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# Faith Lost and Regained: The Evolution of Anne Rice's Critique of Christianity in *The Vampire Chronicles*

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# Résumé

Ce mémoire réunit trois romans de la série *Les Chroniques de vampires* de la populaire écrivaine américaine Anne Rice (*The Vampire Lestat*, *Memnoch the Devil* et *Blood Canticle*) afin d'étudier l'évolution de sa critique de la religion à travers l'écriture. Une analyse précise et complète de Lestat de Lioncourt, le personnage principal de la série, est faite afin de mieux comprendre l'impact de la transformation spirituelle du protagoniste sur l'ensemble de l'oeuvre de Rice. Dans *The Vampire Lestat*, le rejet de toute forme de croyances religieuses de la part de Lestat ainsi que la déconstruction et l'érotisation de rituels religieux traditionnels reflètent l'influence de l'athéisme. *Memnoch the Devil* représente la transition entre le refus de croire de Lestat et son retour subséquent à la religion catholique. Finalement, *Blood Canticle* symbolise le retour vers la foi du protagoniste et de l'auteur, en plus de marquer la fin des *Chroniques de vampires* de Rice. L'analyse s'inspire d'éléments biographiques afin de démontrer l'importance de la religion dans les récits de Rice, sans toutefois considérer ses romans comme des autobiographies.

**Mots-clés** : XX$^{e}$ siècle, littérature américaine, littérature gothique, religion, vampire, *The Vampire Lestat*, *Memnoch the Devil*, *Blood Canticle*, Anne Rice, culture populaire.

# Abstract

This thesis brings together three of Anne Rice's novels from *The Vampire Chronicles* series – *The Vampire Lestat*, *Memnoch the Devil* and *Blood Canticle* – in order to study the evolution of her critique of religion in her writing. A precise and complete examination of Lestat de Lioncourt, the series' main protagonist, allows the reader to better understand the impact of his spiritual transformation on Rice's literary career as a whole. In *The Vampire Lestat*, Lestat's rejection of religious beliefs as well as the deconstruction and eroticization of traditional religious rituals hint at the influence of atheism. *Memnoch the Devil* represents the transition between Lestat's refusal to believe in religion and his subsequent return to the Catholic faith. Finally, *Blood Canticle* symbolizes both the protagonist's and the writer's return to the faith, in addition to the conclusion of Rice's *Vampire Chronicles*. The analysis uses elements from Rice's biography to indicate religion's importance in her works without considering these novels as autobiographies.

**Keywords** : 20th century, American literature, Gothic literature, Religion, Vampire, *The Vampire Lestat*, *Memnoch the Devil*, *Blood Canticle*, Anne Rice, Popular culture.

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# Introduction

Traditionally, vampires and Christianity have been examined hand in hand with the former representing in every way possible everything the latter stands against. As J. Gordon Melton writes in *The Vampire Book: The Encyclopedia of the Undead*,

> "[t]he tying of vampirism [an ancient Pagan belief] to the devil … brought Satan into the vampire equation … Like the demons, vampires were alienated from the things of God. They could not exist in the realms of the sacred". (119)

Although the belief in the vampire's existence may have preceded the apparition of Christianity itself in Europe (Melton 117), the early tying of vampire fiction with Christianity may be attributed, to some degree, to the incredible popularity and influence Bram Stoker's gothic epic *Dracula* has enjoyed since its publication in 1897.

Christianity and its relics have been closely tied in the vampire myth since Stoker's time. Ken Gelder's *Reading the Vampire*, which argues for "the tremendous reach of the vampire into the popular imagination", suggests that vampire narratives since Stoker have shared and replicated certain features, one of which is religion's annihilating power over the bloodsucking antagonists (ix). Not only has it been used as a medium of protection against the vampire, but it has also been portrayed as the perfect tool of its total and complete annihilation.

To put it more plainly, the pre-Anne Rice vampire was irrevocably threatened and vainquished by Christianity.

Since the publication of *Interview with the Vampire* in 1976, Anne Rice has been hailed by many as the most influential writer of vampire fiction since Bram Stoker. More importantly, she has re-invented the genre by switching the focus from the vampire hunter to the vampire itself (Benefiel 261). In "New Life for an Old Tradition: Anne Rice and Vampire Literature", Martin J. Wood notes that her humanization of the vampire as well as her peculiar examination of its consciousness have challenged obsolete representations of the vampire, and succeeded in confronting readers to "the core truths of the [vampire] myth itself" (59). Her vampire fiction has moved beyond the early tradition established by Stoker. On this matter, Lloyd Worley's "Anne Rice's Protestant Vampires" adds that,

> "[i]n Rice's mythos ... the contemporary vampire has lost all the fear and repulsion that Dracula and his kin have for the items of holiness in the ancient Catholic tradition ... because the traditional elements of the fantastic in the old vampire tradition are shattered by the hammer of angst". (80)

Furthermore, her vampires' invulnerability to Christian symbols, their aggressive rejection of religious authority as well as the narrative importance of their spiritual and emotional struggles in today's secular world represent the main means through which Rice has created her own vampire tradition.

While Rice has been praised for the intricacy of her vampire tales and her strong dismissal of Christian traditions in her *Vampire Chronicles*, she went back to her Christian roots in 2002. By the same token, she decided to distance herself from her earlier works and nonbelief in order to consecrate her life and work to "the Lord". Her renewal with the Catholic faith is subtly hinted at through her series, most particularly through her fluid critique of religion in *The Vampire Lestat* (1985), *Memnoch the Devil* (1995), and *Blood Canticle* (2003). These three novels detail her long journey back to Catholicism, mostly through her characterization of Lestat de Lioncourt and his spiritual quest for secular meaning and purpose in a world where "[vampires seem to] have no place" (Rice, Vampire Lestat 466). In this regard, the critical interest in studying more closely Rice's vampire fiction in terms of its religious undertones rests in the evolution of her critique of religion through her writing. Moreover, it represents a unique opportunity to discuss the different ways in which religion and literature are profoundly intertwined with one another.

Although this thesis' analysis will be limited to the three novels mentioned above, it is crucial to acknowledge the importance religion still has to this day in Rice's post-vampire fiction, more particularly in her most recent works, *Christ the Lord: Out of Egypt* (2005), *Christ the Lord: The Road to Cana* (2008) and the yet unpublished *Angel Time* (2009). More importantly, her *Vampire Chronicles* allows her reader to see how influential her strict Catholic

upbringing, her years as a convinced atheist and her subsequent return to the Catholic faith, which she discusses at length in her autobiography *Called Out of Darkness*, have been in her transition from gothic to Christian writer. Nevertheless, her novels should never be regarded as autobiographies, no matter how important the parallels between Rice's religious evolution and what happens on the page may be.

In *Le pacte autobiographique* (1996), Philippe Lejeune defines autobiography as a "[r]écit rétrospectif en prose qu'une personne réelle fait de sa propre existence, lorsqu'elle met l'accent sur sa vie individuelle, en particulier sur l'histoire de sa personnalité" (14). Lejeune also believes that for an autobiography to be considered as such, the author's identity and name must be openly stated within the text as an autobiography merely resembles fiction without this crucial aspect (Lejeune 33). Moreover, Marlene Kadar adds, in "Coming to Terms: Life Writing – from Genre to Critical Practice", that "[a]n autobiography ... can be thought of in relation to biography: it is a biography written by the subject about himself or herself ... with a certain degree of 'objectivity'" (4). In light of this, while *The Vampire Lestat*, *Memnoch the Devil* and *Blood Canticle* are meant to be read as three of Lestat's numerous autobiographical tales, there are not to be analyzed as Rice's personal story. Consequently, my analysis use biographical information and elements known about Anne Rice's life to highlight the ways in which her critique of and

relation to religion progressively evolve from one book to the other, rather than view her works as fictionalized autobiographies.

While a considerable amount of criticism on the vampire as a symbol of enduring evil in Christianity as well as on Rice's contribution to vampire literature has already been written, it is not my wish to study Rice's novels from such traditional angles. Although Katherine Ramsland's work as Rice's biographer, Lloyd Worley's "Anne Rice's Protestant Vampires", Jennifer Smith's *Anne Rice: A Critical Companion* and Aileen Chris Shafer's "Let Us Prey: Religious Codes and Rituals in *The Vampire Lestat*" have studied the ways in which religion influences Rice's writing, their analysis has remained strictly confined to specific instances and texts. However, a similar and more extensive study has been done for C.S. Lewis and the persistent presence of religious symbolism in his stories. Indeed, Richard B. Cunningham's *C.S. Lewis, Defender of the Faith*, Irene Fernandez's *Mythe, raison ardente: Imagination et réalité selon C.S. Lewis* and Clyde S. Kilby's *The Christian World of C.S. Lewi*s explore the religious symbolism and representation of Christian beliefs in Lewis's novels. In this fashion, biographical elements from Rice's life can also shed a new light on her work and allow for new meanings and interpretations to be constructed.

Locating this research within the field of cultural studies, I agree with Joan Gordon and Veronica Hollinger's ideas in “The Shape of Vampires” that the vampire, which belongs to the phenomenon of popular culture, can be examined from a theoretical standpoint as a cultural necessity. In their words, the

> “figure of the vampire ... can tell us about sexuality ... power ... [and] more specific contemporary concerns, such as relations of power and alienation, attitudes toward illness, and the definition of evil at the end of an unprecedentedly secular century”. (Gordon and Hollinger 3)

Its cultural and metaphorical meaningfulness thus helps to understand the vampire's enduring “undeath” in popular culture. As Richard Keller Simon points out in *Trash Culture: Popular Culture and the Great Tradition*, popular culture is often regarded as less worthy than “high culture”, which we are taught to admire and respect (5). Indeed, he argues that

> “[o]ur bias against popular storytelling prevents us from considering it as carefully as we consider great literature because it effectively cuts trash culture off from the tradition of literature that critics have historically valued”. (Simon 5)

It is thus crucial to let go of such bias in order to acknowledge popular culture's important contribution to cultural studies. Thus, I agree with Simon's conclusion that “[t]he most important difference between [popular] culture and the great tradition ... is in the manner in which we experience” and approach them (Simon 25). In this respect, I examine how Rice's vampire fiction allows for the intersection between popular culture and religion through Ken Gelder's

study of “the dialectic of belief and disbelief, illusion and disillusion, in vampire narratives” (Gelder xi) in *Reading the Vampire*.

David Patterson's *The Affirming Flame* and John Coulson's “Religion and Imagination” both offer important theoretical information as to how it is possible to understand the close relationship between religion and popular storytelling through Rice's three novels. On the one hand, Patterson sees literature as an expression of religious longing through which consciousness, both individual and social, can be further analyzed in a narrative, while on the other, Coulson argues that the connection between belief and imagination becomes only understandable once the relationship between religion and literature is closely examined.

Before examining the ways in which Rice’s atheistic beliefs and concerns with morality and faith challenge old Christian rules and practices in this particular novel, it is crucial to define the term “religion” and to discuss the implications such a concept has for literature in general. It is David Patterson’s *The Affirming Flame* (1988), a work in which Patterson offers “a few strands of thought to establish some integration and interrelation of religion, language, and literature” (ix), and John Coulson’s “Religion and Imagination”, which provide an interesting starting point to such interrogations.

With the help of two European philosophers, namely Ludwig Feuerbach (1804-1872) and Miguel de Unamuno (1864-1936), Patterson's *The Affirming Flame* defines religion through its peculiar relation to literature. As Patterson remarks, "Feuerbach puts it simply – or perhaps not so simply – by declaring, 'True bliss in life is true religion'", while de Unamuno goes further and argues that "'the very essence of all religion' turns on 'the problem of human destiny, of eternal life'" (Patterson 3). Although Feuerbach's and de Unamuno's definitions of religion may not seem to share anything else than their desire to define a highly abstract concept, Patterson argues that they are nevertheless both concerned with religion's attachment to "life", which is expressed through the text. In Patterson's words, "religion concerns a relation to that which is both within and beyond life … [and] entails a process of bonding, of connecting one thing with another – life with life, the human with the divine" (Patterson 4). Moreover, Patterson believes that religion arises only when this attachment to life, which is at the core of what it represents, becomes threatened and deficient. This deficiency allows literature to rise as a means through which the attachment to life can be reproduced, and religious longing expressed, as it is the case for Rice's Lestat. He also points out that,

> "when literature arises as an expression of religious longing, there occurs also an involvement with language. The attachment to life that religion seeks is also an attachment to the word as it unfolds in a literary text". (Patterson 5)

In short, in literature, as meaning and interpretation are attached to a text, so is the human attached to the divine, through religion's process of bonding one

thing with another. Once the connection that exists between religion and literature through their active attachment to and engagement with life becomes apparent, the next question that inevitably comes to mind is what is gained when religion and the text are thus intertwined?

In "Religion and Imagination", the first chapter of *Images of Belief in Literature*, Coulson argues that the connection between belief and imagination only becomes understandable once the relationship between religion and literature is closely examined (8). In this particular instance, "religion provides a framework which gives substance and reality to the [writer's] sympathy" (9). In a similar fashion, Rice's novels suggests the complete narrative integration of religion within the text as it is thoroughly structured around Lestat's violent protest against Christianity and subsequent appraisal of its spiritual benefits.

