

Exorcising Pain Through Pen and Writing: A Case Study of Anne Rice's Vampire Chronicles

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Abstract

Anne Rice, author of gothic fiction, called herself an atheist for almost four decades, lasting roughly from 1958 to 1998, after suffering from personal losses. In the second half of which she began to write, producing more than twenty bestselling novels dealing with supernatural, sadomasochistic and historical themes; not only achieving a cult status in the process but also garnering academic attention. Millions of fans felt betrayed because Rice's characters were transgressive beings, especially her most famous creations like the vampires Louis and Lestat, who were identified by her readers and her critics as postmodern beings suffering from an existential dilemma in a Godless world. Louis's story, *Interview with the Vampire* was the first novel published by Rice, in 1976. Her second vampire novel, *Vampire Lestat* came out in 1985, followed by the *Queen of the Damned* in 1988. Critics like David Punter, Nina Auerbach, Dani Cavallaro and others have paid attention to the works produced in the first ten years of her career; especially these three vampire novels from her best known work collectively called the *Vampire Chronicles*, for her contribution to the genre of gothic fiction and her treatment of queer elements. She has also received feminist and psychoanalytical criticism for her other works of supernatural fiction as well as her erotica produced during the same period. Her biographer Katherine Ramsland's personal study of Rice's works ended in early nineties when Rice was still a self proclaimed atheist. There exists little critical commentary on her other vampire novels written in the nineties, where her dilemma with her religious beliefs is better played out. Her conflict with the church, her stance as an atheist, and her attempts to reconcile with her faith have not been discussed adequately; taking for granted that her vampires represent her existential dilemma as a non believer alone.

Keywords: Psychodrama, Religion, Aestheticism, Feminism, Garden/Eden

Creativity itself is a therapeutic process; it is used with patients suffering from trauma and other psychological problems effectively. Young patients, unable to read or write, produce colourful drawings which lead them out of psychological problems into good health; and we also know how playing as well as listening to music soothes the nerves, calms and cures imbalances.¹ Older patients are required to keep a journal to record their daily thoughts, dreams and impressions which are later read, and a pattern is usually recognized in them that may lead to a solution to their problems. All this is done under trained and licensed professional psychiatric supervision as a therapeutic process. As pointed out by Katherine Ramsland in Rice's biography and stated by Rice herself in several interviews, Lestat de Lioncourt is her creative self, he is the

¹ Case studies of this kind where such techniques have immensely helped patients with emotional problem are cited and discussed in their book by Mark Pearson and Helen Wilson, *Using Expressive Arts to Work with Mind, Body and Emotions: Theory and Practice*, London, Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2009.

undefeated projection of what she wanted to be.² Lestat like Rice grew up with two desires: to be a saint and a artist, to serve God with goodness, art and beauty. When his wish to join the church is rejected by his family he runs away and joins a travelling theatre group. Where Rice lost her faith in God because the church could not prevent her devout mother's alcoholism and subsequent death and also because of her child's death from blood cancer, Lestat loses faith both because God does not prevent him from becoming a vampire/dying and also because he lives through the period of French Revolution; conversely, in *The Vampire Lestat*, his friend Nicholas observes that when atheism is in vogue all like to call themselves atheists, perhaps betraying Rice's own feelings in the 60s and 70s. Lestat is self-destructive, he tries to kill himself several times, whenever times get too tough, or boring, or lonely; he buries himself in the earth and sleeps for decades, or tries to immolate himself by exposing his vampire self to the sun, or invites others of his kind to kill him when he fails in his own attempts, and they do try several times after being successfully provoked by Lestat, but true to his vampire-artist-self, he has a penchant for coming back from the dead – remaking himself. His efforts to come to terms with all these experiences, his failure to adjust to his time and surroundings and his struggles to find affiliation with people and ideas through the ages are given to us through his autobiographies. It is impossible to know whether the events described in his journals really did happen to him or were figments of his imagination/dreams, to make sense of which he was writing them down, just as Rice claims she was trying to do through her writings; as what Louis writes in *The Interview*, Lestat rubbishes in *The Vampire Lestat*, and later Louis confesses that some parts of his tale were indeed lies in the subsequent parts or the chronicles.

Lestat calls the world a Savage Garden where only the principle of beauty exists and rules over all. He explains this principle of beauty and his concept of the Savage Garden as,

Beauty wasn't the treachery...rather it was an uncharted land where one could make a thousand fatal errors, a wild and indifferent paradise without signposts of evil or good. In spite of all the refinements of civilization that conspired to make art-the dizzying perfection of the string quartet or the sprawling grandeur of Fragonard's canvases - beauty was savage. It was as dangerous and lawless as the earth had been eons before man had one single coherent thought in his head or wrote codes of conduct on tablets of clay. Beauty was a Savage Garden. So why must it wound...that the most despairing music is full of beauty? Why must it hurt...and make you...cynical and sad and untrusting? Good and evil, those are concepts man has made. And man is better, really, than the Savage Garden³

