



HÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS

Hugvísindasvið

The Vampires of Anne Rice

From Byron to Lestat

Ritgerð til B.A.-prófs

Ingunn Anna Ragnarsdóttir

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Abstract

The myth of the vampire can be found throughout history. When the literary vampire came forth its popularity kept growing steadily. This essay will be discussing the author Anne Rice and her *Vampire Chronicles* and how her writing helped change and forge a new tradition in vampire fiction. The specifics of Rice's vampires characters will be discussed, the changes she produced, and the explicit traits of the vampires in Rice's fiction such as their connection to the Byronic hero and to the sexuality of the vampire. To bring out these traits this essay will analyze the first three books in *The Vampire Chronicles* to show how Rice manages to grab the reader through not only her story-telling talent, but Rice's intellectual, melancholic, erotic and alluring characters that are somewhat perverse but in an oddly charming and seductive way.

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Vampires are by their very nature perverse and do wicked and terrible things simply for the sport of it.

The Vampire Armand, 1998 (Rice 6)

Introduction

The vampire myth has been with the human race for centuries as Theresa Bane duly notes in her *Encyclopedia of Vampire Mythology* (2010). Each culture throughout history has had some sort of embodiment of the vampire that was to blame for unexplained deaths or causing plagues (Bane 1). According to Bane, one of the earliest pieces of writing that has been discovered was not, as she puts it, “a love poem, recipe, or a religious text but rather a magical spell written around 4000 B.C.” She notes, that it was allegedly to have been written by a mother in order to protect her child from the EKIMMOU, “a type of vampire spirit that even then was considered to be an ancient evil” (Bane 7). So then as stated by Bane, even in ancient times the vampire myth was an ancient myth and there seems to be evidence of some sort of vampire threat in many countries and in ancient as well as in earlier cultures.

What is a vampire exactly? That is a very hard question to answer considering the amount of encyclopedias and non-fiction books and essays written about them.

Vampires seem to be different in every culture and age, as Bane points out: “The reason that there is no single definition of a vampire is because each culture of people, from their various time periods and from their various locations, has feared different things” (Bane 3).

The intention of this essay is to explore the development of the literary vampire and then to discuss a specific type of vampires, the literary vampires in the fiction of Anne Rice. The literary vampire has been given much attention and discussion regarding their

meaning and what they represent and the debate around the vampires in Rice's novels has still not ceased. Vampires seem to hold fascination with all ages and genders and the vampires in Rice's fiction are no exception as is noted in the introduction of the book dedicated to Rice's writings, *The Gothic World of Anne Rice*, "Vampires, Witches, Mummies, and Other Charismatic Personalities: Exploring the Anne Rice Phenomenon" (1996) written by Gary Hoppenstand and Ray B. Browne. They mention that at one of Rice's book signings there could be seen, young adults and teens sporting the Goth fashion, all in black and with dramatic hairstyles and jewelry, but among them were also "baby boomers, conservatively clad, as well as a considerable number of older readers" noting that Rice's fiction seems to attract readers that would normally not read horror fiction (Hoppenstand and Browne 2). On a personal note, when I first started reading Rice's novels as a teenager, once finished I would pass the book on to my mother who read them all as well. It is also worth mentioning that when I started reading Rice's vampire novels around the year 1995 I never realized at that time that *Interview with the Vampire* (1976) was written 19 years earlier. Even when I read it again around 2005 it never occurred to me that it was written so many years before, Rice's writing felt very modern and I was sure that the books were written sometime in the 1990s. There is timelessness to her writing that might be why Rice's novels are still popular today.

With the publication of Rice's first novel in *The Vampire Chronicles*, she brought forth a new kind of literary vampire that would from then on continue to develop, both by Rice herself and among new writers. The special traits of Rice's vampires will be discussed in this essay, traits that have made them so popular since her first publication in 1976. Their sensuousness, their suffering and agonizing as well as their love and passion for life and living (as much as one can live when being dead). What has made

Rice's vampires so special? From their obvious differences to Dracula to their connection to the Byronic hero and of course their sexuality or perhaps lack thereof are all aspects to the success of Anne Rice's vampires. I will analyze in the first three novels of Rice's *Vampire Chronicles* the concepts, homoeroticism, the perverse family, the relationships between vampire and vampire, female vampires and the different views of feminism, and how Rice changed the image of the vampire from the cold and aloof Dracula and made way for the sympathetic vampire of today.

Brief History of Vampires in literature.

Before discussing the vampires in Rice's fiction it is important to look back over the literary vampires to understand the differences and contrasts between the old and the new vampire. When searching for the history of the literary vampire it is hard to find anything substantial written about the literary vampire before John Polidori's "The Vampyre", as Carol A. Senf mentions in her article "Daughters of Lilith: Women Vampires in Popular Literature" (1999), vampires hardly exist in literature before the nineteenth century (Senf 199). This brief history set down here will therefore not be an exhaustive recitation but will only mention the highlights of the vampire in literature.

According to J.P. Telotte in his essay "A Parasitic Perspective: Romantic Participation and Polidori's The Vampyre", the first literary vampire in English literature is John Polidori's Lord Ruthwen in "The Vampyre" (Telotte 9). It was published in 1819 in Henry Colburn's *The New Monthly Magazine* under the name of Byron. Milly Williamson in her book *The Lure Of The Vampire* (2005), states that it is debated whether Polidori intentionally used Byron's name or not (Williamson 51), but Richard Switzer in his article "Lord Ruthwen and the Vampires" (1955), suggests that Polidori was not confident enough to publish the story under his own name and

therefore used Byron's name. Switzer remarks that Byron denied having anything to do with it, quoting a letter Byron wrote the same year the story was published: "A few days ago I sent you all I know of Polidori's *Vampire* [sic]. He may do, say, or write what he pleases, but I wish he would not attribute to me his own compositions" (Switzer 108). However, Rosemary Ellen Guiley in her book *The Encyclopedia Of Vampires, Werewolves and Other Monsters* (2005) claims it was created by Lord Byron himself and then plagiarized by Polidori (Guiley 8). This seems to be a mystery that will continue to be unsolved. According to Switzer, Lord Byron, along with Percy Bysshe Shelley and his future wife, Mary Shelley were going on a vacation in Switzerland in 1816 and Polidori accompanied them as Byron's physician-secretary. Byron apparently suggested that they each write a ghost story and this suggestion produced from Mary Shelley her famous novel *Frankenstein* (1818), and Polidori's "The Vampyre" (Switzer 108).

