
Research Papers



Potential values of fiction genre and its future in literature

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Abstract

Despite the two distinctive features of fiction; the mainstream fiction and the fiction genre or the popularly known as popular fiction, they have rooted in depth in each of their areas holding a wide and diverse readership. With or without bare comments on the mainstream fiction, the paper deals the latter fiction with its various subgenres and overlapping its other subgenres, origin in brief, significance as well as the world literature. There is a wide range of popular or genre fiction types and subgenres. All the subgenres though different from one another, hail the dominant factor of popular themes carrying major thrust upon amassing large and wider readership ranging from children to the old people.

To achieve and retain the readership, the writers of the popular fiction are committed to cater what their readers wish. The fiction readers want to be entertained without much of strain to their brain- without philosophy or overdosing of brainstorming social, ethical and literary theories but pure entertainment. Those who grasp the readers' point of view become the bestseller writers. The failures leave; in fact, no room in the popular fiction area and lose their existence in the popular fiction or lead to the conventional fiction where readers are at the insignificant while the critics and their reviews at the crucial place. To name some of the illustrious writers; JK Rowling, Salman Rushdie, Alexander McCall Smith, Dan Brown, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle etc. are the prominent ones in popular fiction. As of subgenres are concerned, there are number of subgenres, each distinctly diverse from other carrying different subjects but sharing one common motive of amassing readers by selling voluminous number

of copies. Following are some of the core contemporary publishing fiction genres.

Action-adventure fiction: It has its beginning from the mid 19th century onwards, with mass literacy growth worldwide; adventure became a prevalent popular subgenre. It traditionally but not exclusively aims at male readers, featuring physical action and violence, often around a quest or military-style mission set in exotic or forbidden locales such as jungles, deserts or mountains. The conflict typically involves commandos, mercenaries, terrorists, smugglers, pirates, spies and the like. Stories of the fiction often include elements of technology, weapons and other hardware, but they may also include unarmed combat. The genre is largely aimed at male audience projecting characters like example the James Bond series. But many post-feminist works feature women in roles more traditionally reserved for males, such as heroic bodyguards, the femme fatale is still a notably frequent archetype in the

genre. This novel often overlaps with other genres, notably with crime novel, science fiction, fantasy and western.

Crime fiction: The subgenre began with Edgar Wallace in the late 19th and early 20th century. The *Four Just Men* is an instance of it. He has to his credit some of the fascinating crime fiction which are very popular among the British readers. The fiction deals with criminal enterprises, their detection, criminals and their motives and they are told from the point of view of the perpetrators. They differ in tone from lighthearted 'caper' stories to darker plots involving organised crime or incarcerated convicts. It is distinguished from mainly the mainstream fiction and even the other subgenre of the popular fiction such as science. But there remains a blurring boundary with the others. During this very time, the popular fiction started regarding it as 'pulp fiction'. An example of this genre is a murder story of Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*.

Detective fiction: It is traced originating with the *Three Apples*, as the earliest known example is one of the tales narrated by Scheherazade in the *One Thousand and One Nights* (Arabian Nights). The fiction is observed as a branch of crime fiction that centres upon the investigation of a crime, usually one or more murders by either a professional or an amateur detective. In Chinese detective fiction, the hero is typically a traditional judge or similar official based on the historical personages. The fiction shares similarity with its synonym mystery. This large popular genre has many subgenres reflecting differences in tone, character, and it always consists of criminal and detective settings. The Golden Age of Detective Fiction was popular during the wars to many English and some North American readers with Arthur Conan Doyle's *Sherlock Holmes*. In others Agatha Christie, Dorothy L. Sayers, Ngaio Marsh and Margery Allingham are considered as the four original Queens of Crime. Agatha Christie is the most popular writer of the Golden Age of whodunit. The sub-plot in the novel *Bleak House* (1853) by Charles Dickens is a fine example of this genre though Dickens and works are regarded as the conventional fiction in the British Literature.

Fantasy fiction: It is defined as a work deriving from imagination dealing with magical objects and supernatural occurrences as the main ingredient of theme, plot and setting. It features stories set in fanciful, invented worlds, an alternate and added fanciful version of our own world or in a legendary or mythic past. Fantasy stories generally involve

magic, mystical elements or supernatural creatures such as vampires. It creates an environment which though very supernatural appears natural and real while the readers are expected to suspend their disbelief and accept the impossible as possible and credible. The genre's relatively loose definition tends to include a large number of works in styles ranging from pseudo-mythological epics like; *Lord of the Rings* to more deliberate modern works such as *Harry Potter* or *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. These works fall under other genres also such as horror, action-adventure or romance. Some works are generally classified as fantasy fiction such as Diane Duane's *Young Wizards* series it also includes elements of science fiction and with many works revolving around psychics and ghosts etc. The fiction of Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* is classed as fantasy fiction.

Horror fiction: It is a work that includes scaring, unsettling and horrifying an audience. It is an experience which is assumed as an intrusion of evil in the everyday life and misconstrued as a supernatural element in the daily life. But the works of 1960s having gruesome, morbid and surreal with thrilling or frightening themes were called horror. The first published American horror story was Washington Irving's *the Legend of Sleepy Hollow*. Modern horror fiction found its roots in the gothic novels that exploded into popularity in the late 18th and the early 19th centuries, typified by Horace Walpole's *the Castle of Otranto* as a prototype and refined by Ann Radcliffe's Gothic novel *the Mysteries of Udolpho*. This genre like others continues to amend from the stories with a religious or supernatural basis to the use of medical or psychological ideologies. Horror stories and mystery stories can both be traced in large measure to Edgar Allan Poe and many others.