Lestat sees nature itself as savage and ultimately its laws are based on aesthetic principles, he sees that ethical truths are embedded in the physical and no one is safe from nature's savagery, not even the innocent, where only beauty is consistent. Five-hundred-year-old vampire Armand sees Lestat as the lord of the Savage Garden, and Memnoch, the devil, informs Lestat that his concept exactly describes God's plan, that is, his Savage Garden is God's version of perfection, and Lestat further understands how beauty and brutality coexist. Lestat goes into the Cathedral of Notre Dame, under Our Lady the mother of all and finds rejuvenation there, not through

² Rice states, "As a writer I put myself into Lestat much more deeply than I had put myself into Louis because I was dealing with aggression...my own repressions. Lestat...could do what I couldn't. I wanted to get out of the mind-set of the passive grieving person." Katherine Ramsland, *The Vampire Companion*, New York, Ballantine Books, 1983, 249.

³ Anne Rice, *The Vampire Lestat*, (New York, Ballantine Books, 1985), 130-131.

religion, but through the blood of a beggar woman with her infant, who approaches him out of sympathy and to lend him some kind words and support in his despair, he reports that he

felt the heat of her breasts swelling beneath her rags. Her soft, succulent body tumbled against me, giving itself to me, as I nestled her in all the bloodstained brocade and lace. I kissed her, feeding on her heat as I pushed the dirty cloth away from her throat, and I bent for the drink so skilfully that the sleepy child never saw it. Then I opened with careful trembling fingers the child's ragged shirt. This was mine, too, this little neck. There weren't any words for the rapture. Before I'd had all the ecstasy that rape could give. But these victims had been taken in the perfect semblance of love. The very blood seemed warmer with their innocence, richer with their goodness.⁴

After killing them Lestat looked at them and found that,

they slept together in death. They had found no sanctuary in the cathedral on this night. And I knew my vision of the garden of savage beauty had been a true vision. There was meaning in the world, yes, and laws, and inevitability, but they had only to do with the aesthetic. And in this Savage Garden, these innocent ones belonged in the vampire's arms. A thousand other things can be said about the world, but only aesthetic principles can be verified, and these things alone remain the same...as I went out in the early morning, I knew that the last barrier between my appetite and the world had been dissolved⁵

Believing in this truth and the failure of the Catholic Church to protect the innocents who enter it seeking shelter Lestat considers other cults. The options are enacted in the novels to evaluate their viability. These alternatives may have been inspired by Rice's childhood dreams, ideas collected from her surroundings, her desire to make art the singular goal of her life and her spiritual conflict⁶. Rice was well practiced in acting out her dreams in little skits with her sisters from her very childhood; she does the same through Lestat, evokes scenarios, playing out psychodramas⁷, testing them out in writing before embracing them. Though psychodramas are more commonly practiced as group activities under the supervision of a professional therapist, the director, on a stage as a full-fledged role-playing act, in literature they can be used to personify concepts and psychological forces. Blatner states that for "Moreno, anyone who was opened to the fullness of the creative subconscious was a 'genius' because, almost by definition, this source of spontaneity was far wiser than our ordinary ego-bound consciousness. Moreno claimed to be a genius and granted the same quality to any and all who would open their own minds to the fullness of their imaginations."⁸ The father of psychodrama and pioneer of group

⁴ Anne Rice, 142.

⁵ Anne Rice, 143.

⁶ Rice's life, influences working on her and her writings, and her spiritual struggle and journey in her *Vampire Chronicles* are discussed in great details in my dissertation, *Practicing Religion via Performing Art Anne Rice's Loss of Faith and her Struggle towards Reconciliation*, M.Phil Dissertation, Kolkata, Jadavpur University, 2011.

⁷ Developed by Jacob L. Moreno in 1937, psychodrama has strong elements of theatre, often conducted on a stage where props can be used. As a powerful tool, psychodrama is more than just a type of psychotherapy. Because of its associated principles, psychodrama can be applied in education, business, religion, community building, the home, and many other contexts. Adam Blatner, *Foundations of Psychodrama: History, Theory, and Practice*, 4th ed., New York, Springer Publishing Company, 2000.

⁸ Adam Blatner, *Foundations of Psychodrama: History, Theory, and Practice*, 4th ed., New York, Springer Publishing Company, 2000, 48.

psychotherapy Jacob Levy Moreno included religious themes in his writings and teaching of his concepts, and used it to enhance spirituality of his subjects or their connectedness with God through these themes. Lestat too plays out little dramas for us that represent an option or lifestyle where a superior presence might be felt in some form in his journals.

The Eden promised by the church had turned bleak and the church had not prevented it, thus it clearly did not lead to a benevolent God, its promise of salvation seemed fake, hence we see Lestat located in a savage, wild, indifferent and ruthless world, which might have once been a garden or could perhaps be one again; it was his desire to seek one out.

