

THE OLD ENGLISH POEM “A VAMPYRE OF THE FENS”: A BIBLIOGRAPHICAL GHOST*

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In his book *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception* (1982), Hans Robert Jauss (1922-1997) –an important German exponent of the so-called ‘reception theory’ (*Rezeptionästhetik*)– synthesised his concept of the appreciation and evaluation of a literary work quoting from Paul Valéry: “It is the execution of the poem which is the poem” (1982: 196, n.71). A text –be it a book, movie, or other creative work– is not passively accepted by the audience, but the reader/ viewer interprets the meanings of the text based on his individual cultural background and life experiences. With the phrase *Horizon of expectations*, Jauss defines “the criteria readers use to judge literary texts in any given period” (Selden and Widowson 1993: 53). In essence, the meaning of a text is not inherent within itself, but is re-created in the relationship between the text and the reader.

Similarly to Jauss, his colleague Wolfgang Iser (1926-) has also insisted on the role of the individual reader. At the same time, though, in *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (1978) Iser stresses the power of the text to control the way in which the *actual reader* reads it, *concretises* its meaning. A balance is thus established between the text’s potentiality to determine responses and the concretisations of the different actual readers, according to their own *stock of experience*, i.e., their views of the world and, ultimately, reading experience (Selden and Widowson 1993: 55- 57). Opposition, approval, negotiation and (re)adjustment on the part of the actual readers are permanent

mental processes while reading: out of them, the different meanings of the text are conveyed.

This approach to literary works provides a suitable theoretical frame for a case I will now present. One of the central characters in a poem written in a language no longer living (let me not reveal the details at present) was reinterpreted in a very precise way by a certain reader belonging to a different historical and cultural period (the nineteenth century). The new reshaping of the character by the *actual reader* was done according to his existing *stock of experience*. The final outcome of this nineteenth century *concretisation* of the character was the dissolution of his original identity, the adoption of a new one, and his alienation from the poem in which he first appeared. And yet, since there must be a text for every literary character, a *new* poem was recreated for him. Interestingly enough, several twentieth century critics have referred to this *ghostly* text, describing it with adjectives such as *unknown*, *obscure* and *old*.

My initial concern was simply to search for this missing poem. Once I found it, however, I thought it would be equally interesting to show the genesis of this interesting mutation in which the reshaping of a character had led to the reshaping of his poem. Therefore there are two parallel levels of research in this paper. In the first one, I will chase this elusive poem in a network of bibliographic references, tracing the different stages through which it came to be known in a different way; for a while, I will postpone giving any names, so that readers may share my excitement in the discovery. At the second level, I will show how the dialogue established between the strong potentialities of the poem and the *expectations* and literary *experiences* of later generations of readers enabled such a reinterpretation of one of its characters. Reception theory has proved to be a most useful tool when making sense of the whole process. As Iser would claim, the critic's task is not to explain the text as an objective entity but rather the permanent process of adjustment and revision it endures at the hands of readers from all periods.

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1. A missing paper

Dudley Wright's book *Vampires and Vampirism* might well be said to be the first serious attempt in English to compile vampire stories and reports from all over the world,¹ as well as to elucidate how far a certain amount of scientific truth might underlie these accounts. However, according to Montague Summers in his now classic treatise *The Vampire: His Kith and Kin* (1928),² this "little book" was an "insipid olio", inaccurate, full of inconsistencies and repetitions (xi-xii).³ A less negative view was held by Anthony Masters, who quoted Wright's text twice in his influential *The Natural History of the Vampire* (1972: 67, 106-7). It is not my task

here to discuss the academic excellence of *Vampires and Vampirism*. Rather I am concerned with a curious statement made by Wright in his book, one that has passed unnoticed for both Anglosaxonists and vampire hunters: "There is an Anglo-Saxon poem with the title *A Vampyre of the Fens*" (1991: 186). The veracity of this claim is demolished by the fact that students and scholars of Old English literature well know that such a poem does not exist.

Besides, the dearth of vampiric literature in England before William of Malmesbury, William of Newburgh or Walter Map⁴ is widely attested.⁵ Van Helsing, the learned professor in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, reports the presence of vampires almost everywhere, but leaves England out of his picture (excuse his English):

He is known everywhere that men have been. In old Greece, in old Rome; he flourish in Germany all over, in France, in India, even in the Chernesese; and in China, so far from us in all ways, there even he is, and the peoples fear him at this day. He have follow the wake of the berserker Icelander, the devil-begotten Hun, the Slav, the Saxon, the Magyar. (Stoker 1978: 266)

It is significant that the term "vampyre" was not used in English until 1734,⁶ as reported by the *Oxford English Dictionary*.⁷ The evidence that refutes Wright's affirmation is, as we can see, overwhelming, and yet there is some truth in his words.

