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Dream of Immortality in Anne Rice's
Interview with A Vampire

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Dedication

To our Prophet Muhammad peace be upon him

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ABSTRACT

The myth of the vampire has continued to frighten and fascinate people all over the world. The idea of an undead night-stalker that feeds on human blood has been around for centuries and endures to this day. Numerous countries and cultures across the globe have personal deviations of a similar mythical entity. No matter the variation, all the vampire tales have a key commonality the lust for human blood.

This paper consists of two chapters. Chapter one deals with Anne Rice's life and career .Chapter two discusses dream of immortality in Anne Rice's *Interview with A Vampire*

Finally the conclusion sums up the findings of the study.

CHAPTER ONE

Anne Rice's Life and Career

Anne Rice is an American author of gothic fiction, Christian literature, and erotica .She was born in New Orleans in 1941. She began her professional writing career with the publication of *Interview with the Vampire* in 1976, while living in California, and began writing complement to the novel in the 1980s. In the mid-2000s, following a publicized return to Catholicism .¹

Rice published the novels *Christ the Lord: Out of Egypt* and , fictionalized accounts of certain incidents in the life of Jesus. Several years later she distanced herself from organized Christianity, citing disagreement with the Church's stances on social issues but pledging that faith in God remained .However, she now

considers herself a secular humanist.²

After the publication of *Interview with the Vampire*, while living in California, Rice wrote two historical novels, *The Feast of All Saints* and *Cry to Heaven*, along with four other novels *The Claiming of Sleeping Beauty*, *Beauty's Punishment*, *Beauty's Release*, and *Beauty's Kingdom*. Rice then returned to the vampire genre with *The Vampire Lestat* and *The Queen of the Damned*, her bestselling sequels to *Interview with the Vampire*.³

Shortly after her June 1988 return to New Orleans, Rice penned *The Witching Hour* as an expression of her joy at coming home. Rice also continued her popular Vampire Chronicles series, which later grew to encompass ten novels, and followed up on *The Witching Hour* with *Lasher* and *Taltos*, completing the *Lives of the Mayfair Witches* trilogy. She also published *Violin*, a tale of a ghostly haunting, in 1997. Rice's *Christ the Lord: Out of Egypt*, published in 2005, the beginning of a series chronicling the life of Jesus. The second volume, *Christ the Lord: The Road to Cana*, was published in March 2008. The third book in the series, *Christ the Lord: Kingdom of Heaven*, has been postponed.⁵

Rice's writings have also been identified as having had a major impact on later developments within the genre of vampire fiction. Moreover, Rice's vampires are explanation philosophers who spend much of eternity debating the nature of good and evil. In addition, Rice's writing style has been heavily analyzed. Ferraro, in a statement typical of many reviewers, describes her prose as both lurid and lyrical, and full of sensuous detail. However, others have criticized Rice's writing style as both verbose and overly philosophical.⁶

In 1997, Rice wrote the story for a television pilot entitled *Rag and Bone*, featuring elements of both horror and crime fiction. *The Feast of All Saints* was made into a Showtime original miniseries in 2001. As of 2002, NBC had plans to adapt Rice's *Lives of the Mayfair Witches* trilogy into a miniseries, but the project never entered production.⁷

Since identification is an unconscious phenomenon, the Ricean personality in *Interview with the Vampire* and *The Vampire Lestat* ‘appears to produce itself through its many transformations from one character to another. To Jung, identification has always a purpose, namely, to obtain advantage, to push aside an obstacle, or to perform a task or a kind of therapeutic purpose. Rice’s identification is obvious through the characters of *Interview with the Vampire* and *The Vampire Lestat*. In these identifications, Rice projects her own family relations and her wishful dreams. She also processes her psychological traumas, projects her psychological turmoil and sublimates her dreams and aspirations[^].

