

## Doctor Watson's Agony Column



Dear Dr Watson,  
I am engaged to a doctor, a charming man who is perfect in every way except one - he becomes quite amorous when we are alone and it seems to me that he does not have the degree of self control I would have expected from a gentlemen - so far as I can gauge these things from discussions with my mother and from reading popular fiction. When I resist him, he seems to become enraged - it's almost like he's another person. Several times recently, after one of our fallings out, he has disappeared for days on end. When I questioned him about this, he flew into such a fury that I feared for my safety. I know he likes to lock himself up in his laboratory conducting his experiments but I don't think it can be healthy for him to spend so much time at it. Dr Watson, I know that he is a good man but I'm afraid that he may have some mental illness. Do you think it wise for me to marry such a man? - 'Undecided'

Dear 'Undecided',  
In my experience of three continents, an amorous fiancé is usually to be welcomed. In fact, my wife often is quite amorous, especially when we are discussing the latest Test cricket results. I merely have to say, "Did you read the cricket results my dear?" and she is suddenly amorous and I am unable to discuss the matter further. Maybe you should try changing the topic to cricket. That will soon sort out whether the poor chap is inflicted

with some mental illness or not. I would not be worried about people disappearing for days, locking themselves in a laboratory and almost becoming another person. I once roomed with a chap like that and he turned out to be quite alright.

Dr Watson,  
I am a doctor, like yourself, but I have always had the good sense to keep out of other people's affairs. I am aware that you write some agonising column, supposedly offering advise to pathetic creatures who have turned to you in despair because they haven't the wit to sort out their own problems. This hasn't worried me particularly but now I have learnt that my fiancée has written to you asking whether or not she should marry me. What a hyde! What right have you to lure these credulous creatures into asking your advice? You are a two-faced charlatan, Sir, and I demand you return this young lady's letter immediately, advising her to put her trust in the man who is to be her husband. -Dr J.E.Kyll

Dear Dr J.E. Kyll,  
We are instructed by Dr Watson to respond to your libel. Our client was quite shocked by your letter and is only now recovering, thanks to some fine medicinal brandy. He described your letter, *inter alia*, as 'a gallimaufry of tittle tattle'. We advised him that we wished we had said that. Whilst our client is still suffering considerably from your letter, he is a reasonable man and has instructed us that he is prepared to settle with you on reasonable terms. We understand this may involve restocking his now dangerously depleted brandy supplies.

Faithfully,  
Messrs Graham & McFarlane  
Solicitors and Commissioners for Oaths



by Christopher Sequeira

Mister Sherlock Holmes, Consulting Detective, and Count Vlad Dracula. Two of fiction's best-known characters whose adventures seem, on the face of it, to belong to the same time period but to two completely separate worlds: that of crime fiction and of horror fiction, respectively. "Never the twain shall meet" might be the purist's cry but, as I shall outline, this has been far from the case when authors of genre fiction - other than these two characters' originators - get a chance. Holmes' meeting Dracula is not a rarity in pastiche history and, as I will expound in this article, it is something of a compulsion.

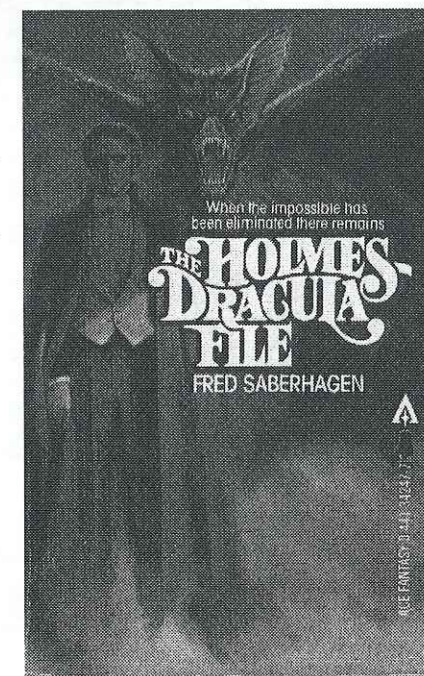
A Holmes-Dracula encounter has been the subject of discussion amongst Holmesians for some time. William Leonard's decades-old article *Re Vampires*, that postulated Holmes and Van Helsing were one and the same (as were Dracula and Moriarty) is perhaps one of the better known pieces on this theme (reprinted in the ubiquitous Peter Haining's *Sherlock Holmes Compendium*). But there are certainly many more examples, and a variety of interesting 'takes' on the concept of these figures meeting.