The idea of the Garden of Eden is the basis of the salvation that the church promises, forming a glimpse or even a window to the true heaven. The Garden of Eden engineered by God and located on earth was modelled on the glory and bliss of God's own Heaven, failing to sustain which man had to go through the sufferings of a mortal cage. The Garden of Eden is similar to the ideas of God as a King and the concept of the *City of God*⁹, which in the Old Testament traces its history to the un-fallen life of Adam and Eve, and borrows its description from the city of Jerusalem, its safe walls, and its fertile land. McGrath points out:

Jerusalem was tainted by the prophetic insistence [by Ezekiel] that sin and corruption within its walls would lead to the city losing its unique status. The siege of Jerusalem by the Assyrians, culminating in its capture and the destruction of its temple in 586 BC, was a devastating catastrophe, both for the social and political history of the city and for the hopes and beliefs of its population. Had Jerusalem lost its special status in the sight of God? The prophet Ezekiel had a vision of the "glory of the Lord" departing from the Jerusalem Temple.¹⁰

Through the sacrifice of Christ, the citizenship of heaven was restored to the humans, but they had to act in a certain way, emulate the models set for them and, in a way, approximate towards that heaven during their stay on earth. McGrath further explains that the idea of Eden as garden also called Paradise originates from the Old Persian word *paradeida*, which designates 'an enclosed garden' or perhaps 'a royal park', the Greek word *paradeisos*, borrowed from the Persian original, is often used in the writings of historians such as Xenophon to refer to the great walled gardens of the royal palaces of Persian kings such as Cyrus and the original garden of Eden is referred to as paradise in Greek translations of the Old Testament; adding that the term is also used at several points in the original Hebrew text of the Old Testament, the word 'Eden' itself may derive from the Sumerian word *edinu* (plain)¹¹. Also, the traditional Mesopotamian image of 'the king as gardener' was taken up and developed in new directions in the New Testament. It is also believed by many that perhaps the Eden had turned wild and the church as a body from which God has turned away due to its excesses and inner corruptions.

The vampire was the new god for Lestat, already a Dionysian figure, the new age idol. The relationship between the Dionysian god and the Christian god was already there¹², it is that

⁹ Augustine discusses the bliss of the city of God as opposed to the imperfection of the city of men, E. McGrath, *A Brief History of Heaven*, Malden, Blackwell, 2003.

¹⁰ E. McGrath, *A Brief History of Heaven*, 8.

¹¹ E. McGrath, *A Brief History of Heaven*.

¹² Jesus' sacrifice and fertility cults before him where one young man was sacrificed for the salvation of the community in many parts of the world, which later changed to sacrifice of an animal instead, a calf or a goat.

vegetation god who had become a vampire in Rice's myth, and was trying to cultivate, nurture and approximate towards the lost garden. The Garden was safe no more, it was savage, therefore it was the duty of the artist, the visionary and the vampire god to weed it and try to appease the original Gardener, so that He returns to it or makes His presence felt. The alternative gardens set up and evaluated in the *Chronicles* are: Lestat's 'Theatre des Vampires' in *The Interview* and *The Vampire Lestat*: an amoral tribute to art where vampirization takes place at multiple levels as we will find out; Akasha's 'Safe Eden' for women in *The Queen of the Damned*: an alternative peaceful world made for and run by women where only a handful of men are kept for breeding, ruled by the old Mother-vampire-goddess, who harrows the garden of the sinners; Wynken de Wilde's 'Pleasure Garden' in *Memnoch the Devil*: where heavenly state is achieved through sexual pleasure and indulgence in licentious behaviour, inspired by the art works of Grunewald and Bosch, and the practice of free-love by the hippies of San Francisco; and Lestat's 'Savage Garden', resembling the rain forests of Brazil, as described in the *Tale of the Body Thief*, where the vampire burns like Blake's *Tyger*, as a symbol of evil which exits to do good, a theme present and played out in different novels of the *Chronicles*.¹³ Through the Savage Garden of Lestat Rice also questions the purpose of her art, whether it exists for itself as a separate and autonomous principle or does it serve some other end higher than itself. "To think of a play is to see a person in action... beholding... the practice of [one's] day-to-day existence," states Nelvin Vos.¹⁴ By playing out these alternative philosophies and ways of communal living Lestat relives them, evaluates and eliminates them in order to select the garden that serves him best.

