

# Portrayal of vampires in contemporary media



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The original concept of vampires was penned down by Bram Stoker, in his book, *Dracula*. In this classic novel, Dracula is the main antagonist, the most dangerous predator on earth, whose survival depends on the blood of human beings. Thus, the concept of vampires became popular and they were seen as blood thirsty predators, the creatures of the night. Stoker depicted them as the living dead, who had the power to control human minds and ability to shape-shift. Their weaknesses included fear of the cross and the inability to withstand the sun. Since then, the concept of vampires has become popular in media and has changed to a significant level. The present day representation of vampires is different as compared to the concept that was introduced by Bram Stoker. The elements of romanticism and humanism have shaped the concept of vampires and they are now depicted as immortals, living in isolation and seclusion. In contemporary media, vampires are seen as soulless individuals, struggling for their survival based on different perspectives. This dissertation would concentrate on analyzing the modern concept of vampires in the lights of broad and diverse academic resources. Case study analysis has been selected as the research methodology, which would concentrate on reviewing and analyzing the concepts of modern vampires in six different Cult TV series related to vampires.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Classical Concept of Vampires

“ Early literary renditions of vampires did not necessarily present the creature in an actual human form, for example they would have conspicuous

pointed teeth, pointed ears or grotesquely hairy hands” (Bartlet & Idriceanu, 2006, 105). As the concept of vampires grew in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, vampires emerged as evil creatures, looking like human beings. They were depicted as charming and attractive creatures, making them convenient for them to attack their victims. In the film *Nosferatu*, which was released in the year 1922, the vampire looked like a ferocious and inhuman monster, with sharp talons (Bartlet & Idriceanu, 2006, 111).

In Hollywood, *Dracula* was seen as a charming and handsome vampire, dressed in suits and capes. In order to study the modern concept of vampires, it is essential to understand the primary classical concepts. Classical vampires have been portrayed in several movies and television. One of the classical vampires can be seen in the film “*Interview with a Vampire*” and Bram Stoker’s “*Dracula*” (Bartlet & Idriceanu, 2006, 125). The classicals have been represented as those vampires, who have a pale, scrawny and pallid appearance. Gordon (2004, 89) asserts that “it was once believed a Classical had to drink blood, not only for nourishment but to replenish his blood supply, which he did not have because he was believed to be dead”. The concept of classical vampires has been derived from the historical Carpathian texts, which talk about Vlad Tepes as well as the research and analysis of Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (Jennings, 2004, 295). The concept of classical vampires did exist before Bram Stoker penned his original masterpiece, however, *Dracula*, is the most popular and well known classical vampire of all times. It should be noted that the characteristics of classical vampires have been derived from those of *Dracula*.

A classical vampire is considered to be weak and gaunt in appearance. Once it feeds on the victim, it gains its human form. However, as the blood dissipates, it again returns to its former state. They have the ability to change into animals. True classical can only become vampires after becoming the victim. This indicates that the victim loses his or her blood and dies. The infected victim revives as the undead. Literature also reveals that newly born undead need to feed on blood as soon as they awake. They cannot withstand sun. Bram Stoker's *Dracula* lived in isolated, dark castle, which was found in the deep forest (Jennings, 2004, 299). Furthermore, they need to sleep in a coffin in order to restore and revive their strength. Literature also suggests that classical vampires are predators and it is in their nature to kill human beings. They see human beings as food, which provides them the nourishment to survive. Feeding on blood is necessary for their survival (Summers, 2009, 115).

#### Modern Representation of Vampires in Media: History

There is no doubt that the classical concept of vampires has been changed by the contemporary media. The new, modern vampires have been romanticized. As mentioned earlier, the concept of vampires gained immense popularity after the publication of Bram Stoker's classic novel, *Dracula*. The success of this novel led to the development of vampires and thus, it gained the attention of media. Since the introduction of *Dracula*, people from all over the world have become interested on the subject of vampires. The film *Nosferatu*, a German film, which was based on *Dracula*, is the first ever film as "it was the first time anyone could truly witness the rising of the undead from its coffin" (Bartlet & Idriceanu, 2006, 205). In the <https://assignbuster.com/portrayal-of-vampires-in-contemporary-media/>

thirties, Todd Browning brought Dracula to life in Hollywood. Unlike its German counterpart, Browning's Dracula was charming and attractive and as sinister as the vampire depicted in Nosferatu. The only difference was that Hollywood's Dracula was good-looking and attractive. Thus, Browning laid down the foundations for the concept of vampire in the American media. From here, the concept of modern vampires emerged; the creatures of the night, who were painstakingly beautiful and attractive yet they had a monster inside them.