Williamson states that the vampire became a Gothic success with the publication of Polidori's "The Vampyre". The story became popular both in Europe and in America being published in three editions in America, three editions from Paris in English along with a French translation and a German version was also published in the year 1819, an Italian one in 1824, then in the year 1827 a Swedish version and a Spanish version in 1829 (Williamson 51). Williamson also remarks that it is generally acknowledged that Polidori based his vampire, Lord Ruthven on Byron and that one of the reasons for its popularity was because of the connection to Byron. The reason for this detailed description of Polidori's vampire and its connection to Byron is because the figure of Byron, the outcast, the sinister aristocrat and his infamy has become connected to the figure of the vampire (Williamson 36), and will be better discussed later in this essay.

Although Polidori's Lord Ruthwen in "The Vampyre" is the first contemporary vampire in English literature it is interesting to note that there is, according to Guiley, another story from ca. 1800 where the modern vampire can be recognized. "Wake Not The Dead" is the English title to this short story credited to the German fabulist Johann Ludwig von Tieck. It is about a nobleman who is obsessed over his dead wife and eventually finds a necromancer who brings her back from death. The wife however, has developed a taste for human blood and soon kills all in her husband's household, along with his adopted children from his second marriage. He is able to overcome her but "ultimately pays a horrible price for disturbing the natural order" (Guiley 8).

The next vampire literature worth mentioning, published in the nineteenth century was a story called *Varney the Vampire* written by a British man named James Malcolm Rymer. It was published through the years 1845-1847 in a form of pamphlets or "penny dreadfuls" that were "an inexpensive novel of violent adventure or crime that was especially popular in mid-to-late Victorian England. Penny dreadfuls were often issued in eight-page installments" (Britannica). Williamson attributes the growth of literacy in the nineteenth century to the success of *Varney the Vampire* among the working class and states that *Varney the Vampire* is the tale that popularized the vampire with the English-speaking reading public (Williamson 21)

The next highlight is in the year 1872, which introduces "Carmilla", an erotic female lesbian vampire written by the Irishman's J. Sheridan Le Fanu. Robert F. Geary in his essay "'Carmilla' And The Gothic Legacy: Victorian Transformations of Supernatural Horror" (1999), states that the level of the lesbian eroticism, taking into account the time it was published in, is surprisingly unambiguous (Geary 19). Carmilla is a lesbian vampire who starts to pursue the nineteen-year-old Laura who lives alone with her father. On invitation from Laura's father Carmilla stays with them and Laura and

Carmilla become close friends. Senf declares that female vampires are often depicted as “bloodsuckers, rebels, or both” but more often than not they are “characterized by overt eroticism” (Senf 204).

In 1897 one of the best-known vampire fiction within the vampire genre is published, *Dracula*, by Bram Stoker. Laurence A. Rickels in his book *The Vampire Lectures* (1999) mentions that when Stoker wrote his novel he examined archives in the British museum to study the history of vampires to support his novel (Rickels 1). According to Kathryn McGinley in her essay “Development of the Byronic Vampire: Byron, Stoker, Rice” (1996) *Dracula* is “very much a product of the Romantic movement, and of Lord Byron” (McGinley 72). McGinley notes that *Dracula* is based on the historical Vlad Tepes, “the fifteenth-century Romanian count, he is a noble outlaw, a devilish aristocrat with an assertive desire to control, a passion for power and for life itself” (McGinley 74).

Dracula remained a quintessential figure through the early twentieth century but a new twist to the vampire was introduced in 1954, when *I am Legend* by American author Richard Matheson was published. Mary Pharr notes in her essay “Vampiric Appetite in *I Am Legend*, *'Salem's Lot*, and *The Hunger*” (1999), that *I Am Legend* is one of the first attempts to connect vampire mythology to science fiction (Pharr 95). In 1975 Stephen King publishes *'Salem's Lot* and Pharr comments that King is not one to develop a new twist, as Matheson did on the vampire mythology but to use and breathe new life into what already exists. In King's novel *'Salem's Lot*, Pharr points out that King “places Stoker's myth on Matheson's path and follows it to a Dark Romantic vista from which he shows us a glimpse of an irrational infinity” (Pharr 96). Guiley notes that *'Salem's Lot* was King's second novel, following after *Carrie* (1974) and she remarks that King's idea for *'Salem's Lot* came after a conversation King had about what would

happen if Dracula found himself in contemporary America and she adds that the vampire in King's novel is absolutely evil (Guiley 252).

Finally, a personal favorite and what this essay is about, Anne Rice's *Interview with the Vampire* is published in 1976. Joan Gordon and Veronica Hollinger in the introduction of the book *Blood Read: The Vampire as Metaphor in Contemporary Culture* (1997), assert that Rice's *Interview with the Vampire* serves as one of the most influential vampire fiction and since its publication the vampire "has undergone a variety of fascinating transformations" (Gordon and Hollinger 1). Candace R. Benefiel in her article "Blood relations: The Gothic Perversion of the Nuclear Family in Anne Rice's *Interview with the Vampire*" (2004) states that with the publication of Rice's first vampire novel, she managed to turn the vampire archetype on its head, focusing not on the vampire hunters as in *Dracula*, but on the vampires themselves (Benefiel 261) making the main focus of her novels on the relationships between the vampires. Since Rice's publication of her first book in *The Vampire Chronicles* in 1976 she has published 11 other vampire novels from the years 1976- 2003.

