

The Ongoing Vampire Commentary, 1/ Reviews

about Anne Rice, The Vampire Chronicles series and no-profit, amateur Vampire Fanfiction by various Authors, which was at one time (and, alas, are no more) available on the web by mazaher, 1998-2001

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So this is a bunch of reviews, badly written, hasty, repetitive, and not even in chronological order... I am also sorry that all the material I am writing about is not available in any published form, and that therefore I can't quote my sources in detail, like I would be happy to do under different circumstances.

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1. Phillipa Hughes

I loved "The sound of my feet" and "Nothing like the sun". Although on the whole the style is different from Oscar's (what's left of his personal notes does make for "sensational reading", but it contains a remarkably small incidence of the pronoun "I"), it definitely feels like him. I should however add that <<At the risk of starting an argument in philosophy with you>> sounds just Oscar to me! I am so happy to meet at last, through your story, someone who can see the obvious under the thin glittering surface of Oscar's defensive shield: his simple goodness and compassion.

Only J.L. Borges seems to have been able to read this in him ("Oscar Wilde", 1946, in "Otras Inquisiciones", 1952). You're right, his fables are not for children. The intuition of how pain is unjust, but inescapable, and yet unexplained, and that what remains for us is compassion -the choice to feel together with another's suffering, to renounce keeping a safe distance from another's sorrow- is probably not for children.

Also, the idea that the ultimate ethical criterium to gauge the measure of evil is the share of avoidable pain a certain act or choice would bring to another's, or even one's own, flesh and blood... that there is too much suffering in life as it is, and that a gentleman's obligation (regardless of gender) is to try and lessen it, or at least avoid adding to it, is purely Oscar. And the raw fact that love doesn't always heed if our beloved's heart is in the right place, and it can and does happen to fall in love with a shining bastard.

I don't wonder in the least at how well he and Louis get along. Both are lucky to have met each other.

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2. Patricia Mitnacht

How beautiful your Cira trilogy. I love the tenderness with which the people in it are painted live by your words.

I love how you see Louis' quiet strenght and its flowing together with Lestat's overabundant drive.

I shiver with happiness at the thought that Armand is given a way out from himself, without losing himself!

I only wish Karma had not been so shocked that she missed the opportunity to change her mind, and teach Armand -after all- what love means, that horrible evening with Angelo.

It was not too late for other things, though. Thank you.

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3. Rushlight

I have just finished reading "Origin of species", and I am awed. Not only it's absolutely lovely, it also touches on a lot of questions which are very fundamental for vampires as well as for humans... and for any living being on this or any other planet, at that

It is rare to find in spec writing this sort of inter-species approach, both to the problems of knowledge and to those of ethics. This spec does just this, and does it with masterful prose, delicate feeling for each person's different character, and admirable concision.

It reminded me of a few among the incredibly interesting notes Oscar Wilde took at Oxford, now edited by Philip E. Smith II and Michael S. Helfand ("A portrait of a mind in the making", Oxford University Press, 1989). In particular, he wrote:

"Life is coextensive with protoplasm, but is consciousness coextensive with life?"

and

"Ultimately, all accountable and natural facts are unaccountable and unnatural"

but also

"To define a miracle as a violation of the Laws of Nature is absurd: Nature is all which is: it is the series of phenomena of which the alleged miracle is one"

and again

"In the moral world as in the physical nothing is anomalous".

These are fascinating, challenging, provisional answers to the questions one begins to ask himself, with rapt interest, as a teenager, and it's a real pity that so many end up dismissing them later as uninteresting, *because* finally unanswerable. Too many end up turning to ready-made answers, in preference to dangerous questions.

Those who don't, are poets, inventors, philosophers, saints (of whatever denomination, or of none), explorers of the outward or of the inner world. Wilde, but also Immanuel Kant, Carl Gustav Jung, Konrad Lorenz, Bertrand Russell, Laurens van der Post, Stephen Jay Gould... and a very few spec writers. Rushlight is one of them.

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4. C*****

I just read "Vampire Eyes" and I loved it. I think what took me in most of all is the natural feel of it, despite (or perhaps because?) its being rather off-canon. The intimacy between Louis and Lestat comes through wonderfully, both for what it already is and for what it can become.

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5. F***** O* L***

My wholehearted appreciation to the François story. I am usually somewhat wary of new characters in VCSpecs, as liaisons are already complicated enough among the coven members without more people adding to the turmoil. However, this story is absolutely delightful, and in its wonderful elegance it solves much more questions than those it raises.

Moreover, it brings to attention one point which until now seems to have been easily missed by some: Louis takes care of François (just like he had of Claudia) as a father, not as a mother. Three thousand years of rather slanted culture have made difficult for us to portray men being caring towards children and young people. Being just that, and being natural about it, is one aspect of Louis' strength and simple courage.

Finally, I do like very much Armand in "Instant Karma". He reminds me of one abused non-human I know well, who although now safe and happy, still shows deep hurt through mistrust and ruthlessness. However, together with outright wickedness also comes fierce protectiveness toward a few young ones. Armand can be pitiless as well, but is never unfeeling.

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6. "With Time", 2

Premise:

When Louis was made he was *near* to suicide. He was *not* quite ready for it; too many things still mattered to him. There has to be complete void to renounce life... also a void of pain. Too much pain still in Louis' life to end it. His acceptance of Lestat's offer is far from well-

meditated and fully aware. He takes a plunge to safety... to some more time to think things over... to the unlikely chance that it may be true there is a way to be with less pain.

The result: he ends up having to find his way alone. He learns the hard way to stand on his own feet only and not trust anybody else's judgement.

The miracle is, he is not soured by that. But he becomes incredibly prudent and self-reliant. He does not **need** anybody, not anymore. That's him at the time of IWTV.

Then, he meets Lestat again. And something new happens, and as usual with him it happens almost without anyone noticing... surely not Lestat. In perfect awareness and with perfect intent, without mental reservations and with complete acceptance, he gives himself to Lestat. It is not need that pushes him to do it. He is absolutely free, and such he remains (proof be his refusal to make Lestat in TotBT). But as a free man, he makes a gift of himself to Lestat. Louis does not underrates himself doing this. On the contrary, he is proud to be such a unique gift to the being who is the most precious to him, and patiently, stubbornly, demands recognition for that.

Therefore:

This is why his killing himself in L****'s "With Time" seems to me quite in character and another, ultimate outcome of his strenght of character.

It is not that he can't go on alone. He has done that for two hundred years. He is a recognized international expert at being alone, **and** like it. It's just that he doesn't **want** to. Now he is completely void, **because** all he is had been given to Lestat, and Lestat is not there anymore. He **could** very well take it all back, but he's not interested. So this one is really a suicide situation.

I don't see it as a jealousy thing. It happened by accident: Lestat was not flirting with Ms. Death this time. Armand knows how Louis is feeling. The same feeling he had before Marius rescued him, only then he was an abused, frightened boy who had not the means and skills to end his own life. Louis can do it, and he does it, coolly and consciously. He won't accept the new terms fate has given to his existence. He responsibly disagrees with fate, god, whatever, and he is free-willed and powerful enough to follow once again his own judgement and nobody else's, and refuse to accept such terms, whatever the outcome. He may find himself with Lestat, or forever separated from him, or most likely disappear from existence and consciousness completely. It doesn't matter. This is the only point I'm not in agreement. I'm **not** crediting Louis with any sort of faith in the next world. It's much more a Lestat thing, in my opinion.

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7. About Sam Molloy ("*Unforgivable sinner*" by M*****)

a. Conscience:

Sam is playing a dangerous game with complete awareness during the time he chooses to live with vampires while being a human himself. He knows very well how different and fiercer vampire emotions are from human ones, and he decides he wants to face this incredible experience. It does not ultimately matter much to him that it was Daniel who forced it on him by making himself known. Life is forever forcing things on us, be it through natural events, or other people's carelessness, or evil intentions, or good ones.

Conscientious people like Sam are prone to a feeling of deserving to be punished, independently from what others do or say. They are forever checking themselves against their personal standards, which are the most strict they can think of, not necessarily the most practicable. It's moral honesty. Only after a while one gets to pardon himself for at least the minor offences against one's own conscience. I say pardon, not excuse!

Sam shows no sign at all of having learned his ethical standards from his so-called family of origin. It's **not** a case of freudian introjection of the father figure (whoever he may have been) as a superego. It's rather a severe, just jungian Self demanding from Sam, as a strong, self-reliant grown up, that he be an instrument of compassion to weaker beings.

While Sam is feeling guilty for not living up to his standards, and he has a hard time forgiving himself; it is even more difficult for him to present himself with no justification in front of others who he feels he has wronged.

For a conscience like his, wrong done to others is not a question of getting even, of checking accounts one against the other. It does not matter that he has been wronged also: the two things do not erase each other, just as killing a killer does not get even with the death of the victim. (I'm sure Sam is against death penalty just as I am myself!)

b. Betrayal:

Daniel does not betray Sam because Sam does not hang his life on Daniel's, so there is no vow for Daniel to betray. Sam can't be betrayed by Daniel because he does not depend on him. He *chooses* to pass his life with him, but it's not the same. He is not ivy, growing on an oak; he is an oak himself, growing beside another, with his own roots and his own limbs.

c. Justice:

I don't think Sam would list killing serial killers as saving lives. He is a policeman, he knows very well that no punishment is rightly given unless after due process of law in which the accused can defend himself. This craze for being accuser, judge and executioner is one of the points in Lestat's character I will never pass by. It is wrong, hypocritical and stupid. And don't come and tell me that mind powers can make a vampire sure of his own judgement! They stick themselves into such messes with interpersonal relationships that *this* argument won't convince anybody! Sam is made of better stuff and has much too much respect for human dignity to do such a thing as becoming a sort of Darkman, a justiciar of the night.

d. Ethics:

I am convinced that human ethics has a genetically evolved basis, ready to be molded by culture. It's one of our strong points as a species. Hobbes showed himself deprived of sense of reality when he said that man is wolf to man. *And* he didn't know the last thing about wolves!

Sam is facing the problem of switching from an ethics based on the interests of humans alone, to a broader concept including other species... vampires, but also animals, aliens, whatever. I say broader, not conflicting. He gets stuck just here: he thinks his moral principles would necessarily be overthrown by acceptance of a vampire's life. Nature itself shows him the hard way that it is not so, and he goes along with this in the end. It is hard to do, it does take time, but it can be done. Leonardo Da Vinci hoped for just that when he asked for equal treatment for men and animals as far back as the late XV century.

I may add that logic is one thing, feelings are quite another. I have decided for myself I am entitled to eat meat as well as my cat does, although I need it only as part of my diet and he needs it as its bulk instead. I also believe there is no moral difference at all in which animal I eat, provided I do my best to ensure it had a good life and a painless death. All the same, as a horseperson I can't bring myself to eat horse meat. It's completely illogical, and I won't scold those who do it (unless as a joke), but I can't see why I should battle myself and eat it all the same either. I can't, that's me, so be it.

e. Being beaten:

Passivity is sometimes needed on a very physical plane to defuse an escalation of emotions. If you know you can face it, it can be the best way to calm things down enough to make room for talking.

I have witnessed this with horses and, in lesser measure, with cats. You put yourself physically in play, acting as ballast, letting violence filter through your slowing down device and steam off without (much) harm. The process has nothing to do with thought on either part. It's purely physical. Sure, humans are much more dangerous than any angry or frightened horse, and vampires even more so. But Sam does have balls.

Sam may have been beaten a lot at times in his life, but he *has* very definite opinions. Letting himself be beaten by Daniel in Unforgivable is his own choice in that specific situation, according to his own very clear parameters of honour, and it doesn't matter to him if they are not shared by other people, many or few that they are.

In this, he has some flavour of a today's version of Dumas' Monsieur le Comte de la Fère, aka Athos.

f. Who is the sinner:

I think *Sam* is, in his own opinion, the Unforgivable Sinner. He feels that way because he can't (yet) forgive himself, but he has chosen to live with it.

He was a policeman, he tried to live differently from criminals, he could maybe feel himself to be a non-sinner; now reality bit him (pardon the pun) and compelled to realize he is not different from any other human or inhuman being, that there is no real difference between him and a sinner, that he has since birth the same inbuilt ability to do bad as well as good as anybody else has, that maybe having cows killed for his hamburger was a "sin" as much as his killing humans is now, but he just didn't realize it...

A new, deeper meaning to equality, and also the destruction of his old ideas about sin. Now sin comes to mean "giving avoidable pain", not just "killing" in itself.

g. A victim?

I think he "offers his life" because he *doesn't* feel a victim at all! He feels strong, and surely more in control of his own emotions at the moment than Daniel... if only because he has given himself time to come to terms with them, time which the others don't have.

Sam does not betray himself, because he is acting in accordance to what he feels bound to with prevalence on anything else, i.e. his principles.

h. And then...(job opportunities)

Sam Molloy is among the very best original characters I met to date, and I can't but grieve his demise. But, he is a very clever fellow. Are we really *sure* he didn't come up at the last moment with some ideas to test after all, something acceptable in the light of his species-specific ethics centered on the idea of "(human) life-saver, not life-taker"?

Something on the lines of nursing staff at a hospital, helping hurt or ill people live by giving them some blood, and dying ones to die easily and happily? Both his telepathic abilities and police training, added to his vampiric powers, would be put to good use there, and could also protect him from being discovered.

Or, a job in a cattle slaughterhouse, solving at once the problem of euthanasical killing and of draining the carcasses... <g>

After all, nobody actually *saw* him die in the sun...

i. After the comeback

I love the human, un-heroic, absolutely indivisible way Sam solves his ethical problem; or rather, he comes to terms with the solution reality forces upon him. He feels completely real, completely alive to me, an actual person faced with something he could never have trained himself for... like life, like death.

I love how the essential lines of his ambivalence about coming back are drawn. The situation is similar not only to his brother's with him, but also to that Marius and Armand find themselves into with regard to each other.

Sam is led through it with such tenderness and unemphatic feeling!

I am also really happy for how he is made one more living proof to any unbeliever of the falseness of Lestat's insistence about Louis being weak...

j. Louis

Louis is also impeccable, and part of it is that he doesn't care a damn if others "dump on" him. Sam and Louis are in perfect accord in that they both follow their own personal ethics for personal reasons, on which nothing others think or do have any influence.

I do agree completely with what M***** says about Lestat clouding Rice's judgement about Louis.

I also guess her distancing herself from him may be some sort of self-preservation device... it is exhausting for one's forces to go on for a long time standing the quality of disillusionment and suffering Louis had to go through between Paul's death and Lestat's return, and then again whenever Lestat plunges headlong into some crazy scheme of his.

Louis comes out as a stronger figure than Rice. Maybe only Marius, not even Armand, has a comparable power of endurance *and* coherence with himself. No wonder Marius is the one who best understands Louis and his strength. Louis is moreover the most capable of learning from experience... not just by his own mistakes, but also from what he does right, and from others' experience too. The result is wisdom, the kind of wisdom which won't refuse to feel surprised or delighted by the neverending changes in the world, but which doesn't expect any miracle anymore either.

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8. *MOM, What I Want, chapter 66*

Now, MOM's writings would be worth a separate commentary. This one short note doesn't make justice to them, to the challenge they are and to the courage of her convictions.

"I've forgiven myself so you can forgive me".

In this one phrase there is all Louis' invulnerability to any sort of bullshit or moral blackmail, even from supreme, or not so supreme, spiritual beings.

He can see through any lie or deception or false hope *because* he has forgiven himself, and in this has taken away from anyone any grasp on his soul, *unless* he is giving it of his own free will.

Nothing can ever be taken from Louis anymore unless he gives it himself as a gift, because nobody can exert any pressure on him anymore.

And MOM managed to say all this in just 34 letters in ch. 66 of What I Want!

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9. *M*****, In Dreams They Come*

Let us suppose that the vampire in M*****'s *In Dreams They Come* is Armand.

Once again I find in M*****'s stories something new, and never about what is obvious in the character.

Here Armand has so much control, he *is* all control, over himself even before the other...

until *need* comes in the picture. His need is the only thing more powerful than his control.

Perhaps he is too good at tightrope-walking... we never get to see how dangerous and painful the path he treads alone really is, unless something goes even so slightly wrong, and we see a glimpse of how he is actually walking on the razor's edge.

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The Ongoing Vampire Commentary, 2/Characters

about Anne Rice, The Vampire Chronicles series and no-profit, amateur Vampire Fanfiction by various Authors, which was at one time (and, alas, are no more) available on the web by mazaher, 1998-2001

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*These are whimsical, subjective, unrevised reflections.
But I'm fond of them.*

I'd be happy if they happened to be the grain of sand from which a pearl is formed in another's oyster.

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1. Benji & Sybelle

It seems I'm a little bit less bloody-minded with regard to Benji and Sybelle than most other Rice readers.

They are really a problem, but what I mean by solving it turns out to be something more difficult than simply doing away with them.

I may be the reincarnation of a former, overzealous sheepdog, but I would love it if the goal was raised to finding a way for them to fit in.

After all, we know precious little about them from Rice's book. It may be possible to think about them in a constructive direction.

The catch is, Rice didn't make them either nice or interesting enough to make this a pleasure, but I'm not sure it can't be done.

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2. Children's play...

In some ways fanfiction **is** a game, but (the Greeks knew!) a game/play can be **very** serious stuff.

This also touches the relation between child and adult. Getting to feel nearer Lestat, thanks to others more than Rice herself, has surprisingly led me towards my younger self, whom I had stubbornly tried to avoid since she seemed to be absolutely too vulnerable to survive and function.

But it is she that (like Lestat) has in her hands the fire of enthusiasm - just as Louis (and Marius) have the patience, and Armand has the key to survival at any cost. So, in a way, sabbiesensibili must thank Lestat also...

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3. Louis/1

M. Pointe du Lac. I see him lean, but muscled. A twenty-five-year-old won't lose athletic condition in just a few weeks or months, and before Paul died he did a lot of physical work in the open air.

He has long bones and long legs, but he is not light- or delicate-boned. His silhouette shows the angles of his joints, but they are large and dense.

He moves like a gust of wind, but he moves always straight to a goal, never fluttering about. His presence is intense with focus and rhythm. Nothing vague in his demeanour and way of looking.

Beautiful, long, fine hands, expressing meanings of their own, but they are never limp. You can imagine his handshake is determined, smooth, quietly progressive and strong.

Shoulders slim but large and not drooping, on which his neck and head are solidly planted, alert, because the world is a dangerous place, unless he knows he can safely relax, maybe in the company of someone he trusts.

Silent unless he has something to say. Prudent. He observes first, draws his conclusions, and only then he takes a position.

The inner strenght of patience, care to detail, measure and balance. Not competitive, but capable of quietly holding his own against anything.

Unobtrusive for a vampire. He doesn't fear loneliness and doesn't need company, so his company is a gift without a price attached.

On the whole, nothing like a Thoroughbred. Rather, picture a fine Trakehner horse, raven-black, refined and light but solidly built, able to tackle rough terrain thanks to his big strong feet, large circumference of shins and large, flat hocks, endowed with beautiful, airy but efficient movements...

I think Marius sees very clearly through him in his brief comments in "The Queen of the Damned", when he appraises the coven gathered to face Akasha. I myself had the indiscretion of having Marius liken him to a goat in "Tapping".

Remember that Louis is forever diminishing himself, seeing himself as uglier and dumber than he is.

About his physique, I keep seeing him as stouter than most Rice readers picture him. I can't see why some try to make him a sort of spidery, feminine, shivering figure to stand at big male Lestat's side. What's the problem about two *male* males loving each other?!

Louis is as strong and as level-headed as any land-owner and land-manager had to be in those harsh times in the XVIII century. And he loved Babette as a man does, and he loves Lestat as a man does.

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4. *Horsemanship*

Sure Louis is a horseman! Re-read the page at the beginning of IWTV, where he flicks a speck of ashes from Daniel's shoulder and then repeats the gesture, more slowly, to calm him down after he startles. *This* is horsemanship!

Louis does not grip the sides of any horse, he's too good a horseman to do that... If you grip, the flat muscles inside your thighs get rounder, and you eject yourself up and out of your seat. Louis learned to ride as a child in the old French classical way, that is by balance and lightness. No gripping sides, no grasping reins for him.

His riding teacher was a middle-aged slave who acted as stablehead, and he put him on the longe without saddle or reins until he could turn around easily on the horse's back, face his rear, and turn to face forward again, without disturbing his canter. Only then he was allowed saddle and reins, but not stirrups yet, and he only could take in hand the cavesson reins, not the bit's. It took more than one year of daily instruction before he was entitled to actually work a horse and not just go with him.

Also his riding across country was modeled on the minimal aids rule. At the beginning of the XX century he took interest in Federico Caprilli's natural riding method, and he adopted the essential tool of modern cross-country riding: the forward seat, that is the self-blocking seat based on the pressure of the foot on the stirrup at the end of a vertical stirrup-leather.

This locks down the knee and joins immoveably the lower part of the rider's body to the horse's without the need for any gripping, so the rider can follow naturally any movement of the horse even during jumps, leaving the hands free to follow the mouth and not interfere with the extension of the neck.

Louis was at once an adept of this much easier way to go with the horse without bothering him, and had frequent discussions with Lestat who still can't leave the old habit of acting as boss, instead of partner, to his mount.

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5. *Louis' Sun sign*

He's a Libra, *not* a Pisces.

Pisces are swayed by their emotions, can't see them in perspective, not even after they have calmed down a bit. They have no reflective powers on their emotions, because they live into

them, like a fish can't mirror itself on the surface of water because he is **inside** it. Louis is not that way.

And, his clothes: worn, yes, to rags, no way! it's just what Lestat says about them. (Lestat on that account sounds terribly like my mother about **my** style of clothing... why don't they mind their own business? my clothes are always clean and mended, although worn and unironed).

Again: Pisces are very easily and deeply influenced by those they love (not only when they're young). However, please notice that Louis' personality and character is not influenced at all by Lestat's. A Pisces would.

Moreover, Louis' sort of wisdom is too detached to be Piscean. It's cold and floating above, not cold and flowing down. He feels **dry**, not wet.

Louis has a **lot** of self-confidence, or how in hell could he have managed to survive between his leaving Armand and his reunion with Lestat?! He simply does not go around bragging about it, like his lover does instead. But he does know his own business very well.

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6. The Body Thief... *a riddle?*

I seem to feel one single feature behind each of Louis' reactions along the way: the conviction that Lestat should **stop** somewhere, instead of always running away. Stop wherever you wish, but do stop for the love of god! Louis even prefers to lose Lestat forever, than being witness to his endless, self-destructive race from he doesn't even know what.

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7. Armand/1

Armand's optimist Sagittarius ASC is beaten every time by its unlucky position in 12th house. He keeps up his hopes, and they are shattered time after time.

