"Lestat, C'est Moi": Anne Rice's Revelation of Self Through The Vampire Chronicles

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Abstract
In lieu of an abstract, below is the article's first paragraph.

To most, the word "vampire" conjures visions of Halloween, of old black and white horror movies, of Bela Lugosi whispering "I vant to suck your blood." Yet for Anne Rice, this view of the vampire is much too limiting; true, her series of five Vampire Chronicles does focus mainly around the dark hero, Lestat, who is indeed, a blood-sucking "monster." However, The Vampire Chronicles are far more than a collection of murderous escapades; they are, symbolically, a "chronicle" of the author's spiritual journey - from her concern with commenting on social dynamics in the first installment, Interview with the Vampire, to her own personal confrontation with the religious experience and redemption in the last, Memnoch the Devil.
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by

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To most, the word “vampire” conjures visions of Halloween, of old black and white horror movies, of Bela Lugosi whispering “I want to suck your blood.” Yet for Anne Rice, this view of the vampire is much too limiting; true, her series of five Vampire Chronicles does focus mainly around the dark hero, Lestat, who is indeed, a blood-sucking “monster.” However, The Vampire Chronicles are far more than a collection of murderous escapades; they are, symbolically, a “chronicle” of the author’s spiritual journey - from her concern with commenting on social dynamics in the first installment, Interview with the Vampire, to her own personal confrontation with the religious experience and redemption in the last, Memnoch the Devil.

Traditionally, a vampire is seen as a “dead person who has been diabolically reanimated and leaves the grave at night to disturb the living,” and this “disturbing” is usually malignant: it often includes strangulation, sucking blood, and leaving disease (Merriam Webster’s Encyclopedia of Literature 1155). The vampire is more often a man than a woman, can change his form (often to a wolf or bat), and is most often killed by having a stake driven through his heart (Merriam Webster 1155). Furthermore, the traditional vampire “casts neither shadow nor reflection” (McBride 119), wears black, is repelled by garlic and crucifixes, can be destroyed by the sun, and sleeps in a coffin (The Vampire Companion 484). These myths date back to ancient mythology of various cultures worldwide: “the bloodthirsty goddess Kali; the Egyptian deity Osiris; and Yama, the Tibetan Lord of Death,” all of whom are associated with blood sacrifice (Companion 485). Essentially, the traditional vampire is a creature who inspires horror through his actions and appearance.

Rice’s vampires, however, break most of these traditional rules. Although they do drink blood to survive, they cannot change forms, and they are not necessarily destroyed by the sun. Older and more powerful vampires, such as Lestat, are able to survive exposure (The Tale of the Body Thief 48). Rice’s immortals also break tradition in that they “enjoy looking at themselves in mirrors, do not flinch before crucifixes and ignore garlic” (Ferraro 67). Female vampires are just as important as males; in fact, the oldest and most powerful vampires are female. Rice’s vampires are often selected for their physical attractiveness, which is magnified by the “Dark Gift,” the gift of immortality that is also known by disenchanted ancients as the “Dark Trick” (The Vampire Lestat 301). Thus, her vampires are usually physically exquisite, and the horror they bring must therefore be related not merely to their murderous sustenance, but also to the fear aroused in a reader when s/he understands the attractiveness of this evil.
However, these exquisitely evil creatures are not themselves the true focus of the Chronicles - humans are. The supernatural merely provides the frame in which Rice can explore human life. She states:

That’s the whole purpose, I think, of what people call fantasy writing. You can put the most horrible things into a frame, and you can go into that frame safely and talk about...grief or loss or survival and then come back safely. That, to me, is the reason for all the artifice - the obvious high style of my books and their use of the supernatural. I would find it much harder to write a realistic novel about my life. I would find it too raw. I just wouldn’t be able to get the doors open. I wouldn’t be able to go deep enough. (Gilmore 97)

Rice is a writer immensely interested in addressing universal questions, and she realized that this would be extremely difficult: “when [she] attempted realism...[her] writing sounded fantastic,” but the vampire could “talk about life and death, and love and loss, and sorrow and misery, and viciousness and grief, and everything a novelist wants to talk about in a worthwhile book” (Riley 13).

