

**Blood and Rhetoric:
Leaving the Mother and the Vampire's Quest for Filiation**

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Les récents récits de vampires se sont trouvés être des terrains très propices pour la critique féministe. Dans la figure du vampire qui défie le dieu mâle, on retrouve l'importance de la Déesse-Mère païenne et du pouvoir de son sang. Ironiquement, Lestat, le vampire des récits d'Anne Rice, rejette le sang de la Mère originelle et cherche la filiation dans la lignée du Père. Cette répudiation du sang maternel est présente dans plusieurs scènes chez Anne Rice. Par exemple, l'amitié entre Marius et Lestat, bien qu'elle repose sur un imaginaire préodipien de la naissance, est le partage d'un sang où se joue la souillure et la contamination du sang de la mère.

I can do you blood and love without the rhetoric, and I can do you blood and rhetoric without the love, and I can do you all three concurrent or consecutive, but I can't do you love and rhetoric without the blood. Blood is compulsory—they're all blood, you see.

Tom Stoppard, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*, Act I

*Recite: In the Name of thy Lord who created
created Man of a blood-clot. (The Koran 96.2)*

Regardless of its epoch or the logic underlying its creation, the vampire's most singular characteristic has been the manner in which it preys on both humans and its own ilk: the sucking of blood. This notwithstanding, the evolution of the vampire figure has been far from straightforward. As vampires' intimate relationships with their creators and audiences have changed over the centuries, so too has the very nature of the vampire product (vampire+blood). The most striking change in the representation of the vampire occurs roughly at the end of the nineteenth century, with the appearance of Polidori's aristocratic Lord Ruthven and Stoker's learned Count Dracula; this trajectory continues in contemporary vampire literature, of course, with Anne Rice's interminably tormented Lestat de Lioncourt. In this, the

latest phase of his development, the vampire is no longer an isolated monster who preys to live and lives to prey. He has grown into and within society, and his growing pains mirror those of society's. In the final analysis, however, the common denominator of all vampires, no matter how socially integrated or ostracized they might be, is their means of survival: i.e., sucking blood. This blood, in and of itself, is rife with a symbolism of its own. It has held centre-stage in menarchal rituals and exerted tremendous power for both good and evil in Goddess-worshipping civilizations throughout the ages. And although these societies were supplanted by the monotheistic religions we know today, the blood trope which was so central to their rites and practices have morphed into those we associate with the lore of patriarchal religious doctrine. If we pause to analyse the presence of the figure of sacrificial blood in the Bible, we find in 1 John 1,7:

But if we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship we one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his son cleanseth us from all sin.

Progressively, Christianity distances itself from all but the most purified and ascetic approaches to blood ritual. The "good" blood of the risen Christ could now wash, redeem and forgive, in opposition to the "bad" human blood shed in the ancient Goddess rites. And therein lies the basis for the evil within the vampire. *Francis Ford Coppola's Dracula* depicts the Count drinking the blood gushing forth from the holy cross, a mockery of the drinking of sacramental wine which is transubstantiated into the blood of Christ during mass. Count Dracula uses the tools of the Christian Church as the currency of his personal, unholy quest, subverting their spiritual role to the merely physical. The drinking of blood, to Dracula, is an act not only of necessary nourishment, but also of recruitment. A simple attack by the vampire brings death by exsanguination. Should the victim choose to suck back, she yields to spiritual poisoning, the end of life as a mortal and the beginning of damnation. This act of sucking, says Vera Dika, "is at once a perversion of sexual intercourse and of lactation as well. Mother's milk and menstrual blood, as corporeal excrement, are the abject" (392). Blood is thus a medium of exchange. By echoing medieval imagery of Jesus Christ nourishing his church, this clash between the holy and the fallen, the spiritual and the earthly evokes tension/horror. But it is at this very site of resistance that many feminist readings of the vampire can be made. In this figure of the male-deity-defying

vampire creature, glimpses of the Goddess Mother's blood and its power to transform can be perceived. In Rice's *The Vampire Lestat*, the vampirization of Lestat's mother, Gabrielle, is a powerful, sexually charged moment where we see child and mother mutually feeding from and on each other. It is tempting to see this locus of interest on the mother as a reflection of the vampire's desire for life-affirming creation in blood and life-sustaining nourishment in milk. Asks Joan Gordon: "When we envision the vampire feeding, we see victim and predator, seduced and seducer: Why not Madonna and child? Is the vampire's lust for blood an extension of a more natural desire for sustenance and is its quest for victims and for others of its kind really a search for mother and family?" (45) But if one follows the Vampire Lestat's trials and tribulations throughout the *Vampire Chronicles*, the answer is unmistakably (and perhaps unfortunately), no. Lestat, who is now very cognizant of and a full participant in twentieth-century society, not only rejects the blood of his creator, the original vampire mother who crated them all, but yearns for filiality: insertion into the order of the Father.

