

OOO! THE PORTRAYAL OF WEREWOLVES IN HARRY POTTER, TWILIGHT SAGA, AND TEEN WOLF

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Abstrak: *This study investigates the portrayal of werewolves across three distinct cinematic franchises: 'Harry Potter', 'Twilight Saga', and 'Teen Wolf'. The research examines how these films visually and narratively depict werewolves, analyzing their transformation, identity, and symbolism. Employing a descriptive qualitative methodology, the study integrates visual analysis techniques, focusing on the denotative and connotative meanings of visual representations. This study applies techniques of analysis by Spradley (2016) which consist of four steps: domain, taxonomy, componential, and cultural theme. Harry Potter frames the werewolf as a tragic figure, emphasizing stigma and societal exclusion through Remus Lupin's humanoid transformation. The Twilight Saga reimagines werewolves as symbols of cultural heritage and guardianship, reflected in their full wolf forms tied to the Quileute tribe. In contrast, Teen Wolf presents a spectrum of forms: humanoid, hybrid, and wolf. Exploring themes of self-discovery, hierarchical structures, and the balance between human and wolf instincts. These portrayals collectively underscore the evolving representation of werewolves from monstrous beings to complex characters grappling with personal and societal conflicts. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of anthropomorphic narratives, offering a comparative perspective on the cultural and symbolic significance of werewolves in contemporary media.*

Keywords : *werewolves, shapeshifter, transformation, mythology, mythological creature*

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In contemporary fantasy literature and media, the portrayal of werewolves has significantly evolved from their traditional roots in folklore. Historically, werewolves in ancient and medieval literature were associated with witches and sorcerers (Ogden, 2021), but the association transforms in a symbolic way into uncontrollable and animalistic aspects of human nature. The phenomenon of werewolves in these narratives serves as a powerful lens through which audiences can

engage with deeper issues of selfhood, otherness, and the human condition.

Werewolves are increasingly used to explore themes of transformation and duality. Across stories like *Harry Potter*, *Twilight Saga*, and *Teen Wolf*, the portrayal of werewolves shifts from being monstrous figures of folklore to complex characters embodying societal and personal struggles. Whether it's grappling with stigma, as seen in Remus Lupin's experience in *Harry Potter*, or serving as a symbol of cultural heritage and community in *Twilight Saga*, the werewolf archetype is reimagined to

reflect modern issues. This evolution highlights the enduring relevance of werewolves as metaphors for identity,

belonging, and the interplay between humanity and instinct.

Figure 1. Werewolf in *Harry Potter* **Figure 2.** Werewolf in *Twilight Saga* **Figure 3.** Werewolf in *Teen Wolf*



In *Harry Potter*, for example, the character of Remus Lupin represents the werewolf as a tragic figure, grappling with the social stigma and isolation that comes with his condition. This depiction taps into broader themes of discrimination and the fear of the 'other,' offering a metaphor for those who are marginalized by society due to circumstances beyond their control. Similarly, the *Twilight Saga* reinterprets the werewolf myth through the lens of cultural identity and community, portraying the Quileute tribe's shapeshifters as protectors of their people, deeply connected to their heritage. This interpretation reflects contemporary concerns about cultural preservation and the complexities of belonging in a multicultural world.

The phenomenon of the portrayal of werewolves has drawn several linguists and those studies tend to focus on the transformation process and physical transformation which only focus on the appearance. Du Coudray (2002) investigates the differences of the werewolf images associated primarily with the oral traditions of folklore and the early-modern

The portrayal of werewolves in this study applies the visual analysis theory of Van Leeuwen (2001). According to Theo van Leeuwen, visual analysis focuses on social semiotics to understand how an image shows its representation and how it communicates its meaning. The representation of each werewolf is the key to determining their differences. An image or visual that is conveyed in the media surely has its own representation, what they want to emphasize in the visual. Just like in *Harry Potter*, *Twilight Saga*, and *Teen Wolf*, each writer of these three movies has their own beliefs to represent werewolves and this can be examined through the visuals.

