GENDER CONVENTIONS: HOMOSEXUAL EROTICISM AND FAMILY LIAISONS IN ANNE RICE AND NEIL JORDAN'S *INTERVIEW WITH THE VAMPIRE*

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Abstract: Hailed by many critics as the second most popular writer of vampire fiction after Bram Stoker, Anne Rice moved past the framework and clichés that Dracula imposed and expanded the vampire legend, altering it to fit the needs of our contemporary society. Although her vampires are similar to the Transylvanian count, in that they can be destroyed by sunlight, and they sleep in their coffins, one important trait differentiates them from Stoker's eponymous character. They are active parts of modern society, and, unlike their predecessors, they are no longer reclusive beings that hide in cemeteries or ruined castles, being integrated into a family. The paper is an investigation of the nuclear family in Anne Rice's novel Interview with the Vampire and Neil Jordan's 1994 film adaptation with a view to highlight the vampire's polymorphous sexuality as rendered in the two media, the literary and the cinematographic one.

Keywords: vampire, homoeroticism, family, paedophilia, incest.

As in the case of Bram Stoker's notorious novel *Dracula*, many readers noted the eroticism that Anne Rice's prose displays, recognizing the perverse sexuality that characterizes its vampires. The author herself confirmed this perception. According to Rice, "vampire fiction is erotic because the vampire is an erotic image" (Ramsland 1996: 20-21). Moreover, the writer added that she sees vampires as transcending gender. In an interview conducted by Digby Diehl for *Playboy* magazine, Anne Rice claimed: "If you make them [vampires] absolutely straight or gay, you limit the material. They can be either one. They have a polymorphous sexuality. They see everything as beautiful" (qtd. in Hoppenstand and Browne 1996: 9). In taking this approach, the Southern writer refused to have her novels characterized by boundary divisions. Good and evil, alive and dead, female and male are blurred in her narratives, allowing the readers to understand the polymorphic nature of the vampire.

Rice's 1976 *Interview with the Vampire* does not deviate from the rule. Offering an uncanny view into the life of a distorted family group made out of three vampires, Louis, Lestat, and Claudia, the Southern author's debut novel deals with themes such as homoeroticism and incest. In spite of the fact that the novel's main characters are not involved in an erotic physical interaction, a passionate tension between the male vampires is clearly suggested in the writing. An example which corroborates our statement is illustrated by the incident which marks Lestat's transformation of Louis into a vampire. The former's recollection of the event is characterized by an extremely sensual language:

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[H]e lay down beside me now on the steps, his movement so graceful and so personal that at once it made me think of a lover. (...) He put his right arm around me and pulled me close to his chest. Never had I been this close to him before, and in the dim light I could see the magnificent radiance of his eye and the unnatural mask of his skin. As I tried to move, he pressed his right fingers to my lips (...) and as soon as I stopped my abortive attempt at rebellion, he sank his teeth into my neck. (...) [H]is lips moving against my neck, I remember that the movement of his lips raised the hair all over my body that was not unlike the pleasure of passion (2008: 18).

Moreover, Louis himself compares the experience to sexual intercourse. He tells the reporter that he cannot describe the process that turned him into a vampire any more than he could explain the sexual act to a virgin: "I can tell you about it, enclose it with words that will make the value of it to me evident to you. But I can't tell you exactly, any more than I could tell you exactly what the experience of sex is if you have never had it" (ibid.: 15). This analogy evinces the fact that Louis links his turning into a vampire to the experience of having sex, making the relationship between the two a homoerotic one.

