

7. *Good at Being Evil:* *the Demons of The Vampire Chronicles*

Az,
the evil mother of all demons,
grew angry and raged
for her own purposes.
From the dirt of male and female demons
she made this body and entered it. [...]
She created the body as a prison
and chained the grieving soul into it.

– “Adam, Child of Demons”
(A Manichean Creation Myth)¹

NATURALISTIC SUPERNATURAL IN HORROR

The early 1970s were a time of renewal for the demons. They had a prominent role in the redefinition of horror fiction that was taking place in those days. The general thrust was that somewhat romantic and formulaic old horror was being replaced by realistically depicted violence and by stories that took their inspiration from the fears of insanity in an increasingly anonymous world. Alfred Hitchcock's two classic films of the 1960s, *Psycho* (1960) and *The Birds* (1963) were indicative of this movement towards monsters that had different sort of claims on realism and even credibility than what had been the case before. This new style was especially striking in the movies – the comfortless graphic realism of *The Night of the Living Dead* (1968) and *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974) caused shocks and later campaigns to ban horror in home videos – but the new horror movies concerned with the demonic had their origins in novels. The movie adaptations of *Rosemary's Baby* (1968) and *The Exorcist* (1971) were exceptionally straightforward: the novels themselves were situated in contemporary America and written in documentary style that abandoned the twisted prose of some earlier horror in favour of low key presentations of natural and supernatural events. Even details like the rhythm of the text, its division into chapters and the distribution of sudden, “shock” effects into the text make these novels “cinematic.” Also traditional monsters, such as vampires, were in for a change in this redefinition of horror fiction. The aesthetic subversion reflected a change in attitude; one indication of this was the interest in

¹ *The Other Bible* (Barnstone 1984, 45).

“turning the tables” by letting the narrative focus and point of view shift to the side of monsters, instead of their hunters. In the case of vampires, in 1975 *The Dracula Tape* by Fred Saberhagen lets Dracula tell his own story, and to prove himself more humane and sympathetic than the humans hunting him.² The time was right for an even more radical rewriting of the stereotype; Anne Rice had already worked on a short story about a vampire giving a taped interview in 1969, and developed it into a completed novel in January 1974.³

The first part of Anne Rice’s *Vampire Chronicles*,⁴ *Interview With The Vampire* (1976) took almost twenty years before it was translated into a movie version (1994, by Neil Jordan), but this is not to blame the novel itself: it is cast in an emphatically realistic and documentary mode. As its title indicates, Rice took this most popular and most traditional of horror movie monsters, the vampire, and put it through an interview.⁵ During an all-night discussion the vampire (named Louis de Pointe du Lac) sheds light on his life and tells about his loves and fears and aspirations, much like any modern celebrity in an in-depth interview. The basic attitude is aptly captured by another celebrity of the “new horror,” Clive Barker: “To deny the creatures as individuals the right to speak, to actually state their cause, is perverse – because I *want* to hear the Devil speak.”⁶ Anne Rice’s vampires are very self-conscious individuals, and the demonic element in their immortal lives puts this *individuality* into double illumination. Focusing on these characteristics, I am going to concentrate in my analysis on the metaphorical capacities of the vampire.

As a metaphor, the vampire has been fertile in many discussions of modern society and individuality. Perhaps the most famous case is Karl

² See Auerbach 1995, 131-32. – The essay and anthology of texts collected in Frayling 1992 make up a good introduction to the literary history of vampires. See also Barber 1988 for the social and psychological history behind the “vampire myth.” Carter 1989 is an informative bibliography of vampire literature, drama, and criticism.

³ Ramsland 1995, 207-8; Riley 1996, xv. A version of the original short story (dated in August 1973) is printed in Ramsland 1995, 553-72.

⁴ The series reached a momentary conclusion in its fifth part; I use the following abbreviations in the references: *Interview with the Vampire* (IV; Rice 1975/1996), *The Vampire Lestat* (VL; Rice 1985/1986), *The Queen of the Damned* (QD; 1988/1989), *The Tale of the Body Thief* (BT; Rice 1992/1993), *Memnoch the Devil* (MD; Rice 1995). It should be noted that because of the considerable length of the series (the five books amount to 2370 pages), it has not been advisable to paraphrase the story-line of them all. I have concentrated in my analysis on the most outstanding features of Rice’s demonic vampires. (*Pandora*, published in March 1998, leaves the narrative of Louis and Lestat and opens a new series “New Tales of the Vampires,” exploring the lives of interesting minor characters from the *Vampire Chronicles*. The latest addition is *The Vampire Armand* [October 1998], which returns to the popular *Vampire Chronicles* subtitle.)

⁵ Rice: “I was just sitting at the typewriter wondering what it would be like if a vampire told you the truth about what it was like to *be* a vampire. I wanted to know what it really feels like.” (Ramsland 1995, 207.)

⁶ Clive Barker, interview with Phil Edwards (“Hair-Raiser,” *Crimson Celluloid* No. 1/1988; Barker - Jones 1991, 11). This claim is discussed below, page 193.

Marx's use of the vampire as a metaphor for the inhuman qualities of capitalism: "Capital is dead labour that, vampire-like, only lives by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks."⁷ The problematic aspects of modern existence could be interpreted through the vampire metaphor; inequality of individuals, and the whole basic setting of a capitalistic society – instead of being a member of a clan, a village, or a guild, a modern (capitalist) individual is conceived as a "lonely predator." The ability to make one's own fortune and to outwit competitors has become essential. On the other hand, the psychoanalytical attention to the vampire has concentrated on sexual explanations: in his classic study, *On the Nightmare*, Ernest Jones interpreted the vampire as a symbol for forbidden desire. According to him, the myth is based on the mixed feelings of desire and hate towards one's parents in early childhood, and on the guilt of the living when they think of the deceased. But, he also notes how important the metaphorical connotations of the vampire are; "a social or political tyrant who sucks the life from his people" and "an irresistible lover who sucks away energy, ambition or even life for selfish reasons" are his two important examples.⁸

For the continuing existence and renewal of this archetypal monster, its ability to stimulate new, and sometimes contradictory, metaphorical associations is essential. In this chapter, I will at first explore the overt connection of Rice's vampires with demons, and then proceed into an analysis of the different aspects of ambivalence and heterogeneity in the texts. I shall finally parallel the self-conception and interpersonal relations in the texts to the paradoxes or inconsistencies this series displays in different aspects of its textuality. My hypothesis is that the demonic imagery used in the *Vampire Chronicles* signals conflicts both in regard to how the characters perceive themselves, and in the production of the "textual identity" of this series.

DEMONIC VAMPIRE AS A FIGURE FOR MORAL AMBIVALENCE

In folk beliefs vampires were often connected with the Devil, and even more often with undefined demonic forces.⁹ However, in literature, not all vampires are Satanic; they are not unproblematically evil and repugnant – something desirable is always intermingled. There even exists a tradition of vampire friends where the motif of bloodsucking is indicative of intimacy and vulnerability.¹⁰ This ambivalence has always hinted at the polyphonic demon

⁷ Marx, *Das Kapital* (1887; Chapter X); quoted in Leatherdale 1985, 216.