Of course there are numerous other vampire novels that have been published and even more has been published recently due to the new vampire fad that has been going on today. Movies based on vampire fiction have become immensely popular, as the recent *Twilight Saga* films by Stephenie Meyer have proven to be as well as the books themselves. Meyer's novels, became extremely popular and led to all four of them being made into movies. Television shows based on vampire novels are also extremely popular, as is evident with the show *True Blood* (2008) based on *The Southern Vampire Mysteries* or *The Sookie Stackhouse novels* (2001-2011) by Charlaine Harris. These even newer vampires still hold the same traits as Rice's characters, although in some cases they might have been exaggerated but in different directions. In the *Twilight Saga*

(2005-2008) the vampire protagonists do not drink blood from humans, making them vegetarians in a vampiric way, and they all live together as a family, each with their roles as the mother and father and five adopted children, though in reality four of them are couples and have been together as vampires for many years. Not quite as perverted or incestuous as in *Interview with the Vampire* but the elements are there. The sexuality is very subdued and they are never portrayed as overtly sexual in a hetero- or homoerotic way. In *True Blood* however, their sexuality or sex is what the show is all about, both between vampire and vampire, humans and vampires, man and woman, woman and woman and man with man, there is no limitation.

Changes in the Literary Vampire

Much has changed since the first vampire appeared in literature. As Williamson points out, through the twentieth century the image of the vampire progressively becomes sympathetic. And the fan culture around the vampire is still growing. This new and evolved vampire no longer addresses the readers through fear alone but draws out other emotional responses. Through the mid- to late twentieth century the vampire tradition takes a significant turn in depicting the vampire characters as narrators, offering readers according to Williamson “Otherness from the inside” (Williamson 28). Williamson states further that *Dracula* is no longer the main attraction in vampire literature. The new vampire came forth portraying them as “morally ambiguous” sympathetic and suffering. The most evident change being the transformation of the reader’s perception of the vampire, as Williamson explains “it is no longer predominantly a figure of fear in Western popular culture, but a figure of sympathy” (Williamson 29). Margaret L. Carter shares the same opinion in her essay “The Vampire as Alien in Contemporary Fiction” (1997) discussing what she feels is a dramatic difference in the vampire genre. To her a

vampire in a Victorian novel might bestow alluring attraction or “even inspire sympathy”, but she feels that the author of such a novel “always took for granted that vampirism as such was evil” stating that a “fictional vampire aroused positive emotions in spite of, not because of, his or her “curse”” and this is a very important point because here is where the change becomes evident. Carter further asserts that most vampire fiction published after the year 1970 “the vampire often appears as an attractive figure precisely *because* he or she is a vampire”. This is one of the most important shifts in the vampire fiction and represents to Carter a “change in cultural attitudes toward the outsider, the alien other” (Carter 27). This is very evident in Rice’s vampire fiction as mentioned by Williamson regarding the huge fan culture surrounding the vampire (Williamson 28). Katherine Ramsland has a similar notion in her book *Prism of the Night* (1992), that the “popularity of the vampire myth indicates that we are attracted as much as repulsed” (Ramsland 146).

Jules Zanger in his essay “Metaphor into Metonymy: The Vampire Next Door” (1997), describes the new vampire in contrast to the old vampire, which he says is Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (Zanger 17). He remarks that with each modification of the vampire the new vampire becomes more human, however, the depiction of their relationships with humans becomes less important and serves a lesser purpose (Zanger 20). The human’s roles as victims have also become diminished according to Zanger, if compared to *Dracula*’s interest in Mina and Lucy and then to the victims of Rice’s vampires in the *Chronicles*, who as Zanger remarks, “are as indistinguishable from each other as McDonald’s hamburgers-and serve much the same function” pointing out that the most significant relationships in the *Chronicles* are, between vampire and vampire. This point Zanger makes is not entirely true however, he does not mention Rice’s *The Tale of the Body Thief* (1992). In that novel readers meet David Talbot, who had

already been introduced in *The Queen of the Damned* (1988). Lestat eventually becomes what might be considered as good friends with him and this friendship develops into a greatly affectionate relationship. The relationships between the vampires are, in Rice's first three *Vampire Chronicles* the most important relationships but eventually, she introduces new characters and they are not all vampires.

Another effect Zanger notes is the sympathy of the reader has shifted from the potential victim to the vampire (Zanger 21). That might have resulted from Rice changing the narrative perspective to the vampire's point of view, allowing her readers to experience the story through the vampire's eyes. McGinley discusses, that by shifting the narrative perspective Rice further modernizes the vampires (McGinley 81). Martin J. Wood also discusses this shift in the narrative perspective in Rice's novels in his essay "New Life for an Old Tradition: Anne Rice and Vampire Literature" (1999), mentioning that having the narrative perspective from the vampires view point helps readers identify with the vampire (Wood 67).

Wood gives a detailed analysis of the changes Rice has produced within her novels and with these changes she has changed the whole vampire tradition. Wood suggests this because the new tradition has readers feeling sympathy with the vampires, enjoying and sometimes encouraging their preying on unsuspecting victims and if readers delve even deeper into Rice's earlier works they will find beneath her sultry seductive text that both attracts and revolts evil, a disturbing underlying meaning, "Sensuousness seems suddenly to become equated with death, pleasure with evil, erotic (especially homoerotic) behavior with possession, consumption, and destruction" (Wood 59). That is, no matter how much the vampires attract us, there is always something aberrant underneath.

