

THE NIGHTMARE LIFE-IN-DEATH: ARTISTIC INTENTIONALISM IN MARY
SHELLEY'S *FRANKENSTEIN* AND ANNE RICE'S *INTERVIEW WITH THE
VAMPIRE*

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the gendered language and reliance upon birth metaphors in anti-intentionalist rhetoric as explicated in Wimsatt and Beardsley's "Intentional Fallacy" and Barthes' "Death of the Author." Reading Anne Rice's *Interview with the Vampire* as a reworking of the themes of creative anxieties, power, and responsibilities presented in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, it posits the novels' respective secondary narrators—Louis and Victor, both of whom are responsible for creating a supernatural life—as creators in conversation with their public. I argue that the differing levels of credibility and interpretive authority granted to Victor and Louis is a product of their levels of access to masculine interpretive authority. The project begins with an examination of the ways in which the anti-intentionalist's demand for authorial silence post-publication affects popular discourse surrounding the speech and images of celebrity authors, including Rice and Shelley, and asks questions about the implications of anti-intentionalist theories for readers' creations of selves.

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Introduction

In their 1946 article “The Intentional Fallacy”, W.K. Wimsatt Jr. and M.C. Beardsley contend that “The poem is not the critic's own and not the author's (it is *detached from the author at birth* and goes about the world beyond his [sic] power to intend about it or control it” (470 emphasis mine). Twenty-one years later, Roland Barthes’ “Death of the Author” does little to build critically upon this central claim. It serves instead to rearticulate the fallaciousness of the intentional fallacy in more poetical terms than these previous critics had at their disposal, so that he may conclude that “the birth of the *reader* must be at the cost of the death of the author” (1326, emphasis mine).

The central contention of this thesis is that this critical insistence upon the silence or dismissal of the author post-publication is a sublimation of the currently pervasive neoliberal impulse to deny our individual dependence upon other people for the purposes of self-realization and -actualization. Harold Bloom’s theory of the “anxiety of influence” describes the artist’s discomfort at their inevitable indebtedness to their predecessors and contemporaries, and the impossibility of creating something truly original. I would argue for the consideration of the self as a performative text regarding which both artists and non-artists—including critics like Wimsatt, Beardsley, and Barthes—experience a similar insecurity. The anti-intentionalist locates the generative spark of selfhood in the space between reader and text, at the expense of that between the author and their work—or as Barthes would say, ‘at the cost of the death of the author’.

In this way, the text is pressed into the service of mediating between writer and reader so that the latter can hone their voice and interiority through engagement with the text free from the sense that they are too directly imitating—and therefore directly dependent upon—another person. By positing the creative process as a sacred mystery that authorial explanations can profane but not disperse—since the interpretive authority of authors over their own work is denied by anti-intentionalism—the theory implicitly stresses the author’s unconscious dependence upon myriad influences that are unidentifiable even to the author.

The burden of influence is thereby shifted to the author so that the text is naturalized—part cultural distillation and part happy accident from which the reader can borrow and experiment in their construction of self. The legible and usually undisguised constructed-ness of a work of fiction and its elements points to the ways with which the reader’s performance of self can be experimented and more or less consciously adjusted. It is only when the writer makes known in one way or another, for example, that their text’s narrative voice is similar to or the same as their own that the reader starts to feel like a poser.

But to avoid knowledge of an author’s biography or commentary about their work is to stifle curiosity, and is in any case increasingly difficult in today’s world. To insist that the critic proceed *as though* ignorant of the author’s life and intentions when they are not is to ask for the effortful mental compartmentalization of two areas of obviously related information. Human minds naturally make connections, usually when one is not even trying to make them, but particularly when one is actively trying *not* to. I will argue

in this thesis that anti-intentionalist rhetoric has its roots in a neurotic fantasy of the self made in a (non-vaginal) void, independent of the precedence set by others' speech, work, and selves. Like a pubescent child, stopping their ears and humming at every allusion to their parents' sexuality, the anti-intentionalist asks the impossible and denies the inevitable. To demand that the author "die" to make room for your own budding subjectivity or creativity is like asking your parents to stop having sex once you are born because you do not like the thought that your body and its pleasures were made possible by an unthinkable sex act.

Mothers specifically are feared because they represent the humiliation of absolute dependence, and—in the same vein—because they make whole people out of next to nothing. It is because of this fear that mothers and birth seem such apt metaphors for the author whom anti-intentionalists would like to see silenced. Just as mothers have been asked to sacrifice development of self to the education and accomplishments of their children, the author's personal ties to their work are dismissed in favour of the reader's bond with a disembodied, seemingly authorless text. This rhetoric is based upon the rejection of a model of interdependent development in favour of one in which a person asserts themselves by negating (m)others, so that a person constructs their own multi-dimensionality out of the variously flattening definitions they project. This sort of negative self-definition through the construction and imposition of definitions of Otherness is familiar from such theories as Edward Said's Orientalism, Foucault's Panopticism, Frantz Fanon's third-person consciousness, and Laura Mulvey's work in feminist film theory.

In this thesis, I will examine the ways in which these issues of gender, subjectivity, and the struggle for self-actualization are parsed in the space between Mary Shelley's 1818 *Frankenstein* and Anne Rice's 1976 *Interview with the Vampire*, as well as the respective critical and popular receptions of these novels. Both authors are women, fascinating in their own rights, and both have personal stories that draw almost as much interest as their novels. Both lost their mothers too soon, and experienced the death of a child whose name and physicality makes their way into these, their debut novels. The novels themselves are rife with similarly striking parallels: Each contains a male frame narrator who hears the confession of a male secondary narrator who tells the story of his involvement in a supernatural creation, the product of which will eventually rail against their creator's carelessness and demand that he make them a mate.

These surface similarities are offset with myriad dichotomic differences between the texts and their characters. Shelley's Creature is male, gigantic, ugly, vegetarian, and deceptively frightening in appearance. He is abandoned at the moment of his creation and experiences repeated rejection from those he attempts to help and befriend. Rice's Claudia is female, small, beautiful, hematophagous, and deceptively harmless- and helpless-looking. She remains enfolded in the embrace of her wealthy, two-parent family until that embrace finally becomes intolerable. In between these clear parallels and perpendicularities are the subtler shifts that generate the questions relevant to this work: If Claudia is to Louis as the Creature is to Victor, where is Claudia's extended monologue at the core of Rice's novel? What is the effect of the shift from Shelley to Rice in the primary narrator's change from the first- to third-person voice? And are the central

creations of each text actually similar when Victor Frankenstein's is a notoriously solitary act while Rice's Claudia's co-creation involves a violent act of coercion? These are all questions about narrative and interpretive authority and power, what the texts suggest about the ways in which subjects get made, and the hostility and competition that arises between creations and identifiable creators.

In emphasizing the similarities between the texts and the experience of their respective creations, I believe that critics comparing the two works have elided the gendered differences in the Creature's and Claudia's experiences. In her "Transcending Monstrous Flesh," Crystal O'Leary argues that both Claudia and the Creature reverse the course described as the "hero's quest" by Joseph Campbell in his seminal *Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Whereas Campbell's hero is "of woman born," and comes of age by seeking his father, from whom he derives his character, both the Creature and Claudia are "created" by men, experience social isolation, and come to seek the protection of women and safe, womb-like spaces. That is, they are born of men and seek comfort in the mother. But if Campbell's hero is presumed male, what does it mean for Claudia to seek the mother? Might her quest towards self-actualization take a different form than a man's, if not because of her monstrosity, then because of her gender?

Similarly, Donna Mitchell in her "Of Men and Monsters" dwells on the parallels between the novels, writing that Claudia

enters the novel as one of Louis's victims and is given immortality by Lestat, who wishes to create a family unit of his own. This act echoes that of Victor in Shelley's text as a male character has once again created his own unnatural progeny without a female input. As parents to Claudia, Louis and Lestat do not

fulfil the traditional, separate maternal and paternal roles; instead they make up various parts of the parental unit. This results in a dual persona of both mother and father figures. Together, they outline the mother's dual aspect and can be defined through the Freudian and Kleinian principle of splitting and the ancient Roman myth of the 'Janus face' as theoretically developed by Bettelheim, in which the mother is divided into the role of the good (and usually dead) mother and an evil stepmother (118).

It is troubling that Mitchell relies upon this misogynistic dichotomy in order to describe the radical differences between Claudia's two *male* parents. The idea that these men make up 'various parts of the parental unit' evokes the various parts from which Frankenstein's Creature is made, though this is not adequately examined. But what I want to push back against is Mitchell's suggestion that Lestat's act of creation "echoes" Victor Frankenstein's. I do not read *Interview* as either echo or amplification of *Frankenstein*. The novels do and say different things on the same topics, and so I work here to put them into conversation with each other and with the misogynistic undertones of anti-intentionalist theories which they work together to problematize.

My first chapter will provide an overview of the theories that will be put into conversation with one another and the novels of my study throughout the rest of my thesis. I will place anti-intentionalist critics' use of birth and motherhood metaphors within the broader context of male artists' historical appropriation of those metaphors to discuss their acts of artistic creation. Through an examination of the recent controversy surrounding J.K. Rowling's post-publication discussion and assertions of knowledge of her *Harry Potter* novels, and comparisons to popular discussions surrounding Shelley and Rice, I will point to the particular and often contradictory demands faced by women writers. Though to be both a woman and a writer is in itself a transgression against

patriarchal expectations for women and a usurpation of the traditionally male prerogative of self-assertion, all of these women have written for or about male characters and explicated male interiorities. Their assertions of knowledge about their work and, implicitly or explicitly, about their male characters, poses a threat to neoliberal individualism and particularly masculinity.

My second chapter seeks to problematize positive comparisons between the methods of creation explicated in *Frankenstein* and *Interview* in order to posit Lestat's co-optation of Louis' body into the vampirization of Claudia as representative of the myriad forms of violence and manipulation by which human women have been pushed into childbearing. I will rely on constructivist concepts of gender as articulated by Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble*, when she writes that "the reproduction of heterosexual constructs in non-heterosexual frames brings into relief the utterly constructed status of the so-called heterosexual original" (*Gender Trouble* 31). And so while acknowledging that Rice's novel asks women readers to identify once again with a male narrator-protagonist, I maintain that in this case, Louis' gender serves to emphasize the social constructedness of motherhood and to resist its essentializing, biologically deterministic tie to physiology.

My third chapter will examine the varying freedom with which the characters in the novels engage in revelatory speech—that is, speech which renders their interiorities exterior. I will ask questions about whose speech is credited, to what effect, and at whose expense. I will argue that Victor's appropriation of the Creature's first-person voice and story is not the generous act it may seem, and betrays instead a sense of entitlement to the

voices and stories of others. The conspicuous absence of an extended performance of Claudia's first-person account at the core of *Interview* to mirror that in *Frankenstein* is not a silencing of Claudia, but an implicit refusal by Louis to continue the act of creating Claudia by continuing to define her after her death.

What I want to advocate for in this thesis is a greater generosity and gentleness in our critical, creative, and interpersonal dealings that stems from a recognition of our interdependence in all these realms. Someone who requires that the author, or the mother, or the Other die or be otherwise flattened or silenced in order to write, live, or like themselves would do well to remember that while written texts are effectively immortal, the self is an ephemeral and performative medium that requires inspiration, including other performances in the same medium.

Selfhood is composed of a voice that is learned, practiced, and adapted over a lifetime, and though the text of selfhood is not the same as a novel, I look at these as two creative genres rather than two separate realms—at no greater a distance than the novel and the film. The inspirations for our art and our selves does not need to be hidden like the seams and tags on clothing, because it is only human to be made up of your favourite people and cultural materials. I crave a cultural return to the understanding of the formation of selves that Nancy Selleck identifies as prevalent in Early Modern England that “we are what we become in the encounter” because the texts and personalities built upon stacks of corpses—that is, which cherish originality above any other aesthetic or ethical value—are invariably insufferable (18).

Chapter I

1.1: Fear of the Mother, Fear of the Author

Wimsatt and Beardsley's theory undergoes two major changes in Barthes' poeticization. First, he posits the reader, rather than the text, as the "birthed" subject. It is the reader's opportunity to come into a new form of being through interaction with a text—their unique *rebirth*—that is forestalled and circumscribed by the author's intentionalism. By positioning the addressed reader as the subject whose self-determination is imperiled by the writer's defining speech, Barthes implies that the author's silence is necessary not only for the reader's determination of textual meaning, but to the construction and determination of self that is contingent upon that textual meaning. Second, while Wimsatt and Beardsley had argued for the necessity of the writer's non-interference in the life of the work post-publication, Barthes insists that only the implicitly feminized writer-parent's death in childbirth can ensure the total independence of the birthed subject that he demands.

And so while both "The Intentional Fallacy" and "The Death of the Author" rely upon the language of birth, Barthes dwells specifically upon the naturalness and desirability of the possibility (formerly probability) of the lethality of childbirth in order to impress upon his readers the responsibilities of the artist. The work and the reader are "better off", his theory implies, if its "mother" is dead the moment it is born, so that both are allowed to speak for and define themselves without interference from, or the need to

compete with, the mother-author's narcissistic desire to dwell upon their role in the process of creation.

There are parallels between this desire to disregard the author's role and the common belittlement of mothers and motherhood in our culture, because both represent the fact of our dependence and createdness. Carol Ochs asks

What is it to recover an awareness that we were mothered? It is to recognize, acknowledge, and accept that we were once helpless; that the life that flows through us now is a gift; that we are not strong and masterful, but dependent creatures who were nurtured by caring parents...*Most people want to forget their dependency* so they can consider themselves "self-made." To come to terms with one's mother is to struggle to remember something prior to language—to waken memories that stir in muscles and in nostrils but that cannot be put into words (28 emphasis mine).

Because it would be absurd for a person to claim that they were literally born independent, the application of the birth metaphor to anti-intentionalist theories works as an unsubtle method by which to articulate and subsequently reject the mother. Because anti-intentionalists were made in women's bodies, and were likely nursed and first taught by women before they had words or teeth of their own with which to brace themselves against these (m)others, they owe to them the stable foundations of interdependent basic language and selfhood upon which their current, malleable adult self depends.

Children's dependence upon their mothers for nourishment and social formation following biological creation is effaced in Barthes's fantasy of immediate self-sufficiency upon parturition. This male fantasy of the death of the mother makes possible a fantasy child that develops language and personality without the help of a mother, so that it is born ready to be a citizen of the world, to 'belong to the public', free from misogynistic

anxieties about ever having been dependent upon a woman. In this chapter, I will examine the ways in which the misogyny of Barthes's metaphor contributes to a hostile cultural climate for women writers—both those who are mothers of children and those who are not—who are more likely than their male counterparts to experience pressure to remain silent outside of their roles as authors.

To remember that a text was authored is to recognize both our dependence upon others for the creation of our selves, and the very fact of that createdness. The anti-intentionalist's alienation of text from author, by which the text is naturalized as a spontaneous outpouring independent from and having little to do with its human source, allows the reader's interaction with the text to seem an interaction with self and nature rather than author and culture. The current fetishization of the vaguely-defined qualities of authenticity and originality encourage the disavowal of one's inevitable dependence upon one's predecessors and contemporaries for the more or less conscious construction of one's self-concept and -presentation. The anti-intentionalist undermines the connection between writer and work in order to strengthen that between work and reader, so that the reader can use the work to develop their sense of self without experiencing the uncomfortable sensation that they are imitating another person.

I will compare the ways in which the rise and current pervasiveness of anti-intentionalist discourses, with their historical dependence upon and resultant evocation of misogynistic metaphors, affects the manner in which the authors of the texts of my study and their speech are received and framed by critics and commentators. Both works involve a women writer's skillful construction of multiple male voices, and this aspect

alone demonstrates the constructedness and performativity of gendered selves which Judith Butler posits in *Gender Trouble*. Anti-intentionalist rhetoric serves to re-establish conservative understandings of a natural, essentializing gender dichotomy, not only by using a female image and experience as a model for laudable silence, but by denying the possibility of the relevance, for example, of a female writer's experiences to her articulation of a male voice and the complex self which it implies.