⁸ Jones 1931/1959, 98-130 (quotation from page 125); also in Frayling 1992, 398-417 ["On the Vampire"].

⁹ Cavendish 1975, 57; Barber 1988, 29-38.

¹⁰ Nina Auerbach's study *Our Vampires, Ourselves* (1995) focuses on this particular feature (its title parodies *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, the popular 1970s guide by the Boston Women's Health Book Collective). It is also hard to imagine children's vampire books like *The Little Vampire* (by Angela Sommer-Bodenburg) without this aspect of the tradition. However, the traditional image of the demon has been transformed into loveable and cute in some works of popular culture, too, as in the computer game *Lilil Devil*

behind the hideous monster. In the *Vampire Chronicles* the connection between vampires and demons is overt and central. “Demon” and “fiend” are constant figurative synonyms for Rice’s vampires; even if early in the series all the central characters (including the older vampires) verify that they do not believe in the existence of any Christian God or Devil, the demon is very real for them as an idea – the different varieties of demonic discourse are used to explain their condition.

Do devils love each other? Do they walk arm in arm in hell saying, “Ah, you are my friend, how I love you,” things like that to each other? It was a rather detached intellectual question I was asking, as I did not believe in hell. But it was a matter of a concept of evil, wasn’t it? All creatures in hell are supposed to hate one another, as all the saved hate the damned, without reservation.¹¹

These are thoughts of a vampire, who is presented as a being that is trying to make sense of its existence in terms of demonic discourse. The paradoxical quality of Anne Rice’s vampires is intertwined with their self-conscious and moral character; they cannot exist long without killing humans and using them as nourishment – yet, they are presented as moral creatures fully aware of their actions. The self-accusations and guilt are particularly strong in the case of Louis, the protagonist and first-person narrator of his story in *Interview with the Vampire*. If, then, Rice’s vampires call themselves devils and demons, what sort of demons are they? How is the demonic discourse applied in the *Vampire Chronicles*?

The first aspect is bound up with the moral ambivalence of demon; discussions about good and evil saturate the action-packed narrative of the vampire heroes. Louis at first tries to resist his “nature” as a vampire: he refuses to kill humans and takes his nourishment from animals instead. However, this is depicted as a profoundly unsatisfactory alternative for a vampire. Louis’s guilt and refusal to accept his lot is even represented as a kind of evil in itself – it makes Claudia, his vampire child and companion suffer. “Your evil is that you cannot be evil, and I must suffer for it,” are Claudia’s desperate words to Louis.¹² Because of their need for blood, vampires are defined as predatory beings. Their virtues are strength and the emotional detachment they need to kill and survive. Louis admits this: he equals his “strength” with “that curious thing I’ve called my detachment.”¹³ If this

(Gremlin Games, 1994). It is also interesting to note how even the Disney company ventures into the underworld with its recent production, *Hercules* (and, in a more sombre tone, already in the classic *Fantasia*, 1940 [the segment “Night on Bald Mountain”]). The ambivalence (the simultaneous presence of unsettling and sympathetic aspects) is much more boldly displayed in some comic book explorations of the demonic – *Nemesis the Warlock* (by Pat Mills and Kevin O’Neill) and *Spawn* (by Todd McFarlane) as popular examples. Both feature demons as their darkly sympathetic main characters.

¹¹ VL, 102.

¹² IV, 283.

¹³ IV, 276.

moral reversal was complete, these vampires would be completely satanic creatures; that what human's call evil would be highest good for them. On the contrary, Rice's vampires dismiss and ridicule the traditional, one-dimensional and morally fixed concept of the demon. They refuse to settle for a place in the Christian mythology, and reject a simple role as "servants of Satan."¹⁴ Yet, the elevation of a vampire into the status of a hero and protagonist (the central focus offered for the reader's identification) could certainly have incited someone like Marx to make biting comments on the sad and corrupted state of our ("late capitalistic") society.

"[Y]ou die when you kill, as if you feel that you deserve to die," speculates the Parisian vampire, Armand, of his intuitions concerning Louis.¹⁵ This empathy makes Louis faulty in vampires' standards: it makes him weak. Paradoxically, however, this "weakness" is the most treasured feature of Louis at the end of the narrative. The ambivalence that these vampires display towards their own natures, their (demonic) selves is profound. Armand continues his explanation: "[Y]ou are the spirit [...]. This is the spirit of your age. Don't you see that? Everyone feels as you feel. Your fall from grace and faith has been the fall of a century."¹⁶ Vampires have to keep their contact with humanity and their times; otherwise, their immortal life will become meaningless for them, everything else changes but they remain the same. This will eventually lead into withdrawal, madness and suicide. "[W]e are *conscious* death," claims a vampire to his victim;¹⁷ this consciousness and self-awareness makes the best of vampires also the most human. This contradictory mixture of human and other (supernatural monster) is, in turn, what makes Rice's vampires demonic beings. The recognition of a fundamental moral ambivalence acts as an interpretative guide; both Rice's vampires and the reader are directed to suspect some sort of heterogeneity, or polyphony, in the ontological make-up of vampires – and to embark on a long narrative quest to explore this possibility.

DESIRE TO KNOW THE LIMITS OF HETEROGENEOUS SELF

They had been entered through their wounds by the demon at the point when mortal life itself was about to escape. But it was the blood that the demon permeated in that twilight moment when the heart almost stopped. Perhaps it was the substance that he had always sought in his ragings, the substance that he had tried to bring forth from his victims with his antics, but he had never been able to inflict enough wounds before his victim died. But now he had the blood, and the blood was not merely the demon, or the blood of the King and Queen [Enkil and Akasha], but a combina-

¹⁴ This is especially deliciously acted out in the scene where Lestat (the modern, individual vampire) meets the old-fashioned group of vampires in Paris: "Our Leader is Satan [...]. And we serve Satan as we are meant to do.' 'Why?' [Lestat] asked politely." (VL, 213.)

¹⁵ IV, 254.

¹⁶ IV, 310.

¹⁷ IV, 241.

tion of the human and the demon which was an altogether different thing.¹⁸

The “all too human” vampires, the protagonists Louis and Lestat, desire two things from the very beginnings: blood and knowledge. Both of these are essential for their survival; blood for their continued existence as supernaturally infected creatures, and knowledge for their psychological survival. The quotation above is the high moment of the latter desire. The origin of vampires is finally revealed in it. This pursuit for blood and knowledge could be described in terms of Peter Brooks’s “narrative desire”: “A rock-bottom paradigm of the dynamic of desire can be found in one of the very earliest novels in the Western tradition [...] where all of the hero’s tricks and dodges are directed initially at staying alive,” Brooks writes. He continues that the hero “stands as a figure of the reader’s efforts to construct meanings in ever-larger wholes, to totalize his experience of human existence in time, to grasp past, present and future in a significant shape.”¹⁹ Following Roland Barthes’s notion that we read because of our “passion for (of) meaning,” Brooks defines the driving force behind narratives as a psychological and semantic demand:

Desire is inherently unsatisfied and unsatisfiable since it is linked to memory traces and seeks its realization in the hallucinatory reproduction of indestructible signs of infantile satisfaction. [...]