To begin with, on the subject of Holmes meets Dracula (or other 'genuine', that is, supernaturally endowed, vampires), I've identified the following works:-

- *The Adventure of the Sanguinary Count* by Estleman
- *The Holmes-Dracula File*, and *Seance for a Vampire* by Saberhagen
- *The Tangled Skein* by Stuart-Davies
- *A Night in Lonesome October* by Zelazny
- *Scarlet in Gaslight* by Powell and Makinen
- *The Adventure of the Missing Coffin* (short story) by Resnick
- *The Case of the Anemic Heir* (short comic story) by Richardson & Duane
- *Sherlock Holmes and the Vengeance of Dracula* (unpublished screenplay sold for US\$1 million in 2000) by Michael Valle
- *The Vampire Serpent* by local writer Kel Richards
- *The Incredible Umbrella* by Kaye

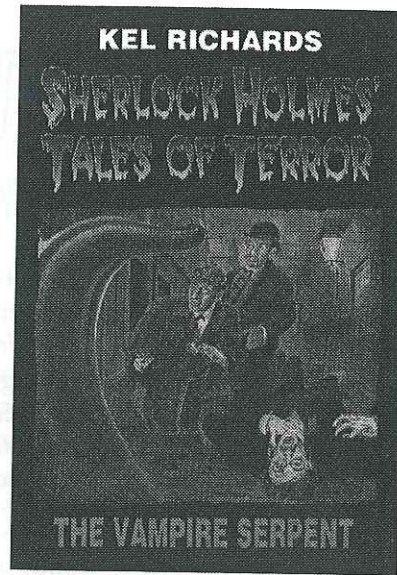
Then there's Holmes meets Dracula's creator, Bram Stoker, in:

- *The West End Horror* by Meyer
- *The List of Seven* (Holmes is called Jack Sparks, but it's undeniably Holmes) by Frost.



Further, I've also located pastiches wherein Holmes is 'off screen' but other members of his 'supporting cast' fight Dracula or other vampires. They include:

- When Holmes is incarcerated in a 'vampire concentration camp' and misses the main action, in *Anno Dracula* and *Bloody Red Baron*, but Mycroft, Moriarty, Moran and others take the spotlight. Both books by Kim Newman.
- Irene Adler takes on Dracula in *Dracula on the Rocks* by Nelson-Douglas.
- Mycroft and Moriarty are central to *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* (comic-book series, which is in development as a film, screenplay written by James Robinson) along with Mina Harker from Dracula. By Moore and O'Neill.



Finally, the creators of Holmes and Dracula interact with one another in the pages of fiction and have their own taste of adventure when Doyle and Stoker meet in:

- *The Dracula Caper* by Simon Hawke and
- The aforementioned *List of Seven*.

As can be seen, the notion of the two caped icons of Victorian literature crossing paths seems irresistible. But, what do they have in common that might set them up for these clashes and cooperative ventures?

Firstly, it must be said that Holmes and Dracula are indisputably the most famous creations of their era and have true immortality and enduring popular appeal far beyond that era. Both characters have been adapted for stage and TV hundreds of times, in fact, they are the two characters who have been the subject of films more often than any others. ANY OTHERS. Indeed, in their *filmic* incarnations, they have been portrayed in as many bizarre fashions as in the pastiche *literature*: in period settings, as well as in modern day adventures where they've been resurrected, cloned, sent time-travelling, and they've resurfaced in the distant future too where they've been made into robots or fought aliens, etc, etc.

