

**'centuries of evil... wacky sidekicks... yadda, yadda':**

### **Vampire Television, Vampire Time and the Conventions of Flashback**

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TV, especially serial television drama, has, according to Glen Creeber, 'unparalleled temporal breadth' (2004: 19). Team this with the cultural icon of the ever-youthful, nearly immortal vampire, and time on vampire television becomes endless. Time, for vampires, works differently. Vampires are generally presented as ageing much more slowly than humans, if at all; often they heal faster or regenerate. This is part of their appeal in a contemporary culture dominated by images of youth. The age of the vampire allows for epic scale and travel through time as well as travel across countries and cultures, or what one character from *Angel* (1999-2004) cynically summarises as 'centuries of evil. . . wacky sidekicks. . . yadda, yadda' (Lilah Morgan in 'Lullaby' *Angel* 3.9). This vampire version of time as part of serial TV drama necessarily takes existing ways of presenting time and combines them with the conventions of vampire fictions.

Any example of visual storytelling makes demands on its audience in terms of how time is represented. Richard Maltby, discussing Hollywood cinema, notes that 'In the course of the most unremarkable movie, audiences may need to comprehend the significance of acceleration and delay, parallel time-frames, and the mechanisms of temporal continuity and its violation' (2001: 413). I do not wish to argue that vampire TV radically innovates or provides new ways of representing time and/or memory. Flashbacks in vampire TV shows tend to follow some of the basic principles expected of classical Hollywood cinema, for instance. As Allen Cameron observes, 'where the narration departs from story order, it does so in order to integrate the present, past and future in a coherent way, allowing for the forging of causal connections' (2012: 4). The same pattern is evident in most flashbacks from vampire television, since the 'forging of causal connections' is the main motivation for flashback: we enter the past of a vampire character in

order to find meaning in a connection between past and present. Generally, this meaning is constructed as a form of backstory and speaks to character development.

However, it is also worth stating the obvious: that television does not operate in the same ways and with the same narrative structures as film. Character development is one area where television differs from cinema; perhaps not in its nature, but in degree. Maltby suggests that in seeking to construct ‘a coherent sequence without the boring bits’ (2001: 429), a Hollywood movie adheres to what he calls *mise-en-temps*. ‘*Mise-en-temps*’, he argues is ‘another form of Hollywood’s textual economy—excising the irrelevant and maximizing our attention to the relevant, showing us all we need to know and getting the most from what we do see’ (431). Drama on television need not adhere to textual economy in the same way. Telling a story can take longer when 24 one-hour time slots per year for any given number of years are available over which to unfold the narrative. Moreover, while ‘classical narrative’, according to Cameron, ‘is opposed to *excessively overt* displays of repetition, as it undermines the linear progression and unity of the story’ (2012: 10, original emphasis), serialised television drama relies on structures of repetition and familiarity as well as on novelty and ongoing narrative dynamics. Maltby points out that cinema cannot afford its audience to miss vital information and thus signposts it vigorously, while also observing that watching a film more than once allows us to notice things we had not previously paid attention to (2001: 430). Serial drama on TV usually incorporates reminders of previously aired information in ‘previously on’ segments, and can return to minor details from previous episodes, altering, or at least heightening, their significance by reworking them in relation to the present, ongoing narrative. Thus TV shows encourage detailed attention by audiences, dropping ‘clues’ for attentive viewers and even relying on repeat viewing of archived episodes.

In this sense, contemporary television drama often operates slightly against the tendency ‘in conventional cinema’ described by Cameron where ‘spectators can be made to “forget” the formal workings of narrative via a process of naturalization, in which temporal structures are simply reflections of the psychological or physical activities of the characters’ (2012: 88). Like many

other ‘quality’ TV series from *The Sopranos* (1999-2007) to *Breaking Bad* (2008-2013), most of the examples analysed here offer self-contained episode plots alongside season arcs and ongoing series arcs. Thus television viewers may well enjoy what Jason Mittel dubs the ‘operational aesthetic’ (in Cameron 2012: 22), or the conscious awareness of how narrative structures unfold in a given drama. Yet at the same time, the flashbacks in vampire TV are naturalised—as part of the conventions of visual storytelling, as part of the structure of their particular narrative, and as routinised ‘interruptions’ to the forward progression of narrative, necessary televisual digressions that add novelty and spectacle to a familiar premise.

