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## **Phantoms of Delight: Gender and Sexuality in Vampire Literature**

Willa Rebecca LeBlanc

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*Vampire*, Edvard Munch

She was a phantom of delight  
When first she gleamed upon my sight  
-William Wordsworth

**Phantoms of Delight:  
Gender and Sexuality in Vampire Literature**

Willa Rebecca LeBlanc

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Presented to:

Prof. Robin Roberts

Prof. Peggy Prenshaw

Prof. Kate Jensen

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## **CONTENTS**

### **Introduction**

**1**

### **1. "The New Woman": Gender, Power and Rebellion**

**7**

### **2. "The Ultimate Seduction": Vampire Sexuality and Crossing Sexual Boundaries**

**32**

### **Conclusion**

**55**



Gustave Dore

## *Introduction*

The bodies of deceased persons, animated by evil spirits, which come out of the graves in the night-time, suck the blood of the living, and thereby destroy them (Robbins 521).

According to the Encyclopedia of Witchcraft and Demonology, the previous description, dated approximately 1734, is the first depiction of the vampire in the English language. Since then, the vampire has been a character in numerous literary texts of all genres and, in the last century, has been the subject of well over a thousand films<sup>1</sup>. What are the traits of this creature, the vampire, that have inspired so many writers and filmmakers? The vampire is a very sensual creature who possesses many qualities humans might envy. The vampire is immortal, beautiful, eternally youthful, mysterious, powerful, seductive, demonic, and immoral. Vampires are able to read minds, change forms, fly and perform other supernatural feats. However, the vampire can not achieve the everyday satisfactions of mortal life; it can not eat, drink or engage in sexual intercourse. All of the vampire's physical needs are satisfied by drinking human blood, an act commonly called the "feed" or the "kill." The kill is a culmination of all physical demands and desires. Thus, the kill takes on extreme importance and satisfaction; it is more satisfying than any food, drink or sex they recall from mortal life. The kill is repeatedly described and portrayed in erotic terms. In fact, the kill so closely resembles mortal human sexuality, some victims do not even realize their lover is not human. They often mistakenly think the prelude to the kill is foreplay. For the vampire, it is foreplay. Killing is the vampire's expression of sexuality. Thus, the kill is a substitution for sex and also serves as a metaphor for sex.

The Victorian forefathers of contemporary vampire fiction established the vampire as a metaphor for issues of sexuality and gender. In his article, "Loving You All Ways: Vamps, Vampires, Necrophiles and Necrophiles in Nineteenth-Century Fiction," Robert

Tracy explains the way nineteenth-century obsessions are manifested in the figure of the vampire:

The vampire's combination of death and sexual activity brings one of the nineteenth century's major public preoccupations-death, the dead, funerals, tombs - together with its major private and secret preoccupation, sex and sexuality. One could be talked about and celebrated incessantly; the other could not be talked about at all, except by thus combining it with death and so disguising it. The vampire story supplies a metaphoric vocabulary to represent certain obsessions and anxieties not otherwise admissible into literature . . . ( Tracy 35)

The original literary vampires -- Count Dracula, Varney, Lord Ruthven, and Carmilla -- were all aristocrats who courted and then fed on "ladies," victims much like someone with whom they might have been romantically involved with in mortal life. These kills are described in very erotic terms. The sensuality of these acts are further emphasized by the fact that no character in the text is presented as sensual except the vampire and the victims under their spell. The vampire metaphor seems to be one of the few licenses to discuss sexuality in Victorian literature. "Does any nineteenth-century British or American writer *not* dealing with vampires and the Undead ever describe a woman in this sensual and provocative way?," Tracy asks (39). Vampirism allows a depiction of sexuality that was otherwise not only socially questionable but also subject to censorship in the nineteenth-century climate.

The sexual vampire metaphor bypasses the censorship of the Victorian era that Bram Stoker openly advocated. "Stoker could not have been unaware that he had larded Dracula with virtually every form of unacceptable sex and evaded censure at a time when Zola's English publisher was imprisoned for indecency and Havelock Ellis's clinical studies of sexual behavior were banned" (Tracy 41). Certainly he was not unaware of this concern as he published the following only eleven years after the publication of Dracula:

A close analysis will show that the only emotions which in the long run harm are those arising from sex impulses, and when we have realised this we have put a finger on the actual point of danger" (Stoker, *The Censorship*)

*of Fiction)*

The vampire created a metaphor which gave Stoker an escape from his own advocacy of censorship. The nineteenth-century origins of the vampire's use as a metaphor continues with contemporary vampire fiction.

As the ageless vampire passes through the Victorian era, into the film age and the sexual revolution, it chases our changing sexual repressions and gender role anxieties. Through modern fiction and film, vampires are not only clearly sexual but are now more overt metaphors for the sides of sexuality deemed "abnormal." Modern vampires and their victims explore homosexuality, incest, sadomasochism and other non-traditional expressions of sexuality as freely as their ancestors explored "normal" sex while merely hinting at these deviant forms. Just as in the Victorian era, the aggressive sexuality of a female was not socially acceptable for mainstream literature; pedophilia and other issues raised in modern vampire fiction could not be openly embraced by mainstream readers without the guise of vampirism. Essentially, the metaphor of the vampire has seen a movement from the implicit to the explicit in the last 125 years. As the sexual and gender issues have become more explicit and alternative in culture and literature, the narrative treatment of the issues has become more overt.

Ironically, despite the sensuality of the vampire, their sexual organs are non-functional. Can a being without the use of sexual organs be inherently sexual? In fact their lack of functioning genitalia creates their sexual versatility and adds to the function of the vampire as metaphor; their impotency allows the breakdown of stereotypical gender roles and alleviates certain sexual anxieties. When procreation is impossible and gender-specific sexual organs are unnecessary for the sexual act, gender becomes irrelevant to the sexual act. The vampires thus become androgynous figures who are attracted to the qualities in others instead of a gender. They are romantic creatures free from the confines of gender constructs and their attraction to beauty and sensuality can be satisfied by a male or a female. The boundaries between gender roles are blurred and vampires essentially

function as bisexuals. The breakdown of gender roles in vampirism opens the door for the crossing of boundaries and overtones of homosexuality and lesbianism.

The non-functioning state or complete lack of the vampire's sexual organs contributes to the sexual metaphor of the vampire in another sense. Sexuality can exist while the possibility of penetration or procreation is completely eliminated:

The myth is loaded with sexual excitement; yet there is no mention of sexuality. It is sex without genitalia, sex without confusion, sex without responsibility, sex without guilt, sex without love - better yet, *sex without mention*.  
(Twitchell 112, emphasis added)

Thus, the vampire as a metaphor alleviates the fear of such consequences, producing an anxiety-free exploration of sexuality. For example, one can observe a vampire relationship with incestuous overtones comfortable in the knowledge that the child will not be violated. As Conant said of the relationship between two adult vampires and a child vampire:

"Some of the scenes. . . border on pedophilia. If it wasn't for the fangs, these guys would have been brought up on a morals charge" (74). Observations of these sexual issues, some of which are considered unacceptable, are possible through the figure of the vampire.

Thus, the vampire metaphor allows a cathartic exploration of the sides of sexuality deemed demented. We are allowed to observe aggressive sexuality or even "dementia" without really having to see it and without even having to admit it. The vampire ". . . may represent the dark, frightening impulses within us to do the things within ourselves. . ." (1 Ramsland 146). The creature is simultaneously a personification of and a metaphor for the sexual monster within humanity.

This thesis will discuss the vampire in two chapters on the following topics; gender and sexuality. The chapter on gender will address how the vampire's lack of gender orientation highlights a breakdown of traditional gender roles. The discussion of gender will lead into a chapter on sexuality which will analyze the vampire as a metaphor for alternate or aberrant forms of sexuality. The previously mentioned chapters will be based

primarily on three texts; Joseph Sheridan LeFanu's Carmilla, Bram Stoker's Dracula and Anne Rice's Vampire Chronicles as well as brief examples from various other novels, short stories, poems and films.

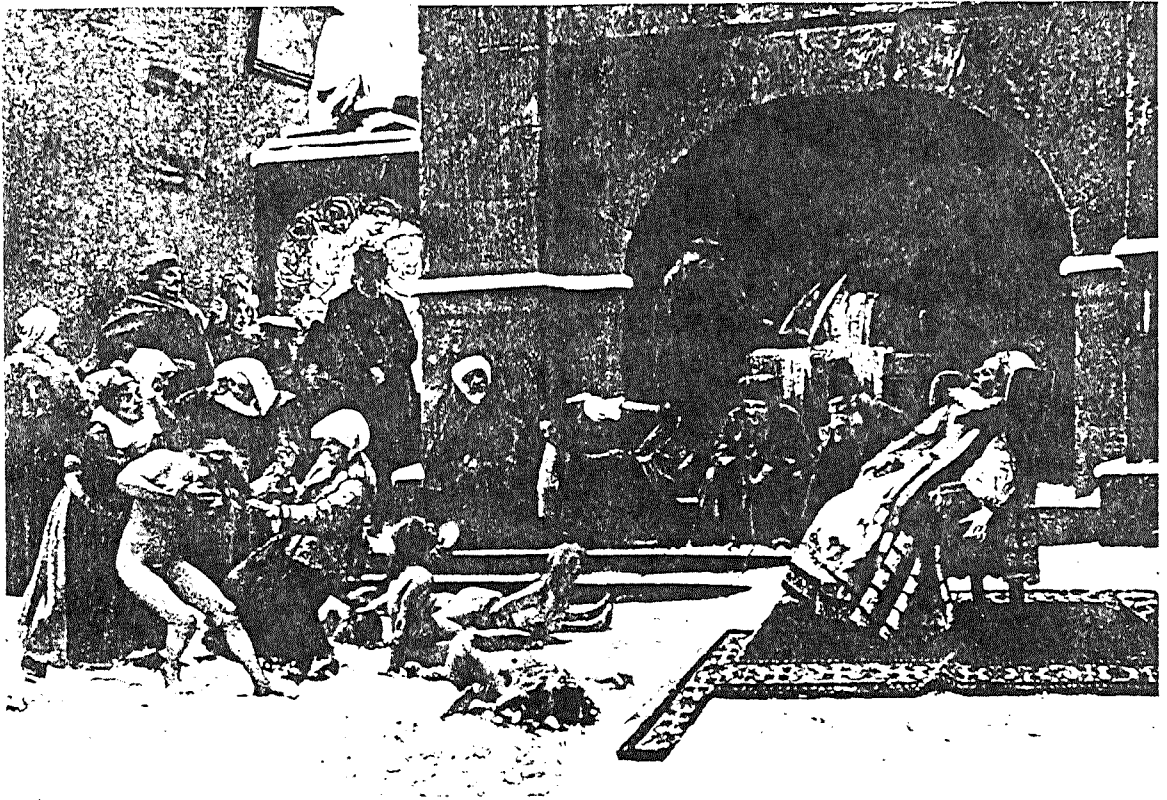
Carmilla is one of the first and most influential vampire stories in literature. This 1871 Gothic novella was one of the very first texts to portray the vampire in erotic terms, especially in its bold depiction of lesbianism. Inspired in part by Carmilla, the 1897 epistolary novel Dracula, which created the modern image of the vampire, is certainly the most famous vampire text. This work introduces issues of feminism, homosexuality, and incest which are further highlighted in more modern texts such as Anne Rice's best-sellers -- The Vampire Chronicles. The Vampire Chronicles are a prime example of vampire literature in modern popular culture. Rice's texts take the concepts of her predecessors to new and more explicit heights.

The opening chapter will address how the progression of vampire literature reflects the crossing of gender role boundaries in society. This unique analysis of gender issues is possible because the vampire is inherently sexual and powerful yet is not confined to a specific gender orientation. Its lack of functioning genitalia and inability to procreate lends itself to an androgyny which highlights the relatively modern breakdown of stereotypical gender roles. The movement of the female gender role will be traced from Stoker's anxieties about female sexuality and briefly addressed societal apprehension of the "New Woman" to modern fiction such as Rice's The Queen of the Damned which realizes Stoker's anxieties about feminism with an openly sexually aggressive queen vampire who attempts a mass annihilation of all males.

The crossing of gender boundaries naturally leads to the crossing of traditional sexual boundaries which will be explored in the second chapter. Vampire fiction depicts the crossing of every conceivable sexual boundary such as lesbianism, homosexuality, incest, and issues of dominance and submission. I will first address how lesbianism progresses from Carmilla's implicit lesbianism to graphic lesbian vampire texts in



contemporary popular culture. I will also trace the progression of the vampire metaphor from implicit to explicit through homosexuality. Homosexuality is present but subverted in earlier texts; the narrative never allows the observation of a male being directly penetrated either for overtly sexual or for bloodletting purposes. Each time the observable penetration of a male is attempted in the text, it is attempted by a woman and ultimately interrupted. The male can not be overpowered by the aggressive sexuality of a female which it fears much less tolerate the realization of homophobia. However, vampire communities in modern fiction are often clearly portrayed as subtle metaphors for the homosexual subculture, even to the extent of highlighting the mass fear of the AIDS epidemic. Likewise, the same movement from implicit to explicit can be seen through the issue of incest. Earlier texts portray relationships that are at once familial and sexual. In modern texts the line between child/parent and lover is clearly crossed and leads to other perversions of stereotypical nuclear family roles. This movement is a representation of the near-extinction of the nuclear family in modernity.



*The Blood Countess, St. Csok*

## Chapter I:

### "THE NEW WOMAN": GENDER, POWER AND REBELLION

#### *Introduction*

Vampires cannot procreate as humans do, through genital sex. The phallus is one part of the vampire that is not enhanced by the Dark Gift; instead it becomes impotent. (2 Ramsland 333)

Ironically, despite the powerful sensuality of vampires, their genitalia is non-functional. Anne Rice claims this aspect of the vampire myth originates in the ancient myth of Osiris on which she based her King and Queen of the Vampires. This Egyptian legend is clearly related to the vampire. The first mummy, Osiris, held the secrets of immortality. His cult made blood sacrifices to him and protected him from the Sun God, Ra, the only thing that could destroy him. In his mortal lifetime, King Osiris was tricked into a coffin-like box by his jealous brother. Upon Osiris' escape, his sadistic brother cut him into pieces and scattered his remains. Osiris' wife, Isis, found all the parts except one--his genitals--and put him back together. As Lestat, Rice's hero, wisely observes, the genitals are the part the vampire does not need:

As for the missing part of the body, the part that Isis never found, well, there is one part of us which is not enhanced by the Dark Gift isn't there? We can speak, see, taste, breathe, move as humans move, but *we cannot procreate*. Neither could Osiris so he became Lord of the Dead (2 Rice 330).

