

Institution: University of Hertfordshire		
Unit of Assessment: 27 – English Language and Literature		
Title of case study: Open Graves, Open Minds: Promoting empathy and interrogating difference through public engagement with Gothic narratives		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2010 – 2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): Sam George	Role(s) (e.g. job title): Associate Professor (Research)	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: 2007 - present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2015-2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words) <p>Dr Sam George's research on the 'ethical Gothic' has sought to shift away from horror, cultivating a sense of moral agency, employing gothic narratives to create empathy for the marginalised, monstrous or othered, including the natural world. Through extensive public engagement, pedagogical innovation and outreach activities, she has i) increased public awareness of how Gothic narratives can challenge perceptions of otherness and difference, helping to combat prejudice and hate crime through her work with the Sophie Lancaster Foundation; ii) used her research into folklore and myth to promote ecological conservation, working with the UK Wolf Conservation Trust to help inform public perceptions of wolves; iii) worked with and inspired the Young Adult Fiction of the novelist Marcus Sedgwick.</p>		
2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words) <p>The research underpinning the case study is George's work on Gothic studies, primarily vampire literature and culture, the representation of shapeshifters and other magical beings (particularly werewolves) and the relationship between folklore and fiction (e.g. wolf myths, folktales of children raised by wolves etc.). This research has been central to the ongoing Open Graves, Open Minds project (OGOM). The project has prospered through collaboration with Drs Bill Hughes and Kaja Franck. OGOM was established by George and Hughes in 2010 to lead and foster research, nationally and internationally, into how representations of the undead, the supernatural and the fantastical in literature and myth relate to, and can influence, contemporary attitudes on issues ranging from sexuality and social change, to otherness, hybridity or difference. Originally focusing on vampire fiction, film and television, OGOM has expanded its scope to embrace a range of Gothic genres and tropes examining such areas as the physical body and animal studies, including the extinction and conservation of seemingly 'monstrous' creatures (such as wolves).</p> <p>OGOM has hosted three major international conferences: 'Open Graves, Open Minds' in 2010; 'The Company of Wolves' in 2015; and 'The Urban Weird' in 2018 (a collaboration with the Supernatural Cities project hosted at the University of Portsmouth). It has also hosted two smaller-scale symposia, to commemorate the 100th anniversary of Bram Stoker's death in 2012, and the 200th anniversary of the publication of Polidori's <i>The Vampyre</i> in 2019. These events have resulted in numerous publications, some of which have become staple texts for the vampire-studies courses which have emerged in the wake of OGOM's success.</p> <p>George's work with OGOM has increasingly focused on the power of contemporary Gothic fiction to speak to, and influence, a young readership; she has argued consistently that Gothic writing both enthuses young adult readers for literary studies, and provides a medium for them to explore complex questions of identity and ethical behaviour on both a personal and societal level. In particular, her research has explored how the study of the Gothic can shape the ethical thinking of young readers, particularly around two of the most pressing issues facing contemporary society: tolerance for difference in the face of rising instances of hate-crime against BAME communities and minority subcultures, and the looming threat of ecological crisis. A selection of outputs relating to the 'ethical Gothic' are listed below (3.1-3.5). Two distinct strands of publication have emerged: on Young Adult Gothic fiction, exploring questions of</p>		

subculture, otherness and difference; and on wolves, exploring questions of human-animal relations, monstrosity, wildness, extinction, habitat-loss and rewilding.

These outputs are the result of a decade of sustained effort to rethink the way in which people conceptualise Gothic studies, both inside and outside the academy, and to demonstrate that the study of popular fiction can, by challenging prejudices and preconceptions, have transformative social impact.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

- 3.1 George, S. and Hughes, B. eds., (2013) *Open Graves, Open Minds: Representation of Vampires from the Enlightenment to the Present Day*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- 3.2 George, S. and Hughes, B., (2019). Werewolves, Wild Children and Wildness. *Gothic Studies* 21.1, 1-9. <https://doi.org/ft6c>
- 3.3 George, S., (2017). Spirited Away: the Outsider and the Representation of Transylvania in the Pied Piper and Dracula Myth in Britain and Germany. In Crisan, M. ed., *Dracula: An International Perspective*. London: Palgrave. ISBN: 978-3319875354
- 3.4 George, S. (2019). Wolves in the Wolds: Late Capitalism, the English Eerie, and the Weird Case of 'Old Stinker' the Hull Werewolf. *Gothic Studies*, 21.1, 68-84. <https://doi.org/ft6d>
- 3.5 George, S. and Hughes, B. eds., (2020) *In the Company of Wolves: Werewolves, Wolves, and Wild Children – Narratives of Sociality and Animality*. Manchester: Manchester University Press. ISBN: 978-1526129031 The reviewer commented: 'This is an excellent, very wide-ranging and extremely well edited collection'.

