

**WOMAN, MOTHER, VAMPIRE: THE RESIDENT
EVIL OF CHANGING SOCIAL ANXIETIES**

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Table of contents

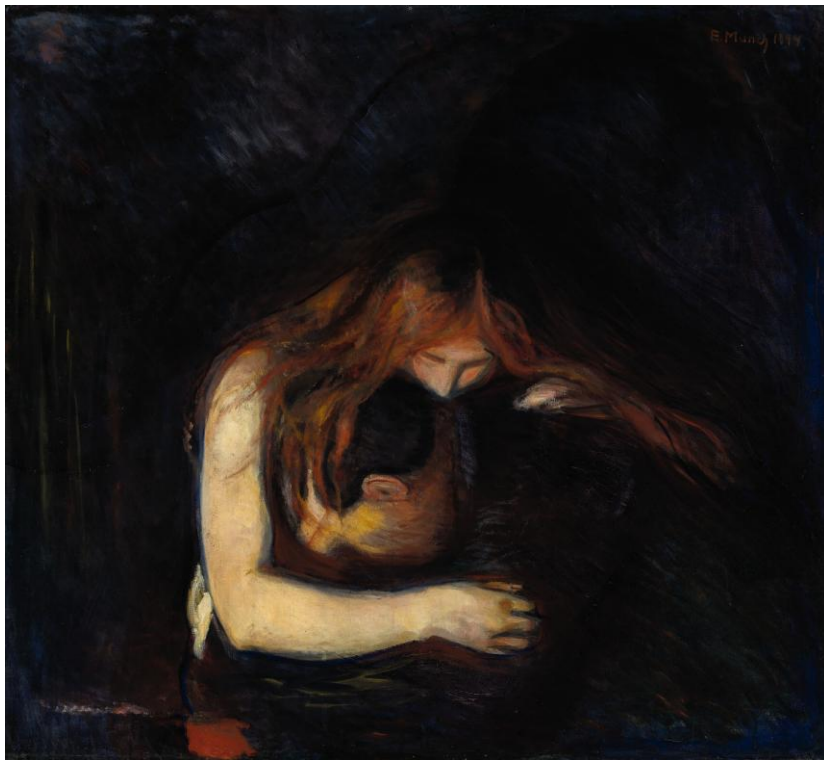
Chapter 1: Fearing the Devouring Woman	1
Introduction	2
Tracing the vampire woman	4
Chapter 2: The “central document in the late nineteenth-century war on woman” (Bram Stoker: <i>Dracula</i>)	9
Chapter 3: The vampire and the postmodern turn: Anne Rice and the representation of femininity in the <i>Vampire Chronicles</i>	21
Conclusion	36
Works Cited	38

Chapter 1

Fearing the Devouring Woman

*Her lips were red, her looks were free,
Her locks were yellow as gold:
Her skin was white as leprosy,
The Nightmare Life-in-Death was she,
Who thicks man's blood with cold.*

(Coleridge: "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner")



Edward Munch: "Vampire" (1894)

Introduction

After the mass production of romantic comedies and historical dramas, in the past few years a new phase began in the film industry dominated by fantasies and gothic stories. This new phase gave a huge impetus to book industry as well, since the blockbuster films are mostly adaptations of popular novels (e.g.: *The Chronicles of Narnia* series, or the *Twilight Saga*) but other less-known stories also make their debut on screen (e.g.: *The Woman in Black*, originally a gothic novel by Susan Hill). One fantastic creature, however, overshadows all the others with its undying allure and inexhaustible new potentialities: the vampire. In the past few years countless vampire movies were released, such as *Blade II* (2002), *Blade Trinity* (2004), the *Underworld* quadrilogy (2003-2012), *Daybreakers* (2009), *Priest* (2011) or the television series *True Blood* (from 2008), and *The Vampire Diaries* (from 2009), just to mention a few. Why vampires? What can account for this huge interest? Ken Gelder in his book *Reading the Vampire* thinks that the answer

lies primarily in their unfailing ability to fascinate. That is, they evoke a response that is not entirely ‘rational’ – a response that may sit somewhere in between disbelief and, in fact, a *suspension* of disbelief. Vampires are both textual and extra-textual creatures; one can even ‘know’ about them (and ‘irrationally’ wish to know more about them) without actually reading vampire fiction or watching vampire films. In this sense, they are ‘in’ culture. (X)

Vampires are fascinating because they are indefinable, the ultimate transgressors, liminal figures of the twilight zone between life and death, beauty and monstrosity. Perhaps the most striking novelty of the recent reworkings of the vampire myth is the radical shift in their evaluation. While in earlier times they were feared as a threat to the established religious, moral and social order, nowadays vampires appear in a much more becoming light. Indeed, in the recent novels and TV series targeting a teenager or young adult audience, the male vampire characters function as revised, updated versions of Prince Charming: alien, secretive, dangerous, exciting, and attractive beyond expression. Thus, turning into a vampire has suddenly become a desirable “life” aspiration for bored, depressed or lonely girls (e.g.: Bella Swan in the *Twilight Saga*).

In this essay, however, I shall explore the changing figure of the vampire woman, which is one of those female stereotypes that haunted mankind from the beginning of human civilisations. As Barbara Creed argues, “[h]istorically stereotypes have been used to represent

female sexuality as monstrous in order to justify the oppression of women—as happens with other groups such as blacks, Jews, gays and lesbians” (30). Thus in the 19th century, when vampire literature emerged, the figure of the female vampire served as a desperate attempt on the part of male writers and male society to fight against an even more dangerous and threatening female type, the New Woman. Since in our contemporary culture sexuality is not a taboo topic any more (rather the opposite), vampire women in general ceased to be as disquieting and threatening as they were at the turn of the 19th century. We could assume that nowadays the majority of female vampire characters stand for little more than a perfect female body and an insatiable sexual hunger. Yet, rather than losing all her social-political significance, the figure of the vampiress adapted to the cultural changes of the 20th century, to reflect and embody other problematic aspects of femininity. Also, the advent of gender studies made her literary and cultural significance even more emphatic. The aim of my essay is to trace the origins of the female vampire and to examine, with the help of Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*, the social anxieties that called her to “life” at the end of the 19th century, and furthermore to compare these with the social issues contemporary female vampires reflect upon in the first three volumes of Anne Rice’s *Vampire Chronicles* (*Interview with the Vampire*; *The Vampire Lestat*; and *The Queen of the Damned*).

Tracing the vampire woman

From Lamia, through Lilith, to the modern-age vampires

The explanation for the proliferation of female vampire figures is rooted in the male hostility towards and suspicion of women, especially female sexuality, which goes back to the origins of Western civilisations. Due to their radically different physical construction (they were said to be more immune to plague and other contagious diseases, and, supposing they survived childbirth, lived longer) and inexplicable biological processes (like childbirth or menstruation), women were from early on linked with magic, supernatural forces, or immediately with demons. Nietzsche said that whatever is radically different from us constitutes an urgent threat to our own existence, therefore we conceive it as ‘the Other’, who is to be feared and expelled (Jameson 115). Elisabeth Bronfen added that the Other is “the site on to which difference, as a tension between the security of control and a fear of its loss has been projected - be this in respect to the difference of self and other, of the masculine and the feminine, of the living and the dead” (182). Therefore, “[t]he construction of Woman-as-Other serves rhetorically to dynamise a social order, while her death marks the end of this period of change. Over her dead body, cultural norms are reconfirmed or secured” (Bronfen 181).

