



*“Us Refugees,  
the Flotsam and Jetsam of Death”:  
the Monsters of Being Human  
as Ethnic Outsiders, Migrants  
and Asylum Seekers*

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**ABSTRACT:** *Being Human* was a British television series broadcast by BBC Three between 2008 and 2013. Its main characters are a ghost, a vampire and a werewolf, who live together and try to lead a normal life among humans; however, their integration into society is a constant struggle. Since *Being Human* is centred on inclusion, exclusion and belonging, the story evokes real-life situations of marginalisation; following Lampert-Weissig’s suggestion about the relevance of the characters’ ethnicity (an Irish, a Jewish and a mixed-race person), which makes them “double outsiders” (65), my essay proposes an analysis of the three main characters in seasons 1-3 of *Being Human* as tropes for ethnic outsiders, migrants and asylum seekers in the UK.

I will first consider each character individually, because each one of the three tropes (werewolf, vampire, ghost) has its own history and evolution in folklore, literature and cinema and, therefore, each one of the three protagonists is particularly suited for introducing different perspectives on foreignness and marginalisation. I will then discuss how *Being Human* addresses the issue of social exclusion and how the show’s final message, while progressive at first sight, is actually problematic and ambiguous.

**KEY WORDS:** vampire; werewolf; ghost; migrants; outsiders; marginalisation



## INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

So, a werewolf, a ghost and a vampire decide to live like humans do. They get jobs, a house and a TV license... (*Being Human*, season 1, episode 6, 43:42-43:51)

*Being Human* is a British supernatural drama. It was created and written by Toby Whithouse and broadcast by BBC Three between 2008 and 2013 for five seasons, for a total of 37 episodes. The story is set in contemporary UK and revolves around a ghost, a werewolf and a vampire (Annie, George and Mitchell) who decide to live together and lead a 'normal' life among humans. What is 'normal,' and, indeed, what is 'human,' is unclear even to the protagonists themselves, whose identities are constantly being defined and re-shaped, as they struggle with their diversity and try to understand whether their feelings and actions are categorisable as 'human.' The show's answer to this question is not univocal, as each character has a different idea of what 'human' is and brings a different perspective to the matter: this surely makes *Being Human* an interesting topic for critical discussion—and, as we shall see, some critics have in fact dealt with the issue of humanity in this series.

A peculiarity of *Being Human* which marks it as different from other supernatural shows is that its main core does not actually belong to the gothic genre. As the creator explained, the three main characters were originally just humans who all had psychological or emotional issues:

Annie was an agoraphobic, Mitchell was a recovering sex addict, and George was someone who had anger issues [...]. And we were getting nowhere with it. And so we decided to have one last meeting [...]. And it struck me in this meeting that George, the way that he suppressed his anger all the time—is kind of like a werewolf. [...] and then it seemed like a natural progression with me that—actually Mitchell is quite like a vampire and, when you think about it, Annie being rooted to the house is quite like a ghost. And so suddenly by the end of this meeting I was writing a show about a werewolf, a vampire and a ghost. (*Being Human* panel, 01:00-02:07)

Even though the physical nature of the characters was changed, their personalities and their problems remained: *Being Human* is fundamentally a story about rejection and acceptance, about inclusion and exclusion, about marginalisation and the difficulty to fit in. This means that the 'supernatural difference' of the characters can be seen as a metaphor for difference and exclusion in reality and that the show itself can be employed to talk about many aspects of contemporary British society, such as race, gender and class discrimination, sexuality, addiction to drugs and alcohol, or psychological disorders.

For this reason, *Being Human* is potentially suited to analysis from many different perspectives and it has in fact caught the attention of a few critics. A central issue in the series is, as already mentioned, that of humanity: Monica Germanà has explored how this notion was expressed in the show, noting that *Being Human*

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers who helped me improve this paper. Many thanks, in particular, for suggesting a reflection on the issue of the loss of humanity and on humans' incapability to accept non-humans.



challenges conceptions of humanity and blurs conventional categories of otherness, pointing to dehumanisation, alienation and broken relationships as central to twenty-first-century human experience [and] drawing attention to the uncanny duality that ultimately defines the human condition. (57)

