Laura Bell Wright. The Appeal of Vampire Romance: Why Do Readers Like These Stories? A Master's paper for the M.S. in L.S. degree. April, 2003. 40 pages. Advisor: Barbara B. Moran

This study describes a survey of five and four star reader reviews posted to Amazon.com for books that are part of the new subgenre of vampire Romances. The study was conducted to determine what aspects of the book reviewers commented on and approved of in this sub-genre.

This research provides an overview of what readers like in vampire Romance. Some of the findings correspond to what was already known about Romance readers in general, but others could not have been predicted.   The findings show that readers value the type of vampire, the type of villain, and the series.

Headings:

 Reader reviews

 Genre fiction

 Vampire

 Romance

THE APPEAL OF VAMPIRE ROMANCE: WHY DO READERS LIKE THESE
STORIES?

by
Laura Bell Wright

A Master's paper submitted to the faculty
of the School of Information and Library Science
of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Science in
Library Science.

Chapel Hill, North Carolina

April, 2003

Approved by:

_____

Advisor

Table of Contents

Introduction

To be included in the Romance genre a story must be more than a love story. A Romance is a love story in which the central focus is the development and satisfactory resolution of a love relationship between the two main characters. The focus of the plot is the relationship between the main characters. Although readers enjoy other elements of the plot, such as intrigue, mystery, historical detail, and comedic situations, the resolution of the romantic entanglements is what ultimately sustains the reader's interest (Ramsdell, 1999; Saricks, 2001). The satisfactory ending is a requirement; without it the story may be romantic, but it is not a Romance. Usually the ending is a happy one in which the relationship is resolved happily, often through marriage or a proposal (Ramsdell, 1999).

Possibly the easiest way to study and characterize genres is to focus on the appeal elements. When talking to readers and asking what they like about a book, appeal factors are often mentioned. Appeal elements are universal across genres and include: frame, storyline, characterization, pacing, and style. The frame set in Romance is evocative, drawing in the reader's emotions. Romances always end with a satisfactory resolution (happy ending). The emotions evoked can vary widely, ranging from lighthearted, humorous, serious, and somewhat bleak. The key to the frame is getting the readers emotionally involved. The storyline is focused on the romantic relationship and its resolution; all else is secondary. In order for a satisfactory resolution to occur both the hero and heroine must recognize and reaffirm their love for one another. Romances are

fast paced and easily read, due in part to their relying on dialogue instead of heavier descriptive prose. The stories are constructed so that the reader can put them down, and when they pick then up again, get right back into the story. Characters in Romance are somewhat stereotypical; the heroine is usually bright, independent, strong, and often pretty, while the hero is strong, distant and dangerous. The story belongs to both him and her, and as such most Romances include both points of view, allowing readers to experience their inner dilemmas. As both character come to terms with themselves and the relationship between them, they must relinquish preconceptions about themselves and the opposite sex before they are able to accept the romantic union. The style present in Romance is created by the writer's use of descriptive language to create romantic tone and emotional attraction. Description of the characters and place allow readers to see the action and draws them deeper into the story (Saricks, 2001).

Romances are written in such a way as to facilitate the reader's emotional participation and provide readers vicarious emotional participation in the resolution process. The story does not just describe actions, it includes how it feels to become involved in, and resolve, a love relationship. Readers participate in the story on an emotional level and experience happiness and emotional satisfaction at a satisfactory resolution. Conversely, readers experience disappointment and dissatisfaction with a bad ending (Ramsdell, 1999; Saricks, 2001).

The promotion of moral values is an important aspect of Romance. Healthy relationships, family, fidelity, caring, and basically being a good person are emphasized. The level of sensuality, both in level of detail and frequency, varies greatly in Romance. For some readers sensuality can be a potentially embarrassing topic, but there is no

denying that Romances are sensual, sexual fantasies usually written for women, by women. Romances describe relationships, romance, and sex (no matter how much or how little) in ways women can identify with. Finally, in many ways Romance is the most optimistic, hopeful, and positive fiction genre (Ramsdell, 1999).

Alternate Reality Romance (ARR) is the newest recognized sub-genre of Romance, created by blending elements from the Science Fiction, Fantasy, and Horror genres into the basic Romance plot (Ramsdell 1999; Saricks, 2001). The language and tone used evoke the otherness of the setting and characters, while grounding the story in the Romance genre (Saricks, 2001). When genreblending, the use of elements from more than one genre in a story, occurs it can be difficult to determine to what genre the story belongs (Ramsdell, 1999). In some cases readers must decide for themselves whether the story counts as a Romance, or not, and not everyone is going to agree. Any fantastic element, drawn from other genres, which does not negate the Romance aspect of the story, can be used in Alternate Reality Romances. Determining what fantastic elements do or do not negate the Romance of a story is often a personal decision. For example, the publishers at LionHearted Publishing have decided vampires are in no way romantic and will not accept any Romance story that has vampires (*Author Guidelines*, n.d.).

One way to clarify this very diverse sub-genre is to think of it as several mini-sub-genres. There are four basic mini-sub-genres in Alternate Reality Romance: Fantasy, Futuristic, Paranormal, and Time-travel (Ramsdell, 1999). Each group parallels another genre from which it draws elements, although elements from several genres may be added to the basic Romance plot. Futuristic Romance stories are set in future times and are most similar to Science Fiction. Some are set in current times but use futuristic

technology (often borrowed from or used by visiting space aliens). In Time Travel Romance protagonists travel to and from different time periods, sometimes transporting other characters as well (Saricks, 2001). Fantasy corresponds to the Fantasy genre and has magical elements and fantastic and mythical creatures, such as unicorns and fairies. No matter how exotic the story, Futuristic, Paranormal, Fantasy, and Time Travel Romance all emphasize romance.

Paranormal Romance has supernatural and magical elements, often drawn from the Horror genre, ranging from humans who use magic to vampires, shape-shifters, and ghosts (Saricks, 2001). Paranormal Romance is a very eclectic group that includes all Alternate Reality Romances that do not fit into any other category. Almost anything supernatural or unexplained by natural causes is included in this group, including angels, reincarnated people, psychics, ghosts, werewolves, and vampires, to name a few elements. Some stories blend paranormal with other mini-sub-genres; time-traveling vampires and futuristic psychics are just two examples (Ramsdell, 1999).