“When women are categorised as monstrous, the nature of their abjection is almost always tied to definitions of what constitutes the proper sexual and reproductive roles for women” (Creed 30). The ‘othering’ of women in the form of various demons that feed on the vital fluids of humans had been an almost universal tendency from ancient times. The myths and stories behind these female demons reflect upon the problematic nature of maternity, childbirth and upon the desire to keep the radically different woman under male oppression. Several among these fearsome beasts were sometime women who challenged male supremacy, who rebelled against their own role as prescribed by patriarchal order. But there are also others whose murderous habits are the monstrous distortion of maternal behaviour, which symbolizes the abject nature of the mother’s sharing her bodily fluids with the child. The most well-known mythical female vampires are the *lamias* of the ancient Greek and Roman culture who “were known primarily as demonic beings who sucked the blood from young children; however, they had the power to transform themselves into beautiful young

maidens in order to attract and seduce young men” (Melton 305)¹. The figure of the female demon who returns from the dead to drink the blood of little children and devour them appears in the folklore of many other peoples as well, such as the *obayifo* in Ghana, the *labartu* in Babylonia, the *aswang* in the Philippines (Beresford 20), the Malaysian *langsuyar*, once a beautiful woman who bore a stillborn baby (Melton 443), the Aztec *cihuateteo* that left the children paralysed or diseased (Melton 457), or the *Estries*, the Jewish female vampires (Melton 239). By the Middle Ages, a new type of female demon, with strong sexual overtones, was preying on the innocent menfolk: the succubus seduced young men in their sleep and withdrew their vital fluids (Beresford 156). Lilith, Adam’s adulterous first wife became the first succubus after she left Adam to mate with archangel Samael, and refused to return to the Garden of Eden (Melton 425). (She is also associated with the murder of children.) A blood-sucking female demon can also be found in Irish folklore in the form of the Dearg-due (or ‘red bloodsucker’), which used “her beauty to tempt passing men and then suck their blood” (Leatherdale 77)². While the Dearg-due preyed primarily upon young men, the Irish fairies were said to steal children (especially those who had not been baptized) from their cradles and leave changelings (deformed or senile fairy children) in their places.

With the advent of Christianity, misogynous persecution reached its peak. Since Christianity is a strictly patriarchal religion, the clergy had to put an end to the belief in the Mother Goddess, which was widespread and powerful in Europe. The best way to accomplish this scheme was to make the feminine and the maternal objects of suspicion, fear and threat, in short, to create a scapegoat from woman. Supported by the Biblical story of Adam and Eve, woman was called the temptress of men, the devil’s gateway (as in Tertullian’s *De Cultu Feminarum*), the source of every affliction on earth. “Eve was shown to be fickle and weak-minded, and these qualities were assumed to have been handed down to women in general” – says Clive Leatherdale (133). As Leonard Shlain argues, “in a seminal book over seven hundred pages long, the demolition of women’s status begins on page 2 and is essentially completed on page 3. Gender relations is the *first* issue raised *and settled* after the creation of the universe, which suggests the priority for the author(s)” (112). Mieke Bal in her analysis of

¹ According to the myth, Lamia was a beautiful Libyan queen whom Zeus fell in love with. Hearing of the affair, Hera, the jealous and vengeful wife of Zeus, robbed the queen of her children. Lamia took out her anger by killing the children of human mothers.

² The story of the Dearg-due is a typical tale of disobedience to, or rather desperate escape from paternal control. She was a beautiful maid who fell in love with a local peasant. This was unacceptable to her father, who forced her into marriage with a wealthy man, thus securing the financial future of the family. Her husband treated Dearg-due badly, and the woman finally committed suicide. They say that one night she rose from her grave and lured her father and husband to their deaths (gotireland.com).

the Genesis also claims that the later versions of the *Bible* were compiled with a view to assert man's superiority over woman, since in the original Hebrew text God created one unsplit, undifferentiated, sexless creature from dust (the *Bible* refers to this as "earth creature"), which later was split into the now sexually marked woman and man (24). As opposed to this, in the later version of the creation story, Adam was created first, and to give him a mate, God made Eve from a rib of Adam's breast. According to Shlain, this was the decisive passage in defining the woman as secondary and worthless. "In a survey of human anatomy a single rib is superfluous. [...] Had Yahweh chosen to fashion woman out of an eye, a lung, or a right hand, her value would certainly have been enhanced" (Shlain 112-13). Nevertheless, this second version became part of the canon, while the first one is considered an apocryphal text. "I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression" – writes Paul in his letter to Timothy (*King James Bible*, Tim. 2:12–14). Paul's letter confirms Mieke Bal's theory of the 'retrospective fallacy', which means that people have always tended to read the *Bible* retrospectively, they have imposed the later versions of the text upon the previous one as if they were the fuller versions and not different reinterpretations (23). Thus women remained primarily associated with physicality, nature and, therefore, with susceptibility to the devil's temptations. If we read an excerpt from Heinrich Kramer's *Malleus Maleficarum* (1486), it becomes clear that women were not just considered inferior to men, but also on the same level as demons and other monstrous creatures (that is the reason why the belief in demons like the succubus was so widespread):

There is no head above the head of a serpent: and there is no wrath above the wrath of a woman. I had rather dwell with a lion and a dragon than to keep house with a wicked woman. [...] What else is a woman but a foe to friendship, an unescapable punishment, a necessary evil, a natural temptation, a desirable calamity, a domestic danger, a delectable detriment, an evil of nature, painted with fair colours! (Kramer 100)

But we should not forget the other important female figure in the Bible, the exact opposite of Eve, who also played a crucial part in the demonisation of women: the Virgin Mary, whose "virginity", in fact, is a mistranslation. The original Semitic term means the socio-legal status of a young unmarried woman, while the Greek term it was translated into ('parthenos') means physiological virginity (Séllei 12). "Yet, St Augustine posited Mary's virginity as the logical precondition of Christ's chastity. Her uniqueness (virginity and divine impregnation) among women [...] however, signifies an absolute lack of her body, sexuality, and activity: she

becomes a passive receptacle for the Holy Spirit” – writes Nóra Séllei (13). Thus came about the Eve-Mary bipolarisation of the female image. In the eyes of the Christian Church there was no reconciliation between these images. “[W]omen were either fallen creatures, with treacherous minds and lecherous bodies – a recruiting ground for the devil; or they were saint-like, obedient to the commands of men, and exalted for their spiritual and bodily purity” – writes Leatherdale (133). This persistent lack of a middleground played an essential role in the gender relations of Victorian England and greatly contributed to the rise of vampire literature.

Chapter 2

The “central document in the late nineteenth-century war on woman”³

Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* as the case study of Victorian anxieties surrounding the
feminine and the maternal

*The woman is perfected.
Her dead
Body wears the smile of accomplishment
(Sylvia Plath: “Edge”)*



Lucy Westenra and Van Helsing, a scene from the film *Dracula* (1992)

³ This was said by Bram Dijkstra about Stoker’s *Dracula* (*Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Evil in Fin-de-Siècle Culture*. New York: Oxford UP, 1986. Print. 341.)

In England the motif of the female vampire was first embraced by the romantic poets, like Coleridge in his poem “Christabel” or Keats in his “Lamia” and “The Eve of St Agnes”, who reflected upon the sexual allures and dangers of this figure. The first significant prose work in English that placed a female vampire protagonist in its centre was Sheridan le Fanu’s novella *Carmilla* (first published in the magazine *The Dark Blue*, 1872). Since the novella also deals with the theme of lesbianism, appearing earlier in Coleridge’s “Christabel”, the text is particularly rich in erotic details and seduction scenes (e.g. Carmilla penetrates not Laura’s neck but her breast and often bursts into passionate confessions of love). Apart from emphasizing the unnatural sexual activity of the vampire protagonist, the story also builds upon the monstrous mother paradigm by treating vampirism as a disease running in the maternal line of the Karnstein family. The story “draws a connection between (dead) mothers and vampires: mothers are ruled out of the story proper, but return as the undead” (Gelder 46). Carmilla’s character folds lesbian *and* mother into each other by functioning as a mother substitute for the half-orphaned Laura. Therefore Le Fanu’s female vampire threatens the patriarchal order with blurring the boundary not just between male and female, but also between the child and mother, subject and other. Le Fanu’s novella conforms to the pattern of the classical gothic narratives, in which the dangerous woman is disfigured, disabled, killed or at the very least domesticated. Carmilla dies a spectacular death from staking and decapitation, thus reasserting the power of the father figures. But as Ken Gelder points out, in the novella “same-sex desire between women is licensed, then managed or regulated (by ‘eliminating’ its object) – but continues to be licensed even after this” (61) since Laura’s attraction towards Carmilla remains unchanged (even after Carmilla’s vampire identity is revealed) and she often fancies to hear “the light step of Carmilla at the drawing-room door” (Le Fanu 89).