In the cases of these and similar texts in which a woman author demonstrates her ability to perform masculinity, the distancing of writer from text—and the granting to the public of rights to the latter—constitutes a reaction to a perceived threat to the natural order. The metaphor of mothers and children allows the “masculine” (because male-voiced) text to be positioned at such a distance to its female author as a grown man is expected to maintain from his mother. The author's claim of knowledge of her text can then be read and ridiculed as a mother's embarrassing and incorrect assumption of knowledge of her son's self and body because she bathed him, dressed him, and was his sole confidant when he was a child. The reader may then rest easy that their knowledge of the text is that of a friend or lover.

A variation on the discomfort that gives rise to this impulse of disavowal of the mother and the author is experienced by the author themselves, which Harold Bloom explicates in *The Anxiety of Influence*. Bloom focuses on the humiliation of the contemporary (male) writer when faced with the knowledge that his own work (and, I would emphasize, his text of selfhood in which he molds his identity as both writer and man, and which is separate from though contingent upon his body of work) is only made

possible by the accomplishments of previous generations of writers. The shame he feels for having learned his first words from his mother is the precursor to the pain of knowing that at no stage is he self-created, and that his post-infancy self fluctuates not because he grows wiser with age, but because constant interactions with texts inspire constant experimentation and refigurations of self. Any novels he may write are built out of the words and ideas he learns from others. Just as there is no such thing as a “self-made man,” it is a truism that no book is written in a vacuum.

Contemporary women writers are in the questionably enviable position of being immune to the anxiety of influence by virtue of women’s historical exclusion from the realm of “serious literature.” Gilbert and Gubar point out that because women cannot be humbled by their dependency upon their predecessors, their anxiety is instead that they do not have predecessors upon whom to model their selves and work, and that women are not made to be writers, or that the writing world is not made for them. They call this the “anxiety of authorship.” Next to this, white men’s distress at knowing that the work of people just like them has been celebrated for millennia begins to look like false modesty. Gilbert and Gubar write that

This anxiety is, of course, exacerbated by [the female author’s] fear that not only can she not fight a male precursor on “his” terms and win, she cannot beget art upon the (female) body of the muse. As Juliet Mitchell notes, in a concise summary of the implications of Freud’s theory of psychosexual development has for women, both a boy and a girl, “as they learn to speak and live within society, want to take the father’s [in Bloom’s terminology, the precursor’s] place, and only the boy will one day be allowed to do so (49).

In “Why Women Can’t Write,” Joanna Russ examines the ways in which women’s relative (and, happily, diminishing) lack of textual models for female

subjectivity and authorship has been both predicament and opportunity. Since the stories by which men and boys have shaped themselves and each other are unsound structures upon which to build complex female voices and selves, women writers are forced to innovate, and to conceive radically new structures. Lacking, as Gilbert and Gubar suggest, “foremothers”, and uninvited to do battle with and supplant their forefathers with unradical variations on those forefathers’ work, women writers fight for traction in a hostile environment, inventing the forms and genres they need for the explication of complex female subjectivity (47). My use here of birth metaphors is self-conscious and ironic. My aim throughout this thesis is to emphasize that when women’s bodies and selves are understood as the scaffolds upon which men construct themselves (that is, as the quasi-human spaces from which real (read male) people are born) as fully and complexly human subjects and artists, women’s own human complexity and artistic potential is displaced.

1.2: J.K. Rowling and The Impossibility of Authorship

The best case-study to begin this discussion is J.K. Rowling’s habit of making matter-of-fact statements about the Harry Potter world that could not be determined from the novels themselves. Pamela Ingleton summarizes and engages with this practice in her “*Harry Potter and the Extratextual (After)Life of J.K. Rowling.*” Regarding Rowling’s most famous “extratextual” comment in which she outed Albus Dumbledore as gay, Ingleton quotes her as saying “[Dumbledore] is my character. *He is what he is* and I have the right to *say what I say* about him” (qtd by Ingleton 183, emphases mine). For Rowling to insist that Dumbledore ‘is what he is’ can be read as a recognition of the limitations of

her power to change, post-publication, what he is. It suggests a certain consciousness that her role in the series has changed, and protects more than anything her right to continued speculative speech without the emphasis on the power of that speech to inform her characters' realities as Ingleton and others suggest.

In response to the uproar following her Carnegie Hall interview in which these comments were made, Rowling said of Harry

He's still mine[...]. Many people may feel that they own him. But *he's a very real character to me*, and no one's thought about him more than I have [...]. No one has mourned more than I have. The characters were *inextricably linked with my life* for 17 years. No one else has that association with Harry. They may remember where they were when they read it. But to remember where you were when you created it is, I'm afraid to say it, a *different* experience (qtd by Ingleton 184, first two emphases mine).

It is normal for authors to “know” more about their characters and their worlds than is visible in their novels, and this is particularly true of speculative fiction. The complexity and realness of the Harry Potter world to its creator is the mechanism by which it is made to feel real to its readers. Rowling presents as an occupational hazard the instinctual response to correct as “mistakes” comments people make in speaking about “extra-textual” aspects of the Harry Potter world and its inhabitants that do not align with her own conceptions of them (Tosenberger, qtd by Ingleton). In a man, especially an older, grandfatherly one, I expect this would be seen as a charming eccentricity that upholds wonderfully the fantasies of children rather than an outrageous infringement upon the freedoms of others.

To become a woman writer has until recently required a conscious and radical reconceptualization of self and world, separately and in relation to one another. Virginia

Woolf figures this reconceptualization as the murder of the “angel in the house” who urges women to prioritize domestic duties over literary ambitions. This fatal transgression against a humble representative of the elaborate sanctification of patriarchal authority that is Christianity emphasizes the air of blasphemy associated with women’s departure from oppressive gender roles. To be a woman and a writer has been to contribute to the establishment of a precedent rather than to take part in a proud existing tradition constructed to accommodate oneself. And so why is it the cause of such surprise—let alone indignation—that a woman writer might be reluctant to relinquish her hard-won sovereignty over her creation and voice?

Rather than considering why Rowling might be anxious about potential threats to the integrity of her created world in the context of women’s historical exclusion from activities of world-making, whether real, fictional, or fantastical, criticism of her perceived assertion of supremacy as author has been framed in terms of bad mothering. Ingleton says Rowling is like “a protective parent with a child” whose “rhetoric betrays a sense of possessiveness, of ownership” (183). And as the release of the final novel approached, *Maclean’s* magazine’s Brian Bethune speculated that Rowling would “[kill] the main character to control his afterlife” (qtd by Ingleton 176). Medea’s specter hangs over this paranoid vision of the mother who would kill the child she loves so that nobody else can have them.

The eagerness of so many who enjoy Rowling’s work—many of whom speak, significantly, of having “grown up on” *Harry Potter*—for Rowling herself to be unseen and unheard is a product of the same disavowal of one’s own dependence that inspires the

devaluation of the mother. Sexism underlies attempts to curtail Rowling's speech not only because her femaleness is a convenient tool that will inevitably be used against her, but because it has become accepted that women are sounding boards and support structures upon which men and children build themselves. Having filled a need for a generation of children when they were most vulnerable, she is met with their hostility when, as adults, they wish to forget their former need and vulnerability.

The general eagerness to understand Rowling as jealous and possessive of her creations is revealed in the frequency with which she is quoted as saying in the Carnegie Hall interview "I would have told you sooner if I'd known it would make you so happy" in reference to her earlier, more tentative and less often quoted comment that she had "always thought of Dumbledore as gay" (The Leaky Cauldron). What she had 'told' the audience is an aspect of her own experience of her own character, again as though he were a real person, which is how she has said she thinks and speaks about her characters. She has not described Dumbledore's extra-textual or post-publication reality as she certainly does with other of her characters.

Rowling's original statement was made in response to a question by a young fan about whether Dumbledore had ever been in love—an explicit request for extra-textual information (The Leaky Cauldron). As a woman who is a writer of children's literature and also a mother, Rowling is faced with multiple pressures in formulating her response. She is a mother to her own children, to her novels, to the children in those novels, and (as evidenced in the Carnegie Hall interview) is sometimes expected to assume a semi-parental role to her young readers in person as well as through the characters such as the

many mentors in her novels like Dumbledore, Sirius Black, and Mr. and Mrs. Weasley. Rowling is therefore faced with competing pressures to remain appropriately maternal towards her fans and appropriately authorial in general—a demand which is more likely to come from older readers and critics who might not consider or care about this position, though they might be willing to criticize her if she were harsh or cold to a child fan.

She is navigating the space, in other words, between Molly Weasley and Lily Potter, with many of her fans craving her attention and the continued presence of her voice in their lives, and others who want her to die after performing her role as creator. Her navigation of her role towards her fans can be seen in her handling of an awkward question from another young child in the same interview. This interchange occurs just before the more famous one regarding Dumbledore’s sexuality:

Q: In the Goblet of Fire Dumbledore said his brother was prosecuted for practicing inappropriate charms [JKR buries her head, to laughter] on a goat; what were the inappropriate charms he was practicing on that goat?

JKR: How old are you?

Eight.

JKR: I think that he was trying to make a goat that was easy to keep clean [laughter], curly horns. That’s a joke that works on a couple of levels. I really like Aberforth and his goats. But you know Aberforth having this strange fondness for goats if you’ve read book seven, came in really useful to Harry, later on, because a goat, a stag, you know. If you’re a stupid Death Eater, what’s the difference. So, that is my answer to YOU.

[loud applause] (The Leaky Cauldron)

Rowling is applauded for the sensitivity and humour with which she answers this question so as to save the child from embarrassment. She is working within the same pressures when asked whether “Dumbledore, who believe[s] in the prevailing power of

love, ever fall[s] in love himself?” (The Leaky Cauldron) What would have been said of Rowling had she left such a question unanswered? Her choices are to be judged cold, withholding, and ungrateful to the audience who has made her what she is, and to have “transgressed on the territory of the fan” (Ingleton 186).

The uproar over this specific extra-textual conversation is, as Ingleton and Szabó Gendler outline in their respective articles, multi-faceted. Indignation over Rowling’s refusal to relinquish control over her novels to her readers and die her authorial death are mingled variously with homophobia and a sense that the comment constitutes a “casual appropriation of queerness” (Szabó Gendler par. 3; Ingleton 186). I have no place in contesting this final assertion, and do not want to suggest that Rowling’s comments should be above criticism. I protest only criticism that denigrates the mother by proxy of the author.

The parental, nurturing nature of Dumbledore’s role in Harry’s life, and by extension the lives of Rowling’s young readers, might make it difficult to think of him as a sexual being. Szabó Gendler writes

One way that a reader might argue against the suggestion that Dumbledore is gay would be to contend that *Harry Potter* belongs to a genre of children’s stories in which issues of adult sexuality do not arise. On this sort of account, it simply isn’t faithful to the story to say that Dumbledore is gay – not because he’s straight or even asexual, but because it doesn’t make sense to speak about his sexuality at all.

But given that Hagrid and Madame Maxine have a book-length flirtation, and that Snape’s hatred of Harry is partly explained by his unrequited love for Lily, this seems like a difficult line to take. Indeed, one might even counter that facts about genre *help* the case that Dumbledore is gay. For the *Harry Potter* books *do* belong to a genre of young adult fiction in which adults’ personal needs and desires are largely invisible to the youthful protagonists. And this

would help explain why no mention of Dumbledore's sexuality is made in the text, despite its being an important fact about the larger imaginary world.

But I suspect that for Rowling to have answered that Dumbledore had been married to a woman would have been considered somehow *less* extra-textual, and would prove less injurious a transgression on 'the territory of the fan,' than for her to say what she did. It would not be as jarring to heteronormative conceptions of anti-intentionalist fans' wider reality into which the Harry Potter novels are fitted.

When asked the same question of Neville Longbottom, Rowling answered that he went on to marry fellow Hogwarts student Hannah Abbot (Hufflepuff), and that the couple would run the Leaky Cauldron and live (and presumably sleep) together above the pub. This extra-textual wedding did not attract the same interest as Rowling's speculations about Dumbledore's sexuality. Of course, those whose objections to Dumbledore's gayness were rooted in homophobia will not object to this comment on the same grounds, but this does not fully account for the comparative lack of interest in Neville and Hannah's relationship. The idea of the shy, cherubic schoolmates getting married and taking their humble place in the wizarding world is excused its extratextualism because it is "cute." The heteronormativity of this marriage allows it to be processed as the natural conclusion to the trajectory onto which Rowling set these characters. The impulse to suppress her extra-textual speech is inconsistent and is mirrored by a contradictory pressure to speak at certain times and in certain ways—that is, to be a living, heteronormative mother figure.

1.3: Explain Your Self

This set of contrary imperatives manifests itself as well in the ways in which women writers are themselves presented as contradictions that must be explained, so that they can be understood as anomalies, and exceptions that prove a rule. This is most clearly articulated in Lord Dillon's comment to Mary Shelley, "your writing and your manners are not in accordance...I should have thought of you—if I had only read you—that you were a sort of...Sybil, outpouringly enthusiastic...but you are cool, quiet, and feminine to the last degree. Explain this to me" (qtd in Gilbert and Gubar 243).

For as many readers and critics who dismiss the author and wish to birth themselves through interaction with an orphaned and independent text, there are those who cannot look away from the fact of the woman author. Some of this attention will of course come from aspiring female writers looking for models upon which to understand their own writing selves, since "we look back through our mothers, if we are women" (Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, qtd by Gilbert and Gubar 243). In this study, I am more interested in the morbid fascination which this "contradiction" inspires, and which elicits demands for edifying speech that resolves the perceived contradiction.

A similar discord to that which Dillon perceived between Shelley's person and writing has also been noted in Rice. In 1990, Susan Ferraro of the *New York Times* described her as

A study in contrasts, the 49-year-old writer creates fictional monsters who are ghastly night creatures, but she is afraid of the dark. She writes reams of steamy, erotic prose, but when the barest hint of her own cleavage shows, she hastily closes the front of the matronly shirtwaists she wears. She radiates vulnerability. Her long, black hair trails behind her, Morticia-style, and she peers at the world from beneath heavy, schoolgirl bangs. Her voice is low and seductive, her smile

elfin, her glance smart and guarded, her face bare except for a smudge of eyeshadow. Asked to speak at the PEN/Faulkner dinner in Washington this year, she declined. "I'm afraid of other writers who might say something awful to me," she says (Ferraro).

The article presumes readers' desire for this sort of inventory of the writer's body, with an emphasis on the feminine: breasts, hair, makeup, and 'matronly' clothing.

The blatantly sexist implication that "woman writer" is a contradiction of terms that underlies Ferraro's charmed disbelief is barely covered with the disingenuous expression of delight that this specific woman could write novels that contain 'ghastly night creatures' or BDSM pornography. But just as Dillon deemed Shelley 'feminine in the last degree,' the 'contradictions' to which Ferraro points confirm rather than complicate her femaleness. Rice is seductive and shy, clean and smudged, modest and unabashedly sexual. Her hair alone speaks at once of frank sexuality and virginal pubescence. She is mother, matron, and crone; virgin and whore. She is not allowed to be something complex in between the reductive extremes by which women have been defined, and so is said to be somehow both—or all—at once, a magical and unique creature and an exception that proves a rule without showing a path forward for others to understand and define themselves as complex, real human beings.

And this determination informs Ferraro's interpretation of everything Rice does. There is not necessarily any contradiction between writing pornography and covering one's cleavage. There are many reasons for which one might do the latter, but it is interpreted as specifically *feminine* modesty because that trait would be surprising in someone who writes 'reams of steamy, erotic prose.' Importantly, an invitation to speak

is declined not because of an unwillingness to speak—this is clearly not the case, as Rice consents to this and plenty of other interviews, and maintains today a vociferous and politically engaged online presence—but because of a rational dread of others’ impositions.