Critics have read this transformation as a metaphor for Louis's awareness of his homosexual identity. William Hughes, for instance, claims that "[t]he transition between life and un-death parallels in many respects that of an awakening consciousness of homosexual identity, and the awareness that to adopt a gay lifestyle is to discard, or at least marginalize, the cultural standards of heterosexuality" (2012: 216). Louis faces this identity crisis that Hughes mentions when he is forced to share a single coffin with his mentor. He recollects the event using contemporary idiomatic expressions imposed by the codes of homosexuality: "I begged Lestat to let me stay in the closet, but he laughed, astonished" (Rice 2008: 24). Apart from this incident, Louis makes other attempts to fit into the mores of society and to preserve connections with mortals, attempts which Lestat mocks. The relationship that he develops with Babette Freniere, for instance, for whom he feels "some measure of love… though not the greatest love [he has] ever felt" (ibid.: 59), determines Lestat to ask him to pick sides between living and un-dead, women and males. His acid comment, "these are images for you of what you were and what you still long to be. And in your romance with mortal life, you're dead to your vampire nature!" (ibid.: 81) "enforces the notion not merely of separation, but of revised loyalties and identities also" (Hughes 2012: 216).

Louis's decision to become a vampire is highly ambiguous. Depressed over the death of his brother Paul, a religious fanatic, he finds solace in vampirism. The closeness between the two is indicated by the manner in which he describes Paul, description which is clearly tainted with homoerotic undertones: "He was very handsome then. He had the smoothest skin and the largest blue eyes. He was robust, not thin as I am now and was then… but his eyes… it was as if when I looked into his eyes I was standing alone on the edge of the world… on a windswept ocean beach" (Rice 2008: 7). The accuracy with which he describes his brother's beauty and the grief that triggers his search for a new identity imply that his feelings for Paul might have surpassed the brotherly love. Furthermore, he fills the void left by his death by bringing another handsome male in his life. "A tall fair-skinned man with a mass of blond hair and a graceful, almost feline quality to his movements" (ibid.: 13), Lestat's beauty

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parallels Paul's. Although, at first glance, Louis expresses his disgust towards the vampire's vulgarity and lack of sensibility, stating that once he was turned and the two became equals he no longer felt the same attraction for him, Lestat's alleged death brings forth the true nature of feelings that Louis held for him. Obviously in pain after his partner's death, he rejects Claudia's affection, for she was the one responsible for the murder. "Go away from me", he blurts out to her. "I'll care for you because you can't care for yourself. But I don't want you near me" (ibid.: 138), cries the vampire clearly hurt by his mentor's sudden disappearance.

While Louis's interest in men is camouflaged, Lestat bluntly expresses his attraction to young males, placing them on top of his food preferences. "A fresh young girl, that was his favourite food the first of the evening; but the triumphant kill for Lestat was a young man" (Rice 2008: 41), recalls Louis in his interview with the reporter. Similarly, when Claudia seeks Lestat's destruction, for turning her into a monster at a fragile age, she allures him using two young boys. Knowing that the more beautiful one will be the vampire's pick, she poisons him with absinthe and laudanum while she feeds on the other. Lestat drinking the young boy's blood is depicted in highly erotic terms:

His lips moved over the neck and over the chest and over the tiny nipple of the chest and then, putting his other arm into the open shirt, so that the boy lay hopelessly wound in both arms, he drew the boy tight and sank his teeth into his throat (…) and again he let out a small moan and his eyelids fluttered but never opened. And Lestat knelt, the boy pressed against him, sucking hard, his own back arched and rigid, his body rocking back and forth, carrying the boy, his moans rising and falling in time with the slow rocking until suddenly his whole body tensed (ibid.: 133).

"The parallel between the kill and sexual intercourse becomes obvious here" (Liberman 1996: 116). And this is not the first instance when blood drinking is associated with the erotic physical interaction in the novel. When Louis and Claudia travel to Paris, where they meet the vampire coven of the Theatre des Vampires, Armand offers Louis a human boy who allows him to drink his blood. He describes feeding on the boy as an ecstatic experience. "I sank my teeth into his skin, my body rigid, that hard sex driving against me, and I lifted him in passion off the floor. Wave after wave of his beating heart passed into me as, weightless, I rocked with him, devouring him, his ecstasy, his conscious pleasure" (Rice 2008: 228), recalls Louis.

