

Jai O'Neal

the hero and the heroine do not show any physical display of affection. Many “close calls” of public displays of affection between the two lead characters are phased out and left to the audience’s imagination.

Knowing my family and culture as I do, I hesitate to read my romance novels openly at home because characters mate freely, frequently, and usually prior to marriage. While I was born in the United States, I still retain my family’s traditions and thus am reluctant to go beyond its parameters. I change the channel when characters make out in my favourite television shows if my dad is watching it with me, or I only watch reruns of *Sex and the City* if I’m by myself or with my sisters. I can’t help the way I was brought up.

So if reading vampire romance is “forbidden,” why do I read it secretly? Well, for me, it’s very simple: I love the characters and the worlds the authors create. Currently, I’m reading the fantastic and very addictive *Dark Hunter* series by Sherrilyn Kenyon. Kenyon has a complex story arc in which she effectively combines Greek mythology with the traditional romance tropes. Greek gods and goddesses retain their childlike characteristics and continue to intrude into the lives of mortals. The books are filled with allusions to Greek legends, along with handsome, tragic heroes that need and seek love in order to feel whole once again. The characters are far from perfect and most of the time are trying to make up for mistakes they have made in their past. There are many themes found in Kenyon’s series such as torn loyalties, finding an identity, and struggling to overcome adversity to achieve happiness. Sure the books are monotonous in a few areas:

the handsome hero who is at least six feet tall with a fantastic muscular body and shoulder length hair, the horrible cheesy covers of people who are dying to be stripped of their clothes, and the beyond-ridiculous titles such as *Burning Desire* engraved on the cover.

This article is appearing in a magazine for school library professionals, so let’s bring it back to the readers we deal with daily. You can’t judge a person by what they read. Reading is a luxury, an escape, and a way of exploring ideas and experiences. There is nothing wrong in reading romance, science fiction, fantasy, horror, western, young adult, or mysteries. Each genre has its merits and should not be marginalized or stigmatized. Ensure that you are supportive of all types of literature and don’t let any preconceived stereotypes affect the way you purchase or recommend books. My personal reading mantra is to not criticize anything without reading it first, and if it’s not my “cup of tea,” it may be someone else’s “burning desire.” ■