However, the most significant and well-known English vampire story to this day is Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897), which fuses folkloric elements with the *femme fatale* tradition and the recent New Woman phenomenon in Victorian social-political life. Although many contemporary male writers thematized the ‘fallen woman’ and the New Woman within the realist-naturalist literary tradition (e.g. George Gissing: *The Odd Women*, Thomas Hardy: *Tess of the d’Urbervilles*), Stoker, together with some other writers, such as H. Rider Haggard or George MacDonald, reflected upon the emergence of the New Woman with the help of fantastical creatures. The reason for this might lie in the essence of Victorian cultural

imagination. According to Nina Auerbach, “This imagination is essentially mythic, though it tries to be scientific, moral, and ‘real’; its most powerful, if least acknowledged, creation is an explosively mobile, magic woman, who breaks the boundaries of family within which her society restricts her” (1). With the growing influence of feminism and the introduction of gender studies as a university discipline, a new critical interest was directed towards *Dracula*, which examined how women are portrayed in the novel. Stoker’s attitude towards women in his novel is highly ambivalent, and that is why some feminist critics see a “fellow feminist” in him, while others criticise him for “a deep hostility towards female sexuality, together with a desire to control women” (Leatherdale 139). One could argue, however, that even those aspects of the novel which can be considered as showing sympathy towards feminism are saturated with the notion of male superiority, only in a less conspicuous manner⁴. Stoker’s treatment of the female characters strongly reflects the Victorian uneasiness surrounding gender boundaries and (female) sexuality. Count Dracula is the only male vampire in the novel, occupying the romantic and elevated status of the Byronic hero: alien, lonely, dark, but somehow attractive, facing the allures and dangers of a foreign land alone. As opposed to this, the representation of the several female vampires populating the story displays strong misogynist tendencies.

In the novel we have two main female characters, Lucy Westenra and Mina Harker (née Murray), who give us an insight into the tense male-female relations in the Victorian era. The difference in their personality, and thus in their reaction to the Count’s seduction, well exemplifies the Eve-Mary bipolarisation of femininity. Both of the women embody and reflect upon some characteristic traits of the New Woman, and in Lucy’s case this is her (alleged) sexual licence which aimed at shaking the patriarchal system in its very basis. The New Women openly discussed contraception, venereal disease and premarital sex, what is more, they campaigned for the same sexual freedom as men had. They believed that women have the same right to enjoy the sexual intercourse and that women should also have the right to live together with a man outside wedlock. As Sally Ledger writes, “[i]t was the putative association between the New Woman and ‘free love’ that led to the labelling of the New Woman as a sexual decadent” (12). In the Victorian era conjugal sexuality, just like matrimony, was strongly business-oriented, since only male heirs could inherit the family

⁴ For instance, although Mina possesses superb logical and technical skills which provide great help to the “brave men”, Van Helsing thinks it is because Mina has “a man’s brain” (Stoker 261), implying that brain is a man’s prerogative. Furthermore, Van Helsing always keeps Mina’s records under surveillance as if any intellectual effort on the part of a woman was highly suspicious and potentially dangerous.

fortune. The primary purpose of sexual union was procreation, not pleasure and women were not supposed to enjoy or even to show eagerness during sexual intercourse. “Love of home, children, and domestic duties, are the only passions they feel [...] As a general rule, a modest woman seldom desires any sexual gratification for herself. She submits to her husband, but only to please him, and, but for her desire of maternity, would far rather be relieved from his attention” – wrote William Acton in 1857 (101-02). As opposed to this, the female vampires in Stoker’s novel represent the threat of wanton and corrupt sexuality. “In the presence of such women, men are absorbed to enervation. Their masculine vitality is put into jeopardy. The satanic aspect of the vampire woman is centered in her sexuality and its capacity to disorder and waste the psyche and fluids, as in the ancient tradition of the succubus” (Dennison 102). Dracula functions as the “catalyst which awakens women’s desire” (Gelder 71), or, in Christopher Craft’s words the women are “[k]issed into a sudden sexuality” by him (Craft 119), and the act of vamping itself, the mixing of blood is the allegory of sexual intercourse (echoing John Donne’s poem “The Flea”). For example, when Mina finds Lucy on the cliffs with Dracula leaning over her, Lucy’s “lips were parted, and she was breathing – not softly as usual with her, but in long, heavy gasps” (Stoker 104), which are clearly the signs of sexual arousal.

This sexual appetite and freedom posed threats to society in more than one ways. First of all, it was thought that it would harmfully affect the purity and vitality of the English race. Due to the very powerful degeneration crisis, the Victorians developed an obsession with sanitation and a contact phobia with “inferior” people. The different social classes were even more demarcated than ever before. Eugenicists feared that if women attained sexual liberation, and with it the right to choose their own spouse, they would choose biologically unfit, weak males (from the lower classes, or even colonial people) instead of the strong, healthy, genetically flawless ones (of course meaning the representatives of the upper-middle classes) (Hopkins 108). In the novel Lucy Westenra is also in a similar situation when she has to choose between three suitors, which creates an unarticulated but tangible rivalry between the men. Lucy even plays with such improper thoughts as the possibility of marrying all three of them: “Why can’t they let a girl marry three men, or as many as want her, and save all this trouble?” (Stoker 69). It is her flirtatiousness that makes her susceptible to vampirism and, after her transformation, she becomes a sexually aggressive figure. The second threat of the sexually active female is the blurring of gender boundaries, the emasculation of males. “[T]he female demon is seen as a usurper; she inhabits and insidiously attempts to exert her influence, to feminize the male” – writes Joseph Andriano (5). Throughout the book it is the

female vampires who are represented as potent, powerful, wildly erotic, and craving for sex/blood, while the men several times produce symptoms of weakness and passivity, for example Van Helsing behaves like a hysteric after Lucy's funeral and Arthur Holmwood at several points falters, almost faints and bursts into tears. However, the most explicit demonstration of male passivity and female seduction is when Jonathan Harker succumbs to the three vampire brides in the Count's castle:

There was something about them that made me uneasy, some longing and at the same time some deadly fear. I felt in my heart a wicked, burning desire that they would kiss me with those red lips. [...] I lay quiet, looking out under my eyelashes in an agony of delightful anticipation. The fair girl advanced and bent over me till I could feel the movement of her breath upon me. [...] I was afraid to raise my eyelids, but looked out and saw perfectly under the lashes. The girl went on her knees, and bent over me, simply gloating. [...] Lower and lower went her head as the lips went below the range of my mouth and chin and seemed about to fasten on my throat. [...] I could feel the soft, shivering touch of the lips on the super-sensitive skin of my throat, and the hard dents of two sharp teeth, just touching and pausing there. I closed my eyes in a languorous ecstasy and waited -waited with beating heart. (Stoker 45-46).

Harker, who is expected home by his faithful fiancée, Mina, gives in to the charms of the three vampire women and passively awaits the fulfilment of his desire. "This is a woman making explicit advances to a man!" – exclaims Leatherdale, "– unheard of according to the Victorian code (except in pornography [and prostitution]), although probably the ultimate male fantasy" (147). The female vampires' intention to penetrate is considered as the usurpation of a male prerogative, "[l]uring at first with an inviting orifice, a promise of red softness [of the mouth], but delivering instead a piercing bone" (Craft 109). This blurring of the boundaries justifies the expulsion and violent destruction of the female demon in order to reinstate the separation between the penetrating and the receptive, or, as Van Helsing says, between "brave men" and "good women". Thus, when Lucy is turned into a vampire, the men immediately feel the urge to passivise and immobilise this "nightmare of Lucy" (Stoker 237), "the devilish mockery of Lucy's sweet purity" (238). In this sense the novel can be seen as "acting out a hatred towards sexually independent women" (Gelder 77).