When describing the differences between Rice's new vampires and the ones from the old tradition they have very few similar traits other than being undead, nocturnal, aristocratic and thirsty for blood. They do not transform into bats, fog or wolves, as Dracula does, nor do they seem to, when it comes to feeding, prefer either sex to the other (Wood 61) (Ramsland 148) (Benefiel 268). Moreover the location of the vampire has changed. They no longer, as they did before Rice's fiction dwell in remote and isolated places, Lestat, Louis and other vampires in the *Chronicles* live in "comfortable, well-furnished places generously appointed with art and cultural artifacts gathered through the centuries" (Wood 65-66). The Gothic castle on the hill is no more, the vampire lives next door and might even offer to babysit for you.

The Author, Anne Rice

Anne Rice was born October 4, 1941 and named by her parents Howard Allen Frances O'Brien but she changed it herself to Anne in the first grade. When her father Howard left in the year 1942 to enlist in the navy, Katherine, Rice's mother now alone for the first time and with two small children to look after turned to drinking and continued to drink even after her husband returned (Ramsland 2-12). In the book *Prism of the Night: a Biography of Anne Rice* (1992), Katherine Ramsland gives a detailed description of Rice's upbringing and her life, from losing her mother to her marriage to Stan Rice, the loss of their daughter and how she became an international best selling author.

Rice's mother died when Rice was nearly fifteen years old (Ramsland 46).

By 1958 her father was remarried and had the opportunity to be resituated within his job at the post office to the regional office in Dallas, Texas (Ramsland 55). Up until this point Anne had been educated in Catholic schools, now almost seventeen and living in Richardson a suburb of Dallas she was for the first time in a secular public school

(Ramsland 56). She met her husband to be Stan Rice in Richardson High School. He was a year younger than she and had also just transferred to Richardson. They dated casually but after Rice's graduation in 1959 it was time for her to leave for Texas Woman's University and Stan showed no interest in a long distance relationship, she left for college with a broken heart (Ramsland 60-61). The next semester Rice transferred to North Texas State University where Stan had also enrolled (Ramsland 66). Rice found that North Texas State University was not for her so after only six weeks she left and moved to San Francisco. In San Francisco Rice became independent but also lonely (Ramsland 72). At the same time in Denton however, Stan was gaining some experiences of his own. He realized that the only other person he knew with the same passion as him was Rice and he decided to see if he could reclaim their friendship and was shocked to discover she had gone to California, that he had "let her get away". He wrote her a long letter and Rice immediately wrote back as her love for him had never died away and they continued to correspond with each other (Ramsland 72). One morning she received a special delivery letter, it was from Stan asking her to be his wife and soon they were married (Ramsland 74). For a while their life was good, they moved to San Francisco where they attended classes and they spent most of their time studying and working (Ramsland 79-82). Eventually they came into contact with other writers and poets and even though at that time Rice was not writing, it was clear to all who encountered her that she had a "strong and insatiable intellect, an ability to retain details, and a drive that eventually would be channeled in ways that few among her acquaintances foresaw in those early days" (Ramsland 84). While Stan's career was developing in a positive way, Rice and her writing ambitions were in the background although Stan did encourage her. And then in the middle of all this disarray Rice became pregnant (Ramsland 103). They were both ecstatic and Rice was looking

forward to being a mother (Ramsland 103). On September 21 1966, Rice gave birth to their daughter and they named her Michele (Ramsland 104). During this time a friend of the Rice's, Michael Riley confessed to them that he was gay and to his astonishment Rice not only completely accepted him but also became fascinated with most everything that had to do with being gay (Ramsland 105).

She saw homosexuality as a physical realization of that ideal and looked to gay men as figures that exhibited the erotic aspects of gender while transcending the negative aspects. A man who transcends gender, she felt, sees the world more clearly. (Ramsland 105-106)

It was during this time that the first inkling of the idea of her vampire story came to life. A friend of theirs invited the Rice's to stay with him for a week in his cabin at Big Sur. During that stay Rice decided to write one story per night as an exercise. As it turns out one of these stories was about a cynical vampire. This story she took out several times to work on but ended up putting it away unfinished. As Ramsland elaborately exclaims: "Without realizing it, she held in her hand the story that would one day radically change her life" (Ramsland 109-110).

Their life went on quite the same for the next four years. Then their daughter Michele became very ill and at the age of four years old she was diagnosed with acute granulocytic leukemia (Ramsland 116). During her illness Michele matured emotionally and seemed to understand what was happening to her "becoming an adult trapped in a child's body" (Ramsland 121). Despite these difficult times Rice decided to finish her masters degree and graduated in 1972, during which time Michele was not doing so well (Ramsland 126). Michele struggled with her disease for two years, then during the night, one month before Michele sixth birthday she passed away and the doctor's were unable to revive her (Ramsland 128). Although they had been aware, during her two-

year illness that Michele could die, nothing could have prepared them for the tragic shock (Ramsland 129).

The next period in their life after the death of Michele was one of heavy drinking. As Ramsland expresses in her book, “They had already been drinking for many years, but now they threw themselves into it with the same energy with which they had cared for their sick child” (Ramsland 132).

Rice Begins to Write

The loss of their daughter put a strain on their marriage but Rice and Stan made a decision to get through this together and renewed their commitment to each other. Stan already had a career but Rice at the age of thirty-two had basically nothing (Ramsland 136-137). Rice joined a group of women who also wanted to be writers and developed close friendships, especially with a woman named Carolyn Doty (Ramsland 137-140). They had dinner together when Stan was teaching in the evenings and would discuss art and the writings of others but not so much what they were working on themselves. Among the writers they discussed were Nathaniel Hawthorne and Edgar Allan Poe and Rice felt that:

Those were the American writers that I somehow connected with. They were writers that had European-American voices. I felt they had a lot to teach me. She was not aware at the time that she would soon take her place among American storytellers of the supernatural. (Ramsland 140)

Finally Rice sat down and began to write (Ramsland 141).

