

TREND WATCH

FICTION GENRES

new and improved!



PIC: THINKSTOCK

The modern fiction landscape is being bombarded by an assortment of refreshing styles of writing. Kasmin Fernandes introduces you to seven emerging genres set to populate your bookshelf

THERE is a silent revolution taking shape right now, and it doesn't involve guns and swords but something considered mightier: the pen (or its modern equivalent, the keyboard). As novelist Henry Giles once said, silent, passive, and noiseless though they may be, books set in action countless multitudes, and change the order of nations.

In this case, it's the literary world itself that is changing rapidly with new-fangled versions of fiction writing. Cli-fi, mythopoeia and fanfic (short for fanfiction), for instance. The enormously popular *50 Shades of Grey* books actually started out as vampire franchise *Twilight*-inspired fanfic. When its author EL James was signed on to publish it commercially, she altered character names and changed a few details.

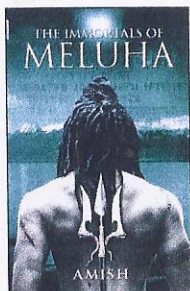
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MYTHOPOEIA

This genre is the stuff of legend, literally! Mythopoeia is Greek for mythos-making. As the name suggests, it's a narrative genre where a fictional mythology is created by the author. *Lord of the Rings* author JRR Tolkien first used the term as the title of one of his poems in order to explain and defend creative myth-making. Mythopoeia is getting a fresh lease of life with popular book series like *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins, *Percy Jackson* by Rick Riordan, and *A Song of Fire and Ice* series by George RR Martin (turned into TV drama *Game of Thrones*). Indian authors aren't far behind. Amish Tripathi, Ashwin Sanghi are mining our nation's ancient epics to write thrillers and fantasy series.



BIZARRO

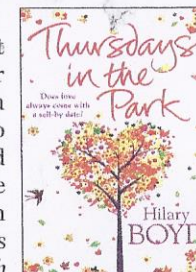
This genre was created by a group of small American press publishers in response to the increasing demand for good weird fiction and the growing number of authors who specialise in it. Simply put, bizarro is the genre of the weird. It is literature's equivalent to the cult section at the DVD store. Like those cult movies, bizarro strives not only to be strange and fascinating, but thought-provoking and fun to read. Think *Alice in Wonderland* for grown-ups, or Japanese animation directed by Hollywood filmmaker David Lynch. The stories are sometimes surreal, sometimes goofy, sometimes gory, but always completely out there. There is a certain cartoon logic that, when applied to the real world, creates an unstable universe where the bizarre becomes the norm and absurdities are made flesh. Take for instance Jeff Burk's *Shatnerquake*. The novel is about every character that *Star Trek*'s lead actor William Shatner has ever played entering our reality with one mission: to hunt down and destroy the real William Shatner! This literature of the absurd is gaining a steady following, one nerd at a time.

What to read: *Shatnerquake* by Jeff Burk; *The Cannibals of Candyland* by Carlton Mellick III; *Felix and the Sacred Thor* by James Steele



GRAN-LIT

You've heard of chick-lit for women in their twenties. Gran-lit is a new genre that is out to prove that romance and passion aren't the forte of just the young. In books with catchy titles such as *The Hot Flash Club*, *Julie and Romeo*, and *The Red Hat Club*, authors give reassurance that the middle-age and later years, while not without challenges and sorrows, can include zest, adventure, and romance. It was coined after 2011 book *Thursdays in the Park*, a romance between two 60-somethings, became an e-book sensation and a bestselling novel. The author Hilary Boyd is a spunky 62-year-old herself. "I wanted to write about what it was like to be a young-at-heart pensioner and a grandmother in the 21st century. Not a specs-toting granny, but a modern one,



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"Mythopoeia has taken off in the Indian diaspora because there has been a change in readership from a mature audience to a younger one. This lot has a desperate yearning to reconnect. They want to consume mythology but in a well-packaged and easily digestible way."

— Ashwin Sanghi, author of *The Rozabal Line*, *Chanakya's Chant* and *The Krishna Key*

advocator and *Fight Club* author Chuck Palahniuk said on his writing portal. "A big reason why I started writing is I felt that fiction had stopped evolving. All other entertainments were getting better, constantly, as technology allowed. Movies. Video games. Music. And as their audiences became more sophisticated, these other media could experiment and risk trying new storytelling methods. The bright future is that readers are accepting more varied forms of stories. And books have the freedom to portray topics movies and music never could—because their success relies on attracting a huge broadcast audience. This combination of 'sophisticated reader' and 'freedom' will give future writers their advantage."

Whenever a new literary term is coined, it's a chance to observe not only the innovative authors but the readers as well who buy and discuss it. And as these exciting fiction styles gain traction, that discussion will only get louder.



"The English language publishing industry in our country wasn't market driven. The success of these new genres is a result of our increasing self-confidence as a nation. Now, publishers are more open to new fiction genres."