The Theatre of the Vampires

"Amoral aesthetes, Rice's vampires are beautifully devoid of social consciousness, another major attraction for disaffected readers"

(Nina Auerbach)

Death looms large over the 'Theatre des Vampires' in the heart of Paris (first mentioned and described in the *Interview*), which is owned by Lestat and run by vampires who are pretending to be actors, who are playing the part of the vampires in plays that are philosophical contemplations on the mercilessness and indifference of death. In *Vampire Lestat* they perform as giant marionettes, in accompaniment of an orchestra imitating mechanical music. The theatre is accepted by the lower-class Parisians as a metaphor of the hated aristocrats and Nicolas, Lestat's friend and fledgling vampire is the playwright, whose themes of "death in the midst of life makes mockery of all things sacred and beguiles mortals."¹⁵ One of his plays is about the starvation of a vampire who cannot get blood out of a puppet, pointing out that art is ultimately useless and perhaps brings no rewards to the artist during his life-time, and another is about a young dancer, who is forced to dance till it causes her death, bringing an end to both the dancer and the dance simultaneously. The horror of death is acted out on stage also on the occasion when Louis and Claudia are invited to audience at a much later date in the *Interview*, this time Armand is in charge. The story presents an old woman's vain pursuit of a figure representing Death in the woods, where Death takes interest in a beautiful young girl.

¹³ Anne Rice, *Queen of the Damned*, New York, Ballantine Books, 1988, *Memnoch the Devil*, 1995; reprint, London: Arrow Books, 1995, *The Tale of the Body Thief*, New York, Ballantine Books, 1992.

¹⁴ Nelvin Vos, *Inter-Actions: Relationships of Religion and Drama*, Maryland, University Press of America, 2009. 1-2.

¹⁵ Katherine Ramsland, *Prism of the Night*, New York, Plume, 1992. 457.

She is surprised by her untimely meeting with death which takes place in a slow seduction, a sort of a rape. She is surrounded by seven vampire-actors, who are playing as humans playing vampires in the play, they confuse her, scare her, strip her naked, exposing both her body and her fear to the audience, making her utterly helpless before Armand, the personification of Death; who seduces her, takes her and passes her around among the seven others until she is dead. Here the victim is real, a human victim, dazzled, perplexed and thrown upon the stage in all helplessness and confusion, where the vampire actors kill and feed on her before the elite Parisian audience. The spectators believe everything they see as mere play-acting and are moved by the so-called performance of players that they believe to be true artists and geniuses to be able to depict the mercilessness and horror of death so viscerally and powerfully to them. The vampires are successful in fooling the viewers and indeed the entire city in believing that they are actors and their real kills are just good acting. Here we meet an entire band of vampires who are artists. They are not only surviving but feeding on their audiences without their knowledge, and are getting paid in the process; they are flourishing with the blood and the gold of the city, which is willingly supplied to them instead of them getting hunted down killed.

The joke is on us, the receptors, whose experiences are observed and retold by authors in their novels, painters in their works, and we devour them back as something new and entertaining. We can also say that this is a process of mutual feeding, one devours the other and is devoured back, the vampires devour the girl on the stage and their performance is devoured back by the audience, who see beauty in it, are intellectually stimulated and aesthetically gratified, hence vampirized in the process. This is the ultimate form of deception at mass level. Rice strips the mortal girl on the stage, which may represent Rice's stripping herself and baring her inner self, her pain, her confusion and her subconscious mind to her readers for the sake of art, who lap it all up hungrily. Underneath the theatre are crypts that house the 'actors' during the day, the walls of their abode are decorated with imitations of Francisco de Goya's *Los Caprichos* (1798), where madness and expression of strongest and wildest passions are depicted in a grotesque fashion. These works further echo the demons of the mind that are hidden in the subconscious, away from vision. In the theatre above the crypts these demons are released in the name of art. Armand, who manages the theatre in the absence of Lestat, finds freedom and expression in art after he is rescued by Lestat from a Satanic band that had confined him in darkness for three hundred years. He clings on to the theatre as it brings him in closer contact with life and diverts his attention from his own doomed nature, as Lestat goes looking for another garden disenchanted by the theatre. When he returns Armand pushes him off a tower to kill him for having abandoned them once. This altar of art with all its priests of death are burnt in their sleep by a grieving Louis when they take away his companion child-vampire Claudia from him and Lestat does nothing to prevent it.

Akasha's safe Eden for women

In *The Queen of the Damned* the now rock-star Lestat is joined by the mother and the oldest of all vampires.¹⁶ Rice based Akasha on the image of a woman who was white like marble seen in a dream at the age of four; this woman was walking down the street holding a prayer book while a voice informed her in her dream that it was her "Regis grandmother"; this dream had scared

¹⁶ Anne Rice, *Queen of the Damned*.

her and haunted her since.¹⁷ Later she could draw parallels between the image in her dream and the idea of the earth as the mother and the first Goddess of human civilization, present in every culture, old and pre-Christian. The mother goddess symbolized fertility, bounty as well as the indifferent ruthlessness of nature which often caused deaths and disasters. She could further relate this old goddess to own her mother under whom she had envisioned her perfect Eden, in a household where her father was absent owing to work, and she and her sisters were free to do their will under a very lenient mother who defended their every act to the world. Gabrielle, Lestat's mother, had left him to his own with her prophetic vision of a future when the Savage Garden would override civilization, in *Vampire Lestat*. Queen Akasha awakens from her millennium long sleep seduced by this very vision, believing she could realize and rule it with Lestat at her side.

