





by Gerard Raymond

“I know my imagination definitely tends to be in a realm where people transcend gender and they love people of their own gender. But I don't question that too deeply,” says Anne Rice, whose novels include *Interview with the Vampire*, *The Vampire Lestat* and *The Queen of the Damned*, the first three books of the phenomenally successful *Vampire Chronicles*. “I just know that I have always been very romantically compelled by gay people because of the images of equals making love to equals. I find it a very appealing and a very beautiful thing. And I may romanticize it to some extent, I don't know.”

Rice's new book *The Queen of the Damned* is dedicated to her husband Stan and ten-year-old son Chris, and to John Preston, the author of many books on gay male erotica, who she refers to as her best friend. It was Preston who once said that her vampire books are “metaphors for gay life and gay sex.” Acknowledging the kinship for the outsider that gay readers feel for her immortal heroes, Rice comments that “some of the most intelligent things that have been written about my books have been from the gay community.”

*Interview with the Vampire* was published in 1976. The story unfolds as Louis, an elegant two hundred year-old vampire, pours out his passionate story to a young man with a tape-recorder. After a few pages it is clear that Rice has taken the vampire genre to a new level. The reader is irresistibly drawn into Louis' world, watching the centuries go by with the gift as well as the curse of immortality and, more perversely, preying on other humans as the vampire is forced to slake his thirst with human blood. We are introduced to the irresponsible Lestat, the dark angel who loves Louis and turns him into a vampire, and who, in a typical moment of thoughtlessness, makes Claudia, a six-year-old girl, their vampire child. Although the book was successful, *Interview* showed no initial signs of being the book that would eventually sell a million copies. Rice was originally quite upset at the reviews which she felt dismissed the book as just another horror story. “I felt very threatened and angry about that and I hesitated to return to that milieu.”

Rice then completed *The Feast of All Saints*, a 19th century novel set in New Orleans, and went on to her “next obsession,” a novel about a famous 18th century Venetian opera castrato titled *Cry to Heaven*. After getting these two books out of her system, she began to realize that *Interview* had stayed in print and continued to have something of an underground life. “It had two lives, first a paperback bestseller and then it had gotten this underground cult-life of people who hadn't even heard of it when it had come out.” What turned out was that “the horror genre readers were in some ways some of the most sensitive readers of the book. They really read it like it was poetry and I was amazed.” She gradually noticed that at book signings for *The Feast of All Saints* or *Cry to Heaven*, “these people would show up all dressed in black and they'd have a copy of *Interview* wrapped in velvet or something. In other words what I saw was that there was no stigma to be attached as a horror writer—it didn't make any difference.”

Rice says she always knew that the story wasn't over with *Interview* and Lestat would have his own story to tell. The result was *The Vampire Lestat*. The somewhat unsavory demon of *Interview* began his autobiography: “I am the Vampire Lestat. I'm immortal. More or less. The light of the sun, the sustained heat



Anne Rice

# Queen of the Vampire Chronicles

of an intense fire—these things might destroy me. But then again, they might not.” Lestat then proceeded to recount his fascinating life and seduced and conquered a whole new host of mortal readers.

In her latest book, *The Queen of the Damned*, which jumped to the number one spot on the *New York Times* best-seller list just one week after publication, Rice has Jesse, one of the mortal protagonists, read *The Vampire Lestat* and comment “there is something obscene about this novel. It makes the lives of these beings seem attractive.” “I got completely involved,” explains Rice. “I was totally in their skin, looking through their eyes and writing from their point of view. My method of learning has always been to embrace and fall into. Some personalities are formed through resistance and negation and refusal, but mine was always the other way around. One of the things I love about *The Godfather*, the movie and the book, is that it goes right into the heart of that Italian family—it sees them the way they see themselves. And though there is a moral overview that's there, it does not intrude.”