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Wright was not the only author to make reference to this mysterious poem, not recorded in the Old English corpus. Some other writers have reported with different degrees of certainty the existence of this obscure text. Wright's words might be assumed to be behind the beginning of M. Summers's "The Vampire in England and Ireland, and some Latin lands", the second chapter in his *The Vampire in Europe* (1929):

Although there is some evidence that the Vampire was by no means unknown in England during Anglo-Saxon times, the allusions are accidental and occasional, rather than detailed and direct, that is to say pieces of folk-lore in the remoter countries, half-forgotten oral tradition (now almost entirely dying out). (1929: 78)

I have already shown what a poor concept Summers had of *Vampires and Vampirism*, although in his new book he reports from Wright the case of an Irish "beautiful female vampire" (1929: 117).⁸ Summers complains that no "authority is given for this" (a recurrent fault in Wright's text), but manages to clarify from other sources the origins of this legend. Probably Mr Summers had more difficulties in finding out which Anglo-Saxon poem Wright was talking about and so he preferred to make a vague reference to "some evidence that the Vampire was by no means unknown in England during Anglo-Saxon times" (1929: 78).

Almost seventy years later, some authors (none of them Medievalists) still include references to the mysterious Anglo-Saxon poem. Such is the case of M. Bunson's *The Vampire Encyclopedia*, where we can read: "It has been stated by scholars that the first poem on the undead in the isles was the "Vampyre of the Fens", an Anglo-Saxon work, otherwise unknown" (1993: 85). The poem referred to is said to be *otherwise unknown* and Bunson gives no bibliographical support that might contribute to the elucidation of this matter. Besides, Bunson reports that the "Vampyre of the Fens" was the first poem on the undead ever written in England. A treasure to be discovered or, simply, a mirage?

In 1989 Brian J. Frost published *The Monster with a Thousand Faces: Guises of the Vampire in Myth and Literature*. In the second part of this study he develops a brief introduction of the Vampire Motif into European Literature and he writes:

However, as every survey must have a starting point, I will stick my neck out and opt for an obscure Anglo-Saxon poem called *A Vampyre of the Fens*, written at the beginning of the eleventh century, as the vampire's probable debut in a work of pure imagination. (1989: 36)

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Reviewing the entries in the Non-Fiction bibliographic list (1989: 133),⁹ one may fairly infer that Frost's source on this point was a book by Carol A. Senf with the title of *The Vampire in 19th-Century English Literature*. In this text, after stating that England seems to have remained free from the vampiric superstition, the author makes reference to the twelfth-century narrations by William of Newburgh and William of Malmesbury and adds: "an article in an 1855 issue of *Household Words* refers to a third example, an Anglo-Saxon poem on the Vampyre of the Fens" (1988: 19). Senf's reference differed from the three previous accounts in one important aspect: the poem was *on* the Vampyre of the Fens, rather than bearing such a title. Fortunately enough, this time the author gives the reference of the relevant paper –"Vampyres", *Household Words* 11 (1855)–(1988: 169, n. 19),¹⁰ but she does not mention either its author or the pages. *Household Words* was a magazine founded in 1850 by Charles Dickens, who remained its editor until the last issue (1859). The relevant article was nameless but it has been attributed to Edmund Ollier (1827-1886),¹¹ a well-known English litterateur, who explicitly stated: "There is an old Anglo-Saxon poem on the subject of the Vampyre of the Fens" (1855: 43).¹²

Taking into account the dates of the works mentioned and the information they offer, one may very well trace how Ollier's reference has found its way to our days and also how it has been altered. Ollier (1855) is the source for Wright (1914), who mentions the former's article (not his name) in his bibliography (1991: 220); why he modified Ollier's words –from *on the subject of* to *with the title*, I cannot say. Maybe, there was a third author between these two who altered the information.

Senf (1988) got the reference straight from Ollier's article –she includes it in her bibliography (1988: 203)– not through Wright's, and did not modify it (*on the subject of*). However, although Frost (1989) took it from Senf, oddly enough he writes of *an obscure Anglo-Saxon poem called*. Besides he is the first one to locate the poem in the early eleventh century,¹³ a detail that will soon fit in this maze. The last reference to the mysterious poem to date is in Bunson (1993), who follows Frost, Senf and Wright –as stated in the bibliography (1993: 297, 299, 300), and gives the title of the poem between inverted commas, "*Vampyre of the Fens*".