An increasingly popular storyline in Paranormal Romance is the vampire Romance. The majority of vampire Romances feature a male vampire with a female human heroine (Carter, 2002). Female vampires are commonly portrayed as depraved monsters, with the same unnatural appetite for blood as male vampires, but with no predilection to be good or redeemable, they are the antithesis of the female heroine (Ryan, 1996). A few writers, including Maggie Shayne and Christine Feehan, do have female vampires as a main character. In most of these cases the romantic relationship is between a female and a male vampire.

The nature of the vampire male, the ultimate alpha male, domineering, physically strong, and sexually aggressive, impacts the structure of the Romance and creates challenges for writers, which is possibly why writers continue to write these stories! Vampire males are the archetype of the dangerous male. Unlike men in today's society vampires can, and do, display aggressively sexual behavior. Readers do not condemn them because the vampire often needs sex, physical intimacy, and ultimately the love of a woman to survive and save him (Knight, n.d.). Vampires are in tune, more so than modern males, with the primal instincts to mate and survive (Black, n.d).

The power of the vampire creates an unequal power relationship; the woman is only human, after all. Many writers, such as Angela Knight, strive to create strong heroines who can convincingly stand their ground. Often, the woman fulfills some need, other than nourishment, that the vampire needs to survive (Cater, 2002). In this way vampire Romances embrace female empowerment. The woman uses her strengths, fundamentally different than the male's, to win, getting what she wants and taming the hero (Ramsdell, 1999). For example, in Christine Feehan's Dark series Carpathian males, essentially vampires with souls and morals, are destined to become ever more desolate, losing the capacity for emotions, until they choose to become vampires, soulless, viscous creatures. The only salvation for a Carpathian male is his lifemate, the one and only woman who can fill his soul and enable him to feel emotions.

The power of the vampire is counterbalanced by the torment he experiences. Only through sacrifice can the torment be resolved and ended. Often, the endings are bittersweet (Ryan, 1996; Roycraft, 2002). For example, in Linda Lael Miller's *Forever and the Night*, the heroine, Neely, falls in love with a vampire, Aidan, creating dangers

they both have to overcome. In the end Aidan is again human, but his only memory of Neely is her name, while Neely looses all her memories of him. Fortunately, Aidan finds Neely and she falls in love with him again. In Colleen Shannon's *The Trelayne Inheritance*, Max and Angelina give up immortality as vampires in order to love as humans.

The use of horror elements can actually complement and strengthen the Romance. Horror and violence provides the conflict that must be resolved for a Romance to end satisfactorily. Conflict may occur between the hero and heroine: can the vampire resist drinking his love's blood? Or the conflict may be between the couple and some outside force trying to separate or destroy them. In many of these vampire Romances, physical allure and the allure of blood develop in parallel. As the couple becomes more accepting and comfortable in their physical relationship the heroine becomes more accepting of the vampire's need for blood, including her own, even when the vampire resists feeding on her (Roycraft, 2002).

There are few fictional characters more versatile than today's vampire. They can be historical, contemporary, have time-travel abilities, and futuristic. Supernatural powers vary greatly but include: hypnotic powers, shapeshifting, telepathy, time-travel, and more. Some writers prefer their vampires to be another species, humanoid but not human that developed either on earth or as aliens.   The hero is morally responsible, often because of his love for the heroine, even if others of his species are not. Morality is a choice these vampires can make; they are not limited to evil because of what they are.

The popularity of vampire characters in Romance is fairly new. Evidence of the phenomenon comes primarily from active reader groups, periodicals, and articles written

by the authors of vampire Romances. Readers who discover and enjoy these unique

Romances are often passionate about these stories, reading all the books they can find.

Evidence of the vampire's surge in popularity is the active groups readers form (Ryan,

1996). Sherrilyn Kenyon is a writer with several website devoted to her Hunter Legends

series, Romances featuring vampires and shape-shifting characters.   The dark-

hunter.com home page, http://www.kinleymacgregor.com/hunter/, averaged more than

1,000 unique visitors a day in August of 2002. Fans can participate in live chats with

Kenyon, and can invent their own vampire characters and role-play via an email-loop or

in real time on the site (Mantell, 2002).

     Romantic Times Bookclub, a periodical devoted to the Romance genre, had an

entire issue centered on vampire Romances in 1996. In addition, there are two theme

spotlight on vampires on their webpage, www.romantictimes.com, each with an extensive

list of recommended reads, both Romance and non-Romance. More recently, *Booklist*, in

their Spotlight on Romance section, had an article featuring short reviews for twelve

vampire Romances.

     Authors of vampire Romances have written articles on why they think these

stories are popular and why they write them. However, there is no research on why

readers choose to read vampire Romances. Although authors do read the books, their

viewpoint may be different from that of their readers. Research is still needed on why

readers read vampire Romances and what they like about them. Is it for the same reasons

they read other types of Romances? It would not be a good idea to extrapolate what

readers like about vampire Romances based on research from other types of Romance or

Romance in general. Vampires were originally demonic creatures of horror. It may well

be that the incorporation of vampires has altered the secondary appeal characteristics of these Romances, even though the primary appeal is, by definition, the same as in any Romance. What do readers like about vampire Romances? What do readers dislike about vampire Romances?

Literature Review

In "Misreading LIS Education", Wayne Wiegand stresses the importance of studying readers and reading in library and information science education. He thinks that library and information schools have shifted their focus in the last part of the twentieth century towards technology and information, neglecting readers and reading. As a result, schools produce librarians who are unable to adequately understand and best serve their patrons' reading needs. However, there has been a recent reversal in this trend with more research in and teaching of readers' advisory services. Readers' advisory is essentially helping readers find another book to read. It commonly takes the form an informal interview in which the librarian asks questions to learn what the reader likes to read, then the librarian can suggest other books with some of the characteristics the reader has described. There are also passive forms of readers' advisory such as recommended reading lists.

