

**In the Shadow of the Night:**

**The Gendered Subtext of Anne Rice's *Vampire Chronicles***

by

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## Declaration

I herewith declare that “In the Shadow of the Night: The Gendered Subtext of Anne Rice’s *Vampire Chronicles*” is my own work and that all the sources I have used have been acknowledged by means of complete references

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Date

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Sign

## Acknowledgements

**Mulder:** When convention and science offer us no answers, might we not finally turn to the fantastic as a plausibility?

**Scully:** ...What I find fantastic is any notion that there are answers beyond the realm of science. The answers are there. You just have to know where to look.

**Scully:** Have you ever entertained the idea of trying to find life on this planet?

**Mulder:** I have seen the life on this planet, Scully, and that is exactly why I am looking elsewhere.

*(The X-Files)*

To my parents who gave me books, made me read and taught me that words shape worlds. Thank you.

To the staff of the Department of English, and especially my supervisor, Ms Brown for believing in my crazy ideas born out of the scraps of an examination answer, thank you all for your support and encouragement over the years. To Mrs Idette Noomé for her helpful advice, editing and colourful commentary.

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## Abstract

Anne Rice writes popular fiction. She is best known for her iconic Vampire Chronicles series. This thesis focuses on the first three volumes of this series: *Interview with the Vampire* (1976), *The Vampire Lestat* (1985), and *The Queen of the Damned* (1988).

The main objective of this thesis is to show that whilst Rice's novels often seem very liberal, an examination of her subtext reveals a conservative message. This message helps entrench socio-cultural and political hegemonies because it does not challenge the status quo.

In order to see how these conservative leanings are entrenched by Rice, this thesis examines archetypes of the female and the Feminine. Louis is male, but can be viewed as a Feminine character because of his meek subservience to Lestat (the protagonist of the series). Claudia is their daughter, but she is also a woman trapped in a child's body. Claudia seems to have great intellectual freedom, but she is trapped within her body and cannot mature. Gabrielle is Lestat's mother. When Gabrielle becomes a vampire, Rice tries to empower Gabrielle by androgynizing her character. However, we find that this androgyny is not empowering because Gabrielle returns to her role as a mother. Akasha is the ancient queen and source of vampirism. She wants to bring about a radical, gynocentric world by killing most men. But subtextually, Akasha's defeat represents the defeat of feminism in favour of patriarchy. Despite the

seemingly liberal nature of the texts, subtextually there is a trend towards negating the power these characters carry in the text.

To explore the flux between the text and the subtext, an array of post-modern reading tools and theoretical approaches have been used. The primary reading strategies include a close reading of the novels, informed by Feminist perspectives, together with other reading strategies such as, Queer Theory, Marxism, deconstruction and the role of the Fantastic.

Little academic study has been devoted to Rice's work. Her work shows deep philosophical and artistic integrity which lends an elegance and beauty to her texts, but this is undermined by the conservative undertones of her work.

## Key Terms

Anne Rice

Vampire fiction

*Vampire Chronicles*

Feminism

Queer Theory

Archetypes

Fantasy

Popular fiction

*Interview with the Vampire*

*The Vampire Lestat*

*The Queen of the Damned*

## Contents

Declaration	i
Acknowledgements	ii
Abstract	iii
Key Terms	v
Chapter 1 Introduction: “The World is a Vampire, sent to Drain”	1
Chapter 2 <i>Interview with the Vampire</i> : “Don’t call me Daughter, not fit to [be]”	41
Chapter 3 <i>The Vampire Lestat</i> : “Lightning crashes, an old mother dies”	107
Chapter 4 <i>The Queen of the Damned</i> : “Here we are now, entertain us...”	133
Chapter 5 Conclusion: “The Sun may rise in the East; at least it settles in the final location...”	170
Bibliography	182

## Chapter 1

### Introduction

#### **“The World is a Vampire, sent to Drain”<sup>1</sup>**

Anne Rice’s novels, such as *Interview with the Vampire* (1976), *The Feast of All Saints* (1982), *The Vampire Lestat* (1986) and *The Queen of the Damned* (1988) have been adapted for Hollywood and television, as well as for Broadway. Some of the most famous names in contemporary popular culture – such as Tom Cruise, Brad Pitt, Kirsten Dunst and Elton John – have worked on projects involving her work and characters. This has given her work considerable stature.

To gain some insight into such an influential figure, it is helpful to look at her formative years. Anne Rice was blessed with imaginative, but eccentric, parents (Ramsland, 1992). She was christened Howard Allen O’Brien in 1941, but she changed her name to Anne when she first began to attend school. She grew up in a family that encouraged creativity and self-expression, but that also gave her a staunchly religious upbringing (Ramsland, 1992). It is therefore not surprising that her writing is littered with religious imagery and hints at deeply-seated existential questions. The creative energy within her family also extended to her late sister, Alice Borchardt, who wrote a popular series on werewolves set in medieval Rome. Rice was born in New Orleans, but she moved to Texas when her alcoholic mother died and her father remarried. There she met Stan Rice, whom she would later marry. Rice’s

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<sup>1</sup> Line from “Bullet with Butterfly Wings” by Billy Corgan, The Smashing Pumpkins (1995)

formative years and the tragedy of losing her mother, as well as of living with her mother's alcoholism, seem to have moulded self-destructive behavioural patterns which Rice would repeat in adulthood (Beahm, 1996).

Following her marriage to poet and painter Stan Rice, she gave birth to a daughter, Michele, in 1966. Sadly, Michele contracted leukaemia and died in 1972 (Beahm, 1996; Ramsland, 1992). This traumatic event sparked a crisis of faith in the then deeply Catholic Rice. Both she and her husband, finding no solace in faith or God, turned to alcohol instead (Beahm, 1996). Later, Rice ended her self-destructive addiction by turning to fiction as a means of exploring her private grief. *Interview with the Vampire* (1976) started out as a short story, and in some senses, Michele was reincarnated as Claudia, the beautiful doll-like child who would never die.

*Interview with the Vampire* (1976) was “written in one sustained piece in five weeks, [and] pulled together Anne Rice's trademark writing skills: the textured history, the sublimated eroticism, the philosophical questions. Going for baroque, Rice's horrific tale transmuted her personal pain into a tale laden with symbolic overtones” (Beahm, 1996:12). It is the tale of the vampire Louis, who tells the story of his life to a journalist. Louis sets a dramatic narrative in motion against a backdrop of rich historical detail. He tells the story of how he is turned into a vampire by Lestat, the ego-fuelled, hedonistic protagonist of *The Vampire Chronicles*, and how they live together with their child-vampire Claudia, and how they part. Louis reveals all his sadness and anger, while also demonstrating his profound sense of humanity even though he is considered to be a monstrous figure by the journalist, Daniel, who is, nevertheless, enthralled by Louis's tale.

In 1976, the novel *Interview with the Vampire* was published by Knopf. The novel is the first of the original trilogy – consisting of *Interview with the Vampire* (1976), *The Vampire Lestat* (1985) and *The Queen of the Damned* (1988) – of *The Vampire Chronicles* series. The series includes many other novels, some of which are *Pandora* (1998), *Merrick* (2000), *The Vampire Armand* (1998). The series ends with *Blood Canticle* (2003). *Interview with the Vampire* (1976) propelled Rice to cult status in some sub-cultural circles, such as the burgeoning gothic groups that had splintered off from the punk rebels of the 1970s. Some internet forums and fan sites suggest that Rice’s vampires were responsible for the phenomenon of Vampire Goths – they dress up in a similar fashion to Rice’s vampires, whom she often presents as wearing the opulent frock coats and ruffled lace sleeves and shirts of the eighteenth century. However, despite the elegance, lucidity and quality of her writing, Rice’s fan-base did not extend to literary critics, who may have been, as popular cultural critic George Beahm (1996:12) suggests, “put off by the subject matter”. James R. Keller’s (2000) research into gender studies confirms the tendency by critics to dismiss Rice’s works, adding that “Rice was sad and disappointed when she did not receive recognition as a serious writer after the publication and success of her first novel, *Interview with the Vampire*” (Keller, 2000:6). He describes Rice’s reaction to the reception of *Interview with the Vampire* by critics as being one of

...astonish[ment] that her first novel could be dismissed by critics and reviewers simply because she chose to exploit the genre of horror fiction, and her point is well taken. While the adoption of the vampire story is often correctly conceived as a signal of the author’s desire to appeal to a mass audience, such considerations do not necessarily subvert the effort to make

thoughtful observations about art, philosophy and life. (Keller, 2000:6)

Beahm (1996) confirms this generic stereotyping of horror and fantasy fiction as somehow being devoid of literary merit. He quotes Rice as saying:

‘Book reviewing is such a mess. There’s no indication of what the book is attempting or accomplishing. It’s not like opera reviewing. The opera guy has to know something about opera. He can’t just go in and say “Why are all these people screaming in Italian?” But a book reviewer can do that “Why are all these people vampires?”’

(Beahm, 1996:1; Beahm’s emphasis)

Although Rice’s attitude towards book reviewing might seem unfair, she does pose a valid question for those debating the merits of popular fiction, especially works which fall outside the canon, but which enjoy mainstream commercial success. This study seeks to unpack some of the more tacit social, cultural and political impacts which Rice’s work may have had.

Keller (2000:6), for instance, flies in the face of orthodoxy by presenting Rice’s work as worthy of critical acclaim. He observes:

Rice’s choice of subject matter reveals a negotiation between high and low culture, between the elite and the popular, between literature and commercial fiction. While many consider her career a surrender to the latter item in each of the above categories, such generalisations oversimplify the content of her work, which is better categorised as a constant oscillation between high and low

or as a recurring penetration of the boundaries between the oppositions.

He refers to Rice's books as "novels of ideas" (Keller, 2000:6), and as worthy of commendation because they "demonstrate an impressive understanding of art, literature, philosophy, psychology, and history" (Keller, 2000:6). He concludes by asserting that critical acclaim for Rice's work is "not only her objective, but also her due" (Keller, 2000:6). Nicoleta Raileanu (1998) holds a similar view. She claims:

Anne Rice is a complex and sophisticated writer who goes far beyond traditional myths. She creates a fascinating world in which the supernatural and reality coexist, a Gothic space in which readers do not experience only fear but are also exposed to existential questions regarding the meaning of life and death, of good and evil, of fear and desire. (Raileanu, 1998:iii)

Although Keller (2000) and Raileanu (1998) praise Rice's work and call for it to be paid the compliment of serious critical study, Keller (2000) is, nevertheless, somewhat dubious about what he sees as Rice's novels attempting to "appeal to the readers of the commercial marketplace" (Keller, 2000:6).

Fantasy and horror critic Yvonne Leffler (2000) notes that Rice was one of the bestselling horror authors of the 1970s and 1980s, along with Steven King and Clive Barker. The commercialisation and easy availability of Rice's fiction is undoubtedly part of her popularity, yet this should not detract from the stylistic and literary merits of her earlier work in particular.

Rice defends her material and subject matter on her own website, AnneRice.com, where she has posted an essay entitled “Essay on Earlier Works”, in which she explains some of the choices which she has made with regard to her subject matter and relates her novels to canonical works. Rice sees her

...earlier novels as part of a long tradition of ‘dark fiction’ which includes some of the most highly prized religious works read in Western culture. Dante’s *Inferno* is a dark work in which Hell is described in considerable detail. Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* are both ‘dark works’ in which ghosts play a key role. *Macbeth* involves three witches as well as a ghost, and the best lines in the play are spoken by the nihilistic villain, Macbeth himself. (Rice, 2007:s.p.)

Rice goes on to discuss many works which she describes as “dark fiction” or as containing supernatural elements, such as ghosts, monsters and witches, including Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818), the Gothic works of the Brontë sisters, Dickens’s *Great Expectations* (1860-1861) and *A Christmas Carol* (1843), as well as John Milton’s *Paradise Lost* (1667), in which the chief character is Satan. Because Rice sees her work as following in the literary tradition of authors whom critics consider the greatest writers of the Western world, she strongly voices her distress at being dismissed by these same critics as an author unworthy of critical acclaim because of her subject matter. In her essay, she comments:

Yet, somehow, my earlier novels have been dismissed out of hand – by people who haven’t read them – as ‘immoral works.’ They are not immoral works. They are not Satanic works. They are not demonic works. These are uninformed and unfair characterizations of these books, and this situation causes me deep personal pain.

If I had it to do over again, I would not use the word ‘vampire’ in my novels. In 1976, when *Interview with the Vampire* was published there was no ‘vampire literature’ published in America. There was no ‘Goth culture.’ Certainly there was no ‘vampire lifestyle’ and I am not sure there is any ‘vampire lifestyle’ today. As far as I know vampires do not exist. I certainly don’t believe that vampires exist.

In 1976, I felt that the vampire was the perfect metaphor for the outcast in all of us, the alienated one in all of us, the one who feels lost in a world seemingly without God. In 1976, I felt I existed in such a world, and I was searching for God. I never dreamed that the word, vampire, would prevent people from examining this book as a metaphysical work. I thought the use of the word was a powerful device. (Rice, 2007:s.p.)

Rice’s defence of her work in the above extract shows both how well-thought-through her philosophical stance is, and the extent of her popularity, in that she needs to defend her choice of words and ideas purely to distance herself from a grouping of people who choose to lead lifestyles similar to those of the characters in her books.

Rice might deny her influence on various sub-cultures, but a mere 0.19 second Google search reveals 186 000 Anne Rice fan sites, and this number is growing. Anne Rice’s fan base has expanded so much that Rice has challenged fans with legal action for writing fan fiction. A statement on her personal website shows that she is “hurt” by people writing fan fiction based on her works on the Internet. A now defunct page on the fan fiction site DarkPower: The Site,<sup>2</sup> posted an article entitled ‘Anne Rice:

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<sup>2</sup> Every effort has been made to ensure that this study uses a wide range of academic references. However, there are not very many published sources which present Rice as an object of serious study or which are directly applicable to this particular study. Since she is a cult figure in popular and sub-popular culture, Rice’s following is largely Internet-based.

FanFiction's Terrorist'. From Rice's perspective, it seems as though the metaphoric use of the vampire trope has been lost in a swirl of popular misconception.

An example of some of the more extreme manifestations of the vampire sub-culture is Don Henrie, the self-proclaimed Vampire Don,

...a real, live vampire...as close as you can get. He sleeps all day, has had his teeth filed and drinks human blood in closely-guarded rituals. He also stars in *Mad Mad House* – a new reality show where guests have to live with Henrie: a witch, a naturalist, a voodoo priestess and a 'modern primitive' who likes to hang himself from skin hooks. (Ellis, 2004:s.p.)

Henrie is a fibromyalgia sufferer who "sleeps in a coffin as a means of sensory deprivation to help relieve some of the pain and sensitivity associated with the condition. Henrie also prefers to stay away from sunlight as he easily develops sun poisoning" (Wikipedia 2010a:s.p.). He has often appeared as a spokesperson for a vampiric lifestyle in television documentaries relating to vampirism such as National Geographic's *Is It Real?: Vampires* (2006).

NationMaster.com (s.a.) provides a detailed definition of the "vampire lifestyle", which Rice (2007:s.p.) claims she believes does not exist. The anonymous author writes:

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Consequently, some information has been taken from websites, fan sites, and Internet forums. Caution and logic have been applied when using information from such sources.

In an effort to unveil new angles on the topic of this thesis, I requested an interview with Anne Rice. Regrettably, Rice was very busy, but in an email sent to me on 22 May 2008 she did provide some links to books she had found compelling. Reading these sources provided interesting material on understanding the broader concerns of the Fantastic and the Horrific.

The vampire lifestyle (or vampyre subculture) is a lifestyle, involving a number of customs and beliefs, followed (in various fashions and to different degrees) by a subculture of people who are attracted to contemporary vampire lore and who seek to emulate it. While some older occult and tribal cultures have rituals and customs similar to the modern subculture, the vampire subculture itself is largely a social creation within Western culture, seemingly drawing from the rich recent history of popular culture related to cult symbolism, horror films, the fiction of Anne Rice, and the styles of Victorian England. It has been noted that the Vampire subculture has stemmed largely from the Goth subculture but also emulates some elements of the S/M subculture. Active vampirism within the vampire subculture includes both blood related vampirism and Psychic Vampirism – which involves ‘feeding’ from pranic energy (see Energy vampire)(*sic*). Members of the subculture take on a variety of ‘roles’, including both ‘vampires’ and their sources of blood or pranic energy. (NationMaster.com, s.a: s.p.)

It is no wonder that Rice would wish to distance herself from such groupings, because the site goes on to describe the criminal activities, as well as the health risks associated with a “vampire lifestyle”. These risks include the possibility of becoming HIV-positive, of contracting hepatitis, and of human bite wounds becoming septic. According to NationMaster (s.a.:s.p.), there are several undesirable aspects of the vampire lifestyle for which Rice would rightly not want to be held responsible:

Vampirism, or select elements of vampire subculture have been criticized for fueling (*sic*) the fantasies of people who are psychotic or otherwise severely mentally ill. Some self-proclaimed vampires have murdered in order to drink human

blood, such as Brisbane's notorious Tracey Wigginton, who was called a lesbian vampire murderer by the press. There have been some reports of crimes committed by people who believed themselves to be vampires: for example, the 'Kentucky Vampire Clan' was a vampire role-playing group in Kentucky whose activities spiraled (*sic*) into murder. Activity of this manner is variously encouraged and discouraged by members of the subculture itself.

Possibly the most notorious of all vampire-related criminal activity is that of 22-year-old Allen Menzies, who "claimed that he was ordered to kill Thomas McKendrick by a character in the movie *Queen Of The Damned*" (BBC News, 2003:s.p.), which he had watched about 100 times. Menzies claimed that Akasha had visited him and promised him immortality and vampirism in his next life to encourage him to murder a friend to whom he had been close since he was four years old (BBC News, 2003:s.p.).

Rice writes metaphorically, but the strong identification of her fans with her beautiful and philosophical vampires speaks volumes about her popularity. It is also important to note how human her vampires can seem with regard to their experiences of longing, pain or love, and their desire to seek companions who truly understand them. The recent, rapid increase of vampires as subject matter in the popular media and books can thus be seen to draw their inspiration from Rice's innovative approach to vampire fiction. Some examples are HBO's (2008) *True Blood*, based on Charlaine Harris's (2001-2008)<sup>3</sup> *Southern Vampire Mysteries: Sookie Stackhouse Series* and Stephenie

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<sup>3</sup> In the interest of brevity, when series are discussed or referred to as a whole (as here), the range of publication dates for the novels forming the series is given, rather than individual titles in the series and their publication dates. This practice is also followed in the bibliography, in cases where individual novels from series are not discussed in detail.

Meyer's (2005-2010) *Twilight* series, all of which feature vampires with distinctly human, emotional features and characteristics. All these examples can thus be seen to draw their inspiration from Rice's innovative approach to vampire fiction.

After *Interview with the Vampire* (1976), Rice continued to publish historical fiction, such as *The Feast of All Saints* (1982) and erotica (under pseudonyms). It was not until 1985 that Rice returned to vampires and published *The Vampire Lestat* (1985), which is the second instalment in what became the original trilogy of *The Vampire Chronicles*. In this novel, Lestat awakens to rebut Louis's version of events in *Interview with the Vampire*. Lestat also becomes an international rock star. In 1988, the trilogy and mythology of *The Vampire Chronicles* was completed with *Queen of the Damned*, in which Lestat's rock music rouses the mother of all vampires, Akasha, who believes the world can be rid of all its evils by killing off almost all the men on earth. Nearly twenty other books followed these, most of which were part of *The Vampire Chronicles* series, though Rice has also produced a spin-off series known as *The Lives of the Mayfair Witches* (1990-1994), as well as various other novels steeped in historical detail.

This thesis focuses on the original trilogy of *The Vampire Chronicles*, since Rice's subsequent novels became repetitive and the plots overlap to a large degree. Published in 2000, Keller's work, which deals exclusively with Rice's sexual-political rhetoric, currently remains the most authoritative text on Rice's work. Keller's criticism is particularly relevant because, although the last of *The Vampire Chronicles* series was published only in 2003, Keller is still able to provide critical and theoretical insights into much of the Ricean mythology. Significantly, Keller (2000) criticises Rice's later work, referring to the problem of plot overlap in *The Vampire Chronicles* as a series.

He goes so far as to claim that “the commercial and the meritorious have become coterminous in the author’s mind, a progression that has become increasingly apparent as her career degenerates into a series of rapidly assembled codicils to her early successes” (Keller, 2000:7). He cites *The Vampire Armand* (1998) and *Pandora* (1998) as examples of this repetition, describing these works as books which narrate “around the edges of...previously told tale[s]” (Keller, 2000:7).

The original trilogy, however, does work closely as a unit and is representative in both style and philosophy of what is best about Rice’s entire oeuvre in the richness of her prose and unique, vampire-centric point of view. It is also often celebrated for its feminist insights. However, the focus of this study is a critical analysis of the subtext of *The Vampire Chronicles*. The study explores the hypothesis that, whilst Rice presents and advocates a radical element in her mythology, such as the overt, almost militant feminism presented in *Queen of the Damned*, her subtext is often orthodox and presents a return to the normative. An extension of this hypothesis is that Rice’s subtext subverts the very core of the message she appears to presents on the surface and her texts contain a degree of self-deconstruction.

In order to achieve this aim, various approaches to Rice’s work are used. A multiplicity of post-structuralist reading techniques, such as Feminism, Queer Theory, Marxism and deconstruction are used to show how the liberalism of Rice’s text is subverted by her subtext and how these theoretical frameworks function within the scope of Fantastic literature, just as they would within the fold of more canonical literature. For example, some of the broader issues are the theory and application of the Fantastic in the context of Rice’s work; Rice’s representation of the female and

the Feminine; and whether Rice as a popular author is worthy of critical acclaim and academic study.

One of the foremost theoretical concerns of this study is to place Rice's work within the context of a genre. It is obvious to any reader that Rice's work falls into the broad category of fantasy, purely because of her subject matter: her protagonists are all vampires. This is, however, a very reductive view, albeit a correct one. The genre she employs is the Fantastic, but her writing style also overlaps with characteristics often associated with the rich writing found in many Gothic and Romance tales. Attebery's *Strategies of Fantasy* (1992) circumvents the tricky aspect of tying Rice's body of work down to one specific genre or mode of writing by allowing for leeway with his theoretical notion of "fuzzy sets" (Attebery, 1992:12). This theory dictates that a text should be classified based on its core themes, since most texts are not rigidly fixed in a single genre, but draw on elements from others. In using the notion of a fuzzy set, we can once more fall back on the subject matter of the text and classify Rice's work as fantasy. However, the eerie effects which arise when fantasy and realism (social, cultural, historical and political) intersect need close attention.

Rice's fusion of the Fantastic with hyper-realism reflects fantasy critics, Tzvetan Todorov's and Rosemary Jackson's theory of the "uncanny" and perhaps this is the natural home of *The Vampire Chronicles*. According to Jackson (1981:63), "[t]he 'uncanny' is a term which has been used philosophically as well as in psychoanalytical writing, to indicate a disturbing, vacuous area" – it is the desolate space between what is real and tangible and that which is imagined and unreal. The "uncanny" can also be defined as a term which is "used both to describe and to create unease" (Jackson, 1981:64). This idea of unease and anxiety is described by vampire

fiction scholar, Peter Leonard Paolucci (2000), as a narrative structural device which he terms the “impossible”. Impossibility, as a defining term, alludes to that which is unreal and is also a fitting designation for the uncanny.

Jackson (1981:5) agrees with Todorov, who defines the Fantastic as literature which “introduces that which cannot be”. As mentioned previously, the sense of “unease” (Jackson, 1981:64) which Rice creates is relevant because the rational human mind immediately rejects any notion of the possibility of the existence of vampires; as a result, Rice’s work can be safely filed as Fantastic fiction. However, her work is so heavily laced with references to popular culture (in the form of the titles of films, books, or music of our time) that, whilst her characters might seem scientifically unlikely, the atmosphere which she evokes begins to feel eerily familiar to her readers because her allusions add a dimension of contemporary realism to the text. Thus, Rice allows the Fantastic to begin to develop an “uncanny” intimacy with reality.

This idea of the uncanny aspect of fantasy is perfectly encapsulated by Dostoevsky, who said in 1880 that “the fantastic must be so close to the real that you almost believe in it” (Dostoevsky, cited by Jackson, 1981:27). Jackson (1981:23) asserts that fantasy’s “impossibilities propose latent ‘other’ meanings or realities behind the possible or the known. Breaking single, reductive ‘truths’, the fantastic traces a space within a society’s cognitive frame”. Jackson goes on to explain that fantasy involves “(p)resenting that which cannot be, but *is*, fantasy exposes a culture’s definitions of that which can be: it traces the limits of its epistemological and ontological frame” (Jackson, 1981:23). Rice’s version of the Fantastic does precisely this; her vampires might not be real, but the world in which they live is not the far-off future worlds of some science fiction, but our world and society with the vampire on the very fringes

of it. The “truth” about vampires which defines them as fictional and mythological is challenged, because the Ricean universe is uncannily our world too, and readers eagerly immerse themselves within the Fantastic as their uneasiness dissipates when fantasy and reality begin to blur in her prose.

Rice presents the world as we know it through the eyes, hearts and minds of her vampires. Everything fits into our world, from the traffic of San Francisco in the twentieth century to the historical vividness of the decadence and decay of eighteenth-century France. The figure which looms large and sits astride all the Ages of Man is the Vampire, and Rice presents his tale.

This is where Rice’s characters differ from the classic vampire tale, of which Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897) is perhaps the best example; the classic vampire tale posits the vampire as a monster and the victims as prey. In Stoker’s tale, Mina and Jonathan Harker are the focus and Harker’s diary entries all deal with what is happening to the humans in the story. Rice inverts and deconstructs this idea – her tales are vampire-centric. Her vampires too are victims: victims of society, of love, of their own tortured souls. Instead of the vampire standing on the edges of society in wait for human prey, Rice’s Romantic and philosophical vampires draw the reader into the tale so that it is the human prey that stands on the fringes of the story looking in, never before having suspected that the Fantastic has existed in their midst throughout time.

As a critic of Gothic literature, Elizabeth MacAndrew (1979:249-250) also notes the relationship between the vampires and the “real” world which Rice first exploits in *Interview with the Vampire*. She argues that it is

...a work that again explores the forms of human love and its relationships, in a first-person, mediated account from the mouth of the vampire himself. The Otherness of this figure, which is beyond human nature in that it does not die and feeds and finds satisfaction in non human ways, is dissolved into the 'reality' of the living, breathing creature sitting quietly and talking into the tape recorder, recounting a tale of passions that we recognize. (MacAndrew, 1979:249-250)

This is exactly how the novels are constructed. Each story is told by a vampire, from the vampire's perspective, in a confessional mode. *Interview with the Vampire* is essentially precisely what the title suggests: a vampire (Louis) tells his life story to a reporter (Daniel) in the course of one night. *Interview with the Vampire* can be described as a novel which

...addresses a multiplicity of literary thematics, including the anxieties of immortality, the search for identity, the problems of domestic abuse, and the relationships between art, reality, mythology and folklore. Moreover, these ideas are set against a rich eighteenth-century backdrop that reveals an appreciation for historical detail and an understanding of the spirit of the age. (Keller, 2000:6)

Keller (2000) believes Rice's novels are elevated above ordinary pulp fiction because Rice provides such rich detail and a dense matrix of philosophical ideas.

Rice's vampires are the humanised faces of the classic horrific and the grotesque. Their challenges and quests for Love, Life, Death, Meaning and God are representative of our human psyche. The world and society in which Rice's vampires are placed is our own world and society. In a sense, one could read Rice's vampires as telling the Human Story through the experience of an Immortal. This is especially

important because we can identify with her characters and the challenges they face. Instead of Rice's vampires becoming the monsters of canonical lore, we can now quite literally have what singer Mick Jagger calls "sympathy for the devil" (Jagger, 1968:s.p.).

The setting in which the interview with Louis takes place is interesting because it is unusual in terms of what many readers might expect from the settings in more traditional vampire tales. Hoppenstad and Browne (1996:7) describe some of the features of a typical Gothic tale – such as those by Walpole ([1764] 2002) and Radcliffe ([1794] 2001) – as having a "castle (as) the genre's dominant symbol, its hidden passageways and dark chambers often embodying repressed, irrational emotions or perverse sexual urges". Descriptions of this sort do appear in Rice's work, for example, the catacombs in Paris where Armand's coven live. However, the *Interview with the Vampire* opens with the memorable description of the room furnished sparsely with just "the round oak table, the chairs. A wash basin hung on one wall with a mirror" (Rice, (1976)2006:5).<sup>4</sup> Rice draws no attention to the surroundings, but all attention is drawn to the vampire Louis as he prepares to tell his tale for the first time. The room is open, empty and sparsely furnished and this sense of openness is unlike the dark, Gothic castle. The mirror becomes an important symbol of reflection in the tale that is to follow. Louis does not hold back after the centuries during which he has existed in secret. The openness of the setting is indicative of the honesty of the confession which follows, whereas the dark catacombs of Armand's coven suggest a sense of secrecy, desolation and hidden truths.

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<sup>4</sup> For the sake of simplicity, from here on, the novels are referenced in their in-text citations as follows: *Interview with the Vampire* ([1976] 2006) is shortened to *Interview*; *The Vampire Lestat* ([1985] 2006) to *Lestat*, and *The Queen of the Damned* ([1988] 2006) to *Queen*.

MacAndrew (1979:250) also fits Rice's work within the framework of the Gothic tradition. She suggests that this is the shadow of literature which, in its darkness, complexity and terror reveals the unsinkable depths to which characters are prepared to sink in order to quell their (usually debased) desires, often with deadly consequences. She then makes an eloquent case for Rice's being a part of this tradition by noting the more philosophical and subtle aspects of *Interview with the Vampire* (1976):

Within the universality of the human condition there is always a peculiarity, the aspect of the dilemma, the paradox of the condition, that presents itself to any given age. Anne Rice's novel, like its predecessors in the Gothic tradition, is fulfilment of literature's inexorable function to show life's complexities. Gothic Fiction symbolises the unresolvable, shifting, but perpetual paradox of human nature. Until the human condition changes, we will need such fantasies to embody the dilemma of our existence, to face us with it, so that we, too, may face the dark. (MacAndrew, 1979:250)

MacAndrew (1979) bases this argument on the fact that at the end of *Interview with the Vampire* we do not know what will happen to Daniel, the journalist who records Louis's tale. Clearly Daniel is enamoured by the power and the enigma of being immortal and he asks Louis to turn him into a vampire. His request elicits Louis's wrath, because Louis feels that Daniel has learnt nothing from the pain Louis has experienced and about which he has decided to tell to the world. MacAndrew (1979:250) believes that the reader of the text shares Daniel's position:

Throughout the novel we have given an imaginative assent to the vampire's account. We have been in the position of the boy who has taken his tape recorder and interviewed the very

figure of the threatening evil within, but now that the boy has himself taken on the nature of a vampire and gone to seek further. Do we wish to follow him?...The novel uses the supernatural as the Gothic tradition has always done, to present new views of human nature ambiguously, so that we are forced to ask questions about it.

Daniel begs to be turned into a vampire, which raises several questions about the greed and lust for power which humans are likely to exhibit. Louis denies Daniel's request vehemently, because Louis understands the torture that he himself feels as a creature who is a killer, but for whom killing is unnatural. Louis shows the ambiguity of human nature; others must be killed so he may live. Daniel is the foil for Louis's insistence on clinging to his humanity. This is because Daniel lusts after the power he could have, but he does not see the repercussions of such power, which Louis has tried to show him. Daniel is single-minded in his desire. As MacAndrew (1979) suggests, the reader is Daniel at the end of the novel; he or she wants to know what it feels like to have the power and the immortality of a vampire, but cannot.

It is perhaps important to note that, when MacAndrew (1979) wrote her commentary, as yet *Interview with the Vampire* (1976) had no sequel. But the same ideas still hold true for all the subsequent books in the *Vampire Chronicles* series. The philosophical slant in Rice's work which MacAndrew (1979) notes is consistently maintained, in keeping with Rice's Gothic antecedents. The greed and power lust which Daniel exhibits is not unlike Manfred's need to cling to his property by marrying Isabella in Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* ([1764] 2002). We discover in subsequent novels in *The Vampire Chronicles* such as in *The Vampire Armand* (1998) that Daniel does, indeed, become a vampire, but lives under the care of Armand. He gains neither the

power nor the type of life he wants from Louis, because he becomes a mindless, weak creature who cannot cope or function as a vampire.

Hoppenstad and Browne (1996:7) also place Rice within the tradition of the Gothic by asserting that

...the traditional gothic narrative has always been a subversive literature, shocking its audience by attacking established social conventions, and Rice continues this practice in her own work. Pornographic images function as a subtext in much of her gothic fiction...Rice's use of sexuality to challenge middle-class values is also a motif found in Walpole and Lewis's 'scandalous' gothic novels.

We can easily see the precursors of this motif in both Ambrosio's lust-fuelled fall in Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* ([1796] 2009) and Manfred's divorce and remarriage in Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* ([1764] 2002).

The uncanny element of Rice's work, wherein we find her contemporary vampires in dialogue with the traditions of Ann Radcliffe's Gothic Romances, is also noted by Hoppenstad and Browne (1996:8), who point out that Rice's vampire fiction "possesses a decidedly contemporary twist in novels such as *Interview with the Vampire* and *The Vampire Lestat* through her use of homosexual eroticism. Rice's vampires are, in a sense, symbolic of an open-minded attitude about sexual mores". Furthermore, Hoppenstad and Browne (1996:9) explain the power of Rice's 'modern' vampires within the Fantastic context as follows:

Rice's supernatural characters are not bound by mortal definitions of rationality or science, they are also not bound by

mortal definitions of proscribed sexual conduct. Lestat, for example is powerful because he is a ‘supernatural creature of the night’ (to borrow a cliché from Hollywood) and because his masculinity is not limited by conventional gender-role expectations.