Women writers—especially those who, like Shelley and Rice, impress (or intimidate) readers with their work’s defiance of patriarchal expectations for women—are in a double-bind. While anti-intentionalist critics and readers deny the relevance of the author’s biography and explanations of her writing process, others either demand that she account for herself by explaining how she can be both a woman and an author of *such* books (which is really a way of asking how she can be both a woman and an author) or else present her work and her self as harmlessly irreconcilable, as Ferraro does. The only way to disrupt this assumption of irreconcilability is by attempting to explain how one’s work and experience inform one another. Like in so many vampire stories in which a human being is near death and can only choose human death or eternal damnation, these women can choose only death or undeath, silence or contentious—at once reviled and fetishized—speech.

When Rice cites herself, her husband, and their daughter Michelle, who died of leukemia in 1972 at five years old, as models for her respective *Interview* characters Louis, Lestat, and Claudia, she disrupts the perception that her life and her books stand in charmingly befuddling contrast. She reads herself as Louis in *Interview* when he loses the child he has mothered, and as Lestat in *The Vampire Lestat* in the scene when he saves his dying mother by offering her vampirism (Das). Rice lost her own mother to

alcoholism at the age of fifteen, and describes writing this scene as a fantasy of having been able to save her (Ferraro). Rice's explicit foregrounding of the autobiographical nature of these characters affirms women's reading of themselves and their experiences into Rice's novels. The longstanding expectation that women readers' will sympathize with male characters and voices which Fetterley terms our "immasclation" is rendered explicit through its inversion (xx), as Louis changes to accommodate women readers' experiences¹.

1.4: Reappropriating the Childbirth Metaphor

In "Creativity and the Childbirth Metaphor," Susan Stanford Friedman examines the ways in which metaphors of childbirth have been used historically to uphold a patriarchal, heteronormative reality. Men's application of the language of childbirth to their own artistic creations has worked to reinforce dichotomic definitions of gender with its implication that creativity is the male counterpart to female procreativity (Friedman). A man's application of metaphors of biological birth, a female experience from which cisgender men are absolutely excluded, implies creativity as a realm from which women are parallelly excluded. Friedman writes that

The historical separation evoked by the childbirth metaphor is so entangled with the language of creation and procreation that the metaphor's very words establish their own linguistic reverberations. Words about the production of babies and books abound with puns, common etymologies, and echoing sounds that simultaneously yoke and separate creativity and procreativity... Underlying these words is the familiar dualism of mind and body, a key component of Western patriarchal ideology. Creation is the act of the mind that brings something new into existence. Procreation is the act of the body that reproduces the species. A

¹ Roberts (1997), Fetterley (1978), Meagher (1996).

man conceives an idea in his brain, while a woman conceives a baby in her womb, a difference highlighted by the postindustrial designation of the public sphere as man's domain and the private sphere as woman's place (52).

For women to describe their creative endeavors in terms of childbirth poses a threat to male artists, because it elides two activities, the distance between which they measure their understanding of the difference between the dichotomized sexes. As Erica Jong writes, “Men have the feeling that women can create life in their bodies, therefore, how dare they create art?” (qtd by Friedman 70).

The metaphor has been taken up differently by women of diverse experience (or lack therefore) with childbirth and mothering. French author Amelie Nothomb has no interest in giving birth or having children, and describes her writing process in terms of pregnancy and birth (*Tout le Monde en Parle*). As a response to her traditional Catholic family's expectations that women give birth and care for their children, the equation of books with babies might work to defy the devaluation of her work and life choices. In response to the sentiment that books are no replacement for children in a woman's life, a writer can respond that *she* experiences satisfaction and pride in writing not only equal in degree, but similar or identical in kind to that which she might experience as a mother of human children.

And women who cannot or do not have children still live in a world in which women are pressured and expected to do so. And so while it is certainly important for men to experiment with the nonspeaking and patient listening that women have always had to practice, it is unoriginal and unfeminist to urge women authors to remain silent outside of the texts legitimized by publication and critical reception. I am less interested

in debating or determining the necessity of the authorial death than in protesting the use of the metaphor of childbirth to remind writers that their duty to their work is the same as that of mothers to their children: to submit to the undeath that is the total denial of self.²

The reappropriation of the childbirth metaphor by women who are both mothers and writers suggests not only that a person can create children and art in the same lifetime, but that each activity can be strengthened and informed by the other. Friedman continues,

The different meaning of the female childbirth metaphor results from the way the reader alters the interaction of incongruity and congruity in a woman's analogy. The metaphor's literal falsehood remains the same as it does in a male comparison. Babies are never books. But the reader's awareness that the metaphor features a woman changes how the biological and historical resonances work. First, the reader knows that the author has the biological capacity men lack to birth both books and babies. Second, the reader recognizes that the author's analogy defies the cultural prescription of separated creativities. The metaphor's historical resonance does not emphasize the division of creativity and procreativity, as it does in a male text. Rather, it makes the reader aware that the woman's reclamation of the pregnant Word is itself a transcendence of historical prescription... (58)

Friedman's article provides a comprehensive overview of the ways in which the language of childbirth—and women's presumed capacity to give birth—has been the basis for arguments for both women's natural inclusion in and exclusion from considerations as artists. While I share the concerns of those who consider women's embrace of this language to be "biologically deterministic, essentialist, and regressive" (Friedman 50), this position ignores the way that this discourse *can* provide women who are mothers and writers with a stable foundation upon which to continue to understand themselves as

² Gieve (1987).

writers when they become mothers, and as they raise their children. The devaluation of this reappropriation as antifeminist threatens the effectiveness of the metaphor for women it might otherwise empower.

Given that there is an existing body of thought that establishes childbirth as that event or capability which excludes women from the creative realm, it is useful to maintain awareness of its obvious potential to work as a defence for men's exclusion from the same—even or especially if it is done playfully—because it emphasizes the absurdity of the original claim. The suggestion that the procreative body is a natural container of a creative mind demonstrates the manipulability of biologically reductive beliefs. And as so often, these discussions are helpful for the ways in which they show us what is possible, rather than what is natural or inevitable. They set a precedent for understanding menstruation, pregnancy, and motherhood as potential bolsters rather than impediments to creativity. Given the versatility of the childbirth metaphor, it is unproductive to debate its truthfulness, and better to establish the non-prescriptive opportunities it offers women, which also serve to deflate it as a weapon to be used against us.

1.5: Over-Eagerness for the Death of Women Author

Sharon Meagher acknowledges the potential of Barthes' theory as a means of feminist empowerment, since the authorial deaths of canon authors can prevent their interference in feminist interpretations of their texts. She goes on to say however, that “feminists have articulated a suspicion of the call for the death of the author, as it seems

to arise just at a point when women are becoming authors” (51). While agreeing with Françoise Lionett’s tracing the roots of Lionett’s own “noncoercive feminist practice of reading” in the methods articulated by Barthes in *The Pleasures of the Text*, Meagher argues that the male critic’s proposal of a “feminine” reading practice will always have different implications for male readers than for female. Meagher quotes Lionett, who writes

I try never to impose a theoretical grid on the text This technique might be labelled a noncoercive feminist practice of reading, since it allows text and reader to enter a dialogue that does not follow the usual rules of linear, agonistic, and patriarchal discourses. To read noncoercively is to allow myself to be interwoven with the discursive strands of the text, to engage in a form of intercourse wherein I take my interpretive cues from the patterns that emerge as a result of this encounter - in other words, it is to enjoy an erotics of reading somewhat similar to Barthes's in *The Pleasure of the Text* (28, qtd by Meagher 54).

In response, Meagher asks “Whom is Barthes addressing? To whom does he issue his call to read like women? For whom might Barthes's call be subversive? For men. It is only a choice to read like a woman if it is what you are actually not” (55).

Similarly, it is different to ask a man to go silent like a woman dying in childbirth than to ask a woman to do the same. The metaphor is only differently hostile to women depending on their experience of childbirth, or lack thereof, and I would argue that it is hostile to all women, both those who are mothers and those who are not. I seriously doubt that the men who so fear their dependence on women that they fantasize of the death of the mother every time they close a book will accept as honorary men those women writers who do not physically give birth.

Barthes' indulgence in fantasies of matricide in explicating the responsibilities of the author gestures towards the extensiveness and adaptability of the popular vocabulary for criticizing mothers. Writers who fail to "let go" of their literary progeny, who continue to assert supreme knowledge of it by right of their role in its creation, can be expected to be ridiculed through comparisons with "bad mothers" as Rowling has been. As suggested by Friedman's account of the differing connotations surrounding and opportunities provided by the childbirth metaphor for male and female authors (and for female authors of different lived experiences), this form of criticism will resonate with different connotations when applied to diverse authors.

When a woman who is both a mother and a writer is criticized in these terms, the implication is that motherhood spoils her abilities as a writer. To criticize a male writer by suggesting that his attitude towards his work is like that of an overly-attached mother towards her children is humiliating because women are understood as less valuable than men under patriarchy, and motherhood as the fulfillment of a woman's gendered potential. Always, the implied "good mother/woman" is one who gives birth in silence and dies without doing anything that will overshadow her child's self-concept.

1.6: Speaking Through the Daughter(-Book)

In the closing pages of *The Female Man*, Joanna Russ asserts herself explicitly and ironically as the mother of her novel, which she addresses in the second-person:

Go, little book, trot through Texas and Vermont and Alaska and Maryland and Washington and Florida and Canada and England and France; bob a curtsey at the shrines of Friedan, Millet, Greer, Firestone, and all the rest; behave yourself in people's living rooms, neither looking ostentatious on the coffee table nor failing

to persuade due to the dullness of your style; knock at the Christmas garland on my husband's door in New York City and tell him that I loved him truly and love him still (despite what anybody may think); and take your place bravely on the bookracks of bus terminals and drugstores. Do not scream when you are ignored for that will alarm people, and do not fume when you are heisted by people who will not pay, rather rejoice that you have become so popular. Live merrily, little daughter-book, *even if I can't* and we can't; recite yourself to all who will listen; stay hopeful and wise. Wash your face and take your place in the library of congress, for all books end up there eventually, both little and big. Do not complain when at last you become quaint and old-fashioned, when you grow as outworn as the crinolines of a generation ago and are classed with *Spicy Western Stories*, *Elsie Dinsmore*, and the *Son of the Sheik*; do not mutter angrily to yourself when young persons read you to hrooch and hrch and guffaw, wondering what in the dickens you were all about. Do not get glum when you are no longer understood, little book. Do not curse your fate. Do not reach up from readers' laps and punch the readers' noses.

Rejoice, little book!

For on that day, we will be free (213-14, emphasis mine).

By positioning her instructions to and expression of her hopes for her 'daughter-book' as a conversation overheard by the reader between it and its mother-author—and which is embedded in the text itself—Russ conspicuously avoids the accusation that she is engaging in extra-textual commentary. She links the daughter's powers of life and speech, and asks that she live and speak for both of them, pointing to a future freedom in which women's voices are not silenced. Because this expression of authorial-parental sentiment is contained within the book itself, Russ plants her voice in her fiction while remaining mischievously beyond the reach of those who would reproach her for speaking from beyond the authorial grave.

Male writers' use of the childbirth metaphor is a product of patriarchal assumptions of women's disposability, as it ignores the work of care and socialization required to *make* a child that has been performed overwhelmingly by women. The silence

that falls when a woman dies in childbirth makes little sense as a model for the creation of a properly independent text, because there has always been a period of time when it is useful to both the child and community that a mother speaks for and defines her child almost entirely in relation to herself. Barthes' insistence upon using the metaphor despite this inaccuracy demands closer attention: why is the mother invoked only to be silenced by death? The anxiety over female speech that produces this violently misogynistic image, and that makes woman the subject that springs to mind when one wishes to express an extreme necessity for silence, participates in a long history of the suppression and derision towards women's speech.

Chapter II

2.1: Shelley to Rice: From Obviation to Creation of the Mother

Margaret Homans describes Victor Frankenstein's endeavors in terms of "his need to obviate the mother" (106)³. She writes that "[t]here are many mothers [and replacement mothers] in the Frankenstein circle, and all die notable deaths," and suggests that this experience with the unreliability of mothers motivates Victor to create a future in which he is no longer dependent upon them (101). He responds, in other words, by "achiev[ing] with great difficulty what heterosexual couples do easily" with the creation of a man-made man—the next best thing to a self-made one (101). Homans has refined the popular interpretation of *Frankenstein* as a "birth myth" in which Shelley expresses her anxiety about childbirth and motherhood (Moers 92). She argues that "[*Frankenstein*] criticizes, not childbirth itself, but the male horror of independent embodiment" (114).

It is in part *Interview*'s apparent obviation of the mother with which Doane and Hodges take issue in "Undoing Feminism." They describe the male vampires' creation in Rice's work—if not their subsequent parenting activities—in similar terms of appropriation in which Homans discusses Victor's project. They write that Louis and Lestat "get to be mothers,"⁴ the wording of which suggests that to be a mother is a privilege, or at least becomes one once divorced from the disadvantages of femaleness (425). But if Victor seeks in his solitary project of reanimation to circumvent the role of

³ Mellor also discusses this in her chapter "Usurping the Female" of her *Mary Shelley: Her Life, Her Fiction, Her Monsters* (1988).

⁴ Worley (1989) attributes the sexual impotence of many literary male vampires, including Rice's Louis and Lestat, to their status as consuming mothers, who ingest blood instead of absorbing semen.

women in creation, Lestat seeks to avoid the sole responsibility for child-making that is the prerogative of vampires of any sex. To paraphrase Homans' statement on Victor, Lestat contrives with some difficulty to implicate Louis in what he could easily have achieved alone.

In this chapter, I will argue that Rice's novel responds to Shelley's not by simply mirroring its obviation of the mother, but by exploring the createdness—and therefore unnaturalness—of the social definition of “mother”.⁵ Whereas *Frankenstein* depicts the direct product of male monogenesis as monstrous, *Interview* focuses on the transformative effects of unwilling participation in a heteronormative creation of a child.

Though Louis feels confident that he is a superior vampire to Lestat because his sensitivity of spirit allows him to properly appreciate the heightened senses and abilities of vampirism, Lestat is able to maintain power over him because he is the older and therefore physically stronger vampire, and has knowledge of the vampire world that he can withhold from, and use against, Louis. This power dynamic mirrors the creation of humans in the Christian creation myth, in which God creates Adam first, and then makes Eve out of her husband's rib. Lestat makes Louis vampire with his own blood, so that he “plays God” and Adam as well, appointing himself Louis' master because he can and he wants to, emphasizing the arbitrary nature of God's supposed assignment of power over women to men.

⁵ In “Feminist Perspectives on Mothering and Peace,” Forcey writes that “[m]othering is a socially constructed set of activities and relationships involved in nurturing and caring for people” (357).

It is in response to the anxiety about having been physically and socially made by women that men create mothers. That is, they define what it means to be a mother and then impose and consistently reinforce that definition so that it can maintain its integrity as an object of cathartic ridicule. In Rice's novel, Lestat forces Louis into the role of "mother," and the effect is not to argue simply that men can mother, or be mothers, but that the socially created role of "mother" that has been historically and arbitrarily foisted upon women is one designed to be constrictive and impossible to fulfill to men's satisfaction. It is fitting therefore that Lestat should obtain consent under extreme duress before performing the sex act that will make Louis vampire, and does not ask his permission at all before performing the one that will make him a parent.

When first approached by Lestat, Louis is grieving the death of his brother Paul, for which he feels responsible. He recalls his depression during this period, saying "I drank all the time and was at home as little as possible. I lived like a man who wanted to die but who had no courage to do it himself. I walked back streets and alleys alone... I backed out of two duels more from apathy than cowardice and truly wished to be murdered" (10). He says that his "invitation was open to sailors, thieves, maniacs, anyone," and as a man, he expects to be robbed and/or murdered in 'back streets and alleys' rather than raped, as a woman could expect (10).