Yet why use vampires? Why not simply transfer these themes to a new setting? First of all, the supernatural was an almost “familiar” area for Rice, having been raised by a mother deeply interested in the occult; the supernatural was such an integral part of her childhood that it created an “intensity” which made it “the most powerful means she had for writing about real life” (Current Biography Yearbook 464). Furthermore, Rice sees the vampire as “the perfect metaphor...for the outsider who is in the midst of everything, yet completely cut off” (Biography 464); he is the “outsider, the predator, anyone who feels freakish or monstrous or out of step but appears normal” (Perry 26).

Above all, the vampire story is her perfect “frame” because “vampires are perceived as extraordinarily human” (Riley 13) - “Trapped in immortality, they suffer human regret. They are lonely, prisoners of circumstance, compulsive sinners, full of self-loathing and doubt. They are, in short, Everyman Eternal,” which allows Rice to create a sense of horror “from the realization of the monster within the self” - including Rice herself (Ferraro 67).

This “monster” first appeared in a short story, “Interview with the Vampire,” which later became a novel of the same name (January 1974). The novel is deeply autobiographical as Rice wrote through her grief over the death of her five year-old daughter, Michele, from leukemia in 1972 (Ferraro 74). Not surprisingly, then, Interview with the Vampire is described as “a haunting meditation on loss, mortality and the uncertain purposes of faith” (Gilmore 94). Rice herself describes it as “a tragic, lyric book about nothing being possible” (Riley 23). The story is told through the perspective of Louis de Pointe du Lac, a twenty-five year-old New Orleans planter who becomes a vampire in 1791. Rice found immediately that she identified intensely with this character, who “is deeply pained by and feels responsible for the death of his brother” (Biography 465) - “I have killed him,” thinks Louis, when his brother falls to his death after an argument over money and religion (Interview 10). Rice had been questioning her own
Catholic upbringing, and with the death of her daughter, “the intense person of faith that she once had been...[was] closed, perhaps forever, into Michele’s coffin” (Prism of the Night 144). The novel thus evidences her belief at the time that “There is no God, no ultimate meaning to life’s anguish” (Gilmore 94). And it is suffering - very human suffering - that Louis experiences throughout the novel. Through him, the “monster” no longer human, Rice deals with the complexity of human emotions and relationships.

In his despair, Louis becomes a wonderful target for a vampire - he cares nothing for his own life, acts recklessly, and, of course, is physically attractive. Lestat, a powerfully charismatic vampire with a keen taste for the exquisite, stalks Louis and imbues him with the “Dark Gift.” Louis, while he is amazed by his newfound vampire powers of keener perception, vastly increased speed and strength, and even telepathy, resents Lestat for imposing on him an immortal existence that must be supported by constant murder. He becomes guilt-ridden by the “great perilous gulf” of evil into which he has fallen (Interview 235), and while continuously drawn to his creator and companion, he is also repulsed by Lestat’s apparent disregard for the lives he takes. Thus, these two immortals experience the very same situation as countless mortals - our “creators,” or those viewed as more powerful, become both objects of adoration and of detestation. We are at the same time addicted to their attention and repulsed by our need for them.

Furthermore, Rice illustrates through her immortals the very human themes of dependency and the fear of abandonment. In his abhorrence of Lestat’s cavalier attitude toward human life (and his own dependence on the “evil” Lestat), Louis stumbles upon a young child, Claudia (who Rice later admitted is probably an unconscious representation of Michele). He drinks from her, and Lestat later makes her a vampire. The three live for several decades as a “family,” until Claudia, too, develops an intense resentment toward Lestat for robbing her of mortal life. Claudia attacks and “kills” Lestat, destroying the “family” and, though she and Louis travel rather contentedly for some time, they have lost the connection to their creator and feel abandoned.