Because Lestat and Louis’s relationship might not follow traditional “gender-role expectations”, it offers a very liberal and bold positing of characters. It does, however, raise questions about the nature of traditional gender/sexual roles and where or how these are enacted in Rice’s work. Female characters are ever-present and feature in all the novels. Doane and Hodges (1990:423) note that “[t]he general thematic movement from *Interview* to *Lestat* is regressive, from oedipal to preoedipal, tending towards a discovery of ever more archaic ‘origins’ centering on the figure of the mother”. Hence, they see the importance of the mother figure in the Ricean mythology as a platform to “[e]asily assimilate feminist readings of the originary power of the mother, [because] Rice’s novels have an almost vampiric relation to feminism” (Doane and Hodges, 1990:422). Doane and Hodges (1990:423) also comment that in “*Interview with the Vampire*, a popular seventies book, a decidedly angry woman does battle with men in the hopes to rewrite the script for femininity”. Doane and Hodges (1990) thus see Rice’s oeuvre as a series of feminist works in which the figure of the mother is exalted because of the importance of her positioning within the psychoanalytical sphere in relation to the Oedipal and Pre-Oedipal phases of development.

However, this thesis seeks to examine the roles, representation and subtext of the female and the Feminine in these novels in order to assess whether or not Rice’s subtext and the gender roles depicted in it are as liberal as the text which she

seemingly presents. The Feminine refers to characters who display archetypal characteristics that would normally be associated with females and femininity.

Feminist theory, which delineates the different forms of feminism and readings of the Feminine, is used, amongst other post-structuralist techniques, to help unpack these ideas.

In order to begin a discussion on the gender issues outlined in Rice's work, a brief definition of feminism is required. Feminist critic, Chris Weedon (1987:1) argues that feminism is "politics directed at changing the power relations between men and women in a society". She suggests that these power relations circumscribe our lives at all times. However, within the scope of this thesis, the social ribbon which binds us to these very gender roles and the power relations which result from this bond are applied to Rice's representation of the female and the Feminine.

The key female characters in whom these gender roles are explored are Claudia, the child vampire and 'daughter' of Lestat and Louis; Gabrielle, Lestat's wandering, free-spirited mother of noble birth, whom Lestat has turned into a vampire; and Akasha, the mother of all vampires and the protagonist of *The Queen of the Damned*. In addition to these female characters, Louis is looked at as a possible Feminine character in that he functions as a foil for the overt "masculinity" of Lestat.

Rice deliberately constructs her vampires as bisexual or sexually ambiguous and has famously been quoted over the years in various sources as saying that she would have liked the character of Louis to have been played by a woman in the film adaptation of *Interview with the Vampire* to clear up any doubt as to his true nature or gender.

Keller (2000) also mentions this and he cites "trying to resolve the gender

controversies [as holding] up production of the film for twenty years” (Keller, 2000:1). The roles of and functions of other minor female characters, for example, the slave women, are also examined as part of the relationship between Rice’s gender text and the gender subtext paradigm (where representations of the female and the Feminine are presented as liberal at a superficial level, but are often found to be more conservative when the subtext is deconstructed) which is the focus of this thesis.

Weedon (1987:4) subdivides feminism into three broad categories. These categories also form major feminist groupings, each with their own key theorists, who are also used to supplement Weedon’s (1987) umbrella definition listed below. The first category Weedon (1987:4) lists is “liberal feminism which aims to achieve full equality of opportunity in all spheres of life without radically transforming the present social and political system”. The second category is radical feminism which

envisages a new social order in which women would not be subordinated to men and femininity and femaleness will not be debased and devalued...[F]or radical feminists the only way in which women can assert their autonomy from men...is in separation from men and the patriarchal structures of society. (Weedon, 1987:4)

Her third category is socialist feminism where “patriarchy, as a social system, is integrally tied in with class and racial oppressions and can only be abolished through a full transformation of the social system. Socialist feminism...sees gender as socially produced and historically changing” (Weedon, 1987:4).

Each of the above sub-categories of feminism that Weedon (1987) outlines, can be applied to Rice’s work in various ways. One could look at the character of Babette,

one of the minor female characters in *Interview with the Vampire*, as an example of how these types of feminism are represented in Rice's work.

Babette Freniere runs a plantation near the one owned by Louis de Pointe du Lac. She runs this plantation herself after the death of her brother, who is killed in a duel.

Unbeknown to Babette, Louis is a vampire. He visits her one night after her brother's death and tells her to run the plantation herself instead of selling it off. She listens attentively as he outlines exactly what the reality of her social situation will be without the plantation. Louis tells her that she should assume her brother's "position despite any outcry, any talk of convention, any talk of propriety or common sense....If you do not the land is lost and the family is lost. You will be five women on a small pension doomed to live by half or less of what life could give you" (*Interview*, 54).

It is easy to see links to what Weedon (1987:4) terms socialist feminism here. The social system of the eighteenth century keeps Babette from taking the plantation for herself, and we can understand her predicament from a historical perspective. We view the idea of women being unable to inherit land as outdated in our present social context. Therefore, we believe that 'our society' is unlike 'their society' and that a social transformation has taken place and that Babette is held back from taking on a leadership role because of her being a woman in her historical context.

While Babette does run the plantation successfully, she "become[s] the scandal of the neighbourhood" (*Interview*, 54) because she has chosen to live "alone on the plantation without a man in the house, without even an older woman" (*Interview*, 65). We also learn that because of this, her "greatest problem [is] that she might succeed financially only to suffer the isolation of social ostracism. She ha[s] such a sensibility

that wealth itself mean[s] nothing to her. She [is] giving up inside” (*Interview*, 65).

Louis again offers her some advice, telling her to hold a charity ball in which the proceeds will be used for religious purposes and in this way “buy” her way back into society and regain the respect of the upper echelons of society so that her life can return to normal.

In this way, Babette takes on the role which her brother played and carries out his duties, but, due to the unchanged social structure and context within which she finds herself, she does not succeed in experiencing the same sense of freedom in society as she does in business.

In terms of Weedon’s (1987) notion of radical feminism, one could argue that this success is undermined by the fact that Babette is a character who has previously been content to give in to the social convention of relinquishing her claim to the land.

Feminist critic, Denise Thompson (2001) provides an interesting platform from which she looks at the contradictions between the definitions of what qualities and characteristics are regarded as male and female. Feminists point out that such a division is both artificial and hypocritical because of the overarching dominance of what constitutes the male being seen as the norm. Thompson argues as follows:

Male domination means that the male represents the ‘human’ norm at the expense of a human status for women. Men’s interests and values are set up as universal ‘human’ interests, and genuinely human values like reason, virtue and courage are appropriated as exclusive to men. At the same time, male domination means that the women is regarded as subsidiary, subservient, ancillary to, or absent from, the ‘human’ norm, while the interests, values and rights of women are denied, trivialized or derided and women’s time, energy and attention

are expropriated for men's use and pleasure. (Thompson, 2001:12)

Babette is consequently 'liberated' in her social role largely because of the influence of Louis, a male character who provides her with the strength to carry out her new role. But radical feminist politics would view this as a failure, not only because Louis, as a male, is a force of change with regard to Babette's condition, but also because as feminist critic, Alice Echols (1989:3) explains, "radical feminists argued that women constituted a sex-class, that relations between men and women need to be recast in political terms, and that gender rather than class was the primary contradiction". This differentiation can be applied to the views of Thompson (2001), who holds that

feminist politics requires that the nature of politics in the conventional sense be radically changed if it is to include the interests of women. This requirement cannot be met by a tokenistic fitting of some women into positions which remain unchanged. Women cannot be 'equal' with men as long as there is no equality among men. In feminist terms, what women want is a human status where rights, benefits and dignities are gained at no one's expense, and where duties and obligations do not fall disproportionately on the shoulders of women. Such a project promises to change politics altogether. (Thompson, 2001:8)

The rights which Babette has to earn come at the expense of the problem of the social ostracism which results from her following Louis's advice on keeping the plantation is also counteracted by following his advice a second time. Thus, despite the strength of character which Babette seems to epitomise as a business woman, her strength is not her own, but is rather derived from the impetus provided by Louis. Cora Kaplan (1986) reasserts the danger of the effect of Rice's subtextually unstable presentation

of a seemingly emboldened and empowered Babette, because this reinforces the view that due to Louis's influence on Babette, "power is maintained by men through ideologies of gender inequality...patriarchy's reason-for-being...is to ensure the domination of men over women" (Kaplan, 1986:19).

We can see how, in this case, Rice's subtext undermines the agenda she appears to present on the surface. Despite Rice's decision to depict Babette as a character who is an atypical business woman of the eighteenth century, the character of Babette is not strong enough to stand her own ground and needs the guidance of Louis in order to succeed. Interestingly too, Babette's success as a business woman is not dwelt on in too much detail because she is such a minor character; we are, however, told in passing that she marries after taking over the plantation. We could argue that her marriage is a normalising and traditional return to conformity. Although Rice constructs Babette as achieving financial freedom and going against the social grain, Rice ultimately compromises the integrity of her presentation by bringing to a conformist conclusion Babette's contribution to Louis's tale. The fate of Babette is symptomatic of what feminist Betty Friedan famously called "the problem that has no name" (Friedan, [1963] 2001:18). Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) outlines the idea that femininity is often exalted through constant socialisation of what is believed to encompass womanhood and femaleness. Her basic premise is that there is a trend towards conceptualising notions and definitions of femininity as alien or relative to (the norm of) masculinity because the basis of the definition locates "its essence in processes such as motherhood or female sexuality" (Weedon, 1987:167). Friedan ([1963] 2001) believes that the constant doctrinal reiteration of what women can and cannot do results in deep-seated unhappiness amongst women, because

women are expected to live up to and fulfil society's expectations of that which constitutes femininity. Thus, docile and submissive behaviour and selflessness in serving their husbands and families is not only expected, but praised and valued. When Rice allows Babette to conform to this stereotype through marriage, Rice destabilises the foundations of the independence which, on a superficial level, she presents Babette as having.

Babette's gratitude to Louis for his help becomes the basis for her allowing Louis and Lestat to stay at her plantation when they need to do so without asking any questions about why they need to hide away before dawn. She also shelters them when Louis's plantation burns to the ground, and before Louis and Lestat escape to New Orleans. The rest of *Interview with the Vampire* follows their move to New Orleans. Babette's subsequent achievements and story essentially become a footnote in the greater mythology of the Ricean universe. We find out that Louis hears through "wisps of gossip" that she dies "young, insane, [and] finally restrained from wandering the ruins of Pointe du Lac, insisting she had seen the devil there and must find him" (*Interview*, 144).

No overt feminist political agenda is presented in Rice's work, except in *The Queen of the Damned*, in which Rice presents a very radical form of feminism. However, as Weedon (1987), Daly (1978), Kaplan (1986), Friedan (1963) and Thompson (2001) amongst others, might argue, the mere presence of female characters makes a case for creating a feminist agenda by default. As can be deduced from the initial definition provided by Weedon (1987) earlier, feminism is an all-encompassing political construct. She includes within feminism's reach the now almost stereotypical view that feminism "campaigns against the objectification of women as sexual objects for

male consumption, against pornography, rape and other forms of violence against women within and outside of the family” (Weedon, 1987:1). Thompson (2001:12) argues that “feminism exposes the existence of male domination and challenges it.”, where “[d]omination’ refers to a hierarchial social order wherein the interests of some prevail *at the expense of* the interests of others.” (Thompson, 2001:8; Thompson’s emphasis). Significantly though, when feminist critical theory is applied to various female and Feminine characters in Rice’s work, one sees that Rice maintains the patriarchal order instead of a more liberal, feminist agenda.

Weedon’s introduction to and definition of feminism in *Feminist Practice and Post Structuralist Theory* (1987) thus succinctly summarises the basic premise which Ricean feminism is supposedly built on (social and political change in power relations between men and women). Thompson (2001) also holds this view and believes that “feminism is a social enterprise, a moral and political framework concerned with redressing social wrongs” (Thompson, 2001:7).

This provides a seemingly broad and all-encompassing theoretical outlook on the basic politics of feminism in which Rice’s art could be used to validate feminist political rhetoric. However, using Weedon’s theories as a benchmark, we can see how Rice appropriates the genre of the Fantastic to subvert the political gains addressed in the theory.

The audience knows that the Fantastic presented within the novel is not real and therefore the feminism which Rice presents at a superficial level becomes problematic because it does not tie in with the “reality” of the patriarchal society which Rice’s subtext entrenches. In a thorough analysis of her work, it will be seen that the subtext

and the genre she employs subvert her message, not only rendering the feminism she presents inadmissible, but actually help to entrench socio-cultural hegemony by reinforcing the social status quo.

Ricean “feminism” exploits the popularity of her novels, as well as the Fantastic, because, by writing within the popular genre of fantasy, Rice allows her work to be dismissed more easily because her audience stands on the outside of her world and looks in. The idea that cases of feminism can be easily dismissed because of the popularity of the genre is noted by Kaplan (1986:60), who also finds that

...Wollenstonecraft... identified the novel as the popular literary genre directed at women readers that would feed and reinforce denigrating, ‘sentimental’ definitions of femininity. Both in the nineteenth century and today, feminism has seen the question of the representation of women, sexual difference and gender relations as a ‘political’ question.

These concepts are expanded on further in subsequent chapters as a basis for discussing the representation of females and the Feminine in *The Vampire Chronicles*. Rice’s presentation of radical and extremist forms of feminism, in *The Queen of the Damned* (1988), for example, is also shown to reflect the time in which the novel was written, since radical feminism was at its peak by the 1980s, for example, with the seminal work of Mary Daly’s (1978) *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism*.

As mentioned previously, the character of Louis provides an interesting springboard from which to launch a discussion of the concept of the Feminine. Although he is anatomically male, Louis’s meekness, reticence and motherliness to Claudia qualify

him as a character who could be positioned as functioning within the paradigm of the archetypal Feminine. Rice has also commented that Louis should have been played by an actress in the film adaptation of *Interview with the Vampire* precisely because of these features of his character. Keller (2000) also notes this. Claudia refers to him as her mother because it is Louis who nurtures, protects and educates her, whilst Lestat teaches her to kill and to hunt, and disciplines her. Although their roles might seem disparate and extreme, the combination of Louis's and Lestat's functions balances out their child-rearing skills. Claudia develops a definite closeness to and bond with Louis, while her eventual loathing for Lestat leads her to attempt to murder him, sparking a series of events which eventually lead to her death.

George Haggerty (2006) in *Queer Gothic* makes the case for Rice's work to be read in terms of queer theory, arguing that "the sine qua non with which Rice mesmerizes readers, however, is homoerotic desire" (Haggerty, 2006:185). Whilst the technicalities of Rice's vampires' sexuality(ies) might not strictly be relevant in terms of some of the more Feminist concerns of this study, they do open up a fascinating look at the Feminine and effeminate in terms of the socio-cultural paradigm of power relations between male and female, cultural and counter-cultural, conservative and liberal, straight and gay.

Haggerty's (2006) chapter entitled 'Anne Rice and the Queering of Culture' discusses the role of Rice's work in communicating the ideas behind gay popular cultural identity to a broader, mainstream readership. He argues as follows:

The *Vampire Chronicles* of Anne Rice have long maintained an uneasy relationship with conservative politics and the cult of glamour. If not the record of the cultural experience of the

United States since the 1980s, they at least offer a précis of some of the nation's most deeply held cultural assumptions and an overview of the banality of transgression in the later twentieth century. The novels have all the topical urgency of popular fiction as well as the peculiar air of decadence in which Rice specializes. (Haggerty, 2006:185)

Haggerty (2006) suggests that there is an attraction between the taboo and the commercial. He suggests that Rice's novels articulate the socially accepted perceptions of gay, queer and the role of the female and the Feminine, especially if one looks at conventional and popular social thought patterns which view gay men in feminine terms. Haggerty's (2006) view thus suggests that Rice places the gay male and the female within the same social framework. In relation to the straight, dominant, "natural" male, both the gay male and females are un-"masculine", emasculated and therefore "queer" in relation to that which is defined as Male.

If the gay male is a transgressor in relation to the normative straight male, then the woman is also alien to the socially normative role of the Male. The hidden worlds and subdued voices of the gay male and the female in society are thus mirrored in each others' submission to the patriarchal norm. If, at one level, Rice's work tells the story of the "Queering of Culture" (Haggerty, 2006), then Rice's work also tells the story of the Female and Feminine Culture as something Other than that which is accepted as Male. By penning her world, Rice may give agency to both the female and the Feminine or the queer and this thesis seeks to examine just how far Rice exercises her authorial autonomy in the Fantastic realm to advance these ideas.

Haggerty (2006) bases his claim that Rice's work may be read in the context of queer theory, on Sue-Ellen Case's (1991) article 'Tracking the Vampire' to connect the Fantastic with the Queer and on the ideas of Todorov and Jackson (1981), whose work I have already cited above. He quotes Case (1991) as saying that "the queer is the taboo-breaker, the monstrous, the uncanny". Haggerty (2006:188) goes on to explain that

...[the] queer moves in and out of culture as an undertow of the uncanny, the slow burn of desire, and the iceberg of the real cutting into the breathless air of cultural self-satisfaction with its lethal edge. The vampire can hide or she can perform her difference; he can lurk in the shadows or he can burst forth in a blaze of counterfeited glory.

The queer is the Fantastic within our midst; it is the Other to socially normative thinking. Thus, Rice's work fits into the hollow of the uncanny, between fictitious realism and pure fantasy, occupying the space where these styles merge.

Haggerty (2006) highlights the parallels between the queer male and the female by discussing ways in which contemporary culture understands the Real and how this understanding connects to the Fantastic. To do so, Haggerty (2006) uses Slavoj Žižek's (1992) critique of Lacan's theory of social and cultural ideology in relation to social views of homosexuality. According to Haggerty's (2006:189) interpretation of Žižek (1992), "cultural determination involves foreclosure of its key determinate". Žižek (1992:73) himself explains that "[w]henver we have a symbolic structure it is structured around a certain void, it implies foreclosure of a certain key-signifier". If the culture is determined by that which is Male, then the void which remains undefined around which this definition occurs is the female, Feminine and Queer.

Haggerty (2006:189) then expands on this when he says:

Culture, then, according to Lacan, is structured around the void left by a ‘key signifier’ that explains the structure at the same time that it must be ‘foreclosed’. The void that exists at the center (*sic*) is therefore symptomatic of the structure of culture itself, and as Žižek goes on to suggest ...sexuality can be understood to function in this way.

Haggerty (2006:189) then uses Žižek (1992:73) as his basis when Haggerty states:

If ‘what was foreclosed from the Symbolic returns in the Real of the symptom’, then Žižek’s argument explains not just why, in his [Žižek’s] words, woman returns as the symptom of man but also why the predatory homosexual, foreclosed from the symbolic, would return as the symptom of a culture so caught up in its own sexuality that it cannot see its sexual obsessions for what they are. (Haggerty, 2006:189)

Žižek (1992:73) continues with this line of thought, which Haggerty (2006:225)

adopts:

The symbolic structuring of sexuality implies the lack of signifier of the sexual relationship...that the sexual relationship cannot be symbolized...And to seize the interconnection between the two universalizations (*sic*), we must simply again apply the proposition ‘what was foreclosed from the Symbolic returns in the Real of the symptom’: woman does not exist, her signifier is originally foreclosed, and that is why she returns as a symptom of man. (Žižek, 1992:73, also cited in Haggerty, 2006:225)

Haggerty (2006:189-190) qualifies the analogy that can be made between the gay man and the woman as shown above by adding that because “the woman [is seen] as culture’s symptom...it is possible to add the homosexual [as a symptom of culture because]... the threat of sexual relation that cannot be symbolized (*sic*), the impossible fact of desire, and the final antagonism” (Haggerty, 2006:189). Therefore we can see that “[t]he homosexual is the figure who is foreclosed in the Symbolic and returns as a symptom of the culture that would reject him” (Haggerty, 2006:189-190). The equation of the gay man with a woman or with that which is Feminine is therefore seen as a symbol or symptom of that which it does not identify or define as the straight, normative male. Therefore, culturally, the gay male and the woman are both seen as Feminine and are clustered together outside the bounds of the culturally Masculine.

When we review the compelling arguments brought forward by both Haggerty (2006) and Žižek (1992) in relation to Louis, we see that Louis can be classified as ‘queer’, because, while he is not overtly gay or very direct about the nature of his relationship with Lestat, we can infer that there are homoerotic bonds which connect them. Louis is physically male, but his Feminine behaviour, attitude and demeanour suggest that he may be classified as a liminal character. Furthermore, Louis is a vampire, and vampires are also representative of a dual nature because they appear alive, but are in fact dead – undead. Louis thus becomes a product of the uncanny.

Louis is not the “predatory gay male” to whom Haggerty (2006) likens Lestat. Louis is the object of Lestat’s desire; he is Lestat’s victim; he is vampire – yet he is different from other vampires in the way in which he tries to hold on to his humanity and live by the codified ethical principles of humanity even though he is not bound by the

social and moral framework which surrounds humans. A primary example of this type of behaviour is his early reluctance to kill humans even though his own survival depends on his feeding on humans.

Louis straddles the gulf between wanting to live his (un)life as though he were human and at the same time being freed of the bonds which necessitate following mortal social codes. This is what Jackson (1981:21-22) also conceptually alludes to as filling the void between the Impossible and the Real with the uncanny. She quotes Russ, who defines fantasy as that which

embodies a ‘negative subjunctivity’ – that is fantasy is fantasy because it contravenes the real and violates it. The actual world is constantly present in fantasy by negation...fantasy is what *could not have happened*; i.e. what *cannot* happen, what *cannot* exist.... Fantasy violates the real, contravenes it, denies it, and insists on this denial throughout. (Jackson, 1981:21-22)

Echoes of the cultural definition of the Queer or Feminine as functioning within the Fantastic can be gleaned from this type of uncanny, “negative subjunctivity” when combined with Žižek’s (1992) and Haggerty’s (2006) ideas of culturally coded definitions of gender. These ideas also allow us to view Louis as both uncanny and queer because he is a human who is turned into a vampire, but behaves as though he were still human. Louis appears alive, but is in fact dead; he loses his soul as a human, but finds it again when he is no longer human. Louis is male, but behaves and functions as though he were a female character. Louis is thus an inversion of his externalised reality and this is the very embodiment of the Fantastic.

Haggerty (2006) also notes this uncanny duality in Rice's vampires as mirror images of fantasy and Reality. Following on from his identification with Žižek's views on social signifiers, Haggerty (2006:190) believes that the "vampire represents the return of the repressed in a culturally significant way. Both inside culture and outside, both a charmingly honest man and a wickedly deceptive one, both the phallic aggressor and the always already penetrated one, the vampire represents everything the culture represents and everything it fears". Žižek (1992:3) asserts that "we must not obliterate the distance separating the Real from its symbolization (*sic*): it is this surplus of the Real over every symbolization that functions as the object-cause of desire". Haggerty (2006) expands on the issues raised here by Žižek (1992). Haggerty (2006:190) proposes the following ideas:

What is the Real to which these vampires hold with uncanny tenacity? What do they do to become the 'object-cause' for this culture's desire? They defy the death drive and turn radical negativity into the ordinary commodity, life itself – well, death in life, but the simulation is exactly the point. Rice's vampires bring this surplus of the real back into the symbolic as its desired objects. In doing so they expose the terms of the symbolic structure that would exclude them. Another way of saying this is that the vampire exposes the roots of bourgeois ideology in his ability to represent its desires and fears.

This thesis examines the way in which Rice uses and exploits this bourgeois mindset and ideology and furthers the agenda of a normative patriarchy despite her often liberal depiction of characters. Critics such as Raileanu (1998) mention what they see as the subversive element in Rice's work because they find that "Anne Rice's novels may be considered subversive in that they attack established conventions" (Raileanu,

1998:49). Furthermore, it is also popularly accepted within the very limited, critical body of work devoted to Rice's oeuvre that her "characters subvert the dominant ideology regarding the past and its role in history, science and the consequences of technology, and the role and limits of reason in contemporary society" (Raileanu, 1998: iv). Despite her novels being regarded as "expressions of mainstream ideology [they] provide a space for subversion" (Raileanu, 1998:ix) and perhaps, most importantly, "[w]omen are presented as both continuing in traditional roles assigned to them by patriarchy but also freed from those limits" (Raileanu, 1998:ix).

The main hypothesis explored in this thesis is therefore that, while Rice's text presents a free and liberal perspective, many times in her novels, we can (by using a multiplicity of post-structuralist reading tools), see how the subtext presents more conservative elements that often contradict her text and help to entrench current socio-cultural and political hegemonies. The liberal and subversive elements which critics such as Raileanu (1998) note are, at best, simply superficial, because there is a strong return to conformity and conservatism in the subtext, which serves to maintain the political and social status quo instead of challenging it.

Various theories and critical techniques are employed in the study to disentangle Rice's subtext and show that it subverts the progressive texts which she appears to present. By examining the ideology of social and historical contexts and the broader theoretical concerns of the Fantastic, Feminism, females, the Feminine and femininity (including Queer Theory), Marxism, race and class discourse, as well as how these are represented within Rice's texts, we can begin to answer the key questions which propel this study.

Some of the ideas to be raised in this study are how Rice exploits fantasy and the role of female archetypes in her work. Examining the differences between the female and the Feminine and the differences between their representations is another feature of this study, as is looking at whether Rice presents a new world order in terms of her gender roles and representations, or whether she simply entrenches patriarchal norms further.

The remaining chapters build on these ideas by monitoring the way in which disparate aspects are combined within the Ricean mythology. The approach followed is to discuss each of the books in the trilogy in a separate chapter and then to conclude by looking at similar memes and themes and how these support the hypothesis of the thesis, which is that Rice subverts the very message which she seems to present. Thus, Chapter 2 discusses *Interview with the Vampire* ([1976] 2006), Chapter 3 examines Lestat's perspective on his life in *The Vampire Lestat* ([1985] 2006), and Chapter 4 looks at the conclusion of the original trilogy, *The Queen of the Damned* ([1988] 2006).

It should, however, be noted that due to how *Interview with the Vampire* and *The Vampire Lestat* are structured, where both follow the format of a first-person confessional tale, it was impossible to apply precisely the same kind of theoretical approach to both these texts and to *The Queen of the Damned*, which has a more sophisticated plot structure. *Interview with the Vampire* and *The Vampire Lestat* are both told from the perspective of one character at one particular time. The events presented recount these vampires' whole lives, but each vampire-narrator presents all other characters only from his point of view. Thus, the presentation of the female characters and of the Feminine in the first two books differs from that in the final

book, which uses a third-person narrator to provide insight into portions of the story which Lestat cannot narrate. However, an interrogation of the subtext of *The Queen of the Damned* reveals a far more muted political agenda and a more conventional, patriarchally-aligned presentation of the female characters in their roles as daughters, mothers, prostitutes and slaves throughout *The Vampire Chronicles*.

## Chapter 2

### *Interview with the Vampire*

**“Don’t call me Daughter, not fit to [be]”<sup>5</sup>**

*Interview with the Vampire* (1976) opens with Louis, a two-hundred-year-old vampire, introducing himself to a reporter called Daniel in a dark room in San Francisco. Louis switches on the light in the room and reveals himself as a vampire. Daniel’s incredulity when he looks directly at Louis is what draws the reader into the tale. Rice carefully negotiates between fantasy and realism and the success of this novel is created by the way in which she blurs the boundaries between them.

Louis is described as

utterly white and smooth, as if he were sculpted from bleached bone, and his face was seemingly inanimate as a statue, except for two brilliant green eyes that looked down intently like flames in a skull. But then the vampire smiled almost wistfully, and the smooth white substance of his face moved with the infinitely flexible but minimal lines of a cartoon. (*Interview*,<sup>6</sup> 6)

The description paints the portrait of an unnatural creature, but Louis soothes Daniel’s horror and asks Daniel if he still wants the interview. Daniel confirms that he does.

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<sup>5</sup> Line from “Daughter” by Eddie Vedder, Pearl Jam (1993)

<sup>6</sup> As indicated in Chapter 1, this short form is used for the in-text references to *Interview with the Vampire*.

Rice has now positioned her characters in such a way that the human reporter is subordinate to the vampire, who captivates the readers. It is the vampire's tale to which we listen and the reporter with his tape recorder merely facilitates the telling of this story. The vampire has become the figure of authority, the one who knows the story, and the reporter is enraptured by the idea of this story.

The story centres on Louis, who has been turned into a vampire by Lestat. Louis has an unwillingness to kill human beings, despite his deep hunger and need to feed upon them. Lestat then turns Claudia, a young orphan girl, into a vampire so that Louis can have a companion to love and cherish. However, Claudia is fixed in her child's body and cannot grow and this breeds resentment in her towards Lestat, whom she believes to be responsible for the horror that she has been forced to become. Claudia rises up against Lestat and tries to kill him. After this, she coerces Louis into taking her to tour Europe in search of older vampires so that they may learn the history and the secrets of their origins.

Eventually they find Armand's coven and Louis and Armand form a strong homoerotic bond. Claudia, afraid because she is aware that Armand wants Louis to himself and because his coven is aware that she has killed Lestat, begs Louis to turn Madeleine, a mother figure and companion for her, into a vampire. Louis does so, much against his will, because Louis believes that turning another into a vampire will result in the loss of his own humanity. Shortly after Madeleine is turned, both Claudia and Madeleine are captured by the coven and killed, while Louis is imprisoned. Armand later frees Louis, but it is too late, as Claudia has already been executed. Louis is forever haunted by the death of Claudia and decides in the twentieth century

to tell his story to a journalist, who not only publishes the story as a novel but also lusts after the power which Louis has and which Daniel is flatly denied.

*Interview with the Vampire* is thus a vampire-centric tale and its readers must now submit to Rice's fantasy by suspending their notions of reality. It is this vampire-centric aspect of Rice's novels which dramatically sets her work apart from canonical works of vampire fiction, for example, Bram Stoker's ([1897] 2011) *Dracula*, where the tale is focused on the lives of the humans who encounter the monstrous vampire, Count Dracula. In his seminal anthropological work, *Vampires and Vampirism*, Montague Summers ([1929] 2005) compiles what is, in essence, the canon of vampire lore. This work helps us further distance Rice's work from stereotypical vampire fiction. Summers defines Gothic literature as follows: "In the Gothic romance we have horror heaped upon horror's head; smouldering abbeys, haunted castles, banditti, illuminati...murders" (Summers, [1929] 2005:278). In Rice's mythology, however, those elements are toned down, primarily because, as we see from the description of Louis, Rice's vampires are not horrifying, but are rather presented as beautiful and seductive. Rice thus tries to turn vampire lore on its head and challenges the archetypal and stereotypical ideas of vampires as presented by Stoker ([1897] 2011) and Polidori ([1819] 2009), among others. By creating her new wave vampires, she creates a new cosmos. Rice's vampires become the objects of the reader's sympathy and their taking of victims is seen merely as necessary to the vampires' survival.

*Interview with the Vampire* is a tale which weaves its way through time as Louis tells his story from his perspective, constantly shifting between his past and his present (the room in which he speaks to Daniel). This gives another dimension to Rice's

work; her story is a spoken tale. Post-structuralists will immediately identify this with Derrida's views on phonocentrism and the spoken word.

West (1996) explains that Derrida ([1978] 2001) claims that we think in terms of binary opposites. He uses speech and the written word as an example of this.

According to Derrida, the Western mind or Western philosophical sense is logocentric, or based on reason; our eternal searching for the Truth or (t) or truthS is a product of this. West (1996:179) defines logocentrism as “seek(ing) beyond signs and representation, the real and the true, the presence of being, of knowing... (it) also involves a prejudice of presence, (which) Derrida calls the metaphysics of presence” (West, 1996:179). In terms of the “metaphysics of presence”, one binary opposite is always privileged in relation to its inverted “twin”; presence is thus always privileged over absence.

Because of this habit of thinking, the Western mind always gives preference to one of the binary opposites. Between the binary opposites of speech and writing, it is usually the spoken word that is preferred, because of the dynamic nature of speech. West (1996:179) states that “speech (is regarded) as a more transparent medium of thought or meaning than writing (because) the voice is closer to immediacy”. Hence critics use the term phonocentrism, to stress that sound or speech is central.

According to West (1996), Derrida furthers this line of argument by saying that, in terms of basic binary opposites, the spoken word, with its phonocentric leanings, implies the presence of the speaker, whereas, in writing, the writer is absent. Thus, writing becomes the more passive of the two media (West, 1996). Derrida sought to invert this relationship, and give preference to the written word. If we accept the idea

of the writer's being absent and therefore denied a voice and that the thoughts of the writer are without immediacy upon being read, then Rice's metanovel, *Interview with the Vampire* can be viewed as a thoroughly post-modernist work because the speaker (Louis) and the writer or recorder (Daniel) are both present and the tale is constructed as it is, seemingly simultaneously, written and spoken. Rice becomes the author of the printed book, the copy which the reader reads, but within the context of the novel, it is Louis's spoken word, recorded onto tapes which form the actual plot of the novel. The stylistic device used by Rice is true to the novel's title, the book is an interview with a vampire.