Another interesting contribution to the topic came from Eliza McNair and Octavio Gonzales, who argued that the characters' humanity can be seen in their making choices "in the name of love, of sacrifice, and of self affirmation" (10). Other essays examined *Being Human* within the context of its narrative genre: Lorna Jowett and Stacey Abbott included *Being Human* in their analysis of contemporary horror television series, focusing their attention on how gothic themes and tropes are presented in *Being Human* and other gothic television shows; Terry Gunnell also considered *Being Human* within its folkloristic context, which comes, as he explained, not only from ancient legends and literature, but also from modern cinema and television, which have contributed and still contribute to the evolution of vampires, werewolves and ghosts in people's imagination.

Moving towards a more symbolical reading of *Being Human*, two scholars focused on how racial difference is portrayed in the series and how it is linked to 'supernatural' difference. Ewan Kirkland (108-110) highlighted *Being Human's* non-canonical portrayal of the vampire and the ghost, none of whom is as white and pale as those of more traditional representations; in particular, Kirkland noticed that the other vampires in *Being Human*—whom Mitchell despises, as we will see later—are very stereotypically white, and suggested that "Mitchell's vampire marginality might be signified by his dark skin casting and his Irish accent" (110). Cataloguing Aidan Turner's skin as 'dark' might be a bit of a stretch; however, his Irish origins are quite clear, and this sets his character apart from the others. This is also underlined by Lisa Lampert Weissig, who focused her analysis on the notion of the uncanny and its relevance in the show and who made some very interesting remarks about the characters' ethnicity:

Mitchell [...], George [...] and Annie [...] are all double outsiders, an Irish vampire, a Jewish werewolf and a mixed-race ghost, whose ultimately failed efforts to fit into the world of humans reflects an uneasy relationship between ethnic outsiders and mainstream culture. [...] [T]he show [...] reinforces their uncanny difference [...] by marking their ethnic differences from normative white, Protestant English identity. (65-68)

It should be said that Mitchell, George and Annie are not the only characters who are not white, Protestant or English, as ethnic diversity is indeed represented both in the human and in the supernatural world of the series; however, it is true that each one of the three main characters, in some way, belongs to a minority. More notably, Mitchell, George and Annie all share a kind of difference that may go unnoticed:

[...] each has an ethnic background that could also make possible a kind of uncanny revelation, as those of Irish, Jewish and mixed-race backgrounds can sometimes 'pass' as part of a dominant 'English' community, just as the three supernaturals attempt to 'pass' in the world of humans. (72)

Indeed, Mitchell and George are able to work with humans, rent a house from a human and interact with their human neighbours without anyone finding out about



their 'true' nature, and Annie can sometimes be seen by humans,<sup>2</sup> in which case humans are—obviously—not aware of her being a ghost.

Taking my cue from Lampert-Weissig's essay, I intend to explore more deeply the connection between the characters of George, Mitchell and Annie and ethnic marginalisation in the UK. My approach will be based mainly on cultural studies: I will explore how diversity is represented in *Being Human*, taking into consideration the folkloristic, literary and cinematic history of the three tropes involved (werewolf, vampire and ghost) and analysing *Being Human* as a product of its own time, which mirrors the social and cultural contexts within which it was produced. I will also discuss which problems and ambiguities arise from this representation if we consider George, Mitchell and Annie to be sorts of 'ethnic outsiders' within a dominant community.

Since the story and the characters of *Being Human* changed and evolved throughout its five seasons, it would be impossible to consider the whole series as a single, unified work. As Whithouse explained on many occasions, he did not write the whole story before filming it, but went on developing it as it was renewed year after year; thus, he was necessarily influenced by external factors, such as the reaction of the public, the actors' performances on set (Ng) or their unavailability for future seasons (Jeffery), or even, more practically, production changes.<sup>3</sup> For this reason, my focus will be mainly on seasons 1-3—which can be seen as constituting the first half of the story and are quite homogeneous—hoping that the subsequent seasons may be the topic of future research.