In her dormant, dreamlike state Akasha listens to all the prayers of all the suffering mortals, she records the conflicts, the wars and the deaths that went hand in hand with human civilization. When Lestat plays his music to awaken her, she rises, kills her old consort Enkil and immediately decides to rid the world of ninety-nine percent of men as they are the primary source of pain and suffering in her understanding; causing war and death, rape and subjugation. She kills thousands of men as well as renegade vampires all over the world with her mind power and pyro-kinesis and plans to create a heaven for women, keeping only a few men to breed; establishing a safe, peaceful and happy society of women only. Rice credits Akasha for inventing the myth of the mother goddess Isis, who ruled the world in Egyptian mythology with her consort Osiris whom she had resurrected from the dead, just like Akasha vampirized her dying king Enkil, and taught the cannibals of Egypt the art of cultivation.¹⁸ Now she actively personifies the cruel, unsafe abode of mother-nature, who demands sacrifices at her whim. At first Lestat is excited by her plan, immortality had become boring, and Marius's¹⁹ idea of being the silent and continuous awareness was tedious to him; but when the queen puts her plan in motion, ordering Lestat to kill for her, Lestat soon becomes horrified. He is clearly not ready to weed her garden in order to make it safe for only one section of humanity.

Rice, like many others, was not very comfortable with the kind of feminism that she had witnessed in San Francisco, she thought some feminists were very puritanical, tyrannical and fascist in their approach; they were biased and "antisexual and antiwoman...the segment of feminist community that says nobody should pose for *Playboy*...buy a magazine that presents women in that light...That kind of thing is shortsighted....shallow and conformist, and ... often very aggressive", "feminism became a huge stick with which to beat people over the head. Women would attack other women in the most insensitive ways... [They] become truly enamoured of ideas...believe they're absolutely right...do the damndest things...get swept up in some pretty crazy cruelties."²⁰ Rice decided to write pornographic novels, which she did in the decade between *The Interview* and *Vampire Lestat*, where she claims women could have their fill, and each page would be as erotic and titillating as the next, so no one needed to mark out the hot pages, as she thought if women wanted to read about sex and enjoyed

¹⁷ Rice did not know the meaning of Regis then, nor did she remember ever hearing it before that dream. Ramsland, *Prism*, 15.

¹⁸ According to the myth related by Marius to Lestat, and later elaborated by Maharet in *The Queen of the Damned*

¹⁹ Marius is the thousand-year-old Vampire, painter of triptychs and keeper of Akasha and Enkil.

²⁰ Michael Riley, *Conversations with Anne Rice* 1st Ed., New York, Ballantine Books, 1996, 65 and 151.

sadomasochism they should indulge in it and not hold back in the name of feminism. In *Akasha the Queen of the Damned*, Rice presented the fascist feminist who has a grand scheme of social engineering. "[Akasha's] mind and values were fixed in 4000 BC" notes Rice. "[She] thinks in absolute terms and she is very dangerous."²¹ She also deceives herself into believing that her plan is good, and sees beauty in it. So, at the end of the novel the other old vampires, who have witnessed the passing time with their eyes open and believe that humanity still has a chance and can solve its own problems in time, without unwanted interferences from the vampire kind, intervene and thwart Akasha's plan of a new Eden. Two old vampires Maharet and Mekare who were vampirized by the queen and had sworn revenge, do not kill her, lest they endanger their own kind, but overpower her and extract her heart and her brain and feed on these vital organs to preserve her immortal essence in themselves. They firmly believe in their roles as witnesses and nurturers of their mortal side of the family, and sit back to watch the world unfold further, thus rejecting the garden envisioned by the radical feminist Akasha.

The Savage Garden of the Vampire god

Once again bored with his immortality and in his desire to become human again, Lestat decides to exchange bodies with a willing mortal, Raglan James, adept in body switching techniques. He believes his human life would bring out the better side of him, where killing will not be a part of his everyday routine, and simple pleasures like drinking orange juice, which is "thick like blood, but full of sweetness and strangely like devouring light itself", would be enough to forget his dark past.²² He is ready to give up his stardom and his prime position in the vampire community for a simple life of anonymity and mortality. But once he becomes human he discovers the limitations of a mortal body, he catches cold and suffers from pneumonia. He loses the vampiric superpowers too, as he stumbles across the world trying to look for his vampire body and the thief who has run away with it. The double seduction of the stage of the Theatre of the Vampires is completed in this novel. Raglan is seduced by the power of the superstar vampire and the vampire is seduced by the naiveté of the mortal receptors, ready for an exchange. But once stripped of his advantages Lestat yearns for them again, while the thief enjoys them to the fullest. Rice states "I read once that an artist takes things to a point where he...questions his own devices"²³ Lestat loses his illusion about trying to be good via art, he discovers his art has only seduced another into evil and concludes that he loves to be evil and prefers his fallen vampire self over a redeemable mortal frame.