Louis experiences this feeling of abandonment a second time when Claudia is destroyed in the sun by European vampires who have heard of her crime against Lestat. Louis, who was powerless to prevent her execution, is lost: “[she was] dead, simply dead. And I was losing consciousness” (Interview 304). Louis is thus the perpetual victim as a result of his dependency: though he finally rejects Lestat’s power over him, he replaces one dominant figure with another - Claudia. Now that she, too, has been removed as a source of strength, he feels he cannot go on. Not only is this an innately human reaction, but it is also an autobiographical one. Rice, after the death of Michele, filled the void with alcohol (Prism 132). It was not until she began writing that her dependence could be focused on a positive activity. Rice, then, uses both her own life’s events and those of her vampires to show that human relationships, even loving ones, involve resentment, dependency, and fear of abandonment, and that the more intensely connected we are to another, the more potential there is for conflict. This theme can also be transferred from human-human relationships to human-God relationships in that we feel some loyalty to the being who has created us, yet we resent the suffering that this creation causes. Therefore, as early as this first novel, Rice was beginning a long meditation on the nature of God and our relationship to him, and it would be this theme that builds with each successive novel.
Although she was probably unaware of this gradual progression until much later in the Chronicles, Rice did realize that, after Interview, she was no longer Louis. From this point on, the character most closely identified with the author is that of Lestat de Lioncourt, Louis' creator. He is certainly a more charismatic figure: he is “amoral, a solitary supervampire who voyages through time and space feasting on flesh” (Conant 72), the “sassy bad boy of the bloodsucking world, a heroic outcast even among the undead” (Ferraro 28). However, Lestat represents not who Rice was a the time of writing, as Louis had, but who she wished to be, and that was a masculine figure: “Lestat quickly became the 'man' in Anne” (Prism 245). Rice herself articulated this desire for a male identity when she described herself as “a gay man writing in a woman’s body” (Perry 28). Yet, in Lestat, Rice has not simply created a “man for a day” fantasy; she has instead superimposed her own femininity onto a strong male figure. The result is Lestat, the “brat prince,” hero of the four remaining Chronicles (The Queen of the Damned 14).

Thus, The Vampire Lestat became the context in which Rice developed this “male side” of her personality, as well as that in which she left behind (at least temporarily) her despairing attitudes. She instead progressed from the hopelessness of Interview to optimism: “Lestat was my male hero who could do what I couldn’t. I wanted to get out of the mind-set of the passive grieving person” (Companion 249). Lestat does just that, he does not wait, as Louis does, for someone on whom to depend. He is the supporter, the questioner, and the rule-breaker. Rice describes him as “the person who refuses to be bad at being bad” (Riley 14) and says:

‘What fascinates me...is the fact that he knows right from wrong and he still does what he has to do. He’s determined to be good at being bad.’ Weary of novels about young people struggling to realize themselves and become something, Anne wanted to write about a person who already was something, with more humor, less darkness. She wanted to create ‘someone who had never had a teacher and never really bemoaned the lack of one,’ determined to express the freedom she felt within herself through a character of excessive emotion and audacity. (Prism 246)

Lestat shows this “audacity” first by writing an “autobiography” which reveals much of the secret history of the vampire race.

In this work, he recounts his own birth into the vampiric world - an initiation in which he was given no choice. After his unflattering description by Louis, he uses this novel to create sympathy by showing his strength. As a mortal, he was sought out by Magnus for both his physical appeal and his courageousness; he once killed an entire pack of wolves even after they had slain his hunting dogs, and for this, Magnus named him “Wolfkiller” (The Vampire Lestat 79). He displays this strength later, when Magnus incinerates himself only moments after performing the “Dark Trick.” Lestat is left with no teacher, no one to show him the new vampire life; he is left to discover everything on his own. Thus, although he has no one to teach him, he also has no one to restrict him, and he becomes fully aware and fully comfortable with his new self.
Even more "audaciously," he pursues a career as a rock star, revealing before the world his evil identity. Although Lestat fully understands that mortals cannot possibly accept this fact, he "wants to use his evil image to do good" (Companion 251). He is not the guiltless monster portrayed by Louis in Interview:

Because, in [Rice's] conception, Lestat, like Louis, knew right from wrong, he also experienced remorse and self-doubt; but at the same time he understood the futility of trying to discover an ethical code that would legitimate his need to kill. Therefore, willfully and gleefully, he remained true to his murderous nature. (Biography 467)

He is able to do so through his metaphor of the "Savage Garden," another name for Nature. He feels that truth is found only in nature's beauty, but that "beauty was savage. It was as dangerous and lawless as the earth had been eons before man had one single coherent thought in is head or wrote codes of conduct on tablets of clay. Beauty was a Savage Garden" (Lestat 131). If this is true, he has no reason to feel guilt; he is only a part of the Savage Garden, which is uncontrollable.