While the vampire's lack of functioning genitalia may seem to be a limitation, it actually enhances their sexual versatility. When procreation is impossible and gender-specific sexual organs are unnecessary for the sexual act, gender becomes irrelevant to the sexual act. The impotency of the vampire allows for the breakdown of stereotypical gender roles and leads to an androgynous freedom. The gender-free status of the vampire reflects the dissolution of traditional gender roles in society. The disintegration of traditional gender

constructs defies the patriarchal order. As Ramsland points out, "sexual indetermacy is a metaphor of a more generalized challenge to the social order" (2 Ramsland 77). In this chapter, I discuss how the female characters in these texts challenge traditional gender roles and gradually become powerful and androgynous. The growth of the female characters represents the feminist movement<sup>2</sup> and the growth of all women. If the texts are addressed in chronological order, the female characters become progressively more powerful. They mirror women in society, slowly but surely asserting their power.

From Carmilla to the present, vampire literature reflects the breakdown of gender roles. Strong female vampires in these texts challenge every role assigned to the female-- mother, daughter, obedient wife, sexual non-aggressor. Vampirism opens the door for a challenge to the traditional social order. Male vampires lose the power of the phallus. Consequently, the female vampire lives in a world in which the power of the phallus has no meaning and thus, she does not acknowledge its power in the human world. The challenge the female vampire poses to fictitious patriarchy parallels the real challenge feminists<sup>3</sup> pose to the patriarchy.

Through the chronological progression of vampire texts-- Carmilla, Dracula, Interview with the Vampire, The Vampire Lestat, and The Queen of the Damned-- feminism can be traced from its emergence through its climax to its effects. The female vampire's rebellion against men and against the social order which benefits men at the expense of women reflects the feminist movement of the past century. In earlier texts, the strong female vampire defies and disturbs the male-ordered world, even though she does not usually win and her defiance is directly punished. After the feminist movement experienced its second-wave<sup>4</sup> in the 1970s, women became more powerful in society, especially in the male-oriented workplace. Consequently, in later texts not coincidentally written by women, female vampires are portrayed conquering the male-ordered world. Through these texts a positive progression in the fictional role of women can be charted.

The final result of this progression is a powerful androgynous female and a world not ordered by gender where she can live.

### *Carmilla*

Carmilla is the story of a powerful female vampire named Carmilla who is discovered, hunted down and killed. At the same time, Carmilla is also a narrative of the discovery, growth, and control of female power which the masculine powers would like to eliminate. The threat of the vampire represents the challenge Carmilla and her lovers, the women, pose to the patriarchy. Patrick Day defines this challenge in his book, In the Circles of Fear and Desire:

The men in this story are determined to destroy Carmilla because she threatens their hegemony over women; the motif of the conspiracy of patriarchs versus the conspiracy of women. . .(88)

Moreover, Day claims that the source of fear in the novella is not the overt threat of Carmilla's vampirism, but the threat the patriarchy poses to the female identity: "but here what is horrible is not substance, but the forms imposed on female sexuality and pleasure by masculine society" (89). Imposing forms on female sexuality and pleasure is simply another means of control. While Carmilla's vampirism threatens the women, this threat pales in comparison to the danger women face in a society defined by masculinity. The patriarchal society of Carmilla's time does not literally murder women as Carmilla does but, in a sense, they murder women's spirits. In the time of Carmilla, the life of a woman was dependent on men and structured to benefit men. Carmilla offers her female lovers a permanent escape from that masculine order--a feminist version of the "easeful death" as Keats describes in "Ode to a Nightingale." Although Carmilla brings death, in the moment of death the woman achieves an ecstasy and independence not offered by the traditional order. In the moment of union between Carmilla and her victim, the women hold an utter disregard for male power. Their deaths, then, are similar to those of other feminist

heroines such as Edna Pontellier in Kate Chopin's The Awakening. Edna "knew a way to elude"(189) the husband and children who "need not have thought that they could possess her, body and soul" (190). She succumbs to death by embracing the "sensuous" sea and then, like a newborn vampire, "she felt like some new-born creature, opening its eyes in a familiar world that it had never known" (189).

Like Edna, Carmilla exemplifies the woman outside the boundaries of the patriarchal order. A vampire free of stereotypical gender limitations, Carmilla possesses more traditionally masculine characteristics than feminine. She possesses a startling physical strength with which she defends herself. During one attack, "the slender hand of Mircalla [<sup>5</sup>] closed like a vice of steel on the General's wrist when he raised the hatchet to strike" (87). In fact, she only pretends to be traditionally feminine and weak in order to explain why she sleeps all day and does not eat. In addition, Carmilla is independent, intelligent, and lethal. She is the ultimate personification of the fiercely independent woman her society will not tolerate. Carmilla represents the power of all women. Her attention to only female victims reflects the spread of feminism. Carmilla's conversion of women to a new vampire identity parallels the conversion of women in society to a new feminine identity<sup>6</sup>. As feminine refers to the social construction of women, a *new* feminine identity refers to the social *re*-construction of women. Carmilla's victim/lovers reconstruct themselves through female love, rebellion and death and gain traditionally male power through vampirism. Carmilla's victims, like women in general, discard the entrapments of the traditional male-oriented world and step into a new role. Likewise, the hunting of Carmilla is simply an attempt by the patriarchs to inhibit the growth of female power. Written by a man, this text stops feminine power dead--literally--in its tracks by killing off Carmilla. By killing her, they seemingly eliminate the threat she poses--the loss of control over women. However, the murder of Carmilla slows, but does not terminate, the growth of feminine power because already she planted a seed which will grow. She is not killed until after she presents her power by defying and disturbing the patriarchal order.

Despite the male interference, Carmilla infects Laura with her power. Before Laura befriends Carmilla, Laura is trapped by the masculine society which impedes heavily on female freedom. Laura is motherless and lives alone with her father in the isolated forests of Styria in an old mansion. Thus, Laura is cloistered from society and unprotected from the law of the father<sup>7</sup>. The only persons with whom Laura comes into contact besides her father are those persons employed by, and thus, controlled by, her father. As Laura describes: "My gouvernantes had just so much control over me as you might conjecture such sage persons would have in this case. . ."(29). Any contact Laura has with the outside world is controlled by her father. Laura anxiously awaits the visit of Mademoiselle Rheinfeldt which is continually withheld from her by the father. However, this visit never occurs, of course, because Mademoiselle Rheinfeldt, unbeknownst to them, is dead. As they later discover, Mademoiselle Rheinfeldt succumbed to an affair with Carmilla, which resulted in "not unpleasant" "sensations"(76). For her transgression with Carmilla, the text punishes Mademoiselle Rheinfeldt with death. She gradually dies from the loss of blood. Thus, the only female companionship Laura could have had is eliminated. Repeatedly in this text, the female is isolated into a more suffocating dependence on the father.

Carmilla, however, enters Laura's life to offer her an escape from the father. Carmilla first haunts Laura's bedroom when she is still a very young girl. Carmilla seems to be a ghostly manifestation of Laura's dreams, but she is, in fact, real. This first encounter with Carmilla is a rebellion which implies Laura's future unhappiness with her position. Thus, subsequent encounters are prevented by the father. After it is discovered that Laura did have a mysterious nocturnal visitor in her bed as "someone did lie there, so sure as you did not; the place is still warm," Laura is guarded every night, "and from that time," she describes, "a servant always sat up in the nursery" (LeFanu 30). Essentially Laura is under surveillance every night not to protect her from Carmilla, but to protect her from herself and any further transgression from the traditional social order.

Years later, Carmilla reappears, a symbol of Laura's inevitable maturation and desire for a separate identity which will not be stifled a second time. Carmilla proves to be a strong influence and Laura eventually describes herself as a "changed girl" (57). While Laura is exploring her identity, however, she is punished by way of nightmares, ghostly torments, betrayal, and the murder of her beloved Carmilla. Laura's only friend, Carmilla--the symbol of Laura's independence--is ultimately expelled by the father. Carmilla, the powerful female, can only be stopped by penetration with the phallic stake which--temporarily--restores the patriarchal order. Unlike Carmilla and Mademoiselle Rheinfeldt, Laura survives, changes, and continues to love Carmilla and what she represents. Thus, Carmilla and the feminine power she symbolizes live on Laura.

### *Dracula*

In the tradition of Carmilla, which Bram Stoker was influenced by<sup>8</sup>, Dracula fictionalizes Stoker's misogyny. However, Stoker had even more cause for his misogyny than LeFanu. Between the release of Carmilla (1871) and Dracula (1897), the feminist movement exploded. There was a "mobilisation of the suffrage movement in America and England between 1890 and 1920, although an organised 'feminist' movement for women's suffrage had existed for 40 years earlier" (Humm 78). Thus, as a result of this social movement, the anxiety over the emergence of feminist ideals seen first in Carmilla resurfaces more explicitly in Dracula. As explained by Tracy:

Stoker's attitudes may be based on personal experience and resentment, but they also echo or at least portray the anxieties of his male contemporaries faced with the 'New Woman' and her demand for social and sexual privileges which had been traditionally reserved for men (Tracy 46).

Mina, the smart, independent, competent, powerful female figure, raises the issue of the "New Woman" which she ultimately threatens to become:

Some of the 'New Women' writers will start an idea that men and women should be allowed to see each other asleep before proposing or accepting. But I suppose the New Woman won't condescend in the future to accept; she will do the proposing herself. And a nice job



she will make of it, too! There's some consolation in that" (91).

Through Lucy and Mina, the novel introduces the new feminine identity then punishes and controls it and eventually restores the traditional patriarchal order.

There is, however, another aspect to Stoker's misogyny. Issues in his personal life exacerbated the anxiety men of the time were feeling towards powerful women. According to Daniel Farson, Stoker's biographer and descendant, Stoker's wife refused to engage in sexual relations with him after the birth of their only child. Thus, Stoker was forced to employ prostitutes to satisfy his desires. From his frequent liaisons with prostitutes, Stoker contracted syphilis from which he eventually died. Instead of allowing men to control their sexuality and their bodies, the women in Stoker's life used sexuality as a tool of power. The prostitutes sold sex to him for money while his wife, for whatever reasons, refused to be a commodity and withheld sex. Thus, he had limited control over women's sexuality and women's bodies in his personal life. In fiction, he could reclaim his control over women's sexuality and define women as commodities.

Tracy also suggests Stoker might have been inspired by a real-life punishment of aggressive female sexuality in Victorian England--the bloody, brutal murders of Whitechapel prostitutes by "Jack the Ripper" in 1888. The Whitechapel murders certainly bear similarities to a vampire attack. A popular vampire television series, "Forever Knight," even went so far as to claim in a recent episode that the still unidentified "Jack the Ripper" was a vampire. Moreover, it is certainly possible that the mass publicity of these gruesome murders could have fueled Stoker's own hatred of prostitutes and inspired the gruesome treatment of women in the novel. The vampire as a metaphor allowed him a fictional--and safe--way to punish and control women. In Dracula, Lucy Westenra and Mina Murray Harker are the objects of this punishment and control.

Lucy, defined by her value to men, determines her self-worth by the number of proposals she receives. After receiving three proposals in one day, Lucy tells Mina:

But, for goodness' sake, don't tell any of the girls, or they would be

getting all sorts of extravagant ideas and imagining themselves injured and slighted if in their very first day at home they did not get six at least (60).

Although Lucy's measurement of her worth in terms of her value to men seems anti-feminist, she exploits this factor of her power to the fullest extent. Lucy defies the social order by wanting to accept the proposals of all three of her suitors simultaneously even though she knows it is not acceptable:

Why can't they let a girl marry three men, or as many as want her, and save all this trouble? But this is heresy and I must not say it (62).

Despite the rules, Lucy refuses to be under the stifling control of one man as is Carmilla's Laura. Before and after her engagement to Arthur, Lucy keeps him and her other two suitors as well as Dr. Van Helsing wrapped around her finger and under her control. As her father is not present in the novel, these are the only men in her life and they all dote upon her.

Lucy further defies her assigned gender roles by perverting the maternal image. After her "death," Lucy leaves her grave nightly to feed on young children. Dr. Seward describes one such meal that he witnesses:

With a careless motion she flung to the ground, callous as a devil, the child that up to now she had clutched strenuously to her breast, growling over it as a dog growls over a bone. The child gave a sharp cry and lay there moaning (190).

The children who survive describe her as the "Bloofer Lady." Through this outlet, the vampire Lucy rebels against the traditional motherhood to which she was headed prior to her death. As Griffin describes, "She has become a demonic mother-parody, taking nourishment from children instead of giving it, as do the three women at the Castle" (143). Lucy continues with this action until she is stopped by the men.

For these transgressions, Lucy is repeatedly punished. She must suffer a painful illness, the loss of her mother and a mortal death. After becoming a vampire, she is subjected to the final violation--a stake through the heart which is analogous to a gang rape. As the five armed men go to Lucy's crypt to open her coffin, this act seems "to be

as much an affront to the dead as it would have been to have stripped off her clothing in her sleep whilst living." This violation is followed by a metaphorical rape enacted by Arthur, her fiancé, the man whom her power has affected most. Arthur is eager to succumb to the gang mentality and punish her, "Go on," Arthur said hoarsely. "Tell me what I am to do." He does as he is instructed by the father figure, Dr. Van Helsing. As Van Helsing describes the incident in his journal:

Arthur placed the point over the heart, and as I looked I could see its dint in the white flesh. Then he struck with all his might.

The Thing in the coffin writhed; and a hideous, bloodcurdling screech came from the opened red lips. The body shook and quivered and twisted in wild contortions; the sharp white teeth champed together till the lips were cut, and the mouth was smeared with a crimson foam. But Arthur never faltered. He looked like a figure of Thor as his untrembling arm rose and fell, driving deeper and deeper the mercy-bearing stake, whilst the blood from the pierced heart welled and spurted up around it. His face was set, and high duty seemed to shine through it; the sight of it gave us courage, so that our voices seemed to ring through the little vault.

And then the writhing and quivering of the body became less, and the teeth ceased to champ, and the face to quiver. Finally it lay still. The terrible task was over.