Joyce Saricks has written numerous articles and books about a variety of topics in readers' advisory. In *The Readers' Guide to Genre Fiction* Saricks discusses ways for librarians to learn what readers like, and then use this knowledge to help them find another book they may like, and even guide them from one genre to the other. Each chapter includes a section on talking to readers to learn what books they liked and why, so that the librarian can make helpful, meaningful suggestions for further reading. Saricks emphasizes appeal factors, which readers often bring up when asked what they liked in a book. Appeal factors are universal across genres and include frame, storyline, characterization, pacing, and style.

There have been some studies of genre readers, including Romance readers, but much of the material that exists is based on personal experiences and informal observations. Very little formal research asking readers why they like Romances has been conducted.

Janice Radway was one of the first researchers to ask readers why they read and liked Romance. Dorothy Evans, the pseudonym for a book clerk who worked in a book store in the Midwestern United States, introduced Radway to the women who participated in her surveys and interviews. Ms. Evans was a bookstore employee who combined her enjoyment of Romances with her desire to help people. She had a regular clientele that relied on her advice for which were the best Romances to buy and which ones to avoid. Ms. Evans's advice was so popular she began a newsletter for booksellers and editors. New York editors would send her galley proofs of latest titles to ensure they were included in the newsletter. Through her relationship with women Romance readers Dorothy Evans was able to facilitate Radway's research by acting as her liaison with the reading community (Radway, 1984).

Radway's research was conducted during June 1980 and February 1981. Radway spoke with Ms. Evans about Romances, reading, and her advising activities, as well as observing her interactions at the store. There were informal group interviews with sixteen of Ms. Evans regular customers. Five of these women were interviewed individually. After the first set of interviews Radway created a survey, with revisions based on what she had learned, and sent it to Ms. Evans, who distributed it to her regular customers. Forty-two of the surveys were completed and returned (Radway, 1984).

There were several limitations to Radway's research. The research subjects were all from the same community and they all knew Dorothy Evans and went to her for reading advice. The group cannot be assumed to be representative of the Romance reading population, although its demographics were similar to the a sizable segment of the Romance audience that had been mapped by publishing houses that were quite vague and secretive about their data (Radway, 1984).

Avid Romance readers had very clear ideas what made a good Romance. The consensus was that Romances were stories about women that the readers wanted to identify with. The story chronicled the events of a courtship and what it felt like to be in a courtship. The point of reading the story was to experience the tension of anticipation and excitement as the reader imagines possible resolutions. The heroine's personality and character were very important because readers project themselves into her. A good heroine was autonomous and capable of productive non-domestic work. The heroine's independence and individualism was not compromised by the care and protectiveness of the hero (Radway, 1984).

According to Radway's research the most important aspect of a Romance was the happy ending; it was indispensable. The second most important aspect was a slow but consistent development of love between the hero and heroine. Two things needed to happen during this process: the hero and heroine grow to love each other and work together solving problems, and they must recognize they have fallen in love. Most of the readers did not like sudden resolutions and change in feelings at the end of the story. A quick reversal of feelings, for example when the hero discovers that he was wrong about

the heroine and his apparent hatred is really affection, was considered unbelievable (Radway, 1984).

The readers also had very strong feelings and clear ideas about what they did not like in Romances. Readers valued expressions of affection over sexual details. Sexual tension needed to be present in the story, but most expressed a preference for leaving something to the imagination. The worst things that could happen in a Romance, and almost certainly ruin it, were rape, bed hopping, promiscuity, physical torture, and weak heroes (Radway, 1984).

In "Romance Novel Readers: In Search of Feminist Change?" Lynda Crane investigated which aspects of Romance novels women most enjoy. Crane hoped to discover which personality traits readers most value in real men and women. In addition, she wanted to learn did readers acknowledge the difference between real mates and fictional heroes and long for a change? Crane also hoped to gain a greater understanding of women's responses to explicit and violent sexual material in Romance novels. Finally, Crane was interested in readers' attitudes towards feminism and social change.

Eighty women, between the ages of 17-71, responded to a questionnaire. The questionnaire was published in the morning and evening editions of a Baltimore daily newspaper, accompanied by an article about the popularity of Romances. Twenty-four of the respondents then participated in half-hour telephone interviews. Although self-selected the readers surveyed were demographically similar to Radway's samples and available statistics of Romance readers in general (Crane, 1994).

The data Crane gathered indicated women were most interested in reading about a Romance that works. The two favorite aspects were romantic love scenes and happy

endings. Crane believed that escape from reality, including the importance and appeal of exotic locations, was consistent with the idea that readers find their current romantic lives dissatisfying. Most of the readers wanted a change in their romantic life; seventy-six percent wished their mates were more like Romance heroes. Women were selective about what hero qualities they missed in their mate but often chose those related to intimacy and emotional satisfaction (Crane, 1994).

Although there are a few studies asking why readers like romance, no one has asked the readers of Alternate Reality Romances why they read Romances with elements of Fantasy, Horror, and Science Fiction or what it is they like about them. The use of vampires in the Romance genre is a relatively new phenomenon that no one has researched yet. Research is needed on why readers read vampire Romances and what they like about them. It is not possible to extrapolate what readers like about vampire Romances based on research about the Romance genre in general. The use of vampire elements from the Horror genre, has likely altered the secondary appeal factors of the these Romances, even though the primary appeal may be the same as in any Romance.

Methodology

The fifty-eight books used in this research were chosen from two articles. The first was "Vampires", which appeared in the Theme Spotlight section of *Romantic Times Magazine* in 1996, and the second was an update of that article in 2001. Both articles included a list of recommended books featuring vampires. Both Romance and non-Romance books were listed, but only the Romance books were used in this study. Several books and series were excluded because they did not fit the definition of Romance, as defined in this paper. The books used in this study can be seen in Appendix A.

Romantic Times, established as a newsletter in June of 1981 by Kathryn Falk, was the first forum that brought together all the elements and participants of the Romance industry; readers, authors, aspiring writers, publishers, illustrators, etc. The newsletter has grown into a magazine that is well respected; it has been dubbed "the bible of romantic fiction" by *USA Today* ("History," n.d.). *Romantic Times Magazine* reviews books and rates them, profiles authors, alerts readers and booksellers to forthcoming books, and has columns for gossip and guides for aspiring writers to hone their craft. *Romantic Times Magazine* has kept up with changes in the industry and has been a motivating factor in quite a few of those changes. For example, the magazine influenced publishers to foster Romance sub-genres, such as time travel, in response to readers' increasingly wide-ranging tastes. The magazine was also instrumental in giving readers a way to express their opinions of cover art. The magazine pioneered a number of industry features readers take for granted, including mailing lists for authors ("History", n.d.).