However, while Lestat learns to accept his nature and to live free from guilt, he can only do so if he feels that he is somehow doing good through that evil nature. By singing about vampires and making their evil "existence" so public, he hopes to help humans rid the world of barbarous and alienating delineations between good and evil - if they see real evil, he reasons, maybe they can become more naturally good without relying on the hypocrisies of religion (once again, this theme foreshadows the last Chronicles' focus on spirituality and redemption). Nevertheless, the other immortals cannot accept this plan, and they plead with him to stop; some go so far as to suggest he may put himself in danger if he continues. However, he persists: "'I want to affect things, to make something happen!'" he screams at Marius, a much older vampire (Lestat 523). He also explains to Louis: "'I mean for all that we have been to change! What are we but leeches now - loathsome, secretive, without justification. The old romance is gone. So let us take on a new meaning" (Lestat 531). Essentially, Rice uses this second Chronicle to explore self-acceptance and to illustrate our need to create meaning even when we are aware of the price of self-deception; just as Lestat accepts his murderous existence, he also feels he must justify it through creation of some higher good.

However, in the next installment of the Chronicles, The Queen of the Damned, "Lestat sees his own idea taken to an extreme" (Prism 301). In this book, actually a "sequel" to the previous in that it continues the same story, we meet Akasha, the original vampire. Thousands of years after her transformation, she awakens from a dreamlike state with a plan to eliminate violence in the world through annihilation of all but a few men on the planet.

While she has lain dormant, she has been telepathically aware of her surroundings and of the societies of the world. She wishes to free women from all forms of oppression: poverty, injustice, war, and crime. However, she believes that in order to do this, she must also create a female-dominated society. When she hears Lestat's music, she "awakens" and decides that it is time to set this plan for a new Eden in motion; after all,
she will now have a worthy partner, Lestat, who will be both "her witness and her tool" (Prism 301). Lestat, however, cannot agree with her plan: "She was absolutely right and absolutely wrong" (Queen 367). He recognizes in her vision a paradox: she seeks to create a world of nonviolence and justice, but she tries to achieve this vision through a worldwide slaughter, and he cannot stand the "chaos, the total loss of all moral equilibrium" (Queen 364).

However, Akasha cannot be persuaded that humans should be left to struggle on their own with the concepts of good and evil. She has taken the search for meaning to an even higher level than Lestat, for she believes in "no objective standard of truth," whereas Lestat has the Savage Garden as his moral construct (Prism 303). Akasha, however, is a being driven by an intense need for meaning, and in the absence of an agreeable "standard of truth," she creates her own. Thus, her nihilism, which "devalu[es] all values to the point of meaninglessness," allows her to impose her own code (Prism 303); after all, she is perhaps the most powerful being on earth, so surely she holds absolute power, she reasons. She believes that the slaughter of all males is justifiable ""In the name of my morality!...I am the reason, the justification, the right by which it is done!...I am the Queen of Heaven...I am anything that I say I am"" (Queen 299). Given her belief in her omnipotence, it is not surprising that this statement sounds remarkably like the Old Testament God, who said "I am who I am."

Even the "brat prince" Lestat is horrified at the ease with which she rationalizes her plan using paradoxical logic which "cannot be lived...She declares the world to be devoid of meaning and uses that declaration to be her meaning. Like other paradoxes, it threatens to cancel itself" (Prism 308). Eventually, it does cancel itself when Akasha is unable to gain the support of the other vampires. Though they sustain their existence by killing mortals, they refuse to be a part of such a mass slaughter, and their doubt causes even the determined Akasha to question her plan in the moments before her murder.

For Rice, Akasha represents several different ideas, from some feminist beliefs to organized religion. However, disjointed as these ideas may be, they are all parallel in that they are impossible - either they are good ideas executed badly, or they are, to begin with, bad ideas: "'The real evil in the world,' said Anne, 'is a complex and seductive thing that sounds brilliant.' Anne felt that Akasha was right in what she said - that most violence is caused by men - but wrong in viewing wanton destruction as an answer" (Prism 301). Here, Rice is commenting on the beliefs of radical feminism, which tend to call for revolution and an inverted order - in the end, the remaining society would be just as oppressive as the present one, but men would be the victims of the oppression. Therefore, it is not a viable solution to our problems.

Akasha may also be seen as a comment on history:

Although Anne thought Akasha's violence paralleled the AIDS epidemic in its focus on victimizing predominantly males, Akasha is more potently the image of Hitler in her vision of the ultimate paradise at the expense of millions of lives. She seeks absolute power and absolute obedience, and in return she will provide answers to all the questions that plague humans - her answers. (Prism 301)
Also like Hitler, Akasha is able to draw in support even from the dissenter, Lestat. Although he cannot justify her plan, he recognizes her power and falls victim to her charm, which causes him to take part in a holocaust in which he does not believe.