The hammer fell from Arthur's hand. He reeled and would have fallen had we not caught him. The great drops of sweat sprang out on his forehead, and his breath came in broken gasps (194).

This incident parallels a gang rape. The five men (who have already all taken their turn "consummating" with her through the blood transfusions while she is unconscious and unable to consent) encourage Arthur to penetrate the phallic stake through her while she is clearly unable to resist. She screams and bleeds while he, sweating, is "driving deeper and deeper." The scene climaxes and ends in a release for Arthur. The description of the scene draws clear similarities with the way that rapists view their victims as objects. This scene objectifies Lucy; she is referred to as "The Thing," "it," or "the body" rather than as an individual. The rape enables the men to change her from the subject of aggression to the object of aggression. Like a rape, this scene is an act of power and control, not an act

of sex. Lucy manages to escape the confines of her gender briefly but is eventually punished, controlled and expelled through an act of sexual aggression.

If Lucy asserts her power sexually, then Mina asserts her power mentally. Mina represents the feminist because she refuses to be subordinated and defined by her "place" in a patriarchal society. She is not a commodity; she is an individual. Mina is the independent, employed, educated and intelligent "New Woman." As Van Helsing describes, "She has a man's brain--a brain that a man should have were he much gifted." (Notice how he describes her brain as a "man's," not taking into account the fact that female biology does include a brain.) Mina possesses knowledge that the men do not: she knows shorthand, she has memorized the train schedules, and she can read Dracula's mind. As previously mentioned Mina was consoled by the idea of the "New Woman." Mina is quickly becoming the "New Woman" of which this novel is so anxious. Unlike Lucy, who asserts her power through sexuality; Mina is mentally powerful.

Although Mina is mentally powerful, she is physically restrained by the masculine power of the father figure, Dr. Van Helsing. Towards the end of the novel, Mina is approached by the three women from Dracula's castle. "Come, sister. Come to us. Come! Come!" (322) they cry. They beckon Mina to join them in what can be interpreted as vampirism, feminism, lesbianism or all three. They are all related deviances from the traditional order. The powerful vampire women, outside the traditional order, are representations of feminism. Some feminists view lesbianism as the natural extension of feminism as in the "Feminism is the theory; lesbianism is the practice<sup>9</sup>." Whatever it is that the three women are specifically offering, Van Helsing does not want Mina to become a vampire, a feminist or a lesbian. However, as Mina is imprisoned in the "holy circle" of the patriarchy and the established Christian order, "she could leave no more than they could enter" (322). According to Dr. Van Helsing, Mina "God be thanked she was not, yet, one of *them*"; of course, Dr. Van Helsing never clarifies whether by *them* he means vampires or sexually aggressive, independent powerful females as one is a metaphor for

the other. Mina cannot address her own desires; she must be kept in the caregiving role of mother/wife to all the abandoned men.

The scar on Mina's forehead is a manifestation and a constant reminder of the threat she poses. Mina is literally burned and branded on the forehead with a holy wafer as a punishment for her "adultery" with Dracula. The scar is also emphasized when she is tempted by the three women. Both of these events represent a deviance from the social norm, a rebellion against the rules imposed on females. Mina refuses to obey these rules. Therefore, she must bear a mark as evident and humiliating as Hester Prynne's Scarlet "A." As Hawthorne described Hester's "A" as a "red-hot brand" a half-century earlier (Hawthorne 169), Mina must bear the scar until the same band of men who violated Lucy also kill Dracula and thus, eliminate the threat of alternative sexuality and female rebellion that he represents.

This text represents the fear of the female in any non-traditional role. Every act of female power and deviance from the male-dominated order is either interrupted or used for the benefit of masculinity. The men in this novel take Mina's knowledge and use it to ultimately control her. Mina can read Dracula's mind but they hypnotize her to gain this knowledge. Mina cultivates her skills of typing, shorthand and memorization but these skills are tools to further Johnathan's career, not hers. Mina is surrounded by men who are surprisingly weak; their only strength is that they are male. The men are distraught over Lucy's death while Mina takes it "like a man" These men are constantly bursting in tears and breaking down. Mina's fiance, Johnathan, is especially effeminate--he is propped up delicately on a bunch of pillows during their wedding ceremony. It is Mina who is truly the strong one. Thus, the males need to keep Mina in a caregiving mother/wife role because they need her power and knowledge.

Other strong female characters are also restrained in roles of mother and wife so that the males can transfuse their power. Each time a female vampire tries to seduce and thus, overpower a male in order to get the blood she needs, the attempt is aborted. First,

when the three women attempt to seduce Johnathan, Dracula intervenes. Secondly, when the vampire Lucy tries to seduce Arthur, Dr. Van Helsing interrupts. Excluding the blood transfusions, it seems that no female in this novel has intimate relations which transfer blood and strength with anyone besides Dracula or a child. Rather, with the exception of the blood transfusions, it is the men who draw power from the women. Dracula survives by depleting the strength of the women who become his "wives." He grows stronger as they grow weaker. If the blood transfusions and Dracula's feed both represent marital consummation, then the only roles for women in this novel are mother or wife-- however distorted a version of these roles it may be. The masculine forces fear the women in any other role. As in *Carmilla*, the patriarchy in this text is threatened not by the vampire but by the powerful women. As Judith Weissman explains in her article, "*Dracula* as a Victorian Novel":

Their fight to destroy Dracula and to restore Mina to her purity is really a fight for control over women (77).

However, neither Dracula nor the women win this fight for control over women; it is, of course, won by the men. Although Mina and Lucy represent an emerging feminine power, they are ultimately overcome by the masculine order which simultaneously feeds on and suppresses their strength. However, the emergence of these strong female characters foreshadows the revolution of feminism in literature and society. Like *Carmilla*, Lucy and Mina are the "foremothers" of the strong female characters of contemporary vampire texts.

### *The Vampire Chronicles*

The Vampire Chronicles revolutionize the female figure of previous texts. This is partially due to the fact that the Vampire Chronicles are the first examples of vampire literature in this study written by a woman. More importantly, The Vampire Chronicles postdate the other works by over a century. In those hundred years, the definition of

female changed more than in any other period of time in history. This revolution, a century-long assertion of female power, is reflected in *The Vampire Chronicles*. While *Dracula* and *Carmilla* portray females whose power ends in punishment; *The Vampire Chronicles* feature women who are even more powerful and retain their authority.

#### *A. Interview with the Vampire: Claudia*

Claudia is the beautiful five year old human girl whom Lestat transforms into a vampire. He does so to create a "daughter" to complete the "family" he began with his companion, Louis. The cruel irony of the situation for Claudia is that although her mind matures, her body remains in the same form--a five year old child--for eternity. The trio live in this dysfunctional version of what Lestat describes as "one happy family"<sup>10</sup> for sixty years--a mortal lifetime! Yet Claudia, for all intents and purposes, is still five years old. The two fathers continue to dress her up like a doll/possession. While she is continually perturbed by their refusal to acknowledge her maturation, she has no choice but to continue in this dysfunctional family. Mentally she is sixty-five years old but her body is that of a five year old. She is physically too small to survive in the world without her "fathers." Lestat has imposed on her a form in which she cannot survive without them. As Laura was in *Carmilla*, Claudia is trapped in a suffocating dependence on the father.

Claudia rebels against the daughter role imposed upon her by using it as a weapon to obtain what she needs--blood. She lures unsuspecting victims by pretending to be a lost and helpless little girl. Her physicality itself is a distortion of childhood; she is a sixty-five year old killer in the body of a five year old little girl. As Lucy Westenra is a perversion of motherhood; Claudia is a perversion of childhood. Claudia takes the limitation forced on her by the masculine figure and turns it into a powerful asset.

Although Claudia finds a way to use her form to her advantage in some ways, her entrapment is as oppressive as Mina's. Claudia, like Mina, is kept from realizing her independence. The law of the father, represented by Dr. Van Helsing in *Dracula* and by

Lestat in Interview, have literally trapped them both in a form from which they cannot escape. For Mina, this form is the "holy circle" and for Claudia, it is her childlike form. Consequently, Claudia bears an obsession with the sensual female form she will never have and what it represents. For Claudia, an adult female form represents independence--the option to leave her "parents" and form her own autonomous life. As she is, Claudia is completely dependent on them. When Lestat recalls Claudia's life, he asks himself:

Was it inevitable that she who would never have a woman's form  
would strike out at the demon father who condemned her to the  
body of a little china doll? (2 Rice 500)

The question is a rhetorical one. Claudia, however, does more than "strike out." She takes the rebellion against the social order of the patriarchy from previous texts a step further. Claudia does not merely defy the patriarchy; she declares war on it. Acting alone, she premeditates a gruesome murder of the father figure, Lestat:

And why not kill him! I have no use for him! I can get  
nothing from him! And he causes me pain, which I will  
not abide! . . . I *want* him dead and will have him dead.  
I shall enjoy it. (1 Rice 124-5)

Claudia is not the only member of the family to desire escape from the law of the father. In this scenario, Louis is repeatedly depicted as the mother figure. Once, when Lestat is angry with Claudia, he lashes out at Louis. "He flared at me," Louis recalls, "as though I'd given birth to her" (1 Rice 106). Like Claudia, Louis desires freedom from Lestat's domination. However, smarter and wiser than Claudia, Louis knows that not only will Lestat "never let us leave" (1 Rice 119) but he is too strong to be killed. In their article "Undoing Feminism: From the Preoedipal to the Postfeminist in Anne Rice's Vampire Chronicles," Doane and Hodges explain, "Claudia's killing of Lestat seems at first to free her and Louis--the male vampire who is most maternal--but they have only an illusory freedom from the father" (425). Lestat, unbeknownst to them at the time, survives the attempted murder. When he returns later to seek revenge, they seemingly kill



him again then flee to Europe to start a new life, free of the father. However, once more, unbeknownst to them at the time, Lestat survives. While Claudia and Louis' repeated attempts to destroy Lestat highlight their amazing strength of character, Lestat ultimately has more strength.

Claudia and Louis escape the domination of Lestat but they cannot escape their dependence on the oppressive cultural order. Lestat's apparent death results in Louis searching for the authority figure he lost. Consequently, Louis becomes obsessed with a much older, male vampire, Armand. As Claudia senses Louis' retreat, she defensively searches out and finds a mother/protector, Madeleine. Claudia is so weakened by the patriarchy in her childlike form that she cannot even transform Madeleine into a vampire without the reluctant assistance of Louis. Again, she is dependent on the father. She cannot escape from the patriarchal structure without help from it.

Despite her setbacks, Claudia appears to have succeeded with her plan. However, even by the mid-seventies, this text cannot realize the female character defying the patriarchy and creating an existence with the mother in which she does not need the patriarchy *and* getting away with it. Claudia and her mother/protector, Madeleine, her only means of escape from the patriarchal duo, are murdered by the Theatre des Vampires Coven to avenge the death of Lestat. The implications of the double murder are daunting. As Doane explains, "Rice insists that cultural structures are extremely oppressive to women and the world of mothers and daughters is no safe haven" (Doane and Hodges 426). Claudia must escape the tyrannical structure in which she is trapped but, because of the physical form imposed upon her, she can only escape by acquiring a mother. Even this mother, Madeleine, cannot protect her from the father. Even worse, Claudia is further defeated in death. Claudia is killed as a punishment for the "murder" of Lestat but she did not actually succeed in killing him. Not only is she punished for a crime she did not commit, Lestat is allowed to live and she is not.

Although Claudia does assert her independence, seemingly killing the father, and finding herself a mother, her war against the father is ultimately unsuccessful. Claudia is strong but Lestat is stronger. Claudia does succeed in disrupting the patriarchal order for a time by separating the alliance of Lestat and Louis for a few centuries. Furthermore, when Louis, the maternal figure, is reunited with Lestat, their relationship is more equal. Through Claudia's death, it seems they may have both learned the consequences of domination. The purpose of the female character in this text, then, is to expose and disrupt the subordinating structure of the patriarchy and the traditional nuclear family.

There is further consolation in the fact that "Rice's resolution of the tension between women's desire for power and a system of male bonding linked to the devaluation of women . . . is provided in the sequels to *Interview with the Vampire*" (Doane and Hodges 427). Claudia's struggle for power and independence is impossible to resolve due to the male-oriented system which traps her in a child's body and then dominates her. However, female figures in the subsequent Chronicles, who are not impaired by Claudia's physical limitations, are able to achieve their desire for power by either breaking down the system of male bonding or ignoring it completely.

#### *B. The Vampire Lestat: Gabrielle*

Gabrielle is the figure who resolves the tension between female power and a male system. She suffers extremely with this tension as a mortal woman. After becoming a vampire, however, she acquires enough strength and independence to completely disregard the patriarchy and survive happily. She thus weakens the male structure by rendering it useless and setting an example for other women.

Gabrielle, is the mortal mother of the hero of the entire series, Lestat. As a marquise in pre-revolutionary France, Gabrielle is unable to achieve her desire of rebelling against the patriarchy. She describes her vision of being a true individual as follows:

'You know what I imagine', she said, looking towards me again. 'Not so much the murdering of them as an abandon which disregards them completely. I imagine drinking wine until I'm so drunk I strip off my clothes and bathe in the mountain streams naked.' 'And then I imagine going into the village,' she said, 'and taking into my bed any men that come there-crude men, big men, old men, boys. Just lying there and taking them one after another, and feeling some magnificent triumph in it, some absolute release without a thought of what happens to your father and brothers, whether they are alive or dead. In that moment I am purely myself. I belong to no one' (2 Rice 39).

Gabrielle feels trapped in her gender-dictated role of mother and wife and feels that she is a prisoner of the patriarchy which has no appreciation for her. She feels that women, who are capable of giving birth, are stronger than men but their strength is not acknowledged. Lestat is perceptive enough to realize that she is uncomfortable with her position in society when he says, "I think she hated to be called mother, but I hadn't been able to help it" ( 2 Rice 40).

Gabrielle is under the dictate of the law of the father and her only means of escape is living vicariously through Lestat, the representation of her suppressed masculinity.

Doane and Hodges describe Gabrielle's situation as follows:

Gabrielle has penis envy and is living her life through her favorite son. . . .Acknowledging that she would love to indulge in a promiscuity that would carry her beyond the law of the father and family (429).