In his work, Coulson distinguishes four crucial historical moments during which the relationship between imagination and religion is reflected in major works of literature, and thus relates religion to literature. Although these periods will not be discussed in detail here, a brief survey of certain aspects of Coulson's theory remains necessary in order to fully comprehend its implications for Rice's vampire fiction. The first period, according to Coulson, is mostly concerned with the imaginative forms of religious beliefs that can be seen in Shakespeare, but not beyond Jane Austen. The second period testifies to

“the beginnings of a dissociation of faith from belief, and culture from religion” in the Romantics and the Victorians (Coulson 7). While the third period deals with the impairment of a culture through violence, it is the fourth mode of relationship between imagination, literature and religion, which concerns exclusively “a society which is constitutionally committed to a strict secularity, as in the United States” (Coulson 8) for instance, that is of most interest.

As a matter of fact, Rice's critique of religion in *The Vampire Lestat*, *Memnoch the Devil* and *Blood Canticle* in addition to the literary representations of faith are better understood once examined through Coulson's discussion of America's secular identity. The dissociation of culture and religion in America, which is at the heart of Lestat's aesthetic conceptualization of the “Savage Garden”, results from the United States's desire “to be free from the claims of one over-riding confessional Christian tradition” (Coulson 15). Indeed, Lestat's singular approach to religion and its beliefs is conditioned by Rice's exposure to American secularity. As for America, Lestat refuses to live in the shadow of Christian history, and is determined to break free from its prejudiced morality. As Coulson notes, “although the transcendent may still exist, it is no longer solely expressible in a dominant confessional tradition” (Coulson 17). Lestat's “Savage Garden”, as well as its symbolic and meaningful evolution throughout the series, argues for the reversible and unstable nature of one's relation to religion. As it is the case for his dependence

upon the symbolism attached to the "Savage Garden" in his existence's justification, Lestat's reluctance to give in to Christianity eventually collapses as he aims at becoming a saint and wishes to be redeemed through his good actions and moral choices in *Blood Canticle*.

Nevertheless, while Coulson's perspective on the association between religion and literature offers precious historical insight as to why such a connection is essential in Rice's three narratives, it is Patterson's *The Affirming Flame*, which best summarizes the significance of integrating religion to literature as a means through which consciousness, both individual and social, can be further analyzed in a narrative. The interest in such a combination is "not only a concern with *what* they are but also a concern with *how* we are related to them" (Patterson 14). Indeed, the purpose of literature is to engage the reader in the spiritual process of affirming life and creating meaning through the religious longing circumscribed within a text, and Rice's *Vampire Chronicles* are consistent with such theoretical ideas.

The first chapter, which concerns Anne Rice's *The Vampire Lestat*, discusses the ways in which Lestat's fear of meaninglessness as well as his defiance of conventional morality are closely tied to his refusal to submit to the Catholic faith. Indeed, Lestat "reject[s] his Catholic past and ha[s] no aversion to the religious weapons traditionally used against his kind" (Melton 570).

Instead, he attempts to justify his thirst for blood and rapid acceptance of his new condition through a set of secular beliefs he often refers to as the “Savage Garden”. Lestat's conceptualization of the “Savage Garden”, which represents an alternative to traditional Christian doctrine, as well as Rice's eroticization of Christian rituals demonstrate that *The Vampire Lestat* is filled with Rice's atheistic questioning. Moreover, the influence of religion and the power it holds over the mind of its followers, Nicolas and Armand more particularly, are also opposed to Lestat's moral nonbelief in order to emphasize the strength of Lestat's doubts.

The second chapter examines the evolution of Lestat's spiritual journey in *Memnoch the Devil*, a religion-oriented novel, in which Rice enables Lestat, through a series of traumatic encounters with both God and Satan, to become “not simply a figure with whom a reader can identify to some degree, but a dynamic character who [goes] through a change in his values and beliefs” (Rout 2). As a matter of fact, *Memnoch* represents a pivotal moment in the evolution of Rice's critique of religion. According to Jennifer Smith's *Anne Rice: A Critical Companion*, Lestat's “internal conflict [in this novel] is whether or not he should trust the Devil, and his character growth comes about through a study of the origins of the world and the idea of evil ... [and] the idea of free will – that is, that we are not destined to be evil, even if we are vampires” (108).

The third and final chapter of my research studies Rice's final *Vampire Chronicles* novel, *Blood Canticle*, in which Lestat's moral transformation is completed. Indeed, Lestat finally shies away from his "Brat Prince" persona, and acts according to what is good rather than what he wants. In this fashion, this chapter exposes and discusses Lestat's desire to become a saint-like figure rather than an angel of death, his refusal to act immorally and his new and strong heterosexual impulses, which are all symbolic of his transformation.

# Chapter 1. The Atheistic Compulsion: The Quest for Secular Meaning in *The Vampire Lestat*

In 1985, Anne Rice published *The Vampire Lestat*, the greatly anticipated follow-up to her 1976 *Interview with the Vampire* and second novel in her *Vampire Chronicles*. As Aileen Chris Shafer points out in "Let Us Prey: Religious Codes and Rituals in *The Vampire Lestat*", Rice's *Interview* has re-invented the vampire genre and marked "a shift from the hero-villain protagonist, who confronts the monster vampire, to the consciousness of the vampire himself" (149). In *The Vampire Lestat*, Rice moves beyond the humanization of the vampire and intensifies her critique of Christianity and its beliefs. Her characters' spiritual hunger and nonbelief have since become a reccurent theme in her vampire novels, even more so in *Lestat*, *Memnoch the Devil* and *Blood Canticle*.

In *Lestat*, she introduces her series' new narrator and perhaps her greatest and most accomplished protagonist, Lestat de Lioncourt, whose search for meaning and purpose seems only possible through the collapse of old Christian codes at first. This shift in narrative perspective allows Rice to "give the strong, independent, atheistic, child-of-nobody point of view" as opposed to Louis's" Catholic bitterness in *Interview* (Riley 16), and thus criticizes the many

ways in which religion, more specifically Christianity, taints one's understanding and experience of life. Rice best voices the moral dilemma and anguish faced by one who challenges beliefs and does not foolishly give in to established forms of religious practices and rituals through Lestat, a defiant pre-French Revolution vampire. To borrow Jennifer Smith's words in *Anne Rice: A Criticial Companion*, "[i]f Louis's narrative seems exhausted and powerless, Lestat's narrative seems exhausting as he gloats with power" (44). In this regard, Rice's narrative switch from Louis to Lestat is paramount to her critique of religion in her vampire fiction.

The criticial interest in examining this particular work in relation to its religious overtones rests in the moral ambiguity Lestat faces as he attempts to break free from conventional forms of religious beliefs. His compulsive atheistic search for purpose and meaning outside religion, both as a young man and a vampire, problematizes Rice's belief in the outdatedness of the Christian concepts of good and evil as well as the necessity to think them anew. While Rice's work criticizes the power these beliefs hold over the human mind, as it is the case for Nicolas and Armand in this particular book, it also entails that a new form of meaning must replace that which is obsolete in order to be better suited to its epoch. However, limiting the analysis of Rice's *Lestat* strictly to a "call for new beliefs to fit changing times" (Shafer 150) would not be giving proper credit to its narrative intricacy. Therefore, I would argue that Lestat's

spiritual construction of the “Savage Garden” and Rice's deconstruction of Christianity through the use of erotic language in her inversion of specific Christian rituals further suggest that her critique of Christianity in *Lestat* is deeply rooted in her own spiritual questioning at that precise moment of her literary critique.

*The Vampire Lestat*, Lestat's autobiography, begins in 1985 as Lestat introduces himself for the very first time and quickly imposes his authority upon the text the reader is about to read. The opening line of Rice's novel, “I am the Vampire Lestat” (Rice, Vampire Lestat 3), does not only set him apart from his narrative predecessor, Louis, but also suggests that Lestat's narrative will be authoritative and forthcoming as Lestat himself, as opposed to Louis's which is passive and filled with melancholy. As Smith's *Critical Companion* implies, “Lestat is fascinated by what he was, what he is, and what he may become in the future” (44), and his narrative's very first sentence is but a reflection of this self-fascination as he is about to reveal his true identity to the world. This switch in narrative agency serves a greater purpose in Rice's series. I agree with Smith who states that, “[h]aving worked through the tragedy and helplessness in her life that made her identify with Louis the victime, Rice now want[s] to write about Lestat the defiant outcast” (Smith 43). In this regard, Lestat the atheist represents the only character in Rice's pantheon of protagonists through

which she can efficiently challenge Christian notions of good and evil and redefine religion as such.

Although Lestat never comes across as a religious young man or vampire, his narrative is still filled with and colored by the overshadowing presence of religious beliefs in his life. As Shafer suggests, "[Lestat's] novel traces religious beliefs and practices, factual and fictional, and concepts of good and evil" (Shafer 150), which he then uses to rationalize his actions as a vampire. Born out of Lestat's faithlessness in traditional religious doctrine, the concept of the "Savage Garden" represents a more viable moral alternative for the vampire that he is, as it substitutes faith and order for beauty's unruliness and ruthlesness. The ongoing battle between good and evil, light and darkness constantly punctuates Rice's narrative. With his heroic morality, Lestat repetitively attempts to break free from the limited boundaries religious traditions have imposed upon the mind of those surrounding him, may they be humans or vampires. More specifically, there are four crucial instances during Lestat's mortal existence in which Lestat's naive belief in goodness and desire to connect with others at all costs are revealed. To a certain extent, these acknowledge Rice's efforts to

> "[echo] Enlightenment views of man" and expose Lestat "to the ideas of Diderot, Voltaire, Rousseau … who were challenging humanity's concept of people and of God, ideas he carries into [both his human and] vampire existence". (Shafer 150)

Interestingly, Lestat's "Savage Garden" echoes these views in many ways.

Katherine Ramsland, a noted interpreter of Rice's writing, provides a thorough definition of Lestat's quest for secular beliefs and meaning throughout the series in her *Vampire Companion*. Indeed, she firmly believes that, "[f]or Lestat, nature itself is savage and ultimately its laws are based on aesthetic principles … ethical truth is embedded in the physical … Only beauty is consistent" (Ramsland, Vampire 408). Lestat understands the world and his own existence through life's ruthlessness and the beauty that can be found in such savagery. In other words, the Savage Garden represents Lestat's version of religion in which vampires' existence is justified and their predatory nature glorified. This savage haven is constructed through Lestat's remembrance of his human existence and vampiric "coming of age" as the "Brat Prince". His newly found independence, autonomy and physical strength allow him to search for new meaning as old religious beliefs do not sustain him anymore.

As a young man, Lestat's incapacity to emotionally and spiritually connect with his practical father and unaffectionate mother greatly impact upon his desire to find a connection and sense of belonging outside the home. At a very young age, Lestat is sent to school at a nearby monastery, against his father's wishes but with his mother's benediction, in an attempt to flee what is doomed to be an unfit life for him. Lestat's future as the youngest son of a

fortuneless aristocratic family could not seem more uncertain. Rapidly, he becomes enthralled with life at the monastery, although his attachment is not in any way spiritual. He quickly admits that "[e]ven at the monastery, [he] had not believed in God. [He] had believed in the monks around [him]" (Rice, Vampire Lestat 47). Although he declares his vocation within a month and wishes to enter the order, Lestat treasures the education he receives at the monastery above any other form of religious devotion and commitment:

> I knew intense happiness because someone for the first time of my life was trying to make me into a good person, one would could learn things … I wanted to spend my life in those immaculate cloisters, in the library writing on parchment and learning to read the ancient books. I wanted to be enclosed forever with people who believed I could be good I wanted to be. (Rice, Vampire Lestat 31)

This particular moment represents the first chronological materialization of Lestat's blind faith in goodness and humanity rather than in religion. His blustering happiness is short lived and crushed when he is brought back to the family home and told by his brothers that his family's fortune cannot support him into becoming "a priest with real prospects within the Church" (Rice, Vampire Lestat 32) as would befit their family's position in society.

Several years later, now a disillusioned sixteen-year old, Lestat again attempts to escape the ties of his provincial home. "[M]ore than ever a nuisance" (Rice, Vampire Lestat 33) in the eyes of his father and brothers, he leaves his home for the second time with a troupe of Italian actors,

unbeknownst to his family. His epiphanic experience of theater's intrinsic beauty urges him to become an actor and recreate "the cleverness … the quickness, the vitality" of the commedia dell'arte (Rice, Vampire Lestat 33), which he sees as one of the many forms goodness can take. Unfortunately, Lestat is once again brought back home by his two brothers who, just like their father, believe theater to be an unsuitable occupation for a young man of his social standing. More importantly, they perceive theater as a form of expression that goes against their Christian "beliefs" in good and evil:

> Wanting to be a monk when you are twelve is excusable. But the theater had the taint of the devil. Even Molière had not been given a Christian burial. And I'd run off with a troupe of ragged vagabond Italians, painted my face white, and acted with them in a town square for money. (Rice, Vampire Lestat 34-35)

Lestat's refusal to agree with his family's religiously limited view of theater contributes to his burgeoning autonomy and capacity to redefine and challenge on his own and according to his own principles, established notions of good and evil. Instead of accepting his family's beliefs without questioning them first, Lestat tries to comprehend the forces at play through his experience and set of personal values. In this fashion, Lestat is, in Kathleen Rout's words, "as defiant of conventional morality as Milton's Satan could ever want him to be" (Rout 2). Despite the evil nature circumscribed to theater by his father, brothers and the Church, Lestat refutes their views as he firmly believes that "God or no God, there is goodness" (Rice, Vampire Lestat 52), blessedness and sanctity to be found in the artists' capacity to create and invent on stage.

