Like many popular and readable books, the occasional misleading oversimplification or misconception does creep in. Burton refers to Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde by RL Stevenson as an example in literature of ideas around schizophrenia. Although he describes multiple personality as rare and not a core feature of schizophrenia — he goes on to describe how 65% of psychiatrists at most, agree on what is schizophrenia — The Jekyll and Hyde narrative is, if anything, more ‘psychoanalytical’ in its themes. In his (sadly incinerated) first draft, Stevenson allegedly did not envisage a physical change in his hero but a disguise that allowed Jekyll to get away with things his position did not allow. Influences on Stevenson included the tale of Deacon Brodie: cabinetmaker by day and burglar by night. By contrast, the subtext of Bram Stoker’s Dracula is far more illustrative of mental disorder in the context of madness and society, madness and religion and madness and criminal responsibility. In the narrative, Professor Van Helsing (a psychiatrist) describes the vampire as of ‘child brain’ and therefore, ‘predestinate to crime’. In using Jekyll, Burton makes a point by reinforcing a misconception which stems from Hitchcock’s Psycho.

Other criticisms include a reference implying that the practice trepanning/trephination in ancient times represents evidence of schizophrenia — a conclusion which is by no means obvious. The influence of Cicero on illness as an emotional imbalance is tantalising but all too brief.

Fine-print aside however, I would echo Professor Bill Fulford’s endorsement, ‘This remarkable book … by combining literary, philosophical and scientific sources, shows the deep connections between ‘madness’ and some of our most important attributes as human beings.’ This book engages with the reader’s own hopes, fears and prejudices — highly worthwhile edutainment.