

**The Sympathetic Vampire:  
A Study of Anne Rice's  
Interview with the Vampire**  
**مصاص الدماء العاطفي دراسة مقابلة أنا  
رايسي مع مصاص دماء**

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**The Sympathetic Vampire .....( 34)**

## The Sympathetic Vampire: A Study of Anne Rice's Interview with the Vampire مصاص الدماء العاطفي دراسة مقابلة أنا رايسي مع مصاص دماء

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### المخلص

إن أسطورة مصاص الدماء قديمة قدم الإنسان، إذ أن كل الحضارات الإنسانية بمختلف امكنتها وأزمتهما إحتوت على نماذج من هذه الشخصية أو على الأقل على بعض من صفاتها وسلوكياتها. ومنذ أن نشرت رواية (دراكيولا) لبرام ستوكر لأول مرة سنة ١٨٩٧، لترسي النمط الأساسي العالمي لشخصية مصاص الدماء والذي أصبح معيارا لتقييم النمذج التي تلتها. ومنذ ذلك الحين وشخصية مصاص الدماء في نمو وتطور مستمر في السر الإنكليزي بعيدا عن الفتازيا والخيال نحو الواقعية والإنسانة. ومن تلك الاعمال التي لحقت رواية برام ستوكر، والتي تعتبر تعتبر ذات قيمة أدبية كبيرة كانت اعمال الكاتبة آن رايس (١٩٤٢□) والتي قامت فيها بتطوير طريقة جديدة لعرض شخصية مصاص الدماء في الاطار القصصي. وذلك بتحويل شخصية مصاص الدماء الشيطانية والمرعبة، كشخصية الكونت دراكيولا، إلى شخصية أكثر لطفا وعظفا، تتسائل عن معنى وطبيعة وجودها. ويهدف هذا البحث الى دراسة شخصية مصاص الدماء العطوف في رواية ان رايس (مقابلة مع مصاص الدماء) وأهم الصفات الجديدة التي استحدثتها الكاتبة في شخصية مصاص الدماء مما جعلتها تبدو أقرب للشخصة الإنسانية الواقعية.

**Abstract**

The myth of the vampire has continued to frighten and fascinate people all over the world. The idea of an undead night-stalker that feeds on human blood has been around for centuries and endures to this day. Numerous countries and cultures across the globe have personal deviations of a similar mythical entity. No matter the variation, all the vampire tales have a key commonality □ the lust for human blood. The cornerstone upon which all the vampire characters now turn was established in 1897 by Bram Stoker in his novel *Dracula* which, since its publication, has never been out of print and its title character, Count Dracula, has become an icon of terror that inspired many subsequent novels and stories of the vampire fiction genre. However, only a handful of these novels were considered of literary merit. That handful includes the works of Anne Rice (1941□) in which she develops a new way of portraying the vampire in fiction. The figure of vampire has changed from the evil and menacing figure of *Dracula* to a kinder and more sympathetic vampire who questions the meaning of its existence.

This paper is an attempt to investigate the image of the sympathetic vampire as a new type in Anne Rice’s *Interview with the Vampire*. It discusses Rice’s inventions concerning the characteristics and abilities of her human-like vampires, the metaphorical functions and the new metonymical aspects of them. This paper is a part of an M.A. thesis entitled “The Development of the Vampire in English Fiction: A Study in Selected Novels” prepared at the University of Al-Qadissiya, College of Education, Department of English.

*Interview with the Vampire* (1976), the first of Rice’s series of *The Vampire Chronicles*, offers one of the most significant rewriting of the traditional myth since it was established by Bram Stoker in *Dracula*. Shifting the narrative perspective to the vampire himself, the text begins to dissolve the conventional boundaries between the vampire and the human. It deals with lengthy

**The Sympathetic Vampire .....( 37)**

philosophical and theological conversations and anguished introspections on the part of vampire protagonists as they struggle with the evil of their nature as blood predators. 1

The novel is presented as a story within a story, telling about mainly three vampires; Louis, Lestat and Claudia. Louis de Pointe du Lac, a 200-year-old vampire, meets with a young journalist to tell his story and convince him of the truth of his tale. Louis's story begins in 1791, in New Orleans, the city that plays a central role in much of Rice's work. Louis, in the midst of a period of despair over the death of his brother, is found by Lestat de Lioncourt; a vampire coming to New Orleans from France, accepts the "Dark Gift" of Lestat; that is, converting him into a vampire. 2 Once he is changed, the two live in Louis's estate outside New Orleans until the slaves figured out that their master has become a creature of the night and drive them away. They then establish themselves in the city where Lestat enjoys himself and Louis suffers tremendous guilt over his new evil nature; he is remorseful over killing humans in order to survive.

Louis, finally, surrenders to his blood thirst by attacking a five-year-old orphan girl, Claudia, whom Lestat saves by making her a vampire as well. The three function for a while as a strange family with Louis and Lestat as Claudia's fathers. Later, resentful that she has been trapped in the body of a child, Claudia attempts to kill Lestat; she sets their house on fire and abandons Lestat, thinking she has killed him. She and Louis travel to Europe in search of other vampires who can tell them about their origins and roots. However, all they find in Eastern Europe are "mindless, animated" corpses who prey on the farmers in the surrounding countryside. 3 Disgusted, they travel to Paris, where they encounter a group of vampires who operate out of the Theater of Vampires, a theater in which real vampires act as vampires for mesmerized audience. The theater is run by Armand, the oldest of all living vampires in the world, whom Louis is very much impressed with.

