

## 5 Polish readers of Spanish American prose

### 1 Readers of literary translations

Empirical investigations concerning readers of literary translations are sparse. Among the Polish studies of that type, it is worth mentioning *Konotacja obcości w przekładzie* [The Connotation of Strangeness in Translation] by Roman Lewicki (1993), in which he analysed surveys regarding the perception and acceptance of elements recognised as indicators of strangeness in a translated text. Even after the cultural turn in translation studies, empirical research on the readers of translations has hardly been conducted despite the fact that the reception of translation and the context of translation attracted many scholars' attention.

Authors of studies dedicated to the reception of literature and problems of the reception of translation generally agreed that critical texts, predominantly reviews, were the most important and almost the only evidence of reception (see e.g. Brown 1994). Reviews in daily press or popular weeklies were recognised, because of their hasted character, as close to readers' common behaviours, and consequently, reliable sources in research on the reception of literature realised within a non-professional distribution (Płachecki 1982:173). Reviews are said to considerably influence and shape readers' expectations and interpretative attitudes. However, media research urges us to be cautious in accepting such judgements. The analyses of readership conducted in the 1970s, the period that is from the perspective of my work especially important because of the huge number of Spanish American works and their critical texts, prove that the real scope of influence of reviews was not as broad as the authors of theoretical-literary studies seemed to suggest.

Reviews of literary works reach readers first of all through literary periodicals. During the period of the Polish People's Republic, the circulation of single issues of the most popular literary periodicals *Literatura* and *Życie Literackie* amounted to one hundred thousand copies (Kupis 1975:71). Their actual range could have been even bigger because of the possibility of the so-called multi-reception – availability in libraries. Yet, this does not change the fact that in those days, readers of particular literary studies constituted less than 1.2 % of the whole population over fourteen years of age as for *Literatura* and 2 % – *Życie Literackie* (Bajka 1976:300). This furthermore means that during the period when literary and cultural press was centralised to a great extent and the number of titles was limited, the public of fiction was much bigger than the

public of particular literary periodicals.<sup>669</sup> Despite the enormous circulations the influence of reviews published in daily press was slight: research shows that only a small number of people read them... (Pisarek 1980:13). Facing these data, we should not overestimate the real impact of literary criticism on the readers of fiction.

It is difficult to state explicitly what the situation looks like today although research on readership is regularly conducted. The Polish Research on Readership project, run since 1998 by MillwardBrown SMG/KRC following the order of the consortium of the Polish biggest press editors, collects data about the number and characteristics of readers of particular press titles. They are meant to help plan publishing strategies and advertising campaigns in Poland.<sup>670</sup> Therefore, this research does not embrace niche or non-profit titles – those that are not interesting from a purely commercial point of view. There is not a single literary paper among 133 titles included on the lists of most popular weeklies, biweeklies and monthlies. Consequently, we cannot determine the scope of literary press today. Since many literary titles exert influence only locally, and there is no single paper that is read by those who regard themselves as intellectuals, we can conclude that the impact range of literary press – and criticism – has now become even smaller than in the 1970s.

Considering that most reviews are published in literary papers, they are meant for specific receivers – interested not only in literature but also in experts' opinions about literary works. Furthermore, this is related to the selection of works to be reviewed (Wojciechowski 1983:96). Thus, reviews of literary works appear to be messages written by experts directed to their colleagues or to readers whose knowledge of literature is profound. Accordingly, they can be regarded as essential testimonies of reception but only the kind of reception that occurs in circles professionally dealing with literature or in groups of readers making deliberate reading choices.

In this context, research on the reception of translation should include real readers if it is to give a complete picture and to describe readers' behaviours, motivations for choosing their readings and, possibly, the effects of their choices. Hence, in my opinion, proper empirical investigations should be undertaken since, as Florian Znaniecki wrote, "the fundamental material concerning some

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669 According to the data of 1992, the readers of highly artistic prose constituted 11 % of the whole population (Straus, Wolf 1996:82).

670 [http://www.millwardbrown.com/Locations/Poland/Uslugi/Badania\\_Syndykatowe/PBC\\_Polskie\\_Badania\\_Czytelnictwa.aspx](http://www.millwardbrown.com/Locations/Poland/Uslugi/Badania_Syndykatowe/PBC_Polskie_Badania_Czytelnictwa.aspx), 8.10.2010.

human activity is the experience of the one who undertakes it.” Otherwise, we will have to rely on working out hypotheses concerning the real reader on the basis of critical texts; hypotheses that will be difficult to verify because they will be based on second-hand materials.

## 2 Readership survey research

The tradition of readership survey research in Poland dates back to the last decade of the 19th century (Wojciechowski 2000:54). During the interwar period, a number of random survey research was conducted but due to the yet imperfect methodology the investigations were rather attempts in this field and are not reliable sources today. After World War II, readership survey research was initiated as early as in 1945. It was the Institute of the Book and Readership founded at the National Library that has systematically conducted surveys since 1955 (op. cit., p. 62). It has investigated the variously understood relationships between reader and book. They are subject matters of research undertaken by scholars interested in culture since a book is traditionally regarded as an important means for spreading, transmitting and conserving values of a supra-individual character (Straus 1993:7). Consequently,

[...] an appropriate level of citizens' literacy determines the possibilities of development of each society. In turn, the essence of literacy lies in its continuous maintenance and even in its increase through frequent reading practices, and especially reading books. Therefore, the state of literacy has far-reaching social and economic effects (Straus, Wolf, 1998:79).

The significance of literary messages for shaping patterns and systems of values is treated as obvious (Ankudowicz 1974:15). Book reading is thought to be the most important form of cultural activity or even its indicator since “sociological research has shown that book readers are more active receivers of other forms of information transfer” (Koziański 1987:108). Moreover, in social awareness one can see a fixed opinion that books play important roles in culture. The results of the survey research conducted in 1984 by the Press Research Centre, cited by Grażyna Straus (1993:9), testified to the fact that Poles were convinced of the high rank of the transmission through books and that reading a big number of books was “an obligation of a cultured person.” This form of activity was regarded as more important than watching television, reading papers, listening to the radio or music, going to the theatre and cinema. The attitude towards book reading considerably changed at the threshold of the 1990s. The 1992 survey of readership showed that it had stopped functioning in “the common awareness as a cultural norm indicating a certain obligation” (Straus, Wolf, 1996:137). A majority

of the respondents wrote that they had read books because they “liked” them and not because they “had to” or “should read.”

One should also consider the numerous aspects of the term “book” that can be defined as a set of contents, preserved in a text, material elements and a social function, the latter causing that the contents influence mental and social life (Wojciechowski 2000:20). In common understanding, a book can be simply a document of at least 64 pages that is designed to be distributed. The term “book” is quite broad and not limited to works of an artistic character. Reading books should not be identified with reading literature, and book rankings made according to various criteria embrace works of a popular scientific nature, encyclopaedias, manuals, etc. The reading public includes those who read at least six books a year (Wojciechowski 2000:20).

Scholars describe reading as “a special form of behaviour which consists in creative participation in the written form of social communication” (Wojciechowski 2000:17), while readership is “a social process consisting in meeting aesthetic, intellectual, scientific, informative and entertainment needs through absorbing the achievements of people’s thoughts, emotions and knowledge that is transmitted in a written form” (Skwarnicki 1960:243). Therefore, reading books is not regarded as a passive – only receptive – action, but as an act of participation in the processes of communication taking place in the society. This attitude towards readership and the role of books direct investigations in this area to capture the significance of books in the broadly understood circulation of culture. These investigations lead to describing the processes of reception of written texts, readers’ behaviours, social functions of texts and their social range as well as channels of circulation (Wojciechowski 2000:35). Sometimes books and their functioning are not objects of scholars’ interests, but appear in the context of “research on the structure of activities undertaken in free time and cultural life of various social categories, and in reflections on the problems of methodology of different branches of the humanities” (Ankudowicz 1978:73).

In the post-war period, readership survey research focused on the size and social diversity of the reading public – differentiating those characteristics that helped scholars see the differences between the reading public and other audiences of culture – on the distribution of books and the sources of distribution; a general description of the main directions of readers’ choices was also provided (Ankudowicz 1978:74–75). These investigations followed the sociological and pedagogical perspective. On the one hand, scholars tried to capture and describe certain processes that happened in the whole society, for instance the percentage of Poles regularly reading books, the percentage of Poles who had access to books as well as the classes or social groups to which readers belonged, etc.

On the other hand, there were specific surveys, e.g. concerning the structure of readership in small towns on the basis of the number of loans from local libraries. The objectives of these investigations were achieved through the methodology taken from social sciences and adopted to readership surveys. The investigations did not consider the psychological, communicative and semiotic point of view (Wojciechowski 2000:36), and the theoretical-literary perspective was hardly taken into account. An example of the last approach was the characterisation of the social requirements of interpreting a literary work.<sup>671</sup> Attempts of portraying readers choosing a concrete genre or a given writer were sporadic. Thus, trying to conduct survey research focused on readers one could not refer to any evidenced methodological pattern since none has been worked out.

### 3 Searching for the reader of Spanish American prose

My survey research did not aim at determining the percentage of readers of Spanish American prose among the reading audience. Firstly, such research would be, after all, an endeavour requiring a powerful research machine and using the tools of statistical analysis, and secondly, its results would be possible to evaluate only on the basis of the circulation of books and the number of loans from libraries, at least referring to the 1970s, and thirdly, the obtained results would not be satisfying. According to the readership surveys conducted on a random representative sample of Polish respondents aged 15 and over, 38 % of the respondents answered that they had read at least one book a year.<sup>672</sup> Out of them, the majority (65 %) declared that they preferred fiction. Yet, we should remember that this number included first of all popular fiction, and not necessarily highly artistically valued fiction. Taking that into account, we should assume that this statistical sample embraced only individuals that had read Spanish American prose. In my view, an interesting question is not how many Poles read Spanish American prose, but who its readers are, why they read it, what they look for in it and what contents they absorb. Therefore, I attempted to create a portrait of a Polish receiver of Spanish American prose. This approach made me try to solve two fundamental problems: how to reach these receivers and which research tools to use. Moreover, I did not want to limit my research to the present times because my aim was to describe the post-war reception of Spanish

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671 See Wojciechowski, *Funkcje krytyki literackiej* [Functions of Literary Criticism], Kraków 1983.

672 <http://ksiazki.wp.pl/tytul,55-lat-badania-czytelnictwa,wid,16095,wiadomosc.html>, 5.11.2010.

American prose. Naturally, my survey research could not embrace 60 years. Therefore, I decided to focus on the 1970s and 80s, the period of the boom. This led to another methodological problem: how to examine the problems of readership that occurred over 30 years ago?