witchcraft trials. Bettini (2011) investigated werewolves in medieval literature had to align with the Church's perspective on transformation, leading them to shift from wild and savage beings to kind and rational figures. Bystrický (2015) studied the transformation of humans into wolves in medieval chivalric romances, rhymed tales (lais), educational works, Norse sagas, Russian literature and Serbian folk songs. Inayah and Hidayah (2022) studied the

representation of blood in the transformation process of human into werewolf through dreams in Viking Wolf movie (2022), namely, half-bloody; sensitive sense and changes habits and blood covers the body; animal instinct and physical changes. Gouda and Elizabeth (2023) studied wolf transformation characterized by physical transformations such as hair growth or loss, alterations in skin texture, weight changes, and increased activity levels, along with behaviors like consuming raw meat, moving on all fours, growling, and making similar sounds, as well as experiencing the perception of distant, unusual voices.

The previous studies circumnavigate only on the physical appearances or physical transformations of the werewolves. This research attempted to fill in the gap of investigating also the psychological transformations and mental impacts of the werewolves. To address this issue, we formulate the question as follow:

How do *Harry Potter*, *Twilight Saga*, and *Teen Wolf* portray werewolves?

In analyzing the comparison between the portrayal of werewolves, this research is sourced from the images of three different werewolves, focusing on the differences in semiotic relationships, how the three werewolves are depicted in an image. According to Van Leeuwen (2001), there are two visual analysis techniques that can be applied, which are denotative and connotative. With these two techniques, it is possible to analyze images by considering the denotative and connotative meanings.

This analysis used one of visual analysis approaches which is the visual semiotics of Roland Barthes (1973, 1977). It analyzes the representations (What do images depict, and in what way?) and the inquiry into the 'underlying messages' within images (what concepts and beliefs

are symbolized by the people, places, and objects shown in the images?). Klingemann & Klingemann (2016) In Barthesian visual semiotics, meaning is understood in layers. The first layer is denotation, which answers the question, "What or who is being depicted here?" The second layer is connotation, which explores the ideas and values expressed through the image and how it's portrayed. Barthes' model helps analyze how images create meaning by breaking them down into a sign made up of a signifier (sound, word, or image) and the signified (the concept or idea triggered by the signifier).

Denotation is the literal meaning depicted by the image. More specifically, what is seen from the image or visualization. Denotation equals the existence of a conceptualized object or class of objects (Sonesson, 2015). Denotation focuses on four things: what physical elements are visible, how they are characterized, what context they are visible in, and what is happening. These physical elements are related to objects, people, and places, which must have characteristics. Then, we can see what is happening in an image or the context depicted. For example, we see a picture of a girl carrying a bowl to feed a cat, the denotation can be interpreted as the girl carrying a bowl containing cat food, the cat will eat from the bowl given.

Connotation is how we look deeper into the meaning constructed from an image, and how we interpret the image. it might be considered that connotation is the second meaning or symbolic meaning of an image. Barthes mentioned that connotation is the interaction between the meaning that is interpreted when a sign meets its cultural feelings and values Bouzida (2015). To understand connotation, we can focus on four things: what is the visible symbolization of objects, colors or actions, what cultural interpretations are displayed,

how emotions are felt in viewing the image, and what ideological meanings are highlighted. These four things will be tied to the sign, which has two components: the signifier and the signified. The signifier is what we see from the images, and the sign is the meaning found in the signifier. For example, a girl carrying a bowl to feed a cat. Here the signifier is the girl, the cat, the cat food, and the action of feeding it. Then it can be analyzed that the signifier is the closeness between humans and animals who have their own bonding so that the cat trusts its owner.