**The Sympathetic Vampire .....( 38)**

Claudia, disenchanted with Paris and fearing the loss of Louis, insists upon him creating a surrogate mother for her, and the doll-maker Madeleine. In the meantime, the Parisian vampires discover that Louis and Claudia tried to destroy Lestat; they expose Claudia and Madeleine to the sunlight. Louis, after torching the theater in revenge, manages to escape, with Armand, and eventually returns to New Orleans. However, Louis is still unable to come to terms with his vampire nature. He winds up alone in San Francisco, telling his story to the reporter.

Interview with the Vampire began as a 30-page short story Rice wrote in 1969. 4 The inspiration came one day when she wondered what it would be like to interview a vampire. As she started to write, Rice found herself taking the vampire's point of view as he told his story to a reporter. Though Rice's short story was not published at that time, she began to write again after the death of her daughter, Michele, of leukemia in 1972 at age five, as a way to heal her grief. She revised and expanded the story into a book, adding other characters and vampires. 5

Unlike Bram Stoker's monstrous vampires who are allergic to garlic and crucifixes, and has no reflection in the mirror, Rice's immortals reinvent the vampire as glamorous, seductive, philosophical, and even godlike creature, endowed with supernatural powers and abilities, well-dressed and sophisticated, who can live in the world of human and can communicate with them. Rice's beautiful vampires do not live in graves, do not avoid garlic and crucifixes; they can look at them safely. Louis says to the reporter when he asks him about the crucifixes:

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

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

“Nonsense, my friend, sheer nonsense. I can look on anything I like. And I rather like looking on crucifixes in particular.” (25)

**The Sympathetic Vampire .....( 39)**

And they can see their reflection in mirrors. 6 According to Rice, in Catholic theology, the inability to see one's reflection means the soul is in hell, and she did not want her vampires to have any better assurance of God than mortals. She also, maintains that vampires must live in the same world as mortals, which means having reflections. Otherwise, in a modern world full of reflective surfaces, it would be difficult for vampires to remain unnoticed. 7

Also, Rice's vampires, like Stoker's, sleep in coffins during the day and burn to death if they are exposed to sunlight. Electric light, on the other hand, has no effect upon them, and this was one of Rice's inventions. Rice, in general, gives her vampires greater range of power and activity in the world of mortals. 8

Stoker's vampires have the power of transformation, that is; the ability to transform into various shapes, for instant; into mist or into animals such as bats or wolves. However, Anne Rice has denied the vampire's abilities to transform, 9 therefore, the vampires in Interview with the Vampire have little of those attributes:

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

“I wish I could,” laughed the vampire. “How positively delightful. I should like to pass through all manner of different keyholes and feel the tickle of their peculiar shapes. No.” He shook his head. “That is, how would you say today . . . bullshit?” (25)

In this conversation between the vampire Louis and the young reporter, it is clear that the reporter has a preconceived notion, of the nature of vampires, that most likely comes from the way vampires are presented in myths, or from the image of vampires he has from previous literary works, such as; Dracula. However, Louis mocks these old beliefs and calls them “nonsense” and “bullshit.”

Another invention is that; Rice's vampires could not be destroyed by stakes through hearts:

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

**The Sympathetic Vampire .....( 40)**

“The same,” said the vampire. “Bull-shit,” he said, carefully articulating both syllables, so that the boy smiled. “No magical power whatsoever.” (25)

Instead; they would absolutely be killed by drinking “dead blood”, that is; from corpses that have been dead for some time; Rice’s vampires need to drink fresh blood. And this is the way by which Claudia manages to kill Lestat. She poisons and kills two boys with “absinthe” and “laudanum”; substances that keep the blood of a dead person warm for a while. Lestat believes the boys are alive, drinks their blood and immediately starts convulsing and gasping for air. This way of killing a vampire was evidently Rice’s invention; because none of the ancient myths or literary works mentions it. 10

On the other hand, the vampires in *Dracula* are static characters; they are mainly one-sided, they do not change during the course of the story. But the vampires in *Interview with the Vampire* are dynamic characters who, if they do not change during the story, at least they want to change. However, Stoker’s vampires are silent and almost absent; their active roles, in the story, are only to be bloodthirsty killers who are seen just through the eyes of the human characters; the victims, in the novel. On the contrary, Rice’s vampires who are the central figures of her novel; are active and not silent; they have the ability to show their own attitudes toward what happened in the story. As a result of this shift, the role of human beings as victims becomes increasingly trivialized and marginal. This is clear when comparing the “relative proportion of space and attention” given by Stoker to *Dracula* and to Mina, Lucy, Van Helsing, and the other human characters in his *Dracula*, with the character development devoted to the vampires and human victims in Rice’s *Interview with the Vampire*. In the later, almost all essential relationships are between vampire and vampire, and where, as Jules Zanger states, “the victims are as indistinguishable from each other as McDonald’s hamburgers, and serve much the same function.” 11

**The Sympathetic Vampire .....( 41)**

Rice's story, as stated above, is mainly about the life and adventures of three vampires; Louis, Lestat and Claudia. At the beginning, Louis, the main character in the novel, meets the boy reporter to whom he chooses to reveal his past, "I would like to tell you the story of my life, then. I would like to do that very much." (7) Therefore, we first see Louis through the eyes of the boy reporter who meets and talks to a vampire for the first time;

At once the room was flooded with a harsh yellow light. And the boy, staring up at the vampire, could not repress a gasp. His fingers danced backwards on the table to grasp the edge. "Dear God!" he whispered, and then he gazed, speechless, at the vampire. (8)

The boy cannot really believe what he sees, he thinks he knows what a vampire is, but he reacts with fear and incredulity because he, in that moment, is unable to connect what he sees with what he knows.

