

## **A Reflection of the Author's Life in Anne Rice's Novel Interview with the Vampire**

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### **Abstract**

Interview With The Vampire is the first novel in Anne Rice's vampire chronicles series, which was published in 1976. Interview with the Vampire has been nominated for various awards since its initial release in 1976, including the Bram Stoker Awards and the British Fantasy Awards. Unfortunately, many people are unaware that Rice's firsthand experiences inspiring this novel. Previous research had managed to highlight the relationship between the author's life with her literature works but none of them were related to vampire stories. Even though people might find monsters' story is implausible, readers and viewers of fantasy, science fiction, and horror have the desire to explore the impossible (Athans, 2014). In addition, Wood (1999) strongly added that the details Rice has made about vampire has entirely changed the general vampire world. Rice's major changes are: vampires were made more reasonable, believable, sympathetic, modern, and suited to the urban setting. On top of that, Rice has put the vampire closer to the readers as the story was told in first-person narration. Considering all of these, the researchers were intrigued in analyzing further the portrayal of Rice's biography in her novel. This research used the descriptive qualitative method. While data in this research were taken from the novel Interview with the Vampire. This study found a resemblance of Anne Rice's adulthood stage of life in Louis's life. In addition, it is also found out that there are similarities between the characters in the novel with the real family member of Anne Rice and her childhood environment. Finally, the study was carried out by conducting a biographical study. The resemblances of characters with people of her life, Rice persuaded the readers to not only like and empathize with vampires, but also to trust them.

**Keywords:** Literature, biographical analysis, novel, vampire.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Interview with the Vampire is the first novel from the vampire chronicles series written by Anne Rice which was released in 1976. Interestingly, this novel was a huge success and changed Anne Rice's life forever. Interview with the Vampire is a novel about a young man named Louis who is turned into a vampire by a sadistic and cruel vampire named Lestat. In this story, Rice emphasized a different characteristic of a vampire who has sympathy towards his prey. Additionally, the vampire is also conflicted about his immortal life. Due to the contradictive plot compared to the common image of a vampire which was originally proposed by Bram Stoker, this novel gained its popularity. Porter from Toronto Star (2016) stated that the popularity of Interview with the Vampire arose because the theme in this novel is more crucial and complicated compared to other vampire stories. Also, the torture for the main vampire character, Louis, gives the book more dramatic essence in the story.

Since its first release to the public in 1976, the novel has been nominated for several awards such as Bram Stoker Awards and British Fantasy Awards. Aside from winning the most compelling one the author of the book, Rice also received special awards from Bram Stoker Awards for horror works by Horror Writer's Association professional membership life achievement and World Horror Grandmaster.

What is more, *Interview with the Vampire* was inspired by Rice's true story. Particularly, Rice was inspired by her experience when she lost her daughter due to leukemia. Jacques (2014) from independent.co.uk mentioned that Rice was a sad, broken, and despairing atheist when she wrote *Interview with the Vampire*. Right after the death of her daughter, she pitched herself and ended up writing the story about vampires.

Fard (2016) believed that literature can be defined as the work of writing that has lasted over years because those works deal with the ideas of timeless and universal interests with exceptional artistry and power. And one way to understand literature is by applying the literary criticism approach, one of which is biographical criticism. Ellis (2012) added that biographical criticism involves the relationship between the work and the biographical experiences of the writer. Biographical criticism assumes that there is a relationship between the writer's life and her work. This theory focuses on particular incidents, people, and historical occurrences in an author's life (Gillespie, 2010). Unfortunately, little research had been done to emphasize the relation between the author's personal life and his/her work.

Firstly, Abing (2018) analyzed the Footnote to Youth, a short story by Jose Garcia Villa. She used five literary theories at once namely biographical criticism, reader-response criticism, formalism, archetypal criticism, and feminist Criticism. From the biographical analysis, it was found out that Villa is expressing his longings for a father figure in his isolated life during his literary exile in the United States. Villa's story demonstrates how a father in one's life does not have to be genetically related, but rather be based on love relation.