The history of werewolves traces back to ancient folklore, where these entities symbolized the intersection between humanity and the untamed wild. Early accounts, such as the Greek myth of King Lycaon, depicted transformation into a wolf as a form of punishment, symbolizing a descent into savagery and the abandonment of rationality. In medieval Europe, werewolves came to embody societal fears, frequently associated with accusations of witchcraft and viewed as manifestations of demonic influence (Smith, 1894). This dual nature of werewolves—both as literal “wolf-men” and as symbols of societal anxieties—aligns with the concepts of denotation and connotation in Van Leeuwen’s visual semiotics. Denotatively, werewolves exhibit visible traits of aggression and transformation, reflecting literal fears of wildness. Connotatively, however, they convey deeper notions surrounding the tension between civilization and primal instinct, emphasizing how human anxieties about the loss of control and social exclusion are projected onto these mythic figures (Du Coudray, 2003). Analyzing these transformations through Van Leeuwen’s framework reveals that werewolves in literature and media serve not only as monstrous beings but also as

metaphors for internal conflict, marginalization, and duality (Rehn, 2019).

RESEARCH METHOD

In this study, a descriptive qualitative research method is employed to analyze the portrayal of werewolves across *Harry Potter*, *Twilight Saga* and *Teen Wolf*. The descriptive qualitative method allows for an in-depth examination of both the visual and textual representations of werewolf characters that explore the transformation process, physical transformation, psychological transformation, and impacts of transformation. Data for this analysis is derived from scenes, dialogues, and descriptive elements within each work, as well as visual elements such as character design, transformations, and interactions. By focusing on these detailed sources, this method facilitates a comprehensive understanding of the symbolic and narrative roles that werewolves play in each fictional world.

This study applies techniques of analysis by Spradley (2016) which consist of four steps: domain, taxonomy, componential, and cultural theme. In domain, this research uses the theory of forms of werewolf by Tresca (2006) to reveal the types of werewolves. In taxonomy analysis, the forms of werewolf were investigated by employing the theory of visualization by Van Leeuwen’s (2001) who classify visualization into connotation and denotation. In componential analysis, the forms of werewolf and their visualizations were connected to reveal the similarities and differences in the presentation of werewolves in *Harry Potter*, *Twilight Saga*, and *Teen Wolf*.

	Humanoid Form		Lupocephalus (Hybrid) Form		Wolf Form	
	Connotation	Denotation	Connotation	Denotation	Connotation	Denotation
<i>Harry Potter</i>		•				
<i>Twilight Saga</i>					•	•
<i>Teen Wolf</i>	•	•	•	•	•	•

This study analyzed the cultural theme of werewolves in *Harry Potter*, *Twilight Saga*, and *Teen Wolf* by identifying each story's unique approach to werewolves. It examined how each narrative constructs the werewolf myth: consider elements like the circumstances of transformation, whether werewolves are depicted as cursed or empowered. By analyzing these narrative elements, the study could uncover each story's specific message about werewolves and how it reflected broader cultural ideas or concerns.

For the visual representation of werewolves in each series, this study looked at the physical appearance of werewolves by noting any distinctive features, transformations, or special effects used. This visual analysis helped reveal how

werewolves are intended to be perceived, whether as sympathetic figures, protectors, or dangerous outsiders. Comparing these visual and narrative portrayals across the three series revealed both shared and unique thematic elements, highlighting how each story adapted and reinterpreted classic werewolf mythology to fit its world and audience.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

According to Tresca (2006), forms of werewolves were divided into three: humanoid forms, lupocephalus (Hybrid) forms, and wolf forms. Humanoid forms in their default state, werewolves look like ordinary humans or humanoid creatures, though afflicted werewolves may start to show physical traits reflecting their wolf form, such as sharp features or a more intense gaze. Lupocephalus (Hybrid) Form, is a mix of human and wolf characteristics, often referred to as a "wolf-headed" form. It combines a humanoid structure with wolf-like attributes, such as fur, claws, and a snout. In this form, werewolves have enhanced strength and can use weapons or attack with claws and fangs. The hybrid form allows them to retain some human intelligence and capabilities while gaining the physical advantages of a wolf. Wolf Form, werewolves in this form resemble large, powerful wolves, but with certain distinguishing traits like glowing eyes and an unnatural size (often larger than regular wolves). This form focuses on speed, agility, and sensory enhancements, particularly their acute sense of smell.