The endless seriality of a soap opera like *Dark Shadows* (1996-1971) continually requires new material and extended flashbacks provide this, adding novelty to the ongoing drama and filling out character backstory. Use of different time frames heightens the sense of Barnabas Collins as not only an immortal vampire but also as a sympathetic character labouring eternally under a curse and forever seeking his lost love. Flashbacks enable character development on a new scale, as well as providing a dynamic sense of change in shows which focus on redemption. The now-common trope of the sympathetic reluctant vampire, dating back to Barnabas Collins, heightens the moral complexity that Milly Williamson argues is inherent in serialised narratives (2005: 48). Vampire TV also uses flashback as memory (point of view), with the ensemble casts of *The Vampire Diaries* (2009-) or *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003) and *Angel* allowing for competing versions of the same story. Vampire TV offers a unique opportunity to analyse how conventions of flashback work in serial drama.

Representation of the vampire, perhaps particularly on television or in serial narrative, tends to oscillate between emphasising change and highlighting stasis. A vampire character is represented as effectively immortal, experiencing a much longer period of existence than a human. Flashbacks may therefore be used to remind viewers how long a given vampire character has existed: while we may meet this character on a regular basis, and over the course of a season or a series may get to know them, they are not human. ‘The vampire,’ as Jeffrey Weinstock points

out when discussing cinematic versions, ‘transcends the limitations of its own body, communicates psychically across distances and defies linear temporality (2012: 12), and thus, he argues, operates as a symbol of our ‘desire to transcend the limits of time and space and become something other’ (13). Helen Powell takes a rather different view, suggesting that for movie vampires, ‘The world around them changes: new inventions, new technologies, new political struggles arise but they do not age’, concluding that ‘In this context the challenges of immortality are interestingly brought to the fore’ (2012: 102). The rise of the sympathetic vampire and the proliferation of stories told from the vampire point of view certainly highlight these ‘challenges’ (the alienation or loneliness that might result from becoming a vampire). However while its vampires may remain unchanged physically, vampire TV, largely through its flashbacks, insists on change as a form of character development. TV vampires do not remain untouched by passing decades or centuries, rather their attachments, opinions and motivations fluctuate, and flashbacks are used to make connections between different periods of a vampire character’s existence.

In *Being Human* (2008-2013), vampire Mitchell’s age is emphasised from the start, when we see him turned during World War I. The sense of vampiric stasis contrasting change in the surrounding society identified by Powell is emphasised during a montage showing Mitchell walking down a night-time street, the passing of time denoted by changing fashion rather than by his physical body (1.4). This effect functions as a corollary to the use of ‘fast motion photography. . . depicting the speed at which immortals move’ (Powell 2012: 98), another convention of vampire film and television. Both have the same effect, emphasising that vampires experience time differently.

Likewise, *Angel*’s season two develops its title character, the ‘vampire with a soul’, by unfolding a season arc involving an old adversary. When he was soulless vampire Angelus, a notorious mass murderer, Angel killed Daniel Holtz’s wife and son in 1764, and turned his daughter into a vampire, forcing Holtz to kill her. Thus when Holtz is magically brought to present day Los Angeles, he is set on vengeance. This is not the first time a character representing Angel’s

(or Angelus') past has (re)appeared, but the relationship between Holtz, Angel/us and his vampire 'sire' and lover Darla affords rich material for extensive character development, emotional engagement and narrative complexity. When human Lilah Morgan accidentally walks in on a confrontation between Holtz and Angel, and Holtz asks if she knows what Angel is, she says, 'Yeah, I know. Vampire, cursed by Gypsies who restored his soul, destined to atone for centuries of evil. . . wacky sidekicks. . . yadda, yadda' ('Lullaby'). Her comment highlights vampire time: 'centuries of evil' and decades of good are not 'normal' human measurements. In his own series, Stacey Abbott notes, Angel is 'represented as a man who is haunted by his past, which every once in a while emerges into the present to torment him' (2009: 78), with flashbacks emphasising not only his long years of existence but also his transition from Angelus to Angel, and the consequences of those 'centuries of evil'.

