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SEXUALITY AND GENDER IN CONTEMPORARY WOMEN'S GOTHIC FICTION: ANGELA CARTER'S AND ANNE RICE'S VAMPIRES

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Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais

2009

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by

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Submitted to the Programa de Pós-graduação em Letras: Estudos Literários in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Mestre em Literaturas de Expressão Inglesa.

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Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais

2009

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my grandmother, Ana Rosa, who is not here physically to see me achieving my objectives, but who continues to be the inspiration for everything that I am and for everything I want to be.

To my mother, Ernestina, the source of my strength, the provider of unconditional love and support, and an example for me.

To my father José Antônio, to my sister Nancy, and to my brother Bráulio, for their care, support and understanding.

To my uncle José Inácio, for so generously giving me the opportunity to pursuit my objectives, and to all my relatives who cared about me and supported my professional choices.

To my all friends and colleagues, for their words of affection and encouragement.

To all my professors, who are not only responsible for the knowledge I have been acquiring, but also for giving me the self-confidence for the pursuit of my dreams. In especial, to my advisor, Professor Sandra Almeida, for believing in my potential, for advising me so patiently and kindly, and for being the one mostly responsible for everything I have conquered so far in my professional life.

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ABSTRACT

In this thesis, I provide an analysis of Angela Carter's and Anne Rice's works based on their depiction of vampires. My corpus is composed of Carter's short stories "The Loves of Lady Purple" and "The Lady of the House of Love" and of Rice's novels *The Vampire Lestat* and *The Queen of the Damned*. My analysis of this corpus is based on four approaches: a comparison between Carter's and Rice's works, supported by their common use of vampire characters; an investigation of how this use consists of a particular way of exploring gothic elements, related to the contemporary context; an identification of the mechanisms through which this use of vampire characters conveys discourses on the issues of sexuality and gender in the 1970s and 1980s; and an investigation of the possibility for the vampire characters to express such discourses, in terms of their symbolisms. I demonstrate here that Rice and Carter explore the potential of abjection of the vampire and the subversive potential of a gothic representation of life experiences to question and subvert in their works patriarchal ideologies about the issues of sexuality and gender. This strategy of questioning and subversion is informed by the debates about these two issues in late-twentieth century, a period marked by the development of theories about sexuality and gender, by political movements towards sexual and gender freedom, and by the eminence of the AIDS epidemic that influenced the direction followed by these theories and movements. My analysis of Carter's and Rice's works demonstrates that, although they are different in their focuses and concerns, both authors represent, through their vampires, discourses against the imposition of gender roles and of sexualities by patriarchal societies, reflecting the contemporary view of gender and sexuality as constructed, complex, and fluid categories. In this sense, their works can be said to characterize a contemporary gothic fiction written by women.

RESUMO

Nesta dissertação, apresento uma análise de obras de Angela Carter e de Anne Rice com base nas representações de vampiros que cada uma delas oferece. Meu corpus é formado pelos contos "The Loves of Lady Purple" e "The Lady of the House of Love," de Carter, e pelos romances *The Vampire Lestat* e *The Queen of the Damned*, de Rice. Minha análise desse corpus se baseia em quatro abordagens: uma comparação entre as obras de Carter e as de Rice, apoiada no uso comum que fazem de personagens vampiros; uma investigação sobre como tal uso consiste numa maneira particular de explorar elementos góticos, relacionado ao contexto contemporâneo; uma identificação dos mecanismos através dos quais esse uso de personagens vampiros reflete discursos sobre sexualidade e gênero nos anos 1970 e 1980; e uma investigação da possibilidade de os personagens vampiros apresentarem tais discursos, com relação a seus simbolismos. Demonstro aqui que Rice e Carter exploram o potencial de abjeção do vampiro e o potencial subversivo de uma representação gótica de experiências de vida para questionar e subverter em suas obras ideologias patriarcais sobre as questões de sexualidade e gênero. Essa estratégia de questionamento e subversão é influenciada por debates sobre essas duas questões no final do século vinte, um período marcado pelo desenvolvimento de teorias sobre sexualidade e gênero, por movimentos políticos em prol da liberdade sexual e de gênero, e pelo surgimento da epidemia de AIDS, que influenciou a direção seguida por essas teorias e movimentos. Minha análise das obras de Carter e de Rice demonstra que, embora diferentes em seus enfoques e suas preocupações, ambas as autoras representam, por meio da caracterização de seus vampiros, discursos contra a imposição de papéis de gênero e de sexualidade pelas sociedades patriarcais, refletindo a visão contemporânea de gênero e sexualidade como categorias construídas, complexas e fluídas. Nesse sentido, pode-se dizer que seus trabalhos caracterizam uma ficção gótica contemporânea escrita por mulheres.

INTRODUCTION

> [T]he principal value of studying fantasy fiction is to provide us with a negative psychology, access to the denied hopes and aspirations of a culture. But if this is true, there is a more specific value to Gothic, which is that, unlike Utopian fiction, it actually demonstrates within itself the mechanisms which enforce non-fulfillment. (Punter 188)

The end of the twentieth-century was marked by questions concerning the taboos, values, and social norms that have governed human behavior. Actually, as early as three decades before the end of the century, increasing discussions on such questions could already be perceived. The 1970s and 1980s experienced a revolution in the notions of sexuality and gender, issues that have always been at the core of many taboos and norms, functioning as powerful instruments of repression. Such notions were profusely discussed by both conservatives and liberals (especially women and homosexuals) in public debates and in academia. In literature, a genre that is often used to convey this discussion is the one that often opposes realism by depicting the world through distorted symbols: gothic fiction. Some of those symbols and supernatural characters—such as vampires—play an important role in the sense that they "represent transgressions that symbolize both desires and fears that are inner to people's conscience as consequences of moral and sexual constraints, expressing specific cultural and historical contexts" (Punter 188). Based on this argument, I suggest in this thesis

that the depiction of some supernatural characters in contemporary gothic fiction written by women reflects the views on the issues of sexuality and gender developed in their historical context. My aim here is to identify these views through a comparative analysis of characters depicted by two late-twentieth century women writers: Angela Carter's and Anne Rice's vampires.

I argue in my work that these writers' gothic depiction of vampires reflects the debates on gender and sexuality that take place in the 1970s and 1980s. The vampire in this historical context becomes an important metaphor for the desires and fears concerning sexual liberation, related respectively to feminists' and homosexuals' claims for sexual freedom, and to the danger of the consequences of this freedom, represented mainly by the AIDS epidemic. In Carter's and Rice's stories, the vampires' condition as outcasts of humanity is both a freedom and a curse: they can freely satisfy their blood lust, but, as an inevitable consequence, they contaminate their victims. This thesis is informed by four different approaches, which I correlate in order to construct the theoretical apparatus that supports these arguments.

The first approach is the comparison, in terms of literary genre and thematic concerns, of two writers that are often considered very different from each other. Indeed, Angela Carter and Anne Rice differ significantly, especially in terms of style. The former is considered a postmodern writer, whose writing is sophisticated, dense and complex, mixing different literary traditions in a disruptive away. The latter is a popular writer of best sellers, related to mass culture and less revised in academic criticism in comparison to the former. Probably because of such differences, there are no works that offer a direct comparison between Carter and Rice. In this sense, the comparative analysis I intend to make here between these writers proves to be relevant for two reasons: they have never been compared before[1] and their works are not

[1] In my research, I looked for works that compare Carter's and Rice's works at websites like Google, Academic Google, the Library of Congress Catalogue, MLA, the banco de teses of CAPES, Project Muse, and Jstor, but I found none. The works I used in my research neither compare the two authors nor refer to critics that do this.

usually discussed with such emphasis upon their gothic characteristics. I believe that such an approach is possible because of Carter's and Rice's common use of the vampire. It is through vampire characters, I argue, that the works of both writers present discourses against sexual repression and the social imposition of gender roles.

In order to provide a comparison between the depictions of vampires presented by these two writers, the corpus to be studied here consists of Angela Carter's short stories "The Loves of Lady Purple" and "The Lady of the House of Love," and of Anne Rice's novels *The Vampire Lestat* and *The Queen of the Damned*. Carter's short stories are part of the collections *Fireworks: Nine Profane Pieces* and *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories*, respectively. They are versions of famous fairy tales ("Sleeping Beauty in the Wood" in the case of "The Lady of the House of Love," and "Pinocchio" in the case of "The Loves of Lady Purple") mixed with folkloric and literary accounts of the vampire myth, portraying women in a way that disrupts their traditional representations. Rice's novels are respectively the second and the third volumes in the series *Vampire Chronicles*. They present a whole mythology of the origin of these creatures and their struggles to understand existential and moral issues in their condition of immortal predators.

Written between 1970 and 1987, Carter's and Rice's works were chosen for the rich depiction they convey of vampires in contemporary Western culture, especially regarding the issues of sexuality and gender. This choice is based on my review of other critics' responses to their works. I consider here works such as Auerbach's, Benefiel's, Haggerty's, Rout's, Smith's, and Tomc's, which present criticism on Rice's novels, as well as works such as Funck's, Gamble's, Guedes's, Martins's, Peng's, and Wisker's, which present criticism on Carter's short stories. All these works provide readings for the works I analyze in this thesis and others by the same writers, using approaches different from the one I use. However, some of the discussions they present also support my arguments.

My second approach in this thesis consists of considering Carter's and Rice's use of vampire characters a particular way of exploiting elements of gothic fiction. I argue here that these writers belong to the same branch of gothic fiction related to the 1970s and 1980s. By using the label "contemporary gothic fiction written by women" to refer to the works analyzed in this thesis, my intention is not to define a totally new tradition that makes a comparison between Carter and Rice possible, but to emphasize how each term of this label contributes to a discussion of the issues of sexuality and gender that reflects the 1970s and 1980s. However, there are no simple definitions for the term gothic fiction, for what can be called a contemporary form of gothic fiction, or for what is particular in gothic works written by women. Theories about each of these terms are discussed in Chapter 1, which consists of my theoretical apparatus. The works of Botting and Punter are used to point out the main features of gothic literature to be considered in my approach regarding the works by Anne Rice and Angela Carter as part of this tradition. My discussion about the contemporary configuration of gothic fiction is based on the works of Botting, Punter, and Veeder, which offer relevant arguments for my choice to classify the works analyzed here as contemporary gothic fiction. Through the bibliographical research about the gothic tradition and feminist literary criticism in this same first chapter, I investigate traits that are considered to be characteristic of gothic fiction written by late-twentieth century women, in terms of literary devices and ideological discourses. The works of Becker, Williams, and Winter are the basis of this research for their attempt to define the characteristics of the so-called female gothic. The works of Moi, Humm, Hutcheon, and Weedon are basic sources for the elucidation of the feminist implications of my approach to Carter's and Rice's stories as part of a tradition of women's gothic fiction.

The third approach used in this thesis relates to the issues of sexuality and gender. Such issues have been intensively discussed in different areas of human knowledge and yet no theory can be considered exclusive and totally efficient to account for their complex implications. I

consider in this thesis theories related to the psychological, cultural and social aspects of sexuality and gender. The works of Butler, Castro, Chodorow, Glover and Kaplan, Goodman, Grosz, Moi, Rubin, Sedgwick, Weeks, and Wolf consist of the main sources for the definitions of sexuality and gender and for the discussions of the implications of these issues that I use in my theoretical apparatus. I rely mainly on Butler's theories about gender, on Foucault's arguments about the history of sexuality, and on Kristeva's notion of the abject to explore the possibilities of the use of the vampire figure to represent discussions of the issues of sexuality and gender. The work of Weeks, which provides a review of the ideas about the body and sexuality that characterizes modernity, and that of Sontag, which discusses the metaphors related to the AIDS epidemic, are important for my approach, as they present a historical development of ideas concerning sexuality and gender. Both works characterize the 1970s and 1980s as a turning point in terms of the debates on sexual liberation (because of the feminist and homosexual movements and the spread of AIDS), providing the historical basis of my research and supporting my argument that this period inspired a particular configuration of gothic fiction, especially that written by women.

In this sense, this first part of Chapter 1 explains the three approaches that constitute my theoretical apparatus, focusing on the identification of the mechanisms through which gender and sexuality are discussed in contemporary women's gothic fiction. The second part of this chapter discusses the cultural, psychological, and social symbolism of vampires in literature. In this part, therefore, I explain my choice of vampires as the characters to be analyzed in my comparison of Carter's and Rice's works—which consists of my fourth approach to their works. The works of Auerbach, Gelder, Gordon and Hollinger, and Nixon are essential for this explanation, as they provide an account for the symbolisms of vampires, considering the changing implications of such symbolisms through different historical and cultural contexts. I argue that vampires gain particular significance in the 1970s and 1980s, which Carter's and

Rice's woks explore in order to convey discussions about sexuality and gender. To support this argument, I use Kristeva's theory of abjection. In this way, I believe that interpreting the vampire as an abject being demonstrates that the threats and the attraction, the fears and the desires this creature symbolically represents to the social and cultural order reflect the threats and the desires related to the abject implications rendered to sexuality and gender by the sexual freedom and the AIDS epidemic that marked the 1970s and 1980s.

My theoretical apparatus presented in Chapter 1 provides a set of tools for both the analysis of each author's works separately and for the comparison between them, to which I proceed to develop in Chapters 2 and 3. In this sense, Chapter 1, "Sexuality and Gender in Contemporary Women's Gothic Fiction," consists of a discussion on the definition and characterization of contemporary gothic fiction as a genre, of women's writing, of the issues of gender and sexuality, of the symbolisms of vampires, and of the criticism on Carter's and Rice's works. Chapter 2, "From Women's Sexual Freedom to Bisexuality: Sexuality through Angela Carter's and Anne Rice's Vampires," I use the theoretical devices identified in the first chapter to analyze these authors' works in a comparative way, so as to demonstrate how they convey discourses on sexuality through their depiction of vampires. Similarly, in Chapter 3, "From Freedom of Gender Performances to Androgyny: Gender through Angela Carter's and Anne Rice's Vampires," I again analyze the works of these writers in terms of the points raised in Chapter 1, in order to identify how their vampires convey discourses on gender. Finally, in the "Conclusion," I demonstrate how the works by Carter and Rice discussed here contribute to an understanding of Western culture in the 1970s and the 1980s in terms of sexuality and gender issues.

What I present in this thesis, in general, is a new approach to the analysis of the works of those authors—one that considers the particular use they make of elements of gothic fiction in order to undermine biased assumptions about the issues of sexuality and gender discussed in

the 1970s and 1980s. This use, I argue here, is evidence of the relevance of these writers' works to a contemporary configuration of the gothic genre. I would say that David Punter's words, quoted above in the epigraph, explain the relevance of my approach. According to him, studying gothic fiction not only provides us with an "access to the denied hopes and aspirations of a culture" but also identify how this kind of fiction "demonstrates within itself the mechanisms which enforce non-fulfillment" (Punter 188). In this sense, my approach shows how Carter's and Rice's works reflect both the desires (concerning sexuality and gender) that are repressed by the hegemonic discourses of contemporary Western culture and the feelings of anxiety and dislocation experienced by people as a result of this repression.

CHAPTER 1 – Sexuality and Gender in Contemporary Women's Gothic Fiction

In this thesis, I assume the existence of particular ways of using devices that are characteristic of gothic fiction in response to the anxieties of a particular historical moment. Accordingly, my argument is that the use of gothic devices in works written in the 1970s and 1980s is peculiar in relation to gothic works of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. A particular use of gothic devices is informed by a particular point of view about the work's cultural and historical context. Therefore, another argument presented here is that the use of gothic devices by women writers in the 1970s and 1980s may relate to feminist perspectives about the cultural and historical context in which they write. If sexuality and gender are issues that have raised some women's anxieties in that context, these are the issues that I assume as important to be investigated in a comparative analysis of two contemporary women writers in this thesis. In order to proceed to such an analysis, all these assumptions are taken into consideration.

This chapter constitutes the theoretical basis of this thesis, as it points out the implications of the discussion of the issues of sexuality and gender presented in late-twentieth century gothic fiction in English language written by women. First, the traces that characterize contemporary gothic fiction written by women are discussed. Second, the definitions of sexuality and gender and the development of the debate about these issues in the 1970s and 1980s are presented. Third, the symbolisms of vampires are addressed, so as to demonstrate how the characterization of these supernatural creatures has been explored in gothic fiction written by women to represent the ideologies, desires, and fears of Western societies in the 1970s and 1980s. Finally, criticism on Angela Carter and Anne Rice is reviewed in order to

support my argument that their works fit into the category that I am calling here contemporary gothic fiction written by women.

1.1. Contemporary Gothic Fiction Written by Women

1.1.1. Characterizing Gothic Fiction

Defining gothic fiction proves to be a complicated task, as the very historical origin of the gothic in literature and its description as a genre are problematic. It is commonly agreed that the first gothic novel was Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764), published in the late-eighteenth century, and that it presented the main characteristics that would inspire and constitute all the other works later classified as belonging to this genre (Williams 13). But scholars disagree in some points about the delimitation of the traits that differentiate this genre from others, about the works to be included in this tradition, and even about its very qualification as a genre.

James Watt, for instance, argues that the term "gothic" only provides "an illusory stability to a body of fiction which is distinctly heterogeneous" (1). He claims that the idea that Walpole intended to create a new genre by calling his work a "gothic novel" (inspired by his own interest in gothic architecture) is dubious and insufficient to be used as an argument for a new distinctive genre. In this sense, the general definition of the term "gothic" and the characteristics often used to describe this genre do not apply to every work labeled as "gothic." Differences in the style of the authors and even in the historical contexts of the works are not considered in this labeling, and, consequently, the definition of gothic fiction becomes problematic. Watt also states that the categorization the term "gothic" as a genre is a "relatively modern construct," created by twentieth-century critics (1). According to him, some critics try to appeal to models of genetic criticism to support their claims about the nature of the anxieties disclosed by the gothic, in a way that their theories are contestable for being predisposed to

become dependent upon a "hermeneutically circular process" (2). In other words, the theories that identify the lines of the gothic genre take the risk of manipulating the definition of this genre according to one's explanatory intentions. Evidence for the possibility of misguided classifications, according to Watt, is in the fact that "most of the works which literary history has classified as 'gothic' actually described themselves by way of the larger category of 'romance'" (3). The author explains that the romance emerged as a kind of fiction that opposeds the novel, which is supposed to be concerned with a realistic representation of its historical and social context, so that the authors who labeled their works as "romance" tried to emphasize their lack of commitment with a realistic representation. The problem in the re-classification of these works under the new construct of "gothic fiction" is that not all of them represent such an evident separation from the novel genre that could fit into this category.

The solution presented by Watt to overcome all these problematic assumptions used in the classification of diverse works as gothic is "to look at the manner in which certain works both appealed to the vocabulary of the genre and defined the possibilities offered by the that the gothic genre should be defined considering the relationship between the parts (the works) and the whole (the genre itself) and that its particularities should be identified using as a framework the larger category of the romance. Watt's proposal seems plausible, but even so it proves a very hard task, not accomplished so far: the amount of works labeled as gothic and as romance and the overall differences among them make the delimitation of a set of recurrent characteristics that could be used to define and differentiate each category a difficult task.

Besides being associated with the larger category of the romance, the definition of gothic fiction has also been viewed in relation to other genres, such as terror fiction, horror fiction, and fantasy fiction, often leading to misconceptions. The problem is that, while some authors present terror and horror as emotions evoked by gothic fiction, others argue that works committed to evoke only one of these emotions and works that evoke both of them constitute

genres that are different from the gothic. Similarly, there is the dispute about the relation between gothic and fantasy fiction, as fantasy devices are commonly pointed as present in gothic fiction. There are discrepancies among the definitions used by critics, each of whom tries to support his or her genre description by pointing out the differences and similarities in varied works by writers who have little in common.

Terror and horror are also considered by some scholars as two different traditions into which gothic fiction is divided. This division finds its source in the stylistic differences (and personal quarrels) between two late-eighteenth century writers, Matthew Gregory Lewis and Anne Radcliffe. The identification of those differences and, thus, the arguments for a division of the gothic tradition find support especially in the words of Radcliffe indicating the difference between her work and that of Lewis:

> Terror and horror are so far opposite, that the first expands the soul, and awakens the faculties to a high degree of life; the other contracts, freezes, and nearly annihilates them . . . and where lies the great difference between horror and terror but in the uncertainty and obscurity, that accompany the first, respecting the dreaded evil? (qtd. in Melani par. 4).

Radcliffe's definition, in this sense, is based on the effects that terror and horror have on the senses, privileging the former in detriment of the latter. Based on this difference, some critics, as Melani states, classify Radcliffe's and Lewis's works in different traditions: terror gothic (represented by Radcliffe's style) and horror gothic (represented by Lewis's style) (par. 4). As I will discuss later, this same distinction between these authors leads to the one between the so-called female and male gothic.

Nöel Carroll's differentiation of horror, terror, and gothic fictions is one of the most reputable works about this subject. According to the author, horror, or more specifically, what he calls "art-horror," labels the works that are designed to cause an effect of horror in the

audience, using as characters monsters of a supernatural or sci-fi origin (15). Works of terror, in turn, cause fear in the audience "by exploring psychological phenomena that are all too human." Instead of monsters, the characters in terror fiction present an abnormal psychology. Finally, the author argues that in gothic stories, "suggestions of other-worldly beings [are] often introduced only to be explained away naturalistically" (15). This division seems clear and useful, but even so, it must be recognized that some works may present complex situations that do not fit so easily into one (or into only one) of these categories.

While trying to identify gothic devices in the works by Carter and Rice that I analyze here, I recognize that Carroll's definitions, although accurate, are not useful. His definition of gothic stories does not apply to those works, as there is no naturalistic explanation for the existence of vampires in them. Rice does provide an explanation in *The Queen of the Damned*, but it is not naturalistic, not possible in the realm of life experience: according to her, the first vampire was created when a spirit, envious of human materiality, merged with the dying body of an Egyptian queen, who developed the habit of sucking blood of living beings to maintain her life. The stories I analyze cannot be classified as terror, either, as they do not present vampirism as a psychological phenomenon. Carroll's category of horror fiction, in turn, seems to be appropriate to classify Carter's and Rice's works, as their vampires are monsters described in a way to cause horror in the audience, but not only that. The fact that both authors use gothic devices to characterize these monsters in the stories cannot be dismissed, and I argue in this thesis that such use is relevant for the implications of their works and their historical contexts.

Indeed, a major problem is that, besides the difficulties in clearly differentiating gothic, horror, and terror fiction, the similarities among them lead to the use of these terms as synonyms or as parts of a larger genre, leading to the coinage of a number of new labels, such as gothic terror, terror gothic, horror gothic, gothic horror, and so on. Each critic uses such

terms in order to support his or her explanatory purpose in interpreting a literary work. As there are no undisputable definitions for the gothic genre so far, an analysis of works that belong to this genre requires a discussion of the most recurrent aspects raised by critics in order to avoid misguided conclusions. In this sense, it is more useful to this thesis to consider the devices and traits that have been pointed out as being characteristic of gothic fiction (more specifically those enumerated by David Punter and by Fred Botting), instead of focusing on more general definitions. It is possible in this way to avoid the manipulation of genre definitions that Watt warns us against.

David Punter offers a useful insight when he points out three major elements to the characterization of gothic fiction. The first of them is paranoia, that is, the sensation of being persecuted, the plausibility and the reason of which remain uncertain in the story, in a way that the reader "is placed in a situation of ambiguity with regard to fears within the text" (404). The second element is barbarism, an idea that relates to the fear of the past, of the aristocracy ("which provides the basis for vampire legendry"), of racial degeneracy, "and more recently . . . the fear of the barbaric not only from the past but also in the present and even in the future (405). The third element enumerated by Punter is taboo, which relates to rules intended to guarantee "sociopsychological equilibrium," as the ones that regulate the relations between the sexes or "man's supposed place in the hierarchy of natural and divine life" (405). I use these three elements in my analysis of Carter's and Rice's works as gothic fiction, arguing that they can be perceived in those stories, thus, contributing to the depiction of the 1970s' and 1980s' discussions on sexuality and gender.

Besides these three, I consider other elements of gothic fiction discussed by Botting, which in my view presents a clear explanation of all the elements mentioned as essential to the characterization of this genre by other authors, such as Carroll, Williams, Punter, Martin and Savoy, Watt, and Sedgwick. One element is the gloomy and mysterious atmosphere (Botting

1), related specially to the story's setting: "desolate, alienating, and full of menace." Botting also points out the idea of threat to Enlightenment and humanist values, "associated with supernatural and natural forces, imaginative excesses and delusions, religious and human evil, social transgression, mental disintegration and spiritual corruption." Fascination with "objects and practices that are constructed as negative, irrational, immoral and fantastic" and with "transgression and anxiety over cultural limits and boundaries" are also gothic elements. The presence of suggestive figures of imagined and realistic threats in the plot is also mentioned by the author, including specters, monsters, demons, corpses, and fainting heroines (2). Still in relation to the anxieties explored by gothic fiction, Botting points out facts that usually elicit them: "political revolution, industrialization, urbanization, shifts in sexual and domestic organization and scientific discovery" (3). Concerning the idea of transgression conveyed in gothic plots, the author argues that it occurs mainly in relation to social properties, moral laws, physical laws, the bounds of reality and possibility, and traditional codes of understanding (6). He also argues that this transgression is related to uncertainties that the story raises "about the nature of power, law, society, family and secularity" (5) and to ambivalence of meaning (moral, political and literary) (9). Botting explains the function of transgression when he addresses it as one of the core issues in Gothic fiction, the one that evokes the feelings of terror and horror:

> The terror and horrors of transgression in gothic writing become a powerful means to reassert the values of society, virtue and property: transgression, by crossing the social and aesthetic limits, serves to reinforce or underline their value and necessity, restoring or defining limits. Gothic novels frequently adopt this cautionary strategy, warning of dangers of social and moral transgression by presenting them in their darkest and most threatening form. (7)

In this sense, by focusing on transgressive practices, gothic fiction provides a reaffirmation of the structures it undermines (a function more related to gothic works of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries), but it may also incite a revision, a reconstruction of this structure.

Veeder goes even further indicating another effect of gothic transgression:

> Through its thematic and representational insistence upon outer desires, gothic acts as a counterdiscursive formation that fosters pleasure in terms of both psyche and society by the release of repressed affects and by the exploration of foreclosed topics. (28)

For the author, therefore, through its depiction of transgressions of social rules in favor of personal desires, gothic acts serve to alleviate the tension caused by repression in life experience.

All these elements relate to the potential of gothic fiction to undermine social norms and taboos, including those related to sexuality and gender. Throughout my analysis of the corpus of this thesis, I demonstrate how these elements are present in each work and how they contribute to a discussion of the issues of sexuality and gender. In this way, in my analysis I consider elements that are widely recognized by literary criticism as characteristic of this genre in order to demonstrate that they are used in a particular way in the works analyzed here. The particularities observed can be said to relate to the historical context, configuring a contemporary form of gothic fiction. But as the definition of the term "gothic fiction" is problematic, so is the definition of "contemporary gothic fiction."

1.1.2. Characterizing Contemporary Gothic Fiction

In historical terms, the differences among gothic works have been explained by the different urges a specific time has on this genre. Based on this idea, critics have proposed a definition of contemporary gothic, which is different from the traditional one constituted mainly by works of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. On the other hand, some critics

argue that what we call gothic genre existed only in the period between the late-eighteenth and the late-nineteenth century, so that the genre that in the twentieth century is commonly defined as gothic is actually pure horror fiction (in Carroll's terms) or even only regarded as "popular culture" (Williams 2). The ones in favor of the notion of a contemporary configuration of this genre argue that gothic elements used in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are now adapted to the particularities and necessities of the twentieth century. For Botting, this possibility of historical diffusion and adaptation shows that the gothic is "a hybrid form, incorporating and transforming other literary forms as well as developing and changing its own conventions in relation to newer modes of writing" (14). The author sees a parallel between the development of gothic devices against Enlightenment values in the eighteenth century and their adaptation to confront modern premises in the twentieth century. While naming contemporary gothic "postmodern gothic," he suggests that this genre assumes the so-called postmodern commitment of criticizing modernity and argues that the fragmentation of postmodern narratives serves the gothic function of undermining values and ideas socially taken for granted (169). Veeder's words also address this focus on a critique of modernity in contemporary gothic fiction:

> I believe the nature of the gothic is to nurture. This belief derives from what I take to be a basic fact of communal life: that societies inflict terrible wounds upon themselves and at the same time develop mechanisms that can help heal these wounds. Gothic fiction from the late eighteenth century to the present is one such mechanism. Not consciously and yet purposively, Anglo-American culture develops gothic in order to help heal the damage caused by our embrace of modernity. (20-21)

The "wounds" Veeder talks about relate to the anxieties caused by the inefficiency of modern values in face of the changing world, which are explored and then alleviated by gothic stories.

His notion of gothic fiction suggests that it is a counterdiscourse that serves a social function: that of helping individuals to cope with their anxieties and uncertainties in relation to historical and cultural changes.

The particularities of twentieth century gothic fiction can be summarized in the following statement by Punter: "Contemporary gothic reflects and provides a singular symbolic language for the discussion of preoccupations of our time: capitalism inhumanity, information overload, child abuse, serial murder, pollution, and corruption" (179). Such issues become preoccupations because they change aspects of the social order, leading to struggles between the individual's ideals and this new order in which he or she is inserted. The old norms that used to prescribe the proper ways of dealing with reality are now inadequate and people feel lost. This feeling of inadequacy is what contemporary gothic often depicts. As the complexities of the postmodern world expand the preoccupations of humankind, contemporary gothic writers tend to follow different paths from those of the gothic tradition, and, consequently, their works reflect such preoccupations. I use the term "contemporary gothic fiction" in this thesis to refer to the particular way of using gothic devices that reflects and responds to the contemporary historical context, more specifically, to the decades of the 1970s and 1980s. Among the vast array of possibilities, I focus on the concerns of some women writers in these two decades in order to investigate to what extent the contemporary gothic fiction that they produce reflects their responses to such concerns.

1.1.3. Feminist Literary Criticism and the Gothic Tradition: Characterizing Women's Gothic Fiction

Before identifying the characteristics that are recurrent in contemporary gothic fiction written by women, it is necessary to understand the implications of defining a subgenre based on gender and feminist issues, that is, of establishing the basis of a gothic subgenre written by

women that focuses on women's experience within this tradition. The basis for the discussion and interpretation of women's writing has been explored by feminist literary criticism, which focuses on the way that literary practices provide an important perception of women's experiences and question the patriarchal assumptions that have dominated social relations. As Rosanne Kennedy observes: "Feminist literary theory is a critical form of knowledge which analyses the role that literary forms and practices, together with the discourses of literary criticism and theory, play in perpetuating or challenging hierarchies of gender, class, race and sexuality" (306).The term "patriarchal," as Chris Weedon puts it, "refers to power relations in which women's interests are subordinated to the interest of men." According to the author, such power relations can take different forms, such as "the sexual division of labor," "the social organization of procreation," and "the internalized norms of femininity by which we live" (2). Besides, she argues that it is on the social meanings given to biological sexual difference that patriarchal power rests. On the other hand, feminist theory in general and feminist literary criticism in particular try to distinguish certain notions that have often been appropriated and misused in contemporary discourses. These notions are relevant to my analysis of women's contemporary gothic fiction.

According to Maggie Humm, the term "female" refers to the "purely biological aspect of sexual difference." "Feminine" refers to the traditional and essentialist "social construction of women," a category created by patriarchy and based on women's appearance or behavior (*Modern Feminisms* 406). The term "woman," in turn, refers to "the social construction of the female whose identity (of femininity) is imposed and constructed through representation" (Humm, *Dictionary* 301) and implies an awareness and a questioning of this gender construct. As Simone de Beauvoir's famous statement shows, "one is not born, but becomes a woman" (267). Nowadays, the term has been used in the plural as a way to avoid the

essentialism that its singular form implies, designating "women as a historical class rather then woman as a feminine essence" or myth (Humm, *Dictionary* 302).

Toril Moi puts it in this way:

> It is in the patriarchal interest that these two terms (femininity and femaleness) stay thoroughly confused. Feminists, on the contrary, have to disentangle this confusion, and must, therefore, always insist that though women undoubtedly are *female*, this in no way guarantees that they will be *feminine*. This is equally true whether one defines femininity in the old patriarchal ways or in a new feminist way. (65)

It follows from this argument that feminist literary criticism views femininity as a category that is socially constructed and that this criticism is committed to exposing the artificial character of this construction that the patriarchal system presents as natural.

The notion of identity becomes an important issue in the development of feminist theories. According to Humm, feminists argue that identity is "the point of departure of any process of self-consciousness," which is important for the basis of women's contestation of the patriarchal oppression imposed on them (*Modern Feminisms* 406). The problem is that, as feminist critics suggest, "women's understanding of identity is multiple and even self-contradictory" (*Modern Feminisms* 406-07). Recent feminist theories recognize that there is no single identity but a multiplicity of possibilities regarding categories other than gender, such as class, race, and ethnicity (Almeida 91). In this sense, a woman may identify herself not only as a woman, but as a middle-class Black American woman, for instance. Feminist literary criticism stresses the fact that the way these different categories interrelate is too complex to convey the idea of a single identity.

Feminist literary criticism offers particular ways of approaching the representation of women in literature (in works written by both men and women), trying to address the biases of

patriarchal discourse. According to Weedon, since "[t]o practice literary criticism is to produce readings of literary texts and in the process of interpretation temporarily to fix meaning and privilege particular social interests," feminist literary criticism "seeks to privilege feminist interest in the understanding and transformation of patriarchy" (136). It does so by denouncing the oppression of women by patriarchy and their consequent suppression as the insignificant other of men, issues that can be perceived in the traditional representation of women in literature.

More recently, the interrelation between feminist and postmodernist theories offers important possibilities for feminist literary criticism. Linda Hutcheon argues that feminism and postmodernism overlap in some points and influence each other ("Feminism and Postmodernism" 26). Craig Owens conveys the similarities between these two movements, including: an endorsement of Lyotard's argument about the crisis in the legitimizing function of the "Great Narratives of the West;" a critique of the "system of power that authorizes certain representations while blocking, prohibiting or invalidating others;" the idea that the "representational systems of the West admit only [the vision] of the constitutive male subject;" a critique of binarism; and the defense of "the importance of 'difference and incommensurability'" (qtd. in Creed 399). In this sense, postmodernism and feminism have in common the contestation of ideas, values, patterns, conventions, and ideologies taken for granted in Western cultures. Hutcheon calls attention to the fact that this contestation does not aim to disintegrate or to decline order and coherence, but to challenge "the very concepts upon which we judge order and coherence" ("Feminism and Postmodernism" 28).

Hutcheon argues that the similarities between feminism and postmodernism make possible for feminist writers (and feminist artists in general) to use postmodernist strategies to convey a questioning of patriarchy in their works. The author affirms that "there is a long tradition of institutional literature whose purpose is to tell women how to 'appear'—to make themselves

desirable—to men" (*The Politics of Postmodernism* 155). In an argument similar to that of Virginia Wolf about the women writer's need to undermine the female stereotypes created by patriarchy (Gilbert and Gubar 596), Hutcheon claims that women writers can subvert such culturally prescribed and biased ways of representing women in literature. She argues that "postmodern strategies can be deployed by feminist artists to deconstructive ends—that is, in order to begin the move towards a change" (*The Politics of Postmodernism* 149). The use of postmodern strategies, however, relay to feminism a problem often attributed to postmodernism: that of a paradoxical complicity with the very values they seek to contest. This is one of the reasons many feminist critics question the close association between feminism and postmodernism. Yet, differently from postmodernism, feminist approaches "go beyond making ideology explicit and deconstructing it to argue a need to change that ideology" (Hutcheon, *The Politics of Postmodernism* 168). Through postmodernist parody and tactics of deconstruction, feminist writers present "new kinds of female pleasure, new articulations of female desire," presenting, therefore, alternatives that can inscribe in order to subvert patriarchal traditions (160).

Chris Weedon discusses another approach of literary feminist criticism that she terms "feminist poststructuralist reading." The author explains that in this approach "texts are read as sites for the discursive constructions of the meaning of gender" and that "their meanings will relate both to the original historical context of production, understood through the discourses which constitute present day conceptions of history, gender and meaning, and to the concerns of the present" (138). In other words, this approach consists of using present day theories to identify the discourses about gender that characterize a specific historical period and society, and of considering these discourses in literary analysis. The poststructuralist approach described by Weedon assumes that "authorship does not guarantee meaning, though the historical context in which the author is located will produce the discourses of the text" (153). The author further explains it, ar-

guing that this approach assumes that the structure of texts written be women indicates the limitations and the possibilities (in terms of artistic expression) presented to them by the patriarchal societies in which they live—that is why their texts reflect the social discourses current in the historical context of the production of the work (156). An identification of these discourses shows how the work reproduces or resists them and what is particular of women writers in the construction of this reproduction or resistance. In this sense, this feminist reading approaches the specificities of women's writing based on the socio-historical context of the work, not on the writer's life experience as a woman or on a view of women based on essentialist concepts.

