Preface

THE *Open Graves, Open Minds* project relates the undead in literature, art and other media to questions concerning gender, technology, consumption and social change. It also seeks to give prominence to writers who are contributing to Bram Stoker's legacy by resurrecting the Dracula myth in inventive new ways, such as Marcus Sedgwick, Kim Newman and Paul Magrs. OGOM was initiated by a prominent and exciting conference in 2010 when contributors came together for the first time to debate 'vampires and the undead in modern culture' and to interrogate these creatures in all their various manifestations and cultural forms. Following my interview with Lucy Tobin in *The Guardian*, the story was taken up by Reuters and soon went global, featuring in newspapers from the *Wall Street Journal* to the *Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Irish Times*.¹ News stories emerged that we were reacting against the Americanisation of the genre ('UK Bringing Vampires Back Home', 'University Rejects Americanization of Vampires', 'Cool Britannia for Vampires', and 'Bloody Hell: Brits Complain Yanks Are Stealing Their Vampires'), developing a vampire degree ('Coffin Boffin Syllabus', 'Twilight Gets Scholarly Treatment' and 'Wanna Study Edward Cullen') and eating food out of coffins (this part was true at least).² It was amusing but it also provoked some interesting debates about the canon and the study of popular literature in universities. We wanted to put vampires in the context of a rigorous academic conference to prove that you can study popular literature in a serious way. There was even a volcanic ash cloud – I wondered at the time if it was divine wrath brought about by our unholy celebration of the undead!

At this early stage, the plenary speakers were Catherine Spooner, Stacey

Abbott, and Marcus Sedgwick, all of whom have contributed chapters to this collection. Sarah Artt and Sara Wasson, Bill Hughes, Ivan Philips and Malgorzata Drewniok also gave papers at the conference and their work is represented here too. Other contributors, Conrad Aquilina, Julieann Ulin, Lisa Lampert-Weissig, Lindsey Scott, Jennifer Williams, Michelle Smith, and Kimberley McMahon-Coleman, responded to our call for papers and together they have helped to shape and define the project.

OGOM reconvened for a special symposium in the period setting of the Keats House in Hampstead to mark the centenary of Bram Stoker's death in April 2012. Keats explored vampiric pleasures in his *Lamia* (1819) and it has become synonymous with the female vampire,³ and Hampstead features in the novel *Dracula*, most famously as the notorious setting of the 'bloofer' lady's vampiric crimes (Lucy roaming the Heath as a vampire). The symposium included a visit to the crematorium where Stoker's ashes are interred and a collection of artefacts, including a first edition of Polidori's *The Vampyre* from the archives. In the spirit of OGOM, there were Dracula canapés and vampire cup cakes (but without the oak coffins this time). The members of OGOM (myself, Stacey, Catherine, Bill, Marcus, Ivan) were joined by Dacre Stoker (great-grand-nephew of Bram), Elizabeth Miller, Sir Christopher Frayling, Kevin Jackson, Catherine Wynne, William Hughes, Peter Hutchings and the novelists Paul Magrs and Kim Newman. The talks and discussions were a testimony to the legacy of Bram Stoker. This legacy is evident in our research for the book, finalised as it was in Stoker's centenary year. Dracula can be seen to shape our narrative in all his various manifestations; 'he is known everywhere that man has been ... he lives on and cannot die by the mere passing of time'.⁴

OGOM is now firmly established as a research project at the University of Hertfordshire and the MA module, 'Reading the Vampire: Science, Sexuality and Alterity in Modern Culture', is approaching its third year. Bringing vampires into the curriculum has proved controversial for some and there have been detractors and scoffers, though these have not been without humour:

Listen up, Lestat lovers: The University of Hertfordshire in England will be offering a master's degree in vampire lit, apparently the only one of its kind in the world. We imagine that the program, which begins this September, will cover all the bloodsucking basics, from Nosferatu to *Twilight* and of course Anne Rice. Extra credit for anyone who scores an interview with a vampire.⁵

Whilst Gothic courses have been popular for some time, it appears that vampire studies still require some explanation. I spoke to Simon Midgley in

The Times about vampires in academe and he even interviewed some of the MA students.⁶ I get fan mail at the university now (I don't remember that happening with my book on eighteenth-century botanical literature!).

I am immensely proud of OGOM and what we have achieved. The project will continue to explore the vampire in all its vicissitudes and we now have a website to track that research and provide OGOM news (www.opengravesopenminds.com). The chapters in this book are the living progeny of the undead project that began in 2010; they offer a lively commentary on the development of the genre, the emergence of dark romance and the rise of happy Gothic. Together, they are essential reading for anyone who wishes to explore open graves with an open mind.

Sam George

Notes

- 1 Lucy Tobin, 'University Conference Sinks Its Teeth into Vampire Fiction', *The Guardian* (6 April 2010), Education section, www.guardian.co.uk/education/2010/apr/06/vampire-conference-literature-hertfordshire.
- 2 Paul Casciato, 'Bringing Vampires Back Home – to Britain', *Reuters*, 6 April 2010, <http://uk.reuters.com/article/2010/04/06/uk-britain-university-vampires-idUKTRE6352NP20100406>; 'University Rejects "Americanisation" of Vampires', *NPR*, 7 April 2010, www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=125660207; Karon Liu, 'Bloody Hell: Brits Complain Yanks Are Stealing Their Vampires', *Toronto Life* (7 May 2010), (online) www.torontolife.com/daily/hype/the-american-invasion/2010/05/07/bloody-hell-brits-complain-yanks-are-stealing-their-vampires/; 'Robert Pattinson, Kristen Stewart on Coffin Boffin Syllabus', *STV Entertainment News*, 7 April 2010, <http://entertainment.stv.tv/showbiz/168301-robert-pattinson-kristen-stewart-on-coffin-boffin-syllabus>; Mark Byrne, 'Vampire Lit Gets Its Scholarly Due', *Galleycat*, www.mediabistro.com/galleycat/vampire-lit-gets-its-scholarly-due_b11462; Chanel Lee, 'Wanna Study Edward Cullen', *Howstuffworks*, 9 April 2010, blogs.howstuffworks.com/2010/04/09/wanna-study-edward-cullen-and-eric-northman-head-to-england/.
- 3 See Twitchell, *The Living Dead*, p. 11
- 4 *Dracula*, ed. Luckhurst, p. 222.
- 5 'Vampire U', *Globe and Mail* (6 April 2010), www.theglobeandmail.com/life/style/tori-spellingvampire-uobama-jeans-wear/article1529173/.
- 6 Simon Midgley, 'Counting on Dracula', *The Times* (16 March 2011), p. 7.