Although, the boy is scared of the vampire, as he has preconceived thoughts about these creatures, he is, however, comforted by Louis's gentle nature, Louis says to him: "Don't be afraid. Just start the tape.... Believe me, I won't hurt you"(8) Thus, we can then see the frightened boy starting to be fascinated by the vampire's lure; this is clear in the description of Louis's appearance:

The vampire was utterly white and smooth, as if he were sculpted from bleached bone, and his face was as seemingly inanimate as a statue, except for two brilliant green eyes that looked down at the boy intently like flames in a skull..... He stared at the vampire's full black hair, the waves that were combed back over the tips of the ears, the curls that barely touched the edge of the white collar. (8)

Here, Anne Rice shows the reader that her vampire is not a horrible and awful creature, because instead of having a "strong and aquiline face" 12 like Count Dracula, Louis's face is smooth. Although his eyes looks down at the boy "like flames",

**The Sympathetic Vampire .....( 42)**

they are of a “brilliant green” color and not of the “ruby red” 13 color of Dracula’s eyes. Also, his hair is not white and does not grow in a strange way, instead; it is “black” and “full” and neatly combed. In this description, the boy reporter feels Louis to be somehow human, but he also sees in him qualities that are unfamiliar and almost too amazing or frightening to decide what really he is.

Then, we encounter Lestat, the other main vampire in the story; he appears after the death of Louis’s brother. Lestat’s first attack on Louis was unexpected although Louis lived like someone who wanted to die. He tells the boy reporter that he truly wished to be murdered;

And then I was attacked. It might have been anyone-and my invitation was open to sailors, thieves, maniacs, anyone. But it was a vampire. He caught me just a few steps from my door one night and left me for dead, or so I thought. (15)

Later, Lestat returns to Louis to complete his transformation; we first see him refracted through Louis’s gloomy eyes:

.... a tall fair-skinned man with a mass of blond hair and a graceful, almost feline quality to his movements.... and I saw that he was no ordinary man at all. His gray eyes burned with an incandescence, and the long white hands which hung by his sides were not those of a human being. (16)

Louis, here, tries to describe the vampire that attacked him; he is a tall, fair man with a thick blond hair and gray eyes. However, this very graceful and quite exceptional being cannot possibly be a human. In other words, Louis, at the first sight, thinks that he sees an “ordinary man”, then, he concludes that what he sees is something almost beyond perception.

Although, Rice’s glamorous vampires seem to be almost alike; physically, Louis and Lestat are totally different psychologically. Rice emphasizes the differences between these two male vampires, with Louis as delicate and sensitive and Lestat as aggressive and impetuous. By this distinction, Rice represents to her readers one of

**The Sympathetic Vampire .....( 43)**

the first sympathetic vampires in English fiction, and may be the most essential one of them; Louis. 14

From the very beginning of the novel, we learn from Louis's story that he is a reluctant vampire, he did not choose his "ontological status", but had it thrust upon him unwillingly. He was made a vampire against his will. Thus, Milly Williamson suggests that Louis has more in common with the heroes of the Gothic tales than he does with their "villains," for like the hero of a gothic novel, what Louis suffers is a result of circumstances beyond his control and understanding; he is a "pathos-ridden" creature, and as such, he represents one of the key emotional and ethical characteristics of the Gothic. 15

Indeed, Louis's unwelcome vampirism is not a sign of evil, but a sign of victimhood; he is the prey of an evil doer, the vampire Lestat, and only comes to inhabit the formal category of evil vampire as a result of Lestat's actions and not his own. "Misrecognized innocence" is often coded as "passive" in the hero of Gothic story, so it is crucial to the establishment of Louis's status that he remains "passive" in the act of transformation, as we have seen above, and also later in the act of feeding on people. 16 Lestat once, after the transformation of Louis, forces Louis to watch him feed on the plantation farmer, and insists that Louis dispose of the body. Louis responds: "I want to die; kill me. Kill me,' I said to the vampire. 'Now I am guilty of murder. I can't live.'" (17)

However, Louis's paradoxical status as an innocent and at the same time a victim is pressed further by his refusal to drink human blood. Sandra Tomc believes that Louis's rejection of blood-drinking is framed as a metaphysical and moral issue. Because for vampires eating involves killing people, Louis, who cannot discard his human moral sensibilities and associates killing with damnation, is engaged in a constant struggle between keeping his soul and his body morally pure and his increasing thirst for blood to live. This, as Tomc suggests, is "a sign of sacrifice and virtue," and this also,

**The Sympathetic Vampire .....( 44)**

marks Louis as suffering and as deserving of our sympathy. He narrates:

My thirst rose in me like fever, and I followed him. My desire to die was constant, like a pure thought in the mind, devoid of emotion. Yet I needed to feed. I've indicated to you I would not then kill people. I moved along the rooftop in search of rats. (67)

Louis, here, tells the boy reporter that he resorted to killing animals to drink their blood in order to keep himself alive. 17