The visual portrayals of werewolves in *Harry Potter*, *Twilight Saga*, and *Teen Wolf* reveal distinct approaches to depicting lycanthropy, each shaped by the series' thematic goals and narrative contexts. The visuals of the three movies show that each werewolf has a different form. The wolf in the *Harry Potter* movie shows a humanoid

form. The wolf in *Twilight Saga* shows a wolf form. The wolf in *Teen Wolf* has three forms, which are humanoid form, hybrid form, and wolf forms. The details on how the Humanoid form of the werewolves are depicted can be seen in Figure 4 & Figure 3 in the appendix.



Figure 4. Humanoid form in *Harry Potter*

Figure 5. Humanoid form in *Teen Wolf*

Humanoid Form in *Harry Potter*

The werewolf in *Harry Potter* is depicted with a thin, skeletal body, pale and hairless skin, and long limbs. Its eyes appear to glow, and it's hunched over in a threatening stance. The werewolf's physical features emphasize its monstrous and predatory nature. It symbolizes the fear of losing control and becoming something monstrous. Characters like Remus Lupin struggle with their condition, which turns them into creatures feared by society. This transformation reflects themes of isolation and stigma, as werewolves are often ostracized and seen as dangerous.

Humanoid Form in *Teen Wolf*

The werewolf in *Teen Wolf* is depicted as a massive, humanoid-wolf hybrid with a grotesque appearance, including dark fur, glowing blue eyes, and an exaggeratedly muscular body. It is uncontrollably violent, with immense strength, speed, and regenerative abilities, making it an unstoppable force of destruction. Unlike regular werewolves, it

fully loses its human traits during transformation, becoming a monstrous predator. The Beast is tied to the historical legend of the same name, adding a layer of mythological mystery to its terrifying presence. It symbolizes the complete loss of humanity, representing the dangers of succumbing entirely to primal instincts. It embodies pure chaos, destruction, and unchecked power, standing as an apex predator with no equal. The Beast highlights the dark side of transformation, showing what happens when control is lost and a person becomes a true monster. Rooted in historical legend, it carries an aura of mystery and dread while raising moral questions about the fine line between humanity and monstrosity.



Figure 6: Hybrid form in *Teen Wolf*

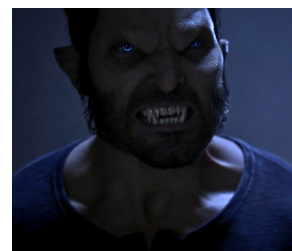


Figure 7: Hybrid Form in *Teen*

Wolf



Figure 8:

Hybrid Form in *Teen Wolf*

Hybrid form in *Teen Wolf*

Hybrid forms of werewolves that found in *Teen Wolf* have appearance like fur only around their face, sharp claws, fangs,

glowing eyes (red for alphas, blue for betas and yellow for omegas) and a muscular build with a hunched posture. Werewolves in this form have enhanced strength, speed, and agility, using their claws and fangs for combat while retaining human-like intelligence. Transformations are often triggered by strong emotions such as anger or fear, making them more aggressive and primal in behavior. It symbolizes the balance between human rationality and primal instincts. It represents power, leadership, and dominance, especially for Alphas, while also reflecting the inner struggle of controlling one's animalistic side. This form signifies growth and maturity, as mastering it often marks a werewolf's self-acceptance. Additionally, it serves as a visual cue for pack hierarchy and inspires fear to assert authority. The details of Hybrid form of werewolves depicted in *Teen Wolf* could be found from Figure 6, Figure 7, and Figure 8 in the appendix.

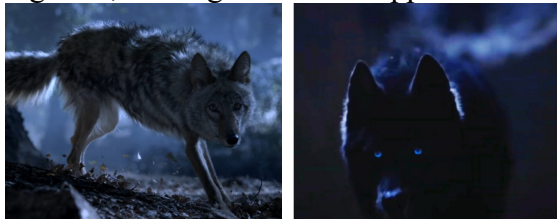


Figure 9: Wolf Form in *Teen Wolf*

Figure 10: Wolf Form in
Teen Wolf



Figure 11: Wolf form in *Twilight Saga*

Wolf Form in *Teen Wolf*

The werewolf in *Teen Wolf* is depicted as resembling a natural wolf but

often with exaggerated features, such as intense glowing eyes to reflect their werewolf status or an especially feral appearance. This form is distinct from the more common partial transformations (e.g., claws, fangs, and glowing eyes) seen in the series. It occurs under specific conditions, such as heightened emotions, significant power, or moments of deep connection with their wolf nature. It represents mastery, primal instincts, and connection to nature. It connotes a deeper, more harmonious acceptance of their wolf side, often tied to emotional extremes or advanced power. It symbolizes total immersion in their animal nature, either as a sign of enlightenment and strength or a loss of humanity. It carries an air of mystique, signifying rarity and exceptional ability.

