Opening Remarks by Sam George

Welcome to the first day of the Open Graves, Open Minds Bram Stoker Centenary Symposium. We are here to celebrate Bram Stoker, the father of literary vampirism, creator of Dracula the undead ‘King’ of vampires! Today marks a hundred years to date since Abraham’s or ‘Bram’ Stoker’s passing on 20\textsuperscript{th} April 1912. To mark the occasion we have put together an exclusive programme of talks and discussions in the period setting of the house of Keats, who explored forbidden pleasures in his ‘Lamia’. Keats’s poem, written in 1819, has become synonymous with the female vampire and Hampstead too has its links to Stoker and vampirism. It features a number of times in the novel Dracula (1897) as the meeting place of the ‘crew of light’ prior to visiting Lucy’s tomb, for example, and as the notorious setting for the ‘bloofer’ lady’s vampiric crimes (Lucy, if you remember, roams the heath as a vampire). In the novel, The Westminster Gazette reports The HAMPSTEAD HORROR as follows:

We have just received intelligence that another child, missed last night, was only discovered late in the morning under a furze bush on the Shooters Hill side of Hampstead Heath [. . .] It has the same tiny wound in the throat as has been noticed in other cases [. . .] when partially restored, it had the common story to tell of being lured away by the bloofer lady (Dracula, ed. by Roger Luckhurst (Oxford: OUP, 2011), p. 166).

Elsewhere in the novel, Dr Seward records that ‘we dined at Jack Straws Castle* along with a little crowd of bicyclists and others who were genially noisy’ (p. 183). This is, of course, a reference to the famous coaching inn on the edge of Hampstead Heath (said to be the highest Inn in England). The eighteenth-century building still survives.

It’s very special, then, to gather here in the Romantic setting of Keats House in Hampstead, and to be surrounded by scholars, novelists and critics, all of whom are testimony to the legacy of Bram Stoker. Indeed, as Prof William Hughes said on being asked to speak today: ‘that man has been my life for the best part of twenty years’. At lunchtime we will join the Dracula Society and members of the Stoker family for a visit to Golder’s Green Crematorium where Bram Stoker’s ashes are interred. Stoker’s ashes eerily share company with Marc Bolan (‘Girl, I’m just a vampire for your love’); Sigmund Freud and his disciple, Ernest Jones, who theorised the uncanny (Jones wrote on the significance of the vampire in ‘On the Nightmare’); Philip Burne-Jones, painter of The Vampire; Isaac Pitman (inventor of Mina Harker’s shorthand); and Martita Hunt (who acted in Brides of Dracula). We’ll be paying our respect to Bram and exploring some vampiric connections!

Our symposium today has developed directly out of a project which I convene at the University of Hertfordshire. The Open Graves, Open Minds: vampires and the undead
in modern culture project relates the undead in literature, art and other media to questions concerning, gender, technology, consumption and social change. I was struck in the beginning by the irony of creatures with no reflection becoming such a pervasive reflection of modern culture. It pleased me in a dark way, and I wanted to create a forum to explore these creatures in all their various manifestations and cultural forms. That is how the whole project came about. It was initiated by a prominent and exciting conference in 2010 when the original members of ogom came together for the first time. These were myself, Dr Catherine Spooner (a specialist in contemporary Gothic), Dr Bill Hughes (a researcher of the genre of Dark Romance), Dr Stacey Abbott (an expert on the vampire film), Dr Ivan Philips (a researcher of ‘undead interfaces’), and Marcus Sedgwick, a writer of vampire fiction. All have since contributed to the Open Graves, Open Minds book. As convenor of the project and co-editor of this publication, I am excited to share this research with you for the first time. A number of the papers will draw directly on chapters from Representations of vampires and the undead from the Enlightenment to the present day, published shortly by Manchester University Press.

Dracula is the most filmed literary character ever (topping Sherlock Holmes). The celluloid Dracula is now the most familiar and we are in a unique position of revising or re-introducing the Dracula of the novel, but it is Dracula in all his various manifestations that we are celebrating today. For, as Van Helsing says, ‘he is known everywhere that man has been’, ‘he lives on and cannot die by the mere passing of time’!

We have a living member of the Stoker family present for our celebrations today. We are honoured to have Dacre Stoker, the great-grand-nephew of Bram, speaking at this symposium. Dacre, a novelist himself, has written Dracula: The Undead, the sequel to the original novel. He is joined by Professor Elizabeth Miller. Elizabeth is Professor Emerita at Memorial University of Newfoundland, where she maintains the Dracula Research Center and edits the Journal of Dracula Studies. She has transcribed and co-edited Bram Stoker’s notes for Dracula (a wonderful resource for Stoker scholars)

Together they will introduce the lost journal of Bram Stoker. This Dublin Journal is the transcript of a private notebook of Bram’s discovered in an attic on the Isle of Wight. The document offers cryptic clues into the origins of Dracula and provides a snapshot of Dublin between 1871 and 1881, as well as a window on the life of the very private Stoker.

Please give a very warm welcome to our special guests, Dacre Stoker and Professor Elizabeth Miller.