#### "THE FLOTSAM AND JETSAM OF DEATH": MARGINALISATION IN *BEING HUMAN*

As already explained in the introduction, marginalisation is the main core of the show, which is centred on the idea that Annie, Mitchell and George do not completely belong to the world of humans. In fact, the first episode of the first season<sup>4</sup> opens with a monologue by Annie, who talks about what it is like to feel isolated and left out on the edge of society:

I was going to die of old age. That was the plan. [...]  
Death was always a certainty, the punch line we could all see coming, but not for Mitchell. For a vampire, death isn't the end but the beginning.  
So here we are. Overlooked and forgotten. Unnatural and supernatural. Watching the dance from the sidelines. [...]

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<sup>2</sup> In the first seasons, and especially in the first episodes, Annie's visibility to humans is linked to her self-confidence, which varies a lot. However, as the plot moves along she becomes permanently invisible to humans, whereas all supernatural creatures (ghosts, vampires, werewolves and zombies) are always able to see and hear her.

<sup>3</sup> For example, the production of the series was relocated in Wales from season 3: therefore, Whithouse had to include a series of events to justify the fact that Annie, who is in theory rooted to her house in Bristol, could and would move to another place (BBC News).

<sup>4</sup> This episode first aired on 25 January 2009 and is the first episode of season one (and the first episode in the DVD edition), but not the first episode of the whole series, since a pilot was aired on 18 February 2008 to 'test' *Being Human* along with other five drama series BBC Three was considering producing at the time (for a detailed account of the events concerning the pilot and a summary of its plot, see Black 50-411).



Then there are the ones like George. The ones that should have died. But shattered and bloody, they walk away from the train wreck. But what's the cost? They're scarred. Transformed. They're monsters now too. [...]  
So what have we got left to look forward to, us refugees, the flotsam and jetsam of death? Maybe, if we still deserve such a thing as mercy, we find each other. (00:09-03:56)

As Annie says, she, Mitchell and George have all experienced death in some way, but they have continued their existence in the world of the living, remaining in a liminal space between life and death. This connection to both life and death is obvious in the case of the ghost, who did not complete her trespassing, and the vampire, who is dead and alive at the same time: Mitchell breathes, eats and drinks,<sup>5</sup> but does not age and is immortal, unless he is stabbed in the heart with a wooden stake. The werewolf, however, has traditionally been associated with nature and animality more than with death (Bourgault Du Coudray 3; Senn 2-3): this potential impasse, which would make it impossible to consider the three creatures as similar, is solved in *Being Human* by explaining that George technically 'dies' every full moon to turn into a wolf, because his human body must transform all its organs and stops working in the process (season 1, episode 2, 00:55-01:38).

Thus, Annie's monologue in the first episode has the function of presenting the three main characters as three individuals who, despite coming from very different personal stories and struggles, are united by their link with death and may thus bond with each other through their shared traumatic experience: we might actually think about three refugees—and this is why Annie uses this particular word—who come from different places and find themselves in the same country of arrival. In fact, the experience of running away from war or persecution has in some cases been described as a death-like experience. A recent example may be found in the play *The Jungle*, which comes from Joe Robertson and Joe Murphy's experience in the migrant camp of Calais: in the play, seventeen-year-old Okot talks about his journey through the desert, Libyan prisons and the Mediterranean as a succession of deaths, because he lost his childhood, his dignity, his family and his entire life in Sudan, not to mention his 'real' death when he almost drowned (1364-1513).

Moreover, none of the three characters was born as a non-human: their original human condition was taken away from them through an act of violence, as George was scarred by a werewolf, Annie was killed by her fiancé, and Mitchell was transformed by a vampire during the First World War. This, again, can be connected to the experience of refugees, who are not born as such but are forced to move from their original homes and who often have to accept degrading living conditions in the country of arrival, where they are often not recognised as full citizens. In the case of George, Mitchell and Annie, we can see for ourselves how this change in status affects them: they remember exactly how their life was before their transformation and this is why they long for a 'normal' human life, a life without all the worries and anxieties coming from their non-human condition. In this longing, too, we can identify a possible connection with the sense of irretrievable loss of wholeness that is central in the condition of refugees.

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<sup>5</sup> This is a peculiarity of *Being Human's* vampires, since other vampires in literature, cinema and television usually do not eat.



With this metaphor in mind, we can say that at the beginning of *Being Human* Annie's monologue is enough to introduce the story and engage the viewers: the protagonists are presented as three marginalised people who will try to overcome their difficulties together—and we shall see how.