Discourse hence becomes the interconnection of signifiers one with another in a “signifying chain” where meaning (in the sense of access to the meaning of unconscious desire) does not consist in any single link of the chain, yet through which meaning nonetheless *insists*.²⁰

The desire for blood becomes desire for knowledge as the narrative desire fuelling the *Vampire Chronicles* begins to unroll. Since the death of his brother, Louis’s life had been meaningless – his existential abyss and craving for answers finds its fantastic, dislocated form in the appearance of the vampire Lestat. The vampire is one of the “undead”: a being that both symbolises death and acts as its walking personification. Death is central for Rice’s vampire novels; it provides an attractor for the course of narrative, an existential challenge and much of the dark aesthetics which has made the series popular.²¹ The dynamic of narrative desire circulates around death in the story: vampires desire the blood and life of humans (these two are figuratively identified with each other), and usually this desire ends at the moment of consummation (the victim either dies, or becomes another vampire – in

¹⁸ VL, 440.

¹⁹ Brooks 1984, 38-39. His exemplary novel is from the sixteenth century: *Lazarillo de Tormes* (1554).

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 55-56.

²¹ *Interview with the Vampire* was written under the shadow of her five-year-old daughter’s death of leukaemia. Anne Rice had also lost her mother early, at the age of fourteen. (See Riley 1996, xv-xvi.)

either case, he or she is no longer an object of desire).²² Also, the “consummation of plot” would signify a sort of death; a complete answer to the protagonist’s search for meaning would be the end. The continuation of desire and story-telling is imperative for the existence of Rice’s fictional vampires. Therefore the “explanation” for the existence of vampires quoted above can only be a temporary answer.

Brooks writes about “the hallucinatory reproduction of indestructible signs of infantile satisfaction.” The immortality of vampires can be interpreted in many ways, but two points should be accounted for: 1) vampires are immortal, and 2) their greatest pleasure is not (genital) sex but oral enjoyment (sucking of blood). In Rice’s case one should connect these to the openly demonic aspects of her vampires; they are metaphorically called “demons,” and their blood entwines them with the demonic also literally. Vampires are supposedly a race apart from humans; but a race that looks deceptively like us, just having different abilities and weaknesses. It is troublesome for the vampires to figure out their true identity, what makes them truly vampires. The monsters hover between two dangers: one of total rejection and otherness, and the danger of becoming the same, of being totally incorporated and subsumed to the self. Rosemary Jackson’s apt characterisation is well worth quoting in this context, as well: “the history of the survival of Gothic horror is one of progressive internalization and recognition of fears as generated by the self.”²³ On the thematic level, Rice’s vampires continue the existential story-lines of many central nineteenth and twentieth century novels; the vampires are presented as individuals who step over the moral boundaries as imposed by human society.²⁴ Murder makes them emphatically individuals, separate from society – and as creatures of fantasy they are also immortal killers, without the human weaknesses of Dostoyevsky’s Raskolnikov. They flourish in the absurdity of existence that made Camus rebel and Beckett study the impossibility of communication – and transform it into bestselling entertainment. *The Vampire Chronicles* achieves this through a primordial fantasy of immortality and omnipotence. The “infantile satisfaction” of an oral pleasure connected with a (practically) indestructible body that can bend iron with bare hands, read thoughts and

²² An example is Lestat’s reaction as he finally took his human friend Nicolas, and made him a vampire: after the Dark Gift (or Dark Trick, as the making of a vampire is also called) Lestat feels “[e]mptiness here [...]. Quiet, and the realization gnawing at my insides like a starved animal – *that I couldn’t stand the sight of him now.*” (VL, 240.) A counterexample would be David Talbot, who stays quite important for Lestat even after he has become vampire (at the end of *The Tale of the Body Thief*). He is, however, no longer of importance to the plot; others become the objects for narrative desire and David steps aside.

²³ Jackson 1981, 24.

²⁴ William Butler Yeats’s poem “Sailing to Byzantium” prefaces *The Tale of the Body Thief*; it is one intertextual example of Rice developing the theme of being “outside natural law” (Ramsland 1995, 531).

even fly, is undeniable.²⁵ However, this satisfaction is also painfully bound up with loss and death. The immutable body of a vampire retains its form because it is *dead*; this object-like quality is increased as time goes, to the point of reaching almost complete immobility in the manner of a marble statue.²⁶ The drive that carries Rice's long narratives is powered by this tension: the perfect satisfaction of infantile fantasies is both celebrated and rejected. Subsequently, the narrative projects an image of divided self. Demon and the ontological heterogeneity are invoked to give this situation a figurative shape.

The second important aspect of demonic discourses in the *Vampire Chronicles* is thus connected with the liminal quality of demons, their ability to transgress the border of flesh and soul.

SUCKING THE SIGNIFICANCE

Blood is a vampire's life, and vampire's blood in Rice's novels is explained to be "a combination of the human and the demon." "Demon" is an answer for the vampire's thirst for knowledge: it is the name for the quality that sets him apart from humans. The quest for knowledge is begun in the first part, *Interview with the Vampire*, and the feature of this particular novel that separates it from the rest of the series is its uncompromising refusal to give answers. A crucial scene points out the dramatic and essential role this refusal plays for the desperation that gives this novel much of its captivating power:

"Then God does not exist ... you have no knowledge of His existence?"
 [Louis asked.]
 "None," [Armand] said.
 "No knowledge!" I said it again, unafraid of my simplicity, my miserable human pain.

²⁵ The powers and feats of Rice's vampires become more and more spectacular with every new book; see e.g. VL, 7.

²⁶ This culminates in *Those Who Must Be Kept* – the ancient King and Queen of Kemet (Egypt) – who have sunk into passive existence as "flexible stone" statues during their six thousand years of existence. (See VL, 387-89.) Cf. the equally old vampire, Maharet, who is described as possessing "the eerie glamour of women who have made themselves into sculpture" (QD, 151). It is also possible to interpret this statuesque immobility as artistic self-awareness, as a Romantic metaphor for art's self-contained detachment (see e.g. Frank Kermode's study *Romantic Image* [1957/1961, 49-91]). Queen Akasha may also claim literary ancestry among the Victorian "demonic women": the ancient Egyptian Queen Tera (by Bram Stoker) and specially the mighty "She-Who-Must-Be-Obeyed," whose real name was "Ayesha" (by H. Rider Haggard) can be seen as models for Akasha (see Auerbach 1982, 25, 36). H. Rider Haggard's terrible *She* lives in ancient tombs, surrounded by the dead and the ruins of a forgotten civilisation; her radiant face and transformed body are covered with "long, corpse-like wrappings" (Haggard 1886/1926, 158). She is thousands of years old, and with her wisdom and fascinating moral ambivalence is a clear ancestor for Rice's Akasha. She is "undying and half-divine" (ibid., 159), ambiguously "evil," yet "the very *diablerie* of the woman, whilst it horrified and repelled, attracted in an even greater degree" (ibid., 162): in her altered (demonic) condition she claims to be "above the law" (ibid., 256).

