

*Death Drive: Vampires in Anne Rice's The Vampire Chronicles*

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In principle, vampire is the fantastic creature of immortality, which mysteriously attains energy by drinking blood from living creatures. This imagined creature is often viewed as the symbol of blasphemy for it suggests human blood as one kind of its dietary supplement. The inhumane setting challenges the teaching of Christian tradition, yet it also arise the clash of human-centered civilization from the agency of killing and surviving. The publication of Anne Rice's Vampire Chronicles series marks the contemporary cultural penetration of vampire popularity. In the essay, I choose five novels of The Vampire Chronicles series: *Interview with the Vampire*(1976), *The Vampire Lestat*(1985), *The Queen of the Damned*(1988), *The Tale of the Body Thief* (1992), and *The Vampire Armand* (1998) to expound the issue of death drive among Rice's vampire literature. I would apply Freudian and Lacanian conceptions to illustrate the vampire myth. Then, I would discuss Rice's vampire plots with the notion of death drive.

In *The Queen of the Damned*, Anne Rice dramatizes her vampire origin with pre-Christian background, an accident of the Egyptian King Enkil and Queen Akasha created the legend of vampires. Blood drinking became the essential for physical survival, and the monstrous feeding brings ecstasy to the vampires. In *The Queer Space of the Drive*, Teresa de Lauretis argues that drive (*Trieb*) 'leans on (lehnet an), the satisfaction of the need for nourishment, cleanliness, warmth, and so forth.' In Rice's books, we can figure out the need for blood drinking is an innate drive for the vampires. The description of the blood-drinking spirit can be viewed as the feature to the issue of drive.

*It wants more like you. It wants to go in and make blood drinkers of others as it did with the King; it is too immense to be contained within two small bodies. The thirst will become bearable only when you make others, for they will share the burden on it with you.* (406)

It shows that the repressive drive would create the feeling of anxiety; only the instinctual repetition can remove the excitement. Lauretis points out drive would 'finds physical expression', yet the death drive (*Todestrieb*) seems to 'have no physical delegates, no psychical repression'.

Death drive is a Freudian term which firstly indicates in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* as a psychical force 'whose function is to assure that the organism shall follow its own path to death.' It works 'essentially in silence'. He later built up the conflicting notions of death drive and Eros to contend the idea of living actually relies on the coexistent drives of self-preservation and self-destruction. This statement presents that the nature of being is confined within time and space, for the idea of self-preservation and self-destruction is basically found under the assumption of the stage of ego development. According to Freud, the word ego means the psychic function of conscious awareness. If the ego accepts the concept of life and death, it means the ego believes in the notion of being exists in limited time and space. For example, in *The Vampire Lestat*, the vampire Marius told Lestat that "I have never had a true purpose. We have no place." (466) Here, Rice marks her vampires with philosophical and psychoanalytic depth by providing the premise of immortal body and the needs from the mortals. In *The Queen of the Damned*, the soul of Baby Jenks depicts vampires as "poor souls of all the Dead guys locked in indestructible matter unable to grow old or die." (57), the description implies that vampires are the immortal beings constantly finding the reasons to exist. Once the vampires acknowledge the idea of being, they may identify selves as enormous egos because of their superman

power such as senses, strength, and the eternal life. However, their strong self-awareness would relatively generate the feeling of loneliness. In *The Vampire Lestat*, the vampire Armand depicts his despair with the following lines:

*That he craved nothing, cherished nothing, believed nothing finally, and took not one particle of pleasure in his ever increasing and awesome powers, and existed from moment to moment in a void broken once every night of his eternal life by the kill...*  
(304)

The statement of loneliness announced that the autonomy of body cannot fully liberate the vampire; instead, the repetition of pure carnal pleasure would increase the lure of death. Or we can say that death drive disguise with the form of extreme stimulus.

However, in *The Vampire Lestat*, the vampire Marius states vampires are made to “triumph over time”(469). He recommended Lestat to “live out one complete lifetime”(468) and make others as members of family. The suggestions express the subjectivity of vampire party derives from the process of self- objectification. That is, the notion of “making others” can construct the scope of ego. According to psychoanalysis, the symbolic meaning of “the other” is the unattainable part of life or the unconscious. Lacan ideally made more detailed identification by dividing the concept of “the other” into the little ‘o’ other and the big ‘O’ other. In *Dangerous Supplements and the Envy of the Gaze*, Patrick Fuery argues the Lacanian ‘Other’ as “the realm of otherness which is distinct from the subject”, and ‘other’ is “the objects of desire which manifest the realm of Otherness for the subject.” The saying that ‘the other’ as an object indicates the theory that ego views itself as a subject acquiring for fulfilling its need by the assistance from the object ‘Other’ through the form of desire. Desire contains the demand of instinctive need and love. In *The Vampire Lestat*, Marius reminded Lestat the criteria of choosing companions. The warning for the subject can be viewed as an advice on how to achieve self-foundation by perceiving the objectifying self from “the Other”.

