

# Significance of blood in dracula



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The rise of British Imperialism during the 1800's created a new sense of empowerment among English citizens and redefined British culture in the Victorian Era. During this time, British imperialists valued personal lineage and emphasized the importance of protecting one's ancestral purity through rigid social customs and boundaries. These ideals developed a distinct class division which valued the wealthy, civilized Victorians over the impoverished lower class. Upper class Victorians feared the idea of class integration because it was seen as a threat to their lifestyle and culture. In order to ensure this separation, Victorians used one's blood as a measure of their social value as well as a representation of their family's lineage. Many Victorian authors, like Bram Stoker, recognized this anxiety over class separation and utilized the significance of blood to enhance fear in novels such as *Dracula*.

The transfer of blood in Stoker's *Dracula*, symbolizes this fear of border crossing between unequal social classes and is represented through how the main characters negatively react to the vampirism of victims like Renfield, Lucy, and Mina. Unlike most of his cases, Renfield's mysterious actions are strange enough to pierce Seward's stern, controlled disposition. Instead of showing interest and concern towards Renfield's mental condition, Dr. Seward constantly demonstrates a clear disgust with his patient's actions. Seward dehumanizes Renfield by labeling him a "Zoophagous patient" (127) due to his interest in eating animals like spiders and flies. Since Renfield has shared blood with the Count, this classification implies that he is now less than human and no longer considered a respected Victorian gentleman. When Renfield cleans his room in preparation for Mina's visit,

Seward notes that Reinfield performs the “ disgusting task” (248) of eating all of his pets at once. Instead of being intrigued by Reinfield’s attempt to be polite, Seward is appalled and dismisses the motives of his patient. As an experienced mental health professional, it is odd that Seward shows more disgust with his patient than genuine scientific interest. Reinfield’s actions intimidate Dr. Seward not only because they transgress Victorian etiquette but also because they represent an impurity of blood within a social class.

As Reinfield’s condition worsens throughout the novel, Seward becomes increasingly intolerant of his patient and begins criticizing the “ madman’s” actions in his diary. For example, when Reinfield infiltrates Seward’s office and attacks the doctor, Seward admits his complete repulsion with Reinfield’s episode. As he describes Reinfield’s obsessive attraction to the puddle of blood on the floor, he compares Reinfield to a dog and confides that “[Reinfield’s] employment positively sickened [him].” (154) This vivid scene should be an ideal insight for the doctor’s study of Reinfield, but instead Seward is discomforted because his own blood is being fed on by someone of a lower social class. The significance of blood is also referenced when the doctor notes that he “ cannot afford to lose blood just at the present,” (154) because it will affect his “ physical good.” (154) Such a small cut on the wrist should not hinder the doctor’s overall health, but his concern with blood loss hints that blood is more significant than just a bodily fluid. Seward’s uncharacteristic discomfort as well as his personal concern in this scene reflects the overarching Victorian fear of class mixing as even the hardened, British doctor is rattled by this transferal of blood. After Seward’s blood transfusion with Reinfield, there is a clear change in the relationship

between the doctor and the patient. Seward seems to be intimidated by his patient after his blood is mixed with the lunatic. When the doctor approaches Reinfield about his repulse of Van Helsing, Seward is shocked by his patient's new found intellect. As Reinfield compared his life to Enoch, Seward knows he was not familiar with the reference, but does not admit it to Reinfield because he "felt that by doing so [he] was lowering [himself] in the eyes of the lunatic." (287) Instead of trying to build on this improvement, Seward's intimidation pushes him to try and break his patient down in order to maintain control. Reinfield's sudden burst of intelligence as well as Seward's concern with establishing the dominant role of the relationship demonstrates the power of upper class blood. After Reinfield drinks the doctor's blood, he not only becomes civilized, but he is also as smart as the doctor. This peculiar interaction shows how the pure blood of an upper class Victorian, like Seward, can empower those of a lower social standing while weakening the strength donor.

The reverse of this effect can be seen through Lucy Westenra as she becomes weaker and less civilized as she loses blood to Dracula. Although Reinfield's endeavors represents how a lower class person can benefit from upper class blood, Lucy's vampirism shows how losing pure blood leads to the opposite effect. As Lucy becomes more entangled with the Count, Mina acknowledges Lucy's growing disobedience. For example, Lucy continuously tries to break out of the house late at night and appears "to be a little impatient at finding the door shut." (105) Even after she is found unconscious from the Dracula attack, the very next day she tries to escape her bedroom. As Lucy is losing blood to Dracula, she is also losing her ability to behave as

