THESIS

A QUEER PERSPECTIVE: GAY THEMES IN THE FILM *INTERVIEW WITH THE VAMPIRE*

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ABSTRACT

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There are a growing number of mainstream films and television shows which include gay characters or same-sex families as central figures: *A Single Man, The Kids Are Alright, Will & Grace, Mad Men, Two and a Half Men, and Modern Family.* This thesis sets out to determine if the film *Interview with the Vampire,* which preceded the above named films and television shows by more than five years, is a cite of queer cinema that focuses on gay themes while proposing a same-sex family. In coupling Seymour Chatman's rhetorical theory of narrative in fiction - literature and film with Harry Benshoff and Sean Griffin's theory of Queer Cinema, the study focuses on locating and citing specific instances where gay themes of identity and identification along with the theme of the same-sex family emerge. The study utilizes the novel *Interview with the Vampire* by Ann Rice as a critical touchstone and draws from Roland Barthes' concept of "Rhetoric of the Image" to evaluate the strength of the themes found within the adapted film *Interview with the Vampire*. The research finds several examples of the re-presentation of individual gay lives and uncovers evidence of a cinematic representation of a same-sex family. The researcher concludes that while the film *Interview with the Vampire* is certainly an example of queer cinema, it also presents a same-sex family unit that may be the first of its kind.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my parents and sister who taught me to value education as a life-long endeavor and to my friends who, by their brilliant personal counsel as well as their own academic work, continue to demonstrate to me daily the immeasurable value of education.

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A Queer Perspective: Gay Themes in the Film *Interview with the Vampire*

How do we seem to you? Do you find us beautiful, magical? Our white skin, our fierce eyes?

--- Louis, from the film *Interview with the Vampire*

Introduction

For nearly three centuries, numerous authors have written novels and poems about the adventures of vampires and those who seek to destroy them. The first recognized feature-length vampire film is F.W. Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1922), which was drawn from Bram Stoker's literary character *Dracula* (1897). However, the literary history extends well beyond 1897 to short stories and poems, such as Heinrich August Ossenfelder's poem "The Vampire" (1748), or James Malcolm Rymer's story *Varney the Vampyre or The Feast of Blood* (1847).[1] The broad history and frequent revisitation of the vampire story, especially in the last century and even the last ten years, with Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight* series (*Twilight,* 2008, *New Moon,* 2009, *The Twilight Saga: Eclipse,* 2010, and *The Twilight Saga: Breaking Dawn Part 1,* 2011) shows that vampires remain an alluring literary theme for authors and readers alike.

Anne Rice's novel *Interview with the Vampire*, a part of her larger collection of vampire stories titled *The Vampire Chronicles*, is one such literary piece that continues to enjoy widespread popularity. From its initial release in 1976 through 2008, Rice's *Chronicles* have sold over eighty million copies worldwide.[2] The film adaptation of Rice's novel, also titled *Interview with the Vampire*, directed by Neil Jordan, earned $223.5 million dollars worldwide, after its theatrical release on November 11, 1994.[3] While the novel's success and the film's box

office returns seem to demonstrate the story's strong draw to audiences, the critical reaction to the film suggests a different tale.

Critical Praise or Distaste?

Critics of the film *Interview with the Vampire* split on their assessments, often leaving the film teetering somewhere between compelling and uninspiring. Roger Ebert states that "It [*Interview with the Vampire*] is a film about what it might really be like to be a vampire" and praises it alongside *Nosferatu* as "one of the great vampire films" because it presents vampirism in a unique way.[4] The film is out of the ordinary because it evokes a tone of sadness and air of realism rather, than falling victim to the more common theme found in vampire films in which the vampire is a sinister character who had "gotten away with something."[5] Due to this unusual view of vampirism, Ebert provides some insight into why the film might attract audiences. Referring to the movie's attempt to present vampire history and the realities of vampirism, Ebert's critique amplifies this notion that *Interview with the Vampire* is a different type of vampire film, "My complaint about the film is that not very much happens, in the plot sense. The movie is more about the history and reality of vampirism than about specific events."[6] Janet Maslin, writing for the *New York Times,* and James Berardinelli, writing for *Reelviews,* agree with Ebert. Maslin writes that "*Interview with the Vampire* promises a constantly surprising vampire story, and it keeps that promise,"[7] while Berardinelli writes "*Interview with the Vampire* makes some modifications to common vampire mythology. . . . The fangs are still present, as are the insatiable bloodlust and fear of daylight, but no longer will religious trappings hold the undead at bay, and a stake through the heart has lost its effectiveness."[8]

In addition to noting the shift away from traditional vampire cinema, Ebert seems to stumble upon a characterization shift taking place in the vampire film genre, where characterizations move away from the menacing and erotic, decidedly unreal creatures that dominate most vampire films through the 1960s and 1970s, to the sad and sullen heroes with whom the audience can identify.[9] Scott Nash of *Three Movie Buffs* online clarifies and focuses Ebert's assessment of the film, writing that "It was she [Anne Rice] who transformed the image of vampires from Eastern European Counts with strong accents and a bat fetish, into the modern, young, glamorous and angst ridden undead super-heroes that we've come to know today."[10] Though Nash's credit to Rice for introducing the transformed vampire is perhaps overstated, John J. Puccio acknowledges that *Interview with the Vampire* is a vampire film that focuses on the despairing life of vampires: "This second time out on Blu-ray I decided to try a different approach. Instead of viewing it as another vampire flick filled with the despair and loneliness of these societal outcasts, I viewed it as a black comedy."[11] But for all of the praise heaped upon the film's new-found-twist in story line and the recognition of a characterization shift, critics also found plenty to question.

Among a number of problems the film has, the under-developed plot and casting appear to be the most criticized shortfalls. Peter Travers, writing for *Rolling Stone,* admits that, though "we [the audience] are dazzled," the film leaves us "unmoved." He argues that the movie had some problems with it being "gross, snail paced, and grindingly glum." As with Ebert and Travers, most critics agree that the plot tends toward the languid, while the visual presentation is excellent. David Ansen, writing for *Newsweek*, comments that "Visually, it's a triumph," and "the cast is likewise feast for the eyes."[12] Ansen praises the cinematography, while, at the same

time, reducing the cast to not much more than eye candy. He focuses his critique on Brad Pitt's and Tom Cruise's performances, stating that

> Pitt has both the hardest role and the hardest time: his sullen, inarticulate style can be distractingly contemporary. Not surprisingly, he's at his best in the present-day scenes, where a nervous Christian Slater is recording Louis's story. Cruise works hard to affect a haughty, supercilious manner, and he's not bad, but you sense that both these men are struggling to find a style any number of classically trained actors could pull off in their sleep (they just wouldn't look so good).[13]

This criticism is fair and certainly acceptable to many, and seems even more so when *Interview with the Vampire* author Anne Rice criticized, then later recanted, the casting choice of Tom Cruise. Rice told the *Orlando Sentinel* in 1993, several months prior to the beginning of shooting, that Cruise "should do himself and everyone else a service and withdraw," saying that he is too "'mom and apple pie' to play the French-speaking, semi-androgynous vampire from the 19th century."[14] Ansen and Rice's initial assessment of the cast is hardly a perspective shared by all. Signaling a division among critics with regard to the cast, Janet Maslin writes that "Mr. Cruise is flabbergastingly right for this role,"[15] and Rob Gonsalves from eFilmCritic.com calls Cruise's effort "an enormously entertaining performance."[16] Rice even pulls an about face and writes that "From the moment he appeared Tom was Lestat for me. He has the immense physical and moral presence; he was defiant and yet never without conscience; he was beautiful beyond description yet compelled to do cruel things."[17] Though without much consensus critically on the cast's performance, Ansen, Maslin, and Rice do allude to the same idea: that the star-power of Tom Cruise's casting is meant to draw large mainstream audiences. Maslin writes about Cruise's star power as a well-known American prep: "Talk about risky business: here is the most clean-cut of American movie stars, decked out in ruffles and long blond wig."[18] Maslin's reference along with Rice's assessment of Cruise as too "mom and apple pie,"[19] and Ansen's

remark that Tom Cruise's casting announcement caused "a high level of inane squabbling," all highlight the star's well-known, "clean-cut American" status and the pre-release hype his casting caused.

The numerous critics writing about the film, along with the novel and film's status as "best-seller" and "box office success" respectively, alone demonstrate a cultural following and interest in these works, which suggest that a deeper look into the themes present in the film *Interview with the Vampire* is worthwhile. The general non-consensus amongst the film's critics, in particular the critical malaise surrounding the star-studded cast and the unique vampire story-form, leaves the film begging for academic evaluation.

Novel and Film: A Synopsis of *Interview with the Vampire*

Interview with the Vampire shares the life experience of a troubled vampire named Louis, played by Brad Pitt. The story unfolds in an interview setting, with Louis telling and reflecting on his life's story to an unnamed reporter played by Christian Slater. Louis describes his relationship with two other vampires, Lestat played by Tom Cruise and Claudia played by then child actress Kirsten Dunst. He documents his thoughts and feelings on tape for the reporter, discussing Lestat's companionship as an eccentric vampire and his violent death, as well as contemplating Claudia's position as a vampire daughter, struggling with her eternally youthful appearance. Louis also talks about his search for other vampires while in France. As he tries to articulate what it means to be a vampire and ruminates over the distasteful necessity of killing people and drinking their blood to survive, he meets a troupe of vampire actors led by an old vampire named Armand, played by Antonio Banderas and Armand's minion Santiago, played by Stephen Rea. From these vampires Louis learns the harsh reality of eternal life, losing

connection with the ever-changing world. The film draws to an end with Louis unsuccessfully trying to define his purpose in recounting his story and aggressively warning the reporter of the consequences of vampirism. The story concludes by reintroducing the still-living vampire Lestat, who preys upon the reporter, biting him though not killing him, as he frightfully flees Louis.

The challenge of adapting a novel to film seems to rest with how well the stories and plot points are preserved, and if the film faithfully adheres to the characterizations found within the novel. *Interview with a Vampire* does very well in following the source material, and is considered a strong, if not accurate, adaptation of the film.[20] For example, the film preserves a main function of the novel in that it is very much dialogue-driven. The film moves along based on Louis' (Brad Pitt) first person recounting of his life, giving a more intimate feeling to the story, which is the same method used by Rice in the novel. Rather than the camera capturing significant scenes in the protagonist's life in order to build the story, the tale is actually being told by someone speaking to another individual. This is one of the film's greatest adaptive achievements. Louis begins in both novel and film gazing out of a window, speaking with a young interviewer (Christian Slater) and his tape recorder. After a brief exchange, we discover that Louis is a vampire. While the novel introduces this by the fifth word, the film introduces the vampire in the first minute of the film. After learning of Louis's true identity as a vampire, through the use of make-up it is obvious to the interviewer, as well as the audience, that Louis is indeed different. The character's appearance on screen is near perfect in following the novel, which describes Louis as follows: "The vampire was utterly white and smooth, as if he were sculpted from bleached bone, and his face was as seemingly inanimate as a statue, except for two

brilliant green eyes."[21] The vampires in the film all share the same sculpted, pure, porcelain-white skin. The dialogue in the film is often lifted directly from the novel, whether it is Claudia shrieking "I'll put you in your coffin!" found on page 134, Louis blurting out "Buffoon" to Santiago in Paris beneath a bridge on page 211 of the novel, or Armand, upon meeting Louis, politely saying "Bring the petite beauty with you," on page 213, these are all examples of word for word dialogue used in the novel.[22] The parallels between novel and film are obvious and easily seen by the reader-turned-movie-goer, but perhaps the most compelling of these is the theme of sexuality, specifically homosexuality.

The novel incorporates strong themes dealing with love, sexuality, homosexuality, relationships, and mortality, which carry into the adapted film as well. Although neither the novel or film explicitly references homosexuality, the main character Louis definitely has a tumultuous, on-going relationship with Lestat, which often seems emotional instead of detached. Louis' and Lestat's relationship also possesses a tension that is less like ordinary male friendship, and more like a married couple, in which one partner is trapped with an abusive spouse. Louis often finds himself tied to Lestat; he often says that he needs Lestat as a "teacher," yet he continually refers to Lestat as a "companion." On page 126, for instance, Louis tells of Lestat's apparent interest in a mortal "boy," and Lestat invites Louis out with them: "he [Lestat] jarred me miserably by asking me to go with him to the boy's flat. He was positively friendly, in one of those moods when he wanted my companionship. . . . But now he came to me in such a mood and asked me to go to the boy's room."[23] It jars Louis because he indicates that the friendship between Lestat and the boy "had gone on far longer than any such friendship Lestat had ever had. And I could not tell whether he had actually become fond of a mortal in spite of himself."

There are two love stories bound up in this passage. Louis' commentary not only implies a sordid love affair between Lestat and the boy, which he is uncomfortable with, but also a strained, jealous love or affection between Lestat and Louis himself. For Louis casts Lestat's relationship with the boy as one resembling lovers, not friends, and Louis' reaction to it seems more jealous than semi-interested or detached, the latter two reactions seem more friend-oriented while the former is more plausibly the perspective of a spurned lover. Louis alludes to this relationship between himself and Lestat earlier in the novel, when he engages in a brief lover's quarrel with Lestat:

> "I'm leaving you," I said to him at once. "I wish to tell you that now."
> "I thought as much," he answered, sitting back in the chair, 'and I thought as well that you would make a flowery announcement. Tell me what a monster I am; what a vulgar fiend."[24]

This feeling of a turbulent relationship persists throughout the film and eventually introduces a child into the mix. Louis and Lestat have a daughter, Claudia, a familial relationship is born in the film and referenced in the novel on page 93, when Lestat tells Claudia, "You're our daughter, Louis's daughter and my daughter, do you see?"[25] Later in the film, Claudia reveals Louis' homosexual inclination to the audience, accusing him of loving Armand, another male vampire played by Antonio Banderas. In defining Louis' relationship to Armand as one based on love, Claudia affirms the analogous relationship between vampires and gays.

Along with the dialogue there is an underlying, intense intimacy found in the film surrounding Louis and Lestat's relationship, particularly when Lestat first turns Louis into a vampire. The scene is suggestive of a sexual exchange because of how it is developed. A close-up shot of Louis clutching Lestat when he is first bitten is followed by an erotic sort of pleasure Lestat seems to take in Louis' sucking blood from him to complete the transition to vampirism,

this pleasureful look is enhanced by two heart-beat-like drums softly beating in rhythm in the background. This scene in the film echoes another scene from early in the book where Louis drinks blood during his first kill:

> The sucking mesmerized me; the warm struggling of the man was soothing to the tension of my hands; and there was the drumbeat of his heart —only this time it beat in perfect rhythm with the drumbeat of my own heart, the two resounding in every fiber of my being . . . . I was in a frenzy for a moment, not myself, insisting to him [Lestat] that the man's heart still beat, and I was in an agony to clamp onto him again. I ran my hands over his chest, then grabbed at his wrists.[26]

Though these scenes each occur separately, one in the film and the other in the novel, the film echoes near perfectly the erotic experience described in the novel. In addition to this, the vampires are shown multiple times in close proximity in the film, at a party, in Louis' plantation home in Louisiana, and in their apartment in New Orleans. These shots of the vampires together reinforce the presence of the close, yet turbulent relationship developed in the novel. Though this thesis focuses on the film *Interview with the Vampire*'s ability to develop and address gay themes, it relies on the novel as a critical touchstone to accentuate and strengthen those themes relating to identity struggle, the identification of others, and the gay family. While Rice's novel is considered a valuable contribution to the vampire genre, and the adapted film is seen as a box office success, neither have been taken up seriously by scholars as a site of criticism regarding sexuality. To date I have found no scholar who has examined the presence or absence of homosexual themes in the film *Interview with the Vampire.* The film possesses a number of strong cues, some of which suggest the sexuality of the characters, allowing for the assumption of a homosexual relationship without explicitly identifying it. Such cues position the film as one sensitive to homosexual themes, especially focused on relationships. These cues echo Roland Barthes' theory that multiple meanings or codes may be incorporated into a single text, and

therefore appeal to several different readings or decodings;. The film *Interview with the Vampire* contains themes relating to religion, sexuality, socio-economic class structure, horror fiction, social-political issues of equality and justice, as well as other motifs.[27] But how do these motifs come to light? Which of the themes are most prominent and how can we know? In order to answer these questions, we must take a moment to consider the rhetorical construction and function of the image.

Rhetoric of the Image: Signifier, Connotation, and Relay

Roland Barthes' concept of a chain of signifiers as a system of symbols that constitute meaning as "signs" drives us toward the conclusion that images contain multiple, symbolically based signs, some coded and some not, which work together to establish a message, and that these resulting messages, too, work as signs that are at once independent and interdependent, reinforcing and justifying meaning.[28] In analyzing an advertisement for Italian pasta which shows food spilling from a string bag, Barthes argues that the images in this French advertisement contain several meanings that are only apprehensible because of their associative and cultural positioning. An image standing alone conveys little, if any, meaning. Rather, an image requires an anthropological perceptive, which is to say, a cultural understanding of the cues found within it between the producer and receiver, in order for meaning to emerge. Barthes stipulates that "image is re-presentation, which is to say ultimately a resurrection," essentially arguing that objects themselves contain little meaning *a priori,* instead suggesting that meaning is found in the re-presenting of the object as an image.[29] He supports this with the claim that "all images are polysemous; they imply, underlying their signifiers, a 'floating chain' of signifieds, the reader able to choose some and ignore others."[30] Simply put, Barthes touches on the

foundational concept of the communicative process that symbols must at least be assembled into signifiers by one individual and transferred to another for interpretation, this process is the result of what Barthes calls connotation.

