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DARK ANGELS

A STUDY OF ANNE RICE'S VAMPIRE CHRONICLES

BY

Jane Plumb
(B. A. Hons)

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SYNOPSIS

The international success of Anne Rice's *Vampire Chronicles*, and the release of the film *Interview with the Vampire* (based on her novel of the same name) has fueled an explosion of interest in the vampire genre, resulting in further incarnations of the vampire story in fiction and film. This study attempts to analyse Rice's development of the vampire narrative in relation to a body of novels and short stories which comprise a recognizable genre.

The first chapter has three sections: an Introduction comprising a comparison between the *Chronicles* and Bram Stoker's *Dracula*; a study of the *Chronicles* as a metaphor for homoeroticism and AIDS; and a study of the psychoanalytic aspects of vampirism linked with the concept of Rice's vampire as a Sadean hero. The second chapter has two sections: an analysis of Rice's representations of femininity; and a study of the myths of womanhood employed in the novels, together with the origins of these myths. The third chapter has two sections: a focus on the complex self-conscious and moral life of Rice's vampires in relation to contemporary consciousness and subjectivity; and a comparison of Rice's treatment of genre, historical romance and erotica with the vampire narratives of her contemporaries. The fourth and concluding chapter is a summary of Rice's treatment of genre, gender and religion in relation to evolving feminist, cultural and psychoanalytic debates, including reference to material from her other novels.

In her self-conscious appropriation of the vampire tradition, Rice introduces a wider scope to the formulaic elements of the gothic genre, interweaving different genres with the gothic horror story. Her innovative approach to the vampire novel, with its complexity of intermingling issues, leaves many unanswered questions. It is the unresolved nature of the contradictions and paradoxes intrinsic to Rice's work that disturb and generate further debate.

ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviations used in the text are listed as follows:-

IV	<i>Interview with the Vampire</i>	Rice, Anne Futura pb 1977
MD	<i>Memnoch the Devil</i>	Rice, Anne Chatto & Windus hb 1995
QD	<i>The Queen of the Damned</i>	Rice, Anne Futura pb 1988
TBT	<i>The Tale of the Body Thief</i>	Rice, Anne Chatto and Windus hb 1993
VL	<i>The Vampire Lestat</i>	Rice, Anne Futura pb 1985

THE VAMPIRE CHRONICLES

INTRODUCTION - the *Vampire Chronicles* and Bram Stoker's *Dracula*

In the tradition of the genre of vampire fiction, vampires have been described variously as bestial creatures, Satanic/Byronic lords, femme fatales or unseen, psychic forces. Bram Stoker created the most enduring and fascinating image of the vampire in *Dracula*, the novel from which subsequent fictional and film vampires have evolved. In this introductory section, I propose to analyse Anne Rice's *Vampire Chronicles* in the context of the Vampire genre with particular reference to *Dracula*.

One of the striking differences between Stoker and Rice in their approach to the vampire novel is in their narrative strategy and use of the gothic genre. *Dracula* and his vampire cohorts do not have a voice in the text; their part in the novel is reported second-hand to the reader. The story of Stoker's vampire, *Dracula*, is narrated from the viewpoint of Lucy, Mina and the Crew of Light. The author has structured the narrative(s) in letters, newspapers, journal extracts and the phonograph. The story unfolds for the reader as the other characters communicate to each other in writing or record their feelings and anxieties in journals or scientific reports. Although many of these 'extracts' take the form of first person narratives, the story presented to the reader is fragmented, thus

producing a dislocation in the perception of time and space. This narrative strategy follows the pattern of many early gothic works including Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Indeed Stoker's novel incorporates most of the formulaic elements of the gothic genre: a disjointed narrative structure portraying a world of chaos, of transformations and of cruelty and fear. William Patrick Day argues that Gothic fiction represents:

*...the space between the worlds of religion and myth and science, between romance and realism, between soul and psyche, between inner and outer life.*¹

In the tradition of the genre Stoker's novel occupies this space with the narrative making its "own artificiality and fictiveness clear" and announcing from the outset its "discontinuity with the real world" (Day p. 13). However, Stoker's use of the genre and his exploration of the Gothic world has limitations.

In direct contrast, Rice's novels have a wide scope, interweaving different genres with the gothic horror story. In this more complex approach she reworks earlier fiction of the Romance, travelogue and confessional narratives. The texts are constructed as self-referential works, mingling popular and 'serious' writing. They draw on philosophical, religious and literary works together with erotica, historical romance, horror and the family saga. Frequently, Rice parodies these

¹ William Patrick Day, *In the Circles of Fear and Desire: A Study of Gothic Fantasy*, (Chicago 1985) p. 10.

genres using the historical romance and family saga to depict the 'lives and loves' of her rogue vampires.

In contrast to Dracula who has no voice of his own in Stoker's novel, Rice's vampires are the heroes of the stories, in effect constructing themselves through their autobiographies. The narrative strategy used by Rice can be found in the ready-formulated genres from the 1960s and 1970s in confessional stories. The self conscious subjectivity of the vampires' narratives follow the pattern of disclosure and public confession prevalent in personal experience narratives. In the *Vampire Chronicles* the narratives describe the experiences of cannibalistic, serial killers, of vampirism/homosexuality, of necrophilia, of sado-masochism and fetishism. Rice constructs a complex representation of subjectivity where the vampire speaks first-hand, blurring the reader's concepts of belief and disbelief, illusion and disillusion.

The first novel of the *Vampire Chronicles*, *Interview with the Vampire*, utilises the roles of interviewer and interviewee in the respect that the hero, Louis, records his oral narrative on to tape. Rice allows the voice of 'the other' to speak directly to the interviewer/reader mesmerising his passive audience. Lestat's written autobiography occurs in response to Louis's story and represents a rebuttal. Lestat wants the reader to know the 'truth' of his experience and put the story 'straight' after Louis' 'lies'. The reader is therefore forced to choose between the narratives and puzzle out the 'facts' of vampirism. The vampire's narratives echo

the personal experience narratives focusing on intimate experiences. These narratives have emerged from the early confessional stories and have evolved into a complex process of storytelling which is presented as 'fact' and presumed true. Ken Plummer discusses this process emphasising the way in which "the most personal and private narratives have become the most public property"². Rice's characters tell their stories for many of the reasons analysed by Plummer, because their lives have "become a source of suffering and anguish" and "the telling of a story is literally a coming to terms with it" (Plummer p. 34).

In the *Vampire Chronicles* the storytelling of the heroes represents their quest for identity and exploration of vampirism. The process of storytelling involves a complex interplay of 'fact', invention and performance. Rice's construct of an expansive vampire narrative focuses on a plurality of different narrative strategies. This process is discussed by Plummer on his analysis of the personal experience narrative as follows:

...some of these stories are screamed aloud in intense rage, some are clouded in bitterly tearful silence, others are quietly told to a researcher with a tape recorder. (Plummer p. 16).

² Ken Plummer, *Telling Sexual Stories*, (London 1995) p. 9.

On account of the fact that they tell their own stories and recite their experiences to the reader, the vampires in Rice's novels can no longer be interpreted as entirely monstrous, alien or 'the other' despite the nature of their vampirism.

Rice's novels portray characters strikingly different from Stoker's *Dracula*, while maintaining certain similarities with the basic themes he treats. She appears to enjoy exploding many of the myths associated with vampires while maintaining the image of the immortal, blood-sucking hero. It is common in vampire literature and film to highlight the most bizarre and extreme elements of the creature's supernatural persona. Rice's vampires display few of these powers. In her novels the vampires are less wonderful or surreal as they have more physical limitations than Dracula - in fact, they appear more 'human'. For example they cannot transmogrify as does Dracula who at the height of his strength transforms himself into a wolf, a bat or a fog-like mist. Nor can they change their physiology in the way that Dracula rejuvenates from an elderly man to one in his prime. Stoker's character can walk abroad during daylight though his powers are diminished. In contrast, Rice's vampires have to seek darkness to sleep through the day, their bodies succumbing to slumber at sun-rise and awakening at sunset. However, all the vampires are associated with coffins, although Rice's vampires use them for effect rather than necessity. Her main protagonist Lestat ironically relishes the polished, black wood and satin lining for aesthetic and hedonistic reasons.

In Rice's novels it is only the vampires who drank from the First Blood - fed from the blood of the first vampires - who have the strength to survive sunlight and the ability to fly across continents and oceans. Her characters cannot transform themselves into bats to fly away or disappear into dust or mist to evade discovery. They can, however, move more swiftly than the human eye can register, thus fooling mortals by illusion. They also have immense strength and increased agility, a mere 'fledgling' having the strength of ten men.

In vampire folklore peasant superstitions and religious relics are used as a means of keeping vampires at bay. Rice's vampires play ironically with these symbols, for stakes, crosses and garlic present no threat to them. Churches become refuges to her heroes who enjoy the peaceful atmosphere and gothic splendour as a retreat from the pressures of immortal life. They take an aesthetic pleasure in the beauty of religious artefacts, religious music and the rituals of the mass.

None of Rice's vampires are killed by the symbolic staking through the heart with its phallic associations and spectacular blood-spurting wound. They can only be destroyed by fire or fierce sunlight. Then their ashes must be scattered to prevent their bodies reforming into grotesque, mutilated beings for only a few have the strength to survive the slow regenerative process to recovery. They are not threatened by a band of 'warrior' mortals, like the Crew of Light described as

"knights of the cross" ³, who use scientific knowledge to overwhelm and ritualistically stake, behead or otherwise mutilate the body of the undead. Their greatest danger comes from their own kind not from humans.

Many depictions of vampires show them as having lupine or reptilian characteristics, with loathsome and bestial qualities reminiscent of *Nosferatu* in F.W.Murnau's film⁴ of the same name. Stoker's portrayal of Dracula appears to merge these bestial aspects with the qualities of the Satanic lord. Dracula has both the appearance of a "lizard" and a "filthy leech", and can transform himself into an aquiline-featured lord. Dracula has an animal's cunning and ruthlessness, allied to a hypnotic power used to entice his victims. He is a monster with "a child-brain" (*Dracula* p. 360) described by his human pursuers as growing in knowledge, but lacking sophistication and the finesse of culture. Dracula is five centuries old but has remained trapped in the time warp of Transylvania.

All Rice's vampires are physically improved when they are 'brought over'. Vampirism acts like an elixir of life enhancing their looks; their hair becomes more lustrous, their eyes incandescent, their physique becomes more trim, and

³ Bram Stoker, *Dracula*, (London 1988) p. 381.

⁴ *Nosferatu*, (orig: *Nosferatu, Eine Symphonie Des Gravens*) Frederich Wilhelm Murnau, Germany (1922).

they are stunningly beautiful, exotic and enticing creatures. Rice's heroes retain their human personalities, foibles and innate traits, but these are intensified by the transformation. This intensification of the visual and emotional state of the vampires parallels the effects of drug taking, the 'high' experienced, and further humanises them. As Lestat states: "... we only become more fully what we are"⁵. Adversely, if the character was unstable in mortal guise, in vampiric form he or she could be driven to madness.

Rice's vampires are "masterfully clever and utterly vicious"⁶ and learn quickly to adapt to their vampire nature and the changing world. They are sophisticated, intellectual immortals whose magnified sensibilities and emotions are tormented by their monstrous dark half. Lestat, Louis and Armand are the most provocative and attractive of Rice's characters and are vividly portrayed as beautiful and tortured dark angels driven by a powerful lust for human blood. They are skilled hunters who can seduce and overpower their victims. Ken Gelder⁷ describes the voyeuristic nature of Rice's vampires when they watch, listen and even mind-read their prey and other vampires. Gelder suggests that Rice's characters, in their detached investigation and study of mortals and their

⁵ Anne Rice, *The Queen of the Damned*, (QD - further references will be abbreviated), (London 1988) p. 7.

⁶ Anne Rice, *Interview with the Vampire*, (IV- further references will be abbreviated), (London 1977) p. 87.

⁷ Ken Gelder, *Reading the Vampire*, (London 1994)

own kind, have much in common with the *flaneur*. They enjoy playing games with humans, especially their victims, studying their everyday life, drawing out the kill in the way the cat plays with the mouse. Louis de Pointe du Lac, the hero of *Interview with the Vampire*, states that he indulged in "one of the greatest pleasures of a vampire, that of watching people unbeknownst to them" (IV p. 48). Another characteristic of the vampire novel is that it draws the reader into a voyeuristic mode. The genre invites the reader to watch with anticipation as the prey stalks his victim or lover and then takes him or her in an intimate and often fatal embrace.

The transformation into a vampire adds to the sophistication of the characters, allowing them time and leisure to enjoy cultural and artistic pursuits through the centuries. Lestat and Louis travel the world using their sharpened wits and intelligence to mingle in human society, enjoying wealth and gaining knowledge of the eras they live through. They have the mystery, glamour and sensual appeal of Milton's fallen angels. This duality to her characters gives them a greater depth and makes their 'stories' more intriguing and absorbing to the reader. In Rice's fiction, in contrast to Stoker's *Dracula* and numerous other vampire stories, it is the vampires who are assigned the role of hero, not the crusading humans. Her use of a subjective viewpoint draws the reader into the troubled consciousness of Louis and Lestat as they try to balance the vampire's instincts for survival against their moral and ethical beliefs. The dilemma that

faces Rice's characters (the conflict between a predatory nature versus an enhanced conscience) is graphically highlighted in her novels. Lestat is described as having an "extraordinary aura" (IV p. 17). He is a seductive being "with a graceful almost feline quality to his movements" (IV p. 161), not the reptilian, conscienceless creature of Stoker's book. Unlike Dracula and many other representations of vampires, Rice's characters have difficulty coming to terms with their transformation to the realm of monsters. Lestat is haunted by his sins. His conscience is always warring with his vampire instincts, urging him to find some "atonement for the death of so many millions" (QD p. 432). It is rare in vampire novels or gothic works as a whole for the monstrous being to display evidence of guilt or a consciousness of good and evil. A possible exception is Maturin's Melmoth⁸, but generally prior to the publication of the *Vampire Chronicles* the vampire was portrayed as completely amoral and alienated from all human values.

In contrast to Dracula, Rice's hero Lestat shows an aesthete's interest in the style and condition of his life. He surrounds himself with the comforts and treasures which wealth and good taste provide, dresses in the best clothes, and enjoys the mortal pleasures of each century. He is foppish without being effete and ponders on his appearance as it is reflected in the many antique mirrors of

⁸ Charles Maturin, *Melmoth the Wanderer*, (Oxford 1989).

his home. Rice's vampires produce reflections in mirrors, windows and the surface of water, whereas in conventional vampiric lore a vampire has no reflection. She appears deliberately to emphasise the qualities that the vampires have in common with humans and, in doing so, makes their dark side more shocking to the reader and their predicament more appalling and poignant.

Significantly, Lestat and his comrades do not smell of the graveyard or dress in garments which are musty and soiled with death. They may be bringers of death but their appearance is not befouled by it. In contrast to Dracula and the undead of folklore, Rice's heroes appear to shine with the light of angels rather than to bear the marks of corruption and decay. They have the hall-marks of the libertine, not the grave-robber. Rice removes the visible signs of corruption but her novels retain the elements of contamination and disease brought in the wake of vampirism. Earlier examples of the genre reflected contemporary society's fear of epidemic and xenophobic anxieties of political or cultural contagion. Vampirism became symbolic of 'plagues' of all types, both literal and metaphoric. In Stoker's era the modern plague was syphilis which resulted in a general fear of sexual contagion. *Dracula* displays an underlying sexual tension linked with excitement and repulsion at the intimate vampiric embrace. Stoker presents his hero planning his journey to England, where he hopes to colonise and spread his own type of contagion. He stresses that the contamination travels from the mysterious East, the Orient of sexual licence, to the West represented by

moralistic, Victorian England. The boat Demeter, in which Dracula travels, is struck by a strange plague, as he devours first the rats and then the crew. Rice reverses this process when Louis and Claudia travel from New Orleans to Europe. Ironically, Louis states that, despite the absence of rats, the passengers aboard the boat succumb to a mysterious plague.

Although few of Rice's vampires are marked by the stench of death (an exception being Santiago's coven in eighteenth century Paris which is stagnating under the weight of religious superstition), on several occasions Lestat is associated with the Louisiana swamp and the evil creatures that dwell there. He is also consigned to his 'grave' in its depths by Claudia and Louis. Rice links the introduction of vampirism in North America to Lestat's arrival in the "fetid little paradise"⁹ where the mist rises off the swamp to cover the inhabitants in its rank odour. Its presence is close and pervading in her descriptions of New Orleans and the surrounding countryside. Corruption is already present in "a most forsaken outpost of the Savage Garden" (VL p. 538) in a New World ripe for colonisation by the vampire. Vampires are a natural element in what Lestat perceives as a primordial garden, "...a wild and indifferent paradise without signposts of evil and good" (VL p. 146). He brings a new 'death' to the colonies:

⁹ Anne Rice, *The Vampire Lestat*, (VL - further references will be abbreviated), (London 1985) p.538.

vampirism with its connotations of defiled blood and its twentieth century associations with AIDS.

A connection with death and its stench has always been apparent in the vampire myth, as it draws on many perverse forms of sexuality. The plot of *Dracula* breaks many taboos, particularly necrophilia with its anal-erotic origins (stemming from the perceived link between death and the rectum as a failed or decayed vagina), incest and cannibalism. Bloodsucking links sexual intercourse with cannibalism through its combination of kissing and eating. Therefore it represents the ultimate possession of the desired object in a cannibalistic kiss/bite. In the vampire myth, blood and semen become interchangeable bodily fluids associated with sucking and discharge. The vampire bite represents a perverse embrace, a sadistic kiss which supplants penetration with the penis with penetration by phallic fangs and, as such, disrupts the male/female distinction by furnishing a cross-gendered eroticism. The oral fascination of the vampire exchange is linked to the perverse nature of the undead, a living corpse. The satisfaction of vampiric lust can only be achieved by feasting on the victim, sadistically 'raping' the mortal and sucking him/her dry of life-giving blood. The vampire is sexually impotent and breeds by the exchange of blood, creating life in death. This reproduction is a grotesque parody of human procreation - sexually perverse, violent and sadistic, yet described by Rice in terms of erotic passion and transcendent love.

The vampire myth mingles fantasies involving sexual initiation, blood, death and immortality. It exposes many taboo subjects suppressed in human society and deliberately subverts the so-called 'norms' of human behaviour. As Ornella Volta states:

*[F]irst and foremost: the vampire is an erotic creation ... blood and death, eroticism and fear, are the main elements in the universe of the vampire. The vampire can violate all taboos and achieve what is most forbidden.*¹⁰

Frayling introduces the term "haemosexual" in relation to the vampire, thus connecting blood and sexual initiation. There is a form of incestuous intercourse in the vampires' exchange of blood that is described with the use of biblical words in *Dracula*: "flesh of my flesh", "kin of my kin" (Frayling p.80). This association is also strong in Rice's work where the vampire relationships converge, break apart and reconnect in various forms. Her characters are first and foremost clearly portrayed as individuals who mingle and search out each other, forming couples, triangles and covens. Their 'procreation' crosses these boundaries reforming the patterns as new relationships start or covens disband. Fledglings who have been given the Dark Gift by one vampire go on to form further relationships, which may also involve an exchange of blood, or may feed off the same victim.

¹⁰ Ornella Volta, *Il Vampiro* in Christopher Frayling, *Vampyres*, (London 1991) p.387/8.

In her study of the feminine in *Dracula*, Marjorie Howes suggests that:

*[H]omophobic panic and the need to displace homoerotic desires onto the opposite gender seem to apply particularly to male homosexuality in the late nineteenth century. Dracula uses the feminine to displace and mediate the anxiety-causing elements of masculine character, representing the forbidden desires the men fear in themselves as monstrous femininity.*¹¹

Dracula portrays two groups of women, the overtly monstrous as represented by Dracula's three vampire women as opposed to Dracula's victims, Lucy and Mina. The voluptuous aggressiveness of Dracula's femme fatales has been widely discussed in critical works. Gail B. Griffin suggests that Stoker's misogyny is directed at the Victorian male's worst horror, the aggressively sexual woman. This 'horror' is symbolised in folkloric terms by the vagina dentata, the toothed vagina, with its threat of castration. The trio of vampire women are portrayed as Medusa figures, temptresses and seducers who deplete male strength. They are both "thrilling and repulsive", linking vampirism "with stifled obsessive sexuality"¹². Griffin goes on to suggest that Lucy represents the ancient taboo of menstruation and the concept of the unclean woman, where fertility represents

¹¹ Marjorie Howes, 'The Mediation of the Feminine: Bisexuality, Homoerotic Desire, and Self-Expression, in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*', in *Texas Studies in Literature & Language*, 30 Spring (1988) pp. 104 & 119.

¹² Gail B. Griffin, 'Your Girls That You All Love Are Mine: *Dracula* and The Victorian Male Imagination', in *International Journal of Women's Studies*, vol. 3 (1980) pp.454-465 (p.456).

the height of female power and is therefore a threat to patriarchal order. Lucy is a "demonic mother parody" when as the mysterious "bloofer lady" she sucks the blood of children (Griffin p. 460). Carol A. Senf¹³ also considers Lucy to be a sensual young woman who is drawn to her three suitors. Dracula sexually awakens Lucy, releasing her from the restrictions of the Victorian womanhood. Senf argues that Stoker describes Lucy in terms of images associated with the New Woman, a concept that was emerging in the late Victorian era to depict sexually aggressive and independent women. Senf suggests that Mina, in contrast, is the reverse of the New Woman, for although she is initially shown as independent, responsible and intelligent, by the end of the novel she has accepted the traditional woman's role in marriage and is shown to criticise the New Woman.

Lucy and Mina mediate the relationship between Van Helsing and his Crew of Light. Lucy's blood transfusion and the rescue of Mina from Dracula's 'stain' enables a homosocial bond to exist between the men, with Van Helsing represented as the paternal figure. This bond mirrors the incestuous 'family' of Dracula whom, as the ultimate father-figure, attempts to incorporate Jonathan Harker and the others into vampirism.

¹³ Carol A. Senf, 'Dracula: Stoker's Response to the New Woman', in *Victorian Studies*, Vol. 26 (1982) pp.33-49.

In a similar way, Rice's novels function to create homosocial and homosexual bonds between men, in which the roles of women become the focus of fear and disgust. The 'mother' image is particularly problematic in her texts either in its absence or as a site of displaced sexual fantasy¹⁴. The first novel of the *Chronicles*, *Interview with the Vampire*, shows Lestat creating a 'family' of three composed of himself, Louis and the child vampire Claudia. Eve Sedgwick discusses the structure of such erotic triangles between men and the roles women play in them where the feminine is used to mediate in male relationships and conceal fantasies about homosexuality. She comments on "...the use of women as exchangeable, perhaps symbolic, property for the primary purpose of cementing the bonds of men with men" ¹⁵. This idea is relevant to the triangle portrayed in *Interview with the Vampire*, as Lestat explicitly creates his family to tie Louis more strongly to him.

Lestat's 'family' is particularly perverse as Claudia performs the roles of both child and lover to Louis. She also acts as daughter to Lestat and has a woman's mind forever trapped in a five year old's body. Claudia is portrayed as a demonic 'child', more aggressive in vampiric desire than either Lestat or Louis.

¹⁴ I will discuss the 'mother' image further in a later chapter on Rice's female characters from ancient civilisations.

¹⁵ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature & Male Homosocial Desire*, (New York 1985) p. 26.

Her thirst for blood is insatiable and she is entirely without conscience. Her aggressive nature appears to mediate the monstrosity of Lestat's and Louis's relationship, ironically showing them to be 'good fathers' in caring for their vampire child.

Hodges and Doane in their essay on Rice argue that

*[T]his perfect staging of the oedipal moment uncovers not the girl's desire for the father so much as the father's desire for the girl child, the infantilized woman who is a perfectly obedient and dependent object of desire.*¹⁶

Claudia subverts this cosy 'family' by stating that "I'm not your daughter ...I'm my mamma's daughter" (IV p. 95) and by finally choosing Madeleine for a surrogate vampire mother. She attempts to reject her subjugation to Lestat by planning his brutal murder in order to release her from child-like role so that she may become Louis' lover. However, she and Madeleine are punished and subjected to a spectacular execution at the hands of the Parisian vampires. Claudia is ostensibly punished for her attempted murder of Lestat, but the text implies that it is her monstrous nature as aggressive and unruly girl-vampire that is the true cause of her execution. She is perceived by the Old World vampires,

¹⁶ Devon Hodges, and Janice L. Doane, 'Undoing Feminism in Anne Rice's Vampire Chronicles', in *Modernity and Mass Culture*, editors James Naremore & Patrick Brantlinger (Indiana 1991) p.160.

Armand and Santiago, as an abomination. Rice characterises her as the most predatory of all the vampires and yet she is the most pitiful, with her angelic appearance hiding the frustration and anger of an imprisoned woman.

One of the most interesting and yet little 'seen' women in the novels is Lestat's mother, Gabrielle. She appears in the first of Lestat's autobiographies', *The Vampire Lestat*, as a sophisticated and educated Italian woman imprisoned in a marriage to a boorish and impoverished French nobleman. She is described as literally trapped in the tower of the tumble-down castle, exiled from the splendour and culture of her childhood. Lestat is the mirror image of his mother and she encourages in him the seeds of rebellion - to learn, to act and to escape. Gabrielle nurtures Lestat's friendship with Nicholas, an outcast from his middle-class background who is perceived by his family and neighbours as monstrous. The nature of his monstrosity is not explicitly articulated in the story but the relationship which develops between him and Lestat is clearly homoerotic. Rice portrays the new fledgling Lestat confronted with his mother's pending death from consumption. He offers her immortality through the vampire 'kiss', bringing her over with the Dark Gift. Rice interprets the incestuous connotations of this exchange:

...she was flesh and blood and mother and lover and all things beneath the cruel pressure of my fingers and my lips, everything I had ever desired...I was almost swooning. (VL p. 174)

Gabrielle is no longer 'mother' to Lestat: he comments "she was simply *she*, the one I had needed all of my life with all of my being. The only woman I had ever loved" (VL p. 186). The significance of Gabrielle's transformation is that she is no longer mother or lover. She rejects all the feminine roles, employing the powers of the Dark Gift to cross gender barriers, to wander and explore the world in masculine attire. Once Gabrielle has crossed the divide into immortality, she refuses to be confined in any sense. She becomes entirely independent, ultimately abandoning any pretence of needing love or companionship. Vampirism is her liberation from all commitment, as Lestat admits:

[T]here was nothing I could do to make her what she would not be...And the truly terrible part was this: she didn't really want anything of me...what she really wanted was to be free. (VL p. 380)

Rice's portrayal of a female vampire who chooses to refuse all feminine roles, whether defined from the view point of the eighteenth, nineteenth or twentieth-century perception of such roles, suggests the ultimate threat to patriarchy. Clearly Gabrielle will not be defined by any order. She disrupts boundaries more ruthlessly than her son, becoming the true outlaw. Lestat is disturbed by his 'creation', "something in [him] rebelled" against the sight of her in boy's clothes. He wanted to ravage her until he realised that:

...she was not really a woman now, was she? Any more than I was a man. For one silent second the horror of it all bled through. (VL p. 190)

It appears that the true horror of Gabrielle is that she cannot be controlled even by her beloved son and maker, Lestat.

Rice raises the question, if Lestat is no longer a man and Gabrielle is no longer a woman, then what does vampirism represent? In the context of Gabrielle, this question is never answered by Rice beyond the point of implying her 'outlawry'. However, it is addressed more explicitly by Lestat and the other male vampires.

VAMPIRISM AS A METAPHOR FOR HOMOEROTICISM AND AIDS

A comparison of Rice's vampire narratives with Stoker's novel shows her development of vampirism as a metaphor for homoeroticism and its link with contagion through defiled blood. The vampire story, like other forms of gothic fiction, is a narrative of paranoia, which circles the anxieties and repressed desires of humanity. Stoker's reference to paranoia and his utilisation of fragmented narratives focuses on unfulfilled homosexual desire. The opening episode of *Dracula*, when Jonathan Harker is incarcerated in Dracula's castle, highlights the repressed nature of the text itself. Howes expresses this

phenomenon in the following terms: "[T]he text hovers between revealing and concealing homoerotic desire..." (Howes p. 104). There are many references to homosexuality in the early section of *Dracula* where deliberate ambiguities occur. Harker is described by Stoker as assuming a particularly passive role in response to Dracula and his three vampire women. He appears mesmerised by the vampires and reacts to their aggression with an anticipatory swoon. The often quoted section on Harker's response to the vampiric attack of Dracula's women portrays him torn between desire and repulsion, swooning in the face of near 'rape'. Stoker hints in the text at unspoken desires and actions which are only confessed to God. Confined in Dracula's castle, Harker admits that "I think strange things, I dare not confess to my own soul" (*Dracula* p. 29). Dracula claims Harker for himself quite categorically "[T]his man belongs to me" (*Dracula* p. 53) and when he leaves Harker to the mercy of the vampire women, Harker states: "...Count Dracula was kissing his hand to me, with a red light of triumph in his eyes, and with a smile that Judas in hell might be proud of" (*Dracula* p. 66). Referring to such episodes, Howes adds:

[T]he text relentlessly feminizes such irrepressible and subversive desires and represents the fear of succumbing to the seductions of a vampire as the fear of being emasculated." (Howes p. 107)

The vampire tradition has always portrayed the vampire bite as a form of phallic penetration. As a result, crossing gender roles and the expression of homosexual desire (male or female) can be implied in the narrative.

Rice's novels deal more explicitly with homoerotic desire than earlier novels such as Stoker's *Dracula*. In the first vampire novel Louis implies, before his encounter with the vampire Lestat, that sexually he "...was so regular! There was nothing extraordinary about me whatsoever" (IV p.20). Rice describes Louis's transformation to a vampire in overtly sexual terms:

...he lay down beside me now on the steps, his movement so graceful and so personal that at once it made me think of a lover. I recoiled. But he put his right arm around me and pulled me close to his chest. Never had I been this close to him before, and in the dim light I could see the magnificent radiance of his eye and the unnatural mask of his skin. As I tried to move, he pressed his right fingers against my lips...I wanted to struggle but he pressed so hard with his fingers that he held my entire prone body in check; and as soon as I stopped my abortive attempt at rebellion, he sank his teeth into my neck...I remember that the movement of his lips raised the hair all over my body, sent a shock of sensation through my body that was not unlike the pleasure of passion... (IV p.22/23)

In the early examples of gothic and vampiric fiction homosexual desire was only hinted at as the *unspeakable*, creating in its namelessness and its secrecy a

form of social control. As Sedgwick observes in her book on nineteenth century literature and homosexual desire, homophobia appeared thematically in their paranoid plots. She comments on "[T]he defining pervasiveness in Gothic novels of language about the unspeakable" (p. 94). *Melmoth the Wanderer* and *Vathek*¹⁷ both have homosexual implications. Sedgwick suggests that Melmoth persecutes his victims, wears them down and then tells them what he wants from them - "this information is never clearly communicated to the reader" (Sedgwick p. 94). Rice's vampires enjoy stalking, trapping and holding their victims/lovers in thrall, but the reader is left in little doubt of their desire to possess their prey entirely. In the erotic sequences, Rice creates a fusion of desire and fear in the victim combined with the intense and overwhelming lust of the vampire to gratify the thirst for blood. In common with Stoker, Rice's work explores homosexual desire and homophobia in respect of the male homosexual, but rarely touches on lesbian relationships. Her main protagonist Lestat expresses his bisexuality in the fourth novel *The Tale of the Body Thief*, remarking "I have always loved both men and women"¹⁸, but instances of heterosexual or lesbian desire in Rice's vampire novels are rare.

"I came out into the twentieth century" (VL p.10), the vampire Lestat

¹⁷ William Beckford, *Vathek*, (Oxford 1991)

¹⁸ Anne Rice, *The Tale of the Body Thief*, (TBT - further references will be abbreviated) (London 1993) p. 282.

announces in his 'autobiography'. His story is reminiscent of the gay 'coming-out' autobiographies of the 1980s and shares a similar sense of exhilaration and desire to shock. As a young 'man', who expresses the rebellion and danger of announcing his difference to the world, Lestat names his fellow vampires, 'outs' them and challenges them to take a stand, fight or, alternatively, be destroyed by the humans.

Whereas Edmund White¹⁹, David Leavitt and Neil Barratt create works of fiction which disclose the rites of passage into the open acknowledgement of sexual 'difference', Lestat (and to a lesser extent Louis) describes his initiation into a monstrous difference which signifies his outcast status.

Richard Dyer in his essay *Children of the Night* explores vampirism as a metaphor for the portrayal of homosexuals and lesbians in fiction from the early literature of the eighteenth century to the twentieth-century. He illustrates how vampire narratives function as a vehicle for gay writers, in particular, to discuss their changing attitudes towards homosexuality. Dyer mentions Rice's work, citing it as one of the first vampire novels which, by employing the vampire as narrator, gives an insight into the interior world of the vampire (or gay) experience.

¹⁹ Edmund White, *A Boy's Own Story*, (London 1982), Edmund White, *The Beautiful Room is Empty*, (London 1988), David Leavitt, *The Lost Language of Cranes*, (London 1986), Neil Bartlett, *Ready To Catch Him Should He Fall*, (London 1990).

Here I shall expand Dyer's ideas in relation to Rice's work and investigate the changing aspects of vampirism/homosexuality as highlighted in the *Chronicles*, together with the development of Lestat's character as representing a vampire/gay/bisexual persona. In his essay Dyer describes the relationship between "the values and feelings explored and produced by the vampire genre and the values and feelings of emergent lesbian and gay male identities"²⁰. He explains that the portrayal of vampirism in fiction and film appears to correspond to the social construction of gay/lesbian sexuality and to reflect both the negative and positive feelings which have been expressed regarding being homosexual and lesbian. By introducing the narrative viewpoint of the vampire, Rice creates opportunities to highlight the contradictions in the representations of the vampire or gay persona within the gothic genre. I shall also propose a reading of Rice's text, particularly Lestat's very public assertion of 'Vampirism', in the light of 'Queer' theory.

If, as Dyer suggests, Rice's earlier vampire novels allude to the gay experiences of the 1980s and to the phenomenon of 'outing', since she draws parallels between the vampire communities with their vampire bars and the gay communities, with the gay bars in New York and the American West Coast, then it may be possible to look for references in her later novels to the fear of AIDS

²⁰ Richard Dyer 'Children of the Night', in *Sweet Dreams*, ed. Susannah Radstone (London 1988) pp. 47-73 (p. 51).

and its emergence both within these communities and the heterosexual population. I have highlighted the overall sexual symbolism of vampirism in the earlier discussion of *Dracula*, but the element of the blood exchange, which is strongly foregrounded in the vampire genre, is particularly relevant when discussing vampirism as a metaphor for AIDS. During its early outbreak in America AIDS was diagnosed and treated as gay-related immunodeficiency (GRID) and seen specifically by the medical world as an epidemic spread within the gay population by the exchange of bodily fluids. The vampire genre, which highlights the "forbidden" and "secret" desires of the vampire, together with his/her hidden identity, is shown by Dyer to correspond to the popular literary representations of homosexuality. In Rice's novels the identity of the vampire is disclosed to the reader immediately, but emphasis is placed on his/her skill in avoiding discovery and capture by mortals.

