



# Dracula: A Transnational Threat in Late-Victorian Europe

*Old Dominion University Model United Nations Society*

## Introduction

It is remembered as the greatest of all Gothic tales, imagining a distant, ancient threat, aroused by contact with the modern world, that suddenly threatens to destroy the stability of the most advanced societies on Earth. In Bram Stoker's novel, from 1897, a Romanian Count, Dracula, plans to buy a property in England. Jonathan Harker, a young English lawyer, is sent to complete the deal. Harker barely escapes back to England, where Dracula has arrived, sowing terror by infecting a race of vampires. In the novel he is fought by Dr John Steward and Professor Abraham Van Helsing.

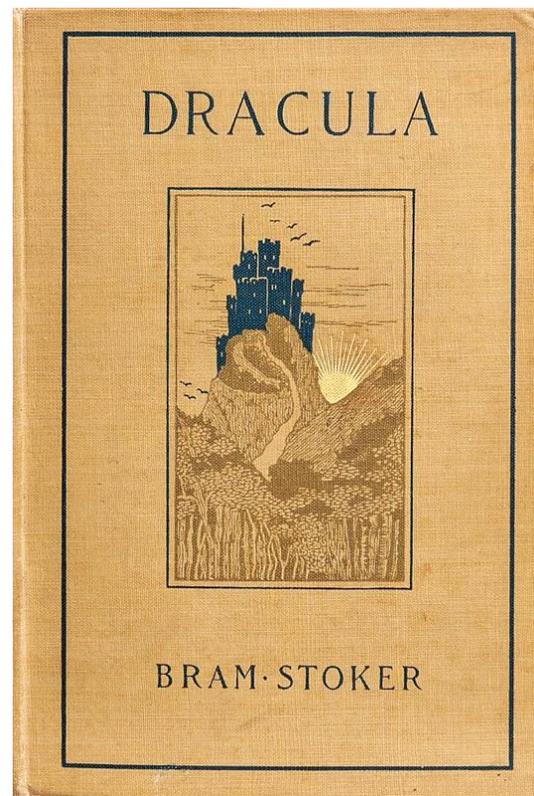
What if it wasn't that easy? In our day, we have seen individuals, societies, corporations and states respond to the extraordinary threat of the coronavirus epidemic. How would the Victorian era respond to Stoker's imagined threat to public health? This crisis simulation discovers through *The Society for Welfare and Hygiene*, an informal association of sociological, scientific, medical, forensic and media experts. Can they organize their diverse skills to overcome an ancient danger that could completely overwhelm their innocent world?

## Late-Victorian Era: Contradiction and Tension

*Dracula* is a novel about the dangers of technology and globalization, of ancient dangers unleashed by new capabilities. It tells a tale of people—some ordinary, others extraordinary—struggling to cope with previously unimagined terror created by this mix of old and new.

It was a time of profound contradictions, the first era of globalization and technological solutions,

but also of ancient ignorance and fears. New technologies and sudden international connectivity offered solutions, but also opportunities for old dangers to reassert themselves with unimagined voracity. We know it today as the late Victorian era, the final years of Britain's aging monarch, Queen Victoria.



Cover of the first American edition

It was an era of stunning wealth, power and technological sophistication, but also extreme poverty and disease. States were powerful than ever, launching monstrous warships and conquering distant foreign territory, but still ignorant of much that happened within their own borders, unable to track, much less control,

movement across their borders. Dracula was imagined as a symbol of the Victorian era's inability to cope the problems it helped unleash. Led by Europe's industrial revolution, the world was experiencing globalization for the first time. National borders, remote and difficult to cross for thousands of years because people were limited to walking, animal and wind transport, suddenly melted away, pushed aside by the spread of railroads and steam ships. The miracles of modern trade, communications and transportation seemed to change all aspects of daily life. Everyone bought goods that arrived by ship or train. Some travelled by train or steam ship. A few communicated by telegraph, or had seen public displays the newest miracle, the *telephone*.



*God save the Queen.*

Although port and customs (tax) authorities tried, it was impossible to know who was crossing borders or disembarking from ships, what was their business, what they carried or smuggled, or what infections or afflictions.

Advances in modern medicine offered unprecedented hope. Led by Louis Pasteur's germ theory (that disease was caused by microscopic animals) and Lister's invention of antibiotics, medical professionals anticipated a future free of disease. But reality lagged far behind. Public health deteriorated in this era. Liberated by the technologies of globalization, new diseases spread with amazing speed, like cholera and yellow fever epidemics, which plagued city populations everywhere. Reliance on coal turned city air into a grey acidic fog that scared lungs and left black crumbs on everything. Anyone walking the street could taste it.

Solutions to the pathologies of late Victorian society came not from the state, but more from the work of private individuals. Visionary civic leaders of the era responded with herculean efforts to reduce cities' mountains of garbage and what people of the era politely called 'mud'. They were desperate to remove the horse manure covering every street, and the reek of back alleys lined with endless buckets of 'human waste'.