Though, he knows that he will not die if he does not drink blood, he has to feed sooner or later because he cannot escape his primal need for human blood forever; "... as the death wish caused me to neglect my thirst, my thirst grew hotter; my veins were veritable threads of pain in my flesh; my temples throbbed; and finally I could stand it no longer." (69) However, the animal blood that he used to drink satisfies his thirst to some extent only; it does not satisfy his inherent need to experience biting a human's neck and drinking his fresh blood. One night of despair, he encounters a potential victim, a girl who is crying over her dead mother; he says to the reporter, "You must understand that by now I was burning with physical need to drink. I could not have made it through another day without feeding." (69) He is so thirsty that he is almost psychotic, he bites the young girl's neck, "... for four years I had not savored a human; for four years I hadn't really known." (70)

The consequence of this incident leaves Louis in even more despair; he becomes horrified and unable to do anything, he leaves the girl bleeding to death. Then, Lestat comes along and fixes Louis's mess by transforming the girl, Claudia, into a vampire. Even this experience of tasting human fresh blood does not change Louis's attitude toward killing people and draining their blood. And, in spite of all Lestat's efforts to make Louis accept the fact of his being a vampire, and continue attacking people, his suffering increases and his rejection of blood drinking still continues. However, Milly Williamson suggests that Louis's refusal to

**The Sympathetic Vampire .....( 45)**

embrace his vampire nature and his despair at his ontological predicament are a form of rebellion, as he refuses to live by rules set by other vampires, and this notion emphasizes that Louis did not choose to be a vampire. 18

This reaction toward vampirism, on the other hand, is in contrast to Lestat, who is the sign of that to which Louis's virtue is opposed-villainy. His delight in blood-drinking and his wanton destruction of human life are emblematic of his villainy, made overtly legible. Louis wakes one evening to find that Lestat has not one, but two prostitutes in their room. He feeds on one quickly, but toys with the other in a manner that horrifies Louis:

He took the girl's wrist again, and she cried out as the knife cut. She opened her eyes slowly as he held her wrist over the glass. She blinked and strained to keep them open. It was as if a veil covered her eyes. 'You're tired, aren't you?' he asked her.... And he picked her up and took her into the bedroom.... Lestat did not put her on the bed; he lowered her slowly into his coffin. 'What are you doing?' I asked him, coming to the door sill. The girl was looking around like a terrified child. 'No...' she was moaning. And then, as he closed the lid, she screamed. She continued to scream within the coffin. (84)

Louis is dismayed at this cruelty and willful destruction of human life. The girl has lost too much blood to live and as Lestat continues to toy with her and terrify her, Louis decides that he must intervene and he finishes her life quickly and quietly. However, Louis's body, at this point cries out for more of the blood now coursing in his veins, an appetite he struggles to refuse: "... My agony was unbearable, never since I was a human being had felt such mental pain." (87) It is this moral anguish that marks Louis off from other vampires, like Lestat, and provides the reader's point of sympathy. 19

Nevertheless, it is also, essential not to neglect the vital function of the third vampire in the story for it has been claimed that the

**The Sympathetic Vampire .....( 46)**

most terrifying aspect of the entire novel is that, at the heart of the story, there is a young child, Claudia. 20 Apparently a beautiful, innocent girl, the fact that she is actually the most voracious of vampires creates a horrifying picture that adds to the Gothic atmosphere of the novel.

This lovely little vampire, who is worshiped and controlled by two fatherly lovers, also appears as one of Lestat's victims; he suddenly decides to have a child and takes over the mother's role, "I want a child tonight," he tells Louis. "I am like a mother... I want a child!" (89) So, Claudia also, like Louis, is a reluctant vampire but unlike him her "pursuit of self-determination is articulated as hunger, her desire for the plenitude that both sustains and relentlessly undermines her identity." 21 She says to Louis: "I kill humans every night. I seduce them, draw them close to me, with insatiable hunger, a constant, never-ending search for something... something, I don't know what it is." (125) This search leads her to condemn living forever as a powerless victim, enslaved by her fathers; her growing rage at being a woman with adult desire trapped in a child's body leads to her revolt against Lestat. Her decision to destroy him has been read as both a protest against the kind of femininity offered to women in particular culture, and a desire to assume the father's authority for herself. 22 She says to Louis persuading him of killing Lestat:

I can kill him. And I want to tell you something else now, a secret between you and me.... The secret is, Louis, that I want to kill him. I will enjoy it! .... Such blood, such power. Do you think I'll possess his power and my own power when I take him. (89)

This speech shows the amount of Claudia's anger that resulted from the sufferings that are imposed on her by Lestat, and that thrust her to kill him in an attempt to end, or at least, reducing the sufferings. However, Nina Auerbach claims that; despite her suggestive anger, still, Claudia is almost an allegorical figure; she, Like Stoker's Dracula, tells no story; "we see her as a refraction of

**The Sympathetic Vampire .....( 47)**

Louis's self-love and self-hate." 23 Louis concludes that, "Claudia was mystery.... It was not possible to know what she knew or did not know. And to watch her kill was chilling." (101)

Considering what have been stated above, about the Gothic elements that Interview with the Vampire contains, it is important to have a look at the Gothic genre of fiction. According to M. H Abrams, the word Gothic "originally referred to the Goths, an early Germanic tribe" fought against the Roman Empire around the fourth century, then, the word came to signify "germanic," then "medieval." Now "Gothic architecture" denotes the medieval type of architecture, characterized by "the use of the high pointed arch and vault, flying buttresses, and intricate recesses, which spread through Western Europe between the twelfth and sixteenth centuries." 24

The Gothic novel, or in an alternative term, "Gothicromance," is a type of prose fiction that was developed from this type of architecture in the late eighteenth century and flourished through the early nineteenth century, and Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto: A Gothic Story* (1764) is considered the first Gothic novel, and even the subtitle refers to its setting in the middle ages. 25 Many other writers followed Walpole's example by setting their stories in the medieval period but the highly successful Gothic romances including; Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794), Matthew Gregory Lewis' *The Monk* (1796), Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1817) and Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847).