The atmosphere and tone of Rice's novels certainly change through the *Chronicles*, possibly mirroring the changing American perception of the homosexual community and of AIDS as an epidemic. Susan Sontag and Cindy Patton, in their work on AIDS, its metaphors and epidemiology, analyse the demonization of an illness and the ghettoization of the ill. Both Sontag and Patton emphasise the military metaphors used to stigmatise and alienate the patient. AIDS is described as the 'enemy within', "a disease contracted from

dangerous others”²¹. The metaphor of plague and epidemic is applied to the illness, introducing associations of defilement and decomposition. Prevention is targeted at ‘risk-groups’ who become further marginalized into “tainted-communities” (Sontag p. 46). As Patton argues:

*...epidemiology defines the boundaries of a disease by constituting a category of subject (risk-group) an imagined community produced through vectors which epidemiology simulates as discovered.*²²

The targeted risk-groups are specified as homosexuals and drug-takers, who are described as the “object of scrutiny, the ‘public’ space, the potentially dangerous bodies” (Patton p. 188 & 193). In relation to Rice’s *Vampire Chronicles*, homosexuality and vampirism could be seen as synonymous with a form of risk-taking behaviour that transmits contagion requiring colonies or spaces to be marked out and cordoned off for control or destruction.

The use of vampirism as a metaphor for contagion is not a new idea. As illustrated in the earlier section on Stoker’s *Dracula*, references to vampirism in literature have represented the Black Death and syphilis. I will argue that the extremes reached in the *Queen of the Damned* reflect and parody the prejudices

²¹ Susan Sontag, *AIDS and Its Metaphors*, (London 1988) p.27.

²² Cindy Patton, ‘Performativity and Spatial Distinction: The End of AIDS Epidemiology’, in *Performativity and Performance*, editors Andrew Parke & Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (London 1995) pp. 173-197 (p.187).

and paranoia surrounding AIDS.

Prior to the disclosure of his vampirism the aim of the vampire Lestat, who “came out in the twentieth century” (VL p.10), was to *pass* for human. He and the other rogue vampires over the centuries have no desire to give allegiance to the devil, join covens or to live under the rule of fear and superstition. Instead, they choose to maintain a life-style as near to human as their monstrous nature will allow. They camouflage their signs of difference, including pearlescent skin, ‘brilliant’ eyes and predatory fangs, in order to move unrecognised among mortals. Their alien and unnatural *gifts* are hidden from the world, while they enjoy the pleasures of civilisation and, at the same time, stalk their prey. They haunt the boundaries of what is considered ‘human’ and ‘inhuman’, rejecting an ‘underworld’ existence of total alienation from humanity. The rogue vampires enjoy their powers, their exotic nature and their Otherness, in contrast to Santino’s and Armand’s covens, which previously lived in the crypts and graveyards of medieval Europe, gripped in an almost religious fervour of guilt, degradation and horror. The ancient rogue vampires are known as the “Children of the Millenia” and they are survivors whose wisdom and adaptability has increased their ‘dark gifts’.

After fifty years of underground ‘sleep’, Lestat reawakens to the New Orleans of the 1980s. Rice portrays her ‘modern’ vampire attempting to find a place in a

world where "[P]ure evil has no real place" (VL p.17). Lestat finds that the secular twentieth century has no more need of religion, superstition or monsters than the Age of Reason into which he was born two hundred years earlier. Lestat discovers that he has no place,

[E]xcept, perhaps, in the art that repudiates evil - the vampire comics, the horror novels the old gothic tales - or in the roaring chants the rock stars who dramatise the battles against evil that each mortal fights without himself. (VL p.17)

Despite his attempts to the contrary, Lestat finds that he inhabits a plane of near invisibility. He feels that if he is perceived at all by mortals, it should be as evil. However, since the secular twentieth-century does not recognise 'Evil', he exists, therefore, on the borders of 'human' and 'inhuman', visible only with the illusory world of art, fiction and fantasy. In the harsh reality of his otherness, he resides within excluded sites, an abject being located in the "unliveable and uninhabitable zones of social life"²³. In a manner similar to the homosexual who finds him/herself marginalized within a "domain of abject beings" (Butler p.4), the vampire in Rice's novels functions on the periphery of mortal society, displaced and alienated by his difference. Judith Butler's use of the term 'abjection' extends Kristeva's references in her essay on the topic²⁴. Butler raises

²³ Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: on the Discursive Limits of 'sex'*, (London 1993) p.4.

²⁴ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, (New York & London 1982).

questions about "the discursive means by which the heterosexual imperative enables certain sex identifications and disavows others." (Butler p.5). The process by which the subject is constituted is exclusionary, requiring an outside domain for those it disavows. This domain or zone is inhabited by excluded beings and operates through the repudiation of what will not be included within the heterosexual 'norm'.

When he 'comes out', Lestat revels in his attempt to be visible to mortals and, in proclaiming himself a fiend, after two centuries of concealment, he comments "I spoke my name aloud, I told my nature. I was there!" (VL p.24). By expressing his "nature", and 'outing' the vampires, Lestat seeks to launch a great and glorious war, where vampires would be recognised, hunted and

...fought in this glittering urban wilderness as no mythic monster has ever been fought by man. (VL p.26)

Rice's "mythic monster" exhibits a difference, one that is analogous to the literary representations of vampirism/homosexuality; this is a sexual orientation which is not visible, linking with secret erotic practices (Dyer p. 58). Lestat's challenge to fiends and mortals alike is that of the defiant outcast, who speaks for himself and delights in his difference. This emphasis on speaking for oneself is particularly strong in Rice's novels and parallels the 'coming out' studies published by gay/lesbian writers since the 1980s.

Lestat's "great and glorious war", to be launched in the concert stadium and fought on the streets of California, re-enacts the gay sexual revolution which culminated in the "ideology of gay pride", its fostering of "sexual proliferation" and the "politics of ecstasy"²⁵. Rice's vampire publicly names himself and incites rebellion among his own kind. By challenging the shameful representations of vampirism imposed over the centuries, he displays intentions which amount to a strategy of confrontation with, and transgression of, the authority of the ancient laws. Lestat's transgression of these laws creates a "disruptive return of the excluded" (Butler p.12). He destabilises the [mortal or heterosexual] matrix, expanding the gaps created by his presence as outsider, one who escapes or exceeds the 'norm'. Lestat affirms his difference through his exuberant search for both lovers and victims, exulting in these erotic exchanges. His subversion of authority and denial of the repressive rules governing vampire existence, parallels the actions of gay and lesbian movement in their fight against exclusion.

In stating his difference, Rice's character comments: "...my favorite was the very young scoundrel who'd kill you for the coins in your pocket." (VL p. /135) He goes on to add: "...I'd had all the ecstasy that rape could give." (VL p.158) In contrast, when discussing the love between vampires, he says:

²⁵ Linda Singer, *Erotic Welfare: Sexual Theory & Politics in the Age of Epidemic*, (London 1993) p.115

...in being dedicated to evil one does not cease to love... Do devils love each other? ...But it was a matter of a concept of evil, wasn't it? (VL p. 114)

Lestat's preference is predominantly for "young scoundrels", since as victims they fulfil two needs for him. First, their strength and youth make them worthy prey, as he relishes the experience of struggle and "rape". Secondly, he attempts to justify the taking of life by choosing ruthless criminals, who have themselves abused and murdered humans. Rice portrays Lestat trapped within a cycle of blood-lust, elation and guilt, since his subjective narrative highlights the emotional complexity of his relationship to mortals.

Lestat describes his love of humanity and individual mortals as an emotion distinct from blood-lust. His love for humanity, envisaged as a desire to bring happiness and goodness into their lives, is an extension of his human emotions and is magnified in his isolation from the intimacy of their world. Paradoxically, he must feed on them in order to survive, the kill being the one moment in time when he can become one with them. These contradictions are inherent in the role of Rice's vampires and can be read in terms of popular homophobic prejudice. Lestat loves and desires mortals, but, in physically expressing his love, he 'taints' and 'harms' them by initiating them into vampirism²⁶.

²⁶ I am indebted to Dr. Paulina Palmer for her helpful comments on this aspect of vampirism/homosexuality.

In *The Vampire Lestat* Rice portrays Lestat's desire for his *own kind* as being one for predominately young male fiends. She describes their relationships in highly erotic terms, but combines reference to the physical with a transcendent quest for mutual exchange of *blood* and love. In referring to the transformation to vampire, Lestat states:

...none of us really changes over time; we only become more fully what we are. (QD p.7) We breathe and we taste and we smell and we feel and we thirst. (VL p.260)...all things were magnified in this state, even the misery that I felt. (VL p.109)

Rice emphasises the vampires' need for, and yet inherent mistrust of, one another. This ambiguity represents aspects of the vampire community which correspond with the contradictory elements of the gay 'scene', as discussed in Dyer's essay. One of the positive aspects of both communities is the vampire/gay support and friendship network. Alternatively, these relationships can be manipulative, with one vampire/gay exerting power over the other, who is portrayed as more vulnerable. Lestat's openness in "knowing [his] own monstrosity" (VL p. 362), and 'coming out', pose a threat to the 'closet' vampires and covens alike. To disclose one's 'difference' to the world of mortal and fiend is to make oneself vulnerable. However, Lestat takes pleasure in breaking the dark covenants; he comments, "I had never been very good at

obeying rules" (VL p.349). His disruptive laughter shatters the secret world of the vampire/gays and ironically subverts concepts of good and evil, along with the *natural* order. He observes, with reference to this:

[A]nd now I am a good vampire. So much for our understanding of the word 'good'. (VL p 367)

He also comments:

I wasn't part of the world that cringed at such things. And with a smile, I realized that I was of that dark ilk that makes others cringe. Slowly and with great pleasure, I laughed. (VL p.110)

Lestat seeks the ancient Children of the Millennia as mentors and companions; he also creates his own 'fledgling' vampires, his progeny, through an exchange of *blood*. According to Dyer, Lestat's increasingly indiscriminate satiating of desire and blood-lust:

...corresponds to the widespread model of gay male coupledness where a stable central relationship and continued cruising and promiscuity are not held to be incompatible. (Dyer p.68)

Rice shows Lestat as becoming less discriminating in his choice of victims as the novel progresses. She highlights the way that, though Lestat's actual need for blood for survival decreases as his *gifts* strengthen, the blood-lust is not

abated. He stalks his victims and lovers ruthlessly, with the irresponsibility of an arrogant child. Lestat gains immense satisfaction from his skills as a hunter; his predatory nature is developed in his mortal youth as "wolf-killer". However, he combines the characteristics of the lone predator with those of the exuberant, pleasure seeker who thrives before an audience. As a mortal, Lestat expressed his love of life and freedom through his roles in the Italian commedia dell'arte. Now he expresses his talent for burlesque and the grotesque by assuming the defiant role of rock star. He plans his ultimate performance for the concert on All Hallows' Eve. He states:

[I]t will be splendid, better than ever before. But I am going on the stage...I will be the Vampire Lestat for all to see. A symbol, an outcast, a freak of nature - something loved, something despised, all of those things, I tell you I can't give it up. I can't miss. And quite frankly I am not the least afraid. (VL p.679)

Lestat determines to change contemporary society's popular perception of the vampire, in the same way that Stonewall and Gay Liberation changed the public perception of gay men. He will do battle as he did against the old covens of fearful vampires, who were convinced of their own perversion and superstitious ritual. Their destruction by Lestat opens up the way for communities of vampires to live as humans and move within their world freely. Rice locates these

communities in the urban streets and bars, where they represent safe zones for vampires and mortals alike. Lestat explains:

[I]t is a new age. It requires a new evil. And I am that new evil. I am the vampire for these times. (VL p.250)

Rice ironically undermines Lestat's positive assertion, as his desire to let loose a "new evil" generates an element beyond his control. Without the controlling rituals and the prohibitions against procreating 'fledglings', there is an explosion in the vampire population. This conspicuous growth in vampire numbers makes them vulnerable. They are untried and inexperienced, lacking the knowledge to protect themselves. Glorifying in their freedom and proud of their difference, they move unwittingly through the world of vampire and mortal, unaware of the dangers. Modelling themselves on the fantasy images of the screen vampires or on Lestat's defiant self-portrait, they are ignorant both of their own "nature" and of society's retribution. Where Lestat alone has walked, many would follow; as he comments:

[T]ry to see the evil I am, I stalk the world in mortal dress - the worst of fiends, the monster who looks exactly like everyone else. (VL p.250)

Lestat goes on to describe what this "new evil" will represent as it moves freely between mortal and vampire, from continent to continent; he asks:

[W]hy should Death lurk in the shadows? Why should Death wait at the gate? There is no bedchamber, no ballroom that I cannot enter. Death in the glow of the hearth, Death on tiptoe in the corridor, that is what I am. Speak to me of the Dark Gifts - I use them. I'm Gentleman Death in silk and lace, come to put out the candles. The canker in the heart of the rose. (VL p.251)

In these prophetic words, Lestat describes not only his own progress through the moral world, but also that of a "new evil" which will stalk mortal and vampire alike without hindrance. Death, in the form of this insidious disease, will hold Lestat hostage, while it sweeps across the world like a plague. The "canker" closely resembles the popular and distorted image of AIDS as a disease originating solely in the gay community through 'high risk' or dangerous sex. "Gay men who bite"²⁷ is a phrase which encapsulates Rice's characterisation of her male vampires. Ellis Hanson's essay the *Undead* discusses representations of death and gay sex. He states that "notions of death have been at the heart of nearly every historical construction of same-sex desire" (Hanson p. 324). The language used to delineate AIDS as a disease and to categorise AIDS 'sufferers' has "concretize[d] a mythical link between gay sex and death" (Hanson p. 324). Hanson discovers a powerful visual and verbal depiction of vampirism implicitly

²⁷ Ellis Hanson 'Undead', in *inside/out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, (London 1991) pp. 324-341 (p.324).

present in the "[F]ace of AIDS" (Hanson p.314) which he traces back to "literature's two most notorious vampires: Bram Stoker's Dracula and Sigmund Freud's homosexuals"²⁸ (Hanson p. 324). He adds that he has found:

spectacular images of the abject, the dead who dare to speak and sin and walk abroad, the undead with AIDS. (Hanson p. 324)

Hanson explores the representation of "the vampire as the embodiment of evil sexuality" where "myths about gay sex serve to amplify myths about AIDS" (Hanson p. 325). However, in Rice's *Vampire Chronicles* the embodiment of evil is not found in the vampire/gay male alone but in the source of vampirism, a fierce and rapacious female. Hanson's depiction of Gaetan Dugas, Patient Zero, as the Dracula of AIDS, "who flits from coast to coast at 'breakneck speed', remorselessly spreading the strange foreign illness of the blood" (Hanson p. 332) is transformed by Rice into a terrifying and problematic image of the female as a bringer of death.

The Vampire Lestat concludes with the proverbial 'cliff-hanger'; the positive energy of Lestat's challenge has been met by an unseen force that thwarts his plans. He is surrounded by his friends and lovers in the comforting retreat of his California home, when he discovers that he has awoken an ancient evil that is

²⁸ I will discuss the psychoanalytical aspects of vampirism later in this chapter.

relentless in its pursuit of victims. This evil disrupts the vampires' new sense of community and severs Lestat from their midst.

Lestat's abduction by Akasha represents a turning point in Rice's *Chronicles*. Up to this point vampirism has become an increasingly positive and seductive image, with Lestat's autobiographic account of his experience in *The Vampire Lestat* mesmerising the reader with its Byronic protagonist and its poetic use of language recounting an erotic tale. However, the multi-narrative viewpoints of *The Queen of the Damned* deliberately undermine Lestat's hold on the reader by offering alternative versions of the explosion in vampirism.

Lestat opens the story with an introduction in a tone that is bitter and disillusioned. He admits:

I didn't foresee the cataclysm, but then I never really envision the finish of anything I start. Its the risk that fascinates, the moment of infinite possibility. It lures me through eternity when all other charms fail. (QD p.6)

The cataclysm which has occurred has resulted in the destruction of the vampire communities, coven houses and bars, with the exception of Armand's Night Island, where a grand coven of wise and enduring vampires lives with their careless young. Each of the vampires has been affected by the evil unleashed, particularly Lestat, who speaks of his guilt, sorrow and loss of freedom. He

bleakly conveys the sense of being driven painfully back into the shadows; he admits that he feels it is:

...so hurtful to be again the outsider, forever on the fringes, struggling with good and evil in the age-old private hell of body and soul. (QD p.5)

This return to the margins of existence, which separates Lestat from human society, drives him back into the 'closet' life of shadows. The cataclysmic destruction of vampire and mortal has brought an end to Lestat's hopes of revolution and has reinstated Draconian laws to regulate the behaviour of all vampires.

The sweeping destruction of the vampires by Akasha has left only the very strong to survive in hiding and made Lestat "a little more conscientious" (QD p.3) in his choice of prey and lover. Akasha, once queen of ancient Egypt and Mother of all vampires, is 'resurrected' by Lestat's strident rock music. Her plan to remake the world gradually unfolds and with it her desire to destroy all who stand in her way; she looks forward to:

[T]he execution of those who should never have been born. Evil spawn. The Children of Darkness are no more. And we shall have only angels now. (QD p.290/1)

The fire that Akasha utilises to consume the vampires could be seen as representing, in symbolic terms, either a virulent plague or a cleansing force. She represents a problematic image of woman/vampire in the novel. She is described variously as "the Mother", as "the Queen" and is depicted as resembling the "Blessed Virgin Mary". Rice's overall picture of her is closely linked with Barbara Creed's image of the archaic mother and woman as vampire in *The Monstrous-Feminine*²⁹. Creed isolates the female monsters that have evolved from dreams, myths and fiction. Akasha represents several of the functions, which Creed lists in categorising the female monster: amoral primeval mother, vampire, beautiful deadly killer, woman as life-in-death and the vagina dentata. Creed divides her analysis between Kristeva's theory of the abject and maternal, and Freud's theory of castration (further discussed in the following chapter).

Akasha is the most powerful of the vampires, at least until the elemental force of Mekare returns to civilisation. Historically, Akasha has been a militarist monarch who dominated the ancient civilisation by strength of arms and fear. Throughout the millenia, she has remained in a 'frozen' state until awoken by Lestat, and although her mind has absorbed the changing nature of the world, she has failed to assimilate this knowledge. On her resurrection, she is still the

²⁹ Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*, (London 1993)

warrior queen. She desires egotistically to rule the world as she ruled ancient Egypt, through conquest and tyranny.

Rice couches Akasha's speech in religious terms, making frequent reference to the Madonna and child; this is exemplified in Akasha's utterance, "[B]ehold the miracle, behold the Mother, behold the Mother and her angel" (QD p.356). However, Rice links the biblical references she introduces to older pagan religions; she portrays Akasha as: "the ancient Mother who always dwelt in the grottoes before Christ" (QD p.416). Akasha's "righteous cause" takes the form of a divine war, in which she, "the Queen of Heaven", will bring a new reign of peace on earth. With Lestat as her angel and weapon, she will sweep from continent to continent reclaiming the world to fit her myth. Her targets are male mortals and rogue vampires, whom her fire consumes, destroying male mortal authority and young promiscuous vampires.

Akasha's paranoid rule could be seen as representing vampiric megalomania taken to an extreme degree, with a small elite saved to serve her and all the rogues destroyed. Her consuming fires could also be regarded as representing the plague as AIDS turning on its own and on mortal enemies. Alternatively, her religious war may be interpreted as a return to reactionary values, and her destruction of vampires and male mortals, as the biblical wrath of a god

cleansing the earth. Akasha's desire to annihilate the bulk of the mortal male population could also be viewed as an extreme expression of aggressive separatist revolutionary feminism. Rice portrays Akasha's paranoid logic and extreme solution as not dissimilar to the puritanical, hell-fire condemnation of homosexuality by some of America's right-wing religious denominations.

If Akasha's ancient authority and militarist viewpoint are interpreted as representing a revisionist right-wing policy, then it is possible to equate her flawed reasoning and divine crusade with the 1980s/1990s response to AIDS. Perceiving herself as not only monarch of the vampire world, but also as reigning over mortals, Akasha prepares her strategy of extermination as a result of her misreading of an apparent world crisis. During her 'sleep' through the millenia, Akasha has 'mentally' journeyed the world, seeking a solution for a world "sunk into depravity and chaos" (QD p.517). However, her "visitations" are selective, and she knows "a world, but not *the* world" (QD p.516). She perceives and creates a crisis to fit her own solution. Akasha's "clear vision after centuries of search" (QD p.426) is a distortion of the true situation. Lestat and the other vampires challenge her "logic" by arguing that, given time, humanity will provide its own solution to the chaos, as goodness and wisdom will prevail. Akasha cannot wait for the natural course of events; she insists on striking first and

putting an end to war, rape and violence by destroying fifty per cent of the population. Ironically, Akasha's logic demands that Lestat, the embodiment of male arrogance, "ravening lust" (QD p. 441) and violent domination, should be her tool. As Rice comments, "the males had been sacrificed to the embodiment of their own violence" (QD p.441). Akasha justifies the massacre of male mortals and vampires in the name of peace and religion.

Rice portrays Akasha's 'logic' as similar to the panic perspective surrounding AIDS. This panic 'logic', spawned from a "logic of contagion" (Singer pp. 6 & 28) described by Linda Singer in her recent book on AIDS, seeks immediate and dramatic responses. It creates an upsurge of regulatory power to 'wage war' on a perceived epidemic, thus exploiting and sustaining the very social phenomena it seeks to control. This power functions as an enabling force for inciting that which it came to regulate (Singer p. 6 & 29). Akasha's "divine war" functions in a similar manner, when she incites violence, murder and religious mania to fulfil her dreams of a utopian world. Her new world would be run by enthralled women and enslaved vampires, her "angels", in order that she, the Queen of Heaven, could rule as despot and goddess. In the *Chronicles* Akasha functions as a powerful image of authority run riot, reacting and formulating strategies based on biased and incomplete knowledge. Her failure to assimilate

information correctly leads her to make arbitrary decisions, which are based on ill-formed judgements. She uses the rhetoric of fanatical religion and fascist government to both hypnotise and incite the masses.

In *The Queen of the Damned* Rice conveys the sense of vampirism becoming drained of its vitality. She describes the "fledgling Children of Darkness" as "weak" (QD p.17) and "pallid as orchids" (QD p.268). She observes that there are "far too many of them for this civilized modern city" (QD p.17). The vampire blood has become dissipated, as the fledglings breed indiscriminately. They are too young to understand the dangers. Since they lack leadership and are ignorant of their history, they are extremely vulnerable to the 'plague'. They are too weak to withstand Akasha's consuming fire, as she destroys all who stand in her way, including all those vampires she considers should not have been made. Akasha represents both the cankerous disease of which she is the primary source of contagion and the hell-fires of retribution. She destroys her victims so completely, that they "explode into tiny conflagrations" leaving only "smoke rising from empty clothing" (QD p.271/2). Ironically, Akasha is herself destroyed by one of the First Blood, Mekare, an early victim abused and mutilated by Akasha, who returns after six thousand years to exact vengeance. This cankerous disease, which symbolically represents a sexual epidemic, is, to quote Singer:

...treated as a retributive consequence of past transgressions, which now return to consume the sources of pollution themselves, as well as claiming... 'innocent victims'... (Singer p. 31)

Rice introduces direct references to American gay districts in her novels; she refers to Castro Street in New Orleans and the gay bars of California and Miami. She places the safe havens of the vampires in these settings, thus drawing parallels between the promiscuous, young vampires and the gay men of America. In doing so, Rice explicitly links the vampiric and gay 'zones', creating links between the 'infection' which spreads through both communities.

In contrast to the decline experienced by the young vampires, Lestat's physical strength increases and his Dark Gifts become more powerful as the novel progresses. He grows stronger as he 'feeds' from Akasha, and Rice describes this exchange of *blood* in erotic terms. Initially, Rice appears to offer a potential heterosexual union for Lestat. He awakens Akasha from her 'frozen sleep', whereupon she saves him from destruction by the other vampires. Akasha abducts her 'lover', but Lestat's role changes to that of slave in thrall to her power and hypnotic attraction, as she demands: "surrender and I'll teach you things you never dreamed of." (QD p.337) This potential heterosexual relationship becomes blurred, as increasingly Lestat is described in terms of the role of child to Akasha the Mother. Rice reiterates Akasha's desire to recreate

the myth of Madonna and child, goddess and prince. Lestat begins to see the kisses that take place between them as a form of blasphemy. In fact, Lestat is a vampiric descendant of Akasha who, as the source of vampirism, is "Mother" to all her kind. Therefore, their erotic exchange of blood could represent an incestuous union.

Rice does not offer a positive image of heterosexual love in the *Chronicles*, although Lestat does sample mortal sexual union when his body is exchanged for that of a human's in *The Tale of the Body Thief*. Ironically, he fails to find a love for mortals in this human form, though as a vampire who is unable to consummate the sexual act he is filled with love for them. The mingling of mortal bodily fluids is unfulfilling for Lestat and not as satisfying to him as the vampire's blood-lust. At the end of *The Queen of the Damned* Lestat continues his quest for companionship and love from a fellow, male vampire.

In both the introduction and closing section of *The Queen of the Damned* Rice presents a sombre and regretful Lestat. She portrays him as unable now to move freely among mortals; he complains of the fact that, "...our little private realm - is smaller and darker and safer than ever. It will never again be what it was" (QD p. 6). Random moments of contact and recognition with mortals will never be enough for Lestat.

Lestat's subjective narrative emphasises his sense of responsibility and feelings of guilt for the disaster. It was members of his own kind who punished him for what he had done, for his brazen disclosure of 'difference' and 'outing' of the other ancient ones. They stated: "...the monster is courting a change in the mortal perspective ...It cannot go unpunished." (QD p. 7)

He recounts the agony of being anonymous among mortals and being regarded as, "Lestat, the sleek and nameless gangster ghoulie again, creeping up on helpless mortals, who know nothing of things like me" (QD p.5).

The importance of the words "nameless" and "unknown" is crucial here. Lestat can no longer proclaim his identity positively. He has returned to the "domain of the abject" (Butler p.5) Rice signals his loss of Self, commenting that, "Lestat was just a symbol now. A symbol of himself" (QD p.329). He is symbolic of an era, the vampiric revolution, which he sought to create but which, through his actions, has ceased to exist. Metaphorically, this era could represent the 1980s period of 'Gay Pride', with its positive assertion of male homosexuality, which has suffered so many setbacks since the onset of AIDS. Lestat's narrative strategy of 'speaking out' and visually displaying his 'difference' become in essence a narrative of resistance to the silence imposed on the 'undead' and parallels the silence imposed on those 'living with AIDS' through social and political constraints. However Lestat's attempt to construct a space to defiantly

articulate his personal experiences of vampirism is swallowed up in the vacuum of the " vast tracts of barren land, territories whose existence remains unspoken, perhaps even—for the time being—unspeakable" ³⁰, a description applied by Patton to the "landscape of HIV epidemic" (Patton p.3). Patton highlights the effects of the backlash against perceived 'risk groups' when political and social anxieties result in:

attention and surveillance, silence and relinquishing of control over one's own meanings are discursive effects symptomatic of relations of power. (Patton p. 3)

Similarly, Lestat suffers a backlash of repressive strategies relegating him to the shadowy, sinister status of the abject.

With regret Lestat acknowledges the irony of his position:

[N]o room for us; no room for God or the Devil: it should be metaphor - the supernatural ... a rock star pretending to be the Vampire Lestat. (QD p.541)

In *The Tale of the Body Thief* there are fewer examples of vampirism as a metaphor for AIDS. However, the novel does raise issues surrounding 'safe sex' and the 'new sobriety' as perceived in post-1980s America. Rice emphasises how the vampire community has split and now offers little support for its members.

³⁰ Cindy Patton, *Inventing AIDS*, (London 1990) p.3.

Lestat opens his continuing autobiography in the role of a “vagabond vampire roaming the earth” (TBT p. 3), homeless and adrift. He states that it is folly for the vampires to think they wanted to create a coven again. Ironically he highlights the contradiction in their lives when he adds:

[V]ampires don't really like others of their kind, that their need for immortal companions is desperate. (TBT p. 4)

However, after the cataclysm the surviving vampires have scattered far and wide. Lestat is left driven by a “keen and merciless conscience” (TBT p.4), seeking a new purpose for his existence. The destruction of his dream of vampiric revolution has ruptured the rationality of his scheme, creating “an absurd demand that the unjustifiable be somehow justified” (Singer p. 119). By the use of subjective narrative, Rice emphasises Lestat’s loss when he questions his right to existence. He asks: “[W]hy would anyone want *me* to live?” (TBT p. 53) and further states: “[M]y guilt is like my beauty - eternal” (TBT p. 14).

Lestat has lost the promise of a future without threat, guilt and suffering, a future which now appears unavailable to the vampires and especially to him. Driven to extremes throughout both his mortal and vampiric life, Lestat decides to challenge fate by trial of fire. His apparent suicide attempt under the fierce sun of the Gobi has its ambiguities, for Lestat does not really believe he can be killed. It appears to function as a way of purging his guilt and cleansing him of

Akasha's contagion; he observes that, "...light was covering me like molten lead, paralysing me and torturing me beyond endurance...(TBT p. 49). When Lestat has finally endured the pain of his self-inflicted punishment, his appearance has changed and he looks: "almost like a man" (TBT p.55). The "taint" of Akasha's blood has been removed, for he no longer resembles one of Michaelangelo's marble statues, conventionally regarded as the male image of homosexual desire. His white, luminescent skin has been burnt to a dark tan, covering his 'difference' and hiding his vampiric appearance.

On his return to the world of mortals, Rice shows Lestat faced with choices and temptations, which he meets with his usual recklessness. His fellow vampires, to whom he turns to for advice, advocate caution. They warn him: "you are going to make another ghastly mistake" (TBT p. 96). The remaining vampires are particularly wary. Their new rules forbid the making of new 'fledglings' or the disclosure of vampire identities and they attempt to control the pursuit and killing of mortals with the highest degree of secrecy. The exhilarating era of the 1980s is over for the liberated vampire, and, as Singer states, for the liberated homosexual:

...the ethos of an ecstatic carnival is progressively being displaced by a more sober and reserved aesthetic of 'sexual prudence' and 'body management'. (Singer p. 116)

However, as always Lestat refuses to accept limits; 'safe vampirism' has no appeal for him.

Rice's novel highlights the problematic constructions of 'safe sex' and 'new sobriety'. To the vampire Lestat 'safe vampirism/sex' is a means of setting limits, a "reorganization of pleasure" (Singer p. 122) and a form of self-denial. 'New sobriety' represents a "narcissistic form of body management":

...a way of caring for and about oneself...an intensification of control over one's body and one's position in sexual exchanges. (Singer p. 123)

Lestat fulfils this narcissistic concern in part, when he views his reflection in the mirror after his trial by fire; he comments: "I was supposed to be destroying myself - not perfecting my appearance" (TBT p. 55). However, he constantly emphasises the difference between what he appears to be and what is his true "nature". As he remarks: "I look like an angel, but I'm not" (TBT p. 63).

Ultimately, Lestat remains true to his own ideals, breaking the new rules with defiance and enjoying the deeply erotic sensation of his vampirism. He knows nothing of resignation and admits that it is impossible for him to justify his actions to anyone he knows. He yearns to experience every possibility to the full, even going as far as inhabiting a mortal body. He observes that he had

"...always been required to go against my conscience to obtain anything of intensity or value" (TBT p. 222). Rice portrays Lestat's dilemma paradoxically, by representing him stating that:

...real pain for me as an evil being was that I understood goodness and I respected it. I had never been without a conscience. (TBT p. 222)

Rice's fourth vampire novel questions the reaffirming of 'human' values, religious truths and ideas of self-denial, associated with 1990s America. These notions have no appeal to Lestat if they result in the loss of himself. He continues to affirm his difference, when he states:

...for some of us such intense feelings are life. We seek ecstasy, we transcend all the pain and the pettiness and the struggle. (TBT p. 242)

In *The Tale of the Body Thief*, as in all the *Chronicles*, Lestat pays "very little attention to the official world" (TBT p. 114). He triumphs by having a wonderful time being himself.

By representing Lestat narrating his own history and the history of the vampires, Rice shows him attempting to write an affirmation of Self as 'Outcast'. In his written and video autobiography, he tries to redefine himself through the discourse that has sought to repudiate him, the popular culture represented by "horror novels, gothic tales - or..rock stars" (VL p. 17).

In the same way as the Theatre of Vampires enacts and parodies the vampire's signification of 'Monster', Lestat's performance as vampire rock star reiterates his claim to the power of naming himself through the identity of vampire. This assertion of identity, within the category of 'Monster' and 'Outcast', places Lestat within the terms of Julia Kristeva's essay on abjection³¹ and Judith Butler's text on the discursive limits of sex. Thus, Lestat's public assertion of vampirism represents "the politicization of abjection in an effort to rewrite the history of the term" (Butler p. 22) and parallels the abjection of the vampire with that of the homosexual. Just as "Queer" has been a term of "discursive regulation of boundaries of sexual legitimacy" and the "abjected have made their claim through and against this discourse" (Butler p. 21) Lestat's claims function in a similar manner:

I AM TELLING YOU I AM A VAMPIRE I AM EVIL! EVIL! ALL YOU REAL VAMPIRES OUT HERE, REVEAL YOURSELVES. (VL p. 587/8)

However, Lestat's assertion 'I am Monster' is problematic in two ways. First, to

³¹ The abject is an impossible object, still part of the subject: an object the subject strives to expel but which is ineliminable. In ingesting objects into itself or expelling objects from itself, the 'subject' can never be distinct from these 'objects'. These ingested/expelled 'objects' are neither part of the BODY nor separate from it. The abject (including tears, saliva, faeces, urine, vomit, mucus) marks bodily sites which later become erotogenic zones (mouth, eyes, anus, nose, genitals). The subject must expel these objects to establish the 'clean and proper' body of oedipalization. Yet they can never be expelled, for they remain the preconditions of corporeal, material existence... Kristeva examines three major expressions of the abject in social life, in various cultural, social and psychical taboos erected to deal with food, death and SEXUAL DIFFERENCE. The abject is undecidably both inside and outside (like the skin of milk); dead and alive (like the corpse); autonomous and engulfing (like infection). It signals the precarious grasp the subject has over its identity and bodily boundaries, the ever-present possibility of sliding back into the corporeal abyss out of which it was formed. [Elizabeth Grosz, *Feminism and Psychoanalysis: A Critical Dictionary*, editor Elizabeth Wright (Oxford 1992) p. 198.]

the human population his revised version of history is perceived as a fiction and his stage performance as an act. This ambiguity allows his affirmation of Self to be interpreted as mere entertainment and fantasy.