During his “conversation” with Nicolas, Lestat further glorifies the arts' goodness and reaffirms his peculiar rapture with aesthetic and unconventional forms of belief. His blind faith in creativity and human goodness rather than in religion furthers Rice’s examination of the limitation religious beliefs impose upon one’s understanding of the world. Moreover, his preference for creativity over tradition hints at the arts's true worth, which is to unite rather than divise. In this fashion, Rice empowers Lestat to recognize and emphasize creativity’s goodness as opposed to the devilish features it is normally attributed by those in his life “who create nothing and change nothing” (Rice, Vampire Lestat 51).

Lestat’s desire to connect spiritually to others is amplified when Nicolas recalls an episode Lestat had not thought of in years. This particular moment, in which the village’s priest takes the two boys to see the place where witches were burnt at the stake, prompts Lestat to question more thoroughly the utility and necessity of a religion, which not only kills people, but does so with the aid of the superstitions and fears it has established through its doctrine. This incident's traumatic repercussions allows Rice to confront two distinct views of religion with one another, namely those of Lestat's and Nicolas’s mothers, and hint at the abuses committed in its name by its followers. Whereas Lestat’s mother knows these men, women and children have died for nothing, “victims of superstition” as “[t]here were no real witches”, Nicolas’s mother is firmly

convinced “the witches had been in league with the devil, that they’d blighted the crops, and in guise of wolves killed the sheep and the children” (Rice, Vampire Lestat 48). In light of Nicolas's remembrance of his mother’s religiously guided reaction, Lestat immediately wonders whether the world would be a better place if no such faith existed to make people murder one another in the name of God. While Lestat is first perceived as an optimistic dreamer by Nicolas, he is irreversibly transformed by the thought of religion’s and superstition’s power over the lives of men, women and children, and the mind of those who believe in it.

The fourth and perhaps most significant moment in Lestat’s quest for meaning occurs when Lestat and Nicolas’s “conversation” becomes inflamed with “the notion of the meaninglessness of [their] lives” (Rice, Vampire Lestat 55). Again, Rice’s concern with spiritual dichotomies such as “good vs. evil”, and “light vs. darkness” is put to the forefront with the occurrence of what Lestat aptly calls the “Dark Moment” (Rice, Vampire Lestat 55), which is one of Lestat's two conversational “Moments” in *The Vampire Lestat*. In her *Vampire Companion*, Katherine Ramsland distinguishes Lestat’s “Dark” and “Golden” moments to highlight Rice’s convenient play with polar opposites. The “Dark Moment”, on the one hand, represents “the sensation of dread that can accompany the loss of support that occurs when one doubts the existence of

absolute values; it is the stark recognition of unbuffered chaos" (Ramsland, Vampire Companion 86). On the other, the "Golden Moment", symbolizes "the time at which everything in [Lestat and Nicolas's] conversation makes sense and disappointments have little weight" (Ramsland, Vampire Companion 166). With regards to Ramsland's distinction, Lestat's "Dark Moment" thus represents a pivotal moment in his existence, both mortal and vampire, during which old Christian beliefs can neither comfort him nor shed away the increasing awareness of his own mortality. As he seeks answers from the village's priest about the meaninglessness of life and the possibility that "[t]here is no judgment day, no final explanation, no luminous moment in which all terrible wrongs would be made right, all horrors redeemed" (Rice, Vampire Lestat 56) after death, his greatest fear is realized. He simply cannot find solace in the priest's stammered words. Interestingly, Lestat's Dark Moment "never did pass, really" (Rice, Vampire Lestat 58), and as for Rice, he still strives to find answers for the moral ambiguity that fills his life as a vampire.

Although Lestat's mortal years are filled by his desire to "be good" and "do good", those he lives as a vampire are colored by his conflicted identity as both a preternatural predator and a morally driven being. The conflation of Lestat's distinct identities allows Rice to deconstruct religion's rejection of what is different or unknown:

> Lestat, for the most part, attempts to victimize only murderers and evildoers, and on the occasions that he resorts to killing innocent victims, he is troubled by his action …
> Because of [his] heroic morality, he recognizes the inherent evil of being a parasite who survives by draining blood from men and whose very nature places him in opposition to men. (Shafer 150-151)

Lestat creates his own personal standards as a vampire, which respect the moral choices he made, as a mortal, and those he continuously makes as a fatherless vampire who has been forsaken by his maker, Magnus. In this respect, while Lestat chose not to follow the old beliefs of his family and community and was believed to be an irresponsible fool for doing so, he is called a "heretic" among his kin for refusing to submit to ancient vampires' rules. He, who has always lived without religious beliefs, takes quite a pleasure in affirming and confirming his own ideas about the world's godlessness and the futility of religious superstitions.

Rice's *The Vampire Lestat* opposes Lestat's humanism, and to a certain extent her own humanism, to the corruptive power of religious traditions and teachings over the minds of Nicolas and Armand, whose existence is controlled by Christian beliefs in a similar way. While Nicolas doubts and questions Lestat's dismissal of beliefs in a deity and a religious doctrine because of his own religious upbringing, Armand repeatedly attempts to convert Lestat to the old ways of the vampires through the power and fear imposed by Christianity upon their against-nature existence. Lestat's perspective utterly challenges and

transforms Nicolas and Armand by destroying their whole systems of belief. Unsurprisingly, Christianity and atheism cannot peacefully coexist in Rice's fictional universe. The ways in which these two characters' lives are compromised by Lestat's ideas are but a reflection of Nicolas's and Armand's submission to rigorous forms of religious "truths" and traditions, which once proven to be mere superstitions collapse.

As a young man, Lestat's hopes are repeatedly dismissed and squashed by his father, an indigent marquis, who does not understand how vital these are to Lestat's existence. While Lestat flees his home unsuccessfully on two occasions in an attempt to escape from the boredom and predictability of his life, it is through his friendship with Nicolas De Lenfent, the son of a Christian merchant, that Lestat is finally able to break free from his family's controlling ways. As for Lestat, Nicolas's father has deprived him of everything that has value to his eyes. Moreover, their friendship also allows Rice to challenge, to a certain degree, Lestat's ideas of goodness and godlessness, and recognize the righteousness of Lestat's desire to connect and belong. Rice first contrasts Lestat and Nicolas in terms of their family's respective relation to religion. Whereas religion has never been more than a duty to Lestat's family as "no one in [his] family believes in God or ever had" (Rice, Vampire Lestat 46-47), Nicolas's parents are both deeply religious persons who blindly believe in the Church's righteousness. Their distinct upbringings have greatly influenced their

personal view of and belief in religion. Nicolas, which Lestat first acknowledges as his alter ego in the sense that they are alike and have been through similar experiences, reciprocates Lestat's desperate need for connection, and also allows Lestat to openly share what he believes in. However, while their ongoing "conversation" strengthens their friendship as they prepare to escape their lives for artistic and fulfilling ones in Paris with the help of Lestat's mother, Nicolas cannot understand the world in which he lives else than through religion's teachings:

> Lestat, sin always feels good … Don't you see that? Why has the Church always condemned the players? It was from Dionysus, the wine god, that the theater came. You can read Aristotle. And Dionysus was a god that drove men to debauchery.
> Lestat, we're partners in sin … We've always been. We've both behaved badly, both been utterly disreputable. It's what binds us together. (Rice, Vampire Lestat 52)

In fact, as Smith notes, "Nicolas was never the alter-ego Lestat thought he was … in fact, he is Lestat's opposite, dark where he is light, craving death as Lestat craves life" (Smith 47). As Rice demonstrates, what distinguishes Nicolas from Lestat is his incapacity to break free of Christianity's belief in guilt and sin.

Whereas Nicolas's attachment to Christianity is purely of an emotional nature, Armand's participation and belief in his coven's rituals enable Rice to discuss a more tangible approach and practice of religion in her novel. Indeed, through Armand's meeting with Lestat, Rice hints at the collapse and utterly

meaninglessness of traditional religion as it collides with new forms of beliefs such as Lestat's "Savage Garden". As a matter of fact, Armand represents everything Lestat believes to be obsolete in terms of one's relation and devotion to religion. As opposed to Lestat, Armand's vampire existence follows a very well defined corpus of five spiritual and social rules, known as "the great commandments, which all vampires must obey … [and] … the condition of existence among all the Undead" (Rice, Vampire Lestat 302). From the creation of a vampire to the vampire's interdiction to reveal their existence to mortals, these commandments do not only dictate what vampires are allowed to do as well as the rites they must observe, but also acknowledge their right to punish the "heretics" who do not submit to these rules. While these rules will not be further discussed in this chapter, I believe it is possible to see them as a critique, on Rice's part, of a questionable way of defining right and wrong.

While Lestat's fierce independence has given him the means to think for himself and behave according to his own sets of rules, Armand's subordination to his masters, Marius and Santiago, has prevented him from questioning the beliefs imposed upon him by them. As a result of his forced conversion to Santiago's coven principles, he eventually reinforces the hold of these same principles on his coven's fledglings. Rice suggests that as long as Armand fears Christianity and believes the Children of Darkness to be Satan's children, as their old rules say, his religious practices confine him not only to a life of filth

and obscure rituals in Paris's cemeteries, but also contribute to his ignorance and close-mindedness. Later on, as Armand expresses his desire to leave Paris with Lestat and Gabrielle, and declares that they both need his guidance as they cannot survive without beliefs to hold them, Gabrielle thoughtfully realizes that while "[m]illions live without belief or guidance … It is [him] who cannot live without some guidance" (Rice, Vampire Lestat 288). Armand's spiritual world crumbles as Lestat's beliefs destroy the Parisian coven. He thus acknowledges that while he now knows that their master, Satan, "[was] the fiction ... which has betrayed [him]" (Rice, Vampire Lestat 310), he still believe in God's existence, a belief which will eventually "destroy" him at the end of Rice's *Memnoch the Devil*. In a way, Rice's depiction of Nicolas and Armand's religious collapse hints at Christianity's incapacity to sustain itself once it collides with newer forms of spiritual beliefs.

Now that the different ways in which "Lestat's heroic search for meaning, purpose, and belief in a world that is a 'savage garden'" (Shafer 150) have highlighted Rice's critique of religious symbolism and faith in *The Vampire Lestat*, it is crucial that to have a look Rice's deconstruction of religious rites through her inversion and eroticization of Christian rituals. As Aileen Chris Shafer suggests in "Let Us Prey: Religious Codes and Rituals in *The Vampire Lestat*", while there is a number of episodes in which Rice refers to Christian rituals in her novel, two particularly stand out. The first one occurs

when Magnus transforms Lestat into a vampire, while the second is when Lestat performs the “dark trick” on his mother Gabrielle as he refuses to watch her die.

After Lestat and Nicolas's arrival in Paris, and their growing success as an actor and a musician at Renaud's theater, Lestat is abducted by Magnus, in the middle of the night, and brought to his Magnus's lair outside of Paris. In doing so, Magnus acknowledges Lestat's boldness and courage as the “Wolfkiller”, and considers Lestat a fitting heir to his dark heritage and legacy. As Lestat remembers the events that took place on that night, he also recalls the strange necessity for him to believe in God as fear and panic overcome him:

> I had to believe in God now. I had to. That was absolutely the only hope.
> I went to make the Sign of the Cross ...
> He watched me make the Sign of the Cross. He listened to me call upon God again and again ...
> And I went into a spasm of crying like a child. 'Then the devil reigns in heaven and heaven is hell,' I said to him. 'Oh God, don't desert me ..,' I called on all the saints I had ever for a little while loved. (Rice, Vampire Lestat 88)

While this episode represents an interesting moment for Lestat’s secular beliefs as well as their temporary dissolution at a moment during which Lestat is confronted with his inevitable mortality, it allows Rice to contrast Lestat's first weakness with his fierce desire to survive as Magnus is performing the dark trick on him. As Magnus is about to give Lestat his blood after first having drunk almost all of Lestat's blood, he whispers, “The wine of all wine ... This is

my Body, this is my Blood" (Rice, Vampire Lestat 89), in an attempt to recapture the rapture experienced during Christian "Communion". Lestat drinks Magnus's blood and finally experiences the connection he so longed for as a mortal. Indeed, as he gives in to Magnus's invitation to immortality, he not only "knows" Magnus, but also feels attached to him both in an emotional and erotic way: "Love you, I wanted to say, Magnus, my unearthly master, ghastly thing that you are, love you, love you, this was what I had always so wanted, wanted, and could never have, this, and you've given it to me" (Rice, Vampire Lestat 91). In short, Lestat's transformation allows Rice to underline the mystic nature of religion's comforting powers over people, while at the same time, she uses the language of one of its most sacred rites, the communion, to describe the delight experienced by Lestat as he drinks his maker's blood and is thus transformed into a monster.

As for Lestat's transformation of his mother into a vampire, Rice is subtler in her reversal of religious rituals. While Magnus borrows the language of Christian communion during his performance of the dark trick, Lestat never does such a thing. Instead, his use of religious terminology is strictly limited to the title of the section, "Viaticum for the Marquise" (Rice, Vampire Lestat 149) in this instance. Indeed, the title's "Viaticum", which is one's final communion before one's death, here alludes to Gabrielle's eminent death as a mortal. Lestat's mother's final communion occurs as Lestat gives her his blood and

shares his immortality at her demand. Lestat's profound emotional attachment to his mother, the only member of his family who ever understood him, taunts him into revealing his true nature to her, and proposing her to join him on the "Devil's Road". Furthermore, as Shafer points out, "[t]his inversion of a Catholic ritual becomes even more subversive as his conversion of his mother is described in erotic language" (Shafer 156):

> 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 gasp, and I felt my mouth grow wide to catch the hot flood when it came. (Rice, Vampire 157)

As she intertwines religious rituals and explicit erotic descriptions, Rice thus reveals her vampires' sensual nature and breaks taboos as well as sexual boundaries within her novel. Interestingly, Rice's use of the Viaticum ritual, in this case, also shows her skepticism toward practices whose only purpose is to increase the Church's spiritual hold over people's lives. Ultimately, in *The Vampire Lestat*, Rice not only attempts to discredit religion through her inversion of Christian rituals, such as the communion and the Viaticum, but also through the erotic way in which these sacrilegious rituals are performed.