“None.’

“And no vampire here has discourse with God or with the devil!’

“No vampire that I’ve ever known,’ he said, musing, the fire dancing in his eyes. ‘And as far as I know today, after four hundred years, I am the oldest living vampire in the world.’

“I stared at him, astonished.

“Then it began to sink in. It was as I’d always feared, and it was as lonely, it was as totally without hope. [...] My search was over.²⁷

The demonic quality of the vampires remains inexplicable in the first part of the *Vampire Chronicles*. Apparently they are the *only* supernatural element in their world – an aberration without any God- (or Devil-) given significance whatsoever. Louis’s search for meaning ends in a void. He is dead, in the corporeal sense, after all, so he cannot find any meaning in the material world any more. The opposite sphere of signification, the spiritual, would be of utmost importance for him, but this alternative is denied, as well. In the world of *Interview with the Vampire* there hardly exist any other levels of significance except those connected with individuals, their self-realisation and need for each other. “The only power that exists is inside ourselves,” verifies Armand.²⁸ Louis cannot accept this; he loses first his mortal brother, and then his immortal child-lover Claudia. In the end he denies all value in such a life – a life that cannot grant “indestructible” meanings and secure love-objects. This is embodied in a gesture at the end of the novel: Louis finds weak and withered Lestat, but rejects him and takes away the little baby that was meant to give Lestat sustenance.²⁹ The vampire becomes positioned as a *demonic self*, one that exists in the absence of meaning, and is haunted by this purposelessness from inside, and therefore is forced to suck the life of others to fill this incurable lack. This is an interesting reformulation of the demon and the demonic, but it is also faithful to the “high” tradition in the demonic discourses: excessive individuality and pride in one’s special value has been interpreted as demonic.³⁰

The petrified and passive quality of the oldest vampires becomes more comprehensible in this light: they fix into an immobile image the purposelessness of their demonic existence. However, *The Vampire Lestat* and later books (particularly its direct sequel, *The Queen of the Damned*) are more open to new departures on the “Devil’s Road” towards final emptiness. Narrative desire can be seen to offer temporary answers for this paradoxical quest of nothingness. This is also connected to the way these novels are more self-reflexive. *The Vampire Lestat* purports to be written by Lestat himself. It describes how he finds out that Louis has told his story to a reporter, and that it has been published as *Interview with the Vampire* (supposedly under the “pseudonym” of Anne Rice). The curious structure of

²⁷ IV, 257.

²⁸ IV, 258.

²⁹ IV, 357.

³⁰ See above, page 38-39.



Louis (Brad Pitt) destroying the Theatre of the Vampires in Interview with the Vampire (dir. Neil Jordan). © Warner Bros., 1994.

The Vampire Lestat has to do with the change of attitude – from the mainly existential anguish of Louis in the first novel we step into the world of Lestat, who calls himself “the James Bond of vampires.”³¹ The main part of *The Vampire Lestat* is made up of “The Early Education and Adventures of the Vampire Lestat” – an embedded narrative of autobiography with a jokingly eighteenth century title. This is a contemporary narrative: it is written for Louis, not to be “an answer to his malice in *Interview with the Vampire*,” as Lestat rationalises, “but the tale of all the things I’d seen and learned before I came to him, the story I could not tell him before.”³² This novel within a

³¹ BT, 5.

³² VL, 16.

novel (*mise en abyme*) finishes with Lestat's signature bearing the date 1984; this is where the fictional novel *The Vampire Lestat* ends. However, *The Vampire Lestat* continues after the publication of its fictional incarnation. The short part at the end of the novel ("Dionysus in San Francisco, 1985") as well as the prologue ("Downtown Saturday Night in the Twentieth Century, 1984") properly belong to the chain of events that are recorded in *The Queen of the Damned*. There is, thus, a part of *The Vampire Lestat* that does not coincide with its embedded self-reflection.³³

This incapability to fully comprehend the material that makes up one's identity is, in a way, appropriate for a novel that aspires to explain the origin and nature of its demonic characters. The very structure of *Lestat* is marked by otherness, an uncontrollable flow of semi- or subconscious materials. In the first part of the *Vampire Chronicles* Rice's vampires were figuratively called fiends or demons; as the thirst for meaning pushes Lestat deeper towards the origin of vampires, they become literally demonised. Vampires are said to be created by a demon, Amel, who blended his own substance with that of humans.³⁴ The narrative layers become more and more complicated; Lestat embeds into the novel his own autobiographical narrative, which includes the story of Marius, an ancient Roman vampire – and this in turn contains the myth of Enkil and Akasha, as told to Marius by the Elder (an even more ancient vampire). Until this explanation, there has been no indication that any sort of spirit would inhabit the world of the *Vampire Chronicles*. The openly atheistic world is suddenly transformed with the introduction of "a common demon, the kind one hears of in all lands at all times."³⁵ The demon acts as a turning point: if demons are accepted into the "secondary universe" of the *Vampire Chronicles*, then there would be no end of spiritual, religious and theological speculation.³⁶ Furthermore, it would just move the origin of evil away from the vampire and open the question of the origin of demon. The closed universe of *Interview with the Vampire* would break open, and its uncompromising lack of meaning would give way to competing systems of thought. A tragedy would give way to an existential travelogue.

This is exactly what happens. After the story of the demon has been told, ghosts and spirits became an essential part of the *Vampire Chronicles*. In *Interview with the Vampire* there are several scenes in which Lestat ridicules death: he makes a *danse macabre* with a corpse of a dead woman, and then makes a vampire of a small child, her daughter. After one of Lestat's

³³ Rice: "There's a more deliberate use of the vernacular and a deliberate use of humor, things I would never have risked in *Interview*. But when *Lestat* was finished, I was blackly depressed. I thought it was a real failure of a book, and in some ways I still think it's a failure. It just ends. Never was I so clearly aware that a book had a bad form." (Riley 1996, 39.)

³⁴ According to Anne Rice, 'Amel' was an ancient Middle Eastern word for evil. See Ramsland 1995, 14.

³⁵ VL, 437.

