

Vampires and Zombies: No mere pop culture trend

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Peter Logan

(PhysOrg.com) -- Vampires and zombies, both of which became a popular phenomenon in Victorian Britain, are all the rage. Temple English Professor Peter Logan believes this is no mere pop culture trend, but rather a reflection of the strong parallels between that period in Britain and our own here in the U.S.

Victorian Britain was the first industrialized society and the dominant world super power of the nineteenth century. At the height of the Victorian period, one quarter of the world's population were British

subjects.

Temple English professor says vampires popularity lives as long as they do -- forever.

“It was the beginning of the world as we know it today, and it was beset with some of the same problems associated with being a world power that we are currently facing,” Logan said.

But, while vampires were popular during the nineteenth century — just as we see today in the hit HBO series *True Blood* and the *Twilight* series of books and movies — the phenomenon didn’t start with *Dracula*.

The title character in Varney the [Vampire](#) (1847) was an aristocrat who walked around in daylight, but he needed the moonlight to survive, said Logan.

“The classic scene during this time is of a weakened vampire soaking up the moonlight and being revived,” he said.

Appearing at the end of the nineteenth century, Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* reflects a changed [social environment](#) in which the British Empire was at its height and conflicts with the colonies in Africa and Asia were a major concern.

“For these changed times, Count *Dracula* is still an aristocrat, but he is also an outsider from the fringe of Europe, and he brings his mysterious ways to London, the heart of England and the center of the empire,” said Logan.

Some critics view this as a reflection of English fears of being “contaminated” by a colonial culture that is very different, in which case the story warns about maintaining the imagined “purity” or homogeneity

of England, he noted.

What has changed with the vampires of today?

“In the past, vampires could feel rage, but not romantic love, and they didn’t have sex,” said Logan. “The fact that they do now accounts for this recent surge in popularity. They are not just metaphorically erotic—in True Blood, its standard sex; but it’s between human and a paranormal.

“It’s the same in Twilight,” added Logan. “Although, it’s never fully acted upon, Twilight is still a typical Boy meets Girl story.”

But worth noting, said Logan, is that now that vampires are able to love and have come out in the open, an overt civil rights theme has developed, which we see played out in True Blood.

“This change in the vampires and the story lines may be a reflection of our changing attitudes toward heterogeneity,” said Logan. “Instead of fearing contamination, we are learning to accept differences.”

Another example of 19th century culture currently in circulation is *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*, which jumped to the top of the New York Times Best Seller List when it was published last April. Of course, *Pride and Prejudice* remains a beloved classic, but the fact that the addition of zombies to the text made for such a successful adaptation says a lot about our own time and author Jane Austen’s.

“It all seems ludicrous at first, until you realize there are some serious things going on,” explained Logan.

According to Logan, if you read between the lines, zombies are already present in *Pride and Prejudice*. Austen’s was a paternalist world in which women were constantly threatened by seducers, and the consequences of

pregnancy outside of marriage really were life and death.

“In novels, an unwed mother would be forced into a life of prostitution in order to support her illegitimate child and would die a pauper in a beggar’s house,” he said. “In this sense, then, the men were predators.”

Looking at the work from a modern perspective, fighting zombies is the perfect metaphor for the woman who is working both inside and outside the home.

“Slaying zombies is just something that is added to the list,” Logan added.

Logan, whose book *Victorian Fetishism* was just published in January, says that vampires and zombies are modern day fetishes. Essentially, fetishism is the attribution of inherent value or powers onto an object.

“In *True Blood* and *Twilight*, the vampires are a projection of our cultural hopes and fears onto the figure of a person who is very different than us. The vampire is a good figure for capturing that,” he said.

Logan is professor of English in Temple’s College of Liberal Arts.

Provided by Temple University ([news](#) : [web](#))

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