The book is presented as being spoken in the present tense by the narrator who is one of the protagonists, instead of being written in the past tense by a less obviously complicit narrator. Louis tells his story to Daniel, who records it onto audio cassettes. The spoken word becomes a tool which Rice uses to entrench the "truth" of Louis's tale; he is present and speaking and therefore can be seen as making a concerted effort to enact and recount the story of his life. He can only present his life through his own presence. Therefore, it is his word, his logos (speech) which proves the reality of his situation. Louis's agency over his own tale deconstructs the classic vampire tale because of its implied presence and vampire-centric structure. The agency Rice gives to Louis gives credibility to her tale by adding a sense of realism to the Fantastic. This credibility is reinforced by Rice's historical accuracy. Daniel, the reporter, begins questioning Louis. Daniel asks, "You weren't always a vampire, were you? ..."  
(*Interview*, 7); Rice lends Louis's tale a gloss of truth when Louis responds, "No, ... 'I was a twenty-five-year-old man when I became a vampire, and the year was

seventeen ninety-one” (Interview, 7). The realism of the novel thus allows for terror, because the Fantastic becomes the uncanny.

Franco Moretti (2001) explains the idea of fear and terror in literature as follows:

The central characters of this literature – the monster [in *Frankenstein*], the vampire – are *metaphors*, rhetorical figures built on the analogy of *different semantic fields*. Wishing to incarnate Fear as such, they must of necessity combine fears *that have different causes*: economic, ideological, psychical, sexual (and others should be added beginning with religious fear). This fact seems to me to make it possible, if not obligatory, to use different tools in order to reconstruct the multiform roots of the terrorising metaphor. (Moretti, 2001:158)

In *Interview with the Vampire*, we see how all these roots of terror are combined in Rice’s mythology.

The novel begins in Louisiana and sees Louis as the head of his household and the master of a large plantation run on slave labour; Louis is thus a figure of economic power. Once he is turned into a vampire by Lestat, whom we are led to believe does this to gain control of Louis’s plantation and wealth, Louis becomes a far more feminine character with the loss of his economic power. In *The Vampire Lestat* (1986) we learn that Lestat is of aristocratic birth and, although he grows up in an ancestral castle, his family are not typically wealthy nobles, since the bourgeois tradesmen of the village they control often have more money than Lestat’s family has. Despite this, Lestat is inherently an aristocrat. Lestat’s control over Louis can be construed as a natural order of supremacy whereby the aristocracy have the right to control. Rice’s

conservatism can immediately be seen, since this is an antiquated social ideology wherein the rich and socially advantaged rule.

Interestingly, Louis is American and has become wealthy from commercial pursuits, whereas Lestat is European and has inherited wealth and titles, both from his family and from Magnus, the vampire who created him. Lestat can thus be seen as a conqueror from Europe and Louis as his colonial subject. Alternatively, Lestat represents the triumph of Old World elitism over New World opportunities.

As a vampire, Louis is bound to Lestat while he learns what he can of vampirism. He becomes Lestat's student and financier, but he finds no meaning in this new (un)life and for a long period he cannot take a human life because of his guilt at breaking a mortal moral code. Lestat's control over Louis is not only economic, but is also one of homoerotic desire (as outlined in Chapter 1); once Lestat and Louis turn Claudia into their vampire child, they, in effect, create a gay family. It is Louis who functions as Claudia's mother figure. Together, Louis and Claudia live in awe and fear of Lestat. They are aware that without him their quest for knowledge or for other vampires is in vain. This gives Lestat control and power over the duo because he is the keeper of knowledge. Lestat, a symbol of familial patriarchy, thus becomes an authoritative and wildly unpredictable coven leader, according to Louis. In this construction of power, Rice returns to the stereotypical positioning of a male character as powerful, in charge of both a female and Feminine character who obey his commands for fear of retribution.

In creating Claudia, Louis and Lestat go against the norm of heterosexual reproduction, as well as against vampire nature. Claudia affirms her natural, mortal

birth when she tells Lestat and Louis that she is not theirs: “‘I am not your daughter,’ she said with the silvery voice. ‘I am my mamma’s daughter’” (*Interview*, 105). Lestat responds to her by saying: “‘No dear, not anymore,’....He glanced at the window, and then at he shut the bedroom door behind us and turned the key in the lock. ‘You’re our daughter, Louis’ daughter and my daughter, do you see?’” (*Interview*, 105).

Lestat’s action of closing up the room, while he explains to Claudia that she is now their daughter, becomes symbolic of Claudia’s entrapment within her own body.

It is the two male parents who are the keys to her imprisonment; it is Lestat in this narrative who controls not only Claudia but Louis as well. Louis too is trapped in the room, and consequently, by extension of this metaphor, within the traditional abusive relationship as well. This is a metaphor which, as Norine Dresser (1989) notes, Rice confirms when she explains that “she sees the vampire as an elegant yet doomed person...and [the vampire’s] plight [as] being a prisoner” (Dresser, 1989:161). Lestat too is trapped, not within the confines of the relationship because he defines the boundaries within which Louis and Claudia exist. Lestat’s entrapment is a far more mythologically conventional one; immortality traps him within himself.

Lestat and Louis’s relationship with Claudia flouts vampiric codes of conduct.

Armand’s disapproval of Claudia’s vampirism (due to her young age) is blatant, and is also indicative of a trend towards conservatism. He says to Louis:

‘There are fifteen vampires in this house, and the number is jealously guarded. And weak vampires are feared; I should say this also....And then there is that mysterious child: a child who can never grow, never be self-sufficient. I would not make a vampire of that boy there now if his life, which is so precious to me, were in serious danger, because he is too young, his

limbs not strong enough, his mortal cup barely tasted: yet you bring with you this child. What manner of vampire made her, they ask; did you make her?’<sup>7</sup> (*Interview*, 273)

Lestat and Louis determine their own destiny in creating Claudia, but Rice shows us that they are punished for not following the “natural” order. Louis loves Claudia and she gives him some meaning and purpose, but he is destined to be alone and to lose her love. Lestat too is destined to feel Claudia’s hatred for his role in creating her. Lestat and Louis defy nature and create the unnatural. This dichotomy of unnaturalness is evident in Claudia, the monstrous child who rises up in rebellion against her “parents” and tries to kill Lestat, even though killing a parent is counter to all social mores.

Thus, Lestat and Louis are punished for their transgression in creating Claudia. Even though Lestat does not ultimately die, he is weakened and reduced. At the end of *Interview with the Vampire*, Louis is punished by his pain and longing for Claudia, whom he loves. Rice presents Claudia’s punishment as the most final because she is killed, sentenced to the ultimate punishment for the most severe crime – killing her father and symbolically negating his power over her. Rice reinforces the idea of Lestat’s male omnipotence by having him survive her attack and continue to grow in strength, fame and power as *The Vampire Chronicles* progress.

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<sup>7</sup> For the sake of simplicity, the use of quotation marks has been simplified for indented quotes. Throughout the novels, the events are narrated by Louis and Lestat respectively, so any dialogue is in fact already quoted dialogue. In my quoting of such quoted dialogue, this would result in multiple quotation marks and quotes within quotes within quotes. Hence, for indented quotes, the first “layer” of quotation (Louis’s voice in *Interview* and Lestat’s voice in *Lestat* and *Queen*) is assumed, and is left out.

Two males appropriate a child whom they take care of, but can never rear to adulthood, because Claudia cannot grow. As a vampire, she is fixed and unchanging and locked in her child-body, even though, intellectually, she is an adult. This is the primary cause of her hatred of Lestat, whom she blames for her condition of being “the demon child” (*Interview*, 112) forever. Lestat taunts Claudia, when she feigns a truce by presenting him with a gift before she tries killing him. He identifies her primary source of bitterness when he says he “hope[s] it is a beautiful woman with endowments you’ll never possess” (*Interview*, 146).

Louis even tries to explain to Lestat why Claudia has grown cold towards him and tells him that “[s]he’s not a child any longer....I don’t know what it is. She’s a woman” (*Interview*, 116-7). Lestat rages at Louis when Claudia acts uncharacteristically and refuses to hunt with her father, but instead follows Lestat around as though she were stalking him: “‘What’s the matter with her!’ [Lestat] flared at [Louis], as though [Louis had] given birth to her and must know” (*Interview*, 117). It is interesting to note that Lestat questions Louis about Claudia’s actions and behaviour, but he does not ask Claudia herself, thereby exposing Claudia’s lack of voice and disenfranchisement. Lestat’s power over the trio is again confirmed by Louis, when they discover the hidden, decaying remains in their garden of a pair of their servants, mother and daughter, whom Claudia has killed. Lestat is furious when he suspects Claudia of trying to turn them into vampires, because he is the master vampire. Lestat “won’t have her do this without [his] permission! [He] won’t tolerate it” (*Interview*, 118).

The permission which Lestat wants Claudia to ask for hints at his own sense of control over her as both his child and a product of his creation, but Claudia’s attempts

at turning the servants into vampires indicate that she sees herself as his equal and has taken up what she feels is her rightful position. Lestat finds this irksome, no doubt because this shows that she no longer recognises his leadership. Claudia's failure to turn the servants into vampires and Lestat's subsequent fury over the matter is presented by Rice as a response which is fully understandable, because of the danger that the bodies will alert the suspicion of mortals. The fantasy framework of anti-realism once more functions to distance itself from the actual political effect of the subtext. This is because Rice expects the reader to keep the logic and moral understanding of the repercussions should the bodies be discovered by mortals on their property. This helps to keep conservative ideologies dominant because, to the reader, Lestat's anger is justified, but Claudia's actions are seen as rash and wilful. Louis attempts to placate Lestat and defend Claudia by saying that "[t]hen, are you master of us all? You didn't teach her that. Was she supposed to imbibe it [subservience to Lestat] from my quiet subservience? I don't think so" (*Interview*, 118). Louis notes and accepts his own emasculation in relation to Lestat and tries to soothe the irate vampire who, in turn, merely "stalk[s] off...and [takes] his vengeance to the city" (*Interview*, 118).

This duality of being child and adult (Claudia), or mother but male (Louis), is also noted by Victor Lana (1994) as typical of vampiric duality. Vampires are undead – dead but living. Fred Botting (1996) notes this concept of duality as being a particularly Gothic feature and argues that Claudia as child, woman, manipulator and killer is typified as the "monstrous double signifying duplicity and evil nature" (Botting, 1996:4).

Lana (1994) also applies the concept of this duality to the gender of Rice's vampires, noting that

...sexual functioning ceases for male and female vampires. This impotence...is compensated for in the power to take victims. The vampire's phallus is his or her teeth; this makes all vampires particularly 'male' in terms of sexuality. The vampire is only able to procreate by the insertion of his or her teeth into a mortal victim. Through this act, and subsequent drinking by the victim of the vampire's blood, a new vampire is born. The drinking usually takes place from a vein in the chest or wrist of the vampire, an action very much like an infant taking nourishment from its mother; thus all vampires also exhibit a feminine function as well. (Lana, 1994:5)

We learn that it is Louis who first feeds off Claudia as a mortal and drains her blood almost to the point of death (*Interview*, 100-105); it is Louis who initiates her death at the gentle coercion of Lestat, who urges him to take her, and who then also immediately snatches her away from Louis and initiates her birth, and it is Lestat who imbues her with vampire blood. Louis cares for and looks after her, but it is Lestat who has power over her and turns her finally into the monster she becomes.

One may read this in relation to the determining of the sex of a child: whilst both sexes possess X chromosomes, it is the male chromosomal set which has the Y chromosome that allows for differentiation between male (XY) and female (XX) children. Claudia is female in body, but she is raised by Louis, who is male in body, but motherly in nature, and Lestat, who is male in body and temperament, and instils in her the instincts of a ruthless killer. She takes on both their characteristics, even though she does not inherit their genes.

Louis notes Claudia oscillating between his frugality and Lestat's excessiveness, for example, when he comments that he was "made...at once aware she was Lestat's daughter as well as [his] own. From me she had learned the value of money, but from Lestat she had inherited a passion for spending it; and she wasn't about to leave without the most luxurious black coach we could manage..." (*Interview*, 184). The killer streak and frenzied feeding, which is typical of Lestat's indulgence (and which makes Louis uncomfortable because of his conscience) is also evident in Claudia.

Claudia's nature is that of a consumer; her taste for killing and the satisfaction she gets out of taking lives is almost identifiable with the behaviour of a drug addict. The extent of her ruthlessness when she hunts is evident when Lestat comments that "Claudia has a taste for families" (*Interview*, 144). She feeds off and kills whole families in her insatiable bloodlust. From the moment Claudia is "born" as a vampire (turned into a vampire in this case) she is led into a life of excess, both in material and cultural terms. Claudia is pampered and given her every desire. Lestat and Louis can afford anything they want – we find out in *The Vampire Lestat* that Lestat inherits all the hidden wealth in the tower belonging to his maker, Magnus, and in *Interview with the Vampire*, that Louis is a wealthy plantation owner.

This veneer of material success goes with a culture of absorption. Not only do vampires feed off the blood of their mortal victims, but they also take whatever wealth may be on their person. In so doing, vampires create personal wealth over all the centuries of their lives without ever working for it. They accumulate wealth even though they have no need for any of the mortal comforts humans require. Keller (2000:33) argues that the "aristocratic leisure of the undead invokes the stereotypes of luxury, decadence, idleness, and effeminacy that are a major part of the dominant

culture's homophobic fiction. The image of Lestat and Louis living on a plantation at the beginning of *Interview* and feeding on the slaves involves a Marxist thematic that is difficult to ignore".

A typical portrayal of the slaves and servants in the Ricean mythology is as *gens de couleur libre* or freed people of colour. These black people are positioned in servile situations which, on one level, could be seen as historical accuracy, but, on another level, it is almost insulting, since Rice has inserted characters into her story who serve no narrative purpose other than to be tokens of demographic representativity, and who are very often preyed upon because of their easy availability. The Marxist, classist, racist polemic that could so easily be read into this is, however, usually dismissed as minor historical detail, because the novel centres on Louis. One such description is of a black cook whom Louis spots and describes:

She had moved to the kitchen door, her long black neck gracefully bent as she peered into the shadows beneath the lighted window. 'Monsieur!', she said, and stepped out into the soft yellow light. It fell on her great round breasts and long sleek silken arms and now on the cold beauty of her face. 'You're looking for the party, Monsieur?' she asked. 'The party's upstairs...'

'No, my dear, I wasn't looking for the party,' I said to her, moving forward out of the shadows. 'I was looking for you.'  
(*Interview*, 169-170)

The silence which follows Louis's statement is obviously an indication that Louis feeds upon her. She is a black woman in a servile position as a cook; she assumes that he is a party guest. It is her job to feed the guests, and in an ironic twist, she "feeds" him as she becomes his prey. Social scientist, Margrit Eichler (1980) notes that,

within a discourse of class analysis, the position of Louis's prey would primarily be seen as a social class polemic to be addressed and the deeper feminist agenda of the suffering and subjugation of women, as secondary to the class issue. She argues that "before we can meaningfully attempt to solve any other social problem, we need to redress the imbalance inherent in class society. Patriarchy is, therefore, defined by most Marxists as a second-order problem that can only be successfully tackled after we have solved the problem caused by class divisions" (Eichler, 1980:114).

According to this argument, therefore, even though Rice presents us with such very obvious abuse of a voiceless female within the text, her subtextual clues make the servitude and lowly position of the black woman seem more politically incorrect than the gender ramification that as a woman, she is easy prey, waiting to be feasted upon, and that it is a male's right to take what he wants.

Ken Gelder (1994:22) describes the lifestyle Lestat and Louis lead as "defined by excess and unrestrained appetite". Indeed, Karl Marx ([1867-1894] 1976:342) also notes this facet of vampirism and uses this imagery in *Capital*, declaring that capital "is dead labour which, vampire-like, lives only by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks".

In the case of Ricean mythology, there is only the appearance and the illusion of aristocratic ways and an aristocratic lifestyle to maintain. Living in luxurious surrounds serves as a foil for the unnatural lifestyles which vampires lead. Their wealth provides a convenient cover and allows them to explore dignified, cultural pursuits during the night and sleep during the day, undisturbed, in coffins within their lavish rooms. This wealth, which they take from their "dead labour", fuels their acceptance in mortal society. Wealth seems to put vampires above suspicion when

death lingers amongst the poor, drunk, weak, criminal and vulnerable members of society. Kathleen Rout (2003:474) even describes Lestat's attitude to killing as "a generous act" when Lestat "puts the poor out of their misery". The lifestyles of Rice's vampires reinforce the impression that the rich and aristocratic are allowed to do as they please in society without needing to be accountable for their excesses. Rice's vampires' wealth buys them prominent positions in society and Rice creates the distinct impression that money equals power. Perhaps this is another facet of her vampires' lifestyles which make them attractive to her readers, because the vampires never have to work and will live forever, both rich and beautiful.

In later books in *The Vampire Chronicles* series, we learn that Lestat enforces a moral code in which only the blood of the evildoer may be taken and the innocent should be spared. Under such a code, the wealth the vampires take from drug dealers and pimps is seen as just payment for killing off criminal elements. Rout (2003:476) refers to this as the "official 'foreign policy' of vampires towards humans". However, this blood money, as it were, also funds the vampires in their desire to use wealth to merge into human society.

Whilst Rice's vampires may be modern and her weaving of a fresh mythology iconic, it is important to observe that most authors who have written vampire fiction have positioned their vampires as aristocratic and wealthy. Polidori's Lord Ruthven, Sheridan LeFanu's Carmilla and Bram Stoker's Count Dracula are all wealthy aristocrats. Carol A. Senf (1988:43) suggests that this serves to "link the aristocrat's hereditary power over others and the vampire's supernatural power over human beings". Rice's wealthy and free vampires reinforce this idea.

Lana (1994:30) goes even further in positing a notion akin to eugenics when he mentions that “vampires have a natural tendency to seek victims like themselves, people of noble blood, to turn into vampires, thus enabling the new vampire to be selective when taking victims and, presumably, assisting their capacity to harness supernatural powers more easily”. We see how Lestat picks Louis to turn into a vampire companion, but fails to create a vampire like himself because of Louis’s persistent clinging to his mortal conscience and moral code. Rice’s mythology is thus in keeping with the normative ideology of rich, aristocratic males, creating a hierarchical context within which the tale is told.

Claudia’s very birth into vampirism is clouded by a sense of materialism. Lestat, in a characteristic tantrum over Louis’s self-starvation (due to his qualms), asserts that vampires have every right to take as they will and do as they like because it is “natural” for them to hunt and kill. Lestat senses Louis’s alienation because of his inability to claim a human life and uses religious imagery to justify his stance on the matter. The religious imagery is no doubt a ploy to work on Louis’s conscience, because Louis feels morally responsible for his brother’s accidental death following an argument in which Louis denied his dead brother’s extreme piety and visions of saints. It is partly this religious guilt which informs Louis’s reluctance to kill. Lestat expresses the following view:

‘Evil is a point of view...[w]e are immortal. And what we have before us are the rich feasts that conscience cannot appreciate and mortal men cannot know without regret. God kills, and so shall we; indiscriminately. He takes the richest and the poorest, and so shall we; for no creatures under God are as we are, none so like Him as ourselves, dark angels not confined to the stinking limits of hell but wandering His earth and all its

kingdoms. I want a child tonight. I am like a mother...I want a child!' (*Interview*, 98)

Lestat perverts Christian religious rhetoric here to validate his demand. He likens vampires to God-like creatures (which seems to be a perverse echo of the Biblical idea suggesting that God created man in His image) and believes that this grants him and Louis licence to act with impunity and without conscience. Lestat's tirade also raises important points about the logic of his argument. Certainly, he argues that vampires do not follow mortal codes of conduct and are therefore exempt from living by these normative codes. However, his argument is supported with religious imagery which would be associated with mortals. Rice thus subverts the message which she presents here.

Rice shows that while Lestat rationalises his stance to prove to Louis that killing is what vampires do, he also suddenly wants a child. His demand seems to be a whim and his desire for a child is, once more, subverted by Rice. Lestat speaks of the natural disposition of vampires to be killers and, following this speech, we see that he could take a child, but Rice blurs this by having Lestat liken himself to a mother, an archetypal nurturer. This is subversion towards the normative again. Keller (2000:17) describes this feature as "heterosexual projection". Although Lestat and Louis are vampires (and despite all Lestat's protestations that they do not heed mortal values and norms), they are still both male and cannot procreate naturally, whether as mortals or as vampires. Therefore, by likening Lestat to a mother, Rice feminizes his desire and allows it to seem more natural. The tone with which Lestat articulates his desire for a child is interesting: he *demand*s one. For Lestat, having a child is yet another whim he can indulge in because he wants a child and, as both a vampire and male, he

has the ability to get what he wants. It is thus not strange at all that Lestat's desire for a child is satisfied by his money: Claudia is finally purchased from an orphanage. We see here how once more, Rice equates power with money, because money allows every whim of her vampires to be satisfied.

We are told that "Lestat [takes] money from his pocket and [sets] it on the foot of the bed" (*Interview*, 99). Louis has previously attempted to kill Claudia in an act of mercy as she lay frail and weak with her dead mother, but could not bring himself to do so. Lestat senses this opportunity to further his stranglehold on Louis and takes him to the orphanage and points out Claudia to Louis, saying: "She's there....Your wounded one. Your daughter" (*Interview*, 99). Lestat picks out Claudia from the rows of "[s]tarving children, orphans....Children of plague and fever" (*Interview*, 99). Claudia's entry into the world of Lestat and Louis is thus enabled by an exchange of currency.

Parallels can also be drawn here to the way Lestat purchases prostitutes to feed on and toy with before killing, as he does just prior to turning to Claudia. Khalid Kishtainy (1982:8) unpacks the social and literary relevance of the prostitute as a metaphor from Biblical times when

...harlotry [was equated] with the corruption of heathenism, the modern prophets of *Das Kapital* equated prostitution with the exploitation of capitalism...To the socialists, the female prostitute represented all the evils that have been brought about or multiplied by the capitalists. She represented the enslavement of women by men and the exploitation of workers by the capitalist crooks.... (Kishtainy, 1982:8)

This idea of the ownership of women can be carried over to the turning of Claudia, as there is also a sense of complete transference of ownership when Claudia asks:

“Where is Mamma?” (*Interview*, 103), and she is duly informed by Lestat that she is “going to live with [them] now” (*Interview*, 103). Claudia is thus the emotional bargaining chip which Lestat uses to keep Louis in check.

For Louis, this idea of their having a child seems to bring closure and peace and a companion for him to love. He is enraptured by Lestat’s speech, riddled as it is with religious rhetoric, but he does not fully understand what Lestat is saying. Louis explains later that he should have guessed what Lestat meant, but did not, because Lestat had “mesmerized” and “enchanted” him, and was “playing” him (*Interview*, 98), just as Lestat had done when Louis was mortal: “[H]e was leading me. He was saying, ‘Your pain will end’” (*Interview*, 98).

Louis’s desire to maintain human morality is abused by Lestat, who snatches Claudia away just as Louis drains her of her blood, almost to the point of death. Lestat then proceeds to feed her his blood and thus, through both their efforts, Claudia, much to Louis’s horror, is turned into a vampire. Louis realises that he is now trapped in his relationship with Lestat. Here, we can see a clearly dysfunctional relationship.

Claudia, as their child, becomes the emotional coinage which binds them, even though they are both on the verge of separating. Lestat manipulates Louis, going to extremes. Popular fiction critic, Candace R. Benefiel (2004:267) also recognises this idea of dysfunctionality in their relationship and says that “as in real life, having a baby to save a relationship is not an optimal decision, and the irony, especially in Lestat’s words gives the action an even more perverse character”.

Once Claudia is turned, she immediately shows her bloodlust by asking for more blood, despite just having fed on a slave boy, killing him in the process. After firmly refusing her request, Lestat explains the basics of vampirism to her in a very matter-of-fact manner: “...they’re dead. You see, they die when we drink from them” (*Interview*, 104). Then he snidely comments: ““Now, Louis was going to leave us....He was going to go away. But now he’s not. Because he wants to stay and take care of you and make you happy....You’re not going, are you, Louis?”” (*Interview*, 105). Lestat has clearly defined the role which Louis will take with regard to Claudia for much of the novel. Louis is the caregiver; Lestat is the provider. They are bound to each other for the sake of the child.

Claudia’s birth into vampirism and Lestat’s acquisition of her through a cash transaction are symptomatic of the way she is objectified throughout the novel. A *Leitmotif* which haunts descriptions of Claudia is that of a doll: Louis often calls her “my doll” or simply, “doll” – ““Doll, doll,’ I called her. That’s what she was. A magic doll” (*Interview*, 113). Not only is the doll a symbol of immutability, but a doll evokes imagery of the passive and objectified female. Christine Brooke-Rose (1981) raises an important issue when she notes that within the scope of literary fantasy, there is a “tendency of the fantastic to use figurative language literally” (Brooke-Rose, 1981:83). Rice’s Claudia seems to be no exception to this trend.

Claudia will never physically grow beyond the five-year-old body that she has when she is turned into a vampire. Just as a doll is fixed, pretty and physically immutable, so is she. Susanne Kappeler (1986) uses the modern-day example of Barbie dolls to show how the creation of these toys is loaded with social significance; similarly this logic may be extended to encompass Claudia’s likeness to a doll, “a rag doll would

symbolize a doll-child but, increasingly realistic reproductions of ‘humans’ were being produced, and the nineteenth century is famous for them”. Kappeler (1986:78) continues with this historical detail and draws parallels with the modern doll:

The demand for verisimilitude in dolls also led to the manufacture of dolls with real rather than artificial hair, to dolls with orifices and with moving eyelids, and finally to the speaking doll. What is more, dolls are no longer children with round lumpy bodies, but they are either realistic babies, often life-size, or else they are ‘young ladies’, full-breasted, well curved and pouting, preferably blond. (Kappeler, 1986:78)

However, perhaps more ominously, a doll can be purchased and it can be used (and or abused) as its owner sees fit. It is loved or hated by whoever owns it. Thus, the purchase of a modern, adult-like doll is, in effect, the purchase of a generic, soulless person created for the purposes of fun and games. It is important to be mindful that a doll is an image of the passive and objectified female, which is what Claudia is to her fathers. We are told that “Lestat played with her as if she were a magnificent doll, and I [Louis] played with her as if she were a magnificent doll” (*Interview*, 110).

Claudia’s ire at being cast in this doll-child mould is the primary motivating factor behind her rising up and trying to kill Lestat, whom she holds most responsible for her position, since it was his blood that turned her into a vampire.

While the inanimate glass eyes of a doll are made to look real with layers of careful colouring and are forever fixed in their expression, Rice tries to show that Claudia is *not* a doll by describing her eyes as “inscrutable liquid” (*Interview*, 108) and “huge [and] luminescent...fixed on [Louis] with trusting curiosity” (*Interview*, 104).

However, images of doll-like inflexibility are carried further when Rice describes the

life Claudia begins to live with Lestat and Louis. Louis first describes her as being “the most beautiful child [he had] ever seen, and now she glowed with the cold fire of a vampire. Her eyes were a woman’s eyes, I could see it already. She would become white and spare like us but not lose her shape” (*Interview*, 104). Louis’s regretful tone and the wisdom of his hindsight are poignant, because it is the loss of Claudia which haunts him so deeply and moves him to tell his story.

We are warned, even at her birth as a vampire, of her entrapment, and are also given clues to her cruelty – Claudia is the “doll from whom someone had cruelly ripped the eyes and replaced them with a demonic fire” (*Interview*, 124); she is also (not unlike a doll herself) “[m]ute and beautiful...play[ing] with dolls, dressing, undressing them by the hour” (*Interview*, 108). Even when Louis chides her for going ahead with her plan to kill Lestat and he cannot bear her presence, he still expresses her reaction in terms of this doll motif and says that “[n]ever had anyone shaped such agitation into the features of a doll” (*Interview*, 154).

Louis tells Daniel that when he first started getting to know Claudia he suspected that she might be mad, but he found instead that “she was simply unlike Lestat and [him] to such an extent that [he] couldn’t comprehend her, for little child she was, but also fierce killer now capable of the ruthless pursuit of blood with all a child’s demanding” (*Interview*, 108). As she grows older in her cherubic body, Keller (2000:19) finds that there are child-like qualities which remain with her too, for example, her “intemperant anger, vindictiveness, pouting, tantrums and sadism”. It is these irrepressible impulses within Claudia’s personality, combined with her spoilt, pampered upbringing and the free rein given to her by her parents that add to her ruthlessness. This idea of a doll as a monster or a child as a monster has been used elsewhere in popular culture, for

example, in the horror movie franchise, Holland's *Child's Play* (1988), commonly known as *Chucky* (after the protagonist), and one of the sequels, Yu's *The Bride of Chucky* (1998), in which a seemingly innocuous doll has the ability to transform itself into a ruthless killer.

Claudia is also deceptively beautiful. Her beauty is the weapon which she uses to seduce her victims. Louis says that "to watch her kill was chilling" (*Interview*, 111). Rice begins to create an image of a manipulative *femme fatale* from the moment we are first introduced to Claudia. Louis describes Claudia on more than one occasion as "sensual" and qualifies this further as she gets older.

Louis's depictions of Claudia as a *femme fatale* come to the fore when he describes her by saying her "doll-like face seemed to possess two totally aware adult eyes, and innocence seemed lost somewhere with neglected toys and the loss of a certain patience. There was something dreadfully sensual about her lounging on the settee in a tiny nightgown of lace and stitched pearls; she became an eerie and powerful seductress..." (*Interview*, 113). The horrifying aspect of this image is contained in the contradiction between the text and subtext here. Claudia is seen as a perverse, oversexed child on one level, but on another level she is an adult woman. There is a sense that Claudia's sexuality is misplaced and somehow depraved. Louis only adds to the reader's sense of the deepest revulsion at the intimations of incest, as well as the socially reprehensible idea of child pornography, when he describes how Claudia and he would find themselves "reel[ing] about the room as if it were the wildest waltz. Father and Daughter. Lover and Lover" (*Interview*, 112). Another example of this blatant flirtation with the taboo is the way Claudia coos "Louis. Lover" (*Interview*, 129).

Keller (2000:19) finds that revulsion at Claudia's sexuality (both hinted at and directly described by Rice) is deeply rooted in conservative perceptions. He finds that Rice readily asserts these conservative values by implication. He also finds that the "portrayal of Claudia also seems to affirm the heterosexist fantasy that a child exposed to a gay or lesbian relationship is likely to experience a premature erotic awakening, usually through molestation and to display a subsequent disposition toward deviant sexuality" (Keller, 2000:19).

It is, however, wise to note that this sexually-laden, *femme fatale* image of Claudia is not an unusual positing of a female vampire character. James B. Twitchell (1981), a critic with an interest in vampire fiction, describes Keats's tendency towards vampiric themes in poems such as *Lamia*, which features a succubus-like female vampire, and "La Belle Dame Sans Merci", in which the description of the central female character has vampiric overtones. As Twitchell (1981:56) explains, these seductive characters are similar in that they echo this very notion, which Rice applies to Claudia too, of "a temptress...with a 'mournful voice'...who 'haunts' the 'meads'...looking for human spoils. She is the literal and figurative 'snake in the grass'" (Twitchell, 1981:56). Karl Siegfried Guthke (1999:188) also notes that in cultural and art history "the ontological status of both, the angel of death and the allegorical *femme fatale*, remains suspended between death and the promise of death". Claudia is a harbinger of death, but she is also beautiful. Her pre-pubescent body is deceptive, because her mind and soul are those of an adult woman.

According to Guthke (1999:188), as artistic plot devices "mankilling water-nymphs, vampires, Undines, Loreleis, Liliths, Sirens, Chimeras, Gorgons, Amazons and Sphinxes" all share a number of tendencies and "there is this fascination...with the

deadly woman” (Guthke 1999:189). He also suggests that this positing of female characters as Death itself is reactionary and is due to the rise of feminism, arguing that there is a sense of the “female Death as ‘a consequence of emancipatory aspirations’ of women” and that this “fear of women [might be] remotely comparable to the diabolization of Eve in the Middle Ages” (Guthke, 1999:189). By reinforcing the equation of females with death, artists position women as being portents of doom for men. The image that is created is one of beautiful women using their sexual wiles and manipulative cunning to dupe men into a false sense of security before maliciously mauling and ultimately killing the innocent victims. These ancient artistic representations encourage men to be on guard against these “inherent”, stereotypical traits in women. Men are encouraged to believe that, through an assertion of their masculine strength through physical, emotional, social or political domination over women, they can acquire positions power and collective safety. Rice uses precisely this stereotype of women to its fullest effect in, *The Queen of the Damned* (1988), the final instalment of the original trilogy of *The Vampire Chronicles*,.

Claudia is not unlike these merciless women, as we can glean from Louis’s explanation of Claudia’s *modus operandi*. She is his polar opposite, as he kills quickly and only when necessary. Claudia makes full use of her manipulative talents to enjoy her hunt and the kill. Louis says:

She would sit alone in the dark square waiting for the kindly gentleman or woman to find her, her eyes more mindless than I had ever seen Lestat’s. Like a child numbed with fright she would whisper her plea for help to her gentle, admiring patrons, and as they carried her out of the square, her arms would fix about their necks, her tongue between her teeth, her vision glazed with consuming hunger. They found death fast

in those years, before she learned to play with them, to lead them to the doll shop or the cafe where they gave her steaming cups of chocolate to ruddy her pale cheeks, cups she pushed away, waiting, waiting, as if feasting on their terrible kindness. (*Interview*, 111)

Claudia's aptitude for manipulation and cruelty as seen in the above extract is symptomatic of her nature. This sadistic feature of her personality is rooted in her insatiable desire for more. Claudia is not satisfied until she gets precisely what she wants. Her appetites for material excess, feeding on blood and cultural pursuits are insatiable. This quality progresses in her as she grows from being a fledgling vampire to being a 65-year-old woman-child.