Wolf Form in *Twilight Saga*

Jacob's sudden transformation is triggered by intense emotion, and his physical appearance changes drastically into a large, wolf-like creature with reddish-brown fur. The transformation symbolizes a loss of control and the onset of puberty or adulthood, as Jacob is dealing with new emotions and the responsibilities that come with being a protector. His transformation also acts as a metaphor for inner strength and primal power, marking his transition into a role as a defender of his tribe and loved ones.

The narrative of each movie is also different. In *Harry Potter* there is Remus Lupin who became a werewolf. When he was four years old, Remus was attacked by Fenrir Greyback, a werewolf, who took revenge on his father for an unflattering remark about the werewolf community. Remus suffers from lifelong lycanthropy, but he is immune to the psychological degradation that turns many werewolves into cannibals. Therefore, werewolves in *Twilight Saga* are descendants, commonly called Shape-shifters, who are often

mistaken for werewolves, descended from the ancient spirit warriors of the Quileute tribe. Back then, warriors and chiefs could leave their bodies and wander as spirits, communicate with animals, and hear each other's thoughts. In *Teen Wolf*, werewolves embody the duality of being both human and wolf, navigating the conflict between primal instincts and human morality. This struggle often manifests in emotional turmoil, identity crises, and challenges in maintaining relationships while managing their supernatural urges. Characters like Scott McCall face dilemmas where their wolf nature clashes with their desire to protect and do good, symbolizing the internal battle for control. The resolution comes as they learn to harness their powers, accept their dual nature, and channel their instincts for positive outcomes, highlighting themes of self-discovery and personal growth. The show also explores a structured werewolf hierarchy of Alphas, Betas, and Omegas. Alphas represent strength and responsibility, Betas reflect loyalty and growth, while Omegas symbolize isolation or rebellion, adding depth to the interpersonal dynamics within the werewolf packs. The details on Wolf form of werewolves are depicted in *Teen Wolf* and *Twilight Saga* could be found from Figure 9, Figure 10, and Figure 11 in the appendix.

CONCLUSION

Portrayals of werewolves from *Harry Potter*, *Twilight Saga*, and *Teen Wolf* tend to be different in terms of visuals and narratives. The visual representation of werewolves is generally divided into three forms, which are humanoid form, hybrid form, and wolf form. The visual representation of the three films has its own form, such as in *Harry Potter* with a humanoid form, in *Twilight Saga* with a wolf form (full form), and in *Teen Wolf* has 3 forms, which are humanoid form, hybrid form, and wolf form. Despite the different

visual representations, the transformation of werewolves from these three films makes the transformed individual lose their sense of humanity and replace it with a animal mind. It appears from the visuals that the werewolves from the three films are depicted as terrible monsters with different origins. *Harry Potter* with Remus Lupin who turned into a wolf because he was attacked by one when he was 4 years old. *Twilight Saga* where the werewolves are descendants likened to guards. In *Teen Wolf*, werewolves embody the struggle between primal instincts and human morality, facing internal conflicts and identity crises. The show explores themes of self-discovery, with characters like Scott McCall learning to balance their dual nature while navigating a structured hierarchy of Alphas, Betas, and Omegas.

The study of the portrayal of werewolves in *Harry Potter*, *Twilight Saga*, and *Teen Wolf* provides significant practical benefits in enriching the wider understanding of anthropomorphic literature. It not only enriches the interpretation of the werewolf figure, but also provides an opportunity to study other forms of anthropomorphic creatures in literature, such as vampires, witches, or other mythological creatures

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