Rice’s two novels reflect some of the concepts of postmodernism. Mainly, the thesis displays Rice’s identification with two male vampire figures that illuminate her apprehension of the spirit of the age and the search for meaning amid the doubt of the chaotic postmodern era. Replacing the familiar image of the vampire with a non-conventional one, Rice recasts and reframes the new image in a way that is quite relevant to contemporary American postmodern society[^].

The vampire, the most prominent product of fantasy, is separated from humanity due to its inescapable physical condition and supernatural power that mark its otherness. Yet, Rice humanizes the vampire to confuse the distinctive borderlines that were once clear between human and non-human. As a

contemporary horror figure, the Ricean vampire is popularized because of its promise of eternal youth and of its naturally transgressive and so potentially revolutionary nature, which renders it the ideal myth to explore and enact imaginative, radical critique of restrictive, oppressive cultural regimes¹¹.

The vampire has become an ambiguously coded figure, a source of both erotic anxiety and corrupt desire. It is one of the most powerful archetypes bequeathed to us from the imagination of the nineteenth century. The vampire stories will never cease to be grisly nightmares that touch on the basic fears that make us all vulnerable¹².

The fascination with vampires immortality blended with self-referentiality sprang from Rice's Chaucer professor who had inspired her by describing how a writer's life is a feeling of redemption a feeling of being saved everyday especially if the writer did something significant that will influence the audience and linger in their minds¹³.

NOTES

¹ Ruthe Stein, *Writer Anne Rice Returns in Triumph* San Francisco Chronicle (Yale Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), p.3.

² Ibid.

³ Joyce Wadler, and Johnny Greene, *Anne Rice's Imagination May Roam Among Vampires and Erotica, but her Heart is Right at Home* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p.131.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid,p.132.

⁶ Kenneth W. Holditch, *Interview with Anne Rice* (London: Penguin, 1989), p.86.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Katherine M. Ramsland, *Anne Rice, Seeking Recognition as a Writer* (London: Heinemann 1990), p.29.

⁹ Leonard G. Heldreth, and Mary Pharr, Eds .*The Blood is the Life: Vampires in Literature*) Bowling Green OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1999)•p.41.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Metton J .Gordon, *The Vampire Book: The Encyclopedia of the Undead*(Canton: Visible Ink Press, 1999)•p.1.

¹² Ibid.

CHAPTER TWO

Dream of Immortality in Anne Rice's *Interview with A Vampire*

Anne Rice's *Interview with a vampire* was published in 1976. It was her debut novel. Based on a short story Rice wrote around 1968, the novel centers on vampire Louis de Pointe du Lac, who tells the story of his life to a reporter. Rice composed the novel shortly after the death of her young daughter Michelle, who served as an inspiration for the child-vampire character Claudia .¹

Interview with a vampire tells the story of mainly three vampires, Louis, Lestat and Claudia, in eighteenth century New Orleans. The frame of the story is, however, set in San Francisco in the 1970's when Louis has decided to tell his life

story to a young reporter. He tells about being grief-stricken by a feeling of guilt because of his brother's death. He becomes suicidal, and when he is attacked and fed upon by the vampire Lestat, he becomes a vampire himself^γ.

Afterwards, however, when he realizes what he has become, Louis is filled with remorse and anguish over the ethical implications of vampirism. Louis and Lestat, the latter who has now become Louis' master, also transform a little girl, Claudia, and she and Louis form a special bond. Fed up with Lestat as authoritarian head of the family, Claudia decides to kill Lestat, and she and Louis flee to Europe in search of others of their kind to find the 'truth' behind vampires^ϣ.

First the only ones they encounter are barbaric vampires, partly similar to Dracula, but in Paris they meet a group of underground vampires led by Armand, the oldest vampire in the world. Nevertheless, Louis finds no answers, and with the underground vampires murdering Claudia and the sudden return of Lestat from the 'dead', Louis and Armand escape to the United States. However, he is still unable to come to terms with his vampire nature^ε.