— Amish Tripathi, banker-turned-author of the *Shiva Trilogy*

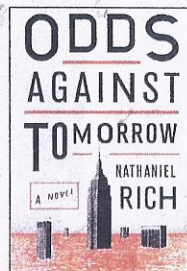
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What to read: *The Shiva Trilogy* books by Amish Tripathi; *The Krishna Key* by Ashwin Sanghi, *The Guardians of Karma* by Mohan Vzhakat; *Thundergod: The Ascendance of Indra* by Rajiv G Menon; *Once Upon an Elephant* by Ashok Mathur

CLI-FI

Hand it to the growing concern over global warming; cli-fi is a hot trend in books. Short for climate fiction, cli-fi describes stories about the hazards of climate change. It's a world where eco terrorists are the villains and impending environmental disasters are the order of the day. The term cli-fi was coined by Taiwan-based blogger Danny Bloom in 2007 in a bid to market his e-book *Polar City Red*, about Alaskan climate refugees. The book bombed but cli-fi caught on. In the recent past, renowned writers like Michael Crichton and Ian McEwan have tackled the genre. McEwan wrote after the release of his cli-fi novel *Solar*. "I'm surprised there aren't more such books. Climate change has clearly begun to have an impact on our lives already, on a small scale, on a private level and on a geopolitical level." Says Nathaniel Rich, author of new cli-fi novel *Odds Against Tomorrow*. "We will increasingly see more novels that incorporate ecological themes as more people begin, or are forced, to contemplate the catastrophic ways in which we have transformed the planet."

What to read: *Oryx and Crake* by Margaret Atwood; *State of Fear* by Michael Crichton; *Solar* by Ian McEwan; and *Flight Behaviour* by Barbara Kingsolver



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FANFIC

Short for fanfiction, fanfic is prose or poetry written by fans of a film or book, featuring the person's favourite characters. The stories are posted online or published in a 'fanzine' (fan magazine). While fanfic did exist among science fiction junkies in the pre-internet days, the ability to share and discuss stories on the web has led to its explosion. You can find fanfic in any fandom, from popular franchises like epic fantasy *Lord of the Rings* to the obscure. Most writers pick up the story from where the original left off or change things to their liking (for instance, some fans have kept Sirius Black alive in their versions of *Harry Potter*). The legitimacy of fanfic as a literary genre has been under debate. A slew of fanfic stories seeing the light of publishing day (chiefly *50 Shades of Grey* that EL James began as vampire franchise *Twilight*-inspired fanfic) laid this doubt to rest. With news of another *Twilight*-inspired fanfic getting a two-book deal, and Kindle Worlds set to offer fanfic authors a slice of the publishing profits, this method is hitting the big time.



INTERACTIVE FICTION

Ever wished you could change the ending of a novel after you finished reading it? In the world of interactive fiction, you can. And not just the climax, you can change the way the story unfolds at every major turn. Interactive fiction tells you the beginning of a story, and then puts you in command of how the story moves forward. The genre has been around since the mid-70s. Remember the *Choose Your Own Adventure* and *Give Yourself Goosebumps* series of children's books? The medium is taking off again with the rise of e-books and gaming. Current interactive fiction blurs the lines between the virtual and real worlds. Through embedded links, you can unlock 'what if' storylines, change the world by interacting with the author through a voting platform, or re-read key scenes from the perspective of different characters. The best part is, there is no wrong way to read an interactive novel. With news that major publishers like Random House and DC are launching interactive fiction platforms, this genre could be the next dimension of the reading experience.

What to read: *Blood of the Zombies* by Ian Livingstone; *Beer, Women and Bad Decisions* by Shawn Harris; *Photopia* by Adam Cadre; *Whom The Telling Changed* by Aaron A Reed



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What to read: *Thursdays in the Park* by Hilary Boyd; *Loop Group* by Larry McMurtry; *The Ladies of Covington Send Their Love* series by Joan Medlicott

MINIMALISM

A lesser-known genre in revival is minimalism thanks to its new guiding light, Chuck Palahniuk. Says the novelist, "Minimalism" seems closest to the sophisticated storytelling of movies. Movies have really educated contemporary audiences to be the most intelligent, sophisticated audiences in history. They no longer need to have the relationship between one scene and the next explained." Post-modern minimalism is all about short sentences and a stripped-down, terse writing style. It mimics the way an average person would talk when relaying a story to someone else. Authors keep adjectives, adverbs and meaningless details to a minimum. Instead of providing every minute detail, the author gives a general context and allows the reader's imagination to shape the story. The latest book in this genre is *Burnt Tongues* featuring minimalist short stories from 20 of Palahniuk's online writing workshop students. An exciting offshoot of modern minimalism is flash fiction, which is even shorter and so plot-driven that every word has the 'plot' as its only objective.

What to read: *Lullaby* by Chuck Palahniuk; *The Mind's Eye* by Liver Sacks; *Automated Alice* by Jeff Noon; *31 Songs* by Nick Hornby