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8. Meditation

Another good way to meditate is taking a character like Louis and daydream about him, about what passes into his head, and so on, until you feel **you** are him, you wear his eyes, and can see things differently, and check this view with your usual one.

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9. One thing I like to read

When Lestat is so clearly in love that he is at his loveliest himself. When he lets himself admit he not only loves Louis (he loves such a lot of people!...) but he is **in love** with him, he becomes so powerful yet delicate with his words...

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10. Louis/2

He has acquired a peculiar ability to go back and look at his past like it happened to someone else, maybe because he has mused over it again and again until he has learned all there was to learn, and he has left it behind... Not locking it into a cupboard like an unwanted, embarrassing skeleton, but rather discarding it like the skin of a fruit he has sucked the last drop from.

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11. About VCSpecs

I especially love how VCSpec writers seemed to refuse to take "no" for an answer and were able to find a way around or through each of the impossibilities, either physical or moral, which plague vampires as well as the other living (?) beings. It's great! It remedies such a waste of happiness...

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*12. About *him**

There is since forever in my mind the figure of a man. He has blonde hair, a sad face, he is lonely, and he is in trouble because he won't compromise about his moral convictions. So, whenever I happen on a story where I recognize him (he has a very special feel, even when his hair is maybe dark) I jump to the rescue. Sheepdog instincts, I guess.

On the other hand, fanfiction is a chance to experiment how I would feel if I were in such-and-such situation. I seem to have always had problems to empathize with humans, and fanfiction is a safe environment to experiment, a little like a psychodrama room.

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13. Armand/2

I have an idea that he actually calls Marius "Paron" (with a closed "o") rather than "Padrone". The former not only is Venetian instead of generically Italian, but it also has a range of meaning shifting more towards the intimate: "padrone" is mainly "owner" or "employer" in a business, legal sense, while "paron" may also have the meaning of a term of endearment and/or an affectionate joke, a little like "boss" on Daniel's lips.

I wish you could hear the peculiar cadence of true Venetian... it's different from the other ways of speech in the Veneto, not only as regards vocabulary, grammar and morphology, but more especially in pronunciation, with a peculiar way of going down with the tone of voice in the last-but-one syllable and raising it again to average in the last. And it's more low, guttural in tone than on the Terraferma, although very soft and never harsh. Really Dante was right: it's fuzzy, like a cat in his winter coat.

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14. Lestat/1

Lestat is forever going about trying to find something he already has/is/can be, and everybody knows except himself.

It may be that one more aspect of Lestat's unrest, however, comes from his not being able to relinquish his need for a set of absolute values. I mean, he runs from one experience to the other because he is searching for "the best one"; and he will never find it, as each leaves something to be desired.

He can't accept the idea that the intrinsic value of each thing/person/experience equals perfectly that of any other. It may be for the same reason that he feels entitled to be accuser, judge and executioner of his victims.

Don Juan, forever tempted by the idea that his next lover is going to be heaven, and meanwhile forsaking real, actual love...?

Such position can become a jail. Freedom is elsewhere, in Kundera's "Insufferable lightness of being" maybe.

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15. About Libra

I have Jupiter in Libra in the third house. I'm all for equality even if it means coming short of compassion, and I love Louis like a twin brother, and I can quite feel the hows and whys of his dumping Lestat when he gets too hot and invasive.

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16. Armand/3

Armand... never completely **there**, and that's the nearest he is ever going to let you. That's my mare V., also.

Big as she is, strong and solid, you would expect a continuous, heavy contact on the reins and the consistency of a Mack truck under the saddle, but instead there was this neverending play on your hands and the feel of a wriggling seaserpent under you. I **really** learned to go together and balance when I took to riding her bareback!

Any form of control is beyond the limits of possibility with her. You can only follow her lead and find momentary agreements by feel. And yet there is trust to be built that way, nearness to be found, joy in being together and doing things together, unexpected joy like something you had learned to live without, that suddenly floods both, and you almost ask it to stop, because you always saw it slip away in the past and you can't face it happening again, but you can't renounce it either...

That's what I am wishing for Armand and for those he loves, and I am not satisfied yet with what I have been able to imagine until now. It's frightfully complicated, there have been so many betrayals in his life, coming from such different directions and different reasons.

::

17. L&L and boats

For them, it's more a problem of finding a way to be so near without bumping into each other, especially as they are made of very different stuff... Lestat has the reinforced hull of an atomic submarine, Louis is a wooden 470 (one of the best little sailboats ever made. They do it in resin now, but the original wooden ones are the best).

I love it when they manage to sail together.

::

18. Armand/4

Armand is always terribly serious. He never lets go enough to just carelessly play. He always has a plan, and one more to spare. No wonder, after all, that he can't access his childhood anymore... or rather, that he won't.

Armand is a genius at keeping secrets, at deceiving, at pretending. **But** he does it in earnest, seriously, like his life depends on his efficiency in lying...

Armand is as truthful as a child. He is very good at lying to others if he wishes, but never to himself. He always calls things with their own names.

He doesn't attempt trusting his own eyes anymore after all the shattering blows he suffered in five centuries; he has no confidence anymore in his feelings and empathy. "An affective" seems to apply here.

::

19. Lestat/2

Lestat almost reminds me of that old Oriental painting with a Devil all taken by his effort to meditate, which Oriental devils aren't designed or supposed to do! and yet, the painting seems to say, he can do it, will do it, if he just keeps at it. It would be such a waste otherwise.

::

20. *Marius and Armand*

M & A can't yet look at each other really, and they can't talk about much either. There is too much pain between them, too much to look at it, or through it, or to talk about it. However, no look and no talk can have any sense unless that pain has been addressed and accounted for. So they're somewhat stuck. They pass some time together but nothing much happens, although both expect it and wish it to happen.

Marius and Armand are an even more difficult proposition than Armand and Daniel, and Lestat and Louis. But I can't, just can't leave it at that. It's too much of a waste, all the more so as neither decided to let it waste. Neither decided anything anymore, actually, after the battle with the Roman Coven, so it's time one or both does decide about something, but such is the hurt and the open wounds all around that both fear to make the first move.

::

21. *Lestat/3*

What a rare gift, being able to get Lestat to slow down. Whenever he does, there he suddenly becomes so deep and clear, like a mountain lake. (Hum, this may have something to do with I-Ching...) Then he can forget about himself and feel the texture of what surrounds him. He has an unerring feel about it. He can infallibly recognize the shade of every detail and find the taste of Louis into each of them.

::

22. *Louis' wardrobe*

Louis began to wear down well before his reunion with Lestat. Let's say he began after he left Armand, when he also more or less left off most social engagements and so the need to conform to the current fashion. My idea is that clothing for him is a strictly functional, not an esthetical, thing. Clothes are a necessary, but in itself worthless, interface with the external world. The external world can be very dangerous. So it's important that clothes are **safe**. They must be trusted. They must act as shield and concealment. Surely Perseus would not throw away his worn-out Medusa shield and buy another!

The clothes must be so well-known to the body that they are like a second skin. Their outward appearance is not important. So I think that each single item is worn to death, and then replaced by something as similar as possible, maybe even found in second-hand shops. Naturally, quality of yarn and texture is important to start with.

A corollary is that, both to insure their functionality and to prolong their useful life, Louis' clothes are carefully mended. A good sweater, carefully handled, can keep for half a century. A good pair of jeans can go on twenty years, unless you ride horses in them. And even then, a well-stitched full-length patch can give them a second life. Another corollary is that, while esthetics are absent from the whole process, the result is so very much unmistakably Louis that it **is** art, as Lestat understands very well despite his grumblings.

::

23. *Manipulation?*

Louis is balanced enough and able enough to master himself and the events (and to bow to the inevitable, I may add), that I'm sure he is not above some occasional manipulation.

Not as a power thing, surely: there are few people less interested than he is to power above other people. But as a fun thing, like suddenly getting the idea to go to an amusement park... In Italian, we talk about "fare un giro in giostra", "having a turn on the merry-go-round".

Good-natured, respectful of the other's wishes, just a funny way to propose something, not to force it. More a declaration of availability than mean, cheating seduction.

::

24. *Lestat/4*

Agrumes are so very Lestat, yellow and orange and sunny, with some bitterness on the skin and some acid citrus inside, together with the sugar in the juice.

::

25. *Submission*

On the whole, the image of Lestat shifting rather to the submissive seems to work well, *but* I doubt Louis would ever take advantage of the thing.

The whole point with a pushy big dog is *not* getting him humbly on his back with his tail between his thighs, but to make friends and go have fun together without him either biting or fussing or cowering.

Louis is too wise to let things counterimbalance, and in my opinion he could not care less for taking another's life into his hands that way.

I once overheard him saying "I have quit owning slaves, I like friends better".

::

26. *Happiness*

Lestat actually seems to miss completely the simple fact that one can't buy happiness. Not with money nor power nor good behaviour nor wisdom. It *is* frightening, but happiness is a matter of pure chance.

What's more, it is terribly rare and brief, so it is a real sin to let it go to waste, be it even through fussing about questions of principle.

Louis also fell into this trap at the beginning, but I think we can say with some certainty that by the time he left Armand his faith, whatever was left of it, had left him, and he remained with the dry acceptance of reality. Nobody can earn happiness for himself, and life is too cruel to deny anybody his share of happiness if and when it comes. So he seems ahead of Lestat on this topic.

::

27. *Trust*

One aspect of the problem is that Louis trusts in what Lestat says, but the reverse is not true. I am unsure about which English verb to use here. In Italian it would be "Louis crede a Lestat" or "prende sul serio Lestat" or "sta alle parole di Lestat".

The meaning in each case has nothing to do with religious faith, nor in a strict sense with trust that the other won't hurt you or betray you. Rather, it means that, for one thing, you listen to the other, and for another, that you take the other's words at their face value. You do the other the credit of considering him as much a gentleman as you try to be yourself, and to take his words as truth just like you expect him to take yours.

Lestat never seems able to do that. He's so unsure of himself and others that he can't take at their face value even Louis' words.

Maybe only Marius managed to get him to listen and pay attention and respect enough to his words, although Lestat later chose to break some of the rules.

Tell me to go to hell, but once again horses are in order. You won't get anywhere by either mild or harsh means unless you first get a horse's attention on what you are telling him. He may very well disagree with you, but nothing will ever be accomplished unless he *listens* first.

::

28. *Visiting*

What Lestat says about the frequency of Louis' visits is very interesting. My idea is that Lestat tends to think that, left to his own inclinations, Louis would never come, or never come often enough. Instead he does come rather often, but Lestat is not ready to acknowledge it... both because his was a mistake, and because accepting it would compel him to review his whole opinion of Louis' position towards him.

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29. *Why L&L will forever be a proposition*

Well, all those Lestat loves or has loved seem to be coupled already, or dead, or lonely for their own choosing, or lacking the rocklike patience needed to stand him...

::

30. *Anxiety*

Lestat needs to calm down. Ever heard about overcompensated anxiety syndrome?... On the other hand, he may not be usually great at being kind, but he **is** more imaginative than Louis in expressing his feelings, as soon as he is also feeling safe enough to let himself go. And safe is what Louis is striving to make him feel since quite a while.

::

31. *Anger*

How would Louis treat Lestat in true anger?

Let me tell you how: he disappears. Pure and simple. Not even Lestat can find him if he doesn't want him to.

With more or less anybody else he could indeed get violent if he feels someone is being treated unfairly (although he is not one to scream out or thrash about, and you would be sure to find you've been hit, and hard, before even having seen him move), but surely not with someone he loves so much. If he didn't burn Armand with the Theatre, he would never harm Lestat... So he suddenly disappears. One can suppose he takes a long walk somewhere, breathing deeply and refusing to think about the matter until he has calmed down.

Legend goes around that he once walked without stopping for twelve whole hours, until dawn compelled him to dig himself down.

Yes, it's a bit scary, but powerfully effective if you don't want to fight, be it because you don't want to hurt back those who hurt you, or because you know fighting would be useless to change the situation for the better, or because you don't want to be hurt even worse yourself. Also, it happens sometimes in a rage to say very true things which however are best left unsaid. It is humanly (or inhumanly) impossible, dangerous and unnecessary to completely bare one's soul in front of anybody, be he the person you love most in the world. Everybody has a dark area, everybody is entitled to it, and nobody else should be subjected to its impact, especially in such an unsettled situation as a fight.

Louis knows very well his own wickedness, knows it can't be got rid of, and takes good care to keep it where it belongs: out of others' way, those he loves in particular.

I believe Louis avoids thinking it over until he has calmed down enough to be able to **ask questions** of himself about what exactly happened. At this point, I guess he goes on a non-stop brainstorm with himself, possibly also writing notes down, until he has a clearer idea of his own and the others' position.

I use here the word idea, but it has all the four components: perception (a memory of what happened, as precise as possible; not easy in a rage: What did he do and say? What did I do

and say?), emotion (how did it make me feel?), intuition (what other experiences did this one feel like to me?) and intellect (a rational reconstruction of how the thing worked to the point of exploding).

I doubt he seeks others' help as a rule. I feel he would only be comfortable with (very private) feedback either from Marius or Daniel, and only in extreme cases.

It would be fascinating to see what the outcome would be from some sort of interaction of such sort with Gabrielle, if the miracle ever happened of her opening to some degree of intimacy with him about their maker.

::

32. Armand/5

He never gives anything for granted, just like a little child... or an alien... or a compensated autistic person.

I won't go into that here, but my idea is that Marius did a rather good job with him. Nothing could filter to him, in the state he was, before trust in **somebody** was re-established, so lavishing love on him was an obvious priority, if only to keep him relatively sane.

Moreover, one gift Marius bestowed on Amadeo (and it served him well, even when ostensibly superseded by the faith Santino forced on him) is the gift of being able to think, to question, and to look for answers to test for himself. The gift of being able to put into perspective even faith, and **never** make little of feelings, intuitions and perceptions in the name of abstract ideas.

Marius is really, refreshingly, classically pagan, rather like Maharet and unlike Pandora, who is easily swayed by the fascination of postclassical (postmodern, for a Roman) mysticism.

::

33. Lestat/5

Lestat. Sigh. Will he ever get around to minding his Greek? "Catharsis" means, quite simply, a cleansing. It does not necessarily imply anything more dramatic than a shower taken with someone you love.

Relax, baby! Life is NOW. There is no need at all to tackle 200 years of misunderstandings **before** getting to embrace the one you love. Tackling them is **not** a prerequisite. Embrace first, tackle later.

In Italian, I'd say "Taci e bacia"... Shut up and kiss (or even more to my taste, "Tasi e strucca", in Paduan: Shut up and hug).

It could not happen again, although you're immortal.

::

34. Lestat/6

I bring to your attention the following piece of interesting information about one possible ancestor of Lestat's.

I was researching lately the life of a late XVIII-early XIX eclectic Italian scholar, Alessandro Barca. He taught canonical law at our university in Padova, but he also pursued **architecture and other music** (to borrow Greenaway's diction), geometry, chemistry and the applied arts. One of his essays talks about Francesco Colonna's "Hypnerotomachia Polyphili" ("Love's strife in a dream for the lover of Polia"), an ermetic, beautifully xylographed novel first published by Manutius in 1499.

Colonna proposes in it two empirical methods to draw 10- and 7-sides regular figures within a circle; the explanations are far from clear, and Barca supports, against Temanza's opinion, the much more logical interpretation given by a "cavaliere di Lenoncourt" within his French translation, first published in 1546.

The French translation was reprinted in 1554 and 1561; this last one is signed by the Parisian printer Kerver. Barca, who read it in de Lazara's private library in Padova, correctly attributes all three XVI century French editions to Kerver.

It seems reasonable to trust also in Barca's informations about our cavaliere de Lenoncourt, although the latest critical edition of Colonna's work after the Aldine incunabulus (Adelphi, Milano 1998, 2 tomes, edited by Marco Ariani and Mino Gabriele) makes no mention of him, not even in connection with Kerver's later editions.

It may be worth mentioning that Barca praises Lenoncourt not only as a clever geometrician, but also as a well-educated scholar of architecture.

Barca's essay was publicly read in Padova on April 27th, 1808, and it is published in volume IV, 1809, of the Memorie dell'Accademia Patavina (Proceedings of the Paduan Academy, now Accademia Galileiana), pages 222-256.

It would be interesting to make out how the cultured, if not necessarily wealthy, family de Lenoncourt decayed to its late XVIII-century state... May the translator of Hypnerotomachia have been a role model for a young Lestat?

I can picture him picking up a copy of the ancient, worm-eaten 1546 folio from its latest position as stabilizer for a crippled wardrobe... (wardrobe collapsing, contents spilling all over, poor Lestat getting a beating...?).

The episode could also relate to Lestat's later fascination with Wynken de Wilde's book (both author and book are of course Rice's inventions... and I *do* wish she let Oscar alone) mentioned in MTD: Hypnerotomachia is illustrated with xylographs in b/w, but its topic, aim and general tone are very close to what is said in MTD about the fake book.

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35. Armand/6

Armand has had to fight very hard just to survive and then to withstand his own survival; finding one, like Khayman, who not only survives since time immemorable, but also has kept intact his tenderness, a capacity for affection as easy as a child's, but strenghtened by a wise and penetrant empathy, is near impossible to take in.

Khayman knows a lot about the others, the good and the bad, and yet he loves them all. This is hard to understand. No resignation in Khayman, but no struggle either.

He is proof of the possibility of a different way to do it... more, and for Armand worse, than an enigma. One is left wishing that whatever god may be there, he or she may have an attitude like Khayman's.

::

36. Santino/1 (&Armand in C*****'s not-quite-canon VCSpecs)

Santino's self-imposed discipline, stripping his every gesture of anything else than the bare essential, and Amadeo's desperate lack of prudence, the courage of one whose back is to the very last wall and no other expectation remains than to fight to death and beyond.

Santino seems perfectly aware of that, and he doesn't try to comfort Amadeo, because he also feels life is fight and hope is a luxury, but he does help him regain the calm to fight with success, together.

He reassesses the situation, modifies his plans, carves ways out of the impossibly hard rock of the requirements of his role, not for himself only but for both.

Armand clings to Santino *because* he loves him, and he's had quite enough of being separated from those he loves. Now he's putting all he has at stake, sure to gain at the very least the prize (even maybe at his last breath) of making certain it is not his fault.

::

37. Endurance

As far as Louis goes, you know already how it is difficult for me to see him as anything but strong in his endurance, and a fitting example of the old Lakota saying: "observe carefully everything while you walk".

Louis is detached enough from preconceived ideas that he can actually like very different things and people, such that most of the others find incompatible with each other. He doesn't see anything strange in liking Santino while he also likes Marius (do you *see* why I like Louis?!).

Marius' comments about him are maybe the best description of him. Lestat tends to lose himself on details and lose the whole picture of him.

Santino feels to me, on reflection, even more embittered than I'd have thought. I'm trying to understand why.

It may be that he feels somewhat cheated, like he had let himself be misled by the ambiguous phrasing of the lines in small letters at the bottom of some contract with life, god, whatever. If he reads them again now, he can't really say they are lies: if only he had been less trustful, and had paid more attention to them, he would have thought twice before signing the contract, but he did sign it, so he has no ground to try and get his own back

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38. Santino/2

Louis does have a strong grip on his surroundings: after all, he managed to survive without even getting into serious scraps through the dangerous times between the massacre of the Paris coven and Lestat's return. He simply does not give to some things as much importance as others give them. So for him what passed between Marius and Santino: 1. is a private thing between them; 2. does not mean that they are going to be or must be enemies forever; 3. leaves him free to have his own personal opinion about Santino and also to modify it as he sees fit.

::

39. Santino/3

How could Santino not be struck by Armand's character and his story, and the depth of his love for Marius?

In the same measure as I am brought to sympathise somehow with Santino in his later years, I am also induced to think that he must have ended up by being heartbroken about the reasons and the outcome of his choice to go against Marius.

Santino was at the beginning obviously much better at reading Armand's mind than Armand was at shielding his thoughts. So he must have been startled by what he read.

Maybe he fought against the radical reassessment of his own beliefs that this implied. Maybe this is why he taught Armand to shield so well, even against Santino himself. Maybe this is why he sent him away to Paris.

Like a poison to his integralist beliefs, was Armand's pain and passion, and the effect of the poison worked in secret for decades, until here he is, wounded by his own past, but still standing and ready to fight for himself.

::

40. Marius/1

There is something strange going on here, but I can't help to think it is more in Rice's mind than in Marius'. I can more easily take in my stride all the Memnoch stuff than Marius turning Armand's humans. Only panic could induce him to do something so plainly stupid, and panic in an old lionheart like Marius should not be easily dismissed.

I can't help seeing him a lot like Marko Ramius in "Hunt for Red October", one who has had to learn being alone and thinking for all, and I love his compassion for all living beings, which does not come in obedience to the command of a transcendent deity but is based on a feeling of brotherhood with their flesh and blood.

His is the only really laical mind among all them. Reality, and the limits of knowledge, are always present to him, without the proud assumptions of modern science that everything will be explained sooner or later.

Remember his remarks about Pandora's interest in Christendom, how wise, how alien he is from the point of view which is the root of intolerance, how preoccupied not for any abstract reason, but for the well-being of humanity.

::

41. *Lestat/7*

I can't picture Lestat as a Leo because he seems to be completely unaware of the meaning of "noblesse oblige", "nobility is duty". Whatever his aristocratic descent, he does not protect the weak and does not abstain from hitting a fallen enemy... So he can't be a Leo (I know, I live with one).

Just to give you the idea of what I mean, Marius may be a Leo (with Capricorn ascendant, if you ask me, or perhaps the reverse, Capricorn with Leo ascendant).

As Louis is concerned, he is not enough interested in power to be a Scorpio *g*! I think Armand is Scorpio...

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42. *Ethics*

That's just what fascinates me about Rice's vampires, beginning with Louis: they create a space for checking out the basis of an ethics working for humans as well as other animals, vampires, aliens, whatever. For a wider meaning of tolerance; a less slanted definition of goodness; a different perspective on fixed sets of values.

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43. *Spiritual exercises*

On one hand, becoming someone else for a while is a great form of meditation and spiritual exercises (as the Catholics used to call it... I think also G.K.Chesterton's Father Brown once referred to it in this way), and moreover it seems to be one peculiarity of our species, being able to put oneself in another's shoes. *Compassion*, "to feel as another".

On the other hand, taking on a personality you don't basically agree with can become an unsettling (or even nasty) experience, even if it may end up opening your mind.

The former happened to me a number of times (trace of most of them can be found in the fanfiction part of my site) and most notably, through recent years, with M. Pointe du Lac himself. I have to really thank him for being my patient companion and mirror and at times master and teacher, at a time when I was deeply lonely.

