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The Evolution of The Vampire From A Gruesome Gothic Creature To A Superstar Of  
Popular Culture With Reference To *The Vampire Diaries* Tv Series

*This research article is dedicated to Dr.Saunak Samajdar, Associate Professor, Cooch Behar  
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Abstract

A vampire is a mythological-folkloric creature that is said to feed on the blood of the living. It is a Gothic uncanny figure. So judging by the outlook, a vampire is not a figure with whom we should fall in love with. But judging by the current trends in popular culture, it is not true so. Though vampires were once portrayed as gruesome and horrible, with the passage of time, change in trends and paradigm shift in popular culture, they have been naturalized as normal. They have even attained celebrity status. The evolution of the vampire from a gruesome Gothic figure to a superstar of popular culture goes through a process of three stages-

- (i) Accepting the Vampire as Normal and Natural
- (ii) 'Celebritizing' the Vampire and Making a Star out of Him

## (iii) Narrative Technique or Storytelling of Vampire Texts

**Key Words:** Popular Culture, *The Vampire Diaries*, Vampire, Celebrityization

## INTRODUCTION

*The Vampire Diaries* is a famous American TV series developed by Kevin Williamson and Julie Plec. The serial tells the story of a 17-year-old girl Elena Gilbert who falls in love with two vampire brothers, Stefan Salvatore and Damon Salvatore. The events take place at the mysterious town of Mystic Falls.

This research paper intends to study the ways in which the vampire, in spite of being abnormal, has become so popular in contemporary popular culture with respect to the famous American TV series *The Vampire Diaries*.

(i) Accepting the Vampire as Normal and Natural:

## (a) Willing Suspension of Disbelief:

In vampire serials or vampire stories, there is an infusion of “human interest a semblance of truth” (Coleridge, 1817) which triggers the viewer/reader to suspend judgment regarding the implausibility of the narrative.

“*The Vampire Diaries* is a teen fantasy series. The teenage years are often a period of rebellion and because fantasy requires the willing suspension of disbelief, the genre is arguably well suited to viewers who may be resisting or rejecting the imminent responsibilities of adulthood.” (McMahon-Coleman and Weaver, 2014)

## (b) Naturalization:

Though vampires were once portrayed as gruesome and horrible, with the passage of time, change in trends, and paradigm shift in popular culture, vampires have been naturalized as being normal. They have gone through a rigorous adaptation process. They are now portrayed as human-like, handsome/beautiful, doing human things, and having human emotions. For example, in *The Vampire Diaries*, Stefan Salvatore and Damon Salvatore attend school, play football et cetera.

(c) Identification:

Though in old times vampires were portrayed as evil, cold-hearted and horrible, in present-day vampire serials or vampire novels, vampires are portrayed as human-like and having human emotions. They are shown as toiling with human emotions. For example, in *The Vampire Diaries*, vampires are presented as looking like humans, having human emotions, et cetera. Stefan and Damon are shown as having strong human emotions; they are presented as toiling with human emotions. So naturally the viewers identify with them.

(ii) 'Celebritying' the Vampire and Making a Star Out of Him:

(1) Cultural Centrality:

We often find the photo of actors/actresses of vampire serials on the 'front page' of magazines which symbolizes their cultural centrality. This helps to glorify the trope of the vampire. For example photo of Nina Dobrev and Ian Somerhalder on the 'front page' of *Entertainment* magazine.

(2) Promotion:

(a) Direct Promotion:

(a1) Public Interactions:

Actors/actresses of vampire serials often interact with fans publicly to promote their show.

Thus it helps to glorify the vampire genre. For example, Ian Somerhalder's meeting with fans in New York City.

(a2) Stage Shows:

Stage shows involving actors and actresses of vampire serials help to glorify the genre of vampire shows. For example, the entire cast of *The Vampire Diaries* was present in the 2012 San Diego Comic-Con stage show. It helps to glorify the vampire serial.