In writing that Rice's characters are "predatory men who also willingly adopt a feminized passivity" as one method by which they "[absorb and contain] femininity," Doane and Hodges blame Louis for the physical and emotional abuse he experiences (427). Louis has not been conditioned to understand himself as a potential target for

sexual assault, and so when he is subjected to the vampire's blood-rape, it is not only highly problematic, but nonsensical to suggest that he is "asking for it." His stated desire to be murdered can have nothing to do with absorbing femininity because—in keeping with his socialization—Louis believes that even as he makes himself vulnerable to attack, his maleness protects him from rape. As a wealthy man, he assumes that when absolutely vulnerable, he will be robbed of his money and perhaps his life, while the possessions understood to be of greatest value to a woman—and therefore at greatest risk of theft—are virginity and chastity. Lestat's initial attack is only the first in a series of traditionally feminine positions that he imposes upon Louis.

Rice's screenplay for Neil Jordan's 1994 film adaptation of her novel condenses Louis' transformation scene while maintaining the sense of Louis' disempowerment and victimization. Lestat appears with a vampire's disarming suddenness, asks Louis if he has "said goodbye to the light," falls on him with the same unseen movement and proceeds to drain his blood. Only then does he ask Louis' permission to make him a vampire, telling him "If I leave you here, you will die. Or we could be young, always, my friend... will you come with me, or no?" to which an incapacitated Louis can barely grunt in the affirmative. Lestat obtains Louis' consent to perform the intimate act that will bind the two forever only after narrowing his choices to death and the literal and emotional living death that is domestic partnership with him.

2.2: The Myth of My Own Will

Doane and Hodges argue that Rice's *Vampire Chronicles* resorts to the problematic feminist strategy of retreat to the pre-oedipal and its celebration of the

feminine through a regressive, essentializing celebration of the maternal. They posit Claudia's rage as the product of being frozen by her male-initiated vampiric rebirth in the oedipal stage of development, when "she is five years old and presumably just ready for female subjectivity, ready to turn away from the mother toward the father who becomes all things, father and mother" (424). They compare the situation of Lestat, Louis, and Claudia to that depicted in the 1987 comedy *Three Men and a Baby*, as explicated by Tanya Modleski in the chapter of her *Feminist Without Women*, "Three Men and Baby M." They summarize Modleski's assessment by writing that the film depicts a world in which "men have taken feminists [sic] demands to heart—they now want to be involved in nurturing—while also constructing a world in which women are more marginal than ever" (endnote 4).

The difference between the film and Rice's novel, Doane and Hodges suggest, is that while in the film, "the substitution of an eroticized infant girl for a mature woman seems a pleasant release for the male characters, Rice's novel protests this cozy arrangement" (425). Though Claudia dies in her attempt to upend patriarchy, they suggest, "the precariousness of male bonds at the end of the novel suggests that patriarchy has been nonetheless weakened" (423). This assessment ignores the possibility that, in attempting to kill Lestat and escape with Louis, Claudia acknowledges Lestat as the creator and oppressor of Louis as well herself.

On the night that Claudia is made vampire, Lestat clearly states his understanding of his planned creation as an appropriation of the maternal, and says to Louis "I want a child tonight. I am like a mother. . . I want a child" (79). Louis does not immediately

understand the meaning of this statement. To want a child to eat or to feed with your own body is the same sensation to the pre-oedipal state—the permanent regression to which Doane and Hodges argue the vampiric transformation facilitates—since this stage represents the period before which a child can differentiate between themselves and their mother (429). This suggestion is supported, as they point out, in the two installments of the *Vampire Chronicles* that follow *Interview*, in “the discovery and valorization of an archaic mother” and “increased emphasis on the vampire's attachment to preoedipal pleasures of sucking, biting, and symbiosis” (434).

I am concerned by Doane and Hodges' dismissal of the ways in which Louis is coerced into the mothering role through the mechanisms made available by vampirism, because they so closely and clearly mirror the mechanisms by which human women are coerced into the same. Rice's conception of vampire nature and reproduction allow for the pressures of family and motherhood to be examined from startling new angles which Freudian definitions must stretch to accommodate. Though Louis begins the novel as a wealthy white man, his social position changes drastically with his rebirth and entry into Lestat's family. His maleness, race, and age begin to lose value after this change, since a female, Black, underage (as demonstrated with Claudia) or elderly person gains unprecedented powers of self-defence and autonomy of movement upon being made vampire.

Doane and Hodges write that

The oedipal story is a narrative that encourages fantasies of male monogenesis because fathers, aligned as they are with the symbolic, produce subjects, if not

babies... When the male vampire couple, Lestat and Louis, 'create' Claudia she is five years old and presumably just ready for female subjectivity, ready to turn away from the mother toward the father who becomes all things, father and mother. Claudia, newly made a vampire, protests to the men, "I'm not your daughter . . . I'm my mamma's daughter," then is told, "No, dear, not anymore." The passage continues: "[Lestat] glanced at the window, and then he shut the bedroom door behind us and turned the key in the lock. 'You're our daughter, Louis's daughter and my daughter, do you see? Now, whom should you sleep with? Louis or me?'" (95). This perfect staging of the oedipal moment uncovers not the girl's desire for the father so much as the father's desire for the girl child, the infantilized woman who is a perfectly obedient and dependent object of desire (424).

Before this 'perfect staging' can occur, however, Lestat feeds Claudia from his own body, before weaning her from his own vampire blood to human blood. It is not so much that Claudia turns from mother to father, but that Lestat announces his intention to become a mother and transforms her in accordance with this stated intention before transforming *himself* back to father. His eagerness to do so immediately after changing Claudia may be spurred by his experience of feeding her from his own body as a mother would:

He was trying now to push her off, and she wouldn't let go. With her fingers locked around his fingers and arm she held the wrist to her mouth, a growl coming out of her. 'Stop, stop!' he said to her. He was clearly in pain. He pulled back from her and held her shoulders with both hands. She tried desperately to reach his wrist with her teeth, but she couldn't; and then she looked at him with the most innocent astonishment. He stood back, his hand out lest she move (82).

Lestat's patriarchal privilege is evidenced in the way he is free to experiment with a mothering posture, without any of the permanent obligations of the role that are normally ascribed to women. When he discovers that the newborn vampire Claudia poses a threat to his physical safety when he assumes a traditional mothering role towards her by feeding her from his body—and therefore to his sense of himself as powerful and autonomous—he abruptly puts an end to his experiment.

And so I would counter Doane and Hodges claim that Claudia graduates from the pre-oedipal stage to the oedipal, and maintain that the only transformation *she* undergoes in this scene is the vampiric one. She is no longer ‘[her] mamma’s daughter,’ but she is provided with a new mamma in Louis, towards whom she is immediately directed for the fulfillment of her emotional needs as soon as Lestat tires of, or perhaps recoils from, his experiment with motherhood. He turns Claudia to Louis and asks her “Now, whom should you sleep with? Louis or me?...Perhaps you should sleep with Louis. After all, when I’m tired . . . I’m not so kind” (84).

It is not Claudia who has changed from one moment to the next, but Lestat, who is first a self-proclaimed mother, filling the role as expected by telling his foundling that she must drink her medicine to get well, and giving of his own body for the nourishment and strengthening of the child until she nearly devours him. The blood he feeds Claudia to induce rebirth is afterwards refigured from mother’s milk to father’s semen with which he passes his nature to his child undiluted by Louis’ input although the latter has been viscerally involved in the rebirth.⁶ And believing that he has made a child in his image, imbued with his nature, Lestat passes on care of her to Louis, sending them both to the snug confines of Louis’ coffin.

Lestat’s primary motivation for making Claudia a vampire is ostensibly to keep Louis with him. The type of mother he ‘feels like’—or in any case performs on the night of Claudia’s transformation—is one probably common to the minds of paranoid

⁶ Craft (1984) discusses the precedence set for an understanding of the mutable signification of blood in vampire stories in *Dracula*.

misogynists, as he intentionally gets himself with child in order to keep Louis from leaving him. But he also depends upon his knowledge of Louis' difference from himself in making his plans to use Claudia as a tool for manipulation in their relationship. And so the two vampires' experience of parenthood is different in kind, and not merely degree as suggested in Doane and Hodges' statements that, while they both 'get to be mothers,' Louis is "the male vampire who is the most maternal" (425). I do not mean to suggest that gay relationships cannot be abusive, or that same-sex relationships should be understood through a heteronormative model. It is Lestat's recourse to and manipulation of Louis' reproductive capacities that evoke specifically heteronormative mechanisms of power.

2.3: Reimagining Reproduction

John Allen Stevenson observes that critics' have had difficulty in defining the relationship between Dracula and the vampire women who live with him, he writes

The problem arises in part because the text does not explicitly define the women's relation to Dracula—who are they? Both [Christopher] Craft and Maurice Richardson call them Dracula's "daughters" (110, 427); Carol Frye terms them "wives" (21); Leonard Wolf the count's "beautiful brides" (249); and C. F. Bentley says that "they are either Dracula's daughters or his sisters" but insists that an "incestuous" relation existed between them in the past (29). The difficulty here is a false either/or: these women must either be kin or be wives. What these readers ignore is the possibility that Dracula's relation to these women has, quite simply, changed, that they have occupied both roles—not simultaneously, as in incest, but sequentially, because of the way vampire reproduction works (143).

The human and vampire engage in a reproductive sex act to make the former the child of the latter, so that they are lovers for a moment, and parent and child ever after. Lestat takes advantage of this mutability of roles in order to play the role of life-giving mother, as I have discussed, for the single evening that it suits him before re-asserting his power

as a father to both Louis and Claudia. That this makes him both co-parents to Claudia with Louis and Louis' father is not incestuous,⁷ but serves rather to represent the discomfort that women can experience as their power over their children has worked to echo their husband's power over both them and their children. This is one mechanism by which women are infantilized under within a patriarchal power structure.

In "Beyond Mothers and Fathers," Barbara Katz Rothman outlines the ways in which cultural understandings of the sexes' respective contributions to making a child have shifted variously to accommodate the maintenance of and resistance to power structures. She explains that while women were once thought of as incubators in which men's "seeds" grow, equality feminists' have used the discovery of the ovum to argue for the similarity of men and women's role in reproduction (142-3). She suggests that this has worked not to validate motherhood, but to allow women to attain fatherhood, which after all had been defined by the contribution of a "seed". Rothman writes that "instead of a flower pot, the woman is seen as an equal contributor of seed—and the baby might just as well have grown in the backyard" (153). She suggests that this is problematic because "now we have women, right along with men, saying that what makes a child one's own is the seed, the genetic tie, the blood. And the blood they mean is not the real blood of pregnancy and birth, not the blood of the pulsing cord, the bloody show, the blood of birth, but the metaphorical blood of the genetic tie" (144). This struggle over the meaning

⁷ Nina Auerbach writes that "[i]t is a Freudian cliché, and a lazy one, to assert that all horror literature is a disguised reenactment of a universal fear of incest" (194).

of body and blood, and the arbitrariness of those definitions, is rendered legible in Rice's novel as it is projected onto male bodies and vampire families.

And so while Doane and Hodges seek to problematize the impulse towards a simplistic, neoliberal levelling of gender differences suggested by the common asexuality and capacity for monogenesis shared by Rice's male and female vampires, this leads them to ignore the ways in which *Interview* depicts and effectively problematizes the created-ness of the gender binary. Louis' maleness allows Rice to dramatize male constructions and impositions of femininity, and to emphasize that the position of 'feminized passivity' is a product of cultural conditioning and personal manipulation rather than biology. Louis himself demonstrates an understanding of the performativity of gender when he describes his sister's response to their brother's death, saying "she became an hysteric. She wasn't really an hysteric. She simply thought she ought to react that way, so she did" (10).

While Louis may have had this insight while he and his sister were both alive and negotiating the competing demands of their community and their personal grief, it seems more likely that he would arrive at it only later, after his transformation to vampire had both sharpened his every perception and made him subject to the imposition of a restrictive gender role—specifically, a disempowering male-constructed and -imposed femininity. But even during his human life, when his sex determined his role within his family and gave him power over his mother and sister after the death of his father, the roots of his identification with individual women are clearly visible. Recalling his former

life with his human family, composed of himself, his mother, brother, and sister, Louis contrasts his brother's otherworldliness against the rest of the family:

And the harpsichord; that was lovely. My sister used to play it. On summer evenings, she would sit at the keys with her back to the open French windows. And I can still remember that thin, rapid music and the vision of the swamp rising beyond her, the moss-hung cypresses floating against the sky. And there were the sounds of the swamp, a chorus of creatures, the cry of the birds. I think we loved it. It made the rosewood furniture all the more precious, the music more delicate and desirable. Even when the wisteria tore the shutters off the attic windows and worked its tendrils right into the whitewashed brick in less than a year... Yes, we loved it. All except my brother (5-6).

Louis' identification with the women in his own family is unaffected and unapologetic.

Heading the family in the place of his dead father, his failure to sympathize with his brother offers him his first taste of parental guilt.

The shame and regret he feels for the way he treated his teenaged brother does not prevent him from making similar mistakes with Claudia, suggesting that he may not see the similarities in his relationships with each of them. As long as they complement his sense of self with their own performances of selfhood, he is generous with his wealth, particularly in the furnishing of the spaces that encourage the cultivation of those convenient and docile selves. His brother initially displays gratitude for the oratory, maintaining it and putting it to proper use. Parallely, Claudia at first finds the splendor in which Lestat demands the family live at Louis' expense "wondrous, with the quiet awe of an unspoiled child, and marveled when Lestat hired a painter to make the walls of her room a magical forest of unicorns and golden birds and laden fruit trees over sparkling streams" (88). The tragedy of both stories is that when the young people "grow out of"

these spaces and require that Louis change his conception of them to accommodate their growth, he fails to do so.

Just as Louis regrets speaking harshly to his brother in the moments before his death, he realizes too late the indignities he has visited upon Claudia by continuing to handle her body as though she were a child, and equates his behaviour towards her to that of Lestat, of whom he has clearly disapproved. He says “Lestat played with her as if she were a magnificent doll, and I played with her as if she were a magnificent doll” (89). Lestat’s and Louis’ young male bodies are also preserved by vampirism. Louis says that “it was [Claudia’s] pleading that forced me to give up my rusty black for dandy jackets and silk ties and soft gray coats and gloves and black capes” and that “[Lestat] loved the great figure we cut” (89).

Of course, to be contained forever in the body of a twenty-five-year-old white man carries with it immense privilege which stands in direct contrast to the disempowerment experienced by Claudia, trapped in the body—and therefore largely confined to the social opportunities and expectations—of a five-year-old girl. And it is not to deny this disparity in power and privilege that I want to suggest that Louis, too, is a magnificent doll, the styling of whom Claudia enjoys and whose body is enjoyed by both Claudia and Lestat. Lestat’s body alone seems to go uncaressed and unpossessed.

Criscillia Benford describes the inassimilable as “an element (e.g., a character, event, narrative technique) that calls attention to a text's constructedness by simultaneously activating two or more competing, yet equally plausible, sense-making

frames” (325). She distinguishes the inassimilable from “the garden-path phenomenon”, in which the reader is confronted with something in a story which makes it necessary for them to “engage in ‘an act of reanalysis’” of all which precedes it (Jahn, qtd by Benford 334). Unlike the garden path, which begins with one truth that will change radically to another truth, the inassimilable offers multiple legitimate but incompatible definitions of the truth.

She offers the Necker Cube as a metaphor for the possibility for the multiple truths and shifting perspectives allowed by the inassimilable:

Depending on how viewers process the lines that constitute it, a Necker Cube can appear to be a wire frame cube, a solid brick, or a solid box with one open side (Jahn, "Frames" 457-59). And, just as decisions (deliberately made or not) about how to process the lines that constitute a Necker Cube affect how it looks, so one's response to the inassimilable affects how one "sees" the text as a whole (335).

Benford examines the inassimilability of the eloquence of Frankenstein’s Creature, which can be read as the “‘manly’ and spontaneous eloquence of a good person wronged...or the studied eloquence of an evil Iago or Satan figure” (337).