Mystery: The term is used to refer a novel or a short story in which a detective either professional or amateur solves a crime. It emphasises on the puzzle element and its logical solution. However in a more general usage, mystery may be used to describe any form of crime fiction even if there is no mystery to be solved. Where there is no crime, the genre refers to completely different situations like that of supernatural overlapping; the other genre. This usage was common during the 1930s and 1940s, where titles such as *Dime Mystery*, *Thrilling Mystery* and *Spicy Mystery* were described as supernatural horror or weird menace stories. This fiction technically involves stories, in which characters try to discover a vital piece of

information which is kept hidden until the climax; it is often used as a synonym for detective fiction. The standard novel stocked in the mystery section of bookstores is a whodunit.

Romance fiction: Romance is traced in the ancient history of literature. It aims primarily to discover the relationship and romantic love of two people as the main plot usually with happy ending. Romance has its roots in the gothic novels. It is believed that the romance fiction is influenced by Ann Radcliffe's gothic novel. Influenced by this, Jane Austen parodied in *Northanger Abbey*, and Charles Dickens and the Brontes also practiced in some of their works. Oldest romance fiction is Samuel Richardson's *Pamela (Virtue Rewarded)*. Later Jane Austen expanded the genre to a height in *Pride and Prejudice* which stands as an epitome in the genre. The success of this fiction made her to be considered to be one of the masters of this genre. Romance fiction is currently the largest and the best-selling fiction genre in North America. This genre, much like fantasy fiction, is broad enough in definition that it is easily and commonly seen combined with other genres, such as comedy, fantasy fiction, literary fiction or action-adventure. The genre is looked at as an optimistic way of life. Elizabeth Lowell; a popular fiction writer and critic appreciates romance in the term of romances follow the ancient Greek formula for comedy which celebrates life rather than anticipates death.

Science fiction: This fiction has some disputes over its origin due to lack of sufficient data. Some people claim it to have begun in the late Middle Ages and others during the scientific revolution relating it to the discoveries of Galileo and Newton. Gothic novel is also ascribed as the beginner of science fiction with Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Science fiction boomed in the 20th century with Jules Verne and H.G. Wells who staged it as a recognisable genre. The fiction is a deep penetration of science and inventions into society creating an interest in literature which explores technology's influence on people and society. It is often set on other planets, in outer space or on a future version of the Earth. It is sometimes used for history of the world, action-adventure and mystery. Alternatively the genre is varied as even fantasy or horror fiction from the science fiction. Within these setting details, the conventions of almost any other genre may be used including comedy, action-adventure and mystery.

Western fiction: The western is defined primarily by being set in the American Old West between the years of 1860 and 1900 and secondarily by

featuring heroes who are rugged, individualistic horsemen (cowboys). Writers of this fiction include Zane Grey from the early 1900s and Louis L'Amour from the mid 20th century. Popularity of this fiction reached peak in 1960s due to the increased televised westerns but inclined to drop from 1970s and reached remarkably low by 2000. Other genres such as romance have subgenres that make use of the Western setting.

Thriller fiction: The origin of thriller is attributed to Homer's *Odyssey* as one of the oldest stories in the Western world and regarded as an early prototype of the thriller. It consists of heroes of great valiance fighting against the better equipped villains and thwarting their plans. Traditionally the heroes of this fiction are men but these days women have also become increasingly common as the heroes exclusively leading the action. It normally leads the readers entirely or partly to the exotic settings like remote places; cities, deserts and high seas. The heroes of the genre can be law enforcement officers, spies, soldiers, seamen or pilots. However they may also be ordinary citizens drawn into danger by accident. The fiction divides in number of sub-genres like spy thriller, political thriller, military thriller, conspiracy thriller, techno-thriller, eco-thriller, erotic thriller, forensic, legal, psychological, horror, disaster, serial killer, romantic, supernatural, action and crime. The thriller overlaps with the mystery stories but differentiates by their structure of the plot. In thriller, a hero has not only to uncover the crime occurred but thwart the enemies' plans. Some of the early and recent thrillers are named here as John Buchan's *the Thirty-Nine Steps*, Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, Dan Brown's *the Da Vinci Code*.

The genre fiction witnesses a strong potential in the world literature in the near future. The readers' inclination for such fiction though a 'pulp' or 'pastime' or whatever it continues to occupy reader's inclination and attention and fulfilling their reading desire or directly or indirectly serving the purpose of retaining the reading habit amongst the readers in the internet society world. Some of the European universities viewed this potential value parameter of this fiction have begun prescribing as a special branch of studies. Some of fiction cited in the paper are surely the needless to say illustrious but they have usurped a stronghold amongst the global readerships. They are read and honoured at par the conventional fiction. That is the success of unsolicited honour of the fiction genre. The paper has attempted to bring forth the

upcoming genre of popular fiction which is at the threshold of the conventional literature knocking the doors to be opened for and to be treated and included with due honour in the conventional literature vis-à-vis the mainstream fiction. The genre fiction has already been started teaching in some of the American universities as one of the branch of regular studies. It is no longer possible for the fiction to wait to be introduced in the most global universities in their curriculum. Some of the fiction mentioned above are better known as conventional fiction than the fiction genre what is gaining ground equal with the conventional fiction. Then they would no more be called as simple entertainer or pulpy or pastime fiction.

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