³⁶ See above, pages 129-30.

outrageous antics, Louis asks him “why have you propped her [his victim] here in some grotesque manner, as if tempting the gods to strike you for your blasphemy?”³⁷ These kinds of comments are clues to the reader, making it painfully poignant what it means to have no such “gods,” to have no meaning that would transcend the world of mere chance and matter. After the story of the demon is told, the world starts to react to Lestat in different supernatural ways: in *The Queen of the Damned* he shares the vision of a dying person’s soul being greeted by loved ones and vanishing into the afterlife;³⁸ a human character, Jesse, who is a sort of “psychic detective,” also reveals that something of his victims may have been left behind after their deaths.³⁹ The ghost of the dead vampire child, Claudia, is haunting the central parts of *The Tale of the Body Thief*. The last of Lestat’s adventures is depicted in *Memnoch the Devil*, which tells about Lestat’s confrontation with the Devil and God, and about his fantastic travel through Christian mythology (including the history of Creation, and visits to Heaven, and to Hell). The introduction of the demon has finally transformed the substance of the *Vampire Chronicles* into spiritualist adventure novels, leaving the limits of *Interview with the Vampire* far behind. The demon thus also functions as the element that breaks up the initial “purity” of the *Vampire Chronicles* universe, and changes its textual composition into a field of conflicting (and eventually blasphemous) intertextuality. “Intertext,” however, should in this case be applied more generally as a concept for transposition of whole systems of meaning, not so much as the influence or interplay of specific individual texts.⁴⁰

MYTHICAL ORIGIN IN DISHARMONY

The disclosure of the vampires’ demonic origins is a very important turning point for Rice’s series. It supposedly ends the quest for knowledge after several layers of embedded narratives, and opens up a possibility for complete self-understanding: a recognition of the vampires’ true identity (*Anagnorisis*). However, to the vampires (and to the reader) an *original disharmony* is revealed, and a conflict between two incompatible substances (demon and human), instead of a single, clear-cut identity. I will now take a closer look at how this conflicted identity is articulated in the text; particularly, how it is characterised by its vampire narrators.

The educated Roman vampire, Marius, impulsively rejects the demonic version of his vampire nature. He is an intensely individual vampire, very much like Lestat, who always begins his narratives in the characteristic man-

³⁷ IV, 90.

³⁸ QD, 57-58.

³⁹ QD, 187.

⁴⁰ See above, p. 101 (and Kristeva 1974/1984, 60).

ner: “I’m the Vampire Lestat. Remember me?”⁴¹ Marius cannot feel comfortable with a story that would violate his individuality and unity:

I revolted against all of it because if I was anything, I was an individual, a particular being, with a strong sense of my own rights and prerogatives. I could not realize that I was host to an alien entity. I was still Marius, no matter what had been done to me.⁴²

This deep anxiety and rejection of heterogeneity is presented also as the motive for the demon, Amel, to go after humans in the first place. *The Queen of the Damned* goes in greater detail into the origin of vampires. Instead of a legend rounded by time into a fairy-tale about a “good King and Queen,” who were accidentally transformed into vampires because they went to face the demon alone, this book presents an eyewitness report from those times, around 4000 B.C.E.⁴³ The evil spirit, Amel, is presented to be motivated by an anxiety towards heterogeneity: he feels an enthralling mixture of hatred and jealousy towards the curious nature of humans. He was “feeling that we are abominations, we humans, because we have both body and soul, which should not exist on this earth. [...] He told us that to have spirit within mortal bodies was a curse.”⁴⁴ This rejection is reported by Maharet, a female vampire even more ancient than all the previous ones (and therefore one who is able to report even more ancient, and supposedly more authentic, knowledge).

As narrative desire propels Anne Rice’s vampires deeper and deeper towards the elusive origin of their evil disposition (Nina Auerbach notes that Rice’s vampires are “compulsive storytellers”⁴⁵), this origin seems to twist into a circle. Humans were made vampires by a demon; but the demon was incited into action by the monstrous character of humans – a unified spirit looks with horror and anger towards this “Chimera,” a creature of mixed up nature. Monstrous liminality is dramatised by the demon in the creation of vampire, but the original heterogeneity is to be found in humans themselves. This is underlined by Maharet’s narrative; she describes how the twisted psychology and personality of Queen Akasha made it impossible for her to live in peace and harmony – and because Akasha behaved the way she did, finally she is really to blame for the acts of the evil spirit.

This is, of course, a modern solution to the complex problem of evil. *The Vampire Chronicles* is an openly post-Nietzschean work; it underlines,

⁴¹ QD, 1. Cf. similar announcements of emphatically underlined self-awareness: VL, 3; BT, 1; MD, 3.

⁴² VL, 446.

⁴³ The virtually immortal characters in the universe of these novels act in many important roles; from a narrative point of view, one of the most central ones is to operate as narrative devices, and to open up new possibilities for story-telling. These ancient characters frequently engage in long narrative sessions which make up substantial parts of Rice’s novels.

⁴⁴ QD, 341.

⁴⁵ Auerbach 1995, 154.

for example, that good and evil are human creations; that “Satanic” is just a name humans have given to such behaviour that disrupts their conception of orderly existence.⁴⁶ Nature itself is described as amoral, more prone to be esteemed by aesthetic criteria than by ethical ones. The demonic elements in the series are connected to an ideological structure, which emphasises the existence of destructive and chaotic potentials as parts of nature. The central metaphor is that of a “Savage Garden.”

If “our conversation” [between Lestat and his mortal friend, Nicolas] could only continue.

Beauty wasn’t the treachery he imagined it to be, rather it was an uncharted land where one could make a thousand fatal errors, a wild and indifferently different 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. [...]

Good and evil, those are concepts man has made. And man is better, really, than the Savage Garden.⁴⁷

It is “only as an *aesthetic phenomenon* that existence and the world are eternally *justified*,” is the way that Nietzsche formulated this principle.⁴⁸ Nietzsche’s *The Birth of Tragedy* is packed with demonic metaphors and images, and he is very useful in pointing out the paradoxes and tensions that typically motivate the use of them. “Whatever exists is both just and unjust, and equally justified in both,” was his formulation of the tragic conflict.⁴⁹ I have above (in chapter two) read the ambiguity of the Nietzschean position, the simultaneous acceptance and recognition of contradictory opposites. In morality, this amounts to the necessary recognition that value-systems are based on human “myths,” and (simultaneously) that such myths are essential for our existence.

The central problem in the *Vampire Chronicles* is analogous to the one presented by Nietzsche. Rice’s modern vampires like Lestat believe in the Savage Garden – a reality without any inherent “meaning” – but they simultaneously are driven by their “desire for knowledge” to find some significant myth. The endless dialectic of new questions and answers creates a particular version of Carroll’s “erotetic narration.” Even if morality is just a human in-

⁴⁶ VL, 334. – The view of morality as a construction is linked with Nietzsche’s name; the view itself, however, has been common enough. In H. Rider Haggard’s *She* (1886/1926, 153) Ayesha ponders: “My life has perchance been evil – I knew not, for who can say what is evil and what good?” Earlier on, the narrator had confirmed that the morality was “an affair of latitude and religion, and what is right in one place, wrong and improper in another” (ibid., 87).

⁴⁷ VL, 131.

⁴⁸ Nietzsche 1872/1967, 52 [§ V].

⁴⁹ Nietzsche 1872/1990, 65 [§ IX].

vention, the vampires take a passionate interest in it, and in their own discussions it appears to be extremely important whether they perceive themselves as “good” or as “evil.” To have this sort of definite designation would help them (and the reader) to make sense of their existence. As they are alternately described with both the attributes of demons and angels, they end up in ambivalence: they are “both just and unjust, and equally justified in both.”

