
Jennifer Westwood and Jacqueline Simpson, *The Penguin Book of Ghosts: The spectres, apparitions and phantoms that haunt 'The Lore of the Land'*, ed. by Sophia Kingshill (London: Allen Lane, an imprint of Penguin Books, Hardbound, 2008), xx, 456 pp.

Reviewed by **Ephraim Nissan**

The Penguin Book of Ghosts is a much abbreviated version of Westwood and Simpson's previous, 918 page anthology, *The Lore of the Land: A Guide to England's Legends, from Spring-Heeled Jack to the Witches of Warboys*, which first appeared in 2005 and was reissued in paperback a year later. Rather than limiting my review to the more recent publication, I have preferred to take the opportunity to reconsider its predecessor, relocating it in the wider context of other 'guides' to English folklore.

The Lore of the Land is among the finest books of its kind to have appeared during the last two decades. Among these, I would include *A Dictionary of English Folklore*, by Jacqueline Simpson and Steve Reid (Oxford University Press, 2000) which, as its name suggests, is a lexicon. But although there are other English folklore books in this category, none are as rigorous, precise, and, for the scholar, satisfactory. In these respects, the same can be said of Iona Opie and Moira Tatem's admirable *A Dictionary of Superstitions* (Oxford University Press, 1989), which lists individual superstitions alphabetically, and within each entry, through a selection of quotations sorted chronologically (as in historical dictionaries) and extending up to the 1980s. Finally, *Lore*, which I would expect to stand out as a classic reference book at least for the next fifty years.

The hardbound edition of *Lore* only differs from the paperback because the page and type are slightly larger, yet otherwise identical, and because whereas the dust cover of the hardbound edition is based on a tapestry map of England (Sheldon Workshop, c. 1588), a knight is shown in the painting on the cover of the paperback. *Ghosts* is in a smaller format, and is a selection of ghost stories from *Lore*. Westwood and Simpson have added an introduction (replacing the one from *Lore*), followed by greyscale maps (whereas in *Lore* colour maps of each county label places by kind of tale). As in *Lore*, chapters in *Ghosts* are also divided by county, and in each county, entries for given places are listed alphabetically. Again as in *Lore*, there is a bibliography sorted by county, and a detailed subject index. The dust cover (also the price: £14.99, rather than £15) suggests that *Ghosts* is a selection catering to a lowbrow public not buying *Lore*, enticed by the blurb on the back cover inviting readers to: "Shiver at the story of the apparition of 50 Berkeley Square that no one has survived

seeing” and to “Listen for the tapping cane, when Jeremy Bentham’s mummified body walks through the corridors of University College London”. The appeal of *Lore*, on the other hand, probably includes both highbrow and average readers. *Ghosts* has no illustrations; many grace *Lore*, often in colour. Moreover, interleaved inside *Lore* there are many green facing pages, two of which host a thematic article, (“Sunken Churches”, for example). *Lore* also has an “Index of Legend and Tale Types”.

Comparatists will treasure *Lore*. Rabelais’ giant Gargantua parallels Gurgunt, the legendary founder of Norwich Castle (683, 509-510). The mountainous east of Latium has Leonessa, but the fabled Lyonesse (submerged off Cornwall) flares the imagination (114-115). The medieval legend about “a chamber lit by a carbuncle” (286) has a parallel in the Jewish tale about Noah’s Ark being lit inside by a pearl. Recalling the biblical bed of Og is the extravagantly large size of the haunted Great Bed of Ware (351-352): an author “in 1736 spoke of the twenty-six butchers and their wives who had slept in it on the night that King William III was crowned” (352). To a Milanese aware of the architect of the Galleria Vittorio Emanuele falling to his death at its very centre, it is instructive to read about the extent to which myth altered fact, concerning the fate of the architect of the Norfolk Pillar surmounted by a statue of Britannia in Great Yarmouth (503). The Saxons led by “an ‘African’ named Gormund” in Cirencester (Gloucestershire), aka *Urbs Passerum* (284), are geographically as delightfully off course as the peculiar incident of the “Indians” found on the coast of Gaul in the 60s BC who had gone rather far off course while on a trading voyage (Pomponius Mela 2.45; Pliny, *Natural History* 2.170). There are obvious difficulties with this tale, and the “Indians” may have been natives of a remote part of Scandinavia, but at least it shows a sense of the Ocean as connecting the extremities of the earth.