As stated above, the vampires in *Interview with the Vampire* are quite different from the type of vampire that Dracula is. The vampires in *Dracula* are static characters, meaning they are mainly one-sided and they do not change during the story. The vampires in *Interview with the Vampire* ‘however, are dynamic characters who, if not necessarily change during the course of the novel, at least *want* to change^ο.

With this novel, Anne Rice transformed the mythical figure of the vampire to fit into the society of contemporary culture. The vampire as metaphor will

therefore be able to say something about 1970's culture just as *Dracula* portrayed the culture at the end of the nineteenth century. Whereas Dracula, for instance, is allergic to garlic and crucifixes, has no reflection in the mirror, and has the power of transformation, the vampires in *Interview with the Vampire* have little of those attributes¹.

Louis says to the reporter when he asks him about the crucifixes:

Oh, the rumor about crosses ”!the vampire laughed“ You refer to our being afraid of crosses”²
“Unable to look on them, I thought ”,said the boy.
“Nonsense, my friend, sheer nonsense. I can look on anything I like. And I rather like looking on crucifixes in particular³ .

However, Anne Rice has denied the vampire’s abilities to transform, 9 therefore, the vampires in *Interview with the Vampire* have little of those attributes:

And what about the rumor about keyholes? That you can. . . become steam and go through them” .
“I wish I could ”,laughed the vampire“ .How positively delightful. I should like to pass through all manner of different keyholes and feel the tickle of their peculiar shapes.
No ”.He shook his head“ .That is, how would you say today. . . bullshit (*Interview with the Vampire* , 26(

In this conversation between the vampire Louis and the young reporter, it is clear that the reporter has a preconceived notion, of the nature of vampires, that most likely comes from the way vampires are presented in myths, or from the image of vampires he has from previous literary works, such as; *Dracula*.

However, Louis mocks these old beliefs and calls them nonsense and bullshit. Another invention is that; Rice's vampires could not be destroyed by stakes through hearts“ :The story about stakes through the heart ”‘said the boy, his cheeks coloring slightly^.

There are, however, some rules that apply to their vampiric existence, for instance, they can move at the speed of light, their senses are heightened, they will burn to death if they are exposed to sunlight and they sleep in coffins during the day. Electric light, on the other hand, is harmless, as is crucifixes and stakes through the heart as we see in the following dialogue between Louis and the boy reporter:

'Oh, the rumor about crosses!' the vampire laughed. 'You refer to our being afraid of crosses'?

'Unable to look on them, I thought,' said the boy.

'Nonsense, my friend, sheer nonsense. I can look on anything I like. And I rather like looking on crucifixes in particular'.

'And what about the rumor about keyholes? That you can...become steam and go through them'.

'I wished I could,' laughed the vampire. 'How positively delightful. I should like to pass through all manner of different keyholes and feel the tickle of their peculiar shapes. No.' He shook his head. 'That is, how would you say today...bullshit'?

The boy laughed despite himself. Then his face grew serious.

'You mustn't be shy with me,' the vampire said. 'What is it'?

'The story about stakes through the heart,' said the boy, his cheeks coloring slightly.

'The same,' said the vampire. 'Bull-shit,' he said carefully articulating both

syllables, so that the boy smiled. 'No magical power whatsoever....'
(*Interview with the Vampire* , 33.)

Here one sees that the human boy have a preconceived notion of what a vampire is, knowledge that most likely comes from the way vampires are presented in myths, or from the image of vampires we have from Dracula. The vampire, though, ridicules these old beliefs and calls them 'nonsense' and 'bullshit', and he says that there really is no hocus-pocus when it comes to vampires ⁹.

One last point when it comes to what vampires in *Interview with the Vampire* can or cannot do is that they absolutely cannot drink blood from a dead person. This is the way that Claudia manages to kill Lestat when she drugs and kills two boys with absinthe and laudanum, the latter being a substance that will keep the blood of a dead person warm for a while. Lestat, who in good faith believes the boys are alive, drinks their blood and immediately starts convulsing and gasping for air ¹⁰.