The most natural place where one can meet readers of fiction seems to be public libraries, which according to the library act of 27 June 1997 “serve to meet the educational, cultural and informative needs of the society and participate in spreading knowledge and culture.”<sup>673</sup> However, we should remember that in the new century, the structure of library audiences has considerably changed. The data obtained in 2002 show that out of 7,508,600 registered readers in public libraries, 73 % were school pupils, students and adults attending various kind of courses (Wołosz 2004). This also concerned district towns since in smaller centres a number of branches affiliated to universities (also the non-public ones) were opened, and their students borrowed books from local libraries. “We are dealing with a new kind of library audience, in Western countries defined as *general public*” – noted Jadwiga Kołodziejska (1999) from the Book and Readership Institute of the National Library.<sup>674</sup> Accordingly, the structure of collections in these centres has gradually changed: fiction titles are bought to a smaller extent, while non-fiction titles, professional and scientific literature as well as popular science to a greater extent. This does not change the fact that fiction titles continue to be the majority of collections in public libraries and that they draw most users.<sup>675</sup> The data published by libraries show that among adult readers there are people of different age groups and that these groups are similar as regards their

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673 Journal of Laws of 1997, no. 85 item 539; <http://lex.pl/serwis/du/1997/0539.htm>, 15.10.2010.

674 <http://www.oss.wroc.pl/biuletyn/ebib02/powiat.html>, 16.10.2010.

675 For instance, in 2003, in the Provincial Library in Olsztyn, the loans of fiction titles for adults constituted 46 % of all loans, while popular science – 25 % (the remaining 29 % constituted fiction for children). “Readers of public libraries prefer fiction written by both Polish and foreign authors” can be read on the website of this library ([http://www.wbp.olsztyn.pl/bwm/1-2\\_05-ie/5.htm](http://www.wbp.olsztyn.pl/bwm/1-2_05-ie/5.htm), 15.10.2010). In 2005, in the Communal Public Library in Opatów, the loans of fiction constituted 53 %, and popular science – 17.1 % (<http://www.biblioteka.opatow.internetdsl.pl/>, 15.10.2010). In 2009, in the Municipal Public Library of Szczecin, there were 69 % of loans of fiction for adults and 18 % of loans of popular science titles, considering that fiction for adults was 50 % of the whole collection, whereas popular science – 33 % ([http://www.mbp.szczecin.pl/index.php?modul=mbp&akcja=dokument&dokument\\_id=57](http://www.mbp.szczecin.pl/index.php?modul=mbp&akcja=dokument&dokument_id=57); 15.10.2010).

numbers of users.<sup>676</sup> We can conclude that the users are of different ages, culturally active and many a time interested in their intellectual growth.<sup>677</sup> If we consider that the number of the so-called sporadic receivers reading at the most six books a year amounts to 25 % of the society, and real readers who report to read at least seven books a year – 11 %, <sup>678</sup> public libraries seem to be places where a selected group of the reading public can be identified and examined, noting that “buying books and creating home libraries are not prevailing phenomena in our country” (Wojciechowski 2000:75). Despite the fact that bookstores sell most of their goods to individual customers, and only 30 % to libraries, books from libraries are used many times, while books from private collections only sporadically reach bigger numbers of readers (Wojciechowski 2000:74). This was confirmed by the results of the research “Social range of books in Poland in 2008” conducted by the National Library, according to which libraries are the chief sources of books for 40 % of all readers (Wolf 2009).<sup>679</sup> Accordingly, I took the view that I should conduct my research in public libraries.

#### 4 Research methodology

In Poland, it is interactive methods that are most frequently used in readership surveys. I have regarded a survey as the best technique to achieve my goals. Its advantages and disadvantages are universally known. The indirect character of survey research, i.e. the absence of researchers while collecting data, causes that respondents’ answers are not completely reliable since respondents tend to present themselves in the best possible light – admitting to read books and having some knowledge of literature is still considered as good manners. The anonymous character of this research to a certain extent prevents distortion while obtaining results.

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676 In the Provincial Library in Olsztyn, the structure of readers according to age groups was as follows: the 20–24 age group – 18 %, the 24–44 age group – 29 %, the 45–60 age group – 17 %, over 60 years of age – 10 %. Similar data are given by other libraries (see <http://bibliotekadzierzgon.bloog.pl/kat,393404,index.html?ticaid=6b100; siedlcembp.bip.e-zeto.com/public/getfile.php?id=90674>; 15.10.2010).

677 “Library public is not representative for the whole population – it can possibly represent its better educated and culturally active part, but it meets the requirement of diversity” – writes Wojciechowski (1983:54).

678 <http://www.kongreskultury.pl/title,pid,339.html>, 15.10.2010.

679 <http://52ksiazki.pl/2010/02/czytelnictwo-w-polsce-w-2008-r/>, 15.10.2010.

The impossibility of researchers' participation in distributing questionnaires causes that the success of surveys greatly depends on the librarians' good will and friendly attitude, whether they agree to distribute questionnaires, whether they encourage readers to fill them in and then prevent the questionnaires from being dispersed or destroyed.

Moreover, difficulties occur at the stage of constructing a questionnaire since it should meet several fundamental criteria. It cannot be too long since lengthiness generally discourages receivers. On the other hand, although a questionnaire must be concise, it should provide answers to problems that researchers are interested in. The language of questions must be comprehensible. Any professional jargon must be excluded. Although readers of fiction are generally characterised by a certain level of culture and above-average skills to use the Polish language, one cannot assume that they know the terms related to the theory of literature.

An important advantage of a survey is that being a standardised technique it can be used in large-scale research, conducted in different and distant places. Therefore, it allows researchers to ask all respondents the same questions and their answers are given in comparable conditions. Furthermore, a well-constructed questionnaire with precise instructions concerning its distribution and way of answering is relatively easy to be analysed because the obtained results are analysed with a standardised key.

Survey research aiming at examining readers of Spanish American prose was conducted between January and August 2010. Thus, it went beyond the time limits of the reception of this prose, being the subject of interest of the present work. Nevertheless, it is difficult to analyse readers' choices given five years ago. Readership surveys usually concern the present times. Yet, preferences concerning reading do not change every year, especially given the fact that the Polish reading audience was recognised as rather conservative (Gołębiewski 2002, vol.1, p. 52). Therefore, results obtained in questionnaires should not have differed radically if the surveys were carried out five years earlier.

The questionnaires were distributed in the following libraries: the Juliusz Słowacki Municipal Public Library in Tarnów, the Provincial Pedagogical Library in Rzeszów (branch in Sędziszów Małopolski), the Jan Wiktor District and Municipal Public Library in Bochnia, the Provincial Public Library in Kraków, the Podgórska Public Library, Branch No. 20 in Kraków, the Municipal and District Public Library in Dębica, the Municipal Public Library in Gdynia, the Library of the Institute of Romance Philology and the Library of the Institute of Polish Philology of the University of Wrocław.

The questionnaires included mostly closed-ended and partially open-ended questions. The latter appeared when the respondents had to indicate the given authors' names – whether they had already known them, or to indicate the titles of the works they had read. In these cases, respondents could add their own proposals. The aim of this strategy was to discern whether in the literary circulation there functioned other books or authors than those that were regarded as most popular on the basis of critical reception and data resulting from publishing policies.

In the specification, there were the usual questions about gender, age and education. There were no questions about profession, assuming that a possible correlation between the type of job performed and love of Spanish American literature was not essential.<sup>680</sup> As regards students, they were asked to give their study fields since the studies of the humanities or strict sciences could have had important influence on their choices of books.

Asking about the respondent's age, the standard divisions used in readership surveys were abandoned. From the perspective of my research goal, it was more important to ask in which period of life the respondents encountered Spanish American prose. It was also assumed that the survey concerned fiction for adults. Hence the first proposed age division concerned the 15–25 age group, i.e. teenagers and adult learners, those whose “choices of readings are to a large extent consistent with preferences” (Straus 1993:24). The readers of this age group who still shape their literary tastes are regarded as most vulnerable to influences of various sources of information about a book, both of an informal character, such as other people's opinions, and of an institutionalised character – schools, reviewers, etc. The second age group (26–40) embraced adults who many a time had stable literary preferences and who had not experienced the boom, i.e. had been too young to remember the fascination with Spanish American prose. Determining the next age division (41–60), I aimed to see those respondents who could have remembered and personally experienced the enchantment with this prose. Finally, the last age group included the oldest readers for whom the boom could not have been a generational experience.

The specification also included a question about the number of novels read in a year. This was to verify whether a given respondent reads, and how often,

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680 Here I refer to Wojciechowski's opinion (1983:61) based on his research concerning a similar topic, “the collected material does not allow me to make any conclusions as regards any possible dependence of readers' attitudes towards literary prose on professional conditions.”

fiction and not books in general, which is usually asked in general readership surveys. Moreover, this question was to verify the thesis, which was common and quite often repeated, that there had been some special group of readers – fans of only Spanish American prose.

The next questions concerned the knowledge, direct or from hearsay, of seventeen names of Spanish American authors and sixteen titles of novels that had been published in Poland in the last 50 years. They were to check which authors and titles functioned in the respondents' awareness and which they had read themselves. Thus, they were to verify the hierarchy of the popularity of Spanish American writers among Polish readers. Since the survey research was planned to be conducted in 2010, the list of authors included works published within the last five years so that the respondents had the possibility to show their knowledge of current publications.<sup>681</sup>

Another question – about the time when a given work was read – was to establish whether this prose still enjoyed popularity with Polish readers or whether reading it was rather a question of some trend that had been long gone. Moreover, I wanted to investigate the incentives for reading Spanish American prose.

The final set of questions was to help determine certain characteristics of people reading this prose. Therefore, the scope of their interests was thought-provoking. The questions about the knowledge of foreign languages as well as visits abroad and their aims were to answer whether lovers of Spanish American prose had any contacts with other cultures and whether they participated in any forms of intercultural exchange. Of significance was also to check whether their interests in Spanish American literature went hand in hand with their interests in other cultural expressions of this continent. The question about the regular reading of some paper was to throw light on the issue of the impact of literary criticism published in the press on readers' choices.

However, my survey research was not to focus on contemporary readers of Spanish American prose. Consequently, the questionnaire was divided into two parts. The second one was directed to the third age group, those between 41 and 60, i.e. those who could have remembered the boom and experienced the generational fascination with Spanish American literature. The dominant questions were the open-ended ones. The first one concerned the moment of the first contact with Spanish American prose. The second one was to show the most popular

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681 The research showed dependence of the readers' choices on the current offers of publications (Straus, Wolf 1996:89).

writer of this age group. The third one was to check whether reading this prose had a communal dimension or led to socialising, i.e. could have drawn groups of people to it. The next question was to examine whether in the 1970s and 80s, reading certain periodicals could have influenced readers' choices (as already mentioned, some periodicals regularly published reviews of the translated Spanish American works). The last two questions were to explain the problem of the motivation of the readers' choices and potential values drawn from the readings.

The second part of the survey was to enlarge and after a lapse of time verify the knowledge about the readers of the Spanish American prose of the boom, coming from other sources. Using additional sources and their analysis was to fulfil the postulate that survey research was not the only source of information on the topic it concerned because of the possible occurrence of distortions and low degree of exactness (Wojciechowski 1983:39).

In the circle of experts in Latin American studies, it was often repeated that in the late 1970s, several MA theses dedicated to the reception of this literature, focused on examining its readers, had been written at the University of Warsaw. Unfortunately, I did not manage to find such theses in the archives of the Faculty of Polish Studies and the Institute of Romance Philology. It is very likely that – if they existed – they were destroyed after the 25 years of mandatory retention. It is also possible that for some reason they were not taken to the archives. Therefore, I had no access to the results of research conducted during the boom, with one exception – the analyses carried out by Michał Boni and published in *Literatura*<sup>682</sup> and *Przegląd Humanistyczny*.<sup>683</sup> Consequently, his results constituted the fundamental comparative material for contemporary research. Another source was press mentions – unfortunately only a few – concerning readers and problems of reception, found not only in the critical texts.