a proper Victorian lady. Another example of this restlessness is when Lucy makes a surprising outburst while sitting in public with Mina. Mina admits she was startled and concerned as Lucy unexpectedly shouted “ His red eyes again! They are just the same!” (106) These unexplained actions show how the loss of pure blood is corrupting Lucy’s behavior and control over her actions. As more blood is lost to Dracula, Lucy becomes increasingly unruly until eventually she is fully overtaken by her toxic vampirism. Once Lucy completes her vampirism, there is a drastic change in attitude towards her transformation. At first, Seward denies any possibility of Lucy’s transgression and even calls the professor mad for suggesting the idea, but once he sees Lucy in the churchyard returning to her resting spot, he and the others are enraged. Her impurity is certain as Seward sees that the stream of blood “ had trickled over her chin and stained the purity of her lawn death robe.” (226) He continues to say that her “ eyes were unclean and full of hell-fire” (226) and that her purity had turned “ to voluptuous wantonness.” (226) Since Lucy is being corrupted by Dracula’s impure blood, Seward’s comments directly show that blood represents social class because of how she is outcasted by the rest. Seward then dehumanizes her by comparing her to “ a dog [growling] over a bone,” (226) and denounces his love for her instantly. He calls her a “ thing” and declares that he could have killed her “ with savage delight.” (226) This immediate change in attitude symbolizes the fear of class impurity as the men instantly feel the need to destroy Lucy. Instead of showing sympathy towards the woman they all once loved, her corruption is so horrifying that she provokes them to attack her.

After Lucy is beheaded by the men, Mina undergoes a similar vampirism which also questions her social purity. Once Reinfield is discovered maimed in his room, Seward and the others immediately return to the bedroom to find Mina being attacked by Count Dracula. What Seward saw “ appalled him” (300) as Mina was being forced to drink Dracula’s blood straight from his chest. The Count made an animalistic response to the intrusion as his “ great nostrils of [his] white aquiline nose opened wide and quivered at the edge” (300) as he showed his bloodstained teeth. Dracula’s feeding and forced feeding of blood represents how he is draining Mina of her pure, Victorian blood while injecting her with his foreign, toxic blood. When Mina finally raises her blood-smearred head, Seward is disgusted with her appearance rather than being sympathetic to her trauma. He describes Mina’s face in a similar fashion to Lucy’s vampirism by calling her ghastly and claiming that her “ eyes were mad with terror.” (301) Again, Seward’s focus on aesthetics suggests that he is more concerned with the social impurity of Mina rather than her overall well-being. Jonathan Harker, Mina’s husband, is also primarily focused on Mina’s social standing as he too initially reacts frantically to Mina’s condition. When Jonathan awakens to the aftermath of Dracula’s attack on Mina, he immediately goes into shock. Seward claimed that Jonathan had a face “ of wild amazement” (301) as he saw his wife covered in Dracula’s blood. He specifically asks, “ What does that blood mean?” (301) implying that Mina has been tainted in some way by Dracula’s blood. Since Dracula’s blood is apparently foreign to Jonathan, his phrasing suggests that there is a physical difference between the two fluids. He then begs for the professor’s help as if Mina’s fate had already been determined. This desperate reaction from Jonathan shows his fear that the

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transferral of foreign blood has corrupted his wife's social status as a pure Victorian woman.

Although Jonathan was eventually able to use this traumatic event to motivate his manhunt, Mina however, was unable to shake her feeling of desperation after the attack. As she explains what happened with the Count, Mina herself admits that she feels tainted by the Count's blood and is a liability to the safety of others. Immediately following the attack, Mina extends her arms to embrace Jonathan, but suddenly retracts them and puts her hands over her face in shame. Mina had realized that her social standing as a Victorian woman was now jeopardized because her blood had been infected by Dracula's. She is so concerned about this border crossing that she fears her touch will even endanger the others. Mina goes further and tells Jonathan that Dracula made wanted her to be the "flesh of [his] flesh, blood of [his] blood." (306) This direct reference to blood demonstrates the fluid's unique properties and shows how Dracula's blood is distinctly different than the main characters'. Mina's self-admission of her impurity shows there is a consistency among all of the main characters regarding the importance of blood purity among the Victorian social class.

The transferring of blood in Dracula represents an exchange of power between two divided social classes. As Dracula and Reinfield get stronger from consuming the pure, Victorian blood, victims like Lucy and Mina are drained of their strength. Characters like Seward and Jonathan are discomfited by this transferring of blood because it symbolizes an impurity of Victorian social class that needs to be destroyed. This common fear among the main characters demonstrates the deeper concern of reverse

colonization. Similar to how Dracula's blood infects one's social standing, British imperialists worried that another nation or culture could contaminate British culture through immigration or foreign occupation. Through Dracula, Stoker is able to use the recognizable symbol of blood to advocate his concern about a bigger threat to British imperialism.