FROM A NEGATIVE ROLE INTO A POSITIVE IDENTITY

The intertwining of ontological and moral ambivalence structures the use of demonic elements in the *Vampire Chronicles*. At the beginning, Louis starts to tell his own story about being a vampire, in order to shatter the old myths and misconceptions. His narrative reveals an insoluble dilemma at the level of character: Louis aspires to live a good life, but in the end he has to face the exact opposite – his existence has taken on the traditional role of evil, and it is questionable whether this existence can be called “life” at all. This moral dilemma takes an alternate shape in the series as the production of a different, new, myth takes precedence. Insoluble at the level of characters, the moral dilemma goes to the roots of Rice’s fictional universe. As a creation of a post-Nietzschean artist, this universe is based on a tension which is productive in aesthetic terms, but dysfunctional in ethical ones. The ontological heterogeneity of the vampires is the form this ambivalence takes as the vampire narrators offer explanations for their existence. The fictive universe proves to be flexible: it accommodates dual principles of flesh and soul, and postulates a primordial conflict between them to match the ethical problems at the cosmic scale.

However, the separation between moral and ontological, ethical and epistemological, individual and universal is somewhat artificial and superficial in Rice’s case. The descriptions and pieces of information the reader receives from the *Vampire Chronicles*’ cosmos are not neutral; they are offered through the vampire characters and reflect their desires and questions. The existence of the narrating self demands such a universe that has made this sort of self possible – the existence of a vampire self demands a universe with natural laws that allow the vampires to exist. In a sense this is a truism, but significant discordances complicate this picture and imply a narrative universe which is self-centred, and which serves the narcissistic need of a “grandiose self.”⁵⁰ This drama of self deserves fuller treatment.

Louis’s or Lestat’s desire to know their origins can be interpreted as a moral imperative, as well as a creative urge. Knowledge of their origins does not necessarily alter their “nature” (as the archetype of a blood-sucking

⁵⁰ A theory of narcissism is presented in Kohut 1971/1977 & 1977. For a metaphorical application of narcissism in the study of metafiction, see Hutcheon 1980; Bouson 1989 offers an adaptation of Kohut’s “psychology of self” and empathic listening techniques to a study of the narcissistic character and the reader/text transaction.

monster is their generic precondition), but it makes possible deliberate responses to this condition. Rice's vampires confront the "old vampire" (the archetypal monster) early on in the series, perceive it as a "mindless, animated corpse", and kill it.⁵¹ After this "Oedipal" act they narrate to each other new myths, and new definitions for what it means to be a vampire. Desire to know is also fundamentally a desire to exist (after all, these "obsessive storytellers" live under the same condition as Scheherazade: capture the interest of the audience, or perish).

Their characterisation as modern, conscious individuals (with an insatiable bloodlust) makes Rice's novels both explorations into unrestricted individuality, and dramatisations of conflicts inherent in this individuality. The great demarcation line that runs through these novels is death, as it separates the "common herd" of humans from the superior (if cursed) creatures that feed on them. Nina Auerbach has recently researched vampires as "luminaries of the twilight zone," or of those limits and social norms which restrict individual self-realisation. She focuses especially on the forbidden relationship between members of the same sex, and points out the existence of a tradition of sensitive and sympathetic vampires. This interpretation shows how these monsters are actually an "alien gender," and (in their subversive behaviour) offer encouraging objects of identification for sexual minorities and other socially suppressed groups of people. "More than our heroes or pundits, our Draculas tell us who we were."⁵²

The homosexuality, or homoeroticism (as vampires do not actually get involved in genital sex) of Rice's vampires is a noteworthy feature, and connected to their general impetus to be transgressive characters – to step beyond all the limits that confine mortal existence in reality. In an earlier work, *Woman and the Demon* (1982), Auerbach has made a forcible claim that the demonic features connected with the female energy and mutability hides in its essence "a dream of transfiguration whose power over lives as well as literature has lasted well into our own century."⁵³ Even the (post)modern loss of self is, according to her, actualised in celebration of characters' "perpetual metamorphosis," especially by such authors as Virginia Woolf and Hélène Cixous.⁵⁴

Auerbach emphasises an important positive dimension, central for any attempt to understand the enthusiastic response and "cult" following that Rice's vampire novels have inspired. The positive aspect is notable in the gradual process of revelation that creates a whole alternative universe on the basis of one conscious (vampire) self. On the other hand, it would be unwise to forget the deeply troubled nature of this individual. Not only feelings of empowerment, but feelings of self-hatred, rejection and impotence are thematised in these texts. Furthermore, the negative aspect is more char-

⁵¹ IV, 207.

⁵² Auerbach 1995, 42, 112.

⁵³ Auerbach 1982, 34.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 228.

acteristic of the series – especially if it is read in the generic context of Gothic horror. Eugenia C. DeLamotte's views are helpful in highlighting these features of Gothic, connecting them with the limits of the self explored in this fiction.

DeLamotte notes how much the liminal state laden with “anxieties of the threshold” means for Gothic horror – ghosts and other typical supernatural beings defy both physical boundaries and those cultural categories which are important for distinguishing one thing from another.⁵⁵ The vampire Lestat, whose narcissism and magnificent self dominates a large part of the *Vampire Chronicles*, demonstrates this “anxiety of the threshold” especially during his search for the meaning of his existence. As the cosmic order and the conscious self are intimately linked in this universe, the world itself changes as Lestat adopts and then transgresses against several “Great Narratives” for his existence. These transgressions of boundaries contribute significantly to the series as a demonic text; the demonic contradictions and blasphemous polyphony create textual ambiguity.

SELF-CONTRADICTIONARY IDENTITIES

The early universe of the *Vampire Chronicles* is devoid of other supernatural elements, except vampires, who exist in solitude as cosmic aberrations. The main intertext (or subtext) behind discussions between Louis and Armand (such as quoted above) was atheistic: no God, or Devil. This is an implicit and explicit precondition for the desperation that is an essential part of the vampiric existence in the early *Chronicles*. Marius's tale transgresses these self-prescribed limits: relating the story of a “Good King and Queen,” it adopts the tone of fairy-tale to rationalise the vampires' origin. The introduction of a demon evokes a new intertext which is at odds with the atheistic, rationalistic and openly “anti-religious” spirit dominant earlier in the series.

The intertextual heterogeneity is heightened further as Maharet tells her story (in *The Queen of the Damned*). This story rejects the fairy-tale and opts for a different perspective: the universe is in fact saturated with different (supernatural) beings, or spirits, and an ancient religion with female sorceresses knew how to use their powers. Maharet is actually evoking a new and totally different intertextual frame: that of the twentieth century “scientific” neo-paganism, particularly the writings of Margaret Murray, an English anthropologist. Murray published her book, *The Witch Cult in Western Europe*, in 1921, and claimed that the medieval witch-hunts had attacked an existing Pagan religion. The later Wicca movement (which also esteems the writings of Robert Graves and Gerard Gardner) reanimated her theories into modern-day mysticism, complete with worship of the Great Mother and her horned companion, a dark male god. With the introduction of the Wiccan

⁵⁵ DeLamotte 1990, 20-21.

intertext, the early paradox (a vampire novel with an openly anti-religious emphasis) is transformed into a new paradox: a tale of predatory monsters who are also Wiccan witches. The climax at the end of *The Queen of the Damned*, during which Maharet and her sister defeat the ancient Queen, Akasha, can be seen as an allegory for the battle of the different, conflicting intertexts.