Reader reviews were collected from Amazon.com for each title taken from the two articles described above. Amazon.com provides a book review service to its customers where they can write reviews and rate books on a scale of one to five, with five stars being the highest and one star being the lowest. Amazon.com encourages customers to use their service to express what they like or dislike about a product and the reasons why. Reviewers may remain anonymous; although they must include a valid e-mail address, they may opt to not display it. The reviews must be specific to the item, but can mention other products that the person considers similar and how this product rates in comparison to them. Guidelines exist that ensure quality reviews. For example, profanity, obscenities, and spiteful remarks are forbidden, as are mentions of promotional tours and seminars. Amazon.com has recently added a feature that allows users to select reviews based on the star rating assigned.

Five star and four-star reviews submitted by Amazon.com customer reviewers for each title were selected and printed. The reviews were limited to those with five-star and four-star reviews because the research was focusing on what readers liked about the books and these two ratings were positive. Three star reviews tend to be more neutral, and two and one stars are usually negative.

The titles found in the two articles were searched on Amazon.com. Then the title, author, pseudonym (where applicable), publisher and date were recorded for each title found. The searches were done and data recorded during March 25 and April 10, 2003. The rating of each book was recorded, as well as the total number of reviews and the number of five and four star reviews. Several books and series were excluded from the study because they either were not Romances or did not feature a love relationship

between a vampire and human. Barbara Hambly's *Those Who Hunt the Night* is not a Romance as previously defined. *Night Wing*, by Linda Michaels and *Night Walker*, by Stephanie James could not be found on Amazon.com. The series by P.N. Elrod and Laurell K. Hamilton are not Romance stories, although they do have romantic subplots. (See Appendix A.)

The reviews were read and analyzed for eleven factors. The factors were chosen based Janice Radway's and Linda Crane's research. Both Janice Radway and Linda Crane found that readers wanted to read about Romances that worked. Two of the most important aspects of this were the happy endings and the consistent development of love between the hero and heroine, along with some romantic love scenes. Readers preferred a heroine they wanted to identify with. The heroine's personality and character were very important because readers project themselves into her. Radway's readers preferred strong heroines capable of non-domestic work whose independence was not compromised by the hero's caring and protectiveness. Both Radway and Crane found that readers expected sexual tension between the hero and heroine, but valued the expressions of affection and qualities related to intimacy and emotional satisfaction over sexuality.

Three people scored the reviews. The first scorer was the researcher who reads vampire Romances. The second, a twenty-seven year old male, was unfamiliar with the genre. The third was a female in her fifties who was unfamiliar with the genre.

The category *Myth* was scored if the reviewer stated he or she liked the treatment of the vampire myth, or the vampires were unique or unusual. The myth, setting, and rationalizations used to incorporated vampires into the Romance were important. How

vampires were brought into the Romance is assumed to be the most significant difference between vampire Romances and other types of Romances.

Originally, the *Ending/Resolution* category was going to be scored if the reviewer expressed approval of the ending or stated the book should be read just to get to the resolution. However, the category was not used because the reviewers avoided commenting on this. Amazon.com asks reviewers to not reveal endings and ruin the book for other readers. Most readers took this request seriously and reviews covered everything except the ending.

The category for *Character* was scored if reviewers stated they liked the characters very generally, not specifying hero, heroine, etc. If the reviewer stated specifically he or she liked the hero or heroine then one of those factors was scored instead. Also, *Character* was scored if the reviewer liked other characters in addition to the hero or heroine.

The *Hero* category was scored if the reviewer expressed approval of the hero, stating he or she liked or loved the hero, or if the review was very descriptive and did not state the reviewer disliked the hero. The assumption was that if the reviewer described the hero and his actions in a 5 or 4 star review then the reviewer must have liked the hero or found him interesting. This assumption was of course negated if the reviewer also stated he or she disliked the hero.

At first, the goal was to further divide the *Hero* category into heroes described as strong or attractive and heroes who expressed emotion and showed vulnerability. However, it was decided that these categories were too difficult to determine because they were too subjective, and the three people who read and scored the reviews often

disagreed on these categories. The reviews for heroes were often very descriptive and many did not state if the reviewer found the hero attractive, strong, vulnerable, or expressive of his emotions.

The category for *Heroine* was treated in the same manner as *Hero*. *Heroine* was scored if the reviewer expressed approval of the heroine, stating he or she liked or loved the heroine, or if the review was very descriptive and did not state the reviewer disliked the heroine. The assumption was that if the reviewer described the heroine and her actions in a 5 or 4 star review then the reviewer must have liked the heroine or found her interesting.

The *Erotic* category was scored if the reviewer described the book as erotic, sensual, or sexy.

The *Series* category was scored for several reasons. When reviewers talked about books featuring supporting characters *Series* was scored. If the reviewers recommended related books by the same author or stated he or she was looking forward to the next in a series then *Series* was scored. *Series* was not scored if the reviewer referred to other unrelated books by the same author or if the reviewer recommended books by another author.

The survey is designed to minimize bias but there are several limitations to the research method chosen, including the reviewers being limited to Amazon.com customers. Individuals who post reviews on Amazon.com are computer literate, credit card shoppers, and willing to shop online. The reviewers are anonymous. The only demographics that can be gleaned from the reviews are location (city, state) and an email address, unless he or she chooses to hide the address. Other data such as age, education,

and sex are not available. In addition, the readers need to be motivated in order to return to Amazon.com and invest effort into a review. There is no way of knowing how representative this sample is the actual reader population for vampire Romances, even though this is obviously a group who reads and enjoys them.

Results and Discussion

The factors favorably mentioned in the four and five star customer reviews found on Amazon.com provide a way to asses which factors are most appealing to readers of vampire Romances. There were 671 for or five star reviews for the fifty-eight books selected. These factors are described in order from the highest percentage of favorable comments to the lowest. The results of each factor may be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Results of scoring.