The setting in the Gothic novel is often a gloomy castle furnished with dungeons, underground or hidden passages, and sliding panels; the typical story focuses on the sufferings imposed on a lonely and innocent hero who is tempted and lured by a cruel and lustful villain, and makes bountiful use of ghosts, monsters, vampires, mysterious disappearances, and other supernatural occurrences. The principal aim of such novels is to evoke chilling terror by exploiting mystery and a variety of horrors. 26 We can see this kind of plot and elements in Interview with the Vampire; Louis

**The Sympathetic Vampire .....( 48)**

is tempted into becoming a vampire by the evil villain, Lestat, and is left in a state of mental and moral pain, and Claudia is also suffering because of the actions of Lestat, the villain. However, the central focus of the Gothic novel has shifted from presenting evil as just terrifying monsters to presenting it as a metaphor for the real nature of human being, and *Interview with the Vampire*, therefore, should be interpreted from this new perspective.

J. A. Cuddon states that most of Gothic novels are tales of mystery, horror and macabre, and, the Gothic setting of these novels plays one of the important functions to evoke the horror, decay and darkness that are the focus of this type of stories. <sup>27</sup> However, we do not really see the typical, traditional Gothic setting in *Interview with the Vampire*; Rice has modernized and changed the code of the vampire myth and the Gothic novel, that is; instead of using locations that emphasize death and decay, she has set her story in vital urban landscapes. The first part of the novel is set in New Orleans, and despite a little detour through the countryside of Romania, Louis and Claudia spend the major part of the end of the novel in Paris. Robert Mighall, in his essay 'Gothic Cities' (2007), calls this type of setting the 'urban Gothic'. He focuses on New Orleans as it is the "quintessential urban Gothic location" for its status as a representative of the Old World. <sup>28</sup> It was, and still is, a melting mixture of cultures and all kinds of people, and the popular use of "voodoo magic and the surrounding swamps and bayous add to the city's mystical nature." <sup>29</sup> Louis describes New Orleans as:

There was no city in America like New Orleans. It was filled not only with the French and Spanish of all classes who had formed in part its peculiar aristocracy, but later with immigrants of all kinds, the Irish and the German in particular.... This was New Orleans, a magical and magnificent place to live. In which a vampire, richly dressed and gracefully walking through the pools of light of one gas lamp after another might attract no more notice in the evening than hundreds of other exotic creatures. (39-40)

**The Sympathetic Vampire .....( 49)**

New Orleans, in this description, becomes almost supernatural in the way that it evokes an image of a world full of exotic creatures.

Another important aspect that makes *Interview with the Vampire* fundamentally different from other Gothic vampire novel is its narrative strategy. Jules Zanger declares that the sympathy of the reader has shifted from the potential human victim to the “good vampire, the reluctant killer, the self-doubting murderer,” and this, as Zanger believes, has resulted from Anne Rice’s shifting the narrative perspective to the vampire’s point of view, allowing her readers to experience the story through the vampire’s eyes. 30

This significant turn in depicting the vampire characters as narrators, offers the reader, according to Milly Williamson, “Otherness from the inside.” 31 That is, this narrative strategy emphasizes disclosure, through confession or revelation, and publicity of the vampire’s thoughts. The reader hears the “other” speaking first-hand; the vampire comes out of the closet and makes himself known, and at last, he gives us “the real story” about vampires. 32

Louis’s life story is told retrospectively in the form of flashbacks where Louis is the first person narrator. However, at the first scene of the novel, we see Louis through the eyes of a third person narrator. It has been mentioned above that in earlier examples of vampire fiction we have seen the vampire characters through the protagonist’s first person narrative or a limited or omniscient third person narrator. In *Dracula*, for instance, there are several first person narratives, and all of them are by the human characters in the story. *Dracula* himself is not even physically present in the majority of the novel. And in addition to not being a first person narrator, the vampire has almost always functioned as the antagonist in vampire fiction before *Interview with the Vampire*; the enemy against whom the heroic human characters must fight and annihilate.