Rice not only reinvents the vampire as a mythical figure, but also invents new rules that will apply specifically to her vampires. However, even if they are not evil and single-minded bloodsuckers, but rather sympathetic and selfreflective creatures, they still evoke a feeling of fear and awe in both us readers and the human characters in the book. This sense of looking upon something that is perceived as both beautiful and terrifying at the same time relates to the concept we dealt with in the previous chapter, namely 'the sublime' .¹¹

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 child¹³.

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, and not just because of their immortality. 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*¹⁴.

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.
(*Interview with the Vampire* , 101(

Although, Rice's glamorous vampires seem to be almost alike; physically, Louis and Lestat are totally different psychologically. Rice emphasizes the differences between these two male vampires, with Louis as delicate and sensitive and Lestat as aggressive and impetuous. By this distinction, Rice represents to her readers one of the first sympathetic vampires in English fiction, and may be the most essential one of them; Louis¹⁵.

From the very beginning of the novel ‘one learns from Louis's story that he

is a reluctant vampire, he did not choose his ontological status, but had it thrust upon him unwillingly. He was made a vampire against his will. Thus, Louis has more in common with the heroes of the Gothic tales than he does with their “villains” for like the hero of a gothic novel, what Louis suffers is a result of circumstances beyond his control and understanding; he is a “pathos-ridden” creature, and as such, he represents one of the key emotional and ethical characteristics of the Gothic¹⁰.

Indeed, Louis’s unwelcome vampirism is not a sign of evil, but a sign of victimhood; he is the prey of an evil doer, the vampire Lestat, and only comes to inhabit the formal category of evil vampire as a result of Lestat’s actions and not his own. “Misrecognized innocence” is often coded as “passive” in the hero of Gothic story, so it is crucial to the establishment of Louis’s status that he remains “passive” in the act of transformation, as we have seen above, and also later in the act of feeding on people¹¹.

Lestat once, after the transformation of Louis, forces Louis to watch him feed on the plantation farmer, and insists that Louis dispose of the body. Louis responds: “I want to die; kill me. Kill me.” I said to the vampire. “Now I am guilty of murder. I can’t live.” However, Louis’s paradoxical status as an innocent and at the same time a victim is pressed further by his refusal to drink human blood. Louis’s rejection of blood drinking is framed as a metaphysical and moral issue. Because for vampires eating involves killing people, Louis, who cannot discard his human moral sensibilities and associates killing with damnation, is engaged in a constant struggle between keeping his soul and his body morally pure and his increasing thirst for blood to live¹².

Anne Rice creates beautiful immortal vampires and thrusts upon them the mental pains of vampirism and lets them suffer forever. The five-age girl, Claudia, is transformed to a vampire unwillingly, to live, physically, as a little girl forever and never grow older, but she does mature enough, mentally, to think as an adult. This leads her to be in just as much, if not more, despair as Louis when she sees other women who are in her own age, mentally, but who have grown bodies. She is ready to give up beauty in order to have limited but normal life^{1^}.

Then, Claudia's fate might be a lesson to human being to realize that to have the beauty of a little girl is not something to wish when she is living trapped, unwillingly, in one state or age forever, therefore, human beings should not seek to escape from human limitations and should not seek beauty and immortality, except in the process of living, growing and dying^{1^}.

However, Louis decides to reveal his life story as a vampire to the boy reporter just to show human how it is to be immortal. He reveals his sufferings as a warning against the illusion of vampirism, but unfortunately he has failed^{1^}.

At the end of the story, the boy reporter is utterly fascinated with the life of vampires; he exclaims:

Don't you see how you made it sound? It was an adventure like I'll never know in my whole life! You talk about passion, you talk about longing! You talk about things that millions of us won't ever taste or come to understandIf you were to give me that power!
The power to see and feel and live forever! (*Interview with the Vampire* , 305(

The boy reporter as a human being has an eager wish for immortality, so he refuses the conclusion of despair toward vampirism in Louis's tale and demands from the disappointed vampire "Give it to me!.... Make me a vampire now"!
(*Interview with the Vampire*, ٣٠٦).