When we seek the definition of "father", etymology sends us in a tailspin with considerations of *pater* vs. *genitor*, nurturer vs. procreator, the one who giveth, vs. the one who taketh away. Toss into the disequilibrium the son's undeath, which ruptures the initial Oedipal analysis, and the ensuing explication takes on proportions that not only question the filial bond, but drains it of its signification and significance. The desire and quest for paternal filiation and maternal blood repudiation on the part of the son, in this case the Vampire Lestat, is thrice problematic in its various representations in three different registers, and shows this need to be as complex as the different traditions that circumscribe each of Lestat's three "fathers".

To the father, the son expresses an excession of possibility and a plurality of being. Using Lévinas' *Ethics and Infinity* as a springboard to understanding Lestat's position in his initial filiation, we are told that the son's future is beyond the father's being, a "dimension constitutive of time characterizing paternity as a filiality that need not be expressed only in its 'first shape', this is, in biological terms." (Tsuchiya 135). Paternity through biology marks a transcendence constituting a father's identity determined by a future which exceeds him. Indeed, He is He when He is transcended in the absolute future of his son, "an alteration and transcendence of [my] subjectivity as passivity in the child who is [my] succession and identification" (136). The engendering of the child does not engender a linear process but rather

places the son in a multiplicitous lineage which goes beyond his "pure origins". In pausing to understand Lestat's position of desire, and ensuing desire of position, we must look at the three phases of filiality.

The position of the vampire *per se* is problematic in and of itself. It has raised the ire of many who want to view him in the traditional manner which demanded that the vampire be viewed as a "[m]onstrous amalgam of adult corpse and thirsty infant vampire whose entire being is defined by its searing lust for regeneration. A thirst for life itself." (Noll 150). As I have mentioned, Rice is most certainly not the first to have posited the vampire's subjectivity, and she does not present Lestat as figure of speech. His existence is no literary metaphor. The blood he drains is not a representation of inspiration or energy; it is the sap of human life itself. Rice's characters encourage not only our analysis but our sympathy and sometimes, identification. Lestat is the Nietzschean *Übermensch*, questioning Christianity and its values, and attempting to replace or substitute these values, "a being of moral courage who could face the total collapse of meaning required to replace Christianity and could shoulder the burdensome responsibility of creating new standards of right and wrong" (Tsuchiya 150).

Rice's novels therefore encourage us to question not only the identity of the vampire as human, but that of the vampire *qua* vampire, in questioning Lestat's desire for filiation, recognizing and questioning the role of his live father, as well as that of the undead one. Anne Rice's novels have often been seized upon as being fraught with images of eroticism and motherhood, inasmuch as these images evoke parallels between the blissful state from the sucking of blood, and play at the breast. Although the bonds characterizing mother-child intimacy occur between fledgling and seasoned vampire, Rice's vampires, no mere monsters, aspire to more than the immortality passed on through blood; they desire full socialization into the world of the undead, the sense of belonging, ensuring both affiliation *and* filiation. It is the primacy of Lestat's interaction with his three fathers which marks him as subject-in-process.

Most of us know the vampire Lestat from his auspicious beginnings in *Interview With the Vampire*. In its sequel, *The Vampire Lestat*, Rice highlights his contention with and/or ostracization from the symbolic order bequeathed first by his three "fathers". I will explicate his passage from his tenuous relationship and subsequent split from his (biological) father the Marquis, his ravishment and abandonment by Magnus, his Maker, and most importantly, his quest for Marius and his

insertion into the ultimate vampiric filiation.

Lestat-Human (The Marquis)

The Oedipal myth, or, in this case, its collapse, is useful in examining the first of this trilogy of desire, whereby the boy-child fantasises killing the father and possessing the mother, but eventually relinquishes his incestuous longings because of the fear of castration at the father's hands. The father's interference and threat becomes the paradigm for the power the child will seek and encounter later in life. Lestat's family life provides a rather flaccid mock-up of the triangle. Although he is the youngest of seven sons, he alone is provider for his titled yet impoverished family, through his hunting and fishing. His bond with the land of his biological origins is one of mystic belonging to a locus of filiality, what Lacan describes as

le lien à la terre comme telle, qui n'est pas simplement un lien de fait, mais bien un lien mystique. C'est également autour de ce lien que se définit tout un ordre d'allégeance qui est l'ordre à proprement parler féodal, unissant en un seul faisceau le lien de la parenté avec un lien local autour de quoi s'ordonne tout ce qui définit seigneurs et vassaux, droit de naissance, clientèle. (Lacan 323-4)

"This land", as Lestat maintains, "was my entire universe" (Rice 23).