**The Sympathetic Vampire .....( 50)**

By making the reluctant vampire, Louis, the protagonist in *Interview with the Vampire* and a first person narrator, Rice has tampered with the code of the narration itself, bringing the vampire closer to readers psychologically, because; if she had chosen to just use the third person narrator, as in former vampire novels, we would not have gotten such a deep psychological insight into Louis; we would not have been able to get into his head and witnessed his way of thinking and sympathizing, and his moral anguish with being a vampire. 33

However, Williamson points out that there is a further sense in which the sympathetic vampire's ontology pushes toward the problem of significance; of how to be meaningful in a "post-scared world." The vampire, Williamson suggests, embodies non-signification because it is neither dead nor alive. Being undead, the vampire signifies a lack of signification- it does not have meaning in the "cold light of day." But the vampire offers us with a "dilemma" because it continues to exist despite a "lack of meaning". It is this dilemma that is at the heart of Louis's anguish and quest and it also structures the narrative of *Interview with the Vampire*. Louis and his companion, Claudia, travel to Europe to find out about the significance, past and origins of vampirism, and of "what it means to be vampire," as they cannot find any sense of meaning in their vampiric life in New Orleans, living under the slavery of Lestat. 34

Instead of finding what he seeks, Louis at the end learns that there is no reality or meaning behind vampirism. He does not find anything in Paris that is different from what he knows; Louis tells Armand:

We stand here, the two of us, immortal, ageless, rising nightly to feed that immortality on human blood.... and you ask me how I could believe I would find a meaning in the supernatural! I tell you, after seeing what I have become, I could damn well believe anything! Couldn't you? And believing thus, being thus confounded, I can now accept the

**The Sympathetic Vampire .....( 51)**

most fantastical truth of all: that there is no meaning to any of this! (217)

Ken Gelder reads this scene as part of Louis's disillusionment and his "lapsed Catholic" faith. And his subsequent belief in vampires is a kind of modern, secular replacement for his lost Catholic faith. He both, Gelder concludes, believes in nothing and is therefore, able to believe in "anything," including the unbelievable vampires. 35

On the other hand, many critics believe that Louis's quest is the most essential lesson in *The Interview with the Vampire*; as the story initiates a search for both origins and meaning, the vampire is reworked to become a vehicle for philosophical speculation about the origins, the point and the condition of human existence. Louis's quest replicates the human quest for truth, for community, and for moral codes and values by which to live. In other words, Anne Rice, through Louis's quest, is saying something about humanity but in an indirect way. 36 In an interview published in *Lear's Magazine*, Rice states that:

Interview with the Vampire is about grief, guilt, and the search for salvation even though one is in the eyes of the world and one's own eyes a total outcast! .... When vampires search for their past trying to figure out who they are, where they come from, if they have a purpose, that's me asking the same questions about human beings.37

This is related to what has been mentioned above in the previous chapter about the potential inherent in the archetypal vampire that is to function effectively as a metaphor for various social-cultural preoccupations, however, this is also the case with Rice's reluctant, sympathetic vampires. Anne Rice, on another occasion, commenting on her novels, asserts that the vampire is "a metaphor for the outsider," even with their different new nature. 38 The vampires, in *Interview with the Vampire*, as metaphor will, therefore, be able to say something about humanity in general, and about 1970's society and culture, in particular, just as *Dracula*

**The Sympathetic Vampire .....( 52)**

portrayed the culture and social concerns at the end of the nineteenth century.

One of the famous proposals considering the interpretation of Rice's vampires as a metaphor is Sandra Tomc's, in which she proposes the vampire as a metaphor for "successful dieting," for the obsessions to curtail the consumption of food and the resulting "promised dissolution of female secondary sex characteristics." 39 Tomc suggests that:

In order to separate her own vampires from those indigenous to the genre, Rice borrowed heavily from 1970s discourses of gender mutability and bodily transformation, finding in the twin paradigms of androgyny and weight loss an articulation appropriate to her generically radical aims. 40

As Rice's novel was published in a time when the dieting pill was a quite popular weight loss tool, Tomc interprets the vampires as a metaphor for the dieting hysteria and the obsession with having an androgynous and boy-like body. She bases her interpretation on the vampires' preoccupation throughout with hunger and food and with the manipulation of their bodies, and on the fact that the novel "contains no significant women characters." 41

However, Rice's supernatural beings are not meant to be read as either men or children only. Rather, the vampire's body is something entirely new, founded on the disappearance of the markers of sexual and productive difference. No matter what she or he is, the vampire's ability to reproduce is located "orally," not genitally; sucking blood is the vampire's way of feeding and of making other vampires. This "gender-free ideal" is powerfully associated in the novel with an absence of women's characteristics. Rice's only significant female vampire, Claudia, is a little girl permanently arrested in her physical development at the age of five, and at the end of the novel Rice introduces the provocative and motherly Madeline and it does not take long before she is destroyed. This "lack of women characters" strategy, Tomc

**The Sympathetic Vampire .....( 53)**

suggests, operates as a “metaphor for the anomaly that women represent in Rice’s gender-free economy.” 42

Moreover, what is interesting about this lack of women characters is that emphasizing the dieting metaphor; it presents the way the dieting extremists’ feel about their bodies; they wish not to have a womanly body; round and fully developed. Instead, they want to be tight, muscular and thin.<sup>43</sup> Tomc, also states that “Louis’s refusal of food is not simply described as a reluctance to commit murder. It resembles a constant vigil to keep from gaining weight.” Although it is clearly explicit that Louis’s refusal of drinking human blood is a matter of moral anguish and refusing killing people, Sandra Tomc sees Louis as a metaphor for an extreme dieter who thinks that human blood is repulsive and refuses it as he prevent himself from gaining over weight. She even describes Louis’s attacks on Claudia as if he “indulges his craving” and commits a sin, an “illicit gorging, like eating a whole chocolate cake.” 44

