

Switch

Written by Administrator

Sunday, 23 January 2011 09:42 - Last Updated Sunday, 23 January 2011 10:25

A thought came to me while reading the second book of Suzanne Collins' "The Hunger Games" series. While I'm enjoying it, really enjoying it (I'll review it sometime), I did find myself focusing on the prose. Yes, I understand it's a juvenile series (at least I hope it is). I understand that the writing is pretty basic. No clever flow, no startling visual imagery, no insightful character development, no creative language use. The story (while good) is just shipped to us, a simple description of events.

She's not alone in this - consider top-selling general-audience authors and you have Clive Cussler, John Grisham, Stephen King and the like. They pound out books that their huge audiences suck in through their eyeballs. But I think of writers from the past I've enjoyed and reread such as Wells, Sabatini, Twain and Dumas, and the difference becomes clear.

Modern writers write throw-away books. They don't expect their audiences to buy a leather-bound copy of their works, to reread them and study them and quote them. They are paperbackers, producing work you'll likely leave on the seat in the airport when you're through. And that's sad, because if we don't reflect on our literary tales, we'll perhaps not reflect upon our lives, either.

Now, I'm not a film critic (but I can be critical of films) but it appears that just the opposite is happening. Films used to be throwaway efforts. Not that there aren't stupid films both then and now, but the shooting was far more casual. Watched a couple of old flicks last night - "Monsoon" and "Borderline" - and there was very little directing in them. The actors appeared to be standing where they'd walked onto the sets, there were few interestingly staged shots, and groups stand in theatrical half-circles, speaking their lines in careful order.

Contrast that to movies now, where every shot is considered. We're over people's shoulders, we're zooming in, moving about. And action shots - even given the technological improvements - you have low shots, sweeping shots, slow motion shots, CGI, slow-rolling fireballs, slow-rolling car crashes, zooming, foreshortening, everything that goes into action porn.

These movies are made to be watched and rewatched, to be slowed down or paused on our plasma screens, to be studied in HD detail.

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Once we found insight in literature and popped out for five cents for Buck Rogers. Now it appears the opposite is true. We read junk novels for simple amusement and find our hearts stirred by visual imagery.

But is there an equivalence between a turn of phrase which reveals a simple truth verses Rambo releasing an arrow in slow motion?