2. A missing Old English poem

The question now is to identify Edmund Ollier's Anglo-Saxon poem about a vampyre who dwelt in the fens. The answer to the puzzle is in the lines of a well-known passage in Old English literature, preserved in an eleventh century manuscript:

Nē þæt se āglæca yldan þōhte,
 ac hē gefēng hraðe forman sīðe
 slæpendne rinc, slāt unwearnum,
bāt bānlocan, blod ēdrum dranc,
symsædum swealb; sōna hefde
unlyfīgendes eal gefeormod,

fet ond folma. (the italics are mine. *Beowulf*, ll. 739-45)¹⁴

Nor did the creature keep him waiting
 but struck suddenly and started in;
 he grabbed and mauled a man on his bench,
bit into his bone-lappings, bolted down his blood
and gorged on him in lumps, leaving the body
utterly lifeless, eaten up
*hand and foot.*¹⁵ (the italics are mine)

Most readers will share my certainty that the *otherwise unknown* poem is in fact the most famous work in Old English literature, *Beowulf*, the mysterious vampire being no other than Grendel, the marauder of the fens and the moors (ll. 103-4, 162, 710, 1348), described by the anonymous poet with details that might have led some to view him as a proto-vampiric character. His nightly existence (ll. 193, 274-5, 703), his attacks when the sun is gone (ll. 115, 135, 702ff) or the fact that he is finally beheaded are typical features of the undead (ll. 1588-90). But above all, the gruesome description of Honscioh's death just quoted is particularly inviting. Blood-drinking and cannibalism are the two most characteristic features of the folk-

vampire (who has little or nothing to do with the famous Transylvanian count). There is none of the sensuality or the eroticism of the nineteenth/ twentieth-century vampire, but rather the brutality –more bestial than human– of the primitive creature with claws and red eyes who came in the night to drink the blood of his unwilling victims. Strictly speaking, however, Grendel is not a vampire. Though he might be said to feed on human flesh and blood (ll. 123-5, 448-50, 733-4, 739-45), a most abhorrent practise to the audience of the poem,¹⁶ Beowulf's enemy does not fulfil one of the basic characteristics of these preternatural beings: he is not a living-dead. It is not my concern in this paper to analyse Grendel's affinity with a vampiric creature,¹⁷ but to clarify why he was perceived as one, since to describe *Beowulf* as a poem about a vampire who lived in the fens is an inaccurate simplification. Several possibilities could be proposed.

1. Mr. Ollier might have read/heard about *an old Anglo-Saxon poem on the subject of the Vampyre of the Fens* in/from a source which I have not been able to identify. Whether or not Ollier (a poet himself and a man with literary interests) knew *Beowulf* is not relevant.¹⁸ In any case, he would not know that the *old Anglo-Saxon poem* he wrote about in *Household Words* was in fact *Beowulf*. If this was the case, Edmund Ollier could not be blamed for triggering the confusion, but for transmitting it.

2. Just five years older than Mr. Ollier, Henry Morley (1822-1894) was the university-educated man on the staff of *Household Words* from 1851 to its cessation in 1859. He also held several academic appointments in London, being Lecturer in English Language and Literature in King's College (1857-65), as well as Professor of English Language and Literature in University College (1865-89). His relevance in the present issue is due to the fact that he contributed to nineteenth-century *Beowulfiana* (in Shippey and Haarder, 1998: 340-41, 448-49), publishing his earliest work on the Anglo-Saxon poem ("A Primitive Old Epic") only three years after Ollier's article and precisely in *Household Words*.¹⁹ It is fanciful, but pleasing, to conjecture that Morley told Ollier about an old Anglo-Saxon poem in which a monster from the fens drank the blood of his victims. It cannot be argued that Morley did not mention the name of the poem; by 1833 J.M. Kemble had already published his translation of *The Anglo-Saxon Poems of Beowulf, The traveller's Song and the Battle of Finnes-burh*. For some reason, however, Ollier did not consider it relevant to mention the title, even when he knew he was writing about *Beowulf*.