As opposed to Lucy, Mina is not a sexually threatening character at all. Although her main characteristics undeniably link her to the New Woman (she is clever, practical, systematic and shows a great interest and skill in using the innovations of modern technological development, such as the typewriter and the phonograph), Mina seems to be

against this new female type. She expresses her opinion about the New Woman on several points in the novel, like “I believe we should have shocked the ‘New Woman’ with our appetites. Men are more tolerant, bless them!” (Stoker 101), or “I suppose the New Woman won’t condescend in future to accept; she will do the proposing herself. And a nice job she will make of it, too!” (Stoker 102). Since the professional and economic demands of the New Woman (such as suffrage, access to higher education, possibility to enter the learned professions and work outside the home for money) were regarded by male society as the abandonment of the traditional Victorian female roles of marriage and maternity, it is no wonder that the always proper Mina, a born saint and mother figure, so fiercely criticizes the New Woman. For “[p]roper women do not seek to usurp the male role, create unrest, undermine femininity, reject motherhood, terrify, castrate or kill. Proper women should avoid the labels of man-hater, witch, Amazon, whore, lesbian or castrator” (Creed 31). That is why Mina subordinates her exceptional skills to playing the assistant to the men in their hunting game, and she declares early in the novel that her main objective in learning stenography is to “be useful to Jonathan” and “take down what he wants to say” (Stoker 63). Without her arrangements of the documents the men would have achieved close to nothing, but, at the same time, her own writings are always under Van Helsing’s surveillance as if, being a woman, she needed a censorship. The “brave men” decide to exclude her from their confidence as soon as her help is not necessary any more, since a woman’s place is in the domestic sphere and not out in the night chasing vampires. But Mina does not defy their explicit wish, she only “accepts and comforts them all – like a mother” (Leatherdale 142). In this respect she perfectly fits into the Victorian female ideal, the “Angel in the House”, which is based on the desexualized idol of the Virgin Mary. An excerpt from Kathleen Spencer’s essay succinctly summarizes the essence of this creature:

In her guises of maiden, wife, and above all mother, Woman (with a capital) had been appointed the guardian of moral virtue; the home, Woman’s realm, became both a refuge from the hard necessities of the utilitarian business world and the temple of a new religion that served to supplement or substitute for the weakening Christian orthodoxy- the religion of romantic love as the source of salvation, and of the family as a haven for all the human warmth, grace and affection that had been banished from the father’s daily life in the world. Woman, as the Angel in the House, was to save Man from his own baser instincts and lead him toward heaven. (205)

Van Helsing expresses the same conviction when he says, “[s]he is one of God’s women, fashioned by His own hand to show us men and other women that there is a heaven where we can enter, and that its lights can be here on earth” (Stoker 209). After the horrible incident with Lucy, Mina gives the brave men hope “that there are good women still left to make life happy” (Stoker 206). Even her child born at the end of the novel is named after the men who destroyed Dracula and his harem. Leatherdale also considers Mina’s giving birth as another link with the Virgin Mary. There is no hint whatsoever that Mina, even for a short interlude, becomes a physical and sexual creature. Her son “can be seen as the product of immaculate conception, without her having defiled her body or spirit through succumbing to the sexual act” (Leatherdale 142), besides her giving birth happens after she has miraculously regained her virginity, with the stain/scar gone from her forehead. The fact that Mina gives birth to a male child has a strategic importance, since in this way she reinforces her own gender roles and the future of patriarchy. “A daughter would open the potential for the return of the vampire, but with a son there is an appearance of identity by patronymic/ patronomy stasis of equilibrium, or cosmic reorder, without which there would be no conventional closure” – explains Michael Dennison (86-87).

Mina never wants to break free from the stereotypical female role of patriarchal society, and she obediently assumes the traditional role of reproductive woman. “[S]he ceases to manage information and leaves the work of cultural reproduction to men” (Armstrong 12), since in the Victorians’ mental dictionary man stands for the mind, and woman for matter; man for culture, woman for nature. What else a woman could aspire for than the boon of maternity. “Motherhood had been held to constitute a woman’s natural function; it was the manifest destiny of Victorian women” – writes Leatherdale (139). Being barren, the vampiress abandons the sole legitimate purpose of a woman’s life: giving birth to children. Despite her barrenness, she is a sexually active female figure in an age when society strives to separate the pleasure from the biological function of the sexual union, and when women are supposed to be passive, bodiless creatures. According to Carla T. Kungl, these female vampires are the metaphorical representation of “society’s fear of women’s growing role in the public sphere at the perceived expense of their child-bearing duties” (109). Stoker’s female vampires are subversive not only in terms of gender roles, but also in terms of the maternal role. The preying of these female vampires is the subversion of the mother nurturing her child: here it is the mother who feeds upon the child. After he denied them Harker’s blood, Dracula gives his three brides a stolen infant child to feed on, and after her transformation Lucy likewise snatches children in the streets as the “bloofer lady”. In the eyes

of the Victorians, the thought of a woman who preyed upon children instead of nursing them was extremely shocking.⁵ When the “brave men” led by Van Helsing await Lucy at her crypt, the woman appears with another small child on her breast:

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. There was a cold-bloodedness in the act which wrung a groan from Arthur; when she advanced to him with outstretched arms and a wanton smile he fell back and hid his face in his hands. (Stoker 235)

Lucy clutches the child to herself not to feed it, but to be fed, shocking her intended husband to the extreme. In other words, the sexually active female vampires are equated with child molesters and bad mothers, which draws a parallel with the “widespread attacks on the New Woman – which included claims that she was a threat to the human race, [and] probably an infanticidal mother” (Ledger 10). Therefore Lucy’s violent destruction seems not just inevitable, but required. A (vampire) woman without reproducing capabilities, neglecting her maternal duties is better dead and still, than mobile and sexual.

The thing in the coffin writhed; and a hideous, blood-curdling 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. (Stoker 240)

In this extremely cruel scene Arthur Holmwood, as husband and father finally takes possession of her bride’s body, reclaims the male prerogative of penetration and, at the same time, restores Lucy into her original passive and submissive state, eliminating the threat against patriarchal order.

But the figure of the vampire as a mother is not only a collective threat against society, but also a threat against the individual subject. The feeding of vampires is primarily an oral pleasure, like the one a baby experiences while sucking the vital nourishment at her mother’s

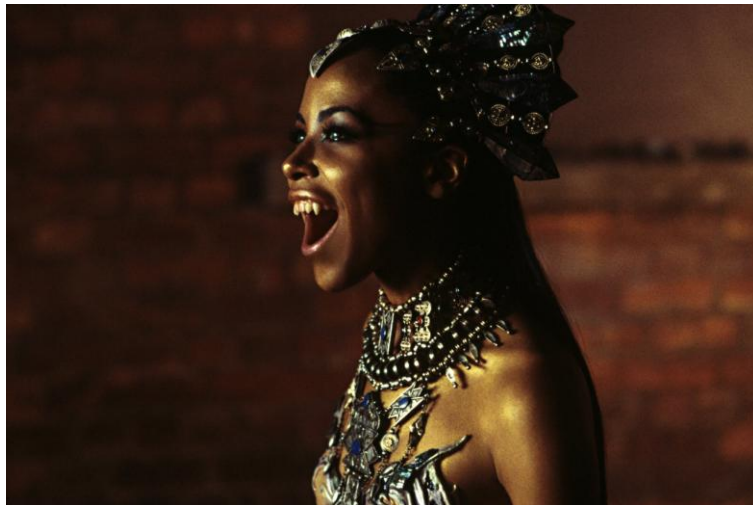
⁵ This was the time when the British Empire reached its peak and British were determined to keep this superpower position. For this reason Victorian society idolized the big family and praised those women who gave many strong (possibly male) children to the English nation.