The fourth book, *The Tale of the Body Thief*, brings little new to the series, but it develops further its religious aspects. The existence of separate souls inside vampire or human bodies is confirmed in this novel, and the vampire Lestat is presented as strongly rejecting human corporeal existence with its disease, filth and messy sexuality. (Lestat swaps bodies with a psychic con-man, Raglan James, and finds out that he hates the experience.) This rejection well suits the *Vampire Chronicles*' obsession with the production of recurring paradoxes, its irresistible compulsion to contradict itself. The spiritualist element in the series is locked in battle with an equally strong emphasis on materialism, and with claims of faith in body and sensual wisdom:

*Let the flesh instruct the mind.*⁵⁶

“In the flesh all wisdom begins. Beware the thing that has no flesh. Beware the gods, beware the *idea*, beware the devil.”⁵⁷

[W]e are both believers in the wisdom of the flesh⁵⁸

The paradoxical quality of the last quotation is especially blasphemous and curious: it is voiced by a being that claims to be the Devil himself, a fallen angel, to another being of equally problematic claims to (human) flesh: the vampire Lestat. In a context of a horror fantasy novel which deals extensively with various spiritual and demonic beings, these claims are openly paradoxical, twisted, and in a painful tension – in other words, typical elements of demonic text.

Memnoch the Devil is the best example in Rice's series about this blasphemous dimension of the demonic. In it Lestat confronts both the Christian God and the Devil; the Christian theological intertext openly contradicts both the initial atheistic, and Maharet's Wiccan framework. This can be illustrated by the case of (non-human) spirits. In Maharet's tale these beings have since ancient times “bragged that they had watched human beings change from animals into what they were” – in other words, they had wit-

⁵⁶ IV, 134.

⁵⁷ QD, 241. – These views, and this claim by the witch Maharet in particular, are attributed by Anne Rice to her husband, the poet Stan Rice (Riley 1996, 19). The biographical information suggests its own roots for the tensions and conflicts in the *Chronicles*: Anne was raised as a devout Catholic (ibid.)

⁵⁸ MD, 302.

nessed the evolution of human species, being themselves exterior to it.⁵⁹ Because Christian theology is not compatible with the Wiccan theories of natural spirits, all the spirits in *Memnoch the Devil* are suddenly relegated to the status of dead human souls. Even the most powerful among them (such as Amel) are explained as souls of dead people, who have just “forgotten” their origins.⁶⁰ Their previous knowledge of natural evolution is not accounted for, and remains insoluble.

On some occasions, the characters themselves comment on the most obvious contradictions. Lestat especially is good at this: he at first puts the blame for the inconsistencies on the unreliable narrator; Louis had been ignorant in the first novel, or telling plain lies. As the contradictions pile up even in his “own” novels, the same explanation will not do. Change in the narrative universe is reduced into evolution in character: “My views are changing,” Lestat warns. “The atheism and nihilism of my earlier years now seems shallow, and even a bit cocky.”⁶¹ When the narrating self is adopted as the sole criterion for purpose and direction, the whole series starts to sound hollow and emptily self-referential. The Devil (in *Memnoch the Devil*) all but admits that he must offer Lestat his last adventure, because all the other possibilities for the narcissistic super-hero have already been used:

You challenged every form of authority, you sought every experience. You buried yourself alive twice, and once tried to rise into the very sun to make yourself a cinder. What was left for you – but to call on me? It is as if you yourself said it: ‘Memnoch, what more can I do now?’⁶²

The exploration and transgression of limits has become the sole imperative in Rice’s vampire series. The demonic elements perhaps figure so prominently in these novels because they articulate the implicit conflicts that narcissistic fantasy (an immortal, superhuman and radically autonomous self) runs into. The simultaneous rejection and celebration of flesh is a typical example of this logic; the wisdom of the flesh is invoked to attack various (religious) ideas or authorities – and the religious intertext is used to save the narcissistic self from the taint (and corruption) of corporeal existence. Lestat wants everything, and the fictional universe mutates very fast in order to satisfy the demand – so fast, that eventually it is in danger of losing all identity, and becoming everything and nothing. It could even be claimed that the compulsive story-telling in the *Vampire Chronicles* exists *not to reveal* something, but in order to hide and cover this final emptiness; it is narrating at length about the search for “truth” in order not to face the truth.

This double bind actively functions in the demonic features of the series’ intertextuality. The quest for the meaning of life and especially for new

⁵⁹ QD, 307.

⁶⁰ MD, 216.

⁶¹ MD, 106.

⁶² MD, 134-35.

religious answers is the compulsive subject-matter of the *Vampire Chronicles*. The atheistic and Wiccan systems are incorporated into the texture of horror fiction, and in their turn rejected, as the Christian intertext is adopted in *Memnoch the Devil* – supposedly to end Lestat’s story in a suitably spectacular and philosophical manner. As it stands, however, this novel is such a tormented and curious mixture of ingredients that even those readers who had enjoyed other parts of the *Vampire Chronicles* reported mixed feelings and disappointment.⁶³ What is it that makes *Memnoch the Devil* so controversial, then?

AMBIVALENT CELEBRATION OF IMPURITY

The heterogeneous quality of different traditions or conflicting elements forced together is captured figuratively in a statue that acts as an augury for the appearance of Memnoch, the novel’s Devil.

Feathered wings. I [the hiding vampire Lestat] could see that now. Not reptilian, feathered. But the face, classical, robust, large nose, the chin ... yet there was a ferocity in the profile. And why was the statue black? Maybe it was only St. Michael pushing devils into hell, angry, righteous. No, the hair was too rank and tangled for that. Armor, breastplate, and then of course I saw the most telling details. That it had the legs and feet of a goat. Devil.⁶⁴

The description does not follow any single alternative of the traditional ways of presenting the devil. Instead, it takes the tradition of fallen angels (upper part) and the folk tradition of hairy, animal-like devils (lower part) and puts them together, into a chimera of our contradictory conceptions of evil. Analogously, Rice’s novel takes the seemingly serious theological and philosophical questions about justice, God, and purpose in universe, and combines them with comical or farcical episodes, or scenes from horror fiction. In the end, the text seems to struggle with its own objectives and hovers ambiguously at the limit between religiosity and irreverent blasphemy.

In some instances *Memnoch the Devil* bears a strong resemblance to Clive Barker’s play “History of the Devil” (see the next chapter). Particularly the middle part of the novel, which consists of a journey through history in the company of the Devil, is comparable to Barker’s work. Both highlight untraditional moments that supposedly are the historical truth behind Christian Scriptures. Both Rice’s and Barker’s Devils meet Jesus, and come out of the encounter as intellectually (and even morally) superior. Rice’s Devil, the archangel Memnoch, is the first and best among the angels; his dispute with God is concentrated on the role and destiny of conscious beings (humans). God (and his alter-ego Jesus, as well) is depicted as a totally detached and even cruel Creator, who is unable to sympathise or iden-

⁶³ See e.g. the Internet newsgroup alt.books.anne-rice .