The vampires' response to the challenge which Lestat enacts highlights the second problem. Lestat has broken the old laws of secrecy, disrupted the protective layers of ritual and superstition, in order to disclose the 'closeted' world of the vampire. This disruption has the unexpected effect of unleashing Akasha who represents the source of vampirism, a source traced back to the start of history. Vampirism (and homosexuality) is therefore, shown as old as wo/man. But Rice's novels in the *Chronicles* do not allow Lestat to succeed in his desire to affirm himself and all vampires publicly. His moment of truth is denied him by the arrival of Akasha, and Lestat is forced to reassess his ambitions. Singer highlights this predicament in relation to the homosexual:

[O]ne is forced to call one's habits, values, and pleasures into question, precisely because the world in which they had a place is in the process of slipping away...(Singer p. 31)

Lestat's world is similarly "slipping away", disrupted by the cataclysm, and ironically he quotes the old maxim; "be careful what you wish for; your wish might come true" (QD p. 441). He had yearned to be visible to mortals, to appear god-like in his role as rock star on stage. Akasha had fulfilled these

dreams, displaying him as her prince-god before the mesmerised mortals. Lestat's burden of guilt is clearly stated by Rice, since he can never atone or justify his actions under Akasha's command.

After the concert Lestat discovers that the cataclysm has been wiped clean from the minds of humans. The mortals have the mental faculty to obliterate or collectively forget the unnatural; Lestat says:

[T]he rational mind had already encapsulated the experience and disregarded it. Thousands took no notice. Others slowly and painstakingly revised in memory the impossible things they had seen.(QD p. 276)

This phenomenon is relevant to the manner in which society reacts to the 'logic of epidemic'; as shown by Singer, the regulatory nature "...immunizes itself against the very populations it is supposed to serve, thereby letting the disease spread without intervention..."(Singer p. 11).

Lestat and the grand coven are driven back into secrecy. New laws are established and he pines for what might have been: "[T]hey knew my name! It was my voice they heard. They saw ME up there above the footlights" (QD p. 551). Lestat is left burning with dissatisfaction, with no more grand schemes to fulfil. He can only revert to being the "perfect devil" (QD p. 573), who finds it irresistible to "break the new rules" (QD p. 562).

While we may accept that Rice's *Chronicles* do contain analogies between vampirism and homosexuality, it is difficult to define exactly in what sense and why vampirism is confined or even punished. Rice's work is full of contradictions and ironies, which subvert the narrative and therefore create problems for the reader. Akasha, whether representing plague itself or the religious mania that is its response, is portrayed wiping out whole populations of mortal males and vampires. If Akasha represents the ultimate contagion carried by vampirism, with an analogy to AIDS, then the relationships signalled in the fourth novel, *The Tale of the Body Thief*, must advocate safe-sex and monogamous relationships. In fact, this fourth novel closes on an intimate triangle of three, harking back to the *Interview with a Vampire*. In this story, however, the triangle comprises three young, male vampires.

The final irony displayed in Rice's *The Queen of the Damned* is that Lestat has been confined within the grand coven until he has assimilated the new rules, which his fellow vampires must know will not persuade him to act differently. As Lestat states:

[N]obody was to make any others, and nobody was to write any more books, though of course they knew that was exactly what I was doing, gleaning from them silently everything that I could; and that I didn't intend to obey any rules imposed on me by anybody; and that I never had. QD p. 547)

The rules set by the coven seek to regulate the freedom of movement and kinds of pleasure allowed to the surviving vampires. These regulatory powers parallel those imposed by the revisionist authorities, in their reaction to AIDS, to control certain kinds of pleasure (Singer p. 11).

Lestat's reiteration of Self, through the act of writing his continued autobiography *The Tale of the Body Thief*, is an attempt not to be silenced and an assertion of a Self that refuses to be bound by rules. Rice's "perfect devil" survives to fight another day; "I got out in one piece...And so many of our kind did not" (QD p.6); "This ego is my strength. I survived...because I am who I am" (TBT p. 257).

Rice's vampire heroes display an egotism, narcissism and guilt which invites a psychoanalytic reading of her texts. The dilemmas faced by her male vampires are derived from the contradictory nature of their desires and the paradoxes inherent in their lives. Introducing a psychoanalytical discussion on homosexuality, AIDS and *Dracula*, in which, questionably in my view, he associates homosexuality with narcissism, Hanson argues "[T]he gay male gaze is the gaze of the male vampire: he with whom one is forbidden to identify" (Hanson p. 328). He asks "[W]hat could it mean for a man to engage the gaze of another man"? and he adds "[I]n psychoanalytic terms, such a gaze would be

a form of madness, an embrace of narcissism and death" (Hanson p. 328). This concept can clearly be applied to the heroes of the *Vampire Chronicles* when the highly homoerotic terms in which Rice portrays the relationships between her vampire heroes foregrounds the importance of the male vampire gaze wherein it is returned, reflected and turned back upon him. The narcissistic tendency in Rice's characters is inseparable from the self-destructive pattern of their lives when the desire for their own kind and the blood lust for mortals is overshadowed by overwhelming guilt and despair. The curse of the elder vampires is that:

...the vampire ...faces a dreadful hell long before madness comes...and finally there comes the moment when he cannot bear to take life, or bear to make suffering, and nothing but madness or his own death will ease his pain". (VL p. 252)

THE VAMPIRE AS SADEAN HERO: the psychoanalytic aspects of vampirism

The text of *Dracula* has provided a fruitful source of psychoanalytic and critical study, in respect of both the villain Dracula and his companion vampires and the 'agents of good', Van Helsing and his Crew. Various psychoanalytic approaches have been applied to the vampire myth, particularly the theories of Sigmund

Freud and Melanie Klein, together with Jungian and Lacanian theory. There has also been a small number of essays on the psychoanalytical aspects of Rice's work. I shall briefly outline these studies in respect of *Dracula* and then go on to argue that the characterization of Rice's vampires in the *Vampire Chronicles* is more closely linked to aspects of the Sadean hero than earlier representations of vampires suggest.

"...[A] vast polymorph perverse bisexual oral-anal-genital sado-masochistic timeless orgy"³¹ are the terms in which Maurice Richardson describes the relationship between the characters in Stoker's novel. Freudian theory approaches the vampire myth through the concept of a perverse polymorphous infantile sexuality. It applies the ideas relating to the Oedipus complex, castration anxieties, fetishism and sadism to the motif of the vampire. In her study on Freud, Teresa Brennan³² discusses how instinctual hunger, rather than love, is the strongest drive in the infant. This hunger motivates the desire for mastery, the sexual drive and a cannibalistic desire. Aggression can be promoted by this hunger in infancy and, when such perverse impulses are repressed in the adult, they can result in same sex fixation, mouth/anus substitution for the genitals, sadism and masochism. Sadism, where sexuality and cruelty are combined, is connected to cannibalism with its desire to devour

³¹ Maurice Richardson, 'Psychoanalysis of Count Dracula' (1959) in Frayling's *Vampyres*, p. 420.

³² Teresa Brennan, *The Interpretation of the Flesh: Freud and Femininity*, (London 1992) p. 169.

and incorporate the object of desire, represented in infancy by the mother's breast (a concept explored by Klein). Brennan's analysis of Freud suggests a pairing of opposites: the sadist is always a masochist, a voyeur an unconscious exhibitionist. Voyeurism is linked here with scopophilia, the love of seeing, which Freud associates with the sexual urge and the drive for knowledge.

From a Freudian point of view, vampire narratives express repressed sexual and aggressive desires. The novel *Dracula* outlines the traditional myths of the vampire illustrating the Oedipus complex, with Dracula seen as a super father-figure and vampirism as an acting out of the primal scene with its blend of sexuality and aggression. As Richard Astle argues, *Dracula* expands the Oedipus complex by introducing "a conflict between two 'fathers' as well as between father and sons"³³. Dracula, "the father who still appeared in the myth as a totemic monster" (Astle p.99), has not been killed by one person but by a group of 'sons' lead by the 'good father' figure of Van Helsing. In the *Vampire Chronicles* the ambivalent relationships between the male vampires vacillate between the dominant/submissive and the equal. The characterization of maker and fledgling or ancient and young vampire represents father/son or mentor/youth relationships which create conflicts and rivalries. The vampiric re-enactment of the Oedipal myth in *The Vampire Lestat*, portrays Lestat incestuously

³³ Richard Astle, 'Dracula as Totemic Monster: Lacan, Freud, Oedipus and History', *Sub-stance*, 25 (1980) p. 99.

reunited with his mother, Gabrielle, who achieves her long-awaited independence through the enactment of the 'return of the repressed'. Their relationship is finally portrayed as loss (lack) when she breaks free of Lestat's dependence. He is left to begrudgingly offer shelter and support to his despised, blind father. The roles are now reversed as the son becomes the dominant (though feminized/vampirized) figure over the 'impotent', infantilized father. A further Oedipal triangle parallels this relationship in Lestat's progress from fledgling to one of the most powerful vampires in the *Chronicles*. He is abandoned at 'conception' by Magnus, his maker, but, as a result of feeding from the vampire Mother/Queen, the Father/King is killed. In this reworking of the myth the Father is destroyed by the Mother as a consequence of the 'son's' actions.

Astle further argues that Dracula's death represents a metaphoric castration. This horror of castration can lead to what Freud calls a 'memorial' being set up to prevent the psychic disintegration or collapse of the subject. The 'memorial' takes the form of a substitute for the maternal phallus/penis; the construction of sexualized phallic object - the fetish. Roger Dadoun discusses fetishism in respect of *Dracula* and the vampire films: "-the Dracula films, from *Nosferatu* to *Kiss of the Vampire*, offer us such a variety and abundance of fetishist fantasies and

symbols”³⁴. The figure of Dracula is itself fetishized as a rigid, phallic form epitomizing the monstrous nature of aggressive sexuality. He is associated with the phallic fangs, nails and blood red eyes paralleling the act of penetration and erection caused by the rush of blood. Dadoun observes that the vampire:

...doesn't have a phallus but becomes one instead...and he turns his essential impotence and inertia into a paranoid aggression which at least opens up a huge field of action for him and preserves him from catatonic collapse, decomposition and dissolution. (Dadoun p. 57)

However, the sexuality of the vampire is cross-gendered, allowing Dracula to represent both the phallic mate and the devouring, castrating woman. Dadoun points out that the mother-figure is absent in the horror films of Dracula, as she is largely absent in the novel. This aspect of the genre is also true of Rice's work which is a point I will discuss in the next chapter. The vampire, in its fetishisation, comes to represent the concealed, figure of the archaic mother which

...can be read in a series of enclosures and expulsions, in a movement whereby spaces, one inside the other, become progressively smaller and more confining, leading us finally to the purest, most original sign of archaic motherhood, a pinch of earth. (Dadoun p. 52)

³⁴ Roger Dadoun, 'Fetishism in the Horror Film', in *Fantasy and the Cinema*, edited by James Donald (London 1989) pp. 39-63 (p. 47).

The vampires' association with the coffin and gothic, labyrinthine structures supports this view giving a womb-like enveloping quality. In the *Vampire Chronicles* the vampires perpetuate this theme through their urge to burrow beneath the earth, lie in catacombs and hidden chambers. Rice's hero, Lestat, parodies the vampires of earlier texts by delighting in the aesthetic image of this association. He states ironically:

I believed there was a grace in sleeping in the crypt. There was a romance to rising from the grave. (VL p. 368)

The other fetishistic symbols operating in the novel *Dracula* are associated with Van Helsing and his Crew. Dadoun highlights the religious and cabalistic nature of the objects incorporated in the novel. Van Helsing's love of scientific, religious and superstitious knowledge, together with his detective and voyeuristic approach towards vampirism, could contain elements of scopophilia. His delight in books and his use of the phallic symbols of cross and stake to destroy the vampires link the love of seeing, with the drive for knowledge and sex. In Freudian terms, Van Helsing and his Crew penetrate and castrate Dracula with the stake which pierces his heart and leaves a gaping open wound - the 'sons' aided by the 'good father' destroy the super-father/phallic mother and incorporate his/her sexual energy and power, perhaps a form of vampirism in itself. While, in contrast, in the *Vampire Chronicles* the lure of scientific and

(Cixous p. 543). It appears that he is also 'tainted' by the manner of his return, for Cixous says of Freud's study that the return passes through the maternal body:

...with the supremely disquieting idea: the phantasm of the man buried alive: his textual head, shoved back into the maternal body, a horrible pleasure. (Cixous p. 544)

The vampire appears to reside in the liminal uncanny realm between states: "that which emerges and/is that which is repelled" and is contained within the infantile phantasms of the maternal body and the castration complex (Cixous p. 545). Rice reworks this theme in literal terms with Lestat's incestuous transformation of his consumptive, corpse-like mother, Gabrielle, when he "gave it (the Dark Trick) to the very womb that bore [him]!" (VL p. 247). Lestat smells and tastes the death and decay present on his mother's body, and in her blood, as he enters her flesh and drains her with his phallic fangs. The image that Rice conjures up is particularly disturbing as it explicitly mingles penetration with incest, blood, death, decay and the undead. Necrophilia, with its sadistic anal fixations, is represented in vampirism by the sexual act which occurs between the undead and the living and, through the breaking of this taboo, the corruption of the corpse with its decaying and abject nature is linked to faecal matter. This powerful image of the transgressive nature of the vampire myth is highlighted in the works of Stoker and Rice.

Another Freudian aspect of vampirism is oral fixation, termed by Dadoun "the moment of transubstantiation" when the vampire absorbs his victim by kissing (Dadoun p. 41). Joseph Bierman suggests that the vampire kiss is "a thinly disguised primal scene in oral terms"³⁶. He highlights the moment in Stoker's novel when Dracula and Mina exchange blood; Dracula gashes his chest and presses Mina's mouth to the wound to drink the spurting blood. Bierman sees this moment in terms of Bertram D. Lewin's concept of the oral-triad; "the wish to eat, be eaten and sleep - and the manic defence against sleep because of the fear of dying and being eaten..."³⁷. Bierman finds another interesting theme in *Dracula*, that of fratricide, with explicit references to Cain and Abel. Both Dracula and Mina bear the mark of Cain, that is a scar on the forehead, while Dracula's disciple, Renfield, likens himself to Cain's son, Enoch. *Dracula* touches on the theme of incest since the association between father/son/brother and father/daughter/sister becomes blurred. This aspect of vampirism is paralleled in *Interview with the Vampire* when the relationship between Louis and Lestat becomes blurred. Louis and Lestat are father/son, lovers and brothers. There is also an implicit reference to Cain for, when Louis is haunted by his and Claudia's attempt on Lestat's life, he has a vision of Lestat's body in the church and, in the vision, Claudia accuses him in biblical terms:

³⁶ Joseph S Bierman, 'Dracula: Prolonged Childhood Illness and the Oral Triad', *American Imago*, Vol.29.2 (1972) pp.186-198 (p. 194).

³⁷ Bertram D Lewin, *The Psychoanalysis of Elation*, (1950) reference Joseph Bierman p.195.

[A]nd now art thou cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to received thy brother's blood from thy hand. (IV p. 159)

Claire Kahane links the horror of being devoured with childbirth. She states that modern gothic evokes images of the womb as the mother's tomb, where penetration, impregnation and childbirth represent a female terror. This terror is encapsulated in the 'invasion' of her body, arousing primitive fears about the integrity of the self. As Kahane states:

[I]n pregnancy the woman's very shape changes, she begins to feel another presence inside her, growing on flesh, feeding on her blood³⁸.

This theory emphatically links sex, blood and childbirth, making it "not too far a metaphorical leap to the Vampyre, to Dracula as a foetus draining its mother's vital fluids" (Kahane p. 57). The process is reversed when Mina is forced to drink Dracula's blood. The foetus/mother relationship comes full circle as vampire and fledgling reverse roles. This reversal takes place in the *Chronicles* between the vampires and fledglings, particularly in the case of the mother/son relationships of Lestat/Gabrielle and Lestat/Akasha.

³⁸ Claire Kahane, 'Gothic Mirrors and Feminine Identity', in *Centennial Review*, Vol.24 (1980) pp.43-64 (p. 57)

Christopher Craft locates the "primary site of erotic experience in Dracula"³⁹ as the image of the Vampire Mouth. This image subverts gender distinctions by being both orifice and penetrator. Craft reads Mina's drinking of Dracula's blood from a wound in his breast as having a double significance "both a symbolic act of enforced fellation and a lurid nursing". Images of blood, semen and milk become mingled, breaking down the distinctions between masculine and feminine.

Further ambiguities are introduced by Stoker in the dualistic relationship between Van Helsing and Dracula. As Craft states, "a perverse mirroring occurs, as puncture for puncture the Doctor equals the Count " (p. 234). Van Helsing uses morphine to immobilize Lucy and then 'penetrates' her in order to transfuse blood, whilst Dracula mesmerizes his victim and then, using his fangs to penetrate her flesh, sucks her blood. Craft's interpretation of the Vampire Mouth and its focus on the oral pleasures suggest a link with Melanie Klein's study of the infant's oral-sadistic-cannibalistic desires. Klein theorizes that:

[I]n the very first months of the baby's existence it has sadistic impulses directed not only against its mother's breast but also against the inside of her body:

³⁹ Christopher Craft, 'Kiss Me with Those Red Lips': Gender and Inversion in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, edited by Elaine Showalter *Speaking Gender*, (London 1989) pp.216-243 (p. 218)

*scooping it out, devouring the contents, destroying it by every means which sadism can suggest.*⁴⁰

The infant phantasizes⁴¹ about the imago of its mother's breast, seeing it as both a satisfying breast and dreaded breast. The mother's body becomes objectified in terms of good and bad parts. Klein saw the aggressive anxieties and frustrations of the nursing infant as arising from the death drive or, in Freudian terms, the death instinct. The young child fantasizes that the loved object may be preserved in safety inside himself. At this stage loving an object and devouring it are very closely connected (Mitchell p. 121).

These aspects of Kleinian theory relate to the vampire, particularly when

*the paranoid-schizoid position sets up its own vicious circle, whereupon the infant's greedy aggression fuels defenses that further compound this greedy aggression*⁴².

This greed creates an insatiable craving to completely scoop out, suck dry and devour the breast, thus paralleling the vampire's craving for blood excessive to his need. Also the phantasized attacks on the imago of the mother's breast take two forms; to rob the mother's body of its good contents and the impulse to expel

⁴⁰ Juliet Mitchell, *The Selected Melanie Klein*, (London 1987) p. 116.

⁴¹ 'ph' spelling is used by Klein to indicate that the process is unconscious.

⁴² Janice L Doane & Devon Hodges, *From Klein to Kristeva*, (Michigan 1992) p. 9.

the bad parts (excrements; anal and urethra) out of the self and into the mother. This idea appears to have strong links with the vampire myth. Kleinian theory suggests that the oral-sadistic-cannibalistic desires of the infant can remain or recur in the adult resulting from the infant's envy of the breast and the milk. Envy, greed and sadism are all strong traits found in the vampire together with the desire to suck dry and devour the loved object. This element of the vampire bite and blood lust is described by Louis in the first of Rice's vampire novels, *Interview with the Vampire*, when he describes his own transformation:

I drank, sucking the blood out of the holes, experiencing for the first time since infancy the special pleasure of sucking nourishment, the body focused with the mind upon one vital source. (IV p. 23)

In the *Vampire Chronicles* the impulse to expel 'the bad parts' from the self is inverted in the vampire transformation. The uncontrollable urge is to evacuate mortal life from the embryonic vampire form. This process occurs immediately after satisfying the thirst and thus parallels the bodily functions of the infant. Lestat describes the moment of transformation when he has devoured Magnus' blood and his humanity is expelled from his new form:

[B]ut in my chest I started to feel a new pain, very hot and mercurial. It moved through my veins, tightened my bowels and belly...And I saw the cause of it then..

My waste was leaving me in a small torrent. I found myself unable to control it. Yet as I watched the foulness stain my clothes, this didn't disgust me. (VL p. 110)

In psychoanalytical terms it is possible to state that the "powerful appeal of vampire narratives grows out of the human experience of mirror-hunger both in parent and child" ⁴³. A vampire displays the predatory patterns which parallel the narcissistic personality's compulsive thirst for the energy of others. The vampire's hunger drives him to search for someone to fulfill his longings both as source of life-blood and to fill a deep inner emptiness. Rice's hero Lestat describes his perpetual search for companionship and love in his autobiography, while Louis expresses it clearly in his relationship with Claudia, referring to "...that love which had sustained me a lifetime...that love which had warmed me in my self-hatred, allowed me to exist" (lv p. 287).

Melton further states that the narcissistic personality bolsters his esteem with fantasies of being able to fly, of being invisible, of changing shape, and of immortality, all of which are traits represented in the vampire myth. The constant need to 'feed' off others becomes a perpetual cycle of the gratification of the senses. As Catherine Belsey argues:

⁴³ J. Gordon Melton, *The Vampire Book: The Encyclopedia of the Undead*, (Detroit 1994) p.497.

[I]n Lacanian terms, need and demand are explicitly separated, so that Lacan's hollow becomes a chasm. Vampires are compelled to seek a prohibited pleasure outside the Law that they cannot repudiate. Desire is not repressed, but a perpetual, conscious condition, and it is above all the desire to regain a lost (organic) humanity...Desire is thus seen to be forever unfulfilled."⁴⁴

The nature of desire as described above, is applied to Rice's novels by Belsey in discussing Lestat's longing to be returned to a mortal state. But all the forms of desire cited in Rice's work appear to have this element of separation between need and demand. Her heroes' obsessive drives are depicted with a self-punishing futility and a repetitive search for identity.

As I suggested in my introduction, I would like to argue that Rice's vampires have more in common with the figure of the libertine than with the traditional image of the undead, corpse-like revenant. In the manner of the Sadean libertine analyzed by Timo Airaksinen, Rice's vampires' "actions become repetitive and ritualized" ⁴⁵. The vampires' nature necessitates them being serial killers, as Lestat explains to his fledgling:

⁴⁴ Catherine Belsey, *Desire: Love Stories in Western Culture*, (London 1994) p. 90.

⁴⁵ Timo Airaksinen, *The Philosophy of the Marquis de Sade*, (London 1995) p. 72.

[Y]ou will be filled, Louis, as you were meant to be, with all the life that you can hold; and you will have hunger when that's gone for the same, and the same, and the same."(IV p. 92)

After the orgiastic pleasure of feeding, the vampire has returned to the point at which he started. Vampire *pleasure* like that of the Sadean character is "defined by a clash with the norm already presupposed" (Airaksinen p. 84). This type of *pleasure* abhors limits; it is similar to pain in that it can only be experienced here and now.

There are three components to Sadean *pleasure*; sensual, cerebral and orgiastic. The cerebral component creates the ritualized element of pleasure, the *theatre* where the predatory discharge takes place. It is a necessary part of Sadean *pleasure* that the violation of norms and values be breached and that the character understands what it means to destroy these. The libertine's crimes must be initiated in cold blood because "it requires rigorous self-control, planning, and reasoning" (Airaksinen p. 88). The vampire, like "the mature libertine needs apathy; he needs it because he wants to control his prey" (Airaksinen p. 88). Rice's vampires are able to distance themselves sufficiently from mortals in order to mingle safely in their world, as Louis explains:

[I]t was detachment that made this possible, a sublime loneliness with which Lestat and I moved through the world of mortal men. (IV p. 44)

Control is of paramount importance to the mature vampires. Lestat shows his outrage when his moment of ecstasy is disrupted by a victim in *Memnoch the Devil*. He has stalked his prey around the world for six months and finally chooses to take the man's life amongst his precious collection of religious artifacts. Lestat anticipates the swoon brought on by the vampire kiss, a moment of orgasmic surrender when the victim yields to the bite and the promise of ecstasy while the vampire experiences sensual bliss. However, instead of being seduced by the sensuality of the vampire embrace, his victim breaks the spell of the swoon by daring to speak to Lestat during the vampire kiss, thus threatening his control over the situation and disrupting the orgasmic surrender. In indignation and outrage, Lestat cries out:

*[T]alk to me! Talking to me during the kill! Asking me who I was! Piercing the swoon?*⁴⁶

Rice's characters have accumulated wealth and, with unlimited time to enjoy it, they can create the ideal *theatre* for their pleasures. They have made an art of the kill, stalking their prey for weeks and even months, planning the precise nature of the deadly embrace. There is a calculated theatricality in this scene which has the effect of lifting the moment above the mundane act of murder.

⁴⁶ Anne Rice, *Memnoch the Devil*, (MD - further references will be abbreviated) (London 1995) p. 39.

Their life-style is like a stage set of elaborate props, few of which are necessary to the vampire's actual existence. However, as is the case with the libertine, this preparation adds to the anticipatory side of his predatory nature. As Airaksinen states, the Sadean hero "will learn how to create and control an artificial environment which guarantees their perverse pleasures" (Airaksinen p. 92). The Sadean hero needs an established social life in order to construct the scenario to play out his perverse pleasures and therefore seeks out libertine friendship. Lestat and the other mature vampires search out others of their own kind for safety and to create venues for their ritualized pleasures. Armand's "Theatre of Vampires" and his "Night Island" provide examples of the theatricality of Rice's characters in creating a controlled world of their own.

Lestat, in particular, enjoys the perverse wickedness which must motivate the libertine. He gleefully describes the 'chase' as:

[J]ust a new way of hunting...I've been following him around for half a year... You know my games, my hunt. I don't need the blood any more ...but I can't stand the thought of not having it!"(MD p. 11)

All Rice's vampires have a heightened sensual awareness which is incorporated into the kill; as Gabrielle states "[S]ensual fiends we are by our very nature" (IV p. 342). The mature vampires rarely kill at random but select a

particular type of victim who represents a worthy opponent. Rice emphasises the orgiastic nature of the vampire kill which is an experience of intense pain and pleasure for the vampire (and in some cases the victim). Lestat describes the moment when he finally takes his victim, as follows:

I was swimming with his mammalian blood...Again the blood flooded through my brain. I felt it electrify the tiny veins of my face. I felt it pulse even into my fingers and a hot prickling warmth slide down my spine. Draught after draught filled me. Succulent heavy creature. (TBT p. 22/3)

The vampire kill and the vampire exchange parallel Sadean sex in that they always represent an interpretation of pain. Airaksinen states that Sade treats sex, bleeding and urinating as interchangeable:

[B]lood gushes out of an open wound leaving the victim dizzy and exhausted; it can find its way into another person's body too. Violence and sex intertwine. (Airaksinen p. 88)

The exchange of blood between a vampire and his new fledgling or between vampire lovers has a different significance to that of the kill. The exchange is rarely fatal but it can incorporate elements of sado-masochism and self-destructiveness. When Lestat 'brings over' David, what begins as a calculated act

of rape changes to a masochistic giving of his life-blood. Having drained David of blood, Lestat starts the process of exchange:

I bit into my tongue, until I couldn't stand the pain. Again and again I made the punctures with my own fang teeth, moving my tongue to the right and to the left, and then I locked my mouth to his, forcing his lips open, and let the blood flow onto his tongue...And when I drew back now, my mouth full of pain, my tongue hurting...I tore my wrist. Here it comes, my beloved. Here it comes, not in little droplets, but from the very river of my being...I knelt on the floor, holding him, letting the pain spread through every vein and every artery as I knew it must. And the heat and the pain grew so strong in me that I lay down slowly with him in my arms, my wrist sealed against his mouth, my hand still beneath his head. A dizziness came over me. The beating of my own heart grew perilously slow. On and on he pulled, and against the bright darkness of my closed eyes I saw the thousands upon thousands of tiny vessels emptied and contracted and sagging like the fine black filaments of a spider's wind-torn web. (TBT p. 417/8)

I have included this rather long quotation from *The Tale of the Body Thief* to illustrate several elements of the Sadean character that Timo Airaksinen isolates. The urge for mastery which is a significant characteristic of the Sadean hero is an important facet of the mature vampire in Rice's novels. The mastery of victims and fledglings by the vampire is motivated by an aggressive need to establish a

stronger identity. Lestat's 'rape' of David shows him at his most aggressive; the episode represents a calculated abuse of friendship and an assertion of power over another whom he has always respected. In Sadean terms, when the heroes are at their most aggressive their pleasures become destructive: "they cause harm to their victims from whom they often have difficulty in distinguishing themselves" (Airaksinen p. 92). Pain becomes attractive to them as if they experience the same fate as their victims. At first Lestat plays 'cat and mouse' with David, sadistically allowing him to attempt to escape, then repeatedly crushing him in the vampire embrace. Once he has complete mastery over his prey, Lestat reverses their roles, giving himself passively, masochistically to David's thirst.

A master/slave relationship appears to be inherent in Rice's representation of vampirism. As Lestat informs Louis, "vampires increase through slavery" (IV p. 93); when more than one vampire is found together, "one will be the slave of the other" (IV p. 93). The families or communities of vampires portrayed by Rice all have a leader or father-figure who exhibits a 'sexual' possessiveness towards his fellows, particularly his own fledglings. In her numerous erotic descriptions of the blood exchange, Rice shows the loss of mortality in terms of a loss of self which remains with the victims in their vampire form and appears to fuel their future obsessions. Louis describes the moment thus:

...I was reduced to nothing. That ego which could not accept the presence of an extraordinary human being in its midst was crushed. All my conceptions, even my guilt and wish to die, seemed utterly unimportant. I completely forgot myself! I forgot myself totally. (IV p. 17)

This crisis of a loss of self is felt by Rice's main characters both before and during their vampiric life. Lestat of all her heroes experiences this most strongly and names it the "Dark Moment" (VL p. 66/69). Before he is turned into a vampire Lestat is seized by a pervasive sense of dread during a philosophical revelry with his young friend, Nicholas. Despite the moment of camaraderie, he is filled with loneliness and despair. He is confronted with a sense of nothingness, which he describes as a limbo of ultimate chaos. Initially, when Lestat first experiences the vampire blood, he believes that the moment of transubstantiation has filled this void. The episode is described in terms of a religious sacrament with the wine of all wines being the 'Body' and 'Blood' of Magnus. Lestat describes the sensation in ecstatic homoerotic terms:

[T]he thirst seemed to hiss aloud. My tongue licked at the blood. And a great whiplash of sensation caught me. And my mouth opened and locked itself to the wound. I drew with all my power upon the great fount that I knew would satisfy my thirst as it had never been satisfied before.

Blood and blood and blood. And it was not merely the dry hissing coil of the thirst that was quenched and dissolved, it was all my craving, all the want and misery and hunger that I had ever known. (VL p. 101)

However, as Lestat learns, the void (this nothingness) has to be constantly filled, replenished by fresh blood through an endless cycle of thirst, bloodletting and death. Rice articulates this nothingness as an absence of life after death and, in fact her vampire characters cannot experience true death themselves, but only vicariously through their victims.

Rice's vampires exhibit a narcissistic rage which demands "the utter destruction of the independent person-hood of the other" either through "death or through ruthless enslavement and exploitation" (Melton p. 500) which is found in the mirror-hunger, personality disorder. Lestat is filled with rage throughout his autobiography and it is often turned against himself. His exploitation of David seems to be motivated partly by self-hate and partly by revenge against the world of mortals. Lestat's anger against fate has inspired his compulsive need to penetrate the hidden depths of vampirism and experience the "subverseness and self-destruction essential to evil" (Airaksinen p. 87). In common with the Sadean character, the vampires:

...seek a metaphysical revenge...they must get hurt both through their own action and through the actions of others. They cannot control nature and hate it; but

since they hate nature, they hate themselves...the discharge of aggression that arises through the need to avenge metaphysical frustrations...includes the psychological motivation by pain. (Airaksinen p. 91/2)

In Airaksinen's analysis of Sadean philosophy even the heroes can be betrayed, abused, mutilated and killed. There is a transference of the pleasure/pain principle between the agent and the victim. Sadean sex is a parody of 'normal' sex, collapsing barriers by playing with extremes. Gender distinctions are blurred by Sade through his emphasis on anal sex and on his reference to taste as an organ of both pain and pleasure. Sade's male and female characters "act in the same way, their bodies function similarly and they even look the same" (Airaksinen p. 77). Female vice in Sade's work is "so strong that it breaks into the male world of power" (Airaksinen p. 77). By this inversion of the traditional roles and his repetitive use of excrement Sade mediates man's ability to penetrate, man's desire for revenge at castration "and the refusal to return to one's birthplace by the means of the unclean surrogate of penetration" (Airaksinen p. 78). His fascination with excrement provides a method of de-prioritizing the penis as "a weapon that feels" (Airaksinen p. 82) and introduces taste as a means of increasing excitement.

This blurring of gender and the mingling of taste, sex and excrement are evident in Rice's portrayal of vampirism. The vampires savour the taste of human

blood as a gourmand savours the pleasures that eating provides; to a vampire, human blood has aesthetic qualities as well as providing nourishment. The vampire kiss has no gender distinction; it extracts the life-blood while providing erotic excitement and, through its connotations of cannibalistic necrophilic perversion, has links with excrement. The vampire's experience of sensual satisfaction through the addiction to blood has many parallels with the Sadean characters obsession with sex and its perversions. One of the strongest images that link the vampire with the Sadean heroes is the emptiness of their quest. The repetitive nature of their existence revolves around the "heat of the transcendent passion [which] is replaced by a feeling of void" (Airaksinen p. 88). Sadean sex/vampiric kiss are both a "symbolic activity whose viciousness is connected to pain on one hand and to the twisted narratives on the other" (Airaksinen p. 88). The Sadean hero constructs a world of orgiastic pleasure in which he reinvents himself through his perverse narrative of punishment, persecution and torture. The vampire world of Rice's novels, like that of the Sadean character, is outside that of the uninitiated and is inhabited by a small, elite, hedonistic group.

The self-referential narratives of Rice's vampire heroes based on their obsessional desires and reconstructed identities perpetually lead towards self-destruction. As Lestat illustrates "I'm too much the slave of my own obsessions and fascination" (VL p. 336). These narratives celebrate a narcissistic urge to rise above the mundane, to master life and symbolically resurrect their narrators

through orgiastic pleasure. But rather than transcending the repressions and inhibitions of the 'real' world, the vampire and the Sadean hero appear to abandon themselves to chaos and self-annihilation.

In analyzing the apparent parallels between the Sadean hero and Rice's vampire characters, I found that the contradictions and paradoxes present in the *Vampire Chronicles* have served to substantiate my argument. Rice sees Lestat as a Dionysian figure resurrected from the swamp by his immortal blood:

[T]he vampire is a disguised image of a vegetation god that's been inverted and misunderstood. The figure [of the vampire] that rises with the moon - the Mother Goddess symbol - that draws to himself the blood so that he's renewed, is a dim echo of the vegetation gods that were once worshipped.⁴⁷

Rice may wish to see her heroes as part of the Dionysian myth of death and rebirth, a positive image of fertility and renewal, but the closure of the vampire narratives suggests a return to confusion, despair and betrayal. In fact the final novel, *Memnoch the Devil* concludes with Lestat adrift in a chaotic world of madness and religious fanaticism. Behind the masquerade, Lestat "the demon

⁴⁷ Katherine Ramsland, *The Vampire Companion: the official guide to Anne Rice's The Vampire Chronicles*, (London 1995) p. 502.

hunter...was silently and secretly lost" (VL p. 373).