His quest takes him to Brazil, where with the help of his aged and close mortal friend David, he devises a plan and successfully knocks the thieving spirit out of his own body and reclaims it. In the process of his hunt he envisions himself as a tiger placed inside the dense and rich Brazilian rainforest, buzzing with life in the form of myriad species that form a part of one single scheme, one food chain. The image of the tiger was also perceived by Rice in a dream, where it had approached and placed its paws on her shoulder, "I thought it was going to kill me...but only ate the necklace I was wearing... I'm as influenced by a dream like that -

²¹ Gail Abbot Zimmerman, "The World of the Vampire: Rice's Contribution", *The Anne Rice Reader*, ed. Katherine Ramsland, New York, Ballantine Books, 113.

²² Anne Rice, *Tale of the Body Thief*, 224-225.

²³ Ramsland, *Prism*, 357.

in terms of feeling, mood, and symbolism – as by [the] things I read and see.”²⁴ Also the tiger in Blake’s *Tyger*, burning in the darkness and the forest of the night infused with her dream. Lestat finally realized that in the absence of a gardener, a God who had turned away from his garden, it was his job as a tempter, a punisher and scavenger, seducing the weak willed, the sinners and feeding on them, weeding the savage garden, a provisional garden, until the return of the original with the return of the Gardener. The tiger stripping away the necklace, a symbol of Rice’s affluence and materialism, was a reminder for her to not to lose herself completely in her celebrity status. And as the tiger Lestat finally hunts the body thief down, who had run away yet again with David’s mortal body, and kills him. David, who is now the owner of the younger body of the thief, is forcefully vampirized by Lestat to join him as a vampire god and help him weed the garden. Rice had published the *Tale of the Body Thief* just before her old father became terminally ill; her foreboding of his death and a desire to extend his existence in a younger and stronger body is also acted out by the body switching and immortalizing of the young David.

The Pleasure Garden of Wynken de Wilde

This garden features men and women both in it. The foundation of this garden is love, and sexual pleasure as opposed to the ruthless and brutal foundation laid out by Akasha. Within the major plot of *Memnoch the Devil*, Rice includes many small stories. One of them was inspired by her study of renaissance painters:

the scholarship on Bosch, Grunewald, and other painters...insist they were members of some sort of cult and their work is replete with blasphemous symbol...we have many Northern German Renaissance painters – Cranach...who have left us very disturbing ‘sacred works.’ The idea that a sensualist ‘code’ may exist in someone’s work is very enticing.²⁵

As the name suggests, it is obvious that the greatest inspiration for this garden was the 16th century triptych *The Garden of Earthly Delights* (1515) by Hieronymus Bosch. Lestat stalks and kills an international art thief and drug-dealer Roger whose ghost returns to haunt Lestat and asks him to preserve the collection of twelve books by a medieval Rhineland Catholic scribe and rubricator called Wynken de Wilde. Wynken is a heretic, as he claims to find oneness with God through loving the flesh, falls in love with his brother’s wife Blanche and organizes secret orgies in the garden with her and four of her friends. Wynken’s books are illuminated manuscripts which contain coded messages, lascivious invitations and lewd suggestions, which are designed to correspond and communicate with his beloved. They almost always depict a castle garden with a naked man frolicking with five women, and dancing around a fountain. Wynken was discovered with Blanche by his brother who chopped him into pieces and buried him by the fountain. It is evident that the key elements that Rice picked up from Bosch’s garden were: God uniting Adam and Eve, though they are not touching each other in the painting, there is a presence of a fountain in the middle which implies the flowing of sexual desires, from the first panel; in the middle panel God is forgotten and men and women

²⁴ Katherine Ramsland, *The Vampire Companion: The official Guide to Anne Rice’s The Vampire Chronicles*. 2nd ed., New York, Ballantine Books, 1995, 66.

²⁵ Ramsland, *Companion*, 525.

are frolicking in delight, the presence of the birds and beasts, men riding horses around naked women emerging from lakes represent lust, and the fruits in their hands echo their multiplication, ‘to pluck fruit’ was an euphemism used for the sexual act during Bosch’s time. The final panel shows the consequences of such indulgence, a violent hell where the sinners are tortured with musical instruments, and a lake where water has turned into blood.²⁶ Roger collected these books and went to San Francisco to form his own cult of free love, peace and charity, based on the books of Wynken, and instead ended up as a smuggler!

Though Rice did not participate in the sexual revolutions herself she witnessed them in ample at her university and had friends and acquaintances in her social circle who were ideologically and actively part of these movements. They were trying out LSD and practicing sexual freedom in front of Rice. The sexual revolution was a fight for the right to self-expression against the bland conformity expected by the capitalistic and corporate American culture. In her book *Goth’s Dark Empire* (2005) Carol Siegel points out that sexual freedom in 1960s and 1970s became possible and liberating with the invention and marketing of drugs that eliminated the threat of death through venereal diseases and provided the option of birth control, which meant freedom for both men and women. They did not foresee AIDS, for them being alive meant sexually alive, “being sexually limited or inhibited by one’s own feelings or circumstances meant being in effect dead, and that deadness was a state many understood to be forced upon them by a sexist culture.”²⁷ In the same way the people in Bosch’s garden do not foresee the outcome of their disobedience, like Wynken could not foresee discovery and death, they just gave into their desires, living fully and freely before meeting their violent end. Rice’s *Interview* according to Siegel foretold AIDS, with their exchange of fluids²⁸, creation of the vampire, or death in life.