## 5 Working hypotheses

A questionnaire used to solve a concrete research problem should be constructed in such a way that it would be possible to verify the assumed hypotheses on its basis (Wojciechowski 1983:37). My hypotheses concerning the behaviours and

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682 Boni, M., "Skąd ten szum o boom?", *Literatura* 1976, no. 31, p. 10.

683 Boni, M., "Literatura iberoamerykańska w kulturze czytelniczej studentów," *Przegląd Humanistyczny* 1977, no. 12, pp. 143–159.

preferences of Polish readers of Spanish American prose, formulated on the basis of conclusions flowing from the analyses of critical texts about this literature and articles placed in encyclopaedias and literary lexicons, are as follows:

1. The most popular Spanish American writers in Poland include Cortázar, García Márquez, Fuentes, Vargas Llosa and Allende. The “old masters,” that is the authors associated with the boom, are more appreciated and better known by Polish readers than younger writers.
2. The most frequently read novels are *Hopscotch* and *One Hundred Years of Solitude*.
3. The readers of Spanish American prose are open to the world, participate in various forms of intercultural exchange and above all, are interested in the cultures of Latin America.
4. It is a public interested in literature, having elaborated tastes and precise preferences, recruiting mainly from the generation that personally experienced the boom, i.e. those aged 41 – 60.
5. This group’s preferences have chiefly been influenced by the preferences of their peers and regular contacts with certain periodicals.
6. What readers seek most in Spanish American prose is exoticism, eroticism, artistic impressions and analogies to the political situation in Poland.

## 6 The analysis of the data

In this section I am going to discuss the results of the survey research. Altogether 229<sup>684</sup> questionnaires filled in by those who declared that they had read at least one book written by a Latin American author were analysed. Most of the respondents were women, which to a certain extent corresponded to the results of the national readership surveys: increasingly more Polish women than men read books.<sup>685</sup> In my research, there was an overwhelming majority of female readers. Yet, it would be too hasty to claim that mostly women read Spanish

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684 A similar number of questionnaires (254) was analysed by Wojciechowski (*Funkcje prozy literackiej*, Kraków 1983).

685 “A certain feminisation of readers can be recognised as their characteristic seen in the survey research conducted in 2000–2008, but only in 2008, the difference between female and male readers increased considerably (earlier it oscillated ca. 10 points);” (Wolf, “Współczesny czytelnik w świetle badań Biblioteki Narodowej,” in: *Poradnik bibliotekarza* 2010, no. 4, p. 3.)

American prose in Poland. Perhaps women were more eager to complete the questionnaires.

It seemed that the most transparent way to order the material was to divide it into the respondents' age groups. Consequently, I analysed the groups of the youngest readers, the middle-aged ones and the old, and finally, the 41–60 age group, i.e. those who could have experienced the boom of Spanish American prose as secondary school or university students.

### 6.1 The youngest readers (15–25)

In my investigations, this age group was over-represented which resulted from the fact that beside public libraries the questionnaires were distributed in the libraries of the Institute of Romance Philology and the Institute of Polish Philology of the University of Wrocław and filled in mostly by students. My decision was justified by the fact that in the mid-1970s, Boni conducted similar research among students (Polish literature and computer science students) in Warsaw. Thus, I thought it would be interesting to juxtapose the behaviours of similar readers' circles over the years. Moreover, students studying foreign languages were especially interesting as a group that theoretically read the biggest number of books and seemed to be the most open circle to read novelties or even avant-garde literature.

Students dominated in this group not only because of the distribution of the questionnaires at the University of Wrocław, but also because they prevailed in this age group as readers of Spanish American prose. A detailed distribution of readers by their field of study and other forms of education goes as follows:

• Polish philology students	<b>40</b>
• Spanish philology students	<b>20</b>
• students enrolled in other philology programmes	<b>11</b>
• students of other humanities programmes	<b>15</b>
• students of non-humanities programmes	<b>7</b>
• secondary school students	<b>4</b>
• university alumni	<b>2</b>
• vocational school students	<b>1</b>

The surveyed students, especially those pursuing the humanities, generally read a lot of books, including fiction (although one female pedagogy student admitted that she had not read novels at all, while another art history student – that she read one novel a year). A detailed juxtaposition was as follows:

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|---|---------------------------|
| • Polish philology students                       | read ca. 40 novels a year |
| • Spanish philology students                      | ca. 10 – 11 novels a year |
| • students enrolled in other philology programmes | ca. 21 novels a year      |
| • students of other humanities programmes         | ca. 30 novels a year      |
| • students of non-humanities programmes           | ca. 38 novels a year      |
| • secondary school students                       | ca. 6 novels a year       |
| • university alumni                               | ca. 8 novels a year       |
| • vocational school students                      | 2–4 novels a year         |

One of the objectives of the survey was to select the most known and popular Spanish American writer. The respondents were asked to write whether they had ever read some book of the listed authors or whether they had only heard of him/her. Seventeen writers were listed in the questionnaire. They included the biggest stars of the boom: the dead ones (Carpentier, Cortázar, Borges) and the living (García Márquez, Vargas Llosa, Fuentes), those who were popular in the 1970s and 80s and appreciated for the artistic values of their prose (Asturias, Sábato, Rulfo, Donoso, Lezama Lima, Poniatowska, Roa Bastos, Puig), Allende who had the biggest number of editions in the Third Polish Republic among the writers who did not belong to the boom, as well as two writers of the younger generation whose books were published in the last several years (Jaime Bayly, Fernando Vallejo). The list was not treated as complete, the respondents were asked to write new names according to their preferences. Tab. 13 presents the results.

In this age group, the most popular writer turned out to be García Márquez. Eighty-two students declared that they had read at least one of his books, out of the remaining 18, fifteen had heard of him. The second most popular writer was Cortázar, whose prose was read by 57 respondents, and his name was known to other 17. High positions were occupied by Borges (40 read his books and 27 heard of him) and Vargas Llosa (39 declared that they had read his works and 17 had heard of him<sup>686</sup>). Rulfo and Sábato occurred to be very popular as well. They were mentioned by 19 students. However, most of these students studied Spanish and might have been obliged to read this literature. Rulfo was heard of by other 14 respondents, Sábato – 16. A similar score was achieved by Fuentes (16 people read his works and as many as 29 heard of

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686 The survey had been conducted before the Peruvian writer received a Nobel Prize. Today almost all respondents could have known his name.

Tab. 13: The numbers concerning the 15–25 age group who read some book of the listed authors or only heard of him/her.

	Polish philology students (40)		Spanish philology students (20)		other philology students (11)		other humanities students (15)		students of other fields (7)		the rest (7)		total (100)	
	heard of	read	heard of	read	heard of	read	heard of	read	heard of	read	heard of	read	heard of	read
Gabriel García Márquez	8	30	3	17	1	9	1	15	1	5	1	6	15	82
Julio Cortázar	9	28	3	17	2	1	1	9	1	2	1	1	17	57
Jorge Luis Borges	17	11	2	18	4	1	1	8	3	2	1	1	27	40
Mario Vargas Llosa	7	13	6	13	1	1	2	8	2	2	1	2	17	39
Juan Rulfo	6	2	2	13	2	3	2	2	1	2	2	2	14	19
Ernesto Sábato	8	5	4	9	1	3	2	1	1	1	1	1	16	19
Isabel Allende	8	11	5	5	1	6	1	1	2	2	1	1	20	18
Carlos Fuentes	12	4	10	8	1	5	2	2	1	2	1	1	29	16
Alejo Carpentier	11	1	8	8	2	3	1	1	1	1	1	1	25	12
José Lezama Lima	8	5	4	2	2	5	1	1	1	1	2	2	20	8
Fernando Vallejo	5	3	6	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	14	6
José Donoso	1	2	6	2	1	3	1	1	1	1	1	1	12	5
Elena Poniatowska	8	1	7	1	1	1	3	1	1	1	1	1	20	5
Miguel Ángel Asturias	8	2	9	1	3	3	3	1	1	1	1	1	24	4
Augusto Roa Bastos	4	1	5	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	11	3
Jaime Bayly	4	1	5	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	13	2
Manuel Puig	2	1	4	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	8	2

him). Carpentier's works enjoyed a small interest as he had been known only by 12, while 25 had heard of him. Other writers whose names were related to the boom in Poland (Asturias, Donoso, Lezama Lima, Poniatowska, Roa Bastos) or whose works were published right after the boom (Puig) were read by fewer readers although more students – up to twenty – declared that they had heard of them. A big surprise was that a relatively small number (18) admitted having read Allende's prose, although 30 declared that they had known her. Only single readers admitted having read the authors of the younger generation who had appeared on the Polish publishing market in the third millennium.

The respondents added a few new names to the list. Those were writers associated with the boom: Quiroga, Benedetti and Arguedas as well as the Columbian Gamboa, whose two novels were published by Muza. Moreover, three Spanish American poets were added: Gabriela Mistral, Pablo Neruda and Octavio Paz, the last two were marked as "heard of." A series of Spanish writers were added, e.g. Cervantes<sup>687</sup> and Valle Inclán. However, most of them were contemporary authors who enjoyed great popularity in Poland, like Carlos Ruiz Zafón (mentioned three times), Arturo Pérez Reverte (mentioned twice), Eduardo Mendoza, as well as the writers whose works were published by Muza in the "Salsa" series: de Posadas, José Carlos Somoza and Marina Mayoral.

In the discussed age group, almost all of the Spanish literature students (18) declared that they had read works of more than two Spanish American writers, and also:

• Polish philology students	19
• students of other philology programmes	4
• students of other humanities programmes	10
• students studying other fields	2
• the rest	2
Total:	37

Another question in the questionnaire concerned the most known titles of Spanish American prose. At the same time, it was a control question to a certain extent verifying the reliability of respondents – whether they did not try to

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687 Of interest is that this name was added by a woman who defined herself as a Spanish philology student.

present themselves as those who had read more books – and their knowledge about this literature. Their answers were to be confronted with their answers to the previous questions, i.e. to control the respondents who declared that they had read some book and also indicated that they had read the prose of the author of the marked book.

The most popular work turned out to be *One Hundred Years of Solitude* – as many as 76 respondents read it, and the second *Hopscotch* (49). Other titles were less popular: *Memories of My Melancholy Whores* by García Márquez – 26, *The House of the Spirits* Allende – 21, *The Time of the Hero* by Vargas Llosa – 18, *The Feast of the Goat* by the same author, and *Pedro Páramo* by Rulfo – each 12 answers (the last title was read mostly by Spanish philology students). The remaining titles were marked by fewer than 10 readers. Tab. 14 illustrates the results.