3. A third possibility would be that Ollier himself had read *Beowulf* and thought that the best way to describe it was the way he did. I do not know how skilled Mr. Ollier was with Old English, but if he was, he might have read *Beowulf* (or Grendel's episode) in any of the several editions of the poem that were available by 1855.²⁰ If, however, Old English was not his speciality –a possibility I tend to favour, he might have approached the poem in a translation.²¹ A partial reading of

Beowulf (particularly its first part), either in Old English or in a modernised version, might well have left Ollier with the impression that Grendel was indeed a vampire who inhabited the marshes and the fens.

4. I am most inclined to think that Ollier read, not *Beowulf*, but about *Beowulf*, in a secondary source, something that might also explain his reductive description of its plot and, perhaps, why he did not care to identify it as *Beowulf*. Two nineteenth-century works are particularly relevant for my present concern. In his "Editor's Preface" to Thomas Warton's *The History of English Poetry...A New Edition*,²² Richard Price discusses the Classical concept of the *Lamia*, a myth that is closely connected with that of the vampire.²³ In a footnote, he makes the following reference to *Beowulf*:

The earliest memorial of them [i.e. male lamias] in European fiction is preserved to us in the Anglo-Saxon poem of Beowulf. In this curious repository of genuine Northern tradition, by far the most interesting portion of the poem is devoted to an account of the hero's combats with a male and female spirit, whose nightly ravages in the hall of Hrothgar are marked by all atrocities of the Grecian fable. (in Shippey and Haarder 1998: 174)²⁴

The second excerpt that I am putting forward for consideration is by Isaac Disraeli, father of the English Prime Minister, who devoted a section of his *Amenities of Literature, consisting of Sketches and Characters of English Literature* (London, 1841) to "The Exploits of Beowulf". When he comes to explain the hero's purpose in travelling to the Island of Zealand, he describes Beowulf's foe (without ever giving his name) in the following manner:

A mysterious being—one of the accursed progeny of Cain— *a foul and solitary creature of the morass and the marsh*. In the dead of the night this enemy of man, envious of glory and abhorrent of pleasure, glided into the great hall of state and revelry, *raging athirst for the blood of the brave* there reposing in slumber. [...] *This life-devourer, who comes veiled in a mist from the marshes*, may be some mythic being. (the italics are mine; in Shippey and Haarder 1998: 239)

The second, third and fourth possibilities that I have suggested imply a high degree of reshaping both of text and character, of adjustment to his own expectations, on the part of Ollier, the *actual reader*. Either of the last two quotations (the second one in particular),²⁵ an isolated reading of Grendel's episode or even a casual conversation, might well have suggested a concretisation of Beowulf's semi-human enemy as a vampire. The icon was so powerful that it became the central focus of interest of the whole poem. This has an obvious consequence: *Beowulf* vanishes, it becomes Stanley Fish's "disappearing text" (J. Olivares 2001b: 52); when it comes back to life, it is "an old Anglo-Saxon poem on the subject of the Vampyre

of the Fens” (Ollier 1855: 43). Such a double mutation (of character and poem), as odd as it might seem, was not odd at all. As Iser would argue, it was the result of the negotiation between the rich potentiality of the text and the reader’s stock of (reading) experience. This negotiation was particularly easy, especially if we take into account the literary tastes in the milieu I am dealing with. I will try to further illustrate this balance in the last section of this paper.

3. The monster and the readers

During the nineteenth-century, English literature showed a particular interest in vampires. The blood-sucker became not only the most familiar character of popular culture, but also an icon in the writings of “serious” artists and philosophers (Charlotte and Emily Brontë, George Eliot, Dickens or even Marx and Engels). The Romantic mind felt this strange attraction for the vampire as the great transgressor, “a proof of the increased relish among us [the English] for the modern German school of literature”, as reported by a late eighteenth-century English reviewer in *The Monthly Review*, July 1796 (Senf 1988: 12).

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This interest had already become manifest in the English literary scenario at the beginning of the nineteenth-century. As early as 1800, “Wake Not the Dead”, a vampire story by the German Johan Ludwig Tieck, was published in England.²⁶ It was followed by Robert Southey’s “Thalaba the Destroyer” (1801). Soon after, in 1810, *The Travels of the Three English Gentlemen* appeared in the *Harleian Miscellany*, as well as John Stagg’s “The Vampyre”. By this time the blood-sucker had gradually made its place in English literature. Lord Byron wrote “The Giaour” in 1813 and three years later he was working on a vampire tale which he would never finish. It was his sometime friend Dr. John Polidori who completed “The Vampyre: A Tale” (1819). Shortly after, Keats wrote “Lamia”, a poem in which this ancient female demon was endowed with a clearly allegorical dimension. In 1845 James Malcolm Rhymer started publishing his weekly novel, *Varney the Vampyre, or, The Feast of Blood*. The tale was so popular that it was reprinted in 1853. One last vampiric story appeared before the publication of Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897), Sheridan Le Fanu’s “Carmilla” (1872).²⁷ Like all monsters, the vampire was not only a horrifying creature, but a metaphor of everything that was feared, repressed or desired. For Victorians the interest in the vampire was never openly confessed.