Another study was conducted by Permatasari (2016) she analyzed the discrimination towards black women in Maya Angelou's poems. The results showed that three factors inspired the themes of her poetry, all of which were influenced by her personal experiences. To begin with, Angelou was born into a black family. When she was three years old, her parents divorced, and she was sexually abused at eight by her mother's lover.

Finally, Bopape (2006) analyzed the historical drama from Africa entitled Kgsane by using a historical-biographical approach embedded with an analysis of the dramatic text using six parameters (authenticity, intention, reception, social function, and narrative syntax) suggested by Fleischman. The play depicts the author's real life involvement in the plot. The author was also inspired to write the drama to demonstrate God's might to the outside world, he claimed. Makwala believes that the civilization was able to reach Bolobedu due to Kgaane's disciples. In addition, the study highlighted that the author's personal background also resulted negatively. Regrettably, the author seemed to have sacrificed inquisitiveness in favor of documenting history. The sentiments of Christians toward Malebelebe after the death of Kgaane would have been foremost in one's mind, given that the drama deals with the battle between Christianity and tradition.

All in all, previous research had managed to highlight the relationship between the author's life. However, none of the research above has discussed vampire stories. Even though people might find monsters' story is implausible, readers and viewers of fantasy, science fiction, and horror have the desire to explore the impossible (Athans, 2014). In addition, Wood (1999) strongly added that the details Rice has made about vampires has entirely changed the common vampire world. Rice's major changes are vampires were made more reasonable, believable, sympathetic, modern, and suited to the urban setting. On top of that, Rice has put the vampire closer to the readers as the story was told in first-person narration. Considering all of these things, the researchers were intrigued in analyzing further the portrayal of Rice's biography in her novel by answering the research question below:

1. To what extent does Rice's biography is reflected through the character of Louis, Lestat, and Claudia?
2. To what extent does Rice's biography is reflected in the setting of the novel?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

In general, biographical criticism studies the reason for the author to write his or her literary art and finds out whether any experience in their life affected them in creating that work. Kennedy and Gioia (1995) argued that biographical criticism starts with a very simple yet resulting central insight in which literature is written by actual people. Thus, understanding the author's life will give more impact on the readers. Therefore, it can be concluded that the focus of biographical criticism was the correlation between the story itself and the author's life to interpret his or her literary works. The main focus of the biographical criticism is to dig deeper information or facts of an author's life and times that relate with the information to the author's work (Gillespie, 2010).

In addition, Warren and Wellek (1962) argued that the oldest and the best method to analyze a literary work is by stressing the creativity of the author. In other words, one should be able to note how the writer's life sometimes be reflected in his or her work. In other words, a scholar studies the extrinsic elements – an approach to see anything outside the text itself, such as history, environment, economy, social and political (Wellek & Austin, 1977).

In addition, Jefferson (2007) also added that within literary biography, there are two approaches to the writer: either the author is considered as having lived an interesting life in and of itself, or the life is presented as justifying recall for the light it shines on the work. However, Jefferson noted that the expressive similarity that the biographical perspective new point of view in the work illuminates the author's purpose, whether interpreted in terms of a global perspective of the world or defined in terms of a narrower emotional or philosophical application.

## METHOD

In this research, the writers used the qualitative method. The method that is used in this research is the descriptive qualitative method, in which the writers tried to investigate the correlation between the authors' life Anne Rice and her novel *Interview with the Vampire*. The data in this research is taken from the novel *Interview with the Vampire*. Then, in analyzing the data, the writers used several biographical writings and articles about Anne Rice.