An object or symbol acquires connotation when it is linked together in a chain of signifiers; therefore, connotation occurs as a result of human influence and interaction. Linking signifiers is the result of shared "familiarity" between a sender and receiver.[31] In the case of an image, it initially seems to present a subject or thing objectively, or what Barthes calls "denotatively," meaning without interpretation: the subject simply "is." But the camera actually and immediately obscures the denotation of the object due to human intervention. Barthes writes, "it is as though in the beginning (even if utopian) there were a brute photograph (frontal and clear) on which man [sic] would then lay out, with the aid of various techniques [such as framing, distance, lighting, focus, speed], the signs drawn from a cultural code."[32] In his own examination of the Italian pasta advertisement which ran in France, he concludes that the "Italianicity of tomato and pepper," coupled with the minimal text in the advertisement, relies on a French cultural "knowledge" of "certain tourist stereotypes" formed about Italy, Italians, and Italian culture.[33] The associative function of the tomato and pepper with text in the ad perfectly demonstrates Barthes' concept of connotation: an associative exchange must occur between the image creator and the viewer based on their shared French cultural knowledge of Italy to create meaning. But the tomato and pepper example also illustrates two notions presented by Barthes as branches of connotation: anchorage and relay.

The creator and viewer of an image or film must rely on at least one of two methods to facilitate message formation and meaning making. The first method, anchorage, is more

common to still images, wherein text specifically and independently situates the image. While the image and text are related, the text does not always directly refer to the image and ultimately does not need the image to transmit its message. In the advertisement, the text "Pasta. Sauce. Parmesan. An Italian Luxury," conveys the message and meaning without the accompanying picture; thus, the meaning is textually anchored. Film, however, most often relies on the second method of "relay" to generate meaning. Relay employs both image and dialogue, working together, to create a message and is vitally important to the message and development of meaning in movies, and *Interview with the Vampire* is no exception.

Interview with the Vampire relies on Barthes' concept of connotation and relay to organize several interdependent symbols to create messages and meaning. Meaning is diminished, or even absent, if the dialogue is considered separately from the moving images in film. For instance, when, in the film *Interview with the Vampire,* Lestat (Tom Cruise) scolds Louis (Brad Pitt), "You whining coward of a vampire who prowls the night killing rats and poodles! You could've finished us both!", it is not clear from the dialogue alone who the "you" is, why that person is cowardly, or how they might have "finished" the both of them, without the viewer first witnessing the series of images in which Lestat snaps a screaming woman's neck and addresses Louis, who sits with the woman's two dead poodles, all in the foreground of a mansion with a party full of guests. The viewer must relay meaning from dialogue to image and vice versa in order to understand that Louis is the "who," he's a cowardly vampire because he does not kill the woman, and exposes the both of them to discovery and possible death because of his cowardice.

In the following example, Louis tells about his journey with Claudia throughout Europe in search of other vampires. Barthes' concept of relay clarifies the necessity of a shared cultural knowledge between filmmaker and audience regarding images and dialogue, in order to create meaning about this journey. Louis' dialogue narrates as images of paintings turn as if pages in a book. The paintings, made by Claudia, are each a dark and muted representation of the different places they visited in their search. As the pages turn, Louis narrates,

> We reached the Mediterranean. I wanted those waters to be blue, but they were black; night-time waters. And how I suffered then, straining to recall the color that in my youth I took for granted. We searched village after village, ruin after ruin, country after country. And always we found nothing. I began to believe we were the only ones.[34]

Louis' sad and despairing narration enhances the dark and foreboding nature of each painting, drawing attention to the idea that he and Claudia searched many locations over a long period of time with nothing to show for it. The turning pages symbolically connect the paintings for the audience by assimilating them to the pages found in a book, relying on the audience's cultural knowledge that the turning pages of a book represents the passage of time. This knowledge must be in place for Louis' dialogue to effectively connect the pages, without the narration the effect gives no indication as to what the pictures have in common or what purpose they serve to the story. Louis' dialogue meanwhile is also enhanced by the images that flash by; as the audience listens to Louis' voice, they see the dark and grim world about which he is speaking. The images deepen the audiences' understanding of Louis' perspective because they represent a certain, funereal continuity about the world that Louis encounters. The pages of a book and the sepulchral tone accompanying dark and brooding images represent Barthes' notion of the floating chain of symbols that must come together through relay in order to create meaning.

As revealed by Barthes' concepts of relay and connotation, *Interview with the Vampire* is a particularly sensitive barometer of popularly held social myths, attitudes, mores, and knowledge of the audiences that embrace it, as well as other vampire films. I argue that the film adaptation *Interview with the Vampire* works as an artifact of public communication that, among other things, situates and examines male gayness and the same-sex family.[35] The primary goal here is to define how the film functions as a cite of understanding with regard to male gayness. In other words, the film constructs meaning with viewers concerning among other themes, gay culture. I pinpoint three gay themes within the film, (1) issues of identity and coming out, (2) identification of the other, and (3) the same-sex family, by combining queer film analysis with rhetorical analysis, while using the novel as a critical touchstone. Blending queer film theory and rhetorical analysis along with references to the novel, all of which I will individually discuss later, sharply defines the film's demonstration of these gay themes.[36] I consider how these three gay themes change between the novel and film, and assess how these differences influence meaning-making with the mainstream film audience.

Highlighting differences between novel and film underscores how certain aspects of the novel were included, excluded, or altered during the production of the film and asserts the film as its own keen rhetorical object, rather than simply a reproduction of Rice's popular novel. The film *Interview with the Vampire* resembles the novel in a number of ways: in characterizations, general plot progression, as well as the family theme. However the film does not maintain certain key sub plots which inform the viewer of the character development. One such subplot is the death of Louis', the main character's, brother. In the novel the brother's death is critical in establishing a gay text, the death's absence from the film shifts this central text to a sub text. In

The Changing Vampire of Film and Television, Tim Kane states that, "In order to revive, vampires needed to adapt to the prevailing audiences taste."[37] In this case, a central gay text would not have met audience tastes, transitioning it to a sub text makes the film more palatable for the mainstream viewer. Vampire films, adapted from novels and graphic novels, demonstrate an ability to satisfy the needs of the audience, making it a lucrative genre for studios and filmmakers. Since the genre of vampire films is one of the more well-known film categories, and is a recurring theme in the filmmaking industry, the appeal of the genre lies not with the story but with the exotic characters and the manner in which they live. The vampire novels which precede the adapted films deal with themes of religion, mortality, sexuality and sexual politics, as well as socio-economic divisions, all of which have more to do with the vampire character's presence than with the story surrounding them.[38]

The vampire character is a fruitful one for literature and film alike. Having been adapted and re-appropriated for film so often, the literary works and the resulting films not only warrant examination, but seem to demand it. As a celebrated genre of horror and fantasy fiction, the vampire has an audience primed for adapted screen versions of popular novels. Tod Browning's 1931 adaptation of *Dracula* is usually used as a reference point for filmmakers concerning Stoker's well-known antagonist.[39] While Browning's *Dracula* is often replicated, the earliest noted vampire film is *Vampire of the Coast* (1909).[40] Since then the vampire has been one of the most, if not the most, visited fictional character in film history.[41] Perhaps the most notable of classic vampire films is a silent, black-and-white German film, F.W. Murnau's *Nosferatu: Eine Symphonie des Grauens* (1922). A celebrated film due to its elaborate setting and chilling rendering of the vampire character, *Nosferatu*, is not an adaptation of Stoker's *Dracula*; rather, it

is inspired by it. The characters' names and the setting are different, as well as the characterization of Count Orlok (the vampire). For instance, rather than transforming his victims into vampires as Count Dracula does, Count Orlok simply kills them. The most recent vampire films have been the *Twilight* series, consisting of three films: *Twilight* (2008), *New Moon* (2009), and *The Twilight Saga: Eclipse* (2010), adapted from the literary works of Stephanie Meyer. These films focus on the human characteristics found within vampires. In contrast with *Nosferatu*, the *Twilight* series embraces the vampire Edward as a character with emotion and human-type flaws, as opposed to the cold-blooded, decidedly non-human creature that is Count Orlok.

The vampire film genre owes some of its appeal due to its well-established position as a cite where issues of gender and sexuality thrive, particularly in the last thirty years of the twentieth century. Tim Kane traces the vampire as a sexualized beast, in what he terms the "erotic cycle" spanning from 1957 to 1985, it is clear that there is a connection between the vampire and sexual encounters. It is not, however, until the last half of that cycle that the representations of homosexuality become a point of critical interest. Harry Benshoff cites the emergence of critical writings beginning in the middle part of the 1970s, he writes that

> In short for many people in our shared English-language culture, homosexuality is a monstrous condition. . . . For the better part of the twentieth century, homosexuals, like vampires, have rarely cast a reflection in the social looking-glass of popular culture. When they are seen, they are often filtered through the iconography of the horror film: ominous sound cues, shocked reaction shots, or even thunder and lightning.[42]

The distinct parallel between the lived experiences of homosexuals and cinematic representation of vampires, individuals who are both feared and hidden, is striking. It is an interesting juxtaposition where one of the oldest genres in film is coupled with one of the more recently

active civil rights movements in which gays, as well as others, are arguing against social discrimination, and for marriage rights.[43]

Literature Review

Vampires, their stories, and particular themes associated with them have experienced regular resurgences throughout history and have done so because of their ability to appease diverse audience tastes. This idea is supported by the continual re-emergence of the vampire genre, accompanied by distinct changes in the vampire character and settings in which they live. Tim Kane asserts that the vampire character has evolved from antagonist to protagonist in film.[44] He identifies three cycles in which the transformation of the vampire character can be seen: the malignant cycle, the erotic cycle, and the sympathetic cycle. Kane begins with the malignant cycle, a period of film from 1931 to 1948, in which the vampire is always characterized as a villain who preys upon the weak or helpless sort, who lie sleeping or unconscious. The malignant cycle gives way to the erotic cycle, films from 1957 to 1985, which show the character as a sexual predator of sorts, preying upon victims (usually upon women though not exclusively) with a combination of sensuality and sexual assault-type sequences. The last cycle Kane explains is the sympathetic cycle, showcased in films from 1987 through the present day. In this cycle, the vampire character is seen as victim, either as a vampire who is subject to the horrors of vampirism and struggles against their damnation or as an individual who falls victim to the curse of vampirism. Kane identifies emerging subsets of the overarching vampire genre and concludes that these different subsets are the result of changing audience taste.

While the predator and prey relationship suggested by Kane in the erotic cycle focuses on heterosexual type, Kane recognizes that homosexual interaction between male vampires and

male victims is nearly always understated and usually not represented directly in film.[45] This suggests that the theme of homosexuality remains under-explored in the vampire film genre. An audience of particular interest is the queer audience and the multitude of texts and sub-texts available within the vampire genre. Vampires and other monsters are frequently recognized as a site of converging themes of religion, sexuality in general, heterosexual culture, homosexual culture, as well as homoerotic, homosocial, and homosexual discourse within novels.[46] In particular, a sub-topic of recurring interest for scholars is the presence of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transsexual, and questioning (GLBTQ) themes of choice, equality and marginalization, sexuality, family, and culture. When comparing vampire novels and films, homosexual and homoerotic themes seem to be far more prevalent in literature than film.[47] Historically, there has been little direct representation of gay male-homosexuality in vampire films, though several writers and film scholars argue that sexuality and same-sex themes may be present in many films, dating back to the 1950's and perhaps earlier.[48]

In those rare instances where homosexuality is directly represented in film, it is frequently through lesbian female-sexuality, not gay male-sexuality, and the portrayal is normally cast under a negative light. Richard Dyer, in his book *The Matter of Images*, argues that "Although undoubtedly intended as negative representations, the very force and vividness of these evocations of female/lesbian power mean that films such as *Daughters of Darkness* (1970) or *Blood Beast Terror* (1967) might be appropriated as almost radical lesbian feminist films."[49] While Dyer acknowledges the existence of lesbian representation, he suggests that these are generally negative, that is, the portrayals are steeped in violence and often result in death; such representations found in cinema may be re-appropriated by the audience member and interpreted

as a positive representation. He seems to suggest that the queer viewer must find liberation, that is, when a group is empowered and appreciated for their differences, within confining circumstances, which are those instances when a text, in this case, a film text, seems to disempower, marginalize, or essentialize particular groups through negative character representations. The pressing question here is: do these films allow for a queer or gay textual read, and, if so, do they do so in a way that confines, liberates, or develops the complexity of the character's gay identity? Additionally, how might that portrayal potentially make meaning with the queer viewer?

Gays in Film

Here I will depart briefly from vampire films to describe how some scholars view the representation of gays in film in general. Gays and homosexuality have been characterized in cinematic productions and served covertly to an audience conditioned to recognize it. Vito Russo, in his work *The Celluloid Closet*, suggests that audience members may positively identify with characters by virtue of their homosexual portrayal or through seeing their own personal struggles played out on screen.[50] For Russo, the presence of homosexuality for some viewers regardless of its positive or negative rendering in film is important on one level because it simply validates the existence of homosexual individuals and homosexuality. Though the 1950s are a period decidedly closed to even the concept of homosexuality, one disputed example of covert, homosexual representation is found in the 1959 film *Ben-Hur*.[51] The characters Messala and Judah Ben-Hur, played by Stephen Boyd and Charlton Heston respectively, engage in conversation and a brief spear throwing contest in which Boyd can be read as playing the role of a gay man attracted to his long-time friend, Judah. The subtlety of the performance is at once

made more apparent with the incorporation of close-up shots, placing the characters in very close proximity. In some ways these films from what is considered the golden age of cinema, may be liberating for GLBTQ viewers while remaining hidden from non-GLBTQ viewers, as Russo suggests, because the presence of muted character traits and actions, confirm the existence of homosexuality within society while demonstrating its marginalized, suppressed position within culture. This argument posits that even though homosexual discourse in film appears with a face of denigration, by separating and marginalizing individuals because of difference, the presence of such images and themes provides a space for gay men and women to meet and feel less isolated.[52]

Homosexuality's position at the margins is contested by other scholars such as Suzanna Danuta Walters, who point to television representations of homosexuality, claiming that homosexuality is co-opted and normalized, robbing gay men and women of the ability to be gay, that, rather than being confirmed by the presence of homosexuality and homosexual themes, gay men and women suffer a process of mainstreaming which depicts them as *similar* or *like* heterosexuals instead of celebrating their gay identities.[53] A prime example of this point is found in the character Will, from the sitcom *Will & Grace*. Will is a gay man living with a heterosexual woman in New York City. [54] He has a job as a lawyer, seen dressed in fine suits every day and interacting with his apartment mate as if they were a couple, sharing grocery expenses, rent, as well as the other responsibilities associated with living; this sort of situation is similar to heterosexuals living together, as husband and wife or as families, and employing characters who have professional jobs, is seen time and again in many sitcoms: *The Bob Newhart Show* during the 1970s, *The Cosby Show* during the 1980s, *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air* in the 1990s, and *How*

I Met Your Mother and *Arrested Development* during the 2000s. Will's moderate, heterosexualized, heteronormative character is contrasted by the presence of Jack, a flamboyantly gay character who serves as the comic relief throughout the show.[55] Jack is a striving actor who spends most of his time attending auditions which exploit his overly giddy energy and general quirkiness into the gay stereotype of the "flaming" queer. Will's character is not so much gay, as he is an individual who lives as a heterosexual, who happens to be gay. Thus, representations of gay men are often reduced to stereotype or "straightened" for mainstream consumption; they must either perform codes of heterosexuality, or at the very least *seem* heterosexual, or they must play up general gay stereotypes of flamboyance and giddy exuberance. As a result the breadth of gay identity is swept into the anonymity of the heterosexual masses and is co-opted by the hegemony of heterosexuality if films or television programs make an attempt at representing homosexuality as anything other than effeminate. Many vampire films seem to confine the vampire as deviant, abnormal, violent, death-like, and predatory, thus confining gay performativity if a dominant, non-queered reading were applied. This juncture is where a queer-rhetorical critique of *Interview with the Vampire* may be helpful in providing an outlet for gay themes without consigning them to straight, heterosexual frames of understanding.

Gays in Vampire Films

Few scholars have attempted to locate male homosexuality in vampire films in general, or in *Interview with the Vampire*. Some research has applied queer theory and gay and lesbian criticism in analyzing vampire films and other monster genres, but most of that is preoccupied with arguing that the notion of homosexuality is a theme meant to maintain audience interest,

due to its exotic, marginalized, and often taboo status.[56] Norine Dresser and Vito Russo both argue, in separate works, that it is homosexuality's place at the margins, in relation to mainstream audiences, that makes it a topic of titillating intrigue.[57] Richard Dyer carries this a step further, asserting that female homosexuality, in particular, remains a topic of interest in vampire films due to its taboo nature and that its presence in film is indirect and perhaps requiring a queer read to actually see it.[58] A small number of scholars however have focused more closely on the purpose of vampires as sexual creatures, asking why a vampire's sexuality might matter to the audience. Andrew Schopp argues paradoxically that,

> the contemporary vampire product clearly functions as a site for playing with sexual alternatives, for acting out socially prohibited roles, and for reconfiguring desire. Though it can easily reinscribe heteronormative ideology, the vampire space has the potential to articulate alternatives and to contest dominant modes of structuring sexual desire and identity.[59]

The existence of homosexuality, as expressed through vampires in literature, is important for an audience because it has the capability to inform the audience about alternative sexual orientations while affirming those individuals identifying with the alternatives. In this way, vampire sexuality is a celebration of individuals who may locate themselves at the fringes of culture and society, vampires are queered. In essence, Schopp confirms that the presence of homosexuality in vampire films can function as a site of liberation for homosexuals from hegemonic heterosexual depictions but also confine them for some straight viewers at the margins; the homosexual while freed from a heteronormative portrayal is shown as being gay but is still seen by some viewers as something different, not located within normal society, and therefore at the margin.