Gabrielle is aware of her penis envy although she doesn't define it as such. She simply wants the freedom not allowed her as a female. Lestat recounts a conversation with Gabrielle about her masculine side:

She spoke in an almost eerie way of my being a secret part of her anatomy, of my being the organ for her which women do not really have. 'You are the man in me,' she said (2 Rice 62).

As a woman, she is unable to escape the confines of her gender. Immediately after Lestat makes her a vampire, she is no longer *a* mother or *a* wife; she is an individual, she is simply Gabrielle. Even Lestat acknowledges that Gabrielle's metamorphosis into androgynous vampirism has altered his view of her:

My knowledge dimmed and flickered and there was no mother anymore, no petty need and petty terror; she was simply who she was. She was Gabrielle (2 Rice 158).

Gabrielle, that was the only name I could ever call her now.  
"Gabrielle, " I said to her, never having called her that except in some very private thoughts, and I saw her almost smile (2 Rice 160).

After the transformation, after the status of her gender ceases to be relevant, she asserts the masculine that she once only experienced through Lestat and becomes one, whole androgynous being. Gabrielle's trip into the realm of the masculine becomes clear to Lestat and the reader as he describes what at first appears to be a senseless kill:

It came 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 his clothes. And to describe it more truly, *as she put on his garments, she became the boy* (2 Rice 171, emphasis added).

Lestat is dumbfounded but Gabrielle knows that vampirism has allowed her to escape the entrapments of femininity. "But there's no real reason for me to dress that way anymore, is there?" she asks. In a shocking moment, Lestat and the reader become aware that Gabrielle is right, there is no reason for her to conform to the feminine ideal:

But she was not really a woman now, was she? Any more than I was a man. For one silent second the horror of it bled through (2 Rice 172).

As a vampire, Gabrielle transcends her assigned role-- the weak, obedient mother and wife. After she consumes the life-giving fluid of Lestat, she obtains the masculine part of him that she always identified with. However, she cannot shed the last accoutrement of femininity; her long hair grows back each time she cuts it. This symbolizes Lestat's--and Rice's--refusal to allow Gabrielle to completely escape the role of the mother. Lestat, clinging to his patriarchal values [he admits earlier in the text that Gabrielle shocked him because he "never thought a woman could feel or articulate anything quite like this"(62)], is threatened by his mother's androgynous freedom. Even though Lestat hated his father

and brothers in mortal life and entertained thoughts of killing them, he cannot cope with his mother having the same feelings and utterly abandoning her role as wife and mother:

'I don't give a damn about them [her husband and sons]. I shall never exchange words with them again. I shall never lay eyes on them.' I nodded. But I hated what she was saying. She frightened me (2 Rice 179).

Even Lestat, who is stronger than any mortal man, is afraid of this powerful female. Like Victor Frankenstein who destroys his female creature, Lestat is afraid of the female he has created.

Gabrielle must eventually leave her beloved Lestat to completely escape the role of the mother. Although she is deeply attached to him, she will not be defined by her mortal femininity. Once she is given the power to escape the patriarchy, she can no longer be confined by it. In a move of powerful independence, she does not fight Lestat, instead, she simply abandons him. When she does reappear centuries later at the end of the novel, it is only to fulfill a very masculine role--the saviour. She rescues Lestat and Louis and then engineers a very masculine car chase in a reverse "damsel in distress" scenario. From this point on, Lestat describes her as a man, calling her "the dusty, ragged boy" (2 Rice 545), and "the intrepid explorer" (2 Rice 547) and recalls how "she straddled the chair like a cowboy when she sat down, resting her chin on her hands on the high back" (2 Rice 547).

Katherine Ramsland concurs with my interpretation of Gabrielle in Prism of the Night:

Gabrielle, however, will not be defined by gender roles. . . as a vampire taking on a gender-free form of sexuality, she neither wants nor needs symbols of vulnerability. . . Unable to avoid social expectations altogether, she moves away from society. . . and merges with an inner darkness represented in the earth and trees with which she becomes obsessed (1 Ramsland 253).

Carrying this line of reasoning farther, Gabrielle's obsession with nature is simply an obsession with a different type of motherhood to which she is not a prisoner --Mother Nature.

Gabrielle is the first truly successful feminist of not only the Chronicles, but all the previously discussed texts because she defies the patriarchy, eludes her defined role and survives without punishment. She realizes a new feminine ideal in which the patriarchy is not even important enough to fight with. "Don't think about them anymore . . . Forget them," (332) she advises. Gabrielle foreshadows the politics of Akasha, the Queen of the Vampires, when she prophesies:

When the world of man collapses in ruin,  
beauty will take over (2 Rice 334).

However, Gabrielle does not choose to be a catalyst to that ruin. She has achieved, through her freely androgynous vampirism, the "abandon which disregards them completely." She finally belongs to no one.

### *C. The Queen of the Damned: Akasha, Mekare & Maharet*

Akasha, the Queen of the Damned, is introduced in The Vampire Lestat and is the main character in this novel. Akasha and her husband, Enkil, are the original vampires. The vampire community refers to them as "Those Who Must Be Kept" because the original vampire is the source of power for all the vampires. Any harm which comes to the original vampire falls also upon every other vampire. For example, when "Those Who Must Be Kept" are placed in the sun, every vampire around the world burns. Thus, Akasha and Enkil, who are unconscious for many millennia, must be guarded and kept safe to protect the other vampires. As the vampires do not know whether it is Akasha or Enkil who is the first vampire and thus, holds the power; they both must be kept. It turns out, however, that it is Akasha, the female, who is the first and thus controls the vampire population. In this modern novel, the power is finally held in matriarchal hands.

Akasha has her own plans, albeit villainous plans, even in her mortal reign but she is controlled by the law of the father, her husband the King Enkil. Long before this social constraint is eliminated, an ancient vampire foreshadows her revolt, "who know what Akasha might do if there were no Enkil to hold her?" (2 Rice 472). As soon as Akasha realizes that Enkil has no power over her, she kills him and escapes.

The Queen of the Damned realizes Stoker's anxieties of a "New Woman" when Akasha attempts a mass annihilation of all males. She is the manifestation of the male fear of an all-powerful female who wants to castrate and control men. For three-fourths of the novel, she slaughters male populations at large. As Akasha reasons:

You know as I know that there will be universal peace if the male population is limited to one per one hundred women. All forms of random violence will very simply come to an end (3 Rice 439).

Akasha plans to kill ninety-nine percent of the males, control gender selection through abortion, and then raise the newborn males to be non-aggressive and egalitarian.

Akasha's theory is not completely insane. Statistically, males commit the majority of violent acts. The absence of males and genocide is a common setting in feminist visions of utopia. However, Akasha's attempt to realize such a utopia by murdering ninety-nine percent of all men does have its obvious problems. Of course, no actual feminists have ever advocated such a ridiculous "solution." Akasha wants to stop violence with violence. In that sense, she invalidates and defeats herself. Some feminist theorists<sup>11</sup> "do not envisage matriarchy as the *opposite* of patriarchy but to be a system based on very different principles from those of male dominated systems" (Humm 132). In light of that theory, Akasha's plan for a matriarchy ultimately betrays feminist values by trying to deconstruct the patriarchy with its own tactics of violence and subordination. Furthermore, her plan to mass murder an entire segment of the population is frighteningly parallel to Hitler.

In a sense, Akasha is like the sect of militant fundamental Christians who defeat themselves with their radical and violent tactics. Their attempts to stop the abortion that they consider murder by murdering doctors who perform abortions and bombing abortion clinics is not only a performance of the very action they are supposedly trying to stop, it turns people away from their movement completely. Likewise, Akasha's plan revolves around the very tactics--violence and subordination--that she is trying to eliminate. This drastic action turns all the other vampires, who do advocate her ultimate goal of a matriarchal utopia, against her. Had Akasha used different tactics, they might have supported her. As militant Christians unjustly give all Christians a negative image, Akasha's militant perversion of feminism unjustly gives feminists a bad name.

Although Akasha is ultimately revealed as anti-feminist, she is on the right track in her idea of behavior and thought modification for male youths. This idea alone would be an application of the system of different principles that Humm describes. The end of violence and the beginning of equality can be more effectively realized through education, not violence. Feminist theorists have advocated this idea of resocialization. For instance, in her book, The Reproduction of Motherhood, Nancy Chodorow suggests that men and women take equal roles in parenting in order to socialize children in a non-sexist fashion. Of course, Akasha is not sincere when she claims to advocate an application of such a system.

As Maharet and Mekare have known Akasha for six millennia, they know that she is evil and although Akasha insists that her plan is for the good of mortal women, they know that what Akasha really wants is to dominate and be worshipped. Akasha uses her feminine power to pursue evil. However, unlike previous texts, in this novel when the uncontrollable female must be stopped, it is not the patriarchy but the matriarchy which stops her.

Maharet and Mekare represent the matriarchy. Maharet, not Akasha, is the true power, the true immortal as is revealed at The Gathering of Immortals:



Was she [Maharet] the true immortal?--the one who had never slept, never gone silent, never been released by madness? One who had walked with a rational mind and measured steps through all the millennia since she had been born? She let him know, for what it was worth, that this was exactly what she was ( 3 Rice 267).

Maharet personifies the same matriarchal values that Akasha perverts. Humm defines matriarchy as "a form of society in which mothers are leaders and operate a women's descent line" (132). Maharet retains a feminine power for many millennia and ultimately leads the vampire society. It is she, not Akasha or a male figure, that represents what all the vampires strive to be--eternally strong, evolving and powerful. She also literally operates a women's descent line. She keeps detailed records through the millennia of "The Great Family" which descends from the one daughter she bore as a mortal in Egyptian times. The Great Family has a matrilineal line and represents the primal power of women to reproduce and create new life. Her utopian matriarchy is as feminists envision--not the opposite of patriarchy but based on very different principles.

As the female figure has finally cast off the traditional version of feminine identity ordained by the patriarchy, she searches for a new definition of her gender. Two opposing versions of a new female identity are proposed by Akasha and the duo of Maharet and Mekare. Doane and Hodges define the dichotomy of femininity in the novel as follows:

The battle is not between men and women as much as it is between women, or between versions of the maternal. On one side is Akasha, whose feminine identity is too rigidly demarcated; she defines herself against all men except her son/prince, Lestat, and she show no real ability to respond to other people. . . . On the other side are Maharet and Mekare . . . They speak-if with difficulty-for a real, deeper female identity that manages to be matriarchal without becoming hostile to men. (Doane, Hodges 433)

Maharet and Mekare represent a new power, a less aggressive manifestation of Akasha's political ideals. They represent an ideology similar to that of Gabrielle--the "abandon which disregards them [the patriarchy] completely." This new power is an

abandon in which they are truly themselves armed with a powerful androgyny which answers to no gender. Doane and Hodges concurrently propose that Rice sees forward to "a new age in which androgynous beings coexist harmoniously." Maharet is the ultimate personification of this new age. She represents an androgynous independent strength that has endured for six millennia. This new age, represented by Maharet, hopefully will become reality and be as long-lived and powerful as she is.

### *Conclusion*

The gradual crossing of gender role boundaries in society in the past century is reflected in the progression of vampire literature from Carmilla to the present. Strong females in these works defy the roles imposed on them by the social order. Although these female characters experience varying degrees of success--some are punished while others are praised--the female character's defiance against the male-dominated cultural structure is a portrayal of female power.

These works, in sequence, serve as a metaphor for the feminist movement. The progression of feminism is paralleled by the increasing strength of the female character as these texts progress in chronological order. The experiences of the female figures also parallel the patriarchal reaction to feminism. Both Carmilla and Dracula, published in the late nineteenth-century, manifest a cultural anxiety of "The New Woman." Consequently, the powerful females in these texts are punished and controlled. A century later, female figures find more power and success in The Vampire Chronicles. Interview with the Vampire, a product of the mid-seventies, portrays Claudia, like the feminist movement in general, making great progress but still oppressed by masculine power. As the Chronicles move from Claudia to Gabrielle to Akasha and Maharet, the women become more independent and assertive. In the event a female figure must be restrained,

like Akasha, it is the matriarchy, rather than the patriarchy, which does the disciplining. Gabrielle and Maharet, Rice's powerful figures, are the "New" Women that Stoker and LeFanu anxiously anticipated.

The progression of these texts presents a positive picture for women. In sequence, these texts ultimately devalue and abandon the traditional patriarchal structure which subordinates women. This structure is replaced with a matriarchy based on values of peace and egalitarianism. Patriarchal values should be replaced with values such as these not based on gender differences. Contemporary feminist ideologies suggest that "androgyny could offer a new monogendered personality" (Humm 9). Rice's figures, Gabrielle and Maharet, present positive role models for such a personality. As the emergence of powerful female figures such as Carmilla, Lucy and Mina foreshadowed positive changes in gender constructions, I hope the portrayal and politics of Rice's figures, Gabrielle and Maharet, foreshadow the acceptance of their ideals into a society that is only beginning to acknowledge feminist values.



*The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters, Francisco Goya*

## Chapter II

### THE "ULTIMATE SEDUCTION": VAMPIRE SEXUALITY & CROSSING SEXUAL BOUNDARIES

. . . morbid dread always signifies repressed sexual wishes. . .  
. . . dream-fulfillment played out in reality causes everyone to recoil in horror.  
-Sigmund Freud

Just as sexual conflict produces the erotic dream, so when normal aspects of sexuality are repressed, the conflict takes on extreme forms, as in the werewolf and the vampire, where 'hate and guilt play a far larger part' and oral sadism is manifested (Robbins 525).

How does a non-gendered creature, who does not have the means to engage in sexual intercourse, express sexuality? The vampire does not eat, drink or have sexual intercourse; all of these basic physical needs are satisfied only by the kill. Literary depictions of the kill are analogous to a sex act, as can be seen in each text. In a recently published novel, Covenant with the Vampire: The Diaries of the Family Dracul, the victim, Zsuzanna, describes her encounter with Dracula as erotic and mutually fulfilling:

His teeth found the tiny tender wounds again; I shivered as they sank, quickly, neatly, into my flesh, shivered again as his tongue began to work, rapidly at first, to encourage the flow, then slowly, voluptuously, but drawing hard, with such pressure that I moaned at the pain.

Despite the discomfort, I did not struggle, but permitted myself to fall at once into that deep, delicious swoon, my heart racing with excitement at the knowledge (his, and now mine) that he would take me to that uniquely sensual precipice at the threshold of death. . . and then beyond, across the great abyss.