Mary Ann Doane, in a discussion of cinematic time, identifies how film flashbacks can be seen to archive the past, or how they express a desire to do so. Yet she also problematizes this notion: 'What is archived then, would be the experience of presence. But it is the disjunctiveness of a presence relived, of a presence haunted by historicity' (2002: 23). This applies particularly effectively to vampire television, where characters like Angel are regularly 'haunted' by their own history, and where flashbacks can present these characters in identifiable historical moments, yet work simultaneously to create vampire legends (key vampire characters like Angelus or Mitchell often have a reputation for being particularly vicious killers). Vampire time, as Weinstock and others argue, can disrupt linearity. A flashback is experienced as both past and present: it is part of a frame narrative in the present, but events depicted in the past of the flashback inevitably unfold in the present tense. This results in the 'disjunctiveness' Doane identifies. *Dark Shadows*, one of the first examples of complex vampire TV, not only uses flashbacks but also incorporates other time frames. 'The show's heavy reliance on flashbacks, flash-forwards, dream sequences, and Parallel Time zones,' states Harry Benshoff, 'complicates and confounds linear narrative structure(s)' (2011: 27).

Just as flashback offers the past as present, Maltby notes, 'The future can be discussed or inferred...but it cannot be visualized without being translated into the present tense' (2001: 433). Flashforwards, such as those in *Being Human* season four, suggest branching paths to the future and highlight the consequences of present choice and action. This is an extension of the strategy taken in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*'s 'The Wish' (3.9) where a wish that Buffy had never come to Sunnydale is granted by a vengeance demon, and we see the path not taken: 'Welcome to the future', proclaims the demon, as we move into another time frame. In this timeline, the town is overrun by vampires under the command of the Master, a vampire killed by Buffy in the season one finale, and every regular character but one dies fighting vampires in the showdown. The future is averted by the action of parallel universe Giles, who destroys the demon's power centre, averting the wish and erasing his own timeline, but not before the episode suggests a dystopian ending to the series. Moreover, the present tense of the visualised alternative timeline heightens the impact of this grim alternative: it not only *could* happen, it *is* happening.

*Being Human*'s season four opens with a flashforward to 'London 2037' and throughout its episodes ghost Annie sees a woman from the future who encourages her to take action and save the world from a global vampire apocalypse. During this season, Annie is caring for baby Eve after the deaths of Eve's parents, werewolves George and Nina. The season arc involves a vampire prophecy about a 'war child', initially thought to be the potential destroyer of all vampires, whom we discover to be baby Eve. It is Eve herself, reaching across time as the adult woman she will become, who finally shows Annie vampire Hal's role as the 'poster boy' for vampire world domination. Eve presents scenes from 'my present, your future' and tries to persuade Annie that in order to avert the apocalypse Eve herself must not survive. In an episode pointedly titled 'Making History' (4.7) the disjunctive temporality of these flashforwards is further enhanced by the way Eve shows Annie a physical location but the future horrors she describes are evoked through sound rather than visuals. The alternative present does not unfold visually, as in 'The Wish'; here Annie, and the audience, *hear* the sounds of the horrors Eve describes but *see* an

empty place. While this may be because of budgetary limitations, it offers a jarring sense of the future as a possibility rather than a concrete certainty. The disjunctiveness offered by such alternative timelines, which disrupt the whole premise of a series, requires some form of resolution, and generally such narrative strands return to standard operation, restoring 'normality' in the timeline we are accustomed to<sup>1</sup>. Thus, as with *Buffy* after 'The Wish', *Being Human* averts the vampire apocalypse, though the following and final season also ends in apocalypse, suggesting that once evoked, such threats cannot be entirely dissipated. Analysing *Dark Shadows* as Gothic television, Helen Wheatley comments that unsolvable conflict extends into past as an uncanny narrative structure (2006: 153) and vampire TV applies the same strategy to the future.

*True Blood* (2008-) takes a slightly different approach, in that its whole premise is a kind of branching path or alternative present. In this world, the development of artificial blood allows vampires to overcome the main reason for centuries of secrecy and admit their presence publically. Now they no longer need to feed on humans to survive, they need not be or be treated as monsters. This aspect of the show ties into another aspect of vampire time on TV: an epic scale which allows for moral complexity.