The latter is perhaps happening now, when I sometimes find myself, quite unexpectedly, seeing things from Lestat's point of view. Which is rather surprising, as I used to dislike him rather sharply

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44. *Interspecies ethics*

It's quite scary to realize that there is no set of rules, however hidden or difficult to discover, following which you will be all right, safe, or at least saved. That mankind as such is not so very special, beloved by god, privileged. That none of us is given special treatment in

comparison with the smallest shrimp swallowed by a whale. That death will have us all (the debate is open about vampires). Yet, just because we are all on the same boat, made of the same stuff, subjected to the same rules of physics and biology, we can understand each other, and have compassion for each other as far as survival allows.

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45. *Calicanthus' scent*

You figure a mortal, and Lestat, each endowed with a different share of power and some sort of conscience, and yet equals in that they are (we are) sons of a bitch. Wise old Hamlet said it short and crisp: "The most holy among us is worth flailing", or something like that. So, in a way, each is a tyrant and each has earned death. And yet, each is also worth of existence. Let me quote River Phoenix: "Any of us is worth the whole world, the stars, the universe".

So, again, Lestat may feel guilty if and when he rethinks his many mistakes (not all in good faith, he's too clever for me to swallow his excuses), and come to think he has earned to die; but it is right and good that the real, sensual happiness of a wonderful smell can keep him back, make him change his mind.

After all, he's not omnipotent, and he's not cause of every evil in the world. Just like mortals go on, just like God himself goes on... if nothing else, to see what happens next.

::

46. *Marius/2*

A non-religious mind, yet open to all the wonders of existence.

Without god-given rules to obey, yet he tries to stay true to his own conscience.

Used to be alone: nobody ever was there for him.

He has to comfort himself, to find in himself the reason to go on, and even to be his own accuser.

I think making peace with the past, and with Amadeo, is so difficult for him because he has never been allowed to feel helpless, sad or scared in the safety of someone's love.

He has been loved, and he is still, but nobody beside himself could ever keep him safe and allow him to relax, if only for some time.

There are also personal reasons who compound my feelings, but the net result is that I am eager to see him and Amadeo together again where they belong... to clear the dead remains of the past and see a future together.

Which doesn't mean I am trying to cut off Daniel, on the contrary. The thing is not settled yet. Daniel surely has earned his prize, and more... not just eternity, but eternity with Armand at last. With him, not only running after his ghost-like presence.

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47. *Daniel & Armand*

To get back to Daniel and Armand. It may just be that Armand always had the intention of making Daniel when the time would feel right, and that the impending doom may have pushed him to stop waiting and do it at last... in some way, trying to tie up all ends, to conclude his own life, and be prepared for his own death, nothing left unfinished. A sort of baseline moral obligation.

In time, I have come to feel Armand rather like those horses who wait for the right moment and attack you without reason when you're not expecting it, because they have been abused so much that they fear and hate you even if you're not doing anything to them. They have lost all trust in humans, and they may have also learned that they're physically stronger. So, they're much more dangerous than those few who just attack trying to bully you, or those who show their fear and let you know in good time what's happening. For this reason they're thought about as "wicked" and very likely get no access to healing their wounded soul. I would so much that Armand could be healed, or at least helped.

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48. "Choice"

I had this image of Lestat finding himself, for all his faults, morally more grown-up even than God and the Devil. A terrible position! He always tried to avoid really taking moral responsibilities, under the excuse that he is wicked anyway, and now he discovers himself as being even more qualified for that than the all-powerful divinities! I always loved the story of Yudhitshira, how he honours the power of God but keeps his own opinion about the worth of the dog. Fine, he thinks, you may be God and that may be your heaven, but I choose and prefer to stay out here with the dog. Sorry, but in conscience I don't agree with you, although you are God and I'm just a human. The most terrible courage, disagreeing with God! and I tried to picture Lestat's relief as he also discovers he is **not** alone, that Louis was there already, is there already since such a long time, and he hadn't realized it. What a comfort.

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49. *The message to Rice which never was answered*

The 64th and last hexagram in the I-Ching depicts a small fox crossing a frozen river. He jumps carefully from boulder to boulder. Will he make it to the other side? or will he get careless, thinking he's already made it, miss the very last jump, and wet his tail? Lestat tends to do that, literally to jump to conclusions... and miss. Louis is always careful to the very last.

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50. *Goats*

Louis as a goat. It's meant as a compliment, obviously. Low-maintenance, although fastidious... but he never asks someone else to take care of him, much less assumes he is entitled to that.

It's paradoxical, and I'll think it over some more: Lestat was never cared or provided for, yet he acts like a spoiled child, demanding everybody to tend to his needs. Louis was loved and cared for, yet he always provides for himself, like a goat will feed without complaining on whatever poor pasture is available, but picking for himself the very best there is.

BTW, here you also see one main feature of Marius. He seems to be the one who best understands and appreciates Louis' character. He **sees** him like nobody else does. It almost seems that, as Rice detached herself progressively from identification with Louis and began to treat him as a wet rag, she appointed Marius with the perception of Louis' strength and inner light.

I know, I know, it's demanding and unsettling to put oneself in Louis' position... it takes a lot of moral character, like living on the edge of an abyss. Especially after crossing depression and coming out on the other side. But disparaging him for the very quiet patience which is the fuel to get out again, is unjust and ungrateful all the same.

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51. *Armand/7*

Armand gives me the impression of being physically hard, tough... not the marble hardness of the Ancients, but that of hard, lean, trained muscles, which are also taut with constant psychic tension. How rare is release, how rare is softness.

When we brought home our late beloved cat, she was a hurt stray ready to fight for her life. My lover said "She feels there is no safe place outside her skin". That's Armand, even with Daniel. He's so strong that he can live with it and not fall under such a weight, but it's like a continuous pain. Not even dream of release anymore.

His cruelty seems to come not from a natural inclination, but by a hard-learned lesson about the cold harshness of living. He plays hard games he never chose, and it's difficult to quit - the only exit is through the sun.

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52. *Lestat/8*

What I think Lestat mostly lacks is open-mindedness. If he ever had a tarot reading, I'm sure the Hanged would come out for him... the need to change perspective, to see things from another point of view, if only to check it against his usual one. He would have a lot of surprises.

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53. *Gabrielle*

I always found humourous that first thing Lestat does after he is made is running to Mother! However, I rather agree with it... who else was there with the mind and strenght to understand and help

I like Gabrielle very much, too - if nothing else, she's not one of those clinging, overprotective mothers, the most common type, nor one of the few who want to plain control you. She lets her son be a grown-up, for bad or for worse... like a mother cat, she does her best for each litter, then goes on with her own life.

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54. *Marius/3*

Marius is too rigid... I think that's the origin of some problems. He has a hard time adapting to unforeseen circumstances. Why? Because he always **had** to be the one who planned and directed or executed the plans.

In part it is a feature of his character, but that's why he was chosen to become the Keeper! He is not fast to react, so he misses some chances. He looks for safety, release, happiness, through strenghtening things. It does work sometimes, but sometimes you just have to flow with the events, without defence. This scares him, I think, and I understand it.

But I do think he is not a childhood relic for Armand. Their relationship can't be severed or washed away. It has to find its place, or a great, precious, part of both their lives would be wasted.

As for a 40+ man being in love, and loved back, by a teenager... the situation of neither can be described as common in today's terms. Their respective stories are **not** by any means usual, **nor** can they be taken as model for any sort of relationship.

Sure, I would not wish a son of mine to become involved with a grown man. But neither I would wish to see him subjected to what befell Armand! Indeed, if ever such had been the case and I could not be there to prevent it, **any** help, even Marius' (a vampire's, a "monster"'s, even sooner a grown man's) would be a blessing!

Marius grew into a culture who had less preclusion against such a relationship than there is today against a m/m one between adults. In twenty centuries, he has made his own rules: working, as anybody, on the basis of his education, but modifying them on personal criteria. One of these rules is, quite plainly, that pain is always too much and happiness always too little in the world, so he does try to lessen the first and increase the second as far as he - responsibly- can.

He's not one to toss dollars to beggar children in the street; rather, to put up a shelter for a number of them, not to gratify his ego for a minute but to do some solid, lasting good.

He does make mistakes, but who doesn't? In any case, as I see it, he did a good thing with Armand. He did save him, both physically and psychologically. Nothing less could have rescued him from the depths he was in. No less intimacy than theirs could have made it. Marius gave his all to Armand and was open to receive whatever Armand gave him back.

Which, BTW, Lestat has never been able/brave/strong enough to do... he's getting there, but.

It's not Marius' fault that things went so bad, just as it's not Louis' fault Claudia was the person she was. Moreover, I really can't blame Marius for allowing himself, in all sincerity and purity, to fall in love with Armand. It's the only time in his life when he allows himself to need someone. He always was the needed one, and he always did his best to be up to expectations, yet nobody ever was there for him.

His blunders (mainly, not finding the courage to look for Armand for such a long time, and making Benji and Sybelle) come in my opinion from his being caught between reluctance to accept his need, and his need itself. In the end, it floods him away.

About killing evildoers: for Marius, it's a question of social defence.

I mean, Marius still believes in mankind: its basic goodness, the possibility of its moral progress. He has to kill to live; so, why not kill those who stand in the way of that progress? Rather like a gardener weeds out some plants to make room for others.

He does not judge the "weeds" as intrinsically "bad"... he only roots them off to help others grow, according to a plan who he believes to be worthwhile although, in a measure, arbitrary. Marius is not blocked like Lestat in a single pattern of judgement, if nothing else because he has seen a lot of such patterns come out in different epochs, be followed even to bloody results, and then be abandoned.

Marius is not a believer... he was not when he was a mortal, much less now. In the name of whom would he be issuing moral judgement on his victims

Instead, he chooses them on the basis of how much pain to flesh and blood their death can prevent. Something objective, a concrete criterium... He would be equally ready to kill a saint, if he was unwittingly going to provoke a massacre.

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55. Marius/4

It is **not** Marius making love to him that causes Armand's emotional problems. It was first his body being raped in brothels, then his soul being raped by the Roman coven. Marius is not a rapist in any sense of the word. He is a vampire, not human anymore, and he sincerely loves a human whose personal history makes him all but "normal".

Should he really stick to therapeutic protocol, or follow his heart?

My idea is that he should have dared even more, and been less secretive with Armand, so as not to let him feel inadequate. In the end, it would not have made much difference as far as security goes, I'm afraid.

Rape of a child by a father can have many faces. Don't you think Hamlet is mentally raped by his dead father into becoming a vengeful murderer in his turn, instead of a scholar and wise ruler?

Marius does **not** do this to Armand. His love is respectful, not manipulative. He tries hard not to exert the influence of his nature, character, age, experience, on Armand's choices. He really tries to make room for freedom of choice. He asks him if he wants to go back home! Marius is ready to renounce him if he so wishes. He may not be completely successful, but I can't see what much more he could have done.

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56. Armand/8

Armand looking the colours change on his dying lovers' faces. In "American Beauty", Sam Mendes' film, the boy has that pure, loving, enlightened expression as he watches Spacey's character die.

That's what satori is, maybe.

He could not have prevented that death. He may be sorry, or not... it is irrelevant to the fact that this death is a fact of life, unlikely and wonderful ("full of wonder") as all facts of life, worth of perfect attention.

Once you're out of shared human emotions, there you find Armand. Enlightened people **are** dangerous!

It's obvious that the first I think about as being enlightened is Louis. But Armand also, because he's not a hypocrite. He's always deadly serious and earnest in everything he does, even lying. His making of Daniel is incredibly brave. It's letting someone much nearer than he ever let *anyone* after his abduction by the Roman coven, with the only exception of Louis, whom even Armand could not but trust.

He must have felt desperate. As usual, he didn't let it show.

The more I keep Armand's company the more I love him, and I wish something better for him than Rice seems to be able to give. Something more concrete and more compassionate than his/her God has ever been. Real love of real people, rooted in the real limitations of existence. How right is Maharet: Beware of whatever is not flesh and blood, beware of ideas, beware of the gods. If nothing else, because they don't know how it feels.

And the cyborg in *The Postman*: Big ideals don't love you back.

I won't settle for anything less than complete love for Armand. He's earned as much, and God seems to be neither able or willing to provide it.

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57. "Why"

Armand chooses at last to settle things with God once and for all. He won't wait patiently anymore for him to forward some explanation. He defies him, he faces him under the sun in an OK Corral duel, he goes to see his real face under the masks of twenty centuries of religion and a piece of cloth, to free his own love for Daniel, and Marius, and Louis, and even Lestat, from the binding threads of a doubtful faith.

At the very real risk of losing his life, and with the certainty in any case of suffering terrible pain, he cuts with a single motion all those links to transcendence, and leaves his love -even if its span of time could only be the very last moment before his death- free on its own ground, the real earthly ground where it can thrive.

He makes certain once and for all that God, if he is there, is actually unpredictable and can't be satisfied, and doesn't care a damn for what Armand loves so much that he doesn't want to renounce it... not anymore, not in the name of anything.

So in a way Marius and Armand have converged toward the same place: both have quit renouncing their own love, life, desires, in the name of something foreign to their heart (be it the Roman coven rules or the duty to tend Those Who Must Be Kept).

Both feel all the more lonely for that, but they come to realize that the comfort or support they formerly felt was a fake. They have *always* been alone, because the gods, or duty, always demand, without giving anything back. The brave thing for both is accepting this awareness, that they *are* abandoned by whatever god or higher task... that they *never* were cared for by any god.

It is even more brave that they choose to care for each other: to love each other as best they can, within the limitations reality imposes even on vampire flesh and blood, and let god or whoever mind his own business.

Once again, Louis was there first... "Who will ever love monsters, if they don't love each other?"

::

58. Armand/9

That's quite right about Armand, he has suffered so much and is so deprived of sense that the only peace he can imagine is the peace where nothing suffers or dies because all is already dead, and nothing is born to suffer and die because all is already dead. Death as the only safety. I would so much to be able to change things for him, and yet I am deeply afraid (no, I was convinced for a long time... now I don't know anymore) that he's right.

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59. *Animals*

I wonder why should the vampire kiss not be a pleasure also for animals? A vampire's body language is more attuned to animals' perception than humans in general, so it should be easy to seduce them as a human can be seduced. I understand haste and hunger, but I keep wondering... And, if this is the nub, why should a vampire have problems with the sexual implications of the feeding? just another different species, same biochemistry, same way of communicating, same fate to die, so what?

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60. *Lestat/9*

I agree that Lestat and Paul could have been a couple. I even share with some other Rice readers the lingering doubt that it may have been Lestat himself to push Paul to his death, when he realized he could have even more fun with his brother's delicate conscience than with Paul's unshakable faith.

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61. *Fledglings*

I do **not** think love between maker and fledgling is incest. It is not by human standards, according to which "parent" is whoever took up parenting functions to the child. It is not by vampire standards: the maker chooses his **adult** fledgling through love, that is, through knowing (something of) him/her and loving that, not like humans give birth to a baby whom they do not know or choose. So I can't see where the problem lies. It would be sad if the fledgling was not allowed to give back the same love. I can't see any reason for that.

::

62. *Lestat/10*

And here we come to that glorious fool Lestat proves himself to be. He still feels Louis is weak and dependent, because he loves him. Love is not dependence! Not Louis's love, anyway. Lestat refuses to "spend all of (his) immortality making it up to him". He should, like we say here, "baciarsi i gomiti e stare zitto" (kiss his own elbows and shut up). He can't see his unearned luck.

And much less he understands how easy it is to lose Louis... misfortune, chance, Lestat's own inattention; that love must be seeded and grown day after day, and the crops may get wasted sometimes.

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63. *Teaching*

There is only Louis who can teach so much without lecturing, just by what he is and does. Armand would never accept any lecture, but he's so sensitive to the inner taste and light -or darkness- of people around him.

::

64. *Lestat/11*

Lestat faces problems by speeding up, trying to leave them behind, but he's harnessed to them, so the more he races the faster they come after him. He just has to learn to slow down and pick his steps.

It may be that he will learn from Louis, as soon as his desire to remain near him will overcome the urge to run away from problems.

It was common to teach young carriage horses by hitching them alongside older, more experienced companions, who steadied them against the sudden impulse to shy into the ditch or bolt away when they got upset in the bustle of traffic. Pardon me if I tend to fall back on technical analogies. I'm so much more at ease with preternatural creatures than with humans because they behave like beasts (and I mean this as a compliment...)

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65. *Marius/5*

Marius is a Roman of the classical age, a truly laical mind, both for inclination and education. He mistrusts any faith and any set discrimination between good and evil. I understand such position is not easy to grasp for us, even today when the relativity of beliefs is widely accepted. However, there is a difference between believing in a certain set of beloved truths or values while accepting others to believe in their own, and thinking that all beliefs are really equivalent, and that any personal preferences are the result of nature and upbringing. The problem of free will in relation to an abstract idea of good and evil is really Christian. In the antiquity, the problem only arose in relation to single situations or choices, not on in abstract. I have an idea that Marius would consider most speculation about abstract good or evil as a waste of time.

Same thing about Maharet: she is concerned with everybody's wellbeing, without stifling them with her care or directions. She has great balance, treads a very narrow, difficult path, yet how graceful she is bearing her weight!

Marius is a man who would never dream of looking at anybody as anything but a person, who respects each and all if nothing else because each and all must die (Epicurus), and who can enjoy his money while using it also to build a better life for those he comes into contact with.

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66. *Armand & Daniel*

Picture the frustration of Daniel, after he has been made, discovering that still Armand shifts away from physical contact. He's never **there**. Yet he is never far. He **craves** contact, yet can't stand it.

Daniel never seems able to seduce Armand into letting himself be touched: Armand knows better than anybody about seduction, he's too good at it to surrender to Daniel, and moreover he would never trust someone who tries to seduce him.

Instead, the idea behind it could be from Daniel: "Things are this way, now I'll hug you because I love you. And trust me: you're going to like it, too. Just try it for five seconds". It's risky, Armand may bolt and put both back many steps, but if you put into the equation Daniel's frustration and the actual block between them, it may be worth a try. It may just work.

Armand's wounds won't heal by themselves, he does need help, and we all know Daniel has no hidden goals, he only wants to be allowed to love him, no strings attached.

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67. *L&L*

In Louis coexist his hot love for Lestat, a cool detachment from his hysterics, and wholehearted compassion for what causes them.

Loving a madman (occasionally) is no reason to lose one's own head without gain for anybody. Louis is ready to die for Lestat, but for a good reason, not as a slave to his hysterics. Being able to stand ambivalence, that endless mix-up of feelings, is difficult; managing it, and not being managed by it, even more so.

Louis won't let pass any silliness, yet there he is with his love, just a step away, if only Lestat quits making a fool of himself on the brink of the precipice.

Louis is not such as to let himself be convinced by Lestat's undercutting: he has come to accept and appreciate his vampire nature quite alone, surely not with Lestat's help, so his awareness of his own worth does not depend even from the judgement of his beloved.

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68. *Lestat/12*

Lestat is usually only acting up, and the problem is that usually there is no-one to make him listen to reason. He is too powerful, and has too little control over himself, and he doesn't *want* to listen, and only Maharet (maybe) could physically or metaphorically slap him and tell him to quit it in no uncertain terms.

Lestat is prisoner of his preconceived ideas, of his king-sized ego, and he honestly can't see anything beyond the walls of his jail.

I'm not excusing him: he's a grown-up man and his problems with relationships are not solved or pardoned just by keeping track of their causes.

It's just that I would often like to kick his ass into looking a bit further than the tip of his own upturned, though shapely, nose.

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69. *Anarchy*

Louis is maybe the more radical of them all, a real anarchist, he just doesn't attract attention to himself so the radicality of his position is easily overlooked. Moreover, he always takes any involved risk on himself only. He has a very clear idea of boundaries: where his life ends and others' begin. He never assumes he is entitled to have an influence on others' lives.

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70. *Lestat/13*

Lestat gives Louis for granted, and feels superior to him. He's a child as far as emotional maturity goes, yet he feels superior. There are parents (mostly fathers, I think) who do the same thing: they miss completely their children's lives, thinking "there will be time to enjoy this", but there is not, the present is such for just a moment, and suddenly it is past and can't be recaptured. Lestat is an anthology of missed chances for happiness, because he never slows down enough to look at the landscape.

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71. *Lestat/14*

Lestat is scared by love: he won't stand still and let it wash over him, because he feels things so strongly that it hurts him.

He is forever running from it, because he doesn't believe he is up to responding to love.

He fears to drown in love and lose his own image of himself, which is the image of a son-of-a-bitch (no offense meant to Gabrielle): in his opinion, such a person is not worth being loved by others, and surely can't love another.

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72. *Claudia*

I am rather wary about Claudia. She feels too much like an even less inhibited Lestat. I can understand how and why Louis loves her, but I'm not feeling especially empathetic with her.

I'm afraid I see her mostly as an instance of how children are not in themselves any better than grown-ups, they only have less power. Scoundrels in the making!

You can see this in IWTV (the movie) whenever Claudia feigns compunction about some mischief. That's your acceptable-lying-child born to acceptable-lying-parents (or rather, parent, as this is quite a Claudia/Lestat thing).

They match perfectly in every single thing I have problems tolerating from either of them. However, I astonished myself becoming so fond of Lestat lately, so it may be that I will be going to feel deeper for Claudia sooner or later.

She could not help being how she was, or at least it is understandable that she was that way. If I wanted to be hard on her, I would say she was greedy for two incompatible things at once: behaving like a woman, which she was perfectly mature and able to do despite her childish body, and keeping all the privileges of infancy, which she was not ready to abandon as they came in very handy.

She refused to choose, just like Lestat. This doesn't make her sympathetic to me... yet.

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73. *Marius/6*

Marius was abducted by crazed-out barbarians who ritually burned people alive; he was raped into being a vampire; and he was entrusted with the life and safety of a whole nation of individuals he did not feel entitled to judge and condemn to death, vampires though they may be, himself included.

He has been flooded with a real nightmare he had no way to wake up from. Yet how gracefully he embraces his new nature and his appointed duty!

So imagine what added horrible dimension the attack by Santino's coven assumed, after fifteen centuries during which Marius bore his task with sensibility, responsibility, reasonableness and compassion, managing to weigh as little as possible on other living beings with his predatory nature.

Do remember Marius took part in the stoic and epicurean philosophical movements, which considered any cruelty as barbaric, because any living being is going to die and is going to suffer in the meantime, so adding more pain to it is as stupid as it is evil.

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74. *Santino/4*

Santino's beliefs. He imposed himself a harsh discipline, believing in good faith that someone out there (god) demanded that. Then he began questioning not only the rules, but the consistency of that idea of god in itself.

He may have found out that those demands came from the depth of his own soul; that god is the name we tend to give to some part of ourselves which is so much different from what we know of ourselves in everyday life that we can't easily come to call it "I".

That's why I see Santino as having come in time to understand the meaning of the old Roman saying, which Marius' behaviour indicates he has very present: "homo sum, humani nihil a me alienum puto", "I am a human being, nothing of what is human I repute being foreign to me" (mistaking one's unconscious for a personal, external god included!).