It is relevant to perceive the use of feminist literary criticism in the identification of the characteristics of gothic fiction written by women, as this genre can be taken as the expression of the cultural and historical contexts in which it was produced and that it comes to represent. It is recognized that feminist as well as queer theorists "have offered particularly insightful analysis of the gothic as a site that stages the repressive construction of normative gender roles" (Noble 165). Michelle Massé argues that gothic fiction "exposes a widespread 'cultural amnesia' obscuring the traumatic destruction of women's independent subjectivity," and that it "makes visible the terror that is used to force women into positions of subservience and powerlessness" (qtd. in Noble 166). Similarly, Mary Chapman calls attention to the fact that gothic fiction has also been considered "a mode that allows the shattering of sexual and social roles" (183). Therefore, if the representation and questioning of culturally established conventions (the ones that relate to gender and sexuality included) is a characteristic of gothic fiction, it seems plausible to relate feminist literary theory to the characterization of gothic fiction written by women. For instance, feminism can be useful in the identification of the conventions used to present women gothic characters of specific cultures and times, in a way that the gender roles that characterize this culture are questioned, therefore helping us to understand the meaning of such conventions.

Most critics emphasize the fact that gothic fiction itself emerged as "a 'women's fiction,' written by and for women" (Punter 191), as a gendered genre. But, as it was mentioned earlier here, the distinction between a male and a female modality of gothic fiction has its source in personal struggles and stylistic discrepancies between two eighteenth century writers: Matthew Gregory Lewis and Anne Radcliffe. Kari Winter argues that the distinctions between the gothic traditions originated from these authors accounts for the different experiences men and women have of fear. According to the author, the difference is that, while men fear "the Other" (women included), women fear "the terror of the familiar: the routine brutality and injustice of the patriarchal family, conventional religion, and classist social structures" (91). Ellen Moers coined the term "female gothic" to refer to this tradition followed by women writers since Radcliffe in the eighteenth century (Winter 90). This term can still be distinguished from what Susanne Becker calls the "feminine gothic." She argues that while the "female gothic" refers to works written by women, the "feminine gothic" presupposes a woman as the speaking subject of gothic texts, including those written by men (10). She agrees with Moer's definition, therefore, indicating that the female gothic is necessarily characterized by women's authorship.

In agreement with these critics, Williams suggests two distinct sets of literary conventions employed by the male and female gothic traditions. She emphasizes that "the dynamics of 'male' and 'female' in all realms of experience were imagined in terms of the patriarchal family" and that gothic conventions in general "reveal a dissonance or disequilibrium in patriarchy's . . . assumption that 'male' and 'female' are a crucial distinction and that 'male' is the central and superior term" (99). The author argues that the different ways through which the male and the female gothic traditions undermine patriarchy's fundamental principles relate basically to three issues: narrative technique, assumptions about the supernatural, and plot. Concerning the first issue, Williams affirms that the female gothic

"generated suspense through the limitations imposed by the chosen point of view," while male gothic "derives its most powerful effects from the dramatic irony created by multiple points of view" (102). In relation to the second issue, Williams argues that "whereas the female tradition of gothic explains the ghosts, the male formula simply posits the supernatural as 'reality'" (103). Finally, the differences regarding the third issue consist of the fact that "the male gothic has a tragic plot, in which the hero/villain fails and dies for being an isolated overreacher punished for . . . his violation of the Law," while the female formula "demands a happy ending, the conventional marriage of Western comedy" (103). Besides, female gothic "is organized around the resources of terror, of an imagined threat and the process by which that threat is dispelled," but the male formula "specializes in horror—the bloody shroud, the wormy corpse" (104). It is worth noticing that Williams's definition of the female gothic relates to Carroll's definition of gothic fiction, as both convey an explanation for the supernatural events they introduce. Her definition of the male gothic, in turn, relates to Carroll's definition of horror fiction and resembles the common attribution of horror as characteristic of a male tradition based on Lewis's style. The author also differentiates male and female gothic in terms of perspective:

> Male gothic is a dark mirror reflecting patriarchy's night*mère* [a nightmare about the mother], recalling a perilous, violent, and early separation from the mother/*mater* denigrated as "female." "Female gothic" creates a Looking-Glass World [in which] ancient assumptions about the "male" and the "female" . . . are suppressed or so transformed as to reveal an entirely different world, exposing the perils lurking on the father's corridors of power. (107)

In other words, while the male gothic conveys an obscure reflection of men's anxieties about the female, their "other," the female gothic enhances the patriarchal oppressive ideologies that

raise women's anxieties. As it can be perceived, women's experience of patriarchal repression is considered by Williams and most critics an inherent preoccupation of female gothic fiction.

The problem with Williams's differentiation of a female and a male gothic formula is that it implies the very binarism that gothic is said to undermine. The author argues that the female gothic makes possible the suppression or the transformation of the division of the male and the female in binary opposites at the same time that she keeps this division by arguing that the male and the female perspectives constitute two different forms of gothic fiction. Besides, attention must be paid to the fact that the experience of patriarchal repression informing Williams's definition of the female gothic is that of women in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Western societies represented in the works by Anne Radcliffe and her followers, being, thus, different from the experience of women in the late-twentieth century. Indeed, the works of contemporary women writers are very different from the early ones and from each other. Although Williams affirm that the "male and female narratives and their differences become most explicit in the twentieth-century mass-market Gothic" (100-01), she neither provides examples enough nor discusses them extensively enough to support her arguments, which seem more applicable to the traditions of Radcliffe and Lewis than to contemporary works. Williams even recognizes that her arguments do not apply to Anne Rice, whom she considers a "quite successful exception to the female author's characteristic tendency to explain the supernatural" (270). According to her, Rice "evolved into a Male Gothic author," as she "assumes the reality of vampires," "treats them sympathetically and gives them a voice" (270). Williams's definition of female gothic does not explain Carter's works, too, as her heroines are both the gothic monsters (supernatural threats) and the victims of the stories. The author assumes that nowadays there are women writers of the male gothic and men writers of the female gothic but she treats these as exceptional cases. Her ideas, in this sense, do not correspond to the contemporary (or postmodern) tendency of focusing less on the criticism of

binaries (as the male/female) and essentialist models than on the criticism of the implausibility of hegemonic ideologies (such as patriarchy).

Becker goes even further by arguing that the relationship between gothic fiction and feminism characterizes what she calls "neo-gothic" (4). This literary genre, according to her, "spans the time between the politicized 1970s, the conservative 1980s and the millennium-ridden 1990s," decades connected by "a lack of orientation especially relating to everyday life, as the traditional separations of the spheres of production and reproduction along gender lines [were] shaken" (4). Neo-gothic, in this sense, addresses "the gendered problems of everyday life" (4). Becker argues that the gothic revival experienced in those decades is related not only to postmodernism (as Botting and Veeder, quoted earlier, argue), but also to feminism (1). According to her, although gothic fiction is characterized by anti-realism, it represents life experiences because of its basis on excess, emotions, and subjectivity. Such representation is the basis for the contextualization (both historical and cultural) of a gothic story. Becker points out "three gothic ways of contextualizing experience" (that is, three gothic strategies for representing life experience): defamiliarization of a recognized experience (which enforces "the familiar, the domestic, everyday experience, to an excess"); refamiliarization of the supernatural (that assures the existence of supernatural events and creatures at the plot level, questioning "the easy acceptance of what we consider to be real"); and displacement of the radical doubt raised in the story into the realm of the reader (which challenges the assumptions about reality and gender, drawing attention to the workings of experience) (24-25). Therefore, these three ways of contextualization, when applied to sexual and gender experiences, inform the discussion of the issues of sexuality and gender and the contestation of social assumptions about them.

When related to the postmodernist strategy of parody, these three gothic ways of contextualizing experience subvert the familiar experience represented in the text. This

experience is not simply installed in the text, passively reproducing the patriarchal structure that informs it. Rather, it is installed in the text in an already disruptive way through defamiliarization, its plausibility is questioned through refamiliarization, and the ideology that informs it is challenged when the doubts about its plausibility raised in the story are displaced. What Becker is describing, therefore, can be considered a process used by contemporary women writers of gothic fiction, which she calls "female neo-gothic."

Nevertheless, Becker's (as well as Williams's and Moer's) definition of the female gothic is too simplistic, rendering this term problematic. As Christine Ruotolo et al. indicate, many questions emerge before one can come to a satisfactory definition:

> What specifically differentiates between the "Female Gothic" and other kinds of Gothic? From other kinds of novels? Can we read "Female" as "Feminist," or do these novels simply reproduce the patriarchal structures their heroines inevitably struggle against? Is the Female Gothic somehow "personal"? Political? Psychological? (par. 1)

The same authors propose as a solution to these questions a discussion of gender issues in the works of Radcliffe and Lewis so as to observe the plausibility of the differences between them. The issues considered are: "the gendered construction of the gothic heroine; the similarly gendered construction of the gothic hero; the link between the gothic 'place' and female sexuality; and the conflation of money/class issues with issues of femininity" (par. 3). I would say that such discussion is not enough to characterize the female gothic or even to justify the coinage of such a term as a genre, although the issues it considers seem to convey a view of gender representation and feminist criticism in the works of individual authors. One example of a problem in this method is the fact that the differences identified between the works of Radcliffe and Lewis cannot be taken as necessarily applying to other works written in different historical con-

texts. It would not guarantee, therefore, a consistent characterization of a male and a female tradition of gothic fiction.

All the problems related to the term "female gothic" discussed above are the main reason I have decided to refer to Angela Carter's and Anne Rice's works not as "female gothic fiction" but as "women's gothic fiction." By avoiding the term "female gothic," I also avoid the essentialism that is the result of the unsatisfactory definitions provided by critics so far. Although Carter and Rice are women writers concerned with patriarchy, their historical context calls for different approaches from those employed by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century women, so that their works cannot be classified as following the tradition of Radcliffe. Moreover, the term "female," as it was explained earlier in this section, is nowadays refuted in feminist literary criticism because it emphasizes a biological category that refers to sex, different from the social category of "women." The form in the plural also has the advantage of lessening the idea of an essence implicit in the use of the word "woman" to refer to a whole category of social beings that differ from each other in terms of class, ethnicity, nationality, religion, and so on. By favoring the term "women's gothic fiction" over "female gothic fiction," I emphasize the fact that Carter and Rice share a critical view of the social role of women, without the intention of defining a literary genre based on this fact, that is, without arguing that women's authorship is what grants the peculiarities of this genre in relation to others. My argument here is that sexuality and gender are fundamental concerns of some women in late-twentieth century, informing the experiences and being contextualized in the works of Carter and Rice through the use of gothic devices. In order to demonstrate how such use can reflect concerns about sexuality and gender, I present next the definitions of these issues and the implications of the debates carried out in the 1970s and 1980s.

1.2. Sexuality and Gender

1.2.1. General Definitions

A contemporary analysis of the terms sexuality and gender indicates that they are conventions that are socially, historically and culturally constructed, therefore proving to be complex to define. Before addressing the complexity of their configurations, I present the most basic definitions provided by different critics. According to Lizbeth Goodman, sexuality "refers to the realm of sexual experience and desire" and, sometimes, "to a person's sexual orientation (as heterosexual, bisexual or homosexual)" (vii). In Jeffrey Weeks's words, sexuality is "related not only to the physical body but also to beliefs, ideologies, and imaginations" (364). It is a "'social construction,' a historical invention, which of course draws on the possibilities of the body, but whose meanings and the weight we attribute to them are shaped in concrete social situations" (366). Gender, on the other hand, "refers to ways of seeing and representing people and situations based on sex differences . . . It is a social or cultural category, influenced by stereotypes about 'female' and 'male' behavior that exist in our attitudes and beliefs" (Goodman vii). Weeks emphasizes that gender, as related to "the social differentiation between men and women" (367) must be understood as different from the term sex, which "refers to the anatomical differences between men and women" (367). In other words, the term sexuality refers to sexual practices and interests, while gender refers to the division of social roles based on sex difference. Notwithstanding the difference between the terms, these definitions emphasize the condition of both sexuality and gender as constructed categories, used to classify people and to prescribe a specific code of conduct. However, it must be recognized that their implications prove to be much more complex than these simple definitions may lead one to suppose. Next, I present a revision of theoretical works that have been discussing these implications.

1.2.2. Gender

As Sandra Almeida asserts, the definition of the term gender as socially and culturally constructed was the basis of feminist criticism in the twentieth century, which focuses on the differentiation between gender and sex, referred to above (91). A current preoccupation among feminist critics, like Judith Butler, is the fact that the notion of gender interacts with other concepts that constitute social relations. Butler explains as follows the implausibility of the already mentioned assumption that the term "woman" denotes a common identity:

> If one "is" a woman, that is surely not all one is; the term fails to be exhaustive, not because a pregendered "person" transcends the specific paraphernalia of its gender, but because gender is not always constituted coherently in different historical contexts, and because gender intersects with racial, class, ethnic, sexual and regional modalities of discursively constituted identities. As a result, it becomes impossible to separate out "gender" from the political and cultural intersections in which it is invariably produced and maintained. (*Gender Trouble* 4-5).

Here, again, it can be perceived the claim for a historical and cultural contextualization of the notion of gender and of the discourses about it. The intersection of this notion with other realms of social life adds to the complexity of such gender identities, indicating how essentialist the social discourses that classify different individuals into the dichotomy man/woman are. Therefore, an acknowledged principle in contemporary criticism is that essentialist definitions of gender (informed by the patriarchal discourses that assume that gendered identities are uniform, fix, and totalizing) fail to account for the complexity of gendered identities.

One of the most important contributions of Butler to gender studies is her argument that the differentiation between gender and sex used by feminist critics is still problematic. In her "1990 Preface" to *Gender Trouble*, she demonstrates the instability of the notion of "female,"

claiming that "its meaning is as troubled and unfixed as 'woman'" (xxxi). She refers to this problem using the term "female trouble:" "that historical configuration of a nameless female indisposition which thinly veiled the notion that being female is a natural disposition" (xxx). In other words, the female trouble refers to the inconsistency of the belief that the female sex is biologically determined. In her book, Butler extends her arguments to the more general notions of sex and gender, affirming that the former is as socially constructed as the latter, and she coins the expression "gender trouble" to refer to the complexity of gender identities (*Gender Trouble* 2). Butler defends that notions of a biological basis should never be taken for granted in the definition of gender identities and that, rather than being the source of gender differences, the notion of sex is informed by the same discursive system that informs the notion of gender (*Gender Trouble* 9-10).

Another contention presented by Butler relates to the question of whether the construction of gender identities implies determinism or free will. This construction can imply determinism if it suggests that "the body" is "a passive medium on which cultural meanings are inscribed;" it implies free will if it suggests that the body is "the instrument through which an appropriative and interpretive will determines a cultural meaning for itself" (*Gender Trouble* 12). It is not clear if the construction of gender occurs as only one of these two possibilities, but, as Butler indicates, it can be perceived that in both cases the body is considered "a mere *instrument* or *medium* for which a set of cultural meanings are only externally related." The author demonstrates that this question becomes even more problematic because of the fact that the body itself is a construction: it does not have "a signifiable existence prior to the mark of [its] gender," making it difficult to foresee a reconception of the body that does not take it as "a passive medium or instrument awaiting the enlivening capacity of a distinctly immaterial will" (12). On the other hand, Butler argues that the intractability of the notions of "sex," "gender," and even "construction" imposes limits to the cultural possibilities related to them:

> The limits of the discursive analysis of gender presuppose and preempt the possibilities of imaginable and realizable gender configurations within culture. . . . These limits are always set within the terms of a hegemonic cultural discourse predicated on binary structures that appear as the language of universal rationality. Constraint is thus built into what that language constitutes as the imaginable domain of gender. (*Gender Trouble* 12)

Said in a different way, hegemonic cultural discourses predict the definition of the notion of gender to be incorporated by society and condition the gendered experiences, limiting in this way both the possibilities of gender configuration that are imposed on and those that are under-taken by individuals.

In this context, the issue of gender identity proves to be also problematic. Butler affirms that "'persons' only become intelligible through becoming gendered in conformity with recognizable standards of gender intelligibility" (*Gender Trouble* 22). Addressing the question of "how the regulatory practices that govern gender also govern culturally intelligible notions of identity," she argues that:

> "Intelligible" genders are those which in some sense institute and maintain relations of coherence and continuity among sex, gender, sexual practice, and desire. In other words, the specters of discontinuity and incoherence, themselves thinkable only in relation to existing norms of continuity and coherence, are constantly prohibited and produced by the very laws that seek to establish causal or expressive lines of connection among biological sex, culturally constituted genders, and the "expression" or "effect" of both in the manifestation of sexual desire through sexual practice. (*Gender Trouble* 23)

This implies that a set of acceptable gender identities (the "intelligible genders") is determined and predicted by cultural norms based on a culture's idea of coherence among sex, gender, and

sexuality (for instance, that to the female sex corresponds the feminine gender and the female sexuality, as if these three categories were fixed in themselves). Moreover, the same cultural matrix that determines which gender identities are intelligible also determines which ones are unacceptable (*Gender Trouble* 24). What Butler calls "unintelligible gender identities" would apply, then, to the cases of androgyny and also to gay and lesbian identities. Androgyny, according to Humm, is "a Greek word from *andro* (male) and *gyn* (female) which means a psychological and psychic mixture of traditional masculine and feminine virtues" (*Dictionary* 10). The notion of unintelligible sexualities could be applied, then, to homosexuality and bisexuality, while the notion of unintelligible genders would relate to gays, lesbians, travestites, and transgenders. These possibilities contest the idea that sex and genders are always binary (male/female, man/woman).

The notion of androgyny is important in feminist's arguments about the complexities of gender identities. Ginette Castro discusses the androgynist point of view as a "theory that developed within the new feminist movement of the 1960s" and affirms that androgyny is "the most revolutionary concept in contemporary feminism" (125). It is not a strictly codified theory, the author emphasizes, but a new perspective in feminism with ontological and social implications. Castro explains that the concept of androgyny contests the notion that the male and the female sexes are necessarily opposite and that one is privileged over the other (Castro 125). The social implication of the concept of androgyny is that it challenges the social divisions of gender roles and the limitation they impose on the individual's personality.

In other words, the concept of androgyny denies the notion that one of the biological sexes must predominate upon the other, claiming, instead, that the so-called masculine and feminine traits are equally present in all individuals. Consequently, the androgynist perspective argues in favor of a "total realization of the self," of "a reconciliation between the sexes, with every sort of being participating in the full span of human experience" (Castro 126). This per-

spective challenges the notion of gender identity, which is "an assigned or learned sex role . . . based on the individual's repression into the unconscious of all psychic manifestations of the opposite sex" (127). Gendered stereotypes, in this sense, are constructed based on a particular society's perception of sexual difference, in a way that the internalization of these stereotypes as patterns of behavior and ideal identities reinforces the discourses that claim that they are natural, innate characteristics. This is a process of socialization of individuals promoted by social institutions.

The modernist writer Virginia Wolf proposes a concept of androgyny in relation to literary creation and criticism. Androgyny, for Wolf, is the condition in which the individual lives and thinks without the necessity of assuming a social position or an identity in relation to one's biological sex and in opposition to the other sex. She argues that this fusion of the male and the female sides of the brain fertilizes the mind and permits its faculties to be used at their fullest (98). Nevertheless, the opinions of feminists about the concept of androgyny are not consensual. As Humm affirms, "androgyny was for Woolf and many feminist critics a way of liberating women from the negative forces placed by patriarchy on their sex," being "an spectrum on which human beings could choose their places regardless of history or tradition" (*Dictionary* 10).

In this sense, the notion of androgyny has been considered by these feminists analogous to what Butler has more recently called "culturally unintelligible genders": it puts into question the necessity of a binary division of gender identities, offering a certain freedom for those who were so far constrained to choose between only one of the two possibilities of gender identification offered by cultural hegemonic discourses. Actually, the very notion of the necessity of gender identification is contested by the notion of androgyny, according to which the individual's assumption of a social position and the construction of his or her personality are not informed by biological sexual differences. On the other hand, according to the Humm,

"[o]ther feminists argue that androgyny is a static concept because it ignores issues of power which can promote individual psychological transformation through material change" (*Dictionary* 11). Despite these problematic implications, androgyny seems a plausible notion if considered in relation to recent feminist arguments (like Butler's) that such a thing as gender identity does not exist. It is also relevant for my analysis of Rice's characters as I discuss later on.

In another work, "Imitation and Gender Insubordination," Butler affirms that "[t]here is no 'proper' gender, a gender proper to one sex rather than another" ("Imitation" 722). She undermines the erroneous assumption that heterosexualized genders are the normal, the original ones, rendering the notion of gender its implicit qualities: phantasmatic (because it is based on an ideal), performative (because "it constitutes as an effect the very subject it appears to express,"), compulsive (because it is constantly repeating that performance in order to be seen as real and original), and compulsory (because the noncompliance with heterosexual norms results in "ostracism, punishment, and violence, not to mention the transgressive pleasures produced by those very prohibitions" ("Imitation" 725).

Butler suggests that heterosexuality does not precede homosexuality as much as it is the very potentiality of this latter that makes possible the former's claim of originality ("Imitation" 724). The performative repetition of heterosexuality is what renders heterosexual identity the illusory quality of being natural. That is, the more the children learn and actualize what they are taught, the more those stereotypical gender roles are considered natural and normal by society, in that cultural and social conditioning is mistakenly related to biological predispositions.

Butler also discusses the implications of the relation between gender presentation and sexuality:

> [S]exuality always exceeds any given performance, presentation, or narrative which is why it is not possible to derive or read off a sexuality from any given

> gender presentation. . . . Sexuality is never fully "expressed" in a performance or practice. . . . Part of what constitutes sexuality is precisely that which does not appear and that which, to some degree, can never appear. . . . That which is excluded for a given gender presentation to "succeed" may be precisely what is played out sexually, that is, an "inverted" relation between gender and gender presentation and gender presentation and sexuality. On the other hand, both gender presentation and sexual practices may correlate such that it appears that the former "expresses" the latter, and yet both are jointly constituted by the very sexual possibilities that they exclude. ("Imitation" 725-26)

Butler shows, in this sense, that there is no necessarily continuity between gender presentation and sexuality, so that, for instance, the way a person behaves in public is not enough to express his or her sexual practices, much less his or her sexual identity (as the latter may also not be expressed through the sexual practices). The idea that gender presentation expresses sexuality is itself illusory:

> [It] is a performance that produces the illusion of an inner sex or essence or psychic gender core; it produces on the skin, through the gesture, the move, the gait (that array of corporeal theatrics understood as gender presentation), the illusion of an inner depth. ("Imitation" 728)

Butler goes on to argue that the operation of thought through which heterosexuality naturalizes itself (sex informs gender that informs sexuality) can be inverted and displaced: the notions of sex, sexual identity, and gender are not the causes of the compulsory performance of heterosexuality, but produced or maintained by the effects of this performance ("Imitation" 728-29). It is the notion that heterosexuality is natural and original (an idea conveyed by the compulsory repetition of heterosexuality) that informs the conception that sex, gender and

sexuality are notions composed of binary categories and that they are continuous and congruent with each other.

In this sense, traditional notions of femininity and masculinity represent what Butler calls culturally intelligible gender identities and are based on the notion of heterosexuality as original source. These notions indicate, as David Glover and Cora Kaplan argue, confusions between the concepts of the biological (or natural) sex and of gender as the cultural and social aspect of sexual difference (xxi)—concepts that are already problematic, as shown above. Traditional definitions of femininity and masculinity try to associate biological traits of sex to social and cultural identities and performances in order to point out essential qualities that characterize an individual as a man or as a woman. These attributes inform a separation between what the hegemonic social discourses consider to be good and what they consider to be bad femininity or masculinity (as if such judgments were possible) and they vary according to historical and cultural changes. In this sense, both notions are illusory in that they try to essentialize something that is too complex and mutable. On the other hand, the analysis of how the notions of masculinity and femininity are constructed in literary works, for instance, can be useful to understand the process of sexual and gendered identification conveyed in relation to its particular time and culture.

Gayle Rubin's concept of the sex/gender system provides a good explanation for the cultural construction of gendered ideals. According to the author, the sex/gender system, present in every society, is "a set of arrangements by which the biological raw material of human sex and procreation is shaped by human, social intervention and satisfied in a conventional manner, no matter how bizarre some of the conventions may be" (543). She also states that this system is "the part of social life which is the locus of the oppression of women, of sexual minorities, and of certain aspects of human personality within individuals" (534).

Rubin affirms that the notion of patriarchy as the only social system that works to maintain sexism obscures other distinctions (538). She argues that

> any society will have some systematic ways to deal with sex, gender, and babies. Such a system may be sexually egalitarian, at least in theory, or it may be "gender stratified," as seems to be the case for most or all of the known examples. But it is important . . . to maintain a distinction between the human capacity and necessity to create a sexual world, and the empirically oppressive ways in which sexual worlds have been organized. Patriarchy subsumes both meanings into the same term. Sex/gender system, on the other hand, is a neutral term which refers to the domain, but is the product of the specific social relations which organize it. (539)

Rubin, in this sense, proposes the use of the term sex/gender system in place of "patriarchy," as this latter implies biased and erroneous definitions about the creation and the organization of sexual practices and relations. Similarly, Butler argues that the notion of patriarchy is essentialized as if it were a universal structure of domination. This notion has been criticized "for its failure to account for the workings of gender oppression in the concrete cultural contexts in which it exists" and for its compliance with the idea of a common subjugation experienced by all women alike (*Gender Trouble* 5). Rubin's arguments for a change in the use of the term patriarchy also relate to a cultural historical inconsistency: it refers to the specific form of male dominance represented in the Old Testament, namely, pastoral nomads (539). Using the same term to refer to contemporary institutions, she argues, is therefore not proper.

Rubin goes on to emphasize that anthropological studies like those of Claude Lévi-Strauss indicate that the social organization of sex is generally based on gender, on the imposition of heterosexuality as obligatory, and on the control of female sexuality (545). It can be perceived, then, that this suppression of individual characteristics under the constraint of one

imposed general category also represents the imposition of heterosexuality. Consequently, Rubin states that "[t]he suppression of the homosexual component of human sexuality, and by corollary, the oppression of homosexuals, is . . . a product of the same system whose rules and relations oppress women" (546). She also argues that what entails the constraint of female sexuality is the asymmetry between the two sides in the binary gender relations (548). But, as socially informed, these relations need to be contextualized in order to be contested.

As Weedon puts it, in the context of patriarchal societies, "the nature and social role of women are defined in relation to a norm which is male" (2). The notion of biological determination of femininity, in this sense, leads to the creation of negative stereotypes for women who refuse the ideal roles patriarchal discourses assign to them. Such stereotypes are based, thus, on the idea of unnaturallity or supernaturallity. This is also what Gilbert and Gubar attack when they discuss Virginia Wolf's ideas that male authors have created two extremes images to represent women in literature, those of the "angel" and the "monster" (596). Common roles prescribed to women by patriarchy are the ones of a good wife and of a good mother, and they call "for particular qualities, thought to be naturally feminine, such as patience, emotion and self-sacrifice" (Weedon 3). Every behavior or personality that differs from this prescription is denigrating, related to evil and threatening to the order that patriarchal discourses label as "natural."

Along similar lines but with a different focus, Peter F. Murphy investigates how both men and women are victimized in literary representations of gender (2). The author emphasizes that the notion of masculinity is "a set of rhetorical constructions (fictions)" (1) and that, in literature, the forms of its representation (the "construction of manhood") are varied (2). Paul Hoch's argues that "the distorted social roles allotted to women and men in our society have similar social and cultural causes," in the sense that "just as women are supposed to be both innocent and sexy, men are supposed to be both 'white hero' and 'black beast'" (qtd. in P. F.

Murphy 4). It can be perceived here that gender works together with racial issues in the construction of these stereotypical social roles prescribed for men, roles that, like those prescribed for women, have worked to constrain gender identities.

According to P. F. Murphy, such masculine roles have their source in "myths about male sexuality [that] have informed men's lives over the past two centuries and focus, frequently, on the relationship between a man and his body" (4). An example of this relationship (and that is present in modern literature) is a man's obsession with his penis, which becomes "a symbol of power, an instrument of appropriation, and a weapon" (4). Also addressing these myths of masculinity, David G. Gilmore argues that "traditional manly codes of stoicism, physical strength, sexual prowess, and bravery function to protect the social unit" (qtd. in Leverenz 47).

Like the notion of femininity for Butler, masculinity and male sexuality for P. F. Murphy cannot be understood as static, abstract, or essential. What have been current in literary representation of manhood, according to the author, are dominant cultural assumptions about masculinity, in a way that this representation ends up exposing the untenability of such assumptions (5-6). This fact too is in agreement with Butler's argument that non-conforming gender identities (or "subversive matrices of gender disorder") question the plausibility of the cultural matrix of intelligibility for gender identities.

David Glover and Kora Kaplan discuss Mosse's concept of "the manly ideal," which emerged as a consequence of "the eighteenth century revival of interest in the ancient Greek ideal of male beauty" (59) and consisted of a "fusion of the moral and the visual," claiming that "an individual's moral well-being depended upon his physical fitness" (60). What proceeds from this claim is that this ideal of masculinity "requires intense effort: a man must struggle against himself, even conceiving of his own body as a sort of enemy, and also against others." The differences between men and women are also predisposed by this ideal: "feminine traits

had to be kept firmly in their proper place" because "in men they were a sign of weakness" (60). According to Mosse, the definitions of masculinity and male sexuality, therefore, depend also on "those unsightly features and pathological behaviors that indicated everything an authentic masculinity was not supposed to be" (qtd. in Glover and Kaplan 61). In other words, the ideal of masculinity depended on the definition of its countertypes, which were said to be dangerous threats to the healthy body, and therefore, should be resisted (like masturbation or sodomy, for instance).

Concerning the issue of the differences in the way men and women are affected by the imposition of gender roles, David Leverenz discusses Gilmore's suggestion that

> both male codes of combative or stoic assertiveness and female codes of self-sacrifice have to be learned, but . . . men need ritual and ideological socialization because they are more "atomistic," whereas women are "normally under the control of men," especially in precapitalist societies. (40)

Leverenz concludes that "the myth [of masculinity] has become both more homophobic and more ambiguously playful about sexual identity" and that it "continues to idealize, marginalize and mutilate women," who, in turn, "continue to function [in narratives] as adjuncts to a man's remasculinization, providing emotional supports and physical targets" (41). The author, hence, seems to agree with the idea that notions of femininity continue to locate women in a position of major victims, independently of how notions of masculinity also victimize men.

1.2.3. Sexuality

Studies about sexuality emphasize the fact that it is also a social construction. Similarly to the term gender, this construction presupposes a set of behaviors and characteristics considered culturally and socially accepted and another set that consists of what is unacceptable. To the former relates to heterosexuality, while the latter, for example, has

traditionally been related to homosexuality or bisexuality. However, the basis of this division between heterosexuality and homosexuality is undecided, as Nancy Chodorow observes: "Both are similarly constructed and experienced compromise formations" (770). In order to understand the mechanism that defines these two categories as opposite, it is necessary to return here to the idea of compulsory heterosexuality, already mentioned in relation to Butler's notion of gender intelligible identities. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan discuss it referring to Adrienne Rich's arguments: "Th[e] regime [of compulsory heterosexuality] had as a major correlate (if not a presupposition) the banishment of alternative sexual practices and the violation of bearers of non-heterosexual gender identities" (Rivkin and Ryan 675). The regime of compulsory sexuality privileges heterosexuality and condemns alternative sexual practices and identities, that is, those that deviate from the socially privileged function of biological reproduction.

The individual's assumption of a position in terms of his or her sexuality relates to the idea of sexual identity, which Humm defines as "a sense of one's own sexuality," which is "culturally rather than biologically determined" (*Modern Feminisms* 409). The author also emphasizes that the term sexual identity refers only to "the public presentation of sexual aims and objectives as integrated into the personality" (409), from which it can be concluded that it does not necessarily correspond to sexual practice. The very fact that public presentation and practice may reveal incoherent aspects of one's sexualities confirms the complexity of the individual's position.

Chodorow argues that psychoanalytic works based on the biological assumption that heterosexuality is innate or natural lead to problems. One of them is that this biological assumption neglects the fact that the so-called normal heterosexuality is as specified in its object of desire as homosexuality is said to be. She goes on to say that "the fairy tales, myths, tales of love and loss and betrayal, movies, and books that members of a culture grow up with

and thus share with others" influence an individual's choice of an object of sexual desire. Sexual fantasies reflect, thus, the individual's appropriations of the language of these culturally created narratives, which also inform the notions of sexual attraction and attractiveness that are culturally privileged. Consequently, Chodorow argues, such notions vary historically and culturally. In the case of the West, she affirms, "cultural fantasies are almost exclusively heterosexual" (771). The individual component of heterosexual fantasy and desire consists of "a private heterosexual eroticism that contrasts with or specifies further the cultural norm" (772). Biology, in this sense, cannot explain the content of either cultural fantasy or private eroticism.

Michel Foucault emphasizes the notion of sexuality as a social apparatus for control of individuals, describing its development throughout history. He claims that the term "sexuality" only appeared at the beginning of the nineteenth century and that the constitution of this notion follows the norms originated from the development of sciences and from social institutions, as well as from the subjectivization of these norms by individuals. (*The History of Sexuality* 2: 3-4). While describing the history of discourses on sexuality, the author rejects the common idea that society has always worked to repress it, arguing, instead, that sexuality is a historical construct provided by society. In this sense, he affirms that the reason for the deployment of sexuality is not "in reproducing itself, but in proliferating, innovating, annexing, creating and penetrating bodies in an increasingly detailed way, and in controlling populations in an increasingly comprehensive way" (*The History of Sexuality* 1: 107). In other words, sexuality is determined and controlled through discourses that intend to examine and explain the human sexualized body.

According to Foucault, such discourses have been incited by social institutions throughout time, in order "to expel from reality the forms of sexuality that were not amenable to the strict economy of reproduction," namely, "unproductive activities," "casual pleasures,"

"practices whose object was not procreation" ("The Perverse Implantation" 683). Social discourses, which vary culturally and historically, provide not only the knowledge of ways of proper sexual behavior, but also of forms of sexual transgression: when a social norm defines what kind of behavior is proper, it also describes the behaviors that characterize the subversion of the rule.

One important aspect in Foucault's account of the history of discourses on sexuality is the nineteenth-century change of focus in what concerned the groups whose sexuality should be examined and controlled: children, criminals, mentally ill people, and gays. According to him, sexuality was then seen as the core of those peoples' identity ("The Perverse Implantation" 685). Pedagogy was concerned with preventing children from masturbation and from so-called deviant sexual practices; women's psychology was related to their sexualized body (the term "hysteria" was created in that period from the Greek word for womb, based on the idea of a causal relation between a woman's biological cycle and her psychological conditions); the alleged perverts were considered aberrations that had to be studied so that the danger they represented could be made explicit and, consequently, controlled. The term homosexual was also invented by the scientific discourses of that time. Those who did not conform to the economic and conservative practice of sex solely for reproduction were examined as if perversion was an innate characteristic, possible of being detected through a technology of health and pathology. For this reason, Foucault calls this new way of treating transgressive sexuality an "implantation of perversion" (The Perverse Implantation" 688). According to him, the intensification of discourses on deviant sexuality has the ambiguous result of controlling such deviations and intensifying their recurrence. This ambiguity can be explained by the fact that these discourses provide both power and pleasure for both those who use them to classify individuals and to those individuals being classified by them ("The Perverse Implantation" 688). The ones who investigate the individuals who experience deviant sexual pleasures feel the pleasure of exercising

power through this investigation. At the same time, those who are investigated feel the power of being able to experience sexual pleasures that are contrary to those socially accepted. For Foucault, through this circular process, the deviant sexualities become as socially determined as the socially accepted ones.

Foucault also explains the relation between sexuality and morality, affirming that the former is constructed and constrained by moral rules. He argues that the definition of morality is ambiguous, meaning both "a set of values and rules of action that are recommended to individuals through the intermediary of various prescriptive agencies such as the family . . . , educational institutions, churches, and so forth" and "the manner in which [these individuals] respect or disregard a set of rules" (*The History of Sexuality* 2:25). Foucault affirms that, as an ambiguous term, morality presupposes two possibilities: code-oriented morality—rules prescribed for an austere conduct—or ethics-oriented morality—related to the subjectivization of those codes by the individual. In this sense, sexuality is shaped by social impositions, as well as by the individual's internalized ideas about such impositions.