She also attempts to murder Lestat (*Interview*, 146-150) using guile and apparent sweetness. Using one of the key features of vampiric weakness in the Ricean mythology, which she learns about from Lestat, she feeds him dead, stagnant blood carried in the bodies of plump, little boys, preserved with absinthe and laudanum to make the bodies stay warm. When he is choking and at his most vulnerable, she slits his throat.

While Lestat keeps Louis and Claudia beholden to him by subtly suggesting that he has information regarding their vampirism and the roots and history of their kind, it is Rice who subverts this admirable desire in Claudia for knowledge and answers. Rice subverts this quest, because as an author, she has the power to allow Lestat to give Claudia the simple answers she seeks. However, Rice does not allow for this and instead, Claudia is unfairly characterised as a murderer because her quest for knowledge only leads to frustrations which drive her to murder. By implying that

Lestat has the knowledge which they seek, Rice once again positions the male as the keeper of knowledge and thus as the powerful one. However, ironically, Claudia tries to kill Lestat by using the very knowledge he has given her. In effect, Rice creates the impression that females with knowledge can be dangerous.

The idea of the educated female as self-centred and potentially dangerous in Rice's texts is explored by feminist critic, Ruth Robbins (2000), who (using the woman artist as a representative figure of female intellectual prowess) claims that the archetype of the woman artist "lives for herself....the woman artist [is seen as] a dangerous or monstrous figure in her egotism, and which simultaneously create[s] ordinary women into vicarious and contingent beings who depend on others for their self-definition" (Robbins, 2000:78). This idea of the female as monster is carried even further by Robbins (2000), who argues that "[t]he fear that the female Gothic expresses is the fear of the unruly female body" (Robbins, 2000:83).

With Claudia's fixed shape, she will never attain the physical attributes of a woman. Therefore, in Claudia, Rice has created a biological freak. By implication, Claudia's stunted body suggests deficient or perverted and repressed desires. She has no body with which to act out her anger and provide agency for herself. Instead, Claudia's mind and scant knowledge of vampirism become the tools she uses to try to free herself and Louis from Lestat's tyrannical arrogance. Robbins (2000:83) notes that feminist and literary theorist Ellen Moers "suggests that visualising the self, especially through puberty, makes women particularly aware of their potential for monstrosity. It is this potential that the female Gothic both articulates and displaces: the stories of the female Gothic tell of the fear, but keep it in the world of fiction, where fear is safe". Claudia's rebellion and attempted murder of Lestat might seem momentarily

liberating, but the reality is that Claudia is still assigned her immutable form and can never reach the milestones Moers describes. Rice makes Claudia always resentful of this fact, which, in turn, emphasises Claudia's monstrousness even more.

Both Keller (2000:19) and Robbins (2000:79) note the notion of "arrested development" and find it particularly interesting in Claudia's case. Robbins finds that there is a trend in earlier works by women, such as the novels by Jane Austen, for the heroines to grow to maturity, "whereas the many later writers [examples are taken from Emily Brontë, Doris Lessing and Sylvia Plath] arrest their heroines' development and sink them into madness and/or death" (Robbins, 2000:79). Claudia's actions certainly leave one wondering if she is not, in fact, mad, as Louis suspects at one point. Her eventual death leaves her forever fixed and this lends credence to this idea of the female as never being fully functional or progressing beyond a certain intellectual, emotional (and in this case, physical) state.

Keller (2000), however, finds Claudia's physical stagnation symptomatic of a far more pronounced trend in Rice's work towards normative conformity. He considers the possibility of a queer reading of Rice's work (as outlined in Chapter 1) wherein the queer or marginal male is likened to a female in the societal hierarchy, but Keller (2000) then goes a step further and shows how, despite the nonchalance and apparent ease with which Rice has created this gay family, she actually "exposes a remarkable homophobia" (Keller, 2000:19). Thus the superficial liberality of Rice's text belies her , conservative point of view. Keller (2000:19) also confirms that Claudia is the subject of a "gay adoption" makes her

... the child of two men, and her growth has been stunted. The implications of this portrayal are truly hostile to gay parental

rights, perpetuating the myth that a child within a same-sex relationship cannot mature in a normative fashion. The parenting of Lestat and Louis serves only to transform Claudia into a sadistic monster.

Claudia is seen as a direct result of both her sex and her upbringing. She is a gruesome killer who enjoys toying with her prey's emotions before killing, so it is no wonder that, when she tries to assert some form of agency and kill Lestat, she employs guile with efficacy.

Claudia's plotting is Lestat's undoing, because he never suspects her of being capable of such a betrayal, despite her palpable loathing of him. The scene in which she attempts to murder Lestat (*Interview*, 146-150) is filled with irony. By paying special attention to the tone of Claudia's dialogue in the murder scene, we see how Rice plays up Claudia's sweetness to emphasise that Claudia is an arch-manipulator. When Lestat begins to feel the effects of the poisoned blood, he asks Louis to "put [him] in his coffin" (*Interview*, 150), presumably until the ill effects wear off. Claudia intervenes: "'I'll put you in your coffin, Father,' she said as if she were soothing him. 'I'll put you in your coffin forever.' And then from beneath the pillows of the couch, she drew a kitchen knife" (*Interview*, 150). Throughout this scene, Louis is relegated to the shadows, literally coming "out of the shadows of the hallway" (*Interview*, 149). Louis makes ineffectual attempts to stop her, but Louis is paralysed and under Claudia's control while she cuts Lestat's throat and watches the blood gush out of him.

In a poignant scene in Neil Jordan's (1994) film adaptation of the novel, we see a vitriolic Claudia (Kirsten Dunst) stepping away from the blood as it spurts along the

carpet towards her, desperately trying to prevent her delicate satin slippers from becoming blood-soaked. She asks Louis (Brad Pitt) to lift her to safety. In this scene, Lestat's blood becomes a metaphor for the haunting and the punishment Claudia will suffer in Europe at the hands of the coven led by Armand (Antonio Banderas). The blood she tries to avoid staining her shoes with is a symbol for the blood on her hands.

Claudia kills Lestat because she is frustrated that her questions are never answered by him. She believes him to be directly responsible for her unchanging condition and she believes that he is withholding from Louis and her some vague knowledge he may have. Claudia puts a great deal of thought into how she is going to go about tempting Lestat. Lulling him into a false sense of security only serves to reinforce the idea of her ruthless cunning and guile.

Lestat is positioned as a character of supreme authority and, by extension, is seen as a master and keeper of secrets. Claudia is obsessed with wanting to know how, rather than why, she was created. At first, this seems little more than one of her characteristic demands, but later on we discover that she herself has tried turning two servants, a mother and a child, into vampires, but has only ended up killing them because she did not know how to turn them. Claudia's desire to have a female counterpart, especially an adult female, possibly as a personal doll and avatar for herself, is so overwhelming that it fuels her anger until her own death in the arms of Madeleine. The confrontation with Lestat that ensues from the act of trying to turn the servants into vampires puts Claudia on the defensive – sullen and silent. Rice (*Interview*, 121) describes the confrontation as follows:

‘You could be dead by now if you were mortal!’ Lestat insisted to her, pricked by her silence. He drew his legs around

and set his boots on the floor. ‘Do you hear me? Why do you ask this now? Why do you make such a thing of it? You’ve known all your life you’re a vampire.’ And so he went on in a tirade, saying much the same things he’d said to me many times over: know your nature, kill, be what you are. But all of this seemed strangely beside the point. For Claudia had no qualms about killing. She sat back now and let her head roll slowly to where she could see him across from her. She was studying him again, as if he was a puppet on strings. ‘Did you do it to me? And how?’ she asked, her eyes narrowing. ‘How did you do it?’

‘And why should I tell you? It’s my power.’

‘Why yours alone?’ she asked, her voice icy, her eyes heartless. ‘*How was it done?*’ she demanded suddenly in rage.

This interplay between Lestat and Claudia is symptomatic of their dysfunctionality. Claudia desires more knowledge because she wants to be an agent of power and create her own female vampire, but Rice (like Lestat) denies Claudia this power, because not only is she small and weak physically, but she, like Louis, is a weak vampire.

Rice locates the gift of turning vampires firmly in Lestat, the dominant male character. Lestat as a keeper of this power enforces some measure of population control, but to do so, he also has to enforce control over Claudia and Louis. Both Claudia and Louis are feminized and, in their dysfunctional family, they are under the control of the male aggressor, Lestat. This is clearly seen in Lestat’s threat when he literally overshadows Claudia, plunging her into darkness, drawing

‘very close so that he towered over Claudia, putting her in deep shadow... ‘I can undo what I did. Both to you and to

him,' he said to her, his finger pointing at [Louis] across the room. 'Be glad I made you what you are', he sneered. 'Or I'll break you in a thousand pieces!' (*Interview*, 121)

Keller (2000:18) finds this pattern of abuse difficult to ignore and finds that Rice's

vampire family begins to resemble the abusive household where the mother and the children live in fear of the adult male who refuses to allow them to leave. The typical story has the persecuted members of the household, after long suffering, finally murder the abusive member. Lestat assumes the role of the arrogant, violent father who is indifferent to the suffering of his family.

Although we see Claudia kill Lestat, Rice subverts this triumph, turning it into tragedy. In the end, it is Claudia who is punished for killing Lestat, and it is Lestat who survives to be the protagonist of the trilogy and its successors.

Once Claudia has killed Lestat, she hopes to unravel the secrets of vampirism, but she does not. She finds no clues in the belongings or documents in which she thought she might find information. One would expect her to feel regret at having killed Lestat to no purpose, but she does not. Instead, she coerces Louis into travelling with her to Europe in order to seek answers in the Old World.

The irony of this situation is emphasised when Lestat unravels his own tale in *The Vampire Lestat* (1985) and we see how he too, is cast aside as a fledgling vampire with nothing but the most rudimentary of rules to guide him. His mad maker, Magnus, flings himself into the flames of a raging fire and immolates himself so as to be finally rid of the curse of immortality. The lonely Lestat, lusting after knowledge about

vampirism, also goes in search of the origins of his species. He too, finds no real answers. Rice presents vampirism – and perhaps this is her strength, as she indicates on her website (see Chapter 1) – as a symptom of the quest for selfhood, and the right to understand one’s origins and purpose and place in the world. However, when Rice repeats the plot device of the vampire-centric tale to show Lestat’s perspective, we see how much he does actually know, and how little it is relevant to Claudia and Louis, since there is nothing that vampires can change about their situation.

Increasingly, Claudia comes to be seen as a demanding, manipulative, yet tragic creature whose search for the origins of vampirism only serve her own desire for a mother or female figure through which to live out her desires, since she is trapped within a body her mind no longer matches. Lestat, on the other hand, sees himself as her protector. Following *Interview with the Vampire*, *The Vampire Chronicles* continue to be presented mainly from his perspective and thus the trilogy entrenches Lestat’s side of the story as the dominant truth. Because of Lestat’s version of events becoming the dominant truth, we start seeing Lestat’s withholding of information from Claudia as protecting her from knowing the emptiness of nothingness (because Lestat has already learned that there are no answers to any of the questions they seek).

Louis is forever left mourning the dead Claudia and is relegated to the shadows, becoming weak and muted. The only other time Louis features in *The Vampire Chronicles* as a character with any form of agency is when *The Mayfair Witches*, Rice’s (1990-1994) parallel series to *The Vampire Chronicles*, merges with *The Vampire Chronicles* in a book entitled *Merrick* ([2000] 2004). In this novel, Louis enlists the services and help of the eponymous protagonist Merrick, who belongs to the powerful and rich and supernaturally gifted Mayfair family. Louis hopes that

Merrick can help him to summon the spirit of Claudia to ask her whether she has found peace or not.

Thus, not only is Louis still moping, forlorn and grieving over two centuries later, but he is so weak as a vampire that his strength as an immortal is only visible in relation to powerless mortals. Rice likens his character closely to that of a depressed, grief-stricken mother (possibly not unlike herself at the time of writing). Pete Remington (2006) is prompted to note that “Rice’s vampire world exhibits a structure resembling both the extrinsic diagnosis and intrinsic experience of the depressive state and this structuration contributes substantially to the readings available to a significant segment of her readership” (Remington, 2006:228). Louis’s existence is tainted by a sense of loss; Remington (2006:231) also alerts us to the fact that Louis’s “principal loss is that of his humanity”. Thus Louis’s depressive tendencies are tied to his very vampirism. He cannot be both vampire and humane by his own mortal standards, yet he continues to try to achieve this.

Louis’s depression is linked to his feelings of guilt and emotional neediness. His persistence in clinging to Claudia also allows her to manipulate him easily. Outbursts of his neediness are found when he tries to subdue her and to bring her to calmness, Louis says things such as “I need you...I cannot bear to lose you. You’re the only companion I have in immortality” (*Interview*, 125). What we see here is Louis subduing Claudia with emotional platitudes. There is a sense of Louis trying to use emotional malleability in his attempts to pacify Claudia in her lust for knowledge. Louis is using emotion to override Claudia’s desire for reason. There is a poignant case for a feminist reading here because Rice is certainly subscribing to the

stereotypical idea that females do not need to know and that females are inherently emotional and illogical.

Both Elena Gianini Belotti (1976), whose research deals with early childhood developmental psychologies, and Simone de Beauvoir (1972) challenge this stereotype and present it as symptomatic of a social conditioning in which the intelligence of girls is played down because intelligence allegedly does not align with being feminine. Rather intelligence is associated with power (a male right), whereas femininity is classified as being docile, passive and malleable; in so doing, therefore, the “superiority of female intuition is exalted. For it suits the one who dominates to have his own desires understood even before they have been formulated – and satisfied by a person who has been formed to consider others’ needs as more important than her own when they run counter to her own” (Belotti, 1976:150-151). Louis makes his need for companionship the focus of the discussion rather than Claudia’s need for answers. He thus uses guilt to lull her into good, albeit sullen, behaviour for a few more days. And Scheherazade-like, Louis extends the prelude to her impending breakdown when she finds out the full story of her birth.

Claudia’s hold over Louis extends beyond her death. She is killed because she desires to know more. Here Rice creates an image of knowledge being dangerous to women. Not only does Claudia use her manipulative wiles to kill Lestat, but she also manages to get Louis to take her on a fool’s errand in search of older, wiser vampires, because she thinks that surely she and Louis ““are not the only vampires on earth!”” (*Interview*, 125).

The search for answers leads Claudia to books, and she is, by all accounts, widely read and well educated. Her voracious appetite for books is evident after her argument with Lestat over wanting to know how vampires are made. When Claudia gets no answers from Lestat, we find that “[d]ays passed and she asked no questions, though now she was deep into books of the occult, of witches and witchcraft, and of vampires. This was mostly fancy, you understand. Myth, tales, sometimes mere romantic horror tales. But she read it all. Till dawn she read, so that [Louis] had to go and collect her and bring her to bed” (*Interview*, 121-122). The “myth and tales” to which Rice refers merely serve to entrench the Ricean vampires as real to the reader. Perhaps it is this fanatical devotion to searching for knowledge and looking for answers first from within the walls of their own lavish home where “[b]ooks filled [the] flat from floor to ceiling in row after row of gleaming leather volumes” (*Interview*, 115), which eventually brings out the full extent of Claudia’s rage when she discovers the truth of her birth into vampirism. This is because the answer is quite literally within her own home, since both Lestat and Louis are equally responsible (even though Louis is far less blameworthy for her condition than Lestat).

Rice elevates Claudia by devoting significant portions of the text to extolling her obvious intelligence. Claudia never lacks intellectual freedom, as she is surrounded by wealth and is given free reign with regard to intellectual pursuits, in obvious contrast to what would be expected of women at the time (the eighteenth century).

She is in many ways spoiled and pampered. When she is newly turned, “Lestat hired a painter to make the walls of her room a magical forest of unicorns and golden birds and laden fruit trees over sparkling streams” (*Interview*, 110). Claudia lacks for nothing material in her life. According to Louis:

An endless stream train of dressmakers and shoemakers and tailors came to our flat to outfit Claudia in the best of children's fashions, so that she was always a vision, not just of her child beauty, with her curling lashes and her glorious yellow hair, but of the taste of finely trimmed bonnets and tiny lace gloves, flaring velvet coats and capes, and sheer white puffed-sleeve gowns with blue sashes. (*Interview*, 110)

Her luxurious lifestyle is firmly taken care of by Lestat and, with his lack of resistance to “anything which smack[s] of style and excess” (*Interview*, 110), he instils a deep and abiding appreciation for cultural activities in Claudia. They have a “box at the new French Opera House or the Théâtre d’Orléans, to which [they go] as often as possible” (*Interview*, 110).

Lestat teaches Claudia to hunt, while Louis, in his role as caregiver, provides Claudia with existential strategies to groom her for eternity. It is Louis who takes time to educate Claudia, to show her the beauty in the world and to teach her to appreciate cultural pursuits such as reading, poetry and music (*Interview*, 111). Soon Louis finds that he can read to her for hours and she responds, wanting him to read more “like a doll coming to life” (*Interview*, 111). This creates the impression that, without Louis's instruction, Claudia is merely a passive absorber. However, we soon find that she grows beyond this intellectual passivity while she is still deceptively locked inside the shape of that “chubby, round-fingered child” (*Interview*, 111). Louis reports:

I would find her tucked in the arm of my chair reading the work of Aristotle or Boethius or a new novel just come over the Atlantic. Or pecking out the music of Mozart we had only just heard the night before with an infallible ear and a concentration that made her ghostly as she sat there hour after

hour discovering the music – the melody, then the bass and finally bringing it all together. Claudia was a mystery. (*Interview*, 111)

There are also indications that it is “not possible to know what she knew or did not know” (*Interview*, 111). Claudia’s intelligence, material wealth and manipulative wiles give her a freedom which strangles her. All the things which she learns from books will always remain theoretical to her, because she cannot grow in order to act on her knowledge. Instead, she is bound by the social conventions which govern both women and children. Thus, Rice simultaneously frees and imprisons Claudia, and never allows her character or her appearance to develop to fruition.

Another important aspect regarding Claudia’s character (especially in terms of critical feminist studies) is that she is denied a voice in Louis’s tale, despite having the profoundest effect on his life. Her entire lifespan is mediated through his report, and not hers. Therefore most of her frustrations, anger and bitterness are exposed by Louis with the benefit of hindsight.

When Claudia starts realising the direness of her situation and starts rebelling against Lestat, whom she blames for her stunted stature, Lestat calls her spoilt and chastises her with painful verbal taunts, as he openly declares: ““You irritate me. Your very presence irritates me...I’ve met someone who would make a better vampire than you do.... You’re spoilt because you’re an only child.... You need a brother. Or rather, I need a brother. I get weary of you both. Greedy, brooding vampires that haunt our own lives. I dislike it!”” (*Interview*, 145). Not only does Lestat threaten Claudia’s position as the centre of attention in the household, but he also threatens her with the

possibility of the introduction of the young musician he has been seeing as a substitute for Claudia. The musician is male and much older than Claudia and would thus be more powerful. Lestat sets the scene for sibling rivalry even before he can actually turn the boy.

Belotti (1976) suggests that the type of behaviour patterns Claudia exhibits are typical symptoms of the psychological strangulation of powerful energies which are not allowed to be freely expressed by girls. This results in girls not being intellectually stimulated enough to achieve something tangible (Belotti, 1976:28). Whereas boys are given the freedom and leeway to become whoever they want to be, girls are forced into socially acceptable moulds which hamper their progress. Belotti (1976) argues that the following then occurs:

The girl whose development has been inhibited is obliged to resort to some sort of self-defence mechanism if she is not to succumb, especially in cases where her drives were particularly strong and a great deal of intervention was needed to repress them. Such a girl exhibits character traits which are not...typical of the female sex but which are simply produced by the psychological castration which she has been forced to undergo. Little girls who seem discontented, spoilt, whining, lazy, self-destructive, bored, inert, apathetic or rebellious against everything and everyone without reason, and unsure of what results they want to achieve by this behaviour are the products of this psychological castration. They are impotent beings who are acutely conscious of their condition and fight against it.... They are locked in a state of perpetual ambivalence towards themselves and others. (Belotti, 1976:29)

Claudia displays all these symptoms and behaves in exactly the way Belotti (1976) outlines. The expression of every single unacceptable impulse that Claudia feels is curtailed, including her growth, supernatural powers and sexual maturity. Despite her obvious intellectual prowess and musical and artistic talent, she is locked in a body which does not match her mind. This frustration eventually leads her to bitterly tell Louis that she is his “vampire self” more than he is and her “sleep of sixty-five years has ended” (*Interview*, 130). She then harnesses all the power that she has in order to kill Lestat. She has no physical strength, so she weakens him with poison and uses her mind to think of ways to tempt him. She is an impotent vampire with the added impediment of being trapped in a child’s frail body. Claudia is, therefore, even more of an outcast than the socially and sexually liminal Louis.

Despite all the references to Claudia’s “dark, demonic intelligence” (*Interview*, 199), she is still without agency, even in simple aspects of her life. For example, when Louis wishes to dress her or brush her hair “out of old habit, aware of her smiling and watching [him] with the thin veil of boredom over her expression” (*Interview*, 113), her response is neutral: ““Do as you like,’ she breathed into my ear as I bent down to fasten her pearl buttons” (*Interview*, 113). When Claudia suggests that she wants her own coffin to sleep in, Louis feels wounded and somewhat abandoned. Even though Claudia does have a coffin of her own, she still usually comes to share his coffin for a little while before they rise. Claudia’s own sense of self is thus deeply entwined with what Louis feels and thinks. Claudia’s child-body influences her choices at an emotional level, despite her being cognitively advanced.

It is at this point, after much questioning, cross-examining and rebellion on Claudia’s part, that Louis finally tells Claudia the truth about her birth. He admits that it was he

who fed on her half-dead, diseased body initially, desperate to quell his hunger, and that it was Lestat who later found her, bought her, and imbued her with his blood and gave her the gift of vampiracy. Claudia's horror at the truth is understandable.

Perhaps she resigns herself to never progressing to other stages of development, but on a purely intellectual level she has groomed her mind to razor sharpness and, in this way, maintains some kind of equilibrium with Lestat and Louis. Once she finds out that she was at one point nothing more than Louis's experimental attempt to take a human life, she responds with the only truly fitting reaction to this painful betrayal as "her face contorted, her head turning as if she wouldn't give [Louis] a direct glance, as if she must deflect an overpowering feeling of revulsion. 'You killed me,' she whispered, 'You took my life!'" (*Interview*, 127). Louis denies nothing and simply says "'I took your life,' ... '[Lestat] gave it back to you'" (*Interview*, 128). Not surprisingly, Claudia's retort is: "'And here it is,' she said under her breath, 'And I hate you both!'" (*Interview*, 128).

The truth surrounding Claudia's birth is a blow to her because she loathes Lestat, who parades and flaunts his power over her, as much as she loves Louis, who is meek and reticent and resigned to walking in Lestat's shadow. Now the betrayal of being nothing more than Louis's prey is painful to her. However, she soon forgives Louis and vows to take her revenge on Lestat, who, she believes, has entrapped them both. Claudia finally realises that she can never be their equal, and will always be subordinate to them, because of her gender, her lack of what Rice calls preternatural powers, and her diminutive frame. In Claudia, Rice gives shape to the feminist view that "central to the universal inferior status of women is the fact that everywhere men have 'authority' over women. This means that while it is certainly the case that in

many societies women have a great deal of influence and power, such power is never culturally legitimated” (Nicholson, 1986:73). The autonomy of selfhood is firmly lodged with Lestat and Louis; Claudia has no agency, even over her own birth into vampirism, as she is simply picked by chance.

Claudia and Louis secretly begin plotting an escape to Europe; however, they are aware that Lestat will not simply let them go, so they take pains to disguise their trip as a holiday. To do so, Louis falls back on his collateral with Lestat – his personal wealth – and readily signs over “rents from several shops, town houses and a small construction company operating in the Fauberg Marigny...[he] wanted to buy [their] freedom: to convince Lestat...that he would remain living in the style to which he was accustomed; he would have his own money and need come to [Louis] for nothing” (*Interview*, 131-132). Louis follows this plan of action so as not to arouse any suspicion in Lestat that they are never coming back.

Meanwhile, Claudia’s need for knowledge gives rise to more frequent outbursts, eventually inducing the first sign of fear and weakness in the powerful hedonist, Lestat. Claudia challenges Lestat regarding the origins of vampirism. An argument ensues:

‘Do you want me to end it? I can give you death more easily than I gave you life!’ He turned to me.... ‘Do you want death?’

‘Consciousness is not death,’ she whispered.

‘Answer me! Do you want death!’

‘And you give all these things. They proceed from you. Life and death,’ she whispered, mocking him.

‘I have,’ he said. ‘I do.’

‘You know nothing,’ she said to him gravely, her voice so low that the slightest noise from the street interrupted it, might carry her words away, so that I found myself straining to hear her against myself as I lay with my head back against the chair. ‘And I suppose the vampire who made you knew nothing, and the vampire who made that vampire knew nothing, and the vampire before him knew nothing, and so it goes back and back, nothing proceeding from nothing until there is nothing! And we must live with the knowledge that there is no knowledge.’

‘Yes!’ he cried out suddenly, his hands out, his voice tinged with something other than anger....And then I sensed it. He was afraid. Lestat was afraid. (*Interview*, 132-133)

This argument is pregnant with meaning. Claudia suspects that Lestat is lying to her, but he is not. The Ricean mythology later confirms this, as we find out how Lestat himself has gone searching for meaning, only to find that immortality is not for the weak and is both a gift and a curse. However, Claudia is so obsessed with the idea of finding something else and so convinced that Lestat is using his position of power to undermine her search and keep her beholden to him that she eventually kills him.

Claudia’s extreme nature does not allow her to believe that Lestat is truthful; her internalised oppression instils some measure of paranoia in her because she constantly believes she is being lied to or that truth is being withheld from her because she is small and weak. Unfortunately, Louis believes her talk of killing Lestat is mere talk and he tries to soothe her, citing Lestat’s superior power. Louis never realises just how serious Claudia is about exacting her revenge on Lestat, whom she believes to be holding both Louis and herself hostage to his whims.

According to Eichler (1980:60), Claudia takes it upon herself to disengage from her “internalised double standard” in order to free Louis and herself and embrace the feminist process of “men’s liberation” (Eichler, 1980:61). Sawyer (1976:287) discusses this process of “men’s liberation” as one which essentially

...calls for men to free themselves of the sex role stereotypes that limit their ability to be human. Sex role stereotypes say that men should be dominant; achieving and enacting a dominant role in relations with others is often taken as an indicator of success. ‘Success’, for a man, often involves influence over the lives of other persons.

Louis’s inherent humanity is incongruent with his vampiric nature. He does not follow the pattern of traditional gender roles as Lestat does, and he is not as dominant and therefore not as conventionally male as Lestat is. Therefore, when Claudia takes a stand and tries to kill Lestat, she is not embodying any powerful feminist agenda endorsed by Rice. All Claudia is doing is conforming to the stereotype of the manipulative, shrewd, female killer discussed earlier. Due to the liminal functioning of Louis’s oscillating gender between the Feminine (in relation to Lestat and other male characters) and Masculine (in relation to Claudia and other female characters), he is not a man who needs to be freed or liberated as Eichler (1980) and Sawyer (1976) suggest, because he does not function within the same clearly delineated gender brackets into which Lestat and Claudia fall.

While Claudia temporarily succeeds in allowing them both to escape from Lestat by destroying Lestat’s domination over them while they go to Europe, Rice never allows her to be free of the consequences of her actions. Claudia’s punishment for these

actions is in line with Nicholson's (1986:73) view that the "power women possess tends to be viewed as manipulative, disruptive, illegitimate or unimportant".

In addition, Lestat's domination over Louis and Claudia continues after his apparent death because of the horror and guilt Louis feels. The fact that Rice allows Lestat to survive the attack also renders Claudia's supposed power null and void. Louis does not feel relief, but only revulsion, when Claudia eventually does murder Lestat. The murder does not net Claudia the desired results either: when Claudia goes through Lestat's belongings, she finds not even "a hint of where he came from, who made him....Not a scrap" (*Interview*, 154). Louis, who realises that perhaps Lestat has been truthful to them all along, is so disgusted with Claudia that he does not want her near him – he retreats as Claudia, perhaps also out of guilt, reaffirms her position and says: "He deserved to die!" (*Interview*, 154). Louis responds to her curtly, saying: "Then we deserve to die. The same way. Every night of our lives....Go away from me" (*Interview*, 154).

An interesting point is that Claudia's predatory nature, as previously noted, feeds on excess. Thus, despite her having been a vampire for 65 years, Louis still reviles her saying: "I'll care for you because you can't care for yourself. But I don't want you near me. Sleep in that box you bought for yourself. Don't come near me" (*Interview*, 154). The old bones of affection, which Louis, like a dog owner, throws to Claudia here are once more indicative of her being belittled. As a vampire, especially a vampire within the Ricean mythology, she has no needs besides that for blood and that hunger too will subside with age. Claudia has already proven herself to be a manipulative hunter who takes pleasure in emotionally toying with her prey before

she feasts. There is no care which Louis can provide besides the trappings of the wealth to which they are accustomed. Had Louis abandoned Claudia, she could theoretically have survived, albeit under the conditions that have become a cliché in vampire tales – within an old grave or crypt or deep underground. Louis still treats her like a child, perhaps to punish her or to wound her emotionally for having shown a very adult determination in plotting, planning and executing Lestat's murder. Claudia has proven herself resourceful enough to survive, but Rice still needs to have a figure of male authority to put her in her place, as though she would simply turn into a feral, Mowgli-syndrome monster (Doniger O' Flaherty, 1995) without the bourgeois lifestyle he provides. Rice panders to the notion that to the spoiled, rich child the threat of material poverty alone is enough to indicate emotional detachment on Louis's (the parent's) part.

Claudia realises that she has angered and hurt Louis by her actions. She also realises that she faces the possibility that he is angered enough to abandon her. Claudia tries explaining herself and her actions and attempts to make Louis aware that he had been warned that she was going to carry out her threats. Claudia claims that her actions were for them both, to enable them to be free (*Interview*, 154). Later, Claudia goes on to try to justify her position on killing Lestat:

‘We'll know these answers when we find those who can tell us, those who've possessed knowledge for centuries, for however long creatures such as ourselves have walked the earth. That knowledge was our birthright, and he deprived us. He earned his death.’ (*Interview*, 180)

Louis looks at her and notes: “Never had anyone shaped such agitation into the features of a doll.... I couldn't stand the sight of her. Her beauty, her seeming

innocence, and this terrible agitation” (*Interview*, 154). So Louis withdraws from her presence. As he leaves, Claudia begins to cry. Louis has never seen or heard her cry since the first time when he met her as a mortal child, before he fed off her. Claudia’s carefully chosen words bring Louis back to her. She effectively manipulates his feelings and tugs at his heartstrings with her pleas:

‘Louis...if I lose you I have nothing....I would undo it to have you back. I can’t undo what I’ve done....I can’t live without you....I would rather die than live without you. I would die the same way he died. I can’t bear you to look at me the way you did. I cannot bear it if you do not love me!’ (*Interview*, 155).

Not surprisingly, Louis relents, and they begin their sojourn in Europe. So Claudia gets her desire through displays of feminine weakness rather than independent strength.

Once she has her way, Claudia immediately takes control over the logistics of their trip. She declares that they should begin their search in Eastern Europe. She prepares her research material carefully. It consists of books and “the few select records of vampire lore which she’d taken to be her guides. They included no wild romances from England, no stories of Edgar Allen Poe, no fancy. Only those few accounts of vampires in eastern Europe, which had become for her a sort of Bible” (*Interview*, 180).

Rice begins the process of Othering Eastern Europe when Louis describes the trip as one “that would take [them] away from the glittering capitals of Europe towards the Black Sea, where we would dock at Varna and begin that search in the rural countryside of the Carpathians” (*Interview*, 180). In this description, Rice juxtaposes

the glamour of Western Europe to Eastern Europe's lack of sophistication. This is once again emblematic of a conservative occidental subtext, because Western Europe has long maintained a sense of cultural superiority over Eastern Europe. Western Europe has for centuries positioned itself as central to modernity, culture, science and the Arts, whereas Eastern Europe has been branded as bleak and poor. Also, given the political climate of the 1970s when *Interview with the Vampire* was written, Eastern Europe was the enemy in terms of America's cultural and political Cold War rhetoric. Although, once having crossed the Carpathians, one is still in Europe, but Rice creates a semantic gulf between Western and Eastern Europe by distinguishing them in such detail as to totally separate East from West totally. It is, indeed, in this grimly Othered eastern half of Europe that Louis and Claudia encounter all the old superstitions, myths and legends of garlic, crucifixes, stakes and holy water. In this way, Rice gives a nod in the direction of her creative heritage and acknowledges the impact of older myths. Perhaps the most famous literary figure from the other side of the Carpathians is Stoker's Count Dracula, who is from Transylvania.

