

Renfield character profile

Who?

- R.M. Renfield is a patient at the lunatic asylum where Dr Seward works and is described as a “*madman*”. It is suggested that Renfield used to be a highly educated gentleman, prior to his insanity, but the reader is allowed to make up their own mind about his morality.
- Renfield is thought to suffer delusions which make him feel the need to eat creatures in order to sustain him. This is why Dr Seward calls him a “*zoophagous maniac*”.
- Renfield provides a barometer of Dracula’s strength and his erratic changes in behaviour coincide with Dracula’s comings and goings.

Character analysis

- Some suggest that Renfield serves not just to create a Gothic atmosphere in the novel, but as a counterbalance to Dracula’s cool mysteriousness. Renfield seems to be a more realistic depiction of the impacts of mental ill-health and is arguably more representative of a common vampire than Dracula.
- However, Renfield manages to maintain some of his human empathy as shown in his well-mannered treatment of Mina. Due to the mind control that Dracula exerts on Mina, she becomes a sort of female version of Renfield and takes his place as the measure of Dracula’s movements.
- Renfield is seen as a predatory animal, who is treated as a specimen of great scientific interest. He puzzles medical professionals and yet remains one of the novel’s most charismatic and fascinating characters.
- Renfield believes that by eating his way up “the Great Chain of Being”, he will absorb so many lives that this will prolong his own. This creates a sense of immortality, which is also reflected in Dracula as the “*undead*”.
- Renfield breaks taboos within Dracula, for example through his repetitive use of the phrase “*the blood is the life!*”. This is taken directly from Deuteronomy in the Bible, and stems from the Jewish belief that blood is literally the source of life. This phrase is also reminiscent of Catholic Holy Communion, when the body and blood of Christ is broken and shared (wafer and wine). This almost blasphemous use of religious symbolism highlights Renfield as unconventional and undoubtedly controversial amongst the Victorian reader.
- Due to his previously sociable and high status life, Renfield is a symbol of degeneration in Dracula. His almost childlike fascination and curiosity with living beings portrays him as infantile, added to the fact that he cannot sustain his basic needs and has to be locked up for his own safety.
- Renfield is both the student of and enslaved by Dracula - he is bound by his thoughts and cannot recover until Dracula has been eliminated. As a minion in forced servitude to his master, it could be argued that Renfield is almost a guinea pig on which to test Dracula’s strength.