Adapted films are borne out of literary works and therefore must incorporate several different modes of production and filmmaking techniques in order to produce a finished work that can stand alone while remaining a faithful relative of the novel. Scholars John Desmond, Peter Hawkes, and George Bluestone argue that since films are produced from multiple perspectives using a variety of tools, it is fitting that the best method for analyzing such an object be a multi-faceted one. The analysis for this project must be adequately equipped with different methods in order to appropriately dissect the film for accurate evaluation. This analytical critique employs several methods used in concert with one another: a theory of assessing the adaptive quality of novel and film presented by Linda Costanzo Cahir, queer criticism and theory, and analysis of explicit and tacit description to extract the variety of methods utilized by the filmmaker in constructing his film as a rhetorical object.

The difference between literary and film criticism is found in the different media; that is to say that the form and the function of each require different reading techniques. For instance, it is difficult to assess the visual aesthetic of the novel's setting since most novels do not include pictorial depictions unless it is of a particular type, say a graphic novel. Beyond this, the methods for critiquing literature and film are quite similar. Cahir states that, "At its most basic and constitutive, four fundamental qualities contribute to the success of a literature[-]based film."[60] These four parameters are (1) that the filmmaker "communicate the definite ideas concerning the *integral* meaning and value of the literary text" as the filmmaker has interpreted it; (2) "The film must exhibit a collaboration of filmmaking skills;" (3) that the film must remain related to the literature yet stand alone as a "self-reliant" piece; (4) that the film "cannot be so self-governing as to be completely independent of or antithetical to the source material."[61] These

four precepts of an adapted film, serve as a strong but flexible basis to begin approaching a novel and its associated film. However this list requires elaboration and an application of method to be fully realized as a set of definitive standards for assessing the adaptive quality of a film. Since these parameters describe the ways a film and novel are intertextual but also separate media entities, I use them as guidelines while examining the film in order to judge the heuristic differences between the film and novel. In essence, these criteria help establish at which points the film is representing itself and when it is articulating themes found in the novel: does the film digress from the novel's plot? If so, how? Are the physical and thought representations of characters the same or different across texts? These questions matter and are answered using these guidelines because they assist in simultaneously situating the film as an adapted and independent piece capable of engaging an audience. Determining when the novel is being echoed and when the film is asserting its own message, also helps identify the rhetorical motives belonging to the filmmakers, as opposed to the author.

Methods

There has been a significant amount of scholarship which looks at the comparisons of novels and their corresponding films. The journal *Literature/Film Quarterly (LFQ)* a part of the *Literature/Film Association (LFA)* is a meeting point for scholars to discuss the relationship between literature and film. While several novels have been re-appropriated for film, and have been the focus of much research, such as Stanley Kubrick's *A Clockwork Orange* adapted from Anthony Burgess' novel of the same title or Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* adapted from Philip K. Dick's *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, *Interview with the Vampire* has been left unexamined.

Through the use of queer cinema theory and rhetorical analysis, this research investigates the development and execution of messages in the film *Interview with the Vampire* which positions alternative individuals' lives and experiences subtextually for audiences. It addresses how the film makes meaning about gay themes and distills what, if anything, the film tells audiences in 2013 about gay issues and their progression beginning in the 1990s and continuing through the present. Essentially, the linking of queer film theory and rhetorical analysis, assesses the status and rhetorical significance of a film as a queer film. But first, I will situate the term "queer," queer analysis, and queer film theory, briefly discussing what constitutes a film as queer, to establish queer theory as one of my two central methodologies.

The term "queer" originated as an epithet against individuals who preferred to be called gay or lesbian. The 1960s was a period in which its status as a word was equal to that of "faggot" or "dyke."[62] It would not be until the 1980s when the word would be reclaimed as a political oriented term with the emergence of the "Queer Nation" which signified the community that was "inclusive of a broad variety of sexual identities and behaviors."[63] Queer, as a term adopting the perspective of multiple forms of sexual identity, sought to transcend the binary of homosexuality and heterosexuality. While the term experienced a reclamation and re-appropriation of sorts in the social sphere, queer also developed as an interpretive strategy employed by academics to investigate the history and evolution of sexuality, as it is perceived, understood, and expressed. Benshoff and Griffin write that, "Importantly, queer theory allows us to study the various concepts, images, and discourses that have been (and are being) used to understand sexuality."[64] Queer theory and criticism is thus an indispensable tool when considering human sexuality and film as reciprocally situated.

Queer criticism is a powerful tool because it does not presuppose an audience's identity. This method of criticism is important when considering the rhetorical functioning of a film because it addresses film as a polysemous object, recognizing the diversity inherent to the groups of people film scholars refer to as "the audience." As an example of the common view of audiences, Brian McFarlane asserts that, "When viewing the film version of a novel or play they [audiences] know, they want to find in the film what they valued in the literary work."[65] While we might insinuate that McFarlane means audience as in the readers of the novel, but then, who is that audience? What differing identities and demographics are associated with the audience of the novel? Queer criticism accounts for the notion that different audience members may have varying expectations surrounding the portrayals and representations than those found in the film. The queer critic approaches a text with the view that it may be available to several alternate readings, separate from the hegemonic interpretation, and may be practiced by anyone regardless of age, sex, gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status, and the like. I want to be clear here, while the term queer is often associated with notions of sexual orientation, I do not mean to suggest that queer readings *always* identify themes which fixate on sexuality. Queer criticism allows for an apprehension of a variety of themes which may be subtextual and which may imply sexuality while not explicitly addressing it.[66] Harry Benshoff and Sean Griffin note that, "Queer film study, then, understands cinematic sexualities as complex, multiple, overlapping, and historically nuanced, rather than immutably fixed."[67] Some of these themes may deal with gay or straight-ness, gender identity, other non-straight sexuality or gender positions, or any combination of these topics that may be found within the viewer, character, or text. Simply put, queer criticism

accounts for the intersectionality of themes dealing with sexuality and gender, rather than treating them as separate, distinct, and perhaps exclusive.[68]

A film qualifies as a queer text in a number of different ways. Benshoff and Griffin claim that "there are at least five ways one could begin to answer the question 'What is queer film?'" This question indicates that the qualities that define queer theory and queer film do not necessarily rest with a single characteristic's presence. Benshoff and Griffin assert that a film can be queer if the text: (1) deals with characters who are identified as queer, (2) is written, directed, produced, or starring queer, gay, or lesbian actors, (3) attracts individual spectators who identify as gay, lesbian, or queer, (4) is identified as a part of a genre that embraces the tenet of identity fluidity associated with queer, such as blurred sexual distinctions or identities, as is found in science fiction and fantasy, bizarre or monstrous notions of sexuality located in the horror genre, the creation of a hyperreal world where anything can happen, in films which employ computer animation, obscuring the distinction between what is real and what is not, or (5) attracts an audience that identifies with the characters.[69] This final notion of a queer film is a trait inherent to all films, making film in general available to queer criticism. In part this thesis focuses on how well the audience is able to perform a queer read of the main character Louis, and if that read results in audience identification of some kind with the character.

Since *Interview with the Vampire* invites the viewer to see the world through Louis' eyes, then that viewer assumes a different worldview than their own, a worldview which may challenge, anger, or threaten the sense of identity that the viewer brought with them to the theater. This discomfort may be so unsettling that the viewer simply refuses to accept this new world view, or it may be unsettling enough to invoke empathy or sympathy within the viewer,

potentially changing their sense of the world, how they approach it, and who they are within it. These five descriptors often "overlap and blur together" offering the queer film as a subject of queer-ness, in that the components which formulate the queer film, are they themselves, fluid. If we accept the fifth notion of identifying a film as queer, that film is queer when it transplants the viewer into a character, and we recognize that the film *Interview with the Vampire* asks the viewer to consider the world from Louis' perspective through narration and camera work, then *Interview with the Vampire* is a queer film. I demonstrate and argue that *Interview with the Vampire* is a queer film, through analysis. In order to understand adequately the rhetorical function of the film by utilizing a queer critique, I employ *explicit* description and *tacit* description. Seymour Chatman explores this concept of description in his work *Coming To Terms: The Rhetoric of Narrative in Fiction and Film* arguing that description functions in two different ways: explicit, which is a detailed, verbally affirmed description of an object or action in the film; and tacit, which is a non-specific, non-verbally affirmed description of an object or action. Chatman writes that, in contrast to explicit description, tacit descriptions produce "offerings [that] are at once visually rich and verbally impoverished."[70] This type of description supplies the viewer's eye with imagery while simultaneously depriving the viewer of a verbal description of what exactly they are seeing. I follow Chatman's theory by attempting to supply carefully detailed verbal descriptions of scenes to illuminate the significance of how the film creates messages regarding the three gay themes on which I focus.

Film must account for the ancillary descriptions, the unvoiced, non-verbalized details of a scene. According to Chatman, this is known as *tacit* description.[71] In the case of film *she* cannot simply *sit in a chair*, the filmmaker must decide what the woman looks like, how her hair is

styled, what types of clothes she is wearing, what type of chair she is sitting in, what color is the chair, what color is the dress, does she sit using proper etiquette or does she flop into the chair? These are only a few of the types of visual descriptors that the filmmaker must pay attention to whereas the reader may or may not supply all of those details in their imagination. Chatman's theory of description is crucial to this thesis because I use his notion of explicit description to illustrate the formulation and importance of subtextual messages in the film which engage the viewer tacitly.

Tacit description is a powerful rhetorical function of film. It is powerful because, as Chatman puts it, tacit description leaves "no holes."[72] When watching *Blade*, a vampire film released in 1998, we are given a scene late in film where the main character, Blade, is strapped upright, into a tomb with the shape of a human, where he is bled out so as to feed other vampires; the brown straps tighten around his wrists and ankles, securing him in position and the lid of the concrete tomb slides shut with incredible speed, heightening the urgency of the event. When he begins to bleed, the audience sees Blade wince in pain, the first sign of weakness and suffering exhibited by him in the film. These filled holes do not allow for the audience to arrive at their own conclusions about the text of this scene itself. The audience is not able to see Blade as a strong character or hear whatever suffering he may be experiencing in his head. Instead the audience is presented with a horror-show of him bleeding from his wrists into a tube from within a claustrophobic sarcophagus. By presenting this image, the film funnels the audience's perception of characters and setting through tacit description. We do not see fear in this scene, though we may feel it ourselves, because we cannot see fear in Blade's character. Interpretation of Blade's state of mind is therefore more limited than if one were to read the graphic novels

because the audience only has a finite number of conclusions to draw about the situations and characterizations portrayed. Blade is trapped and in pain, but fear, anger, regret, strength even, is absent from the audience's visual vocabulary. The inability of the audience to think divergently about the character and his actions and thoughts, works to control the audience's interpretation of the film and the themes within it because the audience is inundated with specific images of pain and entrapment.

Of course, asserting that there is a specific meaning attached to images and dialogue in film, seems to contradict the earlier described notion of queer analysis which decries that film inherently contains multiple meanings and is, therefore, available to several interpretations. However, the possibility of a multiplicity of interpretations of a given film or scene does not imply an infinite number of interpretations, and thus does not escape the necessity to defend resulting interpretations. Janet Staiger's notion of the "perverse spectator" supports the idea of multiple meanings while acknowledging the ability to have a single or limited number of meanings. She writes "perversion can imply a willful turning away from the norm; it may also suggest an inability to do otherwise. . . each case must be described and evaluated with care and within the historical intersection in which it exists."[73] Multiple interpretations are possible, but in order for those to be validated, those interpretations must be supported by the viewer using evidence from the film as well as from their personal experiences and worldview. Similarly, queer analytical methodology abides by these interpretive requirements because it depends on both the presence of an image and the perspective of the individual for interpretation to occur. For queer theory, perspective and viewer are one, without perspective there is no viewer, and no viewer means no interpretation. Therefore, queer viewers are as subject to the concepts of

explicit and tacit description as the next and their interpretations must be justified through the careful analysis and application of the images presented in a film, to the viewer's own lived experience.

Chapter Outline

The thesis will unfold along two chapters. Chapter two discusses how the film *Interview with the Vampire* serves as a rhetorical artifact that is focused on three themes centering on gay men: identity struggle, identification of the other, and the gay family. In utilizing queer theory, while applying Chatman's concepts of explicit and tacit description and calling on the novel as a reference, I assert that the film distinctly constructs messages about each of the three gay themes. First, I develop an analogous relationship between the vampire's experience and that of gay men, demonstrating how the film uses Louis and Claudia to address the first theme, the gay identity struggle. Second, I provide a detailed description and analysis of a critically important scene that supports the notion that *Interview with the Vampire* is indeed a queer film which seeks to inform the audience about identification of the other. Finally, I address the incorporation of the gay family found in the film, arguing that, not only does the film permit the gay family to thrive, but that it also vanquishes the heterosexual family construct.

The third and final chapter offers conclusions about the presence of queer rhetoric embedded within the film. It explores how the film was (or continues to be) helpful in understanding the shifting socio-political issues surrounding homosexuality in American culture. I will summarize my main critical points I develop for each of the three themes and note the implications of my findings, judging whether or not *Interview with the Vampire* was a subject possessing rhetorical currency in the 1990s and if it continues to have that currency today. I

present the limitations of research and conclusions about the research findings as well as identify other possible research areas available for scholarship, closing the thesis by documenting social issues that the film brings forth.

ENDNOTES

[1] For an extensive listing and quite engaging read about the history of vampire literature, see Mary Y. Hallab, *Vampire God: The Allure of the Undead in Western Culture* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2009), 2.

[2] Stuart Husband, "Anne Rice: interview with the vampire writer" *The Telegraph* November 02, 2008, accessed online February 4, 2012, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/donotmigrate/3562792/Anne-Rice-interview-with-the-vampire-writer.html.

[3] "Interview with the Vampire" *Box Office Mojo*, accessed February 4, 2012, http://boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=interviewwiththevampire.htm

[4] Roger Ebert,"Interview with the Vampire," accessed on February 26, 2013, http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/19941111/REVIEWS/411110301/1023.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Janet Maslin, "FILM REVIEW: INTERVIEW WITH THE VAMPIRE; Rapture and Terror, Bound by Blood," accessed February 28, 2013, http://movies.nytimes.com/movie/review?res=9A06E4D91F3EF932A25752C1A962958260&partner=Rotten%20Tomatoes.

[8] James Berardinelli, "Interview with the Vampire," accessed on February 28,2013, http://www.reelviews.net/php_review_template.php?identifier=1781.

[9] The notion of shifting characterizations will be addressed in greater detail later in this chapter, for now I stick to the different points of view held by critics. For more on the different vampire character types, see Tim Kane, *The Changing Vampire of Film and Television: A Critical Study of the Growth of a Genre*, (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2006).

[10] Scott Nash, "Interview with the Vampire," accessed on February 28, 2013, http://www.threemoviebuffs.com/review/interview-with-a-vampire.

[11] Puccio's review was written for the film's release on Blu-Ray in 2008, he is comparing the film to the then recently released vampire teen drama film, Twilight. What is significant is that Puccio recognized *Interview with the Vampire* as a film focusing on a vampire as a the protagonist. See John J. Puccio, "Interview with the Vampire - Blu-ray review," accessed on February 28, 2013, http://moviemet.com/review/interview-vampire-blu-ray-review.

[12] David Ansen, "A Feast Of Rats, Blood, And Wild Rice," accessed February 28, 2013, http://www.thedailybeast.com/newsweek/1994/11/20/a-feast-of-rats-blood-and-wild-rice.html.

[13] Ibid.

[14] “Anne Rice Has Biting Remarks For Tom Cruise's Vampire Role,” *Orlando Sentinel*, published August 26, 1993, accessed on February 28, 2013, http://articles.orlandosentinel.com/1993-08-26/news/9308260841_1_anne-rice-vampire-lestat-paula-wagner.

[15] Maslin, “FILM REVIEW.”

[16] Rob Gonsalves, “Interview with the Vampire,” accessed on February 28th, 2013, http://www.efilmcritic.com/review.php?movie=768&reviewer=416.

[17] Anne Rice, “From Anne Rice: On the film, Interview with the Vampire,” from Trinity College Dublin’s website, accessed February 28, 2013, http://www.maths.tcd.ie/~forest/vamipre/morecomments.html.

[18] Ibid.

[19] “Anne Rice Has Biting Remarks” accessed February 28, 2013.

[20] Perhaps Jeffrey M. Anderson, critic for *Combustible Celluloid*, sums up the spirit of adaptation best, “Movies based on extremely popular books always face a great deal of scrutiny. Most of the people that see *Interview with the Vampire* are going to have their own ideas about casting, script, etc. But given that this is basically a Reader's Digest condensed version, the movie does a pretty good sweep job. We get the basic idea, and we get some nice thrills and some good scenes besides.” Recognizing that there will always deviation, a film adaptation should do more than echo its source material; the film ought to preserve the story and characterizations found in the novel while branching out to explore and highlight plot points from it. For Anderson’s full critique of the film see Jeffrey M. Anderson, “Interview with the Vampire (1994): Screams and Rice,” accessed on February 28, 2013, http://www.combustiblecelluloid.com/archive/interviewvamp.shtml.

[21] Anne Rice, *The Vampire Chronicles Collection Volume I: Interview with the Vampire, The Vampire Lestat, The Queen of the Damned*. (New York: Ballantine Books, 2002), 4.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Ibid., 126.

[24] Ibid., 79.

[25] Ibid., 93-94.

[26] Ibid., 30.

[27] Roland Barthes, “Rhetoric of the Image,” located at http://www9.georgetown.edu/faculty/irvinem/theory/Barthes-Rhetoric-of-the-Image.pdf.

[28] Ibid., 36.

[29] Ibid., 33.

[30] Ibid., 39.

[31] Barthes uses the terms "connotative" and "denotative," which may be synonymous with "subjective" and "objective," however he never makes this comparison; he simply uses "objective," "denotative," and "connotative." This is crucial because the term "connotative" suggests that while there are limitless possibilities to how an image's "floating chain of signifiers" can be decoded, the term itself implies that the message drawn from those signifiers must, at the very least, be transferable and understandable to another individual by way of some shared cultural knowledge. "Subjective" on the other hand, suggests a certain escape from accountability; implying that the "floating chain of signifiers" may be decoded freely and limitlessly into messages that are not subject to the scrutiny of others. "Connotative" organization of the signifiers implies the existence of an element of proof, while "subjective" organization is responsible only to the individual doing the organizing and no one else.