I sensed his pleasure, too. . . the ecstasy of utter power over another's life and death, of ultimate seduction, of pure animal hunger appeased: the fierce, bloody joy of the hunt and the kill (Kalogridis 182).

The kill is a source of sexual pleasure for both the vampire and the victim. Anne Rice describes the sexual nature of the kill as follows:

I meant to imply that the nature of the kill was sexual but not in an immediate genital way. I think I swapped the male orgasm for the

female. The pleasure he [the vampire] gets in killing was an overall swoon like women probably feel, a surrender" (1 Ramsland 148).

Whatever pleasure the vampire derives from the kill, it is evidently more satisfying than the actual sexual intercourse they recall from their mortal lives. The comparison between the kill and intercourse is addressed in Rice's Vampire Chronicles. In Interview with the Vampire, Claudia, the virgin child vampire who never experienced sex as a mortal, asks Louis: "What was it like. . .making love?" He responds, "it was something hurried, And . . .it was seldom savored . . .something acute that was quickly lost. I think that it was the pale shadow of killing" (1 Rice 210).

Louis' opinion is reiterated by Lestat in the fourth Chronicle, The Tale of the Body Thief. In the body of the mortal Raglan James, Lestat is able to experience human sexuality again. Kissing a woman as a prelude to intercourse for the first time in over two hundred years, Lestat is considerably apathetic: "It was nothing as exciting as closing in on a victim, but it was nice" (4 Rice 187), he said. Lestat decides he prefers his vampire version of sexuality, as it is more fulfilling than human sexuality. As he describes human intercourse:

Where was the pounding intensity of drawing near the victim, of the moment right before my teeth pierced the skin and the blood spilled all over my tongue? No, it's not going to be that easy, or that consuming. . . One moment it was eternal; the next it was finished, as if it had never begun. I lay exhausted on top of her, drenched with sweat, of course, and faintly annoyed by the stickiness of the whole event (4 Rice 188-9).

This contrasts strongly with Lestat's erotic descriptions of bloodsucking. The following description of a blood exchange with Akasha is clearly more fulfilling and meaningful to him than his previous sexual encounter:

She was kissing me, kissing the artery through which her own blood so violently flowed . . . I saw it, the shimmering circuit, and more divinely I felt it because nothing else existed but our mouths locked to each other's throats and the relentless pounding path of the blood. There were no dreams, there were no visions, there was just this, *this*- gorgeous and deafening and heated-and nothing mattered, absolutely nothing, except that this never stop

(2 Rice 486).

As he does with sex, Lestat has similarly disenchanting experiences eating food and drinking wine for the first time in centuries. He compares the food and the wine to blood and decides blood is more satisfying. For Lestat, as for all vampires, all physical needs are satisfied only by the kill. They have everything culminated into one thing which is better than any one of the human satisfactions alone--or even all of them combined. Thus, for the vampire, the substitution and the metaphor for sex is better than sex itself. For the reader also vampire sexuality can be more satisfying than depictions of traditional sexuality because the reader can participate without admitting what they are participating in. The reader can explore an alternate form of sexuality without engaging in it physically and without really reading it. After all, it is "sex without mention" (Twitchell 112). They are not actually reading a story of homosexuality or incest; they are reading a horror story. As with any other horror story, the reader is frightened but also fascinated. Whether or not the reader is aware of it, these texts indirectly address humanity's unconscious animalistic desires.

Thus, the vampire's kill is analogous to intercourse and this vampire sexuality is pleasurable not only to the vampire but also to the victim and the reader. This universal pleasure is exemplified, for example, in "Interlude with the Undead." This Rice short story appeared in a 1979 issue of *Playboy* accompanied by a steamy pictorial of a nude young lady and a Dracula look-alike enacting the events of the story. This story and the accompanying photographs made evident the pleasure of the writer, the vampire, the lady and the reader. Such erotic vampire tales are prevalent in literature and the cinema. This chapter aims to uncover their cultural implications.

The vampire's kill is a metaphor for human sexuality. However, by their very nature, vampires are freer than humans to cross sexual boundaries. Through their crossing of boundaries, they confront the anxieties we fear to face. As the ageless vampire passes through the Victorian era, into the film age and the sexual revolution, it chases our

changing sexual repressions and gender-oriented anxieties. Victorian vampires confronted traditional sexuality. Contemporary vampires and their victims (and the reader/writer as surrogate victim) reflect a plethora of social and sexual issues such as AIDS, alternative sexuality, sexual politics, the breakdown of the nuclear family, and power. To address these issues, I have divided this chapter into the following subtopics: lesbianism, homosexuality and sexually transmitted disease, incest and the dysfunctional family and finally, dominance and submission.

### ***Lesbianism***

The movement of lesbianism from taboo to trendy in society is reflected through vampire texts. In Carmilla, the forefather of lesbian vampire fiction, female sexuality and lesbianism is subverted. Recently, the vampire genre, aided by modern sexual freedoms, has produced an abundance of explicit lesbian vampire fiction and films.

Carmilla is the story of the love affair between a vampire, Carmilla, and her lover/victim, Laura. Although Carmilla is clearly a lesbian text, the sexuality is very implicit. Laura never admits--even to herself--that her encounters with Carmilla are anything more than dreams. She calls the encounters "certain vague and strange sensations" which "visited me in my sleep"(58). Laura describes these encounters as analogous to lovemaking but will not admit it was such; it was only "as if a hand was drawn softly along my neck and cheek" and "as if warm lips kissed me" (58). Of course, Laura avoids any of Carmilla's daytime advances. Only in a nocturnal background, which produces a dreamlike, mysterious quality, can Laura accept Carmilla's proposals and chalk the experience up to a nightmare.

This text can only truly explore female sexuality under the disguise of vampirism and monstrosity. However, the text is not advocating free female sexuality; rather, the text is presenting it as a monstrosity. In the introduction to Daughters of Darkness:



Lesbian Vampire Stories, Pat Keesey agrees that Carmilla has anxiety towards female sexuality:

Written during the height of the Victorian era, its underlying message is one of fear of female sexuality and warnings against affections between women(16).

Thus, in Carmilla, alternative sexuality, which is traditionally socially repressed, is expressed through a monstrous figure. Carmilla, the personification of a nightmare, reflects Laura's unconscious lesbian desires. Laura briefly entertains these desires but the heterosexist<sup>12</sup> atmosphere of Carmilla enforces its compulsory heterosexuality<sup>13</sup> by killing Carmilla and thus preventing the union of Laura and Carmilla. However, as Laura not only repeats the story but still loves Carmilla, the lesbian continuum<sup>14</sup> is kept alive.

As in Carmilla, lesbianism appears in a monstrous form in Dracula. It is treated as an alternate form of an already threatening female sexuality in Dracula. There are three potentially lesbian relationships in the novel: between Lucy and Mina, between the three vampire women from Dracula's castle, and between Mina and these three women. All of these are either subverted, avoided, interrupted or merely implied by the text. Although the women in this novel cross sexual boundaries, the novel, a product of the late nineteenth century, merely hints at and does not explicitly portray lesbianism as an acceptable alternative expression of sexuality. Also like Carmilla, Dracula reinforces compulsory heterosexuality.

"The relationship between Mina and Lucy only hints at the potentially lesbian current running between them," Tracy (46) points out. Mina and Lucy share a strong mutual love that suggests something more than friendship although their love is accredited merely to friendship and not developed. The two girls want to be together but are repeatedly separated. Furthermore, Lucy is eventually killed off, of course, preventing any further progression at this level. The "lesbian current" between Lucy and Mina is explored in Coppola's 1992 film version of Dracula in which the two girls are extremely mutually affectionate and eventually share a passionate kiss.

The initial appearance of the three seductive vampire women suggests that their relationship is a lesbian one and that they are seducing Johnathan only in order to get blood as they receive pleasure from each other. Certainly, their second appearance, in which they beckon to Mina, "Come, sister. Come to us. Come! Come!" (Stoker 322), suggests lesbianism as well. However, like the relationship between Lucy and Mina, this lesbian undercurrent in the novel is suppressed. It is more important, at this point, that "the vampire women represent, to the male imagination in the novel, the man-eating, castrating woman, depleting male strength. . ." (Griffin 142). It comes as no surprise that, in this novel, exploring the nature of relationships *between* women takes a backseat to suggesting that female bonding adversely affects men.

However, the lesbian vampire has progressed from the oppression of early texts. Major social movements such as the sexual revolution and second-wave feminism<sup>15</sup> have affected all forms of literature and vampire fiction is no exception. Contemporary vampire fiction now includes an entire subgenre of explicit lesbian vampire texts<sup>16</sup>.

Pat Califia's painfully graphic short story "The Vampire" exemplifies the lesbian vampire subgenre. In this text, a mortal lesbian, Iduna, discovers and then offers herself to a female vampire, Kerry, who then feeds on her in an explicitly sexual scene<sup>17</sup>. Kerry performs a lesbian sex act on Iduna while simultaneously sucking blood from her breast. Afterwards Iduna wonders which penetration led to her orgasm. This scene exemplifies the movement this subgenre has undergone since Carmilla, whose passion was merely described as "like the ardor of a lover."

However, the female vampire is not only famous for her lesbianism, but also for using her sexuality to exploit men. This is the case in Bergstrom's short story, Daughter of the Night, which features a matriarchal vampire, Catherine, who uses the attraction a young girl, Elizabeth, feels towards her to kidnap and seduce a virile young male, Imre:

She [Elizabeth] and this haughty young man cared nothing for each other, so Catherine aroused the attraction each of them felt for her, playing both

parts for the time it took them to complete the act (94).

Although Elizabeth desired Imre before meeting Catherine, afterwards, Imre "aroused nothing in her [Elizabeth] except disgust" and the same for every other man. She tells Catherine, ". . . if I had not met you, I would have loved some other woman. I am cursed . . ." (96). Although this contemporary text, published in 1992, explicitly states Elizabeth's sexual preference, the story is set several centuries ago which explains why Elizabeth views herself as cursed.

By comparing contemporary lesbian vampire texts to the implicit lesbianism in early vampire texts, one can see a progression. Viewing the texts in chronological order, the female vampire becomes increasingly sexually aggressive. Consequently, vampiric terms have taken on the connotations of the "the man-eating, castrating woman, depleting male strength. . ." (Griffin 142). The female vampire is so sexually powerful, she came to represent sexual power in general. As Silver explains:

Perhaps the most enduring re-interpretation of the vampire was through the conceit of the man-eater into the body and soul of the *femme fatale*. . . . the term came to represent a very human and non-supernatural creature who sucked the life out of her male lovers and then ruthlessly discarded them, a connotation which the word "vampire" has retained to this day" (46).

The vampire is defined by Webster's Dictionary as what it literally is --a being who rises from the grave to suck the blood of living--but also as a "woman who exploits and ruins her lover."<sup>18</sup> Thus, as seen through the figure of the vampire, the breakdown of traditional gender roles is followed by the treatment of female sexuality progressing from implicit to explicit. This movement is paralleled in the treatment of male sexuality.

### ***Homosexuality and Sexually Transmitted Disease***

The progression of the vampire metaphor from implicit to explicit is also clearly exemplified through the issue of male homosexuality. Earlier works display heterosexism while contemporary works are freed from this social assumption. Vampire fiction moves

from oppressing homosexuality to elaborate sympathetic metaphors of homosexuality to explicitly confronting AIDS.

Homosexuality is subverted in Dracula; Count Dracula only attacks women. Homosexuality is not only covered by the vampire as a metaphor but further, Dracula consumes male blood only vicariously through the women. He has a taste of all of their blood through Lucy's veins. After each man transfuses his blood into Lucy, Dracula pays her a visit. As Dr. Van Helsing defines the blood transfusions or any such exchange of blood as analogous to marriage and intercourse, not only is Lucy a polyandrist but so is Dracula. Through this medium, Dracula has had intercourse with every single man in the novel, but only through the woman. As Dracula declares to the men: "Your girls that you love are mine already and through them you shall be mine!"

However, the text never allows the observation of the direct penetration of a male. The text does not advocate, much less directly depict, homosexuality. Clearly, Dracula has and does feed on men but the text never shows the act; it merely reports events after the fact. All of Dracula's penetrating of men, such as with the crew of the *Demeter*, are not depicted by the text. It is simply relayed that victims are dead and it is only implied that it Dracula who is to blame. Furthermore, the text does not introduce these victims; it is "casual sex."

However, each time the *observable* penetration of a male (besides Dracula) is attempted in the text, it is only attempted by a woman and ultimately interrupted. The novel "stops short of the transgression which would unsex Harker and toward which this text constantly aspires and then retreats: the actual penetration of the male" (Craft 170). Only women are visibly penetrated in this text. When post-vampirism Lucy tries to seduce and feed on Arthur, he is tempted but stopped by the representation of the law, Dr. Van Helsing. Instead, Lucy is penetrated with the phallic stake and the patriarchal order, to which this text desperately aspires, is partially restored. Early in the text, Johnathan is tempted by the three seductive brides/daughters of Dracula. While Johnathan is waiting

"with beating heart" for their teeth to penetrate his neck, Dracula interrupts with the only overt homosexual line in the text: "This man belongs to me! Beware how you meddle with him or you'll have to deal with me!" (1 Stoker 41).

Although Dracula's penetration of Renfield is never seen, it has happened at some point outside of the narrative of the text. Renfield is some sort of homosexual love slave to Dracula. Renfield parallels LeFanu's *Mademoiselle Rheinfeldt* and Carmilla's homoerotic relationship with her. Like Dracula and Renfield, Carmilla's homoerotic relationship with *Mademoiselle Rheinfeldt* takes place prior to the narrative and is the cause of her destruction. Carmilla kills *Mademoiselle Rheinfeldt*. Likewise, as a direct result of his relationship with Dracula, Renfield is completely insane. These texts suggest that *Mademoiselle Rheinfeldt*'s death and Renfield's mental state are both the result of and punishment for their homosexual liaisons. After all, these two novels have both repeatedly enforced compulsory heterosexuality. Although alternative sexuality is subverted in *Dracula*, it is freely explored in later texts.