My view is that Edmund Ollier (or his unknown informant), sharing the taste of his age for vampiric literature, viewed Grendel according to his own *horizon of expectations* and *experience*, in other words, necessarily as a remote predecessor of the undead blood-sucker. There was a will to find traces of this myth in medieval literature. In the same *Household Words* article on vampires, Ollier refers to other

early manifestations of this superstition in Western Europe. After providing a detailed account of Thorolf Baegifot, Thorgunna, Thorer and Thorulf, three *draugar* (Norse walking-dead) in the *Eyrbyggja-Saga*, he concludes: "[in these cases] we miss the blood-sucking propensities of the genuine Vampyre; but in all other respects the resemblance is complete" (1855: 41).²⁸ In the case of Beowulf's foe, the propensities are made explicit (Grendel drinks human blood), though it is the preternatural existence that seems to be missing. The monster's drinking and eating habits, as well as his nightly exploits were "familiar territory" (Iser 1978: 87) for the reader. Beyond that however, the land is unknown: Grendel is not a revenant, an un-dead. It is time for negotiation, since the text presents a *gap* or *blank* (Iser's key terms) that must be filled, written on, if a meaning (one of the many) is to be conveyed. The reader offers his familiarity with what the text has already shown (*Grendel looks like a vampire to me*), and also his expectations (*He might very well be a vampire*). The poem offers its potentiality and calls for such concretisation. Grendel's condition is by no means clear, his titles providing a plurality of (at times contradictory) aspects. Although, generally speaking, the monster is perceived as "a fleshly denizen of this world" (Tolkien 1983: 35), there are phrases that might suggest his otherworldly existence: "fēond on helle" ("fiend in hell", l. 101), "gæst" ("ghost", l. 102), "dēapscua" ("death-shadow", l. 160) or "scynscaða" ("spectral foe", l. 707). This unfinished or ambiguous nature of the monster impelled the reader to make certain internal adjustments in order to process the antique alien being according to his own pre-existing mental patterns and complete the picture: *Grendel is a vampire*. Walter Scott, himself seduced by the morbid charm of this character, seemed to go as far as he could in the clarification of Grendel's dubious status, when he wrote about "an evil being called Grendel, who, except in his being subject to death, seems a creature of a supernatural description" (in Shippey and Haarder 1998: 177).²⁹

4. Conclusion

Interestingly enough, it is in Germany (the country where the fashion of the vampire as a literary character started), that I have found an explicit description of Grendel as a vampire. Jacob Grimm said little about *Beowulf* in the first edition of his influential *Deutsche Mythologie* (Göttingen 1835), but still he referred to the dweller of the fens in a very precise way. A philologist, so deeply versed in mythology and folk-lore, Grimm was also filling the gaps:

Grendels teuflische art gemahnt und blutdürstige wasergeister (s. 280.) auch wohnt er in *moor* und *sumpf* und sucht bei nächtlicher weile die schlafenden menschen heim: com of môre gongan. Beov. 1413, flieht 'under fenhleodhu' (1632.) er *trinkt* das

blut aus den adern (das. 1478) und gleicht vampyren, deren lippen von frischen blut benetzt sind. In einer altn. Saga findet sich ein ähnlicher dämon, *Grímr oegir* genannt, weil er im wasser wie auf dem lande gehen kann, er speit gift und feuer, *trinkt* das *blut* aus menschen und thieren. (fornald. Sög. 3, 241. 242) (570)³⁰

It is a remote possibility that this work was Ollier's source. I cannot conclude that he knew German, and James Stallybrass' translation of *Deutsche Mythologie* (the first in English) was not completed until 1888. At this point, I would like to call the attention of the reader to an interesting coincidence. John M. Kemble, the author of the first English complete edition of *Beowulf* (1833), as well as of its first rendering into English (1837), was working at Göttingen (1831) under Jacob Grimm, to whom he dedicated both works. Kemble ranked Jacob, as well as his brother, among his friends, keeping confidential correspondence with the first (Kemble 1837: liii-liv) from 1832 to 1852 (Wiley 1971). We also know that Grimm's references to *Beowulf* were taken from Kemble's edition (in Shippey and Haarder 1998: 200). The possibility that Kemble was Ollier's unknown informant is indeed attractive, especially taking into account that in the "copious glossary" that he included after his translation of *Beowulf*, Kemble gave in the entry for Grendel "spiritus quivis infernalis". Is there a better definition of a vampire than a hellish spirit who drinks blood?