The respondents added a number of García Márquez's works, first of all *Love in the Time of Cholera* (17 times), *Of Love and Other Demons* (7 times), *The General in His Labyrinth* (twice) and *The Incredible and Sad Tale of Innocent Eréndira and Her Heartless Grandmother* (once). They also referred to Cortázar's works: *A Manual for Manuel* (3 times), *Short Stories* (4 times), *62: A Model Kit* and *Around the Day in Eighty Worlds* (each once). Two respondents mentioned Vargas Llosa's *The Bad Girl* (*Travesuras de la niña mala*), and one respondent – *Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter*. Two respondents added *Eva Luna* by Allende, and one – *The Infinite Plan* (*El plan infinito*) by the same authoress. *The Burning Plain and Other Stories* by Rulfo, *Amor mundo* by Arguedas and *The Years with Laura Díaz* by Fuentes were mentioned once. There were also works of Spanish writers: two novels by Mendoza (*La verdad sobre el caso Savolta* and *La aventura del tocador de señoras*), two by Pérez-Reverte (*The Queen of the South* and *The Club Dumas*), three – by Somoza (*La caja de marfil* – twice, as well as – *The Art of Murder – Clara y la penumbra*, *The Athenian Murders – La caverna de las ideas*), four times: *The Shadow of the Wind* (*La sombra del viento*) by Ruiz Zafón, and *La Regenta* by the 19th century classic Clarín.

The data show unambiguously that the position of García Márquez among the youngest readers of Spanish American prose was indisputable. Some respondents marked the Columbian writer as the only author whose works they had read. His works were mentioned most frequently. His old and latest works were known. The last remark also referred to Vargas Llosa's works although he seemed to be less popular than García Márquez.

Tab. 14: The numbers concerning the 15–25 age group who read the listed titles.

	Polish philology students (40)	Spanish philology students (20)	other philology students (11)	other humanities students (15)	other fields students (7)	the rest (7)	total (100)
<i>One Hundred Years of Solitude</i>	33	14	7	13	5	4	76
<i>Hopscotch</i>	26	12	2	9			49
<i>Memories of My Melancholy Whores</i>	13	5	2	4	2		26
<i>The House of the Spirits</i>	8	3	3	4	3		21
<i>The Time of the Hero</i>	3	10		4	1		18
<i>Pedro Páramo</i>	4	9	2	1			12
<i>The Feast of the Goat</i>	4	4	2	1	1		12
<i>The Book of Sand</i>	1	4	1	2	1		9
<i>The Kingdom of This World</i>	2	2	1	1			6
<i>On Heroes and Tombs</i>		6					6
<i>Rosario Tijeras</i>		4		2			6
<i>Son of Man</i>	1	1	1	1	1		5
<i>Our Lady of the Assassins</i>	1	1					2
<i>The Obscene Bird of Night</i>	1					1	2
<i>Heartbreak Tango</i>	1		1				2
<i>Paradiso</i>	1				1		2

The articles published in the press suggested that Spanish American prose was still popular among teenagers although this could not be confirmed by the results of the questionnaires – their number was too small. A teacher of Polish from one of the grammar schools in Warsaw referring to the annual survey entitled “What do we read?” claimed that the most popular authors were Coelho, Wharton and Latin American writers.<sup>688</sup> Other secondary school teachers thought that the knowledge of Latin American prose added prestige in a peer group, “It is enough to read *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Márquez and *Hopscotch* by Cortázar. Social success is surely guaranteed.”<sup>689</sup>

The questionnaires filled in by this age group did not show any serious discrepancies between the questions concerning known/read authors and the titles read. Some respondents marked more names of writers whose works they had read than the titles. This tendency was seen especially among the Spanish philology students. Yet, this did not necessarily testify to the lack of competence or building up an “improved” self-image of the respondents. The suggested list might not have included the works that they had read, and at the same time, they did not add the titles that they knew. Some of them might not simply have remembered the titles they had read.

The next question was to show the reasons for choosing Spanish American prose (the respondents could select more than one answer choice). The results were astonishing. Most of them, i.e. 54 %, declared that their friends’ opinions had made them read the works. The second motivation was their aesthetic needs (45 %). In the case of the Spanish and Polish philology students, such a source was the school, which made me wonder since Spanish American prose was not on the list of compulsory readings. Current trends did not seem to be decisive – only 17 % of the respondents declared their influence. Reviews had small impact on choosing readings. Tab. 15 illustrates the results.

Four respondents wrote “by accident” as their reason for reading Spanish American prose, while two – their fascination with this literature, two – editor’s paratexts, and one – film adaptations.

The next characteristic of readers of Spanish American prose is the description of their interests and hobbies. It was not surprising that most of the respondents – 61 – were interested in literature, they were generally language students. This interest was declared by 33 out of the 40 Polish philology students

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688 Szpunar, “Wyzwanie literackie,” *Gazeta Wyborcza Kraków* 2002, no. 299, p. 8.

689 Zablocki, “Iliada nie pomaga,” *Co jest grane* 1999, no. 128, p. 11.

Tab. 15: Reasons for reading Spanish American prose in the 15–25 age group.

	Polish philology students (40)	Spanish philology students (20)	other philology students (11)	other humanities students (15)	other fields students (7)	the rest (7)	total (100)
Friends' opinions	19	6	7	9	7	6	54
Aesthetic needs	18	9	4	11	1	2	45
School	13	13	1	4	1	1	33
Trends	8	2	1	3	2	1	17
Radio or TV programmes	5	1		1			17
Press reviews	7	3	1	2	2		15
Internet sources	4	1					5

and just over a half of the Spanish philology students (12 out of 20). Besides, the answers varied – from music, widely understood fine arts and visual arts through sport, travelling, photography, psychology to computer science, mathematics, modelling, trends and cooking. Consequently, it was impossible to see any correlation between the type of hobby and reading Spanish American prose. Only a general remark can be made that the respondents from this age group had different hobbies and interests.

As a rule, students can speak several foreign languages, are mobile and travel all around the world. Consequently, I will not analyse the respondents' answers concerning these issues. A majority of the respondents declared that they knew at least two foreign languages and that they had travelled abroad within the last several years, as tourists or for further education.

Over 1/3 of the respondents (36, including 12 Polish philology students) admitted that they did not regularly read any paper. Those who declared that they had read a paper mentioned various titles, from opinion-making weeklies through coloured magazines and literary periodical to papers related to a concrete type of interest or political convictions. Some mentioned one title and some several. Most of them, 21, declared that they had read *Polityka*, 6 – *Newsweek*, and 3 – *Odra*, *Wprost* and *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 2 – *Przekrój*, one – *Forum* and *Angora*. The answer choices included quite a big number of the so-called women's press: *Cosmopolitan*, *Vogue*, *Zwierciadło*, *Elle*, *Claudia*, *Glamour*, *Wysokie Obcasy* and *Twój Styl*. Magazines dedicated to geography and travelling were also mentioned: *National Geographic*, *Poznaj Świat*, *Podróż* and *Odkrywca*. The following literary papers were mentioned: *Twórczość* (twice), *Nowe Książki* (twice), *Bluszcz*, *Zeszyty Literackie*, *Topos*, *Polonistyka* and *Lampa* (once). Moreover, the respondents referred to *Kino*, *Film*, *Charaktery*, *Frona*, *Krytyka Polityczna*, *Najwyższy Czas*, *Gość Niedzielny* and *Machina*.

Some of the periodicals mentioned by the respondents published short or long reviews of Spanish American prose. Critical texts about the newly published titles appeared in *Polityka*, which was most frequently declared to have been read by the respondents belonging to this age group. However, in my opinion, the number of its readers was not sufficiently big to conclude that regular contacts with this paper were connected with reading Spanish American prose. Only 15 respondents pointed to press reviews as their motivation to choose this literature.

The answers to the questions about interest in Latin American culture were interesting (tab. 16). It turned out that most readers of Spanish American prose from this age group did not declare any such interest! The exception was, not surprisingly, the Spanish philology students.

**Tab. 16:** The declared interest in Spanish American culture in the 15–25 age group.

	YES	NO
<b>Spanish philology students</b>	17	3
<b>Polish philology students</b>	10	30
<b>Students of other philologies</b>	3	8
<b>Students of other humanities</b>	5	10
<b>Students of other fields</b>	1	6
<b>The rest</b>	3	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>61</b>

The lack of a clear correlation between interest in Spanish American culture and reading the prose created on this continent can testify to the recognition of its artistic values. Spanish American prose was read since it was seen as valuable literature, satisfying aesthetic needs, while its other functions went to the background.

The last question of this part of the questionnaire concerned the most frequent associations brought by Latin American culture. The respondents were instructed to select only one answer choice, but here most respondents did not obey the instruction and ticked more answers. Some even added their own proposals. They associated Latin American culture first of all with dance (64 choices) and music (55 choices). This could be both the reason and effect of the great popularity of schools of Latin American dance in Poland. Moreover, the respondents mentioned literature (41 choices). Similar numbers of choices were given to soap operas (37), exoticism (36) and travels (31). Twenty-nine respondents selected films, which was interesting given the fact that Latin American films were not widely distributed in Poland. They were shown only during festivals and other events promoting Latin American culture. Fine arts received fewer answers than films (19). Single respondents mentioned Latin American food, sport, soccer, complicated political situation and García Márquez's magical realism.

The analysed data provide an image of a young reader of Spanish American prose as a person undergoing education, reading fiction, having broad and varied interests, actively participating in intercultural exchange and seldom being interested in Latin America. His reading activities did not have to concern the press and hence he did not yield to reviewers' suggestions as regards his choices of books. In this respect, the young readers trusted their friends' opinions or followed their own aesthetic needs.

As far as reading preferences were concerned, students living at the beginning of the third millennium did not differ much from those of the 1970s. The most popular writers preferred by the latter were Cortázar, García Márquez, Borges,

Carpentier, Vargas Llosa and Fuentes. The new ranking had similar results, yet the works by Carpentier and Fuentes were read considerably less frequently than 30–40 years ago. The students surveyed by Boni (1976:10) more often spoke about a trend towards Latin American literature and saw the reasons for its success in its difference as compared with European literature, cultural “otherness,” connecting the real sphere with the unreal sphere, in the description of social conflicts other than those in Europe and in formal novelty. Moreover, as a source of knowledge of publishing novelties and their values they showed press reviews, especially critical texts published in *Literatura na Świecie*. At the beginning of the third millennium, students did not seek information and opinions about literary works in the press, and there was no opinion-making paper. A trend towards some literature stopped being an essential element influencing readers’ choices.

## 6.2 Middle-aged readers (26–40)

This group included 61 people, out of whom 47 were women and 14 men. As regards their education, the structure of the group was as follows:

- university graduates            41
- high school graduates        11
- vocational school graduates    1

Moreover, eight people declared that they were still students (they claimed of studying law, administration, medicine, Spanish philology, Romance philology, advertisement, cultural studies, editing and Polish philology).

Most of them worked (53) and lived in cities (49). Their average number of novels read within a year was 24, but only three respondents declared that they had read one book a year. Thirteen respondents declared that they had read less than four books a year. Most read a lot, from a few to several novels a month.

The most popular writer in this group, like in the youngest group, was García Márquez, and his name was known by eight out of the remaining 12 respondents who had no personal contacts with his prose (tab. 17). Like in the previous group, some respondents selected him as the only Latin American writer whose books they had read. The next positions were occupied by Cortázar and Vargas Llosa, but the number of their readers was considerably smaller. Even fewer people – 13 – declared that they had read Borges’ prose, and 18 had heard of him. The rather low position of Isabel Allende was quite surprising. The remaining writers, both those whose books appeared in Poland on the wave of the boom, and those representing the slightly younger generation, had single readers in this group.