[32] Barthes, "Rhetoric of the Image," 44.

[33] " Ibid., 34.

[34] Interview with the Vampire DVD.

[35] Peter Travers acknowledges the other things that vampire films can represent, "Some equate vampirism with alcoholism, depression, sexuality, AIDS — you name it." Peter Travers, "Interview with the Vampire," accessed on February 26, 2013, http://www.rollingstone.com/movies/reviews/interview-with-the-vampire-19940101.

[36] "Queer" as a term and in the method "queer film theory" is not referencing gay identity or even the "strange-ness" as it is colloquially used to represent something different, but instead represents readers or interpretations that resist the heteronormativity found in the film *Interview with the Vampire*. For more on this definition of queer see Harry M. Benshoff and Sean Griffin, *Queer Images: A History of Gay and Lesbian Film in America*, (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2006), 6.

[37] Tim Kane, *The Changing Vampire of Film and Television: A Critical Study of the Growth of a Genre*, (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2006), 88.

[38] The novels I'm referring to are, Bram Stoker's *Dracula,* Anne Rice's *The Vampire Chronicles*, Stephen King's *Salem's Lot*, and the Marvel comic books based on the character Blade, created by Marv Wolfman. Though I have not personally read Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight* Series, I have read a number of reviews on the books and films, which discuss these themes, see internet blogger Zainab and her review "Why I will always hate the Twilight Series" at the following web address: http://www.keepingithalal.com/50/post/2010/10/reviews-why-i-will-always-hate-the-twilight-series.html.

[39] Ibid., 22.

[40] Michael A. Delahoyde, "Vampire Filmography," *Washington State University*, last modified January 6, 2011, accessed February 4, 2012, http://public.wsu.edu/~delahoyd/vampirefilms.html.

[41] Not much is known about *Vampire of the Coast* (1909), while several websites determine that it is the first vampire film, it is left out of most discussions dealing with the genre.

[42] Harry M. Benshoff, *Monsters in the Closet: Homosexuality and the Horror Film*, (New York: Manchester University Press, 1997), 1.

[43] Though this movement began in the 1960s, it was not until the mid to late 1970s and early 1980s when gays and lesbians asserted themselves as a class of individuals with specific demands separate from the earlier civil rights movements which focused on racial equality. Benshoff and Griffin cite the removal of homosexuality from the American Psychological Associations list of mental disorders in 1974. For more on the gay and lesbian equal rights movement of the 1960's and 1970's see Harry Benshoff and Sean Griffin, *Queer Cinema: The Film Reader,* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 3-4.

[44] Kane, *The Changing Vampire of Film and Television*.

[45] Ibid., 21.

[46] Some scholars dealing with these questions are William Patrick Day, Mary Y. Hallab, Andrew Schopp, Alain Silver, and James Ursini to name but a few.

[47] According to Trevor Holmes in his piece "Coming Out of the Coffin: Gay Males and Queer Goths in Contemporary Vampire Fiction" the presence of homosexual/homoerotic themes in 19th century literature through the early 21st century is contested and far from settled. However he spends a great deal of time laying out clues which suggest there may be more to the association between vampire literature and gay sexuality than meets the eye. His allusions though guarded, infer a trend in vampire literature beginning well before the theme debuts in film. For more on this trend see Trevor Holmes, "Coming Out of the Coffin: Gay Males and Queer Goths in Contemporary Vampire Fiction" in *Blood Read: The Vampire as Metaphor in Contemporary Culture,* ed. Joan Gordon and Veronica Hollinger. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 175-177.

[48] Kane, *The Changing Vampire of Film and Television*. 44.

[49] Richard Dyer, *The Matter of Images: Essays on Representations 2nd Ed.*, (London: Routledge, 2002). 32.

[50] Vito Russo*, The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies*, (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1981), 245-246.

[51] Ibid., 76-77.

[52] Benshoff & Griffin, *Queer Images,* 103.

[53] Suzanna Danuta Walters, *All the Rage: The Story of Gay Visibility in America*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 216-217.

[54] Heteronormativity promotes heterosexuality as the normal practice for an individual to follow with regard to their every day life. Will from *Will and Grace* is an example of heteronormativity because he is presented as an individual who behaves in the way the viewer might expect a straight man to behave, living with a woman, having a good, higher profile job as a lawyer, and hardly shown in a romantic or emotional setting with another man even though he is gay. For more on heteronormativity in television see Stephen Tropiano, "Playing It Straight: Reality Dating Shows and the Construction of Heterosexuality," *The Journal of Popular Film and Television,* July 2009, 62.

[55] The counterbalance that Jack presents to Will's character in *Will and Grace,* illustrates Chris Brickell's notion of the "master binary." Brickell's master binary effectively argues that the gay man is always played against a straight or "straightened" character; that the straight character's straightness is heightened and even normalized by the presence of a quirky, gay counterpart. Further, the gay counterpart is better understood as a result of his balancing positioning with the straight character. For more on the binary of heteronormativity see Stephen Tropiano, "Playing It Straight: Reality Dating Shows and the Construction of Heterosexuality," *The Journal of Popular Film and Television,* July 2009, 62 and Chris Brickell "Sexology, the Homo/Hetero Binary, and the Complexities of Male Sexual History," Sexualities 9. 4 (2006): 423–27.

[56] Norine Dresser, *American Vampires: Fans, Fictions & Practitioners*, (New York: Norton, 1989), 152.

[57] Vito Russo, *The Celluloid Closet*, 32.

[58] Dyer, *the matter of images,* 32.

[59] Andrew Schopp, "Cruising the Alternatives: Homoeroticism and the Contemporary Vampire," *The Journal of Popular Culture*, March 1997: 241.

[60] Linda Costanzo Cahir, *Literature into Film: Theory and Practical Approaches,* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2006), 99.

[61] Ibid., 99-101.

[62] Benshoff and Griffin, *Queer Cinema,* 4.

[63] Ibid., 5.

[64] Ibid., 6.

[65] Brian McFarlane, "It Wasn't Like That in the Book..." in *The Literature/Film Reader: Issues of Adaptation*, ed. James M. Welsh and Peter Lev, (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press Inc., 2007), 6.

[66] Alexander Doty, "Queer Criticism," *Film Studies: Critical Approaches*, Eds. John Hill and Pamela Church Gibson, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 147.

[67] Benshoff and Griffin, *Queer Cinema,* 2.

[68] In addition to this notion of queer critique, the terms homosexuality, homosexual, and gay are often used interchangeably within scholarship. Though I prefer the use of "queer" in this work, to maintain variety and to acknowledge the themes I am addressing, I will continue this practice of interchangeability since the film does not explicitly identify one or the other. I simply wish to recognize that I believe a difference exists between the terms, gay, homosexual, and queer. Homosexuality and homosexual seem to relate to the physical action's one engages in, while gay and gayness deals with the identity one expresses or claims and queer attends to the alternative readings an individual might invoke. For more on this see Richard Dyer, *The Matter of Images: Essays on Representation,* 2nd Ed. (New York: Routledge, 2002), 7-9 or Harry Benshoff and Sean Griffin, *Queer Cinema: The Film Reader*, (New York: Routledge, 2004), 1-15.

[69] Harry M. Benshoff & Sean Griffin, *Queer Images: A History of Gay and Lesbian Film in America*, (Rowman and Littlefield Publishers Inc., 2006), 9-12.

[70] Seymour Chatman, *Coming To Terms: The Rhetoric of Narrative in Fiction and Film*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), 40.

[71] Ibid., 40.

[72] Chatman, *Coming to Terms*, 40.

[73] Staiger, *Perverse Spectator,* 2.

CHAPTER 2

Identity, Identification, and the Gay Family in *Interview with the Vampire*

Vampires pretending to be humans, pretending to be vampires.
--- Louis, from the film *Interview with the Vampire*

The film *Interview with the Vampire* illustrates the estrangement regarding homosexuality and gay men within the United States' culture of the mid-1990s, in part because of the spread of AIDS. Following the emergence of AIDS in the mid-to-late 1980s, social fears leading into the 1990s focused on gays, a group believed to be prone to contracting the illness. Gregory M. Herek and John P. Capitanio write that,

> Throughout the 1980's, AIDS was closely linked to homosexuality in the minds of many Americans. This association can be traced to the syndrome's initial epidemiology in the United States. . . . Early media reports referred to it variously as a gay disease, gay cancer, or gay plague, and some health care providers and researchers informally labeled it "gay-related immune deficiency" (GRID), reflecting an initial assumption that it struck only gay men.[74]

This early association contributed to the stigmatization of the GLBT community and more specifically, gay men.[75] While other factors likely contributed to a general disapproval towards gays, it is the association between AIDS, the politics of blood, and the gay community that is of particular interest when analyzing vampirism alongside gay culture. The vampire character Louis arguably represents gay culture, telling a story about an under-informed world surrounding the rise of AIDS. However, Louis also represents the misunderstood victim, specifically, gays and vampires.[76] His experiences as a vampire reflect the uninformed behaviors and attitudes towards gays. While he is feared and avoided due to his association with vampirism, gay men also experienced this same societal reaction of stigma for their association with AIDS. As the

viewer watches the film, s/he learns that Louis is capable of spreading vampirism but does not; Louis is unfairly feared because he has an ability to spread it, not because he has exercised it. Similarly, gay individuals faced discriminatory attitudes and stigma as a result of limited knowledge regarding the spread of AIDS, feared for possibly spreading the disease. The misunderstandings surrounding gay men and AIDS echoes Tim Kane's third, descriptively named, sympathetic cycle of the vampire genre, which claims the vampire is itself a misunderstood being. Unlike the other two cycles described by Kane, which outline the vampire as a monster and a seducer, the third cycle embraces the vampire as a being with whom an audience can relate.

In the film *Interview with the Vampire* the protagonist represents Kane's third cycle, in which a vampire tells a story worthy of an audience's interest and empathy.[77] The opening line of the film implies an interested audience. Louis speaks to a man with a tape recorder whom we learn is a journalist: "So you want me to tell you the story of my life." Clearly, this is a story which focuses on the life of a vampire, which cues the interest of the viewer, but because Louis is providing his story to a journalist, we can also surmise that many others might find his story interesting. Just as vampires were given a reprieve from their historical characterizations as frightening creatures and cast as protagonists worthy of sympathy, gays and the gay community were in need of dissociation from their earlier characterization as individuals who spread a deadly disease.

Interview with the Vampire contains three specific motifs that establish the film as a piece of queer cinema: (1) grappling with identity, (2) identification of the other, and (3) the gay family. I clarify these motifs by employing a "Queer" method of analysis, taking into account

the visual portrayals of, and dialogue between, characters to situate these themes. I will also incorporate occasional references to the novel as a critical touchstone to demonstrate the film's deliberate attempt to address these issues. I will illuminate these three motifs one at a time, while providing references from the film to support my arguments. I will first address the notion of identity under conflict, drawing distinctions and similarities between Louis' identity rumination in the film and the coming out process gay men may experience. Second, I will explore the existence of the gay-gaze, that is, how gay individuals identify other gay individuals without being explicit, and the film's attempt to demonstrate and represent this type of exchange. Finally, I will examine the presence of the gay family, two same-sex parents, in this case the re-presentation of two fathers and their daughter. However, before I begin with my examination, I will first explain and demonstrate how I carry out analyzing segments of the film I use to support my arguments.

Analyzing the Film

I begin with a carefully detailed description of each part of the film I intend to analyze, then follow that illustration with analysis. The first detailed scene provided in the film is in a landscape, an establishing shot of the harbor in New Orleans at the beginning of *Interview with the Vampire*. In the novel, Louis simply says "We were living in Louisiana then. We'd received a land grant and settled two indigo plantations on the Mississippi very near New Orleans. . . ."[78] However, in the film, in the silence before Louis begins narrating, the viewer is allowed to absorb a busy scene of people walking about, carrying barrels and other goods on their shoulders in between brown-hued buildings with smoke curling out from the chimney pipes, with the sail-less masts of ships moored in the harbor as the backdrop, the viewer witnesses a re-presentation

of New Orleans in 1791. The description I provided is a verbal one of a scene that Chatman defines as tacit description, description which receives no verbally-cued description in the film. Tacit description allows film to provide the audience with an ability to observe, without being told. Explicit analysis tends to favor literary description and operates narrowly but specifically.[79] The difference between explicit description and tacit description is enormous, and the rhetorical implications of each are no less drastic.

Tacit description demonstrates the ability of the film *Interview with the Vampire* to deliver finely tuned messages about gay themes to the audience. While explicit description forces readers to supply conclusions about the environment surrounding the explicitly described object or activity and draw their own conclusions about the setting, tacit description leaves very little room for independent conclusions to be drawn by the audience member. For example, when in the novel *Interview with the Vampire*, the narrator describes the first encounter with the vampire as "The vampire was utterly white and smooth, as if he were sculpted from bleached bone, and his face was as seemingly inanimate as a statue, except for two green eyes that looked down at the boy intently like flames in a skull."[80] The audience does not yet know the economic status, the strong or weak physique, or intelligence of this character. The reader must supply such conclusions as the novel moves along, while in the film, the vampire is dressed in a modern suit, gazing out of a window without movement, his facial and skin features are obscured by the dim light of an apartment, empty save for a single wooden table with two chairs. When he enters into the light, he is indeed white and smooth but there are pronounced veins and long flowing hair which is not mentioned until later in the novel. At this point, the audience is unable to back fill the characteristics of the vampire because they are given these characteristics visually. The

conclusions are fixed and rely on the audience member to suspend their own conclusions. By suspending the audiences' conclusions, the film controls how the audience views the character beyond the descriptions found in the novel; the character may be cast as confident, assertive, mysterious, offensive, obsequious, or with any other trait. Tacit description is what steers the film audience, while explicit description lets the reader decide character traits for themselves in the novel. More simply, the phrase "she sat in the chair" describes exactly what occurred and who performed the action; explicit description fails to describe what the chair looks like, in what room or place it is located, how it is approached by the character, or how that character actually sits in the chair, do they plop, collapse, or carefully sit in it? These two different types of description are the keystones to identifying the significance of events in the film. Where appropriate, I relate the scenes I describe to the topic I am discussing by analyzing the tacit descriptions observed in the film, then relating those scenes when appropriate, to the explicit descriptions found in parts of the novel.

Rather than analyze scenes from the film strictly in chronological order, I will use a topical method of organization to address my three motifs, beginning with grappling with identity, followed by identifying the other, and ending with the gay family. There will be instances of overlap wherein certain scenes will be used to illustrate more than one of the three themes. This is unavoidable since all three of the topics are connected. I will take the time where needed to revisit scenes detailed in previous sections and refocus them to clarify how they fit into the individual topic I am addressing.

Identity under conflict is the first theme addressed by the film. One example of identity under conflict is the comparison between Louis' reconciliation with his own vampirism and the

coming out process experienced by gays. I draw associations between the identity conflict Louis experiences as a human turned vampire, with the experience of closeting that some gay men have when interacting with straight individuals. As with vampirism, it is critical for some homosexuals to disguise, obscure, or hide their sexuality. The second theme I will explore is the method by which "othered" individuals, specifically gays, identify other gay, "othered" individuals.[81] The method is used to minimize the risk of exposing one's self to an unsympathetic, potentially dangerous individual. Finally, I address the presence of the homosexual family in cinema, attending to the explicit references made within the film to the gay-couple and the gay family through Louis and Lestat's shared responsibility in creating and rearing the vampire child, Claudia. It is the presence of these three motifs which help classify *Interview with the Vampire* as an example of queer cinema.

Conflicting Identities

To begin, I provide an example of description, analysis, and critique of the film's opening sequence, which leads into my first topic regarding identity. The opening credits are superimposed on a nightscape of San Francisco Bay; the camera passes over a clock tower that splits a conspicuous blood red, neon sign reading, "Port of San Francisco," and slowly closes in on the city. Cutting to a point-of-view shot, the camera then floats to the ground and begins a slow tracking shot, passing over two streets, through automobile and pedestrian traffic as if unnoticed. The opening credits end with the camera rising up from a street corner, where stands a darkened building with a blue neon sign reading "Hotel St. Mark." The film cuts to a centered back-shot silhouette of an as-yet-unidentified character with long blond hair, tied into a low, controlled, ponytail, peering out of the corner window of what we assume is on the second or

third floor of the building. Brad Pitt's voice quietly opens the dialogue, the character's back still to the camera, immediately giving the story line of the film: "So you want me to tell you the story of my life?" Though this phrase is uttered more as a statement and less of a question, he seems to be responding to a prompt that the audience can assume originated with the young journalist in the foreground, who is sitting at a tape recorder on a bare wooden table in the middle of an empty room. The young journalist facing the camera but looking past it with the other unidentified character behind him, responds not in the affirmative which would verify he asked a question; instead, he says "I guess that's what I do. I, uh, interview people, I'm a collector of lives." The character turns, revealing a fanged mouth; the vampire, now facing the table and the camera observes, "You'll have to have a lot of tape for my story." The journalist replies looking satisfied, "That's no problem, I've got a bag full of tape right here." The vampire asks, not really accusing, "You followed me here didn't you?" to which the journalist responds, "I suppose I did. You seem very interesting."