Louis emphasises the Othering of Eastern Europe, calling this a "strange country. Lonely, dark as rural country is always dark....And the people themselves were no relief. We were naked and lost in their tiny hamlets and conscious always that amongst them we were in grave danger" (*Interview*, 184). As vampires, Louis and Claudia suddenly find themselves the physical embodiment of myths the people are terrified of, but their immersion in conventional culture and lifestyles, and their immunity within the Ricean mythology from all the superstitious charms presented in other vampire mythologies and traditions still gives them a measure of freedom. This is because the local legends do not account for vampires as well-dressed, and wealthy

people who do not conform to the stereotypical features and characteristics of the undead.

Claudia and Louis soon find evidence to support the idea that vampirism is rife in the area and go in search of the vampires of Eastern Europe. In the scene where they encounter the vampire, they rush in the general direction of the ruins where a vampire who terrorises the area is believed to stay. Louis and Claudia go out into the night against the advice of the locals and try to find the vampire. Claudia leads the way, as Louis reports:

She was in a frenzy. If she could have driven the horses herself, she would have taken the reins. Again and again she urged me to use the whip. She struck savagely at a few low branches that dipped suddenly into the lamps before our faces; and the arm that clung to my waist on the rocking bench was firm as iron. (*Interview*, 200)

Once they reach the ruins, Louis cautions Claudia about the palpable danger he can feel in the air. Claudia responds by saying that she wishes she had his size and his courage because Louis is so fearful (*Interview*, 201). Claudia leaves the carriage and proceeds into the ruins on her own, whispering to Louis: “Be *en garde*” (*Interview*, 202). The fact that Claudia is given such a strong role in this scene and leads the way seems, superficially, to show that she is courageous and brave in the face of the obvious atmosphere of danger Rice tries to create. On one level, it is her will and desire to know more about vampirism which propels her. But, from the text, one can see that it is also illogical and reckless on her part to venture into unknown danger. At another level, within the muted spaces of the subtextual domain, we see Louis’s character showing logical caution, given their circumstances. Rice thus gives Claudia

power in the text, but immediately subverts this power in the subtext by placing it in opposition to Louis's "wise" caution.

Claudia and Louis encounter the heaving, hulking vampire and a scuffle ensues. The description of this vampire is so disgusting and sad that we immediately identify Rice's elegant vampires as the vampires we would prefer to recognise as superior and real. Louis is put in a stranglehold and tries to free himself:

...grabbing at [the vampire's] head, clutching a mass of tangled filth that was his hair. At once the wet, rotting fabric of his coat ripped in my grasp, but the arm that held me back was like iron; and, as [he] struggled to pull the head backwards, the fangs touched the flesh of my throat. Claudia screamed behind him. (*Interview*, 206)

Special notice should be taken of how Rice uses the generic "the" and neuter "it", rather than pronouns such as "he" or "she" to describe the Eastern European vampire, as though to make this vampire an object rather than a being worthy of personal attention. The vampire is wounded as "[s]omething hit[s] his head hard" (*Interview*, 206), it is slightly unclear whether Claudia throws rocks at him from behind or whether the rambling ruins are crumbling around him as he and Louis clash. Perhaps this is symbolic of the Old World crushing the old mythology which is displaced by the arrival of these new, Ricean vampires.

Eventually we are offered a full description of the traditional vampire: "...two huge eyes bulged from naked sockets and two small, hideous holes made up his nose; only a putrid, leathery flesh enclosed his skull, and the rank, rotting rags that covered his frame were thick with earth and slime and blood. [Louis] was battling a mindless,

animated corpse. But no more” (*Interview*, 206-207). The vampire dies from his injuries and Claudia disperses what is left of his bleeding, crushed cranium. Louis then tells us that they have “met the European vampire, the creature of the Old World. He [is] dead” (*Interview*, 207).

It is symbolic here that the destruction of the Old World vampire positions Rice’s New World vampires as the new foci of legend. Ricean mythology is now *the* myth. The old stories, legends and superstitions of European lore are now dead because the terror of the zombie-vampire has ended. Therefore, within the tradition of the Fantastic, we accept Rice’s version as the norm. Louis and Claudia accept their place as the “real” vampires, since, to the reader, the old Transylvanian legends are dead. However, once there is an acceptance of the cosmology of the Ricean mythology, there is also an acceptance of the truth of her message(s). Rice has, at this crucial point within the story, firmly entrenched her vampires’ superiority. Ricean mythology is now the *real* truth.

Once Louis and Claudia are back in France, they once more delight themselves with typical Parisian indulgences. Their hotel is the very essence of luxury. In Paris, there is a tremendous shift in Claudia, as if she wishes to assert herself. She completely detaches herself from all vestiges and shackles of childhood. She takes complete advantage of the Parisian fashions. As she forges a new identity, Louis reminisces:

Something was collecting in Claudia, revealing itself slowly to the most unwilling witness in the world. She had a new passion for rings and bracelets children did not wear. Her jaunty, straight-backed walk was not a child’s, and often she entered small boutiques ahead of me and pointed a commanding finger at the perfume or gloves she would then

pay for herself. I was never far away, and always uncomfortable – not because I feared anything in this vast city, but because I feared her. She'd always been the 'lost child' to her victims, the 'orphan', and now it seemed she would be something else, something wicked and shocking to the passers-by who succumbed to her. (*Interview*, 223)

Rice once more exploits the previous revulsion felt by the audience for Claudia's *femme fatale* image. By making Claudia more womanly and Louis more afraid of the consequences of her tendency to cruelty, Rice is cementing the image of a dangerous woman. Also, Rice has portrayed Claudia constantly as a child-like woman; now the focus shifts and Claudia becomes a woman-like child. Louis later feels "a palpable relief to see the childish dress, those ribbons, and something wonderfully comforting in her arms, a small china doll" (*Interview*, 224). Rice creates a flux between the text and subtext once more by using these alternating images of Claudia as woman and Claudia as child. This flux is used to great effect to compound the effect of Claudia's rebellion against her appearance and her reality. Louis's sadness and happiness seem inextricably linked to Claudia and her fluctuation between adulthood and childhood. In many ways, she is emotionally stronger than he and, perhaps, when she is more childlike, he feels more in control of her and more authoritative, whereas when she is in adult mode, he is merely the victim of her whims.

The china doll which Claudia brings home with her marks the beginning of the end. It is a doll made by a woman named Madeleine, whom Claudia introduces as a woman who "makes baby dolls, all the same, baby dolls, a shop of baby dolls, until [Claudia] said to her, 'I want a lady doll'" (*Interview*, 224). Claudia's full anger at her situation comes to the fore when Louis innocently replies to her question about why Madeleine

made the doll. Louis says Madeleine did so “[b]ecause you are a beautiful child and she wanted to make you happy” (*Interview*, 224). Claudia laughs soundlessly and comments as follows: “‘A beautiful child,... Is that still what you think I am?’ And her face went dark as again she played with the doll, her fingers pushing the tiny crocheted neckline down toward the china breasts. ‘Yes, I resemble her baby dolls, I am her baby dolls...’” (*Interview*, 224).

Louis notices Claudia surreptitiously crushing the doll in her hands. Suddenly, the full pyroclastic fury of Claudia’s spills forth as she begins to unravel:

‘Why do you look away, why don’t you look at me?’ she asked....But then she laughed softly, a woman’s laugh, and said, ‘Did you think I’d be your daughter forever? Are you the father of fools, the fool of fathers?’

‘Your tone is unkind with me,’ I answered.

‘Hmmm...unkind.’....

‘And what do you think they think of you,’ I asked as gently as I could, ‘out there?’ I gestured to the open window.

‘Many things.’ She smiled. ‘Many things. Men are marvellous at explanations. Have you seen the “little people” in the parks, the circuses, the freaks that men pay money to laugh at?’

I was a sorcerer’s apprentice only!...I wanted to touch her, stroke her hair, but I sat there afraid of her, her anger like a match about to kindle.

Again she smiled, and then drew my hand into her lap and covered it as best she could with her own. ‘Apprentice, yes,’ she laughed. ‘But tell me one thing, one thing from that lofty height. What was it like...making love?’ (*Interview*, 225)

Louis cannot answer her in the awkwardness of the moment. He mumbles a vague description of it being the “pale shadow of killing” (*Interview*, 226). However, in this scene, Louis illuminates the issues which wound Claudia about her life. She always has to be a child or is forced to be a spectacle, an object of derision and ridicule when she appears as an adult. Louis feels saddened by the realisation that he cannot make her happy. This realisation leads to a sense of dispossession, which at a subtextual level creates the effect that he, as a male in relation to Claudia, should be or is the agent of her happiness. There is thus a subtextual reinforcement of the idea that perhaps Claudia can never be happy because she can never be the mediator of her own happiness.

Louis encounters a vampire when he goes for a walk to escape the heat of Claudia’s temper. After the famous mime scene wherein the vampire mimics Louis’s every move, much to Louis’s annoyance, the vampire hands him a card signed by Armand inviting Louis and Claudia to the Théâtre des Vampires. The show which is put on is a powerful literary device employed by Rice wherein the very notion of reality is questioned. A young woman is brought on stage where she is stripped naked as she pleads for her life, while Armand’s coven of vampires, who don the masks of actors, terrorize her and feed upon her. A narrator provides a contextual thread by philosophically discussing the nature of death and the immediacy and insecurity with which we live perpetually in death’s shadow. The audience is unaware of the reality of the situation or of the fact that the fear the woman displays is not stagecraft. The audience is also not aware of the fact that the vampires who feed on the girl are real. The terror which stirs in the woman as she implores the audience to help her is part of

the “production”; this is a type of “reality theatre” and the morbid, voyeuristic desires of the audience are fulfilled.

Rice can be applauded for bringing the Gothic tradition to life with this plot device. Perhaps, more poignantly, it is worth noticing the child-like images used to describe the woman on stage. She is “very like a child, though clearly a full-grown woman” (*Interview*, 237); this woman-like child is quite a contrast to Claudia, the child-like woman. Here Claudia sees herself on the stage, as both prey and an object for the entertainment of an audience. The narrator, who plays the figure of Death, speaks of the victim’s next of kin and asks if she could find anyone to take her place, saying: ““Death waits for you everywhere”” (*Interview*, 240) – he comments on the transience of life and death. The woman is presented as being “baffled, outsmarted, helpless...With a bowed head she bore the whole responsibility for defending life and it was unfair, monstrously unfair that she should have to pit logic against his for what was obvious and sacred and beautifully embodied in her” (*Interview*, 240). This further compounds the feminine stereotype; not only is the victim viewed in child-like terms, not only is she prey and an object of entertainment, but she is also unable to employ logic and rhetoric because she has beauty. Therefore, within the spaces of the subtext, Rice reinforces this stereotype as something sad, but real.

Rice offsets the dichotomy between what is real and unreal by having her new vampires (Armand’s coven) on stage, but allowing the pamphlets and advertising material outside the theatre to display “the crinkling posters of penny-dreadful vampires with their outstretched arms and cloaks resembling bat wings ready to close on the naked shoulders of a mortal victim” (*Interview*, 233).

Claudia's excitement mounts as she believes she will soon find the answers she seeks.

After the show, Louis and Claudia are led into the deep catacombs where the vampires live and where frightening murals are painted on all the walls, telling the story of the damned. Rice displays her knowledge of High Art as she describes the underground vault as a

...world of frescoes and murals...and gradually the theme and content... became clear. It was the terrible 'Triumph of Death' by Brueghel, painted on such a massive scale that all the multitude of ghastly figures towered above us in the gloom.... 'The Fall of Angels' slowly materializing with the damned being driven from the celestial heights into a lurid chaos of feasting monsters....And horrors rose all around [them]: the dumbly passive and degraded damned of Bosch, the bloated confined corpses of Traini, the monstrous horsemen of Dürer, and blown out of all endurable scale....as if this were a cathedral of death itself. (*Interview*, 246-247)

The copies of High Gothic art which decorate the wall of this crypt demonstrates a stylised acceptance of a shared artistic heritage. The dark religious imagery in the artworks serves to reinforce the idea that there is no meaning to life and that vampires are inherently the spawn of the accursed and damned. The cavernous surroundings add to the metaphor of a pit of hell or grave and also speak of the idea of reaching the very depths of despair and darkness.

The conversation between Armand and Louis which follows is interesting. Louis acknowledges Armand as the leader of the coven and the conversation revolves around religious rhetoric. Louis's questions are answered first, and all the things which Claudia wants to know are answered by implication. Here too, Rice, by using

Louis's agency and ownership of the text, satisfies his desire for knowledge first. The questions of Claudia, whose impetus started the journey, are not dealt with, even though the answer she requires would be the simplest to give. The philosophical and religious undertones of the discussion in which Louis and Armand debate the very nature of what constitutes good and evil, God and Satan, sin and piety are given greater weight than Claudia's quest for the origins of vampirism. Claudia is once again passive in this scene and Louis is the key. In a sense, Claudia's sleepiness and dulled senses are indicative of stereotypical female docility in the face of masculine, logical, intellectual debate. Following a lengthy discussion, Armand finally answers the question which has plagued Claudia for years when he states that, after 400 years, he believes he is the oldest vampire living in the world (*Interview*, 257). There is no more to search for and there is nowhere else to go now that she has found Armand. Louis resigns himself to this as they resume their existential dialogue. Louis becomes enraptured by Armand and, just as with Lestat, Louis takes on the mantle of Femininity in relation to Armand. He explains that when speaking to Armand it is as if "the great feminine longing of [his] mind [is] being awakened again to be satisfied" (*Interview*, 255).

This homoerotic desire between Armand and Louis does not go unnoticed by Claudia, who offers Louis a trade-off; she suggests that Louis turns Madeleine into a vampire for her so that he can leave her and be happy with Armand. Claudia realises that by killing Lestat she has ruptured the relationship between Louis and herself, but, due to her diminutive size, she remains a responsibility for Louis to bear. Louis too has wounded Claudia with the realisation that he was partly responsible for her predicament and he realises that this has caused irreparable damage to their

relationship. Turning Madeleine into a vampire would free both of them to pursue other avenues of intimacy.

Louis tries to assuage Claudia's fears when she realises that she is in danger from Armand's coven because she has committed the only unforgiveable act of treachery in the vampiric social code – killing one of their own. Louis tells her that he will not leave her in danger, but Claudia asserts that danger holds him to her. Louis insists that he loves her, but Claudia senses immediately that he wishes to be with Armand. She tells Louis that Armand has spoken to her telepathically and that Armand wishes her to release Louis and die (*Interview*, 269-270).

Claudia brings Madeleine back to the hotel room and, when Louis enters, Claudia instructs him to turn Madeleine into a vampire, because Claudia herself cannot do it (*Interview*, 281). Madeleine offers herself willingly to the startled Louis, who notices the bite marks in her neck and tries to dissuade Madeleine. Claudia flies into a characteristic tantrum, demanding that Madeleine be turned, as Claudia cannot have an adult shape and cannot live with her rage any longer, because she has been given “immortality in this hopeless guise, this helpless form” (*Interview*, 288). Louis asks Madeleine if she will care for Claudia and Madeleine begs for immortality, referring to Claudia as a ““child who can't die....that's what she is”” (*Interview*, 289).

Finally the truth is revealed, as we learn that Madeleine has lost a daughter whom she recreates in dolls. Claudia will be a fitting surrogate as she will never grow or die but can always be loved. It is strange that Claudia desires to be close to Madeleine as a daughter figure, yet cannot abide the thought of being Louis's perpetual daughter. However, in the grief-stricken Madeleine, Claudia finds a willing host who will

indulge her and provide her with a level of emotional care and obsession which her fathers could never give. Rice is typifying the role of the mother as caregiver and suggesting that only women can mother and love children fully. There is also a sense here that there is a generic quality about children, so Claudia is just as good as Madeleine's lost child. This generic quality of female children is further entrenched by the fact that Madeleine is a doll-maker by trade. Madeleine is symbolically a woman who produces fixed, unchanging, marketable products. Rice presents a mother/woman as being a manufacturer of females and feminine objects, a breeder who cares for and creates these images of beauty for someone to purchase.

Madeleine's beseeching words are also poignant as she tries to sell herself to Louis, not with money, but with the hint and promise of sexual gratification. Louis reports what Madeleine tells him:

‘If you were a mortal man, man *and* monster!’.... ‘If I could only show you my power...’... ‘...I could make you want me, desire me! But you're unnatural!’.... ‘What can I give you! What can I do to make you give me what you have!’ Her hand hovered over her breasts, seeming to caress them like a man's hand. (*Interview*, 290)

Louis thinks back to his mortal days and desires her both as his past self and in the present (which would culminate in her being killed). Louis also takes a stand to emphasise his masculinity in the presence of two female characters. He defines his masculinity by asserting that with “a man's pride I wanted to prove that to her, to humiliate her for what she had just said to me, for the cheap vanity of her provocation and the eyes that now looked away from me in disgust” (*Interview*, 291). Within the subtext, we see how Louis once more oscillates in terms of gender function and sexual

preference. He can be classified as a liminal, queer male in relation to other more powerful male vampires who have the ability to control him, but he is nevertheless masculine, and more powerful than the females he encounters.

Rice once more uses the idea of sexual manipulation to coerce Louis emotionally into doing something, thus emphasising the stance that women are likely to be wanton and use whatever means are necessary to get the desired end result. The manipulation which begins with Claudia's tirade, tears and deliberate seeking of comfort within the arms of Madeleine ends with Madeleine's attempt at emasculating Louis by picking at his most sensitive psychological fixation. The turning of Madeleine into a vampire could well be read as a reclamation of Louis's masculinity and a triumph of his power over Claudia, by virtue of his gender, size and knowledge. Louis, however, asserts as Madeleine's mortal body lies dying and her immortal one is being born that "[w]hat has died in this room tonight is the last vestige in me of what was human" (*Interview*, 295). The subtext confirms Claudia and Madeleine's insistence and manipulations as the reason for this tragic loss.

Madeleine, Louis soon finds, is mad. She is a crazed and frenzied killer with an impulsive streak and displays obsessive compulsive disorder traits. Louis notes that she feeds and kills with a "mad intensity" (*Interview*, 296). Madeleine bares her fangs at the mirrors as an indication of her madness. Louis further comments on this lunacy when he finds that he "still did not realise how mad she was, and how accustomed to dreaming; and that she would not cry out for reality, rather would feed reality to her dreams, a demon elf feeding her spinning wheel with the reeds of the world so that she might make her own weblike universe" (*Interview*, 296). This madness seems to be a complete escape for Madeleine who, as a mortal, was so grief-stricken that she

gave up her mortality. This madness causes her to produce more and more miniature objects, such as tables, chairs and womanly clothes for Claudia's use. Madeleine's obsession is symptomatic of what Nicholson (1986:28) sees as the social laws which dissuade "women from thinking of themselves and being thought of by others as autonomous agents. Whereas 'masculinity' embodie[s] certain traits associated with adulthood, such as physical strength, rationality and emotional control, 'femininity', in part embodie[s] traits associated with childhood, such as weakness and irrationality". Madeleine cannot really think for herself; all she cares about is seeing to Claudia's needs; she is presented both in the text and within the subtext as being completely insane. The congruency between the text and the subtext doubly affirms the notion of her female weakness, madness, illogical behaviour and inherent motherly altruism.

Claudia's desire to be a woman resists all forms of logic. She takes Louis's humanity, as she believes he is in part responsible for taking hers. The most significant feature of her anger is that she wants to be looked upon with desire. She no longer wants to feel like a freak of nature. Claudia wants to be gazed at and wants to be the product of The Gaze (Lacan, [1975] 1991; Mulvey, [1989] 2009). Laura Mulvey ([1989] 2009) explores this idea from a film theory perspective and Jacques Lacan ([1979] 1991) from a psychoanalytic view point. This is especially alarming to feminist theoreticians who strongly resist this notion of imposing unwanted and unwarranted attention upon the female form by males in a manner which objectifies the female. Rice is pandering to the normative idea that the woman with infantilised desires seeks this gratuitous attention. Such a woman wants to be objectified; she wants to be the object of lust and will kill if necessary to achieve this sense of accomplishment. Sue-Ellen Case's article

“Tracking the Vampire” (1991), an extract from which was reprinted in Gelder’s (2001) *The Horror Reader*, proposes that the position of the female/woman is akin to that of the monster and that the spectacle which the monster induces in an audience within the staring and the jeering is like that of the

...woman’s condition in the gaze...the woman and the monster both share the status of object, they have a special empathy between them. In other words, this entranced seeing and proximity in the vision, consonant with psychoanalytic theory, rests on the special status of ‘woman’ as object of the viewer’s scopophilia – and hence the shared identification of woman and monster. (Case, 2001:206)

Case’s theory seems valid in relation to Rice’s creation of Claudia. There is a scene in Neil Jordan’s film adaptation which is not in the book, where Claudia happens on a woman bathing in a bathroom near street level. She stops to stare through the door, which is slightly ajar, as she realises that she will never have the body of an adult woman, nor be desired the way the passing men who also witness this inadvertent exhibitionism desire that woman.

Case’s theory of a lesbian reading of vampire fiction can be used effectively to unpack the complex relationship between Claudia and Madeleine and is especially applicable within the Ricean cosmology. Case (1991, 2001) argues that critics such as Janice Doane, instead of making a case for a queer or lesbian reading of vampire literature, in which the female and the monster are objectified by the gaze, have a tendency to follow the normative trend by reading the texts as an identification between characters rather than as queer desire. Rice’s text is clear in this regard; Claudia is a substitute child for Madeleine and Claudia’s desire is for a mother.

However, the subtext reveals that Claudia wants Madeleine more as someone through whom Claudia can live out her desires, because she does not have the body with which to act out these desires. Madeleine will thus serve as an avatar of Claudia's desires.

Case's (1991, 2001) theory can be used to support the idea that the conflict between Rice's text and its subtext serves to entrench the hetero-normative order, as Case argues that although "desire is aroused vis-a-vis another woman (a monstrous occasion), and they are totally proximate, they identify with rather than desire one another" (Case, 2001:206). In this case, Claudia seeks a mother, Madeleine seeks a child. "Their desire is still locked in the phallocratic order, and the same sex taboo is firmly in place. What melds monster to woman is not lesbian desire...but finally daughter emulating mother in the Oedipal triangle with the absent male still at the apex" (Case, 2001:206). The "same sex taboo" in Rice's case would refer to lesbianism, incest, and perhaps even paedophilia. The absent male at the apex in this case is Louis as the agent of power who can turn Madeleine. Claudia cannot do this, so for Claudia to live through Madeleine, Louis needs to shed his reluctance.

This adds to my argument that Rice's text might seem to promote a feminist idea, but her subtext does not, in that, as gender critic Susan Bowers (1992:23) explains, the horror felt at Claudia's situation is negated because "in feminist art, the grotesque is not the source of horror, but of a wild energy; the horror is the oppression against which she revolts". In Ricean terms, the horror Claudia portrays is an external symptom based on her body; she is otherwise free enough to do as she wishes and is not materially constrained by Louis or Lestat, so her rebellion is more a rebellion against herself and the body in which she is caged. She hates her makers but she

cannot change or deny what she is, so her revolution too is stunted. She perishes without winning.

Doane and Hodges's (1990:424) significant article on Ricean feminist constructs proposes that a primarily Oedipal reading of *Interview with the Vampire* reveals that "[t]here is no spectral presence of a dead-undead mother haunting us here, but rather sympathy for a 'daughter' locked into the oedipal moment and a protest against the kind of femininity offered to women in a patriarchal culture". However, this is not the case here, as the text is mediated by the liminal Louis who, when dealing with Claudia, is a distinctly male character in relation to whom Claudia is completely disenfranchised, voiceless and without agency. Within the spaces of the text-subtext flux it is Louis and his narrative which survive and not Claudia, and it is only through hindsight that Louis's text becomes a mediation and representation of Claudia from his perspective. Therefore, all the machinations, manipulations and anger which Claudia displays are presented to us through the experience of Louis. Since Louis has the agency and narrative power, it is inaccurate to assume that Rice opposes patriarchy simply by establishing a mournful, melancholic and regretful narrative tone. This is because the flux created by the anomalies between the repeated, irreconcilable differences between what is said and what could be implied show us a multiplicity of views which indicate that patriarchy and the supremacy of the male voice, are upheld by Rice. This is in contrast to the poor or weak forms of feminism which the text might superficially allow us to believe are powerful feminist agendas at work. Rather, there is some support for this when one looks at the figure of Lestat. Although Claudia tries to kill Lestat, we see that he survives the attack and it is

Claudia who is eventually destroyed. I agree with Doane and Hodges's (1990:426) argument when they assert the following:

One of the lessons of the vampire novel, and one made by Lacanian psychoanalysis, is that it is impossible to kill the father because the law of the symbolic is the law of a dead, not living father. Lestat, like all vampire fathers, is already dead; death does not compromise his power to kill the women and restore what was never really lost, a patriarchal order.

Claudia is given the final punishment for her transgression of vampiric codes, but she also pays a price for the anger and rage she feels at being abused and locked in a body she does not desire under the influence of her fathers. She is not fit to be either woman or child; she is a transgressor drowning under the omnipotence of her male counterparts. Through the finality of Claudia's death, Rice firmly entrenches a deeply conservative subtext, confirming the value of patriarchal hegemony.

## Chapter 3

### *The Vampire Lestat*

#### **“Lightning crashes, an old mother dies”<sup>8</sup>**

In *The Vampire Lestat* (1985), Lestat de Lioncourt arises from his second slumber after the events which Louis narrates in *Interview with the Vampire* (1976). Lestat awakes to America in the 1980s – a decade of extreme excess and decadence, in which rock stars were the poets of their age and where fame was seen as a necessity for success. Given Lestat’s previous life as a mortal actor and his appetite for attention and the limelight, it is no surprise that being a rock star in the 1980s is a role which fits him perfectly. As a vampire, Lestat is an outsider in relation to mainstream society, just as a rock star is a celebrity outside the mainstream and does not lead the lifestyle of ordinary people.

The world which Lestat has left behind has long since vanished. Rice refreshes Lestat for a newer audience as she resurrects his character nearly a decade after his introduction in the seventies. By placing Lestat in a contemporary setting which is acutely linked to the 1980s, Rice adds a sense of realism to the text, but also shows the timelessness of the vampire as a figure of enduring otherness and as a perpetual outsider. There is also an obvious commercial benefit to creating a contemporary vampire to whom new readers can relate, especially given the time lapse between the publication of *Interview with the Vampire* (1976) and *The Vampire Lestat* (1985).

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<sup>8</sup> Line from “Lightning Crashes” by Ed Kowalczyk, Live (1994)

Rice's voice, through Lestat, also serves to reinforce her own opinions and social commentary on the time and context within which she writes. It is therefore vital to understand the social and popular cultural climate of the 1980s in order to understand the plot of *The Vampire Lestat*. Because of the rise of various new media at the time, Lestat has found an age which affords him the freedom to broadcast his message to every corner of the world with ease.

Lestat has slept for 80 years and finds himself in a world where new concepts such as hostile takeovers, corporate buy-outs and mergers are beginning to take hold in the business world. In the 1980s, kitsch became an art form in its own right. Cocaine was the yuppie drug of choice. Advertising and marketing gained ground as professions and were given a veneer of glamour. HIV/AIDS started to claim the lives of people. The Cold War was defrosting and the end of the decade saw the fall of the standing testimony to Communism – the Berlin Wall. The Buggles lamented that *Video Killed the Radio Star* as MTV became the factory which churned out images that would continue to influence popular culture around the world well into the next millennium. Glam-rock saw bulky, studded leather jackets, dark glasses and skin-tight jeans becoming the fashion mainstay of rock stars and their followers. The world took a moment to realize that African children were starving and a mass appeal by artists from around the world signified the beginning of popular social consciousness and caring (Batchelor & Stoddart, 2007; Tames, 2005; Torr, 2000). In this maelstrom of colliding worlds and symbolisms, Rice returned to *The Vampire Chronicles* and resurrected Lestat in the middle of all of this, to provide his tale, simply entitled *The Vampire Lestat* (1985).

Unsurprisingly then, given the cultural climate of the 1980s, Lestat decides to be a rock star and delights the band called Satan's Night Out with the strength of his vocal range during one of their practice sessions. To his surprise, his name is not unfamiliar to them, because they recognise the name from *Interview with the Vampire*.

Victor Lana (1994) notes that the appeal of the rock star in our cultural climate is not unlike the appeal that vampirism holds in that the "rock star is usually a young male...the rock star has thousands of adoring female fans who dream of him as a lover. The rock star also has an equal number of male fans who wish they were in his place" (Lana, 1994:78-79). People lust after immortality and power, but it is a gift bestowed on the select few, just as rock superstardom is only for the choice few.

The members of Satan's Night Out, Alex, Larry and Tough Cookie, tell Lestat about the popular book *Interview with the Vampire*, which has popularized his name. This self-referential intertextuality serves to reinforce the authority of Ricean vampiric mythology, since *Interview with the Vampire* becomes accepted within *The Vampire Lestat* as a text which is not a work of fiction. Through this intertextuality, Rice forces readers to suspend reality and submit to the uncanny and the Fantastic as Lestat reads the story Louis has narrated about him. Lestat reads the book and sets about writing his autobiography, which is also a rebuttal of Louis's version of events in *Interview with the Vampire*, because Lestat "ached to write his story for [Louis], not an answer to [Louis's] malice in *Interview with the Vampire*, but the tale of all the things [Lestat had] seen and learned...the story [Lestat] could not tell him before" (*Lestat*, 24). His story serves as both a sequel to *Interview with the Vampire* (1976) and as a prequel to *The Queen of the Damned* (1988).

Lestat's tale provides insights into many of the flaws and faults Louis finds in him in *Interview with the Vampire*. It is in this continuous juxtaposition between what Louis perceives and Lestat's reasons for those actions that we see the change in contexts and the difference between Louis's dour attitude towards Lestat's actions and Lestat's reality. With *The Vampire Lestat* (1985), Rice not only cements Lestat's position as the arch-narrator and protagonist of *The Vampire Chronicles* series, but also creates an awareness of narrative unreliability due to the constant discrepancies between what is said in *Interview with the Vampire* (1976) and Lestat's perspective on events in *The Vampire Lestat* (1985). Since Lestat's account is given directly to the reader without the use of an intermediary such as Daniel, Lestat's account appears more trustworthy, not only because the gaps which Louis leaves are filled in, but also because doubt is cast on Louis's tale. Lestat's account is also aided by his having the upper hand in terms of knowledge, age and experience.

The shifts in what is defined as truth within the Ricean cosmology are a key factor in viewing the texts as being products of deconstruction (as outlined in Chapter 2). As defined in the previous chapter, the shifts in perspective and the various versions of the "truth" which Rice's protagonists narrate allow for a multiplicity of meanings stemming from the same sequence of events and therefore for a deconstructivist approach. These multiple meanings are likely to change as often as different narrators are introduced because of the range of individual experiences surrounding particular events. Since the texts are mediated not only by a narrator who functions as author, but also by the individual reader's response, Rice places Lestat, as the protagonist of the series, in a position of power. He is often regarded as the dominant source of information, since it is usually his narration and version of events which are

presented. He is the figure of authority who dismantles the enigmatic persona of himself presented by Louis in order to fill in the lacunae Louis leaves. In so doing, Lestat presents himself as being truthful and as telling the whole story. In simultaneously accepting and discrediting Louis's account in *Interview with the Vampire*, Lestat's version of events is made to seem a more balanced view. He takes Louis's version into consideration, whereas Louis does not delve deeply into the factors motivating Lestat's behaviour.

*The Vampire Lestat* (1985) is the story of Lestat's life as an impoverished nobleman from Auvergne, and is set against the backdrop of the looming French Revolution. Lestat has no prospects and is bound by social and monetary constraints. When he is 21, he sets out to kill the wolves which have been terrorising the area. He finds himself ambushed by the wolves and through sheer force of will and determination he kills the pack singlehandedly. Lestat is hurt by the doubts his brothers express about whether he actually managed the feat on his own. The doubts which his brothers cast on his bravery and strength leave him in an emotionally liminal space because he feels the pain of their doubt as though he were once more the little boy they despised, but his rage now is distinctly manly and almost violent. Lestat soon solidifies his position within the family as the hunter and becomes responsible for providing them with food. His mother, Gabrielle, with whom he is extremely close, encourages Lestat to meet with Nicolas, the son of a local businessman. Nicolas has been sent to Paris to read law but finds himself in disgrace because he abandons his studies to take up the violin. Lestat, too, is not without some scandal in his past because he has previously run off with a troupe of Italian actors inspired by his love for performance and the theatre and also as a symbol of his rebellion against his aristocratic upbringing. The

disgrace his actions cause is also seen as a punishment to his family for having taken him out of the monastery where he was at school because his family could not afford to buy him a respectable post within the clergy.

Critics and scholars of Rice's work such as Shafer (1996:152), Ramsland (1992) and Roberts (1994) all draw parallels between Lestat and Dionysus, the Greek god of decadence, theatre and passion. Gabrielle encourages the friendship between Nicolas and Lestat to the extent that, when she feels she is dying of an illness (presumably consumption), she gives Lestat some of her family jewels to sell in order that he and Nicolas can run off to Paris.

In Paris they find themselves jobs as a musician and an actor respectively and live very happily until Magnus, an ancient and powerful vampire, chooses to turn Lestat into a vampire. Once he has turned Lestat, Magnus gives him only the most rudimentary rules for survival, but he does give him a veritable treasure trove of wealth accumulated over centuries. Magnus then immolates himself and instructs Lestat to scatter his ashes so that Magnus can never be revived. Lestat is unable to conceive of a life other than the one he has previously led and continues to live as any person would. He uses his wealth to heap favours upon the theatre company. He insists that his mother is sent to Italy because the climate might be better for her health, but when it is obvious that she will not make the journey and is dying, Lestat turns her into a vampire too. When Nicolas finds out about their powers, he desires them too, but Lestat is wary of turning him. When he does, Nicolas is mentally too weak, and vampirism maddens him. Nicolas alternates between the extremes of catatonia and mania. He can neither handle the powers which he has, nor accept the monster he has become.