Besides the incident with Denis, the boy from the Theatre des Vampires, another homoerotic occurrence is marked in the novel by Louis's attraction to Armand. Far from being a novice in vampirism, he no longer hides his feelings for another male vampire, as he did with Lestat, and openly expresses them. "I felt a longing for him so strong that it took all my strength to contain it, merely to sit there gazing at him, fighting it" (ibid.: 252), he tells the reporter. "And though I felt drawn to him, more strongly perhaps than I'd ever been drawn to any living creature save Claudia, he excited me in other ways which resembled fear" (ibid.: 277), adds Louis. His feeling is reciprocated, for Armand also expresses his desire to have Louis. "I want you. I want you more than anything in the world" (Rice 2008: 279), utters the beautiful auburn-haired vampire.

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The Hollywood industry unmistakably recognized the homoerotic content of Rice's novel when it bought the rights in 1976. However, Neil Jordan's 1994 *Interview with the Vampire* film adaptation reduces and nearly discards the homosexual innuendos suggested by the book. Several changes, which emphasize the main characters' heterosexuality, are introduced in Jordan's motion picture. For instance, Louis (Brad Pitt) is no longer mourning the loss of his brother, but is instead greatly affected by the death of his wife and child. Thus, he is introduced as a widower, a position which establishes his heterosexuality. Discussing her choice of altering the source of Louis's grief when writing the screenplay for Jordan's movie, Rice confesses in an interview with Michael Riley:

I felt the wife and dead child would prefigure Claudia better, that it was a tightening up of things, and that the grief and the loss would be the same. I didn't see it as terribly significant. Whatever I was playing with in the book about the brother was no longer of interest to me. It was only important that Louis be in that state of grief, that he feel completely alone, and that he be living in a self-destructive way (Riley 1996: 219-220).

Moreover, Lestat's (Tom Cruise) attack on Louis occurs while he is in the company of a prostitute, a scene that is not included in Rice's book. Turned into a vampire, his first human victim in the novel is a male slave. The movie, however, takes a more sensual turn, stressing Louis's interest in women. By introducing the beautiful female slave Yvette (Thandie Newton), who declares her concern for her master by urging him to send Lestat away and to visit the slave quarters again, Jordan's 1994 motion picture suggests that the two might have been involved in a sexual relationship. This statement is reinforced by the fact that he calls her *ma chère*. As a vampire, Louis is allured by Yvette's pulsating neck veins and yields to temptation, making her his very first victim. Due to these changes, which marked Louis's heterosexuality as a human, the homoerotic implications that might arise as a result of his liaison with Lestat were ultimately discarded by the viewers, their relationship being interpreted as mere companionship.

Another key moment in Anne Rice's book, which transposed in the movie creates a different image of Louis, is marked by the scene in which he is offered a boy at the Theatre des Vampires. While in the novel, as we have previously established, he experiences ecstasy, Neil Jordan's film depicts a completely different situation. When offered the victim, Louis lifts the boy's hand and cannot hide his disgust when seeing the skin punctured by other marks. In order to be able to drink, he turns the boy's hand and looks for an unmarked spot. Despite his precautions, he cannot hide his revulsion. This gesture, which in the novel has been portrayed as a homoerotic moment, is represented by Neil Jordan as an instance in which Louis cannot come to terms with his nature as a vampire. While in Rice's book he climaxes while drinking Denis's blood, in the 1994 adaptation he behaves as a "courteous guest [who] might take coffee when offered it" (Reep, Ceccio and Francis 1996: 124).