**Tab. 17:** The numbers concerning the 26–40 age group who read some book of the listed authors or only heard of the author.

	I have heard of	I have read
Gabriel García Márquez	8	49
Julio Cortázar	21	25
Mario Vargas Llosa	17	25
Jorge Luis Borges	18	13
Isabel Allende	15	12
Carlos Fuentes	14	11
Alejo Carpentier	10	6
José Donoso	5	4
José Lezama Lima	7	4
Ernesto Sábato	6	3
Fernando Vallejo	8	3
Miguel Angel Asturias	5	2
Augusto Roa Bastos	1	2
Juan Rulfo	2	2
Jaime Bayly	4	1
Elena Poniatowska	4	1
Manuel Puig	4	1

One respondent added Eduardo Galeano, the author of *Las venas abiertas de América Latina* (*Open Veins of Latin America*), which cannot be counted as fiction, and Paz. Moreover, four readers added Ruiz Zafón, and one – Cervantes.

As regards the answer choice “I have read,” 19 respondents selected the names of at least three authors.

The most popular title of this middle-aged group was *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (tab. 18). This novel was read by 47 respondents. Another book by García Márquez, *Memories of My Melancholy Whores*, appeared as fourth, but with a considerably smaller number of choices. The readers added to the proposed list three other titles of this author: *Love in the Time of Cholera* (5 choices), *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* (2) and *Leaf Storm* (1).

The second most popular was *Hopscotch*, considerably less frequently read, and *The House of the Spirits* (21 choices). This was astonishing because only 12 respondents declared that they had read Allende’s prose. This inconsequence of the answer choices can be explained by the popularity of the film based on the novel, bearing the same title. The relative popularity of Vargas Llosa was testified by eight choices of the novel *The Time of the Hero* and six of *The Feast of the Goat*.

**Tab. 18:** The number from the 26–40 age group who read the titles.

Title	No. of the respondents who read the title
<i>One Hundred Years of Solitude</i>	47
<i>The House of the Spirits</i>	21
<i>Hopscotch</i>	21
<i>Memories of My Melancholy Whores</i>	12
<i>The Time of the Hero</i>	8
<i>The Feast of the Goat</i>	6
<i>The Kingdom of This World</i>	4
<i>Heartbreak Tango</i>	4
<i>Paradiso</i>	4
<i>Son of Man</i>	3
<i>The Book of Sand</i>	2
<i>Our Lady of the Assassins</i>	2
<i>On Heroes and Tombs</i>	2
<i>The Obscene Bird of Night</i>	2
<i>Rosario Tijeras</i>	2
<i>Pedro Páramo</i>	1

The respondents mentioned another work of this writer: *The Bad Girl*. Only a few respondents marked the other titles.

Therefore, it seems that this age group preferred popular writers, those who had achieved the status of a star during the boom. Other writers were indicated by single readers.

The data obtained from the answers concerning the knowledge of writers and their works seem to be coherent. Nevertheless, this age group seems to be less reliable than the first one. Their questionnaires contained more inconsistencies between the questions about a given writer and the titles of his or her works. In some questionnaires, the respondents neither selected an answer nor added a title although they declared that they had read some works. In other questionnaires, the respondents declared that they had read some title but did not mark its author. For example, one respondent claimed that he had read the prose of Vargas Llosa and García Márquez, but selected *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and *Hopscotch*. Another declared that he had read the books by Asturias and Donoso, but selected *The House of the Spirits* and *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Yet another admitted having read *Paradiso*, but did not select Lezama Lima from among the authors. Although

such questionnaires were not numerous, they made me look at the results with certain cautiousness. I did not reject them since it was difficult to prove bad intentions of the respondents. Such discrepancies can always result from fallible memory.

Like in the case of the youngest readers, this age group's choices were influenced by their friends' opinions and aesthetic needs (tab. 19). The impact of trends and press texts was less intensive.

**Tab. 19:** Reasons for reading Spanish American prose in the 26–40 age group.

	<b>Number of choices</b>
<b>Friends' opinions</b>	36
<b>Aesthetic needs</b>	30
<b>Trends</b>	13
<b>Press reviews</b>	13
<b>School</b>	11
<b>Internet sources</b>	10
<b>Radio or TV programmes</b>	7

Answering the questions concerning personal interests, most respondents (39) declared literary ones. A slightly smaller number (33) was interested in music, sport – 22 and politics – 19. The other interests embraced computer science and mathematics, fine arts, audio-visual arts, yoga, martial arts, gardening, motorisation, apiculture and cooking. These answers led me to conclude that the readers of Spanish American prose had a clearly defined interest in fiction although had other different passions.

As regards the knowledge of languages, nine respondents admitted that they had known no languages. The knowledge of one foreign language was declared by 26, two languages – 17, three – five, four and five – one reader. Moreover, two respondents claimed to have known foreign languages but had mentioned none. Most of the respondents knew English – 43, German – 11, Russian – 9, Spanish – 6, French – 4 and Latin – 2. The knowledge of Greek, Italian, Turkish, Norwegian, Swedish and Danish was declared by one person per language.

In this age group, ten respondents did not go abroad for the last several years; 44 went abroad as tourists, 12 – on business, 6 – for work, 4 – for education. This group was slightly less mobile than the young respondents and included more of those who did not know any foreign languages.

Eighteen respondents, i.e. almost 30 %, read no papers. The rest mentioned a big variety of titles, as many as 45 periodicals dedicated to various issues: popular coloured papers, opinion-making weeklies as well as specialist and professional press. Most of the respondents marked *Wprost* (10) and *Polityka* (8).

Half of the respondents (34) declared that they had had no interest in Latin American culture. Yet, many of them selected concrete books, most frequently García Márquez's works. On the other hand, interest in Latin American culture does not necessarily refer to reading the prose of this cultural circle. Some of those who admitted that they had been interested in Latin American culture did not mark a big number of Spanish American books they had read.

Latin American culture was mostly associated with dance (38 respondents) and music (33). A similar number of respondents associated it with soap opera (20) and literature (19). Eighteen pointed to exoticism, 15 to films and 14 to travels. Some added sport, cuisine, poverty, sex and another way of making relationships.

To sum up, most of the readers of this age group were educated, living in cities and having jobs. They read a lot and declared that they had been interested in literature. They also had various passions. Most of them knew foreign languages and travelled abroad. While choosing a given book, they followed their friends' advice and their own aesthetic needs.

### 6.3 Senior readers (over 60)

Readers who were over 60 years old formed the smallest group of the respondents. Nevertheless, their number (15) constituted 9 % of the readers using public libraries, which was in accordance with the national statistics (see footnote 672 in this chapter). The number included only two men. Twelve respondents had higher education, three – secondary education. Six had jobs, while nine did not work. All of them lived in cities.

The members of this age group read a lot of books. Only three admitted having read four novels a year at the most, others – a lot more. On average, they read ca. 50 novels a year, i.e. almost one a week. They mentioned first of all García Márquez, Cortázar, Vargas Llosa and Allende. In this way, the ranking of the popularity of Latin American writers in the oldest age group resembled the one of the previous group. Tab. 20 presents the data.

They added only one name – Bioy Casares. This name was given by a reader who declared that they had read over 200 novels a year. This respondent selected all the names of the listed writers. Nine respondents chose at least three authors whose prose they had read.

**Tab. 20:** The numbers concerning the over 60 age group who read some book of the listed authors or only heard of the author.

Author	I have heard of	I have read
Gabriel García Márquez		13
Julio Cortázar	1	8
Mario Vargas Llosa		8
Isabel Allende	2	7
Jorge Luis Borges	1	4
Carlos Fuentes	2	3
Alejo Carpentier	1	3
Ernesto Sábato	1	3
Jaime Bayly		3
José Donoso		2
José Lezama Lima	1	2
Fernando Vallejo		2
Miguel Angel Asturias	2	1
Augusto Roa Bastos		1
Juan Rulfo		1
Elena Poniatowska	2	1
Manuel Puig		1

**Tab. 21:** The number from the over 60 age group who read the titles.

Title	Number of choices
<i>One Hundred Years of Solitude</i>	11
<i>The House of the Spirits</i>	9
<i>Hopscotch</i>	7
<i>The Time of the Hero</i>	6
<i>Memories of My Melancholy Whores</i>	2
<i>Paradiso</i>	2
<i>Our Lady of the Assassins</i>	2
<i>The Obscene Bird of Night</i>	2
<i>The Feast of the Goat</i>	1
<i>The Kingdom of This World</i>	1
<i>Heartbreak Tango</i>	1
<i>Son of Man</i>	1
<i>The Book of Sand</i>	1
<i>On Heroes and Tombs</i>	1
<i>Pedro Páramo</i>	1
<i>Rosario Tijeras</i>	0

There were no surprises on the list of the most popular books (see Tab. 21).

The following titles were added to the list: *The Green House*, *Conversation in the Cathedral*, *The War of the End of the World*, *The Storyteller*, *The Leaders* by Vargas Llosa, *No One Writes to the Colonel*, *Eyes of the Blue Dog* and *The Story of a Shipwrecked Sailor* by García Márquez, *Alguien que anda por ahí* by Cortázar and *The Lost Steps* by Carpentier.

These results confirmed the popularity of García Márquez, Vargas Llosa, Cortázar and Allende as well as little knowledge of other Latin American writers. In five cases, there were essential discrepancies between the answers to the question about the knowledge of a given author and concrete titles of the books read. In this group, five respondents stated that they had encountered Spanish American prose in the 1970s and 1980s, while the rest had known this prose for the last several years.

**Tab. 22:** Reasons for reading Spanish American prose in the over 60 age group.

	No. of choices
Press reviews	6
Friends' opinions	5
Aesthetic needs	4
Trends	4
Radio or TV programmes	3
School	0
Internet sources	0

In this age group, almost half of the respondents pointed to press reviews as their inspirations to choose books (tab. 22). Some even wrote the names of the papers where they had sought reviews: *Przekrój* (3 respondents), *Literatura* (2) and *Gazeta Wyborcza*, *Angora*, *Nowe Książki* and *Pani* (1). Six people pointed to the influence of their friends while choosing books.

Similar to the previous groups, the old respondents declared that they had been interested in literature (12). The other interests included politics and music (5). They also mentioned many passions: fine arts, computer science, mountains, photography, cooking and handcraft.

The oldest readers declared that they had known at least one foreign language; only one admitted having known none. Four knew three languages, and three – two. Most of the respondents (9) declared that they had known Russian, seven – English, one – Slovak, Ukrainian, Swedish, German and Czech. Eleven of them went abroad, most often as tourists (8) or to visit their

families (3). Nine declared that they had regularly read some paper: *Polityka* and *Wprost* (3 respondents). They also mentioned 22 papers of a different character: entertainment, opinion-making and professional. Half of the respondents declared that they had been interested in Latin American culture, half – no such interests. They associated this culture with dance and music (7), literature (6) and exoticism (5).

#### 6.4 The veterans of the boom (41–60)

This group was most interesting to me since they belonged to the generation for which the boom for Spanish American literature could have been important experiences.<sup>690</sup> They were given the second part of the questionnaire, which would allow me to reconstruct the impressions and feelings of the readers of the 1970s and the 1980s.