Rice also uses the "frame" of Queen to discuss more overtly religious themes. The issue is extremely close to the author, as even before Michele’s death, she had left the Catholic church. After her mother, Katherine, who “combined Southern-belle charm with strict Catholicism,” died (Ferraro 67), Rice says:

My faith just went...It struck me as really evil - the idea that you could go to hell for French-kissing someone. I just didn’t believe it was the one true Church established by Christ to give grace. I didn’t believe one had to be Catholic in order to go to heaven. I didn’t believe heaven existed, either. (Ferraro 67)

She had difficulty accepting that her mother, an alcoholic, was a "sinner" according to the church’s beliefs. The result was disenchantment with the entire idea of organized religion, and this change in her beliefs is the foundation for the disillusionment that leads Akasha to create a new code: “Taught to believe in a great and wondrous religious system that failed to deliver when she most needed it, she fell away from it into a dark skepticism that did not satisfy her as much as her childhood beliefs” (Prism 305). For Rice, “Akasha represented the destructive power of religion on a massive scale. Anne believed that humanity should keep moving toward enlightenment free of religious tyranny” (Prism 307).

Realizing that such enlightenment is prevented by barbarous, intolerant religious constructs, Rice felt betrayal, a theme which carried over into her characters. For example, Akasha feels betrayed by her progeny when they refuse to support her plan, even though she is responsible for their very lives. Lestat, too, feels betrayed by his “queen,” when he realizes that she has no intentions of making him an equal. He is, instead, merely a pawn in her game; she uses him to represent everything evil about men - the fact that his strength is used for violent destruction, specifically. The Queen of the Damned, then, is a far-reaching novel dealing not only with the human theme of betrayal, but also with our need to create meaning and our struggle with organized religion.

Since Queen also recounts the entire history of the vampire race (formed when a spirit, Amel, forced himself into Akasha’s human body, creating a being neither wholly spiritual nor physical), it is this dichotomy which Rice explores in her next novel, The Tale of the Body Thief. Just as Amel “stole” Akasha’s body (though her own spirit coexists in it simultaneously), a man named Raglan James “steals” Lestat’s body by offering Lestat a chance to be mortal again for several days; however, once James receives Lestat’s preternatural abilities, he disappears with the body. Thus, the book’s action revolves around Lestat’s quest to retrieve his body from James, who describes himself as “a body thief of the first rank” (Body Thief 120).

When confronted with the possibility of switching forms with James through astral projection (freeing the soul or mind from the body), Lestat is immediately intrigued. He wishes to see daylight again; after all, he has been deprived of the sun for over two
hundred years! Once the switch is made, he believes it worthwhile: “Like flowers to the light, these humans opened themselves, accelerating their pace, and their speech. And when I felt the heat of the sun itself upon my face and hands, I, too, opened as if I were a flower” (Body Thief 197). Therefore, Lestat’s spirit is awakened by the optimism he feels in the daylight; however, even this wonderful, long-forgotten experience is not enough to make him relinquish his vampire self. He misses his old body intensely, for in it, he felt complete comfort and freedom. This new, mortal body has none of his preternatural abilities, and Lestat says: “I felt I would suffocate - I had to escape this...I slapped my hand to my chest, appalled at its thickness, and heard the heavy wet sloshing of the blood through my heart” (Body Thief 165).

Through Lestat’s discomfort in this new body, Rice raises the question of which self - physical or spiritual - is most important. Lestat’s spirit is drawn to the light, yet he prefers the body which can only exist in darkness; the dichotomy remains true to tradition. However, this novel is also about self-discovery and self-honesty (Prism 355), as was The Vampire Lestat. Yet this later novel does not simply reiterate Lestat’s recognition of his evil; instead, it finishes the theme raised in the earlier novel. While before, Lestat said he accepted his evilness, we cannot be sure of his honesty to us or to himself. However, Body Thief forces Lestat to decide, to take action. He dreams of Claudia and realizes that, were he to “do it over again,” he would still make her a vampire. By the end of the novel, he has also created, through force, a vampire of his mortal friend, David Talbot, who had continuously rejected the Dark Gift. Thus, Lestat has truly accepted himself as evil-doer as evidenced by the fact that he is willing to commit crimes unconscionable to him before.