But Lestat describes himself as the one who was "born restless, the dreamer, the angry one, the complainer" (Rice 23). Unable to "sit by the fire and talk of old wars and the days of the Sun King", Lestat twice tries to run away from home, once to the monastery to join an order of priests, and the second time to join an Italian theatre troupe on its way to Paris. As in the traditional Oedipal circumstances, Lestat dearly loves his mother and shares a close relationship with her, while he searches for reasons to be far from his father and brothers. The threat of castration from the father who intercepts this dyad, however, is never realized; the old Marquis is blind, i.e. castrated, and since he symbolically does not possess the phallus, his son does not choose to identify with him. Not only does the Marquis forbid Lestat to leave the folds of the family, where he is needed for sustenance, he sends his other sons to fetch their youngest brother home when he *does* try to escape, attempting to insinuate himself within another filiation which he perceives to be of a higher order, that of the Holy Church, and then that of the theatre, through the *commedia dell'arte*, which, through its

ritual impersonation and improvisation, allowed him to step into the role of another. In Lacanian terms, the threat of castration is not only removed, it was never there to begin with. Lestat's father holds no phallus to entice him with recognition and identification. Without the phallus, the threat of castration is less imperative and Lestat's bond with his mother never suffers. The Father never severs the mother-child bond and, consequently, the Law of the Father (*le non du père*) is never obeyed. Interestingly, the Name of the Father (*le nom du père*) is never known. Ultimately, it is his mother herself who gives Lestat the means to leave the nest, in this way appropriating the phallus and fulfilling her own dreams. Never does Gabrielle call on the blood-bond that marks Lestat as her child; her association to her son, her "gift" to him in the shape of his freedom, is permissible only though her claiming of her cultural, *not* biological connection to him.

She spoke in an almost eerie way of my being a secret part of her anatomy, of my being the organ for her which women do not really have. 'You are the man in me,' she said. 'And so I've kept you here, afraid of living without you, and maybe now in sending you away I am only doing what I have done before'.
(Rice 62)

The ability of Lestat, his mother, and his father to shift positions within the Oedipal triangle reflects the destabilizing of traditional gender and filial categories, demonstrating, as we shall see, the primacy of vampiric over biological filiation. Lestat's complete and irreversible split from his biological father occurs when he literally meets his maker, Magnus, who turns him into a vampire.

Lestat-Vampire I (Magnus)

It is in Paris, as a thirty-year-old actor, that Lestat encounters the "heretic, 300-year-old vampire" who will confer upon him the status of undead. While his making is marked by the expression of bliss encountered in the pre-oedipal Lacanian mother-child bond, with its resulting sense of wholeness, completion and satisfaction, it is, significantly, the rites of the Christian Church which follow his "birth" as a vampire: the possession of his soul by vampiric immortality and the shedding of his human coil.

And the blood that was flowing out of the wound touched my

parched and cracking lips...My tongue licked at the blood. And a great whiplash of sensation caught me. And my mouth opened and locked itself to the wound. I drew with all my power upon the great fount that I knew would satisfy my thirst as it had never been satisfied before... (Rice 90)

The appropriation of the trappings and rituals of Christianity is not a novelty in vampire fiction. In Stoker's *Dracula*, Dr. Van Helsing calls upon sacred artefacts to engage in holy war against the undead. Rice, however, distances her vampire from the tradition that makes them vulnerable to the objects of the Church: "I reached in and took out the jewelled ciborium with its consecrated Hosts. No, there was no power here, nothing that I could feel or see or know with any of my monstrous senses, nothing that responded to me. There were wafers and gold and wax and light" (Rice 113). Rice's use of Church ritual *qua* ritual is not only subversive, but also representative of an order which blasphemes against Church doctrine, into which Lestat is being initiated, there to exist and improvise a new ethics of vampire-hood. Indeed, Magnus tempts Lestat to ask for the gift of immortality—similarly to the way Christ is tempted by Satan — and offering it up as the blood of Christ.