## GEORGE, MITCHELL AND ANNIE AS ETHNIC OUTSIDERS

Even though the beginning of the show tries to present the characters of the ghost, the vampire and the werewolf as three similar supernatural creatures, we cannot ignore the fact that each one of these figures has its own evolution in gothic narrative: for this reason, each of these characters is particularly suited for introducing different perspectives on foreignness and marginalisation. I shall therefore consider each character by itself, taking into account the available literature on the history of the three tropes in folklore, literature, cinema and television and exploring the common threads between the werewolf, the vampire and the ghost in *Being Human* on the one hand, and the condition of ethnic outsiders in the UK on the other.

### GEORGE: RACE AND CLASS DISCRIMINATION

The figure of the werewolf has often represented difference in race and class: in the nineteenth century, the werewolf was already associated with the “‘lower’ realm (superstitious, plebeian, corporeal, bestial, instinctive or ‘natural’)” (Bourgault du Coudray 38) and these features have lasted through time. Talking about werewolves in cinema and their links to ancient folklore, Bryan Senn explains:

[...] the werewolf may offer one of the most intimate explorations of horror's great trope—fear of the 'Other.' With its real-life roots in xenophobia, the horror genre has often focused on how we deal with 'otherness.' Werewolf cinema takes this to the Nth degree by literally transforming the protagonist [...] into what we most fear—the Other. (4)

If we think of very recent examples of werewolves in contemporary narrative, we can see that the werewolf is usually presented in contrast with the vampire, the former being more primitive, poorer and of low social status, the latter being high-class or even aristocratic, elegant and wealthy (not to mention white).<sup>6</sup> In Stephenie Meyer's very well-known *Twilight* saga, for instance, all the werewolves belong to the Quileute tribe, a feature that sets them apart from both humans and vampires;<sup>7</sup> even in recent television narratives, such as *True Blood*, werewolves “are clearly coded as blue-collar or underclass” (Jowett 79). However, if the trope of the werewolf has usually remained linked to the idea of an ethnically diverse and at the same time low-class ‘Other,’ this does not necessarily mean that this ‘Other’ is seen as an enemy. As Kimberley Mc-

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<sup>6</sup> This is not the case for *Being Human*, in which, as already said, the vampire himself belongs to a minority.

<sup>7</sup> Interestingly enough, as McMahon-Coleman and Weaver underline (107), the werewolves' racial difference in Meyer's novels does not entail any hint at discrimination issues throughout the saga, an aspect which is certainly problematic.



Mahon Coleman and Roslyn Weaver explained in their *Werewolves and Other Shapeshifters in Popular Culture*, “literary monsters have been increasingly cast as outsider figures in sympathetic depictions” and we “can see a similar movement in literary werewolves, who often now represent marginalized groups rather than evil” (100; see also Jowett 78).

*Being Human* fits perfectly into this thread of representing the werewolf as not only ethnically different, but also belonging to a lower class and capable of arousing the sympathy of the viewer. Indeed, George’s difficulties in the story are mainly related to his job and social status, a status that he usually accepts as a pure fact. Despite having an IQ of 156 (BBC Press Office) and speaking six foreign languages (“I can speak German and Spanish, [...] Italian, and French and Croatian. But my Russian is pretty basic, I’m afraid,” season 1, episode 3, 15:45-15:52), George works as a hospital porter. He explains in episode 2 that working in a hospital was Mitchell’s idea (Mitchell works as a cleaner in the same hospital): the vampire needed a place with as little sunlight as possible<sup>8</sup> and a low-profile job would allow the two of them to pass unnoticed (31:12-31:34). However, if it is understandable that a vampire would need to work in a place where natural light is scarce, the same could not be said of a werewolf, who only transforms one night a month and is in all matters a ‘normal’ human being for the rest of the time. The case of George, therefore, does not seem so much a life choice as a case of internalised oppression (David and Derthick 7-11): to put it simply, when George became a werewolf he thought that his life as a productive human being was over and that a low-class, low-income job was all that he could hope for.