She took out her vampire short story and began working on it to send it to a competition. As Ramsland states, “She wanted to look at the vampire as a tragic figure, a human who had made the mistake of choosing such an existence to his deepest regret” (Ramsland 142). There was no way of knowing the immense change this story would

bring to her life. She was completely engulfed in her story, writing about Louis's childhood and religion made her delve into her own childhood and religious views, although, Rice did not consider that events in her past might be fueling her words (Ramsland 143). The tale begins with the vampire Louis who is telling a journalist about his life before and after he became a vampire. He was a wealthy plantation owner supporting his mother, sister and brother in New Orleans. Louis's brother Paul prays for hours and wants him to sell the plantation and use the money for God. Louis refuses and Paul in a rage walks to the top of the stairs, throws himself into the air causing him to fall and break his neck (Ramsland 143-144). With Paul's death in the story Rice was able to identify with Louis, his grief, his loss and the regret. This is where the emotions flared up for Rice and she began to write almost unconsciously (Ramsland 144).

Ramsland mentions that Rice wrote from a first-person viewpoint for intimacy and that her sense of accuracy in describing the surroundings in her novels is exacting, "showing attention to the fine nuances that charge a scene with intersensory" (Ramsland 145).

Ramsland suggests that writing through immortal characters gave Rice a safe place to contemplate death and in her writings it was evident that the destructive nature of the vampire was what alcohol had done to her mother Katherine, "what leukemia had done to Michele" and what Michele's death had done to Rice. Rice was torn between painful remembering and the longing to forget, she found a way to combine both in the "flexibility and tolerance of fiction", in her first vampire novel she would "resurrect Michele" and in her later novels she would do the same for her mother (Ramsland 146).

The Byronic Vampire in Anne Rice's Vampire Characters

The vampires in Rice's novels have more often than not been connected to the Byronic figure. Williamson observes that the figure of the vampire as a rebellious outsider is not

exclusively a development of the twentieth century, nor is the public's admiration of him (Williamson 30). As mentioned before, John Polidori's vampire character Lord Ruthwen in "The Vampyre" according to Williamson is based on Lord Byron and one of the reasons for its popularity with the public was because of its connection to Byron, for at the same time Byron had become an outcast himself but simultaneously the public's curiosity about him grew. As Williamson notes, rumors of, incest, infidelity and especially homosexuality had made him exile from the London society (Williamson 36). The Byronic hero as described by McGinley, is "a charming, seductive, aristocratic character with a diabolical narcissism and desire to control" and she mentions that Dracula, along with other vampire characters are linked with the Byronic hero (McGinley 73). Rice's characters Lestat along with Louis and other vampires in her *Vampire Chronicles* can be seen as modern Byronic heroes with Lestat being the more classic example (McGinley 82). Depicting him as a "noble outlaw" and an "aristocratic rebel" who craves independence and power, breaking all the rules as in "making a child vampire, revealing himself and the other vampires to mortals, and trying to become mortal again" and as he was made into a vampire against his will, he is resolute in making the most of it and "finds vampirism the greatest adventure of his existence".

McGinley quotes Frances M. Doherty in her description of Lestat saying:

In Lestat, there is a splendidly aristocratic figure who has been corrupted from good to evil, largely by events beyond his own control, a natural leader of men, though basically an independent figure, at odds with others, someone with an unshakable pride, ungovernable passions and a ravaged heart. (McGinley 82)

McGinley notes as well that the Byronic hero is also marked by guilt, and Louis certainly fills that description but his Byronic traits are the opposite of Lestat's. He feels immensely guilty over the fact that he has to kill to sustain himself and he tries very

hard to hold on to his human sense of being and is much more sensitive than Lestat, making Louis the most human of Rice's vampires (McGinley 82).

McGinley argues that because the vampires in Rice's fiction hold such strong human emotions, "including love and guilt" they go a step beyond Dracula. And being "heavily influenced by Catholicism" not that religious relics can hurt them, "they agonize over the nature of good and evil in search of solace" mentioning Louis as being the most influenced by his Catholic upbringing, holding a respect for it "even into his vampire life" making it the source of his guilt. Another important aspect McGinley mentions is Rice's vampire characters capacity to love. She discusses that though "Dracula insisted he could feel love, his version of love was eccentric" (McGinley 83). Lestat and Louis and the other vampires in Rice's fiction all seem to love each other one-way or the other, "as they need companionship to endure their immortality" (McGinley *ibid*). McGinley further notes that the "Ricean vampires" as she calls them, are even similar in physical appearance to the Byronic hero, being pale and having mesmerizing eyes. She discusses their sexuality by explaining that although they "are not sexual in the traditional sense" the act of drinking blood is sensual noting, "this craving for sensation is a particularly Byronic trait" (McGinley 83-84).

To McGinley Lestat and Louis each displays different sides of the Byronic hero making them polar opposites. Using John D. Jump's definition of the two opposites from his book *Byron* (1972) the "Hero of Sensibility" and the "noble outlaw". She places Louis in the category of the "Hero of Sensibility", stating "he has humanitarian sympathies, and his love is as tender as it is passionate", and Lestat being the "noble outlaw" (McGinley 85). In conclusion McGinley notes that the final parallel between Byron and vampires "is the imagery of eternity and immortality" observing that one of the strongest fascinations with vampires for modern readers is the idea of immortality,

because of humanities “natural fear of death” and for that reason why vampires are frightening, “for they may bring death faster than we expect”. However, to vampires and especially to the “Ricean” vampires as McGinley remarks, immortality can be both desirable and intolerable for, “eternity can seem an overwhelmingly long time” (McGinley 85-86). By creating vampires more human than Dracula, “capable of love and suffering under the weight of a guilty conscience, which Dracula did not possess” McGinley states that Rice has further modernized the vampire while at the same time “returning it to its Byronic roots” (McGinley 86). This Byronic figure is noticeable in most all of Rice’s vampire fiction, from both Lestat and Louis in the first novels, to Marius and Armand in later novels.