The author argues that, since antiquity, people believe in the idea of the excessive force of pleasure (the power of the appetites over the soul), which the Christian doctrine of the flesh associated with men's Fall from Eden (*The History of Sexuality* 2:50). Among Foucault's examples of moral approaches to this excess is the association between "the ethics of sex" and "the ethics of the table" (*The History of Sexuality* 2:51). This association, which the author takes from Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics,* postulates that eating, drinking, and sex are forms of pleasure of contact and touch that when enjoyed in excess bring the danger of exceeding what is necessary. I would say that this idea can be related to the vampire's blood lust, which involves drinking in excess and serves as a metaphor for sexual excess. Moral codes and moral ethics, however, according to Foucault, have served to prevent people from surrendering to this excessive use of pleasure (*History of Sexuality* 2:250). In this sense, the constitution of this

self-disciplined subject requires an austerity. Foucault concludes that it is more useful to comprehend the historical transformations of moral experience ("a history of 'ethics,' understood as the elaboration of a form of relation to the self that enables an individual to fashion himself into a subject of ethical conduct") than the history of moral codes (*The History of Sexuality* 2:251).

Some points in Foucault's theory, however, have been frequently criticized. One of them relates to his definition of sex and sexuality. Comparing Foucault's and Butler's differentiation of these two concepts, Grosz argues that:

> With Foucault I agree that sex is a product, an end effect of regimes of sexuality (which is another way of saying that the inscription, functioning and practices of a body constitute what that body is). With Butler and against Foucault, I want to argue that both sex and sexuality are marked, lived and function according to whether it is a male or female body that is being discussed. Sex is no longer the label of both sexes in their difference, as in Foucault's writings, a generic term indicating sexed, as opposed to inanimate, existence; it is now the label and terrain of the production and enactment of sexual difference. ("Space, Time and Perversion" 213).

In other words, for Grosz, Foucault fails for not differentiating sex and sexuality properly, taking sex as a general term used to refer to both parts of the sexual binary (male and female). Indeed, while concentrating his discussions of the history of sexuality on the sexual ethics from the antiquity, he acknowledges that such ethics have been "thought, written and taught by men and addressed to [free] men" (*The History of Sexuality* 2:22), women and slaves were excluded from it. This also occurs in Foucault's work, as he affirms that women's sexuality has been treated as deviant in social discourse as well as homosexuality has, but concentrates his discussion only on the latter, dismissing the particularities that differentiate each case.

Another problem pointed out by other critics in Foucault's works is his lack of account for the issue of gender. Teresa de Lauretis affirms that his arguments against the social construction of sexuality and the sexual oppression that results from it imply a denial of the existence of gender issues (223). Like the feminist critics that endorse a concept of androgyny, he is accused of refusing to recognize the implications of gender difference in life experiences based on the idea that this difference is socially created. Indeed, Foucault does not discuss gender. This fact distinguishes his ideas from those of Butler, which are based on Foucault's assumptions about the artificiality of the notion of sexuality but took them further to include that of gender. Differently from Foucault, Butler argues that gender differences not only are constructed forms of social oppression but also influence the constitution of the individual's subjectivity (Arán and Peixoto 103). In other words, one thing is to recognize that the notion of gender is a social construction; another thing is to assume that this fact hinders the incorporation of this notion into a person's subjectivity as if it were a natural predisposition. This incorporation attests the efficiency of the imposition of the notion of gender as a way of social control upon individuals, but the recognition of this efficiency does not mean a complacency with such imposition. This fact is what Foucault assumes in relation to sexuality but refuses to consider in relation to gender.

Another problematic issue in Foucault's arguments is his idea of a "truth of sex." According to him, Western societies have established, since the Middle Ages, a way of accessing the truth about people's experience: the ritual of confession (*The History of Sexuality* 1:58). He argues that what social institutions knew of the truth of sex, that is, the actual configurations of sexual practices, was apprehended through that ritual of discourse. It is still "the general standard governing the production of the true discourse on sex," according to him, though it is not only a religious ritual anymore, but is implied in the power relationships between, for instance, children and parents, students and educators, patients and psychiatrists,

delinquents and experts (*The History of Sexuality* 1:63). The problem with this argument is that it implies that sex or sexuality is something that can be fully grasped, understood through a discourse. Actually, as argued by Butler, sexuality can never be totally expressed neither apprehended through sexual performances, presentations or narratives because it is too complex, involving not only concepts and norms that are culturally determined but also having individual, subjective contours. Although Foucault's argument that social discourses about sexuality prescribe norms for its practice (controlling individuals in this way) seems plausible, his suggestion that these discourses intend to and do attain the truth of sex is not.

The notion of sexuality has frequently been used in the study of literary works to create stereotypes related to the representation of both male and female sexualities. The purported transgressive aspect of female sexuality has often been represented by the stereotype of the female monster. Gilbert and Gubar argue that this representation illustrates "Simone de Beauvoir's thesis that woman has been made to represent all of man's ambivalent feelings about his own inability to control his own physical existence, his own birth and death" (607). What the authors emphasize in the use of the woman-monster stereotype is less its literary significance than the consequences it brings to women's life experience. This becomes clearer in the following passage:

> The "killing" of oneself into an art object—the pruning and preening, the mirror madness, and concern with odors and aging, with hair which is invariably too curly or too lank, with bodies too thin or too thick—all this testifies to the efforts women have expended not just trying to be angels but trying *not* to become female monsters. (Gilbert and Gubar 608)

From this argument follows that the representation of women's sexuality as monstrous also fulfills the social function of controlling this sexuality, as it consists of a model of what they should not be, opposed to the prescribed model represented by the stereotype of the angel-

woman. Acknowledging the use of such stereotypes in literary works, therefore, provides evidences for the discourses on sexuality that these works convey: whether such discourses side with the norms of a compulsory heterosexuality or with the reactive forces of alternative sexualities.

A similar approach can be applied to a discussion on men's sexuality as represented in literary works. In her analysis of nineteenth-century gothic works written by women, for example, Hendershot discusses a process of eroticization of British men as the result of imperialist expansion: since men are characterized in these works as both appealing and dangerous, as "the fantasy male lover of the gothic imagination in the explicit context of imperialism" (165). I would say that a characterization of this gothic male lover in contemporary gothic fiction (like that of women's sexuality) requires a historical contextualization, so that the implications of stereotypes of women's and men's sexuality can be identified in relation to contemporary discourses.

1.2.4. Contemporary Debates on Sexuality and Gender: The 1970s and 1980s

Concerning the historical context of the works to be analyzed, namely, the 1970s and 1980s, the theoretical discussions about sexuality and gender are particularly intense. Such discussions were already intense in the late 1960s and early 1970s, when, according to Rivkin and Ryan, "[t]he emergence of a Gay and Lesbian Liberation Movement . . . intersected necessarily with the work of feminists who were concerned with issues of sexuality and gender identity" (675). Apparently fighting against a similar situation (of oppression by a dominant male heterosexual community) these two groups were concerned with common issues. But from the moment their differences (especially of perspective and in terms of the complexity discussed in the previous section) were perceived, these two groups took different paths. Gender studies appeared as a new field in the mid- to late 1970s and into the early 1980s,

when, in conjunction with Gay and Lesbian Studies, "[i]t turned its attention on all gender formation, both heterosexual and homosexual" (Rivkin and Ryan, Introduction 677). Hutcheon relates this development to the postmodernist contestation of values and ideologies that characterize Western culture as androcentric, phallocentric, and heterocentric ("Feminism and Postmodernism" 30).

The 1970s and 1980s were also intense in relation to the public debate on sexuality and gender (among scholars, liberal groups, and society). According to Weeks, this period was marked by attacks on the 1960s' liberal reform on sexual morality, the so-called "permissiveness." Instead of diminishing the social control over sexuality, this reform only proposed new forms of social regulation as an attempt to deal with the social changes taking place then. Consequently, the "permissiveness" the earlier age was attacked both by conservatives and by liberals (Weeks 389). The discussion was concerned with the consequences of permissiveness to the family structure, to the sexual roles, to the classification of heterosexuality and homosexuality in terms of normality, and to the values transmitted to children through sex education (390). Conservatives argued that these aspects would be threatened by the new regulation of sexuality, while liberal activists complained it did not truly guarantee the rights of freedom in relation to one's own body.

In the context of this debate, apprehensions about how to deal with sexuality in the current world order became increasingly apparent. Weeks argues that "all these fears were compounded by, and thought to be symbolized in, the emergence of a major health crisis associated with HIV and AIDS" (390). This disease, associated negatively with what was seen as free and careless sexuality, appeared as an obstacle to the protests of feminists and homosexuals.

The impact of the eruption of AIDS in the 1980s can be understood in relation the characterization of that historical period in terms of medical advances. According to Susan Sontag,

> contraception and the assurance by medicine of the curability of sexually transmitted diseases (as of almost all infectious diseases) made it possible to regard sex as an adventure without consequences. Now, AIDS obliges people to think of a sex as having, possibly, the direst consequences: suicide. Or murder . . . The fear of AIDS imposes on an act whose ideal is an experience of pure presentness (and a creation of the future), a relation to the past to be ignored at one's peril. (72)

In other words, the AIDS virus appeared in a moment when sexual freedom was supported by the medical advances. After the eruption of the epidemic, excessive cares about one's sexual partner's past and present experiences marked interpersonal relations. In this sense, the anxieties elicited by the AIDS epidemic can be related to what Punter points out as basic gothic elements: the intense preoccupation and suspicion in relation to the other's sexual life relates to the notion of paranoia and the fear of being confronted and punished by one's past sexual irresponsibilities. As Sontag puts it, although the fears AIDS represents are old ("especially, contamination by something that comes from the outside, an invader, which was feared in other virus epidemics throughout history"), "its status as that unexpected event, an entirely new disease—a new judgment, as it were—adds to the dread" (71). This form of judgment relates to the debates about sexuality: those who defend moral rules see AIDS as a "necessary effect of sexual excess, as if the limits of the body have been tested, and found wanting by 'sexual perversity', [as if it] was nature's revenge on those who transgressed its boundaries" (Weeks 364).

As a result of such judgment, Sontag describes the metaphors through which AIDS was being discussed in the 1980s. The metaphor of the plague is the main one, supporting the

religious and political discourses that used this disease to moralize society, claiming it to be either a punishment by God or a consequence of a decaying, lascivious, and subversive society (65). Weeks also emphasizes that, as sexuality and morality are historical products of the control of society over the individual's behavior, "AIDS has become a potent metaphor for our sexual culture" (364). This fact seems to be particularly important when related to the symbolisms of vampires in the 1970s and 1980s.

1.3. The Symbolism of Vampires

1.3.1. General Aspects

Vampires are often associated with images of exacerbated sexuality, disregard for moral rules, and immortality (Gelder 48; Nixon, "Making Monsters" 226). They are, for this very reason, representations of both desires and dreads of human beings. Vampires are traditionally symbols of seduction, and they are linked to the idea of random and lustful sexual intercourse (suggested by the sucking of blood) and to the fear of moral and biological contamination (implied in the vampirization of victims). These creatures have come to symbolize the feelings of civilized people at the same time that they have become patterns of behavior to avoid.

This ambiguity of the symbolisms of vampires relate to their importance in a given cultural and historical context. Nina Auerbach argues that "what vampires are in any given generation is a part of what I am and what my times have become" (1). Their immortality, according to her, grants them the freedom of constant change, but at the same time makes of them embodiments of fear of life (rather than fear of death) (5). Auerbach explains in this way the fascination that the vampires evoke: "[t]hey promise escape from our dull lives and the pressure of our times, but they matter because when properly understood, they make us see that our lives are implicated in theirs and our times are inescapable" (7). In agreement with this argument, thus, I believe that an analysis of vampire stories in relation to the historical and

cultural contexts in which they were written indicates the implications of their characterization to the representation of this context in literature.

1.3.2. Contemporary Symbolism of Vampires

Joan Gordon and Veronica Hollinger, while addressing the vampires, talk of a "domestication" of these creatures in contemporary culture:

> [M]any writers now narrate their horror stories from the inside, as it were, filtering them through the consciousness of the horrors that inhabit them. . . . the impact of this shift from human to "other" perspective works to invite sympathy for the monstrous outsider at the same time as it serves to diminish the terror generated by what remains outside our frame of the familiar and the knowable. (2)

In this sense, contemporary works tend to emphasize the vampire's potential for representing the notion of the "other" in relation to that of the "self," questioning the boundary between "human" and "nonhuman." If, as the same authors argue, the "treatment of the figure of the Other is an ideological moment that can usefully be interpreted for political and cultural significance" (2), this more sympathetic presentation of vampires can be related to the 1970s' and 1980s' discussions of alterity in terms of sexuality and gender. Joan Gordon and Veronica Hollinger go on to argue that one of the functions of our monsters is "to help us construct our own humanity, to provide guidelines against which we can define ourselves" and that "the roles played out by [the vampire] shift as our desires and anxieties adapt to particular cultural/political moments" (5). It seems plausible to affirm, therefore, that in the 1970s and 1980s, vampire stories provide a questioning of the gender and sexual dichotomies through the interrogation of the boundaries between human/monstrous, natural/unnatural, and normal/abnormal.

Margaret L. Carter argues that there is a shift in the fictional characterization of vampires, "who appears as an attractive figure in American stories since 1970s," and that it reflects "a change in cultural attitudes toward the outsider, the alien other" (27). She claims that, "[a]s rebellious outsider, as persecuted minority, as endangered species, and as member of a different 'race' that legend portrays as sexually omnicompetent, the vampire makes a fitting hero for late twentieth-century popular fiction" (29). According to Carol Senf, many contemporary novelists "use the vampire motif to explore sexual roles and human identity," often presenting this creature "as admirable for his or her 'romantic independence' and 'refusal to conform to arbitrary social stands'" (qtd. in M. L. Carter 29). Senf relates this "more sympathetic treatment of the vampire" to the contemporary "changing attitudes toward authority and toward rebellion against that authority." M. L. Carter adds that "the vampiric eroticism—especially in female character—that inspired horror and drew punishment in Victorian fiction is framed as positive rather than negative in today's diction" (29). In other words, the vampire in late-twentieth century is used as metaphor for people's uncertainties concerning not only humanity but also sexuality, in a way that their freedom from social constraints becomes a metaphor for sexual freedom. M. L. Carter even points out that "some contemporary vampire tales present [the transformation into a vampire] as a happy ending—or sometimes, the inauspicious beginning of an altered life that proves, after all, to be happy" (31). As examples, the author mentions the vampires from Rice's *Interview with the Vampire*. I am going to argue here that, in the case of Rice's works, the vampire becomes a sympathetic character whose existence represents alternative life styles that oppose normative and compulsory sexuality.

In general, vampires in the AIDS era become important symbols in the discussions concerning sexual liberation. Their symbolism is often related to the notions of sexual permissiveness and random sex and to the free sexuality claimed by feminists and

homosexuals, issues that the conservatives consider the main causes of the emergence of the AIDS epidemic. The vampires, therefore, come to represent in symbolic terms the arguments that conservatives and liberals use in the debate about sexuality and gender in the late 1970s and 1980s, the liberals' aspirations and the conservatives' apprehensions. Although the vampire's supposedly exacerbated sexuality is desired (the sensuous pleasure through the blood exchange/the sexual pleasure through the sexual act), its possible consequences are feared (vampirization/AIDS). Besides, because of their association with the wilderness and sexual hunger, vampires represent the transgression of the moral rules that constrain sexuality and that are said to prevent the spread of the HIV virus. That is why critics such as Gelder argue that the depiction of these creatures in the twentieth century often addresses the concern with and the fear of HIV contamination.

1.3.3. The Vampire and Kristeva's Abject

Critics such as Martin and Savoy defend the applicability of Kristeva's theory of the abject to gothic fiction, affirming that

> The entire history of the gothic lies behind Julia Kristeva's understanding of the abject, that which is "radically excluded" from individual and national self-definition yet which "draws [the subject] toward the place where meaning collapses" . . . Like psychoanalysis, like revisionist historiography, the project of the gothic turn in narrative has been to take the ego, or the story generated by the national ego, "back to its source on the abominable limits from which, in order to be, the ego has broken away," and Kristeva's metaphor for this uncanny cultural encounter might well illuminate the gothic tendency itself: "[i]t is an alchemy that transforms death drive into a start of life, of new significance" (15). (Introduction viii-ix)

This means that Kristeva's concept of the abject can be used to explain the gothic project of undermining values and ideologies that are socially taken for granted. Veronica Hollinger talks of the "potential usefulness of Julia Kristeva's meditation on abjection . . . as a theoretical framework within which to consider the vampire, a figure which exists precisely in that in-between state which [she] identifies as the source of true horror" (230).

Carroll, on the other hand, dismisses Kristeva's works as not germane to his considerations about what he calls "art-horror" (221). He argues that, although Kristeva uses the anthropologist Mary Douglas's study *Purity and Danger* to discuss horror (as he does), her notion is different from his. In fact, Kristeva uses Douglas's arguments about bodily defilement as "marginal stuff" that puts in danger, like other kinds of margin, the clearly defined lines of a social structure (69). Carroll uses the same work by Douglas in his definition of the art-horror monster. For him, horror is related to reactions to the notion of impurity that characterizes the monster, a notion that Douglas explains in terms of "the transgression or violation of schemes of cultural categorization" (Carroll 31). He argues that, for Kristeva, "it seems that horror and abomination are metaphysical elements which she connects with an abstract conception of the female (specifically the mother's body), and which she believes we would be advised to acknowledge" (221). I agree with Carroll that the scope of Kristeva's work is much wider than his, which is concerned specifically with art-horror. But I would say that his interpretation of her notion of horror is misleading and does not disallow the use of her work in the analysis of vampire characters. According to her, the horror of defilement is "the excluded on the basis of which religious prohibition is made up" (65) and relates to the symbolic order, which varies from culture to culture but is present in all of them (68). Kristeva uses Douglas's work to argue that this horror is the "potency of pollution," which "is proportional to the potency of the prohibition that founds it", that is, it depends on the power "inhering in the structure of ideas" (69). She develops the notion of abject to "demonstrate on what mechanism of

subjectivity . . . horror, its meaning as well as its power, is based" (Kristeva 208), providing, then, a psychoanalytic explanation for this mechanism. If her notion of abjection is still different from what Douglas and Carroll mean by impurity and defilement, it is because Kristeva expands it to relate not only to the horror but also to the attraction it incites in the subject, and that is the reason I claim it applies to the vampire. As I show, Kristeva's notion of abjection relates to the symbolisms of vampires in the 1970s and 1980s.

Going on toward a definition, Kristeva claims that the abject is "something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object. . . . it beckons to us and ends up engulfing us" (4). The abject for her, therefore, is characterized as something positioned "in between," and as such, it hinders the subject's identification. The author claims that "the delimitation of the 'clean and proper' body is a condition of the subject's constitution as a speaking subject" and that "'proper' subjectivity and sociality require the expulsion of the improper, the unclean, and the disorderly" (53). This improper thing that must be expelled is the abject, which is also related to body fluids. In this sense, feces, urine, sweat, blood, and the corpse are abject for defying the individual's notion of the integrity of his or her own body. Once expelled, these fluids are not part of the person anymore, but the fact that the person does not ceases to be (to live) without them, both reassures the integrity and threatens it by implying that the body itself can be expelled as a whole. That is why, for Kristeva, the corpse bears the highest abjection: "the corpse, the most sickening of wastes, is a border that has encroached upon everything. . . . The corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life" (3-4). Deprived from the self, the corpse is meaningless and the individual's contact with it attests to the inescapability of the fact that his or her own body will also be expelled some day. What causes abjection, Kristeva argues, is not a "lack of cleanliness or health" but "what disturbs identity, system, order," "[what] does not respect borders, positions, rules," it is "[t]he in-between, the

ambiguous, the composite" (4). In this sense, her notion of abjection extends to people who transgress borders and laws, much as criminals. The abject, understood under this perspective, is not only threatening to the integrity of the individual but also to that of society, to the social order, to the collective identity, related, then, to perversion. Kristeva argues,

> [t]he abject is perverse because it neither gives up nor assumes a prohibition, a rule or a law; but turns them aside, misleads, corrupts; uses them, takes advantage of them, the better to deny them. It kills in the name of life . . . it lives at the behest of death . . . it curbs the other's suffering for its own profit . . . it establishes narcissistic power while pretending to reveal the abyss . . . Corruption is its most common, most obvious appearance. That is the socialized appearance of the abject. (15-16)

In this sense, the abject disrupts boundaries and rules showing their fragility and providing alternative ways of using them. Kristeva characterizes the abject, thus, as subversive and, therefore, as a form of transgression.

Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, based on Kristeva's notion of abjection, claim that "the poetics of transgression" shows that bourgeois culture dramatically represents itself "through the scene of its low Other," a representation informed by disgust, fear and desire (202). For them, transgression "becomes a kind of reverse or counter-sublimation, undoing the discursive hierarchies and satisfactions of bodies and cultures which bourgeois society has produced as the mechanisms of its symbolic dominance" (201). In this way, they call attention to the idea of freedom implicit in transgressive attitudes. For these reasons, the transgression of laws and boundaries that the abject realizes has the ambiguous quality of being both threatening and desired by the culture that excludes it. This ambiguity, the capacity of raising both repulsion and desire, is a fundamental aspect of Kristeva's notion of the abject. The mechanism through which such ambiguity operates can be understood from Kristeva's

explanation of how the individual acts in face of the abject. This individual, "the one by whom the abject exists" is, she says, "a *deject* who places (himself), *separates* (himself), situates (himself), and therefore *strays* instead of getting his bearings, desiring, belonging, or refusing" (8). Such attitudes, in this sense, relate to the confusion the abject causes in the individual's sense of integrity and self-identification.

The abject, Kristeva argues, constitutes the "fluid confines" that demarcates this individual's (the deject's) universe and that "constantly question his solidity" (8). In other words, the abject offers a kind of pleasure by which the individual is unconsciously attracted, but this attraction turns into repugnance when this individual fails to identify himself in relation to the abject. This is why the author states that "jouissance alone causes the abject to exist as such" and that "so many victims of the abject are its fascinated victims—if not its submissive and willing ones." The subject is attracted, "swallowed up" in this pleasure or jouissance, but the Other (the abject) keeps this subject from foundering by making this jouissance repugnant (9).

Kristeva associates the first experience of abjection with the child's separation from the body of the mother, in an argument based on Freud's and Lacan's assumptions that the individualization of the subject requires a rupture with the universe of the mother and identification with the father. The abject results from the repression of the individual's attraction by the pleasures offered by the maternal body, the reason for Kristeva's affirmation that the abject is "the 'object' of primal repression" (12). Once the object of the individual's desire, the maternal body is then rendered abject, repulsive, by the threat it represents to the construction of the individual's subjectivity as separated from that of the mother.

Kristeva's concept of abject also applies to sexual differences. As Elizabeth Grosz puts it, sexual differences are abject for being "a byproduct of the traversing of bodily zones and sensations, those which need to be unified and harnessed in the constitution of the subject

according to the norms and rules of a given culture" (*Sexual Subversions* 74). A potential of abjection can also be perceived in Susan Sontag's words about the anxiety and the phobia caused by the AIDS epidemic: "the fear of polluting people that AIDS anxiety inevitably communicates. . . . Life—blood, sexual fluids—is itself the bearer of contamination" (159). In other words, the exchange of body fluids that characterize the sexual act was the object of desire of individuals until the eruption of the AIDS epidemic, which brought into the scene the danger of contamination that threats the integrity of the individual's body and of the whole community. This fear of contamination has raised people's repulsion not only of careless sexual practices but also of most kinds of human contact that could allow the exchange of body fluids (like surgery and even the Communion cup).

I would say that the notion of the abject can be applied to the vampires to the extent that the representations of these creatures are often based on a dangerous exchange of body fluids, inclusively with sexual connotations. As vampires are corpses getting new life from body fluids (blood) of dead people, they represent an improper crossing of the boundaries between death and life and between the self and the other. Immortality is a desirable effect, which renders the vampire an attractive figure, but the disrespect of natural laws it requires (of the boundaries of life and death) is threatening and makes the vampire also repulsive. The vampire's sexuality (implied in his sucking and exchange of blood) can be considered abject for its transgressing of the bodily sexual zones and cycles. Such transgression is both desired, for the sexual pleasure it offers, and repelled, for the threat it posits to the individual's recognition as a member of a society that labels the kind of sexual practice represented by vampirism as improper. The vampire, in this sense, possesses an abject potential: as constituted by everything that is improper, the vampire threatens a person's identification as a subject and as a member of society. This potential tends to be enhanced by the symbolism added to the vampire figure by its representation in the AIDS era (because of the abjection related to the HIV virus) and in

relation to certain sexualities and gender roles (like the abject maternal function implied in the possibility of vampirizing humans and feeding them with one's blood).

In my analysis of the corpus, therefore, I explore the different kinds of abjection that characterize the depiction of vampires in the 1970s and 1980s, namely: those related to the vampire figure, to culturally unintelligible sexual practices, identities, and gender roles, and to the AIDS epidemic. Kristeva's notion of abjection, in this sense, offers me an efficient tool to show the vampire's capacity for reflecting contemporary concerns about issues of sexuality and gender.

1.4. Angela Carter and Anne Rice

Scholars often attempt to classify Angela Carter's and Anne Rice's works using a varied set of literary genres that includes, for instance, fantasy fiction, postmodernist literature, horror, science fiction, mass culture fiction, and fairy tale. These scholars tend to agree that referring to only one of these genres is not enough for an efficient characterization of these authors' works. Among these genres, gothic fiction is not often pointed by scholars as one of the main traditions Carter and Rice follow. However, many critics have recognized that both writers use gothic devices in their works, and in a peculiar way that results from their using them together with other literary devices in the specific context of the 1970s and 1980s. However, there are no works so far concerned with a comparative analysis of their stories, much less in terms of this common use of gothic devices. It is the objective of my thesis to provide such an analysis as I intend to show that these two writers have in common not only the use of elements of the gothic tradition but also the discussion of issues of sexuality and gender in relation to their historical context. The plausibility of my approach is supported by critical works that attest the presence of gothic elements and of discourses on sexuality and gender in the works of both Carter and Rice, as I present next.

1.4.1. Angela Carter and the Gothic Tradition: Subverting Traditional Representations of Sexuality and Gender

Criticism on Angela Carter (1940-1992) usually characterizes her as a sophisticated writer, capable of mixing different literary devices to create an original and powerful kind of writing (Guedes, "Suplementando o cânone" par. 52). Her short stories are generally considered parodies of fairy tales (Martins 59) that construct "identities, fantasies, fears and desires, particularly in terms of female sexuality and desire" (Botting 169). Her writing is said to include elements of postmodernism, feminism, fantasy fiction, and gothic devices (like the themes of haunting, monstrosity, and the uncanny) (Peng 101-03). Carter is also said to incorporate in her stories elements of "science fiction, magical realism, speculative fiction and fantasy" (Gamble 9-10), putting together popular forms of literature and high art (Wisker 3). For the ability to mingle these elements, Carter's writing is said to be "unconventional, full of tense couplings between the old and the new, the 'high' and the 'low', all conveyed in a highly mannered and stylized prose" (Gamble 9). As Gina Wisker puts it, Carter's style is "excessive, elaborate, [f]illed with paradox, mixing use of both horror and humor . . . [and] elements of the gothic to critique social constructions and suggest alternatives" (6). This characteristic makes her stories, I would say, difficult to read, in that, though short, they prove to be dense and very complex.

Critics always recognize Carter as "a dedicated feminist writer," whose works deals with "gender performance and sexual politics" (Peng 101). Actually, as Wisker points out, Carter does not call herself a feminist, but she "can be seen as aligned with the values, beliefs and behaviors of the Women's Movement," as she "took up and dramatized arguments of sexual equality and celebration of women's sexual energies in her lively tales of powerful women" (19-20). Guedes argues that "Carter is interested in sexual fantasy, in erotic violence, and in the myths and institutions which serve to maintain male power under patriarchy" and

that "[h]er fiction challenges culturally accepted views of sexuality and of gender identities and roles" ("Subverting Patriarchal Structures" 96). However, there is a great deal of polemic around the political implications of her writing. Gamble affirms that:

> Carter's work has consistently dealt with representations of the physical abuse of women in phallocentric cultures, of women alienated from themselves within the male gaze, and conversely of women who grab their own sexuality and fight back, of women troubled by and even powered by their own violence. (111)

But according to the same author, these representations raise different interpretations: on the one hand, those who support Carter's ideas "argue that she indulged in . . . risky strategies in order to deconstruct the powers structures which render women vulnerable to . . . sexual exploitation," and on the other hand, "others assert that it is impossible to play with such representations of women without falling into the trap of perpetuating them" (111). Similarly, Peng states that Carter's achievements are questioned by critics who argue that, although she has an "anti-essentialist stance," she reproduces and is complicit "with the oppressive patriarchal system." Opposing them, there are critics who consider her writing "constructive and positive to women and feminists," although these same critics admit that her radical subversion posits some dangers (101). I address this issue in my analysis of her works, arguing that what seems to be a reproduction of patriarchal structures is in fact the use of what Linda Hutcheon calls a postmodernist strategy of parody, which incorporates this structure but in a disruptive way.

Indeed, Hutcheon uses Carter's works to exemplify what she defines as feminist postmodernist parody. For instance, in "Black Venus," according to her, "two discourses meet —and clash: the poetic language of male sublimated desire for woman . . . and the language of the political and contextualizing discourses of female experience" (*The Politics of Postmodernism* 145). The author emphasizes that "conflicting notions of gender and sexual

identity" are produced across this clash of two discursive practices, the result of which is the exploitation of "the role of our cultural and social discourses in constructing both pleasure and sexual representations" (*The Politics of Postmodernism* 150). Similarly, Guedes demonstrates that in the collection *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories,* Carter rewrites Perrault's fairy tales in order "to reverse the gender biases inherent in [them]," "transcending the ideological limitations which fairy tales generally reveal" ("Subverting Patriarchal Structures" 97). I demonstrate in my analysis that something similar occurs in "The Loves of Lady Purple" and "The Lady of the House of Love."

As Peng points out, Carter's view of the gothic can be perceived in her Afterword to her book *Fireworks: Nine Profane Pieces* (1974):

> Though it took me a long time to realize why I like them, I'd always been fond of Poe, and Hoffmann. . . . The Gothic tradition in which Poe writes grandly ignores the value systems of our institutions; it deals entirely with the profane. Its great themes are incest and cannibalism. . . . Its style will tend to be ornate, unnatural—and thus operate against the perennial human desire to believe the word as fact. . . . It retains a singular moral function—that of provoking unease. (qtd. in Peng 102)

If, as Peng goes on to argue, "the Gothic tradition [Carter] has in mind is the one Poe (as well as Hoffman) writes in . . . , and she views it mainly as a provocative form of writing" (102), it can be perceived that the particular use she makes of this tradition is adapted to her historical context, about which she comments: "We live in Gothic times" (qtd. in Peng 102).

Many critics consider Carter's experience living in Japan during late-1960s relevant to her writing. Peng, for instance, sees in this experience the potential for gothic fiction: Carter "describes in Gothic terms her experience of the cultural change after her return to England from Japan, and . . . her description illuminates the lurid side of the contemporary world in

which the familiar old world becomes strange and uncanny in its phantasmagoric change" (102). Her view of the Western cultural context, then, was informed by a shock of perspectives that allowed her to be more critical in relation to that culture values and ideals. As Peng goes on to argue, this "sense of the familiar becoming strange, the natural becoming uncanny, and the transgressive profanity of the holy" (which Carter herself used to describe the late 1960s) are "what marks Carter's subversive writing and they are also the thematic concerns of the Gothic" (102). Wisker even calls Carter "an exponent of the contemporary feminist gothic," which she defines as a genre in which the security and stability of ideologies are questioned as they reinforce "an order more supportive of dominant middle-class white masculinist beliefs and behaviors and not so generously inclined towards the needs and lives of women" (18). The author affirms that Carter's refusal of "neat endings and the restoration of order" is typical of this kind of genre. Similarly, Peng affirms that Carter's writing is not conventional gothic, but "a postmodern mimicking of gothic horror which is itself theatrical" (101). In this sense, the particularities of Carter's use of gothic fiction are related by her critics to her feminist notions and to her incorporation of postmodernist strategies—two features that characterize her historical context (which witnessed the development of both feminist and postmodernist theories).

Gamble calls attention to the fact that Carter herself used to say she is "in the demythologizing business," believing that "myths are product of the human mind and reflect only aspects of material human practice" (qtd. in Gamble 10). In this sense, the author argues, she "creates her stories in order to shatter the fictions that regulate our everyday existences" (10). In agreement with this idea, Peng argues that Carter's use of the gothic tradition in her provocative writing "plays a crucial part in her fictional play of sexual identity" (101). Indeed, a concern about the discussions of sexuality and gender taking place in her historical context can be perceived not only in Carter's stories but also in her essays and

interviews, in which she assumes, for instance, the possibility of having been influenced by her reading of Foucault's works on sexuality and power (Gamble 112).

Carter's vampire short stories that are analyzed here, namely, "The Lady of the House of Love" and "The Loves of Lady Purple," can be considered examples of Carter's demythologizing commitment, as Wisker's words suggest: "[in those stories, she] uses vampire myths to explore ways in which women are made victims to structures and beliefs embedded in romantic fictions" (41). In her account of these two stories, Susana Bornéo Funck argues that Carter explores the ambiguity and the plurality of interpretations of women's sexuality, in a way that breaks with the mythic boarders and limits of representation (50). In agreement with these critics, I argue that Carter's use of the vampire character as a gothic device revises traditional representations of women's sexuality and questions social and cultural structures.

1.4.2. Anne Rice and the Gothic Tradition: Creating New Myths to Represent Sexuality and Gender

Anne Rice (1941-) is quite less present in academic criticism than Angela Carter, but the works that analyze her stories reveal a number of features that characterize her writing as gothic. As bestsellers in global mass market, her novels are most often associated with popular culture, but they are also said to refer to horror archetypical characters, the mythological world of epic fantasy fiction, and the gothic mood and setting (Smith 12-17). Studies on her works usually present interpretations of her vampires' morality as varying according to their identification with human beings (Benefiel 262; Rout 475). According to Jennifer Smith, her vampires are "fully developed figures with human needs, fears, and questions" (3) and serve as a metaphor for humanity.

Smith's book *Anne Rice: A Critical Companion* is one of the most detailed accounts of Rice's works. In it, besides indicating Rice's use of gothic of devices in her deployment of

supernatural events in gothic castles "full of secrets, crypts, coffins" (15), the author compares Rice's stories to those of other writers related to the gothic tradition. Smith points out that, like Coleridge, she is said to end her vampire stories with the theme of the "acceptance of the beauty of nature and of life [as] the only possible redemption" (10). The difference is that, by returning to this in all of her vampire books, Rice takes this idea further to make her vampires recognize their place in nature (10). Smith also indicates similarities between Rice's vampire stories and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. As the latter presents the story of "a man who created a monster from the parts of corpses because he wanted to create life," the former narrates the story of "a man who became a vampire and who then makes monsters of others when he gives them the Dark Gift of vampirism" (Smith 11). Both writers, Smith argues, focus on the morality of their central characters' actions: while Shelley's doctor Frankenstein "first rejects his monster heartlessly [and] endures great loss" until he recognizes his responsibility to his creation, Rice's Lestat "first rejects any sense of community among vampires, and then after great loss, recognizes his responsibility and his need for others (11). Smith puts it this way: "Rice takes the horror story to this higher level, and instead of saying 'I want to scare you to death,' she says, 'I want to scare you to think,'" (12). This is possible through a portrayal of "the stranger" in the form of a vampire who reflects not only on the existence of evil in the world but also on the evil in himself and everyone else: "Rice raised the traditional vampire story far above the usual 'I want to bite your neck' nightmare by playing with the concept of free will, something that Bram Stoker . . . had done a hundred years before" (Smith 12-13). This characterization of the vampire, I would say, besides providing an insight on the feelings of those considered outcasts from society, also renders a critical view of humanity from the perspective of an outsider.