breast. Thus, becoming a vampire is a regression to the maternal preoedipal stage where a very close bond develops between mother and child. In the process of identity formation this bond is perceived as a “norm-disruptive violence” (Bronfen 190) for society, which one has to sacrifice in order to become an individual subject and to preserve a given social system. This break is traumatic, therefore the image of the mother’s body (esp. the breast) will be repressed in the unconscious as an illegitimate object of desire which must be prevented from becoming conscious again (Copjec 34). Vampirism evokes feelings of uncanniness and anxiety because it has an oral essence which reminds of, brings one into contact with this expelled object of desire. According to some critics, Harker also seems to recognize his own mother in one of Dracula’s brides: “I seemed somehow to know her face, and to know it in connection with some dreamy fear, but I could not recollect at the moment how or where” (Stoker 65). Harker’s fear and anticipation awaiting the fatal kiss evokes the incest taboo, so Dracula’s intervention in the nick of time serves also a moral purpose. The sexual quality of the act of sucking is even more heightened in this scene by the vampire woman’s seductiveness and voluptuousness. Thus, the body of the vampire mother is uncanny not only in the sense of merging the ‘phallic’ and the ‘castrated’ but also in merging the ‘self’ with the ‘other’. Consequently, we can say that what was most to be feared by Victorians was the desirable mother figure who prompted to commit incest.

Joseph Andriano claims that “the book is a male hysterical reaction against the emergence of both the New Woman and suddenly sexual women” in Victorian England (107). The female vampires in the novel threaten patriarchal society with the blurring of gender boundaries, with the inversion of the stereotypical male-female sex roles, with the monstrous deformity of maternity and with the merging of self and other. “Lucy and Mina are essentially the same figure: the mother. Dracula is, in fact, the same story told twice with different outcomes” – writes Phyllis Roth (36). Lucy is the sexually aggressive and socially subversive mother who must be destroyed, while Mina is the sexually passive, submissive and always accepts patriarchal ideology, and thus she is idolized by all the male characters. The group of ‘brave men’ strive to master violent female sexuality, “(feminised nature)” with the help of “[s]cientific power, the (male) mind [...], reason and progress” (Botting 12). They ritually sacrifice Lucy to restore patriarchal values and try to close their minds “to the brief threatening interlude when women tried to rise above their station. The maternal has beaten off the challenge of the carnal (Leatherdale 142).

Chapter 3

The vampire and the postmodern turn: Anne Rice's representation of femininity in the *Vampire Chronicles*



Queen Akasha, a scene from the film *The Queen of the Damned*

As Mark Edmundson noted, the turn of the 20th century proliferated in gothic novels and films⁶, and the “dual monarchs”, the “Hades and Persephone” (xii) of American gothic fiction are Stephen King and Anne Rice. The publication of Anne Rice’s *Interview with the Vampire* (1976), the first volume in her series *Vampire Chronicles*, brought an equally significant turn in the history of the vampire novel as that of Stoker’s *Dracula*. Rice was the first writer who narrated the story from the vampire’s point of view, which is a truly postmodern device that, as Candace Benefiel writes, “turned the vampire paradigm on its head” (261). As opposed to the 19th century vampire novels where the focus is on the forces whose task is to expel the monstrous ‘Other’,

Rice’s first vampire novel took an unorthodox approach to the genre by having its vampire protagonist, Louis, interviewed by a boy [...] with a tape-recorder. This narrative strategy emphasises disclosure (through confession or revelation) and publicity. [...] The reader hears the ‘other’ speaking first-hand; the vampire comes out of the closet and makes himself known. (Gelder 109)

Consequently, instead of the 19th century urge to exorcise the demon, sympathy is awakened towards him in the readers. Our sympathy and undivided attention gives the vampire characters space for introspection as well as for speculation over human life, death, damnation, salvation, belief, aesthetics and, strangely enough, over human relations. It is exactly their essential otherness, their undead existence, which turns them into legitimate vehicles of social commentary.

Rice’s *Vampire Chronicles* could be located on the borderline of the male and female gothic, since it applies the characteristic devices of both. On the basis of the fact that many of the most important gothic writers from the 18th century onward were women (Anne Radcliffe, Mary Shelley, Emily Brontë, Margaret Atwood, Sylvia Plath, Angela Carter etc.), the genre had always been looked upon as a typically feminine, and thus “unserious” one. But since the mid-1970s critics and theorists (both male and female) have adopted a different attitude towards the gothic, especially female gothic, fiction. Leonard Woolf in 1973, in a book review for the *New York Times* writes that “the Gothic novel was something of a cottage industry of middle class women – as if women, oppressed by needlepoint, whalebone stays, psychic frustrations, shame and babies, found in the making and consuming of these fictions a way to signal to each other (and perhaps the world of men) the shadowy out-lines of their own

⁶ Edmundson also calls attention to the fact that several other aspect of American culture, like the rendering of crime cases, TV news, talk shows, political discourses, have also become “suffused with Gothic assumptions” (xii).

pain”, therefore “Gothic fiction ought to be of special interest to critics and historians in the context of the contemporary resurgence of the women’s movement” (Howard 58). Ellen Moers was the first critic to theorize the female gothic as a distinct subgenre in which “woman is examined with a woman’s eye” (Heiland 57-58), and, more importantly, in which women “give *visual* form to the fear of self” (58), in which they represent certain aspects of themselves. The primary aim of female gothic is to “use Gothic conventions to subvert existing patriarchal notions about the nature of women and their place in culture and society” (Howard 62), and in this sense, Anne Rice’s *Vampire Chronicles* smoothly fit into the traditions of this sub-genre. Rice has been asked in several interviews why it is that her female vampires in the *Chronicles* are doomed characters, destined to (second and final) death, at least in the majority of the cases. Rice could not give a definite answer, but she said that the explanation might be found in her own uneasiness about being a woman (Badley 128, Mulvey-Roberts 173) (a common enough sentiment among the female postmodern writers), which also explains why her narrators and the majority of the characters are male vampires. Her sense of displacement and self-division might be rooted in her Irish Catholic origins. She grew up as a woman “in a Church that sublimated her sensuality in devotional forms and gender norms that inscribed the female body as evil” (Badley 128). During her college years in Texas, she discovered a strong similarity between her experience as a female and the plight of homosexuals hit by social discrimination, therefore she felt a strong attraction and sympathy towards their movement. “She idealized homosexuals especially for showing courage in the face of prejudice [...] [T]hey defied patriarchal standards of masculinity and refused anatomy as their sexual destiny” (Badley 123). In other words, she admired gays because, as she saw it, they had the courage and stamina to carve out a space for themselves in an oppressive society which provided them none. Rice has expressed several times her desire to tear down the confines of her female body in much the same way, which represents the traditional, that is patriarchal, gender roles. Virtually, her female vampire characters carry the same burden: their bodies determine their fate. Not even joining the league of the undead liberates them because they remain entrapped in their human shell for eternity.