They are, therefore, the two foremost examples of *series fiction* (and probably fiction-in-general) characters that exist in the English language, spanning and then transcending the mystery and horror genres that spawned them, this even though Dracula did not quite take a 'series' role until after Stoker was dead. Yes, Dracula was a series fiction character, as was Holmes, by definition if not in common perception! For Dracula was not the subject of a single published story by his original author. In fact, Stoker penned two works featuring the Count: *Dracula*, the novel, and *Dracula's Guest*, the short story. (I would argue that Stoker's death was probably the only thing that prevented Dracula from appearing in many more tales from his literary father's pen than the original two works we have to date. If Stoker had lived to see how well-received *Dracula's Guest* was, he would have, I believe, completely abandoned his struggling with other fiction that was never exceptionally profitable and would have, like Doyle, given the public what they wanted and not died as impoverished as he did. I think it simply never occurred to poor Bram that people would have paid handsomely to see the Count return.)

The reasons for the two characters' success in various and diverse media for decades is also clearly prefigured by the fact that, even before film, TV and radio, they moved to the dominant VISUAL medium of their day, the stage, in many popular plays, fairly promptly. To portray the essential essence of the characters, stage was an ideal medium because the two are essentially cerebral in nature. Their situation, their single-minded motives - Holmes' to capture the evil-doer, Dracula's to prolong his unnatural existence - are easily translatable to theatre, even the 'low-tech theatre' of the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

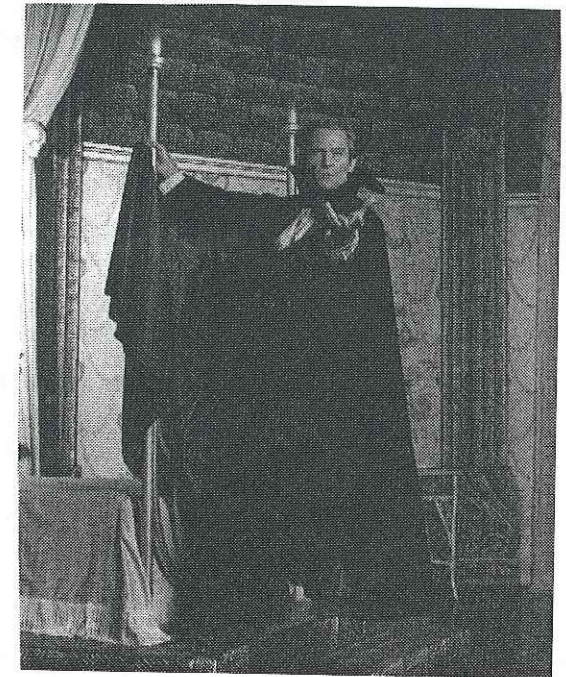
They also have their own 'costumes' - what is commercially referred to these cynical days as 'franchise branding' or 'trademarking'. For pop culture heroes or villains to reach the absolute pinnacle of success, as these two did, they must be universally recognisable by what I call a *visual symbology* - remember, these are fictional characters of whom there are no definitive (the true believer might say 'limiting') photographs. Interestingly, Holmes and Dracula were such powerful creations that they even sprouted aspects of their own symbology beyond the designs of their creators! And they did it the moment they moved beyond the printed page, that is, as soon as they moved into that visual medium - theatre.

Let me illustrate and explain this by asking you: "Think of three identifiable, visual 'things' associated with Holmes". You inevitably have a big, curved, 'calabash' pipe on your list. Now, name some visual aspects of the common conception of Dracula. You inevitably list a high-collared black cape.

The irony is that these significant, indelibly perceived pieces of Holmes' and Dracula's 'costumes' both derive from theatre, not literature! The calabash pipe was first used by the writer-actor William Gillette in his stage portrayal of Holmes because he said he found that a calabash pipe was the most comfortable type to hold in his teeth for two hours a day during performances - he claimed its shape gave it a strange balance that offset its weight.

Dracula's high collar, it transpires, was a necessary invention for the original Dracula stage play. At the climax of the play Dracula is cornered by the vampire hunters a few minutes before sunrise and they grab him by the shoulders but the actor playing the Count turns his back to the audience and with the back of his head hidden by the massive collar, and with convincing acting and a wire frame in the shoulders of the cape, it looks as if the Count is still struggling to save his Unlife. In fact, the actor has disappeared via a trap door under the stage, his cloak suddenly drops to the floor a moment later, and a rubber bat on fishing-line swoops off-stage to create the illusion that the Count has transformed and fled. Thus have both the Master Detective and the Master Vampire received permanent 'additions' to their 'images' through the theatre, and these accoutrements have stuck like glue - more so than spirit-gum.