The issue of sexuality is also recognized as a strong presence in Rice's works. Scholars usually present interpretations of her vampires as homosexual, bisexual or even asexual beings

(Benefiel 261; Gelder 109; Haggerty 6; and Schopp 231). Smith affirms that they represent the idea of sex without responsibility, as their supernatural powers allow them to live without rules (at least human rules, I would add) (13). The author contends that, instead of focusing on this theme, Rice concentrates "on deeper meanings of the vampire figure," namely, "the loneliness and 'Otherness' of the outsider, and the meaning of evil in the twentieth century" (13). Smith also argues that this effect is ironically achieved by Rice though a humanization of vampires: " by giving them human regrets and guilt and pain, so that we can relate to them as outsiders in a world that is so fast moving and cold that we are all virtually outsiders" (4). She mentions that the issue of AIDS is as alluded to by Rice, together with the themes of "free will in a technological society, women's growing power, and the hazards of genetic research, all within fantastic story worlds that allow the reader to see them more clearly" (17). Smith calls attention to the elaborate mythology Rice constructs for her vampires, "giving them supernatural powers with limits and supernatural freedom with boundaries," depicting a supernatural world without ever breaking its internal logic (17). The author goes on to argue that:

> The creatures in Rice's books are characters from horror, Gothic, and fantasy fiction, not reality, but they move through a real world, and the contrast between their cynical immortality and the innocent and fragile mortality of the humans they encounter gives Rice great scope in arguing her philosophical questions about life, death, evil, and the meaning of existence. (18)

As Rice affirmed in an interview that she intends to raise the feeling of intensity in her reader through her use of the supernatural in her stories, Smith argues, "Drawing on this intensity, [she] has taken the classic tales of vampires . . . changed them into modern myths, fairy tales, and nightmares in the language of the twentieth century." For her, Rice's stories are even more fantastic and frightening "because they are about us, our own dreams and fears and feelings" (18). In other words, Rice takes the elements that were used to raise shock and fear in

eighteenth- and nineteenth-century audiences and adapts them so that they can produce the same effect in late-twentieth century audiences.

Jules Zanger observes that Rice is probably the most successful of the producers of the new vampire novels (23). While arguing that in contemporary vampire stories human victims play a small, unimportant role, the author gives as example Rice's *Vampire Chronicles*, "in which almost all essential relationships are between vampire and vampire, and where the victims are as indistinguishable from each other as McDonald's hamburgers—and serve much the same function" (21). I would say that this rendering of human characters less important does not hinder Rice's discussion of human issues because her vampire characters are humanized. Hollinger also recognizes this fact, arguing that "as has often been noted, in Rice's novels it is the human characters, not the vampires, who are relegated to marginal narratives roles." He relates this change of perspective to "the widespread popularity of Anne Rice's *Vampire Chronicles,*" which, he believes, "is due in no small part to her readers' fascination with the psychological make-up of her monsters" (200). Zanger addresses this fact as Rice's "intention to transform the vampire from an objectification of metaphysical evil into simply another image of ourselves seen in a distorting mirror" (23). He then quotes Rice's words in an interview about the novel *Interview with the Vampire*, in which she mentions the concerns of her vampires that can be extended to the other novels in *The Vampire Chronicles*:

> *Interview with the Vampire* is about grief, guilt, and the search for salvation even though one is in the eyes of the world and one's own eyes a total outcast! . . . When vampires search for their past trying to figure out who they are, where they come from, if they have a purpose, that's me asking the same questions about human beings" (qtd. in Zanger 23).

Rice's statement is in tune with Nixon's argument that the vampire tale is "a vehicle for moral interrogations and ideological reaffirmations," a vehicle that the author sees "as both draw[ing]

from and essentially consolidate[ing] the legacy of Rice's late 1970s and 1980s vampire novels, *Interview with the Vampire, The Vampire Lestat,* and *Queen of the Damned*" ("When Hollywood Sucks" 124). I argue in my analysis of her novels that it is exactly through these moral interrogations and ideological reaffirmations that Rice's works provide a discussions on sexuality and gender in the 1970s and 1980s.

As in the case of Angela Carter, some scholars also indicate postmodern concerns within Rice's works. Hollinger argues that "one of Anne Rice's most tellingly postmodern plays is to characterize her vampires as themselves obsessed with questions about good and evil" (203). They reproduce the postmodern denial of clear-cut boundaries between these two notions and between those of human and nonhuman, man and monster, natural and unnatural. Besides, the author affirms that Lestat, like all contemporary vampires, "is postmodern to the extent that [he is the victim] of the self-same absence [he has] come to represent; [he is] as trapped within the framework of meaninglessness as are [his] human counterparts" (203-04). This absence or meaninglessness has to do with the questioning of a reason or plan behind human existence—a question that often constitutes one of the basic concerns of postmodernist theories.

A more direct discussion on Rice's characterization of vampires in relation to the issues of sexuality and gender can be perceived in Sandra Tomc's "Dieting and Damnation: Anne Rice's *Interview with the Vampire.*" She argues that Rice's vampires are characterized as androgynous in that they reflect "1970s discourses of gender mutability and bodily transformation" (97). The author supports her arguments by mentioning Rice's words to her biographer Katherine Ramsland: "I've always loved the images of androgyny . . . I see androgynous figure as the ideal figure" (qtd. in Tomc 97). Tomc affirms that this ideal "was consonant with the egalitarian aims of 1970s' liberalism" (97). Although her arguments are directed to support her suggestion that Rice's vampires are a metaphor for body politics of

dieting, they are very useful for the arguments I present in this thesis: her vampires prove to be highly potential metaphors for sexual and gender uncertainties, questioning the opposition between human and monster through their capacity for change beyond natural and social limitations. I also tend to agree with Tomc's argument that by characterizing her vampires as androgynous, Rice reflects the 1970s' (and I would add, the 1980s' as well, as I deal with her novels from that period) contestation of the possibilities of gender identification that are limited to the binary man/women.

The characterization of the vampire's sexuality provided by Rice is also discussed by Nina Auerbach. She argues that the lives of Rice's vampires, who form "a new species with its own alternate history and mythology," is infused with homoeroticism (153). The author calls attention to the fact that this "vampire life [is] imagined by a woman writer who finds male homosexuality as glamorous as vampirism is to the smitten (and finally bitten) boy who tapes Louis' confession in *Interview* [*with the Vampire*]" (154). This reference to homosexuality and homoeroticism in the first novel of Rice's *Vampire Chronicles*, however, is contested by Tomc, who argues that "the sexuality of her vampires, in fact, bears little resemblance to the forms of gratification conventionally associated with the interactions of men's bodies. . . . It represents a type of polymorphousness and androgyny founded on the disappearance of the markers of sexual and reproductive difference" (98). Tomc's arguments seem indeed plausible and applicable to the other novels I analyze in the next sections, but Auerbach's arguments cannot and should not be dismissed. In my analysis, I explore both arguments, showing that Rice's vampires have this double potential of representing androgyny and homosexuality, in the sense that they can be said to favor alternative sexualities rather than compulsory heterosexuality.

My comparison of Angela Carter's and Anne Rice's works focuses on the way these authors use the figure of the vampire to represent discussion on sexuality and gender. I show

that this representation includes the issues considered by Punter and by Botting as characteristic of gothic fiction: paranoia, taboo, barbarism, the gloomy atmosphere and desolate setting, the idea of threat to Enlightenment and humanist values, the fascination with the irrational, the immoral and the fantastic, anxiety over cultural limits and boundaries, and transgression. I argue that such use of gothic elements is characteristic of the contemporary moment, related to the postmodernist response to the anxieties of Western cultures in the 1970s and 1980s. Since such anxieties also relate to the issues of sexuality and gender, and since the postmodernist strategies are useful to undermine biased assumption about these issues, I investigate to what extent Carter and Rice subvert traditional and patriarchal notions of sexuality and gender. In order to support such investigation, I take into consideration the theories discussed here that attempt to undermine such patriarchal assumptions, in special: Butler's notions of the artificial character of the continuity among sex, gender, and sexuality, of the performative aspect of gender presentation, of compulsory heterosexuality, and of intelligible and unintelligible gender identities; the theory of androgyny; Foucault's notion of the coercive function of discourses that classify proper and improper sexualities; Kristeva's notion of the abject; and the stereotypes of femininity, masculinity, and of male and female sexualities traditionally conveyed in literature. In this sense, I show in the next chapters of this thesis that in Carter's and Rice's portrayal of the vampire, they discuss relevant issues about sexuality and gender that were current in the socio-historical context in which they wrote (the 1970s and 1980s). My argument is that their works not only present patriarchal assumptions about gender and sexuality but also undermine them.

CHAPTER 2 – From Women's Sexual Freedom to Bisexuality: Sexuality through Angela Carter's and Anne Rice's Vampires

As I discussed in the first chapter, recent theories have pointed to the artificial character of the notion of sexuality. Patriarchal societies (or, as Rubin prefers to say, the sex/gender system) constructed this notion based on the erroneous assumption that sexual practices and interests are exclusively biologically determined. In this way, sexuality was polarized in two opposite forms: heterosexuality and homosexuality, the former being the privileged one, as it refers to sexual practices, identities, and interests that claim a coherence with the sexual organ and the function of biological reproduction. But the issue of sexuality, when related to life experiences, proves to be much more complex. The constitution of one's sexual desires, interests, practices, and identities is informed by a wide range of factors, including individual choices. However, the notion of sexuality assumed by cultures in the sex/gender system, although erroneous, is influential in the formation of a person's sexuality, because it is socially imposed as if it were naturally determined. As Foucault argues, social discourses informed by this notion not only set what it considers to be proper and acceptable about sexuality, but also determine the modes of transgression, controlling, in this sense, the sexuality of all individuals ("The Perverse Implantation" 688). Such discourses foster stereotypes to represent notions of an acceptable and transgressive sexuality, including those represented in literary discourses.

In this chapter, I use the theoretical apparatus presented in Chapter 1 to identify discourses on sexuality through the analysis of Carter's vampires in "The Loves of Lady Purple" and "The Lady of the House of Love, and of Rice's vampires in *The Vampire Lestat* and *The Queen of the Damned*. As these creatures represent a kind of sexuality that is transgressive in relation to what is usually accepted in the sex/gender system, I argue here that

vampires are used in the works I analyze to show the implausibility of such a notion and to introduce new possibilities of interpreting and representing sexualities. After analyzing each work separately, I provide an account for the depiction of vampires that is characteristic of each author's style, and, later on, I compare them.

2.1. Angela Carter's Vampires

2.1.1. "The Loves of Lady Purple"

In Angela Carter's "The Loves of Lady Purple" (1974), the vampire is a wooden puppet, who performs every night the story created by an old Asiatic ventriloquist. In this embedded story, Lady Purple is a young girl who, after seducing her foster-father, stealing all his money, and killing him and his wife, becomes the most famous prostitute in town. She develops a taste for torturing her lovers as a dominatrix and then she ruins, abandons, and kills them. The inhumanity of her acts makes Lady Purple decay physically and morally: her community casts her out, and she becomes necrophagic and necrophiliac, living from drowned bodies she finds on the beach until she metamorphoses into a wooden puppet. The puppet performs this story in every show until the night in Transylvania when, while the ventriloquist is repairing her dress and kisses her (here an ironic parody of Perrault's fairy tale "Sleeping Beauty"), Lady Purple comes to life as a vampire woman. She sucks all the blood from her master's body in order to live and then goes away to become a real prostitute.

Criticism on social control operates regarding sexuality in "The Loves of Lady Purple," as the stereotype of the monster (vampire) woman that characterizes the protagonist relates to female sexuality. As a prostitute, Lady Purple's sexuality is exacerbated, and as a dominatrix, a necrophagist, and a necrophiliac, her sexuality is transgressive of a code-oriented morality (to use Foucault's term), consisting of perversion. There are also the implications of her being a vampire, for all the sexual connotations this figure evokes. This monstrous transgression,

together with the presentation of supernatural events, is what renders the story's gothic qualities. This story of a stereotype of transgressive female sexuality takes place in Transylvania, a setting that evokes darkness, mystery, and superstition—recalling Bram Stocker's *Dracula*. It can be perceived that the supernatural character of Lady Purple relates not only to her becoming a vampire, but also to her metamorphosis into a wooden puppet and then again into a woman. This metamorphosis, however, is more important for its metaphorical meaning, rather than for its depiction as a supernatural event: it symbolizes the dehumanization of a woman who does not fit into what Judith Butler calls "the matrix of cultural intelligibility" (*Gender Trouble* 24).

The fact that Lady Purple is a puppet also renders peculiar implications to her characterization as a woman-monster, since it implies that she is controlled by an external force. By presenting the motif of the female puppet, Carter's alludes to E.T.A. Hoffman's short story "The Sandman" (1817), which is used by Freud in his definition of notion of the "uncanny."[2] As Peng puts it, in Hoffmann's fantastic tale, "the female automaton (Olympia) is a lifeless yet most seductive object of desire in which the male protagonist (Nathanael) 'sees perfectly reflected his own view of himself'" (106). Pauline Palmer argues that the Hoffmannian female puppet in Carter's story is used to "represent woman's role in society" and that "the relations between puppet-master and puppet [are] symbolic of the control exerted by a patriarchal culture on women and the roles available to them" (qtd. in Peng 106). Patriarchy is represented in this story by the ventriloquist, who creates for himself a gothic world through his drama of transgression of taboos by means of violence, evil, monstrous acts, and supernatural events. This drama is, as the narrator puts it, "the simulacra of the living" (25), and the life-likeness provided by the puppets' appearance and the ventriloquist's ingenious

[2] Freud uses the term "the uncanny" ("das Unheimlich") to refer to "something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression" ("The Uncanny: Part II" par. 14). This notion is usually related to gothic fiction as the haunting by something that was repressed in the past and now returns is a basic motif in this genre (Savoy 10).

manipulation adds to the fear this drama provokes. The ventriloquist is described as the creative power behind his puppets' acts, making a bridge between reality and imagination to raise his audience's fear. Being, in this sense, a gothic story, this drama created by the ventriloquist represents women's experience of sexuality, one that transgresses the borders of reality and fantasy, proper and improper, natural and supernatural. The use he makes of transgression in his drama reinforces the value and necessity of the social norms that this transgression disrespects, restoring socially imposed limits (Botting 7) instead of undermining them. In this sense, the ventriloquist's gothic presentation of such a violent and transgressive story has the moral intention of educating people through his protagonist's alleged bad example and her unhappy end. The most important point that can be inferred from the ventriloquist's drama is that Lady Purple's transgressive behavior is, in fact, created by him.

In this sense, the fact that the old ventriloquist invented the transgressive role that his puppet performs even after she is released from his control relates to Foucault's arguments about discourses on sexuality that establish modes of transgression ("The Perverse Implantation" 683). Peng argues that this invention relates to literary and psychoanalytical motifs, namely: "the fear of a female doll coming to life because of its uncanny life-likeness, fear of its necromantic power, the mingling of the manipulator's life and the doll's, and the male fear of unrestrained female sexuality" (107). These fears, according to her, are "bound up with a male desire to control the 'insatiable' female sexuality" (107). Such fears can be said to exemplify Punter's notion of paranoia raised in gothic fiction (404), more specifically, the paranoia of men in relation to the sexualized woman's body. Peng goes on to argue that those fears "are displaced by the puppeteer . . . as an intense desire to enact his self through the feared object, the figure of Lady Purple, with whom he lives in symbiosis" (107). Concerning the first fear mentioned by Peng, the puppet's uncanny life-likeness does not function to raise the ventriloquist's fear as much as to raise fear in his audience. This is so because the

ventriloquist is the one who created the puppet to look like a woman; his fear is not of the puppet itself (and thus not of the possibility of the puppet to turn into a woman) but of the kind of real-life woman the puppet represents: the one with an aggressive and insatiable sexuality. In this sense, the ventriloquist's conduct also represents transgressive sexuality: he creates the puppet out of his fear, which is also his sexual fantasy, and she becomes his object of sexual desire. When the ventriloquist tells his audience that now, as a puppet, Lady Purple is "pulled only by the strings of *lust*" ("Lady Purple" 28), it is, implicitly, his lust. The same can be perceived in the narrator's commentaries: "In the iconography of melodrama, Lady Purple stood for passion and all her movements were calculations in an angular geometry of sexuality" (27). As her movements were determined by those of the ventriloquist's fingers, her calculated sexuality was designed by him, according to his fantasy of women's sexuality. The characterization of the ventriloquist as the creator of Lady Purple's role out of his desires and fears and as the one who literally controls her performance of this role makes him a symbol of the sex/gender system's power to set moral codes of both sexual behavior and misbehavior. Carter grants a singular idea to this symbolism as she characterizes the relationship between Lady Purple and her master as one of symbiosis: the ventriloquist, who cannot even sleep if his puppet is not laid down beside him, makes of her an extension of himself, of his inner desires and fantasies.

It can be inferred from the way that the narrative is constructed that the model of transgressive behavior that society creates for women is constructed in the same way: their transgressive traits are rendered so by the male desires and fantasies that inform the sex/gender system's assumptions. This argument relates to Stallybrass and White's notion of the "poetics of transgression" discussed in the previous chapter. According to them, the representation of the "other" is based on fear, repulsion but also on desire (202), a desire explained by the very fact that it is prohibited. Patriarchal (and, according to the authors, more specifically bourgeois)

society excludes exacerbated female sexuality based on its own fantasies and desires, which must be repressed so as to maintain the phallocentric social order. Kristeva's notion of abjection offers a similar explanation in this case. As the object of the ventriloquist's desire, the transgressive sexuality represented by Lady Purple is attractive to him, but the object becomes abject and is repelled when it is confronted with what is prescribed as the clean and proper sexuality that makes the individual part of a society. The ventriloquist is able to raise these same feelings of attraction and repulsion in his audience through the excesses of gothic drama and his perfect manipulations of his life-like puppets. Similarly, the abjection rendered to female exacerbated sexuality by traditional discourses reveals the inability of these discourses to negotiate the sexual desire that the members of this patriarchal society feel in relation to something that transgresses this society's notions of the proper and clean.

Concerning the other fears pointed out by Peng, it can be perceived that they are also related mainly to the ventriloquist's audience (and to Carter's reader), who perceives the dangers of the ventriloquist's endeavor to control female sexuality through his manipulation of a supposedly wicked puppet. It is the audience (and the reader) who feels this fear through the expectation of the unnatural metamorphosis of something that is already transgressive in itself (the excessive life-likeness of a puppet that represents a woman with a monstrous sexuality). The ventriloquist's fear is that of the female aggressive sexuality and he materializes this fear into the puppet. Such materialization can also be seen as constituting his means of achieving pleasure through control over the feared sexuality. This pleasure has its source in both the sense of exercising a moralizing power over others (which Foucault says underlines the sexual ethics) and the attraction that the feared thing provokes ("The Perverse Implantation" 688). While objectified into a wooden puppet, this threatening, monstrous female sexuality is easily controlled. In this sense, the fact that every characteristic of Lady Purple is created by the ventriloquist (from her

physical appearance to her character, behavior, desires, interests, and fate) renders her a symbol of female monstrosity feared by men.

Further considerations can be made about the great abject potential of Lady Purple. She transgresses different boundaries: that of inanimate/animate (puppet/woman), supernatural/natural (vampire/human), daughter/lover (violation of the incest taboo, also typical of gothic fiction, according to Punter [405]), life/death (for her vampiric, necrophagist, and necrophiliac habits, which imply the incorporation of the bodily fluids of another person into one's body). More than that, she repeats every transgression in what seems to be an endless cycle: in the story she performs as a puppet, she starts as the daughter to become the lover of her foster father, as a "normal" woman to acquire nymphomaniac, necrophagic and necrophiliac habits, and as a human being to become a wooden puppet. Then, outside the ventriloquist's show, Lady Purple starts as his daughter (his creation) to become his lover (a condition implied in their symbiotic relationship), as a puppet to turn into a woman, and as human to turn into a vampire (as she kills the ventriloquist by sucking his blood). As she leaves the ventriloquist's booth to go to the town's brothel the same way she did in the story invented by him, Carter's reader can imagine that she is going to perform in real life every step of that theatrical role, repeating all those transgressions to metamorphose into a puppet again, to later turn into a woman again, and so on.

It is worth noticing that each of these transgressive transformations (or metamorphosis) Lady Purple goes through represent the moment in which the object of desire becomes the abject. This can be inferred, for instance, from the ventriloquist's explanation for her transformation into a puppet: "too much life had negated life itself" (44). The idea here is that Lady Purple's excessive sexual energy is what renders her unnatural, what dehumanizes her, transforming the object of desire into the threatening abject. This threat also permeates the other transformations, so that the transformation from object into abject can be represented in

this way: the desired daughter (creation)/the lover who threatens the incest taboo; the lustful prostitute/the necrophiliac and necrophagic woman; the sexualized female body/the immaterial body of a puppet, the life-likeness of the puppet that materializes sexual fantasies/the vampire woman. Besides all those border-crossings, Lady Purple's contact with what is considered abject adds to her abject potential: she lives out of human bodily fluids (both through vampirism and necrophagy), engages in necrophilia, practices sex with dirty, so-called impure people (beggars). Hence, bearing control over such a highly abject being gives great pleasure to the ventriloquist at the same time that it posits great dangers.

The sex/gender system's control over woman's sexuality represented by the ventriloquist's control over his puppet hinders individualization and free will. While an inanimate puppet, Lady Purple represents someone who passively plays out a role created for her. Indeed, she has no voice in the story, no hint of her thoughts or feelings can be drawn from the narrative, only the ventriloquist's. It is as if she acted automatically, without pondering upon her own wish to act like that. In other words, there is no idea of personal satisfaction in Lady Purple's behavior. In this sense, the rebellious act through which the puppet regains the sensuous experiences once denied to her conveys a discourse against the sex/gender system's control of sexual conduct. It also suggests a kind of failure of women to act out of the socially prescribed sexual conduct, as Lady Purple's rebellion is also socially predicted. This illustrates Foucault's notion of the "perpetual spirals of power and pleasure" discussed earlier, in which the deviant sexualities become as socially determined as the socially accepted ones by a circular process (*The History of Sexuality* 2:51). In the case of Carter's short story, both the ventriloquist, who represents social control, and Lady Purple, who represents sexual transgression, experience both power and pleasure—the power to control/the power of being able to get free from control, the pleasure of imposing control/the pleasure of getting free from control. The problem is that the puppet's getting free from the ventriloquist's control is

questionable as an act of rebellion. The narrator posits the question about the implications of Lady Purple's transformation into a woman:

> All that had seeped into the wood was the notion that she might perform the forms of life not so much by the skill of another as by her own desire that she did so, and she did not possess enough equipment to comprehend the complex circularity of the logic which inspired her for she had only been a marionette. But, even if she could perceive it, she could not escape the tautological paradox in which she was trapped; had the marionette all the time parodied the living or was she, now living, to parody her own performance as a marionette? (37-38)

In this sense, the end of the story implies that there are no alternatives for those who do not want to accept the social prescription of proper female sexuality other than to assume the social prescription of woman's sexual misbehavior (prostitution and other perverse sexualities). The passage quoted above suggests a kind of regime that could be described as a compulsory transgressive sexuality, in that it is impossible to know if one's sexuality is really reactive, transgressive, or just a passive acceptance of an externally imposed sexuality. The doubt is posited by Carter in terms of the notion of parody: whether the role invented by the ventriloquist (representative of the socially constructed model of transgressive female sexuality) is a parody of a real life woman's transgressive sexuality or if the living woman who Lady Purple turns into (representative of a sexuality she assumed for herself in reaction to social control) is a parody of the role invented by the ventriloquist. The function of performance to the validation and imposition of heterosexuality (Butler, "Imitation" 725) can be applied to this question. Following this line of thought, the role created by the ventriloquist and performed every night by Lady Purple is rendered natural by the very compulsory repetition of this performance. This repetitive performance illustrates Butler's notion of compulsory heterosexuality, differing from it only in that here it applies to the compulsory

performance of a transgressive female sexuality. In this sense, the role of the transgressive woman performed by Lady Purple can be seen as a social imposition incorporated to one's subjectivity by compulsory repetition.

But a point suggested only at the end of "The Loves of Lady Purple" seems to be the most important one to my arguments in this thesis: the fact that Lady Purple becomes a vampire. When the puppet comes to life, she does not become a "conventional" woman, but a vampire woman. The narrator does not use the word "vampire" in the story but it can be inferred from the description of the scene. It suggests that Lady Purple's coming to life is inexplicable, supernatural ("She gained entry into the world by a mysterious loophole in its metaphysics"), but at the same time it can be understood as having been activated by the ventriloquist's desire when he kissed her: she corresponds with a kiss that "emanated from the dark country where desire is objectified and lives" (36). At this moment, she feeds on him like a vampire, first by "sucking his breath from his lungs so that her own bosom heaved with it" and then, "unaided, she beg[ins] her next performance with an apparent improvisation which [is], in reality, only a variation upon a theme. She s[inks] her teeth into his throat and drain[s] him" (36). The vampire feeding on her master, in this sense, is also depicted as a performance, representing the stereotypical and transgressive sexual practices related to the woman-monster. Besides, as "a variation upon a theme," it repeats old vampire stories, which represent the discourses that created the woman-monster stereotype. The rebellious, transgressive act represented by the vampire feeding on her own creator is, therefore, also socially created and incorporated by women through compulsory repetition.

Nevertheless, this act is not a simple repetition of the theme of female transgressive sexuality, but a "variation" upon that theme, which conveys the same idea but with different implications. Vampirism appears only at the end of the story as a new element in the transformations that Lady Purple experiences throughout it, in a way that suggests new

possibilities to that new being. It is through the violent act of the vampire feeding on her master that she is able to break free from the strings that keep her under the ventriloquist's control. As Funck argues, the same violence that bounded her is what frees her and allows her a satisfaction of her own desires, not those of the ventriloquist (49).

Not only freedom from the violence of the sex/gender system's control, but also from the male desire is represented in Lady Purple's vampire feeding upon her master: his desire, which found in her its materialization, awakens her own desire independently from his. By sucking the ventriloquist's bodily fluids in order to live on her own, she objectifies him, making him the mere instrument for the satisfaction of her appetites (connotatively sexual, as the vampire figure itself suggests) and discarding him when emptied. She awakens, therefore, to the possibilities of her sexual desire. The transgressive and abject qualities already rendered to Lady Purple by all those factors I have discussed above are even more enhanced by her characterization as a vampire. The abject sexuality related to this figure (conveyed through the attraction and to the danger of contamination and death suggested by vampiric practices) adds to the abjection of the transgressive female sexuality. Differently from the human subject who feels repulsion for the object of his or her desire that does not correspond to what his or her society considers proper and clean, the vampire is free to indulge in the total satisfaction of her most transgressive desires. The vampire, for instance does not feel disgust for blood (which metaphorically corresponds to sexual body fluids): she only desires it as the source of her life, the satisfaction of her hunger. Having nothing to repress her desires, therefore, the vampire woman relies on broader possibilities of satisfaction.

In this sense, I would say that the importance of the vampire figure in "The Loves of Lady Purple" is that, through it, Carter demonstrates an alternative way to represent women's sexuality. Although she inserts in the story a number of figures often used in literature and other social discourses to represent transgressive female sexuality, and although this insertion

also denounces the character of social imposition of these figures, it is through the vampire figure that Carter's story subverts the sex/gender system's creation of stereotypes for women's sexuality. The vampire feeding on her master symbolizes the possibility of women's acting upon her own desires as an alternative to simple repetitions of the performances that are rendered sexually transgressive by the male desires and fantasies that inform patriarchal discourses. What relates this story to its historical context, the 1970s, is exactly this claim of sexual freedom for women.

2.1.2. "The Lady of the House of Love"

"The Lady of the House of Love" (1979), explores even more the figure of the vampire to show the same kind of limitation of women's sexuality by the sex/gender system. In the story, which again mixes Perrault's fairy tale "Sleeping Beauty" with the vampire myth, the "lady" is a Transylvanian vampire, daughter of Vlad, the Impaler, and heiress of vampire properties and fate. She lives in her castle only with a dumb maid who brings her the village boys she feeds upon. The Lady of the House of Love, "Lady Nosferatu," is damned to perform forever the same ritual of seducing and sucking the blood of the naïve boys who pass by her property, until the day a young British soldier comes and shakes her senses to the point that she cannot perform her ritual. The vampire lady, it seems, falls in love with the soldier and becomes human, breaking away from the condition imposed on her by her ancestor vampires, but she dies as consequence.

The gothic characteristics of this short story are, as in "The Loves Lady Purple," in the motifs it presents, and so is the allusion to another vampire story (Bram Stoker's *Dracula*) and its gothic setting (the superstitious Transylvania). Other gothic motifs are explicit throughout the story: the haunted, decaying castle; the desolate setting with gloomy and mysterious atmosphere; the anxiety generated by violence and transgression; the dark setting; the focus on

excesses (of senses and emotions); and the figures of the vampire, of the damsel in distress, and of the hero who releases her. But Carter uses such motifs in a peculiar way, as the following passage shows:

> [Lady Nosferatu] herself is a haunted house. She does not possess herself; her ancestors sometimes come and peer out of the windows of her eyes and that is very frightening. She has the mysterious solitude of ambiguous states; she hovers in a no-man's land between life and death, sleeping and waking, behind the hedge of spiked flowers, Nosferatu's sanguinary rosebud. The beastly forebears on the walls condemn her to a perpetual repetition of their passions. (103).

It can be perceived that, in this story, the gothic motifs have distorted implications: the vampire is also a victim; she is the gothic damsel in distress trapped in the house of her ancestors; her female body is also a haunted confinement, not only because she is eternally confined inside it (for the vampire immortality) but also because she is obliged to use it repetitively in the same passionless performance.

The role of a vampire woman in this story implies an exacerbated and improper sexuality, as in the case of Lady Purple. The ritual of seduction and murder is an obligation, through which "the beautiful somnambulist helplessly perpetuates her ancestral crimes" (93). This ritual evokes Butler's notion of compulsory performance of sexuality ("Imitation" 725), in that Countess Nosferatu repetitively and perpetually plays the role of the men-eater woman (literary and metaphorically, in relation to the sexual implications of the vampire figure), a stereotype for female transgressive sexuality. Countess Nosferatu is observed by the vampire ancestors, who monitor her accomplishment of her rituals out of the old portraits on the castle's walls, in a reference to the control by society and tradition over female sexual behavior. Sexuality is discussed in this story, thus, through the characterization of a woman's sexuality

that is transgressive but still imposed. Although Countess Nosferatu is the only survivor of a patriarchal, aristocratic family (that of Vlad, the Impaler), she still suffers from the imposition of the sex/gender system's rules instead of being able to live according to her free will. There is no physical presence of her ancestors to constrain her, only the internalized notion that she is bound to perform the role she inherited from them.

Concerning the dangerous quality of Lady Nosferatu's sexuality, it may be said that her victims are drawn to her through a kind of sex appeal. The description of her rituals resembles the work of a prostitute, a real role performed similarly for every victim/client without any kind of affection. This performance is not indicative of her sexual interest or identity, in that it agrees with Butler's argument that one's sexuality is not something that can be grasped through the observation of one's performance ("Imitation" 725). This is so that the narrator comments that "[e]verything about this beautiful and ghastly lady is as it should be, queen of night, queen of terror—except her reluctance for the role" (96). In this sense, she does not identify with the role of the vampire (metaphorically, the female exacerbated sexuality), her performance is deprived of any kind of personal involvement and self-satisfaction. An evidence for this fact is that the vampire/prostitute performs this sexual role compulsively and efficiently only until the day she falls in love with her victim, the British soldier (who corresponds both to the fairytale's prince and to the gothic hero). When she feels affectively attracted by the one she is supposed only to use and discard (as an object of physical desire), she does not know how to negotiate her personal interests and is unable to perform that compulsory ritual.

The character of the young soldier renders important implications to the story. As Peng argues, he represents a male rationality that "deconstructs" the woman-vampire's sexuality (109). The narrator's description of how he sees Countess Nosferatu shows this:

> A fundamental disbelief in what he sees before him sustains him, even in the boudoir of the Countess Nosferatu herself; he would have said, perhaps, that

> there are some things which, even if they *are* true, we should not believe possible. . . . Not so much that he does not believe in her; he can see her, she is real. . . . since he himself is immune to shadow, due to his virginity—he does not yet know what there is to be afraid of—and due to his heroism. . . . he sees before him, first and foremost, an inbred, highly strung girl child, fatherless, motherless, kept in the dark too long and pale as a plant that never sees the light, hall-blinded by some hereditary condition of the eyes. And though he feels unease, he cannot feel terror. (103-04)

The soldier's point of view, in this sense, is presented as different from that of the Transylvanian society that fears Countess Nosferatu. The soldier's view represents a traditional set of values, a matrix of cultural intelligibility (to use Butler's term) that is based on superstition. This matrix renders the countess a monster, a supernatural being that people must fear and cast out. As a young man of the twentieth century, the British soldier dismisses those values and presents an alternative interpretation for what he sees, a view based on rationality. This interpretation illustrates what Foucault describes as the scientific discourses on sexuality provided at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century ("The Perverse Implantation" 685). In the soldier's view, she is only a sick girl, victim of an illness that is usually related to women's sexuality by one of the discourses discussed by Foucault: hysteria. This view can be noticed in the passage in which the soldier plans a treatment for Countess Nosferatu: "We shall take her to Zurich, to a clinic; she will be treated for nervous hysteria. Then to an eye specialist, for her photophobia, and to a dentist to put her teeth into better shape. We shall turn her into the lovely girl she is" (107). By treating the woman vampire's sexuality in terms of a disease, the soldier is echoing the scientific discourses that examine and classify female exacerbated sexuality as pathological (especially psychoanalytical works, like those by

Freud). In this sense, his interpretation is not less biased than that of the superstitious society: both have the effect of controlling female sexuality.

Two symbols in the story enhance the description of Countess Nosferatu's vampiric practices as a metaphor for exacerbated female sexuality: the roses and her mouth. The huge spiked wall into which "the spiked roses her dead mother planted" have grown is what incarcerates her "in the castle of her inheritance" (95). The description of the roses has clear sexual connotations, suggesting their resemblance to the female genitalia:

> Too many roses bloomed on enormous thickets that lined the path, thickets bristling with thorns, and the flowers themselves were almost too luxuriant, their huge congregations of plush petals somehow obscene in their excess, their whorled, tightly budded cores outrageous in heir implications. (98)

The idea of female sexuality evoked in this passage describes it as excessive and obscene, at the same time that it is capable of overwhelming men's senses, like the rose's intoxicating scent. In this sense, the fact that these roses incarcerate the countess in her castle can be interpreted as suggesting that her exacerbated female sexuality isolates her from social life, deprives her of indulging in practices that would satisfy her personal desires. Similarly, Countess Nosferatu's mouth is rendered sexual implications, especially from the young soldier's point of view. The narrator affirms that: "he was disturbed, almost repelled, by her extraordinarily fleshy mouth, a mouth with wide, full, prominent lips of a vibrant purplish-crimson, a morbid mouth. Even—but he put the thought away from him immediately—a whore's mouth" (101). The idea that that kind of mouth is typical of a whore attests the common sense that sees it as indicative of the woman's sexual appetite, because of the similarities between the mouth and the female genitalia and in a logic that relates sexual excess and eating excess (Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* 2:51). As a mouth with prominent lips

suggests a potentiality for excessive satisfaction of the pleasures of eating, an exacerbated female sexuality suggests a potentiality for excessive enjoyment of sexual pleasures.

Kristeva's notion of the abject can also be associated with this idea. The potential for the satisfaction of sexual desire related to the exacerbated female sexuality (which is suggested by the image of a prominent female genitalia) is abject for being both attractive and repulsive. It is attractive because it offers excessive sexual pleasures and repulsive because it is considered improper by hegemonic social discourses, a danger to the individual's physical and moral integrity (as it is said to be typical of excesses, in general). In the story, Countess Nosferatu is seen as abject by the soldier not only for her association with such exacerbated sexuality but also for her possessing the "unhealthy beauty of a consumptive" (101), and for her living in a decaying, rotting house, where the furniture is infested with fungi and dirty. His feelings of repulsion conveyed by her mouth have sexual implications: as suggestive of the female genitalia, her mouth is abject for its excess and clear evocation of the pleasures it offers as opposed to the soldier's romantic view of female (lack of) sexuality in compliance with traditional societal beliefs. Besides, as the soldier imagines that she is a consumptive, he probably associates her mouth with the expelling of blood, which is also abject as a bodily fluid, and this expelling of blood by a mouth that resembles the female genitalia evokes an even more abject image: that of menstrual blood. But Carter's readers, who know the real use of the Countess Nosferatu's prominent lips (that is, for vampire feeding), can also perceive this abjection as related to her sucking the blood from her victims.

The comparison between the Countess Nosferatu's lips and the roses from the garden results in an image that bears another implication, as the passage bellow suggests:

> Her voice, issuing from those red lips like the obese roses in the garden, lips that do not move—her voice is curiously disembodied; she is like a doll, he thought, a ventriloquist's doll, or, more, like a great, ingenious piece of

> clockwork for she seemed inadequately powered by some slow energy of which she was not in control; as if she had been wound up years ago, when she was born, and now the mechanism was inexorably running down and would leave her lifeless. This idea that she might be an automaton, made of white velvet and black fur, that could not move of its own accord, never quite deserted him. (102)

The prominent lips that barely move, in this sense, recalls the mouth of a doll, in a allusion to Lady Purple and the implications of her condition of being controlled by the external power of the ventriloquist. In this sense, Carter relates her two vampire women, suggesting that both represent the same idea of a social role that, although transgressive, is imposed and incorporated into women's subjectivity through its compulsive performance. This same idea of performance, of repetition, is suggested by the images of the piece of clockwork (that is moved by a power and rhythm already set for it by an external force) and of the automaton (that moves on its own but mechanically, according to what it was programmed for). These objects, therefore, automatically perform functions created for them, representing, the body of a woman controlled by the discourses and ideologies of the sex/gender system —which are informed, as Stallybrass and White suggest, by these societies' ambiguous feelings of attraction and repulsion in relation to the female body (202).