The tragedy of Rice’s female vampires reflects Juliann Fleenor’s definition of the female gothic as a sub-genre which provokes feelings of “self-fear and self-disgust directed towards the female role, female sexuality, female physiology and procreation” (Howard 65). To enhance the horror of female physiology and biology, Anne Rice replaces the traditional gothic spatial symbolism of the ruined castle, or enclosed room, standing for both the oppressive system and the heroine’s psyche, with the never changing, hard and imprisoning

female (vampire) body. When Dean R. Koontz advised would-be authors about choosing gothic settings, he wrote that “[a]nything used in place of the old house should have the same qualities of it: isolation, gloominess, an air of mystery, lots of dark places” (Williams 39). If we consider the social place of the 18th and 19th century woman, together with the ancient mysteries and theories concerning womanhood itself, the choosing of the female body as gothic setting does not seem such a far-fetched idea. There is not a single criterion of Koontz’s that could not be applied to the female body. Some of Rice’s female vampires are placed in the setting of luxurious mansions (like Claudia or Gabrielle), which refers back to the 19th century image of woman as an ornament of the drawing room. But there are others who appear enclosed into a shrine (like Akasha) which is an allusion to the medieval female ideal, or rather idol: the holy picture, the untouchable saint. However, Rice’s female vampires are not just willing, but also capable of leaving these gendered spaces and they seek refuge in nature (which is so strongly associated with the feminine), attempt to return to Eden. This gives a grotesque quality to Rice’s female vampires, grotesque in the sense of “[l]ow, hidden, earthly, dark, material, immanent, visceral”, suggesting an archetypal view which “valorizes traditional images of the earth mother, the crone, the witch, and the vampire and posits a natural connection between the female body (itself naturalized) and the ‘primal’ elements, especially the earth” (Russo 1). But the real horror for Rice’s vampire women derives from their own female bodies, as the gothic setting of the struggle against patriarchal dominance, since they are a prison the women can never for a moment leave behind or escape. Thus the female body is the source of what Mark Edmundson calls “internalized Gothic” (36), the site of repression and the subject to symbolic patriarchal power. “However liberated from sexual functions and hence from the feminine as defined by patriarchy, Rice’s female vampires stand for anatomy as a destiny that is socially inscribed” – writes Linda Badley (131).

Although Western societies underwent huge changes since the end of the 19th century, social anxieties surrounding femininity did not evaporate; instead, they accumulated around different aspects conjured up by the new 20th century female experience. The female vampire retained its significance as the site upon which social anxieties are projected, but in Rice’s novels this figure embodies women’s anxieties about their own situation and not men’s fear of the feminine, like in *Darcula*. Rice’s female vampires represent the same path-seeking attitude as 20th century women’s movements, fighting to reconcile the seemingly incompatible components of modern women’s life (lover, mother, housewife, and wage earner). Therefore, the fate of Anne Rice’s female vampires, according to the female gothic tradition, addresses the traps and limitations awaiting women within the patriarchal order. On the other hand, as

opposed to the happy ending of many successful female gothic fictions (characteristic even in the 1960s), the *Chronicles* adopt the tragic plot of the male gothic, in which the (in our case female) protagonist fails and dies (Williams 103). The first three volumes of the *Vampire Chronicles* (*Interview with the Vampire*; *The Vampire Lestat*; and *The Queen of the Damned*) offer three exciting female characters who share the desire to escape the limitations their gender imposes on them in a patriarchal society, but they eventually must find that vampirism, instead of liberating them, only makes their displacement and sufferings eternal, not unlike the Holy Grail perpetuated the unhealing wounds of King Amfortas.

In *Interview with the Vampire*, Claudia, the child vampire, functions as an “explicitly female metaphor of the horror of embodiment” (Badley 131). Turned into a vampire when she was five years old, she becomes the image of the ideal Victorian femininity, the ‘child bride’: a fixed, passive and infantile living doll. As Janice Doane and Devon Hodges write in their essay, the horror of the novel originates in “the rage of a monstrous girl vampire against her infantilization and dependency in a world defined by the fathers” (424). Claudia is created for the purpose of providing companion to Louis, who plans to abandon Lestat, his ignorant and insensitive father in darkness. Therefore, “[t]he whole scene reads like a couple having a child in an attempt to make a failing relationship once more viable” (Benefiel 267), which is very obvious from the following scene:

‘Now, Louis was going to leave us,’ said Lestat, his eyes moving from my face to hers. ‘He was going to go away. But now he’s not. Because he wants to stay and take care of you and make you happy.’
He looked at me. ‘You’re not going, are you, Louis?’
‘You bastard!’ I whispered to him. ‘You fiend!’
‘Such language in front of your daughter,’ he said.
‘I’m not your daughter,’ she said with the silvery voice. ‘I’m my mama’s daughter.’
‘No, dear, not anymore . . . You’re our daughter, Louis’s daughter and my daughter, do you see? Now, whom should you sleep with? Louis or me?’ And then looking at me, he said, ‘Perhaps you should sleep with Louis. After all, when I’m tired . . . I’m not so kind.’ (*Interview* 94-95)

In this little vampire family, Louis plays the role of the mother due to his empathy and the desire to connect and nurture, Lestat is the father who teaches the child to hunt and kill, while Claudia herself is forced into the role of the daughter. The problem arises from the fact that these roles within the family never change, although as time passes, the girl shape of Claudia

hides not a child any longer, but a mentally and psychologically mature adult woman. Louis, who is always attentive to Claudia, notices this gradual change:

[M]ore and more her doll-like face seemed to possess two totally aware adult eyes, and innocence seemed lost somewhere with neglected toys and the loss of a certain patience. There was something dreadfully sensual about her lounging on the settee in a tiny nightgown of lace and stitched pearls; she became an eerie and powerful seductress, her voice as clear and sweet as ever, though it has a resonance which was womanish, a sharpness sometimes that proved shocking (*Interview* 102).

Claudia sleeps with Louis in his coffin for a long time, but after a time she wants a coffin of her own. This makes Louis feel wounded, like a parent who has to accept that his child grew up and claims her independence. In fact, it is a symbolic act on Claudia's part: she buries her child self into that coffin and when she returns to sleep with Louis, she returns now as a lover and not as a daughter. Although the image of the 'child bride' implies the sexualisation of children, Claudia stands for Victorian society's fear from Freud's hypersexualized child (polymorphous perverse). "And of course" – writes Edmundson, "we still live with Freud's perceptions about the hypersexualized child. Informing many of the 1990s scandals about pedophilia is a fear that children really are sexually attuned, sometimes even predatory, and a wish to hide that perception by foisting the blame on adults" (34). Albeit vampire existence makes Claudia's sexuality emphasized, her child body deprives her even from the perverse vampiric way of procreation: she is too powerless to create vampires through miscegenation. Therefore, her dependent child position makes Claudia the reversal of Stoker's 'bloofer lady': she is not the monstrous mother, but the child who preys on adults, the innocent killer. Although the two men continue to play with her "as if she were a magnificent doll" (*Interview* 99), she is fully aware of her infantilization and imprisonment in a child's body, as her account of one of her vampire birthdays (the numbers of which are the only indications of the lapsing of time) also attests:

Of course, he [Lestat] gave me a doll as usual, the replica of me, which as always wears a duplicate of my newest dress. To France he sends for these dolls, he wants me to know. And what shall I do with it? Play with it as if I were really a child? "Is there a message here, my beloved father?" I asked him this evening. "That I shall be a doll forever myself?" He has given me thirty such dolls over the years if recollection serves me well. . . . Each doll has been exactly like the rest. They would crowd me out of my bedroom if I kept them. But I do not keep them. I burn them, sooner or later. I smash their china faces with the poker. I watch the fire eat

their hair. I can't say that I like doing this. After all, the dolls are beautiful. And they do resemble me. Yet, it becomes the appropriate gesture. The doll expects it. So do I. (*The Queen of the Damned* 183)

The dolls become the symbol of Claudia which is as much a tribute to her unchanging innocent beauty as an injury to her dignity and a reminder of her ever dependent situation. Since Claudia cannot destroy her own child body or break out of it, the vulnerable dolls must perish instead of it.

