Literary vs popular fiction essay sample

Literature, Fiction

Is literary fiction better than popular fiction? What is the difference between the two? Book lovers often hear the words ' popular fiction' – also known as ' genre fiction' and ' literary fiction' thrown around in conversation, but what do these terms actually mean? There is a saying that if popular fiction was a sport it would be football, and if literary fiction was one, it would be polo. This is an example of how people see the two types of fiction; being on opposite ends of the scale. Many people have differing opinions on which one is better than the other. Although I believe that it is not necessarily the case of one being better than the other, rather that they are just different. When comparing popular fiction with literary fiction, a number of differences can be seen. The most widely known difference is that literary fiction are works that offer deliberate commentary on large scale social and political issues. They focus on an individual to explore some part of the human condition. Popular fiction is known as more plot-driven with the intent of fitting into a specific literary genre. It can be divided up into sub categories such as romance, horror and sci-fi (McCracken 1998).

Often, the setting or place in which a popular fiction novel sets the scene are exotic or immediately familiar, which offers the possibility to escape into a different world. Popular fiction uses more dialogue in their works, creating a more conversational style of writing that is familiar to the reader because of how we speak in everyday life, this is because many popular fiction authors write as they speak. This language is often plainer than literary fiction. According to Gelder (2004) popular fiction is essentially genre fiction, whereas genre is less important to literary fiction, the field of popular fiction simply cannot live without it, both culturally and industrially. Popular fiction

novels have an emphasis on entertainment; some novels within popular fiction include those such as Harry Potter, The Hunger Games, Twilight, Fifty Shades of Grey and Bridget Jones' Diary. Like all novels, a literary novel has a plot that exposes characters that the reader becomes attached to and cares about. The background of which the writer writes is what makes it literary. The language is often more extensive than popular fiction, and the main point of literary fiction is that when the reader finishes the novel they feel as if they have taken something away from the book about the human condition.

The language in literary fiction is treated with much care, not wasting a single word and including many metaphors. Some novels within the literary fiction field include Pride and Prejudice, Jane Eyre and To Kill a Mockingbird. What is truly elitist in literary studies is the idea that works of literature can only be appreciated by those with a particular sort of cultural breeding (Eagleton 2011). There is an apparent divide between the people who enjoy reading literary fiction and those who read popular fiction, often preferring one in particular. Those who prefer literary fiction are often chasing answers for bigger issues in life, where as popular fiction is seen as ' light reading'. It is stereotyped that literary fiction requires more of an intelligent and academic writer, therefore is seen as ' better' in general. The fact that many prestigious awards for fiction are given to works of literary fiction can make it easy to claim that those types of writers are superior.

It is obvious that writers of ' literary' fiction are well-read, and they write for readers like themselves. There are plenty of readers out there who strongly

believe that popular fiction does not deserve any praise, as well as types of readers who would classify literary, or ' serious', fiction as pretentious and boring. I believe that both types of fiction have their own appeal and as time goes on the lines between the two fictions are becoming increasingly overlapped. No one type is better than the other. What it comes down to is the experience that the reader is after and their personal preference and I believe that how we perceive the world can affect our reading habits. Literary fiction seeks to engage its readers with the world where as popular fiction looks to provide an escape from reality and into the author's imagination.

Bibliography

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