Proof of the fact that George considers his job to be a consequence of his ‘race’ is that when, in the second season, he tries to lead what he considers to be a normal, human life, part of his efforts are devoted to improving his social position. He thus starts working as an English teacher for foreign students, a job he is presumably qualified to have, and starts dating a human co-worker. However, he also tries to suppress his ‘wolf side’ by taking tranquillisers before transforming into a wolf, so that he spends the full-moon night sleeping. Unfortunately, there is unexpected collateral damage: George starts suffering from a sort of Tourette’s syndrome,<sup>9</sup> releasing the repressed anger and energy of the wolf through uncontrollable swearing and even fits of rage, until he beats the school principal up and has to quit his job (season 2, episode 4). In the end, it is his ethnic difference that causes him to give up his professional ambitions and go back to being a porter.

Class issues are in fact a shared problem for werewolves in *Being Human*. Later in the series, the werewolves we meet have often grown up at the margins of society and have settled for low-income jobs—like Tom, a recurring character in season 3 and one of the protagonists of seasons 4-5—or, if they were infected in their adult years, they lost their previous job—like Larry, a former weather reporter who makes his appearance in the third episode of season 5. The only werewolf we could consider

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<sup>8</sup> In *Being Human* vampires can actually walk around during the day, although they do have to protect themselves from sunlight by not exposing too much skin: as explained by Black, “[o]nly being able to film most of the cast at night would have been unduly restrictive and a lower budget show can do without the expense of continual night shooting” (483).

<sup>9</sup> Tourette’s Syndrome is a disorder characterised by compulsive movements and vocalisations. The vocal tics of Tourette’s Syndrome can include inappropriate language, i.e. coprolalia, which “is often portrayed or mocked in the media as a common symptom of TS” (Tourette Association).



'successful,' even though she has not begun working yet, is Allison, a university student and hopefully future barrister, who nevertheless confirms that most werewolves live a hard life when she says that she looked for Tom in "a number of temping agencies specialising in low-paid shift work, as that's unfortunately where we tend to end up" (season 4, episode 6, 05:08-05:12).

These struggles of werewolves with work in *Being Human* may recall cases of ethnic segregation and over-qualification on the British labour market: in particular, black migrants have been repeatedly reported as having difficulty in obtaining jobs to match their skills and expectations. In an article about Zimbabwean migrants in the UK, Joann McGregor concluded that the "stress created by doing insecure, poorly paid and low-status work was compounded for some by life on the margins of the law and fear of deportation and for others, who worked legally, by a sense of being trapped without prospects" (821); and this is a condition which is shared by many black migrants regardless of their country of origin, because "migrants from various 'new African diasporas' have become concentrated in care and cleaning in the UK, despite their skills and middle class, often professional backgrounds" (820). Moreover, Mitton and Aspinall's statistical research about Black Africans in the UK reported that

Some Black Africans were struggling to translate their qualifications into managerial and professional jobs, as fewer Black Africans than White British workers holding degrees had a job at that level. Thus, whilst a good proportion of the second generation were accessing professional and managerial occupations, the data suggested polarisation, with many working in low-paying sectors or over-qualified for the jobs they were in. (2)

Therefore, we could certainly say that *Being Human's* werewolves—and especially George—are useful, in particular, for addressing the issue of racial discrimination on the job market and investigating the implicit shared beliefs behind these circumstances.

#### MITCHELL: IDENTITY LOSS AND RADICALISATION

The vampire has a long literary history and was used very early on as a symbol for racial difference, beginning with Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (Arata; Gelder 13; Tichelaar 229-234). More recently, and in line with the evolution of other gothic figures, the vampire has become more of a fascinating 'Other,' with thoughts and feelings of his own: since Anne Rice's *Interview with the Vampire* (1976) "we have seen discussions of the steady change from the vampire as primarily a monstrous corpse to largely sympathetic, romantic, outsider" (Anywo 2). Another characteristic which is very common in the portrayal of vampires, especially in the recent ones, and which we find in the character of Mitchell and in other *Being Human* vampires, is the attempt to restrain their urges and the consequent risk of giving in to their dark and dangerous side: for Mitchell, this means the risk of going back to live like most other vampires.