However, these are not the only instances which highlight the reduction of homoerotic implications in Louis's persona. By the same token is the scene in which he and Lestat visit the widow St. Clair and her dandy young lover. Absent in the novel, this episode suggests not only Louis's heterosexuality but also emphasizes the difference between his nature and

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Lestat's. Humorously rendered, the sequence opens with the two vampires attending the widow's lavish party. While Lestat briefs his companion on the lady's marital situation, the scene cuts and the party atmosphere is replaced by a more romantic one with Louis, the widow, her two poodles, the foppish lover and Lestat taking a stroll in the house's luxuriant garden. Clearly intended as a seduction scene, it takes a humorously grotesque turn when Louis, instead of aiming for the woman's neck, sinks his teeth into her dogs. The sequence mirrors Lestat's attack on Madame St. Clair's lover, and, at first sight, it looks designed to highlight Lestat's pleasure of killing young men. However, Louis's description of his companion's taste in victims deconstructs the scene's homoerotic overtones. "Lestat killed two, sometimes three a night. A fresh young girl, that was his favourite for the first of the evening. For seconds, he preferred a gilded beautiful youth. But the snob in him loved to hunt in society, and the blood of the aristocrat thrilled him best of all" (1994: *Interview with the Vampire*), recalls Louis, clearly suggesting that Lestat's choice of the young man was purely a matter of social position and not of gender.

According to critics, the reduction of homoerotic innuendos regarding the two vampires serves two purposes. "It makes the film more acceptable and enjoyable to general audiences who may wish to ignore those implications, and it protects the leading-man status of Brad Pitt and Tom Cruise, both of whom have the responsibility of appealing to wide audiences in other expensive films" (Reep, Ceccio and Francis 1996: 128). Nevertheless, aware of Rice's novels popularity in gay circles, the filmmakers did not discard entirely the book's homosexual implications. Armand's character (Antonio Banderas) stands as proof that part of *Interview with the Vampire*'s homoerotic tone has been preserved in Jordan's adaptation. Unfortunately, Antonio Banderas "a favourite with gays, does not physically suit the role of Armand" (Reep, Ceccio and Francis 1996: 128). The author herself declared that casting Banderas to play Armand was a bad choice. "There was certainly a flattening of the character of Armand" (Riley 1996: 239), stated Rice. "Antonio Banderas played such a heavy that you don't know why in the world Louis would be charmed by Armand" (ibid.: 240).

If, in the novel, the leader of the Parisian coven bluntly expresses his desire to have Louis, in the 1994 adaptation, Armand is less direct. The film openly indicates that he is the one responsible for Claudia's death in order to eliminate her as a rival for Louis's affection. In a scene which replicates the rhythm and speed of a slapstick comedy, preserving at the same time the gruesomeness of a horror movie, Louis, Claudia (Kirsten Dunst), and Madeleine (Domiziana Giordano), are dragged to the Theatre des Vampires. While the three vampires scream for help, we see Armand calmly listening without interfering. He intervenes only when he knows that it is too late to save Claudia from the sun's rays to which she is exposed. He, then, saves Louis from the coffin he has been buried and tells him that there is nothing he can do for the vampire child. Armand's passivity emphasizes his overpowering desire for Louis, thus preserving Anne Rice's homoerotic bonding between the male vampires.

The choice of the erotic object in Anne Rice's novels is an important aspect which provides critics with plenty of arguments that stir commentaries regarding the morality of her writing. In *Interview with the Vampire*, for instance, the erotic encompasses all possibilities: "homosexual as well as heterosexual, children as well as adults" (Liberman 1996: 116). However, according to Candace Benefiel, the novel's major theme is not sexual deviance, but

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the "nuclear family of vampires" (2004: 263), which has "a triangular structure, perhaps reflecting Anne Rice's own recovered family of herself, husband, and son" (Roberts 1994: 10).

Made out of two handsome vampires—Louis and Lestat, who create a daughter in order to save their damaged relationship—Rice's domestic unity has been identified by Ken Gelder as the "queer family" (1994: 113), for it violates all the conventions imposed by the normative family unit. Lasting for almost sixty-five years, more than any standard household would last, the vampire clan treats homicide and domestic abuse with the same easiness that a normal family would treat a Saturday afternoon walk. "Lestat stalks rather than courts Louis, and the 'dark trick' that transforms Louis into a vampire resembles a rape more than it does a marriage and consummation" (Keller 2000: 15). As opposed to the traditional family, which decodes the marriage ceremony as a social approval to initiate new life, the vampire liaison stands as a symbol of death and sterility.