*The Queen of the Damned* is told against an epic canvas, on an even grander scale than *The Vampire Lestat*, which followed the adventures of Lestat from the mountains of Auvergne, ancient Gaul, Sicily, Istanbul, Venice and Cairo to a climactic rock concert in San Francisco where the vampire performed. In her new book, Rice further consolidates her fascinating cosmology of the vampires, going back 6,000 years to describe the birth of the phenomenon of vampirism and the creation of the “first brood of blood drinkers.” A new theme in the book is the interaction between the occult world and the realm of the vampires.

Rice did not always have an interest in the supernatural. “One of the reasons that *Interview with the Vampire* doesn't contain anything except the very limited perspective of that one character Louis is that I have never been very interested in the occult until lately. It is only in the last few years that I started to read Colin Wilson. I was very influenced by his books and the material he turned up on the occult. One of the things that excited me about *The Queen of the Damned* was the idea of writing a full occult novel.

By introducing Jesse and the Talamas (a secret brotherhood of scientific investigators into the paranormal), I was able to weave the cosmology of the vampire into a general cosmology of spirits and ghosts!”

The amazing consistency, throughout the three novels, of her vampire universe—which is as self-contained as Tolkien's Middle Earth—might suggest that she planned the pattern of the books from start. “No I didn't plan it, it just sort of grew,” says Rice. “I think some of us, spin plots and characters. It's almost as if there is a chemical in the brain telling me to do it. And I've always done that. Even as a child I had a complete dream world with all kinds of people who interrelated all the time and I still have it sometimes worry about where all the dream people will go when I die.”

“I keep wanting to take the implications a little further and it also tantalizes me to see how far I can push the limit of credibility,” she continues. “How many different kinds of textures and fabrics can work into the whole thing. It really



# FOR THOSE WHO LOVE THE THEATER

A Comprehensive Guide to American Theater

## TheaterWeek

November 28, 1988

\$2.00

### Sympathy for the Devil

Victor Garber in *The Devil's Disciple*



Marilyn Cooper  
Lanie Robertson  
Charles Busch



## EVERY WEEK IS

# TheaterWeek.

TheaterWeek, 28 West 25th Street, Fourth Floor, NY, NY 10010 212-627-2120

- \$19 for 26 issues of THEATERWEEK (\$31.50 outside USA)
- \$35 for 52 issues of THEATERWEEK (\$60 outside USA)
- Check or Money Order enclosed. USA funds only.  VISA  Mastercard

Account # \_\_\_\_\_

Exp. Date \_\_\_\_\_ Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City/State/Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Please allow 6 to 8 weeks for delivery of first issue.

N2788

something that is almost irresistible personally. I can't stop it. If anything I rather love it, you know, this sense of opening it up and different possibilities emerging. Keeping it open like a scrabble board with a lot of words going out this way and that way." Describing the process as rather like a tree growing branches, Rice shows obvious delight in the fact that she herself sometimes has no idea where her fertile imagination will lead her. Where do all these ideas come from? "I don't know where they come from, I swear. I have never been able to answer that question. I just have a spontaneous need to make plots and stories all the time. More ideas come to me than I can possibly write down. I have a sub-directory on my computer: 'Ideas.' I just type up five or ten pages for a novel—they may never get written."

Given the superabundance of her ideas, Rice knows that in a year's time she will have completed the fourth Vampire Chronicle. The book will be titled *The Body Thief*. "I can't talk too much about it or I'll block myself, but basically it is an adventure that Lestat has, where he learns a great many things about the illusions he cherishes. It is not a book like *The Queen of the Damned* where all the immortals are involved in a big confrontation. There will be some sub-plots and other characters like there were in *The Queen of the Damned*. I know that some of my readers don't like that, they like just the first person voice. But frankly, I was really being constrained by the first person voice and I needed to open it out. But the story is basically something that happens to Lestat. Louis is a big character in the book and also David Talbot of the Talamasca. Beyond that I don't want to say too much."