Category	Number of 4 & 5 star reviews with factor present	Percent of reviews with factor present
Total number of 4 and 5 star reviews	671	
Series	396	59%
Hero	368	55%
Heroine	310	46%
Myth	270	40%
Characters	229	34%
Erotic	90	13%

The factor *Series* was scored for the reviewer's positive comments on other books in the same series as the one being reviewed. It was also scored when the reviewer stated they were looking forward to the next book in the series or if they asked for a book featuring supporting characters. *Series* was the highest category scored at 59%.

There were two main kinds of requests for series. The first was general praise for a series. For example, a reviewer, knightie1228, states "I LOVE this series by Shannon Drake" in her review of *When Darkness Fall*.

Another common type of comment for *Series* was related to secondary characters. Reviewers compared books in a series and talked about books in which secondary characters were main characters. For example, a reviewer for Linda Lael Miller's *Tonight and Always* states, "I really enjoyed this book. I also enjoyed reading the other three books that go along with the characters in this one." Reviewers also asked for books about secondary characters or said they would enjoy a book featuring that character.

The popularity of series in vampire Romance was surprising at first. Romances do not lend themselves well to traditional series in which the main characters appear in another story for new or continuing adventures because of the structure of a Romance story. In Romances boy meets girl, they have a conflict and finally a happy resolution; their story is over at the end of the book, thus the hero and heroine cannot participate in another Romance. The popularity of series in vampire Romances is due to the supporting characters. Secondary characters often star as the hero or heroine in their own Romances, and heroes and heroines appear in the Romances of their supporting characters. The development of a well-structured and logical world, within the story, also contributes to the popularity of series.

The *Hero* category was scored if the reviewer expressed approval of the hero, stating he or she liked or loved the hero, or if the review was very descriptive and did not state the reviewer disliked the hero. The assumption was that if the reviewer described

the hero and his actions in a four or five star review then the reviewer must have liked the hero or found him interesting. This assumption was of course negated if the reviewer also stated he or she disliked the hero. Fifty-five percent of the reviews had this factor scored.

It is apparent that readers find the hero very important. The numbers of reviews support this, as does the amount of space in the review devoted discussion of the hero. There are several themes that reoccur in the comments on the hero including self-acceptance, reluctance to kill, unless the victim is a bad person or in self-defense, reluctance to become emotionally involved with a human, the hero's strength and protectiveness of the heroine, and how attractive and sexy the hero is.

The category for *Heroine* was treated in the same manner as hero. *Heroine* was scored if the reviewer expressed approval of the heroine, stating he or she liked or loved the heroine, or if the review was very descriptive and did not state the reviewer disliked the heroine. The assumption was that if the reviewer described the heroine and her actions in a 5 or 4 star review then the reviewer must have liked the heroine or found her interesting. This assumption was of course negated if the reviewer also stated he or she disliked the heroine. Forty-six percent of reviewers stated they liked the heroine.

Heroine comments varied according to whether the heroine was vampire or human. Many reviewers commented on the human heroine's ability to accept the hero as a vampire. There were positive reviews for heroines who were extremely practical and seemingly unbothered by the vampire issues. There were also positive reviews for heroines that had a hard time coping with the issue, reviewers expressed the opinion that this response seemed far more realistic that a shrug and prompt acceptance. There was a

mix of support for vulnerable heroines that tended to need rescuing versus strong independent heroines.

Reviewers liked heroes and heroines who are learning to deal with their vampirism. This includes personal conflict dealing with living forever, drinking blood, and coping with other vampire powers and limitations. There are several books in this survey with newly turned vampire heroes and heroines and a couple of half-vampire characters that must learn to deal with their vampirism. Readers like it when the vampires learn to accept themselves and behave in an ethical (no killing) manner. For example, a reviewer for *Dark Changeling* states, "a very sympathetic hero, one that is tormented by his horrible hunger and determined to find out just who and what he is." All of the reviews for Nancy Gideon's *Midnight Temptation* discuss the heroine's struggle to accept, learn about, and control her vampire nature before she hurts her friends and family.

The *Myth* category was scored for positive reviews of several interrelated concepts. These concepts included the treatment and detail of the vampire myth. Also, comments on unique and unusual vampires were included here. Finally, *Myth* was scored if the review included comments on, or descriptions of, vampire social structure, vampire laws, and secret societies of either vampires or vampire hunters, all of which contribute to the history and mythology of the vampires. A total of 40% of the reviews included positive comments on these elements.

Several reviewers liked the detail authors put into describing the history and rules of vampirism. Others commented on the added level of plausibility detailed history and rules bring to a book. Readers need to be able to suspend their doubts that a story could

happen, only then can he or she enter the world of the story. In order for this temporary suspension of doubt to occur an author must mix fantasy and reality in the right proportion to allow the reader to willingly believe (Whiteside, 2002).

Some reviewers liked unique and unusual presentations of the vampires. For example, several reviews of *Prince of the Night*, by Jasmine Cresswell approved of the author's unique presentation of the vampire myth, which was different than the traditional myth and folklore, and recreated the mystery of vampires.

A new trend in vampire Romance is the vampire as alien, where the vampire is presented as an alien from another world. These books are described as vampire Romances, not as Romances with an alien, so the people who read and scored the reviews did not realize the vampire was actually an alien unless the reviewers included it in their comments. There are a couple of examples of this trend in reviewer comments for *Sunlight Moonlight* and *Deeper than the Night*, both by Amanda Ashley. It seems to be a controversial trend in vampire Romance. Several positive reviewers commented on *Deeper than the Night* being a good vampire Romance in spite of the fact there was no vampire. Dana Shull's review for *Deeper than the Night* is a good example of this:

> I dove into this one thinking it a typical vampire romance. Not! In fact, without
> giving too much of the plot away, this is a vampire romance without the vampire.
> But we think it a vampire story until the huge surprise (near the end but not so
> near the end that the surprise cannot be delved into more deeply.) Even though
> this book turned out to be not what I thought it was, I was not at all dismayed. In
> fact, I enjoyed it more because of the twist than I would have had it merely
> "followed the formula."