Claudia feels herself suffocating in a “patriarchal order that so restricts her possibilities for development [...] that she develops murderous rage against the father (Doane-Hodges 425). She turns even more towards Louis, now a lover and not so much a mother figure, while her rage against Lestat, the father, culminates in an unsuccessful attempt to kill him. But Lestat returns, almost as a zombie, to take revenge, to reclaim Louis for himself and restore the symbolic order. Claudia and Louis manage to escape again and they sail to Europe, where they are searching for their origins and other vampires. In Paris they meet the members of the Theatre of the Vampires and a new father figure, Armand, appears to separate Louis from Claudia. The desperate and always dependent Claudia seeks refuge in another mother figure, Madeleine, the doll maker, who went mad in her grief over her dead little daughter. “Claudia desires Madeleine much as Madeleine desires her, not as a mother or a lover but as an image to complete the self” (Badley 131), besides, they both share the desire to break free from the patriarchal system. However, the novel is based on the oedipal paradigm promoting male homosocial bonds, thus the death of Claudia and Madeleine is predictable and inevitable to restore “order”. Claudia fails in her attempt to put an end to her infantilization and to escape paternal control. Her self-division is eternalized by her child body, which reflects patriarchal gender stereotypes. The only liberation for her lies in the destruction of this body by the only possible way: Claudia perishes from the fire of the sun, just like her dolls perished from fire.

After the tragic fate of Claudia, whom Rice herself called “the embodiment of my failure to deal with the feminine” (Badley 130), Gabrielle in *The Vampire Lestat* was the first step towards the “breakdown of the symbolic order and sacred gender, family, and class codes” (Badley 132). Gabrielle is the mother of Lestat, wife to an impoverished aristocrat who keeps his whole family under his tyranny (in spite of the fact that he is blind and weak). On account of her gender and social status, she lives the dependent and superfluous life of an 18th century gentlewoman, which fills her with anger and frustration. As a woman deprived of action, she tries to provide opportunities for her similarly oppressed youngest son, Lestat, to

act instead of her, to prove his masculinity in the traditional sense, e.g.: she gives him dogs and guns to hunt and bring home food, and to kill the wolves that decimate the village stocks. A major reason for her assistance is her desire to live a life through her favourite son, which is, in Freud's interpretation, a symptom of penis envy. Even she herself admits it in a straightforward way to Lestat during one of their intimate talks:

She talked for a long time. She said things I didn't understand then, about how when she would see me riding out to hunt, she felt some wondrous pleasure in it, and she felt that same pleasure when I angered everyone and thundered my questions at my father and brothers as to why we had to live the way we lived. She spoke in an almost eerie way of my being a secret part of anatomy, of my being an organ for her which women do not really have. (*The Vampire Lestat* 62)

Lestat feels a kind of incestuous love for and identification with her mother, which culminates in a scene of preoedipal merging between mother and son⁷, when he, in an incestuous turn, gives the dark gift to Gabrielle:

All the memories of my life with her surrounded us; they wove their shroud around us and closed us off from the world, the soft poems and songs of childhood, and the sense of her before words when there had only been the flicker of the light on the ceiling above her pillows and the smell of her all around me and her voice silencing my crying, and then the hatred of her and the need of her and the losing of her behind a thousand closed doors, and cruel answers, and the terror of her and her complexity and her indifference and her indefinable strength. And jetting up into the current came the thirst, not obliterating but heating up 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. (*The Vampire Lestat* 157)

This powerful preoedipal bond between mother and son falls outside the scope of the symbolic order, therefore it gives us the hope of disrupting patriarchy. However, after her transformation Gabrielle leaves behind all the stereotypical female roles and adopts a masculine behaviour. While Dracula's vampire brides are the monstrous embodiment of traditional femininity and maternity, the vampire Gabrielle "dies to her tuberculosis-ravaged body and to the children who 'devoured her and abandoned her' (158) into a person who can

⁷ "When Rice's friend Andy Brumer asked if 'that kind of bonding' might be 'paid for with a loss of the self', she replied that with eternity 'you can work out anything, even an Oedipal complex'" (Badley 132).

now live for herself” (Badley 132). This slowly but surely puts an end to her pre-Oedipal bonding with Lestat, and steers the story back into an oedipal direction.

Although, her vampire existence releases her from the oppressive human institutions, Gabrielle still feels an urge to dissociate herself from her female body, which she regards as the cause of all her previous sufferings. She wants to assume a male form which is the source of power and privileges in the symbolic order. As soon as she finds an opportunity, Gabrielle cuts off her beautiful long tresses and puts men’s garment on. However, in a paradoxical way, her new hairstyle and clothes only highlight her delicate features, her fragility and femininity. When the next evening Gabrielle finds that her hair has grown back to its original length, she begins to scream as if she saw in her long hair the loss of her newly gained freedom. For a while she obsessively shears her hair every evening, but then she begins to concentrate on the new possibilities her vampire existence offers. Gabrielle exults in her new freedom, activity, and strength. She likes to go on solitary adventures into the wilderness to admire and blend with nature (she even sleeps in the earth and not in a coffin). On the one hand, this can be explained by her former hatred for the domestic confinement as a noble woman; on the other hand, it can also be seen as a symbolic return to Eden from where (mortal) woman was expelled forever.

[I]t was the countryside that drew her, the forest or the mountains, or islands on which no human beings lived. And she would return in such a tattered state – her shoes worn out, her clothes ripped, her hair in hopeless tangles – that she was [...] frightening to look at.

(The Vampire Lestat 331-32)

By Gabrielle’s transformation into a vampire, the traditional male-female attributes are swapped between mother and son. Gabrielle is the one who seeks adventures in the foreign outside world, far from home, while Lestat plays the role of the domestic and abandoned female who clings to the safety and comfort of civilisation, and who resents Gabrielle’s incessant reckless ramblings.

In this eerie, rapid undertone she’d speak of cliffs she had climbed, the drifts of snow through which she had tumbled, the caves full of mysterious markings and ancient fossils that she had found. Then she would go as silently as she’d come, and I [Lestat] would be left watching for her and waiting for her – and bitter and angry at her, and resenting her when she finally came back. *(The Vampire Lestat 331-32)*

Lestat feels lonelier than ever and he finally decides that he should find his father after many long years, which reintroduces the oedipal paradigm. He even turns down Gabrielle's offer to accompany her in her adventures, and he insists on returning to the father. Lestat's decision implies that Gabrielle's female body gives ground to certain expectations even among the undead and irrevocably defines her as mother. Gabrielle's figure represents the popular "absent mother" fantasy of the 1880s, who decides to abdicate "her role as wife and mother to pursue her own ends" (Kaplan 184). Gabrielle's case reflects the concern of many 20th women and feminists, who had to reconcile their domestic maternal duties with having a career and life outside the home, which also seemed mutually exclusive. "What representations still cannot produce is images of sexual women, who are also mothers, and who, in addition, have fulfilling careers" – reinforces Ann Kaplan (183).

In *The Queen of the Damned* the battle is not between women and men, but between two kinds of the maternal: between the devouring and destructive mother represented by Akasha, and the nurturing and creative mother represented by the twins Maharet and Mekare. Therefore, on the one hand, the novel adapts the conventions of the male gothic, which imply that "the focus of horror is not merely 'the female' in general, but more specifically, her most mysterious and powerful manifestation as mother or potential mother" (Williams 105-06). On the other hand, the novel also reflects upon Juliann Fleenor's reading of the female gothic "as a form focused on a conflict with the all-powerful devouring mother" (Heiland 58).

After a hundred-year sleep, Lestat wakes in the 20th century and feels a strong desire to become a famous rock star. With his song, he wakes Akasha, the mother of all vampires (the second time during his life), who, after killing her king Enkil, rises from her shrine with the intention of ruling the world as a divinity. Before she turned into a vampire, Akasha was the rightful ruler of the Nile Valley⁸, where matrilineality was the accepted social system. After a paralysis which lasted for many a centuries, she returns as an avenging mother and begins to destroy her own 'children' who drank her blood during her long slumber and also tried to kill her. This attitude evokes the image of the "abusive/neglectful mother", which maternal type gave rise to increasing alarms about child abuse in the 1880s (Kaplan 192). But apart from murdering her children, Akasha has a sacred mission in mind as well, that of slaughtering all infant and adult males except one in a hundred because she is convinced that men are responsible for all the wars and suffering which strike humankind. After her mission is

⁸ Rice's Queen Akasha resembles another of Stoker's larger-than-life *femme fatale* figures, the Egyptian Queen Tera in *The Jewel of Seven Stars* (1912), who also awaits her return, reincarnation in the body of the heroine Margaret Trelawny.

completed peace and plenty would follow under her reign as the Queen of Heaven. “She hopes to totalize her concept of the family as woman's community, creating a New Eden. But in so doing she will reinstate the Church in an inverted form, replacing the Kingdom of God with a Kingdom of Woman” (Badley 134). Rita Antoni claims that Akasha “has an essentialist perception of gender” (1), that is she believes that aggression is an essentially masculine trait, something that women would never be capable of. We must note that she states all this right after she has killed her husband, who kept her imprisoned in the shrine with him for centuries and after she has begun the extermination of the male population.

