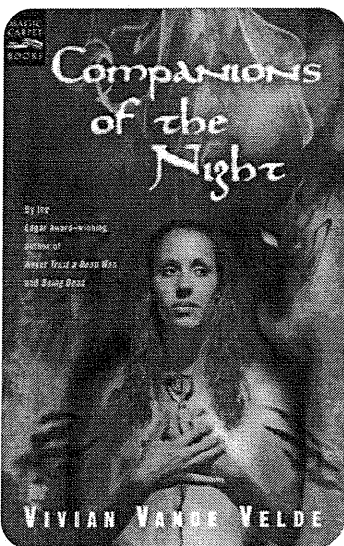


COMPANIONS OF THE NIGHT BY VIVIAN

VANDE VELDE

KERRY NOWICKI: A CHARACTER STUDY



"You demanded to know what had happened to poor Ethan Bryne, but all Marsala would talk about was Satan and Vampires."

"In favour or against?" Kerry interrupted.

As librarians, we are constantly on the lookout for underappreciated books which speak not only to teen readers, but contain content which is relevant to the popular themes of the day. *Companions of the Night* is one such book. It has a male vampire protagonist, which makes it a good book to recommend to the *Twilight* fans (*Twilight* by Stephenie Meyer is the current phenomena among teens) who are looking for similar reading material. *Companions of the Night* also has a female protagonist who has strong family ties and considers herself to be a good person, but who also stands up for what she believes in. One night, while searching for her younger brother's missing stuffed animal at the local Laundromat, Kerry finds herself in a dangerous situation in which she fears for her life. The store owner and two other adults drag a young man into the store, tied up and bloodied, and claim he is a vampire. Ethan Bryne promises her he's not a vampire and begs for her help, while the kidnappers promise to let her go after the sun rises. Kerry has a decision to make, and it is not a difficult choice for her to believe Ethan, whom she sees as the victim and rescues. This shows bravery on her part, and a deeper understanding of the situation – Kerry does not believe that they will allow her to leave after she has witnessed them torture and possibly murder a young boy. She also does not consider escaping on her own, knowing that if she does not help Ethan that he will be killed. Immediately, Kerry sets herself apart from other protagonists in young adult vampire literature by being a person who is both ethically good – she worries about doing the right thing and getting into trouble – and intelligent/quick witted.

These character traits continue throughout the novel, after her father and baby brother are kidnapped and she is forced to turn to Ethan Bryne for help, quickly realizing that he is not a normal teenager, or even human. While trying to find her family, Ethan puts Kerry into some situations she is not comfortable with, such as lying to the police, stealing a car, and breaking and

entering. She strongly opposes these choices, and mentally struggles between her morals and her necessity to find her family. She chooses her family every time. Ethan also feeds Kerry a string of lies and manipulations throughout the novel, many of which she sees through and calls him on. In the end, he gives her a choice to become a vampire or go home to her family, and though she loves him, she gives him what she considers to be the only decision she can make: no. Once again Kerry distinguishes herself from other female protagonists of the genre by seriously considering the implications of becoming a vampire and choosing to remain with her family rather than disappear with the vampire she has feelings for.

Grabbing his wrists, she dragged him across the rug. She wasn't strong enough - she knew she wasn't, she'd get him only so far and then he'd die agonizingly - but she got him down the hall to the master bedroom and - mistrusting the looks of those drapes, too - into the closet.

Kerry's persona is created both by her upbringing and father (at one point in the novel she states her father is such an ethical man he once made her return a ring she found on the ground) and her mother running away with a much younger man along with the household washer and dryer. This has made her a character of contradictions, one who is very trusting and good, but is also cynical and disbelieving of things she is told. She lives her life trying to be a good person and make her father proud, but she also has a great deal of anger and bitterness towards her mother. Combined,

these traits make her a character that many teenagers can identify with. She is a girl whose home life is falling apart and she is struggling to keep it together, who becomes involved with the wrong person, and finds her views of the world challenged. She is also someone who makes difficult decisions based on what is best for the people who love and depend on her first and her own needs second. For these reasons, *Companions of the Night* is an excellent book to recommend to teen readers, not only those who love vampire novels, but also those who enjoy a good mystery or adventure story with a female protagonist who challenges the world instead of accepting it.