Armand's coven soon discovers Lestat and they are shocked that he lives in the light and does not believe in their ways and Satanic customs. Armand shares with Lestat all the stories he knows of vampirism and its origins. Lestat and Gabrielle go in search of more stories and the ancient ones, but Gabrielle leaves Lestat to do her own exploring. Eventually, Lestat goes to ground (buries himself underground to sleep for an extended period) for the first time. He awakens when Marius, the ancient Roman vampire who turned Armand and whom Armand speaks of as being one of the knowledgeable ones, comes to see him. When Lestat meets Marius, he has questions like those which Louis has asked of him. Marius introduces Lestat to the primordial vampires from whom all vampires originate, Akasha and Enkil (Those Who Must Be Kept). Akasha allows Lestat to drink from her most powerful blood and this imbues Lestat with unimaginable strength. Lestat rouses Marius's ire when he disturbs Akasha and makes Enkil angry by playing Nicolas's violin for them in their shrine. Marius tells Lestat to go to the New World and says that he will come to Lestat when the time is right.

While Lestat is in New Orleans, he loses his mother. Because he is her maker, he cannot hear her thoughts or trace her telepathically. He is also saddled with his invalid, blind father who has survived the Revolution, although all Lestat's brothers and their children have been killed. He meets Louis, who reminds him of Nicolas, and he turns Louis. We learn that Lestat loves Louis deeply, so much so that he wilfully breaks a vampiric law which forbids turning children into vampires by turning Claudia just so that Louis can have some peace, happiness and companionship. In *Interview with the Vampire*, Louis gives the impression that Lestat's turning of Claudia was an impulsive act motivated by Lestat's selfishness. Now, through

Lestat's version of events, we can deduce the seriousness of Lestat's infringement of vampiric codes and see that he does so for the sake of Louis. We find that Lestat keeps the secret of Those Who Must Be Kept because he is not only bound by his word, but because he is ashamed that he has created Claudia and is wary of a backlash from Marius.

After the events which transpire in *Interview with the Vampire*, Lestat goes in search of healing blood and seeks out Armand, who refuses to give him the infusion he needs. Broken, Lestat goes to ground for the second time, having seen the end of his first century and having lived out one full human life. This sleep lasts 80 years and Lestat then awakens to the age he was meant to be a part of – the 1980s.

Given the basic plot outline, we can see how once more the key characters Lestat encounters are male. The novel is also dominated by male characters and male homo-social bonds. As Lestat meets each new character, he is simultaneously repelled by and attracted to them. He is a fledgling vampire seeking to understand his circumstances, yet he finds no solace from those to whom he looks up. However, there is one outstanding figure of whom Lestat is master, and that is Gabrielle.

Although she is a largely silent character who occupies a minimum of space in the story, Gabrielle is nevertheless a figure whose presence haunts both Lestat and the reader. Gabrielle's creation and turning into a vampire by Lestat is designed to shock the reader. She is mother and lover, child to and beholden to her son. In examining Rice's construction of Gabrielle's character and looking at the roles in which Gabrielle is placed, we can again identify Rice's discomfort with strong, female characters that do not have a tendency to follow normative constraints.

Rice's representation of female and feminine freedom is, in a word, androgynous. Nicoleta Raileanu (1998) recognises this trend in Rice's work as well, but Raileanu views androgyny as a symptom of potential equality and she believes that Rice pays "[s]pecial attention ... to the figure of the androgyne as the best means to express physical and social difference and sameness at the end of this millennium" (Raileanu, 1998:ix). Raileanu, using a genre-based approach to Gothic fiction, maintains that androgyny is a concept which could help further the development of the genre because "by humanizing the vampire's conflicts, their relationships to each other, and their androgynous nature, Rice opens up new possibilities for developing the traditional conventions of the Gothic" (Raileanu, 1998:102). However, within the scope of the argument of this thesis, androgyny holds dangerous possibilities. This is primarily because Rice presents a distinct tendency towards masculinizing feminine characters, in much the same way as she feminizes masculine characters. With male characters, personalities are softened to feminize them, as is the case with Louis, but with the female characters, Rice's inclination to masculinize them is more overt. Rice characterises them with manly mannerisms and casts them as physically strong and comparable to their male counterparts. This leaves no doubt about how they should be construed.

The gender blurring employed by Rice thus serves to further the hypothesis of this thesis that the liberal text Rice seemingly presents can easily be unravelled to reveal a deeply normative and conservative subtext. We may begin this analysis with a look at Lestat's initial views of the spirit of the 1980s in which he finds himself. Once Lestat has awoken to the 1980s, his reaction to the women in society is as follows:

...ah, the women were glorious, naked in the spring warmth as they'd been under the Egyptian pharaohs, in skimpy short skirts and tunic-like dresses, or wearing men's trousers and shirts skintight over their curvaceous bodies if they pleased. They painted, and decked themselves in gold and silver even to walk to the grocery store. Or they went fresh scrubbed and without ornament – it didn't matter. They curled their hair like Marie Antoinette or cut it off or let it blow free.

For the first time in history, perhaps, they were as strong and as interesting as men. (*Lestat*,<sup>9</sup> 14)

Whilst the gender neutral, or the “beguilingly androgynous” (*Lestat*, 11), may seem a liberal solution to the problem of gender equality, a closer examination of how Rice goes about expressing gender neutrality and androgyny shows the serious flaws within her delineation of freedom for the feminine and reveals a trend once more towards entrenching patriarchy at a subtextual level.

There is a sense here that Rice's reductionist attempt at showing a social liberalism based on the fashions of the time is well founded at a textual and cultural-historical level. This is because by the 1980s, women were allowed to dress as freely as they pleased and were not limited to particular women's fashions as in previous eras such as the Victorian period. However, a closer look at the language employed in this extract is illuminating. Although *Lestat* is speaking of women, there is no effect of female selfhood because of the impersonal use of “they”. This immediately Others the female with regard to the normative male. Rice defines that which is female in relation to the standing archetype of what she presents as human – men. There is also the condescending tone of the following sentence which stands alone as a paragraph.

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<sup>9</sup> As indicated in Chapter 1, this short form is used for the in-text references to *The Vampire Lestat*.

While one could see this at a textual level as a proclamation of female equality, at a subtextual level, the sentence immediately deconstructs itself as Rice presents the image of women having been dull and weak throughout the course of history as an accepted fact.

In problematising Rice's concept of androgyny to show how the androgyny she presents as a liberal solution for gender disparities is in fact no such solution, Eichler (1980: 68) also argues that "once we examine the definitions and operations of androgyny, we can see that it does not overcome the masculine-feminine division, and may, in fact, cement it". The reason Eichler (1980) chooses this standpoint is, very logically, that in order to define that which is androgynous, we need to delineate that which is masculine and that which is feminine and that in so doing we create a polarisation in which stereotypes occur. These stereotypes are thus the starting points of a definition of "androgyny which understands itself as a combination of masculine and feminine traits and behaviours" (Eichler, 1980:71).

Before presenting a more detailed and sustained unpacking of how androgyny could live up to its "negative definition [which] implies that we first define sex role constraints such that we shall be able to notice their absence" (Eichler, 1980:69), we can examine one of Lestat's band members, Tough Cookie. She is a valued and talented female member of Lestat's band, but nowhere does Rice credit her with a proper name. Instead, the use of the name Tough Cookie evokes various androgynous connotations. Rice does not follow this type of naming convention with the other (male) band members, who are called Alex and Larry respectively. Rice gives the female character a "name" which supposedly projects an image of strength, but, by denying Tough Cookie a real name, Rice undermines this strength and instead shows

that she cannot stand on her own and has to hide her identity in order to be perceived as a “tough cookie”. Tough Cookie thus carries a name which shows overcompensation in terms of embracing the androgynous and a tendency towards manliness. It is also an epithet which shows a modicum of cuteness that allows for a child-like element, especially when she is described by Lestat as “the succulent little Tough Cookie” (*Lestat*, 18). These are qualities which negate her independence and reduce her position to that of one who has no intrinsic identity. Rice places this female character in a position of power as a successful band member, but simultaneously undercuts her social normality and her humanity by not giving her a proper, socially conventional name, but a name which is a loaded, sexist term. This narrative strategy suggests that for women to be able to be in a position of fame or authority they need to relinquish their femininity and adopt a more masculine approach. This negative aspect of androgyny ensures that women are still defined in terms of that which is male and that Rice equates manliness with strength and power.

Gabrielle too is covered by Rice with a veneer of androgyny under which lies much pandering to social norms. Gabrielle is a Marquise – married to an impoverished noble, she spends all her time reading and is clearly distanced from her family and children, except for Lestat. Her education allows her to read Italian books, which no one else in the household can understand. She is an outsider within her own home, as she is the mother to seven sons, few of whom live beyond infancy; Lestat is the youngest.

Twitchell (1981) notes this aspect of Lestat’s birth (being the seventh son) as a salient feature in determining the likelihood of becoming a vampire within the

anthropological aspects of vampiric mythology and superstition. According to Twitchell's (1981:9) folkloric evidence,

...[a]n improperly buried suicide was almost a guarantee of vampiric possession....Dying unbaptized, being buried in unconsecrated ground, being excommunicated, ...being the seventh child of the same sex, being born on Christmas day (presumably for the effrontery of intercourse at the same time as the Virgin Mary – unfortunately the responsibility of the child, not the parent)....each culture developed a directory of such favors given the devil.

These rich, socio-cultural historical details which Rice weaves semiotically through her text foreshadow the events which follow, because Lestat does become a vampire, as though his very birth has earmarked him to accept the Dark Gift (to become a vampire in the Ricean mythological terminology is to accept the Dark Gift or to have the Dark Trick worked).

Doane and Hodges (1990:422) define the representation of the mother figure in “traditional accounts [as] lacking in full subjectivity, silent, excluded or at best marginal, her sexuality limited and constrained to her reproductive function”.

Gabrielle certainly fulfils all these criteria. She is a lone female and her education and her wealth give her mental freedom, but she is trapped within the social confines of her marriage, fulfilling her social and cultural function as a wife by birthing children. She is able to give Lestat her jewels to allow him to go to Paris and she buys him the weapons he needs to become a hunter and provide for his family. Rice describes Gabrielle's use of her wealth for Lestat's benefit, suggesting that Gabrielle lives vicariously through him. However, on closer examination of the subtext, we see that

although Gabrielle enables Lestat to live the life he wants and purchases the rifles and other weapons he needs for hunting, she is not actually the agent of power; her inherited jewellery is the real agent of power, because it allows her to buy the tools he needs. By pawning her jewels and giving the money to Lestat, she ensures that he becomes the protector of her interests; he is her son, as are his brothers. Therefore, when Lestat provides food for his family through his hunting, he is seeing that Gabrielle's other charges are duly taken care of. This fulfils the patriarchal stereotype of the male as provider. We see once more how, on a textual level, Rice gives Gabrielle the power to steer Lestat in directions she thinks he will enjoy and she actively encourages his interests. However, on a subtextual level, a deep sense of materialism only serves to entrench patriarchal norms.

There is a clear echo of the psychological concept of penis envy when Lestat describes his mother speaking “in an almost eerie way of [Lestat] being a secret part of her anatomy, of [him] being the organ for her which women do not really have” (*Lestat*, 72-73). Thus, Lestat becomes the male Gabrielle wishes she were. Rice denies Gabrielle agency when she is a mortal. But, in terms of the cultural historical setting of the eighteenth century this is seen as a normal, socially acceptable position for Gabrielle. At a subtextual level, we see that the freedom Rice presents for Gabrielle means being able to live as a man. Rice carries this idea through, but this concept or definition of freedom is problematic, because Rice does not allow Gabrielle to find freedom and function as a *woman* or within feminine terms. Rice entrenches a patriarchal view through this, because, in denying femininity and embracing masculinity, there is a clear loss of that which is devalued (the feminine) in place of that which is valued (the masculine). Therefore Rice, despite making a case

for freeing Gabrielle from the prison of social convention, in fact continues to imprison Gabrielle within a patriarchal structure.

Rice's equation of power with wealth and money is a recurring theme (as outlined in Chapter 2) and a quick examination of how Rice describes the Paris in which Lestat and Nicolas find themselves shows how all the descriptions she provides point to the beauty and majesty of the city, its wealth, its intellectual debates and its regal nobility. All mention of the poverty and squalor which is known to have characterised pre-Revolution France is simply left out or romanticised. It is as though the Revolution were simply an unfair situation in which the beautiful nobles were unfairly caught up. Lestat's family, too, is not spared its effects, but he has already been turned and is distant from his family, so their deaths are more a matter of fact than the source of any major emotional trauma for him.

The pivotal scene in which Gabrielle is turned follows her realisation in her dying moments that the Lestat in the room with her is not the same as the mortal son she knew. Lestat telepathically feeds her images of how he has changed and of the creature Magnus has turned him into. Lestat recalls how he asked for her acquiescence: "*Do you want to come with me now? DO YOU WANT TO COME WITH ME INTO THIS NOW?...With her whole being she said Yes*" (Lestat, 173). From the outset it seems as though Gabrielle is complicit in being turned and that the choice is hers to make. However, Kappeler (1986:104-105) argues that even the choice Gabrielle makes on the surface of Rice's text, wherein she takes ownership of her own destiny by choosing not to die, is undermined by the subtext, wherein Gabrielle is doomed to forever be a fledgling of Lestat because he is the possessor of vampirism and therefore has the power to turn her. Kappeler (1986) suggests that the

power of a female to choose is subtextually compromised within a patriarchal paradigm in that

...[w]ithin the patriarchal culture...the hero is male, the victim female....[T]here are two dominant variations in the plot concerning the object-victim. She is either unwilling, or willing object; victim she remains. She has a ‘choice’ of attitude to the event, but she has no choice of action in the event. The imperative of the plot is strict; it will happen to her, whatever her attitude. (Kappeler, 1986:104-105)

Gabrielle decides to follow Lestat into vampirism to escape her impending death, but she loses her status as a mother in the process and becomes his fledgling, his lover and his child. All of these new definitions for Gabrielle come at the cost of her sense of selfhood, because she is forever beholden to Lestat and can no longer be a figure of authority in relation to him. Thus, despite Lestat’s having been a vampire for mere months longer than she, he becomes her teacher.

In becoming Gabrielle’s master, Lestat takes ownership of her and she is bound to him to learn what she can of her new powers. In gifting Gabrielle with vampirism, one would expect Rice to explore the resulting freedoms stemming from it, but, subtextually, we see that these freedoms are undermined because Gabrielle’s loss of herself in assuming an inferior position in relation to Lestat is evident when Lestat tries to say “her name over and over, to make it natural, she wasn’t really Gabrielle yet to me. She was simply *she*....” (*Lestat*, 186). The use of the impersonal pronoun instead of the name is also indicative of the generic worth of females; Gabrielle, although turned by her own son, is as yet identity-less and is undefined in terms of the male norm.

There is a deep sense of irony in the turning of Gabrielle in the section entitled ‘Viaticum for the Marquise’, in that, while she has refused to allow the priest to administer the last rites, she does allow her son to turn her into a vampire, thus leading her into a new life of the undead. Lana (1994) also notes this irony and compares Lestat’s turning of Gabrielle to a parody of the Eucharist. The pun on the word “viaticum” is relevant as it is used to mean the giving out of the Eucharist as part of the last rites and the original meaning relates to provisions for travelling. Therefore, not only is Gabrielle supposed to receive redemption, but she is also meant to prepare herself for her journey (presumably to the Afterlife). But instead of receiving the ceremonial blood of Christ for redemption, she receives vampiric blood for immortality and is reborn along the Devil’s path as an incarnation of evil. Lana (1994:85) agrees with the superficial application of Rice’s message and believes that “Lestat becomes her saviour, and in doing so he also gives her an allowance to travel. Rice incorporates both meanings of viaticum into this scenario, and reveals the power of the mother and the maternal nature of all vampires”. However, as will be shown below, Rice circumscribes Gabrielle’s femininity by using the idea of motherliness. Although her vampirism might allow her to travel and explore the world freely at a textual level, subtextually she is bound to Lestat and is forever inferior to her son. There is once more a textual/subtextual contradiction. Rice advocates liberalism within her text and reinforces conservatism within the subtext.

This scene also marks the consummation of the incestuous closeness Lestat and Gabrielle share as mortals. Lana (1994:85) qualifies this idea of an incestuous relationship by classifying vampires as “oral beings; they use their mouths for all of their important life functions. The mouth is the center of their sexual pleasure, their

reproductive organ, and the area through which they take nourishment”. Lana (1994) also reinforces John Allen Stevenson’s (1988:144) notion that the blood that vampires crave fulfils many functions because “it is food, semen, Eucharist – like the blood of Christ it guarantees eternal life”. If we accept these ideas, we see how Gabrielle’s vampiric stature in relation to Lestat as is that of a fledgling. Although she is adult in body, unlike Claudia, Rice places Gabrielle in the unfortunate, liminal position where there is “a fusion and blurring of identities – child becomes mother, mother becomes child” (Doane & Hodges, 1990:431). Lana (1994) sees this as a stepping stone to a discussion of Freudian theory; however, within the context of this discussion we can see how the turning of Gabrielle is, in fact, a return to the patriarchal order because Gabrielle is now subordinate to Lestat for eternity as she becomes his fledgling child.

Thus, although the incestuous turning of Gabrielle may seem unconventional and daring, the incest is, in itself, indicative of a deeply conservative subtext. Jane M. Ford (1998:3) finds that “[l]iterature involving incest usually treats one or more of three heterosexual possibilities: mother/son, brother/sister, or father/daughter”. Regarding the infrequency of mother/son incest, Ford (1998) also uses Otto Rank’s ([1912] 1992:301) treatise on why mother/son incest is socially seen as a greater infringement than other forms. Rank says it is because

...incest between son and mother, as well as the fantasies that replace it, are considered by consciousness probably owing first to the physiological sensations – as a more serious infraction than a union between father and daughter. The internal, physical blood relationship that unites the son with the mother is of course not present to the same degree of kinship between father and daughter. (Rank ([1912] 1992:301)

However, when we look at Doane and Hodges's (1990) argument, we see how Rice's flirtation with taboo is merely a shock tactic which challenges no real prohibition. Gabrielle, at the point of her death, is no longer the mother of Lestat the mortal, because Lestat has been changed into a vampire. He is alien to her and foreign in his nature. Despite Lestat's description, as he turns Gabrielle into a vampire, as "everything [he] had ever desired" (*Lestat*, 174) and Lestat's homoerotic relationship with Nicolas (not unlike his relationship with Louis, since Nicolas is the more Feminine and subordinate character), Doane and Hodges (1990:430) find this scene a metaphor of "a version of the whole process of childhood from the child's didactic union with the mother to the achievement of heterosexuality when the mother becomes the lover".

Thus, although Rice tries to free Lestat in the text of most heterosexual inclinations by pairing him in relationships with Louis and Nicolas, who are male, albeit functioning within the text as Feminine characters, his turning of Gabrielle is Lestat's ultimate heterosexual moment. Even though this moment is packaged as incest and designed to shock, it is nothing more than a return to a hetero-normative sexual relation. Gabrielle and Lestat are freed after this to stand on their own, but the critical telepathic link between them is lost, as makers cannot hear the thoughts of their fledglings in the Ricean mythology. This is of no comfort to either of them and marks the beginning of their relationship unravelling. Just as Claudia is given the ultimate punishment for her transgression, so too are Lestat and Gabrielle, because they are ultimately lost to each other.

The subtext behind the incest taboo reveals a return to hetero-normativity. Rice's leanings towards androgyny reveal a similar conservatism. While presenting the

seemingly radical notion of sexless androgyny, Rice negates this idea by masculinizing Gabrielle within the subtext. As part of this masculinising process, we are confronted by numerous descriptions of Gabrielle where she is described in boy-like terms. Gabrielle, newly turned, runs off with Lestat. They break into homes and she finds herself a pink dress, possibly the ultimate popularly accepted symbol of femininity and girlishness. Gabrielle steals it to wear as they go off around Paris looking for prey. Soon they find a carriage driven by a young man and Gabrielle coldly and ruthlessly kills him. Lestat explains:

It became clear in an instant why she'd done it. She tore off the pink velvet girdle and skirts right there and put on the boy's clothes. She'd chosen him for the fit of the clothes.

And to describe it more truly, as she put on his garments, she became the boy.

She put on his cream silk stockings and scarlet breeches, the lace shirt and the yellow waistcoat and then the scarlet frock coat and even took the scarlet ribbon from the boy's hair.

Something in me rebelled against the charm of it, her standing so boldly in these new garments with all her hair still full over her shoulders looking more the lion's mane now than the lovely mass of woman's tresses it had been moments before.

Then I wanted to ravage her. I closed my eyes. (*Lestat*, 189)

The repudiation of the dress is symbolic because it shows Gabrielle's movement away from femininity. Also significant is Rice's decision to make Lestat feel uneasy about his mother's change. This reinforces the idea that beneath the textual display of androgyny is a leaning towards normative conservatism. Significantly, Lestat's sexual desire for Gabrielle is compounded when he notices the boyish change in her, because she now no longer represents his mother. Rice manages to include hints of incest, but

at the same time, subtextually, maintains the taboo, because Gabrielle is different and now masculinized so that Lestat's desire for her is seen as more homoerotic than incestuous. Further illustrations of Rice's misappropriated androgynous descriptions of Gabrielle as "a young boyish figure emerging full blown from an alleyway" (*Lestat*, 279) can be gleaned from Lestat who "looked up and saw the figure of an unearthly young boy, an exquisite young boy, pacing the floor of the chamber. Of course it was only Gabrielle" (*Lestat*, 207).

The affectionate, yet dismissive tone Lestat adopts here may also be seen as devaluing Gabrielle's standing; she is lovely as a boy and her masculinity is exalted, yet she is somewhat insignificant as herself in her female form. Shakespearean and gender critic, Phyllis Rackin (1989:113) holds a similar view to Eichler's (1980) opinion that androgyny can present a problematic representation, since

...[t]he androgyne could be a symbol of transcendence – of surpassing the bounds that limit the human condition in a fallen world, of breaking through the constraints that material existence imposes on spiritual aspiration or the personal restrictions that define our role in society. But the androgyne could also be an object of ridicule or an image of monstrous deformity, of social and physical abnormality. (Rackin, 1989:113)

Feminist film and media critic, Tania Modleski (1998:175) assesses the possibility of psychological transvestism amongst women in texts and finds that, as is the case with Gabrielle, "the woman viewer was said to experience at best an 'oscillation' between male and female roles that is uncomfortable, difficult and even tragic....the heroine's

‘oscillation’, her *inability* to achieve stable sexual identity, is echoed by the woman spectator’s masculine point of view (‘Afterthoughts’, 70; emphasis added”).

Modleski (1998:175) cites Mulvey (1988:72) to further explain the possible discomfort Rice may have with creating strong female characters who function in a feminine, as opposed to a masculine, form or display signs of psychological transvestism. Gabrielle’s cross-dressing, which becomes a feature of her characterisation within the mythology, may well be explained via Mulvey’s (1988:72) opinion, cited in Modleski (1998:175) that “[f]or women (from childhood onwards) trans-sex identification is a *habit* that very easily becomes second Nature. However, this Nature does not sit easily and shifts restlessly in its borrowed transvestite clothes”. Thus, Gabrielle’s clothing is a representation of the manliness she wishes she could radiate, and the social freedoms which this manliness could bring her.

Rice gives Gabrielle vampirism to represent superficially giving her freedom, she is placed in the same situation as Claudia; she is a monster, a cold-hearted killer, a gross personification of the universal taboo against sexual perversion. When we look at some of the uses Gabrielle finds for her vampirism, we can see how the freedom it brings her compares to the restrictions in her life as a mortal. Gabrielle tells Lestat of her dreams of “snow covered mountains...of desert wastes – of impenetrable jungles, or the great North woods of America where they say white men have never been’ (...) ‘There are hearts that beat in those forests,’ she said dreamily. ‘There is blood that flows for the one who takes it...I can do all the things now that you used to do. I could kill those wolves on my own’” (*Lestat*, 347). Rice gives Gabrielle vampirism to superficially represent giving her freedom; what we see, beneath the surface, is Gabrielle viewing her newfound freedom and power purely in masculine terms.

Although there is a seemingly liberal veneer of androgyny, we see that Rice is actually presenting freedom as being inherent in the masculine. In denying Gabrielle femininity and the ability to be fundamentally as a woman, Rice is negating the essence of difference between the sexes and certainly privileging the socio-cultural position of patriarchy above womanhood.

This trend towards masculinity is also seen when Gabrielle is turned and Lestat returns with her to the tower. To rest for the day, she has to find a sarcophagus to sleep in, so Gabrielle studies “the three carved figures. And after a moment’s reflection, she [chooses] not the woman’s sarcophagus but the one with the knight in armour carved on top of it” (*Lestat*, 191). Even though she manages to push the heavy lid aside herself, Rice undercuts this feat and places Lestat in a superior position once more by having him note that Gabrielle has “[n]ot as much strength as [he] possessed but [she is] strong enough” (*Lestat*, 192). In her choosing the male sarcophagus we can see a possible extension of her choice of avatar. Magnus’s face is carved onto Lestat’s sarcophagus – Gabrielle chooses the figure she feels best represents her. If an avatar is an outward representation of the internal and a sarcophagus also portrays that which lies inside, we see that Gabrielle becomes doubly represented as a man trapped within.

Probably one of the most poignant scenes in *The Vampire Lestat* is when Gabrielle finally realises the true horror of what she has become, a day after she has attempted to present herself as a boy. Shortly after being turned, as they enjoy their last few moments before sunrise compels them to rest, Lestat recounts how Gabrielle

...drew something out of her pocket.

It was the golden scissors she'd taken from the lady's table in the Faubourg St.-Germain...

'No, Mother,' I said. My own voice startled me. It leapt out echoing too sharply under the arched ceiling. The figures on the other sarcophagi seemed merciless witnesses. The hurt in my heart stunned me.

Evil sound, the snipping, the shearing. Her hair fell down in great long locks to the floor...She looked down at it, scattering it silently with the tip of her boot, and then she looked up at me, and she was a young man now certainly, the short hair curling against her cheek. (*Lestat*, 192-193)

Gabrielle believes she has completed her transformation. She can now embody the masculinity she desires in order to have her freedom. However, she discovers to her horror the next day that her hair has grown back "even thicker and more lustrous" (*Lestat*, 199) and she screams "as if she were on fire" (*Lestat*, 199). Rice has finally destabilised the basis of the textual androgyny and freedom she seems to give Gabrielle. As a symbol of her femininity, Gabrielle's long, flowing locks, which she cuts, grow back more thickly. They are symbolic of her entrapment within the female form. Her hair grows back, as Lestat says, because "it's natural to [her]" (*Lestat*, 199).

Despite all her strength, her adventurous spirit and attempts to explore the world to test her vampirism in ways which Lestat cannot understand, for example, her experiment to see whether she can survive if she sleeps deep underground instead of within the confines of a coffin, she will always be circumscribed by her femininity and, just like Claudia, is forever fixed in the form she has. This experiment can also be viewed as indicative of freedom, but is actually a return to archetypal conformity within the subtext. Gabrielle says: "I want to see if I can sleep in the raw earth

itself...If I don't rise tomorrow you'll know I failed." (*Lestat*, 348); this is brave and bold, and this soon becomes a feature of her character as Gabrielle the explorer who wants to roam the earth and returns to sleep in the ground, but this key feature of her freedom is an important metaphor too. Rice centralises the idea of Gabrielle, the mother, sleeping in the earth; she is also Mother Earth and she can never escape her role as woman in relation to nature, woman as regenerator, and woman as mother. Rice entraps Gabrielle within a subtextual stereotype, just as Rice seemingly tries to free Gabrielle within the superficially liberal text.

Other examples of being fixed within the female archetypal mode include the motherliness with which Gabrielle tends to Nicolas when his newfound vampiric powers overwhelm, madden and mute him. His mind is closed to *Lestat*, so Gabrielle seeks to understand and silently bond and communicate with Nicolas and lovingly tries to make him function in a rational manner. She does this with Armand too, with all the curiosity of a new mother, as can be seen shortly after the fight between Armand and *Lestat* is over and they all return to the tower. Gabrielle approaches him. She has taken out a handkerchief and she touches his face (*Lestat*, 305) as Armand's bruises heal. Further, we learn that Gabrielle combs Armand's hair for him and wipes away the blood from his wounds (*Lestat*, 306). We see how Rice tries to masculinise Gabrielle with androgyny and male clothes, but her primal function of motherliness is never refuted. Gabrielle's role as a mother and nurturer is also circumscribed by Rice, as the subtextual allusions negate the freedoms Gabrielle is supposedly given within the text.

When *Lestat* decides to go ahead with his plan of putting on a big rock concert with his band, Satan's Night Out, to tell the world the history and the truth behind vampires

and vampirism, this can be read as a large scale “coming out” of the secret supernatural beings in our midst. There are warnings and signs of danger, and threats are levelled against Lestat by vampires who do not wish mortals to know their secrets. In all this understandable chaos and upheaval, Gabrielle returns to her son out of concern for his safety and is with him at the concert as vampires start to spontaneously combust. Rice shows that Gabrielle still has her motherly altruism and she is restored to her original role – she is a mother.

Doane and Hodges (1990:428) feel that “*The Vampire Lestat* reevaluates the mother and puts her in a more privileged position. This is a book feminists might applaud”. However, the repeated irreconcilable differences between what the text says and the subtext implies render this view problematic, because Rice consistently leans towards conservative normative standards and social and cultural hegemonies, cements patriarchy through the effective use of stereotypes of circumscribed femininity. Gabrielle’s vampirism, like Claudia’s, is no guarantee of her freedom within a society and world in which she is always judged as a woman and as a mother. Gabrielle can thus not escape the trappings of responsibility which these titles bring her. She is the old mother that dies as all her intentions fall to the floor, and she becomes the new mother reborn as child to her son.

## Chapter 4

### The Queen of the Damned

**“Here we are now, entertain us...”<sup>10</sup>**

*The Queen of the Damned* (1988) opens *in medias res* – it begins where *The Vampire Lestat* (1985) leaves off. Although they were published as two separate books, several years apart, the novels flow seamlessly into each other. *The Queen of the Damned* (1988) begins at the end of the rock concert depicted in *The Vampire Lestat* (1985) at which the young vampires who oppose Lestat’s music and lyrics, which give away the secret history of vampires, burst into flames. The social, cultural and political climate of the 1980s remains unchanged and continues to add to the atmosphere of the novel. In order to recognize why socio-cultural contextualisation is perhaps more important than the influence an author’s gender has on a text, Chris Weedon (1987) links socio-cultural politics inextricably to an understanding of a given text. She writes:

It is possible, for example, to look at it [a text] in both essentialist and poststructuralist ways and the key difference in these approaches is the significance given to women as authors. Essentialist approaches assume that female authorship of texts is their most crucial aspect and that they are the product of a specifically female experience and aesthetic. In poststructuralist theory authorship does not guarantee meaning, though the historical context in which the author is located will produce the discourse of the text. The forms of gendered subjectivity offered by the texts are also a product of

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<sup>10</sup> Line from “Smells like Teen Spirit” by Kurt Cobain, Dave Grohl, Krist Novoselic, Nirvana (1991)

the social discourses on gender in circulation at the time of writing. (Weedon, 1987:153)

However, *The Queen of the Damned* does differ significantly from *Interview with the Vampire* (1976) and *The Vampire Lestat* (1985) in that, whilst both the latter novels shift between the past and the present moment, there is a linear quality in their narration as Louis and Lestat unfurl their stories. However, with *The Queen of the Damned* (1988), there is a shift in focus as Lestat chronicles the experiences of all the remaining vampires and each tells his or her unique story telepathically through Lestat, who functions as an omniscient narrator, explaining how each of them came to be where he or she is.

Rice (*Queen*,<sup>11</sup> 9) thus makes a conscious, philosophical effort to discuss and delineate the nature of the story telling process by having Lestat admit to offering the readers a “reconstruction” (*Queen*, 9) of the events. Lestat explains that the novel will take us “out of the narrow, lyrical confines of the first person singular; we will jump as a thousand mortal writers have done into the brains and souls of ‘many characters’. We will gallop into the world of ‘third person’ and ‘multiple point of view’” (*Queen*, 9). Because Rice shows an active interest in constructing her mythology through engaging in a discussion of the process of writing as seen from the quote above, we can see that there is no clear sense of the separation of author from text, as Rice lives through Lestat. This is because Rice is channelled and voiced through the narrator (Lestat), who functions as both author and speaker. Once more, we see how the lines between fantasy and reality blur, making *The Queen of the Damned* (1988) a product

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<sup>11</sup> As indicated in Chapter 1, this short form is used for the in-text references to *The Queen of the Damned*.

of the uncanny, where the world in which the novel is set is our world and context, but the chief concerns of the plot involve supernatural vampires who supposedly live within our midst. In this conscious construction of her myth from oral history to the 1980s, Rice centralizes her position again and entrenches the origin myth of her vampires as the dominant truth by persuading the reader to believe that the tale she provides is credible.

