

My love of literature

Description

I've spent a lot of time thinking about reading for pleasure, without actually doing any of it myself.

Let me back up by saying that I am an extremely avid reader. I read the newspaper every morning, as well as countless blogs, press releases and articles for work. However, ingesting all this news has produced an unexpected side effect.

When I arrive home from work, it is difficult to pick up a book (or magazine or other such literature) and read for pleasure. It becomes a chore, which is something that reading should not be and never has been for me before.

I started reading later than other kids, which my parents say is not unusual for twins, since we also started talking a bit later than most kids (though my brother and I did have a "secret" language which we could both understand, but sounded like gibberish to everyone else - believe me, there's video evidence of this).

But as my Dad is fond of saying, "Once you picked up a book, you never stopped."

And I didn't.

I inhaled books and progressed up the reading ladder quickly.

I started with children's books, but quickly progressed to young kids, then young adults and finally to "adult" books. By the point I was in grade 4/5, I was reading Michael Crichton and Stephen King books by the pound. I was a machine, who not only understood what I was reading, but did so quickly and enjoyed them.

It was shortly after grade 5 that I was on a "books that inspired the great horror movies of yesteryear" kick that included Frankenstein, Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, Picture of Dorian Grey and more, and read what was to be one of my favourite books ever - Dracula by Bram Stoker.

Vampires always held a weird fascination with me, and it was only natural that I would eventually read the classic novel. And to my surprise, I enjoyed it so much that I would continue to read it multiple times a year.

What still stands out from that initial reading is the fact that it was written differently, in the form of diary entries of the main characters. It was not the traditional style of narration, and it made me feel like I was reading a secret that I should not be. Add the fact that it initially unfolded like a mystery, possessed an interesting cast of characters and had subtext that requires multiple readings - I was hooked.

My copy has been so enjoyed over the decades that I had to buy a new copy when I took a course in university entitled "Horror and Terror: Variations in Gothic."

While Dracula remained my favourite book for a long time, many books joined it in being repeat reads, including a wide variety by Stephen King, as well as the Harry Potter books, every Sherlock Holmes story/novel, the Lord of the Rings, etcâ€¦

But then, many years later, my sister suggested to me a tiny little book that I had heard of in passing but never really considered. Since she usually never steers me wrong, I went to Chapters and picked it up and polished it off within an hour or so.

The story was simple enough: the oppressed rebel against their oppressors and believe things will be different, but the new government slowly but surely devolves into a very similar beast.

I am, of course, talking about George Orwellâ€™s masterpiece, Animal Farm.

It is a short read from the mid 1940â€™s, clocking in at about 110 pages or so, but it remains relevant, interesting and holds true even 70+ years later. Disguised as a fairytale about animals taking over their own farm and forming a new society, it is actual a morality fable about the corrupting nature of power, communism and greed.

You could write dozens of papers about what Orwell talks about, and probably many have, but the cultural subtext is not even what interests me the most. What I enjoy about the book are the interactions between the animals, the foreshadowing and the belief that if we would just look a little harder, animals are not so different than us after all.

These books, Dracula and Animal Farm, remain a constant highlight anytime I read them, like re-visiting an old friend or recalling a fond memory of love long lost.

They are far from perfect â€“ Dracula drags on at points, characters vanish and reappear with no explanation (except for Dracula, who has supernatural powers and can actually do that) and leaves many plot threads dangling at the end that you could make a scarf. And Animal Farm is so short that it is a stretch calling it a novel and the symbolism is so blatant at points that you want to shout, â€œel get it Orwell, communism and oppression is bad, would you please move on?â€

And yet, I love the books I re-read, and I always enjoy them, whether I have days to lounge around and take my time or speed read through them.

Now if youâ€™ll excuse me, my bookshelf is calling me â€¦ I wonder what I should read next. Any suggestions?

Category

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Date Created

June 27, 2012

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