In conclusion, Anne Rice's *The Vampire Lestat* presents a unique viewpoint from which to analyze the evolution of Rice's critique of religion in her writing. From a critical point of view, Lestat's characterization allows for

the examination of Rice's incendiary critique of Christianity and its rituals, while at the same time, it suggests secular alternatives to traditional religious doctrines and ideas. In this fashion, Lestat's vision of the "Savage Garden", which is presented as the counterpart of Christianity, as portrayed through Nicolas and Armand, evolves at the same time as Lestat overcomes and defeats the different obstacles put on his path by established forms of beliefs. It is thus no surprise that Rice's relation and reaction to religion evolves throughout the *Vampire Chronicles*, much like Lestat's.

More importantly, Lestat's conception of the "Garden" as a savage and ruthless nature from which not even the innocent is safe, and Rice's eroticization of Christian rituals represent the very first step in her literary journey toward her new identity as a Christian writer. As Rice herself said in her 2006 *Christian Living* interview, her *Vampire Chronicles* began "actually a gradual process where God gently drew [her] back" to her childhood faith and beliefs in the Catholic Church, which culminated with the publication of her first Christian novels, *Christ The Lord: Out of Egypt* (2005) and *Christ the Lord: The Road to Cana* (2008). *Memnoch the Devil*, which will be analyzed in my next chapter, moves from Lestat's destabilizing disbelief in God and religion toward his progressive reconciliation with Christian principles through his encounter with God and Satan.

# Chapter 2. In-between Disbelief and Faith: *Memnoch the Devil* as Conceptual Bridge between *The Vampire Lestat* and *Blood Canticle*

Anne Rice published the fifth novel of her *Vampire Chronicles*, *Memnoch the Devil* (1995), almost a decade after *The Vampire Lestat*. It was to be the lasrt of her vampire books narrated from Lestat's perspective until her 2003 *Blood Canticle*, in which she brought him back to the page for the last time. As opposed to the series' first three novels which are mostly concerned with the establishment of a new vampire mythology, *Memnoch the Devil* is barely a vampire novel at all. As Gary Hoppenstand and Ray B. Browne point out in "Vampires, Witches, Mummies, and Other Charismatic Personalities: Exploring the Anne Rice Phenomenon", "[this] is a book about religion, salvation, and personal confession ... [and it] also echoes John Milton's religious epic *Paradise Lost*, paralleling Milton's poetic dramatization of the origins of good and evil in a Christian world" (6). For these particular reasons, *Memnoch* represents a crucial milestone in Rice's literary career as a whole, as if for the first time, Rice acknowledges completely religion's hold on her writing. The novel in itself is a bridge between the conceptually opposed *Lestat* and *Blood Canticle* in terms of the critique of and response to Christianity and its beliefs. Only through a careful examination of the theological elements put

forward in *Memnoch* is one able to fully comprehend the extent of Lestat's moral transition from *Lestat*'s “Brat Prince” to *Blood Canticle*'s “Saint Lestat”.

Rice's reconstruction of faith and belief as utterly ambiguous phenomena in *Blood Canticle* argue for the personal nature of the religious experience within the narrative. The traditional notions of good and evil become, in Rice's hands, fluid concepts that convey a different meaning depending mainly on her characters' viewpoint. On this matter, Hoppenstand and Browne admit that,

> “Lestat's journeys to Heaven and Hell, guided by Memnoch, literally allow Rice to reconstruct Judaism/Christianity, which she does in an amazingly complex and sophisticated fashion ... Her grand achievement in *Memnoch the Devil* is the writing of a modern-day *Divine Comedy*”. (Hoppenstand and Browne 6)

While *Lestat* presents the vampires' perception of themselves as being heavily defined and confined within Christian limits, *Memnoch* calls for the re-examination of such ideas. Rice's goal in doing so is perfectly obvious. Through *Memnoch*, she attempts to make religion more accessible and better suited to the reality of modern secular times.

In *Memnoch*, Rice confronts Lestat's enduring belief in the cruelty and godlessness of the “Savage Garden” with Memnoch's story of the Creation, which reveals that God, the Devil, Heaven and Hell truly exist. Memnoch's tale ompels Lestat to come to term with his own non-belief and the disdain for

religion that emerges from it. It also forces him to question God's and the Devil's respective motives and morality as he must decide whether or not he will accept the Memnoch's proposition to become his “Prince” (Rice, Memnoch 162) and ally in his battle against God. Even though Memnoch's tale is pivotal to the spiritual transformation Lestat undergoes in the course of the novel, Lestat remains the main protagonist of the narrative, which is told from his perspective only this time through David's words. As a matter of fact, *Memnoch the Devil*, which Rice first tried to write from a mortal man's point of view, was an adventure meant to be told from Lestat's perspective all along (Riley 29). As she reveals in Michael Riley's *Conversations with Anne Rice*, “I spent an enormous amount of time trying to give birth to the novel with a mortal hero ... It simply didn't work ... As soon as I entertained the idea of going back to Lestat, everything fell into place” (29). The close connection between Rice and her protagonist, which results in Lestat being the perfect vessel to illustrate Rice's longings in her writing, will be elaborated on in the next chapter as it plays as crucial a role in *Blood Canticle* as it does in *The Vampire Lestat* and *Memnoch the Devil*.

Having gradually fulfilled her vampires' desire to learn about their origins in *Interview with Vampire*, *The Vampire Lestat, The Queen of the Damned* and *Tale of the Body Thief*, Rice tackles the difficult task of explaining and hinting at what their spiritual purpose may be in a world greatly influenced

by religion, more specifically Christianity, in *Memnoch*. Therefore, I would argue that, Rice's *Memnoch the Devil* represents a defining moment in her literary journey from disbelief to belief. Her narrative represents a unique opportunity to oppose, and ultimately reconcile, the two visions of religion that have been at war with each other since her adolescence. More importantly, Lestat's encounter with Memnoch offers an alternative view of the foundations of Christian doctrine and morality. In keeping with this idea, Rice's characterization of Memnoch as well as her use of Roger's and Dora's peculiar views of spirituality highlight the different ways in which alternative forms of religious beliefs and practices offer solace and comfort to her characters. Finally, her blood metaphors and Memnoch's ultimate trickery and use of Lestat as a pawn in his grand battle against God also contribute to Lestat's complete spiritual transformation and increasing awareness of the value of human life at the end of the novel. To borrow Kathleen Rout's words in " Who do you love? Anne Rice's Vampires and their Moral Transition", Lestat becomes "not simply a figure with whom a reader can identify to some degree, but a dynamic character who [goes] through a change in his values and beliefs" (Rout 2), as his sudden wish for redemption at the end of *Memnoch* illustrates.

In "New Life for an Old Tradition", Martin J. Wood reminds us that "until *Memnoch the Devil*, [Rice's] vampires had no connection to Satan" (61), although some, such as Armand and his Parisian cohorts in *Lestat,* wants Lestat

to believe otherwise. The symbolic linking of the vampire with Satan in the earlier novels results mainly from the traditional dichotomy between the vampire and the mortal man, or the bloodsucking predator and its prey. By its nature as a predatory creature who feeds on human blood, the vampire sets itself apart from humanity. Its subsequent association with Satan is then only natural, for he is not only the purest and greatest representation of evil in Christianity, but also Man's greatest tormentor. The parallel between the vampire and the Devil may thus be understood as a necessity, on the vampire's part, to justify its existence and find purpose.

The idea of free will and personal choice, which has always been central to Rice's *Chronicles*, becomes particularly important in *Memnoch*, for it plays on two different levels. On the one hand, Memnoch creates and maintains the illusion of free will during his time with Lestat, allowing Lestat to believe that helping or not Memnoch is his own decision. As he flees from Hell, Lestat remains convinced that the choice is his. However, Memnoch's letter to Lestat at the end of the novel reveals, much to Lestat's dismay, that Lestat has achieved his purpose and was manipulated into revealing Veronica's Veil to the real world exactly as planned by Memnoch: “To My Prince, My Thanks to you for a job perfectly done. with Love, Memnoch the Devil” (Rice, Memnoch 428). On the other hand, the notions of free will and agency open up the possibility of one being defined for their deeds and decisions rather than for

their instincts and nature, of which Lestat's choosing never to kill again is perhaps the most vibrant example. According to Smith's *Critical Companion*,

> "[that] Lestat walks away a sadder but better vampire, now deliberately choosing not to be evil, may mean that the theme is that ... we can choose to rise above our natures and be good, even if we are being good in the midst of madness and evil". (109)

Rice's reconstruction of Christian mythology through the Devil's eyes also underlines the importance of free will in the practice of and belief in religion. As God's "Accuser", Memnoch deliberately chooses to doubt his Creator's plan rather than accept it without first questioning it like the other Archangels. In this regard, Memnoch is to Heaven what Lestat is to the Earth: a perpetual rulebreaker who rebels against all traditional forms of authority, refuses to believe blindly and whose logic is too often overthrown in favor of his physical needs.

Lestat's narrative agency in *Memnoch* appears importantly diminished when compared to that in *The Vampire Lestat* and *Blood Canticle.* However, it remains a key element to the novel's thematic of choice. His vampiric nature is thus less relevant to the narrative than his moral disposition to strive for goodness. As Lestat himself notes, "it doesn't matter that I'm a vampire. It is not central to the tale ... what happened here could have happened to a human being; indeed, it surely has happened to humans, and it will happen to them again" (Rice, Memnoch 2). As such, this passage is particularly insightful and conveys the essence of Rice's argument in *Memnoch*, which acknowledges the

possibility for anyone to experience a change in belief and faith, much like Rice herself. Nevertheless, Rice clearly demonstrates that Lestat's decision to change his ways is not without consequences and comes at a heavy price. His journey to Heaven and Hell, which has left him both physically scarred and emotionally weaken, has irrevocably changed him. In the end, the Lestat readers have come to love for his recklessness and rebellious attitude has undergone so significant a transformation that he will never be the “Brat Prince” he used to be in the earlier novels, as *Blood Canticle* shows. His beliefs and disbelief have been shocked to the core and, because of the events in *Memnoch*, he attempts to redeem himself both in his readers' eyes and his own.

With regards to the unfolding of the plot and Lestat's agency in the story, *Memnoch* is strikingly similar to *The Queen of the Damned* in which Lestat's misadventures are but secondary to the story of the vampires' origins narrated by Maharet. As for Maharet's tale, Memnoch's represents the heart of the novel upon which Rice not only builds Lestat's climatic spiritual transition, but also foreshadows her own literary shift in subject matter. While Lestat's agency is overshadowed by Memnoch's appeal, Rice remains truthful to Lestat's persona, which she has firmly established in her earlier novels. Consequently, Lestat simply cannot resist the temptation of journeying to Heaven and Hell with the Devil and foolishly agrees to accompany Memnoch in order to finally learn the truth about God's existence, something he has been questioning since

his childhood in pre-revolution France. The shift in narrative interest results from Rice's complex characterization of Memnoch, whose appeal recalls immediately to mind that of Milton's Satan in *Paradise Lost*. As Wood points out, "[the] question of Lestat's evil, or of his potential for evoking the evil within human readers, has become irrelevant" (Wood 71). The issue at the core of the novel is not whether Lestat still is the Brat Prince, but whether Memnoch's intentions toward Lestat are truthful and honest. For this reason, the question of Lestat's reliability as a narrator in *Memnoch* is overruled by that of Memnoch who, as the Devil has always been portrayed as a deceptive, untruthful and malicious being by Christianity.

More specifically, Rice has made Memnoch into a "beautifully developed and therefore dynamic character" (Smith 104) in order for Memnoch, the novel's antagonist, to be able to carry the weight of Lestat's later transformation upon his shoulders. As opposed to the story's minor characters, such as Dora, Roger and even Lestat's beloved David, who are all but static and whose purpose is limited to the unfolding of the plot, Memnoch's dynamism comes from the complexity and ambiguity in Rice's characterization. Much like Lestat, the reader remains uncertain of Memnoch's true motives until the very end of the story. He uses multiple disguises depending on whether he aims at frightening or seducing Lestat. From the menacing dark-winged stalker to the well-versed fallen angel, Memnoch's multi-faceted physical appeareance is but

a reflection of the intricate mystery that shrouds his character. Memnoch's appeal to the reader is his narrative versatility, which calls to mind Lestat's in *The Vampire Lestat*. Once the curtain falls, however, Rice returns to a more conventional and Christian characterization of Memnoch. Indeed, Rice's Satan is revealed to be what Christians have accused him of being for centuries: God's deceptive and manipulative adversary. As such, Rice's Miltonian characterization of Memnoch is crucial to the examination of her critique of Christianity in the novel. Indeed, it is this return to a more traditional view of religion that paves the way for the final step in Lestat's spiritual transformation in *Blood Canticle.*

It is worth noting that Memnoch is as complex a character as Lestat. The appeal in developing such a mysterious and intriguing Devil is, in fact, quite simple to grasp. By keeping Memnoch's true motives and nature ambiguous for most of the narrative, Rice wants her reader to doubt Christianity's enduring portrayal of Satan, question its black or white beliefs in morality and form his own interpretation of the divine and profane. More specifically, I believe that Terri R. Liberman's statement in "Eroticism as Moral Fulcrum in Rice's *Vampire Chronicles*" that "[e]vil is both repulsive and fascinating, to be avoided and immersed in" (109) not only echoes Rice's portrayal of Lestat's moral ambivalence, but also that of Memnoch. In these terms, the blurring of

the line that differentiates good from evil in a Christian setting also contributes to Rice's ongoing discussion on the importance of belief and faith in one's life.