As I dissect and analyze each scene I describe, I may draw on other plot points or characterizations in the film to provide evidence for my claims, however I will only summarize those parts in order to keep the focus on the section at hand, avoiding unnecessary description and confusion. In the opening credits, the floating camera seems to represent an individual that moves unseen through the streets and among people, effortlessly avoiding vehicles and trains in the roadway as evidenced by the camera's consistent pace. Perhaps this individual is another hovering vampire. I surmise it is Lestat, the companion our main vampire character, Louis, speaks of throughout the film. While this is not verifiable, this supposition explains how Lestat would know when the interview is over, so he might prey upon the reporter as he flees at the end

of the film. Another reason why this might represent Lestat is because of his seemingly invisible movement--the vampires in the film always appear to move with a sort of ethereal stride that is at once obvious to the film audience, but apparently unnoticed by the other characters in the film whom they pass on streets and in parlors. In this way vampires are depicted as similar to gay individuals, living, moving, existing within society, as individuals who are at once assumed to be one identity, but whose actual identity is not entirely known, if it is known at all by other people.

The vampire's dialogue with the journalist (both of them remain unnamed for the first several minutes of the film), also indicates that this is an anonymous story that has not been told, or that will take a very long time to tell, when the vampire suggests that the reporter will need a lot of tape to record it. This need to tell a story, a long story, conjures up the gay rights movement which was in its earlier stages, still working to assert its voice on the national spotlight. Both characters, Louis the vampire whose name we learn as he tells his story, and the reporter, Daniel, whose name is never given in the film until the credit scroll at the end of the film,[82] seem to treat the occasion of an interview as interesting, though for different reasons. The reporter seems to be interested in learning about an individual who is different and unique, while Louis is looking to share his story, so that others may understand the conflicted life of some vampires.

Louis describes an internal conflict between his human nature and his vampiric instincts. Louis struggles in trying to learn where his lingering human qualities of compassion and respect for life fit within the life of a vampire, a fearsome monster who must kill and draw blood from its victims to survive. This conflict introduces the notion of issues surrounding identity, paralleling the conflicts that some gays may feel when faced with admitting their identity to others. Gays at

the time, as well as before this film was made, were met with fear, apprehension, or sometimes violence and were therefore forced to consider how to identify themselves around others.[83] This necessity to protect one's identity is first shown through Louis. Although Louis seems eager enough from the opening scene to be able to share and convey his story to someone who has the ability to disseminate it, he does not explicitly state an interest in giving his story to a wider audience until the end of the film, when he says, "Do what you want with it, give the story to others, learn what you can." Like gay men at the time, vampires must be careful in deciding whom they can trust in revealing themselves.

Just as a vampire is not immediately identifiable as being a vampire, a gay man is not immediately identifiable as being gay.[84] This attends to the idea that to know someone, to know and understand their identity, the person must first be given an opportunity to speak for themselves as well as given the chance to answer questions from others. Louis also demonstrates the gay man's need to protect himself by guaranteeing the safety and security of his story by taking care in controlling where and with whom the interview takes place.[85] It is not until the end of the film when the reporter realizes that he was in fact lured to the room for the interview when he states, "you brought me up here for a reason, didn't you?" Louis indicates the reason for the meeting is the interview in the beginning of the film, but confirms that he was the one who was following the young journalist, and not the other way around. In so doing, Louis controls the setting and circumstances of the interview. Also, it is understood that this reporter does not know exactly with whom he is dealing because he does not separate his interviewee's identity between human and vampire; instead he lumps Louis in with other "interesting" interview subjects when he says "I guess that's what I do. I, uh, interview people, I'm a collector

of lives." Since identity is not an immediately defined or apprehensible object, the reporter and Louis' exchange suggests that there is safety in the ambiguity provided by identity. Thus, this interview setting allows the journalist to get his scoop on an "interesting" person, while affording Louis the opportunity to share his experience with (1)safety and (2)trust provided by the (3)situation he controls, three requirements central to gay individuals in their own identity management.

Louis' interactions with the reporter are significant traits of the novel that are maintained within the film, and these exchanges in both the film and novel serve as a site for communicating to the audience the wariness of sharing one's full identity with another. The absent name of the interviewer character throughout the film and novel *Interview with the Vampire* represents the number of nameless individuals from whom the character Louis and gays alike, must conceal his identity. Almost immediately and continuing throughout, the film touches on this topic of divulging one's personal identity to a stranger, a nameless individual, with the first and subsequent character interactions between Louis the vampire and the reporter, Daniel.

Grappling with Identity

In essence, the film *Interview with the Vampire* tells a story which provides the audience with an opportunity to hear something they normally would not, the perspective of the other, in this case, the story of conflicted identity as it relates to homosexuality. Without a doubt much evidence exists which suggests a theme within this film and novel that focuses on situating vampires, clearly "othered" individuals given their status as monsters, as representations of the struggles experienced by "othered" individuals in real life, with particular connection to gays and gay culture.[86]

One scene in which Louis and Lestat attend a party, preying upon an older woman and her young servant boy, is particularly informative with regard to gay identity. This scene serves as an example of the recklessness by which Louis lives and the importance of keeping a low-profile. It also spells out more clearly the gay plot line where men are seeking or preying on other men while demonstrating that vampires, like gay men and their gay identity, are individuals whose identity as a vampire goes unseen by the characters within the film. As Louis and the woman sit down beneath a tree with her two poodles, Lestat walks off camera with his arm around the servant boy's shoulders, hushing the youth's lips with a single finger. The camera focuses on Louis and the woman, who assumes the man is trying a sexual advance. She remarks, "Now, young man, you really amaze me! I'm old enough to be your grandmother." He responds by moving his lips over the nape of her neck while eyeing the two dogs. The woman, not noticing the shift in his attention, appears to enjoy the kiss, saying "Yes, that's the melody, I remember it. [sic]" At the next moment, the shot focuses on Lestat who is feeding on the servant boy's lifeless body, he hears the woman shrieking "Murder! Murderer!" The shot shifts back to the woman and Louis, the woman is kneeling on the ground with Louis trying to quiet her, both of her poodle dogs dead in pools of blood on the ground. Lestat promptly snaps the woman's neck and exclaims, "You whining coward of a vampire who prowls the night killing rats and poodles. You could have finished us both!" This scene draws special attention to the action that Louis takes, while much less attention is given to his appearance. The woman only refers to Louis' age and nothing else, it is not until after he kills her poodles that she realizes what he is. Their presence at the party and Lestat's reaction to Louis further supports this assertion that the vampire's appearance is hidden and that it is dangerous to expose one's self by acting out of the

ordinary. Lestat's exclamation, "You could have finished us both!" indicates that Louis and Lestat had been closer to being discovered as vampires due to Louis' impropriety. The preceding scene of a large party in a plantation home wherein Louis and Lestat target then seduce the elderly mistress and her servant boy demonstrates that the vampires can mingle in close proximity with humans at party, while no one shows the slightest suspicion.

Louis' action represents the gay man's cinematic rejection of the female; instead of choosing to live by the accepted standard of heterosexuality and in the confines of heteronormativity, Louis literally throws the woman aside. Lestat's preference for the boy is immediately evident to the audience, but Louis' non-desire for the woman is just as clear when he begins to kiss her while directing his attention to the poodles. Louis' decision to feed on distasteful animals according to Lestat, in this case rats and dogs, instead of the woman indicates his conflict of needing to feed but not wishing to act on his vampire nature to feed on humans. Yet, the most intriguing and revealing part of this scene is Lestat's reaction to Louis' decision to feed on the dogs. Lestat's angry, almost frightened, tone contrasts with Louis seemingly unconcerned willingness to risk discovery by not killing the woman. In fact, Lestat's tone is indicative of the importance in guarding one's identity, whether it be vampiric or gay, even if Lestat is comfortable with it.

Throughout this scene, it is clear to the film viewer that the vampires in the film are different from humans. Vampires are characterized by extremely pale, nearly white skin, with prominent facial veins, long fingernails, intensely colored but oddly translucent eyes, and flowing hair. In the scene leading up to Louis' rejection of the woman as suitable prey, Lestat and Louis linger unnoticed among the humans surrounding them. The physical traits, while

universal for all of the vampires in the film and immediately available to the viewing audience, are largely indiscernible to the human characters in the film, who seem perfectly oblivious to these physical features. It is as if the vampire is able to willfully conceal these facial characteristics by virtue of their vampiric nature. Another scene in which it is evident that the appearance of a vampire is not particularly noticeable is when Louis is sitting at his dinner table. His servant, Yvette, sets food down in front of him, apparently only a little fearful to approach him and says, "We worry about you master. When do you ride about the fields? How long since you've been to the slave quarters? Everywhere there is death. Animals, men. Are you our master still at all?" Louis responds, "Leave me alone now, Yvette." She continues to stand near him and even approaches him closer yet telling him "I will not go unless you listen to me. Send away this new friend of yours. The slaves are frightened of him. They are frightened of you." Yvette comes across as a person that had seemingly trusted Louis at one point. When she acts somewhat afraid of him, she does not recoil as would be expected when someone is faced with a horrific monster. In fact she moves closer, as if to console him, which leads the audience to believe that Louis has not changed physically in her eyes, only in his attitude and behavior. She does not comment that he is cold or that his appearance has changed; instead she draws special attention to his actions.

Louis and Lestat's ability to conceal or to hide their features at parties, as well as in the presence of servants, is reflective of the real-world experience of the viewer in being able to move through the world and being unable to see sexual-orientation. Gays, like vampires in the film, are not distinctly different from other individuals in a physical sense but are capable of disguising their homosexual or vampiric traits of their personal identity to protect themselves

from societal prejudices. The vampires are situated as different individuals to the viewing audience by way of their appearance throughout the film, but are actually able to interact with humans as humans. They only act or appear as eccentric or perhaps charming individuals in order to lure their human victims. Daniel the reporter claims that he found Louis interesting and different, and that was the reason for following Louis to the apartment for an interview, but he does not note how Louis is different, nor does he mention anything about his physical appearance. Louis later admits to luring Daniel in by catching his attention, but Louis is non-specific about how he accomplishes this outcome. Throughout the interview, that is to say as the film goes on, Daniel begins to understand the full power of—and difference between—himself and the vampire Louis. Louis tells Daniel about the physical difference, Daniel does not ask. Louis also explains the different behaviors between vampires and humans and at one point even demonstrates these differences for him. For example, at one point, Louis, while facing Daniel across a table, suggests that they turn on a light for the interview, Louis is able to move to the light switch and sit back down before Daniel realizes Louis has left his chair. Another scene where we see peculiar movement is when Lestat effortlessly scales walls and crawls across ceilings when he is set on fire, all movements being well outside the capabilities of a 'normal' human being, aflame or otherwise. In all of these instances action is the key tell-tale sign of a vampire, not their appearance.[87]

Non-queer and non-gay viewers cannot ignore Louis' continuous struggle with his identity throughout the film. In the search for identity, the vampires in this film, specifically Louis and Claudia, continuously desire clarity with regard to who they feel they are. Both ask such questions as "Who am I?" "What am I?" "Where did I come from?" throughout the film.

Louis' affinity, both in the novel and film, for Lestat and Armand, expresses a sort of intimate love for these two older and more mature vampires. In the novel this love is clearly one of a gay nature because Louis claims that he loves Armand, not as a friend or brother but as a companion. In the film, Louis' relationship with Lestat and Armand is only suggestive of an attraction that is gay in nature, there is no such proclamation of loving another of the same sex by Louis or any other character.

Louis' struggle and longing for companionship can be paralleled with the difficulty some individuals may experience, especially gay individuals, since their identity struggles were forcibly hidden by the stigma surrounding the gay community at the time the film was made.[88] Louis wishes for death during the film and seeks it through living a reckless lifestyle; however, mainstream audiences might find this theme unsavory, as evinced by the reaction of mainstream society to the supposed "reckless" and "dangerous" lifestyles adopted by the gay community. [89] [90] I believe the film softens this issue in hopes of attracting a broader audience, rather than limiting itself to the queer and gay communities.[91]

In addition to Louis' identity struggle, the audience witnesses yet another identity struggle in Claudia's character. Claudia expresses her own identity struggle through her desire to be more like a woman and less like a child. Once bitten, a vampire ceases to show signs of aging beyond the age at which they are turned, so Claudia is forced to spend eternity as a child because she became a vampire at such a young age. She is visibly frustrated throughout the film with the fact that she cannot be like other adult women, even though thirty years pass between her birth to vampirism and her death. Her response to this frustration is in coveting the bodies of other women, instead of learning to deal with who she is and how to live with that. Her near exclusive

targeting of women as victims throughout the film, shows that Claudia clings to the hope of growing into a woman.

Claudia seeks to escape this bodily trap she finds herself in by coveting the bodies of older women. Though different from Louis‘ inability to define his identity as vampire and representation of the gay identity struggle, Claudia reflects a gay identity struggle in which an individual desires another of the same sex. While walking through the streets of New Orleans one night, Claudia stops and admires a nude woman, bathing herself in front of a partially veiled set of French doors. Lestat places his hand on Claudia's shoulder, saying, "Now that is pure creole, trust Claudia to have found her," to which Claudia responds by pushing his hand off and turning away. Lestat, apparently miffed by her attitude, asks "What? Don't you want her?" and Claudia responds, "I want to *be* her. Can I Louis, be like her one day?" Lestat looks at Louis, reproachfully exclaiming, "What melancholy nonsense! I swear you grow more like Louis every day, soon you'll be eating rats!" Lestat indicates that Claudia is holding on to something that she should let go of, paralleling her desires with Louis'. For Lestat, neither Louis nor Claudia seem to grasp the concept that vampires are unchanging, predatory creatures. While Claudia wishes to grow into a woman, Louis' clings to human life and rebukes killing other humans to live, choosing instead to eat rats.

This scene in which Lestat compares and contrasts Claudia and Louis' issues with themselves as vampires, examines the different ways gay individuals may struggle with their own identity. In suggesting that Claudia is like Louis, Lestat draws a connection that she, like Louis, is plagued by a problem related to her identity, one of being eternally a child. Where Louis continually struggles with killing, and questioning whether he is human or not, Claudia's

problem stems from her inability to change. Understanding that she is not so much a vampire or human, but simply child, Claudia's response is to use her vampiric nature targeting different women. To be clear, Claudia's desire to have the feminine in her life, is not a need to have a mother, it is not until later in the film, and only once, that she says she wants a mother. She hunts women because they are older and are able to interact with their world differently than she can due to her childish looks, looks which are often commented upon as "darling" and "sweet" by both Louis and Lestat. Claudia wishes to be something other than a doll, other than a child in the eyes of Louis and Lestat. Along with the act of giving her dolls, Lestat refers to Claudia as a child and accuses her of "pestering" him in the film. Even when he returns from the dead to exact his revenge on Claudia, who is, remember, actually much older than her body suggests, he tells her she is a "very naughty little girl," accentuating Claudia's physical inability to attain her true identity. Louis also treats Claudia according to her appearance, as if she needs guidance and protection, physically defending her by placing her behind him as one might a child, when Lestat attacks her, for instance.

In another scene, Louis and Lestat discover that Claudia has been hiding a woman's corpse in her bedroom; the nude bather in fact, who she earlier expressed a desire to be like. Claudia, Louis and Lestat see the nude bather whom Claudia is later shown drawing a picture of, while Louis' voiceover explains that "Thirty years had passed, yet her body remained that of an eternal child. Her eyes alone told the story of her age, staring from under her doll like curls with a questioning, that would one day need an answer." Lestat enters Claudia's bedroom where she is drawing the woman and gives her a doll. There are dolls strewn about the bed and Claudia responds to the gift, "Another doll? I have dozens you realize?" Lestat says, "I thought you

would like one more." Claudia asks, "Why always this night?" Lestat avoids the question by feigning confusion, "This night? What do you mean this night?" Claudia points out, "You always give me a doll on the same night of the year?" To which Lestat lies by saying "I didn't realize." Claudia presses him, asking and accusing him, "Is this my birthday? You dress me like a doll, you make my hair like a doll. Why?" Lestat begins to sort through a few of the dolls, continuing to dodge her questions, "Some of these are so old, tattered. You should throw them away." Angered over Lestat's unwillingness to respond, Claudia yells in defiance, "I will then." Frantic string music accompanies Claudia as she begins tearing dolls from off her bed to reveal the nude woman, lying dead on her bed. Seeing this, Lestat demands, "What have you done?" and Claudia responds "What you told me to do!" Louis who has entered the room due to the yelling and responds, "Leave a corpse to rot?" Claudia runs past them screaming, "I wanted her, I wanted to be her!" She screams at them as she takes up a scissors and begins cutting her hair, "do you want me to be a doll forever?" Louis pleads, "Claudia don't!" "Why not? Can't I change like everybody else?" She screams. After cutting off her hair, she storms past Louis and Lestat and slams her bedroom door closed and the audience hears her shriek. Louis enters the room to find Claudia looking at herself in the mirror as her hair grows back before her eyes. After she accuses Lestat of "making her what she is," she calms down and flees to the balcony, where Louis explains to her, looking down at an old woman selling flowers,: "See the old woman? You will never grow old, you will never die." Claudia admits, "I shall never ever grow up, I hate him. Tell me how it is I came to be this thing."

In Claudia's keeping of the dead woman, the film demonstrates two things about Claudia which reflect on Louis. By hiding the corpse, Claudia shows her desire to be more of a woman

and less of a child, desiring to be something different than what she is, however she also demonstrates that she is alone in this film, she is the only female character. In comparison to Louis, Claudia shares Louis' search for a companion, in contrast, Claudia's identity is very defined and concrete. She does not ruminate about it as Louis does; instead, where Louis questions and grapples with his identity, Claudia rejects it and continually tries to move beyond it.