In the *Vampire Chronicles* Rice has created a subjective narrative for the vampire which seductively persuades the reader of the 'reality' of the vampire world. Her novels rework the vampire tradition, revitalizing the genre and innovatively portraying her characters as sophisticated, 'humanized' creatures. She extends the image of vampirism as a metaphor for homoeroticism highlighting a specific reference to AIDS as a contagion through defiled blood. Rice's vampires inhabit a world of luxury, privilege and excess which is reminiscent of the eighteenth-century world of the Sadean hero. Within this world the female vampire holds a central place in the history of vampirism. In the next chapter I will consider Rice's treatment of femininity and her appropriation of the myths of womanhood.

FEMININITY AND MYTHS OF WOMANHOOD

REPRESENTATIONS OF FEMININITY

She looked impossible, a woman torn out of time and place...no chains on her, free to soar. (VL p. 181)

She, Gabrielle de Lioncourt, is an eighteenth century French/Italian aristocrat and mother to Lestat, the hero of Rice's *Vampire Chronicles*. Her characterization by Rice highlights many of the contradictory images of femininity, feminism and myth present in these novels. *The Vampire Chronicles* raise issues inherent in female gothic; women's access to knowledge and power, the image of the good/bad mother and the concept of the monstrous-feminine. However Rice's problematic approach to these issues is often puzzling to the reader. It perhaps reflects her own ambiguity towards feminism and, as Anne Williams suggests, Rice's novels predominantly follow the formula of the male gothic: "since she evolved into a Male Gothic author, it is interesting that Rice began her career by writing pornography¹ under a pseudonym"². The legacy of her early writing can be seen in the style and language of the vampire novels, and there are clear

¹ A. N. Roquelaure, *The Claiming of Sleeping Beauty*, (London 1983), *Beauty's Punishment*, (London 1984), *Beauty's Release*, (London 1985).

² Anne Williams, *Art of Darkness: a poetics of Gothic*, (Chicago 1995), p.270n.

parallels between the two genres in the obsessive and transgressive nature of the repetitive plot action, the essential enclosure of their fictional world and the sado-masochistic master/slave relationships. A further link between Rice's approach to the genres is her "cross-sex identification with the male characters"³ and her assimilation of homoeroticism. In both the gothic genre and the pornographic Rice places the emphasis on male/male penetration by vampire bite, penis or dildo, therefore minimalizing the tentative signals she makes towards the sexual liberation and empowerment of the female characters. To quote from Amalia Ziv's essay on the *Beauty* trilogy:

...these [male] characters function in the text mostly in a receptive and submissive capacity, as objects of penetration and violation for other men... identifying with men whose masculinity is humiliated by the celebrated masculinity of other men, enables her to pay tribute to phallic power and exploit its erotic potential while at the same time transgressing it and turning it against itself...Hence, the 'feminization' of the male characters does not entail any significant empowerment of the female characters, since while men may be penetrated, women cannot be envisioned as penetrating...(Ziv p. 72)

³ Amalia Ziv, 'The Pervert's Progress: An Analysis of *Story of O* and the *Beauty* Trilogy', in *Feminist Review*, 46 Spring (London 1994) pp.61-75 (p. 72)

In the *Vampire Chronicles* the penetrative vampire bite which initiates the erotic exchange of blood that is needed for vampire creation is rarely instigated by the female characters. The gender interaction between the characters, whether vampire to mortal or vampire to vampire, in order of frequency, is first, male to male and secondly male to female. Only two occasions is this varied to allow female to female and female to male. Rice's apparent identification with her male protagonists undoubtedly has an effect on the gender relationships set up in the novels, and in order to discuss the issues of femininity, feminism and myth in her work an analysis of the female characters is essential.

Gabrielle de Lioncourt is never described as a conventional mother even in her mortal form. Often distant from her family, she appears alienated from her husband and sons by her education and more sophisticated background. Prior to her marriage, she had traveled Europe widely, and her private rooms in the musty, decaying de Lioncourt castle show evidence of a woman surrounding herself with the souvenirs of a better life; Italian books, jewels and the paintings of Caravaggio and La Tour. She has a cold beauty, described by her son as "strong yet feminine" (VL p. 45), and he adds "she hated the inertia and hopelessness of our life" (VL p. 50). Gabrielle is trapped in this all male domain. Having born eight children with three surviving sons, she lives vicariously through her books and the exploits of her youngest, Lestat. She is a

shadowy, illusive figure, not maternal yet displaying a subversive, protective and controlling influence when possible on his actions. Her apparently passive role as wife and mother is contrasted with the vicarious pleasure she takes in aiding Lestat in his escape from a blind father. The blindness of the Marquis, the master of the house, is symbolic of the inertia of their life, the sterility of the feudal estate and pre-figures the collapse of the ancien régime. Ill from lung disease, Gabrielle's only escape from the eternal winter of the Auvergne countryside is death itself.

Rice contrasts the romantic image of this beautiful dying woman, "an icon of the virtuous femininity"⁴, with the fiercely independent female that she becomes on her transformation. This transformation, the giving of the Dark Gift, is only offered when her death is imminent. Her choice is between non-existence or a terrifying, forbidden existence. Rice depicts the transformation of all the female characters in a similar way, either as an urgent salvation from death or as a terrifying punishment. It is not offered as an exchange of erotic desire as in the manner of the male vampires, where the Dark Gift is bestowed at the height of homoerotic fulfillment. In the *Vampire Chronicles* Lestat, Louis, Nicholas, Armand and David are all young, healthy males 'brought over' by their male vampire lovers.

⁴ Elizabeth Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body: Death, femininity and the aesthetic*, (Manchester 1992) p. 59.

Lestat appears as Gabrielle's saviour offering her the dark blood as her lungs haemorrhage and her life fades. His timely arrival also enables him to act out his perverse desire for his mother. Thus he gives her death (or undeath) and in his return to the mother completes the repetition of the vampire creation. Ironically, in his possession of her, Lestat gives his mother her access to freedom. She becomes "no mother anymore ... she was simply who she was" (VL p. 174). Gabrielle no longer needs to live through Lestat's experiences as she did as a mortal, for now he no longer represents what she lacked, when he represented the phallus, he was "a secret part of her anatomy, of [he] being the organ for her which women don't really have" (VL p. 72). Vampirism has enabled Gabrielle to break her chains, to soar, to be *impossible*. Vampirism has empowered Gabrielle while mortal life imprisoned her and this new existence offers many new possibilities. It could be said that vampirism in Rice's novels highlights the fact that:

*...in the land of the living women's power is limited - in the realm of the undead, which lies across and between that of the living, it might be greater. Speak as a corpse or a reanimated dead woman...and you might counter the negatives of living by embracing the positives of an unterritorialized zone.*⁵

⁵ Linda Ruth Williams, "'A Short Way by a Long Wandering': Writing the Death Drive", in *Critical Desire: Psychoanalysis and the Literary Subject*, (London 1995) p. 172.

The above quotation from Linda Williams' essay on the death drive gives an analysis of J. Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* and explores a possible feminist version of the death drive. She states "...it is only in undeath that femininity finds its fulfillment" (p.163) and this fulfillment "pushes towards a winged state which transgresses a fundamental boundary" (p.164). In her impossible state of non-woman/non-human Gabrielle soars across boundaries and embraces zones which are forbidden to the feminine. To Gabrielle mortal death is humiliating while vampirism is "a dark splendour to walk the nightmare terrain forever" (VL p. 192). Lestat quotes her expressing her exhilarating freedom in terms of flight:

'By day I sleep in the sand, by night I am on the wing as if I could fly. I need no name. I leave no footprints. I will be a goddess to those I slay.' (VL p.378)

Linda Williams applies Freud's theory of the death drive (defined in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*⁶) to literary narratives that explore the structure of repetition found in the drive. One form of the death drive "is a projection into liminal undeath explored in vampire literature" (L.R. Williams p.156).⁷ The image of flight associated with vampires is redolent with sexual connotations but the erotic charge is redirected. The vampire hunger for mortal blood sustains them physically while their desire for the blood-exchange fulfills their reproductive urge

⁶ reference from L.R. Williams, *Critical Desire*, -Sigmund Freud, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' in *On Metapsychology* (1920)

⁷ Psychoanalytic theory is discussed at length in the first chapter.

and erotic lust. The perpetual hunger of the vampire would allow it "...to stand as a figure for that demonic unconscious in Freud's image of compulsive repetition..." (L.R. Williams p. 166) Freud theorized death as a return to the mother, but the state of undeath experienced by the vampire never allows them to reach an actual death. They inhabit "that impossible space at the *other* end of life, undead zones which are alternative escape routes" (L.R. Williams p. 179).

Although Linda Williams focuses her reading on *Carmilla*, interpreting it as a lesbian vampire novel, much of her analysis is relevant to Rice's novels. Specific lesbian relationships are not set out in Rice's narratives, but one interpretation of her work would suggest a lesbian sub-text. I suggested in the first chapter that vampirism in the *Vampire Chronicles* is a metaphor for homosexuality and that her male characters are explicitly depicted in homoerotic unions. Her hero, Lestat, identifies with a Michelangelo sculpture, an icon of male homoeroticism, an image which is repeated throughout the novels. Rice's female vampires could be placed within the iconography of lesbian eroticism. The androgynous figure of Gabrielle in her masculine attire is sexually alluring yet aloof and mysterious. She is slim and blond with dramatically white skin reminiscent of the bisexual personae of Greta Garbo and Marlene Dietrich that appeal to both sexes.

There is a strong sense in Rice's novels that the mortal Gabrielle is waiting for death, that her life in the de Lioncourt home is already a suffocating death-in-

life. Gabrielle, like Carmilla, looks beyond life for a "more fulfilling phase of existence" (L.R. Williams p. 163). As Linda Williams suggests, vampiric immortality offers not only physical transformation but opens up possibilities of emotional and sexual change.

Beyond the initial exchange of the Dark Blood, Gabrielle refuses to be bound by a master/slave relationship even with a member of her own kind. Her expression of sexual/vampiric lust is fulfilled in the kill; it takes the form of a casual sexual encounter which supplants the homoerotic coupling of the male vampires. In Lestat's view this behaviour is perverse:

Something was wrong with her, lovely as she was, something was not right...

What was it?

She didn't want kisses, now or even talk, really. And that had a little sting to it. (VL p. 196)

Perhaps what is wrong with Gabrielle in Lestat's view is what allows us a lesbian reading of the texts.

Linda Williams suggests that "it is unclear whether Carmilla is a good mother or bad, victim or assassin, the subject or object of warning" (L.R. Williams p. 178). Such a reading is readily applicable to Gabrielle, for Rice's characterization presents an equally ambiguous portrait of the female vampire

as her story is largely untold. Her two hundred year old life is encoded in Lestat's silence, a blank page for the reader to fill.

Vampirism allows Gabrielle's access to power and knowledge to be suddenly opened to enfold the entire world; she is now "done with books...they are what I read when I could do nothing else" (VL p. 348). Now she can go wherever she wishes. She discards the only form of knowledge and power available to her in her mortal life. Previously, her access to books could be seen as her only subversive transgression of the male preserve of power and knowledge. However, it is Lestat who turns to books in his vampire existence as the answer to hidden truths. Ironically he states that he has usurped Gabrielle's former role:

And when I wasn't out roaming, I was travelling the realm of the books that had belonged to Gabrielle so exclusively through those dreary mortal years. (VL p. 360)

This closes to a degree the margins between their gender positions. Lestat has informed the reader that Gabrielle "was not really a woman now - anymore than I was a man" (VL p. 190). They both occupy an uncharted territory. Vampirism gives Gabrielle the freedom to escape the claustrophobic world of the scholar and actively seek the excitement of the adventurer. The vampire Gabrielle does not look for the answers to their origin and identity in man-made philosophies

but instead haunts a primordial terrain untouched by mortals or vampires. Here Rice seems to explore feminist empirical theories which challenge the view that reason and science can provide a reliable foundation of knowledge. One of the bases of these theories is to locate the senses as a source of knowledge. Alternatively, she could be associating woman with the imaginary domain of the pre-Oedipal. Lestat records Gabrielle stating that 'words she had no use for them and never had' (VL p.387) suggesting a return to the pre-Oedipal stage.

After her first absence from Lestat, Gabrielle theorizes an imaginary utopia when the world of men collapses and beauty of the Savage Garden takes over. She formulates a strong philosophy based on the power and potential of a pre-Oedipal space. Rice could be drawing on Cixous's⁸ essay evoking "a creative power into which woman can tap if only they can relocate the mother within" (L.R Williams p.118). The philosophy expressed by Gabrielle is encapsulated in Linda Williams argument that a "feminist psychoanalytic vision of the importance of utopian spaces, deriv[es] from a return to the pre-Oedipal connection with the mother" (L.R Williams p. 92). Gabrielle literally returns to the earth-mother when she chooses to sleep in the new earth itself, rather than resting in a stylized, man-made coffin as the male vampires do.

⁸ Helene Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa', in *New French Feminisms*, editors Elaine Marks & Isabelle de Courtivron (London 1981) pp. 245-264. Quoted in L. R. Williams, *Critical Desire*

Paradoxically, vampirism allows Lestat to study and expand his intellect in contrast to his earlier life as the hunter and provider for the family. His previous inclination was to hate her books, as he declares:

I was twenty and I couldn't read and write more than a few prayers and my name. I hated the sight of her reading; I hated her absorption in them. (VL p.47)

This role reversal further intimates the feminization of Lestat, emphasizing his total absorption with Gabrielle and his desire to return to and possess the mother. In contrast, Gabrielle's driving desire is to break away from all ties, to literally soar free from the prescribed feminine roles and forge a 'masculine' space for herself. However, Rice's representation of Gabrielle may not be as radical as it at first appears. In associating her with the earth as opposed to the intellect, nature rather than culture, she could be accused of reproducing patriarchal definitions of femininity.

Freedom means that she can create her own identity, as the narrative states: "we write our own fairy tales now" (VL p.201). Rice's vampires are represented as Dark Angels, and Lestat extends the metaphor: "she and I were archangels together" (VL p. 280). However, Gabrielle, whose namesake is the archangel Gabriel, spurns her past identity including her name. She no longer thinks of her family and friends but instead is drawn to all the places that were far from

her reach when a mortal wife and mother. In making her choice to embrace vampirism, she is seen by Lestat as being colder, braver and more unyielding. He says that "the dark blood has made her colder and already she wonders how she will ever get free of me" (VL p.309/10). She is depicted as a creature of a monstrous purity of purpose and a maniacal curiosity which drives her from continent to continent exploring the jungles, deserts and mountains as an immortal adventurer who follows no man made laws.

An interesting feature of Gabrielle's nascent identity in the narrative is that it is coded through her appearance. On her initiation into vampirism she is described in terms of reclaimed youth and vibrancy. Her body is profoundly changed but to Lestat the most remarkable and disturbing feature of her appearance is her hair. Reference to the quality of Gabrielle's hair is reiterated throughout *The Vampire Lestat* when its abundance and unruliness prove disturbing to Lestat. It epitomizes a tendency in the narrative to project the vampiric Gabrielle in animalistic terms. Lestat describes her as "pure predator, as only a beast can be a predator" (VL p.182) untroubled by moral battles. He is shaken by her ruthlessness and apparent lack of concern over mortals, since she does not share his 'love' for them. Lestat expects the vampire Gabrielle to maintain the fiction of the lady-like Marquise; he expects her to continue to dress and act according to his image of femininity. Her predatory stalking of her

victims shocks him on two levels; firstly, he is horrified by the fact that a female vampire should be as ruthless as he and, secondly, that "...she was a woman walking slowly towards a man - a lady, in fact,...approaching a gentleman..." VL p. 182).

On several occasions, Lestat compares her hair to a lion's mane and stresses her feline grace and languor. However, the most pervading sense of horror associated with her hair comes on the occasion of her rebirth, just before Lestat braves "the final act of courage" to "[l]ook into her eyes" (VL p.177). He exclaims:

... her hair was even more astonishing because it appeared to be alive. So much color moved in it that the hair itself appeared to be writhing, billions of tiny strands stirring around the flawless white face and throat. (VL p. 177)

This Medusa-like reference is heightened by Lestat's continual discomfort with his creation, for although he gave 'birth' to her undeath, she is now his equal and even surpasses him in courage and ruthlessness. He describes how he is mesmerized in her presence "I could have fallen in a stupor looking at her, studying her, all the aspects of her transformation" VL p.180). Gabrielle's new persona evokes the Mother/goddess myth of Medusa, with its focus on the writhing, serpent hair, fang-like teeth and suggestion of flight. She transfixes Lestat (and her victims) with her gaze, as Medusa is said to have petrified all men

who looked into her face. Rice compounds this image with a further description of her hair when, after a scuffle with the Parisian vampires, he comments that "her hair was coming loose from the braid. It was a cobra's hood around her face, loose strands clinging to her white cheeks" (VL p. 206). This image intensifies the rigid, phallic symbolism of the Medusa hair, which Creed suggests serves the double function of, first, a penis replacement "the absence of which is the cause of the terror", and secondly a "classic fetish object which confirms both the absence and the presence of the mother's penis" (Creed p. 110/111). The myth relates to the male fear of insatiable female desire, sexual difference and castration. The Medusa's monstrosity could also evoke fears of sexual ambiguity. Creed describes the symbol for bisexuality in many cultures as being that of the coiled snake, its tail/phallus in its mouth/vagina.

By initiating Gabrielle into vampirism, Lestat has penetrated her with the vampiric bite and possessed the mother he has long desired. Lestat says that to "[l]ook with these vampire eyes at another being like yourself for the first time" causes him to utter an inarticulate cry, "I must have made a sound because she responded ever so slightly as if I had" (VL p.177). Anne Williams suggest that such an inarticulate moan "reflects the pre-Oedipal infant's experience of the mother's gaze, which is combined with a first consciousness of sound" (Anne Williams p. 218/9).

To complete the initiation, Gabrielle has to devour Lestat's blood, therefore literally devouring her young in the manner of Medusa. The wounds resulting from the initiation (in Gabrielle's throat and Lestat's wrist) represent the bleeding wound of the ruptured vagina and menstruation. The Medusa myth links the bleeding female genitals, particularly the mother's genitals, with the terrifying face of the Medusa (Creed p. 66) and awakens male fears of castration. Lestat's reaction to the penetration of his mother and her subsequent power over him results in the terrifying depiction of her as the all devouring vagina dentata and emphasizes his literal impotence as the vampire penis is incapable of an erection.

Gabrielle's own response to her hair takes a different form. She would prefer to wear it short like a man's and, after her initiation into vampirism, she cuts her long locks with a pair of golden scissors she has taken from a victim. On waking from the vampire sleep she is horrified to find that it has grown back to its former length. The scene that follows implies that coming to terms with one's own, monstrous, female nature is a traumatic experience; watching the scene, Lestat observes that,

Her long heavy hair had slipped over her shoulders again, and, exasperated she took hold of it in both hands.

Then suddenly she made a low hissing sound, and her body went rigid. She was holding her long tresses and staring at them.

'My God,' she screamed. And then, in a spasm, she let go of her hair and screamed.

The sound paralyzed me. It sent a flash of white pain through my head. I had never heard her scream. And she screamed again as if she were on fire. She had fallen back against the window and she was screaming louder as she looked at her hair. She went to touch it and then pulled her fingers back from it as if it were blazing. And she struggled against the window, screaming and twisting from side to side, as if she were trying to get away from her own hair. (VL p. 199)

The image of Gabrielle ripping at her hair in pure terror, while covered with her own blood-tears, evokes disturbing resonances of the wild, demented woman. However, her hysteria is replaced with a determination to overcome this final symbol of her previous oppression and constructed femininity. When Lestat recommends that she cut her hair and burn it every night, she replies:

'Yes, burn it,' she sighed. 'Otherwise it should fill all the rooms of the tower in time, shouldn't it? It would be like Rapunzel's hair in the fairy tale. It would be like the gold that the miller's daughter had to spin from straw in the fairy tale of the mean dwarf, Rumpelstiltskin.' (VL p. 201)

Gabrielle not only rejects the fairy-tale image of her golden hair but, at the first opportunity, she discards the restricting corset and full-skirted dress of the era, preferring to wear men's clothes. This cross-dressing by Gabrielle creates an

androgynous creature whose ambiguous sexuality Lestat finds paradoxically disturbing and enticing. She is at once the mother he desired and the waif-like boy in silk "breeches tight over her small belly and thighs" (VL p.190) that confusingly stirs his homoerotic lust. Her androgynous persona allows Gabrielle the freedom to roam the streets like a man and to utilize her "rampant strength" (VL p. 207) for "she was unstoppable [t]here was no wall that she could not climb, no door she wouldn't enter, no rooftop terrain too steep" (VL p.186). She asserts her new power when she claims her independence from Lestat, he records her remarking '...I can do the things now that you used to do, I could fight those wolves on my own...' (VL p. 347). Gabrielle has found a means to transgress the boundaries. As Kahane theorizes, the cult of androgyny and the symbolic identification with the hermaphrodite highlight the "awesome powers" sexual ambiguity has (Kahane p. 63). She adds:

For women, that ambiguity presents a symbolic means of transcending the limitations place on feminine identity. In a culture which defines the true woman in predominantly biological terms, locating feminine identity within the straits of passive sexuality and selfless maternity, it seems especially apt that the image of the hermaphrodite, an essentially biological signifier of the range of human identity, has become a core symbol for contemporary women, surfacing most clearly in the new cult of androgyny. (Kahane p. 63)

At the closure of *The Vampire Lestat*, Gabrielle returns to her son's aid. Lestat sees that her androgynous appearance is unchanged, commenting that "[a]fter two hundred years Gabrielle is still the intrepid explorer" (VL p. 595). He is excited to watch her old walk and gestures. He exclaims:

And there was Gabrielle, the waif just as she'd been so long ago the dusty ragged boy in frayed khaki jungle jacket and pants, the squashed brown felt hat askew on her lovely head. (VL p.594)

Gabrielle defies the understanding of the male vampires. Like mortal men, they expect her to be defined by her beauty and her gender. Her strength is seen as "absolutely unpredictable" (VL p. 512). As Marius explains to Lestat, "Gabrielle had her life; she had her death almost. She has the strength to reenter the world when she chooses, or to live on its fringes indefinitely" (VL p. 512). To Lestat, however, "Gabrielle was gone, no matter what we said here" (VL p. 512).

This analysis of Rice's female vampire would suggest a positive transformation from the self-sacrificing model of motherhood to a self-affirming, independent female image. However, one aspect of Rice's portrayal of Gabrielle which is consistent throughout the *Vampire Chronicles* is her absence.⁹ Rice does not give Gabrielle her own voice so her story is filtered through Lestat's narrative; from his

⁹ I discuss the issue of women being ascribed to aspects of absence in chapter one (see reference E.K. Sedgwick)

perspective, the emphasis is on absence and loss. In his narrative describing her as a mortal mother, she rarely appears in the presence of the family, preferring to be alone with her books and letters. There is little day to day contact shown between her and Lestat in his youth which, as the narrative suggests, adds to his sense of alienation. She rejects the maternal role of nurturer and guide, choosing to let Lestat make his own mistakes and then coming to his aid only under the most extreme circumstances. This aloof mortal becomes the sexually alluring yet cold and mysterious creature of the Savage Garden. While vampirism permits Gabrielle to belong to herself alone and be a servant to no man's desires, it also allows her to remove herself from the world. She lives in self-imposed exile from mortals and vampires. She chooses yet another form of seclusion, wandering the uninhabited zones of both worlds and seeking some affinity and solace from nature. She urges Lestat to "abandon all your valuables, your clothes, the things that link you with civilization" (VL p380). He does not depict her freedom as a positive flight to self-possession but as yet another sterile existence searching the wilderness for answers to a vast truth. He perceives her withdrawal from the civilized world as a rejection of their relationship, of his need for her, which he laments as a lost love in his rock song dedicated to her:

*In my dreams, I hold her still
Angel, lover, Mother.
And in my dreams, I kiss her lips,
Mistress, Muse, Daughter.*

*She gave me life
I gave her death
My beautiful Marquise.
And on the Devil's Road we walked
Two orphans then together.*

*And does she hear my hymns tonight
of Kings and Queens and Ancient truths?
Of broken vows and sorrow?*

*Or does she climb some distant path
where rhyme and song can't find her?*

*Come back to me, my Gabrielle
My Beautiful Marquise.
The castle's ruined on the hill
The village lost beneath the snow
But you are mine forever.*

(QD p. 19/20)

With Gabrielle's failure to yield to Lestat's continued desire to possess her, Rice undermines the positive aspects of her rebirth by virtually deleting her from the text where she remains only as a shadowy vehicle for Lestat's fantasies and perverse desires.

MYTHS OF WOMANHOOD

Gabrielle de Lioncourt is a relatively modern vampire in the time-scale of Rice's novels. At two hundred years old she is young compared to the six thousand year old females, Akasha, Maharet and Mekare. The origin of the vampire race in general lies in Akasha's history, the truth of which is obscured in the many layers of Rice's narratives. In *The Vampire Lestat*, Lestat hears one version of her story from Marius who has been the guardian of Queen Akasha and King Enkil for the last two thousand years. The reader is offered a more elaborate version of the tale from Maharet who, in turn, has been told by Akasha's steward, Khayman, how vampirism was introduced into the world. This version of vampire history is constructed in *The Queen of the Damned*, Rice's fourth vampire novel. This differs from the two previous novels, *Interview with the Vampire* and *The Vampire Lestat* and the following two, *The Tale of the Body Thief* and *Memnoch the Devil*, in that the narrative is not confined to the male

protagonist's viewpoint but comprises many tales within tales. This multi-layered narrative undermines Lestat's narrative control over the reader as, in fact, the plot defines a turning point in Lestat's control over the vampire world. While the fragmentation of viewpoint accentuates the gothic construction of the novel, it disrupts the intensity of male subjectivity and the reader's identification with the male hero, Lestat. This aspect of *The Queen of the Damned*, and the fact that it is the only novel in the *Vampire Chronicles* which allows some of the female characters to utilize their own voice, makes it of particular interest in a study of Rice's work.

Akasha, Mekare and Maharet are three key female figures in Rice's fiction. In this section, I intend to discuss their portrayal and the varied images of womanhood that they represent. In so doing I shall focus on the myths of femininity which contribute to their construction and refer to the origins of the myths situated in the ancient world. I will also discuss how Rice places her female characters from the two ancient cultures portrayed in the novels, *The Vampire Lestat* and *The Queen of the Damned*, in opposition to each other. The analysis will focus briefly on Rice's use of the images and cultures introduced to define the female characters including, ancestor worship/cannibalism and the civilizations portrayed where women held power as shamanistic mediators with the spirit world.

Ironically, Akasha, the eponymous Queen of the Damned, does not voice her own narrative. Her story is told through the perspectives of Lestat and Maharet neither of whom can be said to have unbiased viewpoints. Maharet was a victim of Akasha's bigotry and torture six thousand years ago, while Lestat is trapped in her mesmerizing spell as her lover and instrument of her vengeance. The history of Akasha and her husband King Enkil is so deeply encoded in myth (the narrative suggests of their own making) that they have become gods, neither living nor dead but enshrined as living statues known by their followers as Those Who Must Be Kept. The reader is drawn into the myths of ancient civilizations as Rice's novels rework the ancient creation myths filtered through biblical images of the Virgin Mary and Jesus. Rice states, "Akasha is the villain in QD because she is subordinating everything to a pure idea" (Ramsland p. 10) and she adds that her character is modeled on Kali the ancient blood goddess. Akasha's fanaticism results in her instigating what she believes to be a "divine war" (QD p. 340) with her "righteous cause" (QD p. 337) being fought with the preternatural powers of herself and Lestat. Her "pure idea" is summed up thus:

She devises a plan to create a paradise on earth - a new Eden in which she will reign as the goddess. She will define the concept of goodness on her own terms, as she revamps the world myths that worship the Great Mother and her lover. She wants to free women from injustice, poverty, war and crime. Doing so entails ridding the world of ninety-nine per cent of the men. (Ramsland p. 10)

In her ruthless annihilation of the mortals and vampires who stand in the way of her new world order, she represents a version of Creed's concept of the monstrous-feminine. In fact, Rice has developed a female character who combines several features of the monstrous-feminine. Creed explains:

...that the monstrous-feminine constitutes an important and complex stereotype which can be broken down into a number of different figures of female horror: woman as archaic mother, monstrous womb, vampire, possessed monster, femme castratrice, witch, castrating mother. (Creed p.151)

In her representation of Akasha Rice merges the vampire myth with the ancient myths of Kali, Osiris and Isis. Thus, in order to analyze Rice's character in relation to Creed's monstrous-feminine, it will be helpful to detail a short biography of Akasha and discuss the historical and mythological background that is built round her character. This is problematic, as the reader has very little direct information from Akasha herself. The narratives disclosing her history are unreliable and the plot is biased towards a negative reading of her character. Although she is depicted as an entirely monstrous, if seductive, creature, it may be possible that Rice intends to represent the mortal Akasha is partly a victim of history. The narratives of *The Vampire Lestat* and *The Queen of the Damned* rely on gossip and legend in their depiction of Akasha and Enkil and again, as these are both unreliable sources of information, the reader is not given a clear

account of their story. Its illusive nature, developed through the gothic multi-layering of the narratives, heightens the sense of myth and mystery attached to the characters. Rice appears to be deliberately intensifying the difficulties for Lestat (and the reader) in tracing the origins of the vampires, thus prolonging the quest and the dénouement and deliberately adding an element of mystification to their origins. The process of myth-making is mirrored by the construction of Akasha's non-narrative, her/story, which is represented as absence or lack to be filled by other voices.

One of the most powerful voices in these narratives is that of the witch, Maharet, who represents an alternative perspective of female power in contrast to Akasha's tyranny. The conflict between the two women, and the culture they represent, originates in an obscure legendary past. It is through Maharet's narrative that we learn of Akasha's mortal life and her transformation in to a vampire.

When the young Akasha is brought to Kemet (ancient Egypt) from Urak, in the Tigris and Euphrates valley, it is because she has been chosen to marry King Enkil. She is a princess of the royal house representing a civilization more advanced than that of Kemet where the population hunt and cannibalize their enemies. As a result of her arrival "a great change occurred in the Nile Valley.

Or so we were told" (QD p. 366). She is described in Maharet's narrative as follows:

And this was Akasha, a beauty of the royal family, and a worshiper of the great goddess Inanna, and one who could bring into Enkil's kingdom the wisdom of her land. Or so the gossip went in the marketplaces of Jericho and Nineveh and with the caravans that came to trade for our wares" (QD p, 366)

This continuing narrative depicts a conflict between old and new beliefs, and between Kemet and her neighbouring countries. The civilization now ruled by Akasha and Enkil represents 'scientific' knowledge, writing and military power. This civilization is portrayed as overturning a more 'harmonious' tribal culture which, until recently, was based on a woman-centred community. The conflicts arise from the new queen's horror of the barbaric cannibalism she finds at Kemet. This gives rise to a ban on all forms of cannibalism and those who disobey are put to death. The narrative indicates that it is Akasha's lack of understanding of the distinction between the ritual cannibalism of ancestors and the eating of enemies that disrupts the harmony of the ancient world:

Not to hunt, that was one thing, but to commit one's ancestors to the earth was a horror to them...Not only could one not eat the sacred flesh of mother or father, but it must be secured in linen wrappings at great expense, and these intact

bodies must be displayed for all to see, and then placed in tombs with proper offerings and incantation of the priest. (QD p. 367)

This royal edict results in the growth of a number of enemies who believe in the old religion and perceive it as sacrilegious to bury their dead. However, the narrative also implies that Akasha and Enkil were benevolent rulers, wishing all men to live in peace, and that Akasha brought the knowledge of writing and of sowing the land and herding animals with her from Lebanon. Akasha and Enkil are depicted as “worshippers of the Good Mother Earth ...benevolent rulers in whom the good of others was the commanding value, as the Good Mother was the Nourishing Mother..” (VL p. 475). This discrepancy between the two views in the narrative adds to the many contradictions Rice offers her readers in her texts.

The witches Maharet, Mekare and their mother, to whom Akasha and Enkil turn for assistance, are depicted by Rice as revered shamans with paranormal powers whose community lives in harmony with its neighbours, honours the spirit world and preserves the souls of their ancestors through ritual cannibalism. When Akasha and Enkil hear of a powerful family of witches living at Mount Carmel, they dispatch envoys inviting the witches to Kemet in the hope that their powers may aid the Egyptian sovereigns against their enemies who are on the increase. The soldiers return to Mount Carmel to forcibly remove the witches

after their initial refusal to leave the mountain. In so doing, the soldiers arrive during the funeral ceremony for the witch mother and disrupt the ritual act of cannibalism, desecrating the body in the process. The ceremony involves the careful preparation of the body, baking and then eating it with a ritual division of the heart, eyes and brain. This desecration of a religious ceremony and the murder of the villagers emphasizes the ruthless militarism of the king and queen, illustrating the way they insist on imposing their will over the beliefs of others.

The narrative suggests that the witches are a double representation of the other, for not only are they twins but they are also red-haired. When Maharet and Mekare are taken as prisoners to Kemet they are feared and hated because many early races perceived twins and red-haired people as aberrations against nature; we are told that in Kemet:

...it had been the custom among them now and then to kill twin children; and the red-haired were invariably sacrificed to the gods. It was thought to be lucky. (QD p. 383)

Creed argues that the "witch has been associated with a range of abject things...even cannibalism" (Creed p. 76). She adds that, despite the witch's social function as healer and seer, she has been traditionally accused of performing magic and concocting poisonous potions involving the use of menstrual blood and the bodies of children. This association with the taboos of

blood and cannibalism clearly link the witch with the vampire. Creed states that the “witch is positioned as the oral sadistic mother and phallic woman” (Creed p. 76). This creates a further link between Rice’s representation of the ancient female characters Akasha, Maharet and Mekare.

Rice depicts the growing conflict between the Queen and the two witches being based on a desire for knowledge, particularly supernatural knowledge, and the power that it could bring. The witches’ fame brings about their down-fall as Akasha questions them about their powers as she “would know what wisdom of the realms of the invisible we had to impart” (QD p. 384). Maharet’s narrative suggests that, through their telepathic powers, they understand Akasha’s motives. She states:

[T]his Queen had no true morality, no true system of ethics to govern the things which she did...For always in her there was a dark place full of despair. And a driving force to make meaning because there was none. (QD p. 385)

The mortal twenty-five year old Akasha is portrayed as having absolute power over the people and a single-mindedness of purpose which would not allow her to accept that she could be in error. This trait is indicative of her behaviour throughout the novel. Rice depicts the mortal Akasha’s single-mindedness as giving an insight into her later vampiric fanaticism, when she is described as:

...a dark brooding soul who believed finally in nothing. A chill place was her soul; her religious fervor was nothing but a blaze which she fed constantly, seeking to warm that chill place (QD p. 392).