Lestat is unable to accept these gardens whole heartedly. Louis, first seduced and then persecuted by the coven of vampire actors in the *Interview* burns down the *Theatre des Vampires* of Paris, making him reject the ultimate chapel of art, Louis – Rice’s defeated self does not see redemption or life in art, and we know Lestat, her creative-self had also abandoned it. Ten years from *Interview*, when *Lestat* was published she voiced the hypocritical catholic attitude about the profanity of the stage through the mortal Nicolas, who informs Lestat that “sin always feels good... Why do you think the church has always condemned the players? It was from Dionysius, the wine god, that the theatre came. You can read that in Aristotle. And Dionysius was a god that drove men to debauchery. It felt good to you to be on that stage because it was...lewd – the age-old service of the god of the grape”; he also points out how the players are never allowed to be buried in consecrated ground because they are irredeemable

²⁶ Robert Cumming, “Bosch: The Garden of Earthly Delights”, *Annotated Guides to Art: The World’s Greatest Paintings Explored and Explained*, 1995; reprint, London: Dorling & Kindersley, 1999, 24-25.

²⁷ Carol Siegel, *Goth’s Dark Empire*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2005, 7.

²⁸ In the *Vampire Chronicles* one does not become a vampire if bitten by another, there is an elaborate unholy communion. After having carefully selected one’s victim the vampire drains one of one’s blood to the point before one’s heart ceases to beat, thereafter, the victim is made to drink the vampire’s blood, bringing one immortal life in death or death in life, along with it enhanced abilities and powers. Drinking and diseased blood were very powerfully fatal presences in the author’s life, who had lost her mother and her daughter to drinking and diseased blood; who as a devout catholic till her teens had witnessed and believed in the magic of the Holy Communion daily at church, where the bread and wine transubstantiated into the divine body and blood of the Christ, bringing everlasting life to the believers. Her way of making of a vampire is a grotesque imitation and mockery of the ritual she and Lestat practiced daily as believers.

sinner.²⁹ It is only when Nicolas is turned into a vampire and settles in his fallen state that he is able to write plays for the theatre of the vampires. Nicolas also points out what Rice was doing as a writer, “no one values anything anymore. Fashion is everything. Even Atheism is a fashion.”³⁰

Akasha’s garden is also flawed because in the religion of his childhood the Supreme Being is a male God, always depicted as a *Regis* Grandfather-like figure. It is his father that Lestat goes back to again and again, while his mother, when turned into a vampire, goes off to wander the earth on her own; it’s his father that Lestat cares for till his death, and does not ‘profane’ or alter his death with an undead vampire life. When Rice and her sisters lived without her father’s presence in the house for three years, even though her mother allowed them to do their will, it had no order and soon plunged into chaos due to her mother’s addiction. Her mother’s inability to sustain the Eden and her choice to sink into alcoholism proved her incompetence to Rice. Whereas her and her father’s companionship lasted longer, he lived out the full span of his life and died old. She could never accept a supreme mother figure. In Howard’s second wife Rice’s sisters had found a stable mother, who nurtured them, just like Maharet and Mekare decide to step in and preserve the human beings from Akasha’s whim.

Lestat could not accept Wynken’s garden not only because of the horrific results of lust that were embedded in his mind from, religious instructions, Bosch’s painting and the religious education of his earlier days that had promoted chastity very strictly, but also because he was awake to witness the aftermath of free sex and addictive behaviour. In a way her *Interview* was prophetic, Siegel states, “Since the AIDS pandemic, it has been difficult to read the novel’s [*Interview*] obsessive treatment of erotic predation and blood-borne infection outside the context of the fears of sexuality aroused, or more precisely reawakened, by that crisis”, and also because *Interview* was written before AIDS its “sexual symbology can be understood as a bridge between the discontents that...accompanied the sexual revolution and the fulfilment of their direst prophecies of its consequences...fulfilled with the onset of the pandemic.”³¹ Siegel sees Louis as the emblem of those miserable wretches who saw themselves as seduced and abandoned by the sexual revolution...given no instruction...to live the new, vampiric life into which he has been plunged because of another’s erotic attention...he is tormented by the unleashing of his own dark, predatory desires, which he cannot satisfy without making other souls as alienated from the ordinary daylight world as he is himself. His lamentation of this situation sounds uncannily like that of the many people who now insist that the reason the sexual revolution did not offer real liberation is that what humans truly need is emotional intimacy, not orgasmic release.³²

While Lestat seems perfectly content with this state, Armand and Claudia are “the children “made” (that is, into vampires) too soon, and thus hopelessly perverse in their exercise of their dark powers.”³³ Conversely, Auerbach argues that “AIDS bestowed nostalgic intensity

²⁹ Rice, *Lestat*, 52.