I shall give you the water of all waters[...] the wine of all wines [...] This is my Body, this is my Blood." And then his arms surrounded me. They drew me to him and I felt a great warmth emanating from him, and he seemed to be filled not with blood but with love for me. (Rice 89)

The conflation of Magnus/Jesus/Mother marks Lestat once more as vampire disciple-child and becomes even more significant when Lestat sets it aside to aspire to a greater filiation.

Although Lestat is an unwilling participant in his vampirization, his second "father", Magnus, is a father-by-choice inasmuch as the choice is Magnus' to make, his "blood-rite (right)" to give.

Était père celui qui disait qu'il l'était, qui le consentait de droit[...] Ce modèle s'opposait au modèle médiéval pour lequel le sang prévalait dans la transmission du nom et des biens. Le sang portait dans les veines les valeurs du lignage et celle des normes vassaliques. (Lefèvre 33)

The literal ties of consanguinity that bind Magnus to Lestat are a

bequeathal of privilege, accompanied by a ritual which "names" Lestat into the fold of the vampires, a membership which goes beyond affiliation to filiation, a doubly-binding arrangement marking Lestat's entry into practice *and* process. Magnus has designated Lestat to be "My heir chosen to take the Dark Gift from me with more fibre and courage than ten mortal men, what a Child of Darkness you are to be" (Rice 92).

Although his making of Lestat is successful, it is Magnus who does not properly fulfill his end of the Dark Bargain, by fathering without fatherhood, providing the Child of Darkness a *genitor* without a *pater*. Soon after passing on his worldly goods, a fortune in priceless jewels and artefacts safely ensconced in the tower where he has resided for centuries, Magnus ends his vampiric existence by "going into the fire", a gesture of certain death for vampires. He requires but one "obeissance" of Lestat, that he scatter the ashes after the fire is out so that his body cannot recompose itself and live on. A few hours after Lestat's "birth," Magnus throws himself into the fire. Although the old vampire quickly instructs Lestat on how to feed properly to satisfy the thirst, he does not take the time to tutor him in the ways of respectable vampires. Lestat's despondency is understandable, revealed in his cry of angst, "Magnus, why did you leave me? Magnus, what am I supposed to do, how do I go on?" (Rice 105). And it is at the moment when he catches his reflection in a mirror, in a clever subversion of both the traditional vampire genre and the Lacanian mother-child mirror-phase, that Lestat suddenly realizes his destiny:

But it suddenly occurred to me, I am looking at my own reflection! And hadn't it been said enough that ghosts and spirits and those who have lost their souls to hell have no reflection in mirrors? A lust to know all things about what I was came over me. A lust to know how I should walk among mortal men. I wanted to be in the streets of Paris, seeing with my new eyes all the miracles of life that I'd ever glimpsed. (Rice 104)

From this moment on, Lestat is given the trappings and powers of the vampire; because of his new station as one of the undead, he need never fear castration and /or death according to the traditional human process. In a symbolically colourful twist, Lestat is "given" the phallus in the shape of Magnus' tower, and delivered of the need for the phallus/penis through his new identity, which does not maintain the need for the human sex organ in the quest for ecstasy and procreation. "I

studied my reflection [...] and the organ, the organ we don't need, poised as if ready for what it would never again know how to do or want to do, marble, a Priapus at a gate" (Rice 357). This renunciation of the (literal) phallus, of the erotic drive, is evocative of Freud's theory that posits that one must stifle the sex drive so as to enter into civilization, henceforward the start of one's source of discontent. Indeed, even after being delivered of the Oedipal threat, after having received the Dark Trick and the powers that accompanied it, Lestat's desire for filiation within the world of the undead has not abated. It extends past his means of survival, and the expression of the carnal blood pleasures of a vampire to an interrogation of himself and his *raison-d'être* in this world, as well as his position amongst others of his ilk. For Lacan, identification and meaning are determined solely by the place of the subject within the signifying chain. Lacan's discussion of this subject entails the conflicts and resolutions accompanying his position in this chain. Even this, to Lestat is problematic, for Magnus has not initiated or prepared Lestat for anything else save his bodily survival. Questions of filial identification and loyalty are not approached. Armand, a vampire encountered during Lestat's quest for answers, echoes the fledgling vampire's thoughts when he claims, "It is like not knowing how to read, isn't it?" he said aloud. "And your maker, the outcast Magnus, what did he care for your ignorance? He did not tell you the simplest things, did he? Hasn't it always been this way? Has anyone every cared to teach you anything?" (Rice 249) And indeed, Lestat's insecurity stems from this very quandary of possessing so much power, and not knowing how, or when, or in which circumstances it may be used. Magnus is essentially considered an outcast because he has stolen his immortality, his integration into the order of the undead, by trapping and imprisoning a vampire to the point of near death, and stealing the Dark Trick from him, a modern Prometheus. Furthermore, Magnus has failed to observe the First Commandment of Vampiric Filiation by making Lestat: "That each coven must have its leader and only he might order the working of the Dark Trick upon a mortal, seeing that the methods and the rituals were properly observed" (Rice 301). Striking at the base of the vampiric totem, Magnus' taboo is the creation of an outcast son-of-an-outcast.