In tearing the dolls off her bed and revealing the rotting corpse of a woman, Claudia shows the dead hopes for her own womanhood that lie beneath her doll exterior. Just as there is a woman buried beneath the dolls that Lestat has given her every year, there is a woman inside Claudia that is never seen by anyone except herself. Not until later in the film does Claudia find a woman, Madeleine, whom she manages to convince Louis into turning into a vampire. While Claudia refers to Madeleine as beautiful, signaling that Claudia has found a woman whom she admires and envies, Madeleine has lost a child and tells Louis that she wishes to have Claudia as a daughter. Claudia's frustration in being unable to escape her young physique is played out in her select targeting of women as prey. In fact the only time Claudia kills males is later in the film, when she tricks Lestat into drinking blood from two young dead boys, which appears to kill him. In order to accomplish this, Claudia kills the two youths and fills their veins with laudanum, which "keeps the body warm," she explains to Lestat, after he drinks from them. Aside from these two little boys, Claudia exclusively preys upon women. Her use of two young boys as bait for Lestat, seems to draw attention to the fact that gay men are attracted to other men, which further supports this idea that the film is touching on a gay theme: male vampires attracted to male victims and female vampires seeking female victims, however the use of two

boys to entice Lestat along with the young servant boy at the party, is a critical feature of the film because Lestat's victims and general comfort with his vampiric identity, serve as a contrast which clearly situates Louis and Claudia's individual yet related identity struggles for the audience.

Using two young boys to lure Lestat is the culmination of the film's reflection of the stereotype of the gay male of the 1980s and 1990s.[92] This stereotype is used as a counterpoint to Louis and Claudia's identity issues. Lestat's unorthodox and extravagant character, paralleled with stereotypical gay tones, sharpens Louis' and Claudia's characters by showing their struggle as having little if anything to do with being a vampire or gay, and having more to do with being a different kind of vampire or gay than what others know or believe. Lestat lives eccentrically, going after a variety of victims from young and old, black or white, male or female, which demonstrates that he is a creature who would kill indiscriminately. And while this characterization touches on the stereotypical view that gay men tend to have multiple sexual partners, it also reflects the belief that gay men were considered perverts, as individuals who deviated from the norm of monogamous, heterosexual relationships and shared multiple partners with little regard for age, ethnicity, or gender. Lestat's unbridled, reckless lifestyle, which he seems jubilant in living, eventually leads to his demise. In contrast, Louis and Claudia demonstrate a degree of discretion; Louis rejects his urge to kill nearly altogether, a sign of his identity struggle, and Claudia targets women almost exclusively, a sign of her struggle to obtain a different identity. This confirms for the audience that Lestat's behavior is indeed dangerous, situating him as a crucial hologram with which the audience compares Louis and Claudia.

In the film, identity is not so much a question of what makes an individual that individual, rather it is how do individuals know with whom to interact and how to fit in. This is a subtle but significant distinction. Louis and Claudia are not questioning what it means to be a human or vampire: they both seem to already know the difference between the two; however, they are both trying to learn how their identity functions in their world. Louis initially locates his humanity in his respect for life, not wishing to kill people, but this gives way to his recognition of his need to find companionship. His humanity and vampirism are both centered on this search. The film amplifies a gay theme through the same-sex relationships the characters encounter. Louis eventually encounters male prey and other male vampires besides Lestat in his search for companionship and understanding what it means to be a vampire, and Claudia turns to hunting and feeding on women as she grapples with her inability to appear mature and aged, a woman trapped inside a child's body.[93] Interestingly, Claudia's absence, symbolized by her death in the film, forces Louis into yet another experience with which gays at the time might have identified strongly: the inability to be a parent. But this is a discussion which we will leave until later in the chapter.

Identifying the Other

The framework of the film, set up as an interview, speaks to the question of how one goes about deciding who can be trusted with one's (gay) identity. An interview is one way of learning another's identity, but the film addresses a second way of providing one's identity, the gay-gaze.[94] The gay-gaze is a common method used by gays and is usually evident in television and film media. The film *Interview with the Vampire* demonstrates the gay-gaze at least twice in two different situations. The first example is between Daniel the reporter and Louis and is

detailed in a scene which I have already discussed. I will briefly revisit that scene, focusing my explanation of it to properly orient it to the topic at hand.

Though Louis is not shown revealing himself as a vampire, or person of interest, to get Daniel to interview him, it seems possible that Louis employed the gay-gaze to draw Daniel into the interview. At the beginning of the interview, Louis asks, "You followed me here, didn't you?" Daniel responds, "Saw you in the street outside. You seemed interesting. Is this where you live?" However, at the end of the film, Daniel seems to have an epiphany, "You brought me here for a reason. Didn't you?" Louis, not denying Daniel's guess, responds, "And what reason would that be?" Daniel exclaims, "You want a companion. You want a link to the outside world. That's me!" This exchange suggests that Louis must have revealed something of his vampiric traits which were meant to catch Daniel's interest to conduct an interview. We do not know what if anything, Louis did to catch Daniel's attention, but due to an inconsistency in the dialogue in the film, it seems quite clear that Daniel did not just "follow" Louis, he was also lured there. Remember that Daniel's whole interview is predicated on noticing something intriguing and different about Louis the vampire; the act of noticing indicates a communicative exchange between Louis and Daniel, especially when Daniel realizes Louis angled for the interview just as much, if not more than Daniel. But this exchange is a relatively weak demonstration of the gay-gaze in the context of the film. The second example which I will delve into momentarily is a more specific reference to the gay-gaze in action. The gay-gaze illustrates the pains gay individuals may go to in order to safe-guard their identity. The scene between Louis and Santiago represents a significant, and well-defined example in film of how the gay-gaze might play out between two strangers.

While walking down a cobblestone street in Paris, Louis is followed by another individual. Upon turning and throwing back his cape, he is greeted by a pale-faced individual who throws his cape in the same manner. Facing one another, under a bridge but at opposite sides, Louis raises his hand to his top hat, nodding in a silent gesture of hello, The mysterious follower does exactly the same, mirroring Louis' movements. It is apparent that this meeting is different than others that Louis has had in the film. When Louis takes a few steps towards the stranger, who is hidden by the shadow cast by the bridge, Louis throws his cape back from off his shoulder. While Louis does this, the mysterious individual imitates perfectly, he is in step with Louis and mirrors him by throwing his own cape from off his shoulder just as Louis had. Growing closer, Louis raises his white-gloved hands in a gesture of inquiry and the individual, who we now see is a man, does the same. The man is smiling as if he knows something, while Louis appears uncertain. Louis turns and walks to his right, and the man does so as well, moving to his left. Up to this point Louis and the stranger's actions have been perfectly timed. It is obvious, both to the audience and to Louis, that the man is not copying Louis, he is performing the actions in lock-step with Louis. Louis raises his arms as if to ask something, and instead of imitating him, the man raises his arms, bent above his head, as might a ballerina and begins to dance, breaking the mirror-like interaction. The man dances to the end of the bridge and begins dancing up the side of it until he is upside down looking Louis, who is still upright on the ground, directly in the eye. The moment he begins dancing on the side of the bridge, the audience and Louis understand the man is a vampire. The vampire drops to the ground quickly disappearing from all's sight with a flutter of his cloak. He appears behind Louis and begins to toy with him, bumping off Louis' hat and slapping him lightly in the face, until Louis grabs him

and lifts him up into the air, where the man floats out of Louis‘ hands. Not a minute later, after calling out “Santiago, enough!” Louis is approached by another vampire named Armand and given a business card, informing Louis of a show at the Theatre des Vampires. Armand invites Louis to the show and promises that he and “the little one,” referring to Claudia, will not be harmed, leaving Louis standing in the dark and empty street.

This meeting between Santiago and Louis ought to stand out in queer film history because it explicitly illustrates a gay-gaze exchange, a feat that seems to be previously undocumented in mainstream film or television. Indeed, the trading of glances still seems to be as far as Hollywood will go when demonstrating the gay-gaze up through today in 2012. *Interview with the Vampire* does not simply execute the gay-gaze, it provides a detailed example of it, demonstrating a full example of the strategic and clear method of tacitly identifying one’s own identity, which in turn elicits another to reveal their identity. In the mirroring that takes place between Louis and Santiago, we see some techniques of how one might identify one’s self to another. Cheryl L. Nicholas writes that,

> Eye-gaze is argued to be crucial to forces that either trigger or reinforce one gay person's perception of another person's gay identity during social encounters. "Gaydar" is the folk concept used within the gay and lesbian culture to name this identity recognition device. . . . These types of gaze can be accentuated by the presence of other forms of nonverbal communication such as posture, gestures, and smiles. Consciousness in relation to eye-gaze is also discussed to be a distinct trigger and reinforcer of gay and lesbian identity recognition.[95]

As homosexuality and gay individuals can remain hidden in social settings, similarly vampires are only seen by those with whom they wish to have interaction. Through a combination of gestures performed by Louis and mirrored by Santiago, such as the cordial touching of a finger to one’s hat or Santiago’s mimicking of Louis’ walk, or his actions all while making appropriate

eye contact; Louis and Santiago demonstrate the identity recognition device Nicholas terms "gay-gaze." As a result of this scene, Louis and the audience are able to identify the character Santiago as a vampire, which is confirmed soon after, when Armand, another vampire, invites Louis to come and see other vampires perform at a theater. These imitating gestures demonstrate similarity, and, instead of relegating this meeting to chance, these mirrored actions show purpose and compel Louis to approach Santiago.

The inclusion of a short, establishing shot of people attending the theater, makes it clear that the mirror meeting scene is simply unimportant in terms of plot advancement or character development, furthering the scene's significance in gay and queer filmmaking. The mirror-meeting scene is ground breaking queer film making because it is purely for the benefit of the movie audience to witness how "othered" individuals, in this case vampires serving as stand-in representations for homosexuals, can communicate covertly with one another as a means of identification. It is not really necessary to the plot of the film and does not inform us of anything new or special about each character. The scene merely introduces Santiago and Armand as vampire figures, but this is just as easily accomplished in the subsequent scenes at the vampire theater, where both Santiago and Armand have significant roles in the production. In the scene following Louis and Santiago's mirrored meeting, we see that the theater is obviously well attended and, except for a couple of scenes, the performance is enjoyed by most attending. If one were to remove the mirror scene, the film could go on quite uninterrupted, except that it firmly establishes that at no point during the film are vampires seen by another individual unless they themselves are a vampire and are employing the gay-gaze technique. The existence of the gay-gaze in the film speaks to the broader requirement of its use in identifying others who are

forced to hide in a similar fashion and serves as a concrete representation of the covert manner in which homosexuals must sometimes exercise caution when approaching individuals, especially if they are unsure of a person's attitude towards homosexuals or their sexual orientation. Concealment for gays is necessary to survival because revealing themselves is potentially dangerous. Willful concealment by vampire's is necessary because it preserves their ability to prey and feed upon others. Without this ability they would be unable to approach their targeted victim, making it difficult to obtain the blood needed to survive.

As the gay-gaze appears more frequently in film, there are two levels of gay-gaze which seem to emerge, both of which are in *Interview with the Vampire*. The gay-gaze is a documented technique of (1) identifying other like-oriented individuals, but it also serves as a technique employed by film and television producers (2) to identify a character's sexual orientation for the audience. Outside of the survival benefit afforded by the gay-gaze technique, the mirror scene between Louis and Santiago functions to inform the audience as to whom is a vampire, and how vampires communicate with those who share in a similar experience. As a parallel, the film also demonstrates how gays can be identified in other media through gay-gaze and thus paves the way for more frequent portrayals of the gay-gaze in film and television. For example, the character Salvatore Romano from AMC's television series *Mad Men* is shown a number of times gazing at another man, suggesting to the audience that he is himself a homosexual. However, it is not until he shares a gaze with another man that the audience sees him interact in an intimate manner with another male. The audience already knew of Salvatore's gay identity before he interacted with another man, but this was not confirmed until another man responded to his gaze. This same type of exchange is also found in the movie *Brokeback Mountain* between the two

cattlemen Ennis Del Mar (Heath Ledger) and Jack Twist (Jake Gyllenhaal), with furtive glances across the campfire or while drinking coffee. These glances simultaneously suggest to the audience that the two characters are interested in one another and that the characters themselves are showing each other that they are gay. Finally, it is also addressed in the film *Milk*. When the central character, Harvey Milk, argues against the accepted standard of hiding one's sexual identity out of fear, he claims that in order to be recognized as a real group it is important to "come out" to one's circle of friends and family. In doing so, a gay individual can prove that gay people are not as rare or uncommon as their hiding had lead others to believe. Milk effectively appeals to his gay supporters arguing against employing the gay-gaze when one is around family and friends in favor of simply having those individuals tell their loved ones about their gay identity.

On the face of it, *Interview with the Vampire* represents the plural identities of being gay and human in a heterosexually dominated world through the human-vampire character Louis. The depiction of a plural identity, whether that is being a human and gay, or being a human and a vampire, serves as an introduction to the audience of the existence of gay individuals who are able to control the identity they put forward, and who must work discretely through the gay-gaze to identify others like them. The portrayal of Louis' interactions with other characters in the film, particularly with Santiago, illustrate the fluidity of his identity as being neither fully human nor fully vampire, which causes personal angst for Louis. Gays too experience this angst, when they wish to tell loved ones that they are gay, or when they do not feel safe around others because they are gay, thus they turn to the gay-gaze to find individuals to whom they can safely reveal themselves. The vampires in the film are in large part able to remain hidden in plain sight

when around potential victims, a skill that is important and necessary for their survival. Gays and straights alike can employ this same approach, concealing a part of one's identity when among other gay or straight individuals, though not always necessary for their survival, past events suggest that such concealment sometimes is necessary, especially for gay individuals, which only heightens the importance of the gay-gaze. As during the 1980s and 1990s, one's status as openly gay is still today a reluctant topic for some hetero and homosexual individuals. For gays, it is because of the sometimes violent prejudices against them from both gays and straight individuals, stemming from the stigma regarding the supposed unsavory lifestyle gays are believed to lead,[96] one of promiscuity and sin, both traits which were associated with recklessness in the 1980s and 1990s.[97]

The Gay Family

Interview with the Vampire contains many cues which suggest parallels between vampires and gay men. A prominent corollary of these cues is the films attention to the gay family; it is perhaps one of the earliest mainstream, star-studded films to do so. Now that I have established the presence of gay themes within the film, I will now look at how the gay family motif fits in with the rest of the research.

The film's focus on a heterosexual family early on in the film, identifying a wife and daughter, as opposed to Louis' relationship with his brother, which is much more significant in the novel, might actually be a tactic to make the construction of a gay family subtext more palatable to a wide-ranging audience. By attributing Louis' behavior to the loss of his family, his actions may relate to the lived experience of the straight viewer or a broader, more mainstream viewership. Some critics may argue that this makes this theme a decidedly non-queer part of the

film, but the reference Louis makes to losing his wife and child in the film is fleeting, and such criticism ignores the fact that once Louis is turned into a vampire he does not seek a female vampire mate.[98] The film centers on Louis' loss of his wife and child as the driver for his sadness and despair, the two things which compel him to vampirism, but the sub-plot of his wife and child is a very small part of the novel. Alternatively, the novel spends a great deal of time with Louis ruminating about his brother and his brother's insanity as the motivators for Louis' turn to vampirism.

The film, on the other hand, removes Louis' relationship to his brother, instead attributing his sadness and grief to the loss of his wife and child. The re-appropriation of these themes from the novel is important to consider, and the very reason for using the novel as a critical touchstone. This plot difference between film and novel is key because, while it paves the way for a story line about a gay family, it also sharpens my critique of identity, particularly gay identity, within the film. Had the novelistic story persisted in the film, it may have limited the relationship between Louis and the vampire Lestat to one of brotherly affection, instead of becoming a subtext about a gay couple. The dismissal of the brother story in the film and incorporation of the wife and daughter story allows the gay family theme to be present in the film as a subtext because it is not possible for the audience to attribute Louis' attraction to other male vampires as one of an explicitly marked brotherly nature. In the novel, Louis acknowledges the loss of his spouse and daughter, but is more preoccupied with his own wrongful accusation that his brother was medically insane. Desperate to right his wrong, Louis is unable to muster the courage to kill himself, instead seeking death through reckless behavior.

The relationship to his brother, from the perspective of the novel, is what seems to motivate Louis' interest in death, which eventually leads him to Lestat and Armand.

Since the novel centers on Louis' loss of his brother as the reason for struggle, the novel does not have to construct a gay subtext. The gay theme is in fact a central text between Louis, Armand, and Lestat. Louis' love for his brother in the novel is not confused with his attraction to Lestat or Armand. Louis' struggle with his identity discussed earlier, am I a vampire or am I still human, is a theme which rises from the novel, but is re-appropriated in the film and presented textually; addressing gay topics and the subject matter of the gay family without incurring resistance some audiences might feel towards gays.

The gay family, that is, a family signified by having two parents of the same sex, usually men, sharing in a homosexual relationship, is a topic in film and television that seems to have grown in prominence over the past five years, beginning in 2007. There are some examples from television of same-sex individuals living together during the sixties, seventies, and eighties, such as *The Odd Couple*, *Rhoda*, or *Three's Company.* However, since these shows do not acknowledge the characters as being gay, these programs did not deal with the question of sexual orientation as explicitly as television seems to today. In 2012's television offering, the presence of gay characters is not unusual. While same-sex couples were not identified outright, no television show that I have found deals with the idea of child-rearing in same-sex households as readily as today. The ABC sitcom *Modern Family*, along with incorporating a nuclear and multi-cultural family, also focuses on a family in which two gay men raise an adoptive daughter from South Korea. The academy-award-nominated film *The Kids Are All Right*, starring Annette Bening, Julianne Moore, and Mark Ruffalo deals with the struggles of a lesbian couple working

through issues of infidelity and raising a family with two children. The mainstream television shows and films of the late 1980s and early 1990s mostly avoid this topic. *Interview with the Vampire* on the other hand, seems to address it. It accomplishes this in two ways, (1) in rejecting the traditional notion of the heterosexual family and (2) by dealing with the conception, birth, and raising of an offspring within a same-sex relationship, perhaps creating the first same-sex family representation in cinema.

In one way, Claudia represents Louis' tie to his once familiar heterosexual world, a world which is severed completely following Claudia's death later in the film. This particular separation between Louis and heterosexuality squarely situates him in the lived experience of gay men at the time. But Claudia's character also represents the notion of same-sex parenting, a largely undiscussed topic in the mainstream of the early 1990s. While gay men cannot biologically father a child with another man, and there is a dearth of evidence suggesting that gay men were living in same-sex family settings in the early 1990s,[99] the film seems to address the issue of same-sex parenting, a steadily growing topic in today's society with television shows and movies featuring gay-parent families.