Fifty-three people of this age group, including 51 women and only two men, filled in the questionnaire correctly. Thus we should rather speak of female readers of Spanish American prose.... Most of the respondents were proud of their higher education (35), 14 completed secondary education, and 4 – vocational schools. The majority had jobs (43) and lived in cities (49).

Most of the respondents in this age group read fiction, declaring that they had read on average 33 novels a year. Only 13 admitted having read fewer than 10 novels a year.

The most popular Latin American writer was García Márquez; only two respondents did not select his name (tab. 23). The majority of the respondents (37) read Cortázar's books, and six had heard of him. For this age group, also Allende was a popular author and so were Vargas Llosa and Borges. More respondents than in the other age groups read Fuentes' works (20) and Carpentier's works (18). Fewer than ten respondents read works of the remaining writers.

Only three names were added to the suggested list: Laura Esquivel, Bryce Echenique and the American writer Nora Roberts. Thirty respondents declared that they had read the works of at least three Latin American writers. The lack of Spanish writers can testify to the fact that these readers had known better which writers came from the Iberian Peninsula and which from Latin America.

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690 "The present middle-aged generation had their own great literary advantage – an encounter with Latin American writing which captured their imagination and shaped their literary tastes for a few or even several dozens of years." (Bugajski, "Rewolucje," *Wiadomości Kulturalne* 1997, no. 27, p. 20).

**Tab. 23:** The numbers concerning the 41–60 age group who read some book of the listed authors or only heard of him/her.

Author	I have heard of	I have read
Gabriel García Márquez	4	47
Julio Cortázar	6	37
Isabel Allende	6	30
Mario Vargas Llosa	7	27
Jorge Luis Borges	12	21
Carlos Fuentes	9	20
Alejo Carpentier	12	18
Ernesto Sábato	9	7
Fernando Vallejo	8	5
Manuel Puig	6	4
Jaime Bayly	6	3
José Lezama Lima	7	3
Miguel Angel Asturias	7	3
Juan Rulfo	5	3
José Donoso	9	2
Augusto Roa Bastos	4	2
Elena Poniatowska	3	2

**Tab. 24:** Number of readers from the 41–60 age group who read the listed titles.

Title	No. of choices
<i>One Hundred Years of Solitude</i>	46
<i>Hopscotch</i>	33
<i>The House of the Spirits</i>	30
<i>Memories of My Melancholy Whores</i>	14
<i>The Time of the Hero</i>	13
<i>The Kingdom of This World</i>	7
<i>Our Lady of the Assassins</i>	6
<i>The Feast of the Goat</i>	6
<i>Paradiso</i>	5
<i>The Obscene Bird of Night</i>	5
<i>The Book of Sand</i>	5
<i>On Heroes and Tombs</i>	5
<i>Son of Man</i>	4
<i>Heartbreak Tango</i>	3
<i>Pedro Páramo</i>	2
<i>Rosario Tijeras</i>	0

The list of the titles read by the respondents does not differ a lot from the previous lists (tab. 24). Almost all of the respondents claimed to have read *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Fourteen read *Memories of My Melancholy Whores* by the same author. Moreover, one respondent added *The Story of a Shipwrecked Sailor* and one *Love in the Time of Cholera*. Over half of them knew *Hopscotch* (33) and *The House of the Spirits* (30). Some added *The Winners* by Cortázar and *Eva Luna* and *The Stories of Eva Luna* by Allende. Vargas Llosa's works enjoyed some popularity: *The Time of the Hero* (13) and *The Feast of the Goat* (6). The other mentioned titles included *Conversation in the Cathedral* and *Captain Pantoja and the Special Service* by the same author. Two novels by Laura Esquivel were added: *Like Water for Chocolate* and *Swift as Desire; Diana: the Goddess Who Hunts Alone* by Fuentes and *The Lost Steps* by Carpentier.

The number of inconsistencies between the answers to the questions about the writers and concrete titles noted in this age group was the smallest.

As regards the motivation for reading Spanish American prose, the answers of this readers' group did not differ considerably from those of the other groups (tab. 25). Our respondents relied mostly on their friends' opinions.

**Tab. 25:** Reasons for reading Spanish American prose in the over 41–60 age group.

	No. of choices
<b>Friends' opinions</b>	36
<b>Aesthetic needs</b>	25
<b>Trends</b>	16
<b>Press reviews</b>	13
<b>School</b>	3
<b>Internet sources</b>	3
<b>Radio or TV programmes</b>	1

They were also motivated by their aesthetic needs (25 respondents). They yielded to trends to a considerably smaller extent (16). Only 13 respondents pointed to press reviews as their inspiration for reading. Critical texts were found mainly in *Nowe Książki*. School, radio and TV programmes were marked by single respondents.

Like in the previous groups, the respondents of the 41–60 age group declared that they had been interested in literature (44), in music (30) and in politics (16). They also mentioned more or less popular hobbies.

More than half of the respondents (35) declared that they had known some foreign language; one language – 20 respondents, two – 10 respondents, three – 3 respondents, four – two respondents. Most of them admitted having known English (19) and Russian (16); German (8), French (6) as well as Kashubian, Lithuanian, Italian, Slovak and Serbian-Croatian (each language marked by one respondent). Two respondents declared that they had known Spanish. Forty-one respondents travelled abroad, most often as tourists (33).

The readership of papers in this age group remained at the same level as in the other groups. Nineteen respondents, i.e. ca. 36 %, confessed having no regular contacts with some periodical. The rest mentioned 34 titles of different profiles. They chiefly listed *Polityka* (17 respondents), *Wprost* (15) and *Newsweek* (8).

Thirty-eight respondents did not declare any interest in Latin American culture. The most frequent association with this culture was dance (34 respondents), but in this group a unique number of respondents signalled association with literature (29). Latin American culture was also related to music (23), films (16), soap opera (13), exoticism (14) and travels (12).

In the second part of the questionnaire, the respondents were to say when they had firstly encountered Spanish American prose.<sup>691</sup> Thirty respondents declared that the encounter had happened in the 1970s and 80s, nine in the 1990s, and the rest in the new millennium. Yet, in the first part of the questionnaire, only nine respondents selected “in the 1970s and 80s” in the question when they had read the listed works. A majority read the works in the last several years. However, I did not consider these answers to be contradictory. In some cases, they must have read them again, and partly, the answers concerned works that were published in Poland after 1990.

Most of the respondents associated Spanish American literature with García Márquez's writings (38), nine with Cortázar's prose, five with Fuentes' works, four with Vargas Llosa's books and three with Allende's prose. One respondent chose Borges and one – Carpentier.

Reading Spanish American prose had a social dimension for them. As many as 45 respondents wrote that their friends had also read this literature.

Several respondents did not answer the questions concerning papers that they had read in the 1970s and 80s, hiding behind oblivion. Most respondents listed some titles, most frequently *Przekrój* (12) and *Polityka* (10), *Filipinka* (8), *Kultura* (7), *Przyjaciółka* (6), *Kobieta i Życie* (4), *Radar* (4); three respondents mentioned *Film*, *Forum*, *Razem*, *Literatura* and *Życie Literackie*, two – *Na przelaj*, *Szpilki*,

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691 Several people did not fill in this part of the questionnaire.

*Świat Młodych* and one – *Życie Gospodarcze, Zwierciadło, Kontynenty, Poradnik Domowy, Sztuka, Tygodnik Kulturalny, Poznaj Świat, Dialog, Ekran, Kino, Tygodnik Powszechny, Odra* and *Jestem*. Like in the question about contemporary periodicals, the variety of titles was high, and it would be difficult to state that some title could have influenced the readers' choices to a considerable extent in the discussed group. It was astonishing that only one respondent declared that he had read *Literatura na Świecie*, which in many critics' opinions made Spanish American prose popular in Poland.

The next questions were to reconstruct the readers' approaches, i.e. potential results which readers expected from fiction, and the social function of reading understood as its real effects (Wojciechowski 1983:31). The register of the expected functions and the register of the fulfilled functions in the process of reception are not generally the same, in other words readers do not necessarily find in literary works what they looked for when resolving to read a book.

Wojciechowski (1983:34) listed eight functions:

- Philosophical-social, is fulfilled when the ideological content of a work is confronted with the receiver's views which results in creating a certain "added value," i.e. reflections and thoughts that open up new intellectual perspectives.
- Educational, simply understood as providing positive or negative examples of behaviour. Nevertheless, it is completed indirectly, i.e. when it enriches individual systems of values and principles of action.
- Aesthetic, is to make people aware of the uniqueness of the organisation of linguistic signs, which is not encountered in other forms of communication.
- Emotional, is to make the reader feel emotional tension towards elements of the depicted world.
- Veristic, related to the literary interpretation of a literary work, orders the receiver to identify the depicted world with the real world, thus confirming or completing the reader's knowledge concerning some fragment of reality.
- Cognitive, although refers to the non-literary reality, it reflects the awareness that the depicted world constitutes a certain interpretation of the real world.
- Entertainment, turns our attention to the fact that reading fiction can provide entertainment and satisfaction.
- Substitutionary, uses a literary work to resolve tensions. It is also fulfilled when the reader identifies himself with the protagonist. Another form of this function is to use reading fiction as a tool to build social prestige.

The question "What do you seek while reading Spanish American prose?" was to help me reconstruct the readers' attitudes towards this prose (they could tick a few answers). The list of the suggested answers was based on the opinions

repeated in critical texts. The results of the answer choices to this question were as follows:

• an encounter with an unknown culture	38
• aesthetic experiences	30
• a different view on reality	25
• exoticism	21
• information about Latin America	17
• a new pattern of a novel	10
• humour	8
• impressions that European literature does not give	7
• eroticism	1
• analogies to the situation in communist Poland	0

These data prove that during the boom and just after it, the readers of Spanish American prose expected to have their cognitive function fulfilled. Having profound knowledge of literature, they realised that the world depicted in a literary work was an artistic transformation of the model of the real world. Hence their choices of books were acts to approach another, little known culture that they wanted to get to know through artistic prose. Their desire for exoticism as a feature they looked for in this prose could testify to the cognitive needs. A small group of respondents treated the depicted works in a literary way, confessing that Spanish American prose was to be a source of knowledge about this continent. The readers' expectations related to the aesthetic function were high, which was declared explicitly and by marking the new pattern of a novel and impressions that European literature could not provide as features they desired to find in this prose. "A different view on reality" can be interpreted as the readers' expectation to see the work as something that would modify their system of values to a certain extent, i.e. to fulfil the educational function. Only a few readers declared that they had looked for elements of humour in Latin American prose, which could mean that its entertainment function was not regarded as essential. According to the respondents, this prose was not to fulfil the substitutionary function: they did not look for eroticism and analogies to the political situation in Poland. These answers were suggested to the respondents because some critics ascribed the success of Latin American prose to its heavy load of eroticism that should have influenced especially young readers. In *Rocznik Literacki 1974*, Karczewska-Markiewicz expressed her indignation referring to the Polish editions of the works by Asturias, Fuentes, García Márquez and Vargas Llosa:

Investigating these works with curiosity we cannot, however, accept their sexual contents, obsessively treating these matters that are difficult to be assumed by readers brought up in a different European cultural circle. The huge popularity of these books, especially with young readers, testifies to the characteristic interests in this type of subjects (p. 470).