Rice uses this novel, and Lestat as her alter ego, to explore her own beliefs about the body and soul. She has never agreed with the traditional religious view of the spirit as good (light) and the body as sinful (darkness), as proven by the fact that, under the pseudonym A.N. Roquelaure, she has written several works of erotica, of which she is quite proud (Prism 315). Furthermore, her thoughts are echoed in Lestat’s:

No, give me back my preternatural vision...Give me back the dark beauty of the world by night. Give me back my unnatural strength and endurance, and I shall cheerfully sacrifice this spectacle forever. The Vampire Lestat - c’est moi. (Body Thief 284)

In Lestat’s unwillingness to give up his vampiric self, he finally reaches total self-acceptance, and by reaching it, possibly aids Rice in reaching her own.

However, not all vampires would share Lestat’s viewpoint. Louis, for example, believes that Lestat has been given a chance for redemption. He feels that, in losing their mortal selves, vampires also lose their souls and are thus doomed. Lestat, then, would have he chance to regain a mortal self and, therefore, redemption. Louis sees the situation, as does David Talbot, as closely parallel to Goethe’s Faust: the vampire has “sold his soul” for immortality, so the only way to reclaim the soul is to relinquish the immortality as well.
However, neither David nor Lestat is truly Faust, who sold his soul to Mephistopheles, but was redeemed through his search for truth. David is not Faust because “he acquires immortality...without selling his soul -when Lestat makes him a vampire against his will” (Companion 139). Although secretly, David did desire immortality, he would never have made the choice to receive it, but he eventually becomes immortal without having to give up his soul by asking for it. Lestat is not Faust, either, because “given the choice, he preferred a life of evil in which redemption is not possible. In fact, he is Mephistopheles, for he claimed David’s soul” (Companion 139). Once again, this reinforces the idea that Lestat has accepted his evil self; he is given an opportunity to change, but he instead chooses the life he has come to love, not because he feels it is right, but because it is who he has become.

However, Rice had not yet exhausted the question of redemption. Still struggling with religion as an institution, she seems unsatisfied with her earlier belief that “There was no God. What was terribly important was to live in spite of that fact” (Gilmore 94). Thus her latest, and possibly final Chronicle, Memnoch the Devil, deals with her search, through Lestat, for some kind of answer - a definitive sign that God does or doesn’t exist and if he does, the type of God he is. She says that “There were two things working [as she wrote the novel]: There was my desire to talk about religion itself, the history of religion, what religion teaches us, and my own mystification in the face of it all” (Riley 280). Originally, the book that was to take on this task was to involve a mortal man; it was not intended to be part of The Vampire Chronicles. Rice states that she “tried to do this book...as A Dark and Secret Grace, but [she] had some idea of doing it without Lestat and it didn’t work. With him, everything fell into place” (Prism 378).

Her hero decided, Rice set out to write about... her own growing sense that God existed and that to insist otherwise was just arrogant...she had gotten more used to the idea of God and more interested in exploring her feelings about this elusive entity. Yet, if God existed, he seemed unbelievably paradoxical or cruel or indifferent... (Prism 378)

The result is a novel with a much less definitive story, lines are blurred between good and evil, even between the roles of God and the Devil. Here, there is no dichotomy; we are never sure that God and the Devil are opposites, and we never know their true motives or natures. The entire novel reflects Rice’s own complex and conflicting ideas on the subject, and the result is a confusing story with an even more uncertain ending, all of which serves to solve little, if anything, about the questions raised. However, therein lies the purpose, and the success in achieving that purpose, of the novel; in her confused story and uncertain ending, Rice very accurately portrays the effect that religion may have on those who actually think about their beliefs instead of accepting them blindly from others.

Lestat’s (and therefore Rice’s) confrontation with God and the Devil (named Memnoch) begins when he feels as though he is being constantly watched. A fragment of poetry, “a sleepless mind in his heart and an insatiable personality,” keeps resurfacing in his mind, but he has no idea about its origin (Memnoch 24). He later learns, from Memnoch himself, that the lines come from a Sibyline oracle, and he feels that they are
the most accurate written of him; he is insatiable in his discontent with God’s plans and wants Lestat to help him against the suffering that he says God’s indifference has created.

To convince Lestat to help, he shows him the creation of the world and talks of his belief in the divinity of humans. God, he says, disagrees and says that humans are a part of nature; since suffering is also a part of nature, humans must be subject to it. Memnoch, however, convinces him to allow worthy souls into Heaven; God agrees, and this is why Hell is created - as a place for educating souls to be worthy of paradise. Memnoch, however, feels that Christianity itself keeps humans from heaven because it promotes intolerance and violence, so he wants Lestat to help him destroy it. Lestat is understandably overwhelmed, especially when he observes Christ dragging his cross to the crucifixion and witnesses the creation of Veronica’s veil. He cannot make a decision to aid either God or Memnoch, so he flees Hell, losing an eye in the process.