In spite of its longevity, Louis and Lestat's union is ultimately bound to fail because there is no emotional compatibility between the two. Moreover, the former believes that Lestat has chosen him as a partner for the wrong reasons. In his view, the blonde-haired vampire is only interested in his wealth and the Pointe du Lac plantation that he owns, making their relationship resemble an eighteen-century aristocratic union in which the two husbands increase their family fortunes through their marriage. In order to avoid a separation, Lestat brings a baby into their lives that is meant to strengthen their relationships by providing companionship and entertainment for his partner. According to Candace Benefiel, "the whole scene reads like a couple having a child in attempt to make a failing relationship once more viable" (2004: 267). However, while a more traditional family would give birth or adopt a child, Lestat makes one for himself by passing the "Dark Gift" on to a five-year-old girl. The vampire-child's creation is a grotesque parody of the act of procreation. Both male-vampires contribute to the process. Louis initiates the transformation by draining her blood, and Lestat completes it by replenishing her with his own. Later on, Louis confesses to his daughter: "I took your life (…) He gave it back to you" (Rice 2008: 114).

Named Claudia, the "magnificent doll" (ibid.: 97) does not age physically and becomes the apple of her two fathers' eye, who dedicate their time instructing her how to be a proper vampire. In portraying Lestat and Louis as doting parents, "Rice universalizes the male-female and aggressive-passive binarisms of heterosexual unions" (ibid.: 16). While Lestat is highly masculinized being depicted as a practical, insensitive, blunt character, Louis is illustrated as "delicate and sensitive (i.e. feminised)" (Gelder 1999:112). As a mother figure, Louis nurtures Claudia:

And, carrying her to her crib, I sat beside her and sang to her, and she stared at me as she clung to that doll, as if trying blindly and mysteriously to calm a pain that she herself did not begin to understand. Can you picture it, this splendid domesticity, dim lamps, the vampire father singing to the vampire daughter" (Rice 2008: 197).

In addition, he teaches Claudia how to live in the new surrounding and "to see and drink the world" (Rice 2008: 112) by introducing her to art. On the other hand, Lestat, more of a father figure, instructs his daughter in the practical aspects of vampirism, showing her

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how to feed and how to cover her crimes. Lestat, Louis recalls, "was loving to her, proud of her beauty, anxious to teach her that we must kill to live and that we ourselves could never die" (ibid.: 96).

Although "this family has no marriage license, no college savings plan for the kids, and exists by killing unsuspecting victims" (Benefiel 2004: 264), it has an expiration date which is reached when Claudia matures psychologically and starts asking questions related to her creation. Possessing a woman's mind, but, at the same time, trapped in a five-year-old child's body, unable to grow, she becomes the novel's tragic character. As she develops emotionally, she gradually turns into Louis's lover. The vampire's liaison with his daughter is more shocking than the homoerotic relationships between him and Lestat suggested in the novel. Charged with incestuous overtones, Rice's description of the love between the two stirred strong criticism regarding paedophilia. Louis explicitly describes their strange relationship by calling her and himself "Father and Daughter. Lover and Lover" (Rice 2008: 100). Moreover, the vampire father notices the woman trapped in the child's body. "There was something dreadfully sensual about her lounging on the settee in a tiny nightgown of lace and stitched pearls," recalls Louis. "[S]he became an eerie and powerful seductress, her voice as clear and sweet as ever, though it had a resonance which was womanish, a sharpness sometimes that provoked shocking" (ibid.: 101).