The hygiene problem led Victorian engineers to the greatest public health works of their era. These were not the bridges, ships and railways that got attention, but the neighborhood drain systems and great sewers that carried 'mud' and 'waste' to rivers and the sea, to be forgotten.

Some of the worst problems of the late-Victorian public health had nothing to do with the world of monarchs, states and governments. Rather, they were the work of private individuals, like:

- *Jack the Ripper*, the unidentified serial killer of at least five, possibly eleven more, in London in 1888.
- *Joseph Vacher*, the French serial killer and necrophile, who killed 11 to 27 people, many adolescent farm workers, between 1894 and 1897.
- *Diogo Figueira da Rocha*, the Brazilian serial killer responsible for more than 50

murders between 1894 and 1897 in São Paulo.

- *Baba Anujka* of Serbia, who poisoned at least 50 to as many as 150 people in the late 19th and early 20th century.
- *Johann Otto Hoch*, the German-America murderer of at least 15 to 50 victims.

Serial killers seemed to be emerging everywhere. Part of the phenomenon was the rise of cheap newspapers, bought not just by the wealthy and middle classes, but increasingly by the entire population. Newspapers exploited crime to sell copies. They also provided insights to amateurs and officials to become better informed than ever before.

### **Responding to the challenge: *The Society for Welfare and Hygiene***

The achievements of Victorian engineers are still in use around the world, a legacy often easy to stop. Less remembered today were their private counterparts in every other field of endeavor and discovery. The scientific, literary and geographic societies are well remembered, because they pushed the limits of knowledge and insight. Others focused on public welfare, some as social reformers struggling to alleviate the ills of poverty, disease and lack of education.

In this environment, it was natural from a group of pioneering individuals, united by their commitment to fighting human evil, to gather on their own. *The Society for Welfare and Hygiene* is imagined here as a club of professionals who dedicated their personal work to solving specific social threats to society, ills like criminals harming upstanding members of society, and mass killers who could strike at anyone.

*The Society for Welfare and Hygiene* began to meet in the early 1890s in the private London clubs of its members, as they shared thoughts on

their more difficult cases. The Society allowed government officials and private members a way to cooperate, to share information and suggest responses or solutions, when officially it would have been difficult.

As their work naturally crossed the English Channel and European borders, colleagues from abroad joined the Society Meetings could happen anywhere a few members happened upon each other, not just in London, but in cities like Antwerp, Frankfurt, Istanbul, Paris, Vienna and resort cities favored by the aristocracy.

While the Society always worked informally and secretly, some of its efforts are remembered—with exaggeration and inaccuracy—in the novelizations of Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes series, Agatha Christie’s Poirot novels, and the little known, anonymously published adventure stories of Dr. Sigmund Freud.

In 1897 *The Society for Welfare and Hygiene* confronts its greatest challenge: Dracula.



## Characters from the novel

**Count Dracula** is a fictional Romanian nobleman, the prototypical vampire. His most iconic power is his ability to turn others into vampires by biting them and infecting them with the vampiric disease. Other character aspects have been added or altered in subsequent popular fictional works.

**Jonathan Harker** is a fictional young English solicitor (lawyer) sent by his firm to Transylvania to complete a British real estate transaction with a Romanian Count, Dracula. Aware of his relative inexperience, he tends to be cautious and often struggles to appreciate the significance of what he sees. His great challenge will be to adapt to the pressures of the vampire threat.

**Wilhelmina (Mina) Harker** is fictional a young English schoolteacher, recently married to Jonathan Harker. Loyal and obedient to her new husband, she wants to do the right thing. But she confronts forces far beyond the typical experiences of English country school teacher and young wife. She has a hypnotic connection to Count Dracula, which can make her a danger to others, and a potential tool for his pursuers.

**Rev. Gavin Dishart** is a fictional Church of England pastor. His parishioners include Jonathan and Mina Harker. A quiet, careful, soft-spoken man, he is drawn into their personal troubles and feels compelled to aid them as they confront an evil greater than his pastoral training prepared him for.

**Lucy Westenra** is the fictional 19-year-old daughter of a wealthy English family. Lucy is Mina Murray's best friend and Count Dracula's first English victim. She subsequently transforms into a vampire and is eventually destroyed. In most versions of the Dracula tale, Lucy is the ultimate *femme fatale* (French for a bad date), causing considerable trouble.

**Quincey P. Morris** is a rich young American from Texas, one of the three fictional men who propose marriage to Lucy Westenra. He carries a Bowie knife at all times, and at one point he admits that he is a teller of tall tales and 'a rough fellow, who hasn't perhaps lived as a man should.'

**Dr. John (Jack) Seward, another of Lucy's suitors**, is the fictional administrator of an insane asylum not far from Count Dracula's first English home, Carfax. Professionally experienced dealing with difficult people, he is aware of his limits this time. To fight Count Dracula, he turns for help to his former professor, Abraham Van Helsing.

