Werewolves in Popular Culture

Teen Wolf

*Teen Wolf* is a popular, new show on MTV that follows the lives of many adult and teenage werewolves. The heroes of the show have to fight off evil, supernatural creatures and hide their secret identities from the normal humans in their town. The main character, Scott McCall, is bitten by a werewolf in the first episode and soon becomes a werewolf himself. He must then learn to control his new abilities and to not hurt the people he cares about during the full moon.

However, the werewolves on this show are not as simple as they seem. While people may turn by biting, there are also people who are born with the werewolf gene. These werewolves are generally more powerful and go on to become alphas, who are the leaders of werewolf packs. The two other types of werewolves are betas, who follow the alpha, and omegas, who are “lone wolves” that exist without a pack (wikia). Once the characters on the show have learned how to control their wolfish urges, they come to accept their condition and value it. Scott is at first appalled at the monster he has become, but he soon learns that his new powers and heightened senses can be used to help people.

“*You’ve been given something that most people would kill for. The bite is a gift.*”

Harry Potter

J.K. Rowling creates a sympathetic image of the werewolf in Remus Lupin, mentor of her series’ protagonist, Harry Potter. Remus was the only child of a wizard father and a Muggle mother. He lived a happy four years as a healthy boy who showed early signs of magical ability. His father, Lyall Lupin worked in the Ministry of Magic through the years of Voldemort’s power to help contain the threat of certain Dark creatures. It was here that Lyall came across Fenrir Greyback, a werewolf who was brought in for questioning about the death of two Muggle children, and who would eventually bite his son. Due to the lack of a properly maintained registry of which wizards or witches were werewolves, Fenrir Greyback successfully fooled the Ministry into thinking he was a Muggle, bewildered by the magical world around him. Lyall was not fooled and tried to convince the Ministry to keep Fenrir till the next full moon, but was derided by his peers. He grew angry and described werewolves as “soulless, evil, deserving nothing but death” as Fenrir was released for his charges. Fenrir wasted no time sharing with his werewolf companions how Lyall described them. Their revenge was to break into the Lupin household and bite, and thus transform, the then five year old Remus into a werewolf. Lyall would never be able to forgive himself for the words he spoke to describe werewolves on that fateful day. He then realized he merely parroted what others in his community have been saying about werewolves and that his son was still the same loveable and clever boy, except during his painful transformations.

Throughout the series, readers come to sympathize with Harry’s favorite Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher. Due to the widespread aversion and discrimination against werewolves in the magical world, werewolves like Remus lived in poverty, unable to keep employment once their werewolf status was discovered. Students at Hogwarts at first regarded their new teacher, in his shabby clothing, with wary, though many quickly looked past that after realizing Lupin’s brilliance as a teacher. He was still ridiculed by the Slytherin House, though he never lashed out at any of his students, showing that social stigma could never be cast aside. Those close to Lupin know him as nothing less than a dependent and loyal friend. They know him to be a person with a serious and painful condition he cannot control. Most werewolves are implied to be loners with no close friends, drifting in a society that abhors them. Even Fenrir Greyback, an undoubtedly evil character, is somehow justified in attempting to get back at Lyall, who had dismissed and insulted him. It raises the notion that perhaps his vitriolic behavior is at least in some part caused by the loathing cast upon him and his likes throughout the years. Attacking an innocent child may not have been the most diplomatic way of retaliating Lyall’s insult, but he did rid the stigma werewolves’ carry from Remus’s father and those who would eventually come in contact with Remus.

The Wolf Man

The Wolf Man is a 1941 movie directed by George Waggner and stars Lon Chaney, Jr. as the title character. This Hollywood take on the werewolf is commonly thought of as the movie that initiated the werewolf into the monster hall of fame, which includes the vampire, the mummy and Frankenstein’s creature. The Wolf Man is however, different from its iconic predecessors in that the monster is cursed by his ailment of turning into a wolf while other monsters seek to actively wreak havoc with their supernatural talents. The movie also seems to take an interesting position on monsters in general, as the curious choice of directing seems to infer that the transformation from man to creature only occurs within the protagonist’s mind and that the protagonist himself was actually driven mad by recent misfortunes. This interesting twist allows for the exploration of the werewolfism as a possible disease.