The Vampire Chronicles – The First Three Books

Interview With The Vampire (1976)

When Rice’s first book *Interview With The Vampire* was published in 1976 it was met with mixed criticism but eventually it gained a massive following making it according to Guiley the “second-highest-selling vampire novel, bested only by Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*” (Guiley 162). The story as was described before is about the vampire Louis and his life right before and after he is made a vampire. He has decided to tell his story to a reporter, of how he was made a vampire by Lestat De Lioncourt. Together they live in Louis’s mansion in Louisiana but Louis never really accepts his new identity and is immensely guilty over his demonic nature, drinking blood. Lestat and Louis make a child a vampire after Louis had lost his control and drunk her blood. Her vulnerability called out to him. This vampire child was Claudia whom scholars have connected with Rice’s deceased child Michele (Guiley 162) (Ramsland 154). Eventually this happy little family becomes estranged as Claudia realizes that she is trapped in a child’s body

as she keeps maturing intellectually and is angered at Louis and Lestat for making her a vampire. Claudia kills Lestat and she and Louis go to Europe to find others like them as they seek answers to their origins, answers that Lestat would never give them. In Paris they find Armand and his coven and Louis falls in love with him. However, Lestat did not die and he finds them in Paris and tells Armand and his coven of Claudia and Louis's betrayal to him. Apparently it is a sin among the vampires to make a child a vampire. The coven captures Claudia and kills her and Louis in a rage after finding out about Claudia's death, burns their dwelling and all the vampires within it. He and Armand are together for a while but eventually they grow apart from each other and Armand leaves him. Louis ends his narrative but the reporter does not accept Louis's ending and exclaims he wants Louis to make him a vampire. At this Louis attacks him, drinks his blood but does not kill him. The reporter wakes up and the first thing on his mind is to find Lestat. Thus ends Rice's first *Vampire Chronicle*.

Interview With The Vampire gained much attention for many things but one specific element that attracted a large following were the homoerotic aspects of the novel. Andrew Schopp in his essay "Cruising the Alternatives: Homoeroticism and the Contemporary Vampire" (1997) discusses the vampire and specifically Rice's vampires in her novels. He notes that in Rice's novels, homoeroticism is as common as the hetero-erotic but that desire for the vampires, "does not rely on the sexual act, since such acts are not really an option" (Schopp 237-238). This is not entirely true but given the fact that Schopp's article was published in 1997 he would not have known that in *Pandora* (1998) the vampires actually do have sex but they realize at once that they do not need to.

"Put it inside me," I said, reaching between his legs. "Fill me and hold me."

"This is stupid and superstitious!"

"It is neither," I said. "It is symbolic and comforting."

He obeyed. Our bodies were one, connected by this sterile organ which was no more to him now than his arm, but how I loved the arm he threw over me and the lips he pressed to my forehead. (Rice 293)

So the act is possible but not necessary or desired.

Schopp discusses the relationship between Louis and Lestat in *Interview With The Vampire* remarking that not only does Rice write about two men living and traveling together, they also take part together in creating the child vampire Claudia, basically giving birth to her by "each one engaging in one half of the conversion act" and then treating her as their child (Schopp 238-239). Considering the fact that when the vampire makes a vampire he becomes the parent, therefore, when Louis and Lestat create Claudia in an odd way, Louis became both her brother and father but also her lover. Benefiel notes that the "vampire family, incestuous and blurred as it is, presents a subversive alternative model to the nuclear family" (Benefiel 263). In her opinion the vampire family as depicted by Rice in *Interview with the Vampire* is "so close to the norm as to constitute a parody" explaining that Lestat, Louis and Claudia stay together as quite the happy family for sixty-five years, "far beyond the length of most mortal marriages" (Benefiel 264), and not just because of their immortality. Benefiel also mentions that there is no sexual contact "normal or otherwise" between the family members but that is not completely accurate. Even though there is no physical sexual contact, there is obviously a sexual relationship between Louis and Claudia as Louis claims himself in *Interview with the Vampire*,

She lived to put her arms around my neck and press her tiny cupid's bow to my lips and put her gleaming eye to my eye until our lashes touched and, laughing, we reeled about the room as if to the wildest waltz. Father and Daughter. Lover and Lover. (Rice 101)

This dual relationship between Louis and Claudia, father and daughter, lover and lover is repeated throughout Rice's *Chronicle's* as when Lestat makes his mother into a vampire in *The Vampire Lestat* (1985) and again in *The Tale of the Body Thief* (1992) when he makes David Talbot, his mortal companion into a vampire, thus becoming again the parent and lover.

The Vampire Lestat (1985)

In *The Vampire Lestat* the erotic elements, being homoerotic or otherwise continue. Now it is Lestat's turn to tell his story. The story begins with Lestat awaking in 1984 after having been slumbering in the ground since 1929. He awakens to the sound of rock music and decides to become an eighties rock star. From this novel on, it is clear that Lestat has become the main character of the *Vampire Chronicles*. Louis is still there but almost always in the background. Lestat eventually discovers Louis's interview tapes and feels that the whole story has not been said yet, particularly from his point of view. He decides to tell his own story, from his childhood to his present state. He was made a vampire by force by vampire named Magnus who then committed suicide. Left with no guidance, Lestat makes his mother Gabriella and his best friend Nicolas into vampires as well. However, Nicolas does not cope well with his new life and ends his existence by going into the sun. During this time Lestat and his mother have met Armand. Lestat seeks for answers about the meaning of his vampiric life and its origins but Armand has no answers for him, only telling him of his own maker Marius who might have the knowledge he seeks. Lestat becomes obsessed with finding Marius and

leaves carvings and signals for him wherever he goes. Gabriella leaves him and Marius eventually approaches Lestat and tells him about the origins of vampires from ancient Egypt and of Akasha and Enkil the mother and father of all vampires. They are however as statues and have not moved for thousands of years but Lestat nevertheless awakens Akasha and she allows him to drink her blood as she takes his blood. At this Enkil wakes up, and throws Lestat from Akasha. Marius arrives just in time to save Lestat but then he tells Lestat he must leave.