This confusion Lestat feels represents the human difficulty with faith. Lestat has never been so plagued by a decision; he does what he wants, with no exceptions. However, he now finds himself in a troubling situation: he has no grasp on the truth. Is Memnoch’s story true? If so, the Devil has been completely misrepresented, and God is the true cause of suffering. If not, why does it make so much sense? The difference between this situation and others for Lestat is that he has finally met powers greater than himself, and he must rely on one of them for the truth in order to decide. However, he is now so far removed from earthly existence that nothing seems real. Thus, he feels he has no choice but escape.

When Lestat runs, however, he takes with him the original Veronica’s veil, and he gives it to his mortal friend, Dora, who is an evangelist. She uses the veil to create a religious frenzy so powerful that several vampires sacrifice themselves publicly to reaffirm the miracle. Lestat then receives a note which further exacerbates his confusion: “To My Prince, My Thanks to you for a job perfectly done. with Love, Memnoch the Devil” (Memnoch 292). He is now more unsure than ever: was everything that Memnoch had shown him a lie? Is the Devil only interested in perpetuating the violence of the established church? Lestat desperately wants to believe that he has not helped Memnoch, but he can no longer be sure and is left convinced of nothing except that “I am the Vampire Lestat This is what I saw. This is what I heard. This is what I know! This is all I know” (Memnoch 353).

Likewise, Rice has answered few of her own questions and has assured herself of nothing, save that “Now I think it’s terribly important that there might be [a God]. And it’s not detached from life” (Gilmore 94). In this confusion lies also the horror of the novel; whereas the other Chronicles have dealt with monsters and murder, this one deals with the fact that “You just can’t have a God that cares that little. You can’t. Either he doesn’t know, or he’s stupid, or he’s a bad person. And if it is all true, then it certainly is a horror novel” (Gilmore 94). Therefore, Rice’s last Chronicle is her most spiritual and personal; it is a reflection of her own religious confrontation as well as her attempt to derive meaning from institutionalized religion.

Thus ends the last installment of The Vampire Chronicles - at least for the moment. However, should there be another novel in the series, it will not likely involve Lestat: Rice has said that “’Lestat walked off on me...it was just like the wind’” (Riley 289). Rice admits that he “was a voice, a way of looking at the world...the dream figure
of a strong male me, a doer rather than a watcher, an actor rather than a victim” (Riley 292). However, he is now gone - perhaps because Rice has explored herself deeply enough, perhaps because he has no more stories to tell. He declares this to us at the end of Memnoch: “I am the Vampire Lestat. Let me pass now from fiction into legend,” to which Rice adds in her postscript, “Adieu, mon amour” (353).

Though he began as a secondary character in Interview with the Vampire, written at a time when Rice identified with the grief-stricken and regretful Louis, Lestat allowed her to explore ideas which would have been difficult without the frame of the vampire story. She describes her work as 

...a refusal to be doomed. [The Chronicles are] about assuming the guilt for killing, assuming the guilt for having all kinds of advantages that human beings don’t have, and bearing that guilt, and refusing to behave as if one is doomed. Lestat insists on moving through life like a good man...I see it as related to all of us...As we sit here, people are starving, they are dying, they are suffering injustices...[Yet] we choose to live our lives in spite of the injustices we really don’t feel we can rectify. (Riley 161)

And for Rice, her vampires are her way to seek answers to problems such as this. She uses their unique perspective to build from one novel to the next: she begins with human interaction, then moves to self-acceptance, to our need to create meaning, to the body/spirit dichotomy, and finally to redemption and the nature of God. Her novels allow her to view the world through the eyes of those excluded from it, and her characters give her the sense of having “lived many lives” (Riley 24). Specifically, she has lived her “male” life through Lestat, who has also helped her with her own self-discovery. With his exit after Memnoch, Rice will have to find another “life” to live, and we, her readers, along with her. We will miss him, and we, too, wish him “adieu”...and then await her next “life.”
Works Cited

Conant, Jennet. "'Lestat, C'est Moi.'" Esquire 121 (March 1994): 70-76.