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After 200 years now of *Beowulfiana*, readers and literary critics have constantly recreated Grendel, adding new aspects to him, depending on the different cultural contexts. And so Grendel is no longer only loaded with God's anger (l. 711) but with multiple connotations that range from his supposed affinities with the Norse deity Loki (Shippey and Haarder 1998: 15-16) to his nihilism in John Gardner's ecologist *Grendel* (1971). To this we might add more recent concretisations of the character as the embodiment of the "Anglo-Saxon fascination with *extimité*" (Cohen 1999: 25), or his aggressive brutality in the comic character created by Matt Wagner in the early eighties.

In an ambiance where the vampire was a fashionable being, Grendel was inevitably perceived in this new light. As Marijane Osborn concludes in her introduction to her "Annotated List of *Beowulf* Translations", it "is fascinating to see how certain misunderstandings of those nineteenth-century scholars, corrected long ago, are perpetuated in popular accounts of *Beowulf* a century or more later". The misunderstanding I have shown here had not been corrected before. It has been (still is) perpetuated, not only in popular accounts,³¹ but also in more serious and academic works such as the ones referred to at the beginning of this paper.

Reader-oriented approaches to literature have proved to be especially suitable when trying to understand why *Beowulf*'s foe was assimilated to a blood-sucker. In Ollier's account, Grendel lost his name and mutated into a vampire. A new identity was

given to him by his new reader, who (as Dr Frankenstein) assembled his body with pieces from the old text and other texts he had in mind. *Beowulf* vanished, for the blood-thirsty monster needed a poem of which he would be the only master, a poem about a vampire; Ollier gave it to him. For over fifty years, the creature remained undisturbed, probably unknown, but Dudley Wright brought him back to life. By then, the canonical status achieved by *Beowulf* would not allow a vampire to challenge the supremacy of its epic hero. And so, unknowingly, Dudley Wright killed *Beowulf* and conjured up the ghostly poem, *A Vampyre of the Fens*. This poem and its creature have been around for a while, spreading the disease of confusion, inflicting a familiar pain on those who do literary research: the pain of not locating a source! From now onwards the Vampyre of the fens lies at rest in his grave. He is Grendel once more, haunting the marshes ... but not literary critics.

Notes

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¹. The book was originally published in 1914, a second edition (with an extra chapter) being published ten years later. I have used a more recent reprint (1991).

². I have used a new edition of this work with the title *The Vampire* (1995).

³. This author, who converted to Catholicism and claimed to have been ordained a priest, was so hard on *Vampires and Vampirism* not only for the alleged deficiencies of the work, but because he was prejudiced against Mr. Wright for other works he had written: "one must not look for accuracy and research from the author of *Roman Catholicism and Freemasonry*" (Summers 1995: xi).

⁴. Strictly speaking, only William of Newburg reports cases of vampirism: the revenant from Melrose Abbey and the

revenant from Alnwick Castle (Book V, chapter xxiv). The author himself refers to both as *sanguisuga*, "blood-sucker", from Latin *sanguis*, *-inis* ("blood") and *sugo*, *suxi*, *suctum* ("to suck"). For an edition of this text, see William of Newburgh (1884-9).

⁵. According to the German scholar Ernst Havekost, "Die vampirsage ist also trotz der mancherlei Einflüsse, die sie ausgeübt hat, in der Geschichte der englischen Kultur als ein fremdes Element anzusehen" (1914: 91). Translation: "Therefore, we can consider that the vampiric legend in English culture, despite some influences, is a strange element". See also Masters (1972: 127-28).

⁶. The origins of this word are obscure and elusive. According to Katharina M. Wilson, there "are four clearly discernible schools of thought on the etymology of vampire, advocating Turkish, Greek, Slavic, and Hungarian roots for the term" (1998: 3).