I propose Louis’ gendered positionality as an instance of the inassimilable. As a wealthy White man and a vampire, he has considerable freedom to move through the world as he pleases. His failures to acknowledge Claudia as his equal in maturity and intellect must be understood as a participation in patriarchal and paternalistic constructs. And in these relations are revealed the limits of vampirism as a social equalizer. A human is usually only made privy to the vampire’s secret in the moment before their death, and so vampirism remains ineffective as a tool for liberation or empowerment. For instance, a vampire woman who can easily defend herself physically from a human man’s attempted

rape does not necessarily escape the encounter unscathed. While Claudia's life is obviously endangered and eventually ended by the Paris theatre coven, her interactions with humans who naturally read her as a beautiful female human child remain fraught. When Louis sounds the depths of her knowledge of human sexuality, Claudia assures him bitterly that "men are marvelous at explanations" (188).

But Louis' body is co-opted into the making of a child he does not intend, and to whom he feels an intense emotional attachment and responsibility that stems from his involvement in her (re)birth. He is afraid of his partner and what he may do to their child—especially when she really is still a child. Despite the problematic circumstances of her birth and the subsequent responsibility having been thrust upon him, he loves his daughter. To assure her health and safety, he feigns happiness for the sake of preserving the tranquility of his home. He begins to drink human blood—that is, he begins to eat in a manner towards which he is ambivalent not for the expected moral reasons, but because the practice finalizes and reinforces with every feed his debarment from the human community.

Food rituals and taboos are integral in binding communities together, as "any food taboo, acknowledged by a particular group of people as part of its ways, aids in the cohesion of this group, helps that group stand out amongst others, assists that group to maintain its identity and creates a feeling of 'belonging'" (Meyer-Rochow). Louis makes clear to the Interviewer that his practice of abstaining from human blood during the years between his own transformation and Claudia's is an aesthetic, rather than a simple moral choice (64). His continued observance of his former community's taboo against the

consumption of literal human blood allows him to express his misgivings about his partnership with Lestat, who pressures him into conforming to his own hunting and feeding methods.

Louis' capitulation to these pressures after Claudia's rebirth constitutes a sacrifice of individuality to the cohesion of his family. The practice models proper nutrition for his child and improves his own mental and physical health so that he can be attentive to her needs while relinquishing the practice by which he has differentiated himself from his partner. And so the failure to respond consistently and appropriately to his daughter's maturation, and his relapses into expressing his love in a manner suitable to a child, in Louis can be read as either an oppressive father, who is an individual representative of the patriarchal social order, or as a mother whose relationship to his child is constricted by that order. The ambiguity of this position is an exaggeration of women's competing allegiances to their daughters and the patriarchy which offers moderate rewards to compliant women.

2.4: Vampires Who Give Birth to Themselves

While I disagree with many aspects of Doane and Hodges' positive comparison between Rice's novel and Modleski's fascinating assessment of *Three Men and a Baby*, the latter study offers other points of contrast between Rice's novel and the film that are relevant to my purposes here. While acknowledging the novel's problematic apparent and literal displacement of women in the explication of a female experience, I have argued that Louis' maleness serves to dramatize Simone de Beauvoir's statement that "one is not born a woman, but becomes one". Since Lestat insists that "vampires increase...through

slavery,” his reproduction of patriarchal oppression within his family, and his entrapment of Louis into the realm to which human women have traditionally been confined, means that heteronormative constructs are identified as mechanisms that facilitate and normalize the enslavement of women (74). The novel is therefore an allegory of womanhood under patriarchy in the way that *Three Men* is absolutely not, since the three roommates share childcare responsibilities equally—a function of their shared masculine, heterosexual maleness, which does not allow for responsibilities to be determined by gender difference.

That such equality is only possible by virtue of women’s exclusion is of course ironic and telling. The lack of a comparable pretense of equality in *Interview* is rendered highly conspicuous because vampirism offers to render gender irrelevant⁸, with the vampire’s superhuman strength and capacity for oral monogenesis regardless of gender. Rice’s reader is asked first to do what is usual, and to sympathize with Louis as a wealthy white man in eighteenth-century Louisiana, enjoying all of the unearned privilege that goes along with such a position. The story of his brother’s death is certainly one to evoke readerly sympathy, and shows Louis to be flawed but sincere. As Fetterley argues in *The Resisting Reader*, “to read the canon of what is currently considered classic American literature is...perforce to identify as male” (xii). The radical shift that occurs in Louis’ gendered positionality does not happen with the suddenness of his vampiric change, and

⁸ Doane and Hodges (1990), Wicke (1992).

so the reader is slowly acclimatized to sympathizing with the occupant of a traditionally feminine position.

Of specific interest to me is Modleski's observations of the ways in which "[*Three Men and a Baby*] becomes virtually obsessed with the fact of shit" (80). One of the film's eponymous bachelors and the biological father of its "baby" leaves for a period, during which he asks his roommates to expect a package. When the mother of his child arrives and leaves their daughter, the roommates assume idiotically that this delivery is the one Jack warned them about. Unbelievably, Jack does not think to inform the roommates that the package he is expecting is heroin, or to provide them with instructions for responding to it.

And so when a pair of men arrive asking for "the shit", the only thing that comes to mind for the roommate Michael is the reviled chore of changing the baby girl's diaper. The men express an inordinate degree of disgust and shock at the facts of literal "shit" and the baby girl's body, and resort to using a turkey baster—which, as Modleski points out, evokes women's independent reproduction by auto-insemination—to wash the place "where the poop was" without touching her anus or genitals (qtd in Modleski 77). She writes that

The equation of feces with baby...is, as we know from Freud, a common phantasy dating from childhood; the child first views the feces as a "gift" and later they "come to acquire the meaning of 'baby'—for babies, according to one of the sexual theories of children, are acquired by eating and are born through the bowels. The "cloacal theory," which is at least as old as Dante (according to a traditional mythology, the devil gives birth to babies by shitting them out), is particularly suited to facilitate the phantasy expressed so forthrightly in the film, of male usurpation of women's reproductive function (80).

Rice's vampires lose control of their bowels upon being made vampire, after which point the digestive system—significantly, along with the human reproductive system—ceases to function, and the mouth and throat are magically rerouted to fill the circulatory system. In returning to the pleasures of the oral stage, it makes sense that vampires should pass first through the anal. When Louis is first reborn, Lestat tells him “Stop looking at my buttons...Go out there into the trees. Rid yourself of all the human waste in your body, and don't fall so madly in love with the night that you lose your way” (19).

As the mundane aspects of the familiar world become fascinating through the lens of Louis' new “vampire eyes,” the conditioning of childhood to reject and revile his own feces may fall away so that it becomes distractingly fascinating to him again.

Remembering his induction into vampirism, Louis tells the Interviewer “I still despise him for it. Not because I was afraid, but because he might have drawn my attention to these changes with reverence. He might have calmed me and told me I might watch my death with the same fascination with which I had watched and felt the night” (20).

Though he concedes that it was good advice when Lestat told him to empty himself in the woods, he would presumably have rather not also been instructed not to ‘fall [madly] in love with the night.’

Lestat's instruction that Louis pay no attention to the death of his own body, and specifically not to linger over his last experience of defecation, mimics the lessons human parents impart to their children during Freud's anal stage, from which “time on, what is ‘anal’ remains the symbol of everything that is to be repudiated and excluded from life” (Lou Andreas Salomó qtd in Modleski 80-1). Experiencing human development in

reverse as he dies in order to be reborn, Louis needs to hear this instruction again as every aspect of the world, perhaps including his own feces, becomes new and fascinating to him.

Rice's vampires "shit themselves" at the moment when they leave behind a previous life and embrace a new, magical one with entirely new conceptions of reality and morality. The fact that Louis is afforded and urged to take advantage of the opportunity for privacy and euphemism to "shit himself" informs the ways in which he looks back on his transformation, and understands his new vampire self. Vampire blood—in both Louis' and Claudia's case, Lestat's blood—replaces all human materials and values, which are devalued as 'waste,' the violent expulsion by which the vampire self is born.

Louis' dissatisfaction with Lestat's parenting of him is at this point the child's irritation at having to learn to control their bowels and begin to refine their self-concept through the selective rejections of what might otherwise be pleasurable or interesting. But by so coldly ordering Louis to empty himself in private, Lestat does them both the ambiguous favour of diminishing his own claim to and responsibility over him. It is because of this that Louis can say that "Lestat was never the vampire [he is]. Not at all," at which the Interviewer observes that "[Louis] did not say this boastfully. He said it as if he would truly have had it otherwise" (20).

Louis's sense of individuality—if not independence—in relation to Lestat, the vampire parent whose blood fills him on the night of his rebirth, is made possible by the

privacy into which Lestat urges him. The momentary return to helplessness and the forgotten and suppressed sensation of soiling oneself that is Rice's figuration of the vampiric transition might work to bind two people together with ties of compassion or contempt. Given Lestat's apparent lack of the former, his urging Louis into the forest to birth himself is likely motivated by a desire to moderate the degree of servility with which Louis would afterwards behave towards him. In other words, Lestat avoids being present at Louis' rebirth because he would not be made in any way Louis' mother or caregiver, since this would invert the dyad that he intends to create.

Significantly, no mention is made of this symptom at Claudia's birth, suggesting that she is too empty of food and ideology to birth herself, and remains open to induction into Lestat's system with the imbibement of his blood. Louis is allowed the illusion of the coveted experience of independent self-creation when he completes the awkward part of his transformation in private. This rebirth by defecation is similar to that which Kristeva posits as "food loathing" (2):

"I" expel it. But since the food is not an "other" for "me," who am only in their desire, I expel *myself*, I spit *myself out*, I abject *myself* within the same motion through which "I" claim to establish *myself*. That detail, perhaps an insignificant one, but one that they ferret out, emphasize, evaluate, that trifle turns me inside out, guts sprawling; it is thus that *they* see that "I" am in the process of becoming an other at the expense of my own death, During that course in which "I" become, *I give birth to myself* amid the violence of sobs, of vomit. Mute protest of the symptom, shattering violence of a convulsion that, to be sure, is inscribed in a symbolic system, but in which, without either wanting or being able to become integrated in order to answer to it, it reacts, it abreacts. It abjects (3 last emphasis mine).

Claudia's lack of opportunity to give birth to her vampire self by way of the private expulsion of her 'human wastes' sets a precedent for her to be denied the opportunity to speak herself into being.

Doane and Hodges write that "In Claudia's case, becoming a woman does not entail physical development. (Lestat teases her about her 'lack of endowment,' and she will never be able to reproduce" (425). This is inaccurate. Due to the size of her body, she is limited to the production of vampire children. As she asks Louis unhappily "Can you picture it?...A coven of children? That is all I could provide" (179). The parallel between Claudia's situation and the historical confinement of human women's creative drives to the creation of children is obvious. But it is striking that Claudia does not mention the fact that two or three vampire children would have the combined vascular capacity to transform one adult, especially as she evokes the image of a flock of vampire children. It seems unlikely that in her sixty-five years of vampire existence, and with her sharp intellectualism and inquiring nature that this possibility would not occur to her.

It is either unthinkable to Claudia to do to even one child what was done to her, or else she laments being denied the full enjoyment of the power of monogenesis that is a vampire's birthright. Though the story of her own rebirth provides a model for the versatility of the transmission of vampirism, it is apparently not one she is eager to replicate, characterized as it is by manipulation rather than cooperation. For her to make on her own another child vampire together with whom she could create adults would both confirm Lestat's assessment that vampires reproduce through slavery and bring on her

head the resentment that she (and to a lesser, or at least different extent, Louis) feels towards Lestat.

2.5: The Monster's Quest

In her comparison of the two novels of my study, Crystal O'Leary reads the texts as depicting reversals of the "hero's quest" articulated in Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Campbell argues that the hero has no mother quest, since he is human and originates from a woman, and instead seeks his father who is understood to be the source of his character, so that to discover the father is to gain self-knowledge (O'Leary 243). He writes that "You're born from your mother...she's the one who nurses you and instructs you and brings you up to the age when you must find your father" (166 qtd by O'Leary 243). O'Leary makes the compelling argument that since both the Creature and Claudia are made by men, and can find no place in the human community, they pursue instead a reversal of the hero's quest, a "monster's quest," which is to seek refuge in the mother.

O'Leary compares the Creature's request for a mate "as deformed and horrible as [him]self" in Shelley's novel to Claudia's demand that Louis make her a vampire mate of an appropriate age and appearance to play her mother in human society in Rice's (Shelley 172). Claudia makes this request after she and Louis meet the disappointingly faddish but threatening vampires of the *Theatre des Vampires*, and observes Louis' budding relationship with their leader, Armand. Sensing her immanent abandonment, she chooses for her mate Madeleine, a dollmaker who is herself eager for a "child who can't die," after having lost her own daughter (240). While the Creature ostensibly requests a lover,

O’Leary suggests, his desire for a woman who loves and accepts him unconditionally is a quest for a mother (246). O’Leary writes that

the “hiding-place” and the mother substitute both serve as symbols of the mother archetype. With Madeleine’s “doll-maker’s craft,” she sews scaled-down evening gowns and crafts tiny furniture for Claudia, thus creating for the child vampire a tiny sanctuary in which she is able to become an “adult.” Like the creature’s hovel, the child vampire is enclosed from the outer world, existing in security and temporary happiness (247).

But Claudia’s transition to vampirism sixty-five years before she meets Madeleine has been a return to the mother on several levels—her nature is made vampiric so that she feeds like an infant again, she is presented with Louis as a mother who will provide emotional support, and she is provided with a home furnished with the safe, dark, womb-like coffin in which her new mother sleeps and snuggles with her.

When she demands that Madeleine be made vampire, after having been well-mothered for sixty-five years of vampire life, I do not think that Claudia seeks relief in burrowing further into the pre-oedipal, or relishes her need for a new mother. She rails against Louis, “Six more mortal years, seven, eight...I might have had [Madeleine’s] shape!...I might have known what it was to walk at your side. Monsters! To give me immortality in this hopeless guise, this helpless form!” (235) Sensing Louis’ impending abandonment of her and the danger posed by the Paris vampires, she says “Give [Madeleine] to me so she can care for me, *complete the guise* I must have to live!” (238 emphasis mine).

Claudia does not need care, but a companion with an adult body with whom she can move unbothered through the human world. That Claudia points here to the

independence denied her when she was made vampire so young suggests that she would rather inhabit Madeleine's body—to which she literally points—than remain forever a child and have Madeleine as her mother. Her desire is for true independence and an outward appearance that quickly communicates her inner life, and so to be able to form her own relationships in which she is read as the adult she is, and of course the circulatory capacity to make adult vampire companions of her choosing.

2.6: Vomiting the Father

Lestat's division of the act of vampiric reproduction into two heteronormative parts means that Claudia is faced with human questions about her birth, and her inherited nature. Because there is no precedent for this type of creation, Lestat is free to determine and revise the meanings attached to the different roles he has invented, so that he can be Claudia's mother on the night of her birth as I have described. But by demonstrating the redefinability of the body, Lestat leaves its meanings open for further negotiation.⁹ On the night before he takes her back to the room in which he first found her, Claudia asks Louis “‘Aren't you the same as I?' ... 'You taught me all I know!'” to which he responds feebly “‘Lestat taught you to kill’” (100-1). Since Claudia has always killed with Lestat, and complains that Louis “never lets [her] see [him] kill” (91), her insistence that she and Louis are nevertheless ‘the same’ suggests a desire to understand the emotional and intellectual education she receives from Louis as the primary materials from which she

⁹ Hendershot (1995), Lacquer (1990).

constructs her self, rather than the mere nourishment required by the seed of character planted by Lestat.

Claudia's reworking of her place in her family can be understood within the frame which Kristeva sets forth when she describes the meaning of oral phobias and the oedipal triad:

Fear and the aggressivity intended to protect me from some not yet localizable cause are projected and come back to me from the outside: "I am threatened." The fantasy of incorporation by means of which I attempt to escape fear (I incorporate a portion of my mother's body, her breast, and thus I hold on to her) threatens me none the less, for a symbolic, paternal prohibition already dwells in me on account of my learning to speak at the same time. In the face of this second threat, a completely symbolic one, I attempt another procedure: I am not the one that devours, I am being devoured by him; a third person therefore (he, a third person) is devouring me (39).