Inquiring about the circumstances of her creation, "just as a small child wants to know who made her" (Keller 2000: 18), Claudia discovers that Lestat is the one who turned her into a vampire at an early age, a fact which triggers strong resentments towards him. Recognizing that both she and Louis are Lestat's slaves, she begins plotting the latter's demise. According to Keller, "[m]ore and more, the vampire family begins to resemble the abusive house-hold where the mother and the children live in fear of the adult male who refuses to allow them to leave" (ibid.). As in the typical American suburban story, the abusive figure of the household is violently punished, and the persecuted members are set free. In Rice's nuclear family, Claudia is the one in charge of Lestat's punishment, for Louis, despite the domestic abuse he has been submitted to, is still committed to his mentor. James R. Keller reads the five-year-old girl's aggression towards her father through the Freudian oedipal drama and Jung's Electra complex theory.

Although Louis and Lestat are plainly developed as mother and father, Claudia's Electra complex casts them in the opposing roles, [states Keller]. The desires of the oedipal girl are initiated by the absence of a penis, a condition for which she blames her mother, who is also bereft of the male organ. As she develops, however, she comes to sympathise and identify with the mother and to long for her father, who possesses the penis that she desires for herself (ibid.).

We agree with Keller's theory. In her first stages as a vampire, Claudia and Lestat are described as forming a special bond, for they both shared "the hunt, the seduction, the kill" (Rice 2008: 100). However, as she develops, the five-year-old monster starts to grow cold to him, craving to possess the knowledge that Lestat has regarding their condition as vampires. Thus, she allies with Louis and plots her mentor/father's destruction. Moreover, Claudia's

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incapability to mature physiologically replicates Freud's theory of the *Penisneid* (penis envy), according to which the female is regarded as an incomplete male. Similarly, Claudia is an incomplete vampire, for she is unable to mature into a full-grown woman.

As can be seen, Anne Rice mixed the male and female oedipal experiences. Her choice can be interpreted as an attempt to highlight that vampires have a polymorphous sexuality and that the un-dead are not bound to any gender category. Claudia's behaviour is fairly masculine. Louis notices that she hunts her victims in Lestat's fashion. "And to watch her killing was chilling," states Louis. "She would sit alone in the dark square waiting for the kindly gentleman or woman to find her, her eyes more mindless than I had ever seen Lestat's" (Rice 2008: 99).

Her death is extremely violent. Accused of breaking the vampires' cardinal rule—the killing of another vampire—Claudia is sentenced to death by the members of the Theatre des Vampires. In Katherine Ramsland's view, the five-year-old girl was inspired by Anne Rice's deceased daughter. The writer herself confesses that there is a connection between the death of her child, Michele, and Claudia's creation.

> I never consciously thought about the death of my daughter when I was writing it. I wasn't conscious of working anything out, [confesses Rice]. When I wrote it, it was like dreaming. The book had a life unto itself. The child vampire Claudia was physically inspired by Michele but she ultimately became something else—a woman trapped in a child's body, robbed of power, never knowing what it's like to be a woman and to make love. She became a metaphor for a raging mind trapped in a powerless body. That's really how I see her (Rasmland 1996, 21).

In James R. Keller's view, "[the] portrayal of a same-sex relationship perpetuates one of the most destructive heterosexist myths: the assumption that gay and lesbian domestic units mirror heterosexual unions" (2000: 16). According to the critic, such a comparison is only meant to downplay same-sex relationships, which, because of their lack of fertility are read as "imperfect replication of the heterosexual union" (Keller 2000: 16), a grotesque parody of the norm. "Louis and Letat's domestic relationship is an example of heterosexist projection. It imposes upon same-sex relations the worst malfunctions of the heterosexual marriage: gender inequity, dominance and submission, spousal abuse, abandonment and neglect, child abuse, etc." (ibid.). Discussing Claudia's condition, Keller states that her creation is a metaphor for gay adoptions. According to the critic, Claudia's growth has been affected because she was raised by two male parents. "The implications of this portrayal are truly hostile to gay parental rights, perpetuating the myth that a child within a same-sex relationship cannot mature into a normative fashion" (ibid.:19).