During the seventies, the concept of vampires in media changed to a significant level. Before the seventies, vampires in media were seen as physically attractive and charismatic individuals, who were the most dangerous predators on earth. The main focus was primarily on their external attributes. Their internal characteristics and personalities were unknown. They were only seen as creatures of the night, the undead, who fed on human blood (Summers, 2009, 119). Beginning in the seventies, the concept of vampires changed as the internal characteristics and personality were being explored. During the eighties, the concept of vampires changed in accordance to the culture of Hollywood (Bartlet & Idriceanu, 2006, 225). The vampires of the eighties adopted a gothic lifestyle and resembled like rock stars. These vampires were dangerous and deadly and cool. The eighties witnessed a whole new concept of vampires. In the nineties, the concept of vampires in media became romanticized. The movie, "Interview with a Vampire", completely changed the concept of vampires (Gordon, 2004, 125). The nineties witnessed a new and improved concept of vampires in the media (Gordon, 2004, 147). They were now viewed as the creatures of

the night, whose aim is to survive in the human society, facing various obstacles and hurdles. They are now viewed as immortals, who watch as the human society grows. The concept of vampires further changes with the emergence of Television series such as Buffy, the Vampire Slayer, Angel, True Lies, the Vampire Diaries, etc(Summers, 2009, 121). In these television series, there were two types of vampires; the good ones and the evil ones(Wolf, 2007, 258). The good vampires worked collaboratively with their human alias to combat against the evil and sinister vampires. The nineties media also gave rise the possibility of love between a vampire and a human being; for instance, the love relationship between Buff and Angel in Buffy the Vampire Slayer and the love relationship between Stefan and Elena in the Vampire Diaries(Summers, 2009, 138). The possibility of love relationship between a human and a vampire has also been discussed in Stephanie Meyer's Twilight, between Bella Swan and Edward Cullen. All of these new concepts have romanticized the concept of vampires in media and they are no longer seen as the creatures to be feared.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

For this research, the research methodology selected is the case study approach, which would review the most popular Cult television series in order to answer the questions addressed in this research. Each of the series selected needs to be discussed extensively and in terms of characters and their popularity. The overall goal of case study analysis is to analyze the modern portrayal of vampires in media. The series selected are as follows: Buffy the Vampire Slayer, Angel, True Blood, Being Human and the Vampire Diaries.

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Following are the aims and objectives of the study:

The similarities and differences between the classic and modern concepts of vampire.

To study the relationship between popular culture and the present day representation of vampires.

To study the modern day presentation of vampires in Hollywood movies and to compare it to the concept found in Television series.

Why modern vampires are seen as isolated, humane individuals, fighting for their survival in their own community, in order to capture and captivate the target audiences?

To study whether the soft image has been used to charm the audience in order to cater emotional drama?

To study the relationship between the vampire and a human character of the series.

## CASE STUDY ANALYSIS

### Buffy the Vampire Slayer

In Buffy the Vampire Slayer, the creator Joss Whedon has explored the possibility that the vampire can have a soul. The soul found in the vampire Angel, who has conscious and wide ranging emotions, which makes him a good vampire. Thus, Joss Whedon has explored the fact that vampires can have a soul and therefore, they can have a conscious. Furthermore, the

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creator also explored the possibility of the love relationship between Buffy, the vampire slayer, and Angel, the vampire with soul. Even though, they were completely in love with another, their relation had to come to an end after realizing that Angel can give her nothing but darkness (Dundes, 2008, 98). The concept of vampires in this show is relatively new and it gave the possibility that vampires can be good. Similarities can also be found between the classical vampires and the concept of vampires created by Joss Whedon (Summers, 2009, 145). Just like classical vampires, evil vampires feed on blood. They are afraid of sunlight as it can kill them. They are killed by stakes. However, at these modern vampires live among human beings and during the day, hide in their underground hiding place. The series had made significant impact on other television shows and it has been successful in capturing wide ranging audience from all over the world. " Buffy the Vampire Slayer showed the whole world, and an entire sprawling industry, that writing monsters and demons and end-of-the world is not hack-work, it can challenge the best. Joss Whedon raised the bar for every writer-not just genre/niche writers, but every single one of us" (Jennings, 2004, 298).