Having assumed naturally enough that Lestat was responsible for all aspects of her transformation—having no reason to think that it would have been divided into halves as it was, and having gleaned that Lestat is the older vampire—it is a revelation to Claudia to learn that it was Louis who not only initiated her into the world of vampires, but did so by making her his food, and that Lestat changed her from helpless consumable to powerful hunter. The paradigm shift created by the knowledge that Louis fed on her while Lestat fed her his own blood allows her to reconsider her sense of being consumed by Lestat's system of knowledge (as Louis observes early in the novel, Lestat "use[s] knowledge for personal power" (71)).

When she cuts Lestat's throat, Claudia bleeds her father of the system of knowledge that she has been fed, which sees the fetishized kill as essential to vampire nature, and to which she has been limited for the articulation of her own self-concept. It is

not that Claudia uses the information that Lestat is “actually” her mother to devalue and distance herself from him as Western human culture gives her the opportunity to do. Rather she refigures Louis’ feeding on her, which at first hearing she identifies as victimization, as a feeding *of* her. She tells him “you *gave* me your immortal kiss... You loved me with your vampire nature” (104 emphasis mine).

The knowledge that Lestat made himself vulnerable in a moment of at least symbolic selflessness by feeding himself to Claudia without first drinking from her provides her the opportunity of vomiting her father, Lestat, instead of her mother, Louis. Because the mother is typically figured as the first “other” a child must differentiate from the self, after she has made and fed that child from her body and taken them everywhere she goes, to vomit the mother signifies the advent of an understanding of one’s self as a separate being not only from the mother, but from the rest of the world. As Kristeva argues, the father normally consumes a girl into his system of knowledge, but Lestat’s role in Claudia’s birth suggests that he brings her into the symbolic not by eating her, but by stuffing her with his own language and truths until they overflow and gush from her lips and she can only speak using his language, which is inadequate to describe her experience.

Her initial anger at finding that it was Louis who first drank from her quickly evaporates because it allows her to identify with Louis. Claudia regularly inspires sympathy in her victims before she devours them, and it was only the reverse of this—sympathy for the victim rather than sympathy on the part of the unsuspecting victim—that drove Louis to drink from the human Claudia. Realizing that Louis is a strange

predator like herself—whose fellow-feeling with a human spurs rather than diminishes his appetite for them—and that Lestat has fed a child as she has never done, and will never have occasion to do, she mocks his claim to superior knowledge of the vampire world, vomits him and his way of life, and aligns herself with Louis.

Before her confrontation with the Paris vampires who show that Lestat is only one of many, and that there is a whole system to back him up and to which even he is subject, vomiting the father seems possible. And so after having received the knowledge of her birth, she offers Lestat the gift of two poisoned children (as she has been poisoned by Lestat's blood, and all of the signification that he ascribes to it) before cutting his throat to release an enormous quantity of blood that stands testament to his vampiric and paternal gluttony. The futility of this gesture becomes clear later, as Doane and Hodges write

One of the lessons of the vampire novel, and one made by Lacanian psychoanalysis, is that it is impossible to kill the father because the law of the symbolic is the law of a dead, not living father. Lestat, like all vampire fathers, is already dead; death does not compromise his power to kill the women and restore what was never really lost, a patriarchal order (426).

In Paris, Claudia finds the vampire community for which she has been searching, and which she has dreamt would provide her the sense of kinship she had been denied while living with Louis and Lestat. But she finds that the same system that ruled her life with Lestat comes to his defence no matter his own crimes, and that this law informs nature itself and prevents the success of her attempted patricide. Santiago, a prominent member of the *Théâtre des Vampires*, tells her and Louis that “there is a crime. A crime for which we would hunt another vampire down until we destroyed him. Can you guess what that

is?...It is the crime that means death to any vampire anywhere who commits it. It is to kill your own kind!” to which Claudia responds “Aaaaah!...I was so afraid it was to be born like Venus out of the foam, as we were!” (222)

As she realizes that the law of the father is omnipotent, and that Lestat was only its direct representative in her life, she openly mocks her own plan of killing and disappearing the memory of her father-creator and finding a community based on a system of values and aesthetics that would facilitate and acknowledge her desired self-actualization. It is as impossible to attain this dream as it would be to rise out of the earth or sea rather than out of culture, bodies, and language, and inevitably encumbered and burdened by and indebted to these elements.

In *Frankenstein*, the Creature realizes that no goodness or strength of character can compensate for his physicality and admit him into the human community, and he responds by asking that a female creature be made with whom he could build his own community, the values of which he could determine for himself. When Claudia asks that Madeleine be made vampire, she cannot dream of this sort of retreat and self-defining community, because her vampire nature demands that she live amongst and feed upon humans. Claudia’s reliance upon those to whom she cannot make herself clearly known—and upon a community in which she is forever an outsider—is the experience of marginalized persons to whom the only system for self-definition and -articulation available is hostile towards them.

Chapter III

3.1: Doing the Voices

I have argued that it is fiction's capacity to capture and demonstrate the learnedness and adaptability of complexly human subjectivity that motivates much of the anti-intentionalist's possessiveness over the text. In *The Uncanny*, Freud argues that boys' fear of the eyeball-stealing Sandman is rooted in castration anxiety, and Laura Mulvey also articulates the cultural association between sight and maleness in her theory of the male gaze, which posits that men are the presumed viewer in visual culture, and that to look is understood to be a male prerogative.¹⁰

I would argue that the first-person narrative voice, the *I*—explicit or implied—is to print culture what the gaze is to visual culture: the complex subject whose interiority is worthy of explication has been and continues to be presumed male. When the male reader reflects upon and reimagines his own maleness through speaking or thinking a narrative's alien masculine *I*, his masculinity becomes tied to and partially dependent upon that useful text and its voice, and it is for this reason that the anti-intentionalist's protectiveness over the determination of the meaning of the text and its voice has the instinctive reflexivity of a man covering his threatened groin.

Barthes fittingly opens his "Death of the Author" with a literary passage in which the definition of *woman* is passed back and forth between male character, literary voice,

¹⁰ Sallato argues that the Creature's returning of Victor's gaze is debilitating in the manner of the female Medusa's, and writes that "[t]he terror Frankenstein feels from the reciprocal gaze of the creature represents his horror at becoming a subject" (194).

author, culture, and reader, as though placing masculinity and its bodily sign safely out of readerly or interpretive reach:

In his story *Sarrasine*, Balzac, speaking of a castrato disguised as a woman, writes this sentence: "It was Woman, with her sudden fears, her irrational whims, her instinctive fears, her unprovoked bravado, her daring and her delicious delicacy of feeling" Who is speaking in this way? Is it the story's hero, concerned to ignore the castrato concealed beneath the woman? Is it the man Balzac, *endowed* by his personal experience with a philosophy of Woman? Is it the author Balzac, professing certain "literary" ideas of femininity? Is it universal wisdom? or romantic psychology? It will always be impossible to know, for the good reason that all writing is itself this special voice, *consisting of several indiscernible voices*, and that literature is precisely the invention of this voice, to which we cannot assign a specific origin: literature is that neuter, that composite, that oblique into which every subject escapes, the trap where all identity is lost, beginning with the very identity of the body that writes (1322 emphasizes mine).

The castrated text is representative of the problematic feminist potential that Sharon Meagher acknowledges in anti-intentionalist rhetoric, because it offers the reader, supposedly regardless of sex, the opportunity to wield the interpretive phallus.

In the competition for subjectivity which motivates anti-intentionalism, someone has to be castrated for someone else to bear the phallic signifier. Subjectivity and interpretive authority is therefore still figured as masculine, and Barthes' promise that bodies no longer matter is bittersweet for feminists, since women can still only achieve subjectivity in this system by denying our gendered and physical realities. By declaring the masculine realm of Literature neutered, Barthes reaffirms the power of the phallus by implicitly figuring it as the symbol of the power to determine the meaning of the castrated text which he ascribes to the reader.

The male polyvocality of the read and interpreted fictional voice to which Barthes points is rendered discernable and "audible" by embedded narratives such as that contained in *Frankenstein*. Numerous critics have pointed to the "concentric circles" of

narration of which *Frankenstein* is constructed: Walton tells Victor's story to his sister, Margaret, and the Creature tells his story to Victor.¹¹ Not only does the novel contain three distinct first-person voices—which the reader assumes in turn, thus producing a sense of dissonance between the reader's "real," and the temporarily assumed "I",—but each voice is learned and reproduced by another fictional voice, which models the voices' adoptability.

In *Schools of Sympathy*, Nancy Roberts examines the ways in which novels allow us to build our own subjectivities, and specifically the ways in which certain eighteenth- and nineteenth-century heroines function to stimulate gratifying emotion from male characters as well as from male and female readers, all of whom can feel good about themselves for having such fine feelings at their disposal (9). She writes that a novel can serve as

A school of sympathy, a place in which emotions are coached and disciplined, marshalled and pointed in the right direction. Readers see sympathy displayed through the performance of certain key characters who show us how we, in turn, might perform it. Reading is the performance through which we get a chance to rehearse such feelings, try different roles, play out various emotional responses (10).

Following Gilbert and Gubar's compelling argument that the Creature suffers as a woman—he is pursued feverishly only to be rejected totally at the moment of his reciprocation, his sexuality denied—I will argue that he fulfills this heroine-function as well. Even when Victor no longer wields control over what body parts are granted to or withheld from the Creature, he maintains the power of narrative castration over the Creature, as he appropriates the Creature's voice and story. The Creature's "feminine"

¹¹ Berlatsky (2009).

pain is passed between Walton and Victor for the mutual stimulation of their sympathy over which they negotiate their separate identities and shared masculinity.

While Rice's text would seem the more direct example of Roberts' model, since Louis and the Interviewer are two men discussing and responding to a woman's suffering and death, it ends with the men's mutual denial of the sense of self with which the other wishes to leave the encounter. Men's private negotiations of meaning and reality are shown to be dependent upon their ability to arrive at definitions of self which both fit into and uphold that larger reality, and work to brace and confirm the other man's sense of self. The relationship that is so genial as long as the long-dead and unprotesting Claudia is the subject of conversation turns sour when Louis and the Interviewer surface in the 1970s, and find that they have drawn very different conclusions from her story and have therefore become very different people.

Victor's appropriation of the Creature's first-person voice—his *I*—is made possible by his social privilege. His sex, class, and education contribute to making him into a speaker whose story Walton and a wide audience of readers want to hear. And once this interest is aroused he is able to perform impressions of all the important people in his life so that Walton and reader know them to the extent that Victor knows them, and as the people he understands them to be. Louis certainly assumes Claudia's voice throughout *Interview*, but this is different from Victor's recital of the Creature's story, which is so long and so free from asides from Victor that the reader is enabled to forget to hear the story in Victor's voice, just as they have already forgotten to hear Walton's. Although a positive comparison of the two novels posits Claudia as similar to the Creature as Louis is

similar to Victor, Louis' appropriations of Claudia's voice are more like Victor's appropriations of the people he loves than the creation he despises.

The reader moves through *Frankenstein* like a child playing dress-up, trying on the different interiorities that are implied by each first-person account. The impression that we move from one character's mind to another—hearing a different voice in chapter fifteen, for example, than in chapter five—is sustained in Blackstone Audio's 2008 adaptation, in which a different actor reads as each Walton, Victor, and the Creature. When any of these characters quotes someone from outside this group, the relevant actor modifies his voice accordingly. For example, the actor playing Victor assumes an insulting falsetto in order to speak as Elizabeth so that no female voice need be solicited or heard, and this serves at least to keep in the hearer's mind that this is *not* Elizabeth speaking. The differentness of this assumption of voice from Walton's speaking as Victor or Victor as the Creature is thus made clear.

An accurate if inadvisable rendering of the novel would see a single intrepid actor play Walton—or perhaps Margaret, reading his letters—and change their voice in imitation first of either Walton or Victor, then of Victor's various imitations including Elizabeth and the Creature. The novel does not allow the reader to remove the last “costume” before trying on the next.¹² Instead, selves are layered one upon the other, so that neither Victor's nor his Creature's respective selves ever lies flush with the reader's mind. The reader's sense that they hear Victor and the Creature in their turns depends

¹² Berlatsky (2009) calls this technique “inset panels,” and differentiates it from the “grid panels” that would allow the reader to hear each character directly (178).

upon the honesty ascribed to Walton and Victor on account of their various professions of sincerity, as well as the presumption of neutrality attached to their white maleness.

Since Victor's hatred for the Creature is equal at least to Walton's affection for Victor, the Creature's story is processed by these two layers of bias. By contrast, the format of Rice's novel resists such layering and imitation. The interviewer records Louis' own voice with the stated intention of broadcasting it on the radio, so that listeners would hear Louis' own voice, which of course shapes the meaning of his words. The Interviewer's decision to transpose the recording into novel form instead, and to describe in words how Louis sounded at various times, constitutes a small betrayal even if each of Louis' words is recorded exactly as they were spoken. In this way, the Interviewer has assumed authority of interpretation over Louis' vocal inflection in a way that was not stipulated in their original *oral* contract. The Interviewer refers to himself in the third-person as "the boy" in his frame narration, so that while the reader observes and can learn from his sympathy for Louis, the reader is not able to "try on" his *I*.

In *Frankenstein*, Walton says "I resolve every night, when I am not imperatively occupied by my duties, to record, as nearly as possible in [Victor's] own words, what he has related during the day" and says that "If I should be engaged, I will at least make notes" (22). The inevitability of imperfections in Walton's written record of Victor's words does not change the way the reader hears Victor's story in Victor's voice. And while this sort of assumption of someone else's first-person voice does not seem strange when written down as in Walton's case, Victor's recital of the Creature's monologue in Walton's cabin borders on the ridiculous.

While Victor might be imagined to break from character more often than is represented in Walton's recording for aesthetic purposes, Victor apparently performs a dramatic monologue as the Creature for an audience of one. This is not how readers will experience the Creature's tale in *Frankenstein*, since the shifting first-person narrative is unremarkable in the novel form, and the reader follows the Creature's progress from forest to cottage and onward in their imagination. And while Walton surely does as well, he is in Victor's physical presence and hears the Creature's tale in Victor's voice, so that Victor's appropriation of the Creature's whole subjectivity is constantly before him. When a speaker pauses for breath, for instance, one has the sense from their expression—a distant, fixed gaze or a raising of the eyes—that they are retreating momentarily into their memories of the experience they are recounting. For Victor, even such gestures would be overtly performative, so that he would seem to be remembering things he did not experience. To sustain such a performance requires absolute confidence in oneself and one's right to speak, let alone to speak not just for, but *as*, someone else.

3. 2: I, Claudia

In the context of the two novels' striking similarities, the absence of a monologue in Claudia's voice to mirror the Creature's is conspicuous. I initially interpreted this difference as a sign that Claudia is silenced in Rice's text, and understood the Creature's five-chapter monologue as a privilege of his gender. But as I have suggested, the Creature never does get a chance to speak directly to the reader. Victor's assumption of the Creature's first-person voice in repeating his story implies that he is recounting the narrative verbatim, which is not possible. His implied unwillingness to paraphrase,

condense, or otherwise leave legible room for his own biases to shape the recounted narrative implies an unattainable degree of narrative generosity and accuracy of memory.

For the Creature to have his story reach the reader through so many levels of mediation so that his voice is heard as an imitation of an imitation, accompanied always by the imitator's own reactions and revulsion to the speaker's body and voice, is an ambiguous privilege if it is one at all. The absence from Rice's novel of a monologue by Claudia long enough to allow the reader to effectively forget that it is Louis who is telling the story is not simply the result of the fact that the pair do not experience the post-creation separation that Victor and the Creature do—Claudia certainly has plenty to say to Louis after sixty-five years—but a sign that Louis will not speak with Claudia's voice as though he understood her completely. And so his quotations of her are like Victor's quotations of Clerval, or his father, or Elizabeth (minus, I imagine, the falsetto) not only in that they are brief, but in that they describe his best but limited and biased understanding of her and do not claim to know her so completely as to be able to speak her into the Interviewer's presence.