In *Being Human*, vampires are organised in a hidden criminal community: they have a complex and efficient system in place which allows them to kill humans for blood and pass unnoticed, as many of them have infiltrated hospitals and the police. Mitchell has left this community and has decided to live without blood, so that he will





not need to kill humans; however, his decision is a difficult one, because, even though he does not need blood to survive, his blood thirst does not easily go away, tormenting him as if he were a drug addict on the wagon.<sup>10</sup> For this reason, Mitchell is the weakest of the three characters, as he needs a constant reminder of why he is abstaining from blood and living apart from the vampire community: because, simply enough, humans are good and do not deserve to be killed.

Despite Mitchell's efforts to fit into the human world, his beliefs are shaken when he finds himself unjustly rejected from the dominant group. Because of a misunderstanding, in the fourth episode of the first season Mitchell and George are believed by their neighbours to be paedophiles. Furious and uninterested in explanations, the neighbours try to kick them out of their house, spitting at them, throwing bricks, garbage and rotten food at their doors and windows, and even leaving excrement outside their door. George, who—as previously mentioned—already feels inferior and undeserving of humans' respect, simply accepts the situation: "This was always going to happen, wasn't it? Soon as they'd found out what we are" (29:14-29:18). Mitchell, however, feels angry and betrayed ("It's our mistake, wanting to be like them", 45:34-45:36) and decides to join the vampire community: "I've seen what humanity is really like. And this is where I belong. I am home now" (04:48-04:55).

An interesting aspect of Mitchell's decision is that it comes after an episode that began with Mitchell already insecure about his identity and group belonging:

Where do I belong? Where do I fit? Who are my people? Where do my loyalties lie? We all choose our tribe. It's that need to belong, to live within boundaries, 'cause it's scary on the outside, on the fringes. (Season 1, episode 4, 00:43-01:07)

As Mitchell was already uncertain about his place in society, experiencing rejection by the dominant community leads him to radicalise and to agree with violent ideas. This link between marginalisation, identity crisis and radicalisation has been explored in various studies: as Lyons-Padilla *et al.* explained when talking about Muslim migrants in the US,

immigrants who identify with neither their heritage culture nor the culture they are living in feel marginalized and insignificant. Experiences of discrimination make the situation worse and lead to greater support for radicalism, which promises a sense of meaning and life purpose. (1)

Another essay about Muslim migrants, this time in Western Europe, states that "radicalisation is one possible answer—the most extreme answer—to [...] the development of a double identity and to the lack of recognition and acceptance by the host society" (Waldmann 9). Moreover, Lampert-Weissig noticed that, since Mitchell is an Irish person in England, the viewer is already keen to associate him with terrorist themes (76): this strengthens his connection with ideas of radicalisation and violence. Thus, Mitchell's characterisation brings to the fore issues related to alienation, group belonging and rejection of the ethnic outsider.

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<sup>10</sup> "On the wagon" are indeed the words Mitchell uses to describe his abstinence from blood ("Pilot" 09:53).



ANNIE: THE EXCLUSION OF ASYLUM SEEKERS AND FEELINGS OF INDETERMINACY

The ghost is another trope with a very long history in Britain, with renowned examples that have become literary classics (*Hamlet*; *A Christmas Carol*); even though the ghost represents the persistence of the past, ghost stories “have always maintained an adaptable relationship with the contemporary world” (Cox xi), so that the ghost “can and does metaphorically act as a reflection of the times” (Kovacs 2). Among the many significances of the figure of the ghost, the aspect which is most relevant to the analysis of Annie in *Being Human* is that it is an established trope for migrants, especially undocumented migrants, because “their lack of social visibility [...] or uncertain status” can be described as a spectral essence (Peeren 4; see also Deandrea *New Slaveries*, “Spectralized Camp”).

Indeed, in *Being Human* Annie is characterised by her uncertain status: she has remained in the world of the living, but is trapped, as explained above, in a liminal space between life and death, which makes it impossible for her to live a true life as a member of the human world. Annie is invisible to humans and that means that she cannot work or do anything useful for others—with the exception of vampires, werewolves and other ghosts, since only supernatural creatures can see and hear her. In fact, in one of the rare periods in which humans can see her, she immediately tries to interact with them and be an active member of the community: she begins working as a waitress (season 2, episodes 1-2) and, when all her neighbours are asked to step outside their houses because of a gas leak, she happily brings drinks to everyone (season 2, episode 1, 53:24-54:40). This, however, is a mere temporary situation: when Annie, inevitably, reverses to her condition of invisibility, her role of carer in the human community disappears too.