On the other hand, the mechanism of associating the presented political and social events with the situation in Poland was described in contemporary texts referring to some aspects of the reception of this prose in the 1970s. "We treated dreams, sex and politics as mixed together, with the addition of loneliness and cruelty, as a revelation," Krubski wrote in *Wprost* after years.<sup>692</sup> In turn, Bratkowski<sup>693</sup> recollected:

In the case of many works, their universal message was in the background; we have read them first of all as strong allusions to our own situation, to our desires for the sovereignty of the citizens of the non-sovereign country ruled by the authoritative regime. Jokingly, when the hero of *Conversation in the Cathedral* repeated the question as a refrain, "Why has Peru got rotten?" we knew that Llosa meant Poland, and only because of the censorship he used the metaphor of Peru. We read *The Time of the Hero* in the same spirit.

The last question of the questionnaire aiming at providing answers concerning the fulfilment of the functions of Latin American prose was open-ended. Some readers ignored it, yet a majority made an effort to give brief answers. The answers show that in the process of reading the philosophical-social function and educational function were fulfilled to the biggest extent. The readers indicated that that had gained "broader perspectives and deepened possibilities," "spiritual enrichment and widening of their intellectual horizons," "interesting spiritual experiences," "broader views," "confirmation that one can speak and think differently than the forced norms and patterns prevailing in my lifetime." The modifications of the readers' system of values was testified by the repeated declarations that Latin American prose brought "different (or new) views on reality" and "different views on time and people." The cognitive function was fulfilled in the responses that Latin American prose had given them "a different look at the culture and real life of those living in Latin America," "a new perception of Latin America" and "getting to know an alien and unknown culture." Some respondents confirmed the fulfilment of the veristic function stating that

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692 Fortunately, the cited article appeared under the non-prophetic title "Nie za późno na Nobla dla Llosy" [Too late for a Nobel for Llosa?], *Wprost* 1991, no. 6, p. 52.

693 "Balzak, który przeczytał Joyce'a" [Balzac who read Joyce], *Gazeta Wyborcza* 2000, no. 258, p. 14.

in the books they had found “information concerning South America, its customs and culture,” “news about culture, daily life, social-geographical environment, history.” One reader wrote precisely, “I was interested in the history of Hispanic countries and relationships between Latin America and the USA in the background of the OAS activities.” The aesthetic function was revealed to a small extent. Yet, some respondents admitted that thanks to Spanish American prose they “had experiences that differed from those given by European or American literature,” and “discovered a different aesthetic approach towards the surrounding reality” and “a new pattern of a novel” as well as they got to know magical realism. “I got to know the magic of the depicted world and the extraordinary metaphors of the language,” wrote one reader. Only one person stressed the entertainment flowing from reading this prose. In a few cases, reading this prose proved unsuccessful. One reader answered the question concerning the benefits of reading this prose writing “a slight loss of sight.” Two readers admitted that they had not benefited at all; yet another declared, “I am not a fan of this prose, but thanks to these books I know what I do not like.” The respondents’ answers did not reveal any emotional function and substitutionary function.

The research conducted by Boni in Warsaw in 1976 showed that the reading of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, which he regarded as representing contemporary Spanish American prose, satisfied pupils’ aesthetic and identity needs as well as informed them about the external world.<sup>694</sup> Thanks to this novel, adults fulfilled their needs of identity and information about the external world, while students fulfilled their aesthetic, identity and compensatory-integrating needs (Boni 1976:10). These observations were compatible to a great extent with the results of the survey conducted over 30 years later. Only the identity need, i.e. seeing your own problems and dilemmas in the books you read, was not confirmed.

Boni (1977:158) also put forward a hypothesis combining the choices of books by young people in the 1970s with the important philosophical and cultural tendencies prevailing in the 1960s that were revealed mainly in the contestation movement. He saw similarities between the values that readers discovered in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* and the things characterising “a different view on reality.” These were: attempts to reject a rational interpretation of reality, repressive treatment of culture, seeking metaphysical ways of understanding the world, confidence in intuitive cognition, rebellion against breaking bonds between man

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694 Boni used the typology of readers’ needs proposed by E. and E. Wnuk-Lipiński, distinguishing aesthetic and identity needs, patterns of behaviour, information about the external world, social acceptance, compensation and entertainment.

and the environment he lives in, desire to treat a human being as a spiritual-physical unity. Thus, reading Spanish American prose would fulfil the substitutionary function, i.e., resolving social-civilisational tensions. However, this desire was not reflected in the survey research conducted recently.

The answers given in the questionnaires that I analysed did not reflect the emotions that, if we were to believe recollections, accompanied the reception of Spanish American prose in the 1970s. Boni stressed that readers' choices concerning this literature were to a great extent influenced by trends.<sup>695</sup> Only 30 % of my respondents from the discussed age group admitted that. Actually, Marrodán Casas (1998:4) described the beginnings of the boom as follows:

I felt trapped during the third, or perhaps fourth year of my studies. [...] None of my friends, nor the beautiful and wise girls could have thought that I did not know who Cortázar, Sábato, Carpentier, Fuentes were. During that time, I loved reading Peiper, Przyboś, Białoszewski, Karpowicz and did not even note that something had changed in the lives of my closest people studying Polish literature at the University of Warsaw, that the titles were not from this register, that the poses and gestures were different, that they carried different books. Latin American prose entered my life [...]."

In turn, Bratkowski (2000:14) recollected "girls from grammar school walking along Krakowskie Przedmieście in such a way that others could see them carrying *Hopscotch* or *On Heroes and Tombs*." The knowledge of Spanish American prose became an indicator of the generation:

[...] in Poland, the boom for Latin American literature has just begun: like it was at school several years earlier, in order to get to know one another we asked control questions, "Who do you prefer: the Beatles or the Stones?"; now at university, we were asking, "Who do you prefer: Márquez or Llosa?" (Bratkowski 1992:2)

These exalted poses provoked ironical commentaries. Andrzej Wajs (1997:5), referring to the collection of short stories written by the then most popular Argentinian writer, wrote about "the Warsaw famas who spoke the language of Cortázar, the language of transcendental nirvana," and with malice he attributed his success among juvenile readers to the fact that "he showed the shortest communication line between a disco and Ezekiel's prophecies." People impatiently waited for the next books written by Hispanic writers:

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695 In his opinion, the existence of a trend towards Latin American literature was to be confirmed by the fact that "the awareness of the popularity of the Latin American phenomenon is not correlated with the real knowledge of this literature" (Boni 1976:10).

Are you reading *Hopscotch*? – they asked and disrespectfully waved, “*One Hundred Years of Solitude* is way better than it.” “Are you reading Márquez? Donoso’s *The Obscene Bird of Night* will be published soon, this is a really good book.” The whole Latin American literature was to be beaten by the legendary *Paradiso* by José Lezama Lima, everyone was waiting for its publication with an increasingly bigger tension (Bratkowski 2000:14).

Individual testimonies also prove that some novels strongly influenced young readers’ imagination. The graphic designer Halina Fleger recollected:

I was consumed with *Hopscotch* in my third year of the Arts College. It was a trendy book, difficult to buy, but I managed to do that. [...] Reading this decoded novel as a teenager it dawned on me, I crossed one of the doors of the maturity of imagination. [...] I was fascinated by the cultural difference and a certain kind of magical fantasy.<sup>696</sup>

The mood of the boom was reflected in the recollections about the meetings with writers. Komorowski compared the hysteria of Cortázar’s fans who did not manage to attend a meeting with the reactions observed during the visit of Gérard Philippe to Poland (Komorowski 1977:129). The mood when people awaited the writer’s visit was characterised well by the fragments of the report about the meeting with Warsaw students published in the weekly *ItD*:

Julio Cortázar – a writer to whom hundreds of sketches, essays and critical texts have been dedicated, whose name, especially now, after his visit to Poland, is still being commented on in weeklies; whose books are eagerly sought-after not only in academic circles, and his statements quoted in conversations, often taken for granted almost as Euclid’s certainty. The writer – a legend, has now revealed himself as a human. [...] And so let us be led towards these »gates of heaven« that he is opening before us: He, great, wonderful Cortázar (Jordan 1975:18).

Marrodán Casas (1998:15) recollected the meeting with Vargas Llosa at the University of Warsaw in a similar way:

The hall in the Institute of Polish Philology was packed although it was September, and the organisers – the Warsaw Circle of Students of Polish and the Society of Spanish Philology Students – feared that nobody would turn up. But there were crowds.

Lapse of time made emotions fade and caused that the former enthusiasts of the boom looked at their juvenile behaviours in a sceptical way. They did not want to see their old motivation concerning the choice of books or they simply did not remember it. Analysing their questionnaires, it was difficult to assume that the

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696 “Ta książka olśniewa,” interview with Halina Fleger, *GW Mazowsze* 2004, no. 210, p. 2.

boom for Spanish American literature could have been a phenomenon that was important for the whole generation – none of the questionnaires had an answer that could testify to the fulfilment of the emotional function. Nevertheless, it was obvious that the works of some writers regarded as the authors of the boom, the old and latest ones, remained in the sphere of the respondents' interests and so, their preferences in this respect did not change fundamentally.

## 7 Summary

The research shows that at the threshold of the third millennium, thirty years after the boom, Spanish American prose was read by all generations. In every age group, there were people who read this prose sporadically or quite regularly. An average reader of this literature lived in a city, had university education or was a student, and was professionally active. Regardless of their age, the readers knew at least one foreign language and travelled abroad. They could be included in the reading public, i.e. had contacts with at least six books a year.<sup>697</sup> Moreover, their reading preferences embraced highly artistic prose; we should remember that in all of the analysed groups, the respondents declared that they had read on average more than twenty novels a year. Consequently, they might have been included in the elite circle of readers who were educated citizens residing in cities, employees of educational and cultural institutions as well as representatives of the intelligentsia (see Straus, Wolff 1996:87). Nothing really changed in this area from the time of the research conducted by Boni in the 1970s (1976:10), its results being that the readers of Spanish American prose usually represented a high reading-cultural level. Boni stated:

Reading Latin American literature is not a privilege of some circle but characterises these circles of the society that constitute a stable, relatively constant literary public. Consequently, we cannot unambiguously state that Latin American literature is a phenomenon that has embraced completely new masses of readers (Boni 1976:10).

Already at that point, the myth of some special group of the literary public being created around Spanish American prose disappeared. The myth was naïve because it was difficult to assume that some pioneering and demanding prose speaking about an alien world would reach unskilled readers who had no literary competences. So the literature of Latin America did not reach wide audiences in the 1970s and in the later periods. Nevertheless, it entered the literary canon of readers who had the necessary critical faculties.

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697 This indicator of readership has been accepted in national investigations.

