

**CLASSICS IN CONTEMPORARY CULTURE: CULTUROLOGICAL
COMPREHENSION**

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The purpose of the article is to reveal the semantic content and functional role of classics and classical texts in modern society by means of interviewing a focus group. It is concluded that classics and classical texts incorporating new trends structure modern culture.

Key words: *classics, classical text, modern culture, cult text*

**КЛАССИКА В СОВРЕМЕННОЙ КУЛЬТУРЕ: КУЛЬТУРОЛОГИЧЕСКОЕ
ОСМЫСЛЕНИЕ**

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Цель статьи – выявить смысловое содержание и функциональную роль классики и классического текста в современном обществе посредством интервьюирования фокус-группы. Делается вывод о том, что классика и классический текст, вбирая в себя новые тенденции, структурируют современную культуру.

Ключевые слова: *классика, классический текст, современная культура, культовый текст*

In modern culture there is a paradoxical situation according to the concept of “classic”. Obviously, the relevance of classical texts is based on their timelessness as the classic authors appeal to “eternal” images, problems and values. At the same time, it is not impossible to note the tendency to simplify the perception of the fundamental values of culture by modern people. This situation can be explained by the global rapid penetration of the technological field of culture into any sphere of human life and the gradual shift of the spiritual field of culture to the periphery of the cultural space. The result of the universal technological development of the culture is a change in the perception of cultural archetypes – the basic constants of human life – thereby neutralizing their value, which leads to the emergence of such ambiguous cultural phenomena as “double standards” and “double morality”, “third sex”, same-sex marriages, cloning, virtual reality and network communication, global marginalization, etc. The total confusion of the basic concepts of culture leads to a blurring of clear boundaries between them, and results in their simplification. This trend cannot but affect both the classics the classical text. The latter, existing in the conditions of mass culture and in the consumer society, has become a kind of commodity that can be profitable to buy and sell due to its axiological and

ontological properties. Hence, there is an aspiration to frequent reference to the classical text and its interpretation in order to make it entertaining or a cult (which is facilitated by high technologies).

Such treatment of the classical text leads to a mixture of such opposing concepts as “*classic*” and “*cult*”, “*classic author*” and “*cult author*”, “*classical text*” and “*cult text*” in the society. *The classical text* is characterized as exemplary in terms of its content and form; it carries a powerful ontological and axiological potential. Such a text is not just a value-aesthetic standard of a certain cultural and historical period, but it is able to arouse the response and interest of the addressee of any epoch, and as a result is the most promising text in a communicative sense [1, p. 15]. *The cult text* can be regarded as the product most demanded by the mass recipient to form its taste [3, p. 45-48].

To substantiate this point of view, the results of interviewing a focus group of Russians have been used. 110 respondents aged 16 to 65 who represent different categories of the population (pupils, students, teachers of higher and secondary educational institutions, military personnel, clerks, workers, housewives, pensioners, etc.) were included in the focus group. The respondents were asked the following questions:

1. What authors do you consider cult writers?
2. What authors do you consider classics?
3. What literary texts can claim the status of cult?
4. What literary texts can be called classical?
5. What do you think is “*classic*” in modern reality?

Interviewing the focus group revealed that the respondents, on the one hand, equated “*cult author*” to the notions of “*fashionable*”, “*widely advertised*”, or “*mass*” author. According to the respondents’ answers, D. Dontsova, B. Akunin, E. L. James, P. Coelho, S. Meyer, J. Rowling, J. R. R. Tolkien are definitely *cult authors*. On the other hand, the respondents included in the list of *cult authors* F. Dostoevsky, L. Tolstoy, A. Pushkin, M. Lermontov, N. Gogol M. Bulgakov, A. Solzhenitsyn, E. M. Remarque, W. Shakespeare equating them to “*culture-forming authors*”. A “*culture-forming author*” is the author who writes / wrote his / her literary texts in the national language, whose texts have been in demand for a long time not only among readers of the same nation, but also among readers of other nations and thus influence foreign cultures. No doubt such a definition is more typical of “*classical author*”. Thus, there is a tendency to confuse the concepts of “*classic author*” and “*cult author*” and their mutual substitution.

The analysis of respondents' answers about “*classical*” and “*cult*” literary texts revealed a similar trend. The category of “*cult texts*” fell into two distinct subcategories: 1) “*cult*” as “*fashionable*”, “*advertised*”; 2) “*cult*” as “*culture forming*”. At the same time, when answering the question about “*classical*” texts, respondents proceeded from an understanding of the “*classical*” as “*modern*”, “*popular*”, “*fashionable*”, thus substituting the notion of “*classical*” with the notion of “*cult*”. According to respondents’ answers, unconditionally “*cult literary texts*” are: “*Fifty shades of Grey*” by E. L. James; a series of texts about the adventures of *Harry Potter* by J. Rowling; “*Lord of the Rings*” by J. R. R. Tolkien; “*The Twilight*

Saga” by S. Meyer. It is interesting to note that “*War and Peace*” and “*Anna Karenina*” by L. Tolstoy, “*Viy*” by N. Gogol, “*Captain's daughter*” by A. Pushkin, “*Master and Margarita*” by M. Bulgakov were also included in the category of “*cult texts*” by the respondents, which confirms the tendency to confound such different concepts as “*classical*” and “*cult*” literary texts.

Thus, in modern culture the classics and the classical texts still structure its value-semantic “core” as they support the idea of the Absolute and are firmly associated in the respondents’ minds with the concepts of *timelessness, impeccability, elitism, reliability, of exemplary character*. And this, in turn, helps to explain the tendency of modern culture to appeal to the classics not only in art or literature, but also to resort to it for achieving pragmatic goals. For example, the properties and semantic features of the classics are actively used in business. Quotations from classical texts are often used by commercial enterprises in the slogans of campaigns in order to form in the minds of the potential consumer the image of their product as “exclusive”.

The interview of respondents revealed the modern semantic content of the concept “*classical*” as “*the best*”, “*exclusive*”, “*unconditionally expensive*”, hence there are many of its modern variations: “*elegant classic shoes*”, “*classical alcoholic drinks*”, “*elite house made of classic brick*”, etc. It is found out that the respondents correlate the standard of *reference* with the things that *are made according to the established standard, technology or model, are typical of their class*. Criterion of *verification of the classics by time* the respondents relate to the concepts of *quality* and *reliability of the subject*, which makes it possible to classify it as the “high-class” one. The classical criterion of *exemplary character* is replaced by the respondents with the notion of “*foundation*”, “*basis*”, which can be improved, supplemented, updated, and modernized if necessary. It is noted that the respondents call “*classical*” some material things in order to give them a certain status. A classical criterion of elitism corresponds with the concept of “*fashion*”: new, fashionable, modern, relevant phenomena are considered *classical* by the respondents. [1, pp. 21-22].

In conclusion, it is important to note that in contemporary culture the classics and the classical texts are of high relevance. Besides, they are updated with the meanings of “*cult*”, “*elitism*”, “*fashion*”, “*exclusivity*”, which proves their property to structure, perfect and refine the modern culture.

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