Rice's vampire books reveal an optimism for the progress of the human race which is reflected in the fact that her immortals long to be humans again. "They form a grand appreciation of human life because they are cut off from it and though their lives sound as if they have unlimited possibilities it's obviously not true." (She adds with a sly smile that the fourth book may alter this picture and invites us to stay tuned!) One of the central debates in *The Queen of the Damned* is a discussion among immortal vampires ranging from ages 6,000 to newly made, on whether the 20th century is the best or the worst in human history. The consensus is that with the elimination of religious superstition the human race is on the correct path of reason and enlightenment. "I have very strong, negative feelings against what I would call 'revealed religion,'" says Rice, who was educated in a Catholic convent in New Orleans. "And I think one of the greatest accomplishments of the 20th century is the movement away from these revealed religions. Marius (one of the vampires) says that people are evolving ethics and morality which are based not on supposed revelations from heaven, but on reason and intellect."

"The character I love most dearly in the whole book is Maharet [one of the first brood vampires who is bitterly opposed to Akasha the Queen of the Damned, the mother of the vampires]. I believe what she says, in her speech to Akasha, that she would be hard put to say which is worse, religion or the pure idea—they are both evil. To me the awful evil in our human history is the sacrificing of human life over and over again to religious reasons or pure ideas."

How does the real contemporary world around her inform her novels? "One of the great things about writing about characters that are supposed to be two and three hundred years old is that you can stand back and look at the world

through their eyes and you can do it in terms that could be understood hundreds of years from now. That's the goal. Certainly all kinds of things have happened impinging on them and they made a difference. But to avoid the literal, I tried to be as specific, in the sense that it would be what I am trying to say. I would like that I am willing to synthesize about the 20th century and not too specific."

In this respect Rice's reaction to the catastrophe of AIDS is also relevant. Only recently, one of her editors, Whitehead, to whose memory *The Queen of the Damned* is also dedicated to AIDS. "I said to a friend of mine who is very concerned with AIDS for all the obvious reasons, maybe you don't want to read this book because there are so many references to blood. He said it's a marvelous bridge over. It's an escape. Because it's other-worldly, the book does not deal literally with the tragedy of AIDS, because I can't deal literally with it anymore than I can deal literally with anything else. AIDS has deepened my sense of the meaning and sense of mortality because so many people I have loved as so many people have."

In an interview given to the *Voice* in 1986, Rice said, "It is important for me to say that despite the fact that appropriate, sex is good. Catastrophe, the AIDS crisis can make us proud of our ideals, or commitment to freedom, and I believe that it is important to fight that impulse, particularly for writers." Rice has always wanted to transcend her pain. *Interview with the Vampire* came out a year after her six-year-old daughter Michaela died of a rare adult leukemia. The child Claudia, who resembles her physically, was the same age when she was made into an immortal.

Rice's novels have an advanced board eroticism that covers all types of sexuality. The vampire immortals are attracted to humans as well as their opposite gender. The seduction of mortals, which is a theme in the drinking of blood, is described in highly erotic terms. Rice explains how her work is erotic and women, straight as well as lesbian, says she just writes "what I want to read, sensual and erotic. There is such a pleasure in me in describing textures and the feel of things, it's natural to me in that way. There is no reason why it couldn't be philosophically and compelling and at the same time deliciously entertaining."

In the early eighties, Rice published an erotic S/M trilogy under the pseudonym A.N. Roquelaure, which took off at a point when *Sleeping Beauty* was being marketed by Prince Charming. "It really went up front pornography," she acknowledges. In an interview with *Rolling Stone*, Rice explained matter-of-factly that she meant to be good books to read, not masturbating or fantasizing or to simply enjoy sex." Rice has apologized for wanting to write gaudy authentic pornography "if you find in any store" and now includes titles in her biography for the books. "I wrote them and I have the slings and arrows. But it happened, there hasn't been any reaction. That was kind of what *Belinda* (which was written under the pen name Anne Rampling) was about the fact that there probably was a negative reaction if one brood rules."