Louis' reticence in creating a mother for Claudia symbolizes the rejection of the need for a female character to complete the family setting. The film *Interview with the Vampire* seems to reject the traditional notion of the heterosexual family further, by destroying two characters responsible for creating one. Claudia, out of wanting a mother, repeatedly asks Louis for a mother and Louis continually denies her. Claudia is incapable of finding her birth mother because her mother is dead from the plague, and she is also incapable of creating her own mother by turning another woman into a vampire because her small body lacks the strength required to

do so. Claudia eventually finds a woman named Madeleine who has lost a daughter, and bites her, putting Louis in the position of choosing to kill Madeleine or turn her into a vampire.[100] Louis reluctantly finishes turning Madeleine into a vampire and is shown sitting on the balcony of their apartment, Claudia is having a short conversation with him when Santiago and the other theater vampires abduct Louis, Claudia, and Madeleine. They are taken to the catacombs beneath the theater where Claudia and Madeleine are both placed in a tower with an open ceiling, allowing the sun to shine in, turning them to ash. Indeed, the abduction and deaths of Claudia and Madeleine occurs almost immediately following Madeleine's transition to vampirism, thus completing then destroying the only heterosexual family, vampire or otherwise, to appear in the film within a span of three minutes. Though Louis is not killed, his punishment is that Claudia, whom he continuously refers to as his love or his beloved, is taken from him and killed. His reluctance to turn Madeleine into a vampire mother for Claudia is also perhaps the presence of a naturally gay gesture which saves him from death. If Louis is a representative of a gay individual, and vampires are representative of a gay community, then sticking to one's nature and values seems to be rewarded with mercy instead of death. The near-immediate deaths of both Madeleine and Claudia serve as a reinforcement of the gay family idea because the film eliminates those characters that represent the heretofore traditional, heterosexual notion of family.

However, *Interview with the Vampire,* does not establish a gay-family theme simply by destroying the heterosexual family; the film actually goes a step further and establishes the same-sex family in what I will refer to as the birth scene, where Louis and Lestat in effect conceive and birth Claudia into the world of vampirism and both of them take on duties similar to that of

parents. Louis happens upon Claudia, a child whose mother has died of the plague. He is unable to refuse his bloodlust when she hugs him for comfort. Louis tries to resist but ends up biting Claudia and sucking her blood until she is on the edge of death. Lestat enters the room and surprises Louis, causing him to release Claudia. Lestat and Louis argue about what to do with the dying child. Louis refuses to finish what he started by killing her, also denying Lestat's pleas to turn her into a vampire. Out of horror for what he has done, putting a child into a position of death or eternal damnation as vampire, Louis flees from the room, while Lestat picks up the child's dead mother and dances with her, claiming "there is life in the old lady yet!" He yells out the door for Louis to come back. But Louis has taken refuge in a sewer, where Lestat later finds him and implores him to return to their apartment. When Louis returns, he discovers Lestat has brought Claudia back. She lays on the bed still near death, and Louis, though frightened, stands in the door way and argues with Lestat that he intended to provide "mercy" to her by way of death, eventually giving in, Louis watches as Lestat feeds Claudia blood from his slit wrist, completing her transition to vampirism.

Louis initial reaction to Claudia, hugging her, providing comfort is reminiscent of a fatherly gesture. Louis' resulting action when he can no longer resist her warm neck beating near his mouth, justifies his action as a means to save her with "merciful death," as he calls it. This too, the act of providing death, is akin to that of a parent and child relationship, where the parent provides for their child. While death is an unusual provision in the human world, in Louis' eyes, biting and killing Claudia is an act of kindness when facing the vampire world. In killing her, on one level he is essentially acting as a father might, in her own best interest. On another level, Lestat acts in a similar way, but with the opposite action: he calls her "a gift," giving his blood,

his nourishment to her in order to preserve her life, turning her into an immortal. This sort of language indicates a level of intimacy usually associated with lovers or the parenting of a child. This idea gains strength considering that Louis does not stop Lestat from resurrecting Claudia. Actually, Louis' inaction indicates that he wanted Claudia as a daughter, he is aware of the fate she faces if turned into a vampire and still he does not stop Lestat. In making Claudia into a vampire, Lestat gives Louis a daughter, replacing the unborn child he lost along with his wife, when he was mortal. It is undeniable that Claudia's life as a vampire is a direct result of two men engaging in one of the hallmark, intimate acts of vampire film, the drinking of another's blood, to create their vampire daughter. Louis initiated Claudia's turn to vampirism, while Lestat completed her transition by feeding her his blood. Just as with humans, no single person, man or woman, can make a child. Another individual, or at least another's biological contribution, is required. In this instance Lestat does what Louis cannot: he cannot kill her, nor can he finish turning her into a vampire. The scene in which Claudia is made into a vampire preserves the cultural expectation of the time that the family unit is composed of two parents and at least one child, while simultaneously demonstrating that those parents can be of the same sex.

Thus, the birth scene resembles that of the traditional heterosexual family construct, where the father and mother must work together to create life, except these roles are taken by two males. Louis committed the male act in the sexual exchange, penetrating Claudia, while Lestat emerges as a mother-type figure due to Lestat's giving of blood, providing the necessary food for her birth as a vampire. Louis narrates that he found peace through biting Claudia, and Lestat points out to him that he wanted her, and that in the act of biting her, Louis discovered his true nature, perhaps his nature to be a parent. What is most interesting here is that Claudia refers

to Louis as her father, while all but ignoring Lestat as a "father," calling him that but once during the whole film, compared to Louis' multiple father references. This solidifies Louis as a male figure, bound to another male figure, both in the intimate act of making a child, as well as through companionship. Even though Claudia does not refer to Lestat as father, throughout the film Lestat refers to Claudia as "our daughter." He also refers to the three of them as "our little family," meaning to include Louis as the other parental figure in her life. Claudia has a number of scenes where she acts out, much like a petulant child might, throwing a tantrum when she learns that she cannot be anything other than a child. For instance, as well as acting responsibly as a good vampire child might, she kills in the way she is taught to by Lestat. In essence the vampire characters are shown as raising a child, struggling with the struggles that any other family might when a child acts out and taking pride in her when she acts in a particular way. In many ways this is no different than the challenges that arise in a heterosexual family. Without digressing too far, it is important to point out that heterosexual families do struggle: they experience divorce, teen-angst, disciplinary issues and the like. While things do not end well for this homosexual vampire family, I do not mean to suggest that this is a result of their homosexuality or vampirism. It is simply the nature of families to experience these struggles, regardless of cultural composition. If the heterosexual family is associated with that of the vampire family, and the vampire is a representation of the gay individual, then the vampire family suggests that gays might be just as capable, or incapable, of raising a child and having a family as much as the next straight person.

The Chapter in Brief

The film *Interview with the Vampire* illustrates quite well the relationship between vampires and gays as an analogous one. The film's release followed a period of unrest in the late 1980s and early 1990s, marking a significant era in the United States' history in which gays were stigmatized due to an association with AIDS. Gay men and women, though particularly men since they were at the center of the AIDS outbreak, as well as straight men and women confront the existence and importance of a minority group within US culture and society through the film. Gay identity and the ability to identify others as being gay, are two important keys to survival and understanding. *Interview with the Vampire* illuminates the experience of some straight and gay individuals living in a society that does not very well understand the lived experiences of gay men.[101] The ability for gays and straights to identify others as "gay" appears in television and film from the late 1990s through the 2000s, however *Interview with the Vampire* highlights the ability and necessity for vampires and gays to safely identify one another, demonstrating the silent, covert method of communication called gay-gaze. The incorporation of gay-gaze in the film introduces an audience to the experience of the other; documenting the techniques, methods, and thoughts possessed by another individual in order to live free from harm. Finally, the film touches on the emergence of the same-sex family, focusing on two male father vampires raising a daughter together. This film may well represent the first instance wherein the same-sex family is presented to mainstream culture, effectively moving discussion about it to the public sphere. *Interview with the Vampire* stands as a cultural cite for individuals of all backgrounds to witness the themes of gay identity, identifying the other, and the same-sex family.

[74] Gregory M. Herek and John P. Capitanio, "AIDS Stigma and Sexual Prejudice," *American Behavioral Scientist,* 42 (1999): 1130, accessed March 30, 2012, doi: 10.1177/0002764299042007006

[75] I elect to use the terms "gay men," "gay community," "GLBT community," to assert the fact that the AIDS illness as well as a stigmatized view extended over a group of people rather than being applied to separate, isolated instances. For more on the outbreak of AIDS and the medical evidence associated with it, see Lawrence K. Altman, "Rare Cancer Seen In 41 Homosexuals," *The New York Times Online*, published July 3, 1981, accessed on March 5, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/1981/07/03/us/rare-cancer-seen-in-41-homosexuals.html.

[76] While the terms "gay" and "gays" are used frequently throughout this work, this is in no way an assumption that all gay individuals think, act, or live alike. As with any group of people who are categorized together due to their similarities, there is still distinct variations in attitudes, values, and beliefs. Therefore, source material is inserted as often as possible to qualify any assertions or generalizations made about gays.

[77] Kane, *The Changing Vampire of Film and Television*.

[78] Anne Rice, *The Vampire Chronicles Collection Volume I: Interview with the Vampire, The Vampire Lestat, The Queen of the Damned*, (New York: Ballantine Books, 2002), 5.

[79] Seymour Chatman, *Coming To Terms: The Rhetoric of Narrative in Fiction and Film*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), 41.

[80] Rice, *The Vampire Chronicles*, 4.

[81] The term "othered" can be found in several scholarly works, this interpretation is from Elizabeth McDermott's writing on "Surviving in Dangerous Places: Lesbian Identity Performances in the Workplace, Social Class and Psychological Health. This is a way of describing an individual or group of individuals who are forced to hide, conceal, or obscure their own identity for the sake of protecting themselves from the hegemonic tendencies of the culture in which they're living. For more see McDermott, Elizabeth, "Surviving in Dangerous Places: Lesbian Identity Performances in the Workplace, Social Class and Psychological Health," *Feminism & Psychology*, 16 (2006): 195-196, accessed July 7, 2012, doi: 10.1177/0959-353506062977..

[82] In the novel, the interviewer is referred to as "the boy" when, on the rare occasion he is acknowledged nor is it revealed until the third installment of the book series, *Queen of the Damned*.

[83] For more on the fearful responses and violent reactions perpetrated against gay mean, see Dirk Johnson, "Fear Of AIDS Stirs New Attacks on Homosexuals," *The New York Times Online,* published April 24, 1987, accessed March 5, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/1987/04/24/us/fear-of-aids-stirs-new-attacks-on-homosexuals.html; David A. Landau, "Employment Discrimination Against Lesbians and Gays: The Incomplete Legal Responses of the United States and the European Union," accessed on March 5, 2013, http://scholarship.law.duke.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1340&context=djcil; and Anthony R. D'Augelli, "Lesbians' and Gay Men's Experiences of Discrimination and Harassment in a University Community," *American Journal of Community Psychology,* 17, (1989), 317-321.

[84] Cheryl L. Nicholas, "Gaydar: Eye-gaze as Identity Recognition Among Gay Men and Lesbians," Sexuality and Culture, 8 (2004): 60, accessed April 1, 2012, doi: 10.1007/s12119-004-1006-1

[85] For additional information on the coming out process and its relationship to notions of trust and safety, see Rachel Franke and Mark R. Leary, "Disclosure of Sexual Orientation by Lesbians and Gay Men: A Comparison of Private and Public Processes," *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 10, (1991) pp. 262-269.

[86] "Otherness" or "othering" are terms which refer to and explain the positionality of groups or individuals considered outside of the "norm." In this case Gays have been documented as "othered" individuals in western culture due to heteronormativity. For further discussion on this see Tim Dean and Christopher Lane, *Homosexuality and Psychoanalysis,* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2001),131-136.

[87] The notion that "actions" are what spell out our identities comes from several works dealing with visibility and invisibility in culture. The premise is that individuals may readily disguise themselves within culture since identity, especially relating to sexuality, is not manifested in a person's physical features or mannerisms. This parallels nicely with the vampire story since the vampires in *Interview with the Vampire* manage to conceal their identities as vampires from other characters in the film, allowing them to prey on them. For more on visibility and invisibility in culture see Diane Fisher, "Immigrant Closets: Tactical-Micro-Practices-in-the-Hyphen," *Journal of Homosexuality*; (2003) 45, 171-173.

[88] There is much evidence to suggest that the concealment of ones identity continues today, though this is not the crux of the paper. For more information see Herek, Gregory M. and John P. Capitanio, "AIDS Stigma and Sexual Prejudice," *American Behavioral Scientist,* 42 (1999): 1130 - 1147, accessed March 30, 2012, doi:10.1177/0002764299042007006, and McDermott, Elizabeth, "Surviving in Dangerous Places: Lesbian Identity Performances in the Workplace, Social Class and Psychological Health," *Feminism & Psychology,* 16 (2006): 195-196, accessed July 7, 2012, doi: 10.1177/0959-353506062977.

[89] Several studies have been conducted over the years which suggest that individuals who identify or struggle with squaring their sexual orientation identity have a higher risk and rate of suicide. For more see Vincent M.B. Silenzio, MD, et al. "Sexual Orientation and Risk Factors for Suicidal Ideation and Suicide Attempts Among Adolescents and Young Adults" *American Journal of Public Health,* 97 (2007): 2018, accessed March 31, 2012, doi: 10.2105/AJPH. 2006.095943.

[90] Gregory M. Herek, "Aids and Stigma," *American Behavioral Scientist,* 42-43 (1999): 1109, accessed March 30, 2012, doi: 10.1177/0002764299042007004

[91] Limiting the film to an audience of queer identifying individuals would have been possible but the mainstream audiences of the time would not likely have even heard of the film. Now what defines "mainstream" is important but deciding what mainstream is, is not the theme of this thesis, for this reason mainstream will follow the electronic Merriam-Webster definition of mainstream which reads "a prevailing current or direction of activity or influence." Examples of films that catered directly to gay, lesbian, and queer audiences are *Making Love (1982), The Living End (1992), My Beautiful Launderette (1993).* For more films, see Russo, Vito. *The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies.* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1981).

[92] Many different slurs and names have been used to describe gay men, one of those terms emerged in the 1950s, "pervert." stemming from a belief that gay men, would seek out young children. In the McCarthy era and red scare politics, "perverts" was the accepted term used by news agencies instead of the possibly offensive term "homosexual." For more specific discussion related to this, see Rodger Streitmatter, *From Perverts to Fab Five: The Media's Changing Depiction of Gay Men and Lesbians*, (New York, NY: Routledge, 2009), 10-11.

[93] This notion of being trapped inside another's body, to the queer critic, might be fruitful ground for a discussion of the experiences of transgendered individuals. While this particular project is not focused on such a theme per se, it would not surprise this writer if *Interview with the Vampire* could be queered in such a manner.

[94] This term describes the practice outlined by Cheryl L. Nicholas in her article "Gaydar: Eye-gaze as Identity Recognition Among Gay Men and Lesbians," in which gays identify one another in public without explicitly coming out to one another.

[95] Nicholas, "Gaydar," 58-59.

[96] The everyday use of the term "lifestyle" often imbues choice and a competitive quality about performing that choice, which does not necessarily apply to gay or straight people. For example, some individuals may lead a "healthy" or "active lifestyle" which suggests that the person with such a lifestyle, has some choice in trading it out in favor of another "lifestyle." Many gays do not consider themselves as possessing a "gay lifestyle" because they are actually leading a "gay life." To clarify further and apply this directly to the implications of lifestyle vs. life, a person may perform a "lifestyle" whereas another may "live." One who accepts a certain lifestyle choice can escape criticism and stigma simply by "not doing that" or "making another choice," performing a different lifestyle. The difference between leading a "gay life" vs having a "gay lifestyle" strikes at the heart of performativity, meaning that an individual leading a "gay life" cannot escape, life must be lived regardless. Not to be too philosophical here, but the term "lifestyle" therefore essentializes "being gay" as a choice open to judgement and critique, embraced or abandoned, rather than recognizing that "being gay" is not really "being" anything, it just "is."

[97] Herek, "Aids and Stigma," 42.

[98] This is not to say that a gay individual would not be able to relate to an event such as losing a spouse or loved one, this is not at all what I am getting at. This theme would however relate more directly to the straight viewer because at the time straight individuals were the only individuals allowed to openly marry. This trend continues still today in a majority of states, gay individuals do not have the ability to legally marry a same-sex spouse. This culture of openness about ones spouse applies primarily to the lived experience of the straight individual. Incidentally, it is this gap in equality which allows critics to argue that this film is not queer, because the loss of a gay person's legal spouse was then and is still now, largely not possible under state or federal law.

[99] Smith, David M. and Gary Gates "Gay and Lesbian Families in the United States

Same-Sex Unmarried Partner Households," *Urban Institute Research of Record,* published online August 22, 2001, accessed March 6, 2013, http://www.urban.org/publications/1000491.html.

[100] The film never deals with the consequences of not finishing the job after initially biting a victim. Neither the film nor the novels seems to tell us what happens to a person after they've been bitten but haven't been turned. These are holes that are left unanswered and which I was unable to find in other pieces of vampire literature or film. It may have been a logical oversight in the film, while other films and literature seem to suggest that turning occurs because of the bite, *Interview with the Vampire* shows that a person who has been bitten, must drink blood from a vampire to complete the transition.

[101] Just because American culture was learning about and grappling with gay culture at the time, does not at all imply that straight culture was understood. Though perhaps supported by a general sense of heteronormativity, straight culture's "general acceptance" and re-presentation throughout the 1980s and 1990s, is hardly more than evidence that the culture of "straightness" was acknowledged and established, not that it was understood.

