few years we tend to spot different details, pay attention to different issues brought up in the book. That particular fact leads us to conclusion that re-reading is a great way to get to know ourselves better and see how we changed as the time flew.

In the article a few paragraphs are devoted to the impact that writing can have on a person’s wellbeing. The authors in agreement stated that it is hard to say whether writing itself is as beneficial as reading books. It is because writing is a very specific activity – it consumes a lot of time and it is based mainly on isolating from others. On the contrary, the best thing for an author to get is feedback from their reader as the writer doesn’t directly see the impact his book had on the reader. But knowing he managed to shed light on the surrounding world and simply help somebody out is the best thing for his wellbeing.

by Patrycja Paszenda

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