There is a notable back-and-forth movement in Memnoch's physical and psychological portrayals as well as in Lestat's perception of Memnoch throughout the novel. Lestat's first mention of the Devil occurs at the beginning of the book when he meets with David in New York City near St. Patrick's Cathedral. The importance of the cathedral's closeness in Rice's narrative is twofold. First, it perpetuates the Christian illusion of safety from evil, and most importantly, it reminds the reader of Lestat's urge to look for God's holy protection in situations where his life is threatened by preternatural forces. Ironically, Lestat still considers himself an atheist at this point in time in the *Chronicles*, much like he did at the time of his transformation in *The Vampire Lestat*.

From the very beginning, Lestat feels threatened by Memnoch's invisible presence, which he can barely remember but has sensed on the various occasions he has stalked Roger, his latest prey. Panic-striken, Lestat confides in David that he not only fears for his safety, but perhaps most significantly for his sanity: “I'm being followed again ... I'm being stalked ... David, I'm frightened. I'm actually frightened.  If I told you what I think this thing is, this thing that's stalking me, you'd laugh” (Rice, Memnoch 10). Immediately, Lestat suspects

the Devil of being his stalker. In fact, he admits quite modestly that only the Devil himself could frighten him into such a state of despair and doubt. To use Lestat's words, "[t]here's not much else that could frighten me, David ... We both know that. There isn't a vampire in existence who could really frighten me ... This was The Man Himself, David" (Rice, Memnoch 24). Nevertheless, Lestat being Lestat, he is also flattered by the idea of being at the center of a possible argument between God and Satan. In that sense, Rice also uses Memnoch's looming presence to reaffirm Lestat's extravagant vanity and sense of self-importance in addition to exposing his growing emotional turmoil and vulnerability.

Arguably, Memnoch's stalking of Lestat represents a unique opportunity for the predator to become the prey. This role reversal is crucial to Lestat's later renewal with the Christian faith. Had he not fallen victim to Memnoch's manipulations, the revelation of Memnoch's true nature would not have traumatized him and left him no choice but to live a life closer to Christianity's idea of a good life for a vampire in *Blood Canticle.* As Lestat becomes enthralled with two mortals, Roger an "intricately evil" (Rice, Memnoch 14) drug lord who has "the mentality of an Iago" (Rice, Memnoch 12) and his televangelist daughter, Dora, Memnoch also begins to stalk him. Although Lestat has difficulty acknowledging that his that his being stalked is connected to his stalking of Roger, Rice establishes cleverly and progressively the intricate

connection that exists between each character and event in Memnoch's grand scheme. Everything Lestat is shown by Memnoch and God as well as everybody he interacts with in *Memnoch* plays a key role in his subsequent transformation.

At first, Memnoch's presence is not tangible neither to Lestat nor the reader. Lestat is forced to admit that he is unable to thoroughly recall his physical appearance, except for the brief glimpse he had at a hideous "Winged Being" (Rice, Memnoch 25). Although frightened by the vision of this Being who "has a sleepless mind in his heart and an insatiable personality" (Rice, Memnoch 26), Lestat believes it is not necessarily evil. Rather, he comprehends that it has a specific purpose and "a sense of sincerity" (Rice, Memnoch 26) outside the realm of mere mortality. Memnoch appears to Lestat under two very different disguises that each occur at a specific time for a specific purpose: that of the magnificient yet terrifying Winged Creature, and that of the Ordinary Man. The first may be looked upon as a more traditional view of the Christian Devil, while the latter may be understood as an attempt on Rice's part to break free from such a conventional depiction of God's adversary, if such a thing is possible.

Memnoch the Winged Being inspires both awe and horror in Lestat, who first sees him as a black granite statue of fallen angel with feathered wings,

goat legs and feets in Roger's home. As Katherine Ramsland points out in *The Vampire Companion*,

> "[a]lthough [Memnoch] can take many forms commonly associated with the Devil, he claims to prefer the form of the Ordinary Man because it does not attract attention ... To prove his claim, he turns into the goat-footed, armored, monstruous being that had frightened Lestat in Roger's house". (289)

On the contrary, Memnoch's appearance as the Ordinary Man conveys an entirely different significance, for Memnoch wishes to seduce and convince Lestat with his rhetoric rather than threaten him with his appearance. The nickname Lestat gives Memnoch's disguise as the "Ordinary Man" is particularly telling. Indeed, it perfectly suits Ramsland's claim that Memnoch created it for the practical purposes of blending in and being unnoticed as he walks the Earth:

> "Ordinary ... very ordinary ... Just a man ... a routine flavor of American. A man of good height, my height, but not overwhelmingly tall ... [a]n agreeable face, very agreeable. He was the kind of man who doesn't impress one with size or physicality so much as a sort of alertness, a poise and intelligence ... He looked like an interesting man". (Rice, Memnoch 113-114)

At last, it is as the Ordinary Man that Memnoch is able to charm Lestat and convince him not only to listen to his story, but also to journey to Heaven and Hell with him.

Thus, Rice's depiction of the Devil as the Ordinary Man is in many ways more interesting to look at from a critical and symbolic point of view. Not only

does it clash with the image vehiculed by Christianity, but it also offers a wider range of interpretations as to what Rice's true intentions are in doing so. To quote Hoppenstand and Browne, Rice "develops what essentially amounts to a theological dialogue ... [on] her visions of God, the Devil, and a morally evolving humanity" (Hoppenstand & Browne 6) through the character of Memnoch. Although numbing at times for it is always kept in the abstract, Memnoch and Lestat's discussion on human suffering and God's true nature represents a counterpart to traditional Christian theology. Halfway through the novel, Lestat accepts Memnoch's proposition to journey through Time, Heaven and Hell to see and hear for himself what has long been denied to ordinary mortals: the truth behind the Christian myth. Understandably, as Smith suggests, "Lestat is told of the creation and fall so that the Devil can justify the ways of the Devil to Lestat" (108). In this regard, Memnoch becomes more developed, compassionate, interesting and multi-dimensional than God could ever be in Rice's hands.

Consequently, I would argue that through Lestat's doubts in *Memnoch*, Rice hints at her own return to the Christian faith, for the atheistic discourse she proposed in *Lestat* is gradually being replaced with a longing for faith and a newly found respect for religion's sacredness and purpose. More precisely, Lestat's reaction to his first glimpse of the Ordinary Man foreshadows the final stages of his spiritual transformation in *Memnoch*, and to some extent, Rice's

own search for meaning: “I'm warning you.  My view are changing. The atheism and nihilism of my earlier years now seems shallow, and even a bit cocky” (125). However, it is crucial to remember that Lestat's evolution does not necessarily equates that of Rice, but rather borrows from her own doubts toward the meaninglessness of non-belief. As Rice herself points out in her memoir *Called Out of Darkness: A Spiritual Confession* in regards to *Memnoch*, “no novel I wrote before better reflects my longing for God than *Memnoch the Devil* “ (170). Rice's endearing connection to Lestat, which reaches its peak in *Blood Canticle*, allows her to share her struggle and ambivalence toward faith and belief.

In comparison to Lestat and Memnoch, Roger and Dora are static characters. Nevertheless, their importance to the unfolding of the story is undeniable, for they both add to the religious complexity and ambiguity of the novel. They may also be viewed as representations of two of the stages Lestat goes through in his spiritual transition from the Savage Garden to Christianity. Rice's Roger offers insight on the ways in which religion is experienced on a personal level. From his interest in religious artifacts from various religions to his vivid admiration of the fictional and controversial erotic works of Wynken de Wilde, Roger's religious experience moves away from traditional religious practices such as Dora's. He is, like Lestat, obsessed with notions of good and evil, and this obsession is conveyed through his paradoxical characterization

within the narrative. While he strives to protect Dora and his private collection of artifacts from the harm that may come from his dealings, he is also a ruthless drug dealer whose lack of compassion for the human spirit has led him on a path of destruction and crime. Although he appears to be transformed by his stay in Hell, Roger's character never evolves for, as Smith argues, "Lestat makes it clear that Roger is still Roger and has figured out how to get [to Heaven]" (Smith 103). In a way, through Roger's moral ambiguity, Rice reminds her reader of Lestat's concept of the Savage Garden, a place where beauty, ruthlessness and cruelty permanently coexist and where only the fittest and smartest survives. By the end of *Memnoch*, however, Rice's verdict is clear: both Roger and Lestat's Savage Garden have to be replaced by something greater and more conventional. In Roger's case, it is Dora, while faith in goodness and religion prevales in Lestat's.

Dora's character evidently represents a more conventional approach to religious faith and belief than Roger's. Although Rice hints at the intimacy and personal nature of her relation to religion, Dora's blind faith in religious felicity is extreme and zealous. Nevertheless, Lestat is enthralled with her spirit and the common sense with which she preaches on television. To use Lestat's words, "She talks theology with gripping common sense, you know, the kind of televangelist that just might make it all work ... Theology and ecstasy, perfectly blended. And all the requisite good works are recommended" (Rice, Memnoch

13). Her role in Rice's narrative is more pivotal than Roger's, for it is she who reveals the existence of Veronica's Veil to the world and thus completes the last part of Memnoch's plan for Lestat. More importantly, in using Dora's approach to religion, Rice hints at the possibility for one to believe in Christian values and infuse it with their personal beliefs, while also making a strong case for the importance of choice and free will at the same time.

In *The Vampire Book*, J. Gordon Melton argues that "[*Memnoch*] was not as well received as the previous volumes, as its story tended to subordinate plot to philosophical musings on theological issues" (570). To some extent, Melton's statement is true. The book's pace is indeed often uneven, too rapid at times, too slow at others. The middle section of the novel, which deals exclusively with Memnoch's tale and his discussion with Lestat of the Creation and human suffering, offers a stunning contrast to the fast-moving pre-Memnoch first section. Quite astutely, Smith notes that "[t]he first half of *Memnoch the Devil* moves so rapidly and wonderfully that it seems to crash into a roadblock when it stops for Memnoch to tell Lestat things" (Smith 106). However, Melton's statement also greatly undermines the novel's importance in terms of its contribution to the evolution of Rice's religious exploration in writing. Although uneven in terms of plot development and pace, Rice's narrative offers some of her best metaphorical work to date. As in *Lestat*, she

juxtaposes Christian rituals to vampiric behaviors in a manner such as to blur the already thin line that separates good from evil.

Blood has always been an important component of Rice's metaphorical framework in her vampire literature. With the eroticism and sexual intimacy associated with the exchange of blood, the symbolic intermingling of pleasure, death and power contributes to Rice's modernization of the vampire myth in her *Chronicles*. Interestingly, *Memnoch* is the first of Rice's vampire novels in which the reader does not witness the transformation of a mortal into a vampire. The omission is voluntary on Rice's part, for it allows her to explore the differents meanings blood can have in different situations, “finally all combining into one great metaphor, the idea that blood represents life” (Smith 107). There are three specific blood metaphors in *Memnoch* that ought to be looked at if one is to understand Rice's depiction of Lestat's return to the faith. The first, and most obvious, is the blood that Lestat spills as a vampire, which is depicted by Lestat's killing of Roger. As Rice demonstrates several times in her series, the killing of a victim is heavy with symbolism, for the vampire not only drinks the victim's blood but also its life. Roger's blood also carries his most intimate memories, which Lestat discovers as he drinks from Roger's neck: “I was warmly full of blood ... I swallowed and ran my tongue along my teeth, getting the last taste, he and Dora in the truck, she six years old, Mommy dead, shot in the head, with Daddy now forever” (Rice, Memnoch 45). At that

particular instant, Rice reminds her reader that Lestat's drinking of his victims' blood is not only conducive to their physical death, but also to his absorption of the memories that defined their lives.

The second metaphor, which pertains to the most powerful blood in Christian lore, that of Christ, conveys to a greater extent blood's connection to life. Drinking Christ's blood during His Passion proves to be a transformative experience for Lestat both spiritually and physically, to say the least. It reignites Lestat's belief in genuine goodness and selflessness, and represents the turning point in his spiritual evolution for he truly believes that he has drunk God Incarnated's blood. Before his journey to Palestine, where he witnesses the Crucifixion, Lestat had achieved near invincibility through his drinking of the blood of some of the most powerful vampires in the *Chronicles*, namely Marius and Akasha the The Queen of the Damned. In addition to the physical strength he has garnered through his elders' blood, he has also acquired different abilities, that have made him one of the most powerful vampires in existence. Apart from his being able to survive his exposure to the sun in the Gobi Desert in *Tale of the Body Thief*, one such ability is the power to destroy at will an enemy by an invisible psychic fire. As for Roger, he has also absorbed their wisdom, knowledge and memories, which amounts to thousands of years of vampiric experiences and discoveries. Nevertheless, there is no vampiric equivalent to the Christ's blood in Rice's fictional world. Not even Akasha and

her blood offering to Lestat can convince him to choose her path for humanity's partial annihilation. As Smith points out, “[w]hat Christ offers Lestat is a literal sacrament, not the wine and wafers of communion but the true body and blood of Christ. Christ's offering of Himself is His invitation to Lestat to choose life and God, not damnation and Memnoch” (Smith 107). In the end, Christ's blood becomes the ultimate metaphorical representation of life and immortality in *Memnoch*, for what could be more convincing for an atheist than drinking the Lord's blood?