To those groups like Women Against Pornography, she says, "I think it's entitled to our imaginations. We have to politicize our imagination. Women have been told for the



years what they should feel and think, and in this century for the first time they are really discovering what they feel and think. One of the great mysteries is the sado-masochistic imagination. To me that is something to be explored not something to be politicized and repressed, particularly for women. What a horrible thing to tell them again that they can't explore, that now a new group of rules in the name of liberalism has been substituted for the old ones."

Of the three different Rice styles: Rampling, the "contemporary American," Roquelaure, the erotic, and Rice, the "European," it is Rice the Vampire Chronicler that is the best known and the most successful. Her immortal vampires have changed forever our conceptions of the bloodsucking monster of which Bram Stoker once was master. No longer is garlic and a stake-through-the-heart the hallmark of this genre. Rice delightedly recounts a story where some friends were at a vampire film and heard some members of the audience claim that what was going on screen was all wrong and that was not the way to do it. Her friends were convinced that these people were Anne Rice fans. "We'll always have *Dracula* with us," she says, but chuckles at the thought of "those little voices all over saying no, no that's not the correct one!"

Rice's vampire fans who cherish her novels passionately, naturally, await the inevitable film versions of *The Vampire Chronicles* with great trepidation as well as anticipation. Rice shares these same fears. She acknowledges that "I make much more money in New York from writing than I do from Hollywood, so I could walk away" and she understands the workings of the film industry only too well. "The more I learn from Hollywood, the more I talk to people and meet them, not just in connection with this project but other projects, the more I think that it really is just as bad as everyone says. And the best thing for an author like me to do is to stay away from it. But then you see a movie as magnificent, to me, as *Apocalypse Now* or *The Godfather* and you think, Oh! if they could only do that."

Currently Lorimar Pictures holds the options to all three vampire books with Julia Phillips (*Close Encounters*, *The Sting* and *Taxi Driver*) and Michael Levy (*Gotcha!*) as producers. Nine studios turned down *Interview with the Vampire* because, as Rice explains, "they won't be accused of homosexuality in conjunction with child molesting, that's basically it. Now you know that's stupid really, to anybody who reads this book, it's ridiculous, it's absurd from every level but that's really where they are at. For some reason they cannot take those delicate relationships and give them a full expression. It's crazy!"

Accepting the fact it is an impossible dream for an author ever to gain control of what might be a \$28 million dollar Hollywood film, Rice, because of her confidence in the producers Phillips and Levy, has been working on the film version of *Interview with the Vampire*. She completed a screen treatment in which she has made a drastic compromise at which she fully expects her readers to be outraged. "I think in some ways it is a horrifying compromise, but I have already written it for them. And that is I have made Louis a transvestite woman. You see Louis is merely me. So I made that character me and then I made it the woman I wish I was, a six foot tall androgynous woman. In the 18th Century a woman could not own land in Louisiana, so this woman dresses as a man and shoots as a man and sword-fights as a man. Lestat comes in and is attracted to that strength because of his lost love for Gabrielle his mother, who is a very similarly androgynous figure."

Her only answer to her readers is that

this transvestite character is not Louis, but a new character, and it is the only way that the film can ever get made. "On the other hand the screenplay is exactly the same, the same philosophical questions, they are equals, they are lovers, it does not fall into heterosexual cliché."

"I think it could be done by a director like Ridley Scott [whose film *Blade Runner* is a vampire favorite in *The Queen of the Damned*]. And I think with the present screen treatment the way it is, with Louis as a woman, it could still be a powerfully profound film. I mean I got a great deal of mileage out of that female character and her strength and her reaction to the creation of Claudia, because this is a person who has renounced basically any sort of stereotypical female role and suddenly there is a child. So to me there is a whole new kind of kinky wonderful thing happening." Rice envisions an actress like Cher, Meryl Streep or Sigourney Weaver playing the part.