Maharet's narrative continues to describe the conflict between the witches and the Queen, when as a result of their punishment for opposing her, the witches are ceremonially raped by Khayman, the royal steward, and then abandoned in the desert. The vengeance of Mekare, the eldest and most powerful of the witches, results in a cataclysmic event; the first metamorphosis into vampire. The spirit Amel enters the body of Akasha through the mortal stab wounds inflicted during an assassination attempt, and becomes one with the blood. Rice describes the spiteful and greedy spirit as having craved a fleshy body and represents it as reabsorbing the blood, invading every particle of Akasha's being, while healing her wounds and transforming her. This negative depiction of a woman who has power over her husband the King and her subjects is in direct opposition to the portrayal of the witches, particularly Maharet, who are seen as beneficial to their tribe and loved by both the people and the spirits. The representation of Akasha's transformation produces an image of possession by a virulent evil. Khayman describes in horror the ghastly change that came over her:

...she lunged at the King, as if she were a hungry beast, and with her long tongue, she lapped at the blood that covered his throat and his chest...She was a

line, being destroyed as a result of her fanaticism and bigotry. Although fear and bigotry are on both sides, Maharet's narrative portrays the twins purely as victims and Akasha as the monstrous aggressor. In addition, no mention is made in the narrative as to whether Enkil and Akasha have mortal offspring, while the reader is told that Maharet bears a child as a result of Khayman's rape of her. If there are no mortal heirs to the throne of Kemet then Mekare's revenge not only denies Akasha and Enkil their remaining mortal life but it has also broken the chain of Akasha's dynastic line.

Creed argues that:

...woman is transformed into a psychotic monster because she has been symbolically castrated, that is, she feels she has been robbed unjustly of her rightful destiny. (Creed p. 120)

Rice's characterization of Akasha has much in common with the image of the archaic mother, the vampire and the *femme castratrice* of Creed's monstrous-feminine. There is evidence in the texts that Akasha may feel that she was unjustly robbed of her destiny. First, the sovereigns are assassinated by some of their own people, then they are horrifically transformed into monstrous beings who are forced to live in a world of darkness, and subsequently for thousands of years they remain in a 'frozen' state. When Akasha is finally awoken by Lestat's rock music her first act is to destroy Enkil, thus repossessing all the primal power

of the blood and freeing herself from his dominance. Marius describes Enkil's body as resembling a husk, drained of the healing blood, which disintegrates into dust at the merest touch. Akasha's final devouring of Enkil is reminiscent of the initial scene when, like a lioness she crouches over him lapping at his blood, before resurrecting him. Six thousand years later, Akasha does not resurrect Enkil, but offers the blood to her prince-son, Lestat. This cycle of resurrection recalls both the Kali goddess myth and the Osiris-Isis myth¹⁰.

Rice makes explicit reference in the text to the Osiris-Isis myth during the episode when Enkil and Akasha attempt to graft the ancient myths around their vampire existence. They have left scrolls in which they tell how they "sought to triumph in their adversity" (VL p. 481). They chose the path of ritual and myth:

[T]hey saw in themselves the images of the waning and waxing moon, and their drinking of blood the god incarnate who takes unto himself his sacrifice, and they use their superior powers to divine and predict and judge...They set into motion the tale of Osiris, composed in part of their own terrible suffering ...And they grafted this upon the older stories of the gods who rise and fall in their love of the Good Mother, which were already there in the land from which they came. (VL p. 481/2)

¹⁰ The goddesses Kali and Isis are represented in myth (Hindu and Egyptian respectively) as the Great Mothers from whom all creation arose. In these myths Kali and Isis resurrect their dead partners making them immortal in the process. The goddesses are associated with the cycle of life and death, fertility and rebirth, and Divine incest.

The worship of the Good Mother Earth gradually becomes subsumed into the worship of the Moon goddess, blood sacrifices and the realm of darkness. Creed argues that the vampire is symbolically linked to the snake of myth and legend (Creed p. 65). The image of the serpent is incorporated in many myths. In particular an archaic Egyptian serpent mother is said to have created the world. She uncoils in a spiral which is the movement of creation. Again the serpent myth represents death and rebirth incorporating references to menstrual blood linked to the snake's bite. In Egyptian myth Isis became associated with the "dual Serpent-mother of life and after-life"¹¹ and in Babylonian myth the serpent goddess is known as Lamia, a name which has become associated with the female vampire. The sovereigns Akasha and Enkil in their new incarnation clearly link the images of the moon, the snake and woman's blood with the resurrection myths of Kali and Isis.

Akasha's belief in Inanna, a Sumerian goddess, displays links with the fertility cycle when the goddess's mortal lover is symbolically sacrificed during a ritual marriage. The original version of the Osiris-Isis myth similarly reworks the fertility cycle of death and resurrection. Osiris is brought back to life by the Divine Mother/wife, Isis, after he has been dismembered by his brother Typhon

¹¹ Barbara G. Walker, *The Woman's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets*, (London 1983) p.904.

(sometimes he is called Seth). In certain versions of the myth Osiris is resurrected in the form of his and Isis's son, Horus. The cult centres on "Divine incest" (Walker p. 750) and is represented by Isis' impregnation by her son Horus. The ithyphallic Osiris/Horus fulfills "the archetypal wish for union with the mother" (Walker p. 750). In "Neolithic Egypt, Isis was alleged to have devoured Osiris as she hovered over his corpse in the form of an archaic Vulture Mother" (Walker p. 757) The ancient Egyptians also believed that resurrection was identified with the resurrection of the god by eating his flesh. Osiris became known as the Lord of Death and was identified with the serpent of the underworld. It is perhaps more than a coincidence that the cover illustration to the paperback edition of *The Queen of the Dead* (Futura 1988) incorporates two serpents into the title-script, particularly as the royal title of all Egyptian queens was "Serpent of the Nile" (Walker p. 904). The various names for Isis include the "Giver of Life" and the "One Who is All" (Walker p. 453); she was believed to be the source of life represented by the "Divine essence" (Walker p. 454) of either blood or milk. A further version of the myth depicts Isis swallowing the dismembered parts of Osiris and bringing him back to life. However the penis was lost so Isis makes a clay penis and gives it and him life, therefore enabling the birth of Horus (Walker p. 455). The worship of Isis evolved into the cult of the Virgin Mary and the Madonna, when the resurrection themes were reworked in the story of Christ.

Rice reworks these myths drawing parallels between Akasha/Isis, Enkil/Osiris and Lestat/Horus.

This process of the interweaving and assimilation of myths is relevant to Rice's portrayal of Akasha, which is notably eclectic in the variety of cultural sources on which it draws. In a similar way Rice shows Akasha assimilating Christianity into the mingling of her new and ancient religions. In the *Vampire Chronicles* Akasha is variously referred to as the Queen of Heaven (QD pp. 253, 345, 354), Blessed Virgin (VL p. 64, QD pp. 292, 416, 346), The Mother (VL p. 155, QD pp. 305, 356), Isis (VL p. 471, QD p. 487) and the Host (QD p. 328). Akasha herself refers to herself as Christ and Lestat as her instrument, Judas (QD p. 349). Lestat is also depicted as her Saint (QD p. 305), Angel (QD pp. 342, 356), Prince (QD pp. 301, 526), and Saviour (QD p. 301). Akasha consciously reworks the ritual of the Mass, in the episode when the male sacrifices are offered to the Lestat in a symbolic eating of the god's flesh, and literally, on the occasion when Lestat devours Akasha's blood as she simultaneously drains him of blood. The description of Akasha as the Host combines these references with the body of Christ, superimposing an overtone of Christianity on the new world order she creates. However, the term 'Host' also carries a darker meaning: it implicitly refers to her role as mother to the brood of vampires, since she embodies the blood of the race as a whole. As a result, to kill Akasha is to kill all vampires.

Rice's direct reference to Kali (Ramsland p. 10) incorporates many of these images, particularly of Kali as destroyer. Kali is the Hindu goddess, also called the Dark Mother, she represents a trinity of Virgin/Mother/Crone. These aspects of Kali reflect creation, preservation and destruction (Walker p. 488). The negative aspects of the goddess parallel images of vampirism (particularly Akasha's 'healing' of Enkil); Kali is depicted squatting over her dead consort, Shiva, devouring his entrails as she sexually devours his penis (Walker p. 488). However, this description ignores the positive side of Kali, described by the Hindu poets, when she is portrayed feeding him as a mother feeds a child and he becomes immortal (Walker p. 490). Walker discusses the positive aspects attributed to Kali, when as:

a Mother, Kali was called Treasure-House of compassion, Giver of Life to the World...Contrary to the west's idea of her as a purely destructive Goddess, she was the fount of every kind of love, which flowed into the world only through her agents on earth, women. (Walker p. 490)

Rice appears to ignore or subvert this positive aspect when she applies the myth to Akasha. In describing her utopian world, Rice shows Akasha perverting the love that the women feel for her by turning them into her agents of destruction. She has made slaves of them in order to create her vision of Eden, Lestat quotes:

'And what I shall make is Eden, the Eden all long for, and it shall be better than nature! It shall take things a step further; and the utter abusive and amoral violence of nature shall be redeemed. Don't you understand that men will never do more than dream of peace? But women can realize that dream! My vision is amplified in the heart of every woman. But it cannot survive the heat of male violence! And that heat is so terrible that the earth itself may not survive.' (QD p. 429)

Akasha exemplifies a horrifying aspect of the Mother, not as life giver, but as a destructive force. Her resurrection, and that of her 'children' signifies a reanimation of the dead into monstrous beings whose existence is confined to a nether world of darkness and whose sustenance is the blood of mortals. As vampire mother/queen, Akasha represents the ultimate in abjection. I discussed Creed's theory in relation to Kristeva's essay on abjection in the first chapter, and I would suggest that Akasha embodies the way the "three major categories of taboo: food taboos; bodily change and its end in death; the female body and incest" (Creed p. 69) give rise to a prohibition on access to the maternal body. Kristeva argues that "woman is specifically related to polluting objects... excremental and menstrual" (Creed p. 10). I would also argue that Akasha fulfills Creed's image of woman as castrator. She embodies both the interrelated

images of the *vagina dentata*, exemplified by the symbolic sadistic mother and the dyadic mother¹². In her bloody incorporation of Enkil, she feeds off him, she literally renders him impotent and finally devours his being, taking the life-force into herself. Akasha is the terrifying "phantasy of woman as castrator...She is the savage, destructive, aggressive woman" (Creed p. 116).

Akasha also clearly represents an image of the archaic mother, since her role as the source of the vampire community makes her "the point of origin and the end" (Creed p. 17). In the episode depicting the horrific possession of her by Amel, Rice offers a reworking of the primal scene. Amel enters her body through the gaping stab wounds, using her own blood as a fluid to penetrate the skin. This penetration by blood/semen through the wound/vagina is described as a sexual violation in graphic abject terms; when Khayman, quoted by Maharet, describes how,

'[T]he Queen lay on the floor writhing as if in agony, the blood pouring from her wounds, and a great reddish cloud enveloped her; it was like a whirlpool surrounding her, or either a wind sweeping up countless tiny drops of blood. An in the midst of this swirling wind or rain or whatever it could be called, the Queen twisted and turned, her eyes rolling up in her head. The King lay sprawled on his

¹² Creed utilizes Kristeva's theory on the mother-child relationship, when the maternal body becomes a site of conflicting desires resulting from the prohibition placed on it as a defense against autoeroticism and incest taboo. The conflict arises from the child's struggle to break free from the mother but the mother is reluctant to release it. (Creed p. 11)

back...The great blood cloud that veiled her, swelling and contracting around her, grew denser and, all of a sudden, as if drawn into her wounds, disappeared. The Queen's body went still; then slowly she sat upright, her eyes staring forward, and a great guttural cry broke from her before she fell quiet.' (QD p. 451/2)

This act of possession results in Akasha carrying the Blood, a fusion of part human/part demon-spirit, inside her. The abject literally informs her being..."[I]'ts core resides in the Queen" (QD p. 472). The acts of vampiric blood exchange which occur subsequently represent a repetitive reworking of this primal scene.

The mortal Akasha worshipped the Mother-Goddess, Inanna. However, in her new form she becomes the Mother and Goddess, Queen of all vampires. She exemplifies an amalgamation of the ancient myths; Kali, Isis, Earth-Mother. Creed argues that the archaic mother can be traced back through the "mythological narratives of the generative, parthenogenetic mother - the ancient figure who gives birth to all things" (Creed p. 24)

When Akasha is eventually destroyed, her *essence*, the life-force, is preserved by Maharet and Mekare. After she has been decapitated Mekare devours her heart and brain. The source of vampire existence is incorporated into the First Blood, her children. The final span of Akasha's existence represents a macabre

reenactment of the witch's funeral ceremony for their dead mother. Dadoun, quoted by Creed, describes the archaic mother as:

a mother-thing situated beyond good and evil, beyond all organized forms and all events. This is a totalizing and oceanic mother, a 'shadowy and deep unity', evoking in the subject the anxiety of fusion and of dissolution; a mother who comes before the discovery of the essential beance, that of the phallus. This mother is nothing but a fantasy inasmuch as she is only ever established as an omnipresent and all-powerful totality, an absolute being, by the very intuition - she has no phallus - that deposes her... (Creed p.20)

Kahane argues that in gothic literature the archaic mother is traditionally represented as a "spectral presence of a dead-undead mother, archaic and all-encompassing, a ghost signifying the problematics of female identity" (Kahane p. 48). This description would suggest a similar "shadowy" figure in line with Dadoun's depiction of the archaic mother as a non-presence. However Kahane goes on to argue that in modern gothic "the spectral mother emerges as an actual figure. She, and not some threatening villain, becomes the primary antagonist" (Kahane p. 55). Akasha represents this "spectral mother" in a visible form, a grotesque image of the all-powerful Mother-Goddess. This has the effect of centering the "problematics of femaleness" (Kahane p. 55) on to a female body which is depicted as freakish.

In the *Vampire Chronicles* Lestat's obsessive search for a hidden truth is found in the history of the Mother/Queen of the Damned. Kahane argues that "the conventional gothic paradigm is the pervasive issue of discovering a truth at 'the dark secret center'". She sees the distinguishing feature of modern gothic as "giving that truth grotesque visual form" (Kahane p. 56). Akasha is depicted as an aggressive, militaristic female who threatens the symbolic order. Rice's "villain" is a freakish, grotesque monster who preys on and devours her victims, spurns equally monstrous 'children', murders a proportion of the male population and intends to create a New World order.

If Rice portrays Akasha as the embodiment of evil, finally destroyed by her 'children', does she propose that Maharet is the wise and good witch who should take on her mantle? The focus she places on Maharet's crusade to re-instate the Great Family and on her sensitivity of response suggests that she does. However, before turning to the portrayal of Maharet, it is necessary that we consider the representation of Mekare, Maharet's twin sister. On the destruction of Akasha, it is Mekare, the golem-like vampire who is given the 'crown' by her twin Maharet. As Lestat comments:

[A]nd the twins turned around and stood up now, Maharet's arm around Mekare. And Mekare stared forward, expressionless, uncomprehending, the living statue; and Maharet said:

Behold. The Queen of the Damned. (QD p. 535)

Rice appears to show Mekare having the negative aspects of Akasha's inheritance. As a mortal, Mekare is the more vocal and assertive of the two twins, refusing to defer to Akasha as sovereign of Kemet. The twins are raped because of her blasphemy against the gods of Kemet and Mekare's refusal to answer the sovereigns' questions. When she communicates with Amel, despite their mother's previous warning not to encourage the evil spirits, she unleashes his spite on the royal household and is unwittingly responsible for the conception of the vampire being. Akasha silences her by having her tongue cut out, but not before she has time to prophesy the queen's downfall:

Let the spirits witness; for theirs is the knowledge of the future - both what it would be, and what I will! You are the Queen of the Damned, that's what you are! Your only destiny is evil, as well you know! But I shall stop you, if I must come back from the dead to do it. At the hour of your greatest menace it is I who will defeat you! It is I who will bring you down. Look well upon my face, for you will see me again! (QD p. 480)

Akasha's mutilation of the witches is an attempt to disempower them, to remove their supernatural powers, and thus make them subservient to her commands. When Maharet is blinded, a symbolic removal of her powers as a seer, and Mekare's tongue is cut out, Khayman offers the witches an escape

from death and a chance at vengeance against this evil; he asks, "[Would] you be its equal and its enemy upon this earth?" (QD p. 482) On discovering that the twins are now immortal, Akasha has them sealed in stone coffins and cast adrift on rafts on the great oceans, one to the east and one to the west. This splitting up of the twins, the symbolic burying of them alive in the stone coffins and the blinding of Maharet, represent images of castration. Creed argues in her study of the representation of twin sisters in film, that:

woman's 'castration' is depicted as a separation from part of her self and/or from another woman, her sister. This part constitutes woman's active aggressive, phallic self. The self that survives is represented as symbolically castrated through the image of the scar. (Creed p. 132)

Maharet's blindness, and the pain she experiences through the use of the 'borrowed' eyes of her victims, develops this concept as does her continual sense of loss for her sister, Mekare.

Eventually Mekare returns from an undead slumber of nearly six thousand years to conquer Akasha. The raft, with her stone coffin, drifts across the Atlantic ocean to South America where, denied speech and human company, she survives alone until despair and madness drive her into the primordial earth of the rain forest. Mekare awakens when she instinctively feels Akasha's reanimated presence on earth. Rice depicts Mekare as a mindless creature

driven by the unconscious urge to reach Akasha. Flashes of her memory are 'transmitted' to vampires and mortals in the form of dreams and they receive visions of her struggle to fulfill the curse. As the narrative states,

[T]he origin of these dreams was almost certainly not a conscious survivor of the millennia; rather the visions had - very possibly - come from one who had no more mind now than an animal in whom memory is a spur to action which the animal does not question or understand. It would explain their clarity; it would explain their repetition. (QD p. 330)

These visions commence with an image of "a green, fetid place, full of unwholesome and smothering warmth" (QD p. 23) as Mekare traverses the jungles of South America. Then she is seen by Louis. He glimpses a creature traveling the road winding north, "the feet began their relentless tramp again; he saw the feet caked with earth as if they were his feet; the hands caked with earth as if they were his hands" (QD p. 411). Ramsland suggests that she is caked with earth "as if she is the earth, saving itself from the destructive plundering religious ideas have justified for years" (Ramsland P. 288).

Rice creates this image of a mindless golem who, in pursuing her unreasoning, destructive urge, is literally resurrected from the earth:

[A] thin layer of soil encased her all over, even the rippling shape of her long hair. Broken, peeling, stained by the rain even, the mud still clung to her, clung to her naked arms and bare feet as if she were made of it, made of the earth itself. It made a mask of her face. And her eyes peered out of the mask, naked, rimmed in red. A rag covered her, a blanket filthy and torn, and tied with a hemp rope around her waist. (QD p. 530).

In her separation and loss Mekare turned to the earth for oblivion. She has no consciousness of the millennia as time passed over her 'grave'. She is driven by indistinct memories and desires imprinted on her mind six thousand years earlier. She is an empty shell, an ideal vessel for the final resting place of the source of vampire life. At the conclusion of *The Queen of the Damned* the narrative suggests that Mekare is returned to the hidden recesses of the earth. None of the vampires know where Maharet has taken Mekare and the last image Lestat has of the twins together:

"is of them walking eastward, down the rippling silver creek, swallowed as it were by the roaring music of the water that followed its relentless path through the scattered rocks" (QD p. 543).

Mekare's mindless and relentless pursuit of an obsessive passion is an exaggerated version of Akasha's "pure idea". Mekare learnt nothing during her

six thousand years existence as a vampire; it was as though she was in fact dead and buried in the earth, only awakening in response to a primitive urge.

In contrast Maharet has remained fully awake and focused during her entire vampire life. Unlike Mekare and Akasha, Maharet is depicted as a mortal mother. Her daughter, Miriam, survives to generate a mortal dynasty that in time spreads round the world. Rice shows that two driving forces have motivated Maharet, firstly a desire to watch over her Great Family and secondly a need to find her lost sister. These two forces have also motivated Maharet to use her power positively. She is a benefactor to her mortal descendants and, in this role, she has actively participated through the centuries in development of the human race. Rice creates a character who grows from the youngest, mortal twin to a wise woman of incredible strength and warmth.

As a member of the witch family known as 'the Witches of the Mountain' Maharet lived in caves at Mount Carmel, present day Palestine. In ancient civilizations mountains denoted holy places; often they were associated with the Great Mother's breasts¹³. Legend suggested that the earth mother spread her fertility on to the surrounding land and it was common for witches' shrines to be built on the mountain. The witches of Mount Carmel could count back fifty

¹³ Barbara G. Walker, *The Woman's Dictionary of Symbols and Sacred Objects*, (London 1988) p.346.

generations to ancestors who were alive in an early period of history before the coming of the moon into the night sky, *The Time Before the Moon* (QD p. 362). The significance of this claim to an ancestry before the cataclysmic floods, storms and earthquakes implies a earlier mythological period of harmony when women acted as mediums between the natural forces, spirits and mortals. The community, which built its encampments on the valley floor at the foot of the mountain, represents the earliest food cultivators where "a woman-dominated"¹⁴ culture existed in Palestine during the proto-neolithic period of 6,000 BC. Rice mentions the witches' affiliation to the Pleiades or Seven Sisters "our sacred stars...all blessings came from that constellation" (QD p. 362). In mythology the Seven Sisters were also known as the Seven Mothers or Pillars of Wisdom while the whole constellation was designated as the throne of the Queen of Heaven. The narrative constructs an image of the witches as wise women in a community that existed in pre-history. In this way Rice substantiates the view of the witches as a base for a strong woman-centered culture.

However by the period of Maharet's and Mekare's lifetime the introduction of a male-dominant religion is presented in the form of "the bullgod of our people" (QD p. 364). In Maharet's narrative there is no apparent antagonism between the witches and the priests of the bullgod. The witches use

¹⁴ Joseph Campbell,, *The Masks of Gold: Primitive Mythology*, (New York & London 1991) p. 383.

hallucinogenic drugs to bring on a trance-like state enabling them to talk to the spirit world. The witches are a positive influence in the community, using their magical powers as shamans to advise and heal. Creed argues that witches are not always perceived as figures of the monstrous-feminine (Creed p. 73). In the *Vampire Chronicles* (and in her novels on the Mayfair witches¹⁵) Rice portrays them as having both good and bad human traits. As twins, Maharet and Mekare, are described as mirror images, representing the gothic double, and the mythological lightness and darkness born of the Great Mother. Their powers are doubled and they can communicate in a pre-verbal manner. Maharet states:

my sister and I spoke to each other silently, or by means of our language, the twin language of gestures and abbreviated words that only we understood (QD p. 381).

Maharet's name may have its source in the Asian Maharis, meaning Motherhood, or Mahatma, meaning Great Mother, (later masculinized) (Walker p. 571 *Myths and Secrets*). She is associated with powerful images of motherhood in the text both with her mortal descendants, The Great Family, and the family of vampires. In *Memnoch the Devil* Lestat says "she is the eldest, well, almost the eldest, the Eve of Us, the Mother of Us All or the only Mother who

¹⁵ Anne Rice, *The Witching Hour*, (London 1990), *Lasher*, (London 1993), *Taltos*, (London 1994).

remained" (MD p. 347). In contrast to Mekare's affiliation with the underworld and death, Maharet is aligned to creativity and life-giving forces.

Maharet is portrayed as a powerful 'good' witch. On her transformation to vampire she has "an immense reservoir of power" (MD p. 349) and "the immediate receptivity of a clever mind" (QD p. 311). It is in relation to Maharet's use of her powers and her intellect that Rice suggests the difference exists between her, as wise woman, and Akasha and Mekare as malignant forces.

In chapter one I discussed Akasha's failure to assimilate the knowledge she had gained over the centuries while on her mental visitations around the world. Akasha's vision of terrestrial chaos is a distortion of the truth which she promotes to bolster her tyrannical plan to conquer the mortal world. Her use of religious and fascist rhetoric to incite the masses emphasizes the obsessive single-mindedness of her will to dominate mortals and vampires. After six thousand years Akasha is still the warrior queen, a conquering destructive force, who is unable to free herself from a moral vacuum.

In contrast to Akasha's failure to assimilate knowledge, Maharet's knowledge has grown with The Great Family. As keeper of the records, she has set down the matrilineal thread from the families conception (going back to The Time Before the Moon) to the present day. She comments:

[A]nd the family taught me the rhythms and passions of each new age; the family took me into alien lands where perhaps I would never have ventured alone; the family took me into realms of art which might have intimidated me; the family was my guide through time and space. My teacher, my book of life. The family was all things. (QD p. 498)

Maharet turned to the family "as if were the very spring of life itself" (QD p. 398) to ward off the madness and despair which often afflicts the oldest of the vampires. Her mortal descendants inhabit every nation on earth; they are "blood of our blood" (QD p. 500). This positive image of mortal blood is contrasted with the Dark Blood, when Maharet argues that "all the miracles of the immortals could not outshine this vast and simple chronicle of the Great Family" (QD p. 501). Maharet is depicted as the wise mother of a mortal family. Like the mother/goddess of ancient myth she is a benign influence, for, as Lestat discovers "[s]he had not come to judge" (MD p. 347). It is because of this wisdom that Rice places her, not the great Queen Akasha, in the final narrative as the good Mother and not the great Queen.

A twentieth-century descendent of the Great Family has an important narrative in *The Queen of the Damned*. Jesse Reeves has descended in a direct line from Maharet. She is fostered by New York cousins, Maria and Matthew Godwin, as a result of the accidental death of her mother. Maharet is an unseen

force in Jesse's young life. She provides emotional and financial support through her letters and she "had always been Jesse's distant but, ever frequent mentor" (QD p. 171). Jesse has inherited the witch gene of the Great Family. She closely resembles Maharet in appearance with her green eyes, pale skin and red hair.

The importance of Jesse as a mortal descendent of Maharet is emphasized in the narrative as Rice develops their complex relationship. 'Aunt' Maharet is Jesse's confidant and best friend but it is not until she is an adult that she actually meets her. A growing mother/daughter relationship is suggested, but the text also hints at a sexual attraction between them. Soon after their first meeting Jesse is invited to Maharet's home in the Sonoma forest. In Jesse, Rice portrays a character whose witch's powers are combined with an intelligent and enquiring mind. Jesse learns of the records of the Great Family for the first time and she pores over the books and computer files. Jesse is overwhelmed by a desire to study and work on the records, using her knowledge of ancient languages and civilizations to help Maharet. She is drawn to this "astounding mystery" (QD p. 179). Behind the mystery of the Great Family lies the deeper secret of Maharet's vampire origins and in pursuing the one mystery Jesse could unravel the dark truth. When Maharet becomes aware of this danger and effectively exiles her from the house, Jesse experiences a great sense of loss, as she has been tantalized by glimpses of the mysteries. Maharet has not only denied her access to the knowledge she desired, but also the company of her intimate mentor.

Maharet showers her with gifts and "as the years passed she gave Jesse anything and everything Jesse could possibly desire...[N]evertheless, Jesse had been damaged by that summer" (QD p. 187).

Buried deep in Jesse's unconscious is the memory of her exploration of the Sonoma house, down the spiral staircase into the cellar, where she had found the bodies of Maharet and Mael petrified like statues. When Rice's mortal female wanders through Maharet's medieval fortress, "she aggressively intrudes into the secret chambers of the castle" (Kahane p. 50). Commenting on the experiences of the gothic heroines, Kahane argues that:

...the heroine's active exploration of her entrapment in a Gothic house is also an exploration of her relation to the maternal body which she too shares, with all its connotations of power over, and vulnerability to, forces within and without.
(Kahane p. 50)

The Sonoma house symbolically represents the anxieties that Jesse feels about her identity. She experiences a *frisson* of fear and attraction during her stay at the:

rambling structure built into the foot of the mountains, its roofs and pillared porches veiled in the blue morning glory vines. High above, half hidden in the

grassy slopes, a few tiny secret windows caught the first flash of morning light.
(QD p. 162)

Her origins are contained within the mystery of the Great Family records kept deep within the "Celtic citadel" (QD p. 317), as is the truth of Maharet's vampirism. Three hundred ancestors divide Jesse from Maharet's and Khayman's mortal child, Miriam, but the direct blood line has kept the genes strong. The strong blood link and physical attraction between Jesse and Maharet add to the confusion in their relationship. As Creed argues in her analysis of the witch in film, "the doomed mother/child dyad is marked by repressed sexual desire" (Creed p. 82). Jesse's search for knowledge is a quest for her own identity. However, in pursuing this quest, is she identifying with the mother-*imago*, a potential lesbian lover or a mirror image of herself?

Kahane further maintains that when the heroine intrudes into the secret chambers she "explores and penetrates the mysteries...transgressing the boundaries of her role as a woman" (Kahane p. 50). Jesse's removal from the house is enforced when Maharet asks her to leave. She does not choose to escape, as is the case with the heroine in the conventional gothic novel. At the conclusion of Rice's text the dying Jesse is returned to Sonoma, where she is transformed through the blood-exchange by Maharet. This has the effect of binding the two women inextricably closer. The narrative suggests that Jesse is

the first vampire child that Maharet has created and then only because of her imminent death. The exchange is also described in the alternative terms of an erotic lesbian embrace with incestuous undertones:

[T]hen the blood came; it poured through every fiber of her body...making her body writhe as the blood sought to anchor her soul to substance forever... They lay in each other's arms, she and Maharet, and Maharet's hard skin warmed and softened so that they became one wet and tangled thing, hair enmeshed, Jesse's face buried in Maharet's neck as she gnawed at the fount, one shock of ecstasy passed through her after another. (QD p. 281/2)

During her period of exile from Sonoma and Maharet's presence, Jesse is approached by a member of the Talamasca, a secret order which had been in existence since 758 AD whose purpose was to study the paranormal. Rice's depiction of Jesse's enforced separation from the 'mother', and the split from the maternal body which it involves, introduces her in to the symbolic order of patriarchal discourse represented by the Talamasca. Their offer to allow Jesse admission into the Order has a powerful attraction for her. Maharet had inexplicably denied her access to the knowledge of the Great Family, a rejection she still feels strongly. This knowledge is incorporated into an image of maternal power and a matrilineal dynasty. In contrast, the Talamasca Order represents a male dominated power-base for, despite its womb-like Motherhouse, the rules

and regulations have more in common with a Roman Catholic monastic order in that they demand full devotion, loyalty and obedience. She becomes a novice to another great family which offered her access to the Father's knowledge after the Mother's rejection. 'Talamasca' was an ancient word for witch or shaman, but the Order prohibits any active participation in the paranormal; its purpose is to solely study and record. Rice highlights the fact that Jesse's life in the Order involves a retreat from the real world. To Maharet, the Order's work is a sterile project; she asks rhetorically, "the Talamasca may spend another millennia studying them, but what difference will this make to the destiny of the human race?" (QD p. 193) Maharet believes totally in the survival of the human race. Her dedication to the Great Family represents a human family tree growing from a single root, whose branches spread out Palestine, over Europe, down into Africa, Asia and to the New World (QD p. 499). She sees the family as all, and the family is made up living human flesh. Maharet's love of mortals parallels Lestat's in that they both see vampirism as a monstrous aberration. Rice argues against both pure intellect and against religions which condemn the flesh; she states that:

*we have always to guard ourselves against the pure intellectual, the person who's so far from the truths of the flesh that he has no heart, no real conscience. He thinks he's on the right hand of God, and that's very dangerous.*¹⁶

¹⁶ Michael Riley, *Interview with Anne Rice*, (London 1996) p.152

"He" in this instance could clearly be replaced by "She", signifying Akasha, the tyrannical Queen and evil destructive force.

Maharet echoes Rice's insistence on the "substance and the wisdom of the flesh" (Riley p. 148) when, during her embrace of Jesse, she repeats the dedication made during the incorporation of their mother:

In the flesh all wisdom begins. Beware the thing that has no flesh. Beware the gods, beware the idea, beware the devil (QD p. 281)

The narrative suggests that the Talamasca Order represents the stultifying influence of male control over knowledge. Their quest for knowledge represents a desire for knowledge for its own sake or for the engrandisement of the researcher alone. An example of this male influence over the acquiring of knowledge occurs early on in *The Queen of the Damned*, when the history of the twins is discovered in the cave paintings, ancient papyrus and vase decoration and is appropriated into an area of male research. "The Legend of the Twins" is the title of the archaeologist's paper. From his personal view point, his obscure publications were "so terribly important, it had all seemed. The foundation of a life's work." (QD p.43). Rice depicts his academic obsession leading to ridicule, the ruin of his family, and a life spent in a futile effort to validate his work and reinstate his good reputation.

The appeal the Talamasca order holds for Jesse is a substitute for the mother's knowledge; she says "Maharet had turned her away from the secrets of the family; the Talamasca had taken her in" (QD p. 194). However she adds:

she might have left in a minute if Maharet had appeared on her doorstep and asked her to return to the Sonoma compound and take up the records of the Great Family in earnest... Jesse sought out the Talamasca in order to lose this personal mystery in a wilderness of mysteries (QD197/8).

Jesse finally leaves the Order when they refuse to allow her to continue her investigation into the existence of vampires. Jesse equates their treatment of her with Maharet's earlier rejection, "It was the same old story. She'd glimpsed something of inestimable importance, only to have it locked away" (QD p. 220).

At the conclusion of the novel, Jesse is portrayed by Rice as a vampire who is the equal of her mentor. Her mortal psychic powers added to the Dark Gift created an "overwhelming telepathic power that emanated from her...a monster. A monster... Born yesterday"(QD p. 322) Her reentry into the Sonoma fortress represents a return to the maternal other. She has crossed the boundary between human and other, in the process acquiring the knowledge she has desired; she exclaims "[A]n exquisite pain coursed through her, a pain full of remembered happiness and unforgettable longing. It was the windowless room in which she'd stood long ago" (QD p.498/9). Her experience depicts a reversal of childbirth, a

literal return to the womb, which leads to a dissolution of Jesse's identity as it merges with the (m)other, Maharet.

In her work on the witch, Diane Purkiss argues that Medea, Circe, Dido and Sycorax represent women who are "emblematic of the liminal geographic and ethnic space of the witch...racially, geographically and religiously other" ¹⁷. I would suggest that Rice's powerfully linked depictions of vampires and witches, as originating in an ancient and exotic orient, evoke earlier images of the abject, terrifying female of classical myth. Like Medea, Rice's witch "claims mastery of nature, ghosts and deities of the earth" (Purkiss p. 259). Mekare's journey to the primordial rain-forests of South America creates a link between the Old World witches and the New World. Purkiss argues that the Europeans equated the Native American woman with the Old World witch and the otherness of the 'native' (whether eastern or western) epitomized fantasies of otherness and misrule. Rice's specific reference to the cave drawings, "the Legend of the Twins" found in both Palestine and in Peru depicting the ritual cannibalism of the witch mother, emphasizes the link further. Purkiss adds that the New World witches, the Tupinamba women of Brazil, were cannibals and that such barbarism was understood "in terms of ethnic alterity" (Purkiss p. 258). Akasha, the vampire queen, and the witch twins, Maharet and Mekare, are beautiful, seductive and

¹⁷ Diane Purkiss, *The Witch in History* (London 1996) p. 258.

unnatural creatures. They are the wild woman and sorceress who threaten to disrupt male order. Purkiss quotes Cixous' proposal that "la sorcière involves a repressed desire to return to the pre-Oedipal union with the Mother and the shivers of horror evoked by that desire" (Purkiss p. 80).