Neil Jordan's 1994 film adaptation captures the parody of normality suggested in Anne Rice's novel. The director confirms this statement, being quoted as saying, "In many ways I'm telling the story of a deeply dysfunctional family, except the family unit here is two vampires, Lestat and Louis, and their 'adopted' child Claudia" (qtd. in Benefiel 2004: 268). Treated as a favourite daughter, Claudia is constantly petted and praised by her two fathers who bring seamstresses to make beautiful dresses for her and hire tutors to teach her.

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However, unlike a normal family, the vampire girl feeds on the staff hired by her parents, conduct which triggers Lestat's rage. In spite of the gravity of her deeds, her punishment, for killing humans too close to home, resumes to a slap on the wrist. "The scenes are humorous and chilling precisely because they are so close to reality" (ibid.: 269).

As in Rice's book, Lestat's "one happy family" (1994: *Interview with the Vampire*) falls apart when Claudia matures psychologically. The tragedy of her situation is illustrated in Jordan's film by an episode which is not included in the novel. When the girl sees a naked Creole woman taking a bath, she tells her doting fathers that she wants to grow up in order to look like the woman. Although they avoid telling her that she is unable to grow, Claudia guesses. The climax of her condition is reached when, thirty years after her creation, Lestat offers her a doll to celebrate her anniversary. Enraged by his gesture she reveals that she has killed the Creole woman and hid the corpse in her bedroom, an action which can be interpreted as a symbolic attempt to capture the woman's mature body and beauty. Claudia is forced to face her horrid reality when in a furry she cuts her beautiful blonde curls only to realize that her hair will grow back in an instant. The scene is pivotal in the movie, demonstrating to the audience that she is unable to change the physical shape she had when Lestat turned her into a vampire.

As we have highlighted in the novel, as Claudia develops the mind of a woman she becomes more Louis's lover. The two have spent years sleeping in the same coffin, a fact which indicates their intimate relationship, and it is a sign of her discontent with this situation when she demands a changing of their arrangement. "She wanted a coffin of her own now, which left me more wounded than I would let her see. I walked out after giving her my gentlemen consent; for how many years had I slept with her as of she were a part of me I couldn't know" (Rice 2008: 101), recalls Louis. The film renders the same situation in a different manner. The girl gets her own coffin, "but is shown in the late afternoon coming back to crawl in with her indulgent papa, like a child who has awoken from a nightmare seeks the security of a parent's bed" (Benefiel 2004: 269).

The liaison between Claudia and Louis represents the film's strongest erotic bonding. "Claudia is very dear to me. She is my daughter" (1994: *Interview with the Vampire*), tells Louis to Armand in an attempt to describe his relationship with the girl, to which the auburn-haired vampire replies, "Your lover" (ibid.), defining thus the true nature of their connection. Similarly, Claudia confirms her passion for her doting papa during their trip to Paris. "I love you still. Who will care for me, my love, my dark angel, when you are gone?" (ibid.), utters the vampire girl.

The Parisian setting, which emanates a romantic atmosphere, highlights the erotic liaison between the two characters. In addition, Claudia's new look, which replicates that of an adult woman, reminds the viewers that inside her childish body lies hidden a mature mind. While the novel clearly states that the two vampires are caught in a romantic entanglement, for Louis tells the reporter, when they reached Paris, "We were alive again. We were in love" (Rice 2008: 202), the movie merely suggests that their relationship exceeds the father-daughter boundary. "We were alive again. Just the two of us. And so euphoric was I that I yielded to her every desire" (1994: *Interview with the Vampire*), confesses the character played by Brad Pitt in Neil Jordan's film adaptation, clearly omitting the "love" word from

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his statement. Nevertheless, the visual scene that depicts the two vampires dancing at the Paris Opera House compensates for Louis's vague language, for it captures the chemistry between them.