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75. *Marius/7*

Marius does not behave like the people-burning Celts! He kills painlessly off the criminals to survive, he does not painfully sacrifice them to an idea. Just remember that he is half Celt himself, he is very aware that such darkness is present in himself also, and he keeps it in check.

::

76. *Marius/8*

How comforting is the myth that someone, somewhere, can forgive us for what we can't redress anymore! Marius knows that it is a myth, and he will have to live with his guilt, or let himself be killed by it, because nothing can *really* patch up the irretrievable past, if nothing else because a part of it is the pain others suffered because of us.

At least Marius 1. takes responsibilities; 2. is not afraid of emotions; 3. is not shy of physical contact; 4. never hides behind any father figure or lets anyone hide behind him.

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77. *Armand/10*

"Truth will make you free". It is not always so, sometimes it can make you deranged, but Armand has always been strong enough to stand a very high load of truth without breaking down.

It's strange what's happening with Armand. For a long time I thought I would never be able to forgive him his deliberate acts of cruelty. Then Rice seemed to kill him off in Memnoch, and I found myself grieving on him and thinking that Lestat is a pain in the neck for the whole world, but Armand could very well have kept his own place, between heartstrokes and jaguars.

From then on (not through his autobiography as much as by his own decision, as it seems) he's come much nearer and I think I can understand now a lot of things about him.

The very same happened with Vanilla. We could barely stand each other in the beginning, then I began to admire her strength of character, then, well, I fell in love with her, not all at once but slowly, and even more slowly she came to trust me.

So I love Armand's peculiar desperate strength, different from Louis' quiet wisdom and endurance.

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78. *Armand/11*

Rose bianche con il cuore lievemente rosato, profumate di luna. Sette rose come queste Armand dava a Louis ad ogni compleanno.

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79. *Marius & Armand*

Marius e Armand hanno in comune il passo lungo. Hanno lo stesso ritmo immenso della durata, sono fatti per camminare fianco a fianco. Daniel ha un'altra cadenza, deve trottare per star loro dietro.

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80. *Marius/9*

To relax between two hard tasks in the same night, Marius has the habit of taking off his clothes and refresh with rose water or scented powders. The comfort of freeing his body from the convention of fashionable clothes. Armand remembers it well.

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81. Armand/12

Oct 27, 2000

Core codes for Gates' main software platforms stolen by e-mail and forwarded to St. Petersburg... Is it Amadeo Inc. at work at last? (I'm going to learn cyrillic characters asap!)

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82. Paganism and faith

Marius and Maharet have in common that they have no faith: they're pagan to the core. They both follow the wisdom of the flesh and blood. They don't go with the Christian separation of ethics from aesthetics either. For both, the most beautiful thing, happiness, is also the most ethically right. Suffering is always ugly. Living beings are made for happiness, are tuned to expect happiness, and pain is disruption and destruction and waste. Period.

Marius and Louis have in common that neither bases his ethics on faith. Marius because he has no faith; Louis because, even at the time when he had faith, always knew God is not accountable for by humans, and ethics is therefore most safely based on compassion among those who live and who will die - etsi daremus Deum non esse.

His conscience is his own, not God's, and *that's* free choice. So he may not care a damn for most things which are considered important by others, but he's ready to be killed for things others wouldn't care a damn for.

I wonderer for a long time why two people as different as he and Lestat could be in love with each other. Now I know it's for the same old reason different people fall *and* stay in love with each other: because of where the other heart's is.

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83. Armand/13

Armand's eyes narrow to a slit when he's thinking. Beware those eyes. They belong to a powerful magician.

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84. Armand/14

It feels like for Armand the answer to any request could be nothing but *no*, always *no*, and the only way to have something was not asking but taking it.

It also works for him with Daniel: he never asks, not even what would be given freely. He takes.

C***** manages to produce a miracle. She makes Santino the first *yes* for Armand after an eternity of *no*s.

Armand and Santino in her stories have in common that they both have learned to disregard pain (their own personal suffering) completely... pain is a given, every day, all the time. Then they meet, and discover that being together allows them to take stock of it. They can measure it, because *now* it has an end.

Armand is dark garnet, Santino is obsidian.

Armand: I'm tired of issuing orders. But it's better than obeying another's.

Santino: I was born in the middle ages, Armand - freedom as a concept is foreign to my mind. It took me thirty decades to understand how I could let it into my life. After I lost my faith, I turned to the philosophers. Every one of them seemed even more shallow and unsatisfactory than the theologians themselves. Then I happened on Kant. Here at last I found a solid basis for a whole view of the world and of mankind. I discovered the wisdom of the body: the hard, blind side of the mirror of the mind. This I could at last relate to. This gave sense both to my past and my present life. I had at last a foundation for balance... It was both personal and arbitrary, yet it allowed me to recognize my brother in every creature on this earth. This was

freedom for me. I took no more orders from an authority external to myself. I could choose what to do, not only just how to do it.

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Memnoch the Devil: The Day After

by mazaher, 2001

*with much thanks to Kris who first plunged headlong into the well
and to Marc who cares so much for Lestat*

::

It seems the whole Memnoch trip has shoved Lestat, without his knowing, much nearer Louis than he had ever allowed himself to be until now. Louis' Weltanschauung is built upon ethics... not in the sense of hard and fast rules to obey, but in the sense that every single moment in everybody's existence is the result of choice, and as it has influence on other lives, so it carries responsibilities. Louis is perfectly aware of the inescapable paradox: on one hand, all criteria guiding choices are in a measure arbitrary, and their result often unexpected; on the other, his conscience compels him to ask himself time after time the same, ultimately unanswerable question: What is the right thing to do, for me, now?

Probably the most sustainable criterium for him is something like: Do what honestly feels right to you, and be aware that what feels right to you is necessarily arbitrary, that the outcome of your choice in the near and far future can't be really foreseen, that values (even your own!) change in time, and that the only feedback with which you have to live forever is your own conscience.

This is also part of the reason why I believe that Louis now -and I mean, not only after he burned out what was left of his too painful feelings together with the Théâtre des Vampires, but after Akasha, after the Body Thief, and especially after Memnoch- thinks revenge is **never** a good idea (including "official" revenge, like death, or corporal, penalties, or harsh detention).

For one thing, there is no possible justification for adding more suffering to what already happened. Pain is always too much as it is... Life goes on eating itself alive, no need to wilfully add more suffering. It's quite scary to realize that there is no set of rules, however hidden or difficult to discover, following which you will be all right, safe, or at least saved. And that mankind as such is not so very special, beloved by god, privileged. That none of us is given special treatment in comparison with the smallest shrimp swallowed by a whale. That death will have us all (the debate is open about vampires). Yet, just because we are all on the same boat, made of the same stuff, subjected to the same rules of physics and biology, we can understand each other, and have compassion for each other, as far as survival allows. Besides, can you be really so sure you won't change your mind, and won't regret taking that revenge, inflicting that share of avoidable pain?

Lestat instead carefully, cleverly, brilliantly even, avoids each and every ethical problem, just because none can be solved after all... so why bother with them? However, he has found in Memnoch the very being who can manage to corner him to this task, who tears to pieces his comfortable smugness towards his victims, who chains him, with invisible chains even stronger than Maharet's, to his appointment as a (more or less) human being: taking position, choosing, or choosing not to choose.

He used to be so scared to face it, because he always had to face existence alone... Even more so after he misunderstood for an act of abandonment Marius' declaration of trust in Lestat himself. Marius as much as told him "Go, son, live and love. You don't need me to be your master and teacher. Return as my equal, which you are already, although you don't believe it yet".

Now Lestat's fear of taking a moral standing is not enough anymore: he is even more afraid of Memnoch. And now he also becomes aware that he is not alone, and realizes that he never really was.

Louis is there, was always there since the beginning, waiting against all hope that he would come near. Louis knows very well the stark desert of moral necessity where Lestat finds himself at last after Memnoch; he knows every oasis and every water spot, he is really for Lestat the everlasting well of water of the I-Ching (the everlasting well in the middle of the chequer of fields, in the right place, in the holy place) and Lestat discovers the clean, severe beauty of this barren landscape, and the nearness of Louis' love. Never so near. Never so much love.

Louis, Mojo, philosophy, and Gustav Mahler

by mazaher, 2000

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Let's say a vampire and a German shepherd are stretched on a sofa. To the vampire, there is silence. At the very same time, the dog is listening to a complex symphony of ultrasound.

Ask Louis what he can hear, he will answer "Nothing at all, but I'm going to put on Mahler's Fifth as soon as I can disentangle myself from under this dog". Ask Mojo, and he'll answer "The bats are chatting under the eaves of the roof, complaining about insecticides".

Who's telling the truth? None, both.

In his turn, Louis can distinguish between the darker red of venous blood and the brighter shade of arterial blood, and Mojo can't. So, Mojo will say that blood is generically "colored", while Louis will lecture about the aim with his fangs of the colleague who spilled that drop of blood.

What each living being perceives of the real world depends on his senses, which in turn have been molded by evolution according to the needs of the species. But no single living being and no species will ever be equipped with such instruments as to be able to know in full the whole of reality, for the simple reason that it will never be necessary, and nature hates waste of energy.

So, every conceivable form of knowledge (for worms, bugs, birds, humans, shrimp, or whatever) is nothing else than a road map of a certain territory. According to your needs and preferences, you may choose a larger or smaller scale map, or a map showing all motels, or all natural parks, and so on. But every map is only the representation of some peculiar aspects of the territory, and not of others.

Now, if the cartographer puts Ft. Wayne in Florida, you can be sure that it is a mistake: you can be quite certain that "Ft. Wayne is in Florida" is **not** a true description of reality. But both if the cartographer simplifies the map for special needs, until it becomes a sort of abstract picture (like the wonderful map of the London Underground, showing almost no curves), or on the other hand he details it very much, even drawing in your own house (but not the blackbird momentarily perched on the chimney!), you can't really say that map is **true**: you can only say that it is **not false**, provided it helps you to find the right stop on the Circle Line or that particular junction between hiking trails. The ultimate map cannot exist, ever: there can only be progressive degrees of approximation, according to the needs.

So, let's say I have a map of what I firmly believe is right, and you have another,. Each one of us has picked out of it whatever time and experience proved to be false. We still remain with two different maps. **And who the hell can say mine is more right than yours*?! Chances are that both can be somewhat useful, although maybe to different ends. And what's wrong about different ends?!*

That's what Heinroth's remark about remaining young by throwing one favourite hypothesis out of the window first thing each morning meant: before breakfast, do a little mental calisthenics, and remember **your** map is **not** the only one, nor even the best in itself. Just one of the many.

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Idle musings

by mazaher, 2000

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Most Spec(ulations; although the first thing that came into my mind are Speculatus, delicious spiced Christmas cookies from Tirol) portray Lestat as very much more lovable than Anne Rice does herself, and I am quite grateful for that. I am actually beginning to love the mischief! However, some of them also seem to me to show a recurring, subtle tendency to attribute instead to Louis' psychological makeup some stereotypical behaviors once considered by (much too many) males as a trademark of the feminine, in the pejorative sense. Which doesn't look quite right, as, clearly and visibly:

a) he isn't a stereotype;

b) he is as solidly male as, let's say, Marius or Mael.

I can't actually believe that there is any inherent difficulty in portraying two men (or two women, for that matter) loving each other without either ending up with assuming features that myth and legend once used to associate with the opposite gender.

Therefore, in the spirit of the critical essay Some little known facts by Dark Angel (which I enjoyed very much) I wish to contribute some personal observations which may counterbalance something of an unearned slant against Louis, although, I do not doubt, all this may be slanted enough in its turn.

By the way, my own family of choice is interspecies and comprises two humans of different gender, two ghosts (male), one old mare, and seven cats (four females and three males). No, I won't tell you which member I am.

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1. About male/female:

I agree it is likely that a vampire, that is, a non-human, may find it easier to subvert the myth of a contraposition between genders. So, a vampire is, or becomes, less hindered in his relation with the whole of him/herself (his/her part of the other gender included) than a human. Anyway, this is an attack on three thousand years of cultural tradition, and it requires courage. Being natural about it is an even more rare gift, which Louis is endowed with. For instance, very few grown up men in the early 19th century would even just approach a child of either sex at less than ten feet, unless said child was accompanied and kept in check by a woman. Louis does, and he cares for Claudia, and he does all this like a father, not a mother. Unusual and wonderful.

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2. About "whining":

Being pained about the injustice of evil and pain affecting other creatures is not whining. Whining is about noisily refusing to make choices, and/or to accept responsibility for them once they have been made, and this is not something Louis indulges into as a habit.

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3. A warning about depression:

Non-depressed people usually find depressed people very boring, however serious or appreciable the cause of the depression. "Look how many people are not as lucky as you are!" is not a comfort: if I can barely stand my own situation, how can I be happy knowing somebody else is faring even worse?!

Then again:

Neurosis **is** adaptive (Louis)

Why settle for neurosis when a little effort can get you psychotic? (Lestat)

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4. About ethics:

Louis' depression seems to me to end up taking the form of a reflection on interspecies ethics, that is, one whose criteria may work in a cross-species environment. He is looking for a common key to justice in the relations among humans, vampires and other assorted monsters, and other living beings. His eighteenth-century, catholic education gives him the tendency to express the problem in the usual terms of how to save one's soul, but the ground he treads is indeed completely new and rather revolutionary. This, again, takes courage.

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5. About saving the world:

He does not look for universal salvation, however; he does not conduct his search in terms of universalities. His inward sight is directed to individuals, be they human people, animals, trees, or vampires: to persons he knows, and whose worth (just for existing) he honors.

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6. About quarrels:

By the way, some Specs show quarrels between Lestat and Louis on matters like "You did this to me", while Rice's books on the whole seem to relate them rather to matters like "You did this to him/her". I have an idea that Louis is usually more preoccupied of his place in relation with others than of himself as such, and I cannot abstain from wishing that he could have met Marius in his Grecian abode. Marius could have shown him Saturn's golden age made real: on a limited, sustainable scale, of course, but none the less blessed for those who lived there. Marius won't try to save the world; his talent is making happy and keeping safe those who come in his orbit, as long and as far as circumstances allow. This may just be enough to give Louis peace. Even Lestat telling him about it may have been enough. It's hard to forgive him for keeping the topic to himself. I still can't. Louis is much better at forgiving than I'll ever be.

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7. About his being a Pisces:

He is not. He has a strong sense of reality: he can manage a large plantation; he is good at accounting, spelling, and what else; he is the one who warns Lestat about the real, physical dangers he so easily ignores when he is all set about some mischief; he is the one who travels all Europe to find factual explanations for the beginning of vampires. He undertakes the formal education of Claudia, on the whole with excellent results: he promotes both her grasp on practical, everyday life (so that she can mix with humans without being noticed) and her inner growth to womanhood. It is not a fault of his, or of his intellectual position, that this comes to evil. He is not addictive to anything, at least nothing dangerous (apart from Lestat). He does not want to lose contact with the earthly commonplaces of existence. Finally, I doubt that he is so untidy as some Specs, and Spec writers, picture him: dropping items around, or indeed any form of carelessness, would mean clues left for everybody to intrude on his privacy, and few people are more privacy-conscious than Louis. And I can't believe he may ever leave corpses around for Lestat to dispose of! (The source of this information is doubtful anyway: a spurious remark by one of the most accomplished liars on Earth, although a fascinating fellow).

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8. About what his natal chart may be like:

Earth/ It is a fact that in 1766 Neptune was in the first degrees of Virgo, and Pluto in Capricorn. This speaks of little fantasy and strong rationality, whatever the rest of the theme may be like. Nightmares don't come from a Virgo Neptune; in such a case, they may rather come from the Moon (see below). Pluto in Capricorn, in its turn, gave the epoch a severe hue, especially about ethical matters (domicile of Saturn). Moreover, Louis has all the patience of a Taurus influence, especially with those he loves. His disregard for fashion and any show of wealth and elegance also is a Taurean feature.

Fire/ However, when he is pushed to anger, he ignites fires. A Pisces would provoke floods! His anger, moreover, is sudden, fierce and not planned; this points to a deep involvement in the Fire signs, especially Aries, where Uranus was in 1766. I would tend to exclude Leo, because he lacks this sign's unshakable conviction of always being right.

Air/ Again, he always tries to mediate, to take things in consideration from more than a single point of view and to reconcile conflicts (which make him uneasy); he is not competitive and, different in this from Lestat, he does not love challenges. He moves lightly and crisply: he doesn't fluctuate about, rather he moves like a gust of wind. Read again how he crosses the lawn at the Sonoma compound. All this looks like a Libra influence, especially as it would contribute to an Air triangle, together with Aquarius Mars conjunct North Node, and Gemini Saturn. He is in fact an individualist, who does never conform to other people's opinions just on an authority principle, although he may be ready to sacrifice his position in the name of love.

NB: Lestat's eyes are nothing but Aquarius, surely!

Water/ Finally, he may have a Scorpio Moon in 5th, opposite Aries Uranus: this means strong, and strongly controlled, feelings, which at times give way to cataclysmic explosions. It also means a Moon on Lestat's (supposed) ascendant conjunct Mars...

Just as a first hypothesis:

Louis: Sun in Libra, Ascendant in Taurus, Moon in Scorpio

Lestat: Sun in Aries, Ascendant in Scorpio, Moon in Aquarius

Armand: Sun in Scorpio, Ascendant in Sagittarius, Moon in Scorpio

Marius: Sun in Leo, Ascendant in Capricorn, Moon in Taurus

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9. By the way, about writing:

Louis has little patience with bad spelling, but even less for bad (or just sloppy) Latin. On the whole, he finds he can excuse somehow the occasional slip of pen or keyboard, but not liberties taken with a foreign language, much more if it is dead and can't defend itself. Marius is much more tolerant about bad Latin from English writers: after all, he has lived through all its changes since antiquity, and he's gotten used to a lax outlook on lexicon, grammar and syntax. Louis, on the contrary, learned Latin as part of his formal education, he learned it classical, and he wants it to stay classical. David is clearly the only one who joins him in his yearly Christmas grumblings about "those American parvenus, who can't even keep their vowels in one piece! Venite, adoramus, indeed!".

10. About movies:

Lestat's favored director is David Lynch (who else?), Armand's Peter Greenaway, Louis' Clint Eastwood, Nagisa Oshima and both Tony and Ridley Scott.

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11. About D.H. Lawrence:

As far as I know, Louis was close to lying (I suspect, for domestic peace's sake) when he said he never read his works (1). It was actually Armand who read aloud all of *Etruscan Places* to him as soon as it was published, and Louis loved it as much as he did. It seems that afterwards he elaborated at length in his journal about awareness: the duck dipping underwater, the dolphin leaping out of the waves. And asphodels.

(1) Dark Angel, *Ruling Rue Royale*, chapter 10.

12. About music:

Louis actually loves getting drunk with music as much as Lestat, but is very private about it and only raises the volume on his headphones. He is known to get a fancy for some song or piece of music and record it again and again on cassettes he then listens to, non-stop, for days, whenever he is reading or writing or drawing. By the way, Sting's *Moon over Bourbon Street* has never figured among them. Items from such collections are such heterogeneous pieces as the Beatles' *Hello Goodbye*, Ariel's *Song from The Tempest*, David Bowie's *Speed of Life*, Alfonso el Sabio's *Cantigas de Santa Maria* and Lou Reed's *Finish Line*.

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13. About driving:

Louis is a careful driver, although he doesn't like to drive. He usually stays within speed limits, and only races his BMWs on clear highways. He changes gear with perfect timing and a fluid, three-stages movement. The engines of his cars and bikes are always running smooth. Lestat, on the contrary (beside Porsches) loves small, showy Alfa Romeos whose changing gear he regularly destroys, loves to speed everywhere (not that he has ever caused any accident) and, owing to lack of patience, cannot keep a curve even, especially on the large highways *rondeaus*.

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14. About happiness:

Lestat's idea of happiness is things speeding up: fighting and winning. Happiness is a warm gun.

Louis' idea of happiness is things slowing down, being able to put down weapons. Happiness is a warm heart.

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15. About horses:

Lestat just rode when he had to, and never liked it much (nor his horses!), except for passing fancies for gaited Saddlebreds and, more recently, for spectacular, easy-to-ride Friesians (I suspect this happened after he saw Rutger Hauer riding one in "*Ladyhawke*"). Louis loves riding, rides well and considerately, and even more than that, he loves horses as such. He still hangs his keys on a browband which was part of the bridle of his black bay TB *Treasure Trail* (by Cisco Kid out of Cillacon) whom he purchased from François Baucher. He carefully oils the leather once a month, and shines the engraved stud. He likes to spend quiet time in stables at night and (although getting dusty annoys him somewhat) he is known to sometimes groom a horse, who is then found mysteriously sparkling in the morning. The differences about horsemanship between Lestat and Louis surfaced in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, at the times of the querelle between Baucher and the Comte D'Aure. No need to say that Lestat took D'Aure's part, as much as he would become a fan of Graziano Mancinelli some twelve decades later. Louis upheld instead Baucher's empathy with horses, he believes Klaus

Balkenhol to be now the perfect horseman counterpart of Marius, and is presently very much interested in Mark Rashid teachings.

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16. About why Louis won't receive Lestat's heightened powers:

Because he knows that, like everybody else, he is himself as wicked as he is good. As it is, he knows where his own wickedness is lurking and he knows how to keep it quiet there; but what may happen if more power was thrust upon him? He knows himself well enough to be careful. Not everybody else knows, or cares, about this. On the other hand, it is also true that Louis tends to overestimate the difference a single, evil-meaning individual (even a preternatural one) can do on the whole of space and time.

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17. About perfection:

Many human features he has retained, as it is well-known, and he has brought them to such unaware, unselfconscious perfection, that Lestat has a hard time not letting him notice how they fascinate him. He can rock with absolute ease on the hind legs of a chair while talking or reading, one knee raised against the edge of the table, the other leg stretched under it, of course provided nobody except Lestat is present and witness to this lack of composure. Another familiar gesture with him is turning the key in the latch when going out, at the same time as turning himself away from the door. This usually has Lestat quickly dipping his hands in his pockets, so he won't embrace him there and then.

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18. Things Louis has admitted missing most:

The light of a solitary sunrise flooding an avenue of plane trees on a clear February morning. Sunlight leaping on moving water. However, he says he made up for it when he realized he was not scared anymore by the sight of water running over a mirror, which for mysterious reasons had frightened him since earliest childhood. Now he can pass a half-hour staring at a small hand-mirror held under the tap in the bathroom (2).

The slightly choking smell of tarred wooden boards under the sun.

Sneezing.

Chocolate.

Poplar leaves seen against the sunlight. Or rather, as he put it once, *l'odore personale di un pioppeto in aprile, trafitto dal mattino.*

Watching swallows at late afternoon in summer.

The buzz of bees feeding on meadow flowers.

