Tuberculosis was a widespread and deadly disease which devastated the British population in the nineteenth century: consequently it also had a huge impact upon public consciousness. This text explores the representations of tuberculosis in nineteenth-century literature and culture. Fears about gender roles, degeneration, national efficiency and sexual transgression all play their part in the portrayal of ‘consumption’, a disease which encompassed a variety of cultural associations. Through an examination of a range of Victorian texts, from well-known and popular novels by Charles Dickens and Elizabeth Gaskell to critically neglected works by Mrs Humphry Ward and Charles Reade, this work reveals the metaphors of illness which surrounded tuberculosis and the ways those metaphors were used in the fiction of the day. The book also contains detailed analysis of the substantial body of writing by nineteenth-century physicians which exists about this disease, and examines the complex relationship between medical ‘fact’ and literary fiction.

Katherine Byrne is Lecturer in English at the University of Ulster, Coleraine.
Nineteenth-century British literature and culture have been rich fields for interdisciplinary studies. Since the turn of the twentieth century, scholars and critics have tracked the intersections and tensions between Victorian literature and the visual arts, politics, social organization, economic life, technical innovations, scientific thought – in short, culture in its broadest sense. In recent years, theoretical challenges and historiographical shifts have unsettled the assumptions of previous scholarly synthesis and called into question the terms of older debates. Whereas the tendency in much past literary critical interpretation was to use the metaphor of culture as ‘background’, feminist, Foucauldian, and other analyses have employed more dynamic models that raise questions of power and of circulation. Such developments have reanimated the field. This series aims to accommodate and promote the most interesting work being undertaken on the frontiers of the field of nineteenth-century literary studies: work which intersects fruitfully with other fields of study such as history, or literary theory, or the history of science. Comparative as well as interdisciplinary approaches are welcomed.

A complete list of titles published will be found at the end of the book.
TUBERCULOSIS AND THE
VICTORIAN LITERARY IMAGINATION

KATHERINE BYRNE
For my parents, with love and thanks
Contents

List of illustrations  ix
Acknowledgements x

Introduction  1
1 Nineteenth-century medical discourse on tuberculosis  12
2 Consuming the family economy: disease and capitalism in
Charles Dickens’s Dombey and Son and Elizabeth Gaskell’s
North and South  45
3 The consumptive diathesis and the Victorian
invalid in Mrs Humphry Ward’s Eleanor  69
4 ‘There is beauty in woman’s decay’: the rise of the tubercular
aesthetic  92
5 Consumption and the Count: the pathological origins of
vampirism and Bram Stoker’s Dracula  124
6 ‘A kind of intellectual advantage’: consumption and masculine
identity in Henry James’s The Portrait of a Lady  150

Conclusion  171
Epilogue ‘A truly modern illness’: into the twentieth century
and beyond  176
Contents

Appendix A: Phthisis mortality 189
Appendix B: Medical publications on consumption 190
Appendix C: Gender distribution of phthisis 191

Notes 192
Bibliography 212
Index 222
Illustrations

Beata Beatrix (oil on canvas) by Dante Charles Gabriel Rossetti (1828–82) © Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery / The Bridgeman Art Library page 102
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