Apparitions of demonic dogs feature fairly prominently throughout *Lore*, which reminded this reviewer of how according to Taku who was based in Germany, the acclaimed Hebrew poet, exegete, philosopher, and wanderer Abraham Ibn Ezra (1089-1164) died in England, having fallen ill after a short fall he had when, riding, he escaped a pack of black dogs while en route northwards from London (to Taku, this was retribution for Ibn Ezra’s disbelief in demons, and those dogs must have been of similar ilk). But the broader theme is bogey beasts known as “Shuck” and the like, that get a thematic article (500-501; cf. 497, 687). Only to some “to meet Shuck means death within the year” (501). A 1988 report ascribed a lucky escape to a Shuck-like “huge hound with eyes ‘like coals of fire’; by standing in the way at night, the beast was responsible for the man’s not “being run down by a car with no lights”, “so Shuck may act as a guardian” (501).

Local papers in South East London sometimes report sightings of big cats, possibly panthers, released in the wild. Whereas this may be more or less cogent, it is sobering to refer to the cases presented by Veronique Campion-Vincent, *Des fauves dans nos campagnes: légendes, rumeurs et apparitions* (Paris: Imago, 1992) and especially to her opening essay “Apparitions de fauves et de félins-mystères en France”, followed by “Observations de félins d’ailleurs en Grande-Bretagne” by Michael Goss, and by “Apparitions de félins dans l’Occident médiéval: essais de typologie” by Michel Pastoureau. Sightings of big cats also occur in *Lore* (717-718): one wonders if a case from c. 1770 was “a genuine British wildcat”, “or a particularly large feral cat” (717).

Remembrance Day is marked in Britain by people wearing the Flanders poppy, and at present they are advertised by a charity through a Poppyman made of red flowers – which recalls the figure of Jack in the Green, but with no man inside. *Lore* reports about flowers born from blood, and called “Daneweed” or “Daneblood” (451, 530-531), a name I suggest could be compared to the Modern Hebrew plant name ‘blood of the Maccabees’ (*dam ha-Makkabím*) for *Helichrysum*.

Lore includes an account of the rape and murder of Edward II (278), reminding the reviewer of Jewish myths about defeated or incapacitated biblical kings who were raped. The *caudatus Anglicus* is another figure mentioned in *Lore* (387), with relevant bibliography (870). Although the figure originates in medieval slander that started as a consequence of war against France, the English were not alone. The Christian myth about Jews having a tail even found its way into Iraqi lore from 1948, about a child asking his father to bring him “a little Zionist with a tail” once he defeats the Jews in Palestine. And (in retribution for incest) a tailed baby is born just before a storm destroys Macondo, in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by García Márquez. (But then think of inferiorising myths about Africans, as discussed in Jean-Dominique Pénel’s *Homo Caudatus: Les hommes à queue d’Afrique Centrale: un avatar de l’imaginaire occidental* (Leuven: Peeters, 1982).

Racist hate material is mostly avoided by Westwood and Simpson. *Lore* about Jews is exemplified, but the book does not include the most heinous lore that historically saw the light in England. We do find a hostile tale on an evil Jew who prays at Worcester Cathedral somewhat contradictorily (817), and tales about the Wandering Jew (81, 435, 672-673), but little else. In my opinion, *Lore* is right to avoid hate material in this general work, lest it nourish prejudice, something unlikely to occur from other tales on ‘ethnic’ identity expressing beliefs such as that according to which Fins are magicians and endanger a ship (367). Scholarship usually has the medieval blood libel originate in England (but Robert Chazan claimed a precedent in Germany); however, in *Lore* there is an amused contemporary

quotation on Napoleon supposedly eating babies at breakfast (213).

Similarly libellous tales emerged against other ethnicities. The entry for Tilehurst, Berkshire (24-25) displays a photograph of a monument in black alabaster, presenting a golden crown (standing for the aristocratic status of a family) encircling a black naked torso (black, because it is made of alabaster), whose face is surmounted by curly hair, with a greenish object (a large leaf?) held in the man's right hand, behind his head and projecting beyond it to the other side. The caption states: "According to a local tradition, this figure of Sir Peter Vanlore's monument in Tilehurst church represents a Native American servant who poisoned Sir Peter's children". The entry relates:

The parish church here contains an elaborate alabaster monument to Sir Peter Vanlore (d. 1627), together with his family, including representations of a dead infant and eight other children holding skulls – a convention indicating that they had died before the monument to their father was erected. Above the cornice of the monument are three heraldic shields, the middle one described in the *Victoria County History* as 'argent, a chevron between horseshoes sable, surmounted by a crest of a Negro head'.

It would be too much to expect *Lore's* coverage to be exhaustive. A 'real-life' ghost story that could perhaps have been included is reported in the 1994 Jewish New Year's Eve edition of London's *Jewish Chronicle*, reporting the appearance of the ghost of an early modern Jew standing in prayer on that date of the calendar at a private home, on the site of a synagogue that is no more (according to a non-Jewish woman living there).

Lore is remarkably free of typos. We find "Cosenza in Sicily" (645), instead of in Calabria, but this is an error made by Herbert of Bosham, not Westwood and Simpson who are to be congratulated for their masterpiece and for its more light-weight but less fascinating sequel.