In the movie, Larry Talbot, played by Lon Chaney, Jr., goes to his ancestral home in Llanwelly, Wales after hearing about the death of his brother during a hunting accident and to reconcile with his estranged father. In Llanwelly, he becomes romantically interested in Gwen Conliffe, the daughter of an antique store proprietor. She tells Larry the local legend of the werewolf and convinces him to buy a silver tipped cane with a wolf’s head as a handle. Despite being rebuffed earlier that day, Larry comes back to the store later that evening to go to a gypsy camp to have her fortune told. Gwen only agreed to go after Larry allowed her friend, Jenny Williams, could come as well. Jenny is attacked by a large animal in the gypsy camp and Larry steps in to try and save her, eventually killing the beast with his wolf cane, though he was bitten by the creature in the process. When the villagers come to investigate, they find Larry’s cane next to not the body of a wolf, but the body of Bela, the son of the gypsy fortune teller, Maleva. Maleva tells Larry that her son was a werewolf and since he was bitten, he would soon undergo the transformation between wolf and man as well. Larry does turn into a werewolf and soon begins to stalk the people of Llanwelly. He continually struggles to overcome his condition, but is unsuccessful and eventually bludgeoned to death with the wolf cane by his father when he tries to attack Gwen.

The wolf man reflects the most humanistic qualities of Universal’s army of movie monsters. He unwittingly and unwillingly falls victim to what he personally believed to be a curse and tries, though without success, to overcome it. He is the only monster who ever regrets the damage he causes in his monstrous state. Whereas Dracula was utterly in his preying on innocents and Frankenstein too raw with emotion to properly feel
Werewolves will attack humans. But instinct and centuries of rivalry have hardwired them to hunt vampires. The main reason werewolves are enemies of the vampire is because their bite can kill a vampire. The venom in their bite is like a poison to vampires. One unique thing about the werewolves of this show is that they must trigger the werewolf gene for it to become active. If it is not triggered, a curse will be placed on their prey of choice: vampires.

Werewolves vs. Vampires

Some stories feature werewolves, not as the main attraction, but as the supporting cast to immortals with fangs. It has become a common theme in TV shows, books, and movies to pit werewolves against vampires. However, this rivalry between the two monsters is a relatively new development. In fact, many legends and folktales bring the two creatures together. Many Eastern European myths believed that "the corpses of werewolves, if not destroyed, would return to life in the form of wolves" that would drink the blood of dying soldiers (Wikipedia). But werewolves and vampires have slowly lost their connection to one another over time and become enemies in today's popular culture. One reason why these two monsters may have been placed on opposite sides is because of today's culture's love of rivalries and picking a side. The fight against werewolves and vampires is so appealing because of how powerful both sides are but also because of how relatable the fight is to audiences.

The Vampire Diaries

"If it were a choice, it wouldn't be called a curse. Werewolves will attack humans. But instinct and centuries of rivalry have hardwired them to hunt their prey of choice: vampires."

The werewolves seen in The Vampire Diaries are the type of werewolves that transform into actual wolves during the full moon. They have no control over their transformation, it is extremely painful, and once in wolf form they cannot control their actions. Because of their lack of control, they call their "condition a curse" (wikia). The history of the werewolf is not yet known on the show, but it has been stated that werewolves existed before vampires. The main reason werewolves are enemies of the vampire is because their bite can kill a vampire. The venom in their bite is like a poison to vampires.
werewolf can live his or her whole life like a normal human being. To trigger the curse, a person must kill another human being. It does not matter if the death was caused by accident or done intentionally. Once the gene is triggered, the werewolf will start to turn every full moon. This transformation is extremely long and painful as "the body of the person is twisted in an unnatural manner as bones reshape and shift to form a wolf’s skeleton" (wikia). This intense physical and psychological pain is another reason why the werewolves think they are cursed.

Twilight

The Twilight werewolves are technically found out to be "shape-shifters" later on in the series, but they still have many of the same characteristics of werewolves. For simplicities sake, let's call them werewolves. The werewolves of this series descended from the ancient spirit warriors of the Quileute tribe. Their sole purpose is to defend their tribe from vampires. Whenever there are vampires in the area, the scent of the vampire activities the werewolf gene. This causes the current generations' physique to build until they "phase" into a wolf for the first time.

The Quileute werewolves start to turn around the time they reach maturity. The number of members of the pack depend on the number of vampires in the area. If there are no vampires, then the gene will not be activated, and there will be no werewolves. While the werewolves can turn whenever they want to, and their transformations have nothing to do with the full moon, controlling their transformation is difficult at first. Anger often times leads to phasing, which can hurt any human beings that happen to be too close. However, in wolf form, the werewolves appear to have complete control over their thoughts and actions.

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