

Werewolves and White Trash

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The vampire has experienced an enormous resurgence in film, television and fiction in recent years, and accompanying this renaissance in popularity has been the werewolf, albeit taking second place usually, rather like a familiar or loyal canine accompanying a more powerful master. While there has been parity with the vampire on occasion, as in the British television program *Being Human*, where a vampire, werewolf and ghost shared a flat, generally the furry beast plays a secondary role.

Not only is this monster carrying second billing, an interesting permutation is the community status of the monster. Rather than being the elite, evening clothed, private school creature of the night, the werewolf is frequently placed in a subordinate social class, relegated to the equivalent of a kennel rather than a castle.

This paper will explore this lesser position of the werewolf in three particular works. First, in 1941's *The Wolf Man*, despite his role as a man who "is pure at heart and says his prayers at night" (to quote the Curt Siodmak-penned rhyme about the wolf curse), Lon Chaney Jr.'s portrayal of Larry Talbot as a rather, lumbering, expatriated-to-America prodigal son of a Welsh grandee places him, both in terms of script and performance, as a poor relation clearly out of his depth who will pay for that awkwardness. In the *Twilight* series, the Native American shapeshifter, Jacob Black, lives on the reservation and cannot compete with the effete Cullen family. Finally, while the notion of American Southern white/trailer trash permeates the television adaptation of Charlaine Harris' novels, *True Blood* portrays the wolf packs as crude boondocks residences, and despite his kindness and loyalty, Alcide (played by Joe Manganiello) cannot possibly keep Sookie Stackhouse's affections. Rather like the misrepresented wolves currently being reintroduced in various wilderness locations, these filmic werewolves are equally unwanted and undermined.

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