While the majority of vampire TV shows feature at least one reluctant vampire character, it is commonplace to include 'bad' vampires alongside 'good' ones, and to have even the 'good' vampires struggle to control their blood lust. Contemporary narratives often present the vampire's blood lust as an addiction and thus the story of any given reluctant vampire on TV tends to be a series of recoveries, backslidings, interventions and renewed vows to stay clean. In this way, the biological fixity and stasis involved in becoming a vampire is continually contrasted with shifting moral stances as reluctant vampires seek redemption for past (or current) transgressions. In his discussion of the films *Bad Timing* (1980) and *21 Grams* (2003), Cameron points out how the moral failings and/or redemption of characters can be highlighted through narrative structure, especially through different temporal frames (2012: 35). Vampire TV similarly uses structures of narrative and juxtaposition of time frames to point out either transgression or redemption for reluctant

vampire characters. The vampire's effective immortality often means vampire TV can play with the notion of the vampire as a fixed point, around which time can fold. Moreover, visiting the past is frequently a means of undermining certainty about morality and identity. The vampire may be a biological fixity in terms of outliving humans, but morally and subjectively vampire TV suggests that vampires are continually changing, or at least attempting to change. In this way, flashbacks in vampire TV stick to the rules for inserting flashbacks, offering visits to the past as secondary narratives subjugated to the primary, present-day narrative which retains its position as *the* ongoing narrative, yet the flashbacks suggest that the scale of that ongoing story is much grander than usual.

One obvious means of addressing morality in vampire TV flashbacks is the origin story. For a vampire this is the point at which they were 'turned' or 'sired' as a vampire, transitioning from human to 'monster'. Such origin stories are usually inserted into the present-day, forward-moving narrative structure as significant revelations (for other characters and/ or for the audience) and continue to have resonance in the present. This notion is extended from individual characters to the vampire 'species' in series such as *The Vampire Diaries*, which features a group of vampires dubbed 'the Originals' and ties their origin story to the evolution of the vampire (revealed in season three), and, to a lesser extent *Being Human*, which features the Old Ones, ancient vampires who are instrumental in trying to bring about the vampire apocalypse averted during season four.

This fascination with origins might suggest that vampire stories are fixated on what makes a vampire, either individually or in the general sense. To an extent this is borne out by their emphasis on the nature of vampires (demons, monsters) and on the attempt to retain humanity by the reluctant vampire characters featured in so many of these shows. In vampire films, because they generally offer closed narratives, relationships between vampires and humans tend to be more black and white. Vampire TV, in contrast, more insistently deconstructs the binary opposition set up between human and monster. Here, the origin of a vampire is not simply the point at which they stopped being human, it is a crisis of identity that is revisited repeatedly

throughout the ongoing narrative, either referenced specifically, or by inference each time the reluctant vampire wavers in their determination to continue to ‘be human’. The title of *Being Human* promotes this idea as the main aspiration for its triumvirate of vampire, werewolf, and ghost characters; similarly *True Blood*’s title foregrounds the artificial food source that enables vampires to come out of the coffin and ‘mainstream’ or live among humans. The many difficulties in actually achieving harmonious or non-disruptive vampire-human relationships form the focus of a range of vampire TV series.

‘Spike is a work in progress’, states Rhonda V. Wilcox (2006: 59), neatly summarising the changes wrought by several years of narrative on a vampire character initially meant to be a one-dimensional villain briefly introduced into *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*’s second season (see, for example, Marsters in Norton, 2012). As with Barnabas in *Dark Shadows*, the writers and producers were persuaded by Spike’s popularity to keep the character and develop his role. Benshoff identifies the moment the *Dark Shadows* team decided they needed ‘to soften’ Barnabas ‘from monster/killer to a more complex ongoing character, the writers began to give him regrets about his monstrous status’ (2011: 18) as the birth of the reluctant vampire. Barnabas was seen by audiences as a victim, either of his own condition (as a vampire, he has outlived everyone he knows and feels isolated and lonely), or of its nature (as a vampire, he is forced to be a monster). Thus, while he might behave monstrously to some characters, such as his Renfield-like helper, Willy Loomis, Barnabas demonstrates lingering humanity in other relationships. This pattern is replicated with other characters, such as werewolf Quentin Collins, and Benshoff notes that *Dark Shadows* overturns the standard endings of vampire movies and horror films, where the monster has to be defeated to restore normality. This ongoing story, he argues, ‘is more about its gothic characters’ struggles with their own desires and identities than any attempt to vanquish him or her in the name of traditional moral order’ (2011: 31). A similar structure of struggle and shifting identity over time is seen in subsequent examples of vampire TV.