The procedure of the research started with the writers reading the novel *Interview with the Vampire*. Then, the writers read and study the biography book written by Michael Riley *Conversations with Anne Rice An Intimate Enlightening Portrait of Her Life and Work* (1996). Afterward, the writers collected samples to match the theory and the biographical background. Then, the writers analyzed the data accordingly.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Adulthood

In the beginning, *Interview with the Vampire* shows the readers the miserable life of Louis after the death of his younger brother. Everyone seemed to blame him for what happened. He tried to kill himself but had no courage to do so until a vampire made his wish come true. Louis was turned into a vampire at the age of twenty- four or twenty-five.

Interestingly, the writers found out that Louis's miserable life was inspired by the author's life. Louis's first stage of life was like Rice's experience when she had to deal with the fact that her mother died due to her alcohol addiction. According to Riley (1996) in his biography book *Interviews With Anne Rice*, Rice stated that the books she was written were about an awakening in her life which happened around fourteen or twenty-four.

“Up to a certain point, the books were so much about the awakening that it always happened at the age of either fourteen or twenty-four. Louis at twenty-four. Marcel in *Feast of All Saints* at fourteen, Tonio in *Cry to Heaven* at fourteen—my own age when my mother died...” (Riley, 1996, p. 24).

From the excerpt above, it is clearly stated that she experienced an awakening at the age of fourteen or twenty-four. Twenty-four is just the same age as Louis in her novel *Interview with the Vampire*.

Twenty-four is the age when Rice got married. It is also the same age or period when she had a rough time and lost her daughter due to an illness. She had even tried to commit suicide before she finally decided to move on.

The same thing also happened to the main character, Louis. The story starts when Louis was about twenty-four or twenty-five. It is said that his younger brother was dead, and everyone blamed him. Louis was so desperate. He had tried to kill himself before a vampire answered his prayer. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is a similarity between Anne Rice and the main protagonist character named Louis.

### Character References

The main characters in her first novel are inspired by Rice's family in which she referred herself as Louis, her husband Stan as Lestat and her daughter Michele was Claudia. Before Rice decided to write *Interview with the Vampire*, she wanted to create a story about her deceased daughter, Michele, but her husband disagreed. He argued that their daughter was too young to become the main character as a vampire. According to Lina (2016) in [dailymail.co.uk](http://dailymail.co.uk) Anne and Stan were at the bar and she wanted to make a story. However, they had no idea what they were talking about. Then, she decided to make a story about their daughter in which she also ended up creating characters who represent her family as a whole.

### Lestat

Riley (1996) noted that from the first day, Lestat was always written based on Stan, a person who would become a self-made artist, a self-made intellectual, a self-made poet. Although in *Interview with the Vampire* readers might not see these personalities, but in another sequel of *Vampire Chronicles* titled *The Vampire Lestat* readers can see how Lestat expressed himself more as a rock n roll musician and declared his life and love for music and art as he always wanted to be an artist.

"Then Lestat came, singing something soft under his breath, his walking stick making a rat-tat-tat on the rails of the spiral stairs. He came down the long hall, his face flushed from the kill, his lips pink, and he set his music on the piano.

"He pressed two chords with his hands. He had an immense reach and even in life could have been a fine pianist. But he played without feeling; he was always outside the music, drawing it out of the piano as if by magic, by the virtuosity of his vampire senses and control; the music did not come through him, was not drawn through him by himself (Rice, 1976, p. 79).

The excerpt above shows that the character of Lestat in *Interview with the Vampire* demonstrated a little bit of a self-made artist. He liked to play piano, so he taught Claudia to do what he liked. In addition, Stan was also known as a poet. His poetry and his writing inspired Anne so much in writing her novel too. In conclusion, there are similarities between Stan and Lestat: both were self-made artists and intelligent in their own ways. In her interview, Rice even stated that Stan was, in some ways, still Lestat (Riley, *Interviews With Anne Rice*, pp. 17-18). Thus, the interview strengthens the idea of a resemblance between the character of Lestat and Stan – Rice's husband in real life.