The third and last blood metaphor in *Memnoch* is one where the erotic and the primitive intermingle: Dora's menstrual blood. After escaping Hell and refusing to serve Memnoch, Lestat returns to New York and finds refuge with David, Armand and Dora. A weakenedLestat is immediately drawn to the smell of Dora's blood, for he returns weaken and disfigured from his journey with Memnoch. This blood appears to be a fair compromise to Lestat, who recognizes its purity and innocence. Contrary to his victims' blood, Dora's is offered to him naturally and symbolizes life as such. Lestat recognizes this distinct quality in Dora's blood: “I went down on my knees, my face buried in her skirts, near to the blood between her legs, the blood of the living womb, the blood of Earth, the blood of Dora that the body could give” (Rice, Memnoch 393). Ironically, Lestat finds the peace, safety and reassurance he so craves for in a mortal woman's blood rather than in the Christ's, a symbol of immortality

bought through hardships and suffering. The consumption of Dora's blood is painless and natural, and offers not only a new peace of mind but also an alternative to his former “evil” ways.

With regards to Lestat's spiritual evolution, I would argue that the second blood metaphor is the most significant and poignant example of the changes to come in both Rice's protagonist and the series as such. Lestat's half-hearted refusal to drink the Lord's blood, “No, my God!” (Rice, Memnoch 344), foreshadows his desire to be good and do good in *Blood Canticle*, while it also confirms Memnoch's depiction of God as a manipulative, flawed and competitive Being: “Lestat ... You want to taste it, don't you? ... The blood. Taste it. Taste the blood of Christ ... Is my blood not worthy? Are you afraid?” (Rice, Memnoch 344). In that sense, Lestat's hesitation not only becomes symptomatic of his transformation in the following novels, but also represents a break in his former characterization, for Lestat was never one to pass on the opportunity to drink the blood of those more powerful than him. It comes as no surprise that Lestat, who could not resist the temptation of becoming a mortal again and of journeying to Heaven and Hell with the Devil, is powerless before God's tempting offer. Smith concludes that “[at] the end of *Memnoch*, Lestat leaves behind ... his concept of earth as a Savage Garden, a place where evil triumphs ... to choose a life without killing, even though he has little faith in God's plan since he's still not sure it isn't Memnoch's plan” (Smith

109). Nevertheless, the encounter proves to be traumatic enough to convince him of changing his ways and denying his nature, even though he remains uncertain that he has truly met with God and the Devil by the end of the novel.

In conclusion, Anne Rice's *Memnoch the Devil* represents the crossroad at which Rice's atheism and her longing for God meet in her writing. *Memnoch* distances itself gradually from the previous critique of Christianity of her earlier novels, in an attempt to reconcile Rice's acknowledged disbelief with her reignited desire to make peace with God and return to the faith. In that sense, I share Hoppenstand and Browne's views that "Rice wants her stories to be not an escape from reality but a venture into reality ... [She] intends her writing to be an imaginative fictional metaphor representing our everyday reality" (Hoppenstand and Browne 4). Rice herself admits in Riley's *Conversations* that Lestat has had a more profound impact than any of her other characters, for he has been through struggles and events close to those of her readers. Lestat's meeting with God and Satan is thus paramount to his subsequent detachment from his concept of the Savage Garden. Although Memnoch confirms Lestat's ideas and proves, to some degree, that the world is indeed a Savage Garden, Lestat cannot admit to being a part of it anymore after having seen what he saw in Heaven and in Hell. His desire to be good at the end of the novel is sincere, although it remains to be seen whether Lestat will be able to sustain it once the aftermath of his journey and the shock of the

revelation of Memnoch's true nature have subsided. Ultimately, Rice's *Memnoch* symbolizes the end of Rice's Lestat the Brat Prince on more than one level. As Rice's biographer, Katherine Ramsland, points out, “Rice felt drained by the effort [of writing *Memnoch*] ... It haunted her. Nearly a year later ... she had the experience that Lestat had gone out of her life. What they had done together was finished” (Ramsland, Lived World 31). More importantly, Lestat rids himself of his Brat Prince persona in an attempt to break free from his past endeavours. In *Blood Canticle*, as the next chapter will explore, Lestat's transformation is completed, as his falling in love with Rowan Mayfair and later refusal to bring her into the Blood illustrate.

# Chapter 3. Full Circle: Rice's Literary and Personal Return to the Christian Faith in *Blood Canticle*

In December 1998, Anne Rice returned to the Catholic faith after a three decade-long struggle that had seen her reject and criticize God's existence and the rigid Catholic doctrine both in her personal life and her writing. She admits in her autobiography, *Called Out of Darkness*, that at the end of the 1990's "[m]y faith is atheism was cracking. I went through the motions of being a conscientious atheist, trying to live without religion, but in my heart of hearts, I was losing faith in the 'nothingness', losing faith in 'the absurd'" (172). It is thus in this particular state of mind that *Blood Canticle*, Lestat's final turn as the narrator of Rice's *Vampire Chronicles*, came into fruition in 2003, eight years after the publication of *Memnoch the Devil*. To this day, the year 2002 still represents a pivotal one in Rice's life, for she not only lost her husband, poet Stan Rice, to cancer after forty years of marriage, but also decided to offer her work and gift for writing to the Lord. In this regard, *Blood Canticle* represents the final stage of her shift from gothic to Christian fiction and also marks the end of her vampire literature era.

Like *Memnoch*, *Blood Canticle* was met with disappointment by critics and readers alike, for their high expectations for Lestat's awaited return to narration were not met. Although the conclusion of *Memnoch* had hinted at *Blood Canticle*'s continued yet definite departure from the previous vampire novels, Lestat's transformation as a character was mostly welcomed with skepticism and confusion. Furthermore, the fusion of two of Rice's most beloved literary universes, that of the Mayfair witches and of her vampires, also contributed to its lackluster reception. In 2003, one such critic, Ben Sisario from *The New York Times*, stated that *Blood Canticle*

> "feels a bit like watching a random episode of "General Hospital" ... the major characters ... spend most of their time in melodramatic arguments, while the action is quickly advanced in a big, implausible twist toward the end". (Sisario, n. page)

Although Sisario's article echoed the sentiment of the many who felt let down by Rice's tenth *Vampire Chronicles* novel, it offers little to no insight on the importance of Lestat's spiritual growth in Rice's novel, and in the series as a whole.

In *Blood Canticle*, Rice moves away from the criticism of her earlier years, which was as essential an element to the plot's development as Lestat's character in *The Vampire Lestat* and *Memnoch the Devil*. Instead, she chooses to dwell on Lestat's renewed belief in God and the ways in which his new search for goodness and holiness in the everyday life proves to be an empowering and transformative experience. Rice's narrative is constructed in

such a way as to make it obvious for her reader to understand that faith in God and belief in a religion's doctrine are two very different things that are never to be regarded as one and the same. Moreover, I would argue that Lestat's desire to become a saint, which is presented at the beginning of the novel, is symptomatic of Rice's return to the Catholic faith. As Lestat abandons evildoing, Rice relinquishes her gothic heritage for one better suited to her new aspirations as a Christian writer in *Christ the Lord: Out of Egypt, Christ the Lord: The Road to Cana* and the yet unpublished *Angel Time*.

As such, I believe that *Blood Canticle* symbolizes Rice's farewell to the genre that made her a reknown fiction writer. Consequently, this chapter will dwell on the importance of Lestat's contemplations of sainthood for both the novel's plot and the series' conclusion. With regards to his growing desire for redemption and salvation, the novel's introductory chapter, which stands as Lestat's ultimate testimony to faith and belief, also represents a means, on Rice's part, to respond to the critics who were unimpressed and unconvinced by *Memnoch*'s theological argument and content through Lestat's words. The radical changes in Lestat's characterization convey the extent of his transformation, which is both spiritual and psychological. These changes, which are best illustrated through Lestat's shedding of his “Brat Prince” persona and his embracing of that of “Saint Lestat”, are also reflected in Lestat's growing attraction and infatuation for Rowan Mayfair, a witch from the

Mayfair family. In essence, Lestat's falling in love with Rowan represents his breaking away from his former homoerotic ways and moving forward to a more conventional definition of physical and emotional attraction. Finally, the significance of Rice's intermingling of the *Vampire Chronicles* with the Mayfair witches' universe will be examined from a critical point of view in order to demonstrate that Christianity has always been a key element in the development of these two series' characters and stories since their debut. More specifically, I suggest that *Blood Canticle*'s peculiar ending has been a long time coming, if we are to look at these two series as a whole.

Redemption has been a recurrent theme in all of Rice's earlier vampire novels. Its importance to the series as a whole is introduced early on in *Interview with the Vampire* through the character of Louis. Despite the fact that Louis sees himself and his fellow vampires as utterly evil, forsaken and beyond redemption, he nevertheless keeps searching for ways to forgive himself for what he has become and to compensate for the sins he has committed. Louis's view of the vampire still prevails as one of the major themes in *The Vampire Lestat* and *Tale of the Body Thief*. It is not until *Memnoch the Devil*, however, that redemption and salvation truly become within the grasp of Rice's vampires. As Katherine Ramsland points out in *The Vampire Companion*, “Louis and Lestat both [searched] for redemption [in *Interview with the Vampire* and *Tale of the Body Thief* respectively], but eventually Lestat realizes that it is just not

available to vampires" (368). In a surprising turn of events, Lestat's journey to Heaven and Hell in *Memnoch* teaches him that redemption, salvation and forgiveness are offered to all of those who seek them and are willing to change accordingly. The idea that one can overcome his nature and become a better person, which is introduced in *Memnoch*, offers solace and hope to Lestat who had previously turned his back on redemption and fully acknowledged his evil and predatory nature. The confusion and conflict between good and evil, which was at heart of Lestat's moral ambiguity in the previous novels, is thus progressively being replaced with a growing sense of moral duty which, in its turn, becomes a necessity for Lestat's new way of life in *Blood Canticle*.

Each of the novels narrated by Lestat begins specifically with the "Brat Prince" reminding his audience of his own narrative importance in the tale that follows and offering it a glimpse of the potential effects these events had over his understanding of the world and emotional evolution. More importantly, these first chapters represent a unique opportunity for Lestat to address directly his reader in an intimate yet upfront manner. In this regard, *Blood Canticle* is no different from the novels that precedes it, for Lestat once again shares his most inner thoughts with his reader. However, it is its tone which sets it apart dramatically from *The Vampire Lestat*, *The Queen of the Damned* and *Tale of the Body Thief*. Lestat's disdain for rules and authority is replaced with a deep reverence for faith and the divine, something that is reminiscent of the

transformation he has undergone during and since the events in *Memnoch*. To quote Rice, *Blood Canticle* is “a strange book ... it also gave a voice to my strongest longings to be joined to Christ in a new and complete way ... the Vampire Lestat, the genderless giant who lived in me, was as always the voice of my soul in this novel” (Rice, Darkness 207). More importantly, it echoes Rice's own desire to renew with her faith.

In this fashion, I would argue that it is no accident that Lestat begins the novel with a revealing plea, or to use Rice's words “a cry of the heart” (Rice, Darkness 207): “I want to be a saint. I want to save souls by the millions. I want to do good far and wide, I want to fight evil!” (Rice, Blood Canticle 1). Lestat's affirmation, although problematic in the sense that it goes against his very nature, is symptomatic of the narrative importance of free will and choice for all of Rice's characters in her novels. In fact, the aftermath of Lestat's encounter with God and the Devil has brought a change in Lestat's beliefs which, far from being temporary as one might have supposed, has proven to be permanent and irreversible in many ways. The extent to which his nonbelief was shaken to the core in *Memnoch* has forced him to reconsider his atheistic past and break free from it in order to redeem himself from his past sins. Nevertheless, while his transition is complete from a spiritual point of view, Lestat remains the same defiant and proud narrator that he always was in the *Chronicles*. As such, Rice is careful not to forget who Lestat is as a character

and reminds it to her reader in the opening paragraph: “I want my life-sized statue in every church. I'm talking six feet tall, blond hair, blue eyes – Wait a second. Do you know who I am?” (Rice, Blood Canticle 1). Here, she cleverly juxtaposes two singularly different images of Lestat, that of a devoted and pious saint and of the “legendary” and arrogant Brat Prince, to demonstrate that one may be transformed by belief and faith without losing his sense of self.

Although subtle, Rice's juxtaposition of Saint Lestat to what remains of the Brat Prince is far from coincidental. It represents a deliberate attempt on Rice's part to emphasize the flexibility and fluidity of religious beliefs and faith. Interestingly, Katherine Ramsland's *Vampire Companion* echoes such an idea, noting that while “some [vampires] are burdened by belief structures in which they are deemed evil ... others take on a new set of religious beliefs to give themselves purpose” (374). This is particularly true in Lestat's case. Having witnessed the collapse of his former atheistic beliefs, the existence of God and His infinite compassion and the possibility of redemption in *Memnoch*, Lestat has to construct a new set of beliefs that will give him a new purpose now that his old faithlessness has been revealed to be nothing but unfounded. More specifically, his new religious beliefs are as unconventional as he himself is. They are a reflection of the vampire he is and of what he has experienced, suffered and witnessed during the past two hundred years. His renewed faith in

God is highly personal and, as for Rice herself, suits his peculiar nature and understanding of good and evil.