⁷. The text that illustrates the use is from *The Travels of Three English Gentlemen from Venice to Hamburg, Being the Grand Tour of Germany in the Year 1734* (preserved in the *Harleian Miscellany*, 1810, vol. IV, 358): "These Vampyres are supposed to be the Bodies of deceased Persons, animated by evil Spirits,

which come out of the Graves, in the Night-time, suck the Blood of many of the Living, and thereby destroy them". Nevertheless, the *O.E.D.* mistakenly assumes this is the first use of the word. According to Carol A. Senf there is, however, at least one earlier use of the word: "This account, of Vampyres, you'll observe, comes from the Eastern Part of the World, always remarkable for its Allegorical Style" (May 1732, *London Gentleman's Magazine*, quoted in Senf 1988: 22). Katharina M. Wilson has recently shown two more examples: Ricaut's *State of the Greek and Armenian Churches* (1679), where the term is however not actually used, and Forman's *Observations on the Revolution in 1688* (1688). Besides, as she points out, *The Travels of Three English Gentlemen* was not published until 1810 (1988: 6).

⁸. In note 30, he makes reference to Wright's book, 2nd edition, p. 50. (1929: 130).

⁹. Together with Carol A. Senf (1988), he includes Margaret L. Carter (1988) and Vincent Hillyer (1988). Neither Carter nor Hillyer deal with the present issue.

¹⁰. In his final bibliography (1991: 220), Dudley Wright had also included the relevant reference (*Household Words*, vol. xi), but his words about the "Anglo-Saxon poem with the title *A Vampyre of the Fens*" were not linked to it.

¹¹. The article is unsigned and the attribution has been made by A. Lohrli (1973: 389-91). Mr. Ollier contributed to several periodicals, writing many articles for *Household Words* from 1853 to 1858. He was also a poet, highly considered by Leigh Hunt, who praised Ollier's verse contributions to *Household Words*. It is interesting to point out that two of the latter's poems bore familiar titles: "The Lady of the Fen" and "The Goblins of the Marsh. A Masque". He also compiled various works, such as *The Doré Gallery* (1870), *Cassell's Illustrated History of the United States* (1874-1877) and *Cassell's Illustrated History of the Russo-Turkish War* (1877-1879) (Lohrli 1973: 389-919; and Sidney 1895: 157-89).

¹². This unsigned article (as well as some other interesting early texts on vampirism) can be found at <www.users.net1plus.com/vyrdolak/household.htm>

¹³. I do not know where Frost got this reference to the eleventh century. He may have used another source that he does not include in his bibliography.

¹⁴. I have used Mitchell and Robinson's edition of *Beowulf* (1998).

¹⁵. The translation is by Seamus Heaney (1999: 24-25).

¹⁶. The Christian Anglo-Saxons were quite aware both of the prohibitions against blood drinking and of the connection between human blood and the soul in Biblical writings. An excellent account of this is given by Fred C. Robinson (1993: 143-46).

¹⁷. This possibility is analysed in by E. Olivares Merino (1999: 123-36). The issue was partially anticipated by Nicholas K. Kiessling (1968: 191-201).

¹⁸. *Beowulf* was a well known subject of literary scholarship already by the middle of the nineteenth-century. Sharon Turner had first referred to this poem with the name of its hero in 1807. In the index to the second edition of his *The History of the Anglo-Saxons* (London), Turner included "*Beowulf*, a narrative poem" (in Stanley 1994: 27, n. 55).

¹⁹. The piece is unsigned but A. Lohrli attributes it to Morley. Traditionally, this paper has been said to be by John Earle: see, for example, Shippey and Haarder (1998: 56). Marijane Osborn in her "Annotated List of *Beowulf* Translations" mentions both authors but is not conclusive.

²⁰. Grim. Johnson Thorkelin's *De Danorum rebus gestis secul. III & IV. Poëma danicum dialecto anglosaxonica* (Havniae, 1815); J.M. Kemble's *The Anglo-Saxon Poems of Beowulf, The traveller's Song and the Battle of Finnes-burh* (London, 1833), of which only 100 copies were printed; and Benjamin Thorpe's *The Anglo-Saxon Poems of Beowulf*,

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The Scop or Gleeman's Tale and the Fight at Finnesburg (London, 1855), which also included a translation.