Evidence of quality: All outputs peer-reviewed. 3.5 submitted to REF2021.

Workshop and conference funding includes:

2014 HEA grant for workshop on teaching vampire literature (£750).

2017 AHRC/British Academy. Funding for event at the Being Human festival (£2,000)

2020 AHRC/British Academy. Funding for event at the Being Human festival (£1,000)

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

George has used the OGOM project to reconfigure attitudes towards the sorts of otherness commonly depicted and explored in Gothic fiction. By challenging prevailing conceptions of the meaning and significance of popular Gothic fiction, both in the academy and in broader public discourse, she has used Gothic fiction as a means of intervening directly in pressing contemporary ethical debates about social attitudes towards minority groups, and environmental degradation; this work has also directly affected the practice of an award-winning creative writer working in the genre, who has collaborated in the project.

This impact has been achieved through a programme of public engagement, academic conferences which also attracted a non-academic audience, dissemination through the mainstream media, and wide use of social media. George collaborated with two charities, the Sophie Lancaster Foundation and the UK Wolf Conservation Trust, has developed and implemented educational toolkits for sixth-formers in schools and colleges.

Public engagement with gothic narratives

A key feature of the OGOM project has been its continuous engagement with interested members of public, as well as scholars and students. The OGOM conferences have sought to attract interested members of the public as well as an academic audience. The project website www.opengravesopenminds.com had received 165,084 visitors by 31 December 2020. Social media includes Twitter (@OGOMproject 7,303 followers and 315,000 impressions over a three-month period; @DrSamGeorge1, c. 12,500 followers; OGOM Facebook group 920 members). George has discussed the work of OGOM at literary festivals and public events including:

- 'Books of Blood: objects lost and found', *Being Human Festival* (23 November 2017)
- The Manchester Gothic Festival (24-29 October 2017)
- Living Frankenstein event at SOAS and Bath Literary Festival (23 and 25 May 2018)
- Battle of the Books at Edinburgh Festival and London Conway Hall in collaboration with novelist Marcus Sedgwick (20 August and 4 September 2018)
- Supernatural St Albans Halloween Tour (31 October 2018)
- 'The Black Vampyre: Gothic Visions of New Worlds', online, *Being Human Festival* (14 November 2020)

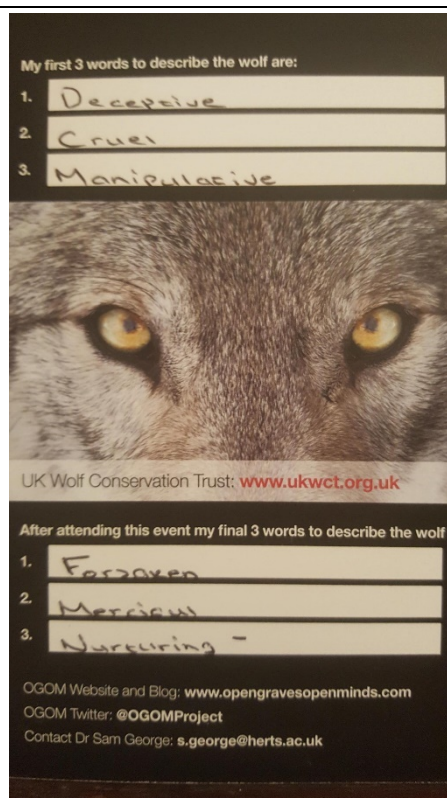
This approach has established her as a leading public-facing scholar of Gothic fiction, providing a platform to challenge conventional thinking about Gothic subcultures and pressing social and environmental issues.

Ecological conservation: challenging perceptions of wolves

The charity Rewilding Britain has argued that the UK should respond to the global climate crisis by rewilding a quarter of the nation's land. One of the key obstacles, however, is widespread misunderstanding of or hostility towards the concept of rewilding. Much of this is rooted in negative associations with some of the wildlife which might be reintroduced in such a plan, such as the wolf. The portrayal of werewolves in literature has, George argues, influenced negative public perceptions of wolves. George has worked with OGOM to challenge negative stereotypes of wolves, by looking at werewolves in a more nuanced, positive light. Two events initially disseminated the work: the Company of Wolves conference (2015), an academic conference that attracted a non-academic audience, and included a visit to see wolves at the UK Wolf Trust; and the 'Redeeming the Wolf' event at the AHRC's 2017 Being Human festival.