The most popular Latin American writer in Poland was certainly García Márquez (tab. 26). As many as 83 % of the respondents declared that they had read at least one of his books, and 12 % had known his name. Consequently, only 5 % of the respondents did not hear of him. The second place in the ranking was occupied by Cortázar, whose prose was known to over half of the respondents, 20 % heard of him. Here we could note a change as compared with the results of the mid-1970s, which said that this Argentinian writer had been most popular in Poland in that period (Boni 1977:148). High positions were maintained by the stars of the boom: Vargas Llosa and Borges. The former was read to a similar extent by representatives of all the age groups, while Borges owed his position to the veterans of the boom and students. Among the writers who appeared on the Polish publishing market after the political transformations only Allende found a big number of readers, although most of them belonged to the age group that had shaped their literary preferences during the boom. The juxtaposition between his prose and that of García Márquez proved to be good recommendation. Fuentes and Carpentier, listed among the most popular Latin American writers during the boom, owed their relatively high positions to those readers who remembered this phenomenon and were obviously faithful to their favourite authors. The other writers who were popular in the 1970s, even Sábato whose books were demonstratively carried by secondary school students, were rather sporadically read soon after. Neither did Polish readers appreciate works of those writers who built their image by openly contesting the literature of the boom, like Bayly or Vallejo.

The results have been fully confirmed by the data showing the most popular titles of Spanish American prose (tab. 27). All of the age groups read *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. García Márquez's position was also supported by the fact that another work of his, *Memories of My Melancholy Whores*, was placed as fourth. This strengthened the fact that readers were not satisfied by reading the *opus magnum* of the Columbian writer but followed his current works. According to Skórzyński (1993:56), he was doomed to succeed in Poland from the very beginning:

[...] he is one of the Nobel Prize winners who have been appreciated both by readers and critics. I think that it is partly thanks to the times when his novels appeared – it was a period when critics, and even more readers, were exhausted and also bored with the so-called ambitious prose, which on the one hand, competed with psychology trying to penetrate the darkest corners of the human soul, and on the other hand, it evolved towards the philosophical-ideological essay writings. That's why Márquez's books in which men fight (for life and death) and women love (with their whole hearts and bodies) in the midst of lush tropical nature must have achieved popularity that they fully deserved.

**Tab. 26:** The percentage of readers who read some book of one of the listed authors or heard of him or her.

Author	Readers									
	15–25 age group (100)		26–40 age group (61)		41–60 age group (53)		over 60 age group (15)		all readers (229)	
	heard	read	heard	read	heard	read	heard	read	heard	read
<b>Gabriel García Márquez</b>	15 %	82 %	13 %	80 %	7.5 %	89 %		87 %	12 %	83 %
<b>Julio Cortázar</b>	17 %	57 %	34 %	41 %	11 %	70 %	6.5 %	53 %	20 %	55 %
<b>Mario Vargas Llosa</b>	17 %	39 %	28 %	41 %	13 %	51 %		53 %	10.5 %	38 %
<b>Jorge Luis Borges</b>	27 %	40 %	29 %	21 %	23 %	40 %	6.5 %	27 %	25 %	34 %
<b>Isabel Allende</b>	31 %	18 %	24.5 %	20 %	11 %	56.5 %	13 %	46 %	23.5 %	29 %
<b>Carlos Fuentes</b>	29 %	16 %	23 %	18 %	17 %	38 %	13 %	20 %	23.5 %	22 %
<b>Alejo Carpentier</b>	25 %	13 %	16 %	10 %	23 %	34 %	6.5 %	20 %	21 %	17.5 %
<b>Ernesto Sábato</b>	16 %	16 %	10 %	5 %	17 %	13 %	6.5 %	20 %	9 %	12.5 %
<b>Juan Rulfo</b>	14 %	19 %	3 %	3 %	9 %	5.5 %		6.5 %	9 %	11 %
<b>José Lezama Lima</b>	20 %	8 %	11 %	6.5 %	13 %	5.5 %	6.5 %	13 %	15 %	7.5 %
<b>José Donoso</b>	12 %	6 %	8 %	6.5 %	17 %	4 %		13 %	10 %	6 %
<b>Fernando Vallejo</b>	14 %	6 %	13 %	5 %	15 %	9.5 %		13 %	13 %	7 %
<b>Miguel Angel Asturias</b>	24 %	5 %	8 %	3 %	13 %	5.5 %	13 %	6.5 %	16.5 %	5 %
<b>Elena Poniatowska</b>	20 %	5 %	6.5 %	1.5 %	5.5 %	4 %	13 %	6.5 %	12.5 %	4 %
<b>Augusto Roa Bastos</b>	11 %	3 %	15 %	82 %	7.5 %	4 %		6.5 %	7 %	4 %
<b>Jaime Bayly</b>	13 %	2 %	17 %	57 %	11 %	5.5 %		20 %	10 %	4 %
<b>Manuel Puig</b>	8 %	2 %	27 %	40 %	11 %			6.5 %	8 %	3.5 %

Tab. 27: The percentage of those who read the listed titles.

Title	Readers				Total (229)
	15–25 age group (100)	26–40 age group (61)	41–60 age group (53)	over 60 age group (15)	
<i>One Hundred Years of Solitude</i>	76 %	77 %	87 %	73 %	78.5 %
<i>Hopscotch</i>	49 %	34.5 %	62 %	60 %	49 %
<i>The House of the Spirits</i>	21 %	34.5 %	56.5 %	60 %	35 %
<i>Memories of My Melancholy Whores</i>	26 %	19,6 %	26 %	1.5 %	23.5 %
<i>The Time of the Hero</i>	18 %	13 %	24.5 %	40 %	19.5 %
<i>The Feast of the Goat</i>	12 %	10 %	11 %	6.5 %	11 %
<i>The Kingdom of This World</i>	6 %	6.5 %	13 %	6.5 %	8 %
<i>The Book of Sand</i>	9 %	3 %	9.5 %	6.5 %	7.5 %
<i>Pedro Páramo</i>	12 %	1.5 %	4 %	6.5 %	7 %
<i>On Heroes and Tombs</i>	6 %	3 %	9.5 %	6.5 %	6 %
<i>Son of Man</i>	5 %	5 %	7.5 %	6.5 %	5.5 %
<i>Our Lady of the Assassins</i>	2 %	3 %	11 %	1.5 %	5 %
<i>The Obscene Bird of Night</i>	2 %	3 %	9.5 %	1.5 %	5 %
<i>Paradiso</i>	1 %	6.5 %	9.5 %	1.5 %	5 %
<i>Heartbreak Tango</i>	2 %	6.5 %	5.5 %	6.5 %	4 %
<i>Rosario Tijeras</i>	6 %	3 %	0	0	3.5 %

García Márquez is the only Latin American writer who appeared on the lists created within the national research on readership. It was declared that *One Hundred Years of Solitude* had been read by 55 of the respondents in 1992. This title also appeared twice in spontaneous answers (Straus, Wolf, 1996:85).

Numerous people declared that they had known *Hopscotch* although critics kept silence over Cortázar's works or showed resentment towards him. However, the popularity and appreciation of this book were confirmed even by young readers in their messages placed on various forums dedicated to literary discussions:

- Now I am reading *Hopscotch* by Cortázar. [...] Excellent prose, I like it – fantastic descriptions of Paris and the protagonists' impressions, a lot of information about jazz, literature and philosophy.

- Cortázar, Cortázar... magic.
- Julio Cortázar and Jostein Gaarder. My literary gods. I can only say that you must try to read their works.<sup>698</sup>

Mainly García Márquez and to some extent Cortázar were regarded as classics in Poland, writers whose works, at least some of them, belonged to the literary canon. Since they were also read by those who did not read any other books of Hispanic writers.

The relative small number of answer choices for Vargas Llosa's novels can result from the fact that the Peruvian author had no single "bestseller" with which his name would be obviously associated. Consequently, the readers' choices went to several titles. The remaining works related to the boom were read only by a few readers in 1990–2005, and those who read them experienced the phenomenon of the boom during their youth. The only book written by an authoress who was not connected with the boom and whose books were read by different generations was *The House of the Spirits*, "a pop version of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*."<sup>699</sup> Other works were mentioned by single respondents. In this context, Pindel's opinion (2004a:197):

If someone feared that after the death of the classics of the book there would be some vacuum, they can relax. Readers have learnt to love Latin American literature for its completely new features.

seems to be wishful thinking.

The most effective way to promote Spanish American literature in Poland turned out to be the so-called word of mouth (tab. 28). Over half of the respondents admitted having followed their friends' opinions. The readers' choices were also made by considering their own aesthetic needs. A trend towards some literature did not incline many readers to pick up a certain book; this was the commonest motif of the generation for who the boom was an experience of their youth. In recent years, school encouraged people to read Spanish American prose, some of its titles being on the list of optional readings.<sup>700</sup> Only

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698 Citations from <http://www.portalsukcesu.pl/?usr;6432>, 10.02.2008.

699 Łobodziński, "M. Vargas Llosa – mistrz fikcyjnego realizmu," *Newsweek* 14 July 2009, <http://www.newsweek.pl/artykuly/sekcje/kultura/m--vargas-llosa---mistrz-fikcyjnego-realizmu,41369,1>, 12.11.2010.

700 See the interesting proposal of a lesson about the short forms of Cortázar's writing in Dutka "O czytaniu utworów Julia Cortázara na <godzinach polskiego> w gimnazjum," *Nowa Poliszczyzna* 2002, no. 1, pp. 10–19.

**Tab. 28:** Motives to read Spanish American prose.

	15–25 age group (100)	26–40 age group (61)	41–60 age group (53)	over 60 age group (15)	total (229)
<b>Friends' opinions</b>	54 %	59 %	68 %	40 %	57.5 %
<b>Aesthetic needs</b>	45 %	49 %	47 %	33 %	46 %
<b>Trends</b>	17 %	21 %	30 %	33 %	22 %
<b>School</b>	33 %	18 %	5.5 %	0	20.5 %
<b>Press reviews</b>	15 %	21 %	24.5 %	40 %	20.5 %
<b>Radio or TV programmes</b>	17 %	11.5 %	5.5 %	20 %	13 %
<b>Internet sources</b>	5 %	11.5 %	2 %	0	5.5 %

1/5 of the respondents claimed that the critical texts published in the press had encouraged them to read Spanish American prose. At this point, it is worth mentioning that we cannot name a periodical that would be authoritative for readers. The first reason for this situation is that 1/3 of the respondents did not read any press titles and secondly, the rest read periodicals having very different profiles. Radio and TV programmes had marginal meaning as regards readers' choices.

My research has not shown correlations between reading Spanish American prose and readers' interest in Latin American culture. There is no connection between the knowledge of Spanish or learning Spanish and reading Spanish American literature, and so it seems that readers did not treat this literature in an instrumental way as a source of knowledge but chose it because of its artistic values. Therefore, this prose was of an autotelic value for them. When it became a bridge triggering intercultural communication, this did not happen directly – since readers did not seek information in it – but as a result of the fulfilment of the philosophical-social and the cognitive function, i.e. through the internalisation of reading experiences.

Finally, it is worth noting the inconsistencies between the results gained in empirical research and those obtained through the analysis of the critical texts. The inconsistencies can especially be seen in the juxtapositions between the answers of the veterans of the boom and the reviews published in the 1970s. The critics stressed the historical-literary context of the discussed works, their political and social dimensions as well as the debates on the Latin American identity. Yet, it does not seem that these elements attracted the attention of readers who satisfied completely different needs through reading Spanish American prose. This is of a greater interest because, as the research showed,

these readers belonged to the skilled public, seeking a prose of highly artistic value, i.e. public whose reception of literature is said to be predominantly at the same level as the professional public. This only confirms the thesis that in order to get to know readers' motives, behaviours and needs, we should approach them directly.