## Angel

Angel is another television show, which is based on vampires. The series was also created by Joss Whedon. The show is similar as that of Buffy, the Vampire Slayer. In this show, Angel is the vampire, who has soul(Wolf, 2007, 258). He had been given back his soul after he had killed one of the gypsies and therefore, he has spent more than a century to get over the guilt of killing so many innocents. The show starts off with Angel working as a private detective. He and his associates work collaboratively to help those

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people, who have lost their way in order to save their souls. Furthermore, they fight with demons. The concept of vampires in this television series is that a vampire is working to help others (Jennings, 2004, 299). The nature of the vampire depicted is soft, which is used to gather the attention of the audience. The concept of vampires in this show is relatively new and it gave the possibility that vampires can be good. Similarities can also be found between the classical vampires and the concept of vampires created by Joss Whedon. Just like classical vampires, evil vampires feed on blood. They are afraid of sunlight as it can kill them. They are killed by stakes (Jennings, 2004, 300). However, at these modern vampires live among human beings and during the day, hide in their underground hiding place. The series had made significant impact on other television shows and it has been successful in capturing wide ranging audience from all over the world.

### True Blood

True blood is another American television series, which is based on vampires. In this series, vampires have gained citizens rights and they are living with humans. The series also explores the relationship between Sookie Stackhouse and Bill Compton, a vampire (Summers, 2009, 296). In this series, the vampires do not feed on human blood and thus, they are seen as citizens, who have the same rights as humans. Like other modern versions of vampires, the series concentrate on the possibility of a relationship between a human and a vampire.

### Being Human

The concept of vampires in *Being Human* is same as *True Blood*. The story revolves around three vampires, who concentrate on adjusting themselves to the human society.

### Vampire Diaries

The concept of vampire in *Vampire Diaries* revolves around the relationship between Stefan, a vampire and Elena, a human. Stefan is a good vampire and only feeds on animal blood, whereas his brother, Damon is vicious and preys on human blood. The concept of vampires in this show is relatively new and it gave the possibility that vampires can be good (Summers, 2009, 302). Just like classical vampires, evil vampires feed on blood. They are afraid of sunlight as it can kill them. They are killed by stakes (Dundes, 2008, 114). However, at these modern vampires live among human beings. At the same time, they can withstand sun rays by wearing a ring or an amulet, which protects them from sunlight.

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Bram Stoker's *Dracula* is the main antagonist, the most dangerous predator on earth, whose survival depends on the blood of human beings. Thus, the concept of vampires became popular and they were seen as blood thirsty predators, the creatures of the night. Stoker depicted them as the living dead, who had the power to control human minds and ability to shape-shift. Their weaknesses included fear of the cross and the inability to withstand the sun. A classical vampire is considered to be weak and gaunt in appearance. Once it feeds on the victim, it gains its human form. However, as the blood dissipates, it again returns to its former state. There is no doubt that the <https://assignbuster.com/portrayal-of-vampires-in-contemporary-media/>

classical concept of vampires has been changed by the contemporary media. The new, modern vampires have been romanticized.

As mentioned earlier, the concept of vampires gained immense popularity after the publication of Bram Stoker's classic novel, *Dracula*. The nineties witnessed a new and improved concept of vampires in the media. They were now viewed as the creatures of the night, whose aim is to survive in the human society, facing various obstacles and hurdles. They are now viewed as immortals, who watch as the human society grows. The concept of vampires further changes with the emergence of Television series such as *Buffy, the Vampire Slayer*, *Angel*, *True Lies*, *the Vampire Diaries*, etc. In these television series, there were two types of vampires; the good ones and the evil ones. From case analysis, it can be concluded that the soft image of vampires have been depicted in order to captivate the audience. Furthermore, the possibilities of a love relationship between a vampire and a human, makes a vampire more humane, having a consciousness.