In this way, Annie’s experience becomes evocative of the condition of migrants in the UK and, in particular, of the detention of asylum seekers and of their exclusion from public life. Under current UK immigration law, migrants—including those seeking asylum—can be arrested and detained indefinitely at any time during their stay:

Some people are detained as soon as they arrive by Home Office officials stationed at airports and ports. Others can be detained after living in Britain for many years when they try to renew work, family or study visas. (McIntyre and Taylor)

In the case of asylum seekers, if they are released from detention they are still not allowed to work before the resolution of their asylum case. The denial of the possibility to work implies a denial to make them full members of society (Herd); and if asylum seekers do try to work—because they want to buy something that their weekly allowance does not cover, or just because they want to give some purpose to their existence—they have to work illegally, with a high risk of being arrested again (Gurnah 39; Bergvall 66). With such a system in place, asylum seekers become *de facto* ghosts: they are made invisible to other human beings by being detained in immigration centres or by not being included in citizens’ daily life. Just like Annie, their integration into the community is made difficult, even impossible, because of their liminal status, which prevents them from belonging anywhere.



Another aspect shared by Annie and migrants is the constant anxiety of waiting for an indefinite amount of time:

waiting to leave, waiting to be caught by the police, waiting to have their testimony questioned, waiting for the legal documentation to come through, waiting for acceptance, waiting to make a new life... (Bhabha in Schulze-Engler *et al.* 710)

Indeed, Annie experiences a constant feeling of indeterminacy: she does not know how long she will remain in the world of the living, what is the task she has to perform in order to move on and what will happen to her when she is able to go on with her journey. When we are finally shown a glimpse of what stands ahead, it is something that again concerns waiting: when at the end of the second season a villain drags Annie into the afterlife, she gets stuck in yet another limbo, without any information about her present and her future ("They call this the waiting room. We wait here until... they know where they want us to go", season 3, episode 1, 04:29-04:41).

This anxiety for Annie is probably worse than death itself, as it is impossible for her to plan her future, just like those who are indefinitely waiting for the resolution—any kind of resolution—of their asylum case:

I was released in 2011 only to return to the limbo I was in before. I am not allowed to work. I have now been here for eight years. I have no choice but to live where I am told to live and wait for the next hearing to allow my application to be considered. Do you know what limbo means? It means the edge of hell. (Gurnah 39)

## GEORGE, MITCHEL AND ANNIE FACING MARGINALISATION

As shown in the previous sections, *Being Human* tackles issues such as marginalisation and discrimination through an interesting perspective. However, we must ask ourselves if the overall message of the series—which remains, of course, first and foremost an entertainment product—is applicable to cases of racial discrimination: in other words, what strategies do *Being Human's* characters employ to face discrimination? Are they able to improve their condition in the society they live in? We can go back to Annie's words in the first episode: "Maybe, if we still deserve such a thing as mercy, we find each other" (season 1, episode 1, 03:48-03:56).

It is often suggested during the series that vampires, werewolves and ghosts do not normally get along and do not live together (season 2, ep. 2, 17:43-17:45; season 4, ep. 2, 09:50-10:03). Therefore, the friendship between Annie, George and Mitchell is a good exception to the rule: by showing three very different supernatural creatures who become friends and help each other out, *Being Human* provides a positive representation of marginalised people overcoming racial boundaries. However, it should be considered that *Being Human* only shows cooperation among characters belonging to these marginalised groups: there is no example of a positive and lasting relationship between the 'dominant' community—in this case, humans—and supernatural creatures.