So, Holmes and Dracula have a permanent visual imagery associated with them, as integrated in



Jeremy Brett in *Dracula*

the general collective unconscious as is Superman's cape or an eye patch on a generic pirate. Indeed, we've all seen countless 'detectives' have the trappings of Holmes and all 'vampires' have the trappings of Dracula, in advertising and cartoons, etc. Consider, also, this effect in 'reverse'. Look at the careers of the first 'globally successful' Holmes and Dracula of the mass-film audience era: Basil Rathbone and Bela Lugosi never escaped that ultimate type-casting. It made them famous, but at a frustrating cost.

So, why do people want to see these icons together? We don't see dozens of pastiches featuring Dracula in Alice's Wonderland, nor Holmes helping Allan Quatermain discover King Solomon's Mines. Besides the fact they are contemporaries, I think it is because not only are Holmes and Dracula dramatically positioned to be opponents (Holmes the manhunter, Dracula the villain) but their worlds are in opposition. I maintain that the very fact that they should not be part of the same world only makes creators, fictioneers, want to put them together. Every little chink in the seeming armour-plate barrier between them seems to serve as an avenue for their atmospheres to mix and blend, like roiling fog.

That Holmes seems to be on record as dwelling in a non-supernatural universe seems to only make the compulsion stronger. It does not matter that he seems to not accept vampires' existence in *The Adventure of the Sussex Vampire* - it does not matter because the 'damage' has been done; he has a listing on 'vampires' in his index and he investigates a pseudo vampire! Thus, the Undead are, even tangentially, part of his world and we can't forget that!

Dracula too, does not remain in a world of random, lawless, supernatural magic, where rationality will not sit. In fact, reading *Dracula*, it is clear that although defying the laws of physics, The Count is absolutely a creature governed by natural laws - an unusual, blighted side of nature, but nonetheless one that sets down specific terms for existence. We see this in the way Dracula is hunted and destroyed by Van Helsing. Van Helsing is a man of science who, at one stage in the book, itemises very clearly what a vampire can do and what he cannot do, what sustains a vampire, and what kills a vampire. From that moment on, the Count, who has been a phantom-like wraith, becomes a supernatural plague, a disease incarnate if you like, *but one that can be prescribed against*. This positions him perfectly as a potential opponent for our good Baker Street sleuth who, we know, will of course be accompanied by his companion, the trusty Doctor!

In addition, something more simple, more primal, lies behind repeated Dracula-Holmes bouts. Dracula MUST meet Holmes *because they form a dramatic symmetry when placed in conflict that no characters in their own world provide for quite as well*. Both are brilliant, both are planners or schemers, both see things that others do not, both are leaders with loyal followers. *Therefore they need worthy adversaries*.

"Of course", you say, "but Holmes has his Moriarty and Dracula has his Van Helsing. Isn't that sufficient?" No. Holmes and Dracula are formidable *physical* specimens, too, dynamic beings of action. Part of us cannot help but think that Holmes toppling Moriarty off Reichenbach was a 'lay-down misere' - this frail, although deranged and vicious, maths teacher was, after all, a round-shouldered, head-oscillating bookworm to all appearance - hardly a match for the man who could straighten steel fireplace poker and punch out accomplished boxers. Van Helsing, we are shown, would have utterly failed without the help of Harker and the other younger, strong men who went with him to beard the Count in his den in Carfax and then in Transylvania. It takes a concerted effort by all of them to win the day, and then they only just do so. The Dutch professor is no physical match for his nemesis.

There it is: Holmes and Dracula must meet. They must battle. One on One. Good v Evil. *Mano a Mano*. Life against Undeath, Holmes capable of delivering a right cross as well as a silver crucifix; Dracula not just an Emperor of Evil, but its deadliest soldier. Mental *and* physical.

It is as appealing to us as:- Logic versus superstition, and left brain versus right brain.

They are even the dark and light definitions of the same word: BLOODHOUND - which reminds us of the final resonance: can we not let the man who laid the demon Hound of Dartmoor pursue a man who can turn into a demon-hound?

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