

Vampire mania a perpetual fad in pop culture

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(PhysOrg.com) -- They're everywhere. Like knee boots, capes and cloaks, vampires are trendy again. In books and movies, on magazine covers, TV and the Internet -- it's hard to avoid blood suckers in the media lately.

One of the most prominent components of this sub-genre is Stephanie Meyer's "Twilight" series that has gone from paperback popularity to the silver screen. Another example, "True Blood," is a TV series on premium cable network HBO, loosely based on "The Southern [Vampire Mysteries](#)" series of novels by Charlaine Harris. Matt McAllister, a professor in the College of Communications at Penn State who studies popular culture in mass media, said it is not uncommon for books to start pop culture trends. Book companies look for titles that can turn into movies or TV shows, create heavy promotion and cultivate a fan base.

"Media industries right now think a fan of one vampire story is a fan of another, and they're all just jumping on the bandwagon," McAllister said. "They don't want to be the first at something, there's too much risk in that. They want to be first to be second at something. There have been multiple successes with the 'Twilight' books and movies and 'True Blood' is HBO's top rated show. Naturally, now we're seeing more and more books, TV shows and movies popping up."

Peter Dendle, an associate professor of English at Penn State Mont Alto who studies early medieval demonology and folklore, said vampires have been around for quite some time, but go through phases of popularity,

much like fashion trends.

"Vampire-like creatures are known from as early as the earliest recorded writings," he said. "In Greek literature, there's not a Dracula or Twilight character, but the idea of a soul-sapping, life-drawing creature in human or animal form is very old."

In the 19th century, Bram Stoker's gothic novel, "Dracula," discreetly sexualized the vampire with a male predator drawing life out of a maidenly woman. Dendle said Stoker used metaphors for sexuality, in a century when it was difficult to write about it explicitly. In the 20th century, vampires were more conventional on TV and in movie portrayals of Dracula. Later in the century, new characters like Eddie Munster, Count Dracula, the "Lost Boys" and those in comic books and on kids' cereal boxes put a new spin on the fearsome demon. In the 1990s, Anne Rice's vampire books re-popularized the fanged creatures, and Joss Whedon's "Buffy the Vampire Slayer" transformed them into more modern vampire characters. Both of these series drew in fans that never thought twice about the genre before.

Kathleen Kuehn doesn't consider herself a vampire zealot, but admits the "Twilight" books became an addiction. The Penn State College of Communications graduate student said she rarely left her room while reading the series.

"I had a bunch of friends who were really into the 'Twilight' books," she said. "A good friend of mine has similar tastes in music, art and literature and highly recommended reading them. I figured if she was that big of a fan, there must be something about them."

Kuehn didn't expect to enjoy the series quite so much. She purchased all four books before she finished the first and sheepishly confessed she has never savored another book series quite as much as "Twilight."

"I don't know what it is about them. The writing isn't very good, it's pretty elementary, but it's a page turner," Kuehn said.

Kuehn speculates the intensity between the two main characters is responsible for drawing readers in. The first book, Kuehn said, is about the beginnings of new love, which everyone can relate to, regardless of his or her age. Readers continue through the series because the author illustrates the compelling volatility of a bond between a vampire and human. The plot of each book keeps fans feeling insecure about the stability of that relationship and wanting to know more.

McAllister said "True Blood," which shares similarities to "Twilight," is another example of vampires living among humans. In this case, the vampires can be "out of the closet" -- there is an infrastructure in that world that caters to vampires. They can be honest about who they are, and are accepted. However, McAllister pointed out that in the 1990s "Buffy the Vampire Slayer" was among the first in this current wave of vampire stories to explore a vampire and human relationship. It was the slayer who first fell for Angel, a good vampire with a soul. Their relationship had too many barriers to last. These are the story lines that create fanatics that have never before been devoted to fantasy or demon stories.

"It took me a while to move on. I was sad I didn't have the 'Twilight' series to read, but my fiancé was happy it was over," Kuehn said. "It fulfills something that real-life romance doesn't."

Provided by Pennsylvania State University ([news](#) : [web](#))

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