

The Revival of Dystopian Novels

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It seems not too long ago that televisions and bookstores nationwide were plagued with the then-latest trend: vampires. From *Twilight* to *Vampire Diaries*, teens everywhere were drawn into the blood-sucking craze.

Lately, a new contender has swept the vampire craze under the rug, leading the way to a new era of movies, television and book series. Rising from the ashes and taking first place is a not-so-new genre: post-apocalyptic and dystopian literature.



The genre of dystopian literature has existed for years. From George Orwell's *1984* to Orson Scott Card's *Ender's Game*, dystopian literature continually shows up in English classes nationwide and are constantly being revamped into modern movies. It seems that recently the entire genre of dystopian literature has been revived, refilling the shelves of bookstores with their daring heroes and twisting plotlines.

Unlike fantasy, dystopian literature has a certain set of characteristics that generally appear throughout all dystopian texts. The most notable characteristic includes a society with a strict, foreign set of rules that cause the government and society to be on the brink of

collapse or revolution. Most dystopian novels also take place after the collapse of modern western civilization and feature a protagonist that defies the standards of society.

September of 2008 marked a turning point in the popularity of dystopian literature with the release of Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games*. With nearly 65 million copies in print, *The Hunger Games* has spent five consecutive years on the *New York Times* bestseller list. In 2012 the movie adaption brought in over \$152 million just in its opening weekend, ranking it as the seventh highest grossing film in an opening weekend.

But what is the appeal of this genre? And what has caused this sudden shift in interest? Talawanda High School teacher Bernie Phelps explained he noticed a big shift in reading interests after the release of Collins first book. "I definitely saw the boom with *Hunger Games*," he said. "I guess that the trilogy sparked an interest in that type of genre."

Phelps elaborated, explaining that other authors may have tried to attain the same success that Collins had with *The Hunger Games*, "Other authors may have jumped on the bandwagon and that made them start writing these dystopian novels and kids have just stuck with that genre," he explained.

However, the dystopian phenomenon did not end with *The Hunger Games*. In May of 2011, Veronica Roth released her first book *Divergent*. Within a year, *Divergent* had climbed to the #1 spot on the *New York Times* bestsellers list for paperbacks. *Insurgent*, the second installment also climbed to the top, holding the #1 spot for hardbacks within the same month.

Other series such as *Matched* by Ally Condie and *Delirium* by Lauren Oliver have also brought on the revival of dystopian series. All of these series feature common trends, such as an apparently utopian society that is unjust in some way. A female heroine dominates all of these series as well, driving the plot line by defying the government their society blindly follows.

Talawanda librarian Monica Greene admitted to seeing an increase, both in the checking out of dystopian novels at school and an increase in the publishing of dystopian literature overall. She explained that the current students might have a better appreciation of it now than in the past.

"Back in the 70s and 80s, I don't think people saw that there was ever a chance that society could really control us. But, I think as we see things change – and I'm not saying that society will ever control us – but I think people are drawn more to it because it's becoming more realistic," she reasoned.

The obsession with this post-apocalyptic genre has spread to other areas as well. Besides the dystopian genre, readers and television fanatics alike have also zoned in on another post-western civilization genre: zombies.

Like dystopian literature, zombies are hardly new. With *Night of the Living Dead* celebrating its 45th anniversary this past October, zombies have long been a staple in pop culture. However, there has been a recent interest in the genre, with new additions to the film and book realm of the living dead.

The Walking Dead took the world by storm in 2010 when the tv show adaption of the comic hit AMC, landing a spot in IMDb's top 100 tv shows with a rating of 8.7/10. To date, the show has been nominated for 61 awards, winning a total of 17 awards including Favorite Cable TV Drama at the People's Choice Awards this year.

In the past two years movies have brought the dead back to life with features such as *World War Z* and *Warm Bodies*. Both are adaptations of books, but the similarities end there. *World War Z* depicts the typical zombie apocalypse, with a fast moving virus quickly overtaking the world, while *Warm Bodies* is told from the viewpoint of "R", a zombie who actually has a conscience and befriends a human.

The zombie genre has even made its way so far as to appear in children's movies. The 2012 animated stop-motion movie *Paranorman* took its own spin on the mythology of zombies, telling the tale of a witch's curse that brings the dead back to life to plague the protagonist, Norman's, town.

Both dystopian literature and zombie movies have the same post-apocalyptic feel to them, and both are hardly a light and airy subject. So why is it that this generation has fallen in love with the darkness that comes with post-apocalyptic movies and books?

Talawanda Senior Maggie Herrle thinks our own society is to blame. "Our society has become so bored and unchallenged, we like the idea of having to become inventive and rely on ourselves. It's a change from this boredom we've created."

And whether we find excitement in the thrill of surviving another day, or in the struggle to be ourselves in an unjust world, the phenomena of post apocalyptic and dystopian literature is vast in its scope. Phelps insists however, that this interest is probably a good thing, "I definitely have seen an increase in their [students'] passion to read. It's had a positive effect, I think."

Let's just hope that these interests don't become full-fledged realities.