Rice's novels, as the above discussion of her female characters illustrates, reflects a problematic approach to the issues of femininity, feminism and myth. Her main female characters considered in this chapter — Gabrielle, Akasha, Mekare, Maharet and Jesse — proffer ambiguous images of the female. Gabrielle is an androgynous figure coded as lack and absence. Akasha is condemned to obliteration for her fanatical attempt to remove one evil with an arbitrary extinction of half the human race (the male half). Her "pure idea" becomes an extreme expression of aggressive, revolutionary separatist feminism in what appears to be a brutal indictment of this form of feminism by Rice¹⁸. In fact Rice describes "one segment of the feminist movement [as] very much puritanical, and that segment is fascist and tyrannical" (Riley p. 65). The character of Akasha can be perceived in these terms and allied with the shallowness and aggression that Rice argues is indicative of this segment of the Women's Movement. Despite depicting her as a Queen/Mother/Goddess, Rice emphasizes Akasha's 'masculine' traits which celebrate the phallic and reinstate patriarchal order.

¹⁸ I am indebted to Terry Lovell for this example of Rice's contradictory treatment of feminism.

Mekare is portrayed as a grotesquely abject figure on whom the others place Akasha's negativity and then expel her from the body of the vampires. Jesse's individuality is submerged so closely with Maharet's that it becomes indistinguishable from hers. Maharet, in her crusade to perpetuate the Great Family, exhibits an unexpected humanity. As the Good Mother, she is described as the:

one true immortal. It is she who has endured, fully aware and self-conscious, through six millennia without resorting to the relief of madness, silent trances or going into the ground...she is the true embodiment of continual awareness (Ramsland p.276)

However, despite the positive identification of Maharet as the Good Mother, her figure is represented as absent in the last two novels of the *Vampire Chronicles* apart from a brief moment at the end of *Memnoch the Devil* when she prevents Lestat from a possible suicide attempt.

Perhaps some explanation for Rice's ambiguous representations of female characters can be found in her personal statement where she claims "I've always felt uncomfortable in the role of being a woman" (Ramsland p. 16). Rice valorises the androgyne as the ideal, a figure that represents an expression of both *masculine* and *feminine*. However this figure has a closer link to her

identification with the male hero, Lestat, than to the female characters. Ramsland cites an article in *Vogue* (November 1983) where Rice describes:

rock stars as romantic images of gender renunciation and sexual ambiguity. They represent she claimed, the power, energy and "wise innocence" of pregender childhood. (Ramsland p. 16)

This image is epitomized in Lestat's performance as vampire rock musician, signifying Rice's continued cross-sex identification and assimilation of homoeroticism as the site of desire.

In closing this chapter I will reiterate that Rice's ambiguous approach to the issues inherent in female gothic and her representations of femininity and the myths of womanhood minimise any liberatory and empowering qualities attributed to her female characters. The female vampires are all but eradicated from the text of the *Vampire Chronicles* to remain only a memory in Lestat's narrative.

COMPARATIVE THEMES: CONTEMPORARY NOVELS

COMPARATIVE THEMES

In this chapter I will start by exploring Rice's focus on the complex self-consciousness and moral life of Lestat, and her utilization of this to explore problems and ideas relating to contemporary consciousness and subjectivity. I also plan to explore some of the religious and literary sources on which she draws in treating these topics. From here I will proceed to examine a diverse selection of vampire narratives by Rice's contemporaries, such as Freda Warrington, Poppy Z. Brite, Nancy A. Collins, S. P. Somtow, Tom Holland, Jean Kalogridis, Kim Newman, Anne Billson and Kate Pullinger whose texts represent analogues to her novels¹. I intend to look at these analogues and signal to the reader how they illuminate facets of Rice's work. For example writers such as Kalogridis and Newman tend to merely reappropriate the traditional image of the vampire and portray the vampires in their novels as bloodthirsty and cruel. Similarly, many other historically based vampire novels do little to explore or

¹ I have not included a study of Jewelle Gomez's novel *The Gilda Stories* (London 1991) or the collections of lesbian vampire short stories edited by Pam Kersey *Daughters of Darkness* (Pittsburgh & San Francisco 1993) and *Dark Angels* (Pittsburgh & San Francisco 1995) in this chapter, despite their importance to the genre, because Rice does not develop a theme of lesbian vampirism in her *Chronicles*.

expand the genre. They simply reiterate the nineteenth-century classics, particularly Stoker's *Dracula*, while giving little or no characterization to the vampire figure beyond the sketchy, stereotypical, brutish revenant or zombie. Billson's and Pullinger's novels offer interesting interpretations of the genre in relation to the modern, secular and materialistic world, but their work does not create the vampire 'figure' or vampire world of the *Chronicles*. In comparison these narratives cast into relief the moral complexity and contradictions which Rice assigns to her vampire protagonists. I shall also compare and contrast other aspects of their writing and Rice's, including the treatment of and interplay of genre, the utilization of historical romance, travelogue and erotica.

We have souls, you and I. We want to know things; we share the same earth, rich and verdant and fraught with perils. We don't—either of us—know what it means to die, no matter what we might say to the contrary. It's a cinch that if we did, I wouldn't be writing and you wouldn't be reading this book. (MD Prologue)

It is thus that Lestat addresses the reader in the opening to the fifth book of the *Chronicles*, *Memnoch the Devil*. He claims the sole narrative point of view in this fourth volume of 'his autobiography' in which he emphatically states "I know exactly who I am" and adds "[W]hat do I do? [A]nything that I please" (MD prologue). The prologue encapsulates important themes present in Rice's work

which are expressed powerfully through the medium of her vampire characters. In mingling modern jargon with old-world literary style, Lestat's self-conscious narrative echoes the twentieth-century angst which overlays a Faustian quest for knowledge that is present in Rice's writing. In the passage quoted above, Lestat draws on the similarities present between mortal and vampire. These similarities have been emphasized by Rice throughout the *Chronicles* to show how the dilemmas faced by the vampires represent a magnification of human anxieties.

In the *Chronicles* existence for the vampires becomes more than a simple question of survival and the satiating of blood lust. It is a quest for identity. Lestat's narrative, and that of the other vampires, comprises a search for answers to questions such as the following: Why should such creatures as vampires exist? What is their origin? Are they unnatural beings or part of God's creation? Rice's vampires ask in one voice, What are we? Are we monsters? Are we evil? Are we Satan's demons or God's Dark Angels? Her heroes' search for meaning steers the course of their lives in the same manner that the gothic quest delineates the plot structure of the novels. Rice uses the subjective narratives of her male characters to offer a highly distinctive point of view which creates a sympathetic reading of her vampire heroes that few other contemporary vampire novels proffer. In my first chapter I discussed the specific issues relating to identity raised in Rice's depiction of the vampires through the self-reflexive nature of their narratives. She creates a conflict between their monstrous desires

and their apparent spirituality. These self-reflexive narratives take the form of philosophical debates on the vampires' place in the world as creatures of evil who nonetheless have a consciousness of good. I wish to explore this issue further, in considering Rice's metaphorical and literal use of the religious and literary depictions of the devil in her later novels. I shall draw on possible comparisons with a brief selection of vampire novels which are contemporary to the *Vampire Chronicles*.

The transgressive nature of Rice's vampire heroes in their ability to transcend death creates a paradox. It is clear that by inhabiting a space between life and death they are trapped in a limbo state which perpetuates a frustrating cycle of being in which they are close to death and yet unable to define the ultimate meaning of what lies beyond. In the broadest of terms all vampire novels explore death at a symbolic and metaphoric level, but Rice's writing specifically generates questions about the meaning of death, about identity and about good and evil through the vampires' personal speculations surrounding the mysteries of their origins, the existence of God and the Devil, and the nature of their own monstrousness.

Rice's vampires live very much in the world of mortals. They constantly mingle with and prey on them whilst enjoying the comforts of civilization. Their existence is a "ghastly imitation of the real thing" (QD p. 99). They do not exist

on an alternative plane beyond that of their own immortality. Lestat's quest represents the aspirations of all Rice's vampires (and mortals) and it is magnified by his strength, irrepressible optimism and his "merciless conscience" (TBT p.4). Rice portrays her vampire characters as striving to create an ethical balance, "struggling with good and evil in an age-old private hell of body and soul" (QD p.5). Lestat is represented as an "anguished and hungry being" (QD p. 3) whose strong belief in goodness and heroism cannot outweigh the guilt he carries as a killer. "[W]e are death" (TBT p. 208), he says of all vampires. However, despite his crimes, Rice's character is not doomed. Her exuberant hero believes in salvation, and she shows his humour and optimism, allowing him to overcome the disillusion and bitterness that destroys many other of the vampires she portrays. Lestat actively seeks redemption by affirming his existence, by confronting his own evil and through his determination not to give up. He acknowledges his own ruthlessness and ambition, and accepts the guilt for his actions. He refuses to give way to despair although he understands the horror of the vampire's life which is inescapably pervaded by evil. Lestat states "I don't hate myself...That's the contradiction" (TBT p. 233). He adds:

[M]y greatest sin has always been that I have a wonderful time being myself. My guilt is always there; my moral abhorrence for myself is always there; but I have a good time. I'm strong; I'm a creature of great will and passion. You see, that's

the core of the dilemma for me—how can I enjoy being a vampire so much, how can I enjoy it if it's evil? (TBT p. 233)

Rice's novels question the implications of our religious beliefs through Lestat's consciousness and draw specifically on literary and religious sources to highlight the inconsistencies and dangers present in blind faith. The medieval pact with the devil and the subsequent reworking of this theme is a popular element of gothic literature from its inception. Rice draws on this tradition in the last two novels of the *Chronicles* by making both oblique and explicit references to Goethe's *Faust*. In the early stages of *The Tale of the Body Thief* Lestat is portrayed facing a crisis which in his own inimitable way can only be met by drastic action. However, before resorting to attempted self-immolation in the Gobi desert, he turns for help to David whom he perceives as both scholar and friend. Rice shows Lestat and David trying to face their respective futures. While Lestat has the prospect of further centuries of immortality, David is rapidly being forced to face his own mortality as age and illness bring death closer. Lestat becomes aware of his friend's failing health when he is following David through the streets of Amsterdam to finally confront him in the Rijksmuseum. He studies David as he sits gazing at Rembrandt's masterpieces idly clutching a copy of Goethe's *Faust*. Lestat offers a theory in respect of Rembrandt's life and work that is a reworking of the Faustian pact with the Devil. Rice suggests that the vampire is drawn to Rembrandt's images of human goodness because they

paradoxically feed a need in him for beauty and yet produce a great sorrow at the sight of the angelic faces portrayed in the masterpieces. Lestat believes that Rembrandt redeemed his soul by dedicating his life to the creation of the divine in man, an ability denied Lestat, as he says:

[B]ut I am not mortal. I cannot save myself through Art or Great Works. I am a creature like the Devil, with one difference. I love the paintings of Rembrandt. (TBT p.39)

When Lestat tempts David with the Dark Gift he poses the question "[W]hy the *Faust* play, David? Am I Mephistopheles? Are you Faust?" (TBT p. 62). These questions foreground the importance which the Faust legend assumes in Rice's fiction and the self-conscious manner in which she utilizes it. As a result, her treatment of it merits attention here. David refutes any suggestions of Lestat as the Devil to his Goethean *Faust*, but the text foregrounds many of the qualities of the Romantic evolution of Mephistopheles that are present in Lestat, as described by Jeffrey Burton Russell. Russell observes that "the prince of darkness appears as a witty dandy, elegant and soignée, masking his malevolence behind his refined appearance"². David may well be a dedicated scholar in his position as Motherhouse leader of the Talamasca, but he does not truly achieve the role of Faust. He refuses Lestat's offer of immortality and the Dark Gift is bestowed on

² Jeffrey Burton Russell, *Mephistopheles: The Devil in the Modern World*, (Cornell 1986) p. 201

him through an act of force. Rice blurs the characters of Faust and Mephistopheles further in her portrayal of the blood exchange between the two figures, for it does not represent a pact made between them but an act of rape; as Ramsland states:

Lestat and David each mirror the Faust story. Both buy copies of the book from the same shop in Amsterdam, and both are plagued with many questions. The immediate issue they face is whether one must sacrifice one's soul to achieve youth or immortality. A secondary theme involves the duality of the human soul, for which the vampire is a metaphor. (Ramsland p. 139)

Many of the characteristics attributed to Mephistopheles are mirrored in Rice's hero. Both are "clever and foolish" and embody "the tension between self-centredness and open-mindedness, darkness and enlightenment" (Ramsland p. 297). In *The Tale of the Body Thief* David and Lestat are portrayed as two opposing personalities. Lestat is the dark, mysterious active being while David is the passive enlightened, philosopher. The two characters are drawn to each other as two halves of the same person. Lestat seeks David's knowledge and his quiet, steadying influence while David is seduced by Lestat's charismatic, devilish charm. The distinction between Faust and Mephistopheles in Goethe's work is blurred by Rice and emphasizes her belief that the darker side of human nature should not be denied.

There is a further implicit reference to Goethe's work later in the novel when Lestat receives aid from the nun, Gretchen. She shares not only the given name of Goethe's character, Gretchen, but also her religious name, Sister Marguerite. In Goethe's text Faust seduces and corrupts Gretchen's innocence, resulting in her death. Rice ironically deconstructs and inverts the roles of the two characters, as again Lestat represents both Mephistopheles and Faust, the immortal tempter and the seeker of knowledge. However, although the nun may be physically innocent, it is she who tempts Lestat both spiritually and morally. In Rice's novel it is Gretchen who initially assumes the Faustian role by seducing the mortal Lestat. Although a member of a religious order, Gretchen's belief in God is tenuous and her life's passion is to imitate the saints' lives and be endowed with the miracle of the stigmata. Her life appears to be ruled by false pride rather than true faith.

When, in *The Tale of the Body Thief*, Lestat is faced with a choice of renouncing his vampire body for ever and devoting his mortal existence to self-sacrifice through the care of the suffering, he is filled with dread as "it seemed the very opposite of transcendence" (TBT p.250). Although Lestat never chose to become a vampire, as he says "I never promised my soul for this" (VL p. 254), in *The Tale of the Body Thief* he recognizes that his desire for mortality is an empty dream. Rice's hero refuses to redeem himself through this means and in this

form for, despite being obsessed with the question of redemption, Lestat must seek his own unique salvation using his true power and daring otherwise the “Vampire Lestat would perish in his own redemption” (TBT p. 251). He explains his dilemma to Gretchen who has begged him to accompany her to the mission:

[D]on't you see, I survived all that has happened to me because I am who I am. My strength, my will, my refusal to give up—those are the only components of my heart and soul which I can truly identify. This ego, if you wish to call it that, is my strength. I am the Vampire Lestat, and nothing...not even this mortal body...is going to defeat me.” (TBT p. 251)

Gretchen's appeal to Lestat represents a temptation which he ponders with irony. Self-sacrifice has become an art form for Gretchen, a virtue mingled with pride, as it is not a belief in God that inspires her to work endlessly to relieve suffering in others but “her brand of heroism” (TBT p.246). She says of the mortal Lestat, with whom she has shared her bed, “you could become my god” (TBT p.252). In this episode Rice reverses Christ's temptation in the wilderness, for it is the nun who tempts the monster to renounce his demonic form for mortal flesh. She suggests that he has been reborn a mortal man for “the same reason as Christ did it” (TBT p. 235). Ironically, it is Lestat who perceives the false salvation offered here and, as he considers her suggestions to be saved as “a lovely, extravagant and impossible thought” (TBT p. 235), he states “God gave me an

individual soul and I cannot bury it" (TBT p. 250). Rice's novels rework the literary and religious traditions to which she alludes, and through the paradox presented by vampiric existence she questions the origins and faith of the Roman Catholic church. When Lestat finally appears before Gretchen in his vampire form she rejects his explanations and perceives him as a miraculous visitation. She is inflicted with stigmata when unwittingly Lestat inspires in her a spiritual transcendence. Ironically Gretchen's 'religious' experience brings a halt to her active mission work as she now represents a passive spectacle of sainthood. As Lestat states "we are like a religious vision without revelation. A mystic experience but without a core of truth"(TBT p. 231).

Rice's hero, Lestat, has always felt an intense curiosity about death and experiences a morbid dread that what lies beyond may be only an empty void. Rice employs the self-conscious narrative further to extend her themes in her final vampire novel. Lestat has always asserted that vampires and all living beings have souls and he has agonized over perceptions of good and evil throughout the centuries. In the Prologue to *Memnoch the Devil* Lestat appears to make a positive assertion as to who and what he is, in a language that suggests he no longer has any doubts as to his place within this world. With his usual brashness bordering on arrogance, he addresses the reader, remarking:

[W]hat does matter very much, as we go into this story together, is that I have set for myself the task of being a hero in this world. I maintain myself as morally complex, spiritually tough, and aesthetically relevant—a being of blazing insight and impact, a guy with things to say to you. (MD Prologue)

However, this assertion is undermined by the closing paragraphs when he explains why he feels compelled to write this further episode to his autobiography:

[S]o if you read this, read it for that reason--that Lestat is talking again, that he is frightened, that he is searching desperately for the lesson and for the song and for the raison d'être, that he wants to understand his own story and he wants you to understand it, and that it is the very best story he has right now to tell. (MD Prologue)

When Lestat tells David how much he detests being afraid, and describes how he is now the prey being stalked by a hideous winged being, David's reply is "for you Lestat, it would have to be the Devil himself" (MD p. 22). Lestat's ultimate confrontation with evil is depicted by Rice in terms of *Faust* twinned with a parodic version of Dante's *The Divine Comedy*, a vision/journey through Heaven and Hell in the company of the Devil. Lestat's quest for knowledge and his desire to penetrate the mysteries of good and evil are shown to irrevocably change him. As Marius points out earlier, there is danger in seeking answers

recklessly for "knowledge may change you" (VL p. 412). The answers that Lestat seeks are a continuation of the motif that Rice introduced through the character David in *The Tale of the Body Thief*. The motif centres on David's *vision* of God and the Devil, and Lestat's interpretation of their relationship in Faustian terms. Rice hints that, like Faust, Lestat's experiences are as a result of a wager between God and the Devil; "a wager entered on a result of a conversation about mankind"³. As Lestat remarks, after a vision similar to David's, "...it's like God and the Devil are arguing about me" (MD p. 19). Rice portrays her hero seeking some recognition of his existence when he tells David "I want to be wanted by God and the Devil" (MD p. 24), a wish he may later regret.

Rice incorporates several of the ironic reversals present in the Romantic view of Mephistopheles which she links to her vampire characters and utilizes in David's *vision* of God and the Devil:

...a number of attitudes were fixed in the artistic imagination: the moral ambiguity of both Devil and God; their possible integration; psychological empathy for Satan as representing the human mind lost in ignorance and selfishness yet yearning for the good; the use of Satan as an ironically distant voice with which to satirize the human condition. (Russell p.202)

These reversals are present on a number of levels as Rice draw parallels between

³ J. W. Smeed, *Faust in Literature*, (Westport, Connecticut 1987) p. 27

Lestat's role in *The Tale of the Body Thief* and Memnoch's role in *Memnoch the Devil*. In *Memnoch the Devil* Lestat finds his usual rôle of predator reversed when he is stalked by a being claiming to be the Devil. Rice constructs a complex character in Memnoch, a supernatural being who appears in three different incarnations depicting the evolving images of the Devil: first, the black, goat-legged devil of the medieval Christian church; second, the beautiful, diaphanous-winged fallen angel of Milton and Blake; and third, in the guise of the Ordinary Man - the Mephistopheles of Goethe. Rice uses Memnoch in these incarnations to represent an interpretation of the Faustian pact and as Lestat's guide on the vision/journey. She merges Faust's illusory travels with a parodic version of *The Divine Comedy*. Memnoch's changing appearance as he guides Lestat through the levels of Heaven and Hell allows Rice to introduce a discussion on the nature of the Devil, God, angels and the suffering of lost souls. This discussion develops into a theological and philosophical debate summing up the many questions raised throughout the *Chronicles*. Ironically at the culmination of the vision/journey Lestat and the reader are no nearer to the universal truths posited by the novels. The pact offered by Memnoch and the direct confrontation between God and the Devil could be as illusory as Faust's 'revelations'. Rice's devil is portrayed in a similar manner to Marlowe's brooding, fallen angel when Memnoch asserts that the "ways of God are bloody, and wasteful and exceedingly dangerous" (MD p. 134). In the vision/journey Memnoch shows

Lestat the suffering of the human souls striving to reach Heaven. When Memnoch tells Lestat that God is "a moral idiot" (MD p. 342) who has abandoned these souls he appeals to Lestat's love of humanity. However tempting the offer to save these souls may be to Lestat, he still has his reservations. "The Devil is a famous liar" (MD p. 136) Lestat asserts when he considers Memnoch's offer for Lestat to serve him as his prince, and Rice's final vampire novel continues to produce baffling contradictions and paradoxes on the nature of truth and reality. When Lestat rejects Memnoch's pact it is because he is horrified by Memnoch's Hell and begins to doubt the truth of what he has seen. Lestat's refusal is expressed in vehement terms:

Not for a God as blind as He, and not for one who demands what you demand of me. You're mad the two of you!...I refuse. (MD p. 317)

Rice creates a strong conflict in Lestat between his desire to believe what he has seen and experienced, and the harsh reality of his return to 'normal' life. The desire to cling to a fading 'vision' and maintain faith with the dream is a crucial issue raised by Rice in respect of our beliefs and religions.

In *Memnoch the Devil* Rice draws implicit parallels between Lestat and Faust. Her hero's determination to live to the full of his vampire potential, to stretch the limits and boundaries of his supernatural powers highlights their "kinship as tragic heroes" (Ramsland p. 139). Goethe's Faust and Marlowe's devil are both

depicted as fallen angels which is a metaphor utilized by Rice in respect of Lestat and Memnoch. Smeed states that:

arrogance, pride and envy which drive Faust into Lucifer's arms are in fact the same qualities, which according to theologians, caused the fall of the angels.
(Smeed p. 15)

The mortal and vampiric Lestat, like Faust, is desperate to escape the enclosure of his gothic existence. Faust journeys from his role of scholar to man of action. Lestat's existence becomes a round of "ceaseless movement and activity"⁴ which epitomizes Faust's pursuit of knowledge under the 'guidance' of Mephistopheles. Lestat, like the Romantic image of Faust, is represented by Rice as "doomed to a state of partial knowledge and insatiable longing" (Smeed p. 9). Mephistopheles offers Faust a precious commodity, 'time', which is described in terms paralleling Rice's portrayal of vampiric immortality. The pact results in Faust experiencing a prolonged period of "soaring flights and illuminations, feelings of liberation and release" (Smeed p. 127). Whereas Faust's 'time' is limited, Lestat's immortality offers him an eternity to follow his quest. Faust's quest for knowledge alienates him from the comradeship of his fellow mortals. He is effectively excluded, expelled from normal life as result of his pact with the Devil. Lestat sees himself

⁴T. J. Reed, *Goethe*, (Oxford 1984) p. 71

as a "lonely Cain" (TBT p. 233) set apart from the rest of humanity. His experiences as a vampire parallel those of Faust when Mephistopheles:

draws him away from friends and past life and involves him a web of guilt culminating in a murder which estranges him from nature. Faust is driven back within himself ...remorse combines with futility. (Smeed p. 47)

Smeed argues that there is a strong erotic element in the Faust legend, as the Devil's "mode of temptation has always been through the flesh" (Smeed p.187). One form of Faust's rebellion is his hedonistic approach to life and his pursuit of sexual experience. Like Rice's characterization of Lestat, Faust is:

a complex character, a personification of western man's rebellious individuality and his quest for self-realization in all its forms. (Smeed p. 193)

Smeed's argument incorporates parallels between the Faust and Don Juan legends. He states that both characters have traits in common including the "reckless and arrogant determination to be true to oneself" (Smeed p. 169). He argues that Don Juan is not a common libertine but a Romantic figure striving "to fulfill a destiny inescapably imposed upon him by his nature...so he must follow his own laws" (Smeed p. 177). These traits, which link Faust and Don Juan, are portrayed by Rice as the determining characteristics found in her vampire heroes,

particularly in the case of Lestat. Her vampire characters are depicted as being bound by their nature and as being driven by the blood-lust. Their quest, like that of Faust and Don Juan, is inseparable from the (homo)erotic.

One of the disturbing incidents described by Rice in Lestat's vision/journey in *Memnoch the Devil*, is the mystic and erotic encounter which he experiences with Christ. Rice combines all the earlier associations of vampires and the Holy Communion with Christ's passion and salvation through a literal blood exchange between Lestat and Christ. The only physical evidence remaining of this encounter and Lestat's nightmarish journey through Hell is his wounded, bedraggled appearance and a cloth of ancient weave bearing the imprint of Christ's face and blood, 'Veronica's Veil'. Rice's accumulative use of symbols and beliefs from the Christian and particularly the Roman Catholic faith to question orthodoxy and doctrine ultimately challenges our need for, and creation of, religion. The joke appears to be on Lestat and the reader at the conclusion of the novel, as we are left with many unanswered questions; are Lestat's experiences a lie devised by God, or the Devil or both? Is Memnoch God's instrument as well as his opponent? These are the eternal questions relating to good and evil.

Rice's introduction of the incident of the symbolic loss and recovery of Lestat's left eye represents a continuation of her earlier treatment of the resurrection myth. Lestat's partial blinding re-emphasizes the vampire's sterility. His journey to and return from the underworld represents a symbolic rebirth and possible salvation through Christ's blood. On his return Lestat drinks Dora's menstrual blood to restore his strength. Rice explicitly links this moment with Lestat's feeding from Christ and she reverses Christ's healing of Veronica's 'unclean' haemorrhage when the vampire is nourished by Dora's 'unclean' blood. During the religious fervour that follows the discovery of the Veil, Lestat is cast by Dora in the role of the "Angel of the Night" (MD p. 348), a Messenger from God, who brings the miracle of the Veil. Lestat vows never again to take human life and his sight is restored to him. Ironically Lestat is left with a sense of betrayal, in not knowing if his whole vision was a subterfuge and his mystic experience a lie. Despite his aspirations to find a moral and religious truth Lestat has been the dupe of God(?) and/or the Devil(?) and he has unwittingly conjured up the cornerstone of a new religious sect in the form of the precious veil.

The image of Lestat as the maimed and fallen angel breaking free from Hell continues the angelic imagery Rice utilizes to emphasize the spiritual over the bestial in her vampire characters. The symbolic Dark Angel of the *Vampire Chronicles* is epitomized in her hero Lestat. Rice argues:

I always saw vampires as angels going in another direction, as finely tuned imitations of human beings imbued with the evil spirit. They became for me refined and abstract rather than animalistic. (Ramsland p. 17)

Rice suggests that her vampires' innate qualities, including powers of telepathy, flight, transcendence over time and gender, and heightened vision, all have similarities with those of the angels. Lestat's characteristics, in particular his strength, courage, heroism and search for truth, imbue him with a spirituality that transcends the essence of his evil. Rice incorporates the Romantic image of Cain and Prometheus in her portrayal of Lestat. He is the lonely outcast and the bringer of miracles to mortals. Russell argues that Satan as represented in modern literature is an ambivalent entity, a symbol of revolution (Russell p. 196) who is used by God to accomplish salvation. Is Lestat God's tool? As a vampire he is a monstrous symbol of evil and yet he has a sensitivity to love that transcends this evil. Rice's vampire figure represents the extremes of the human character: an evil being who inflicts suffering on others; and a being whose love for humanity drives an eternal search for goodness and truth. At the conclusion to *Memnoch the Devil* Rice leaves the reader to decide if Lestat has found grace through suffering. Roaming the streets of his beloved New Orleans, Lestat is restored to his former resolve. The novel concludes with this assertion from her hero:

I am the Vampire Lestat. This is what I saw. This is what I heard. This is what I know! This is all I know.

Believe in me, in my words, in what I have said and what has been written down.

I am here, still, the hero of my own dreams, and let me please keep my place in yours.

I am the Vampire Lestat.

Let me pass now from fiction into legend. (MD p. 353/354)

CONTEMPORARY FICTIONAL ANALOGUES TO RICE

Following the international success of Rice's novels and the release of the film *Interview with the Vampire* (based on her novel by the same name) there has been an explosion of interest in the vampire genre resulting in many incarnations of the vampire story in fiction and film. A comparison between these vampire narratives and Rice's work will serve to illustrate how Rice produces a complex and sophisticated metaphor in her vampire characterization for the moral and religious dilemmas facing humanity in the twentieth-century. Vampire narratives by other writers which are contemporary with Rice's *Chronicles* range from those set in the twentieth-century to ones with a period setting based on historical or

legendary figures. The vampire characters are often portrayed as lone predators rather than members of covens. The driving force behind the vampires can be the quest for identity as in the *Vampire Chronicles* or the survival of the family/brood. In some cases the instinct for survival is linked with the unthinking, bestial vampire whereas in others the immortal must find his/her own reasons to exist over the centuries. The heroic vampire yearns for a purpose to life, a need for love to conquer the loneliness and horror of what it means to be a vampire. In some of these novels parallels can be drawn with Rice's work, particularly in their shared themes and approaches to the genre.

The British writer, Freda Warrington, has created a world of vampires in her novel *A Taste of Blood Wine*. Warrington creates a multi-narrative viewpoint of both mortals and vampires which is similar to Rice's *The Queen of the Damned*. Her construction of the vampire characters is also close in spirit to Rice's novels in offering a sympathetic portrayal of the vampire. The romance depicted between the hero of the novel, the vampire Karl Von Wultendorf, and the human heroine Charlotte Neville highlights the gulf and yet also the bond between human and vampire. The Prelude to the novel shows the vampire Karl feeding off the mortally wounded soldiers lying in the trenches of World War I. He is the lone destroyer, an immortal 'vulture', but in the context of man's ruthless devastation of his own kind the vampire represents an insignificant evil. Warrington's hero, Karl, is from the same mold as Lestat. He is a rebellious, courageous

individualist who was born in eighteenth century Vienna and, like Lestat, was made a vampire against his will. Both Karl and Lestat were born into eras of tremendous upheaval; revolution, war and the growing disintegration of religious beliefs. In *A Taste of Blood Wine* it is the vampire hero who tries to utilize science to conquer the coven leader, Kristian. It is his desire for scientific knowledge that brings him into the Neville's home where he is drawn to Charlotte as lover and not just prey. The story of Karl and Charlotte is set in the England of 1923 and poses questions about a post-war Europe in which the desolation and destruction of the war is still very present. Karl represents the Other on two levels: first, as the Austrian enemy and second, as vampiric predator. He is accepted into the household because, like Lestat, he appears to be a charismatic, gentlemanly intellectual. Warrington's vampires possess the beauty and hypnotic presence of Rice's heroes, with which they spellbind mortals.

However, unlike Rice's vampires, Karl and the other vampires who comprise Kristian's brood can walk abroad during daylight and, although they cannot procreate between themselves or with humans, they are not impotent and can mate with one another and with mortals. Love between vampire and mortal has its risks, as physical love and the lust for blood become a vicious cycle of desire.

Karl asks "[W]hat kind of love is it, that can only destroy?"⁵ Warrington's vampires are capable of love "though of unhuman and ungentle intensity" (Warrington p. 250). Karl, like Lestat, finds humans "as enthralling to me as a vampire can be to a mortal" (Warrington p. 249). Lestat's love for humans carries similar risks, although he cannot consummate his love except through the vampire bite. Warrington describes the dangers of Karl's love for Charlotte as follows:

Every time he made love to her, the craving to feed on her blood - to possess her completely - grew harder to resist. Yet the more he resisted, the stronger his need for her became. She was in greater danger every time, and she did not even know...And the tension between his desire, and knowledge that consummation of it would destroy her, was agony to him. (Warrington p. 183)

The religious and philosophical disputes between Karl and the vampire leader, Kristian, allow Warrington to raise issues about the nature of good and evil which have parallels with Rice's novels. The character of Kristian reveals elements of the fanaticism of Armand and Akasha in the *Vampire Chronicles*. In mortal life Kristian was a hell-fire preacher, a puritanical believer in the forces of God and the Devil. He controls his brood, the "Children of Lilith" (Warrington p. 269), like a dreadful and avenging god, punishing and destroying those

⁵ Freda Warrington, *A Taste of Blood Wine*, (London 1992) p. 183

vampires who are disobedient to his commands. He rules from his "Schloss Holdenstein" on the Rhine and is described by Karl as:

... the worst kind of ego-maniac, one who believes he has God on his side. An avenging God who visits disasters on mankind to teach them their folly. Sometimes he believes he is God. And his little flock are his black angels.
(Warrington p. 276)

Kristian is portrayed as a tyrannical leader, resembling Hitler, who believes in witchcraft and superstition, ruling through terror and torture.

One of the most striking elements of Warrington's novel is her creation of a hidden dimension, the "Crystal Ring" which Kristian describes as the mind of God. The Crystal Ring is another realm inhabited by vampires. It is a world in which they are invisible to humans and, as the following quotation indicates, their vampire bodies change:

They become slender ebony creatures cloaked in lacy wings. Angel-demons... in a realm that meshed with the sky yet was like nothing of earth; a dream-terrain for ever flowing like liquid glass. (Warrington p. 8)

In this realm the vampires become bird-like "[D]ragonflies spun from black crystal" (Warrington p. 40) whom Kristian perceives as God's dark wings, instruments of the dark god walking the earth to do his work. The imagery of

vampires in angelic form, as Dark Angels, is very close to Rice's concept of the fallen angel as represented in her portrayal of Lestat. However, Warrington's vampires become literally transformed on entering the Crystal Ring. They are diabolically beautiful with "the burning face of [a] seraph" (Warrington p. 508). Warrington's Crystal Ring creates a link with Germanic legends and fairy tales. This hidden realm "envelops the earth in a vast circle of crystal", with layer upon layer "each greater than the last like an onion" (Warrington p. 157). It is "utterly silent, a sweeping realm of beauty" (Warrington p. 42) which offers a refuge to the vampires. It is essential to their existence as it allows them a period of rest similar to human sleep. However, the Crystal Ring has its dangers for at its furthest point from earth, about forty miles above, is the Weisskalt, a frozen layer of white ice crystals. Here an unnatural cold saps the vampires of energy, leaving them in a form of hibernation. It is in the Weisskalt that Kristian punishes those of his brood he perceives as being disobedient. They remain 'cocooned' in the biting, endless cold until he chooses to release them. Within the Crystal Ring the vampires can perceive the auras of humans, and Kristian feeds on these auras rather than human blood. As he comments, he has "sucked the life-force out of whole populations, all over the world. Plague, they call me. Typhoid, Cholera, Black Death" (Warrington p. 540). He also feeds on his brood as he believes that to drink from immortals is a show of love and power. This master-slave relationship is reminiscent of the involvement between Lestat and Akasha in

The Queen of the Damned" and, to a lesser extent, to that between all the vampires and their fledglings in the *Chronicles*. Kristian's wholesale slaughter of mortals in his callous fanaticism and his god-like aspirations also echo Akasha's behaviour. Karl is able to destroy Kristian, using an ancient source of power rather than finding salvation through science. He and Charlotte discover the abandoned lair of an old vampire where the victims' pain and suffering have created a vacuum. The ancient vampire had "fed not on the blood but on the auras, the life-force itself. The victims' energy was taken and only their pain was left" (Warrington p. 331). This absence of energy creates an unnatural coldness like the Weisskalt, and the victims' sucked the life-force from Kristian in revenge. Kristian's death, like Akasha's, occurs as the result of the supernatural force. Warrington's vampire hero also owes his continued existence to the mortal Charlotte, who gives her blood in order to save him from a similar fate. In the *Chronicles*, Lestat owed his continued vampire existence to the mortal David, when he comes to his aid in *The Tale of the Body Thief*.

