PREFACE

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This volume of essays presents further research from the Open Graves, Open Minds Project (OGOM) at the University of Hertfordshire (soon to be an internationally recognised research centre).¹ The collection connects together innovative research on the cultural significance of wolves, wild children and werewolves from a variety of perspectives as portrayed in different media and genres ranging from folktales and Gothic literature through sound, fashion, film and television to contemporary poetry and visual art.

The book developed from the now legendary conference and series of events entitled 'The Company of Wolves: Sociality, Animality, and Subjectivity in Literary and Cultural Narratives – Werewolves, Shapeshifters, and Feral Humans' in August 2015.² OGOM hosted over fifty international speakers, together with invited keynotes from Sir Christopher Frayling, Prof. Garry Marvin, Dr Catherine Spooner, Dr Stacey Abbott, Dr Sam George and Dr Bill Hughes. There was a contribution on wolves from the field of fiction, from the prize-winning novelist Marcus Sedgwick. The idea for the conference came from discussions we were having with two of OGOM's funded PhD students, Kaja Franck and Matt Beresford. Kaja was writing a PhD on werewolves in literature and Matt, researching Byron and the Romantic vampire, had written a book on the European werewolf myth.³ A number of the smaller, related events at the conference were also inspirational and important to the development of the research in this volume. For example, we visited the headstone inscribed 'Peter the Wild Boy', in the graveyard of St Mary's Church in Northchurch, the stone marking the Hertfordshire resting place of this famous feral child. We also viewed the plaque erected in the church in his honour. The strand in the book on wolf children developed directly out of the associations that had grown up between OGOM research and the local figure of Peter the Wild Boy. The conference also saw the beginning of our important collaboration with the UK Wolf Conservation Trust.⁴ We invited delegates to directly interact with wolves and, following that, to hear an exclusive talk by members of the Trust on

'Re-wilding the wolf'. We closed our festival of events with the 'Lycanthropic Lantern of Fear' – a magic-lantern show on the theme of the werewolf in which David Annwn Jones took us on a journey to the edges of civilisation and sanity, in a spectacular show presented on a genuine Victorian magic lantern. The imaginative, Gothic element of our research was awakened again here, following our interactions earlier with the actual flesh-and-blood animal, the wolves behind the werewolf myth, via the UK Wolf Trust.

The Company of Wolves received unprecedented attention in the media and a large number of press articles were generated and published locally, internationally and globally. Two of our favourite stories were on BBC News: 'University to Host International Werewolf Conference' and 'Werewolf Conference: The People Seeking the Company of Wolves'.⁵ We inspired articles as far afield and as diverse as the *Smithsonian Magazine* in the USA and the *South China Post*. The furore surrounding the research delivered at the conference was celebrated afterwards by Katherine Hughes in *The Guardian* and we received an acknowledgement from *Times Higher Education* that we had achieved a first for a UK Academy.⁶

Following the success of this strand of the OGOM project, we collaborated again with the UK Wolf Trust at the 'Being Human Festival' in November 2017 in an event entitled 'Redeeming the Wolf : A Story of Persecution, Loss and Rediscovery'.⁷ We argued that wolves had been hunted to extinction in Britain but they still haunt the human imagination. Stories of the wolf had portrayed a vicious, snarling beast that emerged from the wilderness to attack humankind. The werewolves of popular culture had further fomented fear. But the lost wolf was making a comeback: conservation groups were working to reintroduce the animal to the British countryside. Our event brought together scholars, writers and conservationists to explore how literature, folklore, fairy tale, and film have shaped our perceptions of the wolf and could be impeding its return. Mike Collins, chief 'Wolf Keeper' at the UK Wolf Conservation Trust, contributed a piece to accompany a short film on the impact of wolves. This was preceded by a series of illustrated talks (Prof. Garry Marvin ('lupophobia'), Dr Sam George ('wolf-children'), Dr Kaja Franck ('monstrous werewolves') and Dr Bill Hughes ('beauties and beasts'). The audience was invited to debate the implications of redeeming and rewilding the much-maligned 'big bad wolf' and what the wolf can teach us about being human. I collaborated further with Mike Collins from the trust in an interview with the BBC on the impact of fairy tales on our perception and understanding of the wolf.⁸ These projects and symposia have fed into and inspired this collection, together with an OGOM special issue of *Gothic Studies*.⁹ In this offshoot, we develop the theme of wolf-children, wilderness and werewolves and revisit the story of the Hull werewolf Old Stinker, who, as serendipity would have it, appeared for the first time since the early twentieth century during the period that we were planning