"The film, in using an eleven-year-old actress instead of a five-year-old, strengthens the paedophilia implications that appear in the novel and, at the same time, creates the image of a tragic love affair" (Reep, Ceccio and Francis 1996: 130). However, Claudia cannot be a true partner for Louis "because her body cannot match her emotions, and she needs him to take care of her in a world that sees her as a child" (Reep, Ceccio and Francis 1996: 130). Realizing that Louis will abandon her for Armand, Claudia demands him to turn Madeleine, a Parisian doll maker, into a vampire, in order to take care of her in his absence. "To emphasize her understanding of the hopelessness of her situation, the film shows her gently kissing Louis goodbye an instant before she is seized by the vampires who will kill her" (ibid.). The scene in which the Parisian vampires kidnap Louis, Madeleine, and Claudia is shot with an arresting rapidity. The contrast between the section depicting the father and daughter terminating their relationship on the hotel balcony and the shot in which the coven of vampires interrupts their tranquillity is disturbing. The difference in pace between the two shots, combined with the non-diegetic sound, startles the viewers, reminding them that are watching a horror movie designed to excite their senses.

The murdering of Claudia and Madeleine is "the film's most visually compelling example of sublime merger" (Pramaggiore 2008: 39). Physically joined in death, the two are imprisoned in a "stone tunnel that resembles Dr Frankenstein's tower turned inside out" (ibid.:40). The scene is worth taken into account not only for its artistic prowess but also for the manner in which it handles the point of view. As opposed to the novel, where the action is rendered solely through Louis's eyes, in Neil Jordan's film the point of view shifts, allowing the viewer to empathize with other characters, as well. Such is the case of Claudia and Madeleine. Although their death is not described in Rice's book, the 1994 film adaptation imagined the two falling victim to a "nuclear blast." (…) Jordan worked with the production designer Dante Ferretti to design their statuelike remains, which recall the intertwined limbs of the Pietà" (ibid.). And this is not the only embrace rendered in the motion picture. Throughout the film, the director has depicted his characters immersing in embraces, "beginning with the 'shocker of a neck-biting embrace' (…) and culminating in the mingling of identity at a granular level" (ibid.). The shell of Madeleine and Claudia's bodies, made out of ash flakes, resembles the lava "statues" of Pompeii. When Louis touches the remains of their bodies, the structure crumbles into a pile of grey ashes.

Another aspect that is worth mentioning is the fact that, as opposed to Anne Rice's book, the 1994 motion picture does not involve Lestat in Claudia's death. While in the novel, he comes to Paris seeking revenge for the girls' attempt to kill him, in Jordan's movie, he only chides his daughter by telling her that she has been a "very naughty girl" (1994: *Interview with the Vampire*). By adopting a parental role, Lestat preserves the audience's sympathy for his character. "Eliminating Lestat's involvement in Claudia's death is an essential change if there are to be film versions of Rice's other vampire novels, which focus on Lestat. Responsibility for killing a child, even a vampire child, would tarnish Lestat's character with audiences, perhaps beyond acceptance" (Reep, Ceccio and Francis 1996: 128).

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Although, at first glance, *Interview with the Vampire* appears to offer an insight into an unconventional vampire family, allowing the readers to explore the incestuous relations between its members, Anne Rice's novel is more about "being orphaned" (Reep, Ceccio and Francis 1996: 124), rather than being integrated into a family structure. The main characters live a solitary life, even when they are in each other's company. Lestat's search for a partner, for instance, proves to be futile, for his two companions plot his death. Louis, on the other hand, cannot enjoy his vampire existence, living a damned solitary existence, and Claudia is trapped in a childish body, in spite of the fact that she has matured psychologically. Neil Jordan's 1994 movie manages to capture the solitary life of the novel's immortal characters, determining Anne Rice to declare that "[t]he entire look of the film was perfection (Ramsland 1996: 21).

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