Warrington highlights the bond existing between vampire and mortal in the closing section of the novel. In her transformation to vampire, Charlotte, perceives the truth behind the creation of the Crystal Ring. It is human thoughts and dreams that form the layers comprising the Ring. The thoughts become energy which animates the vampires. The energy of that realm makes them vampires because of human fears and hopes "the fear of the dead coming back

and the hope that there is life after death" (Warrington p. 576). Warrington's vampires are created by mortals; they "are the inevitable creation of people's most powerful nightmares and dreams." (Warrington p. 577). This theme of the interaction between vampire and mortal is foregrounded in Rice's writing. Warrington's depiction of vampires and vampire life as beautiful and yet excruciatingly lonely is another motif repeated throughout Rice's *Chronicles*. Warrington also symbolically reworks the resurrection theme when she portrays Karl revived by Charlotte in the underground tunnel and subsequently rescued by her from this metaphorical underworld to return triumphantly to the upper world. However, the strongest links between Warrington's novel and Rice's work are the angelic imagery applied to the vampires and the philosophical nature of the vampire's narratives.

In contrast to the *Vampire Chronicles* Warrington's novel depicts a strong female figure equal in vitality and intelligence to the vampire hero. Karl and Charlotte are portrayed as a heterosexual couple whose lives and love survive despite the desire of Karl's 'master', Kristian, to return his creation to slavery. Strong female desire linked to a heterosexual relationship is highlighted through Charlotte's individuality and intelligence to create a formidable female vampire character. Such a successful relationship embodying a heterosexual couple is not depicted in Rice's novels. Thus the elements of historical romance, intertwined with the gothic, are shown to be stronger in Warrington's work. The initial

juxtaposition of the vampire character amidst the carnage of war foregrounds Warrington's utilization of the vampire figure to explore issues relating to twentieth-century life. The horrors of man-made slaughter far outweigh those perpetrated by the predatory vampire who feeds from necessity. In Rice's *The Queen of the Damned* it is the vampires Akasha and Lestat who bring wholesale slaughter to mortals in the cause of a divine war. Warrington's plot construction clearly highlights the combination of historical romance, gothic genre and mysticism in employing the language and style of the writers of the early twentieth-century, the period in which the novel is set. It is not a postmodern novel in the style of the *Vampire Chronicles* and does not foreground the complex characterization of the vampire figure as is the case in Rice's work. *A Taste of Blood* does, however, emphasize the moral perspective of the vampire character in relation to the mortal world about him.

The American writer Nancy A. Collins has written a number of vampire novels often centring on New Orleans. In the manner of Rice, she depicts New Orleans as being ripe for vampires and the supernatural. She describes the city of a humid, subtropical climate with its background of voodoo and slavery, old cemeteries and haunted houses, as the ideal haunt of creatures of the night. Collins' novel *In the Blood* utilizes the narrative viewpoint of a mortal William Palmer, a private investigator whose language is reminiscent of his predecessors in the detective genre. Palmer is the world-weary investigator but he lacks the

puritanical leanings of Chandler's Marlowe. He is hired to find Sonja Blue and tracks her down in a Carnival New Orleans. Palmer is a complex character who, self-sufficient from an early age, has an unconventional outlook on life. After experiencing an attempt on his life he is now a 'sensitive', a person who is receptive to the supernatural and, as such, becomes embroiled in the vampire battle between Sonja Blue and her demonic maker, Lord Morgan. Collins creates a sympathetic vampire character in Sonja who, despite being a ruthless killer, is portrayed as being capable of instilling love and loyalty in others. Sonja is not however a complete vampire. Although she was raped and 'tainted' with the vampire blood, she did not die. She is portrayed as a hybrid, half human-half vampire. Collins depicts the complete vampires as purely evil. They cloak their real form behind human shape, but in reality they are desiccated, mummified creatures. These vampires are bestial, conscienceless beings who have more in common with Stoker's Dracula than with Rice's vampires. Collins emphasizes this relationship by her vampires' use of figures termed "Renfields", psychic humans who become their slaves and are derogatorily named after Dracula's mad slave. Collins' self-conscious reference to the gothic genre is extended to include H.P. Lovecraft. When the vampiric Sonja describes the Real World of the vampires in terms of a Lovecraft's story, she calls the supernatural creatures who pose as humans "Pretenders"⁶. These beings have inhabited the

⁶ Nancy A. Collins, *In the Blood*, (London 1992) p. 79

world before humans and Sonja uses the Lovecraft reference to explain their presence to Palmer:

Remember that stuff about Cthulhu, the Elder Gods and the Old Ones? How mankind was only a recent development, as far as the earth was concerned, and that these hideous giant outer space monsters used to rule the world back before the dinosaurs, and how the giant ugly nameless horrors are just sitting around on their tentacles, waiting for when time is ripe to take over the world?...it's kind of like that. (In the Blood p. 79)

In contrast to Rice's writing, Collins' novels are filled with various supernatural creatures from legend and myth who prey on humans; shape-shifting demons, vampires, werewolves, and ogres. They use and abuse humans to their own ends, adopting human shape and employing telepathy to trick their prey. They do not have the beauty or *presence* of Rice's idealized vampires. The hybrid, Sonja, is an exception in that she appears human and cannot change her form. Physically she is distinguishable from humans by her reptilian eyes and immense strength. Collins' vampires do not have angelic qualities either literally or metaphorically: they lack the spirituality of Rice's characters. However, Collins does introduce further supernatural beings, the "Seraphim", who are angels disguised as the old and dirty homeless. These beings are transformed into magical beings, communicating with one another through "a mixture of crystal

chimes, birdsong silver bells, and the crashing tide" (*In the Blood* p.233).

Palmer is dazzled by their transformation, which he describes as follows:

...the ragged street-people had been transformed into pure light, spinning around him like luminous dust devils...The other seraphim joined in, transforming themselves from electric-blue tornadoes to rainbow-colored clouds. (In the Blood p. 233).

The seraphim are the only benign supernatural beings portrayed in Collins' novel but they take little active part in the plot. Collins incorporates scientific research into her novel through Lord Morgan's use of genetic splicing. Sonja's adversary attempts to breed a race of vampires who are immune to silver by restructuring human DNA into that of a vampire's so that his hybrids can breed. His attempts to manipulate genetic engineering are thwarted by the scientist whom he holds in thrall. Instead of breeding the "Antichrist" (*In the Blood* p.260) his breeders produce a baby seraphim. Rice's *Vampire Chronicles* do not explore the use of science in relation to the vampires. In fact, her vampires express the fear that science may be used against them; that they may be imprisoned and experimented on. The threatening aspect of scientific research is used, in fact by Rice in her Mayfair witch book, *The Witching Hour*, when the dangers of genetic engineering are linked to the supernatural.

In the Blood combines the conventions of the genres of fantasy, horror and detective fiction. The fact that Sonja is a vampire could almost be incidental to the plot. She is the lone, strong female, who survives and conquers the powerful male who raped and stalked her. The novel is grounded firmly in the twentieth-century despite the character of Lord Morgan whose vampirism represents a rampant chauvinism and megalomania. There is no subjective narrative for the female character, Sonja, and, as a result the reader's identification and sympathies lie with Palmer, the mortal who becomes both father and mother to the seraphim child. This mortal male, who has been victimized in his youth, represents a feminized version of manhood with links to an earlier, shamanistic life in Central America. The female vampire assumes the male role of adventurer, 'flying' across continents, while Palmer is transformed from the cynical P.I to domesticated carer. It is possible that Sonja represents the modern liberated female, scarred by the sexual struggle, but surviving as a powerful, independent feminist icon. However, it is Palmer's narrative which highlights the moral and political perspectives of the novel; perhaps ironically he has been transformed in to the New Man, disempowered by the feminists of the 1980s and 1990s America.

In *Tempter*, Collins' second vampire novel, the narrative viewpoint is consistently that of the human characters. A vampire figure is used to explore issues of race and gender in a novel that shifts in location between twentieth-

century New Orleans and the slave plantation of Seraphine in the 1800s. Collins utilizes New Orleans' history of voodoo and slavery to create a background of magic and superstition which resembles Rice's depiction of the city in *Interview with the Vampire*. However, in Collins' novel the vampire appears a metaphor for male power and abuse of women. As Mark Jancovitch states in his pamphlet on American horror fiction and film in contemporary New Orleans, the vampire tries to reassert his dominance over the women who are reincarnations of his wife and daughter "and the story is at least as much about the way in which they discover their power as it is about the vampire"⁷. The vampire, called Tempter and previously the slave owner Donatien Legendre, is trapped in the "Palace Between"⁸ by a voodoo curse. He has no corporeal form in this limbo state when he is trapped within the old plantation house. His re-entry into the physical world depends on a book of spells and magic designs, the *Aegrisomnia*, through which he can entrap and enslave human minds. The plot revolves around spells and incantations rather than blood lust and the vampiric bite. In this novel Collins shares Rice's fascination with the history of New Orleans which she incorporates into Tempter's story. However the plot follows the fight of the mortals against the demonic vampire, in the manner of Stoker's Crew of Light in *Dracula*, although Collins' heroes use magic rather than science

⁷ Mark Jancovitch, *American Horror from 1951*, British Association of American Studies pamphlet 28 (Keele 1994) p. 40

⁸ Nancy A. Collins, *Tempter*, (London 1990) p. 274

to defeat the vampire. In this novel Collins' mingling of the conventions of horror and the ghost story emphasizes spiritual and emotional vampirism rather than physical vampirism. The reader's sympathies are drawn directly to the mortal characters whose narratives delineate the plot. The eponymous Tempter is represented as being evil in mortal and spirit life. The cruel slave owner who is never redeemed reveals parallels with Harriet Beecher Stowe's character Simon Legree in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, whose abuse of women and slaves led to his destruction. In contrast to Rice's work, Collins' novel does not have the complexity of characterization found in the *Vampire Chronicles*. The vampire figure in *Tempter* is not developed to give a detailed exploration of the moral complexities of the character or to explore fully the homoerotic, though elements of sadism are present in Tempter's mastery over the male character Rossiter. The plot highlights the battle for power between good and bad 'magic' in which the female characters, who gain strength through shared experiences, prevail. Collins' ostensible vampire novel has more parallels with Rice's Mayfair Witch books, than with the *Vampire Chronicles*, in its use of the gothic genre.

An American writer whose work is frequently compared to Rice's *Chronicles* is Poppy Z. Brite. Her vampire novel, *Lost Souls*, shares Rice's homoerotic theme and depicts the vampires as beautiful, androgynous beings. The narrative point of view is divided between mortals and vampires in this story where the vampires create a metaphor for the drug-crazed adolescent or the promiscuous gay man.

The young vampires are portrayed cruising America in their black van in an orgy of drink, sex and killing. The road leads them from New Orleans, to Washington, and to Missing Mile, North Carolina, in a 1990's *On the Road* story. The plot centres on two bars: the vampire bar in New Orleans run by the vampire, Christian, and the mortal youngsters' bar the Sacred Yew in Missing Mile. The figure of Christian links the various places and time-shifts in the novel, as the plot moves from the birth of Nothing, the vampire child, his return to his father, the vampire Zillah, and his final role as leader to his father's small coven. The title, *Lost Souls*, refers to a rock group comprised of young mortals, of whom Steve and Ghost are the lead performers. The loneliness and sense of alienation felt by the two musicians links them with the vampire characters in their aimless search for thrills and fulfilment. It is the haunting music which draws the young vampire, Nothing, to seek out the 'Lost Souls' and which brings about the confrontation between the young mortals and the vampires. At the conclusion of the novel, Nothing has become the rock singer and leader of the vampire group, following in the footsteps of his mortal hero, Ghost. The image of a vampire as rebellious rock star has echoes of Rice's hero, Lestat in *The Vampire Lestat*, but in Brite's novel the image does not function as a positive affirmation of monstrous identity, but rather a means to keep the 'family' together. Brite's vampires are half-human and half-vampire, and "even in the

womb they are killers”⁹. The mother, whether vampire or human, dies during childbirth for:

Our babies are born without teeth, but even so they manage to chew their way out. Perhaps they have a set of womb-teeth. Perhaps they claw their way out with their tiny fingers. But they kill, always they kill. Just as I ripped my mother apart. (Lost Souls p. 277)

Nothing’s father is the vampire Zillah, portrayed as a “wild and predatory master” (*Lost Souls* p. 189), the leader of the small coven comprising himself, Molochai and Twig. Zillah abandoned his human lover Jesse, not knowing that she was pregnant and it is the older vampire Christian who offers her shelter until the birth of her child. Christian names the child Nothing and drives with him to a suburban middle-class home where he leaves him on a doorstep with the note “[H]is name is Nothing. Care for him and he will bring you luck” (*Lost Souls* p. 11). Nothing grows up in his adopted home with a sense of alienation, a magnification of all teenage angst which he depicts in the following passage:

I’ve got to get out of this place,...and the ghosts of all the decades of middle-class American children afraid of complacency and stagnation and comfortable death drifted before his face, whispering their agreement. (Lost Souls p. 29)

⁹ Poppy Z. Brite, *Lost Souls*, (London 1994) p. 277

Brite creates the ironic reversal of the conventional theme of the individual's quest for identity in that this vampire child should feel more comfortable with the name "Nothing", a non-name. He reverts to this name on discovering the note left by Christian, rather than keep his adoptive name, Jason, a 'nice' middle-class American name. Nothing has no sense of identity until he meets Zillah and the other vampires. He is drawn to Zillah's beauty, and Brite explicitly describes the homoerotic nature of the attraction, which is intensified when they discover that they are father and son. Nothing's wayward teenage behaviour is now explained and he finds a 'home' and 'family' with the three vampires. Brite's young hero is aware of the negative aspect of his love for Zillah, as their obsessive, incestuous passion creates a master/slave relationship between them where Zillah treats Nothing like "half sex slave and half lapdog" (*Lost Souls* p. 288). This incestuous, master/slave relationship is apparent in Rice's work in both the heterosexual and homosexual vampire coupling. However, a significant difference between Rice's vampire characters and Brite's heroes is that the vampires of *Lost Souls* are not prey to their conscience. Nothing admits that he has no concept of evil or wrong-doing; he could not make himself feel ashamed at his incestuous love of Zillah or of his blood lust. He asks the question:

Were members of his race born with some sort of amoral instinct that shielded them from the guilt of killing to stay alive? (Lost Souls p. 232)

Brite's vampires display a wanton and callous nature, combined with a crazy passion for violence and pain. Her characters have none of the exuberant optimism, courage and charm of Rice's vampires. Their lives lack the beauty and grandeur of Lestat and his companions. As Christian says of their sordid round of drinking and sex:

Surely years upon years of living on the fringes of the world would drive anyone to madness. Zillah and the others—their madness was that they had grown to love living as nomads, outlaws, murderers. Their madness made them happy. And as for Nothing, perhaps being loved by his mad, beautiful father was better than being alone. (Lost Souls p. 235)

In Brite's novel the bar in New Orleans represents a transitory meeting place where the vampires congregate during Mardi Gras. It is a desolate and empty place compared to the mortal world outside and yet represents a refuge for the vampires. It does not have the glamour and vitality of the vampire bars in Rice's *Chronicles* where mortals and vampires mingle, with the packed house listening to Lestat's raucous rock music. In *Lost Souls* it is the mortal bar, the Sacred Yew, that represents life and hope for the teenagers of Missing Mile. It is the backwoods North Carolina bar which is filled with life, music and vibrant youngsters. Brite's vampire characters exhibit a nihilistic quality reflecting an obsessive and self-destructive segment of the population. Her lost souls could

represent those youngsters who seek the quick fix or thrills desired by her characters. The shifting perspective of Brite's novel fragments the narrative, producing a postmodern effect similar to that found in Rice's *The Queen of Damned*. However, in *Lost Souls*, this has the effect of reducing the reader's identification with her heroes. Brite's novel is a distinctly twentieth-century horror story in its utilization of the vampire genre, highlighting the blood and gore aspects with a disturbing heartlessness. In contrast to Rice's novels there is no element of the Romance in *Lost Souls*, nor does Brite rework the vampire legend or attempt to identify the origins of vampirism through the characters' search for identity.

S. P. Somtow's vampire novel *Vampire Junction* has as its hero a two thousand year old vampire Timmy Valentine, whose appearance is that of an adolescent. He is a successful rock star, like Lestat, and his story combines elements of legend and historical events. His life incorporates many of the elements of Rice's vampires, including the ancient mysticism of Mael and his encounter with the Druid's oracle, the artist Marius and his adolescent model, Armand, and Lestat in his role of twentieth century media star. Timmy is linked to the ancient Sibyl of Cumae, to classical and rock music and art. He has 'lived' through the horrors perpetrated by Gilles de Rais's, (known as Bluebeard) the mass murderer of children, and of Vesuvius and Auschwitz. Timmy is described

as an "angel of darkness"¹⁰ and can transform himself into the forms of beast and bird. The fragmented narratives focus on the many reincarnations of the vampire protagonist and trace the attempts of the mortal Gods of Chaos to destroy him. In *Vampire Junction* the vampires are at risk from human adversaries instead of fellow vampires, where as in Rice's novels it is the fanatical vampires that destroy their own kind. Somtow's Gods of Chaos, the band of mortal vampire killers, have much in common with Stoker's Crew of Light.

Timmy Valentine is portrayed as a beautiful, sensual androgynous child-like figure. He became a vampire when he was abducted, with the Sibyl, by a powerful Persian magus who wishes a release from immortality. The magus uses a mystical ritual which includes the castration of the young boy, making Timmy immortal and saving his wondrous voice. Timmy's initiation as vampire is brought about through a brutal violation of his body and spirit, representing his literal and metaphorical impotence as a vampire. Somtow's hero combines the bestial elements of Stoker's *Dracula* with the romantic and sympathetic portrayal of the vampires found in Rice's work. He is a ruthless predator who can kill and maim his prey before an audience of mortals who are, in general, unaware of what has happened:

¹⁰ S. P. Somtow, *Vampire Junction*, (London 1992) p. 292

He changes form. Proteus-like, he runs through a hundred shapes in as many seconds, he becomes a panther, and a wolf and a lion and a dog and a serpent and then on to hybrid animals so monstrous that they have no names, while the audience eggs him on, cheering each transformation, and at last he soars up on wings of night, an avian chimera of hawk and vulture. He flies squawking across the full moon's face and pecks out an eye and sips the blood that froths up to the socket, and the taste maddens him more and he cannot hold his shape, before he is through he has become a slaving wolf, ripping open a girl's throat, dragging her along the aisles, he is a bat clawing at a leather boy's cheeks, a dog chewing on a woman's amputated hand---(Somtow p. 240/1)

However, Somtow shows her hero suffering the torments of his immortality and of his monstrous nature. Like Rice's heroes, Timmy is a creature of conscience and remorse, and he is stricken with the horror of his existence when he confronts Gilles de Rais before his execution:

We are kin! He realizes at last. And I do long to be like him! I envy him! He is a human who has longed to become a monster, and I...am a monster who yearns to be a man. For this madman—even this man, who has raped children to death and cut them in pieces for souvenirs—even this man can weep! While the boy vampire, who possesses eternity for reflection, can no more weep than can the mountains or the forests or the winds or the long dark nights. (Somtow p. 294)

This moment of self-realization highlights Timmy's isolation and his recognition of his monstrosity.

The title *Vampire Junction* refers to the small town of Junction in Idaho. It represents a junction between the world of the mortals and of the vampires, where time and space become blurred. It is here in the quiet, small town of the American heartland that Timmy can cross the boundary and achieve rebirth. The mystical qualities of Junction have little in common with Rice's luxuriant New Orleans but there is a possible parallel with Brite's Missing Mile as a sight of spiritual rebirth. Gelder describes the town "as a place where all these moments converge" when the characters arrive by train at Junction. He further states "this is the novel's destination, a 'picture postcard' American town" (Gelder p. 138). Somtow achieves a sympathetic rendering of the vampire character through the blending of legend and historical events. The postmodern reworking of the genre fragmenting the narrative mirrors 'fragments' of Timmy's existence. However, the disjointed narrative creates difficulty for the reader and disrupts his/her's understanding of the events which have an effect on Timmy. This disruption of the plot-line has its origins in the gothic tradition, but Somtow's development of the technique displaces the original formula to produce "contemporary vampire fiction at its most ambitious and its most *excessive*" (Gelder p. 136). Somtow's utilization of the technique emphasizes the dream-like quality to the narrative. This aspect is highlighted by the figure of Timmy, who despite his youthful

appearance is portrayed with the mystical qualities attributed to the ancient vampires of the genre and this paradox pinpoints the contradictions present in Somtow's characterization. In common with Rice's novels, *Vampire Junction* contains elements of homoeroticism, the travelogue and a narrative which voices the moral conflicts and anxieties which plague the vampire hero. However, despite the somewhat androgynous figure of Timmy, the novel does not provoke questions on sexual politics, gender and eroticism in as lively a manner as Rice's *Vampire Chronicles*.

There are two other categories of vampire novels which invite comparison with Rice's work. First, there are the stories of vampires based on mythical or historical figures and second, there are the tales of the *modern* vampire used metaphorically to represent a phase of the modern human condition. Tom Holland, another British writer, mingles fact and fiction in his novel *The Vampyre*. Holland's protagonist is George Gordon, the sixth Lord Byron, whose narrative is told to his twentieth-century descendant Rebecca Carville. The narrative construction follows the gothic pattern of layering the 'tale', with Byron verbally relating his story to the young listener, in a similar way to Rice's vampire Louis recording his autobiography to Daniel in *Interview with the Vampire*. Holland produces an interesting characterization of the Byronic tragic figure linked with an underlying monstrous, vampiric nature. The fictional aristocratic Byron becomes a poet, after his transformation to vampire, as a means of recording his lost

humanity. Lestat's serial autobiography is presented by Rice as a similarly cathartic process. Holland's depiction of a lonely and lost hero reveals many parallels with Rice's hero Lestat. Both young men were transformed against their will, 'raped' into a monstrous state, and their narratives illustrate the struggle each character has in coming to terms with his new identity and nature. Byron's initiation or conversion to vampirism is brutally described when his body is savaged by Vakhel Pasha. He depicts the sensation as follows:

I seemed stripped of all my skin, so naked that there was nothing but flesh, and organs, and arteries and veins, shimmering in the moon, viscous and ripe. And yet, although I was flayed like an anatomist's corpse—I could move.¹¹

Despite the savage and grotesque imagery, there is an underlying element of eroticism in Holland's depiction of the relationship between Byron and his 'maker'. Vakhel Pasha attempts to seduce Byron willingly into vampirism "as though wooing" (Holland p. 103) him. Byron experiences the same frisson of passion at the Pasha's touch as with his beloved, Haidée.

Byron's story, like Lestat's autobiography, explores a two hundred year struggle with the weight of immortality and the horrors of vampirism. The tale is told through a complex web of myth and set in a variety of countries. Like Rice,

¹¹ Tom Holland, *The Vampyre*, (London 1995) p. 141

Holland utilizes myths from different sources; ancient Hebrew, classical Greek, Turkey, the Bible and the Koran, which he combines with the vampire legend to heighten the mystery. The narrative of *The Vampyre*, like that of the *Vampire Chronicles*, obscures the source of vampirism behind the barrage of myths only to hint at its origin in the Lilith legend. The novel also transports its readers across Europe to the mysterious 'East' where Byron is initiated into the monstrous state of vampirism. It is in England that Byron feels the most monstrous while in Italy, Switzerland, Greece, Albania and Turkey he is able to satiate his passions to the full. Holland depicts Venice as the perfect vampire home. Its air of decadence and decay reveals correspondences with Rice's New Orleans. It is here that the spirit of the Borgias survives despite the fact that "all the true pleasures of aristocracy are dead" (Holland p. 284). Byron describes Venice as:

an enchanted, sadness-haunted island of death. Palaces crumbled into the mud—rats played amongst the maze of dark canals—the living seemed outnumbered by ghosts...Venice had grown into a playground of depravity. Everything about her was extraordinary, and her aspect like a dream—splendid and filthy, graceful and cruel, a whore whose loveliness concealed her disease...an embodiment of the beauty and vileness of myself. She was the vampyre of cities. (Holland p.283)

The intermingling of fiction and factual background in Holland's novel dwells on the meeting between Byron and Shelley and introduces the theme of scientific

experimentation and exploration of creation. Parallels are drawn between Mary Shelley's creature in *Frankenstein* and Holland's Byron. Vakhel Pasha had been a teacher of the sciences in mortal life. When he lived in Alexandria, Pasha studied chemistry, medicine, philosophy and made himself "the master of buried wisdoms and long-forgotten truths" (Holland p. 119). This description evokes images of Frankenstein as the scientist and Faust as the seeker of knowledge. There are repeated references to 'forbidden knowledge' throughout the text, foregrounding the theme of knowledge as both a blessing and curse. Holland's character Pasha has parallels with Lestat's 'maker', Magnus, the ancient magician and alchemist who stole the vampire blood believing it to be the fountain of immortality. Magnus voluntarily meets his death in the flames, but Pasha is killed by his 'heir' Byron when he perceives the horror and revulsion of his monstrous condition. Holland's novel explores the relationships between creator/creation, father/son and master/slave in a similar way to Rice's texts in that the vampires' incestuous and homoerotic nature is emphasized. The relationship between Vakhel Pasha and his 'heir' Byron combine graphic images of cannibalism, incest and homoeroticism. The gorging of Byron's near dead body by the Pasha, with the tearing of his flesh and exposure of the heart, is clearly cannibalistic and, linked with the Pasha's powerful desire for Byron, bring together images of homoeroticism, cannibalism and necrophilia. However, the bestial qualities attributed to Vakhel Pasha are reminiscent more of Stoker's

character Dracula than of Rice's vampires. Holland highlights the grotesque nature of the Pasha when he feeds off Haidée his own daughter. This description reworks the psychoanalytic theories ascribed to vampirism discussed in the opening chapter of this study and produces a disturbing, highly erotic image of the succubus found in nineteenth-century vampire stories. Vakhel Pasha keeps his daughter as a slave from whom he feeds. Byron describes the scene that he discovers at the altar to Hades, Lord of Death:

She lay on her back, lovely and desolate, her veils ripped, her tunic torn away from her breasts, and the Pasha was feeding on them, like an infant drawing on its mother's milk...how tenderly the Pasha drank from her; again, he stroked the side of her breast with his cheek, and he dyed her nipple red with the blood on his tongue. Haidée gasped suddenly, and her fingers tore at air; she clenched her legs around the Pasha's own...like a bloated tick being knocked off its host...the Pasha lay on his side, ruddy, swollen, gorged on blood. (Holland p. 118/9)

The most striking similarity with Rice's hero is in the physical and emotional description of Byron. Paradoxically Byron is portrayed as combining ruthlessness and compassion. He is described ironically as "the demon who was kind" (Holland p. 275). Holland emphasizes Byron's physical beauty drawing on the portrait of the real-life Byron by Thomas Phillips which adorns the cover of the novel. His androgynous appearance is heightened by a delicate aristocratic

beauty which hides an element of sensuality and danger. Both Holland's Byron and Rice's Lestat are products of the Age of Enlightenment, reflecting the fact that the historical Byron was born during Lestat's mortal life. The representations of Byron's aristocratic background are shown as more decadent than that of the impoverished ancien régime family of Lestat. Both characters were born in an age when the excessive appetites of the upper class were to be challenged, in Britain, by an increasingly moralistic middle-class and in France by the revolution. Byron is described as having a physical appearance which is almost a mirror image of Lestat; he has "a beautiful pale face ...the face of an angel cast from another world" (Holland p. 32). Byron's face is a picture of his soul, displaying "distress struggling with malignity" (Holland p. 210), as he gazes into the mirror, he sees:

The soul of passion seemed stamped on every feature. My face was pale with haughtiness and bitter contempt; yet there was an air as well of dejection and woe, which softened and shaded the fierceness of my looks. It was a terrible face, beautiful and wretched. (Holland p. 209)

This image of passion, beauty and despair recalls Rice's depiction of Lestat, together with the recurring motif of the fallen angel. Byron is accused of being "fallen, but ...an angel still" (Holland p. 239) by Caro his lover, and he acknowledges that "I was a fallen being, and it was a fearsome and romantic

state" (Holland p. 179). This emphasis on the beauty and angelic quality of Holland's hero parallels Rice's desire to show her vampires as rising above their demonic state.

The powers which Holland assigns to Byron and his fellow vampires differ from those Rice assigns to her vampires. Holland's vampires are able to survive in daylight, though their powers are diminished. They can 'travel' in a dream state when they can feed on their victims, and since they are as "dangerous as the plague and evil as the Devil" (Holland p. 161) they have "the power to make the stuff of [their] dreams a reality" (Holland p. 165). More importantly Byron is neither impotent nor sterile. He and his companion, Lovelace, enjoy heterosexual and homosexual affairs with mortal and vampire alike. In fact Byron's frenetic sexual activity appears to be aligned to his desperation, and Holland's explicit reference to libertinism highlights the vampire's link to the Sadean hero. Like Rice's vampires, Byron sees sensuality in everything; he states when he is with Teresa, "the pleasure—when I fucked her—was like the rush of a drug" (Holland p. 155) but, like a drug induced ecstasy, the rush is short lived. Byron and Lovelace are driven like the Sadean hero into a repetitive cycle of lust, satiation and hunger. Byron states that his "own need for pleasure rag[ed] in my blood like a disease...But still that hunger—for something—but for what?" (Holland p. 156). Byron discovers that, like Lestat, his hunger can only be appeased by "blood!--the taste was that of the food of paradise" (Holland p. 157).

Holland depicts his hero's constant desire for "a partner of the soul with whom I might share the burden of eternity" (Holland p. 286) as paralleling Lestat's yearning for an immortal companion. Byron's worldly pleasures become mingled with sorrow and doubt as he:

fucked numbly—like the rake who is growing old—whose powers can no longer keep pace with his desires. My wildness was really nothing but desperation. (Holland p. 285)

The object of Byron's desire is Shelley and Holland again mingles fact and fiction in the context of the relationship between Byron and Shelley. Byron longs to transform Shelley into a "vampire lord" like himself, but he is loath to impose this by force. He attempts to seduce Shelley with his powers and the offer of immortality in a similar manner to Lestat's 'wooing' of David in *The Tale of the Body Thief*. Shelley represents the philosopher and, like David, he rejects Byron's offer, fleeing Italy before he is seduced by Byron's mesmeric powers. Byron's homoerotic desire for Shelley is thwarted and his former love, Haidée, becomes his immortal companion.

Despite their different vampire powers, Byron mirrors the tragic qualities attributed to Rice's vampires. Holland's subjective narrative highlights Byron's sensual beauty and expresses the hidden despair and guilt which motivates the vampire's obsessive quest for knowledge in order to find peace of mind. The

novel links the vampire's blood-lust to homoerotic desire, and emphasizes the repetitive cycle of hunger, the vampires' bite and death. Both Byron and Lestat are cursed by knowledge and eternity. They experience the forbidden fruit, the "golden taste of blood" (Holland p. 158) and discover that "misery can sometimes be a fine and pleasant thing. A dark drug" (Holland p. 154). The conclusion of *The Vampyre* leaves many questions unanswered, with Holland's vampire hero despairing, his quest unfulfilled and trapped in his monstrous immortality. This ending is unsatisfactory for the reader who has no clearly defined picture of Byron's existence from the 1800s to the present day. The vampire characters remain 'frozen' in the past, literally existing in the underground crypt and, unlike Rice's character Lestat who becomes a modern vampire, are not portrayed as developing. The unresolved ending in effect leaves the reader stranded with Byron in the crypt. Although the novel highlights the moral dilemmas faced by the protagonist, these are situated in and remain focused on the eighteenth-century and this distances the reader. As a result, they cannot be readily equated with twentieth-century concerns. The continuity between Byron and his twentieth-century descendant, Rebecca, is not sustained as it is in respect of Rice's characters. Holland's treatment of the genre utilizes the many myths relating to gothic and also utilizes the formulaic motifs incorporated in the genre, in particular Poesque mansions, labyrinthine dungeons and opulent eastern settings. However, the novel does not present a reworking of these

aspects of the genre, except in the way it intertwines the factual elements of the historic Byron. Vampirism, in Holland's novel, represents the supposed 'sins' of incest and homosexuality for which Byron was exiled from England.

Jeanne Kalogridis' *Covenant with the Vampire* is the story of the family Dracul and represents a prequel to Stoker's *Dracula*. The narrative is related through a series of diary extracts of Arkady and Mary Tsepesh. Tsepesh is the name which the Dracul family took in the seventeenth-century, and the novel discloses the discovery made by Arkady of the family's covenant with their ancestor Vlad Dracul. Arkady is Vlad Dracul's great-great-great-great-grandson many times removed. He is summoned to the Carpathian Mountains on his father's death. Arkady and his wife leave London and travel across Europe by train and coach until they reach the Dracul castle. The narratives describe the journey and the home of the Dracul family, and attempt to recreate the language and atmosphere of Stoker's novel. In this way Kalogridis appropriates more elements from Stoker's work than Rice does in her *Chronicles*. Kalogridis portrays Arkady as unaware of the history of Dracul until he remembers a childhood visit he paid with his father to see Vlad. He recalls the covenant enacted between his father and Vlad, in which a ritual exchange of blood takes place between Vlad and Arkady drunk from a chalice. The plot centres on the struggle between the mortal Tsepeshs and the immortal monster Vlad Dracul. The covenant binds

Arkady into the service of Vlad to protect him and provide victims for his blood lust. At the conclusion of the novel Arkady's wife and child escape the castle at the cost of Arkady's mortal soul. Although he is taken by Vlad and transformed in to a vampire "one of the Devil's own"¹², he will not allow Vlad to defeat him:

I will see even this great Evil turned to Good, for love's sake. I possess the vampire's powers and shall use them all to see V. destroyed. He has created a foe as mighty as he." (Kalogridis p. 368)

Kalogridis' novel provides a fascinating reworking of the *Dracula* story and incorporates many elements of the gothic and vampire genre. However, like many of the historical versions of the vampire novel which are contemporary with Rice's *Chronicles*, they reveal correspondences more with Stoker's *Dracula* than with Rice's work. The vampire is portrayed as a bestial and amoral figure who attracts little sympathy from the reader. Arkady and Mary Tsepesh are depicted as resourceful characters who pit themselves against the monster despite being drawn into his lair. The reader is reminded of Jonathan and Mina Harker, who however, both survive Dracula's assault on them. The novel self-consciously draws on the plot structure, language and claustrophobic atmosphere of Stoker's novel.