So, after everything he has confessed and everything he has revealed about his miserable life as a vampire, Louis has not been able to make the reporter realize the fact that vampirism and the immortal life it brings with it is not worth seeking; it is nothing but an illusion. Bitterly refusing the reporter's demand, Louis punishes him with a non-fatal attack to make him feel the pain and fear of vampirism. Yet even that experience does not discourage him and as soon as he recovers, he rushes out to search for Lestat who, he hopes, will grant his wish ٣٣.

However, Rice's vampires tend to be communal, rather than solitary as was Dracula. And even that they have to keep their existence relatively secret, and despite the fact that the main story takes place in the vampire universe only, Rice's vampires still interact with humans, freely, much more than Dracula did ٣٣.

Furthermore, the vampires in *Interview with the Vampire*, as mentioned above in the physical description of Louis and Lestat, have come to resemble humans much more than earlier mythical vampires such as Dracula. The boy reporter does not become frightened of Louis until he sees him in real, electrical light. Louis says "By candlelight I always had a less supernatural appearance" (٣٦) and this implies that, compared to Dracula, Rice's vampires have a less supernatural appearance so that one need to look at them in a very good light to see that they are not human ٣٤.

NOTES

¹ Gordon Melton, *The Vampire Book: The Encyclopedia of The Undead* (Detroit: Visible Ink Press, 1999), (p. 683)

² Ibid.

³ Ibid, p. 684.

⁴ Sandra Tomc, *Dieting and Damnation: Anne Rice's Interview with the Vampire* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), (p. 103)

⁵ Ibid, p. 106.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Anne Rice, *Interview with the Vampire* (New York: Ballantine Books, (1988), p. 20

⁸ Joan Gordon and Veronica Hollinger, *Introduction: The shape of Vampires* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), (p. 6)

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 9

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Andrew Schopp, "Cruising the Alternatives: Homoeroticism and the Contemporary Vampire". *Journal of Popular Culture*, (1997), p. 231

¹³

¹⁴ Ken Gelder, *Reading the Vampire* (London: Routledge, 1994), 112.

¹⁵ Milly Williamson, *The Lure of the Vampire: Gender, Fiction and Fandom from Bram Stoker to Buffy* (London: Wallflower Press, 2005) (p. ٤٠).

¹⁶ Ibid, p. ٤١

¹⁷ Zahraa 'Adel Abdul Sahib, *The Sympathetic Vampire: A Study of Anne Rice's Interview with the Vampire*. Unpublished M.A. Thesis. College of Education/ University of Al-Qadissiya, 2014, p.9.

¹⁸ Ken Gelder, p. ١١١

¹⁹ Ibid

²⁰ Lilia Melani, "The First Wave of Gothic Novels: 1765-1820". *The Gothic Experience Page*, ٢٠٠٣, p.66.

<http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/english/melani/gothic/history.html>.

²¹ Ibid

^{٢٢} Margaret L. Carter, *The Vampire as Alien in Contemporary Fiction* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997) (p. ٣١)

^{٢٣} Jules Zanger, *Metaphor into Metonymy: The Vampire Next Door* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997) (p.18).

^{٢٤} Nina Auerbach, *Our Vampires Ourselves* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1995) (p. ١٠٤)

CONCLUSION

The development of the literary vampire has been a long journey and is still ongoing. 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?

Although Louis has become more metonymical, he still functions as a metaphor for the contemporary social and cultural preoccupations of the twentieth

century. And therefore, the way Rice's vampires function as a metaphor is different from that of Stoker's vampires; vampirism in *Interview with the Vampire* has become more appealing than it was in *Dracula*. However, the vampire has evolved to fit the social and cultural interests of the twentieth century, and it seems that the evolution will never stop and the vampire may become even more human or metonymical in future.

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