In Hollinger's discussion of this short story, she states that it is "directly concerned with the apparent destruction of the fantastic in its encounters with a clearly-defined human reality" and that "one of the nicely ironic twists Carter builds into her narrative is that the magical creature and the betraying maiden are one and the same" (205). In this sense, Countess Nosferatu fits into the characterization of the contemporary vampire as a creature that defies the traditional distinction between human and monster, rationality and superstition, reality and fantasy, victim and victimizer. As she is both the perpetrator of vampiric murder and the victim of an imposed inherited role, her story raises the question of to what extent sexually transgressive women are

not the victims of the same society that casts them out. Hollinger calls it a meta-fantastic story in the sense that it is a fantasy fiction that shows that socially predicted sexual behaviors are in fact a fantasy and a construction (205-06).

The end of Countess Nosferatu's tale presents a paradox in the criticism of control of women's sexual behavior by the sex/gender system: she breaks free from the fate of killing every man she seduces (the *femme fatale* stereotype) but dies, as if she could not live in any other way. Although the death of the victimized lady seems a sad end, it can be seen as congruent with the idea of breaking with social expectations: if Lady Nosferatu's fate is to live eternally from the blood of her victims, breaking with this fate means not killing and thus not living. As in "The Loves Lady Purple," I believe that the transgressive sexuality presented by Carter in this story relates to the 1970s' discussion of women's sexual freedom, in the sense that it criticizes the social prescription of women's sexual behavior and orientation. But differently from Lady Purple, whose transformation into a vampire represents an alternative possibility of satisfaction of women's sexual desires, Countess Nosferatu dies because the kind of satisfaction offered by vampirism does not attract her. The sexual pleasure implicit in the vampire feeding is presented to Lady Purple as a new possibility, different from those she experienced in her performance of the other roles she assumes (the puppet, the prostitute, the dominatrix, the necrophiliac, the necrophagist). For Countess Nosferatu, on the other hand, vampire feeding is the only kind of consummation of desires she knows, so that, when she is unable to perform it, she does not have an alternative and dies. Despite this difference in their conclusions, both stories contribute to the discussion about sexuality when they bring to the scene the fact that the modes of women's sexual behavior and misbehavior can be both socially created.

Regarding the two stories, therefore, it can be said that Carter's vampires represent the stereotypical female monstrous sexuality. This monstrous quality is provided not only by the use of gothic motifs and devices in both stories, but also and mainly by the deployment of this sexuality as dangerously attractive, because it is seen as threatening men's moral and physical integrity. The representation of this sexuality in both stories illustrate what Linda Hutcheon calls "the feminist use of postmodernist parody" (*The Politics of Postmodernism* 152). It may be argued that the ironic narrative voice in Carter's stories install in both texts the sex/gender system's structure that privileges a female sexuality characterized by submission to male desires and discretion, but in a subversive way: the stereotypes of female sexuality indicate the oppression women suffer from the compulsory performance of socially constructed roles. In this sense, it is through this reproduction that criticism is conveyed on the sex/gender system's structures, as it suggests that society constrains female sexuality (in a stereotypical duality of roles) to such an extent that even the sexual performances and identities that are considered culturally unintelligible are prescribed by it, often women leaving no alternative. In this sense, the discussion on sexuality in Carter's vampire stories reflects the 1970s' feminist concerns about women's sexual freedom.

2.2. Anne Rice's Vampires

2.2.1. *The Vampire Lestat*

In Rice's novel *The Vampire Lestat* (1985), the protagonist tells his own story, from his life as a human being in eighteenth-century France to his life as a vampire in late-twentieth-century United States, including his vampirization and his own version of the events narrated by the vampire Louis in *Interview with the Vampire* (the novel that precedes it in the collection *The Vampire Chronicles*). The novel presents the struggles of Lestat and other vampires to understand both human and vampire life. The feeling of anguish and loneliness that assaults

Rice's vampires in this novel is due mainly to the impossibility of their living normally among human beings and the uncertainties about the origin and the meaning of the vampires' existence. Lestat recounts his last experiences as a young French man who has to provide for his decadent aristocratic family, his childhood wish to become a priest and his later wish to go away from his household to become a famous actor. Lestat's relations with his blind father (a decadent Marquis) and with his idle brothers hinder the fulfillment of his dreams until he decides to run away and join a theater company. He achieves great success, but then, one night he is vampirized by Magnus, who kills himself in that very night, leaving Lestat alone with his fortune. Lestat's first experiences as a vampire are traumatic, as he has to learn how to survive all alone. He vampirizes his own mother, Gabrielle, and his best friend, Nicolas, to share this new life with them, both being people with whom he had a close relationship during his mortal life. But this does not work as he expected, as their interests and wishes get in conflict now they are vampires, culminating in his mother's leaving him and his friend's suicide. Lestat then finds another vampire, Marius, who becomes his teacher of vampire affairs. From Marius he learns about the existence of the king and the queen from whom all the vampires originated, Enkil and Akasha. They are kept in a shrine in Greece, sleeping under the form of statues. Their location is kept a secret and is protected by Marius, for it is believed that their destruction may lead to the death of all the vampires in the world. When Lestat disobeys Marius's restriction and drinks blood from the queen, they quarrel and Lestat decides to go to the USA. There he vampirizes Louis and Claudia, with whom he lives the events narrated in *Interview with the Vampire.* After Claudia's death and Louis's departure, Lestat retreats in a long sleep into the earth from 1929 until 1984, when he awakes with the sound of rock music and decides to become a rock singer. He joins a band and becomes worldly famous, fulfilling his desires of both becoming idolized by humans and living among them even after telling them he is a vampire. For the humans, he is just an eccentric rock singer pretending to be a vampire for

marketing and stylistic purposes, but the other vampires around the earth get angry at his audacity. It is the rule that their real identity must be kept so as to preserve their life and the safety of the king and queen of the damned. The novel ends with a cliffhanger: Lestat is going to his first concert in San Francisco, where he expects to meet the other vampires who will start a war against him.

The first thing to notice about sexuality in *The Vampire Lestat* is that Rice depicts her vampires exploring these creatures' traditional symbol of an exacerbated sexuality. All the vampires are described in the novel as extremely beautiful, attractive, and sensual. Lestat's description of himself at the very beginning of the book illustrates this:

> I am six feet tall, which was fairly impressive in the 1780s when I was a young mortal man. It's not bad now. I have thick blond hair, not quite at shoulder length, and rather curly, which appears white under fluorescent light. My eyes are grey, but they absorb the colors blue or violet easily from surfaces around them. And I have a fairly short narrow nose, and a mouth that is well shaped but just a little too big for my face. It can look very mean, or extremely generous, my mouth. It always looks sensual. (3)

This description presents the vampire as an ideal of manly beauty, but interestingly, it is a combination between the charming prince, like the British soldier in "The Lady of the House of Love," and the vampire with protuberant lips, like Lady Nosferatu.

Bisexuality is an important issue in the characterization of all Rice's vampires. Not only the male vampires, but also the female ones are described in a way that endows them with ambiguity in terms of the sex/gender system's dichotomized notions of sexuality. A sexual ambiguity can be perceived in the vampire's behavior and relationships with each other. I would say that this bisexuality functions in the story as an alternative to the compulsory heterosexuality that, according to Butler ("Imitation" 725), characterizes the sex/gender system.

This alternative is only possible in an existence different from that of the humans: vampires are not constrained by human moral codes, so that they construct their sexual identities according to their free will (as I am going to argue later, there are vampire rules that restrain their sexuality, but those are rather directed to excessive use of sexual pleasure rather than to sexual orientation).

My arguments about the vampire sexuality of Lady Purple and Countess Nosferatu also apply to this case. Rice's vampires count on wider possibilities of satisfying their (sexual) desires since they lack a commitment to human social norms that render certain practices improper and unclean, and so they do not feel repulsion for any kind of practice. There are no abjects for them, only objects to which their attractions are not repressed. Also in relation to this fact, Rice's vampires feel attraction for each other, a possibility that does not exist in stories of solitary vampires as those by Carter. In this attraction, their sexual identities are unlimited, unrestrained by the mechanisms of compulsory heterosexuality. The idea of bisexuality, then, seems the more plausible one to classify their case, for the broader range of possibilities it presents for sexual relationships between people regardless of their biological sex.

Another fact that supports the characterization of Rice's vampires in terms of sexuality is that the sucking of blood becomes a metaphor for the sexual act. These vampires are described as feeding on human victims or exchanging blood with each other in a way that makes it similar to a sexual intercourse. The physical contacts among the vampires and those between them and humans are intense, causing all the senses to sharpen. It can be perceived, for instance, in Lestat's narration of his feeding on one of his first victims:

> This was a hard young body. Even the roughness of his badly shaven beard tantalized me, and I loved the strength in his hands as he struck at me. He froze

> as I sank my teeth into the artery, and when the blood came it was pure voluptuousness. (103)

I would say that vampiric intercourse (or vampire feeding) parodies human sexual act in a way that what is emphasized in *The Vampire Lestat* is the sensuality and the pleasure that the act provides.

Generally, it can be perceived that the discussion about sexuality in *The Vampire Lestat* is based on the characterization of vampire sexuality as different from that of humans. Rice's vampires are incapable of completing a genital sexual intercourse, since their bodies are dead. Jennifer Smith sees this lack of genital sexuality as an advantage: "because freedom from genital sex also means freedom from sexual taboos, since almost all our cultural restrictions on sex are based on what we do to each other, not on what we feel" (52-53). I tend to agree with Smith that this lack of genital sex makes the vampires free from the constraints on sexuality, but I believe that interpreting their bloodsucking as an alternative to this sex and as a metaphor for it provides other important implications. If the morality that constrains human sexuality does not constrain vampires, as it can be perceived throughout the story, so they practice not only random (for they have many victims in one night and drink each other's blood unrestrictively) but also homosexual and bisexual sex/blood sucking—which, in Kristeva's words, is abject both in terms of the exchange of body fluids and sexual difference: it suggests desirable new possibilities of sexual satisfaction but are threatening to the individual's physical and moral integrity and to the social order.

More specifically in relation to the interpretation of Rice's vampires as homosexual, Sandra Tomc's argument is worth considering here:

> the sexuality of her [Rice's] vampires, in fact, bears little resemblance to the forms of gratification conventionally associated with the interactions of men's bodies. Rather, the vampire's body is something entirely new. . . . No matter

> what his or her residual sexual organs denote, both the vampire's experience of erotic pleasure and its ability to reproduce are located orally, not genitally; sucking blood is the vampire's way of feeding, of gratifying itself, and of making other vampires. (98)

Tomc interprets the sexuality of Rice's vampires as something different from homosexuality: it is a new kind of sexuality that has no continuity either with their biological sex (residual in the human body that the vampires inhabit) nor with their socially constructed gender (which is only publicly performed so that the vampires can pass as humans). In this new sexuality, the sexual practice is oral and, I would add, is satisfied in terms of its more literal function of feeding the body (the vampires need blood, the symbol of sexual fluids in this sexuality, to live in their dead human bodies). Reproduction is also possible through this kind of sexuality, as a vampire is able to vampirize the human being he or she bites.

Tomc's argument, in this sense, is in agreement with my argument that what Rice is presenting is an alternative to compulsory heterosexuality. But, differently from her, I would say that the particularities of this alternative sexuality do not exclude its allusion to homosexuality. This is because what Rice emphasizes in the characterization of her vampire's sexuality is not the biological aspects of the sexual practice, but the ideas of love and pleasure related to this sexuality. These feelings do not necessarily require the use of the biological sexual apparatus to be achieved, but can also be satisfied through alternatives. In this sense, the perforation of one's skin by the vampire's fang symbolizes the penis penetration, the blood that is sucked from the victim/lover symbolizes the sexual bodily fluids, and these acts provide pleasure. To explain the fact that this alternative sexual act disrespects the notion of a necessary continuity among one's biological sex, one's sexuality, and one's gender, it is not necessary to create a new kind of sexuality: homosexuality also provides a break. Reproduction, possible in the new form of sexuality created by Rice, is the only thing that cannot be achieved in

homosexual relationships. However, I would claim that there is another way of interpreting this reproduction that relates more clearly to homosexuality, and as a way of reflecting the 1980s' concerns about the AIDS epidemic.

For this interpretation, it is necessary to consider the implications of vampiric reproduction: it is not a reproduction of life, but rather a reproduction of undeath. When the vampire bites a human being, this person does not gain a "vampire life," but his human body dies and he or she begins a new existence as an undead. Despite the connotation of birth that vampirization may entail, what is created is definitely not life. Therefore, as a new form of sexuality, that of Rice's vampires is so biologically unproductive as homosexuality. The vampire does not create life or another being when he vampirizes a human: he brings death to this living being. There is still another possibility, related to the interpretation of vampirization as a contamination. In this sense, and considering that Rice wrote her novel at the eruption of the AIDS epidemic, vampirization does not imply procreation but rather the spread of an infection, the reproduction of infected beings, the transmission of a virus, not of genes. I believe that because Rice does not present "forms of gratification conventionally associated with the interactions of men's bodies" (Tomc 98), it does not mean that the relationships between her male vampires cannot be interpreted as representing homosexual practices. Perceiving homoeroticism and homosexuality as a possible form of interaction may be a matter of interpretation of the potential symbolisms of the vampires in the context in which the works that depict them was written.

This homosexual emphasis appears in most of the relationships portrayed in Rice's novel. The most sensuous ones, in fact, are those among male vampires and between male vampires and male humans. But male and female vampires also have relationships with creatures of the opposite biological sex in a way that characterizes bisexuality. Such relationships implicitly represent the issue of bisexuality, as well as of gay and lesbian

homosexuality, raised in the debates on free sexuality in the 1980s, focusing on the humanity and beauty of this sexual orientation in detriment of its repulsive and threatening potential (and, implicitly, of the risks of contamination with the AIDS virus). Accordingly, I would say that Rice's novel praises the positive aspects of sexuality as related to love and pleasure, implicitly taking a position against homophobia and the social control of sexuality. Implicitly because, it must be recognized, there is no direct reference or discourse about the social acceptability of male-male relationships in the novel. They are described by Lestat, the narrator, as natural, without considerations about the estrangement the reader may feel in relation to them. If, on the other hand, homosexuality posits a threat to heterosexuality, raising fear that reinforces heterosexuality as a way of escaping from that threat (Butler, "Imitation" 724), then, characterizing the vampire as homosexual or bisexual increases the sexual threat represented by these creatures. The potential threat of vampires that are characterized by an unintelligible sexuality is increased by the threat to compulsory heterosexuality and by the fact that homosexuals were considered the main risk group at the eruption of AIDS epidemic.

Moreover, the sexuality of Rice's vampires is also different from the one they present publicly while humans. Lestat's mother, Gabrielle, is an example, since, as a human and the wife of a blind decadent French aristocrat, she was submissive and had no sexual life at all except that predicted as her marital obligation. It can be perceived, however, that even as humans those characters were not satisfied in performing this compulsory heterosexuality. The passage when the human Gabrielle confesses her inner dreams to Lestat illustrates this:

> I imagine drinking wine until I am so drunk I strip off my clothes and bathe in the mountain streams naked. . . . And then I imagine going into the village . . . and up into the inn and taking into my bed any men that come there—crude men, old men, boys. Just lying there and taking them one after another, and feeling some magnificent triumph in it, some absolute release without a thought

> of what happens to your father or your brothers, whether they are alive or dead. In that moment I am purely myself. I belong to no one. (35)

In this sense, it can be perceived that Gabrielle had sexual desires that were repressed by the moral codes of her society, codes that cease to constrain her when she is vampirized. This is so that as soon as she becomes a vampire she starts to wear men's clothes. The bisexuality of Rice's vampires can be understood as the realization of a sexual appetite and orientation that they had to hide while they were human beings. Vampirism in Rice, then, is not a parody of stereotypical transgressive sexualities that are constructed by the sex/gender system. Rather, it represents an alternative to compulsory heterosexuality that, although similar to bisexuality and homosexuality, brings new implications (related specially to the impossibility of genital sexual intercourse). On the other hand, one fact that makes Rice's novel a kind of failure in presenting alternatives to the sex/gender system's notion of sexuality is the implicit fact that such alternatives can only be accomplished outside the domain of the human.

Lestat's case is the best example of the sexual implications of the change from human to vampire. In the passages about his human life in France, he seems to have a normative heterosexuality, having relationships exclusively with women. In his human life, Lestat performs at least three different roles: that of a monk, that of an artist, and that of a hunter. When a child, he goes to the monastery and desires to be a monk in order to be a good man. This wish is denied him by his aristocratic father and brothers, who do not want to have a poor monk denigrating the family's glamour. In young adulthood, Lestat envisions the artistic career as the true way of achieving beauty and goodness, with which he becomes obsessed. But his wish to become an actor is also hindered by his family, who think it is inadequate to their aristocratic lineage. The only role his father and brother allow him is that of the hunter: he becomes the provider for his decadent family, caring about their land and hunting their meat himself. It can be perceived that a sensibility that is presented as innate to Lestat contrasts with the only role he was allowed to

assume, one that relates to what David G. Gilmore calls "traditional manly codes of stoicism, physical strength, sexual prowess, and bravery" (qtd. in Leverenz 47). He becomes the "Wolfkiller" (after the episode in which he kills a pack of wolves that were tormenting his village) and it is this capacity for strength and violence that attracts the vampire that would later vampirize him, Magnus, at the moment when he gains success and fulfills his dreams of becoming an actor in Paris. His vampirization, then, imposes on him the hunter role once again. The violence of this event carried out by Magnus and its sexual implications can be perceived in Lestat's words:

> I fought him harder than I had ever fought anyone or anything in my existence, even the wolves. I beat him, kicked him, tore at this hair. But I might as well have fought the animated gargoyles from a cathedral. He was that powerful. . . . "Damn you, damn you, damn you!" I was roaring and bellowing. And he drew closer and the teeth went through my flesh. . . . The sweetness and the softness and the world far away, and even he in his ugliness was curiously outside of me, like an insect pressed against a glass who causes no loathing in us because he cannot touch us, and the sound of the gong, and the exquisite pleasure, and then I was altogether lost. I was incorporeal and the pleasure was incorporeal. I was nothing but pleasure. (77)

This passage illustrates an argument that I have already mentioned here: that the satisfaction of vampire desires through blood drinking is not abject for him or her, the victim is the object of desire that exerts an attraction that is not repressed. As Lestat describes his feelings, it can be perceived that in Rice's novel the same lack of repulsion and total use of pleasure experienced by the vampire is also experienced by his victim (at least to the one who is going to be vampirized, if not to the one who is being drained to death). Lestat's reference to the pleasure he felt attests the potential of vampire blood-sucking (a metaphor for the sexual act) to provide

excessive (sexual) pleasures. In Rice's novels, after the vampire sucks the victim's blood, the vampirization is completed when he has the victim drinking his own blood in exchange, and Lestat narrates his own experience as irresistible and inescapable. He grows desperately thirsty as Magnus offers him his own blood:

> "The wine of all wines," he breathed. "This is my Body, this is my Blood." . . . In pure horror I said No. I will not bow down to it, the chaos and the horror. . . . He lifted my face, and holding me with his right hand, he lifted his left hand and gashed his own throat with his nails. . . . My tongue licked at the blood. And a great whiplash of sensation caught me. And my mouth opened and locked itself to the wound. I drew with all my power upon the great fount that I knew would satisfy my thirst as it had never been satisfied before. (79)

The intensity of Lestat's experience mingles violence and pleasure. Magnus's words, alluding to those of Christ at the moment of the Last Supper, reveal his intention, unknown until then, to pass onto Lestat his vampire legacy (he commits suicide after he vampirizes Lestat). But, considered in relation to the sexual connotations of the vampire blood drinking, this biblical allusion also suggests that vampirization is like a mystical experience that leads to a kind of ecstasy. Indeed, Lestat narrates his experience as an intense bodily intimacy that provides him with a unique sensation. His initial reluctance to accept the Magnus's blood can be related to his moral ethics— in Foucault's terms (*The History of Sexuality* 2: 250) —, to his struggle to indulge in an act that he believes (because of his religious instructions) is evil and unacceptable in terms of humanity and metaphorically in terms of sexuality (a male-male intercourse). At this moment, therefore, Magnus becomes abject to him, because the attraction he feels for this vampire is repressed by his acknowledgement that vampirism threatens his self-identification as a human being (also, metaphorically, that homosexual intercourse threatens his self-identification as a heterosexual male). Despite Lestat's repulsion at this moment, Magnus's

advance is inescapable and then Lestat experiences an intense satisfaction of all his inner desires. By drinking the vampire's blood, he says, "all the desperate desires of my life were a thousandfold fed" (79). Also here the idea of a high potential for the satisfaction of desires is perceived as characterizing vampire feeding. Magnus is not described here as the predator who wants to satiate his thirst on his victim, but as someone who wants to share love and pleasure, and Lestat feels extremely grateful for that: "Love you, I wanted to say, Magnus, my unearthly master, ghastly thing that you are, love you, . . . this was what I had always so wanted, wanted, and could never have, this, and you've given it to me!" (79).

I would say that the pleasure and satisfaction Lestat feels when vampirized hints at a desire that he seems to have while human for his best friend, Nicolas. In his narration, he always focuses on the attraction he feels for his friend since the very first moment they meet, without hinting at any idea beyond homosociability. Nevertheless, the terms Lestat uses to talk about Nicolas suggest to the reader a homosexual attraction, as in the following passages: "a great energy poured out of him, an irrepressible passion. And this drew me to him. I think I loved him" (42), and: "[h]e was beyond handsome when he smiled" (43). After he becomes a vampire, it seems that Lestat's lust becomes even greater, now also in the form of blood lust:

> I wanted Nicki. . . . I wanted his blood flowing into me, wanted its taste and its smell and its heat. . . . The hard heat of his body made me stiffen and draw back, though it seemed I didn't move at all. And it maddened me suddenly that his one whom I loved even as I loved my mother and my brothers—this one who had drawn from me the only tenderness I'd ever felt—was an unconquerable citadel, holding flat in ignorance against my thirst for blood when so many hundreds of victim had so easily given up. (117)

In this passage, Lestat is confronted with moral ethics in a way that he is not while randomly taking strangers as his victims. Nicki is an object of desire for him, now also a prey.

The above passage brings to mind the ethics of the table as related to the ethics of sex explained by Foucault (*The History of Sexuality* 2:51). Lestat's intense blood lust for Nicki implies both thirst and sexual attraction (an attraction to which the satisfaction is urged by the vampire's exacerbated sexuality). This satisfaction is accomplished latter in the novel when Nicki begs for the "Dark Gift" (vampirization) and Lestat grants it, in an attitude that he tries to justify and to avoid at the same time: "was it that I now had the excuses I needed to bring him to me as I had wanted to do from the first moment? My Nicolas, my love. Eternity waits. All the great and splendid pleasure of being dead" (206). The physical attraction and lust he feels for Nicolas (who desperately desires the pleasures offered by vampirization) are stronger than his human scruples:

> the love for him, the aching, wrenching months of longing for him, the hideous and unshakable human need for him, the lust. I tried to see the mortal who didn't know what he was saying as he glared at me. . . . Shuddering. Shirt soaked with sweat. Gleam of taut flesh through the torn lace, tantalizing, the mere sight of it, the narrow tightly muscled torso that sculptors so love to represent, nipples pink against the dark skin. . . . Tight little belly glistening with sweat, sweat staining the thick leather belt. Blood full of salt. I could scarce breathe. (207-08).

Here, Nicki becomes again Lestat's object of desire. He does not feel the moral scruples anymore, only desire. The sequence of references to Nicholas's bodily fluids presented in this passage enhanced Lestat's lust for him to the point he cannot resist: he feels only desire for his friend's human body, not repulsion, and satisfaction can be indulged now without repression. Lestat describes his drinking Nicola's blood and deciding to vampirize him as the moment of satisfaction of his lust:

> the blood was the blood after all, and the heart—the luscious heart that was all hearts—was right there, on tiptoe against my lips.

> Now, my love, now's the moment. I can swallow the life that beats from your heart and send you into the oblivion in which nothing may ever be understood or forgiven, or I can bring you to me.
>
> I pushed him backwards. I held him to me like a crushed thing. . . .
>
> His arms slipped around my neck, his face wet, eyes rolling up into his head. Then his tongue shot out. It licked hard at the gash I had made for him in my own throat. Yes, eager. (209)

Taking the historical context in consideration, the development of the relationship between Lestat and Nicolas can be interpreted as a metaphor for the changes in a homosexual relationship at the eruption of AIDS. While humans, their friendship is most explicitly homosocial, despite Lestat's insistence in their mutual identification and connection (as if one was the alter-ego of the other or the other's soul mate). But after Lestat becomes a vampire and vampirizes Nicolas, their relationship becomes more clearly homoerotic. The problem is that, as a vampire, Nicolas shows a temperament different from that of Lestat's: he is more violent, crueler, and eager to bring death to his victims. If vampirization is considered a metaphor for HIV contamination, then Lestat's and Nicolas's attitudes can be seen as resembling those that were probably the reactions of homosexual men infected with the AIDS virus. While one is eager to live and reflects on his existence and that of mortal humans, the other is angry and eager to spread death and contamination among those from whom he now differs.

Lestat's vampirization of his own mother also provides important implications for the analysis of sexuality in *The Vampire Lestat*. Gabrielle consents to her vampirization, which frees her from death and from a miserable life, a choice that her son does not have, but even so his act is highly transgressive. Considering the vampirization a sexual act, what Lestat commits is a transgression of the incest taboo (a typical gothic motif, as Punter affirms [405]). Sexual connotations can be perceived in his narration of that moment:

> The thirst leapt out for her and tried to transform her into mere flesh. . . . And jetting up into the current came the thirst, not obliterating but heating every concept of her, until she was flesh and blood and mother and lover and all things beneath the cruel pressure of my fingers and my lips, everything I had ever desired. I drove my teeth into her, feeling her stiffen and gasps, and I felt my mouth grow wide to catch the hot flood when it came. . . . there was no mother anymore, no petty need and petty terror; she was simply who she was. She was Gabrielle. (138-39)

As the scene above shows, by sucking Gabrielle's blood, Lestat is confused by the contrasting ideas she represents for him: she is at the same time human, food, mother, and lover. Feeding on his mother and vampirizing her is not only a matter of satisfaction of his desire, but a necessity, in order to avoid her death. But Lestat is only able to proceed when he objectifies her, trying to forget that she is his mother and seeing her as an object of desire. Defying the repression of his desires urged especially by the incest taboo, he is able to satisfy them because he feels no repulsion for the body of his mother. Lestat's vampirization of Gabrielle, then, is very meaningful if we consider that the maternal body, according to Kristeva, is abject par excellence (12). Drinking her blood conveys a satisfaction of his desire for the mother's body that primal repression transforms into abject. Depriving the maternal body from the repulsive side of the ambiguity of abjection, then, Lestat's vampirizing her promotes the return of the repressed, transgressing the taboo incest. At the moment he gives his own blood to her, another transgression can be perceived as an inversion:

> I lifted my right wrist to my mouth and slashed the vein and pushed it against her lips. She didn't move as the blood spilled over her tongue. "Mother, drink," I said frantically, and pushed it harder, but some change had already commenced. Her lips quivered, and her mouth locked to me and the pain

> whipped through me suddenly encircling my heart. . . . Yet it was only her pulling, her sucking, her taking the blood out of me that had taken from her . . . Harder and harder she drew and faster, and I felt her grip tighten and her body grow hard. (139-40)

Here, Lestat assumes not only the implied role of the lover but also of mother to his own mother. His feeding his own mother in an attitude that resembles breast feeding is transgressive not only because such relation is incestuous but also because, as a male, Lestat should not have the capacity to do it.

Throughout Rice's novel, there is constant longing for father and mother figures, which brings further implications to the discussion of sexuality. These figures relate to the necessity of instruction, of education, which the vampires require to be able to live their immortality among the mortals. This education implies the construction of morality: the teaching of moral codes and the self-construction of moral ethics. Considering the symbolisms of Rice's vampires, this morality also suggests a regulation of sexual practices, represented by the rules that regulate the vampire's predation. Right after being turned into vampires, all of them have to learn that drinking blood is necessary for their survival, but that exceeding the satisfaction of this necessity puts them in danger: excessive blood lust exposes them to human beings, who can track them down and destroy them. Besides, they learn that they must control their voracity while sucking their victim's blood, taking care not to let them completely dry: if they do not spare the last drops of blood in the victim's body, they take death onto themselves. Such regulations recall again the equivalence between the ethics of the table and the ethics of sex (Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* 2:51), in a way that the vampire's rules for avoiding the dangers brought by excessive use of the pleasures of drinking are metaphors for the moral codes intended to prevent excessive use of sexual pleasures. In that point Rice's vampires resemble those of Carter's, as even their sexuality, alternative to the culturally intelligible one,

is culturally created, and, thus, subject to rules. When the historical context of Rice's novel is considered, these rules can be said to imply the limitation of sexual practice imposed by the danger of HIV contamination: an excessive use of sexual pleasures accelerates the spread of this sexually transmitted syndrome.

The relation between vampire and human rules can be better perceived in the passages about the coven *Les Innocents* led by Armand in eighteenth-century Paris. This five-hundred-year-old vampire, a fifteen-year-old boy while human, controls the other vampires in Paris, imposing on them what they call "The Dark Ways," "The Dark Commandments," "The Dark Vows," "The Dark Blessings," "The Rules of Darkness," a kind of vampire moral codes. Lestat tells how Armand himself explains their views:

> the vampires who walked the earth, tested, purified, Children of Darkness, born of a fledgling's blood, never the full power of an ancient master, so that time would bring the wisdom to use the Dark Gifts before they grew truly strong. And on these were imposed the Rules of Darkness. To live among the dead, for we are dead things, returning always to one's own grave or one very nearly like it. To shun the places of light, luring victims away from the company of others to suffer death in unholy and haunted places. And to honor forever the power of God, the crucifix about the neck, the Sacraments. And never never to enter the House of God, lest he strike you powerless, casting you into hell, ending your reign on earth in blazing torment. (197)

Such assumptions and rules suggest that those vampires still feel constrained by human morals, religious dogmas and taboos. Ignorant about the nature of their existence, they assume the old beliefs used by human beings to explain the unknown: metaphysical evil, the Devil's design, God's wrath. Lestat is not taught such rules by Magnus, so he does not follow them and does not teach them to his mother, putting into question the plausibility of the coven's dogmas.

At the coven *Les Innocents*, Lestat and Gabrielle are confronted as threatening transgressors of vampire codes: "'You will bring down the wrath of God on all of us with your defiance'. . . 'In vanity and wickedness you disregard the Dark Ways. You live among mortals! You walk in the places of light" (187). Lestat answers by arguing that the whole philosophy of the coven "is founded upon a lie," and adds: "you cower like peasants, in hell already by your own choosing, enchained more surely than the lowest mortal, and you wish to punish us because we do not? Follow our examples because we do not!" (192). This argument can be interpreted as a refusal of imposed social roles in that it can also be related to the imposition of sexual roles. In this sense, Lestat's refusal to follow the Rules of Darkness parodies human beings' refusal to obey social rules that control sexuality, so that Lestat's arguments against vampire's rules also apply to social rules: the novel suggests that the latter are also based on old myths, superstitions, religion, and biased assumptions.

The transgressive character of Lestat's attitudes is, then, double: if being a vampire already symbolizes a transgression of culturally intelligible sexual practices, refusing the vampire role imposed by the Rules of Darkness represents a refusal of the roles of sexual transgression, which are also culturally imposed. This is so because vampires are a metaphor for people with an exacerbated sexuality and the roles created by the Rules of Darkness to be performed by the vampires represent the stereotypical roles created by the sex/gender system. Being "creatures of the night, meant to feed the fears of man" (193) is the way through which vampires like those of *Les Innocents* (who resemble the old vampire figure of folklore and early gothic fiction) perform a sexual role that is recognized as transgressive but that is at the same time controlled. Lestat refuses such a role as he says to Armand and the other vampires: "you waste your gifts! . . . And worse, you waste your immortality! Nothing in all the world is so nonsensical and contradictory, save mortals, that is, who live in the grip of the superstitions of the past" (194). The gifts he refers to relate to the exacerbated sexuality that vampires

represent, which allows them to have pleasurable experiences through new possibilities of practices. Lestat argues that the eighteenth century is a secular age and that men do not fear that old metaphysical evil anymore:

> [Evil] changes its form. How many men in this age believe in the crosses that frighten your followers? Do you think mortals above are speaking to each other of heaven and hell? Philosophy is what they talk about, and science! What does it matter to them if white-faced haunts prowl a churchyard after dark? A few more murders in a wilderness of murders? How can this be of interest to God or the devil or to man? (199)

Lestat here refers to the then emergent Enlightenment values, claiming that the assumptions and ideologies that inform the Rules of Darkness are outdated. He argues the implausibility of the ideologies that inform the norms that regulate sexuality in relation to the context of Rice's novel (the 1980s). In terms of sexuality, Lestat seems to evoke the changes mentioned by Foucault in the development of discourses on sexuality, and positions himself against an attitude that is outmoded. I would say that this attitude is advanced even for the eighteenth century, resembling more closely the 1980s' ideas about sexual freedom and public manifestation of one's sexual orientation. In this sense, the vampires of *Les Innocents* could be interpreted as representing those who undertake the role of outcasts assigned to them by the moral codes of the sex/gender system that render their vampire nature and their exacerbated sexuality as culturally unintelligible. He calls himself an example to be followed by the other vampires: "It is a new age, it requires a new evil. And I am that new evil . . . I am the vampire for these times," and he goes on: "try to envision my beauty and my power. Try to see the evil that I am. I stalk the world in mortal dress—the worst of fiends, the monster who looks exactly like everyone else" (200). Lestat proposes, then, that vampires do not need to live at society's margin, being able to take on an existence almost equal to that of humans, passing as one of

them. This existence, when taken as a metaphor for the sexual life of human beings, suggests a separation between one's sexual identity and his or her public presentation of sexuality—a correlation with Butler's argument against the notion of a necessary coherence between sexual identity, sexual orientation, and sexual practice ("Imitation" 725-26). Lestat's proposal suggests that a person who indulges in the sexual practices that society considers culturally unintelligible does not need to live at its margins: he or she can enjoy life in society by passing as a person who assumes culturally acceptable practices. This notion of "passing" as something else posits a different implication to the notion of performance of sexual roles in relation to the one presented by Carter's vampires. While the latter are trapped by the social control, performing the roles created for them, Rice's vampires use the fact that public performance does not reflect one's sexual identity and sexual orientation to conceal their transgressive sexual orientation under the performance of culturally intelligible sexuality. In other words, they pass as heterosexual human beings among humans although they have bisexual interests and indulge in bisexual practices only secretly (not even Lestat dares to feed on his victims in public).

In the novel, Lestat is able to change the mind of the vampires of *Les Innocents*, freeing them from the control of Armand as he shows them the possibility of a new, happier, and more satisfying kind of existence. The problem is that such freedom cannot be perceived as complete, as vampires can only live among humans if they are disguised: they still cannot reveal their identity or humans would track them down as in the old times. What they do is to perform a role as heterosexual humans, which is more evident in their carrying on with the Theatre of the Vampires, a new coven created by Nicolas, who defies Lestat. At this theater, the vampires pretend to be human actors that publicly perform roles of vampire characters. However, this performance, like that proposed by Lestat, does not break with the social codes of sexual behavior because it relates to Butler's notion of compulsory heterosexuality ("Imitation" 728): by performing the heterosexual roles created by society, the vampires

contribute to the reinforcement of the idea that heterosexuality is a natural kind of sexuality. In order to break with compulsory heterosexuality, that vampires would publicly assume their transgressive sexual practices and orientation, contesting the negative qualities attributed to them. Lestat is against the performance of his fellows at the Theatre of the Vampires, and when he awakes in the twentieth century he tries to accomplish an alternative to it, which, although seemingly more complete in terms of sexual freedom, is still only a performance: the role of the vampire rock star, which I further discuss in my analysis of *The Queen of Damned*.

