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A Medical Professor's Reading List

Annotated reviews of classic and contemporary readings by a professor of medicine

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ABSTRACT

The author presents a set of literary reviews, first explaining the criteria by which he chooses his reading: new books suggested by reviews, classics not yet read or worth rereading, and works from his own collection consulted to resolve doubts. He reflects on the scarcity of time for the mature reader, citing Schopenhauer on the value of not reading what is bad. He then comments on and recommends several works, among them Schopenhauer's 'The Art of Writing', Steven Englund's political biography of Napoleon, Isaac Deutscher's 'Trotsky: The Prophet Armed', Max Weber's 'The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism', and Alípio Corrêa Netto's 'A Doença do Aleijadinho', along with titles by Pitigrilli. The assessments blend personal impressions, historical context, and a defense of the enduring value of the classics.

KEYWORDS: *literary reviews; reading; classics; schopenhauer; medical culture; books*

Former Professor of Medicine at the University of São Paulo; Author of Erro Médico e a Justiça, RT, 5th edition 2003 and Tratado de Clínica Cirúrgica, 2 vol., 2,300 pp., Ed. Roca 2005.

I choose my reading according to the following criteria: 1. *New books* - certain reviews in the Estadão prompt me to acquire particular new titles; 2. *Classic books* - those I had not yet read or that I read long ago and now feel the urge to read or reread; 3. *Books from my own collection* - prompted by someone raising a resolvable doubt, books I have on hand lead me to a quick rereading until I find the answer to the question at issue.The greatest concern in reading a new book is knowing that in buying it one does not buy the time to read it, and, according to Schopenhauer, *a condition for reading what is good is not to read what is bad, for life is short, and time and energy are limited.*To know which books I am reading **at the moment**, a remark is in order. With age we come to feel that time passes faster each day; in compensation, the **moment** grows much longer. A moment denotes a quantity of time. That span, though dictionaries say it is minute, changes dimension under such circumstances. That span, with the reader's own time, grows longer. Which is why **at this moment** I have just read and reread several books. I would not presume to do as Bernard Shaw, who, strolling and reading in Hyde Park, would tear out each page as he finished it and throw it in the trash. A passerby asked him why he was destroying the book. The answer was: I won't have time to reread it!

Schopenhauer, Arthur (1788-1860) - A ARTE DE ESCREVER, *Editora L&PM, RS, 2006, 176 p. R$ 12.00; translated by Pedro Süssekind.*

R. A German philosopher who offers profound reflections and teaches one to think, write, read, and evaluate the writings of others.

1. The work is excellent.
2. Everything to do with writing has always interested me. I ran a course on Scientific Methodology in the Graduate Program at the School of Medicine of the University of São Paulo for 14 uninterrupted years, and

it was very well received by students of Medicine, from USP and from private university units alike.

3. The author influenced Freud and Nietzsche, which is reference enough.
4. I recommend it to all whose profession obliges them to write, and to those who wish to refine the way they write and reason in order to clarify their ideas!

Englund, Steven – NAPOLEÃO UMA BIOGRAFIA POLÍTICA, *Jorge Zahar Editor, RJ, 2005, 630 p. R$ 79.90; translated by Maria Luiza X. de A. Borges.*

R. The author is American and produced a biography so well done that the French liked it.R. An excellent book that analyzes the political life of Napoleon, whose reading was fictionalized in Plutarch.R. Napoleon is a fascinating figure. His life is, today, 200 years later, still much studied by biographers.R. Every young person should read it; it is thrilling.R. It will always be relevant for understanding the history of France, of culture, of citizenship, and of freedom.R. If the French liked it, that is enough to make us enthusiastic.R. I think every young person should know a great deal about Napoleon, if only so that, when they go to Paris and visit Napoleon's Tomb, they understand why they are bowing down to see it.

Deutscher, Isaac – TROTSKI: O PROFETA ARMADO, 1879-1921, *Editora Civilização Brasileira, RJ, 2005, 592 p. R$ 65.90. Translated by Waltensir Dutra.*

R. The subject, Bronstein, came from a well-to-do Jewish family. In 1902, wishing to go to London to join Lenin, he had, for his safety, to procure a false passport and a pseudonym. It occurred to him to adopt the name of his jailer at his last prison in Odessa – Trotsky. The obscure name of that guard became famous in the annals of the history of this protagonist.R. An excellent work.R. Anyone wishing to refine their culture should read it.R. The translation is excellent.R. Culture is always relevant, for it is what one knows after forgetting what one learned.

Max Weber – A ÉTICA PROTESTANTE E O ESPÍRITO DO CAPITALISMO - *Livraria Pioneira Editora, SP, 1967, 233 p. Translated by M. Irene de Q.F. Szmrecsányi and Tamás J.M.K. Szmrecsányi*

R. It is a classic. Whoever has not yet read it, or whoever already has, should read or reread it.R. He was a German economist and sociologist of great international influence, ever timely.R. A proponent of a so-called "interpretive" sociology, objective and free of value judgments.R. The classics are always relevant.

Alípio Corrêa Netto – A DOENÇA DO ALEIJADINHO – *Editora Mestre Jou, SP, 1965, 126 p. Preface by Paulo Duarte.*

Recently a relative of the author sought me out to learn about the aforementioned book, wishing to challenge someone who had appeared in the media claiming to have discovered the true illness of the Aleijadinho.Prof. Alípio published the said book in 1965. It was based on the descriptions made by the historians who recorded the mutilating disease of the artist and his great social activity. At the time, everyone was well acquainted with leprosy and felt great repulsion toward it, not even accepting the entry of such patients into churches. These two facts are enough to rule out leprosy as the disease of Antonio Francisco.The horror of the leper is thousands of years old. Through the ages, these unfortunate people were banished from contact with their healthy fellow men.On the basis of these facts, the Aleijadinho's disease must have been something other than leprosy. Thus Alípio, a deep connoisseur of vascular diseases, found in *thromboangiitis obliterans* the disease that precisely explained what Antonio Francisco had. I myself treated a patient with thromboangiitis obliterans, who appears in his book on page 103 and who, as an inveterate smoker, came periodically to the outpatient clinic of the Hospital das Clínicas of the School of Medicine of the University of São Paulo to have a gangrenous segment of his limbs amputated.I recommend the reading of this book to those who wish to see a line of scientific reasoning applied to a work in the field of medicine, particularly in vascular surgery and angiology, which in the end served to correct a historical error.

Pitigrilli, Dino Segre – O COLAR DE AFRODITE – *A collection of thoughts compiled by G. Blasset, Editora Vecchi, RJ, 300 p;*

Pitigrilli, Dino Segre – DICIONÁRIO ANTI-LOROTEIRO - *Editora Vecchi, RJ, 215 p; translated by Marina Guaspari.*

Pitigrilli, Dino Segre – O FARMACÊUTICO A CAVALO - *Editora Vecchi, RJ, 219 p. Translated by Marina Guaspari.*

These three books by Pitigrilli are classics of the Italian author, who treats everyday situations with sarcasm. They are a cultural complement that everyone should read one day!

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