A few of the positive reviews referred to complaints, presumably from other reviewers, about the use of an alien. For example, Marika K. Shilling stated in her review of *Deeper than the Night* "Since many give it away in their reviews, yes he is an alien and not a vampire, So What?! I thought it was a unique twist to make him an Alien. But, if you are a Die Hard Purist, and must have Vampires all the way, I suggest that you try one of Ms. Ashley's other books… But please if you are not a "Purist" then read this book and judge for yourself."

The factor *Myth* was also scored if the review included comments on, or descriptions of, vampire social structure, vampire laws, and secret societies of either vampires or vampire hunters. These elements all contribute to the vampire myth and history. Many reviews included these elements. For example, reviewers of Susan Sizemore's books *Partners* and *The Hunt* appreciated the role of the Enforcer, the vampire who is judge, jury, and executioner for vampire law. Readers of Maggie Shayne's books often comment on the dastardly deeds of the Department of Paranormal Investigators (DPI) a secret society determined to hunt down vampires. The DPI also tortures vampires and humans with the genetic capability to become vampires (in Shayne's books not all humans can be converted to vampires) in an attempt to find new ways to eradicate vampires. The use of a social structure, laws, and secret societies create a world that authors can reuse in subsequent books and allows readers revisit characters, which often reappear in a series, and social worlds they have become accustomed to and enjoyed.

The *Character* category was scored when reviews referred in general to the characters in a positive manner. For example, it would be scored if the review stated the

characters were well-developed, or something similar. If the review referred specifically to the hero or heroine then *Character* was not scored. If the review referred to the hero or heroine, and to secondary characters then both *Hero* or *Heroine* and *Character* was scored.   A total of 34% of the reviews mentioned the characters.

The way reviewers discussed characters revealed two important trends in vampire Romance, well-developed, interesting villains and supporting characters are popular. Readers like well-developed, interesting villains because they really strengthen the story line and conflict. For example, several reviews for *Midnight Temptation* by Nancy Gideon talked about how the heroine, Nicole, is befriended by evil enemies of her father and in dealing with them faces a true test of character and matures.

Readers also like supporting characters that are well-developed and capable of starring in their own books. Several of the authors included in this survey write interconnected series, in which the hero and heroine are the main characters in one Romance then appear as supporting characters in other books. Sometimes the supporting characters get better reviews than hero and heroine. For example, one reviewer for *Walk in Moonlight,* by Rosemary Laurey preferred the supporting characters to the hero. This reader states, "I found Christopher a boring character. The heroine kept the story going from start to finish. Justin was more interesting and also Tom. I saw no point in having Christopher around. But I am still looking forward to Justin and Tom's story." The trend for reviewers to like supporting characters and either request a book for those characters or talk about another book featuring the character was explored in the discussion above.

Erotic was scored if the reviewer described the book as erotic, sensual, sexy, hot, or used other similar terms. Readers clearly differentiated between a sexy hero or

heroine and a story that had a lot of explicit sexual content. Only 13% of the readers

commented with approval on the sensuality of a book. These results correspond to

Radway's results indicating that sex was not as important to readers as other elements of

the romance (Radway, 1984). Also, many readers are reluctant to discuss the sexual

content of the books they read or how much raciness they prefer (Saricks, 2001).

Reviewer comments on sexuality are very general and do not include details or

descriptions, unlike comments on the hero and heroine. For example, a reviewer named

Gail described *Walk in Moonlight*, by Rosemary Laurey as "HOT!!! and erotic.."

The reviews were not scored for comments about disliking the sexual content of

the book. However there were a few 5 and 4 star reviewers that stated they liked a book

in spite of the sexual content. For example, Shannon stated in her review of *When*

Darkness Falls, by Shannon Drake "Just a bit of warning, and the sexual content is a little

strong. Not as bad as the dollar store romances, but still."

The factors favorably mentioned in the four and five star customer reviews

provide a way to assess which factors are most appealing to readers of vampire

Romances. In order from highest percentage to the lowest the factors were *Series, Hero,*

Heroine, Myth, Characters and *Erotic*. Reviewers spontaneously chose to talk about

these factors in the reviews and included comments on a wide variety of issues, factors,

likes and dislikes. The reviews were very informative.

Conclusions and Suggestion for Further Research

This research has provided an overview of what readers like in vampire Romance. Some of the findings correspond to what was already known about Romance readers in general. Some of the findings, such as the popularity of series, might not have been predicted based on what was known of Romance readers in general. Librarians benefit from knowing what readers like about vampire Romance in several ways. During readers' advisory interviews librarians need to know what sort of questions to ask readers in order to best guide them. From this research it is apparent librarians need to ask what type of vampire readers prefer, the type of villain (evil vampire or secret society?), and what series the readers like. Also, this research contributes to knowledge about collection development for libraries. If a library wants to support vampire Romance readers it would be best if they collected an entire series. One way to test the audience for a series would be to purchase one book in a series and see how it circulates. It seems that if one book in a series is popular then all of the books will circulate well.

The popularity of series in vampire Romances is due to the supporting characters, the vampire myth, and the world developed in the book. Readers often like to read books that feature characters they were introduced to in previous books. However, by asking question about the vampire myth and the world structure, librarians acting as reader advisors can refer readers to similar series. Readers seem to like reading more books with a vampire myth and world structure, with societies and rules, which they liked in previous books.

Readers' advisors should know that there are a variety of different qualities that readers' value in their heroes and heroines. Some readers prefer vulnerable heroines,

others prefer strong independent and thoroughly modern heroines. There are reviews supporting vampire heroes who accept their vampirism and other reviews supporting vampires who long to be cured. The variety is such that librarians need to ask what type of hero and heroine a reader prefers before recommending a vampire Romance.

Studying the myth category was very useful and informative because it has revealed the variety that exists within vampire Romances. These Romances feature characters who are aliens, secret societies, half-breed children born to a vampire and human parent, traditional garlic fearing vampires with no reflection, and vampires that are really another species and were never human to begin with. Librarians working with readers need to be aware of the variety that exists in vampire Romance. The variety makes readers' advisory services more complex; librarians need be prepared to ask what types of vampire readers prefer as well as other plot elements they enjoyed in previous books.