*The Queen of the Damned* (1988) is a mammoth and complex story, divided into five parts, each distinct in its focus, but each contributing to the overarching plot. Lestat's music with his band, Satan's Night Out, has awoken Akasha, the first vampire and primordial queen of ancient Kemet, which later becomes Egypt (*Queen*, 371). She is the Queen of the Damned. Akasha has killed her king-consort and fellow vampire Enkil, and has escaped the care of Marius, who for centuries has looked after Akasha and Enkil in secret and ensured that no harm befell them, as this would affect all vampires. By killing Enkil, Akasha is set free to pursue Lestat, because she believes he can help her with her plan to eradicate most of the world's male population to bring about female rule and, to Akasha's mind, peace.

Akasha and Enkil are also portrayed in the Ricean mythology as the mythological prototypes of Isis and Osiris, who were worshipped by ancient Egyptians for centuries (Cott, 1995). The central premise of this myth is that the king, Osiris, is killed by a foe and his body cut up into 14 parts. His wife, Isis, searched for all these parts in order to ensure a proper burial. Isis discovers all the parts except for the phallus, so she fashions one out of gold and sings songs of praise until Osiris is resurrected. Since he is restored to life, he can die once again in a more befitting manner, ensuring that he has the opportunity for a proper burial. Because of his miraculous resurrection he

takes his place in Egyptian mythology as the Lord of the Dead, with Isis as his consort. The dispersal and the division of his body parts were associated with the number of full moons in a lunar year and Osiris is also associated with the night (Cott, 1995). Thus, Akasha and Enkil are presented as being the prototypes for this myth, because Enkil is the product of an assassination attempt and both their powers are only evident during the night. Like all vampires in the Ricean mythology and in vampire traditions generally, they are incapacitated in the day. Also within Ricean mythology, no vampires function sexually in the normal human manner. They are impotent, as was Osiris.

Akasha has silently watched the world for over 6 000 years in her vampiric state of suspended animation. Now she believes the time is right for her to rule the world and be worshipped as a deity by women. She wants to kill 99 per cent of the male population and leave only one per cent of men for the purposes of breeding. In a viewpoint widely reminiscent of that of Valerie Solanas, Andy Warhol's attacker, whose failed attempt at assassinating Warhol made her *S.C.U.M Manifesto* (based on her radical feminist grouping called the Society for Cutting Up Men) famous (Harron, 1996), Akasha blames men for all the suffering and oppression in the world and feels that women are better suited to rule because women are more sympathetic.

Parallel to the diabolical schemes of Akasha is the story of the origins of vampirism, which illuminates and informs Ricean mythology and the cosmology of vampirism. It is here that "The Story of the Twins", Maharet and Mekare, is given, with Maharet as the narrator rather than Lestat. This is because as this (parallel) story is being narrated within the text, Lestat is away with Akasha as she unleashes death and leaves destruction in her wake, and so Lestat is unaware of this aspect of the story.

Lana (1994:96) confirms that “Rice unfolds the stories gradually and simultaneously, allowing the reader to compare Akasha’s irrational plan of genocide with Maharet’s tragic story. Lestat is the narrator for the last two parts of the book..., leaving the reader with the implicit suggestion that Lestat’s tale has been more accurate than Louis’s story.” The idea of the unreliable narrator has been addressed in the previous chapter, but it is crucial to realize that in having Lestat channel the thoughts, perceptions and stories of the relevant vampires from their minds to his notes, Rice is positioning Lestat as a character whom all the other vampires implicitly trust. This allows Lestat to put a stamp of authority on the texts which he narrates.

The twins’ people practised a symbolic form of cannibalism. The brain and heart of the deceased were consumed so that they lived on within the living. This is an act which Maharet and Mekare are willing to perform after the death of their mother. They see it as an act of love, but it is found too offensive and barbaric by Queen Akasha. As mortals, the twins are also witches. They have familiars and hold council with benevolent spirits and ignore malevolent ones. Akasha orders them to be punished for their witchcraft, but this order is later rescinded when her household is plagued by a malevolent spirit and she needs their help. The twins cannot help her against the spirit, so they suffer her cruel torture of rape (ordered by the king to be carried out by the reluctant Khayman, one of his personal guards), and mutilation, during which Maharet’s eyes are gouged out and Mekare’s tongue is amputated. After an assassination attempt on the king and queen by dissidents unhappy with Akasha’s foreign cultural imperialism, which they see as destroying their own culture, the malevolent spirit sees a way to lock into Akasha and Enkil via their blood; through their open wounds, they are imbued with vampirism and the power of that spirit is

passed down through blood to every vampire, just as genes are passed down to mortals.

Barbara Creed's ([1993] 2001:17) psychoanalytical notion of the ancient mother, which she uses to analyse the film *Alien*, is particularly relevant in terms of a psychological understanding of Rice's creation of Akasha in that the "archaic mother is the parthenogenetic mother, the mother as primordial abyss, the point of origin and end....the monster as fetish-object of and for the archaic mother". Although Akasha's parthenogenesis is not the kind presented in *Alien*, there are important lessons to be learnt from Creed's analysis of *Alien*. This is because the root of all vampiric power rests with Akasha, as the mother vampire; it is a power which she receives by non-sexual means and which renders all vampires derived from her sexually impotent. Rice uses this as a device to go beyond known history and provide a new origin myth for an established myth complex.

Akasha takes Lestat as her new consort, her "fetish-object", and spares the vampires he is close to from the combustion. These vampires include Marius, Pandora, Maharet, Mekare, Khayman, Armand, Louis and Gabrielle. When Akasha has gone through the parts of the world where she feels women are most oppressed, such as Asia and the developing world in general, inciting genocide (or rather androicide), she wishes to convert the spared vampires to her will and to ordain her worship.

Lestat leads Akasha back to Maharet's compound where the vampires try to dissuade her from her plan to kill 99 per cent of the world's male population by telling her that she has no conception of the modern world and that her plan will never work. Akasha is unmoved, but within moments Mekare arrives after centuries of trudging through

jungles. She has been lost, and trying to find her sister Maharet for 6 000 years because Akasha ordered them to be put into caskets and left to float in the ocean in separate directions. Mekare lops off Akasha's head by smashing it against a glass window. She then consumes Akasha's brain and heart and thereby fulfils the cultural covenant which Akasha had forbidden after their own mother's death. In consuming Akasha's brain and heart, Mekare now becomes the new keeper of vampiric power, under the care of her long-lost twin Maharet, and the blood line of vampirism lives on without the bloodshed Akasha wanted to unleash upon the world.

In presenting the veracity of this tale as confirmed by Lestat, it is important to note that, before we even become conscious of how Rice's radical feminist agenda is subverted by the subtext, we should look at Weedon's (1987:168) argument that while "the gender, race, sexual orientation or class of authors do not guarantee the meaning of fictive representations in their texts, male-authored texts are likely to have a greater investment in traditional gender norms. The social construction of masculine subjectivities tends to serve patriarchal interests which allot more power to men". It is therefore not farfetched to be mindful of the fact that, despite the radical feminism presented in the text in the form of Akasha, who wishes to exterminate most men from the world in order for women to live in peace and inherit the earth, Rice is writing through Lestat, a male character. So, as Weedon (1987) suggests, we can assume that there will be a bias in favour of patriarchy because Lestat (as the narrator) is male. There is a strong theoretical agreement that if a woman writes a text there is no guarantee that it is a feminist work simply by virtue of the work's being penned by a woman. However, in *The Queen of the Damned* (1988), the radical feminism is so overt that it would be irresponsible on the reader's part to ignore it.

Feminist critic, Stephen Heath (1987:1) acknowledges the concept that women authors do not necessarily produce feminist works, and so Heath insists that “[w]omen are not feminists by virtue of the fact alone of being women: feminism is a social-political reality, a struggle, a commitment, women become feminists”. Therefore, Rice (as a female author), presenting a form of feminism in *The Queen of the Damned* as a doomed liberation movement, might also not be writing as a feminist, or to further any particular feminist agenda, and this is a choice that the author makes. Kaplan (1986) provides for the possibility that this a-political stance is a matter of authorial choice, but, sadly, finds that, given the potential of Rice’s novel to influence popular thought, Rice does not exploit its ideological possibilities. Rice, however, follows the path offered as the “[h]ardest to accept in Millet’s literary analysis [which] is the unproblematic identification of author, protagonist and point of view, and the unspoken assumption that literature is always a conscious rendering of an authorial ideology” (Kaplan 1986:24). The political background which Rice provides might show the defeat of feminism, and Rice’s subtext further supports this argument and deeply entrenches patriarchy as well.

*The Queen of the Damned* (1988) is the only book in the original trilogy of *The Vampire Chronicles* which overtly presents this form of political treatise. The radical brand of feminism which is depicted in the text as a liberal path for the feminist movement can once more be unpacked through looking at the subtext which Rice presents. In order to do so, we need ultimately to look at the end of Akasha’s reign of terror, at the pivotal scene where she is destabilized, to see how Rice undermines the feminist treatise which she seems to have provided in the text.

Within the text there is a clear message about the defeat of radical feminism in general. Akasha is presented through the vampires and their narrations of their encounters with her as fundamentally evil, even though Akasha's arguments are shown at a textual level to be well thought out. It seems as though her plan has been designed with the best intentions; she wishes to end human suffering. But, when we look at the subtext, we see how the current socio-political hegemony is not only maintained, but also entrenched by Rice.

The status quo of power being associated with aristocracy (not only in general society, but also within Ricean mythology) is not questioned in *The Queen of the Damned* either. The mortal Akasha is of royal lineage in her own land of birth, Uruk, and she marries into Egyptian royalty as well.

Her insistence on imposing her own Urukian cultural norms and conditioning upon the people of her adoptive Egypt is telling, as it affords her a sense of moral power and self-righteousness. This self-righteousness gives Akasha a sense of power although she is socially, politically and culturally subordinate to Enkil, the king.

Kaplan (1986:3) argues that

...because of the subordinated place of women within the ruling classes, and because sexual difference is constructed through hierarchies of class and race – and vice versa – women's writing both articulates and challenges the dominant ideology from a decentered position within it. Women's texts often move through the rhetoric of radical individualism towards a critique of both patriarchal and capitalist relations. Yet this same writing will be painfully class-bound and often implicitly or explicitly racist, displacing onto women in

subordinate groups the ‘bad’ elements of female subjectivity so that a reformed and rational feminine may survive.

Akasha’s lower standing in relation to Enkil is sufficient motivation for her to impose her beliefs on his people, because it is a way in which she can show her own power to people who are less powerful than she is. Rice uses the “radical individualism” of Akasha to gain power from the space of a “decentered position”. Akasha does not have the political might of Enkil and so Akasha in life and death manipulates and dominates him. She is the older vampire and she takes his power, yet she does not survive despite the fact that, within the text, Rice imbues her with noble ideals of wanting to help the poor and eradicate violence and oppression on earth. However, Rice does this by presenting the feminism which Akasha wants to enact as barbaric and extreme. The vampires who remain after Akasha is gone continue to be wealthy and aristocratic in nature and this reinforces the class and race stereotypes which Rice presents in her series.

In order to examine another facet of these class and racial stereotypes, it is essential to note the underlying effects of some of the more idiosyncratic features of Ricean mythology. Perhaps one of the more salient aspects worth noting is that, as Rice’s vampires age, they become whiter. Their skin becomes paler and more luminescent and they are often said to become more beautiful as they age. Furthermore, when we examine other aspects of their ageing, we find that they actually attain more power with age. Therefore, by logical extension, Akasha and The First Brood are not only the most powerful vampires due to their age, but they are also the whitest.

This becomes increasingly problematic when we look at how Rice's vampires have already been proven to be wealthy and aristocratic; now the most obvious indicator of their power lies in the whiteness of their skins. Film and media critic, Richard Dyer ([1993] 2002:127) problematizes representations of whiteness by asserting that

...[p]ower in contemporary society habitually passes itself off as embodied in the normal as opposed to the superior (cf. Marcuse 1964). This is common to all forms of power, but it works in a peculiarly seductive way with whiteness, because of the way it seems rooted, in commonsense thought, in things other than ethnic difference.

Dyer ([1993] 2002) also discusses how culturally ingrained the idea of associating whiteness with goodness and light and black with evil, danger and darkness is. He goes on to explain that

...white is no colour because it is all colours....This property of whiteness, to be everything and nothing, is the source of its representational power. On the one hand...white domination is reproduced by the way that white people 'colonise the definition of normal'....On the other hand, if the invisibility of whiteness colonizes the definition of other norms – class, gender, heterosexuality, nationality and so on.... (Dyer, [1993] 2002:127-128)

Within the dichotomy of the text and subtext we can see how Akasha, the queen of Egypt, is given a position of power in the text by being a ruler not only of Egypt, but originally of Uruk (the ancient Middle East). Logically, she is an African or non-European mortal. But she only becomes truly powerful once she entrenches herself as the dominant authority and soon after is born into vampirism and so becomes white. Lestat later describes Akasha and Enkil as “white skinned Egyptians” (*Queen*, 25) and

Akasha is said to have “skin that was white and hard and opaque as it had always been” (*Queen*, 34). Numerous references throughout *The Vampire Chronicles* describe vampire skin as being like Maharet’s “[a]labaster” (*Queen*, 224). Rice gives Africans a voice within the text as a mythological starting point; however, within the subtext, she dismantles this power by making the powerful white-skinned, since dark skin is an indication of mortality and powerlessness.

It is perhaps not strange at all then that Lestat, the most powerful and overarching character, is described, within the first few pages in every novel of the series, as being blond and blue-eyed, and as a model vampire and a master of those whom he encounters. This all bears an eerie resemblance to the oversimplified Nazi racial rhetoric with which history has made us familiar. Race and gender critic, Trevor Holmes (2006:s.p.) agrees with this and sees *The Vampire Chronicles* as being “structured like a racial split” between humans and vampires. Holmes (2006:s.p.) picks up another fluctuation between the text and the subtext, because he is also aware that “while Lestat’s favourite urban spaces are ethnically diverse melting pots, it is his blue-eyed, blond whiteness that guarantees his attractiveness”.

Rice’s Eurocentrism does not end there, as we see from the figure of Azim. He is the only non-European vampire who is offered any real recognition, but all the recognition Rice does afford him is negative. Not only is he an Eastern vampire and, presumably, Indian, but he is seen as the most decadent and tyrannical of all vampires and fully embodies every aspect of mythical cruelty. This links closely with Edward Said’s ([1978] 2003:4) definition of the basis of Orientalism: “To speak of Orientalism therefore is to speak mainly, although not exclusively, of a British and French cultural enterprise, a project whose dimensions take in such disparate realms

as the imagination itself, the whole of India and the Levant, the Biblical texts and the Biblical lands, ...a complex array of ‘Oriental’ ideas (Oriental despotism, Oriental splendor, cruelty and sensuality).” Rice’s depiction of Azim falls neatly within the sphere delineated in Said’s argument, as Azim is described as having

...dark bronze skin...moist and gleaming in the light of the candles, his head bound in a black silk turban, his long embroidered robes stained with a mingling of mortal and immortal blood. His black eyes, ringed in kohl, were enormous. To the hard underlying beat of the drums, he danced, undulating, thrusting his fists forward and drawing them back as though pounding upon an invisible wall. His slippered feet tapped the marble in frenzied rhythm. Blood oozed from the corners of his mouth. His expression was one of utter mindless absorption. (*Queen*, 72-73)

He is a product of Rice’s distinct Othering of vampires who are neither Western nor European. We have previously seen Rice’s use of this technique in her representation of the Eastern European vampire that Louis and Claudia encounter in *Interview with the Vampire* (*Interview*, 206).

Azim is portrayed as being greedy and ruthless as he positions himself as a God-like being to be worshipped in his temple compound in the Himalayas, in which people praise him continuously. He feeds off them cruelly and indiscriminately, despite age having negated his need to feed with frequency, as Ricean mythology dictates. The description of Azim’s followers is also condescending, as it suggests that they do not know any better, as they keep up their chants in a way that evokes a sense of brainwashing and cultist behaviour: “‘Azim! Azim! Azim!’ the celebrants sang over and over... ‘Azim! Azim! Azim-Azim-Azim! Ahhhh Zeeem!’ ...Their eyes were

closed, their dark faces smooth, only their mouths moving as they repeated the revered name” (*Queen*, 72). Part of the ritual involves Azim letting his blood gush forth while they lap it up. His wounds then heal, which drives the crowd to hysteria as they pay obeisance to him.

When Akasha strikes, Azim is one of the first vampires she destroys because she takes him to be one of the epitomes of the kind of deplorable male behaviour which undermines women. Azim and Pandora are lovers, just as Pandora and Marius once were. Both relationships display the same tempestuousness, but Azim is portrayed as a cruel lover, while Marius is portrayed as the voice of reason, even though he shows Pandora a distanced affection very similar to that which Azim shows her.

The polarized stereotype Rice employs in the creation of Azim sets him apart from other vampires and reinforces the notion that other cultures are barbaric and foreign to the rationality of a white, western worldview. Dyer ([1993] 2002:14) discusses the use of stereotype as a literary tool. He also places responsibility for the furthering of stereotypical ideas firmly with the author since he explains that

...[t]he effectiveness of stereotypes resides in the way they invoke a consensus. Stereotypes proclaim, ‘This is what everyone – you, me and us – thinks members of such-and-such a social group are like’, as if these concepts of these social groups were spontaneously arrived at by all members of society independently and in isolation. The stereotype is taken to express a general agreement about a social group, as if that agreement arose before, and independently of, the stereotype. Yet for the most part it is *from* stereotypes that we get our idea about social groups. The consensus invoked by stereotypes is

more apparent than real; rather, stereotypes express particular definitions of reality, with concomitant evaluations, which in turn relate to the disposition of power within society. Who proposes the stereotype, who has the power to enforce it, is the crux of the matter. (Dyer, [1993] 2002:14)

The definition and effectiveness of the use of stereotypes which Dyer ([1993] 2002) provides is cyclical and shows how integrated and deeply intertwined perceptions of stereotypes and the functions of stereotyping are. When an author uses a stereotype such as the Orientalist one which Rice uses in relation to Azim, it not only becomes symptomatic of that author's own views about a particular demographic or culture, but also serves to compound these images in the mind of the reader. By extension, the unflattering depiction of Azim in contrast to those descriptions of non-ruthless (white) vampires becomes indicative of Rice's own views regarding racial and cultural differences. In further entrenching these stereotypes, Rice conforms to socio-hegemonic trends which use whiteness and Eurocentricism as the reference point for Othering non-Western cultures, religions and people. The use of this form of stereotype is furthered as Akasha's plan and worldview are unpacked by Rice. In previous chapters, Rice has been shown to Other females by positioning males and masculinity as the norm. Similarly, Rice's Eurocentricism helps to compound the androcentric nature of her work because females are generally presented as secondary characters or as not immediately relevant to the views which her male characters express and embody.

Akasha is described as being "full of dreams and high ideals" (*Queen*, 249) and perhaps this is symptomatic of her solution to the troubles of the world. However, the way in which Rice presents the developing world is problematic. Special attention

needs to be paid to the type of loaded negative imagery used to describe it and its people. Akasha asks Lestat, who is incredulous and appalled at her inhumane request, to do her bidding in Azim's compound and "[s]laughter the males to the last one" (*Queen*, 340; emphasis original) because she believes the men to be "*the henchmen of the blood god.*[And] [*t*]he women are helpless" (*Queen*, 340; emphasis original). This already positions women as weak and men as strong, which conforms to a generally accepted social stereotype or construct. The interesting feature of this scene is that when Akasha tries to coerce Lestat into killing Azim and the other males she asks him to "*punish the males in [her] name*" (*Queen*, 340; emphasis original). Akasha is very able, as the most powerful vampire, to kill on her own, completely unaided. When Lestat is reticent because he feels that "this can never be atoned for....can never be justified" (*Queen*, 344), Akasha takes on a submissive role as she tries to manipulate Lestat into doing her bidding. Lestat agrees to kill on her behalf because he is powerfully attracted to her. At a subtextual level, this once again extends the idea of the woman as a manipulative *femme fatale*, as is the case with Claudia in Chapter 2.

While they are at the compound in the Himalayas, Lestat tries to make Akasha listen to his logic. Akasha posits that she is a Goddess sent to rescue women and give them freedom; Lestat believes this to be nonsense and claims that the women who worship her and believe her are "ignorant souls" (*Queen*, 349). He is outraged that Akasha has "told these ignorant people that [you] are the Queen of Heaven! How do you mean to redeem those words and what they will accomplish among stupid and innocent minds?" (*Queen*, 349). It is unfortunate that Rice is not only equating the poverty of the women of the developing world with the prevalence of patriarchal oppression and dependence on males, but also with ignorance. It is problematic that Rice promotes

the impression that impoverished, vulnerable women within a particular socio-cultural context are uninformed.

Raileanu (1998) also notes this hypocrisy in the selection of places in which Akasha unleashes her plan. Raileanu (1998) provides a somewhat tongue-in-cheek comment when she highlights the irony of Rice's choices for Akasha as "[b]esides, the cleansing plan works best in third world countries and, being far removed from the powerful ones, ultimately does not affect the latter's status quo that, presumably, is perfect" (Raileanu, 1998:78). Anderson (2006:127) also succinctly notes

...an elegant deconstruction of how Western feminist discourses have produced a single, homogenized 'third world woman', arbitrarily constructing an image which effectively subsumes 'the material and historical heterogeneities of the lives of women in the third world'.\* Trying to include third world 'difference' within one political framework, as Mohanty points out, has the effect of replicating the imperialistic gesture whereby third world 'otherness' is used to sustain the first world as the norm or privileged vantage point...

When Akasha takes Lestat to all the places where she coerces him into killing the males with her, there is a frightening trend with regard to the type of location to which she takes him. All of these places are poor areas. She lists places where she believes women are in need of her rescue, saying: "Shall I recite the poetry of names?... Calcutta,...or Ethiopia; or the streets of Bombay; these poor souls could be the peasants of Sri Lanka; of Pakistan; of Nicaragua, of El Salvador..." (*Queen*, 352). We

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\* "Note 36: Mohanty, C, Russo, A and Torres, L (eds) 1991. *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press" (Anderson, 2006:127).

The reference quoted here comes from the original quotation above and is included here for the sake of accuracy and completion.

are told that they go to places like “[t]he Caribbean. Haiti. The Garden of God” (*Queen*, 457) and cause “mass hysteria in Sri Lanka. Women killing men. Even male babies murdered. On the island of Lynkonos there had been mass hallucinations and an epidemic of unexplained deaths” (*Queen*, 443).

Other examples compound the impact of the subtextual effect of undermining the very women who are given a modicum of support by Rice within the text. At a textual level, Rice acknowledges poverty and its associated miseries, and the social vulnerability with which poor women live. The material poverty with which Rice equates the ignorance of these women, the “worshippers of Azim” (*Queen*, 416), is highlighted when Lestat affirms that “these are poor, ignorant women; women for whom television sets and phones are miracles, these are women for whom change itself is a form of miracle” (*Queen*, 416). Rice’s equation of poverty with ignorance is also furthered when Lestat counters Akasha’s argument and argues that “[a]ll women are not peasants blinded by visions!” (*Queen*, 429). This suggests that poor women are more gullible and susceptible to the mass hysteria that Akasha induces. After the defeat of Akasha, this idea is also reinforced by Marius, who tells Lestat that her plan was

‘...madness,’ [Marius] answered. ‘They would have stopped her; destroyed her faster than she ever dreamed.’

Silence.

‘The world would not have wanted her,’ he added. ‘That’s what she could never comprehend.’

‘I think in the end she knew it; no place for her; no way for her to have value and be the thing she was. She knew it when she looked into our eyes and saw the wall there which she could never breach. She’d been so careful with her visitations,

choosing places as primitive and changeless as she was herself.’ (*Queen*, 549)

Even the newly turned vampire – Jesse, a highly educated historian and researcher with the Talamasca (the secret order of watchers who document paranormal activity through the ages) and a direct descendant of Maharet and Mekare – cannot understand: “[W]hat was the Mother doing? Males slaughtered. The fabric of life for these ignorant people utterly destroyed” (*Queen*, 445). The image that Rice creates of poor women is a pervasive one and this is emphasized even more by the fact that Rice has a modern, educated woman like Jesse find these women ignorant. The views expressed through Jesse help to confirm and maintain the patriarchal structure by positioning males as intrinsic to the lives of these women from the perspective of a modern, independent, Western, educated and wealthy woman like Jesse.

Akasha continues justifies her plan of enforcing gendercide (androcide) by positioning herself as “The Queen of Heaven, the Goddess, the Good Mother”; she is “The Queen of heaven [who] will bring a new reign of peace on earth. There will be death for the males who have oppressed [women], but [women] must wait for [her] sign” (*Queen*, 346). She sets herself up as the pinnacle of rational behaviour and believes herself to be the embodiment of the morality she preaches. She claims that she is “the reason, the justification, the right by which it is done!” (*Queen*, 348). She furthers her justification by asserting that she has “thought out for thousands of years [her] designs for the world that is now [hers]. And the evidence is overwhelming that [she] must proceed as [she] has done. [She] cannot turn this earth into a garden, [she] cannot create the Eden of human imagination – unless [she] eliminates the males almost completely” (*Queen*, 426). Lestat questions her logic and the scene which

follows between Akasha and Lestat maps out Akasha's justification for her plan in its entirety. Akasha firmly believes that killing forty per cent of the world's population (or ninety per cent of all males) is the solution to ending war, rape and violence.

Lestat counters this point by arguing that if everyone is dead, there will be no violence. Akasha believes that her plan has merit because historical examples exist where female children were killed in favour of males who could fight battles. She believes males to be responsible for crimes against women. Akasha feels that only once men have been properly trained and socialised into modes of non-violence can their numbers slowly be increased to let men live in her gynocentric world (*Queen*, 427-428).

Akasha truly believes that her logic is sound and that killing off men will solve all the problems in the world. Despite this decidedly radical element in the text, the conservative attitude emanating from the subtext is the stereotype that women are nurturers and will be peaceful and placid in the face of the upheaval Akasha wants to unleash. By making the basic premise the placidity, malleability and gentleness of females, the crux of the argument depends not only on a gross generalisation, but also on a damaging stereotype which Rice employs. This stereotype about the nature of women is quite evident from a deconstruction of Rice's text because, by examining the subtext for possible subversion, we see how these stereotypes reinforce patriarchal ideas about women. Therefore, the ideas which Rice presents in the text as radical enough to change or challenge the status quo within the political context are unravelled as not only superficial, but also detrimental to genuinely liberal ideals which could have been espoused instead.

Akasha's simplistic logic is taken even further when she cites examples from nature such as the way bees are organised in a social grouping consisting mainly of females, with a queen and males for breeding purposes only. In addition to this, Akasha believes that over time the memory of what violence is will be eradicated from popular consciousness and she will then permit more males to be slowly re-introduced into her society, which will have no conception whatsoever of war, violence or rape. She further advocates this stance by asserting that her "logic...is elegant. A world in which only a handful of males are kept for breeding shall be a female world. And that world will be what we have never known in our bloody miserable history" (*Queen*, 434).

This brand of what Weedon (1987:4) defines as radical feminism is strongly related to Mary Daly's seminal *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (1978), a treatise in which she asserts in no uncertain terms that "[t]he fact is that we live in a profoundly anti-female society, a misogynistic 'civilization' in which men collectively victimize women, attacking us as personifications of their own paranoid fears, as The Enemy. Within this society it is men who rape, who sap women's energy, who deny women economic and political power" (Daly, 1978:29). Daly (1978:40), just like Akasha, believes that we exist "on a planet which is under the Reign of Terror, the reign of the fathers and sons". Daly (1978) also defines her political extremism by stating that "[r]adical feminism is not reconciliation with the father. Rather it is affirming our original source, movement, surge of living" (Daly, 1978:39).

The "source" to which Daly (1978) refers is inherently the mother-daughter relationship which is also central to how Akasha views herself. Akasha believes that

she is the mother and queen of all the ‘daughters’ she leaves behind. Maharet’s records of the Great Family in which she has plotted a complicated family tree stemming from her own child, who was the product of the rape by Khayman, also show a matrilineal line which identifies with the source of the birth – the mother. Akasha’s original culture is one which follows a matrilineal line, primarily based on the idea that no man could be sure any child is his, which in itself is a return to the idea of an unfaithful, duplicitous woman. Akasha believes that the gender inequality in the world is caused by men and that it is the cause of all problems.

The idea that gender inequality is an overarching and artificial construct enforced by men who keep women in check is also evident in the arguments of Kaplan (1986:19), who argues that patriarchy as a social construct has a determining influence on the lives of women:

Within radical feminism the origin of women’s subordination is variously described, yet it is always at pains to point out that the transhistorical, transcultural, transclass character of women’s oppression proves that patriarchy is much more fundamental in the determination of women’s condition of existence than the effects of any given mode of production. The original conditions under which men seized power over women, or maintained it at subsequent historical moments, hardly matters. What does matter is that power is maintained by men through ideologies of gender inequality. (Kaplan, 1986:19)

In terms of a radical feminist outlook, Akasha is justified in her assertions regarding the position of women in society. She too lives as a mortal under the control of her King-consort Enkil. Then Akasha rises up, usurps Enkil’s power and kills him in

order to reclaim her position as the source of vampires. When Akasha rises up against Enkil and physically begins to implement her plan of global androicide, beginning with herself and her own condition of being subservient to a male, Rice positions and presents Akasha as a monster on the rampage. This implies the necessity for a patriarchal structure. Akasha takes on shades of Creed's ([1993] 2001) and Case's (1991, 2001) "monstrous feminine" construct.

We see how the idea of the necessity of a male in charge is supported by Rice, who allows Akasha to run free once she has removed Enkil, who is an obstacle in her path. Enkil rages against Lestat in *The Vampire Lestat* (1985) when Lestat first goes down to their shrine to play his violin for them. Akasha is tempted by Lestat and lets him drink from her. The act of letting Lestat drink from her has profound sexual connotations within Ricean mythology and causes Enkil to awaken because of Akasha's infidelity and impetuosity. The jealously enraged Enkil crushes Lestat's violin and very nearly destroys him too. Marius saves Lestat, and Akasha and Enkil return to their stony silence until the 1980s.

The idea of patriarchy as a measure of control against the unpredictability, irrationality and chaos which women have been stereotyped as embodying is also found in Kaplan (1986), who cites Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Émile* (1762) to explain how society has consistently seen a need to have females under control:

Women... 'must be subject all their lives to the most important constant and severe restraint, which is that of decorum; it is therefore necessary to accustom them early to such confinement that it may not afterwards cost them too dear...we should teach them above all things to lay a due

restraint on themselves.’ (Rousseau, JJ. 1974. Emile. London)

To justify this restraint, Rousseau allowed enormous symbolic power to the supposed anarchic, destructive force of untrammelled female desire. As objects of desire Rousseau made women alone responsible for male ‘suffering.’ If they were free agents of desire, there would be no end to the ‘evils’ they could cause. (Kaplan, 1986:156)

Rice uses Akasha to exemplify the “destructive force of untrammelled female desire” (Kaplan, 1986:156). In the text, Akasha is a radical socio-political revolutionary who has correctly identified social injustice based on gender role constructs. Akasha is seen as vicious in being so set on fixing the world to coincide with her dream of a new world order. The careful construction of her character within the text is closely aligned to theoretical notions of the rationale behind radical feminism; however, we see, within the way these precepts are presented, that Rice reduces Akasha to nothing more than a renegade, someone who is out of touch with the pulse of the people. Akasha’s defeat is not only the defeat of radical feminism; but also the establishment and confirmation of the current patriarchal hierarchy as accepted, validated and ostensibly needed in order to control and protect the world from the threat of evil and wildness lurking within women.

The defeat of Akasha comes as no surprise, given the virulent opposition her plan meets with from all the other vampires who seemingly represent a brand of moderation, sympathy and tolerance. They do not wish to interfere in human history. Nor can they abide the madness which Akasha insists upon. Nowhere is this more telling than in the final scene of Akasha’s defeat, when Lestat leads her back to

Maharet's compound and the council of the vampires who were spared (those beloved of Lestat).

Lestat believes, even before the deliberations begin, that the other vampires will never yield: "Something inveterate would prevent it, just as it had with [him]. And some fatal resolution would come before [they] left this room" (*Queen*, 511). Akasha is confident that all the trepidation which Lestat feels is "death, but it is the death of belief and strictures. Nothing more" (*Queen*, 511). Furthermore, Akasha believes that her plan will succeed because she looks towards the future and argues that "there are no answers in history now. We have transcended history. History is built on errors; we will begin with truth" (*Queen*, 511-512). By positioning Akasha at the standpoint of a relative absolute such as a single, reductive perception of truth, Rice allows Akasha's plan to be destabilized through the perspectives of others.

The most telling perspective offered is that of Marius, the Roman vampire who has cared for Akasha and Enkil in their inanimate states for millennia. In his mortal life, Marius was a Roman citizen of noble birth (although his mother was a slave); he is never denied the right to a quality education and has the benefit of not having the Patrician duty of serving on the Roman Senate. Marius, as a mortal, thus had the freedom to exploit his wealth and education as a travelling scholar, historian, philosopher and writer; within his socio-historical context he becomes a figure who is completely representative of a sense of Western logic. He too is blond, blue-eyed, wealthy, and educated and completely personifies the stereotype of the 'unfailing' rationality and logical ontology and epistemology of western thought.

Marius immediately begins his challenge to Akasha and takes a position of leadership within the gathered coven by asking ““Is there nothing that can persuade you to stop?... What can we say? We want you to cease the apparitions. We want you not to intervene?”” (*Queen*, 512). Akasha immediately counters this suggestion with ““And why not, Marius? Because it so upsets your precious world, the world you’ve been watching for two thousand years, the way you Romans once watched life and death in the arena, as if such things were entertainment or theatre, as if it did not matter – the literal fact of suffering and death – as long as you were enthralled?”” (*Queen*, 512). Rice at once begins sowing the seeds for Akasha’s downfall by placing her arguments against Marius within a particular historic context.