The apparent opposition between soulless killer Angelus and Angel, ‘the vampire with a soul’, is an obvious example. In using the notion of the ‘soul’ as a defining principle in constructing its vampire mythology, *Buffy* and consequently its spin-off *Angel* apparently sets up a clear distinction between vampires and humans: vampires have no soul, they are human shells inhabited by demons, and are therefore evil. Very soon, however, this distinction is complicated and the lines between human and vampire are blurred. A further consequence of this mythology is that Angel’s own history has not one but two origin stories. Human Liam became Angelus when sired by Darla in 1753, but another pivotal moment comes nearly a century and a half later in 1898 when Angelus is cursed by gypsies and has his soul returned. Overwhelmed by the horrors he has perpetrated as a vampire, he eventually takes the name Angel and attempts to help humans. This history unfolds slowly over several years and two series, setting the character’s oscillations from ‘good’ reluctant vampire to ‘bad’ uncaring killer in a fresh context, and deepening the resonances of Angel’s struggle to control his vampire desire and retain the identity he has chosen (see Stacey Abbott for more on Angel/us).

The mythology of the shows may describe Angel’s problem as relating to his soul, or lack of one (and this is further elaborated when Spike also recovers his soul in seasons six-seven of *Buffy*) but he is also presented to the audience as someone suffering a powerful addiction (see Dale Koontz, for example). Likewise, both reluctant vampires in *Being Human* are also depicted as coping with addiction, though Mitchell and Hal both adopt different strategies. Hal engages in repetitive behaviours and, over a period of nearly 60 years, practises how to ‘fight small urges’ in order to ‘resist much bigger ones’, alluding to the elements of obsessive-compulsive actions in some versions of vampire lore. ‘I like routine’, he tells Annie, ‘it keeps me—it keeps my mind occupied’ (‘*Being Human 1955*’ 2.2). Thus we see Hal constructing elaborate domino patterns, building houses from cards, cleaning, and exercising to stave off his ‘urges’. As we have seen, season four suggests that Hal might have a leading role in the vampire apocalypse, and the final

season of *Being Human* presents him as a kind of split personality, much like Angel/us, with a bad side who eventually comes to the fore however hard Hal tries to repress him.

In her analysis of costume drama films, Julianne Piddock notes how in certain examples, ‘the male protagonist is afforded a depth and complexity that come with ageing and regret, whereas the female object of desire remains frozen in time’ (2004: 57). This tendency is a feature of vampire TV, which certainly awards ‘depth and complexity’ to its male vampire characters, especially as a function of ‘ageing and regret’, yet here it is the male protagonist who ‘remains frozen in time’ courtesy of vampire immortality. While *Being Human* is resolutely contemporary and generally eschews extended ‘period’ flashbacks (in keeping with its social realist aesthetic), this tendency is made highly visible when Mitchell meets a lover from his past, Josie, in the hospital where he works. She has aged physically, while he has not, and she describes him as ‘frozen. Like a photograph’ (*‘Where the Wild Things Are’* 1.5). Later we discover that Mitchell met Josie in 1969, and she helped him get clean (*‘The Looking Glass’* 2.5).

Here the fixity of the vampire body is an indication of loneliness: in the present, Josie has married and is now widowed and being treated for terminal cancer. Her appearance is thus embedded in mortality, while Mitchell appears unchanged to her. The same effect is achieved in season two, using a slightly different relationship, when vampire Daisy visits an aged woman in hospital (*‘Cure and Contagion’* 2.1). When she is found leaning over the woman with a pair of scissors, Daisy explains that it is her daughter and she wanted to cut ‘the last thread’ to her human life, felt ‘even from the other end of the world’. A similar scene in *True Blood* (*‘Sparks Fly Out’* 1.5) spells out the isolation of vampirism. After Bill is turned into a vampire by Lorena, he returns to his human home and sees his family—but for the last time since, as Lorena asks, ‘Do you want to see them grow old? Grow feeble and die, while you remain the same, year after year?’ This consequence of vampire fixity sets the stage for vampire alienation and the struggle of reluctant vampires to reconnect with humans. It has also become a characteristic of vampire romance between vampires and humans where it forms an obstacle to the idealised sense of a ‘forever’

love, as with Angel and Buffy (*Buffy*), Hoyt and Jessica (*True Blood*), and Elena and Stefan (*The Vampire Diaries*).

