



# NOT YOUR REGULAR FICTION GENRES

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If someone asked me what my favourite fiction genre is, I would probably reply with a predictable "fantasy" or "romance". We all have different tastes, of course, but it seems that only the common genres come under the spotlight, despite the existence of other more obscure yet interesting ones.

Here are some examples of such genres and the books you could read if you wanted to try them out:

### Bildungsroman

This odd word comes from the combination of two German words - *Bildung*, meaning "education," and *Roman*, meaning "novel." This genre essentially encompasses coming of age stories, where the psychological and moral growth of the protagonist, usually transitioning from youth to adulthood, is a core theme. Options in this genre are both vast and popular. For a light read, a good example is *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* by Stephen Chbosky, an enthralling book about Charlie, a 15-year old struggling to cope in high school. Among classics you could try *Jane Eyre* or

*The Catcher in the Rye.*

### Black Comedy

This is also known as Dark Comedy and contains books which portray an otherwise serious or often taboo topic, such as death or murder, in a light, funny, or satirical way. *Catch-22* by Joseph Heller, an anti-war satire revolving around the theme of death during World War II is a thought-provoking read to consider. If you don't mind Chuck Palahniuk's crude language, give the action-packed *Fight Club* a try. *As I Lay Dying* by William Faulkner, a story about trials written through 15 different points of view, also has multiple instances of black comedy in the characters' actions.

### Epistolary

This refers to books written through a series of letters, diary entries and news clippings. The beauty of epistolary fiction is that it doesn't read like a regular narration rather makes you feel connections with the writer(s). There's something real about it. Spine-tingling classics *Dracula* by Bram Stoker and *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley belong to this genre. More recent forms of communication such as recordings and e-mails also count as epistolary,

two examples are *The Boy Next Door* by Meg Cabot and Sinclair Smith, and *Attachments* by Rainbow Rowell. These two lean on the romantic side so if that's not your cup of tea, *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker (which provides insight into the lives of African-American women in the 1930s) shouldn't disappoint.

### Alternate History

Events from the past are re-written about with a "what if" twist. Popular themes include - what if the losing side in a historic battle actually won? How different would things be? Science fiction elements such as time travel are often embedded in alternate history. Harry Turtledove is probably the most famous writer of this genre, his *Ruled Britannia* set in 1597-98, imagines a world where the Spanish Armada was victorious in 1588 and The Kingdom of England was conquered and brought under the rule of Queen Isabella, daughter of Philip II of Spain. Stephen King's *11/22/63* is about a time traveller who attempts to prevent the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, but sets into motion unexpected events. This is one good science fiction novel.

### Mythopoeia

Or literally, "myth-making" refers to stories about artificial mythologies. Mythopoeia is not to be confused with Fantasy, as the former must have well-developed, specific mythologies (usually created by one writer in a short period of time) rather than actual ones that are

usually passed on through generations. The use of mythopoeia in this sense was popularised by J.R.R. Tolkien after he wrote the poem *Mythopoeia*. Tolkien's *The Lord of The Rings* and *The Silmarillion*, set in mythological Middle-earth, are definitive examples of the genre. Chances are you're already familiar with them. If so, consider reading *The Dark Tower* by Stephen King or Rick Riordan's *Camp Half Blood Chronicles* which has been called "contemporary mythopoeia" for his modern interpretations of Greek and Roman mythology.

### Bangsian

Bangsian Fantasy has rather specific characteristics - it deals with often famous late individuals and their interactions in the afterlife. This genre probably isn't for you if the idea of death scares you terribly. Written by John Kendrick Bangs (the pioneer of this genre), a must-read is *A House-Boat on the Styx* which consists of short stories about a bunch of famous dead people on a, you guessed it, boat on the river Styx. Books by other writers include *The Lovely Bones* by Alice Sebold, a story narrated by a dead teenage girl, and *Damned* by Chuck Palahniuk.

If you're feeling monotony from your usual book shelf, a look into these genres may just be what you need.

Salma Mohammad Ali fears she is becoming a crazy cat lady and uses writing as a means to grasp on to sanity. Send her your views/hate/love at [fb.com/salma.ali209](https://www.facebook.com/salma.ali209)



Bildungsroman (noun):

A type of novel concerned with the education, development, and maturing of a young protagonist.