



POP CULTURE
FREAKS

IDENTITY, MASS MEDIA, AND SOCIETY

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There's always something witty whenever a writer or an artist intentionally adds something in their work that makes people say, "Hey I get that!" These references, which are inspired by previous works, are sometimes used to either pay respect or to mock said work. They have existed since writers and artists became fanboys, and examples of this date back to Roman writers who tried putting their own spin to Greek texts and mythologies.

However, it was not until the birth of pop culture where these references really blasted off. The moment Sherlock Holmes criticized Auguste Dupin in the *Study of Scarlet* gave rise to modern homage, pastiche, and parodies we love today. Pop culture references became more and more common as films and video games became popular, to the point that some works were written solely for the purpose of adding these references. It wasn't until the late 2000s where these pop culture-infused films, books, and games became their own genre. A genre known as Pop Culture Fiction or Mass Culture Fiction.

Characteristics

Pop Culture Fiction can exist as any other genre. But its most defining characteristic is its stories that are filled to the brim with pop culture references. This isn't just about referencing one or two works. In Pop Culture Fiction, references are the main appeal of the story. In some examples, their whole universe and mythos even revolve around pop culture references.

The works that are most associated in this genre are homages and modern parodies (like those of *Scary Movie*-fame). A lot of science-fiction stories, especially those concerning virtual reality and nerd culture, can also fall under this genre. In recent years, metafiction that are surrealistic, wacky, and out of this world (like *Regular Show* and *Scott Pilgrim*), have also become examples of this genre.

Due to stricter laws and etiquette when it comes to copyright, Pop Culture Fiction in film and television exist mainly as parodies or cartoons. You won't see anyone making a film where Batman and Jason Voorhees fight unless they came from the same studio, or have large amounts of money to pay off their creators. Because of this, there are only a few examples of this genre in film and television, and most of them are either cartoons or live-action parodies (the latter which is already a dying genre in the medium).

But still there were some serious examples that have been released. The most famous film about pop culture is *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* A humorous, satirical and wacky film about a detective and a cartoon rabbit. It may sound like child's play, but the amount of sexual innuendos and adult humor made sure that it is definitely not for children. It was created by Robert Zemeckis as a homage to the slapstick genre he grew up with, and as such, is filled with tons of pop culture references of said genre. It even has Bugs Bunny and Mickey Mouse meeting each other in one scene; a scene that will probably never happen again in a long time.

When it comes to television, the most popular examples are the works of Seth McFarlane. His adult-style cartoon *Family Guy* is filled with both retro and modern pop culture references. In the show *Family Guy* (and other similar works by McFarlane), references are used both as a gag and a plot point in the story. Everything from historical events, celebrities, to even current issues (like online bashing and abortion) have been satirized and referenced in this show. Controversies about it, together with similar shows like *South Park*, did occur during its runtime. But most of these were probably planned by the mad genius that is Seth McFarlane.

Books and Graphic Novels

Unlike in motion pictures, Pop Culture Fiction has an easier time existing in the realm of ink and paper. Since copyright laws here

can be tricked through the use of visual and ingenious warping, writers and artists have been able to add references much easier into their stories. In terms of books and novels, science-fiction has been the home of many examples of Pop Culture Fiction. Books like *Ready Player One*, which is filled with 80s nostalgia like *Pac-Man*, *Monty Python* and *Joust*, is one of the most famous examples.

The book *Escapist Dream* however, is the novel that really embodied the genre to its core. Like *Ready Player One*, it also pandered around geek culture. But unlike the former, *Escapist Dream* took it up the notch by including other geek-related stuff like anime, comics, films, literature, and modern video games. The large amount of pop culture references were well-written and well-integrated into the story, unlike some who only add references for the sake of it. These references both described and satirized geeks in a humorous and intellectual way. In the world of literature and geek culture, *Escapist Dream* is by far, the *Great Gatsby* of Pop Culture Fiction.

Pop Culture Fiction in comics and graphic novels are mainly used as a way to share nostalgia. *Scott Pilgrim* for example was filled with a lot of cheesy 80s video game references (like *Ready Player One*), while the *League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* was written as a love letter to British media from Sherlock Holmes, Captain Universe to Harry Potter. One book, Warren Ellis' superhero story *Planetary*, became unmatched as a homage to all fiction. Its world is built upon references to every genre from fantasy, science-fiction, kaiju, Hong Kong action cinema, horror etc. Because of this, *Planetary* became one of a few comic books which garnered scholarly interest in the literary world.

Manga and Anime

Pop Culture Fiction in Japanese media is few and far between. There have been some recent examples in post-2010 manga and anime but most of these focused only on Japanese culture. Unlike its Western counterpart where there are stories written that were worthy of literary analysis, most Pop Culture Fiction in Japan