In the finale to *The Vampire Diaries* season four, Klaus's remark to Caroline, a recently made vampire he unsuccessfully attempts to woo away from her werewolf boyfriend Tyler, is designed to promise exactly this kind of eternal love. He tells her that he has called off a previously issued death threat on Tyler, who may now return home. Klaus follows this up with his exit line: 'Tyler is your first love. I intend to be your last', suggesting that as two vampires, their love really can last forever (4.23 'Graduation'). More usually, since even vampire-vampire relationships tend not to last, the narratives of vampire TV are less than optimistic about the longevity of a teenage crush or any kind of 'true love'. The necessities of serial narrative also require that romantic fulfilment is short-lived, since it implies resolution. Obstacles that keep lovers separate are therefore integral structures and vampirism suggests doomed romance from the start. Yet the stasis of vampirism still invokes eternal love, a romance that lasts through the centuries, as promised to Caroline by Klaus.

Again *Dark Shadows* sets the precedent: part of its project in making Barnabas a sympathetic character was to give him a tragic relationship and an eternal quest. Barnabas' 'love for Josette DuPres', states Benshoff, 'permeates the entire series, as Barnabas searches for her (or some reincarnated form of her) throughout time and space' (2011: 58). This successful strategy was revisited in Francis Ford Coppola's film, *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (1992) which, as Powell outlines, 'positions Dracula as a time traveller crossing centuries to be reunited with his reincarnated wife, Mina' (2012: 97). This motif is currently thriving in vampire TV and *The Vampire Diaries* continues to unfold the story of the Salvatore brothers, Stefan and Damon and their love for vampire Katherine, who turned them in the 1860s, and subsequently for her 'doppelganger' Elena. This somewhat elaborate but not unfamiliar structure allows double doubling: not only are the two brothers in love with and thus competing for the affections of the same woman but the 'same woman' is actually two different women. Moreover, while the brothers alternate being

'good' and 'bad' vampires (the series starts with Stefan being the typical reluctant and sympathetic vampire and Damon being the conventional bad boy, matching similar contrasts between Angel and Spike in *Buffy* and *Angel*, or Bill and Eric in *True Blood*), Katherine plays 'bad' love object to Elena's 'good girl' (as Lorena does to Sookie and Darla to Buffy). Such elaborate patterning is made possible by vampire time and enables both stasis—the male vampire's desire for his true love remains unchanged over the years—and change—the object of that love may actually change as it is switched from one female to another. In addition, while the love may remain true, the possibility of it being lastingly fulfilled is regularly deferred by other plot points as well as by vampirism. Even when Elena becomes a vampire in season four of *The Vampire Diaries*, both Salvatore brothers strive for possession of an elusive 'cure' so that she may be returned to her humanity rather than taking the opportunity to enjoy existence with her forever.

Vampire romance on television is tinged with melancholy because of the epic scale of vampire existence and the problems this causes relationships. Love is something to be remembered, obsessed over and brooded on, but rarely enjoyed in the present moment. The 'depth and complexity' identified by Piddock as being assigned to male protagonists of period drama as a function of time passing, appears in vampire TV with the presentness of the past. Piddock notes that 'the filtering of these events through the memory of its protagonist produces an obsessive structure that returns insistently to moments of encounter and loss' (2004: 52). Because Piddock is analysing period drama films with one main time frame the 'events' she mentions are the central action of the plot. In vampire TV, however, such events can be from any part of a vampire's long existence, though the 'obsessive' structure means they will often be origin stories, or key relationship moments that signify 'encounter' (as in the origin story) or 'loss' (in the origin story, the loss of humanity, or of family). Since vampire TV uses conventional structures for flashback, these glimpses of the past are generally coded as memories of a particular character. Indeed, this is where the sense of loss derives from—vampire flashbacks are not objective history

but personal recollections of the past, subjective memories that engage emotion as well as providing new information.

Cameron points out that 'Within Hollywood cinema, the intensified use of the flashback often coincided with an attempt to represent psychological crisis' (2012: 85), and he cites the use of flashback in *film noir* as an example of aligning flashback with issues of identity and subjectivity. The oscillation between 'good' and 'bad' in vampire characters on television also suggests a form of *ongoing* psychological crisis. I have already mentioned, for instance, how both Angel and Hal are presented as types of split personality, and strive to distance themselves from their evil deeds by projecting them onto another, uncontrolled and monstrous, self.