In this way, Tomc has interpreted Louis’s suffering as a metaphor for the extremist dieters’ deep fear of gaining over weight or having a womanly body. In other words, she uses Rice’s text to read the 1970s upheaval around bodies and weight, particularly women’s bodies. However, many critics consider Tomc theory of examining Rice’s vampires a valid interpretation that fit into the framework of the novel. Nevertheless, the vampires in *Interview with the Vampire* can be interpreted as a metaphor for other social obsessions; incomprehensible beauty and immortality, for instance. In the 1970s social discourses of bodily alternation and plastic surgeries have been popular; people were seeking new ways to preserve their beauty and look as young as possible. Also, people, all over the world, have searched for the possible ways to live longer. Therefore, one can interpret Rice’s beautiful vampire as a metaphor for the unobtainable beauty that people want, even if it is artificial, and try to get through plastic surgery. 45

**The Sympathetic Vampire .....( 54)**

Anne Rice creates beautiful immortal vampires and thrusts upon them the mental pains of vampirism and lets them suffer forever. The five-age girl, Claudia, is transformed to a vampire unwillingly, to live, physically, as a little girl forever and never grow older, but she does mature enough, mentally, to think as an adult. This leads her to be in just as much, if not more, despair as Louis when she sees other women who are in her own age, mentally, but who have grown bodies. She is ready to give up beauty in order to have limited but normal life. 46 Then, Claudia's fate might be a lesson to human being to realize that to have the beauty of a little girl is not something to wish when she is living trapped, unwillingly, in one state or age forever, therefore, human beings should not seek to escape from human limitations and should not seek beauty and immortality, except in the process of living, growing and dying.

However, Louis decides to reveal his life story as a vampire to the boy reporter just to show human how it is to be immortal. He reveals his sufferings as a warning against the illusion of vampirism, but unfortunately he has failed. 47 At the end of the story, the boy reporter is utterly fascinated with the life of vampires; he exclaims:

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

The boy reporter as a human being has an eager wish for immortality, so he refuses the conclusion of despair toward vampirism in Louis's tale and demands from the disappointed vampire, "Give it to me!.... Make me a vampire now!" (305) So, after everything he has confessed and everything he has revealed about his miserable life as a vampire, Louis has not been able to make the reporter realize the fact that vampirism and the immortal life it brings with it is not worth seeking; it is nothing but an illusion. 48 Bitterly refusing the reporter's demand, Louis punishes

**The Sympathetic Vampire .....( 55)**

him with a non-fatal attack to make him feel the pain and fear of vampirism. Yet even that experience does not discourage him and as soon as he recovers, he rushes out to search for Lestat who, he hopes, will grant his wish. 49

We have seen that Anne Rice's vampires can function as metaphor for humanity. Now, it is worth noting, however, that the vampires, also, begin to have some metonymical aspects. As stated above, Rice provides her vampires with the ability to see their reflections in mirror, Louis says, "I discovered that I could see myself in a mirror." (37) Unlike Stoker's Dracula who never had a reflection; Stoker uses this particular invention to illustrate his vampire's inhumanity. 50 And as suggested above, another reason behind Dracula's inability to see his reflection is that it represented the shadowy sides of ourselves that we do not want to acknowledge and therefore, Jonathan Harker does not see Dracula in the mirror. 51 One can say that the reason why the vampires in Interview with the Vampire have the ability to see themselves in the mirror is that they no longer function as mere representation of our shadowy sides. But they rather, lose their mythical attributes and become more substantial, and more human. 52

However, Rice's vampires tend to be communal, rather than solitary as was Dracula. And even that they have to keep their existence relatively secret, and despite the fact that the main story takes place in the vampire universe only, Rice's vampires still interact with humans, freely, much more than Dracula did. 53 Furthermore, the vampires in Interview with the Vampire, as mentioned above in the physical description of Louis and Lestat, have come to resemble humans much more than earlier mythical vampires such as Dracula. The boy reporter does not become frightened of Louis until he sees him in real, electrical light. Louis says, "By candlelight I always had a less supernatural appearance" (46), and this implies that, compared to Dracula, Rice's vampires have a less supernatural appearance so that one need to look at them in a very good light to see that they are not human.

**The Sympathetic Vampire .....( 56)**

They are incomprehensibly beautiful; they have immortal life and do not grow older or become overweight. Thus, they are what many human beings dream of and seek out to achieve through surgery and special diets. 54 On the other hand, when it comes to their psyche, it has changed from what we have seen before, at least when talking about Louis; Lestat, unlike Louis, has too much of the mythical, predatory, bloodthirsty killer. But Louis is able to retain some of the humanity he had as a human, and therefore he has a conscience. He has moral and ethical qualms, something that applies more to a human way of thinking than a stereotypical vampiric way. In that sense, one can say that the type of vampire that Louis is a sort of; is an extension of being a human. He talks like a human, walks like a human and even though he does not exactly look human, he still possesses a human side that makes him float in the realm between supernatural and human. 55

Therefore, it is debatable whether one can see ‘vampire’ and ‘human’ as two detached terms when it comes to the physical appearance of these vampires. This is because, in spite of having supernatural qualities, they still have a physical appearance and features that make them too human. Thus, the boy reporter sees something in Louis that he finds attractive and obtainable, not as repulsive as Dracula. In that sense, we can say that, Louis in particular, is moving away from the metaphorical and supernatural, towards the metonymical and human.

Although Louis has become more metonymical, he still functions as a metaphor for the contemporary social and cultural preoccupations of the twentieth century. And therefore, the way Rice’s vampires function as a metaphor is different from that of Stoker’s vampires; vampirism in *Interview with the Vampire* has become more appealing than it was in *Dracula*.