and presenting the conference. He became something of a totem figure for OGOM.¹⁰

This collection then, despite coming under the shadow of the Open Graves, Open Minds Project, is not about undead creatures.¹¹ Instead, it is about the rather disturbing vitality of the werewolf, and other beings which unsettle the distinction between animal and human, whether wolves themselves figuring as representatives of human nature, other shapeshifters or the curious stories of children discovered in the wild and without language – widely thought to be the unique characteristic of human beings. So, we are cheekily stretching the meaning of ‘Open Graves, Open Minds’ away from its obvious suggestions of revenants – the phrase comes from *Generation Dead*, Daniel Waters’s marvelous novel of unlikely romance between living humans and zombies – just so that it can encompass shapeshifters. We would like the phrase to suggest the uninhibited prying into dark secrets, and an even more strained metaphor of consciousness emerging from the invigoration of dead matter.

Notes

- 1 OGOM maintains a blog and website that is constantly updated with dialogues around related topics and with additional scholarly resources: <www.opengravesopenminds.com>.
- 2 The full programme is available on our website: <www.opengravesopenminds.com/company-of-wolves/conference-programme-pdf/>.
- 3 Kaja gained her PhD in 2016 on ‘The Development of the Literary Werewolf: Language, Subjectivity and Animal/Human Boundaries’. She is now an even bigger part of the project. Matt is completing his doctoral research. His book on the werewolf myth is *The White Devil: The Werewolf in European Culture* (London: Reaktion, 2013).
- 4 The UK Wolf Conservation Trust is based in Reading. Details can be found at <<https://ukwct.org.uk/>>.
- 5 Laurence Cawley, ‘University to Host International Werewolf Conference’, *BBC News*, 22 August 2015 <www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-beds-bucks-herts-33971546>; Jodie Smith, ‘Werewolf Conference: The People Seeking the Company of Wolves’, *BBC News*, 4 September 2015 <www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-beds-bucks-herts-34144752>.
- 6 Kathryn Hughes, ‘In Our Dog-Eat-Dog World, It’s Time for Werewolves’, *The Guardian*, 30 August 2015 <www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2015/aug/30/werewolves-scarcity-fear-vampires-sexual-anxiety>; Matthew Reisz, ‘Werewolf Conference Billed as First for UK Academy’, 31 August 2015 <www.timeshighereducation.com/news/werewolf-conference-billed-first-uk-academy>.
- 7 The Being Human Festival is led by the School of Advanced Study, University of London, in partnership with the Arts and Humanities Research Council

and the British Academy. Our event can be found on the BH site: <<https://beinghumanfestival.org/event/redeeming-the-wolf-a-story-of-persecution-loss-and-rediscovery/>>.

- 8 'Little Red Riding Hood Tale Hampers Wolf Debate, Says Academic', *BBC News*, 4 November 2017 <www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-beds-bucks-herts-41845167>.
- 9 *Gothic Studies*, Werewolves and Wildness special issue, ed. by Sam George and Bill Hughes, 20.1 (May 2019).
- 10 For Old Stinker, see Dr Sam George, 'Why We Should Welcome the Return of Old Stinker, the English Werewolf', *The Conversation*, 30 October 2016 <<https://theconversation.com/why-we-should-welcome-the-return-of-old-stinker-the-english-werewolf-67797>>; Sam George, 'Wolves in the Wolds: Late Capitalism, the English Eerie, and the Weird Case of "Old Stinker" the Hull Werewolf', *Gothic Studies*, Werewolves and Wildness special issue, ed. by Sam George and Bill Hughes, 21.1 (May 2019); Kaja Franck and Sam George, 'Contemporary Werewolves', in *Twenty-first-century Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*, ed. by Maisha Wester and Xavier Aldana Reyes (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), pp. 144–57.
- 11 The Open Graves, Open Minds Project began around 2010 with a very successful conference on vampire narratives, followed by the Bram Stoker Centenary Symposium in 2012, and the monograph and special issue of *Gothic Studies* in May 2013. There have been further events, and Dr Sam George has instigated an MA module on vampire fiction at the University of Hertfordshire and an undergraduate one on Young Adult Gothic.