²¹. In his third edition of *The History of the Anglo-Saxons* (London, 1820), Sharon Turner paid some attention to *Beowulf*, translating or paraphrasing its earlier part, where the fight with Grendel is described. Three years later, Turner published *The History of the Manners, Landed Property, Government, Laws, Poetry Literature, Religion, and Language of the Anglo-Saxons*. Vol. IV (London), the first considerable though still partial English prose translation of the poem. J.J. Connybare published in 1826 his *Illustrations of Anglo-Saxon Poetry* (London), containing a summary of the poem as well as a blank verse translation. Nine years later, Thomas Wright wrote "On Anglo-Saxon Poetry" (*Fraser's Magazine* 12: 76-92), translated several passages (up to l. 569 and ll. 499-606), providing a summary of the rest. In 1837, Kemble published the first complete translation of *Beowulf* into English, *A Translation of the Anglo-Saxon Poem of Beowulf...*(London). A.D. Wackerbarth's *Beowulf: An Epic Poem. Translated from the Anglo-Saxon into English Verse* was published in 1849 (London). Finally, Thorpe's 1855 edition should also be taken into account (see note 21).

²². 4 vols. London, 1824.

²³. As recorded in the *O.E.D.*, the Latin term *lamia* designated "a witch who was supposed to suck children's blood".

²⁴. For an analysis of Grendel's dam as a lamia, see Kiessling (1974: 30-31).

²⁵. I would also like to quote another passage from the above-mentioned *The Travels of the Three English Gentlemen*, one that describes the vampire's nightly ravages and very well fits Grendel's onslaught on Hondscioh: "The Vampyres, which come out of the graves in the night-time, rush upon people sleeping in their beds, suck out all their blood, and destroy them" (Wilson 1998: 7).

²⁶. Coleridge, possibly under the influence of Burger's vampire-fantasy *Lenore*

(1773), had written "Christabel" in two parts (1797 and 1800).

²⁷. For a detailed study of these and other nineteenth-century English vampiric texts, see Julio A. Olivares Merino (2001a: 192-229, 246-346); Senf (1988) and Twitchell (1981).

²⁸. It seems to me that this author had a taste for horror topics. He also published in *Household Words* an article titled "Wehrwolves" (1857: 405-08).

²⁹. Article on "Romance" in *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1824 edition), vol 6. Walter Scott himself made a passing reference to a female vampire in *Rockeby* (1813): "For like the bat of Indian brakes,/ Her pinions fan the womb she makes,/ And soothing thus the dreamer's pains,/ She drinks the life-blood from his veins" (in Masters 1972: 197).

³⁰. The following translation is included in Shippey and Haarder (1998: 201): "*Grendel's* devilish nature reminds one of the bloodthirsty water-spirits (p. 463) [sic]. He too lives in *moor* and *swamp* and seeks out sleeping humans by night: com of more gongan, Beo. 1413, flies under fenhleoðu (1632), he *drinks* the *blood* from veins (1478), and is like vampires, whose lips are moistened with fresh blood" (the italics are Grimm's, the underlining is mine). Grimm seems to have been highly impressed by Grendel's drinking habits. In the second edition of *Deutsche Mythologie* (1844) he added an extra paragraph on p. 464, where he once more emphasizes that "Grendel ist grausam und blutdürstig: wenn er nachts aus seinen moor steigt und in die halle der schlafenden helden gelangt, ergreift er einen und trinkt das blut aus den adern (1478)". Translation: "Grendel is cruel and bloodthirsty: when he rises by night out of his moor and gets into the hall of the sleeping heroes, he seizes one and drinks the blood from his veins (1478)" (in Shippey and Haarder 1998: 252).

³¹. It is interesting to trace the echo of these statements in the Internet. Eleven web sites make reference to the "Vampyre of the

Fens". Four of them provide the same text: "Although the first English language reference to vampires occurred in the 1734 poem, The Vampyre of the Fens..."(<www.conservation.mongabay.com/files/Fens.htm>;<www.daytondailynews.com/life/content/life/daily/1031vampire.html>;<www.literature.surfswax.com/files/Bram_Stoker_Book>;<www.news.shopeasier.com/files/shopeasier_Bram_Stoker>). A fifth one (<www.fortunecity.com/rosewell/wells/954/vamp-triv.html>) presents a slightly modified text: "The word 'vampire' did not appear in English until 1734, when it was used

in an Anglo-Saxon poem titled 'The Vampyre of the Fens'..." The same could be said about <www.geocities.com/Area51/Zone/7981/two.html>: "The first published-vampire story is from 1734 and is an Anglo-Saxon poem called The Vampyre of the Fens". Two Portuguese translations of this quotation can be found at <www.organon.hpg.ig.com.br/vampcren.htm> and <www.geocities.yahoo.com.br/typeo_br/vampiros.htm>. Finally, Senf's quotation is included at <www.uoregon.edu/nateich/Vampire_Backgrounds.html>.

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