Kristeva's notion of abjection can also be seen as supporting the apparent denial of the negative aspects of free sexuality/vampirization presented by Rice's vampires. After the drained human victim drinks his vampire creator's blood, his body dies. The curious thing about it is that the victim's body at that moment expels all the bodily fluids, but it is not expelled as a corpse: it becomes not dead, but undead, animated by the vampire's bodily fluids. Lestat's narration of his own experience suggests that, once he is a vampire, bodily fluids and other abject things are not threatening to him anymore. They lose their repulsive quality and become only attractive:

> as I watched the foulness stain my clothes, this didn't disgust me. Rats creeping into the very room, approaching this filth on their tiny soundless feet, even these did not disgust me. These things couldn't touch me, even as they crawled over me to devour the waste. (86)

Through vampirization, the abject (that which caused desire but which should be repelled because the satisfaction of that desire is threatening to the subject's integrity) is deprived of its threatening aspects and the subject is able to satisfy his desire for it without risking his identity.

Considering that vampirization, in the AIDS era, can stand for infection and that vampire feeding stands for random and careless sexual intercourse, sexual practices gain abject implications because the desire to indulge in pleasure cannot be satisfied lest the subject risk

his or her life getting infected by the HIV virus. However, vampires, being already infected, do not fear the implications of random and careless sexual intercourse. This practice is dangerous neither to them nor to other vampires with whom they can exchange blood, but to their human victims, who can die or become infected (vampirized). In other words, once the subject is a vampire, the sexual act (vampire feeding) is not abject anymore, since it loses its threatening implications and only unrepressed desire remains. This is why the negative consequences of sexual freedom do not preoccupy Rice's vampires. All those sexual practices considered dangerous at the AIDS era are enjoyed by the vampires, in a way that Rice's reader can have an idea of how pleasurable such practices could be if they were not dangerous. There is no homophobia and no sexual repression in the world of her vampires. In this sense, in her novel, the characterization of the vampire's sexuality suggests a focus on the possibilities of relationships of love and pleasure even among the infected ones.

2.2.2. *The Queen of the Damned*

The Queen of the Damned (1988) starts from the point *The Vampire Lestat* ends, with the vampire rock star narrating all the events involved in the heading of vampires and humans to his concert. There is great expectation about this moment, not only because Lestat knows that vampires from all over the world are coming to kill him (due to his audacity in revealing their existence to the humans), but also because his music had awakened Akasha, who all the characters know is heading to the concert. They do not know, however, her intentions in doing so. Throughout the novel, the characters keep going closer to discover the history of the origin of the vampires, as they have visions and dreams of an unknown past, until everything is revealed at the end, when Akasha appears. Having killed Enkil, the queen now intends to start a new reign on earth with the vampire rock star as her king. She plans to have the women kill ninety-nine percent of the men in the world, claiming that it would "put an end to war, to rape,

to violence," so as to create a kingdom without male violence and evil, "the Eden of human imagination" (332). She appears at the rock concert and saves Lestat from murder by the other vampires, taking him away with her. In the meantime, other ancient vampires who had been Lestat's friends and knew that the queen was looking for him were there to avoid what they believe to be her plans to punish him for his boldness. They get all together, led by the vampire Maharet, who is as old as Akasha, and learn from her about the origin of the vampires.

Akasha was a foreign queen chosen by Enkil to reign over a civilization that preceded the Egyptians, six thousand years ago. But her intolerance to cultural difference made her change the funeral practices of those people (from necrophagy to mummification). Maharet and her twin sister Mekare were witches who could talk to the spirits of nature. Akasha ordered that they were brought from their homeland to tell her subjects that their Gods and ancestors approved of her changes in the funeral rituals. But the twins could not do it, because it was not the truth. Furious, the queen ordered her head steward, Khayman, to publicly rape the sisters and to send them back to their homeland, but this raised the fury of an evil spirit, who started tormenting her people. Believing that those problems were punishments for the queen's heresy, the subjects revolted and stabbed Enkil and Akasha to death. At this moment, the evil spirit, who was envious of human materiality and had developed a way of hurting people by sucking their blood, started drinking Akasha's blood so eagerly that he got merged into her dying body. She immediately came to life again, and by giving her blood to her king she brought him back to life. As they fed upon human blood and could vampirize humans by making them drink their blood, Akasha and Enkil became the father and mother of all vampires. To punish the witches, the queen ordered that they should be set apart (Maharet with her eyes taken off and Mekare with her tongue cut off) and sent to opposite parts of the world, never to meet again. But before that, they had been vampirized by Khayman, so that they lived all those millenniums trying to meet again and kill Akasha. This happens at the very end of the novel, when the ancient

vampires and Lestat refuse to take part in Akasha's plan of creating a new kingdom on earth. They start a debate on her reasons and intentions about the future of humanity, and as she is not convinced that she is wrong and tries to kill all the vampires, she is destroyed.

Concerning sexuality, *The Queen of the Damned*, like *The Vampire Lestat*, does not present sexual experience directly, but implicitly in the metaphor of the vampire blood lust. The arguments I used to analyze the general aspects of the characterization of vampire sexuality in that other novel by Rice also apply to this one. Added to them, the characterization of Akasha is the one that provides the main points for an analysis of the representation of transgressive sexuality in *The Queen of the Damned*. Akasha is described by Lestat, the narrator, in a way that suggests a high potential of seduction and an exacerbated female sexuality. He always emphasizes her beauty and the ambiguity of her appearance: "a dead and perfect thing," a female body that presents traces of both death and intense life, a being who "looked indescribably lovely, . . . so pure and otherworldly," like a goddess (229). As a result of such physical appearance, the desire Lestat feels for her is intense:

> The lust I felt was unsupportable. The goddess, mine! I took her roughly with a strength that would have hurt a mortal woman. The icy skin seemed absolutely impenetrable and then my teeth broke through it and the hot fount was roaring into me again. (229)

The description provided by Lestat of his sucking Akasha's blood is delivered in highly sensuous terms, resembling a sexual intercourse, the satisfaction of a lust raised by the queen's exacerbated sensuality and power. But this satisfaction is described as transgressive. Akasha is a symbol of female exacerbated sexuality, as Carter's vampires are, but she is not simply a vampire prostitute: she is regarded as the goddess and mother of all vampires. Once again Lestat is breaking old vampire codes, feeding on one who is infinitely superior to him. He is conscious of it, so, he feeds on Akasha after he witnesses the great dispel of power through

which she easily kills thousands of vampires who try to attack him at his rock concert. His feeding on her also resembles the breaking of a religious taboo, as she is like a goddess. The transgression of the incest taboo is also implicit in this feeding, as Akasha is the mother of all vampires. At this point, Lestat's relations with the queen resemble those he has with his mother, described in the *The Vampire Lestat*: both of these vampire women have abject maternal bodies that vampire feeding transforms in objects of desire, depriving them of their repulsive character. Gabrielle's maternity is biological, human, and Lestat's vampirization of her reconcile him with his repressed primal desires. Akasha's maternity is supernatural, vampiric, and Lestat's feeding on her conveys the satisfaction of his unrepressed desires. To the other vampires, however, the abjection of Akasha's body is somehow maintained. Her religious attributes (as if she were a goddess, sacred) and her destructive power reinforce the prohibition of the act of feeding on her. The other vampires' desire to experience the great power and pleasure that comes with her blood is repressed by the danger of punishment for violating something that is sacred. Lestat is not worried about the violation of a law as he craves an identification with the vampire mother rather than a separation from her.

Despite the transgressive quality of his acts, Lestat is not punished by Akasha. Their relationship is described by the vampire narrator as one of love, but it has other implications. Power is a very important element, as Lestat is fascinated by the fact that he can feed on such a powerful being: "to have her as I had a thousand mortal women, yet she, the goddess, she with the immeasurable power" (233). What makes Akasha more dear to him than the other mortal women and the vampires who attract him is the superior power that she possesses and that he can experience (through her blood) without the risk of been punished. The queen's feelings for Lestat, in turn, are motivated by the power she has over him. She privileges him over the other vampires (even over her own king, whom she kills) and allows him to feed on her because she is at the same time impressed by his boldness in defying vampire and human codes and

fascinated by the fact that she has such a rebellious being under her control. This control is possible because of Lestat's intense desire for her, which suggests the power of female sexuality over men. This relationship, based on an interaction between desire and power without necessarily resulting in harm for any of the sides, relates to my argument that Rice's novel focuses on the beauty and the pleasure of sexuality. Nevertheless, this relationship does not resist in face of Lestat's disagreement with Akasha's plan. Lestat disobeys her, refuses to join her in the accomplishment of her plan of dominating the world and does nothing to prevent the other vampires from killing her. It is implied, therefore, that his moral ethics, the human values he still possesses are stronger than her cruel, inhuman objectives, despite the power she has over him and the attraction he feels for her.

Akasha's characterization has other implications as well. As a foreign woman brought to a land in which people's customs are so different from those of her people, she could be identified with otherness. However, her case is peculiar, as she is the queen. Therefore, invested with a ruling power, she inverts the situation and tries to eliminate from her new community the traits that oppose her cultural ideas and values. She imposes her own customs, values, and moral codes on her subjects. The fact that she is a woman only enhances this inversion. In a patriarchal culture in which the king is supposed to be superior, queen Akasha is able to have her will accepted. Such situation, however, does not last long, and the Egyptian people stab their foreign queen to death. Although she is a beautiful, attractive queen, she is threatening the maintenance of the community's integrity, as she tries to change their rituals, the basis of their identification as members of that community. Her vampirization, in this sense, occurs when her society expels her.

Once Akasha becomes a woman vampire, she becomes an abject and a prototype for all the figures of transgressive female sexuality (and transgressive femininity), seeing as she exceeds what is prescribed as the role of a woman and assumes powers that are far beyond

what is allowed to her by patriarchy. She resurrects her dead king Enkil and reigns with him in an unrestricted satisfaction of their blood lust. To human beings this is an abject kind of existence, which is attractive for the pleasures it offers but threatening to one's identification as a living human being. At this point, the situation is again inverted: the danger that comes from this excessive use of a pleasure that is metaphorically sexual is responsible for their being expelled from the human world, obliging them to hide in the undergrounds where they continue to live throughout the millennia in the form of statues.

This new existence in safe seclusion provides Akasha with a particular possibility of observation of the development of human history. She grows angry as she witnesses through her vampire ability to read people's minds the way women's sexuality has been controlled by patriarchal societies throughout time. So, when she wakes up in late-twentieth century, she has plans to cause another inversion in the power relations controlling human sexuality. If the inversion Akasha brings to the value system of the people over whom she reigns is due to a shock of cultural values, the inversion she intents to impose on contemporary patriarchal societies relates to the shock of historical contexts. She is an ancient vampire woman claiming the power and the right to interfere in contemporary human phallocentric codes. This fact explains the implausibility of her plans, an explanation also provided by the other vampires who confront her. Intending to create a world dominated by woman, she proposes the extermination of ninety-nine percent of the men and the subjugation of the rest of them, in a way that just inverts the patriarchal ideologies that inform male domination. She disregards the debates about sexuality and gender taking place at that time in support of a more egalitarian society.

Akasha is expelled by her own vampire children at the end of the novel, because her ideas are unacceptable. The outmoded ideologies she follows are threatening to the construction of vampires' moral ethics in the twentieth century and to humanity. Her plan

suggests the moral regulation of the use of sexual pleasure, not only symbolized by the satisfaction of blood lust but also literally in the attempt to constrain male sexuality—an attempt that only changes the focus of social control over sexuality.

If the characterization of Akasha as the queen of the vampires is the main tool for the representation of female sexuality in Rice's novel, her characterization of Lestat as a rock singer is what provides discussion on transgressive male sexuality. The fact that the vampire is a metaphor for the outsider, his being a rock singer adds to it the idea of a rebel that acts against social norms. Anne Rice states that she made Lestat a rock star because "rock singers are symbolic outsiders," who are "expected to be completely wild, completely unpredictable, and completely themselves, and they are rewarded for that" (qtd. in M. L. Carter 27). M. L. Carter argues that "contemporary American society, in glorifying and—at least to some extent—rewarding the outsider, differs from the cultural milieu that engendered the literary vampire" (27). In the novel, the narrator explains his reasons for becoming a rock star in the following terms:

> I was enchanted by the world of rock music—the way the singers could scream of good and evil, proclaim themselves angels or devil, and mortals would stand up and cheer. Sometimes they seemed the pure embodiment of madness. And yet it was technologically dazzling, the intricacy of their performance. It was barbaric and cerebral in a way that I don't think the world of ages past had ever seen. (5)

In this sense, Lestat's being a rock star adds to his characterization as someone dislocated in society for not fitting into its matrix of cultural intelligibility, but at the same time this new role allows him to transgress moral rules without punishment. Indeed, the rock star figure, like the vampire, is often related to sensual seduction, unrestricted sexuality, and promiscuous sexual practices (one can just remember the worldly known slogan: "Sex, drugs

and rock and roll"). This figure is also often abject, attractive (for his or her sexual freedom) and at the same time repulsive (for the threats he or she represents), adding to the abjection of the vampire. The importance of the performance is clear in this case, too: the rock star is a role created to please the fans of rock music and to shock the same society that creates this figure. Smith points out the reason Rice's vampires are so popular: "Lestat, the great vampire/rock star, is our metaphor for social anarchy and sexual freedom, the ultimate powerful Other" (53). Lestat's adoption of such a disguise is only possible in the twentieth century, for reasons that he points out in the novel. These reasons relate to an evolution of the way sexuality is understood and experienced. At the beginning of the novel, the vampire narrator comments on the 1980s' view on sexuality:

> As for sexuality, it was no longer a matter of superstition and fear. The last religious overtones were being stripped from it. That was why the people went around half naked. That was why they kissed and hugged each other in the streets. They talked ethics now and responsibility and they beauty of the body. Procreation and venereal disease they had under control. (8)

In terms of Foucault's arguments, discourses on sexuality became more scientific, secular, but differently from the French historian, Lestat sees it only positively: his focus is on sexual freedom, regardless of its threatening implications suggested by the HIV epidemic and of the social condemnation that is still present. In this sense, as sexual freedom was desired but also feared in the 1980s because of the dangers it represented (the spread of the HIV virus and the destabilization of the patriarchal order), so the vampire rock star, although he is a metaphor for people's desires, is also feared. Again, my argument is that, despite the fact that Rice chooses not to present direct discourses about these negative implications of free sexuality, she does so metaphorically through the negative implications of the vampire existence. As Lestat says that rock stars "dramatize the battles against evil that each mortal fights within

himself" (9), I suggest that his being a rock star vampire is a dramatization of 1980s Western culture's battle against the evil implications of free sexuality. The vampire rock star, in other words, defy the dangers of the HIV contamination and social ostracism related to sexual freedom in the 1980s in public performances of his exacerbated and transgressive sexuality. These performances represent the dramatization of the desires at that time, of what people would like to do but could not because the consequences would be fatal.

A representation of a homosexual relationship can be perceived in the novel in the relationship between Armand and Daniel. The latter is the human journalist who interviews Louis in *Interview with the Vampire* and since then longs to be vampirized. In *The Queen of the Damned,* Daniel is a kind of human slave to the vampire Armand, who controls his mind through telepathy. Armand, who also appears in the two first novels of Rice's chronicles, is characterized as a five-hundred-year-old vampire with the body of a fifteen-year-old boy. He is perhaps the vampire that most clearly represents homosexuality in Rice's novels, not only for his effeminate manners and features but also (and mainly) for his feelings toward other vampire men. The relationships he has are strongly suggestive of homosexuality, starting by that with his creator, Marius, and including those with Louis and Lestat. Armand is characterized as needy, always longing for affection but always rejected and abandoned by the men he loves. With Daniel, he is able to relate for a long time, but less because of a mutual affection than because he imposes his company on the young mortal. Daniel does not resist him, but only because he wishes to become a vampire. Armand denies this request, until when, foreseeing a tragic end for all vampires due to the battle with Akasha, he concedes to Daniel's pleads and vampirizes him. Considering that vampirization represents sexual intercourse, it can be said that their relationship was consummated only at that moment of the novel.

Daniel, in his strong wish to be vampirized, does not see Armand and the vampire existence as abject. Rather, since the moment Louis tells him about this existence, he considers

only the positive consequences of vampirism: immortal life, supernatural powers, sharpened senses, and new possibilities of pleasurable experiences. In this sense, he feels only desire for the vampire existence, no repulsion, so that, although disturbed by the possessive control Armand exercises over him, he desires him and insists on being vampirized by him. The desire the vampire feels for Daniel is more clearly homosexual. Armand's refusal to vampirize him resembles Lestat's resistance to vampirize Nicholas, implying, as in the other case, a repression of his desires because of human values. Armand also arguments that he wants to spare Daniel the negative consequences of the vampire life: the terror of killing human beings, boredom with immortality, the life in darkness, the necessity to hide one's identity from the humans. Taking the vampire life as metaphor for the life of person infected with the HIV virus, Armand's concerns can be interpreted as representing those of an infected man about contaminating his lover. But, as I have argued earlier, if vampirization in Rice's stories is deprived of the threats to one's integrity, after Armand vampirizes Daniel there is no loss for either part. On the contrary, Daniel is extremely satisfied. This implicitly homosexual relationship in the novel, therefore, represents the possibility of indulging in the pleasure of sexuality that is socially condemned without the risks of being punished by it.

Another kind of relationship between vampires and humans is presented in this novel, with implications different from those that I have discussed so far. Jesse, the human girl who descends from the child born from Maharet and Khayman (as a result of the rape ordered by Akasha), has paranormal abilities and woks in an secret organization, the Talamasca, which for centuries has been keeping record of supernatural events and creatures, including vampires. She investigates Lestat and attests the veracity of his claims to be a vampire, without knowing that her tutor is one of the most ancient of these creatures: Maharet. Only toward the end of the story, at the eminence of the battle with Akasha, does she know all the vampire history and ends up being vampirized. The kind of interest Jesse and the Talamasca have in these creatures

is different from Daniel's: they are fascinated by the existence of vampires and want to understand their nature, the reason of their existence, and, at the same time, to keep control of their activities in the world of humans. In this sense, their investigations can be related to the function of discourses on transgressive sexuality, explained by Foucault ("The Perverse Implantation" 687): they serve to control vampire activity in the world, providing society with scientific judgment about how these creatures should be treated and how they should behave among humans. However, in Rice's novel, the Talamasca has no significative power of control over the vampires, at least over the ancient and the strongest ones, and plays no relevant role in their struggles with Akasha. Jesse joins the group that confronts the queen only after she becomes one of them and even so she plays no important role in their fight. Rice's novel, in this sense, dismisses the importance of social regulatory forces over vampire activity, focusing, instead, on the practices.

The characterization of vampires in *The Queen of the Damned*, therefore, provides a representation of exacerbated sexualities that reflect the novel's cultural and historical context. The themes of women's sexual freedom, random and exacerbated sexual practices, homosexual intercourse, and the social control of transgressive sexual activity, present in the debates about sexuality in the historical context in which Rice wrote are implicit in her novel. By characterizing her vampires in relation to these themes, she offers alternative ways of representing sexualities. However, her representations are idealized, possible to occur only in the gothic world she creates for her vampires. All the threatening implications of the sexualities that her vampires represent in the 1980s are dismissed by the possibilities offered by vampirization, in a way that only the pleasures they offer prevail in her novel. This is so that even the human organization that represents social control in her novel is ineffective in repressing vampire activities, serving only to attest the notion of the human fascination with vampirism.

All that being said, it can be noticed that the complex depiction of vampires that Anne Rice presents in *The Vampire Lestat* and in *The Queen of the Damned* can be related to the Western culture of the 1980s. The transgressive nature of Rice's vampires represents the so desired sexual and moral freedom and, at the same time, the main fears of people in that period, namely the consequences that this freedom could bring to the social order. In an historical moment when people were horrified by the contamination of blood by the HIV virus, the issue of sexuality receives a new scope: what is supposed to convey pleasure and life leads to prejudice and death. The immortality that one achieves through vampirization is as evil as it is life-in-death and puts vampires at the margins of humanity. This kind of life can be understood as a metaphor for AIDS, a disease that makes people live with the constant threat of death and imposes on them especial conditions that raise prejudice from society. The victims of HIV can be seen as the victims of vampirization: as the result of their transgression of what the sex/gender system considers as proper sexual practices and orientation, they live on the edge of life and death and are marginalized by society. But it seems that Rice chooses to leave this idea just implicit in the traditional symbolisms attributed to vampires in general. Through the particularities that characterize her vampires as a new myth, she neglects the negative implications of sexual freedom and exacerbated sexuality in the 1980s, focusing instead on the beauty and the pleasure of transgressive social acts and affective relationships. It is still a way, I argue, of suggesting that such issues should prevail even in face of what is considered to be the negative effects of the sexual freedom in the 1980s.

2.3. Comparison between Carter's and Rice's Vampires

The notion of abjection is the basis of the characterization of Rice's and Carter's vampires as sexuality transgressive. Carter's vampires are highly abject not only for being

vampires but for being associated with other abject figures. Both Lady Purple and Countess Nosferatu represent the stereotype of the *femme fatale*, being abject because their exacerbated sexuality promises great pleasures, while the act of indulging in these pleasures brings death to their victims. Similarly, Rice's vampires represent to their victims the possibilities of satisfaction of their desires (in having a relation with a being whose sexuality is so exacerbated) but also death. The difference is that, while Carter emphasizes the threat of her vampires as necessarily inescapable, Rice presents alternatives to it. The victims of Lady Purple's and of Countess Nosferatu's vampire feeding always die, while Rice's vampires can avoid their victims death by vampirizing them. Vampirization for Rice, therefore, is an alternative condition, in which the threatening consequences of the transgressive sexual act are eliminated and only the possibility of satisfaction of the desires remains.

This difference relates to a major distinction between Carter's and Rice's use of the vampire figure. Carter uses it as a stereotype of sexually transgressive women, demythologizing this figure to show that it is socially constructed. Rice, in turn, transforms the vampire figure, creating another myth to make it represent alternative sexualities that could be assumed in the place of the ones imposed by society. In other words, while Carter changes the use that is traditionally made of the vampire figure, employing it with the objective to subvert patriarchal values instead of reinforcing them, Rice promotes changes in the characterization of the vampire, using it to represent an idealized view of sexuality. This existence is only possible in the world she creates for them.

To some extent, Carter's Lady Purple resembles Rice's vampires: to all of them, vampirism comes as a kind of escape, an alternative kind of sexuality. Countess Nosferatu's case is different, as her vampirism is a curse, an imposed role from which her only escape is death. To Lady Purple, vampirism is what allows her to live independently from the ventriloquist's control, at least to some extent, as it is his blood that feeds her new body. The

vampire that she becomes, however, is still the same kind traditionally used to represent transgressive women, that is, still a socially imposed role. The case of Rice's vampires, in this sense, involves a more radical independence in relation to socially constructed forms of sexuality. Theirs is a transgressive sexuality, not only for being exacerbated but also for suggesting homosexuality and bisexuality. It has not the character of a socially created role, like that of Carter's vampires, but consists of a totally new possibility. The sexuality of Rice's vampires is different from the one represented by the traditional vampire stereotype because it does not necessarily brings negative consequences to ones who assume it. It is not the abject, only the object of desire that cannot be controlled because it cannot be repressed. As sexual freedom at the AIDS era poses threats to those who choose to undertake it, the freedom of vampire existence also has its dangers: the murder of human beings or their vampirization, a responsibility akin to that of transmitting the AIDS virus. Rice's vampires are free to choose between these possibilities, differently from Carter's vampires, whose very sexual transgression is a performance of roles socially imposed on them.

The notion of performance present in the stories by both writers is central to their use of vampires to represent sexualities, but with different implications in each use. Differently from Lady Nosferatu and Lady Purple, Rice's vampires do not perform a compulsory sexuality imposed as a role and they are not constrained by human social rules. They have their own set of codes, the Rules of Darkness, created by vampires and to the vampire community around the world. These rules can indeed be said to reproduce the traditional vampire stereotype, created to represent transgressive sexuality, but it is despised by the vampires as outmoded. The roles that Rice's vampires perform are those of humans: they pass as humans in order to live among humans. Differently from Carter's vampires who perform a role that deprives them of humanity, Rice's vampires perform a role that gives them the disguise of humanity. The

exacerbated sexuality that the performances of Lady Purple and of Countess Nosferatu reveal is what the performances of Lestat and his fellow vampires disguise.

The analysis presented in this chapter demonstrates that both Angela Carter and Anne Rice use vampires characters in their stories to represent ideas about sexuality that were present in the public debates of their works' historical contexts, the 1970s and 1980s. Both writers explore the transgressive sexual connotations usually associated with the figure of the vampire. A fundamental point in Carter's and Rice's use of the vampire figure is the focus on the perspective of the transgressor, which questions, in this sense, the sex/gender system's assumptions about what is considered proper and what is improper in terms of sexuality.

CHAPTER 3 – From Freedom of Gender Performances to Androgyny: Gender through Angela Carter's and Anne Rice's Vampires

The notion of gender, which predicts patterns of behavior to men and women based on concepts of masculinity and femininity, is nowadays recognized by feminist, sociological, and gender theories as a social construction. Like the notion of sexuality, it is has long been informed by the belief that the biological function of reproduction determines an individual's personality and identity. The erroneous assumption that to a specific sexual apparatus corresponds a specific pattern of sexual practices and interests and a specific kind of sexuality is the basis of the sex/gender system's ideologies that inform social discourses. Such discourses have traditionally privileged the masculine over the feminine gender, promoting the internalization of the idea that men are naturally superior to women. As it was presented in Chapter 1, this assumption has been undermined not only in feminist criticism but also in women's writing and contemporary social and cultural theories, which demonstrates that not even the idea of a binary division of sexuality and gender finds support in biological determination. In this sense, the ideals of masculinity and femininity have been recognized as essentialist for ignoring the importance of other factors in the construction of identity. Since the ideals created by the sex/gender system inform the stereotypes of what is considered a so-called proper and an improper gender identity, demonstrating the inefficiency of such stereotypes to deal with the complexity of identity and personality is important for the subversion of such ideologies.

In this chapter, I identify discourses on gender through the analysis of Carter's vampires in "The Loves of Lady Purple" and "The Lady of the House of Love," and of Rice's vampires in *The Vampire Lestat* and *The Queen of the Damned*, based on the theoretical apparatus

presented in Chapter 1. These characters represent what the sex/gender system considers unintelligible gender identities, in a way that the writer's use of them in their stories convey criticism on the gender representations provided by the ideologies of social discourses. Repeating the procedures I used in Chapter 2, here I first analyze each work separately, to later point out the implications of the depiction of vampires that is characteristic of each author's style, and then compare them.

3.1. Angela Carter's Vampires

3.1.1. "The Loves of Lady Purple"

The discussion on gender in this story is mainly related to the fact that Lady Purple represents the gendered stereotype of the woman-monster, the *femme fatale* who seduces and ruins her lovers. This stereotype is related to others, also gendered and also negative, which together enhance the characterization of Lady Purple as a monster. These stereotypes follow the short story's narrative structure of embedded stories, namely, the one told by the narrator and the drama created by the ventriloquist. Next I explain each of these stereotypes separately in order to demonstrate the implications of the general stereotype of the woman-monster that they help to construct.

The first one to be mentioned is the stereotype of the woman as a marionette, which is what Lady Purple is at the beginning of the story. Her description as a marionette suggests grotesque, monstrous qualities:

> She was the Queen of Night. There were glass rubies in her head for eyes and her ferocious teeth, carved out of mother o' pearl, were always on show for she had a permanent smile. Her face was as white as chalk because it was covered with the skin of supplest white as leather . . . . Her beautiful hands seemed more like weapons because her nail were so long, five inches of pointed thin

> enamelled scarlet, and she wore a wig of black hair arranged in a chignon more heavily elaborate than any human neck could have endured. . . . Her clothes were all of deep, dark, slumbrous colors—profound pinks, crimson and the vibrating purple with which she was synonymous, a purple the color of blood in a love suicide. (26)

The marionette is described as inhumanly attractive, monstrous, and supernatural. All her features indicate a potential for murder. But more than an object that represents a woman-monster, the peculiarity of the marionette is that it suggests the idea of passivity in relation to an external control: it is inanimate, it moves and speaks only through the manipulation of another person. Considering that the person who controls the marionette's movements is the puppet's master, the old Asiatic Professor, it can be perceived that the monstrous female sexuality that characterizes her is deployed by him. The following passage indicates it more clearly:

> it was he [the Asiatic professor] who filled her with necromantic vigor . . . when she moved, she did not seem so much a cunningly simulated woman as a monstrous goddess, at once preposterous and magnificent, who transcended the notion she was dependent on his hands and appeared wholly real and yet entirely other. Her action were not so much an imitation as a distillation and intensification of those of a born woman and so she could become the quintessence of eroticism, for no woman born would have dared to be so blatantly seductive. (26-27)

As a marionette, Lady Purple represents, thus, not an ordinary woman (with a culturally intelligible gender identity), but a monstrous one, whose superhuman sexuality provides her with the power of a goddess over men. By mentioning that the character represents the essence of "a born woman" the narrator recalls, by inversion, Simone de Beauvoir's famous argument

that "one isn't born a woman, one becomes one" (265). The narrative voices suggests that the role the ventriloquist created for Lady Purple is informed by patriarchal assumptions about an essence of femininity as an innate quality—precisely what Beauvoir negates. The very fact that it is a role that is played out supports Beauvoir's and other feminists' arguments that gender performances are learned through social instruction, rather than being innate. Lady Purple's role is the fruit of the ventriloquist's imagination and his manipulation of the puppet represents the sex/gender system's control over women, which leads us to conclude that her monstrous femininity is as socially created as the normative femininity she transgresses. This normative role, the ideal of womanliness that Lady Purple supposedly opposes, is addressed by the narrator as a possibility of representation that the puppet does not achieve in fact:

> She could have acted as the model for the most beautiful of women, the image of that woman whom only a man's memory and imagination can devise, for the lamplight fell too mildly to sustain her air of arrogance and so gently it made her long nails look as harmless as ten fallen petals. (35)

The poor illumination just gives the illusion that the monstrous-woman is an angel, as this passage is followed by the scene when the marionette turns into a woman and kills her master, performing the role he himself created for her. This episode seems to convey a metaphor for the imposition of models of femininity. The stereotype of the puppet is a recurrent one in literature and social discourses: like puppets, women who accept this model speak not in a voice of their own, but become a reproduction of socially constructed ideals and ideas. The female puppet reproduces social beliefs that create an ideal of femininity that fits into Butler's definition of a culturally intelligible gender identity (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 22), a discourse, thus, contrary to the one feminist critics claim it is necessary to represent women's political interests. The narrator describes the ventriloquist's theatrical art as "brief imitations of men and women with an exquisite precision which is all the more disturbing because we know it to be false; and so

this art, if viewed teleologicaly, may, perhaps, be blasphemous" (24). This description suggests that his art is a reproduction of non-normative gender performances. There is a gothic quality implied in this representation of the reproduction of gender roles, as the ventriloquist's art suggests the ideas of uncanniness, the sublime, and "ambivalence of meaning" (Botting 9). This quality adds to the transgressive quality of those roles, but even so they are socially created. In this sense, the puppet stereotype in Carter's story renders the stereotype of the woman-monster the idea of both lack of self-control and lack of freedom, which, though seemingly paradoxical with the one that suggests transgressive femininity, contributes to the criticism provided.

A second stereotype is that of the prostitute, perceived in the story the ventriloquist creates to be performed by Lady Purple. In his story, she is a cruel prostitute, a nymphomaniac dominatrix, who later develops necrophagic and nechophiliac habits. This stereotype confers a high potential of abjection to Lady Purple. Her transgressive femininity is both attractive and threatening in terms of gender, for provoking men's fantasies and at the same time putting in risk men's control over women and, consequently, the patriarchal order. But this femininity is also abject in terms of her contact with body fluids: necrophagy and necrophilia provide a new possibility of satisfaction of desire, but the pleasure it causes are situated at the border of life and death—in the corpse, the self expelled. The description of the brothel Lady Purple lives in adds to that sense of abjection:

> [T]hat inverted, sinister, abominable world which functioned only to gratify the whims of the senses. Every rococo desire the mind of man might, in its perverse ingenuity, devise found ample gratification here, amongst the halls of mirrors, the flagellation parlors, the cabarets of nature-defying copulations and the ambiguous soirées held by men-women and female-men. (29-30).

The brothel is, therefore, the place where people find the satisfaction of the desires that are repressed. It is a place of abjection as all the pleasures it provides subvert the ones prescribed as proper by social discourses, representing, thus, a threat to social order. For this reason, it is in this place that the culturally unintelligible gender identities and performances of "men-women" (gays) and "female-men" (lesbians) achieve the pleasures desired.

In the following passage, two stereotypes are mixed in this transgressive site of all non-normative sexualities and genders, as the narrator demonstrates how the marionettes represent real-life prostitutes:

> Along the streets, the women for sale, the mannequins of desire, were displayed in wicker cages . . . These exalted prostitutes sat motionless as idols. Upon their real features had been painted symbolic abstractions of the various aspects of allure and the fantastic elaboration of their dress hinted it covered a different kind of skin. . . . Yet, however fortuitously, all worked out so well it seemed each one was as absolutely circumscribed as a figure in rhetoric, reduced by the rigorous discipline of her vocation to the nameless essence of the idea of woman, a metaphysical abstraction of the female which could, on payment of a specify fee, be instantly translated into an oblivion either sweet or terrible, depending on the nature of her talents. (30)

The narrator suggests here that both puppets and prostitutes consist of what is believed to be the "nameless" essence of womanliness or of the feminine gender, and that their social roles are reduced to the possibilities of sexual practice granted to them. In fact, both puppets and prostitutes are described as performing this essence like machines, only carrying out their roles as "figures of rhetoric," that is, as stereotypes of transgressive femininity, without personal involvement. This passage illustrates, thus, Butler's idea of the performative character of gender identities ("Imitation" 725).

The particular role attributed to Lady Purple—her "vocation," as the narrator puts it, in another reference to the confusion between the so-called biological predisposition and the social construction—is even more transgressive: she is inexplicably cruel, as she "squeezed [her lovers] dry of fortune, hope, and dream" (31). In this cruelty she cannot be easily controlled:

> She was no malleable, since frigid, substance upon which desires might be executed; she was not a true prostitute for she was the object on which men prostituted themselves. She, the sole perpetrator of desire, proliferated malign fantasies all around her and used her lovers as the canvas on which she executed boudoir masterpieces of destruction. (31)

In this typical description of abjection, the great threat that Lady Purple's femininity represents to men is emphasized—an abject threat that is both physical and moral and that works against men's control upon women. Once seduced by the prostitute, men are the ones under control, in that the power relation between them and women that is characteristic of patriarchy is inverted. But Lady Purple's attitudes are not explained in terms of a feminist rebellion or revenge: she is described as remorseless, acting out of her slightest fancies, practicing evil for no reason or just for pleasure. An example of her cruelty is the passage in which she is dancing to the sound of her lovers playing a flute made from the thighbone of one of the lovers she had killed. The narrator says that this is "the apex of the Professor's performance" exactly because at this point his manipulations are able to make the puppet "the image of irresistible evil" (32). The credits for the representation of the woman-monster stereotype are, in this sense, granted to the ventriloquist.

The nature of Lady's Purple threat to men is also emphasized in the reference to the contagion of diseases: "She visited men like a plague, both bane and terrible enlightenment, and she was as contagious as the plague" (32). This metaphor, besides adding to Lady Purple's

abjection, renders her an irresistible, inescapable power. At this point, the story created by the ventriloquist, who has the control of the puppet, inverts her fate to punish her:

> Lady Purple's pyrotechnical career . . . ended as if it had been indeed a firework display, in ashes, desolation and silence. She became more ghastly than those she had infected. Circe at last became a swine herself and, seared to the bone by her own flame, walked the pavements like a desiccated shadow. Disaster obliterated her. Cast out with stones and oaths by those who had once adulated her, she was reduced to scavenging on the seashore, where she plucked hair from the heads of the drowned to sell to wigmakers who catered to the needs of more fortunate since less diabolic courtesans. (32)

Ironically, Lady Purple comes to suffer the same moral humiliation and physical destruction she imposes on her lovers, in a way that Carter reproduces the end traditionally allowed to transgressive women in literature: her fate is a punishment for the acts she committed during the entire story. The myth of Circe to which the narrator refers is an example of the fate of this kind of women. Circe, the Greek goddess who has the power of necromancy to transform men into animals (an idea related to the transgressive woman's stimulation of men's wild, beast-like sexual instincts), ends up subjugated by Odysseus in Homer's *Odyssey*.