As a result, rather than understanding *Frankenstein* as allowing the Creature the opportunity to “tell his side of the story,” Victor's ostensibly sympathetic appropriation of the Creature's voice is a ruse by which he models feeling for the Creature, stimulating Walton's and the reader's sympathy before modeling its rejection, as he says “The latter part of [the Creature's] tale had kindled anew in me the anger that had died away while he narrated his peaceful life among the cottagers, and as he said this I could no longer suppress the rage that burned within me” (173). Victor's acknowledgement that even he,

who has most reason to despise the Creature who murdered everyone he loves, feels sympathy for him during the first half of the story provides validation to the listener's sense of pity for the Creature, so that this pity will not feel like a divergence from the fellow-feeling with Victor in which Walton takes such pleasure.

Indeed, the authority and self-righteousness with which Victor tells his whole story, framed as it is as a cautionary tale that will serve Walton well in life, gives his story the air of a lesson. Joining his listener in initial pity for the Creature—and the disgust for Victor himself which inevitably attends it—he can expect Walton to join him then in his return to loathing for the Creature. This relationship is defined not so much by honesty as by reciprocity in the negotiation of a shared definition of a reality and a proper moral stance in relation to that reality.

3.3: Morgan's Monologue

In lieu of the Creature's tale of woe, Louis hears and repeats to the Interviewer the first-person account of an Englishman, Morgan, whom he and Claudia meet on their tour of Europe in search of other vampires. In a rural Varna inn, they meet the drunk and grieving Morgan who tells Louis the story of his new wife Emily's death. The couple had been honeymooning, and had arrived at the present village to find a procession forming to the cemetery. Morgan investigates and finds that a suspected vampire is being disinterred and decapitated. He is unable to impress upon Emily the horror of what he has witnessed and the consequent necessity of leaving, and she is found dead the next morning with a cup clutched in her hands and bite-marks in her throat, apparently having tried to offer the

vampire water. Louis repeats Morgan's vow while narrating his actions in the third-person:

...Well I won't let them." He shook his head adamantly. "I won't let them. You've got to help me, Louis." His lips were trembling, and his face so distorted now by his sudden desperation that I might have recoiled from it despite myself. "The same blood flows in our veins, you and I. I mean, French, English, we're civilized men, Louis. They're savages!" (161-2)

Morgan's appeal to Louis' sympathy on the basis of their shared whiteness makes explicit the arbitrariness and exclusionary undertones of Walton's desire for "a man who could sympathize with [him], whose eyes would reply to [his]" (6). Morgan sees Louis' race before his apparent circumstances, in which they might have more in common, since Louis appears to be a young man travelling alone with a young child. Morgan does not ask Louis where Claudia's mother is, or if he knows what it is like to lose a spouse. Morgan is relieved to find a white male confidant to whom he can relate on account of his 'civilized blood' rather than the possibility of visceral sympathy with his pain, and hopes that he will become his ally in preventing the desecration of Emily's corpse.

I propose that this scene, and Morgan's request for Louis' help in protecting Emily's remains, more closely mirrors the Creature's request for a female mate than Claudia's demand that Louis transform Madeleine. The surface similarities between Claudia's and the Creature's respective demands for a female mate can distract from their radically different and significant natures and contexts. As I argued in chapter two, Claudia despises that she requires a mother for social survival, and would much prefer to inhabit Madeleine's body than have her as a mother. Moreover, neither Emily nor the potential Female Creature can protest or encourage Victor or Louis' interference on behalf of their unconscious bodies, whereas Madeleine argues with Louis on her own

behalf and for her own reasons (separate from the satisfaction of Claudia's needs) to be made vampire.

After Louis and Claudia do battle with and destroy the zombie-like “revenant” vampire that plagues the village, Claudia refreshes herself with an injured Morgan's blood and urges Louis to do the same before the sun rises. In a reflexive return to his days of abstaining from human blood by choice rather than necessity, Louis refuses to do so, choosing instead to catch and drink a rat once they have returned to the inn. He experiences a moment of alienation from self when he catches sight of himself in the mirror, feasting on the massive rat, and does not immediately recognize the image as himself.

Having listened sympathetically to the first-person narrative of the human Morgan, who encourages Louis to see the similarities between them, Louis does not settle back into his own vampire selfhood fast enough to feed as a vampire that night. But although Louis feels for Morgan, it is Emily with whom he can truly sympathize, and he ensures that her corpse will not be desecrated when he quite truthfully assures the innkeeper upon his and Claudia's return that he has killed the troublesome vampire. Carrying Claudia in his arms, Louis literally bears the evidence of the vampiric hunger and procreativity that the villagers fear in Emily.

This is of course the same prevention of procreativity for which Victor Frankenstein aborts his attempt to create a female mate for his creature for fear that “a race of devils would be propagated upon the earth who might make the very existence of the species of man a condition precarious and full of terror” (202). While Victor tears up

his half-made female creation in disgust at the thought of her bearing children, Louis prevents the pointless dismemberment of Emily, whom he knows to be humanly dead and not vampirically procreative as he himself has been forced into being. Louis does not crave the destruction of a female body and the “lack” it represents because he does not avail himself of the opportunity offered by his culture and community to construct his masculine subjectivity upon the rejection of women, and the “lack” which their bodies represent (Mulvey 57-8).

3.5: Do You See What I Am?

Having disavowed his masculine prerogative to be a subject through women’s negation, objectification, and destruction, Louis faces similar treatment in his community as women have faced, as he is corrected in his self-concept and told who he is by various men who would construct him in relation to themselves. His desire to be recognized and understood within a structured and legitimating discourse is frustrated throughout the novel. When a drunk painter insists that Louis come back to his studio and let him paint his portrait, the anger Louis experiences at the drastic disparity between his self-concept and others’ perceptions is rendered explicit by the visuality of the artist’s medium. Stroking Louis face without permission, the artist mumbles “Bones. Bones...” And Louis says that he “saw them in heaps, taken from those shallow graves in New Orleans as they are and put in chambers behind the sepulcher so that another can be laid in that narrow plot” (231).

In his encounter with Louis, the artist figures himself an eccentric, and as one who can recognize and capture beauty when he sees it. Louis, whom the artist values for his

beauty, understands himself not as a beauty but as a bringer of death, but does not in this moment protest the artist's self-interested and self-constructive misreading of him. After sitting for the artist briefly and studying him as he works, Louis rises and drains the artist at his easel. When he looks at the unfinished work, he is predictably devastated to find that it does not reflect his complex interiority, and that the artist viewed him until the moment of his vampiric revelation as an innocent and slightly mindless beauty. Having thought the artist and his definer was dead, Louis is shocked when the man drags himself off the floor:

“Give it back!” he growled at me. “Give it back!” And we held fast, the two of us, I staring at him and at my own hands that held so easily what he sought so desperately to rescue, as if he would take it to heaven or hell; I the thing that his blood could not make human, he the man that my evil had not overcome. And then, *as if I were not myself*, I tore the painting loose from him and, wrenching him up to my lips with one arm, gashed his throat in rage (232 emphasis mine). In this scene, authorial subject and object literally struggle futilely over the representation that binds them. Though the artist has no chance of reclaiming his painting or surviving Louis' attempt on his life, the representation remains a devastatingly inadequate representation of Louis' experience. Women whose complexity of personhood and experience has been overridden by the male gaze and male representations as Louis' has been might be able to kill the author, but they are left clutching the horrible object in which they do not see themselves, but someone else's selfish vision of them. Louis experiences the discomfort usually experienced by women of being looked at and assigned a definition, based on superficial elements, that suits the male gazer.

In a parallel scene, Louis visits a Catholic church for the first time since becoming vampire, and is surprised that the holy space does not register and respond to his vampire presence. Again, he is solicited to sit intimately with and be examined, as a priest asks

‘You wish to go to confession?...You *are* troubled, aren't you? Can I help you?’
‘It's too late, too late,’ I whispered to him, and rose to go. He backed away from me, still apparently unaware of anything about my appearance that should alarm him, and said kindly, to reassure me, ‘No, it's still early. Do you want to come into the confessional?’ (129-30)

As with the artist, Louis expects his nature to be evident in his physicality, and this primary “misunderstanding” fractures into smaller ones so that the interaction is defined by this frustrating element. This is partly due to Louis’ having lived at a time when character was thought to be legible in one’s physiognomy, and partly the fact that vampirism certainly does transform the body, if not to the extent that Louis self-consciously—or perhaps hopefully—believes. The result is that Louis cannot help believing that his physical presence is more communicative than it really is, and is continually frustrated to the point of enagement at not being “seen.” In the confessional, he confesses to

‘Murders, father, death after death. The woman who died two nights ago in Jackson Square, I killed her, and thousands of others before her, one and two a night, father, for seventy years...I am not mortal, father, but immortal and damned, like angels put in hell by God. I am a vampire!...’Do you see what I am! Why, if God exists, does He suffer me to exist!’ (130)

The priest naturally disbelieves Louis until he bares his fangs and chases him to his death.

In both of these cases, Louis’ self-revelation disables the male gazer, like the Medusa returning the male gaze, and while this puts an end to that male gaze’s own debilitating power (Sallato 194), it also makes it impossible for Louis’ or women’s true selves to be recorded in art or confessional discourse.

3.6: Mutability of Gendered Roles in Catholic Confession

The platonic hierarchy of the senses has historically posited sight and hearing as intellectual and masculine, while women have been associated with the tactile and olfactory sensuality of the bedroom and kitchen (Lee). However, I would argue that in many contexts the ear becomes a vaginal orifice into which the seeds of selfhood are poured with the expectation that the listener will assist in the speaker's project of self-creation without demanding reciprocation.¹³ It is telling that "ejaculation" signifies both an exclamation and the culmination of a man's pleasure and reproductive role. And Foucault writes that "Ours is...the only civilization in which officials are paid to listen to all and sundry impart the secrets of their sex: as if the urge to talk about it, and the interest one hopes to arouse by doing so, have far surpassed the possibilities of being heard, so that *some individuals have even offered their ears for hire*" (*Sexuality* 7).

For Foucault to suggest that his was the first generation to patronize 'ears for hire' is to efface the empathy work that has always accompanied sex work, in which women's ears have been hired with the rest of their bodies' as vessels to be entered and filled through their various holes. Moreover, it is of course hardly 'all and sundry' who can afford recreational psychotherapy, and the wealthy will always have easier access to professional ears in which to safely sound, and receive help in shaping, their sexualities and self-concepts. Women with sufficient capital may now assume the role of speaker-

¹³ "Bartky's interest in confession focuses on the 'emotional labor' of women's caregiving in which they are positioned culturally as consolers and nurturers...Whether as confessional subjects *or as audience for a man's confession 'in the case of heterosexual intimacy,'* women are disempowered by the act of confession" (1991 qtd by Bernstein 1997, pp. 36, emphasis mine).

ejaculator in relation to a therapist of their choice, who assumes the feminized position of selfless reflector and assistant self-shaper by receiving her words with vaginal, passive, understanding ears.

Louis' status as speaker and listener proceeds through several distinct phases as each shift in his gendered positionality results in a new set of demands and expectations being made on him as a person who cares or is cared for—which is to say whether he is able to make himself out of others, or must act as a sturdy stake upon which other might grow even as he strangles. He compares his human self with his brother, Paul, a deeply spiritual young man who spends much of his time in silent and solitary meditation, saying “It was ironic, really. He was so different from us, so different from everyone, and I was so regular! There was nothing extraordinary about me whatsoever” (6). Louis has an oratory built so that Paul might have a space of his own in which to worship, and where he remains much of his time, available and beholden to Louis like a “kept woman”:

Sometimes in the evening I would go out to him and find him in the garden near the oratory, sitting absolutely composed on a stone bench there, and I'd tell him my troubles, the difficulties I had with the slaves, how I distrusted the overseer or the weather or my brokers . . . all the problems that made up the length and breadth of my existence. And he would listen, making only a few comments, always sympathetic, so that when I left him I had the distinct impression he had solved everything for me. I didn't think I could deny him anything, and I vowed that no matter how it would break my heart to lose him, he could enter the priesthood when the time came. Of course, I was wrong (6).

When the interviewer assumes that Louis means he was wrong about Paul's desire to be a priest, he clarifies: “I mean I was wrong about myself, about my not denying him anything” (6). Louis articulates the delineation of ‘the length and breadth of [his] existence’ to Paul, in which slaves and weather are equated in terms of unpredictability,

suggesting the homogeneity with which Louis considers the entire world outside of his own self.

Eventually Paul begins to see visions in the oratory of St. Dominic and the Virgin Mary. He retreats further from his family, neglects the oratory even as he spends all his time there, and presumably becomes a less comforting listener to his brother. Paul begins the articulation of his shifting reality—the changing length and breadth of *his* existence—through his social withdrawal and performance of physically demanding devotional practices (Louis sees him stay on his knees with his arms outstretched for an hour at a time). Louis tolerates these non-verbal articulations of his brother’s rapidly developing adolescent self and believes that Paul is “only...overzealous,” which is to say that he has ‘only’ progressed too far down the path that Louis deems acceptable, and might still be prevailed upon to retrace his steps (7).

Finally, Paul tells Louis the full extent of his spiritual experiences, and that he has received instructions from the Virgin for Louis to sell all the family’s property and possessions to “use the money to do God’s work in France” and “to turn the tide against atheism and the Revolution”:

I laughed at him.... And the more he tried to convince me, the more I laughed. It was nonsense, I told him, the product of an immature and even morbid mind. The oratory was a mistake, I said to him; I would have it torn down at once. He would go to school in New Orleans and get such inane notions out of his head. I don't remember all that I said. But I remember the feeling. Behind all this contemptuous dismissal on my part was a smoldering anger and a disappointment. I was bitterly disappointed. I didn't believe him at all (7).

Louis’ response to his brother’s declarations is undoubtedly influenced by the financial and social convenience of disbelief: To believe in and obey the commands of the Virgin would leave him destitute and relegated to his younger brother’s shadow, and

to believe in and ignore them would bring him spiritual unease. At this point, Louis has the power to impose definitions upon his brother's reality. Paul has left the private space of his oratory which has been the primary site of his self-creation, and entered Louis' space in the main house to confess his saintliness to his earthly brother in an inversion of the normal order. And instead of leaving him feeling as though all his problems have been solved, Paul leaves Louis having had his interdependent concepts of self and reality rejected and scorned in place of the validation he had always offered Louis, promised that the physical space that has fostered his self will be destroyed, and that he will be sent away without consultation in the hope that a change of physical surroundings will alter his inner landscape.

As Louis reminds the Interviewer, he was a Catholic in his human life and believed in saints. It is also important that this interaction occurs before Louis meets Lestat and receives evidence of a supernaturalism outside the Catholic pantheon. Looking back on the event from a distance of two hundred years, Louis charges himself with "vicious egotism" for not believing in his brother's visions that he would not doubt in a person less closely connected with himself (8). This is indeed insightful, and supports my suggestion that Louis' disbelief has been a method of imposing his own reality upon his brother, and therefore upholding his own self-concept at the expense of Paul's. In Louis' experience, then, to insist upon his own right and ability to define someone else is to drive them to their death, and he studiously avoids committing the same transgression afterwards even when it leaves him open to the same insult.

One significant instance of his failure to do so is when he challenges Madeleine's understanding of herself and her life in his attempt to convince her to give up her desire to become a vampire. When he asks Madeleine whether she had loved her dead child, her answer is emphatic and affirmative. Louis tells the Interviewer that he will "never forget her face then, the violence in her, the absolute hatred [for him]", and this is enough to unseat her as interpreter of her own feelings (241). Even so many years later, he tells the Interviewer "[i]t was guilt that was consuming her, not love" (241). I would suggest that this apparent triumph of masculine imposition of definition over "feminine" sympathy results from Louis' projection onto Madeleine of his own current sense that his guilt overwhelms his love in his memories of Claudia.