Rice's *Vampire Chronicles* constantly and more explicitly portray homosexual relationships, both those between vampires and those between vampires and mortals. One homoerotic instance of "the yielding of a conscious mortal" takes place in *Interview with the Vampire* when Louis takes Denis. The experience is so intense that Denis, the mortal, sustains an erection throughout the interplay and Louis is surprised that a mortal could "live on, comprehending, surviving that intimacy!" (1 Rice 232). As Louis describes their encounter:

He was pressing the length of his body against me now, and I felt the hard strength of his sex beneath his clothes pressing against my leg. . . I sank my teeth into his skin, my body rigid, that hard sex driving against me, and I lifted him in passion off the floor. Wave after wave of his beating heart passed into me as, weightless, I rocked with him, devouring him, his ecstasy, his conscious pleasure. (1 Rice 231)

The erotic nature of homosexuality in the Chronicles, such as in the preceding passage, is explained in Anne Rice's biography:

'For me,' she [Anne Rice] said, 'the most erotic scenes in any book are those that take place between totally equally franchised human beings, so I always find a scene between two men much more erotic to write about or read about than a scene between a man and a woman.' (1 Ramsland 148)

The relationships between vampires in these texts almost exclusively consist of two males. However, the male/male relationships in Rice's texts transcend anonymous eroticism reminiscent of "casual sex"; these vampires function in long-term relationships very similar to those of monogamous gay male couples. Louis and Lestat, the predominant couple of the Chronicles, exemplify the homosexual analogy. Their first intimate encounter, when Lestat transforms Louis into a vampire is passionate and homosexual and, as in a homosexual "coming out,"<sup>19</sup> Lestat is the wiser, more experienced one who shows an apprehensive Louis his true nature and initiates him into his new lifestyle. As Louis describes:

. . . his movement so graceful and personal that at once it made me think of a lover. I recoiled. But he put his right arm around me and pulled me close to his chest. . . I remember that the movement of his lips raised the hair all over my body, sent a shock of sensation through my body that was not unlike the pleasure of passion (1 Rice 18).

Afterwards, they are longtime companions, living outside of traditional society but together in the same household exhibiting all of the characteristics of a marital relationship, even raising a vampire child together.

The undercurrent of homosexuality in Rice's work can be explained by the social context of the 1970's. The male/male relationships in the series, like Louis and Lestat's, are a reflection of social trends. Interview with the Vampire was published in 1976, a time when the gay community was gaining popularity, especially in the San Francisco community where Rice was living at the time. The influence of the gay subculture on the

novel is evident in many ways. As explained by John Preston, gay activist, author of homosexual literature and close friend of Anne Rice:

Lestat also proved to be popular among gay men. The passages about initiation, and the concepts of being separate from society-perhaps even above it, but always estranged by it -fit most gay men's self-images. Many gay men find the descriptions about becoming a vampire to be parallel to coming out, especially involving the welcome seduction by a being who holds the secret to the future. Gay men also relate to the voluptuousness of the descriptions and the heavy sensuality. Also, Anne has never turned away from gay society-something very important to a group which perceives itself as stigmatized. There's also the veracity of her point of view. Her take on how it feels to be in a gay relationship is very strong and accurate. It reads. . . *right* to a gay man." (1 Ramsland 266)

Anne Rice herself noted the parallels:

Anne admitted that Lestat's invitation to become a vampire was analogous to a sexual awakening, even a dramatic sexual conversion from one gender to the other. Becoming a vampire involves being taken to the edge of experience and beyond into new territory, which is both frightening and erotic (1 Ramsland 148).

Even the some of the settings of the novels paralleled the settings of gay community. Many of the characters are drawn to San Francisco and the vampire bar in The Vampire Lestat, called "Dracula's Daughter," "is a composite based on several gay bars in the Castro District " (1 Ramsland 296). The setting, the characters, the relationships and the experiences of the male characters in the Chronicles are analogous to homosexual life.

Anne Rice's vampire community is commonly interpreted by critics and fans as a metaphor for the gay community. In November 1994, when the film adaptation of Interview with the Vampire was released, the Oprah Winfrey Show aired a debate on the controversial film. During this episode, an admittedly homosexual audience member described how he and his friends identified strongly with the story and also declared that, from his viewpoint, vampirism was evidently analogous to homosexuality.

Anna Livia's vampire short story, "Minimax," published in 1992, very clearly takes Rice's metaphor one step further, more explicitly portraying the vampire community as an metaphor for the homosexual community:

... in a secret late night session the state legislature decided that ... it is no longer lawful ... to intentionally promote v\*\*\*\*\*ism [vampirism] or to support the publication of any literature which might be considered to present the v\*\*\*\*\* [vampire] lifestyle as an attractive alternative to the nuclear family. ... V\*\*\*\*\*s [vampires] should be pulled out of their coffins and exposed to the light of day but, we repeat but, only by duly authorized personnel wearing rubber gloves, mouth-guards and dental dams ...

This passage satirizes social homophobia<sup>20</sup>. It not only addresses government condemnation of homosexuality as an alternative lifestyle but the description of pulling the vampires out of their coffins and "exposing" them is a clear analogy for coming out of the proverbial closet. Most importantly, however, the segment which suggests precaution against the contamination vampires/homosexuals carry formally introduces the modern anxiety of the AIDS epidemic into vampire literature.

AIDS, a blood disease originally attributed to sexual deviance, has many similarities to vampirism. The HIV virus is parallel to the bite of the vampire, not only are both spread through sex acts but also the victim either dies or lives to spread the poison blood to others. The homosexual victims of AIDS are viewed and contaminated and the disease their just punishment by radical fundamentalists. Similarly, Dracula's Mina, because of her "adultery" was contaminated by Dracula's blood and was punished with the strange illness this blood gave her and also with the brand on her forehead.

AIDS is considered the modern day plague. Vampirism has historically been linked to various plagues. Superstitious civilizations of old Eastern Europe often mistook an outbreak of the plague as the onslaught of a vampire. Robbins describes this superstitious confusion of the Middle Ages as follows: "any plague where 'within a few hours five or six persons fell ill in the village' would be linked to vampirism. . .In later



times, the unknown factor causing death would be called a germ or virus"(524).

Inversely, the characters of Carmilla mistake the siege of Carmilla for a "strange illness." "Nosferatu," the first Dracula film, establishes in fiction the rampage of the vampire as analogous to a mass outbreak of the plague. In this film, the town incorrectly assumes all of Dracula's victims are victims of the plague.

As vampirism is linked to plagues, it follows that overt homosexual interpretations of vampire fiction, like Livia's "Minimax," lend themselves to AIDS analogies. Again and again the vampire functions metaphorically to address societal anxieties and AIDS is no exception. The tradition of the vampire facing what humans fear to confront is exemplified in "Red Tide," a play by Justin Tanner, which features a vampire who contracts AIDS through bloodsucking. The issue is also the subject of the story "All Dracula's Children" by Dan Simmons<sup>21</sup>. In this story, one of Dracula's children, Palmer, admits "all of us in the family are experts in AIDS and its symptoms. We fear it more than the stake. . ." These sexual deviants reflect modern society; AIDS is arguably more feared than any other disease, especially by those who are sexually active and non-monogamous. Palmer is later shocked to discover that not only is Dracula dying of AIDS but it is Dracula who transmitted the disease to the Western World:

Father was very careless. Remember, the HIV virus is a *retrovirus*.  
A contagion from millennia ago. The scientists do not know whence it  
came, or how it was spread to humans.

It is no surprise that Dracula, the character who has come to represent an alternate sexuality, is the source of the fatal sexually transmitted disease in this story. It is also no surprise that Dracula, after centuries of sexual indiscretion, has contracted a sexually transmitted disease like everyone else. Ironically, in this text, AIDS--the plague that threatens to kill us all-- is the demise of Dracula who survived centuries of life, war and even the Bubonic Plague. Thus, if AIDS can kill Dracula, it can kill anyone--even the low-risk. On a lighter note, a recent segment of the popular television series "Saturday

Night Live" satirized the nineties obsession with safe sex through a vampire analogy. This show featured Dracula at a cocktail party asking the guests the questions, which have become cliches, that determine an individual's risk of transmitting AIDS<sup>22</sup>. Frustrated at the discouraging answers he receives<sup>23</sup>, this Dracula transforms into a bat and flies out the window.

The theme of AIDS appears less comically in *The Vampire Chronicles*. In a series interpreted as a metaphor for the homosexual community, it is natural that AIDS would become part of the plot. Anne Rice was certainly influenced by the AIDS epidemic; she lived in the gay community of San Francisco around the time that AIDS emerged:

While Anne was writing about sexual freedom, something was happening to threaten the potential effect of her books: AIDS. People in the Castro district were growing seriously ill and dying as a result of their sexual activities. Anne was immediately supportive of efforts to assist. The disease saddened her. (1 Ramsland 243)

As AIDS spread rapidly through the eighties, the third Chronicle, *The Queen of the Damned*, (1988) focused on the mass annihilation of men, starting with the predominantly male vampire community. In a sense, this annihilation reconstructs the epidemic of AIDS which Rice was witnessing. Rice's vampire community was already established by the first novel as an analogy for the homosexual community. In this novel, the vampires, like their homosexual counterparts in reality, are the initial victims of a tragic epidemic. Rice "thought Akasha's violence paralleled the AIDS epidemic in its focus on victimizing predominantly males. . ." (1 Ramsland 301).

Thus, from subverted homosexual tendencies to the emergence of a predominant gay subculture to the epidemic of a fatal sexually transmitted disease, the vampire follows the sexual anxieties of every given era. Thus, the vampire as a metaphor provides a way to deal with issues that otherwise might be too threatening. Such issues include not only AIDS and homosexuality but also incest and the breakdown of the nuclear family.

### *Incest and the Dysfunctional Family*

As with AIDS, vampirism provides a fictitious and less threatening way to cope with a very frightening issue--incest. Vampire fiction has a unique angle on incestuous issues. There are several reasons for this. Foremost, through the vampire sex act, vampires can transform humans into new vampires, thus spawning "children." A mortal who is chosen for immortality rather than death is usually given the "Dark Gift" so that he or she can be a companion to the vampire. Naturally, the vampires usually chose their lovers for this fate. By making a lover into a child, they reverse traditional incest which makes the child into a lover. In doing so, they create a whole new series of complexes which deviate from the traditional Oedipal Complex. Secondly, vampires are immortal and are not dealing with a short human life span. The eternity involved lends itself to two new issues. First, they have centuries to explore and resolve incestuous issues. As Anne Rice said, "when you have eternity, you can work out anything, even an Oedipal Complex" (1 Ramsland 253). Secondly, as vampires have eternal life, age differences eventually become irrelevant. If the vampire parent is 435 years old and the vampire child is 410 years old, those twenty-five years are not as significant as they would be if it were a thirty-five year old human molesting a ten year old child. Furthermore, as their genitalia is non-functioning, vampire incest does not involve genital penetration, thus eliminating the most horrific extreme of incest. For all these reasons, incestuous issues are dealt with more comfortably in fiction than in reality, through the figure of the vampire. Incest in vampire texts also reflects social problems other than child molestation and abuse. The incestuous relationships in these texts highlight the breakdown of the nuclear family, the repressed memory syndrome, the dysfunctional family and the dissolution of traditional gender roles.

Dracula first introduces incest into the vampire genre. The three seductive "wives" of Dracula and the vampire Lucy molest infants. In fact, they only feed on infants! Although they attempt to seduce adults, they are only successful in seducing helpless

children. Lucy "has become a demonic mother-parody, taking nourishment from children instead of giving it, as do the three women at the Castle" (Griffin 143). Thus, they reverse the traditional parental role. Instead of the mother feeding the child with her milk, it is the child who feeds the mother with its blood. If these women are mother-parodies, then clearly their feed on infants has incestuous implications, especially considering the exchange of nourishment only occurs through an act of oral satiation. This perversion of motherhood is eventually eliminated in *Dracula* only to reappear--and grow--in contemporary texts. A century later, in *The Vampire Chronicles*, incest is portrayed more explicitly and is nearly presented as normative.

### *Oedipal Complex*

There are many dysfunctional relationships in *The Vampire Chronicles* but the relationship between Lestat and his mother, Gabrielle, in *The Vampire Lestat* would have stumped Freud himself. In mortal life, Lestat has sexual feelings for his mother and, of course, wants to kill his father. As Gabrielle is dying, Lestat transforms her into a vampire in a highly erotic scene:

I leant forward and kissed the blood on her open lips. It sent a zinging through all my limbs and the thirst leapt out for her. . . And jetting up into the current came the thirst, not obliterating but heating every concept of her, until she was flesh and blood and mother and lover and all things beneath the cruel pressure of my fingers and my lips, everything I had ever desired. I drove my teeth into her, feeling her stiffen and gasp, and I felt my mouth grow wide to catch the hot flood when it came (2 Rice 157-9).

Thus, Lestat's mother becomes his child and his lover. Subsequently, each time Lestat and Gabrielle share a sexual moment, it is incest twiceover. When Gabrielle desires Lestat, she is not only desiring her mortal son but also her vampire father. Likewise, when Lestat desires Gabrielle, he is not only desiring his mortal mother but also his vampire child. Although "Lestat demonstrated great maturity in offering the Dark Gift to his own mother. It meant he was treating her as an equal" (1 Ramsland 253), he cannot see her in

this light for long. They live together as a heterosexual couple for a few decades but even eternity cannot resolve this Oedipal Complex. Lestat is never truly able to see Gabrielle as anything but his mother and they eventually separate. Subsequently, Lestat strives to create a more traditional nuclear family, in which he will be the father figure.

### *One Happy Family?*

The trio of Claudia, Louis and Lestat from Interview with the Vampire, which Lestat describes as "one happy family"<sup>24</sup> are the ultimate exemplification of the dysfunctional family. As Ramsland points out, "the three present the picture of a dysfunctional family bound together by love and hate" (Companion 132). Lestat and Louis, the homosexual couple whose favorite hobby is murder, basically kidnap an innocent five-year-old girl, Claudia, to make her their "daughter." Ironically, it is Lestat's idea to do this to prevent Louis from leaving him. Once they have Claudia alone and helpless in their home, they transform her into a vampire. Thus, Claudia loses her innocence to two men on a bed in an act involving domination, penetration and blood. Claudia's transformation is analogous to child molestation, especially as Louis describes it:

Take her, Louis, I know you want her.' And I did. I drew close to the bed now and just watched her. . . I couldn't bear it, looking at her, wanting her not to die and wanting her; and the more I looked at her, the more I could taste her skin, feel my arm sliding under her back and pulling her up to me. . . It was sensual. She was sensual. ( 1 Rice 91-3).