However, the vampire has evolved to fit the social and cultural interests of the twentieth century, and it seems that the evolution will never stop and the vampire may become even more human or metonymical in future.

**NOTES**

- 1 Rosemary Ellen Guiley, *The Encyclopedia of Vampires, Werewolves, and Other Monsters* (New York: Visionary Living Inc., 2005), 162.
- 2 Ken Gelder, *Reading the Vampire* (London: Routledge, 1994), 112.
- 3 Anne Rice, *Interview with the Vampire* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1988), 114. All subsequent references to the novel are taken from this addition and therefore they are referred to parenthetically within the text.
- 4 Guiley, *The Encyclopedia of Vampires, Werewolves, and Other Monsters*, 243.
- 5Ibid., 162.
- 6David Punter and Glennis Byron, *The Gothic* (UK: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 246.
- 7 Guiley, *The Encyclopedia of Vampires, Werewolves, and Other Monsters*, 203.
- 8Ibid., 273.
- 9 J. Gordon Melton, *The Vampire Book: The Encyclopedia of The Undead* (Detroit: Visible Ink Press, 1999), 683.
- 10 Wayne Bartlett and Flavia Idriceanu, *Legends of Blood: The Vampire in History and Myth* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing Ltd., 2005), 40.
- 11 Jules Zanger, "Metaphor into Metonymy: The Vampire Next Door," in *Blood Read: The Vampire as Metaphor in Contemporary Culture* ed. Joan Gordon and Veronica Hollinger (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 21.
- 12 Bram Stoker, *Dracula* (Gutenberg: Project Gutenberg, 1995),15-16.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Gelder, *Reading the Vampire*, 112.
- 15 Milly Williamson, *The Lure of the Vampire: Gender, Fiction and Fandom from Bram Stoker to Buffy* (London: Wallflower Press, 2005), 40.
- 16Ibid., 41.
- 17 Sandra Tomc, "Dieting and Damnation: Anne Rice's Interview with the Vampire," in *Blood Read: The Vampire as Metaphor in Contemporary Culture* ed. Joan Gordon and Veronica Hollinger (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 103.
- 18 Williamson, *The Lure of the Vampire*, 38-30.
- 19Ibid., 43.
- 20 Bartlett and Idriceanu, *Legends of Blood*, 41.

**The Sympathetic Vampire .....( 58)**

- 21 Tomc, "Dieting and Damnation", 104.
- 22Punter and Byron, *The Gothic*, 245.
- 23 Nina Auerbach, *Our Vampires Ourselves* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1995), 154.
- 24 H. M. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 7th ed. (USA: Earl McPeck, 1999), 110.
- 25Ibid., 111.
- 26 Ibid.
- 27 J. A. Cuddon, *Dictionary of Literary Terms & Literary Theory*, 4th ed. (London: Penguin Group, 1998), 356.
- 28 Robert Mighall, "Gothic cities," in *The Routledge Companion to Gothic* ed. Catherine Spooner and Emma McEvoy (London: Routledge, 2007), 54.
- 29 Gelder, *Reading the Vampire*, 110.
- 30 Zanger, "Metaphor into Metonymy," 21.
- 31 Milly Williamson, *The Lure of the Vampire*, 28.
- 32 Gelder, *Reading the Vampire*, 109.
- 33 Milly Williamson, *The Lure of the Vampire*, 47-48.
- 34Ibid., 44.
- 35 Gelder, *Reading the Vampire*, 111.
- 36Punter and Byron, *The Gothic*, 246.
- 37Lear's Magazine. Interview with Anne Rice. 2,7 (Oct. 1989): 8, quoted in Jules Zanger, "Metaphor into Metonymy: The Vampire Next Door," in *Blood Read: The Vampire as Metaphor in Contemporary Culture* ed. Joan Gordon and Veronica Hollinger (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 23.
- 38 Anaya Martin, "A Conversation with Anne Rice," *Cemetery Dance* 3 (Summer 1991): 34-39, quoted in Margaret L. Carter, "The Vampire as Alien in Contemporary Fiction," in *Blood Read: The Vampire as Metaphor in Contemporary Culture* ed. Joan Gordon and Veronica Hollinger (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 27.
- 39 Joan Gordon and Veronica Hollinger, "Introduction: The shape of Vampires," in *Blood Read: The Vampire as Metaphor in Contemporary Culture* ed. Joan Gordon and Veronica Hollinger (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 6.
- 40 Tomc, "Dieting and Damnation," 96.
- 41Ibid., 97.

**The Sympathetic Vampire .....( 59)**

42Ibid., 98.

43Ibid., 99.

44Ibid., 103.

45Ibid., 95.

46Punter and Byron, *The Gothic*, 245.

47 Williamson, *The Lure of the Vampire*, 38.

48 Gelder, *Reading the Vampire*, 110-112.

49 Margaret L. Carter, "The Vampire as Alien in Contemporary Fiction," in *Blood Read: The Vampire as Metaphor in Contemporary Culture* ed. Joan Gordon and Veronica Hollinger (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 31.

50 Guiley, *The Encyclopedia of Vampires, Werewolves, and Other Monsters*, 202- 203.

51 Stoker, *Dracula*, 20.

52 Zanger, "Metaphor into Metonymy," 19.

53Ibid., 18.

54 Tomc, "Dieting and Damnation," 96- 97.

55 Zanger, "Metaphor into Metonymy," 19.

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