*Choose them because you like to look at them and you like the sound of their voices, and they have profound secrets in them that you wish to know. In other words, choose them because you love them.*(471)

It suggests that love is the direct way to identify with self. Thus, we can say desire for the vampires of making companions originates from the calling for love. In other words, the vampire ego intends to make identification by pursuing desire of love. The companions seem to be the redemption of the vampires, but the ultimate way to make identification is to dissolve the notion of subjectivity and objectivity. In short, the vampires need to discover their nature with love, rather than chasing after the desire of love. Accordingly, we can figure out that Rice draws desire as an inevitable illusion for vampires. Yet, the illusional desire also presents the fact that vampire is aware of the discontent of being without love. In *The Vampire Lestat*, Armand viewed his vampire myth as the disillusionment.

*And when you first know about us, whether it's through the dark blood or promises or visitations, you think anything is possible. But that isn't so. ....That is, you become accustomed to the new limits and the limits define everything once again.* (307)

In order to become fully liberated from self-discontent, the vampires eventually intend to get rid of all the desire by seeking for death through their living. In fact, the tendency for death also belongs to desire, or we can say that death drive is the ultimate content for desire. The discussion of death drive and desire actually points out that real immortality doesn't mean living without physical death. To discard desire is the minimum condition for immortality. Being a vampire cannot achieve real immortality, they are just imitations of mankind.

We can say that the images of vampires in Rice's *Vampire Chronicles* are often viewed as the subjects, and their human victims are the objects of desire. That is, mankind is succumbed to the vampire species, which creates the uncanny effect to the readers. In "*The Uncanny*", Freud defined the term 'uncanny' as "class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar" (825). The reason that readers sense the uncanny effect from vampire literature is based on the setting that most of vampires are not just living dead; instead, they are living legend because of possessing eternal youth, great fortune, and superhuman power. Nevertheless, being a vampire means being evil from moral aspect.

So, why do people want to become vampires? In *Interview with the Vampire*, Louis, the most human of all vampires, says that one of the reasons he became a vampire was 'wish for self-destruction'. He apparently regarded vampire as the embodiment of immortal death. The new world that he imagined would eliminate all the sufferings from human world. His first death drive, however, leads him to sense "sublime loneliness...through the world of mortal men".(39) For the vampire Louis, the act of killing is "the experience of another's life for certain, and often the experience of the loss of that life through the blood...It is again and again the experience of that loss of my own life..."(29) Based on Rice's description, vampire is not an unfeeling corpse, but a creature that can recapture the value of life through killing. Armand, the vampire prince, reckoned Louis as the spirit of the nineteenth century, the age falling from grace and faith. The physical phantasy indicates that vampire is not simply an issue of dead body with desire alive, but an argument of the struggle between enlightenment and drives.

The infatuation toward Babette once again reminded Louis the price of being a vampire is lack of intimacy. Louis depicted Babette as "an intriguing soul clothed in rich, mysterious flesh"(64), and he wanted to know her "without the need to kill, without robbing her of every breath of life"(63). The Eros of vampire manifests the wish for self-preservation, which can be extended to the ideal demand for vampire civilization. In Freud's *Civilization and its Discontent*, he asserts that 'sexual love is a relationship between two individuals...whereas civilization depends on relationships between a considerable numbers of individuals', both emphasize on the importance of human bonds. We can say the foundation of civilization is based on love-relationship. Lestat once pictured the similar possibility of civilizing the vampire society as well:

.....we might possess out legends, might at least ponder the riddles of our history, as men do. So that we might swap our stories and share our power— (478)

According to Freud, the nature of civilization serve for two purpose: 'to protect men against nature and to adjust their mutual relations'. To the vampires, the benefits of civilization seem to harmonize the drives of nature and build up orders in the savage garden. In *The Queen of the Damned*, after the Father, Enkil, and the Mother, Akasha, got complete destruction; the mystery of vampire myth revealed to all the vampires. The destruction of Father and Mother symbolize the closure of phase of Oedipus

complex, the vampires had the power to construct their society. They set up some kind of agreement such as never make new others or always go back to the sanctuary. Yet, the civilized vision would ruin the aggressiveness of nature and sacrifice the individual freedom. The wish of constructing the vampire society is doomed to fail. Because of the anchor of vampire is individuality rather than intimacy. Lestat informed Louis that the nature of vampire is killing. The announcement shows that vampire is regarded as the symbol of death.