(a3) Technology:

In this age of internet, anything can become an 'instant hit' as everyone has instant access to TV shows via the internet. So vampire serials can also become an 'instant hit' because of the internet. For example, all the seasons of *The Vampire Diaries* is available on Netflix and Amazon Prime Video. It is a prime factor behind the show's popularity.

(a4) Interviews:

Interviews of actors/actresses of vampire serials help to promote the 'star status' of vampire characters as well as vampire serials. For example, the interview of *The Vampire Diaries* cast at Comic-Con 2015. It increases the serial's popularity as well as the vampire's.

(a5) Generic Status and Classical Conditioning Theory:

The generic status of the time-slot of popular TV shows is an important factor behind a show's popularity. We often get accustomed to a particular time-slot of a day and stick to our sofas in front of the TV when a popular TV show airs. It has a lot in common with the experiment Ivan Pavlov conducted on his dog. It is called classical conditioning theory. So if we combine the generic status of popular TV shows with Pavlov's theory of

classical conditioning and apply it vampire serials, the joint effect will result in the popularization of vampire serials as well as vampire characters.

*The Originals* series, which is a huge hit, was shown (in The CW network) in the same time-slot before *The Vampire Diaries*. And like the former show the latter is also a hit. So here we have the combine effect of the generic status of the time-slot of popular TV shows and Ivan Pavlov's theory of classical conditioning at work. As a result, we stick to our sofas at the same time-slot each day. And the vampires virtually become our daily companions.

(a6) Media and Social Media Coverage:

Nowadays vampire serials and vampire novels are advertised on TV channels and social media (Instagram, YouTube, Facebook et cetera). This helps to promote the popularity of the vampire genre. For example, the dazzling ads of *The Vampire Diaries* on TV channels, Instagram, Facebook et cetera.

(b) Indirect Promotion:

(b1) Cross-Media Marketing:

Nowadays, following cross-media marketing, promotional companies commit themselves to surpass traditional advertisement techniques and decide to include extra appeals to the products they offer. In this marketing, the material can be communicated by any mass media such as e-mails, letters, web pages, social media or other recruiting sources. This is the strategy adopted by production companies of vampire TV serials in order to promote the vampire show. This results in the 'celebritization' of the vampire characters.

For example, *The Vampire Diaries* was advertised on a variety of mass medias such as TV, web pages, social media (Facebook, YouTube et cetera) et cetera. Even we got

reminders on our phones (through SMS, online notifications) when the show aired on television. This results in the glorification of the vampire characters.

(b2) Synergy:

These days two or more companies work together to achieve something either one could not have achieved on its own. The result of it is called synergy. Nowadays different companies come together to promote the 'star status' of vampire characters in order to popularize vampire serials. For example, Outerbanks Entertainment, Alloy Entertainment, CBS Television Studios and Warner Bros. Television-- these four companies jointly produced *The Vampire Diaries*. The reason behind is to get as much profit as possible and to achieve something either one could not have achieved on its own. So in capitalism even repelling creature like a vampire is transformed into an alluring commodity.

(b3) Relative Autonomy of Actors and the Concept of Personification:

At the present time, superstar celebrities are chosen for the casting of vampire serials. Now the presence of a cultural icon will naturally glorify and popularize any character, be it a hero or a villain or even a vampire. For example, if Shah Rukh Khan is casted as villain in a film, the role of the villain in that film will obviously be glorified because of the immense popularity of Shah Rukh Khan. So in this case, the actor's personality overwhelms the character. The same applies to *The Vampire Diaries*. In this vampire TV series, Paul Wesley plays the role of Stefan Salvatore; Ian Somerhalder plays the role of Damon Salvatore; Nina Dobrev plays the dual roles of Elena Gilbert and Katherine Pierce; Joseph Morgan plays the role of Niklaus Mikaelson, and so on. Ian Somerhalder, Nina Dobrev, Paul Wesley (and others) are extremely popular actors. The very presence of them in a TV serial is enough to glorify and popularize the trope of even such a gruesome creature like the vampire. So in *The Vampire Diaries*, we find