The narrator relates Lady Purple's fate also as a consequence of her transgressive gender and sexual performance:

> outrageous nymphomaniac, she practised extraordinary necrophilies on the bloated corpses the sea tossed contemptuously at her feet for her dry rapacity had become entirely mechanical and still she repeated her former actions though she herself was utterly other. She abrogated her humanity. She became nothing but wood and hair. She became a marionette herself, herself her own replica, the dead yet moving image of the shameless Oriental Venus. (32-33)

The causes of Lady Purple's necrophiliac and necrophagic habits are, therefore, related to her repetition of transgressive sexual practices, a repetition that renders those practices automatic, mechanic. This repetition makes her case an illustration of Butler's argument that gender identities (including those considered transgressive sexual practices) are compulsory and performative, which leads to their incorporation in the individual's personality as if they were natural ("Imitation" 725). Having no clients with whom to practice her transgressive sexuality, Lady Purples starts to practice them with the corpses she finds on the seashore. The ventriloquist incorporates in Lady Purple's performance the gendered identity of the monster-woman as if it were part of her nature instead of a role she is taught to perform.

Finally, the concrete realization of the punishment on the prostitute is the removal of all humanity from her, her objectification is represented by her metamorphosis into a puppet: "the petrification of a universal whore," who "had once been a woman in whom too much life negated life itself, whose kisses had withered like acids and whose embrace blasted like lightning" (28). The fact that the stereotypical prostitute turn into a stereotypical puppet, in this sense, symbolizes an enhancement of that quality that these figures share: that of the automaton, as they repeat the transgression mechanically.

A third stereotype present in the story is that of the vampire, perceived when the puppet turns into a woman and gains life by sucking her master's breath and blood. Besides the connotation of transgressive sexuality traditionally attributed to the vampire, this stereotype is also highly abject for the multi-level liminality it implies: the pleasures achieved through vampire feeding lie at the edges that threaten self-identification (death/life, inanimate/animate, one's vitality/the other's body fluids). The introduction of this stereotype, as I have argued in the last chapter, is important for what it represents in relation to the other stereotypes assumed by Lady Purple throughout the story. Even after becoming a woman, she is still characterized by a stereotype of monstrous femininity that is similar to that used to describe the puppet:

"Although she was now manifestly a woman, young and beautiful, the leprous whiteness of her face gave her the appearance of a corpse animated solely by demonic will" (38). This undead body, proper of vampires, is one that implies a potential for acts of evil, monstrosity, aggressive and transgressive sexuality. The fact that this is the body she acquires when she becomes a woman hints at the continuity of the same roles she played as a prostitute and as a puppet.

As I explained in the previous chapter, Lady Purple's sucking the ventriloquist's blood is described as "an apparent improvisation which was, in reality, only a variation upon a theme" (36), because it is a repetition of old vampire stories and of her previous masochistic acts. The repetition of the vampire feeding described in old stories is only possible in a context in which the matrix of cultural intelligibility recognizes it. Hence, the vampirization of this woman monster is stimulated by the place in which the ventriloquist sets with his troupe: Transylvania, the homeland of one of the most famous vampires in literature, Bram Stoker's Dracula. The realization of the supernatural event is only possible in a setting propitious to the supernatural, a place inhabited by a highly superstitious society who acts out of old beliefs: "a dark, superstitious Transylvania where they wreathed suicides with garlic, pierced them through the heart with stakes and buried them at crossroads while warlocks continually practiced rites of immemorial beastliness in the forests" (24). In this sense, the Transylvanian society, as I argue in my analysis of the "The Lady of the House of Love" in the previous chapter, symbolizes a narrow-mindedness that also characterizes patriarchal societies in general, in their dictation of stereotypes and in ways of dealing with transgressive behaviors.

But vampirization brings new possibilities to the transgressive woman, as it posits another turn in the relation between men and women. Now it is the ventriloquist who is objectified by Lady Purple: "When he was empty, he slipped straight out of her embrace down to her feet with a dry rustle . . . and there he sprawled on the floorboards, as empty, useless and bereft of meaning as his own tumbled shawl" (36). In a place where everything is possible, a

woman assumes the control of her own life and reduces a man to an inanimate thing. But again, the fact that this woman is empowered by the vampire attributes does not contradict the fact that this act of freedom is still a repetition of stereotypical roles created by the same society she reacts against. The fact that the vampire is an undead passing as a living being suggests that Lady Purple's new attitudes are not free of the character of imitative performance that her attitudes as a puppet had. As an undead woman, she does not only imitate the role created by writers of old vampire stories, but also the life of transgressive women.

A general statement Peng makes about Carter's works can be applied to this particular short story: her "gender performers are not only enthralled with their freedom to create themselves, but also haunted by the performative in their freedom" (101). The doubts raised about the implications of Lady Purple's metamorphosis from puppet into woman illustrate these ambiguous implications of freedom: "had the marionette all the time parodied the living or was she, now living her own performance as a marionette" (38). "The tautological paradox in which she was trapped" (38), in this sense, poses the question if the performance of her freedom from the ventriloquist's control is just another performance of the role created by him. After she becomes a vampire and kills her master, she is described as "making her way like a homing pigeon, out of logical necessity, to the single brothel it contained" (38). This description suggests that her attitude is instinctive, reproduced and repeated automatically—just like those of the nymphomaniac prostitute and of the puppet, roles that the ventriloquist created for her—as if it were natural. This repetitive attitude can be related to what Butler says about the implications of the idea of construction of gender identities, whether it implies determinism or free will (*Gender Trouble* 12). Therefore, the doubt about the implication of Lady Purple's act can be understood as the question whether she is constructing a gender identity out of her free will or if she is just accepting the one that is prescribed by society.

This question is the basis of claims that Carter's story is just reproducing the structures that constrain women. Indeed, these structures are present in the story, but I argue here that they are reproduced in a way to convey criticism, illustrating what Hutcheon calls the feminist use of postmodernist parody (*The Politics of Postmodernism* 149). It is exactly Lady Purple's abjection that makes this criticism possible. Considering that this abject stereotype—an extremely attractive nymphomaniac, necrophiliac, and necrophagic prostitute, later also a vampire—is as socially constructed as the one it opposes—the socially privileged angel woman stereotype mentioned by Virginia Woolf—, what is being presented in Carter's story is a criticism on the social prescription of gender roles through the creation of female stereotypes. The reason such creation is criticized in the story can be justified in this way: it is the sex/gender system that prescribes the very formula for the abject, the highly desirable but improper element that must be expelled from society for the sake of the continuity of its control over individuals.

What was said in the previous chapter about sexuality in "The Loves of Lady Purple" is also valid for the discussion of the representations of transgressive gender identities and performances: the end of the story implies that there are no alternatives for those who do not want to accept the social prescription of a women's proper behavior other than to assume the social prescription of women's misbehavior. In this sense, Carter's story also criticizes the creation of stereotypes for women. The focus of this criticism can be perceived in the insistence in referring to the theme of theatrical performance: what renders Lady Purple transgressive is not her gender identity (which is normatively heterosexual), but her gender performance. The social control, represented both by the community that cast her out in the ventriloquist's play and by the ventriloquist's mastering of his puppet, implies a sex/gender system that judges a performance that transgresses the continuity between (biological) sex and (socially constructed) gender as unacceptable (Rubin 543). The story is, therefore, congruent with feminist's urge to

undermine the patriarchal assumptions about gender in the 1970s providing new ways of representing women in art. In "The Loves of Lady Purple," these new ways of representation denounce the artificial character of women's gender performances instead of perpetuating the idea that they are plausible and must be accomplished.

3.1.2. "The Lady of the House of Love"

An analysis of gender in "The Lady of House of Love" can start by considering what Gilbert and Gubar argue about the nineteenth-century ideal of femininity:

> [T]he aesthetic cult of ladylike fragility and delicate beauty—no doubt associated with the moral cult of the angel-woman—obliged "genteel" women to "kill" themselves . . . into art objects: slim, pale, passive beings whose "charms" eerily recalled the snowy, porcelain immobility of the dead. (601)

The narrator's and the soldier's descriptions of Lady Nosferatu echo this aesthetic ideal that was socially accepted in the nineteenth century:

> She is so beautiful she is unnatural; her beauty is an abnormality, a deformity, for none of her features exhibit any of those touching imperfections that reconcile us to the imperfection of the human condition. Her beauty is a symptom of her disorder, of her soullessness. (94)
>
> a girl with the fragility of the skeleton of a moth, so thin, so frail that her dress seemed to him to hang suspended, as if untenanted in the dank air, a fabulous lending, a self-articulated garment in which she lived like a ghost in a machine. (100)

The irony here is that Carter's vampire, who represents the stereotypical woman-monster, resembles the stereotypical angel-woman. This is possible not only because, as Gilbert and Gubar observe, the socially accepted stereotype is often viewed in gothic terms (because of

the imagery of death), but also because, in both cases, what is being suggested is that a woman embodies a gender identity that affects her physical appearance. As the obligation to fit into the nineteenth-century angel-woman ideal results in a frail health condition, the obligation of fitting into the vampire (monster-woman) practices renders one an inhuman physical appearance. Carter's story plays with this stereotype of the angel-woman combining it with that of the monster-woman in "The Lady of the House of Love:" "a girl who is both death and the maiden" (93). In terms of gender, this combination means that Countess Nosferatu is at the same time a *femme fatale*, a woman with a transgressive femininity, and the victim of social marginalization. The life that she leads is that typical of outcasts of society, but one that is as socially predicted as that of women with a cultural acceptable gender identity and performance.

The countess is described as not only transgressive in her sexual practices, but also as representing a bad influence, especially upon other girls: she is the one who "torment[s] pubescent girls with fainting fits, disorders of the blood, diseases of the imagination" (95). However, this role, as socially imposed, is not compatible with her desires: "In her dreams, she would like to be human; but she does not know if that is possible" (95). In this sense, Countess Nosferatu is victimized by her own transgressive condition, by the rituals she is obliged to perform perpetually. As the story's narrator puts it: she "is herself a cave full of echoes, she is a system of repetitions, she is a closed circuit," and from this fact arises the question that seems to synthesize the story's point: "Can a bird sing only the song it knows or can it learn a new song?'" (93). The development of the story suggests that the answer to this question is "no": a woman who always performs the same role that is predicted to her may have difficulty acting out of this role. It can be said, therefore, that the same ritual Countess Nosferatu is fated to perform forever represents a gendered role, not that which Butler calls "intelligible gender," but its opposite, a culturally unintelligible gender. Again the model of transgression of socio-cultural norms is also socio-culturally imposed.

As in the case of the representation of sexuality in this story, the social imposition of this transgressive femininity is represented through the idea of an inherited role. Considering that the vampire is a metaphor for exacerbated sexualities and transgressive gender identities, the fact that Countess Nosferatu accomplishes her vampire practices out of the obligation of carrying on with the rituals she inherited from her ancestors represents the performance of gender roles imposed by the sex/gender system. As the countess descends from a family of vampires, it is implied that her vampirism is genetic. The countess's vampire practices (her rituals of seduction and murder) represent gender performance in the story. Vampirism can be considered a genetic condition in the story, but the roles that Countess Nosferatu performs cannot. Beauvoir's argument that "one is not born a woman but becomes one" (265) finds resonance in this case. The vampire rituals are something that Countess Nosferatu learns from her ancestors and that represent the gendered role of the *femme fatale* created and imposed by the sex/gender system. As in "The Loves of Lady Purple," the focus of Carter's criticism is on the performance of gender roles, not on gender identity, therefore, on the vampire rituals, not on Countess's Nosferatu vampirism.

The mechanisms of social imposition of gender roles are represented in Carter's story by three motifs. The already mentioned ancestors' ghostly presence observing Countess Nosferatu is one of them: "the eyes of the portraits of her demented and atrocious ancestors, each one of whom, through her, projects a baleful posthumous existence" (95). This controlling observation is delivered by the narrator in gothic terms: the ancestors are not physically present but the countess feels psychologically pressed by what she believes is their will. Another motif is "the only dress she has, her mother's wedding dress" (96), which represents a gender role that is passed throughout generations of women, without alteration. In the soldier's view, Countess Nosferatu looks like "a child dressing up on her mother's clothes, perhaps a child putting on the clothes of a dead mother in order to bring her, however briefly, to life

again" ("The Lady" 100). The idea suggested here is that the romantic gender role or identity that the dress represents is inappropriate for the countess. As it is mentioned that the dress is too large for the vampire girl, it means that this role does not fit her as it should but, even so, she has to use it because it is "the only dress she has" (96). Her mother is the only model of femininity she knows, so that she has no other alternative but to identify with that model. Although the dress is a bridal gown, a symbol of the culturally privileged role of the bride and the good wife, it is dressed as a bride that she seduces the boys who pass by her property and takes them to what they believe to be her nuptial bed. The wedding dress, in this sense, is a mocking motif, a symbol of socially accepted gender relations that is used in a transgressive practice with the function of seduction. However, in the presence of the British soldier this symbol does not have the same effect. As it can be noticed from the passage quoted above, he can perceive the inadequacy of Countess Nosferatu's wearing the dress and is not seduced by it, but rather, he feels pity, taking the girl to be suffering from mental illness. The third motif is the tarot cards that the countess plays to predict her future but that "always shows the same configuration: always she turns up La Papesse, La Mort, La Tour Abolie, wisdom, death, dissolution" (95). The disposition of the cards refers to the ritual of seduction and death and helps to reinforce the idea that the accomplishment of this ritual is inescapable because it is predicted by some external force. The tarot represents, therefore, the social discourses that reinforce the idea that the gender roles prescribed by the sex/gender system are predermined, part of a natural order or God's design. The idea of predetermination of the rituals and of gender roles is undermined when the tarot cards show a fall in a different disposition, indicating a turn in the fate predicted for Countess Nosferatu.

The young British soldier comes to her castle but the countess fails to perform her rituals upon him because he represents the masculine stereotype of the charming prince: "blond, blue-eyed, heavy-muscled" (97). He stands for the fairy tale boy that, as Guedes puts it,

is traditionally "clever, bold, resourceful and brave," in opposition to the fairy tale girl, who is often portrayed as "patient, enduring and self-sacrificing" ("Subverting Patriarchal Structures" 97). The narrator adds:

> He has the special quality of virginity, most and least ambiguous of states: ignorance, yet at the same time, power in potential, and, furthermore, unknowingness, which is not the same as ignorance. He is more than he knows —and has about him, besides, the special glamour of that generation for whom history has already prepared a special, exemplary fate in the trenches of France. This being, rooted in change and time, is about to collide with the timeless Gothic eternity of the vampires, for whom all is as it has always been and will be, whose cards always fall in the same patters. (97).

As I argue in my analysis of sexuality in this story in the last chapter, the soldier represents the rational man who interprets the vampire-woman in a particular way. In his interpretation, he demythologizes her, but at the same time creates another fictional, an artificial explanation based on learned codes, which treats her performance as affected by physical and psychological illnesses. In demonstrating this failure in interpretation from the part of the soldier, the story undermines the masculine stereotype often presented in fairy tales. The ignorance to which the narrator refers can be said, thus, to represent his lack of perception of the real structure under Countess Nosferatu's gender (and sexual) performance. The "Gothic eternity of the vampires" refers to the centuries-old performance of the same socially constructed roles of women that are considered transgressive. The soldier is young, an innocent virgin, who does not know about the stereotypical roles of transgressive women, and thus he does not recognize evidences of transgression in her attitudes. The only knowledge he has comes from his rationality and the codes of behavior he has learned, but they collide with the supernatural world of the countess and do not provide him a plausible interpretation of her condition. Considering Kristeva's

notion of abjection, the soldier's reaction to Countess Nosferatu can be explained in this way: lacking the knowledge to recognize her potential of satisfaction of pleasures or the threat she is to him, the soldier feels no abjection for her.

Gendered implications of the ambiguous presentation of Countess Nosferatu as a predator of men and a virgin can be perceived in the ambiguity of her attitudes at the moments of killing. The narrator explains her necessity of fresh meat as a matter of biological necessities of a maturing woman: "When she was a little girl, she was like a fox and contended herself entirely with baby rabbits . . . But now she is a woman, she must have men" (96). The necessities of a woman (in this case, food necessities but with sexual connotations) are not satisfied in the same way a child's necessities are. The idea of virginity is clearer in the passages that narrate her encounter with the British soldier, who is referred to as the bridegroom of the vampire girl dressed in her mother's weeding gown. As Countess Nosferatu repeats to herself that fundamental question ("And could love free me from the shadows? Can a bird sing only the song it knows, or can it learn a new song?") and as she leads the soldier to her room, the narrator tells us that "however hard she tries to think of any other, she only knows one kind of consummation" (103). This consummation is the literal one, that of feeding on the men she seduces. Not accustomed to sexual consummation (but implicitly eager to experience it, for she has fallen in love with the soldier), the countess's predatory instincts have a stronger hold on her in the nuptial room: "She turns her head away from the blue beams of his eyes; she knows no other consummation than the only one she can offer him. She has not eaten for three days. It is dinner time. It is bed-time" (104). Here again one can perceive the conflation between the pleasure of eating and sexual pleasure. Other references to this similarity follow in the narrator's voice: "She has no mouth with which to kiss, no hands with which to caress, only the fangs and talons of a beast of prey" (104). In the voice of the countess herself:

> your golden head of the lover whom I dreamed would one day free me, this head will fall back, its eyes roll upwards in a spasm you will mistake for that of love and not of death. The bridegroom bleeds on my inverted marriage bed. Stark and dead, poor bicyclist; he has paid the price of a night with the Countess and some think it too high a fee while some do not. (105)

The story presents in an ironic way the parallel between, on the one hand, the satisfaction of a predator on her prey and the latter's death spasms, and on the other hand, the satisfaction of the bride's sexual desire and her groom's orgasm. Ironic is also the fact that death spasms traditionally serve as a metaphor for orgasm. The ambiguity of the role of the virgin predator of men is that this virginity makes no sense if we consider that vampire feeding is a metaphor for the sexual act, which often implies sexual promiscuity rather than virginity. However, I would say that what the narrator suggests as virginity in this case is a lack of intense, self-satisfactory sexual experience. What Countess Nosferatu performs is a ritual of seduction and murder that satisfies her bodily necessities but that lacks any kind of personal involvement. In this sense, in the diegetic level of the story, the Countess is really a virgin, and the sexual implications of this ritual can be only inferred by the reader. It can be perceived that the ambiguity of her condition comes from the relation between what is explicit in the diegetic level and its connotations. By presenting such ambiguity, the story suggests that even women who indulge in transgressive social practices and perform transgressive gender roles may not attain satisfaction of their personal sexual and affective desires as those women only mechanically perform roles that are stereotyped. Being, therefore, at the same time a woman predator of men and a virgin girl (two feminine stereotypes), Countess Nosferatu illustrates Butler's argument that gender performances are not enough to reveal one's gender identity and sexual interests. But other implications can still be drawn out of this ambiguous characterization of the woman vampire.

I agree with Zanger, according to whom "The Lady of the House of Love" "offers us a kind of paradigm of the shift [from the old, metaphysically evil vampires to new, socialized, humanized and secularized one]" (22). Carter's vampire is described as a victim of her ancestors' imposition of a role she does not want to perform, a fact that renders a certain humanity to her and relates her feelings to women's anxieties under societal control. The nature of this imposition can be perceived when this short story is compared to that of the Sleeping Beauty, which served as one of Carter's sources, a comparison which also attests the ambiguity of Countess Nosferatu.

In the fairy tale, the lady is first bewitched to death by a wicked fairy, and then the good fairies, accepting her parents' pleas, cast a spell on her that save her life: she falls asleep in her family's almost impenetrable castle until a virtuous prince comes and awakes her, so that the two of them can restart her family's reign together. By turning this princess into a vampire, Carter substitutes the *femme fatale* stereotype for that of the virtuous and innocent fair lady, but to explore the ideas that are implicit in the fairy tale and that grant it its didactic function. In fact, the vampire lady and the fairy tale princess have something in common, something that is only implicit in the fairytale but that is made overt in Carter's story. Like the innocent princess, the vampire lady is helpless, passive in relation to the fate imposed on her. As Sleeping Beauty's family decides about her future, implicitly relegating to her the obligation of taking care of their reign that sleeps with her, the vampire ancestors of Countess Nosferatu impose on her the obligation of carrying on their legacy of murder. By using evil intentions as substitutes for the supposedly good intentions of the fairy tale family, Carter's story suggests that the fate of the latter is cast despite the lady's own desire: it is a fate imposed on the princess. Although what the princess's parents intend through this fate is to save her from the wicked fairy's curse, it is conceived by them according to what they believe is a happy future for the princess, namely, to marry a virtues prince and reign with him. The future they plan for her is informed

by their values and ideologies, like the roles prescribed to women. Likewise, the vampire ideologies of the countess's ancestors inform the rituals they impose on her.

The criticism is, therefore, placed in the notion of a fate, a social role imposed on young women. Lady Nosferatu represents the stereotype of the *femme fatale*, the opposite of the virgin princess stereotype represented by Sleeping Beauty, but she is also a victim of social conventions as the former. As "the Queen of the Vampires," "the last bud of the poison tree that sprang from the loins of Vlad the Impaler," she has the obligation of eternally performing the vampire role: she is the "queen of night, queen of terror—except [for] her horrible reluctance for the role" (94-95). This obligation implies, as in "Lady Purple," that the stereotype of the sexually aggressive woman is also created and imposed by society. The gender roles and practices she indulges in consist of a kind of ritual that she is obliged to perform independently of her will. Lady Nosferatu's reluctance, in this sense, can be associated with a lack of identification in relation to this imposed role.

The notion of love plays an important part in the end of the vampire woman. She longs for a love that she believes would free her from her fate. Countess Nosferatu cannot perform her rituals upon the soldier because she falls in love with him and these rituals, the only ones she knows, are not able to provide the kind of satisfaction she now desires: the consummation of love, not of biological necessities. It is this love that makes her break with the role she is supposed to perform and what is supposed to free her from the vampire fate. The act in the story that represents this moment of breaking with the ritual is the soldier's kiss in her blooding finger. The motifs of light and vision involved in this scene are very significative. The countess is sensible to light, she suffers from "a hereditary affliction of the eyes" (102), and is "condemned to solitude and dark" (103). Taken metaphorically, these passages suggest that together with the gender role she plays as an imposition comes ignorance, an inability to see beyond what she is permitted to see. The sunglasses she has to wear to protect her eyes are the

materialization of the ideologies that block her vision, hindering their understanding of life and of her own identity. “She can’t take off her mother’s wedding dress unless she takes off her dark glasses” (105), that is, she can get rid of an identification with the woman-monster stereotype that the compulsory performance of the vampire rituals impose on her only after she gets rid of the ideologies that block her vision of life and of herself. The soldier is described as being like the sun, for “his heroism” (103), that is, he fits into the stereotype of the virtuous charming prince, epitome of rationality. The narrator indicates the potential of the soldier’s influence on the countess: “if he presented himself to her naked face, he would dazzle her like the sun she is forbidden to look at because it would shrivel her up at once” (102). In this sense, the soldier brings the potential of both rationality and love that would make the countess see what the role imposed on her prevents her from seeing. This is also the reason why she falls in love with him:

> When you came through the door retaining about you all the golden light of the summer’s day of which I know nothing . . . the card called Les Amoureux had just emerged from the tumbling chaos of imagery before me; it seemed to me you had stepped off the card into my darkness and, for a moment, I thought, perhaps, you might irradiate it. (103)

Disturbed by her vision of the soldier and the feelings he rouses on her, the countess lets her glasses drop to the floor and cuts her finger. Without the glasses she is able to see for the first time her own blood and gets fascinated with it, in a image that recalls a girl’s having her first period and becoming aware of her own woman’s body. She is also able now to see the soldier, who takes her bleeding finger and kisses it for the better. This kiss is the moment of her awakening, as it somehow transforms her into human in the same way the ventriloquist’s kiss transforms Lady Purple. As in the other story, this kiss implies that her own desires are awaken and now she can reject that role she was obliged to perform.

The end of "The Lady of the House of Love," however, suggests that there are no other alternatives for those who do not want to conform to the cultural matrix of intelligibility for gender identities. The British soldier (ambiguously both a symbol of a constraining rationality and an "exorcism" (106) of the ancestor's control upon the Countess) is able to inspire her to break with her ancestors' rituals and to break free from her fate. Yet, as the narrator tells us, "the end of exile is the end of being" (106), and Countess Nosferatu dies as if she were not able to live in any other way. At this point it is implied that she also loses her virginity and enters in fact into womanhood: "now there was no trace of her to be seen, except, lightly tossed across the crumpled black satin bedcover, a lace négligé lightly soiled with blood, as it might be from a woman's menses" (106). The loss of the vampiric immortality, therefore, is related to the loss of virginity, a relation as ambiguous as the one between sexually predatory habits and virginity. The implications of this ambiguity are, thus, repeated: the end of the mechanical repetition of a performance that deprives a woman of experiencing sexual pleasure has no substitute predicted by the sex/gender system. Unable to act out of social modes of behavior and identity, even the transgressive one, this woman cannot live: the Countess vanishes in the morning light for she was "only an invention of darkness" (107). The narrative voice seems to suggest that a woman whose role is created as being perverse and transgressive cannot experience what society denies her through the imposition of this role and go on to live a totally new (and self-constructed) sexuality and gender identity.

A last symbol adds more irony to the narrator's final comments: the rose Countess Nosferatu leaves for the young soldier as a souvenir, "the dark, fanged rose [she] plucked from between [her] thighs, like a flower laid on a grave" (107). This rose can be taken as a metaphor for the countess's virginity (in accordance also with the already mentioned idea of the rose and the vampire's mouth being metaphors for the female genitalia), from the loss of which, implicitly, she becomes human, and dies. The comparison between the rose plucked from the

vampire's body and a flower taken from a grave suggests a potential for that pleasure to be fatal. In other words, the rose represents an experience of sexual pleasure that was for a long time denied to a body that thus becomes objectified—as an automaton—by a compulsory repetition of the same practices. This body becomes lifeless when it ceases to perform this repetition. But it is the suggestion that the female genitalia itself that renders an ironic tone to the fact that it is left as a souvenir to the soldier. It symbolizes the means, the organ through which a sexually aggressive woman prey on men, but it has no use for a dead woman (whose state is different from that of the undead vampire) who cannot seduce men anymore. It can be better used if it goes to war with the soldier. Indeed, the narrator tells earlier in the story that the vampire's roses are nurtured with the carcasses of the vampire's victims. It is implicit, therefore, that the rose the soldier takes with him is going to find more corpses to feed on in battle fields. This is why the dried rose "resurrects" when, already in the army's quarters, the young British soldier puts it in water and fresh air. In this sense, the narrator's ironically suggests that the soldier (and, by extension, contemporary men who identify with the Enlightenment notion of rationality) is under more risk at the war (representing an inescapable historical event) than under the seductive power of transgressive women who are, in fact, as constrained victims of the sex/gender system as the angel-women are.

The fact that the vampire is a woman in "The Lady of the House of Love" and in "The Loves of Lady Purple" renders gendered implications to the symbolism of this creature. Through them, Angela Carter discusses not only the gender performances of transgressive women. Lady Purple and Countess Nosferatu, as vampire women, represent a kind of stereotypical transgressive sexuality based on the distribution of gender roles: they are women who seduce, ruin, and kill their male lovers out of external control (the ventriloquist's plot and the vampire ancestors' legacy). Nevertheless, their liberation from such control does not represent an alternative: Lady Purple lives the role created by the ventriloquist and Countess

Nosferatu dies. A positive aspect still follows from this apparently pessimistic end that Carter allows to her vampire women: it is then that she offers these women the opportunity of knowing their own desires independently from external control. The difference is that while to Lady Purple this opportunity comes through vampirization to Countess Nosferatu it comes to free her from vampirization. It is when she becomes a vampire that Lady Purple is able to get free from the ventriloquist's strings, but it is when Countess Nosferatu is able to break with the vampire rituals and become human that she is freed from social control.

In other words, in "The Loves of Lady Purple" the gendered figure of the vampire woman is introduced at the end to represent a new possibility to women who play the transgressive roles created by the sex/gender system. In "The Lady of the House of Love," the vampire woman performs what represents a socially created role and she only gets free from external control when she becomes human and dies. Despite this difference in the meanings that each of Carter's vampires come to represent, I believe that this gendered stereotype (the *femme fatale*, the woman vampire), as well as the transgressive sexuality presented in Carter's short stories, relate to the 1970's discussion on women's freedom in the sense that they criticize the social prescription of women's behavior. More than this, the stories offer a contribution to the discussion about gender when they bring to the fore another fact: that the modes of women's misbehavior are also socially created.

3.2. Anne Rice's Vampires

3. 2.1. *The Vampire Lestat*

The gender identities and roles that characterize Rice's vampires, such as their sexuality, consist of new implications, different from those imposed on humans by the sex/gender system. These new implications are related to the notion of androgyny (such as the one defended by Virginia Wolf) and are supported by a discontinuity among the notions of sex,

gender, and sexuality that vampirism enhances. References to the vampires in the novel as male and female relate to the residual biological sex that they still carry from the time when they were humans. However, as it was argued in the last chapter, their sexuality is not continuous with this sex, not only because they are not heterosexual but also because they are not human anymore, being unable to engage in conventional human sexual practices. Similarly, their gender identities are not continuous with their residual human sex: Rice's vampires do not present what is defined by the sex/gender system as femininity or masculinity, being rather androgynous. They are generally characterized as possessing both the characteristics culturally attributed to men and those attributed to women.

The androgyny of Rice's vampires, thus, can be related to the fact that their existence is not restrained by the rules that control the gender identities and gender roles of the mortals. The notion of androgyny, as critics advert, may not be confused with that of bisexuality (Castro 126). The latter relates to the desire to indulge in sexual practices and in affective relationships with individuals of both biological sexes as I discuss in the previous chapter. Bisexuality can be related to the sexuality of Rice's vampires. The notion of androgyny refers to an ideal psychic identity in which human traits are not sexualized: the characteristics of personality and patterns of behavior that the sex/gender system divides into two opposites (masculinity and femininity) are equally present in an androgynous person. I would say that, as the sexual organs of Rice's vampires are only residual (attending to no function anymore, neither reproductive nor non-reproductive), and as their sexuality is not constrained by the same binary categories into which the sexuality of mortals is divided, the incoherence between sex, gender, and sexuality is clearer for them. The dismissal of the very idea of sexual and gender difference that androgyny requires is an easier task for them, as in vampire existence these issues are not important.

According to Smith, Rice herself assumes in interviews that she supports an ideal of androgyny as a symbol of power: it combines the best of both femininity and masculinity, as

Rice believes that the division of gender in irreconcilable opposites is tyrannical and must be abolished (58). For Rice, instead of a war between men and women with the division of roles as exclusively masculine or exclusively feminine, the importance of both genders in the development of humanity must be acknowledged. In the novel, this ideal can be perceived in an androgynous characterization that presents Lestat as possessing "both aggression and tenderness," as Smith puts it, "which makes him all the more mythic in his emotions and in his accessibility to both genders" (58). Therefore, Lestat's androgyny serves to empower him, as he embodies the combination of the best that femininity and that masculinity can offer to humanity, making him attractive to men and women alike.

However, a distinction must be made between the vampires' gender identity and the public presentation of their gender. As Rice's vampires live disguised among humans, in a way that they are vampires in the domestic realm but humans in the public one, their public presentation of their gender is somehow a farce, and in a double sense: it disguises both their vampire nature and their androgynous gender identity. In this sense, while among humans, they obey the social norms and perform the gender roles considered culturally intelligible. The social performances of Rice's vampires, in other words, consist of their passing as humans and as heterosexual men or women. On the other hand, the "Theatre of the Vampires" can be interpreted as a metaphor for the site in which the vampires can subvert public gender performances. In this theatre in eighteenth-century Paris, the vampires pretend to be human actors pretending to be vampires. In this sense, through the dramas they perform, their closeted sexualities and gender identities are revealed in public presentations. In this place, they can act regardless of the social rules that constrain humans. Keeping their identities in secret is essential for the survival of vampires, who would be tracked down and killed or cast out if the humans knew about their nature or, implicitly, about their gender and sexual identities. The theater, then, functions as a place where the vampires can alleviate the tension of having to perform all the time roles with

which they do not identify. Such performance is necessary in the contexts of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early-twentieth centuries presented in *The Vampire Lestat*, as at the time androgyny was strongly repressed.

The androgyny of Rice's vampires must be analyzed also in relation to the historical and social context in which they are inserted. As an immortal vampire, Lestat is capable of observing historical changes in gender public presentation. His commentaries about the 1980s reveal the characteristics of those times that are relevant for an analysis of gender:

> Once again, [the men] costumed themselves in velvet and silk and brilliant colors if they felt like it. They did not have to clip their hair like Roman soldiers anymore; they wore it any length they desired. . . . the women were glorious, naked in the spring warmth as they'd been under the Egyptian pharaohs, in skimpy short skirts and tuniclike dresses, or wearing men's pants and shirts skintight over their curvaceous bodies if they pleased . . . For the first time in history, perhaps, they were as strong and as interesting as men. . . . And these were the common people of America. Not just the rich who've always achieved a certain androgyny, a certain *joie de vivre* that the middle-class revolutionaries called decadence in the past. (6-7)

Lestat sees the 1980s as marked by the return of a kind of freedom of self-presentation (in terms of sexuality and of gender) made possible by capitalism. Focusing on the way people dress, he argues that the extravagance, the sensuality and the eroticism that make people look androgynous are not considered improper anymore, as they were in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early-twentieth centuries. Lestat's commentaries about contemporary women are also remarkable, as he refers to the social equality they were conquering at the time. The 1980s, a time that experienced an increase of sexual freedom and of gender equality, seems the most proper one to the return of a highly androgynous creature that can now pass more easily as

human. The Theatre of the Vampires is not necessary in this age, as the vampires do not need to worry so much abut their public presentation (this can be better perceived in *The Queen of the Damned*, as I argue later).

Lestat's performance as a rock singer also has the function of allowing him to reveal his vampire nature without the risk of punishment (in that his performance is like theatricality and the vampire rock singer is regarded as a character like many others created by singers), but it does not have the same gender implications of the theatrical performance. As in the 1980s androgyny was somehow common, especially among rock musicians and fans, Lestat's performance of a transgressive gender identity, as I argue in the previous chapter, represents the dramatization of the desires of humans at that time.

This view of the 1980s as a time of liberation presented in Rice's novel may sound, however, too optimist, neglecting the social resistance in openly accepting different sexual and gender presentations. It is in this sense that Rice's vampire otherness can be contextualized. They can be identified with marginalized groups that took to the extreme the possibilities of sexual and gender freedom that were rising in the 1980s: gays, lesbians, and other men and women who assumed an androgynous public presentation and who were more closely associated with the HIV epidemic for their sexual freedom. Nevertheless, it must be recognized that Rice does not explore the negative aspects of this otherness in her novel, as she does not mention any kind of repression of androgyny from the part of humans. Rather, I would argue, she presents the vampire community as a kind of alternative society in which androgyny is taken as "natural," the common way of people to present themselves publicly. Similarly to what is said of bisexuality in the last chapter, it can be perceived that vampirization offers the possibility of assuming androgyny to break free from predetermined gender roles.

The characterization of Lestat's mother, Gabrielle, conveys one of the most important discussions on women's incorporation of androgyny in the novel. Deprived of her personal

interests and dreams and bound to an unhappy marriage while a human being, as a vampire Gabrielle achieves the freedom to fulfill her desires. Lestat describes how she changes after vampirization:

> And I saw that her body was even more profoundly changed, she had the fullness of young womanhood again, the breasts that the illness had withered away. They were swelling above the dark blue taffeta of her corset, the pale pink tint of her flesh so subtle it might have been reflected light. (141)

It can be perceived that Lestat's idea of full womanhood suggests feminine attractiveness and intense sexuality. It is as if Gabrielle recovers a kind of power of femininity from the moment she is released from the constraints of social control. The new existence she acquires with vampirization is the border between life and death, the abject position, different from the socially constrained subject position (the "good woman") and the socially marginalized object position (the transgressive woman). But this abjection only exists from the perspective of human beings, to whom the vampire is both attractive and dangerous. Among the vampires, there is only attraction: as the words of Lestat quoted above attest, the new body of Gabrielle loses the condition of the maternal body (of being the body of his mother), and, consequently, his desires for her are not repressed anymore. For the few humans in the novel that come to know her real nature, that of a vampire, Gabrielle represents the abject that is expelled from a human mother/wife subject: a desirable but threatening sexuality and gender identity. Gabrielle becomes, in other words, a woman-predator, representing women's sexual aggressiveness. This stereotype can be perceived through Lestat's impressions of her taking her first victim:

> when she moved towards the man she wasn't human at all. She had become a pure predator, as only a beast can be a predator, and yet she was a woman walking slowly towards a man—a lady, in fact, stranded here without cape or

> hat or companions, and approaching a gentleman as if to beg for his aid. She was all that. (145)

As a vampire woman, in this sense, Gabrielle assumes the same role that Carter's vampires perform, that of the *femme fatale*. The difference is that, in "The Lady of House of Love" this role is the one that constrains the woman and makes her a victim of the sex/gender system, and in "The Loves of Lady Purple" this role allows the transgressive woman to experience her own desires independently from external control. Vampirism in Rice's novel, therefore, offers a new role to women, one that is totally different from the roles they are obliged to perform while humans. Gabrielle maintains the human appearance of an attractive woman (in fact, this attractiveness is enhanced in her), but her lack of humanity is revealed at the moment of vampire feeding (metaphorically, the sexual act). This ambiguity also makes possible for her, as it is the case of all other vampires, to pass as a heterosexual woman among humans and disguise her vampire, androgynous nature.