This aspect is mostly evident in George's and Mitchell's 'inter-species' romantic relationships, which are usually brief and do not last long, as if it were impossible for



them to truly interact and live with humans. In the pilot episode, George meets his ex-girlfriend, who, we later find out, is still in love with him; however, she leaves after finding out he is a werewolf, because George's condition is too much for her to bear. Later, in the second season, George has a human girlfriend, Sam, and he even moves in with her and her daughter Molly, but he keeps his lycanthropy secret from both of them: this, as already said, is part of his attempt to live 'as a human,' with a good job and a normal life, rejecting the part of his identity he finds most difficult to cope with. This attempt at living with humans does not end well: one night Molly sees George transforming into a werewolf, and even though he has not harmed anyone, she is so terrified that George has to break up with Sam and go back to live with Mitchell and Annie. As for Mitchell, he also has a human girlfriend in the second season. Unfortunately, she reveals herself to be one of the main villains of the series: she is a religious fanatic who thinks that vampires are all inherently evil and at the end of season 2 she bombs the vampires' headquarters, killing almost all of them in what is unmistakably a terrorist attack. In all these cases, of course, humans' own responsibility should not be forgotten: when human characters are faced with supernatural difference, they generally refuse to be involved in this newly-discovered world, as is the case for George's girlfriends. These choices, however, are usually considered normal, even unavoidable, by non-humans, who are themselves convinced that for humans it is impossible to accept them as they are.

Moreover, when inter-species relationships in *Being Human* do work it is only because the human eventually turns into a non-human. This is the case of George's long-lasting relationship with the nurse Nina, a recurring character in seasons one and two and a main character in season three. When Nina and George begin their relationship, she is human and unaware of George's nature; at the end of the first season, George scratches her during a transformation, infecting her and making her into a werewolf like him. Despite this traumatic event, which causes them to separate for a while, George and Nina eventually build a stable relationship and they even have a child together—but all this happens *after* Nina becomes a werewolf and is brought into the three friends' supernatural world, becoming the fourth inhabitant of the house. Later in the series, the pattern recurs with other characters: when the vampire Hal and the werewolf Tom meet a human girl, Alex, Hal's enemies (other vampires) kill her and she becomes a ghost ("Making History", season 4, episode 7). From that moment on, she begins spending all her ghost-time with Tom and Hal, so that the three of them slowly become close friends (season 5).<sup>11</sup>

As the alleged focus of the story is on the characters' marginalisation and on their attempts to be accepted in the human world, the overall significance of these developments and dynamics cannot be understated or ignored: in the end, the show seems to imply that racially diverse people cannot live together, because—in line with Monahan's critique of whiteness as "a pure, unambiguous, all-or-nothing" category

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<sup>11</sup> These long and stable, but 'infectious' relationships do not concern Annie, the ghost, as she cannot transmit her condition, which evades the alleged 'fixity' of racial categories foregrounding, instead, conditions of liminality; however, she can indirectly cause other characters to lose their human life. For example, in season 2, episode 2 some demons trying to reach Annie trick a human she met into committing suicide just to open the passage to the afterlife: thus, even though she could temporarily be seen by humans, this seemingly positive change in her status brought about somebody else's death.



that “one either occupies or not” (71)—if ‘pure’ humans come into contact with non-humans, they are ‘contaminated’ and turned into monstrous aberrations. Of course, becoming a non-human should not necessarily be seen as a worsening of a person’s status or condition; however, it is in fact perceived as such, so much so that the above-mentioned Nina and Alex need time to adjust to their new life and to reconcile with George and Hal. Moreover, it is undeniable that, in the end, positive relationships in the series develop *within* the supernatural world, not *between* the supernatural world and the world of humans. In the end this confirms the separation of humans and non-humans, relegating werewolves, vampires and ghosts to their own ethnic ghetto.

## CONCLUSIONS

We have seen how the characters in *Being Human* cope with discrimination and marginalisation by overcoming personal and racial differences: the werewolf, the vampire and the ghost all have their own personal difficulties in integrating into society, but they can try to overcome their problems by sharing them and helping each other out. Even though this is an interesting solution, it must be said that supernatural creatures in *Being Human* are shown as incapable of achieving true integration among humans, and, at the same time, humans are shown as generally incapable of accepting them: even though *Being Human*’s protagonists build positive inter-ethnic relationships, they remain trapped inside a symbolic non-human ghetto, from which they do not seem to be able to escape. For this reason, the show’s underlying social message, which is necessarily constrained by issues of medium, format and genre, may be more conservative and problematic than it might seem at first sight.

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