Barry King's concept of 'personification' at work. In "Articulating Stardom", Barry King says: "In contemporary times, the tendency towards personification may have increased with the advent of advertising as a field of employment, which combines naturalism with the sedulous cultivation of personal charm as an ingredient in the sales pitch." (King, 1985)

(3) The Übermensch:

In popular culture, vampires are portrayed as the Übermensch. They have superhuman powers, and are immortal both in the TV serials and also in the mind of the viewer. Vampires have the abilities which we all want. In *The Vampire Diaries* TV series, Stefan Salvatore and Damon Salvatore can control others' minds, can turn their humanity off et cetera. And we the viewers become fascinated with these spectacles.

(iii) The Narrative Technique and Storytelling of Vampire Texts:

(1) Moulding:

Vampire stories and vampire serials are often moulded as love stories. While some vampire stories/serials are also moulded as erotic fiction. It helps to neutralize the repelling factor of vampirism. For example, *The Vampire Diaries* TV serial is moulded as a romantic love triangle story. Thus the repulsive factor of vampirism is transformed into an alluring one.

(2) Scopophila:

Vampires are supposed to look like a corpse, ugly, smelly et cetera. But in the adaptation of films and television serieses we see vampires as attractive. So films and TV adaptations add scopophilic elements to vampires. That is what pleases the eyes. Earlier vampire

texts portrayed vampires as pale white-skinned, ugly, unattractive and repulsive beings. But contemporary film and TV adaptations make them a 'composite cultural icon' of handsomeness, sexual charm and stardom. For example, we can take the case of *Twilight* film series. In the film, Edward Cullen is a vampire who is portrayed as being handsome and sexy. This adds scopophilic elements to the film and make the vampire a scopophilic object.

In *The Vampire Diaries* TV series, the vampire protagonists, Stefan Salvatore and Damon Salvatore, are presented as handsome, attractive and sexy. So the vampires have become scopophilic objects.

### (3) Point of View:

These days vampire stories or vampire serials are narrated from the point of view of teenage girls. This attracts teenage audience, especially teenage girls. For example, Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* is told primarily from Bella's point of view. In the story, Bella is a teenage girl. This is one of the factors behind the novel's popularity.

*The Vampire Diaries* (TV series) is told from the point of view Elena Gilbert. In the serial, Elena is teenage girl. This attracts teenage girls, especially teenage girls. That is why the serial is so popular among teenage audience. And naturally this results in the popularization of the vampire genre.

### (4) Shock Therapeutic Narrative:

The narratives of vampire serials or vampire novels are full of twists, turns, shocks, thrills and surprises. It is called shock therapeutic narrative. It is the same techniques used in TV shows, soap operas, commercial films et cetera to increase TRP and achieve as much popularity as possible. And it is also responsible for the popularity of vampire serials

and vampire films. For example, in the film *New Moon* (*The Twilight* saga), Bella runs through a sea of people in red cloaks to save Edward from committing suicide. This is one of the most thrilling moments of the film. And this scene gives the audience a shock.

Similarly, the narrative of *The Vampire Diaries* (TV series) is also full of shocks, thrills, suspense and surprises. For example, in Season 6, Episode 22, Elena Gilbert falls asleep until the death of Bonnie.

(5) Exotic Setting:

These days exotic locations are being chosen for the shooting of TV serials and films. This adds on a prismatic visual flavour to them. For example, Chris Weitz's film *New Moon* was shot in Montepulciano, Italy. It adds a special visual charm to the film. And as a result, the vampire also becomes an exotic character along with the film.

## CONCLUSION

To conclude, we can say that in spite of being a repulsive figure the vampire has gradually been naturalized and accepted as normal. And it has even attained celebrity status. Popular vampire films like *The Twilight Saga* and vampire serials like *The Vampire Diaries* are a living example of this fact.

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