The whole family structure is to have an incestuous undercurrent, as Lestat immediately explains, "'You're our daughter, Louis's daughter and my daughter, do you see? Now, who should you sleep with? Louis or me?' " (1 Rice 95). They continue to treat Claudia as a childlike lover, even when she is well into old age. As Conant said "Some of the scenes of Lestat and Louis cuddling with Claudia, the five-year-old love child, border on pedophilia. If it wasn't for the fangs, these guys would have been brought up on a morals charge" (74). Lestat and Louis are perverted distortions of fatherhood, not only because of the incestuous nature of their child's conception and birth, but their child-rearing

practices leave a lot to be desired. They train Claudia in the art of murder, scolding her for killing in the home but applauding her sinister accomplishments elsewhere.

Of course, Claudia does not remember the incestuous incident of her birth for decades. In an episode of the repressed-memory-syndrome so favored by modern tabloid talk shows, Claudia begins to recollect her molestation and demands to know which one of them "did it" to her. Shortly afterwards, she becomes obsessed with murdering the father, Lestat, so she can escape from this dysfunctional family. She is, however, somewhat justified. Not only have they "molested" her, but they also made her a vampire without giving her a choice. In my opinion, any jury would view the abuse of Claudia as a direct provocation for her murdering of Lestat. Abuse, both sexual and spousal, is often used as a defense in murder trials such as in the highly publicized case of the Menendez brothers. After murdering their parents, the Menendez boys claimed the parents had sexually abused them. Like Claudia, they sought revenge.

Claudia presents a strange twist on incest which is a sort of revenge for molested children. As adults pervert and abuse their authoritative role in order to lure the child into an abusive situation, Claudia perverts her childish position for the same effect. Presenting herself as a lost, helpless child--when she is really a sixty-year-old murderer capable of finding her way home--she lures unsuspecting innocent victims and she, the child, molests the adults. In another way, she is an adult who uses her childlike appearance to molest children. She revels in killing entire families. As Lucy is a perversion of motherhood, Claudia is a perversion of childhood. Of course, we sympathize more with Claudia because not only is she getting revenge, she was socialized by her fathers to do this. Claudia is not the only one socialized by the father. A recent novel (1994) Covenant with the Vampire: The Diaries of the Family Dracul, goes as far as to have Dracula make blood pacts with his young nephews so that they will become his partners in crime as adults.

*Covenant with the Vampire*

Covenant deals with incest on a more adult level than *The Vampire Chronicles*. In this novel, Dracula makes blood pacts with his child relatives and seduces the adult ones. This text, in epistolary form like Dracula, consists of the diaries of Dracula's mortal family and predates Dracula by fifty years. Zsuzannah Tsepesh engages in incest with Vlad<sup>25</sup> (a.k.a. Dracula) who is not only her uncle by a human bloodline, but also serves as a father figure to her. She clearly is a willing participant. After one graphic encounter with Vlad, Zsuzannah writes, "I feel closer to Uncle than ever, as if he and I truly share this wicked, marvelous secret" (59).

Unfortunately, this novel is not much more than a simple spin-off of classic vampire fiction. It is readable and entertaining but very straightforward and lacks the underlying symbolism of Stoker, LeFanu or Rice. However, it provides a good, if simple, example of a contemporary text very explicit in its representation of crossing sexual boundaries. It also exemplifies the fact that vampirism provides a disguise which renders questionable subject matter acceptable. Kalogridis' tale of the affair between an uncle and a niece probably would not have been as well-received as it was if the uncle were not a vampire. Again, through the figure of the vampire, the unacceptable is rendered tolerable. As with homosexuality and AIDS, the vampire confronts the incest anxiety. The vampire also confronts the confused power roles prevalent in our society that can be seen through issues of dominance and submission.

### ***Dominance and Submission***

The sexual aspect of the vampire raises issues of power that are posed in society. The breakdown of traditional gender roles led to the reconstructing of power. Gender-based changes are occurring in every aspect of our culture but especially in male/female relations. The traditional structure of the dominant male/submissive female relationship is essentially extinct but a new structure has not completely evolved to replace it. The construction of courtship--such as which party will initiate and control the relationship and

the very real question of who pays for dinner and whether the person who pays hold any power over the other--is broken down but not yet reconstructed. The question is still on the table--who will dominate and who will submit? The same question is posed to the vampire and the victim.

The relationship between vampire and victim is a unique structure. Some victims are attracted and repulsed by the monster at the same moment. Other victims are attracted to the vampire and or enjoy the sexual act of the kill, unaware that their lover is a vampire and that they are experiencing death. Still others are aroused by the intimacy of the vampire, consciously aware that the danger excites them. Some want to dominate the powerful vampire while others possess an unconscious desire to submit. Most, however, experience conflicting feelings.

The predecessors of vampire fiction, Carmilla and Dracula, show their ambiguous victims torn between attraction and repulsion for the vampire. The time period does not allow them to freely admit that they desire sexuality so they must exhibit a degree of disgust as well. Carmilla's lover, Laura, is the first to admit her confusion and thus, the first to admit that she desires to be dominated by beautiful monster:

I experienced a strange tumultuous excitement that was pleasurable, ever and anon, mingled with a vague sense of fear and disgust. I had no distinct thoughts about her while such scenes lasted, but I was conscious of a love growing into adoration, and also of abhorrence. This I know is a paradox, but I can make no other attempt to explain the feeling. (LeFanu 44)

Dracula's Johnathan Harker meets Carmilla in a Stoker short story entitled Dracula's Guest, which was originally a part of the novel Dracula. As he enters the tomb of "Countess Dolingen of Gratz in Styria," he experiences a paradox similar to Laura's:

There was an icy feeling at the back of my neck and all down my spine, and my ears, like my feet, were dead, yet in torment; but there was in my breast a sense of warmth which was. . .delicious. (2 Stoker 37)

Johnathan's paradox becomes intensified when he encounters the three beautiful female vampires in Dracula's castle:



There was something about them that made me uneasy, some longing and at the same time some deadly fear. . . There was a deliberate voluptuousness which was both thrilling and repulsive. (1 Stoker 39)

However, the fear of them seems to excite him further and his attraction overpowers his repulsion:

I could feel the soft, shivering touch of the lips on the supersensitive skin of my throat, and the hard dents of two sharp teeth, just touching and pausing there. I closed my eyes and waited-waited with beating heart. (1 Stoker 41)

Mina also admits her strange fascination with the vampire, Count Dracula. After she and Dracula drink each other's blood, she tells the others, "I was bewildered and, strangely enough, I did not want to hinder him" (1 Stoker 255).

Many victims are attracted to dominating, dangerous characters but are unaware that they are vampires. In "The Master of Rampling Gate," a Rice short story, Julie is intimate with the vampire and does not realize what he is until afterwards when she touches her neck and has blood on her finger. However, she knew that her father saw him with "unspeakable horror" (54). She is attracted to the danger.

The fact that all of these victims experience desire and fear at the same moment implies that fear fuels their desire. They want to be dominated. Of course, some victims, on the other hand, desire domination over a powerful creature such as the vampire and engage in a power struggle. In Califia's "The Vampire," Iduna tracks down and seduces Kerry, the vampire. They reach a showdown in which Kerry insists she will not feed but Iduna persuades her to do so. However, Kerry turns the table and becomes the dominant one during their union, ultimately winning the battle. In the Vampire Chronicles, Armand and Daniel engage in power struggle that lasts for decades. Daniel ultimately wins by convincing a very reluctant Armand to give him the "Dark Gift."

The vampire arouses the most unconscious animalistic desires and is a manifestation of the most sinister fantasies of either dominating or submitting. The sensual

nature of the vampire attracts their mortal lovers but it is the other side of what the vampire represents--dominance and submission--which makes the vampire's kiss irresistible. Thus, ". . .for the victim, sexual arousal heightens with the threat of annihilation; a vampire is the image of 'dangerous sex' in which the greatest possible orgasm is achieved at the point preceding unconsciousness, but the risk is death" (1 Ramsland 146). This dangerous sex blurs the line between sex and violence, the line between dominance and submission. The vampire, a representation of dangerous sex, clearly crosses sexual boundaries. These texts also reflect the sexual politics of contemporary society--gender bending or the dissolution of traditional gender roles, explicit representations of sexuality, and the resulting confusion about gender and sexual roles.

### *Conclusion*

The chronological progression of vampire fiction, represented by Carmilla, Dracula and The Vampire Chronicles in sequential order, reflect the chronological progression of social movements. Lesbianism moves from taboo to an extension of the feminist movement. Likewise, homosexuality, repressed in early texts, is freely depicted in later texts. Although alternate forms of sexuality are still basically taboo in society, a greater acceptance is evolving and previously forbidden topics are now discussed, especially on tabloid talk shows. Vampire fiction reflects the very slowly evolving societal acknowledgment of personal sexual preference. The vampire metaphor also confronts the AIDS epidemic which threatens the modern world and changed our sexual and social behavior. Vampires address incestuous complexes as timeless as Oedipus Rex as well as the modern disintegration of the traditional nuclear family. Finally, these texts address the sexual politics of the contemporary era such as gender bending. In short, these texts confront the cultural anxieties of their given eras by providing a way--the vampire as a metaphor-- to deal with threatening issues. Contemporary vampire fictions exemplify all

of the phenomena which characterize the present era such as AIDS, new gender roles and homosexual and lesbian subcultures.

The vampire's metaphorical substitution for sexuality relates to crossing boundaries and alternative forms of sexuality. These texts rebel against heterosexism and embrace the aberrant sexuality that is deemed "abnormal" by the mainstream. Overall, the treatment of sexuality in these texts progresses from implicit to explicit which reflects the changing treatment of sexuality in society.



*The Vampires*, Estienne Csok

## *Conclusion*

Many people have given me strange looks when told the topic of my thesis. "Interesting, but what does that have to do with *serious* literature or anything else?," some have justifiably asked. In response to that, I will discuss the importance of studying popular culture, what I have learned from this study, the social and literary relevance of this study, and outline equally valid potential studies on the vampire in literature.

Studying vampire literature in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries revealed a progression in the depiction of gender and sexual roles, reflections of social anxieties, the influence of the respective author's cultural and personal experiences, and the general differences between nineteenth-century British and Irish literature and twentieth-century American literature. Most importantly, this study required an application of the thinking, researching, and writing skills I have developed as an student of literature.

I wanted to study the vampire in literature because I was fascinated by it and realized a lot of other people were also. I wondered why the vampire and vampire fiction was so appealing, not only to me, but to the many fans of this genre. Among many other things, I discovered that part of the fascination is that the vampire is a culmination of two of humanity's greatest obsessions--sex and death. The vampire is also free from the gender roles which confine humans. The vampire's possession of eternal youth and immortality is a large part of our obsession with this myth. Unfortunately, in a thesis of this length, I was unable to address that issue completely.

The vampire in literature provided a great avenue into gender studies and social and sexual issues. The analysis of these texts exposed a progression in the depiction of gender roles which mirrored changing gender roles in society. Specifically, these works dealt metaphorically with the feminist movement as I discussed in chapter one. This study also revealed a movement in the treatment of sexuality from implicit to explicit. Chapter

two stressed the increasing openness in discussing traditionally taboo topics such as homosexuality, both in fiction and in society, as seen through vampire texts. Finally, through vampire fiction, the thesis revealed most, if not all, literature reflects the anxieties of the given era, even if this is an unconscious commentary. My primary texts suggested anxieties about many social issues from feminism to AIDS.

I chose to study popular culture because I feel it is equally important as the study of high culture. Popular culture reflects what appeals to the contemporary mainstream public and, for this reason, it is a subject of social and cultural significance. Popular culture is not isolated from high culture; popular literature is a product of the influence of classic literature. For example, Anne Rice is obviously influenced by such classic authors as Milton, Keats, Yeats, and, of course, Stoker.

Vampire literature as a genre of popular writing is part of a long tradition of juxtaposing sexuality and death. The Romantics, for instance, frequently utilized these two themes. Many poems, such as Keat's "The Eve of St. Agnes" and "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" address sexuality and death through a monstrous and mysterious atmosphere without explicitly using the vampire motif. Byron's narrative poem, "Manfred," clearly relates death, guilt and aberrant sexuality, i.e., incest, in the same manner as vampire literature. James Twitchell even proposes that Byron is implying vampirism when Manfred drinks his sister's blood (2 Twitchell 77). Ironically, the opening sequence of Coppola's 1992 film version of Dracula, which creates a history for Dracula not present in the novel, is reminiscent of "Manfred." This scene addresses other themes common to both vampire texts and Romantic texts such as morality and loss of belief in God. Other Romantic works, such as Keats' "Lamia" and Coleridge's "Christabel" portray the vampire image more explicitly. Likewise, vampire literature is the ultimate extreme of the Romantic obsession with sex and death. Thus, the influence of high literature on contemporary writing--and cinema--is important to study because it reveals that literature is a chain of connected ideas and themes.

This thesis also revealed how the author's experiences, cultural or personal, are manifested in their work even though the work may not be intentionally biographical. Obviously, Stoker and Rice are not vampires but reading their fictional works against their biographies and respective social settings revealed undeniable influences in their work. As I discussed, issues in Stoker's personal life exacerbated the misogyny of the period. Likewise, Rice's experiences with AIDS and the homosexual community are manifested in her work. Rice also admitted, if it was not already obvious, that her character Claudia is a fictional reincarnation of her daughter, Michele, who died tragically at the age of five. Vampire literature, like most popular fiction of any period, shows the relevance of the author's experiences to the text.

Studying the vampire in literature through the texts I chose also highlighted the differences between nineteenth-century British/Irish literature and twentieth-century American literature. Although all of the texts focused on the same topic, vampires, they treated the topic very differently. Contemporary American works are much more explicit than Victorian texts. The progression of time which loosened inhibitions about sexuality and the democratic ideals of freedom contributed to contemporary atmosphere which is extremely open about sexuality and traditionally tabooed topics. Comparison of these texts also required contrasting narrative tools such as point of view, characterization, tropes, and narrative structure. For instance, Dracula is an epistolary novel which is a fairly uncommon structure in contemporary fiction. However, Kalogridis utilizes this structure in her prequel to Stoker's story, Covenant with the Vampire: The Diaries of the Family Dracul. Contrarily, Rice uses a wide variety of narrative structures, experimenting with them a little differently in each novel. This study revealed differences in the structure of the novel.