Lestat's image of “Saint Lestat” is both vibrant and revealing, although it remains strictly in the abstract. More precisely, it serves two distinct purposes. On the one hand, it makes Lestat's desire to fight his evil nature and do good tangible to the suspicious reader, while on the other, it also highlights the necessity for him to be adorned, revered and recognized for his good deeds by the millions he will potentially assist. In a sense, the Saint Lestat persona symbolizes a way for Lestat to express his desire to make peace with his past, while also breaking free from it. Through his help and divine intervention, which he offers to all of those who seek them, he attempts to make amends for his past disbelief and sins: “I answer everyone. Peace, the certainty of the sublime, the irresistible joy of faith, the cessation of all pain, the profound abolition of meaninglessness” (Rice, Blood Canticle 9). This particular passage also epitomizes Rice's subtext in *Memnoch* that salvation and solace should be available to everybody, and not limited to a privileged few only.

The fantasy of Saint Lestat brings together Lestat's most intimate desire, which is not to be and do evil anymore, with the recollection of his time in and experience of Heaven in *Memnoch*. Not surprisingly, in this intricate vision of

Lestat, he has been forgiven for his less than pious past, and has also become God's acolyte, his servant:

> "I'm in Heaven with God. I am with the Lord in the Light, the Creator, the Divine Source of All Things. The solution to all mysteries is available to me. Why not? I know the answers to positively every question ... God says, You should appear to people ... And so I leave the Light and drift slowly toward the green planet". (Rice, Blood Canticle 9)

His heroic deeds as a saint go from the ordinary, such as finding someone's glasses, to extraordinary, such as destroying the drug trade forever by creating "an odourless, tasteless, harmless drug which creates the total high of crack, cocaine and heroine combined, and which is dirt cheap, totally available and completely legal" (Rice, Blood Canticle 8). To Lestat, and therefore to Rice as well, this fantasy is extremely appealing from a symbolic point of view. It brings about the collapse of the traditionally rigid and excluding Catholic doctrine within Rice's narrative by having Lestat, a bloodthirsty and reckless vampire, as one of its divine and benevolent representatives on Earth.

While Lestat imagines Saint Lestat as a "vastly and wondrously known" (Rice, Blood Canticle 9) saint, his first aim is to be "relevant" (Rice, Blood Canticle 9) and bring comfort and hope to those in dire need of it before anything else. In keeping with his old pompous self, Saint Lestat retains much of Lestat's old human personality and is "totally geared for an apparition" (Rice, Blood Canticle 9) to the pope in Vatican City, for even the pope knows of Saint Lestat and recognizes him as so. His imagined time with the pope in the

Vatican is thus emblematic of Lestat's transformation to a certain degree. It allows him to share the knowledge he has acquired during his journey in Heaven and Hell as well as the conclusions he has come to, more specifically "[t]he image of God Incarnate, become Man out of fascination with His own Creation", which he hopes, "will triumph in the Third Millennium as the supreme emblem of Divine Sacrifice and Unfathomable Love" (Rice, Blood Canticle 13-14). At the same time, Lestat finally acknowledges the central role played by religion in the series, recognizing that Christianity "is the religion of the secular West, no matter how many millions claim to disregard it" (Rice, Blood Canticle 12). The implications of such a statement on Lestat's part are nothing short of tantalizing. As J. Gordon Melton points out in *The Vampire Book*, Rice's vampires were created, at first, to reflect and illustrate her own nonbelief toward religion as a whole (121). However, Lestat's claim makes it possible for the reader to comprehend the extent of Rice's own evolution as a writer and a believer.

This fantasy, although extremely appealing from the point of view of Lestat's and Rice's moral transition, cannot be realized in a sustainable manner. As a matter of fact, Lestat is never fooled by his fabricated vision of Saint Lestat, because he knows that even though redemption is now within his reach, he will always remain Lestat the vampire:

> "the fact is, my fantasy of Saint Lestat is dissolving. I know it for what it is and I can't sustain it. I know that I am no

> saint and never was or will be ... I am a vampire ... And there's only one kind of miracle I can work. We call it the Dark Trick and I'm about to do it". (Rice, Blood Canticle 15-16)

Lestat thus acknowledges that the collapse of his Saint Lestat fantasy has much to do with the reality of his vampiric nature, which although redeemable to a certain degree, is still highly incompatible with his definition of goodness and holiness in conventional religious terms. Therefore, the conflict that emerges from the juxtaposition of the real and the imagined at the beginning of *Blood Canticle* enables Rice to further the complexity and intricacy of her protagonist's transition. While Lestat clearly announces his intention of performing the Dark Trick again, Rice then hints at the transformation of the underlying motives for his doing so, as I will discuss later on.

Lestat has emerged as the predominant character and narrator in Rice's *Vampire Chronicles* because of his important contribution to the series' popularity. Rice has used him as the narrator for five of her ten novels, while also having him play a key role in two more, namely *Interview with the Vampire* and the series' penultimate book, *Blackwood Farm*. In retrospect, Lestat's narrative style differs greatly from that of David Talbot, Thorne or Tarquin Blackwood who have respectively narrated *The Vampire Armand*, *Blood and Gold* and *Blackwood Farm*. With regards to the series as a whole, the characters' distinctive narrative styles reflect their respective motives and purpose in telling these stories. For instance, Rice makes David, Lestat's

fledging, the guardian of his species' origins and history through his collecting of his fellow vampires' personal stories, such as Armand's, Merrick's and Pandora's, while she has Thorne, a vampire of Nordic descent whose only appearance in the series is in *Blood and Gold*, become the narrator of the story of Marius's life. Lestat's approach to narration is much more personal than David's or Thorne's, for he aims at having his own relevance recognized by his fictional audience.

In this fashion, the interest in examining the introductory chapter of Rice's *Blood Canticle* is not exclusively limited to the importance of Lestat's dreams of sainthood and holy deeds to the narrative. On the contrary, Rice's response to the detractors of *Memnoch the Devil* through Lestat's voice is as essential to the story as Lestat's renewed faith in Christianity. *Blood Canticle*'s first chapter testifies to the depth of Rice's understanding of and emotional connection to Lestat, who had been inspired by her husband, Stan Rice, “a self-made artist, a self-made intellectual, a self-made poet ... the atheist” (Riley 16). As mentioned earlier, Lestat's intimate connection with his audience, which he has cultivated since *The Vampire Lestat* in his addressing directly the reader at the beginning and end of each of his novels, offers an unparalleled opportunity for Rice to voice her concerns and state of mind through his words.

Readers and critics alike were mystified by Rice's theological turn and Lestat's disappointing passivity in *Memnoch*, although the book enjoyed an enormous commercial success and rapidly became a national best-seller. According to Hoppenstand and Browne, most reviewers have criticized Rice's *Memnoch* because it is different from her earlier vampire novels. As they point out, one critic "proclaimed that the beginning of [the novel] was the only redeeming feature to be found in Rice's story ... no doubt because these early chapters read like traditional horror fiction" (Hoppenstand and Browne 5). Interestingly, Rice responds to such critiques by confronting them indirectly through Lestat who dares to question his readers' expectations :

> "But I ask you, my beloved followers ... what the Hell happened when I gave you *Memnoch the Devil*? ... Did you understand it? ... I trusted you with my confessions, down to the last quiver of confusion and misery, prevailing on you to understand for me ... and what did you do? You complained". (Rice, Blood Canticle 2)

It seems that the importance of Lestat's spiritual transition from nonbelief to belief, which also echoed own Rice's longing for God at that time, was overlooked and, to a greater extent, criticized by those who had circumscribed Rice's literature to the gothic and horror genres. Lestat's metaphysical vision of God and his Creation, his retelling of the "true" history of Christianity as well as his subsequent reflections on these matters have been discarded for being uncharacteristic of Lestat, "the fancy fiend" (Rice, Blood Canticle 4). To quote Hoppenstand and Browne, "[w]hen Rice's story meets her critic's formulaic expectations, they enjoy what they see, but when she moves her plot away from

conventional expectations into a different, more abstract philosophical area, they find fault with her efforts" (Hoppenstand and Browne 5). It is to such criticism that Lestat retorts and emphasizes the extent to which his travel to Heaven and Hell has irrevocably transformed him. Thus, Rice has found in Lestat the perfect medium through which to convey her increasing ambivalence toward atheism as well as her impressions on her readers' perception and critique of her novels.

At the end of *Blood Canticle*'s first chapter, Lestat promises his readers that the Brat Prince remains as "irrepressible, unforgivable, unstoppable, shameless, thoughtless, hopeless, heartless, running rampant, the wild child, undaunted, unrepentant, unsaved" as ever (Rice, Blood Canticle 16). However, his characterization throughout the novel certainly does not echo his claim, which could be perceived as a desperate attempt on his part to cling to the image of the vampire he used to be pre-*Memnoch*. As such, Lestat's announced intention of performing the Dark Trick yet again certainly seems to contradict his newly found respect for life's beauty and sacredness, which grew out of the events in *Memnoch*. To a certain extent, it seems paradoxical for Lestat to create and share his elaborate vision of the life-saving Saint Lestat, while entertaining the idea of transforming a mortal into an immortal at the same time. Consequently, it is imperative for the reader to have a close look at the underlying motives behind his offering of the "Dark Gift" (Ramsland, Vampire

85) in the previous novels in order to compare them to those implied by Mona Mayfair's transformation in *Blood Canticle* and thus fully comprehend the extent of Lestat's moral evolution as such.

In *Interview with the Vampire*, Lestat performs the Dark Trick on two different occasions for very different reasons. Lestat first offers immortality to Louis de Pointe du Lac, a young plantation owner from Louisiana, who is also the novel's protagonist. As Ramsland points out in her *Vampire Companion*, at the time of his transformation, "[Louis] was deep in grief over his brother's death. [He] felt responsible for this death ... Lestat had then spotted Louis and had fallen in love with his air of despair" (260). Later on, Lestat transforms Claudia, a five year-old child whose blood Louis drank on the previous night, in an attempt to stop Louis from leaving him. Both instances reveal the perversity and selfishness of the reasons behind Lestat's making of Louis and Claudia into vampires: the former becomes the companion he so desperately longs for, while the latter represents the only means of keeping Louis with him. In *Tale of the Body Thief*, Lestat makes David Talbot into a vampire against his wishes for "[w]henever Lestat looks at [him], he thinks of David's inevitable death" (Rice, Body Thief 449). The thought of losing David is more than Lestat can bear, so he takes it upon himself to make David his immortal companion and confident. In a way, Lestat's motives for transforming David are still selfish, although to a lesser extent since they come from his love and affection

for David rather than his need to control those around him. In *Blood Canticle*, however, Lestat's decision to perform the Dark Trick on a dying Mona Mayfair, the most powerful of the Mayfair witches, is perhaps the greatest expression of his sudden selflessness, as he saves her from a certain death and prevents the "veil of silence" (Rice, Blood Canticle 503) from falling between her and Quinn. His impulse is essentially altruistic, born out of his genuine love for Quinn and his desire to mitigate Quinn's pain. Even more so, Lestat ponders the necessity of undertaking such an irreversible action, as well as the potential repercussions it may have on his faith and beliefs:

> "Work the Dark Trick? Make another one of us? Woe and Grief! Sorrow and Misery! Help, Murder, Police! Do I really want to steal another soul out of the currents of human destiny? I who want to be a saint? ... Bring another into the – get ready! - Realm of the Undead?". (Rice, Blood Canticle 23)

Lestat's questioning of the motives and moral consequences of his offering of the Dark Gift to Mona for Quinn's sake represents the first tangible proof of his transformation's permanence. In essence, it reflects his inner desire to change his ways, fight his nature and do good.

Soon after Mona's transformation, Rice engineers Lestat's fateful meeting with Rowan Mayfair, who is "the thirteenth in the line of Mayfair witches ... [and] represents the fulfillment of her ancestors' most powerful genetic traits and paranormal abilities" (Ramsland, Witches 296). Immediately, Lestat finds himself drawn to Rowan's remarkable composure, power and the

mysterious aura that surrounds her. In itself, his instantaneous fascination with Rowan is quite uncharacteristic of him and represents an important break from Rice's former characterization of him, for "it was [his] role to fascinate as [their] conversation went on" (Rice, Blood Canticle 44). In keeping with Lestat's characterization in the previous novels, it is important to note that up to this point in the series, Lestat had been attracted almost exclusively to men toward whom he has always felt a deeper sexual and intellectual connection. Lestat's attachment to Louis Pointe du Lac, Nicolas Delenfent and David Talbot are perhaps the best examples that can be found within the series of this sincere and complete emotional attachment. Furthermore, these characters' subsequent transformation into vampires by Lestat attests to the importance of Lestat's peculiar attraction to them. All three characters have played a central role in Lestat's life as a mortal, in Nicolas's case, and as a vampire, in the case of Louis and David. Their importance in Lestat's existence has remained unequalled by women until he meets Rowan at Blackwood Manor in *Blood Canticle*. Lestat acknowledges the extent of Rowan's grip over him, while he does not fully grasp its significance: "I was the one being spellbound. I couldn't break loose of her. I felt the chills again ... What was it about this woman? Why was her strip down beauty so provocative and threatening? I wanted to see into her soul" (Rice, Blood Canticle 48). More precisely, Rice subtly hints at a progressive transition from the homoerotic to the heteroerotic in Lestat's behavior. To a certain degree, this movement in Lestat's sexual and emotional

desires symbolizes his desire, conscious or not, to adhere to a more Christian, therefore more conventional and traditional way of life.