She has no idea if she will be hired to write the shooting script and is only too painfully aware that "in giving them the idea of making Louis a woman, I, in a sense, bought into heartbreak, because they could take that idea and they could wreck it." She is confident however that Phillips and Levy will not ruin it, that is if they manage to stay on the project. One of the "amazing victories" she was able to win in the film negotiations was that the first production must be a theatrical motion picture. It cannot be made into a TV series or a musical (and there have been many lucrative offers for this) before it comes out as a movie.

In the meantime, ("I almost have too many things cooking to fit into one career"), Rice will put out a new book in paperback in June. Titled *The Mummy*, it is another story about immortals. "It's more sweetly romantic than the vampire books because the immortals in it are not compelled to kill to survive. So it lacks that particular kind of darkness. It has other forms of darkness and, like the vampire books, it was inspired by the old black and white 1940s movies: in this case the Mummy movies, *The Mummy's Hand*, *The Mummy's Curse* etc."

Rice keeps in close contact with her readers. She indefatigably dedicates long passages to them at book signings and even keeps her phone listed so they can talk to her. "I may have to change the number eventually, because the calls are getting more and more frequent and sometimes they come late at night and they wake up the whole family, but so far it has been very good. I am really like one of the lucky types of artists in history because I am not alienated from my audience, they are right there and they talk to me." From the dialogue with her fans Rice has learned that her readers love her characters and the way she writes. "Getting that feedback, those are the two most luscious pleasures that I have, because I feel you can take anything from the critics if you know that your readers love your characters and they love your style and they absolutely understand what the books are about."

Finally one has to ask this woman who has revitalized a literary genre and peopled the world with the most fascinating Undead ever, does she believe in vampires? "I think the myths of the world contain vampires because we love the idea of them and they really are the most poignant metaphor for the outsider and the predator in all of us and for everything we feel that is going to sap our energy and is going to take us away. There are a thousand layers behind the vampire image but I don't believe there are vampires walking about. I don't believe there are lycanthropes, wolfmen, either."

New York City  
Gay Men's Chorus  
Gary Miller, Musical Director

NOËL  
NOËL!

Carnegie Hall  
December 21 & 22  
8:00 pm

Tickets: \$5 - patron: 25, 20,  
15, 1 & 8.  
Carnegie Charge: 212 247-8700  
Box office: 57th St. & 7th Ave.  
Group rates: 212 691-7500

Specializing in Individual Pizzas from our wood burning oven

Tiziano



Lunch  
12:00 to 3:00  
Dinner  
5:30 to  
Midnight

Happy H  
4:00 to 7  
Late Nig  
Supper

Trattoria

Available for Holiday Parties - Catering  
165 Eighth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10011 Tel. 212-989-2330

Sauté!

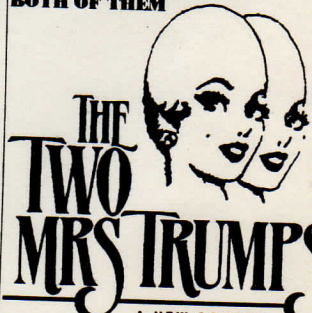
Serve yourself a career!  
NEW YORK  
RESTAURANT SCHOOL  
1-800-541-1691  
RESTAURANT MANAGEMENT  
CHEF TRAINING  
27 West 34th Street  
Financial aid available if you qualify

Support the  
businesses that  
support the gay  
community.  
Tell them you saw it

in  
the

NEW YORK  
NATIVE

HELD OVER  
THEIR HAIR WAS BIGGER THAN  
BOTH OF THEM



THE  
TWO  
MRS TRUMPS  
A NEW COMEDY  
Thurs, Fri & Sat December 1 - 17 8:30 pm  
Tickets \$8.00 • Reservations 212 691 2277  
Westbeth Theatre Center Cabaret  
151 Bank Street  
beer & wine served • no minimum