Cicadas singing in the afternoon sun.

Rainbows.

The scent of his own mortal skin.

(2) *Similiter et quibusdam speculis virtutem liberandi quemcumque captum, vel carceratum vellet [quidam posuerunt]...* Guillaume d'Auvergne, *De legibus*, 23, I, coll. 66aH-67aC, about 1230-35, in *Opera omnia*, Parisiis 1674.

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19. About hell:

One last remark about this topic. If Hell, as Memnoch showed it to Lestat, is a place where unconsiderate people are forced to take responsibilities they did not care to look for, then Louis is not headed there.

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About Marius, but also Santino and Armand

by mazaher, 2000

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I am going to follow here with my comments the tracks of a long-ago debate (held on a board dedicated to literary criticism) concerning the vampire Marius and his relationships with those who played a significant part in his life, Santino and Armand in particular.

The debate was already concluded, or rather abandoned, when I happened on its written remains, and some of the participants whom I was able to contact expressed a preference for my avoiding any direct quotation, as their contributions at the time do not necessarily represent how they would uphold their position today.

*According to their wishes, I am limiting myself to putting here in better order my own considerations, stemming from the debate itself and from an exchange of private messages with a friend who **was there** at the time.*

Please remember that these notes would not even have come into being if those sensitive, well-read, opinionated and articulate literary critics had not been so generous of themselves as to take part in the public debate, and if my friend had not been so kind as to resume it with me long after its natural death.

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The premise

It has always been difficult for me to understand the reason why -among VCSpec writers- Santino's supporters in general seem to feel the urge to take an anti-Marius attitude, such as Santino himself does not feel or take in Rice's books.

I am strongly pro-Marius myself; I can't help seeing him a lot like Marko Ramius in "Hunt for Red October", and I love his compassion for all living beings which does not come in obedience to the command of a transcendent deity but is based on a feeling of brotherhood.

However, this does not mean I can't sympathise with Santino, too.

Marius, on his part, would be the last to figure any use for revenge in general and against Santino in particular, as revenge only adds to the sum total of suffering without any possibility to change an already too painful past.

I can guess Marius is especially uncomfortable with fear, an emotion uncommon to him, and that he may wish to avoid as far as possible Santino's presence, but I can't figure him not acknowledging Santino's change and his consequent deeds, or not respecting his personal quest for whatever sense there may be either in human or vampire existence.

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Considerations on the Debate and its outcome

One. Though fascinating, the debate does not explain yet the hostility of some pro-Santino VCSpec writers against Marius. I keep wondering.

One opinion explains this with the wish of reducing the day-night, good-evil opposition which seems to exist in Rice's works between Marius and Santino. However, the main reason for this wish is the scarcity of actual information about Santino in Rice's books. Therefore, in my opinion, there is no need at all to make Marius the bad guy just to get him even with Santino's past. It would be much better if that barely outlined past was filled up by making Santino a little bit more of a good guy...

I think "tradition" among VCSpec writers should not be constraining them to stick with superficial, unsensitive characterizations.

My job is teaching, and very often I happen on this mistake on the part of the students. They come to a point when they feel they have already some experience; they have passed a number of exams successfully, they are hard workers and confident in their ability to learn. When they tackle a new textbook, they take detailed notes of it (a good way to understand it, and begin memorizing it also). But at this point, they leave the textbook aside and only study

on their own notes. Good as these may be, very often what they end up answering to my questions during the exams is rather different from what it should reasonably be. Off-canon specs are perfectly right for me, and some of my favourites fall in this category, but I'm bothered by superficiality, both in canon and off-canon specs or debates.

Two. Who won the chess match between Armand and Santino at Night Island?

I think Armand won, too: more motivated, even less prone to feel safe on top, maybe more subtle in reading faces...

Others probably use the same arguments to press that Santino won!

About the opinion that Armand and Santino are unlikely to be friends. Here canon plays a part. Cecilia's works where Armand and Santino are lovers are among those I re-read with great pleasure; as far as Rice canon goes, however, I agree that they will never be what would be called friends.

But I also think they have come, willing or not (especially on Armand's part) to understand each other very well, and unless a conflict is on between them (which I too don't believe is likely) this would work in a way very similar to friendship. So I really feel the game of chess is less a sizing up of each other than an exciting sport, like a mental tennis match, with no second intentions.

Three. Then the big point comes up: was Armand unable or just not interested in keeping control of the Paris coven?

I tend to think "not interested". I have the idea that Lestat's arrival may have seemed to him like the long awaited release from the continuous, tight effort of ruling. Not quite his vocation, although he did it well. Some think Armand kept trying to find some place to belong to. When Lestat turned up, Armand may have seen him for a while like the miracle of some*one* with whom to belong at last. It's cruel that this yearning went unanswered.

A different opinion has it that Armand wanted to keep control, but he lost it to Lestat. In this case, his behaviour would be nothing more than a way to lose with grace, but it doesn't sound true to me.

There must be something else.

Armand seems now to use his heightened XX-XXI century powers to *avoid* the need of issuing orders or organizing others. His own Night Island is remarkably anarchical in management.

This makes me think the role of coven master was not satisfying in itself for Armand, and he was part molded, part hammered by Santino into it instead. I know many doubt that Armand could ever be forced or tricked into it. But what else could he do, other than be as good as he could at whatever he was taught? He was a seventeen-year-old boy, what the hell!

And Santino surely did not encourage his initiative or original thought, he is too clever and (at the time) he was too dedicated to his projects for that!

Four. Some think Marius did not teach Armand as well and as fast as he should have, both before and (especially) after making him a vampire.

But Marius, with his solar faith in human nature, could not easily foresee such an unprovoked attack as Santino moves against him, and Armand at the time still needed reassurance and love most of all, not a military education.

I don't really think Marius can be accused of lack of common sense, like Bruno Bettelheim thought about Anna Frank's parents.

Five. I agree with the opinion that Santino leaving the Roman coven is no mystery in itself, nor it is a mystery his loneliness in later years.

He realized that what he may have believed at one time to be ideals, were merely politics. He wanted to bail out. But a lot of people still believed in those ideals, people he himself had taught to believe in them. The real mistake, he came to think, may have been the preaching in itself, not just the doctrine preached. So he didn't want to once more impose himself and his new convictions, and he simply disappeared, leaving the others to their conscience as he should have done since the beginning.

Six. Another argument is about the reasons why Santino avoids confronting his former coven. Whatever the reason, it is not because Santino's character is non-confrontational! Santino is a born fighter.

The fact is, probably Santino now just thinks it is wrong to try to convince people that what he preached earlier is bullshit. Confronting the believers makes no sense.

Seven. Well, let's say that about the end of the XVIth or the beginning of the XVIIth century Santino felt convinced that organized religion was not about ideals but just politics.

What about god, whatever or whoever it may be?

Probably Santino's position was agnostic. If he could not believe anymore that the church, and the covens, were the consequence of god's presence in human history, what other proof could he ever trust?

On the other hand, "no proof of god's existence" does **not** mean "he/she does not exist".

So, I tend to uphold the idea of Santino keeping a non-judgmental attitude.

Then suddenly Akasha turns up and he finds himself face to face with an actual, touchable, un-living being endowed with most of the requisites of a divinity. And this being's behaviour is as shallow, mean, cruel and politic as the worst behaviour of non-divine beings.

It is easy to empathize with his detached bitterness... his "bitter smile", his "burnt beliefs". He had left such things behind him centuries before, convinced at last that if there was a god, he/she must be much better than that. How could he get back now to conforming to political directions from one he can't even have a good opinion of, let alone love? Surely not in the name of her power alone!

He knows better than anybody that power does not equal worth. He also knows very well that he has been a Bigtime Bad One, and that he may be one still, but now he also learns that Akasha is much worse and meaner than he has ever been.

It is really horrible to find oneself above god. Who ever may wish or withstand to stay there? Yet he does, bravely and without fuss as usual.

Eight. Why is Santino spared by Akasha?

I agree about Lestat throwing bullshit around in his book about the final confrontation. I also agree about the subtle, tender observation I once read that "Lestat has a tendency to become a clam whenever he's talking about things in his life which are very emotional, painful and significant to him".

But I don't agree Santino is spared because Lestat likes him. I think it is typical of such a personality as Akasha's: she's so conceited that she still thinks she can appear as a long-lost divinity to Santino, who on the contrary is both more clever and honest than she is, and reads through her plans easily. He did **not** want to become her Goebbels, or anyone else's, anymore. And this she can't believe.

Moreover, the crew at Hollywood Vampires can make me believe (and enjoy) absolutely anything, but as far as canon goes, once more I can't imagine Lestat and Santino as anything more than superficial acquaintances at best: with their respective characters, they would be sure to fight at a moment's notice!

Nine. With regard to Lestat. I read somewhere that "Lestat never deliberately tries to hurt those he loves". I wish he wouldn't!

I am a lawyer by formation, and believe me that there is a thin difference between doing things on purpose and being grossly, guiltily careless, and Lestat will never convince me he is enough of an idiot to get away with a "not-on-purpose" excuse!

I may be prejudiced (no: I **am** prejudiced), but also I can't remember a single instance in Rice's books when Lestat tries to "spare Louis's feelings".

Ten. Back to Marius. To sum up my position about him and Those Who Must Be Kept: Marius never was in love with Akasha. She and Enkil were his duty... and he was entrusted with them unwillingly.

Yet, he performs at his best: with dedication, responsibility and generosity. Yet without abnegation. This is another thing I like in Marius: he is not selfless in a Christian way... he does his duty, but risking and suffering as little as he can. He does not believe in any divine prize to be gained through abnegation and suffering.

On one hand, then, he cares for mankind and he knows very well how important it is to keep Those in a good mood and in contact with the current age as far as possible. The mind boggles at the thought of what a pissed off Those may be up to, or even what would happen if they waked up a bit frisky and began playing with H-bombs, mistaking them for billiards!

On the other, he feels compassion for them, he cares for them as living beings. That he brings them flowers does not mean he is in love with one or both of them. It is just his nature, to lavish gifts.

It is not simply hospitality either, or the rules of social courtesy, that induce him to care for them. He knows very well that after his being robbed of his human life he is not part of any society anymore, so what are social rules to him? Which rules of which society?

After two thousand years and the passing of three eras in human history, it looks like it would be frankly difficult to identify with any set of social rules...

Surely not rules of the sort Christian Thomasius filed under the heading of decorum, meaning the rules whose infringement won't stir trouble with your conscience nor rock the foundations of social order, but obedience to which -on the other hand- makes social interaction easier and more pleasant.

I am convinced instead that the reasons of Marius' behaviour come just from his strife to conform to what his conscience dictates, and so it comes under the class of *honestum* in Thomasius' system.

Eleven. In Akasha's eyes, Lestat is obviously a better choice as a companion than Marius, because Marius does not seek power in itself, while Lestat does.

Marius can't be bought with dreams of power: he knows very well how heavy is the responsibility that comes with it, and that Lestat instead is all too ready to forget.

(Now don't begin to think I don't like Lestat: I used not to, but VCSpec writers have shown him in a much better light than Rice herself, so I have actually grown really fond of the mischief).

Twelve. Why does Marius look so closely at Santino when they all meet at Night Island?

I agree with the idea that he may want to know how Armand feels about him.

I also agree about Marius' surprise at his beauty... and Marius is not one to be fooled by fine features if they are not lighted from within by the personality of the man, so I can quite believe he is surprised.

But I also think Marius wants to keep an eye on him. Not even Akasha has ever hurt Marius as deep and lastingly as Santino I believe he is more than a little afraid of him, and is bravely struggling to keep his fear, Santino's mood and the whole situation under control.

In the same way, Santino watches Lestat because, in my opinion, he is unsure whether or not Lestat hates him for what he did to Armand and Marius.

Now Marius can't quite make out what to think of Santino. His helping Pandora to rescue him from the ice must puzzle the Roman greatly.

I do think Santino is making an effort to suggest to Marius that he has actually changed, without however intruding upon him. I like this. Santino does not seem to feel any sense of self-importance. It's like he thought he had thrown his weight about much too much in the past, and that, while he is eager to communicate to the others the results of his self-criticism, he's not trying to get the spotlight upon himself.

Or, in different words: he thought his former beliefs more important than himself. Now he has lost even the last scrap of a hypothesis of a possible belief, but yet he does not feel to be, or have become, important because of this. He knows his worth, his abilities, his powers, but he does not feel important, or especially good, or safe, because of them.

Thirteen. My idea is that Marius would not have been stopped from looking for Armand by a merely intellectual consideration (like "I am not yet healed...", "I am not strong enough to rescue him...", "He's fine where he is"), without a strong emotional brake on top of it.

I have my ideas about what such brake may be... look them up if you wish at my site, the "Getting back" little trilogy.

Fourteen. About The Battle of Venice. I think it may have been a perfectly reasonable plan for Santino to send an army to the battle of Venice, while staying home for the moment.

He may have sent there just those who may be plotting against him: they would be eager to go and gain glory and reputation, but surely many would have been killed, thus weakening their ranks.

If they won, and killed Marius, little harm would be done as they would be glorious, but thinned out in numbers. If they lost, then they would be discredited, and Santino could plan a second expedition, go himself, and hopefully win, thus both killing off Marius' threat and strengthening his own prestige. If he lost... well, the problem would pass to someone else. Santino is not one to foster illusions, or harbour fear.

Fifteen. I'm still musing about the reason why Marius made Benji and Sybelle.

I can more easily take in my stride all the Memnoch stuff than Marius turning Armand's humans. Only panic could induce him to do something so plainly stupid, and panic in an old lionheart like Marius should not be easily dismissed.

I should add that the nearest I can get to a possible explanation is this. When the thing you love most is lost to you, and the pain is so great that you are pushed to the ultimate act of self-importance -suicide- then you grasp at the thing nearest to your lost love, and love **that** instead.

Yes, there is panic in this, and desperation, and Marius is used to have nobody to comfort him. It's a pity he's shy to ask Daniel for help.

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97 short essays about vampires

by mazaher, 1998-2001

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one: about love

Se per un vampiro uccidere equivale a quello che per gli umani è fare sesso, Louis è uno che (per citare Philippe Noiret in Tango di Patrice Leconte) preferisce una buona sega a un cattivo matrimonio, mentre Lestat è ovviamente uno che va a puttane.

Lestat come li raccatta così li pianta, gioca a innamorarsi; Louis non vuole conoscere le sue vittime per non correre il rischio di un (altro) amore, perché il suo amore gli è stato tolto, e non vuole che possa accadere mai più.

Interessante.

"...Credo che fosse la pallida ombra dell'uccidere." "Ah... nel modo in cui farti male come faccio ora è la pallida ombra dell'uccidere." "Sì, signora," dissi. "Sono incline a ritenere che ciò sia esatto." E inchinandomi rapidamente, le augurai la buona notte." IV, 226

Una notte, passata da molto tempo, mi era presente come se ancora fossi là,... Sedevo accanto a lei e cantavo per lei, mentre mi fissava aggrappata a una bambola... Puoi immaginarlo, questa splendida intimità, luci basse, il padre vampiro che canta per la figlia vampiro? Solo la bambola aveva un volto umano, solo la bambola. IV, 216-217

Louis che chiedeva cortesemente a Jesse di descrivere ancora una volta l'apparizione di Claudia. E la voce di Jesse, piena di sollecitudine e di confidenza: "Ma Louis, non era reale." QD, 466

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two: about Paul de Pointe du Lac

Visto che a pensar mal se fa mal ma se ghe intiva: non è che le visioni del fratello piccolo di Louis le abbia combinate Lestat, che è giusto il tipo da innamorarsi di un santo, e che l'abbia fatto fuori quando si è reso conto che poteva divertirsi molto di più con le ambivalenze di Louis che con la fede di suo fratello?

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three: of curiosity, and quiet

Lestat passa da una scenata a un'altra ("Meglio male accompagnati che soli" è il suo motto), Louis ha una quiete fluida: nessuna risposta, nessuna soluzione, nessuna fede, nessun rimedio, soltanto la calma accettazione dell'immutabile, inevitabile. Non è adesione, comprensione, convinzione nemmeno riluttante che ciò che accade sia giusto o anche solo logico: è pura presa d'atto, e compassione.

Anne Rice sembra essere giunta dopo un paio di libri a considerare Louis come personaggio insipido e non suscettibile di evoluzione - sottovalutando un fatto fondamentale e cioè la portata folgorante della sua quiete. Sembra darle l'impressione di picchiare su un materasso o affettare il loukoum.

Louis non è curioso: non pasticcia con le persone e le situazioni "per vedere cosa succede" (e per avere il gusto ipocrita di dire a se stesso dopo il massacro che non l'avrebbe mai immaginato: Lestat lo fa proprio perché non riesce a immaginare cosa succederebbe! come dio).

Sei noncurante e spaccone e presuntuoso. Oh, non lo dico per offenderti. Davvero. Fai di tutto per farti notare e farti avvicinare e farti badare e per metterti nei guai, rimescolare la minestra e vedere se riesci a farla traboccare e se dio non verrà giù a prenderti per i capelli. Be', non c'è un dio. Potresti essere tu, dio. BT, 111

Louis è tenace per posizione e non per sforzo, come una inforcatura salda, fedele alla linea anche quando non la vede. Non l'equilibrio stabile del cubo ("ben tetragono ai colpi di mia

sorte" come dice Dante) ma l'equilibrio indifferente della sfera. Non importa sapere il destino, perché nessun destino può più cambiarlo. La lama delle Stelle. Non è freddo come può sembrare a fianco di Lestat, che è una fiamma libera: Louis è una bottiglia dell'acqua calda, una teiera fumante, un sacco a pelo.

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four: on enlightenment

"Tutto è compiuto", un'opera è stata completata, un cambiamento definitivo ha avuto luogo, e c'è calma, e libertà assoluta, l'insostenibile leggerezza dell'essere, l'agire senza motivi e senza scopi degli illuminati. Ora è illuminato - ma non vuole essere maestro, nè discepolo, a nessuno. E non è più curioso.

E' passato in una notte dall'angosciata eloquenza del primo tempo del concerto per violino di Mendelssohn op. 64 (nell'esecuzione di Ormandy con la direzione di Stern e la Philadelphia Orchestra) al Canone in re maggiore di Pachelbel, assolutamente conciso ed esauriente sull'argomento della pace.

E ancora: Calling all angels di Jane Siberry e k.d.lang, in Until the end of the world di Wenders; e Praia do mar dei Madreus, spiaggia vuota davanti all'oceano, un vuoto freddo paradiso di fronte alla fine del mondo.

Ero in uno di quei rari momenti in cui sembrava che non pensassi a nulla. La mia mente non aveva forma. Vedevo che la pioggia era cessata. Vedevo che l'aria era chiara e fredda. Che la strada era luminosa. E volevo entrare al Louvre. IV, 342-343

Pensavo quietamente, Non c'è altro che possa dire, niente altro che possa fare. Volevo andare dove non ci fosse nulla di familiare. E nulla importava. E questa è la fine. Non c'è altro. IV, 361-362

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five: about measure

Louis è uno che non dice "ti prego": dice "per favore". L'understatement come condizione esistenziale, lento all'ira come al perdono, capace di sopportare l'ambivalenza.

Ci vuole del bello e del buono perché Louis prenda un'iniziativa, e quando accade di solito finisce per appiccare incendi con le sue emozioni (acting out!)

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six: love's labours lost, or are they?

Che cosa porta infine Louis a ricambiare così limpidamente l'amore di Lestat? Lo stesso riconoscimento di questo amore, come se non potesse esistere (o non dovesse esistere) un amore non ricambiato; neppure questo amore, che Lestat nega una volta dopo l'altra, come se fosse una debolezza invece che una forza, fino a avvolgere la fiducia iniziale di Louis in una rete di diffidenza e delusione? La pura compassione per la carne e il sangue di vampiro di Lestat, sofferente e spaventato in un mondo con cui ha perso il contatto? La violenta percezione da parte sua della distanza incolmabile tra l'abitudine all'affetto reciproco, in cui è cresciuto Louis, e la solitudine, il disprezzo e la violenza tra cui è nato e in cui è riuscito a sopravvivere Lestat? O soltanto il fatto che li amiamo per quanto sono splendidi, e non necessariamente per dove hanno il cuore?

Armand/Amadeo fatica a concepire che tra vampiro maestro e novizio non ci sia reciproco amore, e non ha torto. Anche Lestat ha fatto Louis per amore. Il fatto è che un amore selvatico, impaziente, indisciplinato, inconsapevole di sé, come quello di Lestat, non è facilmente percepibile da un galantuomo come Louis.

Distolsi lo sguardo da lui, desiderando di poter dire quello che davvero avrei voluto dire. Che lo amavo. Ma non potevo. Lo sentivo troppo profondamente... L'amore che provavo per lui era nientemeno che umiliante. VL, 574, 580

Sperso come il resto di noi. Non il geloso custode di una conoscenza che temeva di condividere. Non sapeva nulla. Non c'era nulla da sapere. L'avevo odiato per le ragioni sbagliate... E Lestat sedeva lì a occhi chiusi, la faccia trasfigurata dal dolore. Sembrava la copia di Lestat, una creatura ferita, sensibile che non avevo mai conosciuto. IV, 259, 327 "Hai sofferto mentre ero via?". Molto sobriamente rispose, "E' stato puro inferno." BT, 407 All'improvviso mi resi conto che quello che desideravo di più al mondo era voltarmi verso di lui e buttarli le braccia al collo e piangere sulla sua spalla come non avevo mai fatto. Che vergogna. Che banalità! Che stupidaggine. E quanto sarebbe stato dolce. Non lo feci. BT, 408-409

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seven: about spirit and movement

La figura di Louis è delineata con più delicatezza e dolcezza dalle parole di Lestat che dal tono di quanto dice di se stesso, sempre distaccato e neutrale e freddo come non è mai quando parla di Lestat; Louis non riconosce in se stesso ciò che cerca. E Lestat descrive Louis solo come movimento, un corpo che si muove, dà solo informazioni sul movimento... occhi di predatore?

Agile, spostandosi appena un po' troppo lievemente per un mortale, le membra che si muovevano come seta sotto gli indumenti trascurati... Aveva oltrepassato l'elicottero, rigirandosi e indietreggiando come un danzatore per alzare lo sguardo su di esso, i pollici infilati negligenemente nelle tasche dei jeans neri. Quando guardò di nuovo verso di me, vidi distintamente il suo viso. E sorrideva, delicato e accecante come un laser mentre si avvicinava. VL, 573-574

Per un lungo momento rimasi a spiarlo. Amavo fare questo. Spesso lo seguivo quando andava a caccia, semplicemente per osservarlo mento si nutriva. Il mondo moderno non significa nulla per Louis. Cammina per le strade come un fantasma, senza suono, lentamente attirato verso coloro che attendono la morte, o sembrano attenderla. E quando si ciba, è indolore e delicato e rapido. BT, 104

Il passo pieno di grazia di uno che non ama fare rumore, o fare confusione, o essere visto. Abiti neri, semplici come l'espressione sul suo volto. MD, 423

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eight: about Marius and sight

E invece Marius vede Louis molto più nitidamente di Lestat, vede non solo il suo modo di muoversi ma il suo modo di sentire e di pensare, e la qualità del suo continuare a esistere. Ne vede il centro, l'essenziale, a colpo sicuro. Lo riconosce.

