

Chapter

1

Body and Mind

It is this very obliquity of thought and memory which makes mental disease such a fascinating study.

(D, p. 237)

In the novel *Dracula* by Bram Stoker, published in 1897, two of the main characters are medical practitioners specialising in the mind: Dr John Seward and Professor Abraham Van Helsing. As often in fiction this allows two doctors to disagree with each other, but less usually, both here collaborate on the side of ‘good’, determined to exterminate the vampire Count Dracula, and by physical methods.

By the 1890s such doctors of the mind were no longer called ‘mad doctors’ nor yet frequently ‘psychiatrists’, although the term ‘psychiatry’ was used. They were often referred to as ‘alienists’, but also sometimes as ‘medico-psychologists’. No doubt Dr Seward would have been a member of the Medico-Psychological Association, which had been founded in 1841 as ‘The Association of Medical Officers of Hospitals for the Insane’, whose qualification for membership is evident in the title. This body has now developed further into the Royal College of Psychiatrists, for whom the old-fashioned asylum has largely receded into history, and possibly been converted into luxury flats. And probably, like several real-life eminent continental doctors, Professor Van Helsing would have been an honorary member of the Association.

There is a multiplicity of writings on the subject of *Dracula* and its social and literary context, but I have chosen to concentrate on medical sources and medicine in fiction, especially if written by doctors. One major source is the *Journal of Mental Science (JMS)*, produced monthly for its members by the Medico-Psychological Association, which provides contemporaneous evidence of professional views. It aimed to cover the proceedings of the society, original scientific papers, reports from asylums, reports of the Commission of Lunacy, relevant parliamentary proceedings, and reviews of other meetings and publications relevant to psychiatry both in the UK, North America and Europe. Views were trenchantly expressed and well-minuted, so that personalities clearly emerge.

One of the editors of the *JMS* (and later President of the Association) was Daniel Hack Tuke (1817–1895), who was also responsible for compiling and editing the extensive *Dictionary of Psychological Medicine*, completed in 1892 and contributed to by an international group of 128 authors. Hack Tuke, as he was usually known, was a Quaker and the great-grandson of the founder of the York Retreat, the reformer and philanthropist William Tuke. Other Presidents of the Association also feature several times in this account, especially Henry Maudsley (1871), Sir James Crichton-Browne (1878), Sir George Savage (1886), and Conolly Norman (1894). This last was a Dublin doctor and a close friend of Bram Stoker’s brother Thornley – a reminder that some of Bram’s medical ideas may have emanated as much from Ireland as London.

Lunacy was a popular theme in nineteenth-century British fiction and in addition to *Dracula*, asylums featured in the plots of Edgar Allan Poe’s *The System of Doctor Tarr and Professor Fether*; Charles Maturin’s *Melmoth*; Sheridan Le Fanu’s *The Rose and the Key*; Wilkie Collins’ *Jezebel’s Daughter*, *The Woman in White* and *Armada*; and Charles Reade’s *Hard Cash*. A variety of ‘doctors of the mind’, some good, some evil, occur in these and other tales. Terminology for the objects of these doctors’ attentions, the patients, has also varied over the years and here may differ according to what the quoted author is intending to convey – such as a straightforward lunatic, an unjustly confined young woman, a pathetic victim, a deluded killer or a person suffering from the illness of insanity. ‘Mental illness’ was not very usual, nor ‘mental health problem’.

But the medical implications of *Dracula* stretch beyond the psychiatric, and indeed Dr Seward and Professor Van Helsing have to use a full range of medical and surgical skills.

Meanwhile the vampire Count himself has understandably been taken as a disease metaphor of the time – especially cholera, plague and syphilis, afflictions that seemed to sweep in from abroad, and be connected with horrid deaths, miasmas, rats and unnameable sexual transmission. Several medical specialisms, sometimes confusing fact and fiction, have claimed the diagnosis of the original vampires, while today’s children in hospital enjoy a metaphor too, and call the phlebotomist who comes to take their blood a ‘vampire’, just as their forebears called the blood-letter a ‘leech’.

The approach for several of the chapters is to look at a particular issue, how it is covered in *Dracula*, the medical and psychiatric context of the time, and how the theme was used in other Victorian fiction, which Bram Stoker is likely to have known. Other chapters journey into different topics associated with *Dracula*, such as diagnoses, vampires and asylum diseases, teeth and finally, of course, death, including that of Bram Stoker himself.