## Louis

In the interview, Rice also admitted that the character of Louis is pretty much representing her personality. Nevertheless, she admitted that the resemblance is only depicted at the half beginning of the novel. One of the similarities between Louis's personality and Rice's at the beginning of the novel is that they were both passive and in despair.

"Well, I lay there helpless in the face of my own cowardice and fatuousness again," he said. (Rice,1976,p.11)

The excerpt above demonstrates that Louis is described as a passive person. He just waits until it is time for him to die. In addition, Louis is also described as a character who lives in grief. Below is an example of how Louis is dwelling in his grief.

I lived like a man who wanted to die but who had no courage to do it himself. I walked black streets and alleys alone; I passed out in cabarets. I backed out of two duels more from apathy than cowardice and truly wished to be murdered. And then I was attacked. (Rice,1976,p.7)

All in all, from the excerpt above, it can be seen that Louis is passive and is in great despair. He also lives in grief. As explained in the biography, Anne admitted that Louis was certainly her when she wrote Interview with the Vampire. She knew everything about that kind of person, being passive and living in grief since she is experiencing the same suffering time. Both of them had lost the person they love the most and had to deal with a massive grief (Riley, 1996). Thus, it can be concluded that Louis represents Rice's personality in real life.

## Claudia

The last character that was created from a real-life family member is the character of Claudia. In the interview, Rice explained that Claudia was a character written based on her daughter who has passed away (Lina, 2016).

She was only five at- most, and very thin, and her face was stained with dirt and tears.  
 "...why do I feel such pity for her, for her gaunt face? Why do I wish to touch her tiny, soft arms..."  
 (Rice,1976,p.44)

From the excerpt above it can be seen that Claudia represents the description of Michele, Anne's daughter who passed away due to leukemia. Claudia was turned into a vampire when she was five years old the same age when Michele was diagnosed had leukemia and died before her sixth birthday in 1972.

Conroy (1988) in the [washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com) described that Anne had a prophetic dream of her daughter dying of some blood disease and she thought it was a such horrible dream. In the story, Rice wrote the same situation when she described the event of Lestat turning Claudia into a vampire.

The child lay pale on his shoulder, her cheeks still full like plums, though she was drained and near death  
 (Rice,1976, p.54)  
 I realized what he was doing, that he had cut his wrist and given it to her and she was drinking.

She tried desperately to reach his wrist with her teeth, but she couldn't; and then she looked at him with the most innocent astonishment (Rice, 1976, p.55-56)

The excerpt above depicts how Claudia was dying in the first place. After getting bitten by Louis, Claudia became seriously ill and she had to transform into a vampire so that she would not die in vain. This situation represents the dream that was experienced by Rice as explained in [washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com). Rice said that after having that dream, she began to write

Interview with the Vampire, a story of an eternal child with a story of passion, then later she would be one of the vampires (Conroy, 1988).

### Setting References

The setting of Interview with the Vampire was taken place in New Orleans, Paris, and Eastern Europe. New Orleans has inspired Anne so much in creating her stories. Cooper (2016) from Billboard.com had an interview with Anne Rice, and she asked her about how much the city of New Orleans affected Rice's writing. Anne said that since she grew up in New Orleans, the city and its history and the legends influenced her so much to the things that she had ever written.

There was no city in America like New Orleans. It was filled not only with the French and Spanish of all classes who had formed in part its peculiar aristocracy but later with immigrants of all kinds, the Irish and the German in particular. Then add to these, within years after my transformation, the Americans, who built the city upriver from the old French Quarter with magnificent Grecian houses which gleamed in the moonlight like temples (Rice, 1976, p.24).

The excerpt above shows how Louis expresses his admiration for New Orleans. He is complimenting the city as if there is no city in America like New Orleans which is filled with diverse people, magnificent houses. Similarly, Rice also had the same admiration towards New Orleans. Rice's admiration can be seen from her interview with Cooper from Billboard. In the interview, Rice described how magnificent the city of New Orleans affected her in creating her works, as cited in the excerpt below:

"For me, New Orleans is unique, and surely one of the most beautiful cities in the world. I grew up loving its antebellum Greek Revival architecture, the Spanish architecture of the French Quarter, the majesty of the Mississippi River flowing past the city's docks, the great old oak trees that line St. Charles Avenue" (Cooper, 2016).