Louis, quello gentile, con i capelli scuri e gli occhi verdi, i cui passi risuonavano spensierati, che fischiettava tra sé nei vicoli bui così che i mortali lo udissero venire... Provava un grande affetto per quello lì, per Louis. E l'affetto non era saggio, perché Louis aveva uno spirito tenero, colto, e nulla dell'abbagliante potere di Gabrielle o del suo diabolico figlio. E tuttavia Louis avrebbe potuto sopravvivere tanto a lungo quanto loro, ne era sicuro. Curioso, il tipo di coraggio che serviva per durare. Forse aveva a che fare con l'accettazione. QD, 18-19 Louis, quello che stava a guardare, quello paziente, era lì puramente e semplicemente per amore. QD, 202

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nine: of loss and missing

Fin da subito, Louis si trova privato del maestro che si aspettava di trovare in Lestat. Poi, anche la stessa presenza fisica di Lestat finisce per essere la posta della scelta tra lui e Claudia, una scelta che non è abbastanza veloce per fare e che il destino o il caso o il senso della sua paternità fanno al posto suo. E li perde entrambi, e c'è un vuoto di decenni, un abisso permanente attorno al quale è costretto a radicare la sua esistenza. Poi lo ritrova, e subito

rischia di perderlo di nuovo, una volta, due volte, tre, senza poterci fare niente. Una lama attraverso l'anima, e che lucido silenzioso coraggio quello di attraversare il prato con calma mentre pure il passo si fa leggero di felicità, verso di lui per un momento solo, casualmente gettato di traverso a una eternità di solitudine. Lo stesso venir meno del dolore sordo e continuo della sua mancanza è una pena in sè, rimette tutto in gioco, sradica dalla base un modo di esistere che già gli è costato fino all'ultimo sospiro; e già incalza una diversa mancanza, un diverso modo di non averlo. Non fa meraviglia che in tutta onestà Louis finisca per preferire la definitività di un Lestat di nuovo mortale, e perduto, sposato a un'altra vita, piuttosto che dare mano, lui stesso, a perpetuare la tortura dell'assenza. Non fa meraviglia che il suo bacio sia freddo e senza passione. Non averlo è tutto quello che resta.

"Non stai per lasciarci, vero?" chiese d'improvviso, la voce tagliente per l'ansia. "No," risposi. QD, 477-481

E poi si sporse in avanti, chiudendo la distanza tra noi, e posò le sue lisce labbra di seta sulla mia guancia. Volevo sottrarmi, ma usò tutta la sua forza per tenermi fermo, e io lo permisi, questo freddo bacio senza passione, e fu lui a ritirarsi infine come una pila di ombre che si chiudono l'una sull'altra, con solo la sua mano ancora sulla mia spalla. BT, 408-409

"Vieni a casa con me," disse. Una voce così umana. Così gentile. Se qualcosa avesse potuto confortarmi, sarebbe stato lui: solo con il cenno affascinante del capo, o col modo in cui mi guardava, proteggendomi con una calma piena di intimità da quello che aveva dovuto temere per me, e per sè, e forse per tutti noi. MD, 423

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ten: of being and feeling

"Perché mi ami?" chiesi. "Lo sai, l'hai sempre saputo. Vorrei essere te. Vorrei conoscere la gioia che tu conosci." "E la pena, vuoi anche quella?" "La tua pena?" Sorrisse. "Certo. Farei cambio con il tuo tipo di pena in qualsiasi momento, come si suol dire." BT, 407

Vorrei essere te. Diventare te che amo. Per diventare amabile anche io, se tu lo sei così tanto, e se solo io riuscissi a somigliarti, e invece c'è di mezzo il mondo e tutta una vita e un'anima tutta diversa.

Marius e Amadeo hanno un linguaggio di sentire comune, ma se Louis è un labrador, Lestat è un fox-terrier: il labrador non riesce in una settimana neanche a immaginare il casino che il fox combina in un pomeriggio.

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eleven: of the growth of love

Com'è interessante che entrambi imparino ad amarsi, un po' per volta!

Quello che li ha messi insieme è stato un combinarsi di motivi più o meno casuali e non condivisi, la cui portata è breve.

Poi, subentra qualcos'altro. Uno stare a vedere che succede, per il caso che poi vada meglio, e comunque finché non vada molto peggio, da parte di Louis; il solito giocherellare per vedere che cosa si romperà prima, da parte di Lestat. L'incrollabile pazienza dell'evoluzione filogenetica, accanto alla irrefrenabile curiosità dei primati.

Dopo ancora, ecco lo sguardo cambiare. Ciascuno giunge a essere talmente inconfondibile agli occhi dell'altro, che le uniche sorprese possono riguardare quanto l'altro riesca ad essere se stesso, anche cambiando nel tempo; e allora sono solo belle, le sorprese. E allora, chi prima chi dopo, ecco l'accettazione e non più il giudizio, perché ciascuno è già stato giudicato; ed ecco l'amore, per lo splendore unico di quell'esistenza e proprio quella. E' vero, ad amare si impara. Si diventa più bravi, pur che non si abbandoni troppo presto. Dopo i primi duecento anni, è tutta discesa.

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twelve: vampire eyes

Tenere a mente: l'esperienza del tempo e del mutare del mondo che hanno i vampiri, e il lasciare andare che permette a Louis di sopravvivere. Lasciare andare tutto ciò che è mortale, come noi mortali lasciamo andare le rondini in autunno sapendo che le rondini torneranno, ma non saranno le stesse rondini a tornare. Guardare ogni cosa che vive come il giardiniere guarda le erbe annuali: durano solo una stagione, vanno in seme, ne nascono altre l'anno dopo.

Se non esiste un metro di qualità valido in sé, come pensare che la cosa nuova che arriva sia peggiore della cosa vecchia che se ne va? il dolore colpisce il vecchio e il nuovo in ugual misura. Sapere che non essere è meglio che l'alternativa non porta necessariamente a concludere che il mutare delle cose che hanno la sventura di esistere sia un male ulteriore.

Vedere con occhi da vampiro: vedere il paradiso dietro la siepe di quell'orto lungo la strada e accettare il fatto che sparirà e ci costruiranno sopra uno schifo di condominio con le tue in cortile, e nessuno saprà mai più che lì c'era il paradiso - però sarà nato un altro pezzo di paradiso da un'altra parte, intanto che i ceppi dei platani antichi assassinati marciranno qui.

Occhi da vampiro - senza amare meno quello che muore.

"Tornai a New Orleans. Era la tarda primavera di quest'anno. E appena emersi dalla stazione, seppi che davvero ero tornato a casa. Era come se l'aria stessa fosse profumata e speciale, e mi sentivo straordinariamente a mio agio camminando su quei marciapiedi larghi e caldi, sotto le querce familiari, ascoltando gli incessanti vibranti vivi suoni della notte. Naturalmente, New Orleans era cambiata. Ma lungi dal rincrescermi di quei cambiamenti, ero grato per tutto ciò che sembrava ancora lo stesso." IV, 347

"Quanti vampiri credi che abbiano la resistenza necessaria all'immortalità? Ogni cosa cambia tranne il vampiro stesso; ogni cosa tranne il vampiro è soggetta a costante corruzione e distorsione. Presto, se la mente è inflessibile, e spesso anche con la più flessibile delle menti, l'immortalità diventa una condanna... e quel vampiro se ne va a morire. Spesso nessuno attorno a lui -sempre che cerchi ancora la compagnia di altri vampiri- nessuno sa che è disperato. Ha smesso molto tempo prima di parlare di se stesso o di qualsiasi cosa." IV, 308-309

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thirteen: of writing

What does Louis write by night? Diaries, essays, poetry, novels? Dreams, nightmares? His quiet is not to be underrated. Like the little fox in the sixty-fourth sign of I-Ching, he warily crosses the frozen river of eternity.

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fourteen: of killing and human life

Louis non ha la presunzione di adoperare le vite dei viventi per passare il tempo, come fa Lestat (e come fa Dio con Giobbe). Louis ha per le vite dei viventi il rispetto che il vecchio Amleto non ha mai avuto per la vita di suo figlio; il rispetto dovuto in quanto vivente anche al peggiore dei criminali; il rispetto per Caino, per Don Giovanni e il suo rifiuto di pentirsi, e per tutti i fin troppi malvagi consapevoli e senza pentimento della vita reale.

Louis non è moralista; non presume come Lestat di possedere una scala di valori valida in sé, in base alla quale giudicare condannare ed eseguire la sentenza, senza contraddittorio, basandosi solo sulla sua propria testimonianza e su illegittime e inaffidabili intercettazioni telepatiche. Louis uccide con piena e sincera consapevolezza che si tratta di un atto arbitrario. Chi è l'ipocrita tra i due?

Quanta più onestà nelle uccisioni indiscriminate e indolori di Louis, che non vi proietta l'arroganza di un giudizio.

Noi mangiamo le bistecche, e non vogliamo sapere come è morta la bestia. Un vampiro uccide di persona, uccide per mangiare, responsabilmente (o no).

Una prospettiva non specie-specifica favorisce l'apprezzamento dell'ecologia dei vampiri. Mostri a chi?! Se un vivente vale l'altro, non è la morte che importa ma la sofferenza. Lestat ha una mente da torero, Louis è come Jeremiah Johnson in Corvo Rosso non avrai il mio scalpo.

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fifteen: of compassion, and letting go

E soprattutto: Louis lascia andare. Ha chiaro quale rapporto possa esserci tra un immortale e i viventi, il solo che può preservare la capacità di un immortale di provare compassione, il solo che può impedire che l'amore per i viventi sia fonte di sofferenza per coloro che ne sono oggetto: non interferire! Non cercare di conservarli in vita, non toccarli neppure, perché il tocco degli immortali è letale per i viventi. Lasciarli andare: lasciare che i grandi alberi antichi siano tagliati o abbattuti dalle tempeste, che gli uomini muoiano di cancro e i gatti siano presi sotto per strada e le specie si estinguano e altre ne nascano e altri alberi e bambini, perché nemmeno un immortale può eliminare l'ingiustizia del dolore.

Louis sa, e Lestat non vuole credere, che nemmeno un immortale può evitare di fare danno se cerca di salvare qualcuno senza il suo permesso; e probabilmente nemmeno con il permesso - sia per i mortali che per gli immortali, vale il principio attento a quello che chiedi, potresti ottenerlo.

Louis è un vampiro post-buddhista, taoista, indeterminista.

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sixteen: about recognition

Dopo duecento anni, dopo che le due sole persone (la donna, il prete) dalle quali aveva sperato in un riconoscimento basato sui suoi atti, impeccabili verso di loro, hanno corrisposto al suo scoprirsi con orrore, rabbia e disperazione, ecco che Louis si trova davanti uno sconosciuto che lo guarda negli occhi e lo riconosce e gli resta davanti e parla con lui, senza che nulla ve lo spinga o costringa: come chi si trovi fronte a una tigre nella foresta e la guardi per la sua realtà e bellezza e sincerità e per questo venga a sua volta riconosciuto e onorato dalla tigre - 10. Lü

E già questo solo vedersi è fin troppo per Daniel.

"Vedo che vuoi farmi una domanda." Il vampiro si fermò. "Oh, no," disse il ragazzo, che aveva voluto nascondere. "Ma non devi aver timore di chiedermi nulla. Se qualcosa mi è troppo vicino..." e quando il vampiro disse questo il suo volto si oscurò per un istante. Aggrottò la fronte... in una curiosa espressione di profondo dolore. "Se qualcosa mi fosse troppo vicino perché tu me ne domandassi, non ne parlerei neppure," disse. "Provavi qualcosa di speciale per Babette?". "Vuoi dire amore," disse il vampiro. "Perché esiti a dirlo?" "Perché hai parlato di distacco," disse il ragazzo. "Pensi che gli angeli siano distaccati?" chiese il vampiro. Il ragazzo rifletté per un momento. "Sì," disse. "Ma gli angeli non sono capaci di amore?" Fissava il tavolo, come se stesse ripensando a quanto aveva detto, e non ne fosse interamente soddisfatto. Si spostò sulla sedia e girò il viso alla finestra. "Temo di aver fatto una domanda troppo personale. Non intendevo..." disse ansiosamente il ragazzo. "Non hai fatto nulla del genere," disse il vampiro, d'improvviso guardandolo negli occhi. "e" una domanda assolutamente a proposito." IV, 66-67

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seventeen: I know my horseman

Il vampiro si protese sopra il tavolo e gentilmente spazzò via un frammento di cenere di sigaretta dal colletto del ragazzo, e questi fissò allarmato la sua mano che si ritraeva. "Chiedo scusa," disse il vampiro. "Non intendevo spaventarti. Ecco, lo rifaccio. Di nuovo, non l'hai visto... Il gesto a me è apparso lento e piuttosto languido. E il suono del mio dito che sfiorava la giacca era perfettamente udibile." IV, 30-31

Questa è una cosa da uomo di cavalli: questo gesto, questa ripetizione tranquillizzante, il discorso del tatto, così familiare, intimo, fisico, denso e terrestre, riconoscibile anche (perfino) nel timbro alieno di un essere inumano. La lingua franca del tatto.
Come la camminata oscura e splendente di Jack Celliers alla fine di Merry Christmas Mr. Lawrence: "...As he was doing no more than walk across the paddock at home to take a high-spirited stallion in hand".

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eighteen: ethics

"Io so un segreto ma non te lo dico": lo dice Geova ad Adamo ed Eva, lo dice il vecchio Amleto al figlio, lo dice Lestat a Louis e a Claudia perché la curiosità e la paura li tengano con lui e per farsi credere superiore - MA ANDATE A FARVI FRIGGERE chi vi ha chiesto niente
Louis cerca qualcuno con cui stare alla pari. Lestat cerca qualcuno che gli sia inferiore (oppure, per cambiare, sperticatamente superiore), ma mai, mai alla pari.

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nineteen: about Memnoch

Il diavolo, Memnoch:
oscuro perché è triste e non perché sia cattivo
triste perché non capisce e non rinuncia a capire
perché insiste per capire
perché non si rassegna all'idea che non ci sia niente da capire
perché non si rassegna a dover mettere limiti al proprio amore
e a dover scegliere se amare le creature sofferenti o il creatore indifferente
perché non si rassegna a dover cambiare opinione sul suo dio
perché se è costretto a cambiare opinione sul suo dio, non può fare altro che non voler avere più nulla a che fare con lui
anche se questo comporta essere escluso da un luogo magnifico
e non può nemmeno sapere se tutto questo è poi vero

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twenty: about Job

E poi è proprio dio, che per milioni di anni ha fatto restare male Giobbe e i gigli del campo e i due passerai per un soldo e tutti i viventi che si fidavano di lui, a guardare Lestat battendo gli occhioni dicendogli "come puoi pensare di farmi questo"!
Non è un caso che il postumo più tenace di coloro che sono stati torturati sia la insidiosa convinzione di essere loro i viscidati traditori.
Cosa ha imparato Giobbe che non sapesse già prima?
A non fare domande.
Chi avrebbe dovuto imparare qualcosa non è Giobbe ma Dio.
Dio crea individui per avere un contraddittorio, e poi non vuole ascoltare (anzi si incazza)
Non è che Dio possa pensare di cavarsela solo perché è così bello e/o potente
Non più di quanto possa pensarlo il diavolo o qualunque degli umani, o dei vampiri
Che razza di "amore per tutte le creature" sarebbe, se si accompagna all'indifferenza verso quello che accade loro, perché tanto "non ha bisogno di loro"?!
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twenty-one: about flesh and blood

"Ama dio" e "ama il prossimo" non sono imperativi necessariamente compatibili, come mostrano almeno duemila anni di guerre di religione.

Non è OK nessuna idea che imponga il sacrificio della carne e del sangue, nemmeno se questa idea è un'idea di dio (ammonisce giustamente Maharet "guardatevi da ciò che non ha carne e sangue, guardatevi dagli dei, guardatevi dal diavolo, guardatevi dalle idee".
Non sottoscrivo nessun progetto che non preveda l'entrata in paradiso anche del cane insieme a Yudithshira.

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twenty-three: about heaven

Dice Memnoch che la sofferenza umana è più profonda di quella degli altri viventi perché gli umani ci riflettono su. Ma mentre sta capitando non rifletti un accidente! se stai lì a riflettere su come possa dio permettere tutto questo, vuol dire che hai il lusso di tempo ed energia da perdere e non stai lottando per la vita tua e quella di chi ami.

Non basta neppure restare fuori dal paradiso con gli umani, se non si resta anche con i cani e i canarini e i loro pidocchi e le rane di Venere in *Out of the Silent Planet* di C.S. Lewis. Che cosa è accaduto alle rane fatte a pezzi dal demonio? non se ne parla più, non vengono più menzionate, nemmeno una parola sulla loro sorte, come se non fossero importanti. Invece sono importanti! una sola di quelle rane dimenticate, proprio perché sono dimenticate, basta per mandare a gambe all'aria tutta la costruzione dell'universo come creato e gestito da un dio buono.

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twenty-four: about evolution, and suicide

Le anime in Sheol, come Louis, non si evolvono oltre: e che si evolverebbero per fare? per subire e causare altro male? Non sono più curiosi, non assomigliano più a dio (e a Lestat); stanno fuori col cane.

A Louis non viene neanche in mente di suicidarsi come Armand, scommettendo la vita contro la posta del paradiso: non gioca d'azzardo, mai, perché sa che si può solo perdere.

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twenty-five: about sheol

La pace degli spiriti in Sheol che hanno perdonato dio: coloro per i quali la sofferenza patita da ciascuno non importa più, perché sanno che nulla potrà riportarli là in mezzo, che sono al sicuro per sempre: che è passato, la vita è passata, e passerà anche per tutti gli altri. La stessa pace di Louis, il pensiero che poi la vita passa, anche se insieme al dolore passa lo splendore delle diecimila cose.

Come possono desiderare il paradiso? le sue stesse delizie sarebbero una beffa a fronte di quello che le ha precedute! Non c'è nulla che possa compensare l'ingiustizia del dolore; non esiste ricompensa "a mille doppi" che non sia un insulto, il prezzo pagato alla puttana dopo averla violentata. Come Thornton in *The Call of the Wild* di Jack London chiede e ottiene da Buck di fare per amor suo una cosa impossibile, e poi lo premia con una carezza.

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twenty-six: of pain and time and forgiving

Non passa il dolore, come ancora riesce a sperare Armand: non è il dolore che passa. Passa il tempo in cui è avvenuto, e non può ricominciare da capo. Rimane il danno, l'impercorribilità di tutta la vasta area di emozioni dove Louis non tornerà mai più, e si guarderà bene dal tornare, dopo la perdita di Claudia.

Gli è passato? No, per niente. Ha perdonato? No, mai: ha solo compassione, perfino per i colpevoli (ma non per sè). Gli ha cambiato la vita? Sì, per sempre. Come sopravvive?

Ricordando che non potrà accadere di nuovo mai più: che la sua stessa irreparabilità porta con sé la certezza che è passato.

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twenty-seven: of patience

Louis a cui non passa mai niente; infinitamente paziente, come un molo tra i frangenti, verso i capricci di umani e non umani; incapace di fare a fette l'esperienza a colpi di idee, per separare arbitrariamente il dolore e il rimorso dalla gioia e dalla speranza, e pronto piuttosto a rinunciare a queste per non causare quelli; modesto, perché si giudica al di sotto dei suoi stessi criteri; capace di tenerezza impeccabile verso chi è abbandonato, e di implacabile freddezza verso chi quella tenerezza la pretende; che si lascia andare ai propri sentimenti in privato, e non in pubblico come Lestat; che decide ogni sera di sopravvivere anche se è assurdo, e non cerca giustificazioni fittizie della sua scelta

Louis è l'acqua tranquilla in cui scendere, lontano dalle diecimila cose. L'acqua e il fuoco, 64: Ue Tsi, Prima del compimento, la piccola volpe che con grande attenzione attraversa il fiume ghiacciato dell'eternità, senza saltare alle conclusioni, senza bagnarsi la coda proprio all'ultimo. Le Stelle, 17, "In quest'acqua tranquilla / scendi", contrapposto a Lestat, Il Mondo, 21, le diecimila cose...

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twenty-eight: the look of him

Sorride guardando, senza una ragione apparente, e gli occhi splendono, come se vedesse e riconoscesse lo splendore in colui che guarda, e fosse felice solo perché c'è; un sorriso che non vuol dire nulla sulla sua posizione, non implica nessuna scelta, come essere felice per la luna piena della sera non vuol dire non esserlo altrettanto della pioggia pulita del mattino. Non è azione, quel sorriso, non è scelta e non è prendere parte: è pura presenza, pura consapevolezza che tu sei lì e splendi e lui lo vede e ne è felice. E' privato, solitario, non cerca compagnia, non comunica nulla; il sorriso di un maestro giovane, nato maestro, che non sa insegnare.

Tutto è dato gratis, tutto è dono.

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twenty-nine: of innocence and guilt

Nessuno è innocente o colpevole: è solo che quella volta lì non è/è stato lui/lei a fare (più) male. Non è vero che "non lo sapevo": è vero che "non ho voluto pensarci" (come dio), e con questo logoro pretesto si dovrebbe avere accesso al paradiso (dove sta anche dio)? Se dovessimo essere trattati come meritiamo, il più santo di noi non sfuggirebbe alla frusta. La saggezza di Amleto. Tanto basti per le punizioni. A chi serve più dolore? E cosa sposta che dio stesso venga giù a fare un giro, e poi dica "ho provato anch'io"? poteva ben risparmiarselo, per la differenza che ha fatto.

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thirty: of faith

Meno male che Louis è ancora là e non prende iniziative e non prende posizione e resta a guardare e resta vicino e lascia passare, perché esistere è tanto strano, troppo improbabile per farci pasticci - e lui resta a vedere, come Marius.

E non si suicida come Armand e Mael dopo aver visto gli effetti speciali di dio (come si fa senza Armand? che peccato, che spreco. Come si fa senza Mael? Potremmo stare benissimo con meno incidenti stradali, meno cancro, meno stronzi come chi-so-io, ma gente seria come Armand e Mael potrebbe restare benissimo accanto agli infarti e ai giaguari).

Meno male che Louis crede senza credere. Meno male che non si fa tirare dentro il gioco misterioso e scintillante di spionaggio e servizi segreti teologici in cui Lestat si butta a pesce, dimenticandosi del suo cane Mojo. Meno male che Louis ha la tenacia di restare, e di pensare che ci sarà un futuro e che ancora si leggeranno libri insieme agli amici. Benedetto buon senso di Louis.

