

BOOK REVIEW

Dracula for Doctors: Medical Facts and Gothic Fantasies *by Fiona Subotsky*

Paperback, 196 pages
Cambridge University Press
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Dracula for Doctors is a book of eclectic chapters, each of which contains Medical Facts and Gothic Fantasies. Each chapter starts with a précis, which makes it easier to distinguish between fact and fiction, although concentration is necessary. On one occasion, there is a reminder that Dracula was a fictional character, so the author may have been aware of this difficulty.

The usual chapter sequence involves a Dracula reference, followed by consideration of similar material in other novels and, finally, a section of historical facts and references. The balance of fact and fiction varies considerably between chapters, with some having nuggets of interesting medico-historical facts, while others are mainly literary criticism, comparing Stoker's work with other writers in the Victorian Gothic genre. This latter aspect was well done and would be of interest to those readers wishing an overview of the Victorian Gothic "medical" novel. Medical topics covered are mainly related to psychiatry and neurology, reflecting, no doubt, the author's specialist interests.

The relationship of each chapter to the rest is that they all have some connection to Dracula, or the novel of that name by Bram Stoker, but they cover a wide range of topics from the medical circles in Dublin in which Bram Stoker was raised and the achievements of the family, the physical diseases likely to affect inmates of Victorian Asylums to the characteristics of various biting animals, distinguishing European and South American bats.

There is a lot more besides, including consideration of disease processes upon which the folklore of vampires might be based. There is a fairly detailed treatment of the anti-vivisection movement and a separate chapter on trephination of the skull. In the latter, a real case written up by Bram's brother Thornley Stoker is presented. That last fact sums up the difficulty I have with this book. The case report, of itself, is of no great moment and is of interest mainly because of its author. Such a mixture of "medico-historical fact" and "Dracula association" is more likely to be of interest to a non-medical Dracula fan than a medical historian.

To end on a more positive note, each topic seems to have been well researched, and each chapter well referenced, both from a literary and medico-historical perspective. The best way for the casual reader to enjoy the book might be to take advantage of its loose structure to dip in, a chapter at a time, and discover interesting snippets of information rather than trying to read the whole thing from start to finish.

Graham Kyle
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