After she is vampirized, Gabrielle assumes a personality and a behavior that suggest androgyny: she likes wearing men's clothes, but maintains some of her feminine features; she does things that only men are allowed to do but she does not totally dismiss practices culturally attributed to women (her maternal caring for Lestat, for instance). As an immortal woman, free from the constraints that impose on her exclusively feminine roles, she is able to assume those roles culturally attributed only to mortal men. Those roles cannot be performed publicly in the first centuries of her existence, but as time passes and the norms of gender performance become more liberal, she is able to assume her androgyny also in the public sphere, as the other vampires are.

I agree with Gelder, who interprets the relationship between Lestat and his mother Gabrielle in the terms of a reversion of identifications, and with Hodges and Doane, who argue that Lestat, when human, identifies with his mother, not with his decadent father, who despises

him. On the other hand, Gabrielle sees in him an extension of herself, as Lestat's words attest, "She spoke in an eerie way of my being a secret part of her anatomy, of my being an organ for her which women do not really have. 'You are the man in me', she said'" (qtd. in Hodges and Doane 164). When Lestat vampirizes her, he accomplishes the so desired identification with her. In this sense, "Gabrielle is masculinised through her relations with her son . . . Lestat, on the other hand, is feminized—that is, rendered 'effeminate' —through his relations with Gabrielle" (Hodges and Doane 164). Metaphorically, it can be said that, as vampirization offers them the possibility of indulging in the sexual desire denied to them by the primal repression, it also offers them wider possibilities of gender identification. These possibilities disregard the notion of gender difference and the necessity of a primal repression. Vampirization also allows them to become androgynous beings.

Moreover, I would say that a tentative to construct a different gender identity to herself and to perform it can be perceived in Gabrielle's decision to go "back to nature." It must be recognized, though, that the idea of nature for her does not imply that of the sex/gender system, which would explain such interest in recovering a female "natural" sexuality and freedom, untamed by social discipline and moral codes (an explanation based on the dichotomy nature/culture). Rather, her idea of nature suggests those that are characteristic of old matrilineal societies, which saw in nature a creative power (through the figures of female goddesses and the "Mother Nature"). In this sense, I agree with Smith, according to whom "Gabrielle becomes the complete earth goddess when she leaves Lestat and humanity to go back to earth, at one with the world that inspires her" (59). This integration with nature, allowed only for mythic figures of old religions, is possible in Rice's novel only in the vampire existence, which is abject for the humans but which is deprived of feelings of repulsion in the view of the vampires themselves. In this way, Gabrielle's potential of abjection for humans is enhanced: in a sex/gender system (human) culture, she is a socially free female vampire

identified with nature. Marius's comments about her are suggestive: "Gabrielle defies my understanding. Not my experience—she's too like Pandora. But I never understood Pandora. The truth is most women are weak, be they mortal or immortal. But when they are strong, they are absolutely unpredictable" (409). Patriarchal societies' belief in women as inferior and incomprehensible to men is present here, with the addition of the idea that when a woman has some kind of power, she cannot be easily controlled by men. The difference perceived by Marius between vampire men and vampire women suggests that something of the gender difference that was present in their human lives still persists in the ideas they have about gender identity in vampire life. Vampirism in Rice, in this sense, represents a new power to women, since it makes them free from social control. This power is chosen by these women, differently from the vampirization imposed as a fate on Carter's Countess Nosferatu and from the vampirization that comes in a moment of self-awareness for her Lady Purple.

Pandora, the ancient vampire woman mentioned by Marius and compared to Gabrielle, is an example. When she was a mortal woman, she was a courtesan (Marius's lover) and believed she had been a vampire who was destroyed and then reincarnated as a woman. She wanted to be a vampire again and convinced Marius to vampirize her. At this point, Rice's story resembles that of Carter: her prostitute is as socially constrained and unsatisfied as her properly behaved woman. The difference is that, in Rice, vampirization provides the escape for both cases, while in Carter, it works like a metaphor for the first case. Like Gabrielle, Pandora, who supposedly has experienced the two kinds of lives (mortal and immortal) chooses to get the power that vampirization offers women. In Rice vampirization not only permits the assumption of gender roles denied to mortal men and women, but also enhances what in the novel is related as their femininity and masculinity. The notions of femininity and masculinity conveyed by Rice's characters, however, resemble those of the sex/gender system. Her vampires, in this sense, lack a more appropriate language that enables them to talk about their

peculiar gender identities and roles (related to the notion of androgyny) and use the notions that they know from the time when they were humans, which must not be confused with a compliance with the ideologies of the sex/gender system.

The insistence on the search for father and mother figures referred to in my analysis of sexuality in *The Vampire Lestat* also brings implications to the analysis of gender issues in this novel. This insistence relates to the vampires' necessity of being educated into codes that will guarantee their survival. However, the socially constructed gendered roles of father and mother are subverted in this novel. The very definition of mothering roles is transgressed: not only female vampires have the capacity of generating and feeding other vampires with their own blood (which is equivalent to procreation and mother feeding), but so do male vampires. In fact, it can be perceived that the father figures in the story are those that most often use this capacity and that better fulfill the educational role. For instance, Lestat fathers his own mother, his best friend Nicolas, and Louis, with whom he forms a family of two fathers after they vampirize the child Claudia (resemblances with the contemporary structure of homosexual parents of adopted children are not coincidental). In another example, Marius plays better the role of educator to Lestat than his own biological mother, as she decides to retire into nature because she does not agree with the use Lestat wants to make of the possibilities of his vampire existence. Even the "Great Father" and the "Great Mother" of all vampires, Akasha and Enkil, fail to fulfill this role, as they live only under the form of statues and teach nothing of the mysteries of vampire's existence to their "Children of Darkness." It is this lack of knowledge that makes Rice's vampires eagerly search for their origins in order to construct their identities.

Besides their androgyny in their patterns of behavior and in their adopted social roles, Rice's vampires often stand as representations for either idealized masculinity or idealized femininity. I believe that the following commentary that Nina Auerbach makes about *Interview with the Vampire* is also true for *The Vampire Lestat*: "AIDS bestowed nostalgic intensity on

Anne Rice's eternally young, beautiful, self-healing men, whose boredom with immortality looked like a heavenly dream to young men turned suddenly mortal" (174). In this sense, Rice's vampires represent a kind of ideal masculinity (and femininity, in other cases), related to youth, beauty, strength, physical attraction and health, characteristics that are especially meaningful in a period when men and women are vulnerable to death independently of their age. This fact explains the attraction they exert upon humans. Auerbach argues that the interest of Rice's vampires in discovering their origin (an interest that is satisfied in *The Queen of the Damned*) represents an escape from the kind of existence possible in the complex and dangerous contemporary world (174). As the quotation above suggests, those vampires' capacity for surviving over time (to the extent of being able to look back to such a distant past as escape) contrasts with the shortened lives of young victims of AIDS in the 1980s. By such a contrast, I would add, Rice's vampires represent an alternative way of life, one constituted only by the positive aspects of being free in terms of sexual practices and of gender presentation in the 1980s. However, this dismissal of the negative consequences of sexual freedom is only possible in the vampire realm as the excessive use of sexual pleasure and gender freedom symbolized by the vampires are still fatally threatening in the AIDS era. This is why vampirism, although highly attractive, is also highly dangerous for humans, hence its abject quality.

On the other hand, this vampire life can be interpreted as a metaphor for the life of a person with AIDS if its negative aspects are considered. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, there are some negative aspects of vampirization in the novel, considered as such when contrasted with humanistic values: the necessity of killing humans, the inability to assume their identity among humans, the boredom of immortality, and the anxieties that result from their potentiality for a wider understanding of life and human problems without being able to interfere in the development of human history. In this sense, the dangers of vampirizing human

victims can be related to the danger of infecting sexual partners. The especial care that prevents the vampire's destruction[3] (like the avoidance of light and fire) can be related to the especial care an HIV infected person needs. The anxieties that the vampires feel for being unable to live openly and among the human beings relate to the feelings of being marginalized that people with AIDS experience. Considering Rice's vampires as metaphors for infected homosexuals may lead to the assumption that in her novels these people are compared to predators, but this is not the case. The characterization of her vampires focuses on their humanity and the blood-sucking is related rather to their survival and to the satisfaction of their desires than to irrational and evil predation. Rice's vampires represent at the same time an ideal existence, which is deprived from the anxieties typical of the 1980s, and a metaphor for the life of those who most suffer those anxieties. In this way, her use of the vampire figure can be said to reflect the novel's historical and social context.

3.2.2. *The Queen of the Damned*

The same implications of androgyny in physical appearance and in social roles perceived in *The Vampire Lestat* are present in *The Queen of the Damned,* as most of the characters are the same. But it is through a debate among the vampires that Rice presents in this novel that the main arguments concerning gender in the 1980s can be perceived. Among these arguments, some defended by a few radical feminists, especially from an earlier period (the 1960s and 1970s) against the domination of men on women is reflected in Akasha's assumption that men are the source of destruction and violence, which she explains arguing that they are the ones who "glorify death and killing" (271). She wants to create an ideal world, without male domination: "a world without war or deprivation in which women [would] roam

[3] Rice's vampires are immortal only to the extent that their remains have conditions to harbor their souls (if their bodies are burned to ashes, for instance, their souls have no place to return to). There is a belief among them that if a vampire's body is destroyed, he or she can reincarnate in another body, human or animal. Marius believes that probably this is what happened to Pandora.

free and unafraid, women who even under provocation would shrink from the common violence that lurks in the heart of every man" (277). For her, such an ideal could never be reached by men and their extermination is essential for its realization:

> Don't you understand that men will never do more than dream of peace? But women can realize that dream? My vision is amplified in the heart of every woman. But it cannot survive the heat of male violence! And that heat is so terrible that the earth itself may not survive. (334)

Akasha's arguments that women are superior to and, therefore, should dominate men are exaggerated and too radical, as they present an inversion of the dichotomy between men and women. These arguments present an essentialist and oversimplified view of the complexity of gender issues and of women's struggle, and the debate between Akasha and the other vampires points it out. She clearly denies any idea of an equal participation of men and women in the evolutionary process of human societies), arguing that what she wants to create is perfect, which a world ruled by patriarchal values that are erroneously said to be authorized by a natural order is not. Women's domination is what is really natural, according to her. Lestat, on the other hand, calls her attention to the possibility of a "duality of masculine and feminine [as] indispensable to the human animal" (334). He also indicates that her ideas are based on her personal view about men, claiming that most possibly "women want the men," to which Akasha replies: "Do you think men are what women want? . . . We'll keep them where the women may have them when they want them, and I assure you they shall not be used as women have been used by men" (334). Here she stresses the differences in women's interests in relation to those of men, arguing that, in their place, they would not commit the same injustices. However, she relies on an essentialist notion of femininity, as she dismisses the existence of individual differences among women (and among men), which are informed by a

varied set of issues, such as social class, ethnicity, nationality, age, personal life experiences, and so on.

The vampire Marius also argues against her position, using the metaphor of the biosystem to show that she is wrong for not considering the interdependence among men, women, and nature as part of the same system:

> Pick one tree; describe it, if you will, in terms of what it destroys, what it defies, and what it does not accomplish, and you have a monster of greedy roots and irresistible momentum that eats the light of other plants, their nutrients, their air. But that isn't the truth of the tree. That is not the whole truth when the thing is seen as part of nature, and by nature. . . . I mean only the larger thing which embraces all. . . . The biosystem that integrates men, women and non-humans in nature. (403)

Lestat's and Marius's arguments relate to the ideal of androgyny defended by Rice herself, while Akasha's ideas consider the existence of a masculine and a feminine essence, despising the masculine one as destructive. On the other hand, the queen also uses the metaphor of nature to argue that women are naturally designed to dominate the men:

> Let us look at nature . . . Go out in the lurch garden that surrounds this villa; study the bees in their hives and the ants who labor as they have always done, they are female, my prince, by the millions. A male is only an aberration and a matter of function. They learned the wise trick a long time before me of limiting the males. . . . When the ways of women are inculcated into every member of the population, naturally, as aggression is now inculcated, then perhaps the males can return. (336)

She claims that women instinctively know how to create a world of peace and abundance and her idea is that women can teach it to the few men left, until all of them are domesticated and

able to live "equally" with women. Actually, what Akasha calls equality refers mostly to the numerical proportion of the population, as in her ideal world men will always be subjugated to women's will. The queen argues that "the world burns with masculine fire," and Lestat replies claiming that this fire is inherent to the human soul, being present in women too. She insists that masculine fire is more destructive, as "it rages now through every forest and over every mountain and in every glen" (337). Akasha goes on to say that women never wanted to burn this fire, that "they want the light . . . [a]nd the warmth, [b]ut not the destruction, [for] they are only women, they are not mad" (337). She argues that women are inherently peaceful and their rage and excitement is directed only towards the accomplishment of life. It can be perceived, therefore, that although some of her arguments are plausible, what the queen uses to justify the domination of women over men is also based on the erroneous idea of a continuation among sex, gender, and sexuality.

As I have argued in relation to sexuality in this novel, Akasha's notion of masculinity explains her relationship with Lestat as one of love and power. She chooses Lestat as her king, claiming that he is "so perfectly what is wrong with all things male; aggressive, full of hate and recklessness, and endlessly eloquent excuses for violence . . . the essence of masculinity" (336). He attracts Akasha because he represents everything that she wants to control and to have women control as well. However, Lestat refuses to take part in her plans and, together with other ancient vampires, contests her discourse.

The debate on gender roles and identities held by the vampires in Rice's novel is supported by the fact that their existence differs from that of humans. The moral codes that constrain humans do not constrain them, though some vampires sympathize and identify with human beings. Rice, therefore, criticizes the sex/gender system's division of social roles through gender by using the point of view of creatures that are outside the scope of human social control. Such a point of view makes possible to imagine how the world would be without

the control of human morality. This imagined world is queen Akasha's plan, as what she uses to construct the new distribution of gender roles is not society's moral codes, but her own. She claims that the destruction of man will make them "reap what they have sown" and that "collectively the lives of these men do not equal the lives of women who have been killed at the hands of men over the centuries" (401). But the queen aims at stopping male domination by starting another war. She tries to convince Lestat, arguing that her war of women against men is divine, "[n]ot the loathsome feeding upon human life which you have done night after night without scheme or reason save to survive" (267). As Lestat questions the morality that she uses to claim to herself the right to destroy men, the queen answers: "In the name of my morality! . . . I am the reason, the justification, the right by which it is done!" (273). Akasha's discourse relates to what have been termed radical feminism of the 1960s and misrepresents later feminist ideas for transferring the situation of oppression from women to men instead of working to eliminate oppression altogether. As Imelda Whelehan observes, radical feminism demonstrated the rage of women against male and the patriarchy, but the drawback was that this "distorted, trivialized and depoliticized" rage, "was seized upon by the media and parodied in the mainstream, and still informs the popular (mis)conception of a 'feminist' today" (67). In the novel, the discourses of the other vampires show that Akasha's intolerance hinders the cooperation between men and women and that it consequently maintains and reinforces an unjust distribution of social roles through gender.

Through Akasha's discourse, Lestat's narrative voice presents what would be an erroneous way of dealing with late-twentieth century problems involving gender discrimination. As Smith argues, the queen is "the epitome of the Feminist Gone Mad, a woman enraged at the brutality that men have shown women for centuries" (76). Similarly, Auerbach emphasizes that the queen "is scarcely a vampire as Rice defines the species, but a depersonalized female force" (174). Akasha's intolerance echoes male chauvinists' and radical

feminist's beliefs that stood for the maintenance of the division of social roles through gender mainly in the 1960s and 1970s. The other vampires, in turn, use human morality to argue against the queen, but this morality is different from the one endorsed by the sex/gender system's values: it relates to equality, an ideal of humanity, related to the claims of the Women's and of the Gay and Lesbian's Movements of the 1970s and 1980s and to the androgyny theory feminists and contemporary feminisms.

This kind of ideal human morality defended by those vampires represents the public debate held by people who cannot endure the injustice of a sex/gender system. This idea can be perceived in the vampire Marius's words:

> It is the intolerance of thinking men and women in power who for the first time in the history of the human race truly want to put an end to injustice in all forms . . . We have no right to interrupt their struggle . . . Even in the last hundred years their progress has been miraculous; they have righted wrongs that mankind thought were inevitable. (404)

Marius points out the very existence of activists as the key to eliminate the injustices that harm humans. This is a real change in progress, according to him, and shall not be interrupted by Akasha's plans. In terms of Foucault's ideas, I would say that the so-called morality defended by Akasha is code-oriented, as it is composed of her rules, prescribed for what she believes is the correct conduct. One the other hand, the other vampires defend an ethics-oriented morality, as they believe that individuals are in their way to assume a proper conduct according to their perception of life. Their position is not in agreement with the code-oriented morality of the sex/ gender system, which does not constrain them because they are vampires, but it is suggested in the narrative that their moral ethics are still human.

Although the human conduct about which Rice's vampires debate does not refer only to sexuality and gender, these issues play an important part in the novel, as Akasha relates the

causes of the wrongs in the world to patriarchal ideologies. However, Smith argues that *The Queen of the Damned* can be considered "ultimately a feminist novel because of Rice's view of men and women in the world" (81). The author bases her opinion on the fact that "Akasha's condemnation of men goes against basic feminist theory that both sexes are equal and needed for balance and harmony in the world" and affirms that "Rice's rejection of Akasha's plan is actually a feminist act" (81). I disagree with this opinion, because the ideals implicitly defended in the novel do not seem to be feminist, but rather generally humanist. The vampires in this novel (and in *The Vampire Lestat* as well) have existentialist concerns about the humanity, discussing not only the oppression of women by patriarchal societies but also other issues such as religious fundamentalism, poverty, international politics, and morality. The debate between Akasha and the other vampires is an example. Smith also claims that the fact that Rice's female vampires are more limited and less complex than the male ones reveal "the author's uncertain feelings about female power and female sexuality" (82). Ironically, this observation contradicts the assumption that the position assumed by Rice is feminist. Besides, Smith's criticism of Rice's work and the critique presented by those critics who claim that Carter is only reinforcing patriarchal structures in her stories seem to miss a central point. I claim that both writers are in fact installing the sex/gender system structure in their works in order to subvert them (using postmodern strategy of parody). In relation to Rice's novel, I would say that what is being stressed is an androgynous ideal, which claims the dismissal of all traces of gender on sexual difference—which is also an idealized view of gender relations. I would argue that the conclusion that can be drawn from the debate among Rice's vampires is that, although the sex/gender system's values are the basis of gender discrimination, and although some ideologies created to eliminate it are only maintaining their implications, the public debate itself contains the possibilities of solution.

Another issue present in the *Queen of the Damned* concerning gender and the division of gender roles relates to the interest in a spirituality based on female entities and on a matriarchal society. Nature-based religions historically contain strong images of female power and regard female deities as at least equal to male deities (Sturgeon 29). These religions worship the Great Goddess, also called the Great Mother, who represents the earth itself, that is, the source of life for the human beings. This can be related to Patrick D. Murphy's concept of a natured culture: "a human culture that functions on the basis of harmonizing human and nonhuman interaction, rather than on the basis of maximizing human action on the nonhuman" (150). In Rice's novel, the new religion Akasha intends to create as the basis of a society dominated by women resembles nature-based spirituality. In her reign in Egypt six thousand years ago, she tried to be a mother and goddess figure, but was destroyed by her own subjects. As the "Mother of all Vampires," she was granted the new role of mother in a patriarchal society: the life-giving body out of which vampire existence emerged, but that is controlled by a male power, Enkil. The vampire legend has it that the true source of vampire power was Enkil, the king, not the queen. But now that she is back in the 1980s, Akasha wants to show her "true" condition and labels herself "The Queen of Heaven, the Goddess, the Good Mother" (271), even suggesting to the mortal women she meets that she is the incarnation of female deities widely worshiped in contemporary cultures, as the Virgin Mary.

Peculiar about the religion proposed by Akasha is that, at the same time that it is meant to replace patriarchal religions, it maintains some of their characteristics. Patriarchal religions usually see "the natural world, together with human society, as something created, shaped, and controlled by God, a God imaged after the patriarchal ruling class" (Ruether 158). According to the most widespread vision of male-based religions, man is "entrusted with being the steward and caretaker of nature, but under God, who remains its ultimate creator and Lord" (158). Similarly, in Akasha's new religion, she is the almighty Goddess who entrusts the role of

caretaker of nature to women, her subordinates. In religions that claim the apocalypse, "God is seen as intervening in history to destroy the present sinful and finite world of human society and nature and to create a new heaven on Earth, freed from both sin and death" (Ruether 159). This view is present in Akasha's plans of destroying patriarchal culture by sacrificing the men in order to purge all historically inflicted violence perpetuated by them against women. For her, the vampire Azim, who is worshiped as a god by humans in an Asian community, represents this violence, since he represents an old God figure that opposes the Goddess that Akasha wants to be. When facing him, the queen says: "You have milled these hopeless innocents; you who have fed upon their lives and their blood like a bloated leech. . . . I am risen now to rule as I was meant to rule. And you shall die as a lesson to your people" (265). By destroying Azim, the queen begins enacting her objective of replacing all phallocentric God-based religions by hers. The slaughter of males all over the world represents both a punishment for their sins and the destruction of a sinful patriarchal society that will purge humanity and make the rise of a new era possible. Therefore, Akasha's religion maintains the same oppression and violence that characterize the radical basis of patriarchal religions, only changing the hierarchy in the relation among God, men and, women to that among Goddess, women, and men, instead of providing for the harmony that ecofeminists endorse.

At the end of the novel, it is implied that the ideologies of nature-based religions are reinstituted, at least in the vampire realm. Akasha is killed by the twin sisters that she mutilated and separated six thousand years ago: Maharet and Mekare. Differently from Akasha, they are more conscious of the need for the integration among men, women, and nature and believe not in a powerful, coercive god figure, but in the power of nature. They react against Akasha and kill her, performing a funeral ritual that was typical of their ancient community: feasting on the brain and the heart of their ancestors. Through this ritual, they incorporate Akasha's life energy, which is supposed to be what keeps all the vampires alive because of their sharing her

primal blood. In this sense, Mekare and Maharet make their own bodies the maternal bodies to all vampires. The vampire legacy now depends on them. I tend to agree with Gelder, according to whom these two vampires seem to believe that "history is productive when maternalised, and destructive when patriarchal, since [Akasha], too, wishes to destroy in order to (re)create a new matrilineal order" (116). Their attitudes, therefore, aim at reinstalling a matriarchal order, replacing the patriarchal one that regulates the human realm and the radical one through which Akasha intends to regulate both human and vampire realms. This new order, however, can be installed only in the vampire realm, which can be explained by the fact that Rice's vampires believe that they should not interfere in human history, which is already going in the direction of progress.

The Queen of the Damned provides an overview of the main directions followed in the 1980s by feminism as a social movement in the public debate about the values of a patriarchal society and the implications for gender discrimination. Not only the sex/gender system's division of social roles through gender, but also radical feminism is criticized in Rice's novel. In this way, the public debate that was taking place in the historical context of the novel is praised by vampires who believe it indicates possibilities for a better world. In a way the concepts about gender identity and gender performance implicit in the position and in the ideas of Rice's vampires reflect the theories of radical feminism and androgyny.

The discussion about gender presented in Rice's *The Vampire Lestat* and in *The Queen of the Damned* provides a critique of the sex/gender system's division of gender roles and the oppression of women promoted by the discourses of this system. It also defends an ideal of equality and non-separation between the genders through the focus on the possibility of androgyny, made possible by the vampires' existence. Vampirism, thus, represents androgyny as an alternative to the culturally intelligible gender presentations, in a way that the vampire's

freedom from social control includes freedom from imposition of gender roles. Rice's use of the vampire figure differs from that of Carter's. Carter's female vampires represent the stereotypical role of the *femme fatale* that women are obliged to perform compulsively. Rice's vampires are also obliged to perform stereotypical gender roles but only in order to pass as humans, and even this performance becomes less necessary in the novel as the historical development of notions about gender allows the vampires to perform their androgynous identity without punishment. At the same time, this new possibility of life for the vampire existence is implicitly abject to humans, because it is not only desirable but also threatening to the individual and the social integrity in a historical context plagued by the AIDS epidemic and marked by homophobia. Concerning gender inequality, a criticism in the novels is clearer in the vampires' view of human existence, as their discourses point out the fallacies of the sex/gender system ideologies and of some of the ones created to oppose it, as radical feminism. *The Vampire Lestat* and *The Queen of the Damned* can be said to reflect the 1980s since freedom of gender presentation and equality between the genders are important issues in the context of the AIDS epidemic and the public debates on the division of gender roles.

3.3. Comparison Between Carter's and Rice's Vampires

As it was argued in relation to the representation of sexuality in Rice's novels, it can be perceived that they also differ from Carter's short stories in terms of gender issues: while Carter is exclusively concerned with criticism of stereotypes of femininity imposed on women, Rice's scope is wider for adding references to androgyny. Although the gender of Rice's vampires, like their sexuality, seems to be a new one, it is actually based on the ideal of androgyny being discussed and incorporated in the context of the novel, in a way that their gender identities also represent culturally unintelligible genders. Differently from Carter's vampire women, who even in being transgressive are only accomplishing social prescriptions,

Rice's vampire women (like Gabrielle, Pandora, Mekare, Maharet, and Akasha) are free from the gender identities constructed by the sex/gender system in which they live. For instance, while Carter's Countess Nosferatu dies at the end of her story because she cannot attain sexual freedom in life, Rice's Gabrielle breaks out of this death-as-the-only-escape destiny when Lestat vampirizes her at the moment she is dying of consumption.

Kristeva's notion of the abject is useful to understand the difference in the ways Rice and Carter use vampires to discuss gender (and sexuality). The stereotypes that the vampires oppose (the angel-woman, the gentleman, the maiden, the charming prince, for instance) can be related to the subject position, as they agree with what is considered intelligible and proper by the sex/gender system. This is the position that guarantees one's identification with one's own culture. The object position can be associated with the sexuality and gender that are considered desirable. It relates to the subject's fantasies, his or her objects of desire. The abject position is something different: it relates to what is desired but that cannot be objectified because it threatens one's subjectivity. Abjection involves cases that are not socially intelligible anymore but that still defy the self-recognition of the subject (or of society) and as such his or her identity. The culturally unintelligible gender identities and sexual and gender performances are placed in this position. I would say that Carter's vampires are more clearly in the abject position, as they are objects of desire but are completely marginalized. The roles they perform are culturally created. This is why Carter's vampires convey criticism on the imposition of social roles of both cultural adequacy and cultural inadequacy on women. Rice's vampires, on the other hand, are in the abject position only in relation to humans. Vampirization is not abject, only desirable, because it offers human beings a way out of social control. Like Carter's, however, Rice's vampires are still abject to humanity, as the desires that are not repressed in the utopian world created by Rice are highly threatening and must be repressed in the historical context of humans in the novels.

Both Carter's and Rice's stories criticize the notions of gender that inform their cultural and historical context. They do so by installing such notions in her stories so as to undermine them through the narrated experiences of their vampire characters. However, they differ in the use they make of the vampire figure. While Carter uses it to represent the gender roles and identities that are considered culturally unintelligible by the sex/gender system and that women perform under social imposition, Rice uses it to present an alternative condition (in relation to humanity) in which such transgressive gender roles or better, the dismissal of the division of gender roles all together, represent an escape from the culturally intelligible genders. Rice's use of the vampire figure can be seen as more idealized, utopic, than that of Carter's. Both of them, however, are efficient in using this figure to undermine the assumptions that informed the social discourses of the 1970s and 1980s, reflecting the theories and the public debates taking place at the period in relation to issues about gender identity, gender performance, and gender difference. This is possible because they characterize their vampires using the strategy of postmodern parody, which installs and subverts social discourses, together with gothic devices, which also have parodic effects, providing a distorted, subversive view of reality through the de-familiarization of life-experiences.

CONCLUSION

A configuration of Gothic fiction written by women in the 1970s and 1980s can be described in terms of this genre's potential for reflecting issues that concern people in specific historical contexts. The definition of a contemporary form of gothic fiction is based on the recognition that it is different (in terms of themes and devices) from the works of traditional gothic, the particularities of which render them representative of the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries. In the 1970s and 1980s, people were particularly concerned with the issues of sexuality and gender. At that time, women's liberation movements and the gays and lesbians movements contested socially prescribed gender roles. Theories were developed in diverse fields, which questioned, among other issues, the suitability of the definitions and of the application of the notions of sex, sexuality, and gender in relation to the alleged notions of naturality and normality. Similarly, freedom of sexual orientation and practices was claimed and debated at the same time that the eruption of the AIDS epidemic posited threats to an invalidation of the current classification of homosexuality and heterosexuality in terms of normality.

Women's gothic fiction often provides a depiction of the world that brings into light aspects of the social reality that are related to feelings of dissatisfaction and displacement that were experienced by some women in their cultural and historical contexts. In this sense, it seems plausible to consider that gothic fiction written by women in the 1970s and 1980s reveals these women's views on issues that directly concern their private and social lives—such as those related to sexuality and gender. Angela Carter and Anne Rice wrote during that period and the analysis of their works presented in this thesis demonstrates that both writers have a position against the social control of sexual options, of sexual practices, of gender identities and of gender performances.

As I tried to show here, the depiction of vampire characters is one of the forms through which Carter and Rice convey such position in their works. Because of the traditional symbolisms attributed to them, vampires are useful tools in the literary representation of sexuality and gender. Carter and Rice portray these figures by endowing them with gothic characteristics: their vampires are part of a world of darkness, supernatural events, violence, and transgression of cultural boundaries (such as that between human/inhuman, natural/unnatural, normal/abnormal, life/death, good/evil). In all the works analyzed here, the vampires present complex sexual and gender identities and indulge in transgressive sexual and gender performances that subvert the essentialist notions of sexuality and gender created by the sex/gender system. This use of the vampire figure is particular of contemporary fiction and often related to the postmodernist tendency to subvert the binary oppositions that inform Western culture, such as those between human/monster, good/evil, and men/women.

In Angela Carter's "The Loves of Lady Purple" and "The Lady of the House of Love," the issues of sexuality and gender are closely examined. In the two stories, a woman vampire represents the stereotype of women's exacerbated sexuality. Sexuality and gender are discussed together in those stories through the depiction of women's transgressive behavior, their gender and their sexual identities that are as constructed and imposed as the socially privileged roles are. Carter demonstrates that the so-called transgressive women that the vampires represent do not rebel against society and act on their free will, but on the contrary, they compulsively perform the transgressive roles that society creates for them. Therefore, the discourse conveyed in Carter's short stories is one against the control of women's sexuality through the artificial social distribution of gender roles and of modes of sexual behavior, calling attention to the power of such control even in the determination of modes of transgression.

In *The Vampire Lestat* and *The Queen of the Damned*, the vampires' condition also foregrounds the sex/gender system's notions of sexuality and gender, but in different terms. Rice creates for her vampires a kind of sexuality that is different from that of human beings in terms of sexual practices, but that represents bisexuality in terms of sexual orientation. Their sexuality is opposed to that endorsed by patriarchal standards and unintelligible in relation to patriarchal cultures. Similarly, the concept of gender accepted by mainstream society does not work for the vampires, who assume the ideal of androgyny, dismissing sexual and gender difference. By having her vampires discuss their own points of view about the issues of human sexuality and gender in her novels, Rice points out the fallacies of some discourses that took place in the public debate of the 1980s. Her novels praise the primacy of sensuous pleasure over sexual repression and of the consciousness of the interdependency between men and women (the ideal of androgyny) over patriarchal and radical feminist ideologies. Rice's use of the vampire figure conveys alternative ways of dealing with sexuality and gender and distinctive ways of representing sexualities and gender identities, related to sexual and gender freedom.

But, although both Carter and Rice use the same kind of gothic devices to convey discourses against the same issues, they differ in terms of the focus each one chooses. While Carter is demythologizing stereotypes of women's transgressive sexuality and gender performance, Rice is creating a myth, an ideal based on the notions of bisexuality and androgyny. Both strategies subvert the traditional use of the vampire figure informed by the ideologies of the sex/gender system, but they have different implications.

When Carter shows that there is no alternative to her vampire-women other than to adopt the role created for them (like Lady Purple) or to die (like Countess Nosferatu), she demonstrates that what is culturally considered unintelligible is also socially imposed on women who do not conform to social roles. Consequently, she demonstrates that transgressive

women are also oppressed by the sex/gender system. She, therefore, destroys the myth according to which sexually transgressive women are free from social control and able to dismantle the social order. This fact can be explained especially by Foucault's notions of discourses on forms of transgressive sexuality as a form of social control of this sexuality, as well as Butler's ideas that gender roles are always socially imposed, including the culturally unintelligible ones, and incorporated into the individual's personality through compulsive performances. Although Carter's vampires are abject in Kristeva's terms (because they are at the same time attractive and threatening, living at the border of cultural binaries), they are portrayed as victims of society, unable to inflict actual harms on the social order because they act according to this order: compulsively performing the roles created for them.

Rice, on the other hand, does not use the traditional vampire figure, but changes some of its aspects, creating a somewhat idealized, alternative social structure and alternative notions of sexuality and gender to characterize the vampire existence. Her vampires obey a particular morality and codes of behavior, characterized by what resembles a contemporary version of bisexuality and androgyny. Such morality and codes are considered normal in the novels and are never questioned by the vampires, as they reflect Rice's claims about the ideal of androgyny as a better option for humanity. The feeling of abjection does not exist in the vampire realm, being implicit only in their relation to humans and perceived only by the reader who realizes that the sexual identities and practices represented by Rice's vampires cannot be accomplished in the AIDS-plagued 1980s. What she creates, then, is a new myth, one that represents the ideals of sexual freedom and gender equality.

Despite these differences, Angela Carter and Anne Rice are equally efficient in using gothic devices to discuss issues of gender and sexuality in contemporary Western culture. Both writers are able to contest and subvert in their works the sex/gender system's notions of sexuality and gender through the exploration of the potential of abjection that the vampire

figure represents and of the subversive potential of the gothic contextualization of life experiences. This subversion conveyed often reflects the scientific and public debates about sexuality and gender taking place in late-twentieth century, in its denunciation of the inefficiency of discourses and ideologies to deal with the complexity of those issues in contemporary configuration. My analysis of Carter's and Rice's works demonstrates that both of them represent, through their vampires, discourses against the imposition of gender roles and of sexualities by patriarchal societies.

It is impossible to define contemporary gothic fiction written by women as a genre or subgenre based only in the comparative analysis of two women writers. Although the many similarities between Carter and Rice attested here, in terms of themes, strategies, and positions in relation to the social structure they criticize, the differences between them prove that much more is at stake in writing in response to a historical context. The peculiarities of this context certainly inform the similarities among the writers inserted in it, but each one measures this period according to his or her point of view and personal agenda. Although the cultural and historical context is the same and although both of them present in their works discourses against patriarchy, Carter's and Rice's focuses differ. While Carter focuses on women's experience, Rice organizes her arguments in a broader sense of humanity, in a way that the issue of gender identity and inequality is relevant but it is not the central concern in her novels. The solutions they present to the issues of sexuality and gender they problematize also differ. Carter's story sounds more pessimistic, demystifying ideas taken for granted about these issues claiming their configuration as culturally constructed stereotypes. Rice, on the other hand, is idealistic, mystifying the ideal androgynous being through the creation of an alternative kind of life: the vampire existence. My work does not present a definition of contemporary women's gothic fiction, but I believe it is important for future researches committed to the characterization of this genre. Although the fact that Rice and Carter are women cannot be

considered fundamental to their use of gothic devices in their discussion of sexuality and gender in the 1970s and 1980s, it cannot be ignored. My analysis demonstrates that, as women who witnessed the cultural, political, and philosophical movements of the 1970s and 1980s about sexuality and gender, they share the position against patriarchal control over women.

Finally, I believe that my thesis brings relevant contributions to the current knowledge on the topics it investigates. The definitions of "gothic fiction," "contemporary gothic," and "female gothic" are problematic ones, as it is the notion of women's contemporary gothic fiction. Since no consensus has been reached so far regarding this problem, I believe that my work contributes to current discussions and to future researches about the state and possibilities of the contemporary debate about the literary tradition so far labeled as gothic fiction, especially that written by women. In addition, my research provides a detailed comparison between Angela Carter and Anne Rice as gothic women writers—an approach that has not been found in any other works.

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