All this happens before Lestat finds Louis and Claudia. He has a different perspective on their little family life than Louis has told of in *Interview with the Vampire*. Lestat angers other vampires because he becomes a public figure as a rock star and is telling the secrets of their existence. In the end of the story Lestat holds a huge rock concert where many vampires have gathered with the intention of killing him. However, the novel ends in suspense with Akasha the Queen awoken and she takes Lestat. The story continues where this one ends in Rice's next novel *The Queen of the Damned* (1988). All this fiasco around Lestat in regard to his becoming a rock star and "outing" himself and other vampires is his attempt to seem ultimately evil to accomplish something good, as McGinley notes:

He hopes to serve some function, perhaps even serve a good purpose by displaying himself as definitive evil. He therefore goes to extreme limits of evil, almost hoping to be struck down by God, so at least he would know of His existence. (McGinley 84)

If readers were shocked with the sensual relationship between adult and child in *Interview with the Vampire*, and the homoeroticism "the second book offers the literally incestuous relationship between Lestat and his human mother made vampire, Gabriella", as stated by Terri R. Liberman in his essay "Eroticism as Moral Fulcrum in

Rice's *Vampire Chronicles*" (Lieberman 117). Lieberman points out that the eroticism in Rice's *Vampire Chronicles* is mostly expressed in two specific acts, "the kill" and in creating another vampire and these acts are unmistakably, very sexual (Lieberman 109). However, as Schopp suggests, if the act of creating a vampire is a metaphor "for the moment of indulging in sexualized homoerotic desire" then according to him the *Vampire Chronicles* suggest that "satisfying this desire isn't enough in itself" (Schopp 239). That is, there is always the fear of losing the one they love after they turn them into vampires, as when Lestat made Nicolas, Nicolas turned against him and when Armand meets Daniel, the reporter who interviewed Louis, he keeps him attached to him by giving him small amounts of his blood, not wanting to turn him into a vampire "because he fears the conversion will separate him from Daniel forever" (Schopp 239). Armand eventually turns Daniel into a vampire. Schopp notes further that Rice has often implied in her *Vampire Chronicles* that once the conversion has taken place and the desire fulfilled, the desire to make a vampire "the relationship between the men is doomed" (Schopp 239). This can be seen in the relationship between Louis and Lestat, Claudia and Lestat (although Schopp is only mentioning the relationships between men, it is also evident between men and women), Lestat and Nicolas, Lestat and his mother, and in later novels between Marius and Pandora.

The Queen of the Damned (1988)

The next novel in the *Chronicles* is *The Queen of the Damned* (1988) where the story continues from when Akasha has taken Lestat at his concert. The Queen has kidnapped Lestat to help her accomplish her plans for the creation of a new world. She intends to make the world right after all the cruelty and injustice caused by men over the centuries, especially against women. To accomplish this she plans to, along with Lestat kill 99 percent of the male population on earth (Guiley 236). Readers are also introduced to

Maharet, a vampire as old as the Queen and Maharet tells how she and her twin sister Mekare came to be vampires shortly after the King and Queen were made. Akasha has also sent forth her forceful strength to kill other vampires, mostly the new and young ones. The ones who survive, the old and the wise gather at Maharet's house to figure out a way to stop the Queen. The only problem is, because Akasha is the mother of all vampires, the first vampire, she is their life force so that if she is killed all vampires will die, as Lestat says himself in *The Queen of the Damned*, "if Akasha and Enkil should ever walk hand in hand into a furnace, we should all burn with them. Crush them to glittering dust, and we are annihilated" (Rice 12). So they cannot destroy Akasha without destroying themselves. Before Akasha continues her plan, she confronts the vampires gathered at Maharet's house, offering them to join her or die. They all refuse and right before Akasha can kill them Maharet's twin sister Mekare whom Maharet has not seen for thousands of years enters the house, tears Akasha's head off and commences to eat her brain and her heart, thus taking the life force of the vampires into herself and destroying the Queen of the damned.

Although there have been female vampires before *The Queen of the Damned*, it is in this book that Rice depicts her strong female characters. Akasha of course is very strong but ultimately evil as her plan was to get rid of almost all the men in the world. Rita Antoni criticizes Rice in her article "A Vampiric Relation to Feminism: The Monstrous Feminine in Whitley Strieber's and Anne Rice's Gothic Fiction" for her portrayal of women in Rice's *Vampire Chronicles*. To Antoni the "representation of gender relations in these novels, as seen by feminist readings, deploys a certain level of dissatisfaction" (Antoni 8). She mentions what has already been noted in this essay that in the first two novels in *The Vampire Chronicles* the main emphasis is on "intellectual and homoerotic bonds between male vampires" and that Rice's literature has been greatly valued for

“transcending gender boundaries and the ideological system of compulsory heterosexuality” thus portraying gender as irrelevant. However, in Antoni’s opinion the irrelevance of gender is merely shown “by almost all male characters” and therefore contributes to the “marginalization” of female characters. She feels that the female characters are mostly powerless although they can be wise and strong they are more often than not depicted as isolated and alone (Antoni 8-9). In Antoni’s opinion Akasha is the only character with political and moral concerns about the marginalization of women “and the violence against them” and that the other female characters who defeat Akasha do not even try to come up with an alternative solution, only telling her that the humans need time to mend their ways and to Antoni this situation implies the failure of sisterhood, meaning that since they have become vampires they have become indifferent to the violence against them and other women (Antoni 12).