⁶⁴ MD, 34.

tify with the lot of suffering humans. Incarnation into human form and Jesus' final self-sacrifice are portrayed as complete mistakes. Memnoch tries in the novel to make God understand the morally destructive nature of human existence (tormented by the lack of any absolute knowledge or meaning, broken by intolerable suffering). Jesus goes through suffering and death, but because of his divine understanding he makes an inhuman (or superhuman) mistake and glorifies the value of suffering into a Christian dogma.

“Oh, no, no!” [Memnoch cried out to Jesus]. “This is disaster.” [...]

“Lord, there are times when the hardest men hold infants in their arms, their own children, and the happiness and satisfaction of those moments is so sublime that there is no horror on earth that can destroy the peace they feel! That is the human capacity for love and understanding! When one can achieve harmony in spite of everything, and men and women do this, Lord. They do. Come, dance with your people. Sing with them. Feast with them. Throw your arms around the women and the men and know them in the flesh!”⁶⁵

The inhumanity and fundamental inability of God to understand the Devil, who is trying to defend the cause of humanity and ethical values is symptomatic of the novel in general. It has taken the whole of (Catholic) Christian theology and put it through a demonic inversion. The traditional names for Good and Evil – God and Devil – are reversed. At the same time, however, the narrative does not carry far enough to subvert the opposition completely. The evil God is still omnipotent, and the rebellious Devil is locked into impotent, if righteous, rage. The Christian subtext becomes coded with ambivalent and blasphemous acts and parallels; as Lestat confronts Jesus for the last time, on the road to Golgotha, he both receives the veil of Veronica (the mythical cloth with Christ's image) and drinks his blood. Jesus himself is depicted as teasing Lestat into this ambiguous act of blasphemy or mystic union: “The Blood of God, Lestat,” Jesus whispered. “Think of all the human blood that has flowed into your lips. Is my blood not worthy? Are you afraid?”⁶⁶ Later, back from Heaven and Hell, Lestat kneels down on a menstruating woman and licks her menstrual blood – in a double act of blasphemy parallel to his vampiric “Communion” with Christ, and rejection of Christ's sacrificial blood.

“Forgive me, forgive me,” I whispered, and my tongue broke through the thin cotton of her panties, tearing the cloth back from the soft down of pubic hair, pushing aside the bloodstained pad she wore, and I lapped at the blood just inside her young pink vaginal lips, just coming from the mouth of her womb, not pure blood, but blood from her, blood from her strong, young body, blood all over tight hot cells of her vaginal flesh, blood that brought no pain, no sacrifice, only her gentle forbearance with me, with my unspeakable act, my tongue going deep into her, drawing out

⁶⁵ MD, 277.

⁶⁶ MD, 283.

the blood that was yet to come, gently, gently, lapping the blood from the soft hair on her pubic lips, sucking each tiny droplet of it.

Unclean, unclean. They cried on the road to Golgotha, when Veronica had said: “Lord, I touched the hem of your garment and my hemorrhage was healed.” *Unclean, unclean.*⁶⁷

This (compulsively repetitive) celebration of the “impurity” of the flesh, however, sounds odd as Lestat had spent most of the previous book (*The Tale of the Body Thief*) cursing the filth and agony of human bodies. In the end, any claim or gesture in the *Vampire Chronicles* should not be interpreted as a declaration of some authentic position, but rather as strategic moves which are connected with some opposition in a structure of tension. Lestat finally transgresses all limits and rejects all options: he comes through his Christian adventure claiming: “God and Devil are idiots!”⁶⁸ As a creature of borderlines (and as an image of a borderline personality), the vampire Lestat cannot accept any alternative, nor any system of signification, apart from the value of story-telling. The confrontation with Christian mythology proves finally to be profoundly disappointing. Lestat feels seriously betrayed and is imprisoned during a violent attack of madness. As he is free again, he walks into a deserted automobile store, watches his reflection in the glass, and the *Vampire Chronicles* are finished with this image – the vampire self looking at his own reflection. “I am the Vampire Lestat. This is what I saw. This is what I heard. This is what I know! This is *all* I know.”⁶⁹

Lestat finds no meaning, nor lesson: after every system of thought has been transgressed, contradicted and blasphemed, the vampire self finds himself devoid of all “depth” or substance. He is only a mirroring surface which may reflect (and distort), but which figures relationships to others (and other texts) as violence, parasitism, and death. The interpersonal and intertextual relationships are both portrayed as necessary, but also fundamentally ambivalent and rooted in difference, debt, and separation. Maybe this is the “demonic voice” these vampire narratives are trying to drown in their voluminous, polyphonic fantasies.

Demons have been used in narratives for a wide variety of reasons during their long history. In Anne Rice’s vampire novels, the quest for some “Grand Narrative” that would organise life and meaning in our contemporary society is set in an unresolved tension that suits well the traditional thematics of the demonic. The blasphemous obsession with the Christian religion in the *Vampire Chronicles* grows more pronounced as the series enters its fifth part, *Memnoch the Devil*. This can be interpreted in terms of the *Vampire Chronicles*’ particular “demonic poetics” (how these novels utilise demonic imagery in their own, particular manner): the series simultaneously strongly rejects all the answers offered by religions as insulting to a modern

⁶⁷ MD, 322.

⁶⁸ MD, 339.

⁶⁹ MD, 353.

individual – at the same time, however, it just cannot completely give up on religious themes. To exist in a total lack of answers would be unthinkable. The *Vampire Chronicles* is locked into battle with limits and is constantly forced to cross them. The borderline between Good and Evil is entangled with the logic of double-bind; “the saints of evil” is one characteristic expression used.⁷⁰ Another, equally typical expression is “good at being [a killer, a vampire]” that characterises Lestat. “I was a good marksman when I was a young man [...]. And now I am a good vampire. So much for our understanding of the word ‘good.’”⁷¹ Other limits that the series similarly circles and twists are Beast/Human, Human/Demon, and Spirit/Body.

I conclude my analysis of this chapter by emphasising the profound ambivalence that characterises Rice’s *Chronicles*. Both her vampire characters and her novels have liminal “impurity” or heterogeneity in their fabric. The demon acts as a sign of the Other: the vampires explain their plural and morally conflicting condition by their fusion with the demon.

In the end, the heterogeneity of the self precedes the demon; the potential for conflict is inherent in human make-up itself and Rice’s vampires are just exploring the demonic extremes of the desire. The *Vampire Chronicles* cannot stop at any conclusion; it is sucking different occult and religious materials into its textual self, proving only that desire is always desire for something Other. It is possible to see it as an exhilarating or terrifying prospect (or both, as in Rice’s case) that we cannot ever really reach and know this Other.

Anne Rice has been central in establishing “monstrous others” as the main characters of horror; especially such forms of sexuality that have traditionally been labelled as “perverse” have gained new prominence as a part of horror’s transgressive character. Another important writer to explore these possibilities is Clive Barker, even if from a somewhat different angle. He returns the Christian Devil to the centre of the stage in the next chapter.

⁷⁰ VL, 312.

⁷¹ VL, 336.