[D]on't you think the peoples of this earth have limited in the past their female children? Don't you think they have killed them by the millions, because they wanted only male children so that those children could go to war? Oh, you cannot imagine the extent to which such things have been done.

And so now they will choose female over male and there will be no war. And what of the other crimes committed by men against women? If there were any nation on earth which had committed such crimes against another nation, would it not be marked for extermination? And yet nightly, daily, throughout this earth these crimes are perpetrated without end. (*The Queen of the Damned* 365)

The flaw of her theory derives from the fact that she does not recognize that women are “not less aggressive because they are biologically coded to be so [...] [but because o]ur society, as it is shown in the earliest stages of education, discourages women from self-assertion and aggression, but it is also lenient towards male aggression” (Antoni 1). The members of the 20th century feminist movement realized that women's oppression is deeply rooted in the institutionalization of sexism, which was instilled into children from an early stage of development. “The elimination of sexism, like the elimination of racism, therefore called for a drastic transformation. It meant changing values and attitudes, behavior and institutions” – writes Nancy Woloch (519). That is why in the '70s sexual reform projects were launched by feminists to fight against rape, wife battery, child abuse and sexual harassment. Feminists rightly understood that the use of aggressive and radical means would only result in even more aggression, and that the solution might lie in the re-education of the future generations.

Contrasted to the radical Akasha are the twins, Mekare and Maharet, who belong to the First Brood of vampires and are as old as the Queen herself. They are witches who lived isolated in the mountains in a matriarchal community. They were able to control the elements with the help of spirits, maintained a harmonious relationship with nature and followed the tradition of sacred cannibalism through which they internalized the knowledge and power of

their predecessors. They stand for a female identity “that manages to be matriarchal without becoming hostile to men” (Doane-Hodges 433). The twins in league with the other important characters of the *Chronicles* (like Lestat, Louis, Gabrielle) await the arrival of Akasha to put an end to the fiery apocalypse she set loose in the world. Finally, Mekare, who represents an even more primal femininity (she literally arises from the earth to avenge herself on the Queen), kills Akasha and devours her body according to the ancient rite of the funeral feast, “so that [Akasha, the Mother] can be effectively internalized and transcended (Doanne-Hodges 434). Rita Antoni is right in her claim that both the femininity of Akasha and that of the twins are somehow ambiguous in their aims and in the means of achieving them. Akasha is a radical feminist, essentialist and atavistic, moreover, she wants to liberate women restoring the very same institutions and thought systems that patriarchy used to oppress them. She wants to replace the patriarchal Christian Church with a rule of woman, proclaiming herself the source of symbolic power as the Queen of Heaven. As opposed to this, the twins represent the mild, nurturing aspect of femininity, closely associated with the belief in the Mother Goddess, but their submissiveness makes them accomplices in the maintenance of patriarchy (or at least seemingly). “[D]espite all moral flaws in her personality she [Akasha] is still the only character in the novel that has political and moral concerns about the restricted situation and marginalization of women, and about the violence against them” – writes Rita Antoni (1). It is true that the other female characters try to avoid radical interference with the world of humans, but Maharet poses a much slower and less ‘spectacular’ alternative solution. Before she was turned into a vampire, she became pregnant and gave birth to a daughter, who secured the survival of the ancient blood line. All through her immortal life, Maharet followed and guarded the life of her descendants, what is more she kept extensive records of them based on the matrilineal principle. The family thrives even in the present age and its members spread all over the world. “No people, no race, no country does not contain some of the Great Family. The Great Family is Arab, Jew, Anglo, African; it is Indian; it is Mongolian; it is Japanese and Chinese. In sum, the Great Family is the human family” – says Maharet (*Queen of the Damned* 428). Thus, Maharet advocates a return to and reliance on the archetypal feminine function maternity, which was considered so powerful and formidable by patriarchal institutions that they did everything to demonise it. This alternative reflects upon the mid-1980s idea of the “self-fulfilled mother” which brought about the “reification of mothering, now not as a *duty* (women no longer *have* to mother), but as in itself *fulfilling*” (Kaplan 194). Maharet’s Great Family shows us that the real stronghold of women lies in the maternal function and women are capable of preventing male aggression and the oppression of women

by uniting the people through Great Families. The sheer extension and life-span of Maharet's Great Family proves the idea viable and demands respect from males and females alike.

We can say that the first two volumes of Anne Rice's *Vampire Chronicles* rely on the conventions of the "no-hope/ dead-end gothic" mode, which "counsel us to despair about political change and social reform [but t]hey offer us only the satisfaction that can come from complete fatalism" (Edmundson 62). Both Claudia and Gabrielle suffer from stigmatization by their female bodies and fail in their attempt to break free from the patriarchal system, the oedipal paradigm. These two novels depict the symbolic order as something that penetrates "society and individuals on a molecular level, and from which escape is impossible" (Edmundson 42). But the third volume, *The Queen of the Damned*, gives reason to hope. Although the aggressive and radical feminist woman type (Akasha) is still regarded as a threat to (male and female) society, the novel suggests that a return to the archetypal nurturing maternity and a changing of attitude would be a solution to the victimization of women.

Conclusion

The fact that the female vampire has retained her social-political significance to the present day, and that she is still a potent and viable literary figure, proves that she is capable of adapting herself to the changed social circumstances and to the demands of the readers.

In the past decade, thanked to our strongly visually oriented culture, the emphasis from vampire literature shifted to vampire movies and series. Parallel with this phenomenon the function of the female vampire also underwent a significant change: the focus is not on the monstrous maternal/feminine aspect, but on the redemptive lover. The main theme of the majority of vampire films is the transgressive love between a vampire male and a human female (or seldom the other way round). In the introduction of this essay, I have already referred to the fact that nowadays the male vampire functions as a new-age Prince Charming, who is usually desperate about and suffers from his vampire existence, and, as a sign of humanness and penitence, he drinks only animal blood (we could say he is vegetarian). These characteristics give justification for the developing romantic love between the human girl and the vampire boy, between prey and predator. Of course, the girl's mortality gives one more reason for the vampire boy to practice abstinence from human blood. Nevertheless, this

relationship always carries in itself the potential of violence and cruel disappointment, since the vampire technically falls in love with his food. What if the animalistic instincts gain the upper hand, and the boy devours his love? What if he kills her unintentionally due to his supernatural strength? Or what if he turns her into a vampire, but it turns out that the strong feelings had been evoked only by the throbbing human heart and the pulsing blood, and not by the girl herself? In most of the cases, however, the love is eternalised by a symbolic marriage ritual, in which the human girl is turned into a vampire (e.g. *Twilight Saga*). In this way, the now vampire girl gives purpose to the boy's undead existence and makes the weight of eternity bearable for him. This kind of plot implies that the fear element which pervaded the earlier vampire novels/films is faded or downplayed, and a kind of liberal multiculturalist attitude comes to the foreground. It suggests that we should accept, integrate vampires into society since they are, or at least were, humans and they can be organic and even useful members of our society (e.g. in *The Vampire Diaries* the blood of vampires heals every sickness and injury before it leaves the human body within twenty-four hours).

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