¹² Jeanne Kalogridis, *Covenant with the Vampire*, (London 1994) p. 367

Kim Newman's novel *Anno Dracula* represents an ironic reworking of the 'Jack the Ripper' story. The story is set in Victorian London when a widowed Queen Victoria marries Wallachian Prince, Count Dracula. Dr. Seward is the murderer known as Jack the Ripper who brutally slaughters prostitutes in London's streets. The twist in Newman's novel is that Inspector Lestrade, Sir Charles Warren, Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police and half of the population are now portrayed as vampires. Victoria's royal consort has reshaped the greatest Empire to suit his tastes:

*The Prince Consort, who had take for himself the additional title of Lord Protector, ruled Great Britain now, his get executing his wishes and whims. An elite Carpathian Guard patrolled the grounds of Buckingham Palace and caroused throughout the West End like sacred terrors.*¹³

The novel self-consciously draws on the literature of Sherlock Holmes, *Dracula* and other nineteenth century detective and vampire stories. In fact, the writer appropriates names and characters from earlier fiction including Ruthven, Rupert of Hentzau, Darwin, Mina Harker, Van Helsing, Florence Stoker and Dr. Jekyll. The mortal Dr. Seward butchers the vampires with his silver scalpel and the mortal investigator Charles Beauregard pits his wits against Dracula. The dénouement of the novel rests on a confrontation between Beauregard and

¹³ Kim Newman, *Anno Dracula*, (London 1993) p. 45

Dracula, when Beauregard assists in the suicide of the enslaved Victoria and thus dethrones the Prince Consort. The novel combines elements of detective, adventure and gothic story with an ironic study of Victorian society. Newman creates a grotesque, animalistic Dracula who wallows in filth among his courtiers. Beauregard is the romantic hero of Newman's novel who, aided by a beautiful and ancient vampire, Genevieve, defeats Dracula. The vampires of *Anno Dracula* do not share the qualities of Rice's characters nor does Newman's novel explore the nature of good and evil through the perspective of the vampires. It does however investigate the vampire as alien conqueror and as a plague invading Victorian England. The murder of the vampire prostitutes highlights the vampires' links with the syphilis which was virulent during this period of English history. An underlying theme, which reveals links with aspects of the twentieth-century, concerns issues relating to society and government. The monarchy, in the form of the widowed Victoria, is shown as being ineffectual, imprisoned by the foreign interloper. The country is governed by a leech-like aristocrat whose vassals are corrupt and murderous. The self-conscious reference to Sherlock Holmes links the utilization of the vampire genre with the detective story and the political thriller. The novel, however, lacks the complexity of characterization found in Rice's *Chronicles* and there is little or no development of the moral perspective.

The final two novels I wish to mention briefly are Anne Billson's *Suckers* and Kate Pullinger's *Where Does Kissing End?* The former is a humorous satire of twentieth-century urban mores, while the latter is a psychoanalytical study of sexual obsession. Billson's *Suckers* is set in 1980s London where vampirism becomes a metaphor for the materialism sucking the City dry. *Suckers* is a satire on the materialistic yuppie lifestyle and the power adverts and the media exert on the population. Her vampires are humorously portrayed as the yuppies of the modern world, slick young executives driven by greed and hunger. Advertising is used to promote vampirism. Focus is placed on a "decadent chic"¹⁴ style with white faced models whose fangs drip blood and who pose for drink, sunscreen and restaurant adverts. The narrative is told from Dora's viewpoint, as she witnesses London become transformed to a city of night creatures. Dora is allowed to survive in this new world to act as a human mediator and servant to the vampires. She leaves to live in Paris away from the riots and upheaval of London during its transition to the new order. Ironically the call code of the taxi cab taking her to the airport is 'H.P. Lovecraft to Edgar Allan Poe'. Dora Rosamund Vale disguises her appearance in order to pass unnoticed amongst the vampires drinking their "Bloody Mary's" vintage "Ruby Regular", (Billson p. 244) hoping she would not be recognized as a "nip", a human. This reverses the position of Rice's vampires who try to pass for human in the mortal world. In

¹⁴ Anne Billson, *Suckers*, (London 1993) p. 21

Billson's London the vampires outnumber the humans in a process that creates a new, efficient society; as Dora discovers:

In a couple of months ... everything would be back to normal. Back to normal, if not quite the same as before. There would no longer be a train service during the day...From now on, the trains would be running only at night. But at least they'd be running on time. (Billson p,315)

Billson's use of the name of Dora (perhaps an implicit reference to Freud) for her heroine suggests that her narrative point of view may be unreliable. Is she simply paranoid or an hysteric? Her narrative could reflect the voice of someone estranged from the yuppie world depicted in *Suckers*. Dora's disguise which allows her to mingle with the vampires could be interpreted as a masquerade, enabling her to survive in a world she finds increasingly hostile. The vampires in Billson's novel are portrayed sucking England dry of its individuality. The characters achieve the ad-man's dream - the emaciated model of the ruthless, materialistic young executive. Her vampires appear to be clones of a particular type, a personality where what is considered normal within society, humanity and charity, is erased. Billson's reworking of the vampire genre utilizes elements found in science fiction, where the humans survive by mimicking the alien invader and a 'doomsday' atmosphere is predominant. Unlike Rice's novels, *Suckers*

contains the shock and thrill of the B-movie shlock-horror without drawing the reader into a sympathetic identification with the protagonist.

Kate Pullinger's novel is also set in the 1980s United Kingdom. It is a tale of obsessive sex and possession. Mina and Stephen are lovers whose interdependence and jealousy create a claustrophobic and dangerous relationship. The narrative viewpoint shifts between the two characters as they manoeuvre around each other, jealously clinging to each other and yet wanting to remain detached and distanced. Mina is lost without Stephen; when she looks in the mirror she sees nothing reflected back. She discovers that "[W]ithout Stephen to remind her of who she is there is nothing. She is composed of other people's perceptions; she relies on being reflected upon"¹⁵. Mina, who becomes obsessed with control whether physically or psychically, drains Stephen. He becomes weak until finally he collapses and is taken into hospital with anaemia. Stephen wants to possess her completely and fears that she is leaving him during the night only to creep back to his bed in the early hours. They both have nightmares of blood and death and share a final vision of Mina composed of a dazzling light in the moonless night. Pullinger has created a novel about two dysfunctional characters who share a compulsion to control and possess the one they love. They emotionally drain one another until an "adjustment is made"

¹⁵ Kate Pullinger, *Where Does Kissing End?*, (London 1992) p. 113.

(Pullinger p. 128) when both characters share a common bond. As the title suggests, the novel asks where pleasure ends and pain begins. Pullinger uses the metaphor of vampirism to explore the nature of human relationships in an era of selfishness and self-absorption. The questions she raises about identity, human relationships, love and death are issues explored in Rice's work. However, Rice considers them in terms of the Romantic vampire not in the everyday setting of 1980s London. The only explicit link which Pullinger's novel displays with the vampire genre is the name of the female protagonist. Mina is, of course, the name of Stoker's heroine in *Dracula*. With her husband Jonathan Harker, she survives the vampire's attack. In Stoker's novel, Mina and Jonathan represent the only heterosexual couple who survive and, at the novel's closure, they represent the ideal of the English family. In contrast to Rice's heroes, Pullinger's characters are unconcerned with moral or ethical problems, they are not worried by the nature of good and evil because their self-absorption is complete.

The small selection of contemporary vampire novels considered in this chapter foreground the differences present in the use of the genre and its conventions in contemporary fiction. The novels of Rice and Brite belong to the bestseller market of America and United Kingdom and the differing way they merge fantasy and gothic illustrates an interesting and, perhaps, contradictory development in the genre. Both women writers utilize the metaphor of vampirism to create a homoerotic world of male relationships that includes sado-masochistic

master/slave scenarios and intensely erotic same sex love affairs. Their novels operate in an alternative space inhabited by outsiders, dangerous androgynous creatures who exist by ruthlessly preying on others. It can also be argued that neither author offers a positive image of women in their vampire novels as their female characters are relegated to acting as mediators in a male world.

Rice's contemporaries fail to deal with the vampire genre and its conventions in such a complex and contradictory fashion as she does. As I have mentioned, Rice avoids the spectacular animal transformations employed by Somtow preferring to maintain the humanistic qualities of her vampires. While several of Rice's contemporaries develop vampire characters beyond Stoker's image of Dracula they fail to create a complex reworking of the genre which allies the vampire's dilemma to twentieth-century human concerns. The sensationalistic focus on violence and pain which Brite assigns to her vampire characters emphasizes the nihilistic quality of their existence in contrast to Rice's depiction of vampirism as an affirmation of 'difference'.

None of the novels discussed above combines all the elements introduced by Rice into her work. Rice utilizes the figure of the vampire to focus on problems and ideas relating to contemporary consciousness and subjectivity. She develops the genre to incorporate a postmodern view, breaking down the distinctions between popular fiction and serious forms of writing. Her fiction foregrounds

subjectivity as fragmented and deconstructs images of gender and sexuality. The contradictions found in her novels mirror the complexity of her characterization of the vampire figure and highlight her use of the vampire character to explore aspects of twentieth-century life.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this chapter is to consolidate the ideas previously explored in this study and consider Rice's frequently contradictory treatment of genre, gender and religion. By drawing on references to other novels and short stories by Rice, I intend to relate her treatment of these topics to the recent debates on gender and body politics. Finally I shall discuss whether the *Vampire Chronicles* represent a changing perspective in Rice's work which agrees with and is influenced by evolving feminist, cultural and psychoanalytic debates.

Genre

Rice's highly self-conscious appropriations of myths, legends and ancient beliefs, together with the contradictions present in her work, are an integral part of her reworking of the vampire tradition. Rice introduces a wider scope to the formulaic elements of the gothic genre, interweaving different genres with the gothic horror story. Her more complex approach to the vampire novel reworks the historical romance, travelogue, confessional narrative, horror, family saga and erotica. As Paulina Palmer argues, in her analysis of the fiction of Atwood, Carter and Winterson, this "interplay of different genres and literary forms"¹ would relate Rice's work to postmodernism. Palmer continues:

¹ Paulina Palmer, 'Postmodern Trends in Contemporary Fiction: Margaret Atwood, Angela Carter, Jeanette Winterson', in *Postmodern Subjects/Postmodern Tests*, editors Jane Dowson and Steven Earnshaw (Amsterdam and Atlanta 1995) p. 188.

[B]y constructing their novels around popular literary forms...or introducing allusions to them, the writers destabilise the distinction between so-called 'serious' kinds of writing and 'popular' ones. (Palmer p. 187)

Rice's innovative use of the gothic subverts the reader's understanding and expectations of the genre. However the contradictions in her work, highlighted by the very complexity of intermingling issues, leave many questions unanswered. These contradictions result in an ambiguity which emphasizes the problematic nature of Rice's work.

In the place of the more conventional depiction of the vampire as a bestial or Satanic creature, Rice's vampire figures are seductive and graceful immortals. Rice appears to enjoy exploding many of the myths associated with vampires when, in her many references to the genre through books and films, she ironically alludes to the legendary symbols and totems used against the vampire: crosses, mirrors, coffins, wooden stakes and garlic. Ironically, her vampires delight in the aesthetic image presented by their association with the earth and the concealed figure of the archaic mother, by finding grace and romance in "rising from the grave" and "sleeping in the crypt" (VL p. 368). Rice's parody and self-referential reworking of diverse legendary figures is found throughout all her gothic novels which includes the following categories: immortals - vampire

(*Vampire Chronicles*), mummy (*The Mummy*²), genii (*Servant of the Bones*³), spirits/ghosts (*Vampire Chronicles*, *Mayfair Witch*⁴ series, *Servant of the Bones*, *Violin*⁵); 'unnatural' - androgyne/castrati (*Vampire Chronicles*, *Cry to Heaven*⁶), giant, leprechaun, witch's spawn and genetically engineered embryo (*Mayfair Witch* series). The elements connecting these gothic novels and the *Vampire Chronicles* are Rice's reworking of the traditional gothic motifs of immortality, death, and the perverse or unnatural.

In contrast to the conventional gothic novel where the vampire's viewpoint is not conveyed to the reader directly, Rice's vampires are the heroes of her novels who construct themselves through their stories. Lestat, in particular, invents himself through his continued autobiography. As is the case with the fiction of Atwood and Carter which Palmer discusses, Rice's novels "represent subjectivity itself in terms of storytelling and narrativity" (Palmer p. 188). Her use of a self-conscious narrative in the form of the vampires' autobiographies influences the reader's interpretation of the characters and events. In using the vampire's perspective Rice creates a highly subjective narrative strategy, invoking the reader's sympathy and identification with the vampire character. Rice's complex

² Anne Rice, *The Mummy or Ramses the Dead*, (London 1989).

³ Anne Rice, *Servant of the Bones*, (London 1996).

⁴ Anne Rice, *The Witching Hour*, (London 1991), *Lasher*, (London 1993), *Taltos*, (London 1994).

⁵ Anne Rice, *Violin*, (London 1997).

⁶ Anne Rice, *Cry to Heaven*, (London 1990).

representation of subjectivity, in which the vampires speak first-hand, humanizes the experiences of these cannibalistic, serial killers. This process of storytelling involves a complex interplay of 'fact', invention and performance which blurs the reader's concepts of belief and disbelief, illusion and disillusion. In the context of the "postmodern era" this form of storytelling is perceived in "terms of invention" (Palmer p.188). Lestat's cathartic recounting of his 'history' has parallels with psychoanalysis when the process is expected to achieve "liberation from neurosis and anxiety" (Palmer p. 188). In the *Vampire Chronicles* the vampire's storytelling represents a quest for identity and the exploration of vampirism. Rice's vampires retain their human personalities. They are portrayed as sophisticated, intellectual immortals who are tormented by their monstrous dark side; they are Rice's tortured *Dark Angels*. The duality to Rice's characters gives them greater depth, adding to their mystery and glamour. Whereas traditionally the vampire figure is amoral and alienated from all human values, Rice deliberately emphasizes her heroes' human qualities, thus dramatically highlighting their dilemma and making it more appalling and poignant for the reader. Her vampires, like humans, are faced with choices and temptations and she depicts them attempting to balance their vampire instincts and their moral beliefs. She vividly describes the conflict between their predatory nature and their morally enhanced conscience.

Rice's portrayal of the immortal and/or supernatural figure is utilized to illuminate various human concerns. As Gelder proposes "Rice is seen as an *intellectual* writer of popular fiction" (Gelder p. 119) whose vampire characters are philosophers and sensualists. He comments:

[H]er novels unfold as meditations; their moments of ecstasy puncture long passages of inquiry amongst vampires into a range of 'classical' topics—faith, art, humanity, purpose. (Gelder p. 119)

This focus on the intellectual as well as the emotional aspect of the vampire is a significant break from the conventional representation of the vampire. Their response to the dilemmas of vampire existence confirms their place in her work as metaphors for human struggle and resourcefulness. Her vampire characters are developed with individual and unique qualities paralleling their human counterparts; each character follows his/her own path to enlightenment or self-destruction according to their own innate nature. Their vulnerability and recklessness engender sympathy for and identification with these 'monstrous' and yet so 'human' creatures.

Rice's portrayal of the vampire couples and communities is explicitly homosocial. She develops the image of vampirism as a metaphor for homoeroticism found in Stoker's *Dracula*, and its link with contagion through

defiled blood. Rice describes the duality in the vampire's perverse blood-lust both as an erotic passion and as a transcendent love. By placing the vampire and gay bars and communities in the same 'zones' she explicitly creates a link between the 'infection' which spreads through both communities. Her representation of this 'infection' and the widespread destruction which follows is, however, extremely problematic. At the conclusion of the *Vampire Chronicles* (assuming that *Memnoch the Devil* is the final volume) only a few mature and powerful vampires have survived Akasha's annihilation and, of these, some have succumbed to religious martyrdom in the name of Dora's new religion. As Rice's vampires are linked so explicitly to male homosexuality, why are so many ruthlessly eradicated, leaving only a few 'demons' to roam the world, like Lestat, "silently and secretly lost" (VL p. 373)? Gelder discusses the issue of AIDS in relation to fiction and film. He argues that:

...vampire narratives may be mobile enough to touch a range of contemporary issues, but too mobile, perhaps, to develop them in an engaged way. References to AIDS in contemporary vampire films, for example, are relatively commonplace, but engagements with the politics of AIDS simply do not happen. (Gelder p. 143)

It is difficult to gauge from a reading of the *Vampire Chronicles*, if it is in fact Rice's intention to engage with the politics of AIDS. She glamorizes the image of the vampire/gay male while at the same time punishing him for his excesses. Her

work appears to mirror the changing American perception of the homosexual community and AIDS as an epidemic, with homosexuality and vampirism seen as synonymous with a form of risk-taking behaviour that transmits contagion. The lifestyle depicted in Lestat's narrative suggests an implicit agenda in the novel regarding libertine excesses, 'infection', epidemic, and a focus on return to restraint and self-denial. However, is Rice merely reflecting the moral attitudes of the time or is she condemning the excesses practised by certain groups within the gay community? The novels *The Queen of the Damned* and *The Tale of the Body Thief* do appear to implicitly engage with issues intrinsic to gay promiscuity, the 'logic of epidemic', high risk groups, sobriety and safe-sex. However, the final novel, *Memnoch the Devil* does not depict a positive image of vampirism, as is the case in Lestat's initial exhilarating affirmation of it in the previous novels. The previous celebratory mood is dispelled as the vampire community disperses in caution and her hero departs alone after swearing, if not a vow of celibacy, certainly a vow to refrain from satisfying the lethal blood-lust.

As depicted in the *Chronicles*, the orgiastic nature of the vampire kill combined with the elite, hedonistic grouping of the vampires creates a distinct break from the traditional emphasis of the genre. Rice's vampire characters are developed beyond the basic instinctual beings of Dracula and his contemporaries to create complex psychological personalities which parallel the Sadean hero. Their desire to create a controlled environment, an elaborate 'theatre' for their pleasures, is

unique in the conventional vampire novel. Paradoxically, their excesses are controlled within this framework. Rarely killing at random, Rice's heroes chose to select their victims with care and plan the precise details of the deadly embrace. Vampirism is depicted at the closure of the *Chronicles* as being synonymous with the loss of self, combined with a self-destructive pattern, when the desire for one's own kind and the blood lust for mortals is overshadowed by feelings of overwhelming guilt and despair. Ultimately, the reader is left to ponder if, in true Sadean fashion, her vampires abandon themselves to chaos and self-annihilation or if Lestat, at least, finds some salvation.

Gender

Rice's utilization of 'monstrousness' to highlight issues of gender and prejudice, while innovative in approach, offers further contradictions to the reader. Her reworking of the traditional vampire character permits an exploration of images of the 'monstrous' outsider, images which are mirrored in the form of androgyne, castrati, homosexual and woman in her novels *Cry to Heaven*, *Mayfair Witch* series, *The Mummy* and *Servant of the Bones*. This representation of 'monstrousness' incorporates an element of carnival and theatricality. Her 'unnatural' figures adopt *acting* and *performance* as a way of life to hide their 'freakishness'. The roles adopted by, or imposed on, the characters often evolve or invert or appear interchangeable. Lestat, for example, is shown to use

performance, in the Butleresque sense of the parodic re-enactment of gender, to deliberately disrupt established order, break rules, create chaos and legitimize his existence as 'Monster'. Throughout his existence, he has chosen to act in different ways. He has appeared on stage in the burlesque role of Lelio the lover. As a vampire, he has disguised his vampirism by 'acting' human, while as rock-star he ironically performs as vampire posing as a mortal enacting the role of monster. Paradoxically, *performance* in Rice's novels functions as both a shield to hide one's freakishness and a platform for a positive affirmation of difference. *Performance* in relation to the *Vampire Chronicles* is allied to vampirism both as a dislocation of gender difference and as 'queer' affirmation. Rice's vampire heroes and heroines can be equated with Butler's "performative theory of gender that disrupts the categories and conditions between bodies, sex, gender and sexuality."⁷

Androgyny, which Rice so highly prizes, is incorporated in the vampire figure. The androgyne is portrayed as paradoxically mysterious and monstrous, titillating and repellent. Rice's male vampires are inherently impotent by their very nature, while her female vampires become powerful, aggressively sexual creatures who often adopt an androgynous persona. The cross-gendered union of the vampire bite and the equality of strength and prowess between female and male vampire

⁷ Judith Butler, quoted in Nancy Duncan, 'Introduction - (Re)placings', *Body Space*, (London 1996) p. 5.

consolidates their androgynous image. The concept of monstrousness-as-performance also applies to Rice's representation of Tonio, a castrati and the hero of *Cry to Heaven*⁸, who uses his voice and acting skills in his public and private life to mask his perceived monstrousness. Tonio is forcibly mutilated during a family power struggle by his brother/father. He perceives himself as a deformed, freak of nature, a larger-than-life aberration. Society and the Church see him as an abomination, but as 'performer' he is feted for his vocal skills. Off stage, Tonio wins the respect of the virile, Italian youths through his 'masculine' performance; this includes his mastery of the sword and a studied arrogance of manner. In Rice's novels the male vampire and the castrati have much in common. Both are 'unnatural' creatures, both are sterile, and in both figures their monstrousness makes them 'larger-than-life', *super-natural*. Rice's castrati and the vampire attempt to 'gate-crash' the 'normal' world from which they have been excluded through their *performance*. Does Rice's use of *performance*, therefore, represent a collapse of the binary distinction between private and public sphere?? This question introduces an inherent theoretical problem. If, as Butler and Duncan argue, lesbians and gays:

⁸ *Cry to Heaven* is not specifically a gothic tale but it does incorporate gothic motifs within an historical framework.

⁹ Nancy Duncan, 'Renegotiating Gender and Sexuality in Public and Private Spheres', in *Body Space*, edited by Nancy Duncan (London 1996) p. 142.

*...destablize the spatially structuring binary that is employed to exclude, control, confine, and suppress gender and sexual difference preserving traditional patriarchal and heterosexist structures*¹⁰

does this disruption allow for a "spatial revolution" (Duncan p. 142)? Duncan maintains that to allow each individual to "renegotiate the public/private spacial and discursive boundaries for themselves" (Duncan p. 142) would not necessarily put an end to the marginalizing and ghettoization of gays and lesbians.

In her characterization of the castrati, as with the vampire, Rice prioritizes same-sex relationships. Even Tonio's consummation of his love with Christina has its ambiguities. She is portrayed as 'unwomanly', a widow and yet a virgin, a woman who wishes to maintain an independent role as an artist. As she resides outside her allotted role in eighteenth-century Europe is she thus perceived as a fit mate for the castrati? In uniting these two androgynous characters, is Rice deconstructing the established 'norms' of sexual and gender difference or is she strengthening them? Again the ambiguities and contradictions in her work are problematic and are open to several interpretations. The androgyne holds a powerful place in the cultural imagination, as theorized by Kahane (quoted on p. 102), but by valorizing an 'outlawed' figure there is a danger of further marginalizing the different or 'freakish'. Rice's desire to create characters who

¹⁰ Nancy Duncan, '(Re)placings, in *Body Space*, edited by Nancy Duncan (London 1996) p. 8.

embody the cults of androgyny and Dionysus, epitomized by her hero Lestat, can be problematic in feminist terms. Feminist theorists Mary Daly and, in a more recent study, Rosi Braidotti deny that images of androgyny are liberating, especially for women. Daly, as quoted by Lucy Sargisson, perceives androgyny as a trap for women and “the myth of Dionysus as an illusory vision of freedom”¹¹. Like Daly, Rosi Braidotti regards the affirmation of androgyny as “an extraordinarily dangerous move for women”¹². She argues:

[I]n a cultural order that, for centuries, has been governed by the male homosocial bond, the elimination of sexual difference can only be a one-way street toward the appropriation, elimination, or homologation of the feminine in/of women; it is a toy for the boys. (Braidotti p.54)

How appropriate is this quotation in relation to Rice’s homosocial vampire world? As I have argued earlier, Rice prioritizes the male same-sex relationships in highly erotic terms, while her female characters are assigned roles of mediation or absence. In Lestat’s serial autobiography, can one read Gabrielle, Akasha and Maharet as “toy[s] for the boys” (Braidotti p. 54)? To answer this question it will be useful to consider if Rice’s treatment of the female vampire reflects recent feminist and philosophical debates.

¹¹ Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology* in Lucy Sargisson’s, *Contemporary Feminist Utopianism*, (London 1996) p. 141.

¹² Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects, Embodiment and sexual difference in contemporary feminist theory*, (New York 1994) p. 54.

Rice's female vampires are doubly linked to the taboo relating to blood in that they are both 'female' and 'vampire'. Rice's vampires, male and female, are all incestuously inter-related, through their descent from Akasha and by their mutual erotic blood-exchange. Christine Battersby discusses 'blood-lines' in relation to Luce Irigaray's essay on Antigone. Descent through the matrilineal line is described by Irigaray as "sang rouge" (red blood)¹³, while "sang blanc" (White blood) is associated with white sperm and patrilineality (Battersby p. 113). Battersby utilizes Irigaray's argument which suggests there is a "relationship with flux--and a type of red blood" and "with 'red blood', 'birth' and with possible/impossible spaces that fluidly open out" (Battersby p. 116). However, Battersby extends and opens up Irigaray's philosophy to construct a new subject "taking the embodied female as norm" (Battersby p.5). In this construction of a female subject-position there are some interesting analogies with vampirism, especially female vampires. Battersby's theory privileges "becoming rather than being", a process of a self that is born, embodied "through mutation, birth and change" (Battersby p. 6). Rice's vampires procreate through a blood-exchange; either 'sex', male or female vampire, can breed. All vampires know that they are capable of 'birth' so it becomes an integral part of their identity. They also sweat blood and shed blood-tears. The vampire physiology and psychology is

¹³ Christine Battersby, *The Phenomenal Woman: Feminist Metaphysics and the Patterns of Identity*, (Oxford 1998) p. 113.

intrinsically merged with issues of blood. They are described in terms which parallel Battersby's female specificity, of "a body that bleeds...and that generates new selves from within the embodied (flesh) self" (Battersby p. 14). Battersby's model of a female subject-position encodes images of morphological transformations and identities that emerge through repeated patternings, of blood and fleshy bodies, all potent images linked to vampirism. As Rice's vampires are 'related' through the matrilineal line, through their "sang rouge", perhaps, instead of appropriating Rice's valorization of vampirism as androgynous, with her 'feminized' male characters, it would be more relevant to argue a case for all her vampires to represent versions of the female(?)

It is interesting that Rice's utilizes the *Sleeping Beauty* tale in both her gothic and pornographic texts. Akasha is woken by Lestat who later becomes her 'prince'. She is not woken by his initial kiss/bite, but by hearing his rock songs. Ironically, once awoken, the 'beauty' is not carried off by the prince, but, on the contrary, she forcibly abducts Lestat. Rice reverses the conventional roles assigned to the prince and the 'beauty', making Lestat subordinate to Akasha's desires. However, throughout the *Chronicles*, it is made clear by Rice that Lestat always follows his own inclinations. If Lestat is perceived as a slave to Akasha's mastery, then it is in order to fulfill his own goals; to achieve physical strength from her blood, to gain power from her knowledge and to enjoy the erotic pleasures of her embrace. Sargisson argues that there is an element of the

vampire in the traditional figure of the prince in *Sleeping Beauty*. In her reading of Cixous, Sargisson states that the "prince's desire is "essentially necrophilic, based on the lack of life that he perceives before him" (Sargisson p. 120). Lestat's desire for Akasha is an incestuous desire to possess the ultimate mother-figure, the Mother of all vampires. Although he may enjoy a temporary submission to a powerful female character, her destruction is ensured by the end of the novel. In a similar manner, Rice's *Beauty* trilogy initially offers versions of gender and sexual freedom through various role reversals. Again however, male same-sex relationships are prioritized with the result that the books "fail to envision a radical change in female power or in the construction of female desire" (Ziv p.70). In contrast to the *Vampire Chronicles*, the ending of the trilogy portrays a return to "the institution of heterosexual monogamous marriage" (Ziv p. 71). It is debatable whether this is a more positive image than that of the lone Lestat.

Rice's representation of Akasha's utopian world raises issues relating to single-sex cultures and alternative social orders. Sargisson argues:

that many of the major texts within contemporary feminist utopianism present cohesive and autonomous, self-defining cultures as separatist to a lesser or greater degree" (Sargisson p. 206).

Akasha's vision of a separatist utopian world would ensure the eradication of almost the entire male population. Rice's introduction of such an extreme version of radical feminism indicates her disapproval of certain factions within feminism typified by Valerie Solanis' SCUM Manifesto of 1983. This Manifesto is an extreme expression of aggressive separatist revolutionary feminism and is echoed in Akasha's inciting to violence and murder in the name of her utopian dream.

There is evidence in Rice's novels that she engages with prevailing debates on gender and sexuality as highlighted within this study. Her representation of the vampire deconstructs and subverts gender roles while questioning issues of sexual difference. However, as Ziv argues in respect of Rice's pornography:

...certain sexual myths—such as the link between powerlessness and sexual responsiveness in women—are harder to dislodge than others, and that a progressive sexual ideology on some fronts (e.g. the assimilation of homoeroticism) does not entail a progressive stance on others” (Ziv p. 73).

Religion

Rice's growing concern with religious beliefs is expressed through a strong authorial presence behind the narrative. Her interest in religion is indicated by

her dedication of one of her novels to 'GOD'¹⁴. Her novels are concerned with tracing the development of our religious, philosophical and scientific beliefs. Her Roman Catholic background influences her writing and is utilized to illustrate and critique the Church. If her later novels suggest a link between her heroes, especially the vampire hero Lestat, and the tragic figure of Faust, she also appears to argue, through representing an escalating category of angels and saints, God and the Devil, Heaven and Hell, that in a final image of the creative artist (whether actor, writer or singer) salvation may be found through the creative process. Lestat's journey through Heaven and Hell in *Memnoch the Devil* reworks the possibility of salvation through religious experience, while the earlier vampire novels show Lestat seeking redemption through performance, music and in the act of writing his history. Music offers salvation to Tonio in *Cry to Heaven* and to the female protagonist of *Violin* whose intuitive playing of the ghostly, Stradivarius violin saves not only her self but also her family. Tonio's lover, Christina, finds fulfilment in painting religious and mythical characters, as well as in producing portraits of friends and acquaintances. Rice assigns a mystical and spiritual value to the creative arts which in some way substitutes for the restrictive and oppressive dogma of the orthodox church.

¹⁴ The dedication in *Servant of the Bones* reads 'This book is dedicated to GOD'.

Through her further exploration of religious beliefs, Rice introduces a debate on the resulting manipulation and exploitation of sections of the population by various churches and sects. Her work also raises questions on human intervention through scientific research or through religious fanaticism. These topics are further discussed in her *Mayfair Witch* series and the *Servant of the Bones*. The latter novel explores the issue of religious beliefs ranging from the ancient Isrealites, exiled in Babylon 2500 years ago, to the television evangelism of twentieth-century America, a topic first broached in *The Tale of the Body Thief*. *Servant of the Bones* continues to explore the theme of corruption inherent in systems of religion. Rice specifically links the cult TV religious leader Gregory Belkin to "other madmen with great dreams" (*Servant of the Bones* p. 6), such as Jim Jones and David Koresh who incited their followers to suicide. Rice frequently refers to religious fanaticism of different periods in her gothic novels. In *Memnoch the Devil* Lestat inherits from his victim a collection of heretical books written in the form of psalms but depicting the pagan sexual practices of a small medieval cult lead by a monk. Paradoxically, Lestat's victim, a murderer and drug baron, collects religious artifacts. Rice ironically subverts the reader's expectations surrounding religion and religious symbols. In *The Tale of the Body Thief* and *Memnoch the Devil* she links strong religious beliefs to madness, utilizing her Roman Catholic background knowledge of saints, martyrs and heretics to illustrate the way that extremes of ancient, medieval or modern religious

fanaticism can border on madness. After making a brief reference to her full name Theodora, (associated with God and god-like), Rice assigns the shortened version Dora to the evangelist in *Memnoch the Devil*, reminding the reader of Freud's case study and raising the issue of female hysteria. In fact, mass hysteria is released when Lestat hands the 'Veil' to Dora, since she utilizes as a symbol of her new faith. In a similar manner, Gretchen, in *The Tale of the Body Thief*, evokes a form of religious hysteria both in herself, in the form of the stigmata, and in the villagers' canonization of her.

Rice ironically subverts our concepts of good and evil through her depiction of a vampiric evil-being who kills ruthlessly yet understands goodness. Her subjective narrative emphasizes the vampire's sense of responsibility and feelings of guilt, while the representatives of orthodox and 'media' religions are portrayed as deceiving themselves, their congregation and exploiting the people.

Summary

The publication of Rice's novels span the 1970s -1990s and, as I have argued, there is a shift of perspective through the *Vampire Chronicles* which accords with changing feminist, cultural and psychoanalytic debates. Rice fosters an interaction between her readers and herself, analysing their responses to her literature, and to the release of the film *Interview with the Vampire*, through their phone calls and

letters. She encourages this active engagement by her readers through her fan club, call-line and web-site. By regularly up-dating the message on her call-line, she responds to the public consciousness of her work. On phoning her call-line the caller is asked: "[P]lease send a postcard with your name and address so we can start a newsletter" (Riley p.268). Gelder sees this interaction between Rice and her readers as vampiric in itself (Gelder p.114). Her eclectic use of the current popular American response to feminist, cultural and psychoanalytic theories may be a reflection of this open-ended debate.

However, while her revitalizing treatment of the gothic genre produces an inventive reworking of the vampire tradition and a graphic critique of our religious beliefs, her challenge to conventional attitudes in relation to sexuality and gender politics is problematic. Rice's novels continue to produce baffling contradictions which result in ambiguities, foregrounding this aspect of her work. Her innovative approach to the vampire novel, with its multiplicity of intermingling issues, leaves many questions unanswered. However, it is these crucial questions which subvert the readers' previously acquired understanding of conventional order and remain to haunt the reader. It could be argued that her failure to provide neat answers is a motif inherent in the gothic genre. It could also be argued that it is the very unresolved nature of the contradictions and paradoxes intrinsic to Rice's work that generate the disturbing image of vampire-as-human, human-as-vampire. Rice's narratives question the origins and purpose of the vampires by

relating them to pressing human concerns; in doing so she blurs the distinction between their 'fictional' world and our 'real' world. As Gelder states:

The fantasies of paranoia these fictions entertain often work...by shifting from a conventional view of the vampire as culturally marginal (of little significance, confined to low cultural forms) to a recognition that the vampire is not only central to culture but may even be (re)constructing it in its own image—or vice versa. (Gelder p. 142)

Perhaps it is through these unresolved issues in the *Vampire Chronicles* that the reader is provoked into asking questions about our present day culture.

* * * * *

Jane Plumb,
University of Warwick,
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