³⁰ Rice, *Lestat*, 46

³¹ Carol Siegel, *Goth’s Dark Empire*, 7.

³² Carol Siegel,

³³ Carol Siegel,

on Rice’s eternally young, beautiful, self-healing men, whose boredom with immortality looked like a heavenly dream to young men turned suddenly mortal”; “Science reconstitutes vampirism into a universal cure”.³⁴ *Interview* was published in mid-seventies, while *Memnoch* came out twenty years later in 1995; in this long period Rice’s prophetic vision was realized with the horrors of AIDS, discovered in 1980. Therefore, when she played out the pleasure garden in her *Memnoch*, she did not make her immortals Lestat or Louis a part of it. Besides she had already written five pornographic novels, between the release of *Interview* and *Lestat*, elaborately living out her sexual fantasy to the fullest. The twelve books of Wynken remained hidden from the world in Lestat’s possession; while the true relic, the Veil of Veronica³⁵ retrieved by Lestat in his cosmic journey in *Memnoch* is revealed to the world by the television evangelist Dora, at the end of the novel.³⁶ Not only was her own prophetic vision in her earliest novel realized, but also her Catholic vision of hell was proved right by AIDS.

Lestat settles down better with an ambivalent relationship with his faith, an evil figure within his old faith, as the tiger or an interim gardener in the Savage Garden, clearly places him back inside the Catholic universe, one that needs an evil presence to confirm the true presence of God. God could always be reached through action, whether they were church rituals or doing good or art believed young Lestat as did his creator. Through Lestat’s decision to weed the Savage Garden Rice further makes His presence evident, telling herself that God was not just a noun for the crucifix at the altar that her mother used to make her visit, but a verb that is manifested via the unfolding of His creation. When she suffered a diabetic coma at the age of sixty-seven, brought upon by her own alcohol addiction and survived it, she took it as a sign that God had shown mercy. She re-joined the church, and decided that by doing the work of God and teaching his mortal life, an action played out by him to manifest his love for his fallen and sinning children, she could consciously serve God this time and accepting that art was to serve God. She declared and wrote the fictionalized history of the life of Christ,

³⁴ Nina Auerbach, *Our Vampires, Ourselves*, Chicago, University of Chicago, 1995, 175 and 179.

³⁵ There are several copies of this relic each claiming to be the real one. The idea in *Memnoch* is to retrieve the real relic, or to rediscover the real essence of Christianity from underneath the conflicting doctrines, each claiming its superiority over the others, the superstitions, the clergy which stands between the faith and the people. By sending back Lestat to the time of Jesus’ journey to Golgotha, Rice puts him, the sinner, inside the stations of the cross which she used to meditate upon in her childhood as a believer, it is her way of going back in time to that moment when her faith was born. By making her supernatural character retrieve the Veil of Veronica Rice may have been alluding to the story of the donation of one such holy image now kept in the village church of Manoppello, Italy, known since the mid-seventeenth century, which appeared under curious circumstances, rolled-up and bestowed by a mysterious pilgrim who was seen entering into the church but never seen leaving, as mentioned in his book by Joe Nickell, *Relics of the Christ*, Kentucky, The University Press of Kentucky, 2007.

³⁶ Wynken’s manuscript is never given to the world in the novel, it is locked away, instead Lestat does the biddings of who he believes to be God, the Devil and a TV evangelist to preach the word of God and rekindle faith in the world. The experience leaves Lestat bewildered, mutilated and absolutely confused, in chains and later in recuperation, unable to comprehend his own story even as he writes it, or rather is unable to write it at all, but dictates it at David who records his words. Lestat is unable to see the liberation in the sexual revolution nor is he able to accept the moral dictates against it, there is a final attempt to believe in the magic and the myth of his lost religion, where Lestat is sent to the past to recover Veronica’s veil, and prove to the world the divinity of Christ and re-establish faith in God. He is unable to believe in his own adventure, is crazed by it, and fails even write it, receding back in the process of healing, where he is like a patient narrating his problems to a patient therapist who records them. David is a perfect listener, as when mortal he belonged to the secret sect *Talamasca*, a group of scholars who know and record all that goes on in the world, both perceived as natural and supernatural, but unlike vampires Akasha and Lestat do not intervene.

completing her journey back into Catholic faith, and along with that a memoir *Called out of Darkness: A Spiritual Confession* (2008), again 'writing' her spiritual autobiography, much in the fashion of Lestat, to chronicle her relationship with her faith, this time as herself. But this reconciliation would not last long, soon she found she could not remain faithful to a church that was not tolerant towards homosexuality, her son author Christopher Rice being gay, and announced her divorce with it again