**Professor Abraham Van Helsing** is a fictional, aged Dutch polymath. He is a doctor, professor, lawyer, philosopher, scientist and metaphysic. His former student, Dr. John Seward, first turns to him to assist with the mysterious illness of Lucy Westenra. In the book—and most movie versions—he just barely contains the fires Dracula lights. But even Van Helsing would be overwhelmed by a nation on fire.

## The Society for Welfare and Hygiene



**Professor George Edward Challenger** (above, in a 1922 silent movie version) is a fictional character in a series of fantasy and science fiction stories by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. Unlike Conan Doyle's self-controlled, analytical character, Sherlock Holmes, Professor Challenger is aggressive, hot-tempered, dominating. At the British Museum he is Assistant Keeper in the Comparative Anthropology Department. He also holds a professorship in Zoology and was elected President of the Zoological Institute in London. Several of his inventions were successfully applied in industry and brought him additional income.



Influential hack? Journalist Winston Churchill.

**Mr. Winston Churchill**, *real*. Before he became a major politician, and ultimately British Prime Minister, the young Winston Churchill was in fact a well-known journalist and military adventure. In 1894 he travelled to India with his regiment to fight against Pathan and Afghan tribesmen, with a contract as a war correspondent for the *Daily Telegraph*. In 1895, Churchill managed to obtain a temporary commission as a Lieutenant to the Sudan, also serving as a war correspondent, for the *Morning Post*. In 1899, having left the army, Churchill went to South Africa to cover the Boer War for the *Morning Post*. A master of publicity, he knows how to sue the power of the press to

arouse public interest and force—or halt—official action.



**Dr. Marie Curie**, *real*, was the Polish-born, French scientist, was the first to master the concept of radioactivity and appreciative its possible uses. She received the 1903 Nobel Prize in Chemistry for her discovery of radioactivity, and the 1921 Nobel Prize in Physics. Her research identified previously unknown elements and found applications for radioactivity, including treatment of cancerous tumors. Could radioactivity save humanity from a vampire scourge?



Please lie down. Tell me what you remember.  
The Vienna office of Dr. Sigmund Freud.

**Dr. Sigmund Freud**, *real*, was the greatest of all psychologists. He began as an Austrian neurologist. He became the founder of psychoanalysis, a clinical method for evaluating

and treating pathologies explained as originating in conflicts in the psyche, through dialogue between a patient and a psychoanalyst. His analysis of dreams provided him with models for the clinical analysis of symptom formation and the underlying mechanisms of repression. This led Freud to elaborate his theory of the unconscious. No one has greater insight into the human mind. Whether his methods work with the undead remains to be seen. He still sees patients at this point in his career, on a cash basis.

**Mr. Sherlock Holmes** is a *fictional* detective created by British author Arthur Conan Doyle. Referring to himself as a ‘consulting detective’, Holmes is known for his proficiency with observation, deduction, forensic science and logical reasoning that borders on the fantastic, which he employs when investigating cases for a wide variety of clients, including Scotland Yard. Most Holmes stories are narrated by the character of Holmes’s friend and biographer Dr. John H. Watson, who usually accompanies Holmes during his investigations and often shares quarters with him at the address of 221B Baker Street, London, where many of the stories begin. Holmes works best analyzing the discoveries of others, finding connections they may have missed.

**Dr. Henry Jekyll**, and his alternative personality, **Mr. Edward Hyde**, is the *fictional* protagonist of Robert Louis Stevenson’s 1886 novel, *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. In the story, Jekyll is a kind and respected English doctor who has repressed evil urges inside of him. In an attempt to hide this, he develops a type of serum that he believes will effectively compartmentalize his dark side. Instead, Jekyll transforms into Edward Hyde, the physical and mental manifestation of his evil personality. This dualism can give Jekyll great care and restraint, or enable Hyde’s extreme combativeness. You appreciate Jekyll in a club meeting, but want Hyde in a fight.



Actor Richard Mansfield originated the dual portrayal of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde in an 1887 stage adaptation.

**Mr. Hercule Poirot** is a *fictional* Belgian detective created by British writer Agatha Christie. Poirot is one of Christie’s most famous and long-running characters, appearing in 33 novels, two plays, and a great many short stories. Small and fastidious, always perfectly dressed, he is precise in all his actions and thoughts, willing to face dangers, but always with a mind to carefully controlling circumstances to reveal the forces at work.



Nicolae Paulescu in Paris in 1897

**Dr Nicolae Paulescu** was a *real* Romanian physiologist, professor of medicine, and politician, most famous for his work on diabetes. Paulescu also was co-founder of the National Christian Union and later of the National-Christian Defense League in Romania. He was also a leading member of the Iron Guard, a nationalist movement. He has only local knowledge of Transylvania of anyone in The Society for Welfare and Hygiene.

**Dr. John H. Watson** is a *fictional* character in the Sherlock Holmes stories by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. Watson is Holmes's best friend, assistant and flatmate. Watson is described as a classic Victorian-era gentleman, unlike the more eccentric Holmes. He is astute and intelligent although he fails to match his friend's deductive skills. His detachment and reflectiveness lend a care and wisdom often missing in his more volcanic friend.



Mr. Holmes and Dr. Watson.