At the novel's end, Rowan admits to reciprocating Lestat's feelings and asks to be given the Dark Gift, so as to retire from the grief of her mortal life and become his immortal lover. Lestat's response to Rowan's request is particularly revealing in terms of his transformation as a character in the course of the series. The pre-*Memnoch* Lestat would have accepted her offer without hesitation, whereas the post-*Memnoch* Lestat knows it is not the time to bring her into the Blood. As opposed to Mona whose life had come to an end, Rowan has much left to do and realize and too many people who depend on her to let her "walk away from everyone who looks to [her] for a future they couldn't envisage without [her]" (Rice, Blood Canticle 395):

> "Rowan, ... it's not the time .... The time will come ... I'll wait and I'll be there ... You haven't lost what I have to give, Rowan ... I'll be guarding you, Rowan ... And the night will come when we'll share the Blood. I promise you. The Dark Gift will be yours". (Rice, Blood Canticle 397-398)

In this respect, Lestat comes as close as he will ever be of becoming Saint Lestat. He chooses life over death, righteousness over selfishness, Rowan and her family's needs before his own. In terms of Christian morality, it may be argued that this particular moment is perhaps the most significant of Rice's narrative. Indeed, for the first time in the series, Lestat sacrifices his own happiness in order to do what he thinks is right:

> "I was so unhappy that I hardly knew what I was doing. At one point it struck me that what I'd just done was mad ... A selfish fiend like me just would not have let her go! ... She'd given me the moment ... And I'd tried to be Saint Lestat! I'd tried to be heroic! ... I had forfeited her forever" (Rice, Blood Canticle 399).

While it certainly pains him to let go of Rowan after having realized the intensity of his love for her, he nevertheless acknowledges that he has not truly lost her, for "[he] wouldn't lose the lesson of love [he]'d learned through her. And this she had given him as [he] had tried to give it to her" (Rice, Blood Canticle 400). For these reasons, the closing paragraphs of Rice's *Blood Canticle*, in which Lestat reaffirms his desire to be a saint and save souls by the millions (Rice, Blood Canticle 400), are truly emblematic of the evolution of Lestat's beliefs and religious faith since *The Vampire Lestat*. They convey the sincerity of his intentions and testify to the authencity of his convictions in goodness and selflessness. As Rice demonstrates, Lestat's perspective on life and the inevitability of death have been dramatically altered by his change of beliefs, which is by no means temporary. Thus, his fascination with and heterosexual love for Rowan are the most tangible tokens of his transformation within the narrative.

Interestingly, Rice does not undermine at any point in her narrative the difficulty of Lestat's choices. In fact, his bursts of guilt toward the making of Mona into a vampire and his sentiments for Rowan punctuates the narrative through the appearances of Julien Mayfair, Mona and Rowan's ancestor. Rice's

intricate use of Julien's ghost as a narrative device allows her to reproduce Lestat's moral agitation and voice his concerns and doubts on a greater scale. During his numerous apparitions, Julien either chastises Lestat for imprisoning Mona's soul in a vampire's body or scolds him for his attraction to Rowan, which he perceives an atrocious abberancy. On this matter, Julien is particularly confrontational and mocking:

> "you cannot have her. No, never. Not Rowan Mayfair ... you shall have all the fun of watching her from afar and never knowing what might happen to her. Old age, sickness, accident, tragedy. Won't it be something to behold! And you can't ever interfere. You don't dare!". (Rice, Blood Canticle 147)

To Julien, Lestat is and will always remain an evil creature since he has taken his beloved Mona away from her family, murdered her soul and has now fallen for "the family's philanthropic wonder, the family's guiding star" (Rice, Blood Canticle 147). Quite simply, the ghost of Julien and his haunting of Lestat are but concrete manifestations of Lestat's emerging Christian morality and distinction between the right and the wrong.

In conclusion, *Blood Canticle* represents the end of Anne Rice's vampire era in more than a way. To borrow Rice's words in *Called Out of Darkness*, it "close[s] the *The Vampire Chronicles* as a roman-fleuve, but it also [gives] voice to my strongest longings to be joined to Christ in a new and complete way" (207). More importantly, it marks Lestat's definite retreat from her literary universe. After being her "dark search engine" for twenty-seven years, he

"would never speak in the old framework again" (Rice, Darkness 208). In the course of *The Vampire Chronicles*, Lestat has experienced a dramatic change in beliefs, which has seen him denied and then acknowledged the importance of faith and religion in his life. This change has brought a strong desire in Lestat to change his ways and free himself from the shackles of his nature. In this regard, his fantasy of Saint Lestat and unconditional love for Rowan Mayfair, which have both been discussed at length in this chapter, have been paramount to Rice's depiction of Lestat's return to the Catholic faith.

The importance of Catholicism in the *Vampire Chronicles* and the Mayfair witches series should not be underestimated. As a matter of fact, it has been at the heart of both series since their debut. From Lestat's early disdain for Christian narrow-mindedness to the near extinction of the Taltos race in *Taltos*, Rice's stories have been centered on the impact and influence of religion and beliefs in her characters' lives. Therefore, I would conclude that the intermingling of these two universes, which had begun in *Merrick*, was inevitable, for it has allowed Rice to challenge Lestat's beliefs in ways they had never been before *Blood Canticle*.

# Conclusion

After almost thirty years of soul-searching and twenty novels, Anne Rice has finally returned to the faith with which she had been raised as a young girl. The struggles and the obstacles she faced as she journeyed back to belief have punctuated all of her stories, starting with *The Vampire Chronicles.* Since the publication of her cult novel *Interview with the Vampire*, Rice has not only contributed to the much-needed update of the vampire myth, but also to its use as a medium through which writers can reflect on modern concerns, such as sexuality, religion, family and tradition. In *Anne Rice and Sexual Politics: The Early Novels*, James R. Keller and Gwendolyn Morgan suggest that,

> "Rice is also truly popular in that she reproduces the polyphonic voice of the culture as a whole, introducing both mainstream ideologies and marginalized discourses in her novels ... *The Vampire Chronicles* ... creates an opportunity for the author to explore both alternative and normative sexuality, including problems with traditional family relations, spouse and child abuse, justifiable homicide, divorce, and gender-power relations". (162)

Indeed, the ingenuity in Rice's writing comes from her capacity to blend effortlessly the fictional with the real, the good with the bad, and the divine with the ordinary. The conflicts and tensions at play in her stories are but fictional representations of current social and cultural issues. More importantly, Rice invites her reader to participate in the debate that arises from the "unique

tension between progressive and conservative points of view" (Keller and Morgan 162) in her stories.

As for C. S. Lewis, the influence of religion in Rice's writing is undeniable. From *Interview with the Vampire*, in which the reader is confronted with Louis's Catholic guilt, to *Christ the Lord: The Road to Cana*, the second volume of a new series dedicated to the life of Jesus Christ, Rice never ceases to find inspiration in what is most close to her: the struggle to find and keep one's faith. Interestingly, Anne Rice has experienced a struggle with faith similar to what C. S. Lewis himself experienced. Both have been atheists, believing "that the main point in all the religions of the whole world is simply one huge mistake ... that most of the human race have always been wrong" (Lewis 35), only to realize the meaninglessness of their ways and return to their faith. Apart from their interest in different genres, the main divide between Lewis and Rice comes from the amount of critical analysis written on the importance of religious symbolism in their works. While much has been written about Lewis's extensive use of religious imagery, Rice's novels are still mostly regarded for her play with taboos and social conventions.

From series such as *The Lives of the Mayfair Witches*, *The Vampire Chronicles* and *The New Tales of the Vampires* to individual novels such as *The Servant of the Bones*, the battle between belief and nonbelief has always been at

the heart of Rice's stories. Rice's use of religion as a plot device is always intricate, and most importantly, not strictly limited to Christianity in terms of her critique. From cults of Ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt in *The Servant of the Bones, The Mummy* and *The Queen of the Damned*, to voodoo rituals in *Merrick* and *Blackwood Farm,* and finally to early Judeo-Christian history in her chronicle of the life of Jesus Christ, Rice has used a variety of religions and cults from different moments in time to convey the importance belief holds in people's lives. Therefore, it is somewhat surprising to see the limited amount of critical interpretation available about the evolution of her literary critique of Christianity, as religion has always played a significant role in all of her fiction.

With the help of notable Anne Rice critics, this thesis has aimed at highlighting the important correlation that exists between Rice's relation to religion and that which is portrayed in three of her most innovative novels, namely *The Vampire Lestat*, *Memnoch the Devil*, and most recently in *Blood Canticle*. Each novel respectively depicts a different stage in Lestat de Lioncourt's journey from his initial disbelief to his subsequent complete faith in God, a journey Rice famously experienced herself. As for Lestat, Rice's "central vocation ... is not to learn church history or to become involved with church politics ... It is not to change the church of others, or the church to which [she] belong[s]" (Rice, Darkness 238). Rather, it is to establish a personal connection to religion, one that fits her beliefs and aspirations as a Christian

writer. To quote Rice, “[t]he Lord Jesus Christ is where my focus belongs ... the politics of religion has almost nothing to do with the biblical Christ” (Rice, Darkness 240). Even if it is possible to say that Rice has found her way back to the faith of her youth, that faith, which is in no way identical to what it was when she was eighteen years old, has blossomed into a more personal and intimate form of belief.

In *The Vampire Lestat*, Rice confronts her reader with her protagonist's refusal to believe in religion and take its doctrine for granted. The hypocrisy of the Church is revealed early on in the novel to vouch for Lestat's faithlessness in religion, which emerges in part from his doubts concerning God's existence, but mostly comes from Christianity's own corrupted politics. As Rice questions the necessity for one to adhere to such a dividing and discriminating religion, she also points out the excesses and abuses committed in its name. More importantly, Lestat's realization that Christian artifacts and places have no effect on the vampire that he has become is particularly telling in terms of Rice's critique of Christianity's power over the collective imaginary. In “Development of the Byronic Vampire: Byron, Stoker, Rice”, Kathryn McGinley suggests that,

> “religious articles have no affect on [Ricean vampires] ... because they are no more or less sure of the existence of God than modern mortals are ... Instead, they are forced to struggle with questions of good and evil just as the rest of humanity must”. (McGinley 81)

In these terms, it is possible to appreciate both the critical appeal of Lestat's struggle with his faith in *The Vampire Lestat* and the profound impact the novel has had on Rice's audience since its publication.

Rice's *Memnoch the Devil* is perhaps the most intriguing novel of *The Vampire Chronicles*. It is not a vampire story per say as much as it is a cautionary tale of redemption and salvation. The shift from Lestat's atheistic compulsion in *The Vampire Lestat* to his acceptance of the "truth" at the end of *Memnoch* is emblematic of Lestat's spiritual evolution within the course of the series. The most interesting aspect of the book, apart from Lestat's journey to Heaven and Hell, is without question Rice's rewriting of the Bible, which she does through Memnoch's story of the Creation. Interestingly, this attempt on Rice's part to rewrite the Bible calls to mind Northdrop Frye's *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature*, a book in which Frye undertakes the difficult task of highlighting the ways in which the Bible has become a source of inspiration for writers. According to Frye, the Bible has had an immense influence over the language and subject matters of various literary works (Frye xii). This influence is certainly perceptible in Rice's deconstruction of the Old and New Testaments in *Memnoch*, as much as in her addition of Lestat to the Christ's Passion. Furthermore, Memnoch's ambiguous characterization throughout the novel also hints at the important ascendancy Christian ideas have on Rice. That Memnoch is revealed to be deceitful and treacherous at the novel's end is only fitting, if

one considers the spiritual transition Rice is undergoing at that particular moment in her career.

With *Blood Canticle*, Rice's transition from gothic to Christian literature is almost complete. The final book of the series represents a distinct break from the new vampire tradition Rice had established with *Interview with the Vampire* and *The Vampire Lestat*. The increasing focus on Lestat's desire to act in a morally satisfying manner erases partially the moral struggle and anguish present in the earlier novels. In her autobiography, Rice admits that by the end of the novel, Lestat "had to tell the truth ... confessing his failure to ever be anything but a rambunctious reprobate and Byronic sinner, he nevertheless resigned as the hero of the books which had given him life" (Rice, Darkness 207). More specifically, his renewed belief in God, which parallels Rice's, paves the way for her new historical series about the life of Jesus Christ, *Christ the Lord*.

Rice's contribution to modern popular culture is undeniable. Her fiction appeals to "both the academic reader and the general reader with equal ease" (Hoppenstand and Browne 1). To say that there is a pre- and post-Anne Rice era in vampire literature is to state the obvious. Rice's fiction has transformed a genre that had been stuck in time, content and form since Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. With her *Vampire Chronicles*, Rice has brought a new

sensibility to the vampire myth. From Stephenie Meyers's *Twilight Saga* to P. C. Cast's *House of Night* series, from Charlaine Harris's *Sookie Stackhouse* novels to Ljane Smith's *Vampire Diaries*, both of which have recently been adapted into television series, the vampire has never seem more alive than in today's popular culture. That it is in every media and has become such an important part of our culture is perhaps the greatest accomplishment of Rice's *Vampire Chronicles*.

Anne Rice has now crossed a new step in her literary career with the publication of *Christ the Lord: Out of Egypt* and *Christ the Lord: The Road to Cana*. With the series' third novel, *Christ the Lord: The Kingdom of Heaven*, still to be published in the upcoming years and a new series, *Songs of the Seraphim*, underway, Rice's commitment to write Christian fiction is more than ever firmly established. This new series' first story, *Angel Time*, is a metaphysical thriller that will be published in October 2009. With so many new projects on the way, it will be interesting to see if Anne Rice's Christian fiction will become as groundbreaking and influential as her gothic fiction.

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