Extensive media coverage of the Company of Wolves conference, showing high levels of readership and reciprocal engagement, demonstrates how George's work has influenced public discourse on the issue. A Guardian article, *The howl truth: scholars get packing for UK werewolf conference* (21 August 2015), discussed initial interest in the conference. This inspired a further comment piece that argued it was time for the resurgence of the werewolf in the public imagination, drawing a connection between werewolves and modern society's problems ('*In our dog-eat-dog world, it's time for werewolves*' 30 August, 2015). This piece attracted 96 comments of its own, e.g.: "Surprisingly insightful and frankly quite excellent article... I've been sensing the return of the Werewolf archetype in popular culture for some time now". A further article on the conference in *The Independent* was shared widely on social media (2,000 shares, 10,300 Facebook shares, 1,600 comments, 6,700 reactions) while BBC Local Live (Beds, Herts and Bucks) excitedly live blogged the first day of the conference. Day two saw them publish a feature article on their interviews with visitors to the conference [5.6].

Public engagement on the subject continued with an article by George in *The Conversation* on the Hull werewolf, *Why We Should Welcome the Return of Old Stinker the English Werewolf* (30 October, 2016). It gained 16,879 reads, was shared 202 times on Twitter and 2,220 times on Facebook and attracted 63 comments, significant metrics for the site. George actively engaged with the people who commented, thereby stimulating debate on the topic [5.2]. Elsewhere, she collaborated with Mike Collins, chief keeper at UK Wolf Trust, on a BBC article exploring the public perception of wolves and their conservation ('*Little Red Riding Hood tale hampers wolf debate, says academic*', 4 November 2017). Cementing the relationship between George's literary research and the wider re-wilding debate, the article highlights George's belief that negative perceptions of wolves arise from the "demonising folklore and fairytale around the animal", with Collins confirming that there are "almost no wolf attacks on humans", and that he would "welcome a debate about bringing the wolf back to British shores" [5.2].



My first 3 words to describe the wolf are:

1. Deceptive
2. Cruel
3. Manipulative

UK Wolf Conservation Trust: www.ukwct.org.uk

After attending this event my final 3 words to describe the wolf

1. Forgiven
2. Mendacious
3. Nurturing

OGOM Website and Blog: www.opengravesopenminds.com
 OGOM Twitter: @OGOMProject
 Contact Dr Sam George: s.george@herts.ac.uk

On arrival at the Redeeming the Wolf event (18 November 2017), audience members were asked to write three words they associate with the wolf, and then to perform this task again after attending the talks, film and panel. As Professor Garry Marvin, education and research committee at the UK Wolf Conservation Trust stated, this “thoughtful and active engagement with the public” gave a “snapshot of their attitudes to wolves, [indicating] what views they had come with and how they felt at the end of the day” [5.7]. As shown, responses demonstrated how attitudes towards the wolf shifted significantly through engaging with this research. The audience response cards were then displayed at the UK Wolf Trust, playing a part in their educational outreach and public engagement. The Trust is now directing educational queries to the OGOM project.

OGOM’s Redeeming the Wolf educational pack incorporates the response cards alongside a collection of benevolent wolf myths, with a programme of interactive workshops, lectures and seminars. Educational outreach work was undertaken by George with 16 local schools, using these packs to engage students with both the ethical issues surrounding wolves and the nature of literary study through their textual representations. The recorded

responses show significant shifts in attitudes – with almost all moving from a negative to a positive view of wolves – and increased ethical awareness, e.g. “I’d like to be more involved with environmental conservation” [5.4]. The pack has been made available online.