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thirty-one: of answers coming too late

Tutte le rivelazioni di Lestat dopo la sua avventura mistica arrivano di molto troppo tardi, quando ormai Louis ha già risolto tutto quello che è possibile risolvere, e l'ha risolto da solo. Il racconto mistico di Lestat non gli fa cambiare l'assetto dei suoi valori etici e non gli apre alcun orizzonte verso cui valga la pena di partire, perché ha già raggiunto da solo la saldezza dell'illuminazione: non c'è alcuna luce.

Se questi sono i maestri (l'aveva già detto ad Armand), meglio imparare da solo.

Louis non è uno che parte per la corsa all'oro, non è uno che vende tutto quello che ha per comprarsi l'evangelica perla preziosa (e che se ne dovrebbe fare...?). Preferisce la sua casa i suoi libri i suoi quadri e la compagnia di coloro che ama: che ama arbitrariamente, non in base al merito, come uccide, come ama Lestat.

L'irruzione di Memnoch nella trama del tempo non gli porta nessun nuovo problema e nessuna nuova soluzione; ovvio che Memnoch si rivolga a Lestat e non a Louis, che non ci casca più.

Aveva sempre avuto tante domande; e ora aveva le sue risposte, forse più di quelle che avrebbe mai voluto avere; e che cosa avevano fatto alla sua anima? QD, 477-481

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thirty-two: more theology

(censored)

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thirty-three: about forgiving, again

Things I still can't forgive Lestat, as he is portrayed in Rice's books:

a. He appoints himself judge and executioner of his victims (for instance, Dora's father), just through his telepathic readings. But how can he presume to really know somebody this way, when he still can't say he knows his most intimate friends and lovers? And how can he presume to be better than his victims are, and entitled to issue judgment? Who told him his criteria are the only good ones? At least Armand lets his victims be their own judges, by whatever criteria are true for them. That's paradoxically much more honest and straightforward.

b. He never stops from hitting hard on what he should instead protect or at least refrain from harming, like Louis' intellectual honesty and ethical honour. "I know, but I won't tell you because I don't feel like it" is quite exasperating, and he never loses occasion to kick anybody who's on the ground, be it friend or foe, to hell with noblesse oblige.

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thirty-four: about development and relief

To my relief, however, a number of VCSpecs are now showing his autocritical developments in this area, but this only stresses that a change is sorely needed.

By the way (be it Christ's blood that changes Lestat, or a sort of placebo effect, or again the shock of his supernatural experiences opening a breach through which Louis', and Marius', and even Maharet's impeccability can flood him at last) as soon as his own capacity to love and be

responsible is released and allowed to surface, he becomes much less anxious, and much happier. And we all with him.

KC's solution through lightning-induced amnesia in "Return to Innocence" seems a bit drastic, but it does prove equally effective.

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thirty-five: of questions and aims

On his part, it is true that sooner or later Louis has ended up by dumping everybody in turn, at least for a while, but he also has always been the one to ask himself what seem to me the pitiless, necessary questions. It is not "How can I win" (Lestat) or "How can I control" (Armand), but "How can I avoid adding to the pain of the world". Only Marius is really like him: even David doesn't care a damn for the pain of the world.

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thirty-six: of hope

One can understand why Louis said he would change his pain with Lestat's. Not that one is sharper than the other; but one entails hopelessness for all the living, the other for the whole of one's existence. Louis has to learn to concentrate on a singularity, Lestat to look beyond individual boundaries.

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thirty-seven: about seducing

Il maestro seduttivo finché non ti ha nelle mani, e dopo te la fa pagare per avergli ceduto, e resti lì a domandarti per anni quale gaffe devi aver fatto senza saperlo. Qualcuno in cui hai fiducia che ti molla quando conti su di lui, lasciandoti a chiederti che cosa hai sbagliato. Ma il paradosso è che non perdonare e tuttavia continuare, in qualche modo, a qualche livello, ad avere compassione, e a voler bene, e perfino ad amare, sono cose che possono stare insieme. Louis non ha perdonato a Lestat di aver partecipato alla morte di Claudia; e non gli ha perdonato il suo comportamento nei primi anni. Ma la comprensione dei motivi e la pura e semplice compassione, perché tutti siamo colpiti dal dolore, vivi e non-morti allo stesso modo, e siamo tutti figli di puttana uguale, è compresente in ogni momento.

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thirty-eight: about pride

Louis sembra avere un talento per amare nonostante tutto, a dispetto di tutto. Come mai, anche se viene trattato così male? Perché non ha abbastanza amor proprio. Louis è cresciuto nell'affetto della sua famiglia, a differenza di Lestat; eppure non crede di essere degno di affetto. Si sente beneficato da un dono che non ha meritato e per cui prova una gratitudine perenne. Non considera ovvio essere amato; considera ovvio che sia amato Lestat. Quindi gli va bene tutto, non si aspetta di essere trattato bene, gli pare normale che sfoghi i nervi su di lui, o peggio. L'unica cosa a cui tiene e che difende è la sua percezione di quello che è giusto, proprio perché non crede che sia sua: proprio perché è lo standard a cui cerca di conformarsi, e crede di non riuscirci.

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thirty-nine: about guilt

Louis feels guilty for choosing to defend Claudia against Lestat. I wish he would also think about how guilty he would have felt if he had not. Between two fighting predators, he found

himself standing on the side of the younger, smaller, weaker, like the gentleman he is. Which he won't, ever, realize or believe.

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forty: about power

Marius si comporta come se l'unico motivo per sopportare il potere sia l'occasione di usarlo per proteggere qualcuno dal dolore. Per poter occuparsi senza interferenza, da parte di nessuno, di quelli che può, dei suoi cari che ama. Per non ricevere ordini, da nessuno, riguardo a questo; per poter assicurare a chi vive con lui, nel suo territorio, nel suo regno, anche le libertà che "non stanno bene" secondo le regole del decoro del momento. I gatti nel letto, i gatti sulla tavola. Questo potere lo vuole! per questo potere è disposto a lottare, e a essere spietato. Ha grazia, in questo potere. Il suo potere non è rozzo e greve, anche se non è neppure sottile e leggero. E' denso e caldo, solido, morbido, e con un'anima inflessibile.

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forty-one: about suicide, again; and friendship

Mi pare ovvio che Lestat non abbia parlato con Louis di quello che l'ha spinto ad aspettare il sole nel deserto; che Armand non abbia parlato con Daniel, o con Marius, di quello che l'ha spinto ad aspettare il sole davanti alla cattedrale. Si può -forse- parlare di darsi la morte con un amico, ma non con un amore. Si può parlarne con qualcuno per il quale un discorso come questo è solo una parte della sua vita; con qualcuno la cui vita non viene capovolta da un discorso come questo, perché non sei tu la sua prima priorità, così come non cambia poi gran che nella tua se quando lo cerchi non c'è o ha da fare con il suo, di amore, perché non è lui la tua prima priorità. Un amico davvero intimo può ascoltare il racconto che fai della tua vita, esserne testimone, ma non la vive insieme a te. Le vostre vite si toccano, si abbracciano, ma scorrono separate. Non si può parlarne con un amore, perché con un amore due vite sono diventate una, e scorrono nello stesso letto. Quale dei due fiumi è l'affluente? E quello che può spingere a darsi la morte è proprio ciò la cui esperienza non si può condividere, con nessuno, mai, e quindi non si può dire all'altra metà dell'acqua. Se si potesse parlarne, non porterebbe a morire.

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forty-two: Armand, and betrayal

Armand/ Il suo tradimento verso Marius è forzato dalle circostanze - e dopo, che si fa? Ancora più difficile che ammettere, senza scuse, di avere tradito, è tornare di fronte/accanto a chi è stato tradito, e non solo per chiedere perdono, ma per riprendere un rapporto qualsiasi. E' già difficile quando sono morti; ma uno vivo (per così dire) come Marius è qualcosa di terrificante, perché la presenza di una ulteriore variabile nell'equazione ("e lui ora cosa farà?") la rende inaffrontabile.

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forty-three: trust

Per di più, ogni volta che gli scappa di fidarsi a essere felice Amadeo sembra incappare in qualche disastro di cui finisce per sentirsi colpevole - eppure un ragazzino di diciassette anni non poteva farcela a difendere la propria anima con un senso della realtà che non poteva ancora essersi costruito.

Risultato: non si sogna nemmeno di fidarsi più di nessuno, men che meno di se stesso, e (per proiezione) nemmeno di Marius. In effetti, sta in un'incidente di doppio vincolo: se viene perdonato, o comunque amato ancora, si sente ancora di più una merda, e se viene anche solo

rimproverato trova conferma che non può fidarsi nemmeno quando, da parte sua, è davvero impeccabile, al punto di avere il coraggio di chiedere perdono.

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forty-four: self-esteem

Non si fida perché non si stima abbastanza. Non si stimava abbastanza allora, perché non ha creduto di avere ragione al punto da continuare a lottare contro quelli che dall'alto gli dicevano che aveva torto e che era cattivo a causa di quello che credeva (e che amava). Non si stima adesso, perché si è reso conto che avrebbe dovuto continuare a lottare, per difendere se stesso ancora prima che Marius o la sua memoria.

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forty-five: healing?

Non serve a niente sperare che si arrenda a un amore che lo curi, perché si sentirebbe ancora più impotente; e non si autorizza di sicuro a lottare per se stesso contro quelli che ha tradito. Allora ecco che fa finta di niente, fa finta che il tradimento sia il modo normale di funzionare per tutti, e riproduce all'infinito la situazione per mimetizzare tra le ripetizioni il guaio irrisolvibile.

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forty-six: healing!

Ci vogliono anni, secoli; ci vorrebbe che avesse il coraggio di azzardarsi a curarsi impeccabilmente di qualcuno che ne ha bisogno -qualcuno di facile, non un umano, o un ex-umano- anche senza amarlo, solo per adempiere a una promessa verso se stesso, e avesse successo fino in fondo, e riuscisse a sentire di stare facendo penitenza abbastanza per presentarsi al cospetto di quello che amava anche di più, ma il proprio amore per il quale non è riuscito a difendere.

A diciassette anni si crede che la felicità sia davvero possibile, e ci vorrebbe un miracolo per riuscire a tenere duro davanti a un' "autorità morale" che odia qualsiasi amore e gioia al di fuori di sé. Ci vogliono anni anche solo per riuscire a pronunciare di nuovo quel nome, altri per chiedere perdono, troppi per decidere di vedere se è possibile ritrovarlo, e chissà diavolo che cosa per sentire di aver cominciato a riparare un pochino. Per Armand non può esserci fiducia e stima in nessuno se non c'è prima fiducia e stima in se stesso e in quello che ha imparato - imparato a essere, non a sapere!

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forty-seven: on lies, and hypocrisy

Armand is a liar. He is a master at all the forms of this subtle art: not saying, suggesting, inducing conclusions, and outright telling lies. But he does not lie to himself; does not even just hope for the best. He knows better than anybody the dangers of wishful thinking in any matter, but especially about oneself.

On the other hand, Lestat has a stubborn vein of hypocrisy. He tends to fear uncomfortable truths, so he does his best to dodge them by any means. When he lies to others, he often ends up believing his own lies. He has never been cornered by intolerable realizations about himself like Armand has been; he has never reached the bottom of disillusionment.

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forty-eight: sense of reality

Another way to put it: Armand has necessarily developed a strong sense of reality. He had to, in front of his marginal chances of survival (and sanity) throughout his mortal and immortal existence. Lestat hasn't: he always somehow found resources to spare, without finding himself shackled down to the basics of things-as-they-are.

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forty-nine: being spoiled

Again: although his formative years were more than uncommonly hard, Lestat has managed to be spoiled all the same. It seems he did it himself, as nobody else cared enough to do it. Armand is not spoiled. He could not afford the energy. He did not even get spoiled by Marius. Surely he was not spoiled by his power as coven master... his awareness of the dangers involved outweighed whatever heady effect such position might have had. He now takes care not to be spoiled by Daniel. This may be a part of their problems, as such caution involves a sort of reticence or lack of trust.

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fifty: being spoiled, again

On the whole, the fastest way to get spoiled is living for some time without anyone criticising you. It becomes all too easy to get into the habit of believing to be always right, just because nobody dares, or cares, to propose alternative points of view. Armand has always been especially good at criticising himself, quietly and effectively, from the inside. He is a sort of living, permanent brainstorming session. He never allows himself to believe that good things won't go bad, bad things won't get worse, and he won't make some terrible mistake at some time or other.

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fifty-one: about gambling

Lestat è il tipo da giocare agli sciocchi giochi di sorte, dadi, lotto, faraone. E' un cane a poker perché gli si legge tutto in faccia. Sente il gioco d'azzardo come una cosa che sta dalla parte della vita. Armand vince ai giochi di calcolo psicologia e ragionamento, bridge, scacchi, Terraform. Minimizzare l'incidenza della sorte. Giocare è rassicurante, come per un samurai allenarsi con la katana, lo strumento perfetto per una perfezione che sta fuori dallo strumento e fuori da chi lo usa con precisione mortale. Louis non gioca d'azzardo, non più. Il gioco d'azzardo è una mimesi della morte, un corteggiamento della morte. Sa benissimo che non c'è nulla che valga la pena di ottenere vincendo al gioco, e che comunque si perde sempre.

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fifty-two: happiness and danger

Nota anche: la faccenda della felicità pericolosa. Ogni volta che Armand si sente felice e che comincia a convincersi che possa essere vero, succede un disastro. Perché? che cosa apre la strada al pericolo? che cosa lo rende pericoloso per se stesso e per gli altri? Risposta: il fatto che essere felice si identifica nell'abbattimento delle difese. Si sente felice quando si sente al sicuro; quando è felice non sta in guardia. Si lascia scoprire, si lascia vedere, per quanto è in carne viva, e indifeso. L'entusiasmo è felicità, felicità è sentirsi al sicuro, e se la fortuna è cieca, la sfiga ci vede benissimo.

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fifty-three: honour

Nulla di breve può restituire a Armand il suo onore davanti a se stesso. E' questa mancanza, questa lesione, a far sì che Armand -anche se fa abilmente in modo che non si veda- già al tempo del Théâtre des Vampires stia messo parecchio peggio di Louis dopo Memnoch the Spec e Sins of the Past. Sta messo come D'Artagnan in *Vingt ans après*. Non solo è ferito dalla sofferenza che gli è stata inflitta, ma si vergogna pure. Non riesce ad assolversi nè a chiedere di essere assolto, perché non ce la fa a tornare sopra quella sofferenza. Come la strega Karabà non riesce a pensare di affrontare il dolore che sentirebbe se la spina della malvagità le venisse strappata dalla schiena.

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fifty-four: trust and love

Armand è capace di amare, anche se è così possessivo (come la bambina romena adottata dalla mia amica Manuela, che non voleva spogliarsi per paura che le portassero via i vestiti); ma non si fida. Non si fida di Daniel: perché dovrebbe? Lo vuole, ma non si fida. Non gli dice nessuna delle cose che si dicono agli amici. Non gli dice come si sente. Dagli torto! Non desidera neanche più di potersi fidare. Non gli manca più. Ha dovuto imparare che si può vivere senza fidarsi. Che fidarsi è troppo rischioso. Guarda cosa è capitato nei primi vent'anni della sua vita! che cosa potrebbe resistere su una durata di tempo infinita, se nulla ha resistito anche solo vent'anni? *Nothing's forever not even five minutes* (Lou Reed, *Finish Line*).

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fifty-five: trust, again, and wanting

Magari ha solo un'idea sbagliata della fiducia. Un'idea infantile, che ci sia qualcuno, da qualche parte, che non potrà mai farci del male perché ci ama. Magari è questo, pretende troppo, o piuttosto nulla. Incapace di sostenere l'ambivalenza altrui, e per questo incapace di perdonare, o anche solo di dedicare anima al recupero di amori affondati.

E' un peccato? oppure è saggezza? E' più ingenuo pensare che non si possa ricostruire una storia naufragata (letteralmente: che non valga il dolore che costerebbe), o pensare che quella storia sia indispensabile all'universo? E' più ingenuo rinunciare, o volere ancora di più? Da bambini si tende a volere sempre di più, a volere il massimo, a volere tutto, a volere la favola. Come fa Lestat. Ora Armand tende a non volere niente che non sia certo di poter avere.

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fifty-six: too late?

E' quello che è, ormai. Non sa che cos'è; sa dove non è. Non è più un problema di essere, è un problema di avere: avere cose, potere, persone vicino, un territorio in esclusiva, finché ce la fa - finché i secoli e la morte non lo svuoteranno e il mondo non si impadronirà di nuovo di quello che è stato suo.

Controllare quello che si ha, chi si ha. Tenerlo accanto, o almeno sotto controllo ogni momento. Non è OK seminare roba e gente in giro come Lestat. Non basta essere senza avere (niente, nemmeno un amore su cui contare) come Louis. Prudente come un serpente, anche a costo di non essere innocente come una colomba.

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fifty-seven: courage

Armand ha più coraggio di Louis nell'affrontare la conoscenza del dolore degli altri. Louis ha più coraggio di Armand nel rinunciare a farsi delimitare dal feedback di qualcun altro.

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fifty-eight: solitude standing

Armand non riesce a restare da solo. Da solo sparisce, non percepisce i propri contorni. Forse anche il suo coraggio di guardare dentro la pena degli altri è un modo per sentire che la sua è da un'altra parte; che è diversa; che non è quella lì.

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fifty-nine: about power

Ci sono modi ben peggiori di quelli di Armand per gestire il potere. Capita che sia crudele, ma non ha mai la mancanza di rispetto che è l'indifferenza. Cruel, never uncaring. He does care. He cares as much as Marius, but his power is different. It is the power of seduction, not of protection. Armand feel powerless to protect. His presence demands that you are responsible for yourself, that you take care of yourself and make your own decisions, and face the consequences - including his own reactions. It may not be quite a comfortable position, but one understands how this may have come to be.

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sixty: about advance payment

Ancora: non si sente all'altezza nè della felicità nè del dolore. Non gli riesce di riconoscere la felicità e di apprezzarla e soprattutto di lasciare che si veda (che Daniel veda) che la apprezza, perché il dolore verrà di sicuro, presto, perché non si può mai pagare prima, si paga tutto sempre dopo...

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sixty-one: masks

CHI è quando è felice? e CHI è quando il dolore colpisce? avvolto di maschere, con parole prese a prestito, senza sentire il sapore di quello che sta accadendo e che non è tanto veloce o coraggioso da seguire... non è nessuno, appena la superficie dell'acqua si arruffa lui sparisce sotto. Il tempo e l'accumularsi del dolore non elaborato fiacca la stessa forza che cresce con gli anni, sia verso il dolore fisico che verso la sofferenza interiore.

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sixty-two: is a child really so innocent?

Lestat/ E' testardo e pieno di arie e di aspettative che pretende gli vengano soddisfatte, intollerante possessivo verso chiunque gli piaccia, non si ferma davanti a niente per ottenere quello che vuole e non tiene conto di come ciò fa sentire gli altri. Li chiude in gabbia e li lascia lì intanto che se ne va per i cazzi suoi, solo per il gusto di sapere che li ritroverà quando torna e che nulla di interessante potranno fare o potrà loro accadere se non sarà lui a farlo succedere. E quando è felice non gliene frega niente se qualcun altro non lo è. E' tutto quello che Louis ha lavorato dalla nascita e continua a lavorare per non essere, anche a costo di non essere felice, e di cui non vorrebbe sapere proprio più nulla mai, se non gli fosse capitata la sorte (buona? cattiva?) di innamorarsene.

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sixty-three: how many centipedes under that stone?

Eppure ecco che sotto (tanto sotto che Anne Rice non lo lascia nemmeno sospettare, e ci vuole la tenerezza degli Spec writers perché me ne accorga) lo accompagna la sensazione sottilmente orribile che c'è qualcosa che lui non vede, e che NON è piacevole. Che quello che sa di se stesso non è tutto, e che quello che non sa e che non vede non è niente di bello. Non si rende conto che questa cosa oscura dalle molte gambe formicolanti non è affatto ciò che teme lui. Lui teme di essere inamabile, e invece è amato con passione da un sacco di belle persone. Quella cosa oscura è la mancanza di una cosa che ha sempre data per scontata, dall'alto dei suoi nobili natali, ma che non è ereditaria e che viene dall'educazione del cuore, che ognuno dà a se stesso: il concetto che noblesse oblige, che chi è (o si sente) superiore ha il dovere di coscienza di proteggere chi gli è inferiore, senza volere nulla in cambio. Una cosa che a Louis viene del tutto spontanea, e che Lestat non si sogna nemmeno. Il che smonta definitivamente qualsiasi definizione precostituita di "nobile" e "borghese".

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sixty-four: about escaping, and fighting

E allora Lestat non vuole vedere e non vuole che vedano gli altri, per cui non si lascia aiutare e non si aiuta neanche da solo: si sposta altrove, non si mette mai lì a fare psicodrammi nemmeno soltanto con se stesso; non riflette mai, reagisce e basta. Dannato angloarabo. Eppure è ammirevole come abbia le palle per tenere duro anche quando la posizione è insostenibile. Non cede mai. Non smonta nessuna delle sue aspettative: al contrario, lotta per esse anche quando sono impossibili.

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sixty-five: habits

Un'altra cosa: Lestat è abituato a stare male come un cane senza che nessuno possa farci un accidente. Lo trova normale. Ci hanno pensato i suoi, a fargli prendere l'abitudine. Quindi trova altrettanto normale che soffrano anche gli altri. Louis invece no: è stato amato, si sono presi cura di lui, è abituato a ricambiarli, non riesce a concepire che il dolore non sia uno sbaglio, rimediabile, da rimediare, subito.

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sixty-six: the age of happiness

La felicità/ Si diceva: Felicità per Lestat è quando le cose accelerano, è combattere e vincere un avversario forte. Happiness is a warm gun. Felicità per Louis è quando le cose rallentano, è poter abbassare la guardia e deporre le armi. Happiness is a warm heart. Felicità per Armand è qualcosa che riempie l'anima, e non avere paura. Entusiasmo che non deve nascondersi, che può lasciarsi vedere. Quando è felice non si protegge, e lo beccano sempre. Perché quando è felice è piccolissimo. La sua felicità non è cresciuta. Il suo dolore è adulto, ma non la sua gioia. Non è cresciuta perché non vuole educarla, anzi non vuole avere proprio niente a che fare con qualsiasi cosa di lui sia così piccola e indifesa, anzi non vuole avere a che fare proprio con nessun cucciolo che deve ancora crescere, visto quello che hanno fatto a lui. Non mi stupisce che ne abbia sterminati tanti. Essere veramente felice, e piccolo, lo ha portato sempre a sbattere il naso contro qualcosa di adulto, incomprensibile e infrangibile come una scogliera, contro cui non ha avuto mai nemmeno il permesso postumo di arrabbiarsi. Ha un sacco di senso immaginare in che modo e perché si difende così abilmente dalla gioia. Non si lascia vedere felice, perché è pericoloso. La gioia deve restare dentro, non vedersi, restare mascherata da una -da un'infinità- di maschere, di personae accettabili per il mondo; e il mondo comincia subito al di fuori della pelle, e non esiste nel mondo un solo posto sicuro al di fuori della pelle. Per forza non va in cerca di Marius: perché Marius lo conosce per dentro e

per fuori, e da lui non potrebbe nascondersi, silenzio radio o no. Per forza tiene a distanza Daniel: perché è così vicino, e lo rende così felice, che finirebbe per vedersi.

