

Anne Rice

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Summary:

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In this critical appraisal of the novels created by the contemporary queen of the Gothic, Bette B. Roberts argues that Anne Rice is more than a "popular" writer. Reinventing the vampire figure to reflect on the human condition, Rice is both philosopher and social commentator. Her vampires are a far cry from the leering, black-caped caricature on a lonely quest for blood. Unique in the history of vampire lore, they are a feeling community of creatures, each driven by the very human needs for power, recognition, a sense of purpose, and love. Roberts traces the history of Gothic fiction and places Rice in the rich tradition of those writers who have used the genre to undertake what one scholar calls "a searching analysis of human concerns." Like Mary Shelley in *Frankenstein* and Bram Stoker in *Dracula*, Rice uses the supernatural to explore the realms of human experience that disturb or confuse. For many writers of Gothic fiction - including Rice - this has meant examining the nature of evil, of sexuality, of death, of the unconscious. Rice adds to her inquiry the existential, modernist quest for meaning in a complex, impassive world. This quest, as well as Rice's fascination with the imagery of the Catholic church, her belief in the transforming power of sexual engagement, and her use of place as a metaphor for her characters' states of mind, appears in varying degrees in all of Rice's work: the Gothic fiction (the four books that compose *The Vampire Chronicles* as well as the nonvampiric tales of the supernatural), the historical novels, even the erotica, which Rice first published under pseudonyms. Throughout her analysis Roberts cites the influence of Rice's life on her writing, particularly her Catholic girlhood, her marriage of more than 30 years to poet Stan Rice, the loss of the couple's five-year-old daughter to leukemia, and Rice's attachment to certain locales, especially San Francisco, where she attended college and graduate school, and New Orleans, where

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