Finally, in a broader sense, this thesis required and responded to an application of the tools used in the study of high culture. This study was essentially a study of various literary tropes and an analysis of metaphor and symbolism which is, of course, an

important component of literary theory. Furthermore, not only is the vampire a popular topic to the public of readers and to writers, it is also gaining popularity among critics and scholars. During my research, I was pleasantly surprised to discover a plethora of criticism already in existence on the vampire in literature. There is an abundance of articles by esteemed critics in scholarly journals and entire books devoted to the study of the vampire in literature. These critics utilized the same ideologies of literary criticism which are traditionally applied to high culture. I found this research an excellent introduction to the in-depth research I hope to continue in graduate studies. This varied criticism was interesting and promoted scores of different literary schools of thought.

The vampire provides seemingly inexhaustible topics for study, several of which I would have liked to address but, unfortunately, time and length restrictions did not permit. However, I will take the opportunity to outline a few of those ideas here. Possibly using the same primary texts as this thesis, it would be interesting to explore the depiction of the vampire as a sympathetic character and the moral and philosophical issues the sensitive vampire faces. Specifically relevant would be an analysis of characters for whom vampirism was not a choice, such as Rice's Lestat or Claudia and Countess Zaleska in the 1936 film Dracula's Daughter. Another fascinating component of the vampire myth is immortality and eternal youth. Vampires never change while the world around them is in a constant state of change. The theme of time and aging in vampire literature would provide a fascinating study, especially in the context of technology or vanity, for instance. Finally, I will outline in greater detail two possible studies--a comparison of the Southern Gothic and Vampire genres and secondly, the vampire in film, a virtually unexplored topic.

The Southern Gothic element is interestingly tied to the Vampire Motif. This connection is addressed in some fashion in all three of my primary texts. A 1989 Showtime film adaptation of Carmilla moved the story from an old castle in an isolated European forest to a secluded plantation in the Antebellum South. This required little to



no change in the story. This is certainly not the first example of modern fiction and film claiming Gothicism for the South and utilizing the Southern aura for a new "exotic" locale. A large part of Interview with the Vampire takes place on a Louisiana plantation. The film adaptation of this novel was partially shot at a local plantation, Oak Alley. The subsequent novels in the series are often set in various places around Louisiana and also in Miami. Not surprisingly, Anne Rice was born, raised and presently resides in New Orleans. She feels that she is a Southern writer and describes her New Orleans as having a "Southern Gothic ambience" (1 Ramsland 316). Other contemporary vampire stories, such as Jewelle Gomez's "Louisiana: 1850" and Robbi Sommers' "Lilith," have a Southern setting. In reverse, some twentieth-century Southern fiction utilizes a vampire motif. For example, the vampiric themes in Faulkner's Absalom! Absalom! have been studied by critics and myself.<sup>26</sup> This novel bears many similarities to Dracula. Further exploration of the connection between Vampire fiction and Southern Gothic fiction would prove an interesting and unique study.

The vampire in the media of film addresses many topics, not the least of which are the issues previously discussed in this thesis. Film adaptations of literature allow a unique analysis due to their pictorial interpretations and their revisions of the original text for the society of the given time. My topics of gender and sexuality would be interesting to analyze through the medium of film. Preferred films for this analysis would be various cinematic adaptations of the texts I studied; Carmilla, Nosferatu, Dracula, Bram Stoker's Dracula, and Interview with the Vampire. The forefather of vampire film, the 1922 silent Nosferatu is the first film adaptation of Dracula and establishes the rampage of the vampire as analogous to an epidemic of disease, as I discussed in the context of AIDS. The 1931 version of Dracula is important because its star, Bela Lugosi, has arguably done more than any other film or text to perpetuate the modern image and popularity of the aristocratic, sensual, cloak-sporting vampire. A more modern film, Francis Ford Coppola's 1992 Bram Stoker's Dracula is a graphically erotic adaptation which proposes a

sexual history for the Count not present in the novel. The most recent of these films, Interview with the Vampire (1994) exemplifies the modification of an androgynous and sexually aberrant text for a mainstream audience. The progression of sexual metaphor in the texts from explicit to implicit and the movement of the issues from normative sexuality to deviant sexuality is paralleled in the treatment of erotic scenes in various films. For example, the depiction of Dracula's seduction in the 1922 film version is faded out before the penetration of the neck. This film could be analyzed in contrast to the 1992 version in which Dracula's seductions are portrayed in a nearly pornographic fashion. Another recent film, Interview with the Vampire, still in local theaters at the time of this writing, could also be addressed in terms of audience reaction. The homosexual context of the novel was subdued in the film version (amid massive sighs of relief from the audience) for acceptance by the homophobic mainstream audience. There is also a proliferation of lesbian vampire films, many inspired by Carmilla, which, as of yet, have not been the subject of much criticism. These lesbian vampire films provide interesting depictions of female homosexual relationships and images of women as powerful, seductive, man-eating, "vamps" or "femme fatales." These films could be studied in the context of feminist film theory and especially Laura Mulvey's theories<sup>27</sup> regarding "the look" and scopophilia, the love of looking. Interestingly, most of these films defined as lesbian, which implies that they are constructed for female pleasure, are actually constructed by men for a predominantly heterosexual male audience. In short, the vampire in film could easily be the subject of another thesis in itself.

After completing this study, I feel that the vampire is so connected to social and literary themes that perhaps there should be a course offered on the vampire in literature. The vampire as a topic has a sensationalistic appeal which would attract many students who otherwise would not be interested in a literature course. However, although the draw to the course would be the non-intimidating, popular culture aspect of the vampire, this topic could be utilized to address any number of other "serious" literary topics and genres

such as Romanticism, Gothicism, Southern studies, gender, film, philosophy, narrative style, and so on. The texts I have discussed in detail, Dracula, Carmilla, and Anne Rice's Vampire Chronicles would be excellent primary texts for a course on the vampire in literature. Dracula and Carmilla are classics in their own right while The Vampire Chronicles may soon be, considering their enormous popularity and strong cult following. Furthermore, these are readable, entertaining texts which are also educating and rich with symbolism and style. For a course, these texts would also be ideal because while sharing common themes, they provide a good example of very different styles and periods. Other vampire texts, especially poetry, could be used to introduce important figures in literature. For instance, a poetry unit could include Coleridge's "Christabel," Keats' "Lamia," and Byron's "Giaour," to name a few. James Twitchell's book, The Living Dead: A Study of the Vampire in Romantic Literature, would provide an excellent source of criticism for this unit. These are only a few of the many things that could be addressed in a course on the vampire in literature. As I have mentioned, this course would be ideal for students who would otherwise not be interested in a literature course, but it would also provide a fresh, interesting angle for the literature student, as it has for me.

<sup>1</sup> In John Flynn's 1992 book Cinematic Vampires he counts the word "vampire" appearing in a film title 1046 times and the word "Dracula" in a film title 62 times (310). This is not to mention all of the movies about vampires which do not have "vampire" or "Dracula" in the title such as "Nosferatu," "The Lost Boys," "The Hunger," "Near Dark," etc.

<sup>2</sup> By the feminist movement, I am referring not only to the organised movement to attain women's rights but also the movement for social transformation and equality in all aspects of life.

<sup>3</sup> In The Dictionary of Feminist Theory, Humm defines a feminist as "a woman who recognises herself, and is recognised by others as a feminist. That awareness depends on a woman having experienced consciousness raising; a knowledge of women's oppression, and a recognition of women's difference and communalities"(75). Definitions of feminists vary widely. I adhere to a broader definition of feminist which includes any woman who recognises and asserts her independence from the patriarchy and defines her own value even if she does not define herself as "feminist." Essentially, a woman who adheres to feminist values, whether or not she recognises herself as a feminist.

<sup>4</sup> The contemporary feminist movement which emerged in the early 1970s is referred to as 'second-wave' feminism. It is characterized by "its search for the political bases on which contemporary feminism rests." The term 'second -wave' distinguishes it from the 'first wave' feminist movement which refers to the "mobilisation of the suffrage movement in America and England between 1890 and 1920." These definitions can be found in Maggie Humm's The Dictionary of Feminist Theory (p.78).

<sup>5</sup> Mircalla is one of Carmilla's aliases. It is an amalgam of Carmilla.

<sup>6</sup> Humm clarifies that female "is a term reserved in feminist theory for the purely biological aspect of sexual difference with 'feminine' as the term for the social construction of women" (71-2). Therefore, in terms of my argument, the breakdown of traditional gender roles is a positive social *re*-construction of women. A "new feminine identity," therefore, is the end result of this social *re*-construction.

<sup>7</sup> The law of the father is a feminist term which can basically be defined as the patriarchal rules. The father is defined not only as the male biological parent but as all fathers--a personification of the patriarchy. As the patriarchy is the social system in which men control the means of power; the law of the father is the means by which the patriarchy imposes this power.

<sup>8</sup> According to Robert Tracy, in his article "Loving You All Ways: Vamps, Vampires, Necrophiles and Necrofiles in Nineteenth-Century Fiction," "Stoker acknowledged his debt to Carmilla with an act of homage intended to serve as the first chapter of Dracula, but removed it at his publisher's advice, presumably because it anticipated too much of what was to come" (42). This chapter, revived as a short story entitled "Dracula's Guest," bears many similarities to Carmilla. The most notable of these similarities is a "Countess Dolingen of Gratz in Styria" who parallels Carmilla in her title of Countess and her birthplace. Likewise, Johnathan is as threatened by the powerful Countess Dolingen as all of LeFanu's male characters are of Carmilla.

<sup>9</sup> Ti-Grace Atkinson's slogan summarizes the view of lesbian feminists who view heterosexual relations as oppressive and lesbianism as an alternative. They further argue that lesbianism is not only a sexual preference but a political choice which rejects the compulsory heterosexuality that they see as the cornerstone of the patriarchy. Their sexual and political choice constructs a life which rejects male definitions. Maggie Humm provides a summary of differing "lesbian feminism" ideologies in The Dictionary of Feminist Theory (117-8).

<sup>10</sup>From the film version of the novel.

<sup>11</sup>For more information, see Helen Diner's Mothers and Amazons: The First Feminine History of Culture and Merlyn Stone's The Paradise Papers: the Suppression of Women's Rites.

<sup>12</sup>In The Dictionary of Feminist Theory, Humm defines heterosexism as "the unconscious or explicit assumption that heterosexuality is the only 'normal' mode of sexual and social relations." She continues, "feminist theorists agree that heterosexuality, as an institution and as an ideology, is a cornerstone of patriarchy. For example heterosexism implies that the suppression and denial of homosexuality and assumes that everyone is, or should be, heterosexual. Second, heterosexism relies on the fallacious superiority of the dominant male, passive female pattern" (94).

<sup>13</sup>Compulsory heterosexuality is "a term in radical and lesbian theory for the enforcement of heterosexuality. It includes the ideological and political control of women's sexuality. In her keynote essay Adrienne Rich describes compulsory heterosexuality as the main mechanism underlying and perpetuating male dominance. She argues that the assumption of heterosexuality both reflects and reinforces ignorance about lesbians and lesbian perspectives. . . If heterosexuality were not presented as, or perceived to be, *the* 'natural' form of sexual relations then the erotic choices of both women and men and our gender identities would be very different. . . The assumption that heterosexuality is innate has been a theoretical and political problem for many women as well as for men" (Humm 34).

<sup>14</sup>Lesbian continuum is "a range of women-identified experience embracing all forms of intensity between women, not simply the fact that a woman has had or consciously desires to have genital contact with other women" (Humm 116)

<sup>15</sup>Second-wave feminism is "a term coined by Marsha Weinman Lear to refer to the formation of women's liberation groups in America, Britain and Germany in the late 1960's. The term 'second-wave' implies that 'first-wave' feminism ended in the 1920s" (Humm 198).

<sup>16</sup>Pat Keesey's anthology Daughters of Darkness: Lesbian Vampire Stories provides a good sampling of this subgenre. There is also a plethora of lesbian vampire films, although most of them are constructed for the male fantasy.

<sup>17</sup>See p.180-182 (especially p.181) in the Keesey edition.

<sup>18</sup>Webster's Seventh Collegiate Dictionary defines:

Femme Fatale: 1:a seductive woman who lures men into dangerous or compromising situations:siren. 2: a woman who attracts men by an aura of charm and mystery.

Vamp: a woman who uses her charm to seduce and exploit men. Vamp(verb tense):to practice seductive wiles on. One of the definitions of vampire is "a woman who exploits and ruins her lover"

<sup>19</sup> Coming out is "the formation of a homosexual identity. In the late 1960s 'coming out' was thought to be a single event, the first time that a homosexually orientated individual identified herself as such to another person. As a result of lesbian theory 'coming out' is now described at a *process* rather than as a discrete point in time" (Humm 33). This definition is applicable to both lesbians and male homosexuals.

<sup>20</sup> Homophobia is the fear of homosexuality. It can refer to others or oneself.

<sup>21</sup> All references to this story will be from page 55.

<sup>22</sup> i.e.-- How many sexual partners have you had? Do you practice safe sex? Have you ever used intravenous drugs? Are you regularly tested for sexually transmitted disease? etc.

<sup>23</sup> Dracula's final acquaintance informs him that she is dating Keith Richards, the Rolling Stones band member famous for excessive drug abuse and copious sexual liaisons.

<sup>24</sup> This quote is from the film adaptation.

<sup>25</sup> Vlad refers to the historical Vlad Tsepesh also known as Vlad Dracula (Dracula means "son of the devil") or Vlad the Impaler, presumably the inspiration for Stoker's Dracula. Radu Florescu and Raymond McNally provide extensive information on the historical Dracula in several books: In Search of Dracula (1972), Dracula: Prince of Many Faces (1989) and In Search of Dracula: The History of Dracula and Vampires Completely Revised (1994).

<sup>26</sup> For a more detailed discussion of this, see my paper "The Children of the Night: *Absalom, Absalom!*'s Vampiric Elements" and Cheryl Tornsey's article "The Vampire Motif in *Absalom, Absalom!*"

<sup>27</sup> For more information, see Mulvey's essay "Visual Pleasure and the Narrative Cinema" and also Mary Ann Doane's essay "Film and the Masquerade: Theorizing the Female Spectator" in which she briefly discusses the function of the look in horror films. Both essays can be found in Issues in Feminist Film Criticism, edited by Patricia Erens.

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