The excerpt above illustrates the similarity between how Anne Rice admired New Orleans and how Louis described New Orleans in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Both are fascinated with the city of New Orleans specifically the French Quarter, the views are beautiful and the architectures are unique.

This similarity happens because New Orleans was the place where Rice grew up. She admired the Greek Revival architecture and the Spanish architecture of the French Quarter which are also stated in that story where Louis described the situation in New Orleans during the 19<sup>th</sup> century (The New York Times, n.d.). She chose New Orleans as the setting because the word "death" is considered as something common there, and since vampires' link to death she took that place as her setting reference. Rice also added that she admired the old classic architecture of New Orleans.

The author's work is always contextualized in time and has its own temporal variations. This is why biography analysis is the most appropriate format for critical commentary (Jefferson, 2007). From the findings above, it can be seen how Rice's work is time-contextualized and has its own temporal fluctuations. The character of Louis emerged when she was dealing with great pain after she lost her daughter, Michele. If Rice had written the novel years before her daughter passed away, the novel might have different vibes. Here lies the reason why readers of Interview with Vampire find themselves sympathizing with the monsters, including Louis. The readers frequently wonder whether something else is going on (Wood, 1999). When the readers read Louis' story, they were intrigued since Louis is the representation Rice herself. By revealing her life in the novel, Rice also succeeds in modernizing the nature of the vampire – they are no longer simple or single-minded personification of evil (p. 59). In addition, Rice personal experience in crafting the character of Louis – in a way that he contrasts sharply with a Dracula. Dracula is a predator whose

understanding of nature is limited to physical combat, whereas Louis considers philosophy or metaphysics in addition to nature's beauty. It can be emphasized that the novel showed the presence of evidence of human motivation (Wood, 1999, p. 64).

Finally, it should be noted that the most significant changes that Rice's has made is changing the old characteristic elements including the setting. Instead of locations emphasizing death and decay, she has set her stories in vital urban landscapes (Wood, 1999, p. 61). Thus, Rice's decision to apply her admiration for New Orleans and her comfortable modern-day settings highlights the real horror's appeal, just as her use of the real, nearby cities promotes its familiarity.

It can be concluded that aligned with the theory from Jefferson (2007), biographical study offers fresh point of view in the work exposes the author's aim. An author's aim can be a personal point of view whether understood in terms of a global viewpoint of the world or a smaller emotional or philosophical application. It can be observed from this that, rather than preventing the reader from empathizing with the vampire, Rice convinces that readers not only like and identify the vampires, but also to trust vampires (Wood, 1999).

## CONCLUSION

From the discussion above, it can be concluded that there are similarities between Rice's life and the Interview with the Vampire. First, there is a resemblance of Anne Rice's adulthood stage of life in Louis's life. Secondly, there are similarities between the characters in the novel with the real family member of Anne Rice. Both Stand and Lestat were intelligent people and lived their life as self-made artists. Next, the character of Louis represents Rice's personality. Rice admitted that Louis was much more like her for he was passive and suffered in grief. Then, the character of Claudia represents Michele. Michele died when she was five years old that age was when Claudia turned into a vampire by Lestat. Thirdly, there is a similarity between the setting in the novel and the place where Anne Rice grew up, which is New Orleans. The setting in the story is based on the author's growing-up environment. Lastly, the author's aim can be studied by conducting a biographical study. A personal point of view, in terms of a global picture of the world or a smaller emotional or philosophical application, it might be the goal of an author to share her own life experiences. It can be concluded that by writing as many resemblances as possible with her life, Rice persuades the reader to not only like and empathize with vampires, but also to trust them.

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