In some cases, the flashback may, as in *film noir*, not be entirely reliable. If flashback represents memory, is memory always accurate? The added factor of the psychological crisis identified by Cameron as well as contemporary debates about how reliable recovered memories of traumatic events are further destabilise any notion of accurate memory. *Angel's* 'Damage' (5.11) tells the story of Dana, a young woman who was abused as a child by a male attacker. As an adult she has mental health problems and has also acquired Slayer strength following the sharing of Slayer power in the series finale of *Buffy*. (In this way the episode demonstrates an unusual form of TV time and memory: it remembers events from its parent show and outlines their consequences). Dana takes vampire Spike captive, drugging him and cutting off his hands, thinking he is her attacker. Flashbacks—over-exposed and bleached out to denote both their status as flashback and Dana's confusion—show Spike as her antagonist. Spike tries to explain that her inherited collective Slayer memories (of him killing a Chinese Slayer in 1900, for example) are becoming confused with her individual human memories. As the identity of the attacker comes into question, he changes visibly in the flashbacks, denoting Dana's psychological crisis and the unreliability of these flashbacks as accurate 'memory'. Moreover, though Spike is finally proved not to be Dana's attacker, a key aspect of the story is that he very well could be, and the viewer is left in doubt until the resolution of the episode, when Spike (hands magically and surgically

reattached) himself admits, ‘I’m supposed to—what, complain?—because her’s wasn’t one of the hundreds of families I *did* kill?’ Dana’s memory may be mistaken in the specific, but not in the general: Spike is a vampire, he was a brutal killer and has committed similar atrocities. His acceptance of this past indicates his remorse and quest for redemption in the present.

Interruption of the forward-moving plot is acceptable in serial drama, of course, and endless deferment is characteristic of soap opera. It is not, therefore, much of a stretch to incorporate frequent flashbacks within a vampire TV show with a contemporary setting, even to the point of embarking on months-long forays into the past or future, as *Dark Shadows* did in the course of its original five year run. ‘It is the paradigmatic character relationships that exist across these various story lines which provide the narrative “glue” for ultimately holding the entire series together’, Benshoff argues of *Dark Shadows*, noting also, ‘This is an ongoing structural effect impossible to achieve in single closed texts such as the gothic novel or the horror film’ (2011: 30). Complex stitching together of different time frames and subject positions is commonplace in today’s contemporary television drama, and nowhere is this epitomised more than in vampire TV.

In some cases, innovative or experimental episodes play with these complex structures to convey ‘the power (as well as the danger) of storytelling’, as Wilcox observes (2006: 106). Thus in *Buffy*’s ‘Fool for Love’ (5.7) we finally see Spike’s origins in a tour de force of unreliable narration, as the vampire tells his story to Buffy in the present day, accompanied by a series of flashbacks which often visually contradict his verbal segues. ‘What can I say, baby, I’ve always been bad’, he boasts to Buffy, only for us to see him as ineffectual and socially inept human poet William in 1880. This episode increasingly collapses the distinction between past and present until the present-day Spike speaks directly to Buffy (and to the camera and the viewer) from the 1977 flashback, fast crosscutting deliberately not quite maintaining clear boundaries between the two time frames. The sense of Spike’s past as a subjective, and mediated, story that can be told in different ways is further enhanced by the companion *Angel* episode ‘Darla’ (2.7), originally broadcast immediately following ‘Fool for Love’. ‘Darla’ covers several of the same flashbacks from

Darla's perspective, and includes new action from the same time frame (in the 'China 1900' segments, for example) because of this shift in perspective, making the events part of Darla and Angel's story, rather than Spike's.

Other TV doesn't go quite to the extremes of 'Fool for Love' and 'Darla' but *The Vampire Diaries'* consistent play with doubling does demonstrate that Stefan and Damon have different points of view, and new information from flashbacks might change how we re/read significant events from the past, such as Katherine turning both Salvatore brothers into vampires. Similarly, Klaus' version of the story of the Original vampire family positions him, unsurprisingly, as a hero, while both his sister Rebekah, and brother Elijah offer different perspectives, backed up at times by flashbacks presented as their memories, and supplemented by the stories of their mother Esther and father Mikael.

Such variant perspectives, as well as moral complexity, stories of struggle and redemption, and rocky relationships may all feature in television that doesn't revolve around vampires. Vampire TV does not necessarily break the conventions of how time is represented. It does push them, however, taking advantage of the epic scale of vampire existence to offer a different angle on narrative structure and character development. This epic scale lends itself to the slow and incremental unfolding of story only possible in serialised narrative, as well as to the repetition and return found in much television drama. Ultimately, with 'centuries of evil' to choose from, there will always be a new story to tell, or a new angle to tell that story from in vampire television.

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<sup>1</sup> *Fringe* (2008-2013) is an obvious exception, though it does not include vampires.