It is the ability for destruction that conflicts with the notion of intimacy, which shows vampires are incapable of preserving family relationship. For example, Louis, Lestat and Claudia once made a “queer family” in New Orleans. In *Anne Rice’s Use of Gothic Conventions in The Vampire Chronicles*, Nicole B Tanner analyzes the vampire family with sexual perspective:

*it can be a bit tricky to establish the relationships as incestuous as they are not related in the traditional, mortal sense where consanguinity is based on reproductive lines rather than the physical transfer of blood....vampire’s fangs are phallic, and so Louis and Claudia ‘s initial encounter can be viewed as sexual as well...*

Vampires do not possess family-of-origin to build up genuine intimacy by sexual reproduction, but by their fangs and blood exchange, their family status is not fixed; that is, infidelity would destroy the possibility of reaching intimacy. The process of making Claudia, the girl vampire, can explain the argument. Lestat told Louis that “ I want a child tonight. I am like a mother...”(89), and later transformed Claudia with his blood. Tanner asserts Claudia as the product of incestuous relationship.

*since Lestat also sired Louis, Lestat’s blood flows through both of the veins, making them not only father and daughter but also brother and sister...this also makes Louis and Lestat father and son...*

However, Claudia grows up as years pass. The act that she asks for “a coffin for a child”(103) not only symbolizes her awareness of individuality, but her sorrow for existing in the inferior body. The fact that Claudia will never be “a beautiful woman with endowments”(132) stimulates Claudia to seek for objective confirm in order to compensate her lacking. That’s why she told Louis that “I am your vampire self more than you are.”(118); she regards Louis as the ideal image of her ego. Both Louis and Lestat took her life, yet Claudia treat Louis as her only lover whereas Lestat as her fatal enemy. One reason is that Lestat possess the power to govern the family, Claudia mocked him as the one who determines life and death to the mortals. The absolute authority of Lestat not only threatened her living but the perception of her identity. She needed to free herself by putting Father in his coffin (136) in order to begin “the great adventure” of life .(141) According to Freud, the motif of patricide would generate the sense of guilt to the ego state. Yet, the development of civilization is constructed by the heightening of the sense of guilt. Rice employs the psychoanalytical point to indicate the perverse desire of Claudia would eventually disillusion the construction of vampire civilization. In short, vampire family lacks patriarchal or matriarchal order in the long run, which force them to battle for supremacy to possess absolute love. And the collapse of family stands for the turmoil of Eros. Or we can say that the uncontrollable desire would lead to chaos.

Once life is not restricted by social order, moral doctrine, or religious belief, the excessive desire, however, would awaken the need for self-destruction, or death

drive. According to Freud, the aim of life is to experience zero stimuli, or death. In *The Tale of the Body Thief*, the act that Lestat switch his immortal body into the mortal is motivated by his death drive. Because of his “Dark Gift” had drowned him with desperate loneliness. On the other hand, his desire to experience the civilized human society can be viewed as the adjustment of value to mainstream society, or we can say it is the process that Lestat reconcile his subjectivity and objectivity. In George Haggerty’s *Anne Rice and the Queering of Culture*, he argues that “Rice is aware of the vampire as the surplus of the real in western culture.” In the novel, Lestat repetitively suffered remorse from Claudia’s death, in fact, all his doing attempts to atone for his crime. Nevertheless, all the characters such as Sister Gretchen, the vampire Louis, and David Tibert cannot save him from the sense of guilt. It means that social ideology cannot solve the issue of death, or the loss of life. For Lestat, the Dutch painter, Rembrandt, become the iconic figure of triumphing the issue of life and death. The art of Rembrandt is the “vision” of his life, which signifies the meaning of eternity. Lestat, on the other hand, regains nothing but agony from his immortal life. His loss for being a vampire emerged in the comment of Rembrandt’s picture.

*...that human beings are wholly unlike nay other animal in the cosmos, they are a precious minging of the flesh and immortal fire.....But I am not mortal. I cannot save my soul through art or Good Works. I am a creature like the Devil...(39)*

His despair of life made force the unwilling scholar, David Tibert, as his new companion. Apparently, Lestat wants to prove that the power of love can condone the creature of evil and its sin.

The attitude of desperate self-abandonment is not the last judgment for Rice’s vampires. In *The Vampire Chronicles*, Rice tries to figure out the meaning of evil and the nature of death with Christian belief. In *The Vampire Armand*, Armand conceptualize the core of the Lord is love. (454) Even Marius rebuttal his belief with the horror and evil side of man, Armand still insists the existence of The One.

He was another man like me... He was human...His was suffering...His blood might as well have been my blood too...He didn’t make a hierarchy...He was the *very* thing (455)

The saying shows that all the differentiation is the mirror image of the same Nature. The notion of evil is the reflection for suffering. The death drive of being is the drive for returning to Nature. Rice’s vampire world is the allegory for human liberation, the death drive of vampire is the thirst for awakening from the illusion of desire.

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