Perceptions of ‘otherness’ and hate crime

George’s work on otherness and hate-crime, approached through the study of Young Adult fiction, has pressing social relevance in the wake of Brexit, at a time when the Home Office has reported a spike in reported hate-crimes. George is working with Poet Laureate Simon Armitage and the Sophie Lancaster Foundation, the charity set up in the wake of the murder of the Goth teenager Sophie in 2007 to encourage tolerance of subcultures through education and outreach, and to campaign for the inclusion of subcultures within the legal definition of hate crime. George’s research, disseminated in her keynote ‘Black Roses: The Representation and Appropriation of Sophie Lancaster from Broken Britain to Brexit (2007–17)’ at the Manchester Gothic Festival (2017, 200+ attendees) “spoke directly to the work of the Foundation...She made people aware that hate crime is not restricted to issues of race or sexuality, that it can extend to subcultures and all those who are perceived as different within their own communities” (Education Officer, Sophie Lancaster Foundation [5.5]). Over 50 people approached the Foundation’s stall after the talk to offer donations and request further information. Her work “had a lasting impact on the audience of festival goers. It has helped to cement and shape Sophie’s legacy ... through increased donations to the Foundation; through an increased number of young people wanting to become involved in the work of the foundation; through changing people’s understanding of what a hate crime is” [5.5].

Understanding Otherness educational packs, incorporating material from Armitage, were trialled in empathy workshops with students on the “Generation Dead” undergraduate module, where Armitage’s ‘Black Roses’ is tied to the themes of subculture, otherness and adolescence. Responses to evaluation after the workshops demonstrate a change from stereotyped attitudes to the Goth subculture, with positive descriptions including “gentle, enthusiastic, misunderstood”. They also show how the research fostered active commitment to work against hate crime, e.g. “I would personally look into volunteering at a charity or company that helps to rehabilitate victims of hate crime back into society and obviously spread word of the Sophie Lancaster foundation” [5.10]. The Foundation were “struck by the level of impact” and the “strong shift in opinions about

Sophie as a result of Sam's work in the workshops". They plan to use the exercises with their own live audiences and will direct teachers to the OGOM packs. Collaboration with the Foundation continues, with an event with Simon Armitage and Sylvia Lancaster in 2021 [5.5].

***The Black Vampyre* and 'otherness'**

Research into the 1819 American Gothic slavery text 'The Black Vampyre' began with a social media campaign to celebrate this text: the first black vampire, the first vampire story by an American writer and the first vampire anti-slavery narrative. It inspired 130,000 impressions on Twitter, 34 comments, 654 retweets and 1,780 likes. George's article in *The Conversation* 'America's first vampire was Black and revolutionary' (30 October 2020) received significant public attention: 38,171 reads; 14,600 Facebook shares; 405 Twitter retweets [5.2]. A public event was held as part of the Being Human Festival (November 2020), focusing on how humanities research into Gothic narratives engages with people's aspirations and dreams, especially when facing crises—such as plague, war, and racial oppression. The event had 159 attendees including participants from the US, Australia, South America and throughout Europe. The audience was asked what three words they would use to describe Gothic narratives after engaging with the discussion and there was a very strong shift away from horror and sensationalism; instead, the responses showed an understanding of how empathic and revolutionary the Gothic can be: "Humane, questioning and clever"; "Progressive, connecting, revolutionary". Responses to further questions demonstrated that attendees gained a new perspective on contemporary issues and understanding of Gothic narratives through exploring otherness: "The links to the BLM movement seemed particularly poignant"; "this event definitely opened a new perspective on the Gothic for me" [5.9].

Inspiring and informing creative writing

The author Marcus Sedgwick has been involved with OGOM since its inception. His fiction for young adults shows deep concern with ethical issues, often dramatised through the Gothic. He states that his writing has been influenced by his cooperation with OGOM: "working with OGOM and the team around Dr Sam George has encouraged me to voyage more deeply into the relationship between folklore and fiction, and I can see the result in all my work. It has been consistently inspired, enriched and informed by it...I strongly see a connection between this work with OGOM and a book I wrote some time later, *Midwinterblood*, perhaps the book for which I am best known... *The Monsters We Deserve* was very influenced by our discussions and my thinking about gothic monsters. One of the central questions...was inspired by OGOM!!" [5.8]. *Midwinterblood* won the Michael L Printz Award, America's most prestigious prize for writing for Young Adults.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- 5.1 OGOM Project website, social media, metrics and other online data:
- 5.2 *The Conversation* articles written by Sam George, with readership and social media data.
- 5.3 Data on event attendance, visitor testimonies, blog and social media comments
- 5.4 Wolf Educational Pack and testimonies
- 5.5 Letter from Educational Officer, Sophie Lancaster Foundation
- 5.6 Compilation of media articles
- 5.7 Letter from Prof. Garry Marvin for the UK Wolf Trust PLUS 'Redeeming the Wolf' exercise
- 5.8 Letter from author Marcus Sedgwick
- 5.9 *Being Human* Black Vampyre event evaluation and feedback
- 5.10 Sophie Lancaster Educational pack and engagement