The finding that readers prefer all the characters to be completely developed and not two-dimensional may be obvious to readers and librarians. However, the added appeal of villains in vampire Romance may not be as well known. Romances generally involve a conflict between the hero and heroine but the conflict can take many forms ranging from simple misunderstandings and a lack of trust, to murder mysteries and action adventure type situations where the hero or heroine or both are in danger from a common enemy. It seems from these reviews that the villain adds to the story line and gives a plausible excuse for the hero and heroine to be brought together. For example, several of the books in this survey are mysteries in which a vampire is on a killing spree,

the hero or heroine is a suspect vampire, and the other main character is an investigator or potential victim that the villain is deliberately hunting.

Librarians involved in readers' advisory should be aware of the potential appeal of the villain and the variety of villains that exist. Questions asked of readers will reveal if they prefer vampire villains or secret societies such as the DPI in Maggie Shayne's stories. Also, librarians need to know that readers often become attached to all of the characters in a book and are interested in reading the entire series and hearing about new books in favored series.

This research did not reveal anything new about the readers' preferences for sexual content in vampire Romance. It seems that readers of vampire Romance are similar to other readers of the Romance genre in their reluctance to discuss sexual content.

Suggestions for Further Research

Although this research produced findings that will be helpful to librarians and others interested in vampire Romances, there is much more research that could be done on the topic.

As mentioned above, few reviewers commented on the sexual content of these books. Future research is needed to determine how readers feel about the sexual content in Romance, including vampire romances. An indirect approach, like the one used for this paper, is insufficient for determining what readers like and dislike about the sexual content because of many readers' reluctance to discuss sexuality. A more direct approach using confidential surveys with questions designed to elicit the information might be more successful.

This study focused on positive reviews for a variety of books and authors. Another approach would be to select a set of books and compare positive and negative reviews using reader reviews from an online site that focuses on Alternate Reality Romance. By using reader reviews from an audience that is familiar with the sub-genre, as evidenced by their use of the website, the researcher could hone in on what Alternate Reality Romance fans like and dislike about vampire romances. Amazon.com is a more generic source of reviews than some of the online sites that focus on the Alternate Reality Romance subgenre. As a result, they are more likely to have reviews from readers unfamiliar or new to the genre. Amazon.com has proven to be a useful tool for this study. However, there are several sites on the Internet that collect reader reviews for Alternate Reality Romance. These sites have a more specialized, and often more active, audience than Amazon.com. It would interesting to see if readers expressed themselves more freely, with more detail, when volunteering feedback for a book on these sites than they do on Amazon.com.

Another avenue for further research would be to replicate Radway's study, looking only at readers of vampire Romances. Richer data about likes and dislikes could be gotten from personal interviews with fans of this subgenre.

As vampire Romances increase in popularity it is important that librarians and others interested in the subgenre continue to investigate what makes this type of Romance popular. The research in this paper provides a beginning to understanding the popularity of vampire Romances, but more work remains to be done.

References

Author guidelines. (n.d.) Retrieved April 15, 2003 from

http://www.lionhearted.com/guidelines.htm

Black, Jaid. (n.d.). *The lure of the erotic vampire*. Retrieved January 27, 2003 from

http://sensualromance.writerspace.com/vampire.html.

Carter, Margaret L. (2002). The vampire as alien in romance. *Science Fiction Romance*

Newsletter, 95. Retrieved January 27, 2003 from

http://www.sfronline.com/articles/vampirealien.htm

Coles, Claire D., & Shamp, M. Johnna. (1984). Some sexual, personal, and demographic

characteristics of women readers of erotic romances. *Archives of Sexual Behavior,*

13(3), 187-209.

Crane, Lynda L. (1994). Romance novel readers: In search of feminist change? *Women's*

Studies, 23(3), 257-269.

Firat CINGI. (2000). *It might give your nightmares*. Retrieved April 11, 2003 from

http://www.amazon.com from the reviews for *Dark Changeling*, by Margaret L.

Carter.

Gail. (2001). *Wow absolutely marvelous story…from UK reader*. Retrieved April 11,

2003 from http://www.amazon.com from the reviews for *Walk in Moonlight*, by

Rosemary Laurey.

History. (1998). Retrieved March 21, 2003 from

http://www.romantictimes.com/index.html

Knight, Angela. (n.d.). *Sex and the modern vampire.* Retrieved January 27, 2003 from

       http://sensualromance.writerspace.com/vampire.html.

knightie1228 (2001). *I love this book!* Retrieved April 11, 2003 from

       http://www.amazon.com from the reviews for *When Darkness Falls*, by Shannon

       Drake.

Mantell, Suzanne. (2002). Online romance. *Publishers Weekly, August 12*.

Radway, Janice A. (1984). *Reading the romance: Women, patriarchy, and popular*

       literature. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.

Ramsdell, Kristin. (1999). *Romance fiction: A guide to the genre*. Englewood, CO:

       Libraries Unlimited, Inc.

A reader. (1998). *Just what I was looking For!* Retrieved April 11, 2003 from

       http://www.amazon.com from the reviews for *Tonight and Always*, by Linda Lael

       Miller.

A reader. (2001). *It was a good read*. Retrieved April 11, 2003 from

       http://www.amazon.com from the reviews for *Walk in Moonlight*, by Rosemary

       Laurey.

Review Guidelines. Retrieved March 22, 2003 from

       http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/browse/-/508094/104-3346520-

       2181557#reviewguidelines

Review Guidelines. Retrieved March 22, 2003 from

       http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/browse/-/508094/104-3346520-

       2181557#reviewguidelines

Roycraft, Jaye. (2002). The immortal kiss. *Science Fiction Romance Newsletter 95*.

    Retrieved January 27, 2003 from

    http://www.sfronline.com/articles/immortalkiss.htm

Ryan, Kate. (1996). Vampires. *Romantic Times Bookclub, 152* (Nov.) [electronic

    version]. Retrieved January 27, 2003 from

    http://www.romantictimes.com/f_reader/f3a_26.html

Saricks, Joyce G. (2001). The readers' advisory guide to genre fiction. Chicago, IL:

    American Library Association.