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sixty-seven: by the way

(Lo stesso meccanismo di Lestat con Louis, con la differenza che Lestat non ha paura di nessun pericolo nè in cielo nè in terra nè altrove, semplicemente si rifiuta di ammettere un legame qualsiasi; gli va benone di essere felice, ma non di essere dipendente da qualcuno).

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sixty-eight: intimacy

Quale intimità ammette la condivisione della gioia (dell'entusiasmo senza paura, anche se è così bambino)? Tutte hanno ceduto, prima o poi, lasciando a nudo la vulnerabilità della sua gioia che si trasforma in dolore.

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sixty-nine: is happiness selfish?

Lestat: quando è felice, è un maledetto stronzo egoista, a cui sembra che nessuno possa avere dei problemi veramente gravi, dato che LUI è felice. E comunque non ha nessuna intenzione di occuparsi dei guai degli altri, perché se no gli toccherebbe smettere di essere felice. Non è capace di essere felice mentre qualcun altro non lo è, quindi evita anche solo di vedere (non vuole vedere, è bravissimo a non vedere!) l'infelicità degli altri.

E' tutta un'altra storia il fatto che Louis non tocca chi conosce, e non vuole conoscere le sue vittime. Difendere una felicità egoista non è lo stesso che decidere di sopravvivere ancora un giorno soffrendo meno possibile, facendo quello che serve per arrivare a domani, e domani vedremo.

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seventy: even worse than that

Armand/ Su che cosa si può contare? Sulla persistenza del dolore. ALLORA? Allora meglio essere prudenti, basarsi sull'ipotesi peggiore che è sempre la più probabile, e costruirsi una vita meno peggio possibile basandosi sulla considerazione che non si può contare sulla felicità qualsiasi cosa si faccia per raggiungerla o per tenercela; basandosi su quanto amore e fedeltà è possibile ottenere su questo presupposto. Se è felice lo piantano, se è triste, ben che vada, almeno lo sopportano.

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seventy-one: addition

Può darsi che in fin dei conti la principale puttana che si fa quando si è felici sia saltare alle conclusioni e aspettarsi che duri. Che "adesso" non potrà accadere più niente di male, né a me né ad altri. Che loro staranno dalla mia parte, che lui non sparirà in fondo alla piazza, eccetera eccetera.

Un'altra cosa che Armand sa, e vedi sopra a proposito dell'intimità: nemmeno l'intimità dura per sempre. Nessuna esperienza condivisa nel passato è di per sé garanzia che l'intimità duri. L'intimità dura per quello che le succede adesso. Non è mica diverso che per i gatti. Ci si trova, si sta insieme, poi capita che ci si separi, anche per sempre. E' la vita. La fine di una intimità non la svaluta retrospettivamente. L'abitudine, l'adattamento, l'affezione sono una colla

potente, ma nemmeno questa basta da sola. Le storie finiscono, davvero, di solito, quasi sempre. Non sempre.

::

seventy-two: ambivalence

C'è qualcosa che non quaglia - non ancora. La faccenda della felicità e dell'intimità che finisce è ancora così ambigua. Non ha ancora capito. Sa solo che l'irreparabile esiste, e che non può più riparare la cosa peggiore che sa di aver fatto (e spera con tutta l'anima di non averne fatte altre di peggiori di cui non si rende conto), e che qualsiasi altra cosa non può non essere tinta di questo colore. Se non ha saputo lottare per Marius, se non è stato fedele a lui, a chi altro vale la pena di essere fedele? Sono uno stronzo? sono uno stronzo. Però prudente.

::

seventy-three: of command and obedience and anarchy

Per esempio, la questione del comando (e dell'obbedienza).

Mi sa che l'unico a cui comandare piace proprio è, al solito, Lestat. Gli piace dare ordini e ottenere obbedienza, cieca pronta assoluta e rispettosa. Fa in modo di avere sempre sotto qualcuno a cui comandare.

A Marius invece viene naturale, ma non sembra tenerci particolarmente.

Marius non costringe nessuno a obbedire. Spiega sempre il perché dei suoi ordini. Non si fa servire per rafforzare il suo ego sottolineando la sua superiorità.

Louis doveva essere piuttosto bravo, attento, probabilmente abbastanza gentile da essere considerato un buon padrone, e non riesco a immaginare che abbia tenuto altro che un profilo basso nell'organizzare il lavoro e tenere la disciplina tra gli schiavi, ma appena non ha più avuto da badare alla piantagione ha accuratamente evitato sia di dare ordini che di riceverne. Mi sa che è il vero anarchico fra tutti: non ha bisogno di essere nè di avere un capo, non rompe le regole, nemmeno le vede... Un po' come Tristan Ludlow?... "Afflitto da complesso di parità: non si sente superiore o inferiore a nessuno".

Armand... credo che, dopo gli ordini pazzeschi che era stato costretto a eseguire, obbedire a uno come Marius fosse il massimo della felicità immaginabile. Non avere nessuno a cui obbedire, a quel punto non è immaginabile. Scorpione e Leone, il primo ministro e il sovrano, due modi di esercitare il potere non necessariamente incompatibili, forse complementari se riescono a delimitare e dividersi i campi dell'ideazione e dell'azione. Obbedire, ma solo a lui; a lui, che comanda tutti gli altri. E invece ecco che gli finisce addosso la tensione continua di svolgere entrambe le funzioni, di progettare e di comandare, di essere solo al potere, coven master. Una fatica acuta come un dolore.

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seventy-four: free us from power

Non è per caso che l'irruzione di Lestat lo affascini totalmente. Forse, forse, ecco qualcuno che può prendere il comando, alleggerirlo di metà del peso spaventoso del potere assoluto. Non è per caso che passa tanto tempo con Louis, in compagnia del quale il problema del comando non si pone a nessun titolo. Anche Night Island è organizzata in modo che non ci sia un coven master: nè lui stesso, nè altri. Mai più. Per chi, in nome di cosa? Mai più. Resta vuoto il posto dove una volta c'era LUI, e non smette di fare male anche se non c'è più nessuno -neppure lo stesso Marius- che abbia la forma esatta di quel vuoto e possa colmarlo.

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seventy-five: kill the Buddha

E Louis? Quando ha creduto di aver trovato un maestro, ecco che non era così. Il maestro era più piccolo di lui. Allora ha ucciso il Buddha. Non si fida più di nessuno. Non vuole obbedire più a nessuno. Forse nemmeno a se stesso. E non gli interessa dare ordini: non abbastanza per desiderarlo, per fare in modo da poterne dare. Non abbastanza per superare il timore di trovarsi a dare ordini come a schiavi e non a dipendenti, a creare accettandola una situazione di disparità, di disegualianza. Meglio fare da solo, meglio non chiedere aiuto a nessuno, meglio non comandare a nessuno.

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seventy-six: is neurosis adaptive?

"La nevrosi è adattativa"

Non ha senso affrontare di petto quello che non si può risolvere.

Ma come fare a sapere che cosa non si può risolvere? le grandi domande, i rapporti affondati... c'è energia abbastanza da rischiarla (rischiare di perderla, inutilmente) per recuperare quello che si è perduto? Il rischio è reale.

Di irreparabile c'è, realmente, solo la morte. Ma tutto muore un po' alla volta, quasi niente muore tutto d'un colpo.

Come fare a sapere che cosa è già morto e cosa ancora vive? a sapere se ce n'è ancora abbastanza perché abbia senso, e prudenza, correre il rischio...?

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seventy-seven: wish

Ancora a proposito di Armand/ E' guardare in grande che fa venire voglia di morire.

Tra oggi e domani, si trova sempre qualcosa che distrae abbastanza da far sembrare che valga la pena di tirare avanti: se non altro, come fa vedere il training autogeno, il cuore batte, il respiro continua, il corpo c'è (ancora). C'è sempre qualcosa che aspetta, qualcosa da fare stasera, o domani mattina.

Sono le larghe vedute a uccidere -- vedere le proporzioni della propria personale esistenza e di quella dei propri cari in rapporto a quelle del mondo, vedere (non solo sapere) le migliaia di creature macellate per te, intanto che per il soffio di pochi anni o pochi secoli cerchi di fare felice qualcuno che ami.

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seventy-eight: the world is too much for us

E più tempo passa, più è difficile pensare in piccolo. Il mondo preme sulle pareti della mente, si infiltra nelle fessure, cola dentro come un'acqua nera. Dopo trecento anni tocca sgottare ogni sera. Dopo quattrocento... *The more I hurt, the less I feel. The more I know, the less I rest* (River Phoenix, *Lone Star*).

La mente umana non è fatta per reggere a prospettive così vaste, e sopravvivere. Non senza avere alle spalle una forza già radicata: una vita piena e felice come Marius, uno scopo bruciante come Maharet.

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seventy-nine: Armand/ renounce

Armand è sopravvissuto rinunciando, e quello che prende non è mai suo -- lo sfiora soltanto.

Di nessuno dice "è mio". Non ha nulla e nessuno in esclusiva. Anche Night Island è a disposizione di chiunque. Perché niente dura. Better to have loved not, than to have loved and lost. Better to have not, than to have and have lost.

::

eighty: Armand/ the pain will come

*oh oh these little earthquakes
oh here we go again...
(Tori Amos, Little Earthquakes)*

come si dice quando sai che verrà il dolore, inevitabile come sforzi di vomito o le doglie del parto; quando ormai sai prevedere al secondo il momento preciso in cui ti attraverserà come una fredda lama sottile, insopportabile, invisibile, e sai che non hai potere di cambiare nulla e hai smesso di pensare a quanto tutto dovrebbe essere diverso (e avevi creduto che potesse esserlo); a quella che immaginavi fosse la felicità, e invece era un sogno, estraneo al modo di andare del mondo.

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eighty-one: Armand/ accepting?

Non è accettazione, non è rassegnazione perché ancora non capisci il perché e non credi che ce ne sia uno. E' solo che tutta la forza e tutta la pazienza e tutto il coraggio sono succhiati fino in fondo solo per far sopravvivere a quel dolore la tua anima, e non ne resta nemmeno per fare una domanda, o protestare, o sperare in qualcosa di diverso, o per la compassione di Louis. Il dolore irresistibile come le doglie

here we go again

non c'è niente che si possa fare
niente da qui alla fine dei secoli

un sapore duro amaro ma unilaterale, liscio, pungente, stretto come un grido che non si sente perché se lo si lascia uscire non si smette più di urlare, e non si può urlare sa che sapore ha l'inevitabile quando non c'è un altro posto dove stare che stupidità aver pensato che potesse andare altrimenti che spreco credere di poter dedicare energie a immaginare che andasse altrimenti

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eighty-two: the seducer

La seduzione/ altro bel problema. La seduzione è un potere non legittimo, perché non manifesto. La seduzione subentra quando chiedere apertamente non ha dato risultati. E' una di due cose, costrizione ("se vuoi questo, allora devi fare quest'altro") oppure frode ("non si accorgerà neanche che sono io ad averglielo fatto fare"). Non è OK. E' come coprire gli occhi al cavallo per fargli l'iniezione (quella a cui appartengo si incazza come una bestia: "ma per chi mi prendete?". Preferisce il torcinaso, almeno è onesto) oppure picchiarlo tanto che preferisce passare dove prima aveva paura. E' come "guarda l'uccellino!" per fare quelle dannate foto. E' come tutti i "vedremo", i "domani", le mezze bugie, le promesse false che si dicono ai bambini per farli stare buoni per mezz'ora. O andare a fare le coccole al papà perché così ti molla le diecimila lire. (Louis si rifiuta di tentare di sedurre chicchessia che gli abbia risposto picche quando ha chiesto qualcosa direttamente. A parte che non è capace, perché ci vuole una certa finezza mondana, e Louis non si prende la briga di essere così con nessuno che non sia un cavallo, e quelli non ha bisogno di sedurli. Che incredibile fortuna non aver mai dovuto imparare a sedurre per sopravvivere. Che peccato che non abbia avuto i riflessi abbastanza pronti per combattere e far sopravvivere quella che amava).

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eighty-three: about anger

Arrabbiarsi/ Arrabbiarsi fa bene. Un guaio con Armand è che ha smesso di arrabbiarsi contro l'ingiustizia. Perché? Perché si sta malissimo. Tanta ce n'è, di ingiustizia, tanta ne ha vista, tanta ne ha subita, che ha rinunciato ad arrabbiarsi come ha rinunciato a fidarsi. L'orrore è normale: l'orrore repentino, imprevedibile, inevitabile. Non ci si può fare niente. Arrabbiarsi, o chiedersi perché accade, sono lussi da bambini ricchi. Ha smesso di discutere con dio, come con chiunque altro; non prende neanche più in considerazione che possa esserci un dio (persona o proiezione che sia), pur di non trovarsi a dover essere in disaccordo con lui (o lei, o esso/a). Non solo non c'è un criterio oggettivo di bene o di vero, ma soprattutto non vale la pena di indagare che cosa lui stesso sia personalmente convinto che sia bene o vero... tanto, presto accadrebbe qualcosa che gli porterebbe via anche quelle convinzioni, arbitrarie quanto preziose. Basta, quel che non c'è non si può rompere. Si era convinto che fosse possibile essere felice: ah, ma allora si poteva! e poi di colpo no: ecco, mi pareva... Era possibile, e proibito.

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eighty-four: getting back there

"Non dovrebbe avere più importanza" come disse il Corto Maltese, ma invece ne ha tanta che non ce la fa a tornare là, a vedere il momento del passato in cui ha visto sparire quella felicità che gli era sembrato potesse essere sua, e non in prestito. Per questo è addirittura più facile per Louis pensare a Claudia: la sua morte non ha cambiato le sue convinzioni, solo il modo in cui affronta un mondo creato, a quanto pare, secondo criteri incompatibili con i suoi. Per questo Armand è affascinato da Louis, la cui rabbia contro l'ingiustizia lo spinge a bruciare un teatro e fare una strage. Armand non ci riuscirebbe più. Armand quando stava con Marius cercava ancora, contro ogni speranza, qualcuno di cui fidarsi e da amare. Poi diventa come la mia cavalla, la tenerezza distrutta per sempre, non cercata più. Sempre in guardia.

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eighty-five: here we go again

Oh oh these little heartbreaks

oh here we go again...

Little earthquakes,

little heartbreaks...

l'irreparabile, inevitabile che mormora al mio orecchio "eh già", con quel tono piatto e vacuo di quando non c'è vita di fronte a quella cosa, non resta nemmeno il ghigno involontario dell'orrore, che sembra un sorriso e non lo è.

Little heartbreaks

con la stessa tenace rassegnazione di *Parlando del naufragio della London Valour* di Fabrizio De André...

e il macellaio mani-di-seta distribuì le munizioni.

A last stand going on forever.

::

eighty-six: anything can happen

Di questi tempi, Armand fa attenzione a non dimenticare mai la sua fortuna, il potere che facilmente potrebbe dare per scontato che gli spetti... con quello che gli ha fatto, che fa dio al mondo, chiunque può fargli qualsiasi cosa. E' stato il suo punto più debole quando è stato catturato: la spaventosa certezza che LORO POSSONO fargli del male, e che lui NON PUO' farci niente. Ora sta attento a non abituarsi che non possano fargli niente, a lui e ai suoi. Sarebbe un pericolo. Non ha più paura di altre cose, ma di questa sì.

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eighty-seven: transitions (Little Earthquakes, again)

E dopo che per cinque volte Daniel dice *I can't reach you* e per nove volte giunge la risposta la richiesta di Armand *give me life give me pain give me myself again* ecco lo scivolo giù per la ripida, e poi una mezza fermata, elastica eppure perentoria, subito released, non più in là di così, e la transizione al passage poderoso e rassegnato.

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eighty-eight: submission

Intimacy/ Submission in sex may be useful to avoid intimacy under two different aspects, each of them working both ways. Being submissive relieves from the effort of trying to read the other's wishes and feelings, as the other is empowered to know them himself and enact them on his own. Being dominant allows to go as close or inside as the agent wishes, which may effectively fake nearness. Both are palliatives for feelings of emotional inadequacy: I can't read his soul, I don't know what he is feeling, I can't have an idea how to make him happy, does he love me, what does it mean when he says he loves me, I am afraid something I am unable to see is pushing us slowly apart, it won't last, he said he would go away if I... etc.

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eighty-nine: respect

Armand has more respect for the human (or vampire) soul than Lestat. He doesn't think he can own someone's soul, the very feeling which on the other hand could calm his anxiety. So he gets along by s/m practices: just because he doesn't feel he owns whom he loves.

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ninety: scope

Armand è un ritmo basso, immenso, come Little earthquakes e come Indiani di Branduardi, e maestose maree muove la luna, like his black racer su un mare lungo, penetra senza attrito e senza suono in falcate stese che sembrano facili e leggere e sono poderose come il tempo. Come la mia signora V. e *All tomorrow's parties* dei Velvet Underground.

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ninety-one: rhythm

Lestat, ancora/ Nell'unità di tempo c'è dentro un sacco di roba. Nell'unità di tempo si muove moltissimo, come tutto l'intrico di suoni che c'è stipato dentro ciascuna pulsazione all'inizio di The Bell in Tubular Bells remastered di Michael Oldfield. E guarda come si completano reciprocamente, lui e Marius, che è il cadere perfetto, regale, pieno di grazia, di tutta questa energia accumulata: ...and, Tubular Bells. Quello che si può farne, se la si conserva e la si dirige verso quello scivolare impeccabile in un risultato. Lestat in diastole, accumulo, Marius in sistole, release. Il corpuscolo-fotone come pacchetto di onde. La vibrazione interna al ritmo del suono. Le infinite variazioni su ogni unità di suono nei Brandemburghesi.

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ninety-two: power, again

Potere, ancora/ Armand si avvolge di potere come unica possibile barriera alla catastrofe. L'unico modo perché tutto quello che appare possibile, permanente, amabile, non crolli da un

momento all'altro gettando il mondo nel caos e l'anima all'inferno, è di essere il vampiro più potente di tutti. Ma non basta. Il potere deve essere invisibile. Non si deve sapere. Marius era il più potente di tutti, e si vedeva, e su di lui come su un grande albero in cima a una collina si è scaricato il fulmine invidioso e devastante. Il potere funziona se non si fa vedere, se si avvicina di nascosto, se agisce invisibile, accumulandosi inavvertito. Solo allora, forse, la faccia del mondo può rimanere stabile, e non tramutarsi all'improvviso, senza ragione, in un ghigno orribile e feroce.

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ninety-three: roping techniques

Lestat's power upon Louis is holding him: not letting him go away. Hard-and-fast roping. Armand's power upon Daniel is control: letting him go, and get him back again at will. Dally roping.

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ninety-four: figures of speech

Bisogna anche ricordare che:

- Quando si emoziona, Armand chiama Louis "Alvise".
- informato dell'invenzione del telefono cellulare, Marius è stato udito dire "Chi che no mor in cuna ghe ne impara sempre una".
- Marius: --Paxe, fio mio, ricordite che la pazienza... Armand: --Xe la virtù dei morti. Me ricordo, Paron. He could not but smile at their own old private joke. //Nothing tastes better than a 500-year-old pun// he thought.

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ninety-five: what does all this mean?

These disjointed and not very coherent reflections are the backbone of a snake of thought which began uncoiling about seven years ago and of which, as it seems, the lumbar vertebrae have not yet been reached. Each of them can or could at some time be said about myself also. Most were first expressed in different form, with reference to facts and situations too private for strangers, and then rewritten to fit other eyes beyond my own. The highs and lows of identification are clearly stratified within, with all the inherent ambivalence and contradictions. But when all is said and done, what remains is:

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ninety-six: about fanfiction

Why do people write fanfiction? because it's meditation, of course!

You happen on an image so powerful you can't keep your mind off it. It feels so intimate, yet so very different from anything you use to call "I". You keep looking, and it moves, it changes, and you just have to record its evolution. The image may be a mandala, or the icon of a spiritual master, or one of Rice's vampires, or really anything. What matters is that it is a guide helping to formulate questions which had never been asked before, and then off you go searching answers. Meditation can begin any way, and can lead anywhere. Some horsepeople meditate in the silence of the stable, in the powerful presence of horses. What a blessing when a story finds you! and surely it's great if and when someone else likes it, but this does not really influence the sense the story has in itself and for you.

In the confusion that inevitably follows one's own death, the Tibetan Book of the Dead advises to recall and hold fast to whatever image one meditated over during life. It may be a picture of the Dalai Lama, Mickey Mouse, one's left foot, and in one instance recorded by C.G. Jung it

was a loudly striped pijamas. Whatever helps one to remember one's goal (and avoid slipping into a womb, again). Why should it not be Louis' stillness?

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ninety-seven: about Vampire Chronicles fanfiction

Reality is what the artist perceives to be the world. Art is the expression of a critical standpoint about reality. A work of art is made a part of reality on its creation, if nothing else, because it is the product of man: a living being, him/herself a part of nature. It is as much real, and as much a fit object for art, as a sunset, or an emotion, or a spiderweb glistening with dew. Distinction between nature and culture, or nature and art, is a fake in front of the actual reality pertaining equally to both as part of the world perceived by the artist. It is a paralogism to accept the writing of a critical essay about a work of art, and censor the writing of fanfiction. Like Louis, Anne Rice has told her story. Like Daniel, we have been changed by the story in ways unforeseen by its author. We have listened, and now act with sincerity upon the change wrought in us.

Art is a gift to the world. The recipient is grateful for the gift and has freedom to enjoy it. Fanfiction does not mar or sequester the gift from the enjoyment of others, nor violates the right of the original author to be recognized as such, to the integrity and wholeness of his/her works, and to the financial gain to be gathered from them, although I understand this last may appear to be a petty and minor consideration from the point of view of the original author. Fanfiction writing is a form of expressing enthusiasm about characters or stories, a creative form of art critique, and a form of meditation. I wish Oscar Wilde's reflections on the point in *The Critic As Artist* were taken into deep consideration. Ms. Rice has changed the texture of reality with her characters. Fanfic writers are witness to this change.

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