On one level, Akasha’s argument is fitting and logical. However, once she is defeated, the idea that she is hopelessly out of tune with the world and its context is reinforced by this line of argument. By situating most of Akasha’s argument within the narrow confines of a particular timeframe, context, or era, based on her ancient mortal moral understanding of the world which has shaped her, Rice allows some room, at a textual level, to show how the world and society have seemingly evolved beyond ancient times. When Marius tells Akasha that she has no right to carry out this scheme, Rice tells us that Akasha’s “tone was now as subdued and eloquent of patience as his. ‘But more significantly, I have given them a thousand times to myself. How long do you think I have listened to the prayers of the world, pondering a way to terminate the endless cycle of human violence? It is time now for you to listen to what I have to say’” (*Queen*, 512).

Akasha tries to placate the vampires at the council by giving them power and an ultimatum when she says ““You will be my angels.... You will be my gods. If you do

not choose to follow me, I'll destroy you” (*Queen*, 512). Maharet begins questioning Akasha's logic and asks: “How is it possible....to break a cycle of violence through more wanton violence? You are destroying the males of the human species. What can possibly be the outcome of such a brutal act?” (*Queen*, 513). Akasha's answer is the simplistic male-less utopia she envisions where “[a]ll forms of random violence will very simply come to an end” (*Queen*, 513). This is an argument which she has clearly used throughout the novel as the basis upon which her premise rests.

Akasha believes that the time is perfect for such a revolution because of the advances in technology which have made the selection of children's sex and abortions easier. Interestingly, Akasha makes a concession in promising to allow the male population to increase over time, but her primary act is one of eradication because she feels that “for the conceptual framework to be changed, the males must be gone” (*Queen*, 514). This extreme notion is also highlighted by gender scholar, Cecily Lockett (1990), who suggests that this is what the earlier wave of feminists also believed, because they felt that “the ultimate aim of feminist criticism should be the subversion of patriarchy, the rule of the fathers that Kate Millet so resoundingly denounce[s] in *Sexual Politics* (1970)”.

In not only subverting and denouncing patriarchy, but also advocating the efficacy of a world of women, Rice gives Akasha agency within the text. However, her ultimate defeat is underlined by the subtextual allusions to the lack of logic and rationality in her argument, a rationality that Marius embodies. The chasm between the stereotypical association of the male with logic and the female with irrationality and impetuosity can be gleaned from feminist linguist Deborah Cameron (1990:11), who points out that “there are themes of ‘feminine writing’ – the body, sexuality,

irrationality. As a number of critics have pointed out, this too is quite close to traditional anti-feminism, in which women are identified with sex, body, passion while men are identified with reason and the mind.” (Cameron, 1990: 11). Jane Augustine (1992:11), another feminist critic, shares a similar view with Cameron (1990) and she believes that “patriarchy perpetuates a false dichotomy between body and mind, equating ‘man’ with ‘mind’ and ‘woman’ with ‘body’”. Within the gulf between these stereotypes Rice firmly entrenches the current patriarchal hegemony by constructing Akasha’s defeat in a manner which not only embodies these ideas, but also serves to support the idea that males are rational and females are irrational and emotional.

Akasha’s illogicality is presented as hyperbolic. When she rationalizes her concerns using the example of male violence, she also justifies them by presenting women as being placid and peaceful, asserting:

‘It’s the simplicity of it which is beautiful. Collectively the lives of these men do not equal the lives of women who have been killed at the hands of men over the centuries. You know it and I know it. Now, tell me, how many men over the centuries have fallen at the hands of women? If you brought back to life every man slain by a woman, do you think these creatures would fill even this house?’ (*Queen*, 514).

Akasha does not pause after this rather weak argument filled with glittering generalities but immediately goes on with her propagandist rhetoric, which exposes the gap Rice has built into Akasha’s arguments. Akasha states: “‘But you see, these points don’t matter. Again, we know what I say is true’” (*Queen*, 514). Weedon (1987) believes in the idea that, in the fluctuating spaces between the text and subtext within this radical discourse presented by Rice, there is room for a displacement of

meaning and that the subtext of a radical text may well be deeply conservative. She notes:

It is in making claims to truth that discourses demonstrate their inevitable conservatism, their investment in particular versions of meaning and their hostility to change. It is possible for feminists to approach the question of truth from within this same discursive framework, aiming through reversal, to establish new truths, compatible with their interests, and this is a strategy which may, at times, prove politically useful. (Weedon, 1987:131)

Akasha's vehemence about her plan and her "truth" is evident when she asserts that she "shall *make* the rhyme or reason...shall *make* the future, [she] shall define goodness; [she] shall define peace" (*Queen*, 515), which suggests that despite all the time she has spent pondering her plan, she has not fully grasped its long-term repercussions. Weedon (1987) finds this a typical symptom of theoretical radical feminism, because she uncovers that Akasha-like forms of

...[s]eparatist political strategies have potentially profound implications for heterosexist patriarchy. Radical feminism, however, in reversing dominant values, runs parallel to hegemonic discourse and has yet to subvert its power. For this subversion to occur it would be necessary for radical feminist ideas to challenge successfully a whole range of practices and forms of subjectivity guaranteed by institutions such as the family, the law, the work process and the education system. (Weedon, 1987:110)

The system employed within Ricean mythology does nothing to challenge all the different facets of the agenda within the scope of the novel. All that is presented is the

extreme of subversion, which is Akasha's enforced gendercide. The intolerance to change which is evident in the subtext is indicative of Rice's general acceptance of the overall failure of this form of feminism.

Marius is presented as knowing that the plan is doomed and rhetorically entreats, "even if it could be done, even if the mortal population did not rise against you, and the men did not find some way to destroy you long before such a plan could be accomplished –" (*Queen*, 515). The full weight of Marius's entreaty comes against Akasha in a manner which is not only androcentric (*Queen*, 515), but which also sets the standard in terms of the logical approach of Marius's argument. It is pertinent to notice how Rice elevates the status of men over the general population. Men are given agency in a very definite manner; they are seen as being capable of rational thought and they have the power to defeat Akasha, who is otherwise presented as being all-powerful based on the extent of her supernatural abilities.

When Akasha tries to explain that she thinks she knows how the modern world works, Marius tries to correct her and tell her that none of the vampires can fathom the depths of the modern world. Akasha's anger at being corrected immediately causes her to lash out: "Don't try my patience, Marius....I spared you for a very simple reason. Lestat wanted you spared. And because you are strong and can be of help to me. But that is all there is to it, Marius. Tread with care" (*Queen*, 516). It is once more ironic that Akasha, given the power that she is said to possess within the text, needs any help. However, Rice destabilizes the power which Akasha is apparently given by stating that she has kept Marius alive because Lestat wanted him spared. This is blatant pandering to a patriarchal norm in which a woman is expected to give in to the whims of her male counterpart. Akasha's power and indestructibility are portrayed as

being malleable only because of the presence of Lestat at her side. Lestat is therefore the real agent of power within the subtexual allusions instead of Akasha, although it is she who is given overt power in the text.

Marius continues pleading and tries to make Akasha see the progress made by society. He tells Akasha that she is “not fair to them when [she] speak[s] of this as the most bloody century; [she] [is] not seeing the light that shines ever more radiantly on account of the darkness; [she] [is] are not seeing the evolution of the human soul!” (*Queen*, 518). Maharet asks for more time for humans to develop what Marius calls the “idealism from which true realities can be born” (*Queen*, 518). Maharet cites the technological advancements of the twentieth century as an indication of the ability to overcome poverty and disease, but Akasha immediately counters this with a “deep smoldering hate” and sees the technological advancements as consisting of “poison gas, and diseases born in laboratories, and bombs that could destroy the planet itself. They have given the world nuclear accidents that have contaminated the food and drink of entire continents” (*Queen*, 519). Marius tries to make Akasha see that she is focusing only on the negative aspects of technology and that her idea is simply “another superstitious lie!” (*Queen*, 521). Akasha denies lying and truly believes that she is a harbinger of an era of peace and prosperity because she is “eternal, and all powerful, and shall protect them –” (*Queen*, 521). Rice immediately counters this argument and presents Akasha’s case as weak and lacking in logic through Marius, who unravels the point that Akasha has crafted:

‘How can you protect them against their most deadly foes?’

‘What foes?’

‘Disease, my Queen. Death. You are no healer. You cannot give life or save it. And they will expect such miracles. *All you can do is kill.*’

Silence. Stillness. Her face suddenly lifeless as it had been in the shrine; eyes staring forward; emptiness or deep thought, impossible to distinguish.

No sound but the wood shifting and falling into the fire.  
(*Queen*, 521)

The simple logic by which Marius unravels the crux of Akasha’s entire philosophy is staggering and disappointing. Rice provides a sustained philosophical montage, with Akasha making a case for the social and political importance of the radical feminism which she believes will improve the world. However, this argument is destabilised by Marius’s cold logic, which is indicative of how Rice’s seemingly liberal and radical text can be continuously deconstructed to reveal a subtext which tends towards the conservative and reinforces the political status quo, leaving the female, Feminine and feminist agendas, which she presents at a textual level, completely void of merit.

Once Akasha realises that she has been defeated philosophically by Marius, Santino provides more logical points to annihilate her argument. He says (of humans): “But they’d want to know what we really are...And once they did know, they’d rise against us. They’d want the immortal blood just as they always do” (*Queen*, 523). Maharet reinforces this idea and says: “Even women want to live forever...Even women would kill for that” (*Queen*, 523).

In this scene, not only does Rice reinforce the notion of the irrational woman with simplistic reasoning, but she also asserts the supremacy of the Eurocentrism which

she has consistently displayed. Marius sums up their arguments: “Akasha, it’s folly....It cannot be accomplished. For the Western world, not to resist would be unthinkable” (*Queen*, 523). Rice, through Marius, places a great emphasis on the West as a model for coherent and logical thinking. As seen in the case of Azim and the Eastern European vampires, Western thinking is the ontological and epistemological starting point for Ricean arguments and the socio-cultural model by which all else is Othered.

The vampires, headed by Marius, continue beseeching Akasha to grant humans more time and for a respite from her plan in which they want no part, while Akasha continues using emotional platitudes to justify her position, such as calling the other vampires selfish, weak and arrogant and claiming that they have always hated her and no longer love her.

In the midst of Akasha’s rapidly derailing train of thought, Mekare, lost and separated from her twin sister Maharet for 6 000 years, appears. The description which Rice provides of Mekare contains an important set of symbols. We already know Mekare has previously inhabited the jungles of South America and has left wall and pottery paintings there depicting The Story of the Twins. The startling portrayal which Rice gives of Mekare is as follows:

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 naked arms and bare feet as if she were made of it, made of 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.

What impulse could make such a being cover herself, what tender human modesty had caused this living corpse to stop and make this simple garment, what suffering remnant of the human heart? (*Queen*, 530)

The description contains images which are pitiful and which add to the impression of the deep suffering the twins must have undergone because of the cruel treatment they received 6 000 years earlier to this at the hands of Akasha. These are also images which, not unlike Gabrielle's longing to sleep deep within the earth, evoke the impression of the woman as being deeply connected to the ground and that which is natural. Perhaps, an extension of this idea is the notion of the woman as the generator just as the soil generates, and one of the woman as Mother Earth.

Just as nature in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* has its revenge, embodied by the Ents attacking Isengard (Tolkien, [1954-1955] 2005), so too does Mekare, as Mother Earth enact her revenge, as she immediately lunges for Akasha. Khayman recognises this as the fulfilment of the curse which Mekare unleashed upon Akasha before her tongue was removed. Khayman recalls the words as having been "Queen of the Damned...hour of worst menace...I shall rise to stop you..." (*Queen*, 531). Mekare manages to deflect the brunt of Akasha's power and physically grabs Akasha by the hair and shatters the window with Akasha's head, holding the severed head in her hands as Akasha's priceless, immortal blood spills. In this scene, which is typical of the flux between Rice's text and the subtext, we see how Mekare has defeated Akasha.

However, despite Mekare's actions, Rice allows Marius to be seen as the true saviour since all the vampires at the council begin to weaken as the source of their power

(Akasha's blood) slowly drains away. Even though we are told that the vampires have already realised what is required of them, Marius is given the power or agency as it is his voice which gives the order: "The funeral feast!" Marius cried. "The heart and the brain, one of you – take them into yourself. It is the only chance" (*Queen*, 533). On the verge of death, Mekare "lifted the brain to her mouth; Maharet put the heart in her other hand; Mekare took them both into herself" (*Queen*, 534). Once all the vampires come to full consciousness again, the twins stand up and "Mekare [stares] forward, expressionless, uncomprehending, the living statue; and Maharet [says]: "Behold. The Queen of the Damned" (*Queen*, 535).

At a textual level, Rice has bestowed the power of immortality on another woman. So Mekare, as another woman, becomes the keeper of this power. However, we know Mekare to be mute because of Akasha's having ordered her tongue to be removed. The muteness of Mekare is particularly significant to the understanding of the subtextual devaluation of females and the Feminine in *The Vampire Chronicles* because the lack of a voice is emblematic of powerlessness and the absence of expression. Mekare can no longer voice her ideas, thoughts, feelings or anger. With Mekare being mute, we have a symbol of a silenced woman. Maharet, on the other hand, cannot see, because her eyes have been removed, however, she does put into her eye sockets the eyes of her victims so that she can have some temporary vision until the mortal nerve endings in those eyes die. Theoretically, the idea of a silent woman is extremely pro-patriarchal. Weedon (1987:173) asserts that "power is invested in and exercised through her who speaks. Given the long history of patriarchal silencing of women, it is crucial that women speak out for ourselves and occupy resistant subject positions while men work to deconstruct masculinity and its part in exercising

patriarchal power”. This is particularly significant in the light of the story as a whole, because Akasha is also silent for all those centuries in the sanctuary Marius creates for her and Enkil. Cameron (1990:4) expresses a view similar to Weedon’s (1987), asserting that “[t]he silence of women is above all an absence of female voices and concerns from high culture” (Cameron, 1990:4).

Since Lestat is the male in charge, it is unsurprising that it is he who awakens Akasha. It is Lestat’s music and his voice which attracts her attention. Akasha admits to Lestat that it is he who has “awakened” her from her “long sleep” and to her “great purpose”, because it gives her such joy to be able to look at him and hear his voice (*Queen*, 348). Lestat’s popularity as a rock star is a complete return to the concept of the powerful having a voice, and their story being voiced both within the text and the subtext. Lestat is the voice of the last two novels; he is the narrator; he is a singer, and theatre performer. His rock band holds a vast degree of influence over his fans, who worship him, as rock stars are often awarded demigod status amongst their following. Lestat’s voice and his expression are where his power and appeal to the mortal masses lie.

*The Queen of the Damned* is a novel which comes full circle at its close. Lestat is restored to his strength and remains unpunished for the transgression he has committed in telling the world the secret history of vampiric origins through his music. The motherly source of immortality is housed within Mekare, under the care of Maharet, both of whom represent a moderate, socio-politically pleasing balance within the text and subtextual spaces. In vesting the power in them, Rice returns to focusing her attention on the woman as a mother and nurturer. The twins are more controllable, because Jesse, their descendant and a newly turned vampire, is

dependent on their will to live. Maharet holds great love for her family line, which she has traced over the centuries. Jesse is a direct descendant of Maharet and Mekare – should any misfortune befall the twins, Jesse’s vampiric life is in danger. To protect Jesse, the twins will not allow harm to befall them. This is a return to the matrilineal family line where the whole human race is shown to be related, by Maharet’s calculation, on the family tree of The Great Family.

Rice’s opinion about and representation of the militancy and danger of radical feminism is presented as definitive and fixed through not only the structural and text-based defeat of Akasha and her radical ideas, but also subtextually through the way in which Marius and Lestat are valorized as agents of power, moderation, safety and logic. The worrisome aspect which this analysis highlights is that Rice presents the socio-political hegemony and androcentrism in her pro-patriarchal subtext as a fixed pattern of being and as a universal worldview that is beyond question. The continuation of Lestat as protagonist through the subsequent novels of *The Vampire Chronicles* allows Marius’s description of Lestat as The Brat Prince to ring true and one can almost imagine Lestat singing about his vampirism again in words not unlike the following lyric: “I’m worst at what I do best / And for this gift I feel a little blessed / Our group has always been and always will until the end...” (Cobain *et al.*, 1991). Rice’s safe housing of the power of vampirism within the silent twin who guides the blind twin poses no danger to society. Unlike the volatile, radical Akasha, together, they are together the perfect embodiment of the passivity contained in the lyrics “With the lights out it’s less dangerous,/ here we are now – entertain us” (Cobain *et al.*, 1991).

## Chapter 5

### Conclusion

**“The sun may rise in the East; at least it settles in the final location...”<sup>12</sup>**

The popularity of Anne Rice’s work is undeniable. This popularity stems not only from the contextual originality of her work, but also from the genres which she employs. Her historic fiction has been interspersed between the publication of more volumes in *The Vampire Chronicles* series, for which she is most renowned. It is perhaps worth noting that popular fiction is often dismissed as vapid and transient, devoid of the merits thought to characterise what critics regard as Literature. Because of this, not enough critical, theoretical and academic attention has been given to Rice. However, Rice’s popularity should not detract from the calibre of her work, which Ricean critic, Roberts (2003:223) describes as a “blend of low, sensational plots with higher philosophical, social, and psychological issues; and their allusions to other literary works and myths that enrich and deepen their narratives”. Keller (2000:165) expresses a similar opinion, asserting:

The author adopts two of the literary genres that are most frequently associated with low culture, horror and erotica, and lends an intellectual integrity to them that is characteristic of high cultural practices. Her vampires, witches, and sexual renegades are also philosophers, historians, and poets. This combination enables her to be taken seriously while becoming an extraordinary commercial success, transforming the literati

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<sup>12</sup> Line from “Californication” by Anthony Kiedis, The Red Hot Chili Peppers (1999)

into advocates of popular fiction and the casual readers into literary critics. (Keller, 2000:165)

The popularity which Rice's work enjoys can be likened to the way in which she presents immortality as both a gift and a curse. Popular fiction has historically been seen as reading material for the masses; cultural elitism has ensured that popular fiction is seen as that which is easy to read and understand. These novels are considered linear and entertaining. Whilst Rice's work has these elements, the philosophical leanings, which she presents through her vampires, have provoked profound intellectual debate and challenge the reader to confront his or her own esoteric and existential opinions.

Within the context of this study, it is perhaps wise to look at the political-historical context of popular fiction. Popular fiction has long been thought of as reading material for women (Kaplan, 1986). However, this generalisation is not strictly true as popular fiction does have a male readership as well. It is imperative to note that popular fiction is part of a media that produces examples of cultural expressions for its readers. Popular fiction is thus a tool which can chronicle cultural or social experience for an audience. Moreover, because popular fiction is able to reach a wide audience, it is perhaps even more necessary for critical studies to look at the messages which these works of fiction send out to readers. As the arguments in the preceding chapters have shown, Rice's conservatism, and consistent reinforcement through the subtext of patriarchal ideas and ideals surrounding womanhood and femininity are also messages which her readers take with them. Rice has a platform that she could use to powerful effect to help change social and cultural perceptions of females and

the Feminine but, sadly, this is not what she does. Instead, she uses her subtext to undo the liberal in favour of the conservative.

That Rice's work undoubtedly has a significant female following, as the usernames on her fan sites indicate, makes the underlying message of her texts profoundly dangerous to the readers. Weedon (1987) is also well aware of this fact and highlights some of the problems associated with the political implications of popular fiction targeted at female readers. This is because, as Weedon (1987:170-171) explains,

...[m]ost women's writing and all popular fiction do not come within the bounds of 'literature'. They are not legitimated by the literary institutions and are not seen as modes of access to the truth about 'human nature'. However, the fact that they are not defined as 'literature' does not detract from their discursive power to transmit meanings and values. This process continues both in spite of and because of the practice of recognized literary, educational and cultural institutions. Girls are taught basic skills in reading which involve reading in particular ways to specific ends. Most are then left to the attractions of the market place. This includes magazines as well as fiction in novel form. Popular fiction, read as it most often is for pleasure, works on these basic skills and extends and confirms the expectations of the reading subject. It is arguable that the absence of popular fiction from most literary critical discourses of reading helps popular fiction to shape the reader's sense of pleasure more directly and leaves it open to more powerful, apparently 'natural' modes of reading. As with literature its power and effectivity lie in the role it plays in the battle for subjects, helping to constitute them in conservative, chauvinist or in the case of some feminist fiction, radical ways. The institutional marginalization of popular fiction helps to further the myth that it is pure entertainment, a

condition conducive to its ideological work. (Weedon, 1987:170-171)

In the course of the discussion presented in the preceding chapters, we have consistently seen how Rice's textual liberalism is belied by a profound subtextual conservatism. The ideological implications of this, as Weedon (1987) points out, are problematic. This is because such normatively conformist views are systematically reinforced by Rice, as has been repeatedly demonstrated throughout this thesis. These ideas do not allow for any freedom from the female and Feminine stereotypes, so that Rice does not succeed in freeing her female readership from any socially-ingrained ideology, but instead colludes in shackling them through the constant fortification of disempowering ideas.

This thesis has effectively applied a number of theoretical approaches to prove its primary hypothesis that, whilst Rice presents a seemingly liberal text, often with radical and even taboo elements, the message which she reinforces in the subtext is often a return to orthodoxy, patriarchy, hetero-normative conformity and conservatism. To show how the subtext deconstructs Rice's textual message, the female and Feminine characters (and the archetypes which they embody) have been examined. Feminist Theory, post-modernist theory, Queer Theory, and aspects of Marxist Theory, and Gothic Fiction have all been used to show how the liberal text only serves to entrench a deeply patriarchal world view. This view does nothing to show a move towards a liberal understanding of women, Femininity, and society.

It is in using the array of tools which these theories provide that we can carefully view the cross section of political awareness which informs our understandings of texts.

Feminist literary critic, Ellen Rooney (2006a:89) reminds us that the basic “politics of literature are literally the politics of agency and subordination, of the forms of subjectivity that are ceded power and those that are assigned ‘subjection’”. Rooney (2006) also suggests that we cannot separate ourselves and our reading from the political agendas at work within a text. In terms of a basic political understanding of a text, the roles of the powerful and the weak are obvious political and social constructions. When these constructions are applied to viewing female characters and Feminine archetypes within a text, we need to be mindful of the probability that these characters may have no agency and may be “assigned ‘subjection’” (Rooney, 2006a:89).

Since political readings can be applied to all texts, politics also informs the Fantastic and the uncanny. It is generally recognised that fantasy is a distancing mechanism allowing for political comment, whether liberal or conservative, as Rice’s texts show. It is vital to note that the wide scope of popular culture and commercial fiction should not blind us to the way in which these novels can influence perceptions. The conservative subtext which has been unravelled throughout this study proves that Rice provides very little challenge to the socio-cultural status quo; she allows for the prevalence of patriarchal hegemony and makes minimal room for the emancipation of the female, the Feminine or for the queer. Rice’s influence as a popular author could be well used to inspire some of her readership to believe that the seemingly liberal text which she presents is in fact a viable possibility for future patterns of social thinking. Instead Rice’s texts show that this liberalism is not possible and that the patriarchal hegemony is a natural order. This reinforces the notion that females and the Feminine should accept being subjugated.

The perpetual flux between the radically differing political messages coded in the text and decoded in the subtext seems to be emblematic of Rice's entire public versus private persona. Rice has a reputation for not settling on a point, and she is also celebrated for marketing herself and her work as avant-garde. Rice's defence of her artistic integrity is so determined that she famously took out a full-page advertisement in a newspaper to voice her dissatisfaction at the choice of Tom Cruise and Brad Pitt to play Lestat and Louis in the 1994 film adaptation of *Interview with the Vampire* (Newitz, 1998). Not only did Rice voice her unhappiness, but she also went as far as encouraging fans of her novel to boycott the film. Yet, ironically, Rice is credited with writing the screenplay for the film. After she had seen initial takes of the film, she was forced to rescind her words in another advertisement (Newitz, 1998). Rice, at the time, claimed that Tom Cruise and Brad Pitt were indicative of a mainstreaming of her work and that their popularity would overshadow the artistic merit of her writing. Newitz (1998:179) explains:

Rice like her cultish vampire heroes, finally gave up lurking in the shadows and cashed in on the monstrosity – or to put it simply, she got used to the idea of selling out. While Rice wanted to claim initially that she was 'victimized' by Hollywood, clearly she was hardly the victim in this situation – not only did she make a small fortune off the movie deal, but she was also able to use her story of 'abuse' to nearly crush the movie project with bad publicity. (Newitz, 1998:179)

Rice's "bad" publicity had the opposite effect and *Interview with the Vampire* (1994) was a blockbuster. The movie still stands as a cinematic testimony to the beauty of Rice's writing and has lost none of its appeal over time. The vibrant and accurate historic detail is true to the novel and there is sensitivity towards depicting the

individual back-stories of each of the characters. The poignancy with which Claudia's ashes in the arms of Madeleine are depicted is a defining scene which helps bring another dimension of vividness to the novel.

Unfortunately, the same cannot be said of Rymer's (2002) *Queen of the Damned* film adaptation, which Rice happily endorsed. The acting is poor and the dialogue not only lacks substance, but is also clichéd. The plot bears only a vague resemblance to the novel, and the political and philosophical conjecture which is so evident in the novel is all but eradicated in the film amidst a very loud rock soundtrack featuring popular bands such as Korn, Linkin Park and Static-X. Rice, by that stage, had endorsed the butchering of her work. However, in keeping with her seeming inability to take a fixed stand on matters, Rice now repeatedly comments on her Facebook page "that *The Queen of the Damned (sic)* film is not something she can understand or embrace, that she encouraged them not to do the film and that it hurt her to see her work mutilated" (Wikipedia, 2010b: s.p.).

With the rise of the popularity of vampire fiction targeted at the teen market, for example, Stephenie Meyer's (2005-2010) *Twilight* series and HBO's (2008) *True Blood*, based on Charlaine Harris's (2001-2008) *Southern Vampire Mysteries: Sookie Stackhouse Series*, it is hardly surprising that Rice would at some stage have to reassert her position as a doyenne of vampire fiction. The rivalry between Rice and Meyer has led Rice to state publicly that *Twilight* is "based on a really silly premise: that immortals would go to high school. It's a failure of imagination, but at the same time, that silly premise has provided Stephenie Meyer with huge success" (Schwartz, 2011:s.p.)

Rice condemns the commercialism of *Twilight* and by implication extols the virtues of her own ‘Higher Artistry’. This is once more indicative of the author’s inability or unwillingness to state her position plainly. She uses shock tactics in her writing in the form of radical political treatises, eroticism, pederasty and high-handed classist rhetoric which socially, historically and culturally dissociates itself from the reality of the plight of the poor. The poor and the marginalised are undermined by the unstable seemingly liberal foundations upon which these texts are built. Keller (2000) provides a lengthy, but succinct estimation of Rice’s work in this regard. He asserts:

Through both her novels and her interviews, Rice persistently pays homage to a polymorphous sexuality as well as a variety of marginalised subject positions, yet she also undermines the authenticity of these portrayals with the conventionality of her life and her narrative conclusions, consigning these subject positions to the realm of fiction and artifice.

Because the subject matter of her novels is frequently unconventional and many of her characters are representative of the socially marginal, one might expect that the author shares a peculiar propensity for non-conformity. This, however, does not seem to be the case. While there is little or no moral condemnation of her characters, there is a refusal, both in her fiction and in the rhetoric of her public persona, to embrace a revolutionary posture to social marginality. Upon a superficial consideration, Rice seems to be quite radical in her views toward sex and in her willingness to represent the sexual outsiders in her fiction. However, even here there is a bias toward normative conclusions like marriage. (Keller, 2000:1-2)

Keller (2000) extends this discussion by linking this oscillation of beliefs to Rice’s personal depictions of her views and beliefs. Keller states:

At every level, Rice can be observed to negotiate between a radical and a conventional point of view regarding sex and social taboo. In Michael Riley's *Conversations with Anne Rice*, Rice asserts that she finds the pictures of naked children in Vogue 'very erotic'. She goes on to describe the 'sensuous enjoyment' that she experiences when she showers her children with kisses and hugs, initially a rather bold admission from a mother and a mainstream writer. However, in her subsequent explanation, she very rapidly distances herself from any impropriety, so much so that she completely eviscerates the concept of the erotic, implying that she wants nothing more unconventional than maternal affection, an interest in watching her son grow 'big and strong' (63-65). The backpedalling is very clear in the exchange. The author wants credit for the shocking suggestion, but she does not want to face the social stigma that would attend such an admission. (Keller, 2000:3-4)

Given Rice's constant shifting between polarised ideas in her text, in her subtext and even in her personal capacity, we can see that defining her exact political stance (and corresponding theoretical school of thought) is almost impossible. Even the blatant echoes of incestuous relationships which Rice weaves through her mythology and packages to shock audiences can be viewed as simply "highly *suggestive* of incest" (Newitz, 1998:182; Newitz's emphasis). Rice manages to maintain a delicate balance so that the very indications of these incestuous affairs, which are often too clear to misinterpret, can also be disowned and defended as completely inoffensive and innocent because there is an element of "plausible deniability built into any reading that wants to claim the vampires' relations are *strictly* incestuous" (Newitz, 1998:182; Newitz's emphasis). This makes the novel reader-friendly to a wider, more conservative audience, which also works as a safeguard so that Rice can easily

dismiss claims with regard to the questionable morals and messages which her texts promote.

Keller (2000:5) criticises Rice's distaste for showing any true liberal or reformist proclivities, because he feels that "the author only flirts with the revolutionary; her inclination is consistently more toward the mundane" (Keller, 2000:5). This is a view which this thesis has shown to be validated by Rice's own oeuvre. *Blood Canticle* ([2003] 2004) is the grand finale of *The Vampire Chronicles*. Rice has repeatedly asserted that she is not returning to vampire fiction, especially since the death of her husband, Stan Rice, and her return to Catholicism. Rice initially moved on to writing accounts of the early life of Jesus (Peace be upon him), but following her much-publicised break from the Catholic church, she has made a foray into crime fiction.

However, as the last book in *The Vampire Chronicles*; *Blood Canticle* ([2003] 2004) raises some intriguing points. In it, Lestat finds his calling in (un)life as a saint. He celebrates the virtue of the Pope and decides to live his life doing as many good deeds as he can. Not only does Lestat's entire existential view change from *Interview with the Vampire* ([1976] 2006) to *Blood Canticle* ([2003]2004), but this return to conformity is also evident in his desire to marry Dr Rowan Mayfair. He cannot marry her, even though he loves her because he does not want to turn her into a vampire since he feels that she is too important to her family. The final message which Rice reinforces is that Christianity and a heterosexual marriage are the logical conclusions to the quest for selfhood and self-knowledge. In terms of a feminist approach, we also see Rice confirming the social stereotype which Betty Friedan challenges in *The Feminine Mystique* ([1963] 2001), that a woman's place is with her family. Not only is this return to hetero-normativity limiting, but it is also presented as so final that it

leaves the reader more than slightly disappointed. There is no attempt to be more inclusive of other denominations of Christianity, or to reconcile Lestat's past views with his present ones. He simply wishes to atone for his sins and attain sainthood. This is more than slightly hypocritical, especially in light of the range of philosophical, social, cultural, historical, existential and political issues which Rice's work has raised over the course of *The Vampire Chronicles*. It suggests that the answers which Rice presents in the grand finale of Lestat's quest are answers for all time and the ultimate truth. It also suggests that the considerations of pluralism and the philosophical ideas raised in the earlier works are merely sinful examples of vacuous sophistry and require nothing but reproach.

As the concluding novel to *The Vampire Chronicles*, *Blood Canticle* ([2003] 2004) thus confirms the hypothesis of this dissertation. Not only does Rice's liberal text repeatedly carry with it the undertow of a conservative subtext, but it also serves to emphasise the political weight of this conservatism. Rice succeeds in selling high-quality popular Fantastic fiction to members of an audience that embark on their own existential quests, just as her vampires do. Because of this, Rice's novels have a responsibility to bear in terms of the message and ideas which they carry. Rice could use this platform to good effect by encouraging the emancipation of females and the Feminine from the social and cultural bonds that keep females in a subordinate position to patriarchy. However, Rice manages to ensure that the socio-cultural and political hegemonies of patriarchy, consumerist materialism, and other hetero-normative ideologies are not only maintained, but compounded.

The primary focus of this thesis has been to examine the pervasive images of gender archetypes and stereotypes of the major female characters in the original trilogy of

Anne Rice's *The Vampire Chronicles*. The effect which the conservative subtext has on undermining the apparently liberal message of the text has been analysed.

However within the scope of this dissertation, I have also touched on other avenues for future research. This thesis can serve as a springboard for further studies on Rice's work. Some interesting options for these studies are a close Marxist reading of her work, or even a detailed Derridean or Foucauldian analysis. These areas of analysis may also be applied to other works of vampire fiction, for example, Charlaine Harris's or Stephenie Meyer's works, to see if there are similarly conservative undercurrents and trends.

To conclude, Rice's gendered subtext, which reinforces patriarchy and a normative, Western socio-cultural positioning of political inclinations through the often vapid depiction of the female and the Feminine shows that "the sun may rise in the East, but at least it settles in the final location" (Kiedis, 1999).

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