Lestat-Vampire II (Marius)

When Armand tells Lestat of the Ancient Millenium Vampire who created him in the 15th century and then perished, Lestat refuses to believe that he is dead and feels an inexplicable longing to see this

Marius, to commune with him, feeling that Marius, at last, will be the key to the answers he has been seeking, who will prove to be his completion. Lestat sets out on his own, travelling the world from Sicily to Greece to Turkey, south to the ancient cities of Asia Minor, and finally to Cairo. And although Lestat is fully cognizant of his telepathic powers, his approach to and claim of Marius as his third father is mediated by letters, proper missives seeking acceptance into an order originally designated not by protocol, but by blood.

And in all these places I was to write my messages to Marius on the walls. Sometimes it was no more than a few words I scratched with the tip of my knife. In other places, I spent hours chiselling my ruminations into the stone. But wherever I was, I wrote my name, the date, and my future destination, and my invitation: Marius, make yourself known to me. (323)

Lestat situates himself in both space and time, concepts which are almost meaningless now to the Ancient Marius, but which delineate a most reverent Pilgrim's Progress, as it were. Even as he implores Marius to step forth to claim him, Lestat speaks of his day-to-day existence, the mundane events leading to the point in time where Marius will find the message. This is no mere fancy; Lestat's need for Marius overlaps the boundaries of pure physical desire and communion. He beckons to Marius in a most proper fashion, with his letter of announcement, his request for recognition and introduction.

When Lestat's meeting with Marius fails to materialize, very much in the same way as ancient ceremonial menstruants did, Lestat "goes into the ground" in self-imposed exile where he will lay for some time, shrinking to a skeletal caricature of himself, wallowing in self-remonstrance, reliving cherished moments of his past with those he drove to destruction, questioning the meaning of heaven and hell and wondering what it is all worth. And then, without warning, Marius heeds Lestat's call.

In what is probably the most emotionally-charged passage in all of the *Vampire Chronicles*, conflating and confounding any traditional human bond, Marius arrives to claim Lestat. In a burst of filial piety, deistic worship and erotic outburst, Lestat the outcast recognizes his Father.

Marius reaches deep into the ground to where Lestat lies buried,

[a]nd he, the one who had been looking for me, the one from whom the sound came, was standing over me [...] At last, it lifted its arms to enfold me and the face I saw was beyond the realm of possibility. What one of use could such a face? [...] No, it wasn't one of us. It couldn't have been. And yet it was. Preternatural flesh and blood like mine. (Rice 361)

As he has with Magnus, the first moments Lestat shares with Marius are rife with the symbolism of the pre-oedipal, of the bonding in birth and blood and shared substance.

"Drink," he said, eyebrows rising slightly, lips shaping the word carefully, slowly, as if it were a kiss. As Magnus had done on that lethal night so many eons ago, he raised his hand now and moved the cloak back from his throat. (Rice 362)

The shared bonding of Lestat and Marius, however, due to their vampiric state, preclude the "pollution" of sexual intercourse, and through their male identity, the "contamination" of mother-blood; the implicit reference here is that the sharing of substance between vampires creates relatedness and ensures lineage. Filiality is invoked in this sharing of substance, in the gaze of the son and the recognition of the Father in the son, I-and-yet-not-I. "Blood, like light itself, liquid fire. Our blood." (Rice 362)

"Drink, my young one, my wounded one."

I felt his heart swell, his body undulate, and we were sealed against each other.

I think I heard myself say:

"Marius."

And he answered:

"Yes." (Rice 363)

In conclusion, it is perhaps telling that Michael Rymer, who directed the film adaptation of Rice's *Queen of the Damned*, saw fit to shrink Lestat's lineage. It is Marius, not Magnus, who "gives birth" to Lestat. In Rymer's adaptation, where Lestat's most influential and coveted bond is highlighted, the director by-passes the history which Rice has created for Lestat and zeros in on what, for her star vampire, is most

significant: recognition from the Father.

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