While Lestat pushes Louis into his masculine vision of femininity, Louis' willingness to listen sympathetically and "femininely" has its roots in his guilt at having failed to do so with his brother. He describes the way his becoming vampire changed his relationship with his sister:

It was only now as a vampire that I did come to know my sister, forbidding her the plantation for the city life which she so needed in order to know her own time of life and her own beauty and come to marry, not brood for our lost brother or my going away or become a nursemaid for our mother... My sister laughed at the transformation in me when we would meet at night and I would take her from our flat out the narrow wooden streets to walk along the tree-lined levee in the moonlight, savoring the orange blossoms and the caressing warmth, talking for hours of her most secret thoughts and dreams, those little fantasies she dared to tell no one and would even whisper to me when we sat in the dim-lit parlor entirely alone (34).

A relationship predicated upon unreciprocated confessions similar to that which Louis had maintained with Paul grows between Louis and his sister, with Louis now the sympathetic listener. His otherworldly reality remains unspoken as did Paul's even before

he began to have visions, since even then his experience was far removed from Louis'. The role of spiritual or secular confessor is characterized by differentness and separation from society. The priest's professional retreat from secular society is signified by the partition in the confessional. People are at least supposed to be able to confess their sexual acts and thoughts to a priest with the assumption that he is not himself personally familiar with the act, and the institution of marriage has traditionally confined women to the home while their husbands venture forth into the public realm of which their wives are kept ignorant. These men might then feel confident that their confessions and complaints at the end of the day will be safely outside the hearer's purview and thus safe from worldly judgement.

As the slaves of Pointe du Lac rise up against the vampires, Lestat urges Louis to kill Lestat's dying father so that the pair can make their escape while the father begs Lestat's forgiveness for having taken him out of school as a boy and for having neglected to recognize and love his gentleness until it was gone. Caught between the two, unable to prevail upon Lestat to forgive and tend to his own father, and moved to pity for the old man, Louis effaces himself in appeasing both members of this family that now lives in his home. The father is blind and desperate for his son's forgiveness, and is content to believe Louis is Lestat when he offers his hand and tells him all is well and forgiven between them. Louis says he then "bled him just enough, opening the gash so he would then die without feeding my dark passion. That thought I couldn't bear" (50). His own self and hungers are denied in this moment of self-sacrifice in which his body becomes a receptive vessel to the confessions and sadness of others without itself being nourished.

On the night that Lestat catches Louis drinking from Claudia, and after a verbal and physical confrontation, Lestat says to Louis “Get in your coffin...But tomorrow night . . . we talk,” to which Louis recalls feeling “more than slightly amazed” and thinking “Lestat talk! I couldn't imagine this. Never had Lestat and I really talked” (67). What amazes him here is likely not so much the verb, but its use in conjunction with the pronoun *we*, with its implication of reciprocity—that is, that Lestat will listen to and consider what Louis tells him. And it is this posture of receptivity, of actual listening rather than just hearing, that renders Lestat vulnerable in a way that nothing else has up to this point. In an apparently self-protective measure, Lestat manipulates the conditions under which this talk takes place, and arranges for two female sex workers to be in their apartment when Louis wakes the following evening, and drinks from, torments, and slowly kills them while he finally condescends to discuss Louis’ experience of vampirism.

As Lestat lays one of the woman in his own coffin, she begs for a priest to hear her confession before she dies, to which Lestat responds by telling her that Louis is a priest, and can hear her confession. Like Lestat’s father, she is eager to believe that Louis is the person to suit her final purpose, and is willing to be comforted and absolved by him before he ends her life, this time by drinking deeply of her remaining blood. The intense empathy work of the deathbed confession that Louis performs in both of these cases requires that he be someone entirely different from himself for the sake of others. Lestat facilitates Louis’ emptying of self for the comfort and formation of others in preparation for making him a mother.

3.8: I Confessed a Lie

As Gilbert and Gubar point out, *Frankenstein* is punctuated with false confessions of guilt. They write that “Elizabeth is reported by Alphonse Frankenstein to have exclaimed “Oh, God! I have murdered my darling child” after her first sight of the corpse of little William (Ch. 7, 57). Victor, too, long before he knows that the monster is actually his brother's killer, decides that his ‘creature’ has killed William and that therefore he, the creator, is the ‘true murderer’” (228). Likewise, upon seeing the body of Clerval, Victor exclaims before numerous witnesses “Have my murderous machinations deprived you also, my dearest Henry, of life? Two I have already destroyed; other victims await their destiny...” (Shelley 216)

The resistance with which all of these confessions are ultimately if not initially received—and upon which members of the distinguished family seem to count as they make their extravagant and unelicited confessions—does not extend to Justine Moritz, an outsider by virtue of her class and religion, who is adopted into the family but does not become Victor’s “more than sister” like the noble-blooded Elizabeth. Catholic confession constitutes an unseen evil in *Frankenstein*, a novel with no qualms about direct descriptions of grave-robbing and reanimation of the dead. Justine’s tragic end is occasioned by both her association with Victor and his family, and her own family’s Catholicism, so that she is caught between these competing ancient (and to Shelley’s and

the Frankensteins' minds, antiquated) and radical scientific frames of knowledge, neither of which she is shown to embrace.¹⁴

Her loving acceptance into the Frankenstein household may well have diminished the effects of her Catholic upbringing, but no explication of her experience of religion is offered before she has been wrongly accused and imprisoned for the murder of William Frankenstein. She has no opportunity to speak for herself until she has made her false confession and receives Victor and Elizabeth as visitors to her prison cell, (always of course relayed by Victor to Walton to the reader). She is introduced to the novel by Elizabeth, who randomly summarizes Justine's history for Victor in her first letter to reach him after his post-creation fever. She reminds him that "Justine had always been the favourite of her father, but through a strange perversity, her mother could not endure her, and after the death of M. Moritz, treated her very ill" (67).

The mother's "strange perversity," a vaguely incestuous jealousy of her husband's love for their daughter, is only exacerbated by the advice of Church representatives, which gives rise to paranoid accusations against Justine. After sending Justine to live with the Frankensteins and subsequently losing the rest of her children, Madame Moritz begins to fear that these deaths are punishments for her treatment of Justine. Elizabeth writes

She was a Roman Catholic; and I believe her confessor confirmed the idea which she had conceived. Accordingly, a few months after your departure for Ingolstadt, Justine was called home by her repentant mother. Poor girl! She wept when she quitted our house...Nor was her residence at her mother's house of a nature to restore her gaiety. The poor woman was very vacillating in her repentance. She sometimes begged Justine to forgive her unkindness but much oftener accused her of having caused the deaths of her brothers and sister (69).

¹⁴ Schiefelbein (1998) discusses Shelley's conformity to anti-Catholic sentiment prevalent in England during her lifetime.

There is no indication that the Frankensteins, who value education and reason, and are likely to have seen Catholicism as contrary to these principles, tried to introduce her to a different way of understanding the world. Indeed, it is for Justine's perceived simplicity that she is valued by the family, and by Victor in particular. As Elizabeth reminds him, he had "once remarked that if [he was] in an ill humour, one glance from Justine could dissipate it...she looked so frank-hearted and happy" (68). While other members of the family are valued for their conversation, it is Justine's 'glance' that is eloquent in its own charmingly different way. Elizabeth goes on to say that "Justine was the most grateful little creature in the world: I do not mean that she made any professions; I never heard one pass her lips, but you could see by her eyes that she almost adored her protectress" (68).

Justine as 'grateful little *creature*' is equated in dependence upon Frankenstein generosity and contrasted in every other way with Victor's ungrateful gigantic Creature. Justine's unaffected adoration of the family and the cheerfulness she brings to the home and family are applauded as highly appropriate. Expressions of love that do not 'pass her lips' are read in her face by the highly sensitive Frankensteins, who do not fault Justine any inferiority in articulateness, but rather value it for the change which her charming simplicity offers amidst their lofty intellectualism.

By valuing and encouraging this difference from themselves rather than encouraging Justine to become discerning and exact, the Frankensteins do not instill in her the aptitudes that they demand from the children they educate as their own. When Victor's father sees he is reading the work of Cornelius Agrippa, he chastises him and

directs him towards more current scientific texts. The family's removal of Justine from her Catholic family without ensuring her full induction into the rigid rationality upon which they pride themselves leaves her ill-equipped to defend herself against the misguided ministrations of her confessor, either with a lifelong experience with this mode of discourse or with the skepticism of it that the Frankensteins exude. She tells Elizabeth

I did confess, but I confessed a lie. I confessed, that I might obtain absolution; but now that falsehood lies heavier at my heart than all my other sins. The God of heaven forgive me! Ever since I was condemned, my confessor has besieged me; he threatened and menaced, until I almost began to think that I was the monster that he said I was (96).

Justine finds the confessional discourse that for others is an accommodating space in which they may tentatively and safely speak themselves into being will for her only distort her words and self-concept. She follows the Creature into an understanding of self as a monster through the unearned hostility of her community.

The credulity of both novels' primary narrators is achieved and maintained only through the presence of physical evidence in the form of Louis' vampire body and the Creature's giant, stitched-together one. So while both novels are composed of lengthy personal accounts heard credulously and respectfully by a single listener, these previous instances of confession in *Frankenstein* suggest that the freedom to 'confess a lie' and be misbelieved is a strange privilege afforded to a special few. The inequality with which the cathartic effects of confession are experienced is exaggerated in the impunity with which proper members of the Frankenstein family can dramatically confess to crimes to which they know they are only indirectly guilty.

After he is acquitted for Clerval's murder, Victor continues to berate himself in front of his father for the murders of Clerval, Justine, and William, confident that both

these confessions and any part of the explanation for them he can give, will be ascribed to his recent illness. And so in this safety Victor can make the confessions which “reliev[e] the burden of [his] mysterious woe” because they are consistently disbelieved (227). The relief that such confession brings comes from shifting some of the blame to the disbelieving listener. The overshoot—in her case, entirely false—confession that Justine hopes will bring relief, but results in her death, is readily available to Victor.

When Louis denies and violently punishes the Interviewer’s request for the vampiric change at the end of Rice’s novel, he certainly seems to hold the power—interpretive and otherwise—in the relationship. But acknowledgement of one’s self-concept cannot be achieved by force. In any case, the understanding of a single person is little comfort when a person is systematically denied and erased by their culture. It is not difficult to imagine Louis telling his story again and again and being disappointed each night to find that his listener has once again romanticized his story, which revolves around the suffering and death of his only child. The listener’s power to take Louis at his word, and believe his account of himself and his life, mirrors and perhaps balances Louis’ own powers of life and death.

The reception of confessional speech differs meaningfully between the novels not only in terms of the credibility and lack thereof that it is afforded, but in differently functioning incredulities. Victor’s father disbelieves his confession of guilt because it disrupts the narrative of the first twenty-one years or so of his life, before he breaks contact with his family in his frenzy to complete work on his Creature. The priest to whom Louis truthfully confesses his vampirism, another type of father, perceives it as an

insult and responds with anger. While credulity can of course be no more expected here than in Victor's confession to his father, compassion and the benefit of the doubt as to the motives and state of mind which might produce such a confession are still possible.

This is evidenced in the way that the integrity of Victor's self-concept is protected and partially restored by his father's incredulity after the damage done by his horror at having become the maker of the Creature. Kindly disbelief is shown to work as a form of interpretation rather than condescending contradiction, since the insistence that Victor's professed guilt is incompatible with his father's knowledge of him can inform Victor's own interpretation of the facts, and allow him to remind himself of his own intentions, and to understand the Creature, or fate, as responsible for his brother's death. Victor is able to confess an extravagantly exaggerated truth and receive help in reconciling this truth with his previous self-concept because—rather than in spite of the fact that—he is disbelieved.

This disparity between these two dynamics is sustained and rendered explicit when these confessions are afforded credibility. When the facts of the stories are no longer in question, Victor's *interpretations* of those facts are not questioned, whereas Louis is told that he does not understand the meaning of his own story, and needs to have it explained by an outsider. That his own experiences of "passion" have been worth his pain becomes a matter of debate. The Interviewer's appreciation for Louis' story is revealed as aesthetic rather than sympathetic, and different form of incredulity arises out of this encounter.

Even after the Interviewer's conception of reality has stretched to include the existence of vampires, he persists in the heteronormative belief that those ascribed with—or made to fill the role—of a male-defined “femininity” need to have their lives interpreted and explained to them. This presumption that interpretation is a male skill and prerogative underlies the gendered language of popular anti-intentionalist discourse, which dismisses the author of any sex based on their being too close to, and too invested in, their own creation to see it clearly. The anti-intentionalist's quelling of the author is therefore far from the radical and righteously freeing act that anti-intentionalists posit, since it is evocative of the gendered dynamics of so conservative a discourse as Catholic confession and its secular offshoots.

Conclusion

While acknowledging the feminist potential of an anti-intentionalist stance, I have argued that it also has the potential to be deployed for the purpose of disavowal of personal dependence through disavowal of the mother. I am not defending the essentialist definition of women and motherhood that comes under attack in such disavowals, or hoping for those definitions to be culturally re-inscribed for celebration. Rather, I have shown that mothers have been defined and then scapegoated as symbols of a loathed dependence. My own shifting perspective on the two novels of my study as I formulated and researched this project speaks, I think, to the shifting perspectives and potentialities of Barthes' theory.

I originally planned to make a positive comparison between Victor's and Louis' respective projects of creation and subsequent maintenance of power over their creations—the Creature and Claudia—through the defining speech of their storytelling. The important difference, I thought, was that while Victor is so revered by his “reader,” Walton, that his interpretive authority outlives his physical death, Louis is met in the 1970s by the reader who expects and demands the author to self-negate so that the reader might self-actualize. Victor only needs to tell Walton once that he will not provide him with the secret of re-animation of the dead—the Interviewer spends the entire evening listening to Louis' tale of misery and death under the impression that this story will be the ashes out of which he himself will rise.

As I proceeded, I realized that it was ironic to consider Louis' speech as intentionalist when his articulation of his intentions to be a good parent to Claudia are predicated upon his insistence upon the *unintended* nature of his participation in her birth. And so rather than viewing the novels as similarly expressive of their time's anti-intentionalist artist, I now understand *Interview* to depict the mutual frustration that a theory like Barthes' can foster. Barthes' call for the "reversal of the myth" of the vampiric author, who lives as long as they are read by mortal, expendable readers, so as to privilege instead "the birth of the reader...at the cost of the death of the author" retains the patriarchal imperative to self-actualize through denial of the Other (1326 emphasis mine).

The reader knows that Louis has waited so long for the recognition of his self and experience that he expects to receive from the Interviewer, and that he has spent a considerable portion of that time self-negating in the interests of familial harmony. Readerly sympathy is torn between Louis and the Interviewer as they fight for the single space of subjectivity that is fostered by both Barthes' system and that which he seeks to replace, and they both leave the interview unsatisfied. And so rather than the reversal of the problematic power dynamic that Barthes identifies, I would call for it to be complicated, so that subjectivity need not be predicated upon the objectification of an Other, and so we do not need to dehumanize and flatten someone else in order to understand and assert our human complexity.

Finally, I want to add that I think it is important that the gothic first-person *I*, with its rich and complexly human textures, is deployed for the empowerment of women and

racialized and gendered Others by letting it be spoken by Othered characters. In arguing for consideration of Rice's novel as a feminist text, I acknowledge that this is not achieved in Rice's first (or second) novel. I think that *Interview* can work to both articulate and stimulate the discomfort of Fetterley's "immasculation," as women might identify with aspects of both the Interviewer's and Louis' experience but are barred from full identification because both characters are men.

Women might identify with the Interviewer as he craves Louis' subjectivity, and with Louis as he is exploited, made a mother, and finally told that he does not understand his life or himself, full identification might be prevented by these characters' maleness. While I do not believe that men and women are essentially different, the socially-constructed and rigidly enforced gender binary creates a presumption of exclusion based on perceived difference. And so while I have argued that this maleness achieves much—for instance it makes possible the explication of the constructedness of gender—I acknowledge that it does not replace works imbued with complexly human voices in the bodies of woman and racialized and gendered Others.

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