Schilling, Marika K. (2002). Great Story, *Surprising twist!* Retrieved April 11, 2003 from

    http://www.amazon.com from the reviews for *Deeper than the Night*, by Maggie

    Shayne.

Shannon. (2000). *I'm impressed*. Retrieved April 11, 2003 from http://www.amazon.com

    from the reviews for *When Darkness Falls*, by Shannon Drake

Dana Shull. (2000). *What a treat!* Retrieved April 11, 2003 from

    http://www.amazon.com from the reviews for *Deeper than the Night*, by Maggie

    Shayne.

Vampires. (2001). *Romantic Times Bookclub, 205* (March) [electronic version].

    Retrieved April 10, 2003 from http://www.romantictimes.com

Wiegand, Wayne. (1997). MisReading LIS Education. *Library Journal* 122 (11), 36-39.

Whiteside, Diane. (2002). How real do you want your vampires to be? Retrieved January

    27, 2003 from http://sfronline.com/articles/realvamps.htm

Appendix A. Books used in the survey.

Author	Title	Publisher	Date	Ave. Rating	Total Reviews	5 Star	4 Star
Amanda Ashley	Embrace the Night	Leisure Books	1998	4	25	15	3
Amanda Ashley	Deeper than the Night	Love Spell	1996	3	27	9	4
Amanda Ashley	Sunlight Moonlight	Love Spell	1997		7	4	1
Amanda Ashley	Shades of Gray	Love Spell	1998	4	24	13	4
Amanda Ashley	A Darker Dream	Love Spell	1998	3.5	19	9	1
Sharon Brondos	Kiss of Darkness	Harlequin	1994	1	1	1	0
Margaret L. Carter	Dark Changeling	Hard Shell Word Factory	1999	4	2	0	2
Annee Cartier	Redemption	Pinnacle Books	1997	0	0	0	0
Jasmine Cresswell	Prince of the night	Topaz	1995	4.5	9	5	3
Thea Devine	Sinful Secrets	Kensington Pub. Corp	2001	2.5	22	3	3
Shannon Drake	Beneath a Blood Red Moon	Zebra Books	1999	4	37	19	4
Shannon Drake	When Darkness Falls	Zebra Books	2000	4	41	22	8
Jennifer Dunne	Dark Salvation	Hard Shell Word Factory	2001	4	5	2	2
Lynn Erickson	Out of the Darkness	Harlequin	1995	5	1	1	0
Christine Feehan	Dark Magic	Love Spell	2000	4.5	82	55	12
Christine Feehan	Dark Gold	Love Spell	2000	4.5	65	46	13
Christine Feehan	Dark Desire	Love Spell	1999	4.5	66	51	11
Christine Feehan	Dark Prince	Love Spell	1999	4.5	111	77	16
Christine Feehan	Dark Challenge	Love Spell	2000	4	71	38	16
Nancy Gideon	Midnight Temptation	Pinnacle Books	1994	4.5	6	3	3

Nancy Gideon	Midnight Kiss	Pinnacle Books	1994	3	5	0	3
Nancy Gideon	Midnight Surrender	Pinnacle Books	1995	5	4	4	1
Nancy Gideon	Midnight Enchantment	ImaJinn Books	1999	4		8	2
Nancy Gideon	Midnight Redeemer	ImaJinn Books	2000	4.5	5	3	2
Nancy Gideon	Midnight Gamble	ImaJinn Books	2000	3.5	6	2	1
Wendy Halen	These Fallen Angels	Diamond Books	1995	5	6	2	3
Karen Harbough	The Vampire Viscount	Signet	1995	4	5	2	2
Jane Harrison	Dark Dreams	Kensington Pub. Corp	1996	3.5	7	4	1
Michele Hauf	Dark Rapture	Kensington Pub. Corp	1997	4	12	9	1
Lori Herter	Confession	Berkley Pub. Group	1997	5	1	1	0
Lori Herter	Eternity	Berkley Pub. Group	1993	5	1	1	0
Lori Herter	Obsession	Berkley Pub. Group	1991	3.5	3	0	2
Lori Herter	Possession	Berkley Pub. Group	1992	4	1	0	1
Cheryln Jac	Night's Immortal Kiss	Pinnacle Books	1994	0	0	0	0
Sabine Kells	A Deeper Hunger	Leisure Books	1994	4.5	4	2	2
Nancy Kilpatrick	Near Death	Pocket Books	1994	5	3	3	0
Susan Krinard	Prince of Dreams	Bantam Books	1996	3.5	14	5	4
Rosemary Laurey	Walk in Moonlight	Avid Press	2000	4.5	17	13	3
Linda Lael Miller	Forever and the Night	Berkley Pub. Group	1993	4	29	19	3
Linda Lael Miller	Time Without End	Berkley Pub. Group	1995	4.5	16	11	1
Linda Lael Miller	Tonight and Always	Berkley Pub. Group	1996	4.5	6	4	1
Heather Graham Pozzessere	This Rough Magic	Harlequin	1998	0	0	0	0
Jeanne Rose	Good Night My Love	Harlequin	1996	0	0	0	0
Margaret St. George	Love Bites…	Harlequin	1995	4	4	3	0
Maggie Shayne	Twighlight Phantasies	Harlequin	1993	4.5	7	5	1
Maggie Shayne	Twighlight Memories	Harlequin	1994	5	10	9	1

Maggie Shayne	Twighlight Illusions	Harlequin	1995	4.5	2	1	1
Maggie Shayne	Born in Twilight	Harlequin	1997	5	14	12	2
Susan Sizemore	Partners	Ace Books	2000	4.5	9	5	3
Susan Sizemore	The Hunt	Ace Books	1999	3.5	19	6	5
Amanda Stevens	Dark Obsession	Harlequin	1995	4	4	2	1
Karen E. Taylor	Bitter Blood	Kensington Pub. Corp	1994	4	2	0	2
Karen E. Taylor	Blood Secrets	Pinnacle	2000	3	9	3	2
Karen E. Taylor	Blood Ties	Pinnacle	1995	3.5	3	1	1
J.C. Wilder	Retribution	Dreams Unlimited	1999	4	4	3	0