Wood has another notion of the females in *The Queen of the Damned*. Firstly he points out that Rice has created within her fiction a new myth, a new Adam and Eve but Adam is Akasha, “the female” and to Wood only the women are the “active parties” and Maharet and Mekare are the “essential catalysts, and the important sacrificial victims”. Secondly Wood feels that all the males, even Lestat, “are powerless in an apocalyptic struggle among vampire women”. Wood maintains that *The Queen of the Damned* suggests “a powerful matriarchy among vampires, counterpoised against the predominantly patriarchal order among humans” (Wood 75). Furthermore according to Wood, Rice’s vampire fiction are not condemning men or masculinity but to an “unthinking allegiance to a system where power determines everything, including sexuality–allegiance, in other words, to an outdated social code” (Wood 76).

I rather agree with Wood regarding this point rather than Antoni. Although the female characters are not as noticeable as the male characters, my notion was always

that they do not need to be in the foreground and do what needs to be done mostly silently in the background. Which differs from Lestat who always needs to be in the center of attention, that could be connected to his acting career in his mortal life and considering the fact that he chose to become a rock star, it seems evident that he needs the attention. Even though Akasha is quite evil, her plan was to make the world a better place but her solution to eliminate all men who had in her opinion caused all the problems to begin with, seemed to be naive as a plan to remove a problem instead of working on it always is. I always thought of Maharet as the ultimate female hero in the *Chronicles*, someone who had all the answers and the courage to do what she felt needed to be done, without seeking the glory for it.

Later Novels in The Vampire Chronicles

The Vampire Chronicles came to the total of twelve books. The next novel in Rice's *Chronicles* is *The tale of the Body Thief* (1992). As the title indicates the story revolves around Lestat having his body stolen from him, as he had only agreed to switch bodies for a specific time. It is also about the relationship between Lestat and David and how through the unfortunate event that Lestat has his body stolen, David in helping him retrieve it back is forced to switch bodies as well and ends up in a much younger, fitter and handsome body. However, Lestat is lonely and though David has refused many times his offer of turning him into a vampire, Lestat makes him a vampire anyway in what Schopp sees as a "disturbing rape fantasy" (Schopp 240). Liberman remarks that the central theme in all four books is "the struggle between good and evil" (Liberman 110). This theme is also evident in the next novels. In *Memnoch the Devil* (1995) Lestat meets the devil and according to Guiley, the devil takes him on a tour of heaven and

hell to make Lestat decide which side he wants to join (Guiley 2000), and because he wants Lestat to take over his job for him in hell, the ultimate good and evil.

Then Armand tells his story in Rice's next novel *The Vampire Armand* (1998). There he tells of his life before and after he was made a vampire by Marius. Marius also tells his story in Rice's novel *Blood and Gold* (2001). In later novels Rice mixes the vampires with her Mayfair witches, which she had at that time already published a trilogy about, *The Witching Hour* (1990), *Lasher* (1993) and *Taltos* (1994). In *Merrick* (2000), *Blackwood Farm* (2002) and Rice's final novel *Blood Canticle* (2003) the vampires and the Mayfair witches interconnect and ironically Lestat falls in love with one of the Mayfair witches. Rice also wrote about *Pandora* (1998) who was Marius's love and *Vittorio the Vampire* (1999).

Although all these novels are successful the first four novels are the ones who have gained most attention and most scholars have written about. Every reader who is a fan has found through Rice's writing something in the characters or in the characters dilemmas that they can relate to in their own lives.

Conclusion

The development of the literary vampire has been a long journey and is still ongoing. From the first popular story in English literature of Lord Ruthwen in "The Vampyre" by Polidori, *Varney the Vampire* by Rymer, Le Fanu's lesbian "Carmilla" to ruthless *Dracula* by Bram Stoker, Stephen King's depiction of him to Anne Rice's *Vampire Chronicles*. This ongoing evolution of the vampire in fiction has led to even newer depictions of the undead today as before mentioned popularity of the *Twilight saga* (2005-2008) novels and movies (2008-2011) (Rosenberg and Meyer) and *True Blood* (2008) TV series show. The fascination of the vampire in fiction has in no way

decreased which tells us that even though the vampires are in so many ways abnormal and anomalous people just cannot seem to get enough of them.

Through the analysis of the first three novels in Rice's *Vampire Chronicles* the theme of love and relationships is noticeably strong and predominant. The deep desire to find a companion to love and to be loved is essential for most creatures. How else could anyone, especially a vampire endure the loneliness of eternity? Lestat will always love Louis and Louis will always love him but they grew apart and could not spend eternity together. What relationship can last forever, especially if you are a vampire and are doomed to live infinitely?

Through Rice's *Chronicles* she has changed the way readers think of vampires, gender, relationships and love, as she made her vampire characters sympathetic and likeable despite the fact that they drink blood to nourish themselves. Readers are now able to relate to the characters and not only be repulsed as before but feel attracted. Rice has made it easy for her readers to feel empathy with the vampires and thus the lives of the readers and vampire characters become interwoven and this might be why Rice's *Vampire Chronicles* were and are still so popular.

Not only did Rice create a new vampire but she also cleared the way for new writers to make their own depiction of the genre and create the new vampire of today. Rice's *Chronicles* have also helped young readers find interest in literature as she did for me, for after reading *Interview with the Vampire* my interest to read more literature of all kind was kindled, as most likely other young readers have experienced. Rice's fiction opened up for me a whole new world to explore new literary fiction, of course after reading Rice's *Chronicles* first.

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