CHAPTER 3

Implications, Limitations, and Opportunities

So there are no vampires in Transylvania?
--- The Reporter, from the film *Interview with the Vampire*

Interconnectedness Among Themes

The film *Interview with the Vampire*'s status as queer cinema relates to three queer themes addressed in this thesis: (1) the individual struggle with identity, (2) the communicative technique of gay-gaze, (3) and the representation of the gay family, defined as same-sex parents leading a family environment. These three themes weave together throughout the story, demonstrating the complexity of a queer protagonist and other queer characters around him. Many scholars argue that the seduction of victims as well as the vampiric sucking of blood are actions which imitate eroticism and sexual intercourse, therefore, presenting two male characters as vampires engaging in such activities, would situate those characters in the film as queer.[102] Thus, the incorporation of these three themes in the film, along with the inclusion of numerous queer characters with whom the audience can relate, supports the conclusion that *Interview with a Vampire* is a queer film.[103]

While audiences may experience another's perspective through film, this research argues that the film *Interview with the Vampire* offers not only another's perspective, but a point of view that is different from the audience's own while demonstrating that the "different" perspective is not so different. The film achieves this because of the societal reaction to the AIDS crisis of the 1980's. Researchers, the government, and the general public did not know how AIDS was transmitted, just that gay men seemed to be the source. In response, society in the 1980's and

90's generally treated gay men differently because they seemed to be different; gay men were also responsible for spreading AIDS. This film however, through the vampire character, works to show that gay men were not so different or dangerous, only misunderstood. Louis is not a character that is reviled so much as sorrowful and contemplative. The film presents the viewer with the one-of-a-kind opportunity to adopt the perspective of a not-so-different, maybe even similar person, in the vampire character Louis. The relate-ability of an audience to a character is something many cinema scholars argue that films in general offer; by their nature, films present audiences with characters with whom they can identify. Cinema accomplishes this to some degree, but few outside of queer theorists seem to be interested in why this story-telling technique, wherein the audience identifies with the character, is significant. Queer theorists argue that the presence of queer characters perhaps deepens this relatable experience, Benshoff and Griffin claim that cinema is queer when the audience has the opportunity to approach the world through another's perspective, namely a queer character's.[104] If Louis and the other vampire characters stand in for (or parallel) the gay perspective, which qualifies as a queer perspective, then by association this film offers a glimpse into the lived experiences of gay individuals. Therefore, in providing a basis for understanding differences and similarities, this work and this film represent a queer critique.

On a basic, yet important, level, the film *Interview with the Vampire* illustrates the interdependent relationship between the three examined themes, showing that gay individuals, as with any other individual, including vampires, might learn who they are as they grow into their identity, seek out other like-oriented individuals with whom they can identify, and would have interest in being a part of a family. The synonymous relationship established here between

vampires and gays is reinforced by the natural interconnectedness of the three themes (gay identity struggle, identification of the other, and the gay family). The three motifs examined in this paper are not easily separable, but this works to the benefit of each in a reciprocal sense, wherein each individual theme supports the other two. The first theme, grappling with identity, informs the second and third motifs, identifying the other, and the gay family. Struggling to understand one's self leads Louis on a search to find other vampires. This journey teaches him how to identify other vampires and brings him closer to his vampire family.[105] This symbolically parallels the situation where some gays seek out communities in which they feel safe and can learn about their own world-view, bringing many closer together and providing a platform for issues important to them.[106] The second motif, identifying the other, introduces Louis to other vampires and allows him a glance into how other vampires deal with their identity, also giving him an appreciation for his vampire family, the third motif. He does not particularly like how the vampires in France live and spites them for their inability to identify with his experience with Lestat and killing his beloved daughter Claudia. In learning about other gays' experiences, differences of opinion form. Those differences, for better or worse, work to inform gay and straight individuals alike that a variety of life experiences exist and that those experiences are not all that different from their own. The third topic of the gay family emerges because, to put it bluntly, without gays there is no way for a gay family structure to exist. But the presence of the vampire family, standing in for the gay family, also shows that a gay family is more or less similar to a heterosexual one. The key here is that the interconnectedness of the three themes actually brings the audience closer to the perspective of the other, by realizing that the perspective they are presented with on screen is not all that different from their own.

Implications

Research in communication studies, queer studies, and film studies are all represented. The project is communication driven because it is concerned with the rhetorical function of film, developing and passing a message to an audience. It strengthens and reinforces previous research by pointing to the presence of alternative themes found in mainstream film and argues that these alternative messages are, in fact, available to non-code-reading audience members. It expands on and details the suggestions made by Harry Benshoff in his work *Monsters in the Closet.* In this work Benshoff claims *Interview with the Vampire* as an example of contemporary queer cinema within the horror genre. He provides insightful suggestions about several different queer themes that seem to exist in the film, though not detailing their presence or discussing the reasoning behind the inclusion of queer motifs within the film. I expand on Benshoff's notion that the film *Interview with the Vampire* incorporates a theme surrounding the queer family, a family wherein both parents are of the same sex. Benshoff suggests its presence but offers no actual evidence or rationalization supporting his claim. This project not only provides such evidence, but it also reveals that this may have been the first mainstream, major motion picture to deal with the topic. This is particularly germane in a time when the gay family seems to be a more acceptable and popular topic within mainstream media.[107] Along with the gay family, the presence of more eccentric, and therefore more apparent, gay characters have emerged in the 2000's and are available to mainstream audiences.[108]

The connection between the novel and film is documented by using certain plot, dialogue, and description points found in the book as reference points to support the themes that surface in the film. This research takes a film that was fairly popular when it first came out, and establishes

it as a rhetorical artifact which arose at a time of shifting cultural attitudes towards gays. While scant film critiques or reviews can be found which suggest that this film addresses interests concerning a particular subculture beyond vampire enthusiasts, there is plenty of evidence to suggest that this film is making a deliberate effort in expressing alternative views associated with queer audiences. The original novel attends to gay and queer themes, and since the film follows the novel to a certain degree, this suggests that there is an actual attempt being made by the film's crew and producers to maintain those themes. The preceding pages demonstrate that not only are these themes present, but in some cases they are amplified, through the use of make-up, scene setting, dialogue, and character interactions. This project seems to be the first to consider this film in such detail while relating those elements to the three gay themes I define.

Method of Research

The influence from both methods, queer film criticism and Seymour Chatman's theory of explicit and tacit description as it applies to narrative, shapes an understanding of the film based on two different yet related perspectives. Each method informs the other, while simultaneously examining two critical parts of the rhetorical process, message and transmission. The methodological approach found in this study is a hybrid of queer film critique, which falls under the wider umbrella of film criticism, and Chatman's theory of the rhetorical function of narrative in fiction and film which derives from the rhetorical tradition. The fusion of these two methods allows the scholar to examine the film with a particular audience in mind, in this case the queer viewer, while also considering how messages are developed, tailored, and presented to a mainstream audience. The distinctive physical characteristics and abilities of the vampires in *Interview with the Vampire*, such as Louis' and Lestat's pale, almost translucent skin, or

Santiago's ability to defy gravity and stand upside down in the mirror sequence under the bridge, are examples of how well this hybrid method works. On the one hand, Chatman's theory of tacit description (the non-verbal description of an object) immediately informs the audience that they are viewing someone, or something completely different from themselves, and on the other hand, queer critique identifies the gay-gaze and clarifies just what that something different is: a covert exchange of symbolic gestures which aid characters in identifying one another. Claudia's continual treatment as a child by Louis and Lestat, even though her chronological age is well beyond adulthood in both the novel and film, is a good example of the analytical accomplishment possible when combining these two methods. Chatman's theory of explicit and tacit description helps the audience recognize that Claudia is actually quite older than she is, due to her actions and her acute questions, while queer criticism situates her as an individual who is struggling to understand who she is and what her desires are.

This method also focuses on locating and distilling particular messages related to homosexuality, primarily gay themes, and the inclusion of them in the film *Interview with the Vampire*. The best example of this methodological function is in examining the third motif of the gay family. While there are cues in the dialogue which suggest that the three vampires consider themselves a family, the non-verbal, tacit descriptors such as Louis' love for Claudia, Lestat's fatherly scolding of Claudia as a "naughty little girl," or Claudia's affection for Louis as a father figure, sleeping in his coffin with him or hiding behind him when Lestat returns from the dead, all serve as excellent markers of Chatman's theory at work. Queer criticism situates the family as a gay family because of the ground work it provides in paralleling the vampire characters, specifically the males, as gay men. Without queer criticism to orient the characters sexuality and

Chatman's theory to concretely define the family, the theory of the gay family theme is weak, if not lost altogether.

Limitations and Opportunities for Future Research

While informative, particularly with regard to the gay family and film, the method and conclusions made are limited due to scope. Missing from the analysis are discussions about sexuality as it relates to female homosexuality and heterosexuality. While this topic does get some recognition because of Claudia's character and her struggle with identity, this thesis focuses more on gay men's experience with AIDS and the discrimination it invoked, rather than on gay women's experiences. Such examinations however, would be helpful as reference points to strengthen the arguments made in this paper about *Interview with the Vampire*'s place as a pivotal queer film.

A more comprehensive study examining the cultural, social, and political shifts regarding gays and the gay community would help locate the significance of *Interview with the Vampire.* One question that lingers is why was there an eighteen-year gap between when the novel was published in 1976 and the film's production in 1994? Perhaps cultural and/or socio-political reasons account for this gap, but then queer criticism suggests that many older films also demonstrate queer themes sub-textually and a growing number of current films and television shows openly touch on queer themes, the question becomes which films stand out in history and why?[109] It seems that as time goes on society becomes increasingly tolerant, if not out right accepting, of socio-political changes, in this case increasing social acceptance of new minority groups such as blacks, women, and gays may be the foundation for audience identification. The civil rights movement for blacks in the 1960's, the re-establishment of feminism as a strong

movement in the 1960's, 70's and 80's, and the gay rights movement beginning in the late 1980's through the 2010's, all feature a growing number of individuals from those minority groups in films and television in the years immediately following each movement's emergence. To name just a few: the 70's have *Shaft, Different Strokes*, and *Good Times*; the 70's and 80's have *Three's Company, Rhoda*, and *Mary Tyler Moore*; the 90's have *Philadelphia, The Bird Cage*, and *Will & Grace*; the 2000's have *Modern Family, A Single Man,* and *The Kids Are Alright.*

The salience of particular sentiments, characteristics, emotions, or actions taken by a character, relies on the viewer's ability to identify with that character; indicating that the viewer must have some reference point or social experience that provides for identification to occur, that reference point may be the changing social climate in which audiences find themselves. Janet Staiger asserts that "Reception occurs to an individual as both a psychological and sociological experience."[110] So the very idea that a viewer may identify and be changed as a result, suggests that both the social environment surrounding the individual and the cognitive manner in which s/he approaches the film matters if identification is to take place between viewer and character. *Interview with the Vampire* supplies an opportunity for the audience to engage the vampire character as a socially situated figure as well as an individually appealing one. Louis is different, that is why the interview between him and the reporter occurs in the first place; he is different than other people, "interesting" is the word the reporter uses. Louis is obviously treated as different in social settings if he exposes himself as being a vampire, so in society he is restrained. Gays fall into a similar category where the way in which they are treated differs depending on the social surroundings in which they find themselves; some individuals may be indifferent about a gay person in their midst, while others may react with hostility. Therefore, some gay men

experience social restraint just as Louis does, this characterization represents the sociological experience of identification that Staiger references. *Interview with a Vampire* also engages the viewer on a psychological level by presenting a protagonist that, though different, is compelling because the audience is able to see themselves in him. For instance, the viewer is able to identify with the repulsive feeling and thought Louis describes when talking about sucking the blood of another living human. Yet at the same time Louis' description of bliss and comfort is also engaging because the audience member has a strong idea of the meaning associated with satisfying one's needs to survive. The audience members' needs, such as eating when hungry, sleeping when exhausted, or drinking when thirsty, while perhaps different for each individual still strike a chord with Louis' because each member can comprehend the feeling that accompanies satisfying that critical need. Another example is in Louis' search for companionship. Most audience members would have some notion of desiring companionship, whether it is with a friend, family member, or a lover. The point here is that *Interview with the Vampire* is psychologically engaging because it touches on basic compulsions with which most audience members can identify.

Another engaging feature of the film not examined here but certainly worth academic assessment, is the allegory of infection. *Interview with the Vampire* contains several instances where the exchange of blood occurs and the threat of transition to vampirism lurks close behind it. This not only draws attention to the association of blood born diseases such as AIDS with vampirism, but the act of sucking blood and making another vampire alludes to a metaphor in the vampire character for gays. Where vampires are considered predators, capable of converting someone to vampirism, there exists a notion that straight people can be converted to

homosexuality by gays.[111] A study or analysis of the film's release in proximity to the outbreak of AIDS would be quite productive since the fear associated with vampires, as disease spreaders through blood, seems to echo the societal fear of homosexuals and homosexuality of the time.[112]

This research consciously leaves out a detailed analysis of the audience, though it could be helpful. This paper instead deals with how the film *Interview with the Vampire* constructs messages relating to the themes of gay identity and the gay family; however, the method used falls short in defining how messages are coded, and how an audience might decode those messages. While Staiger is interested in the ability to identify with a character, which involves the transference of a message, she is not claiming that the message is exclusive to a particular person or individual, only arguing that a person or individual's ability to receive is influenced by their sociological and psychological surroundings. The process of coding and decoding messages necessitates a specific message and receiver due to the furtive nature of codes. To examine such a process requires a more detailed analysis of the message's construction as well as careful consideration of the construction of the individual receiving it. Determining message and receiver is crucial to the coding and decoding process in order to accurately identify the code and the equipment required to decode it. This not to say that messages from *Interview with the Vampire* do not influence or shape culture in some way, quite the contrary; the question is how exactly do those messages effect culture? The presentation of the vampire characters in a manner that reflects a gay family relationship, with Claudia the child vampire at times calling both adult vampires father, or Lestat referring to Claudia as their daughter, at minimum signals a transformation of the traditional family, capable of changing some long-held attitudes, values, and beliefs of a culture. The exclusion of a proper and detailed audience analysis simply means

that this research cannot make any larger inferences about how messages found within *Interview with the Vampire* influence or alter culture.

Another area of future research involving audiences would be tracking how depictions of gays in film have changed along with the evolution of vampire film characters over time, using Kane's vampire cycles as a reference point. If there is indeed a relationship between vampire films and gay topics, then examining the progression of vampire films and gay representation in film could reveal a clearer link between the two. Studying the progression of vampires and gay themes may very well reveal that gay themes have been present in film for generations, even before the novel *Interview with the Vampire* was written. Attention to the film-making techniques common to both queer and vampire films might be useful in identifying similarities between as well as teasing out patterns common to both genres. Coupling that research with an audience reception study or multiple studies might be a powerful piece, documenting markers in cultural adjustments in thought over time and their presence in film messages. Vampire films then are not making broad statements about culture, so much as they are indicative of specific cultural shifts represented by audiences.

As with qualitative film study in general, wherein analysis is often performed on one or two films, this research and the conclusions from it are limited by the small sample size of a single film, *Interview with the Vampire*. This does not suggest that the conclusions made are inaccurate, but that their applicability to the larger genre depends on additional research examining other films. The use of the novel as a critical touchstone lends credibility to the findings of this research because the book itself serves as a second source.

The film *Interview with the Vampire*, and the vampire genre in general, serve as fruitful objects for rhetorical and queer analysis due to the transformative nature inherent to vampires (one is not born a vampire, one becomes a vampire), the wide variety of characters compiled by a long history of vampire film making, and the popularity of the vampire theme stretching across generations of movie goers.[113] Vampires' consistent regeneration into new films, have perhaps told the story of gay culture long before the contemporary movements now in place took shape. With one hundred years of vampire films now in the vault, the vampire is really an archive that chronicles the evolution of societies and cultures that, like the vessel, live eternally.

[102] Tim Kane, *The Changing Vampire of Film and Television: A Critical Study of the Growth of a Genre*, (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2006), 46-47.

[103] Scholars stipulate that the presence of queer characters indicates queer cinema. For an extensive list of indicators, see Harry M. Benshoff & Sean Griffin, *Queer Images: A History of Gay and Lesbian Film in America*, (Rowman and Littlefield Publishers Inc., 2006), 9-12.

[104] This trumpet may also be sounded by gay and lesbian criticism and perhaps feminism, but these groups are also represented by the queer community since queer theory seeks to critique and identify alternative groups and provide understanding to alternative perspectives. To be clear, this is not a co-option of those groups perspectives or theories, it is simply demonstrating that those forms of criticism are born out of groups who currently focus or have focused on the experience of the "other" just as queer criticism. Traditional criticism, outside of these forms, seems not to consider the perspective of the other, favoring a third person, objective perspective to criticism. For more on this see Benshoff & Griffin, *Queer Images,* 3-12.

[105] Although Louis and Lestat do not part ways happily, Louis expresses remorse for how he treated Lestat and ruminates over the loss of his vampire daughter Claudia.

[106] Such communities might be Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning (GLBTQ) Organizations in schools, the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) or the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA). These organizations, among other things, provide a common space for individuals to express their point of view and debate others as well as each other. They all specialize in disseminating information to members and non-members about groups and individuals active both locally and globally.

[107] I'm thinking here specifically about the ABC television sitcom *Modern Family* and the 2010 academy award nominated film, *The Kids Are All Right.*

[108] Characters such as "Cam" from *Modern Family*, "Jack" from *Will and Grace,* "Armand" and "Albert" from *The Bird Cage*, and "Marc St. James" from *Ugly Betty.*

[109] Vito Russo's work in this area is particularly eye opening, suggesting that such well-known films as The Maltese Falcon, Ben-Hur, and Thelma and Louis as well as many others contain queer characters, plot-lines, and sub-plots. It is only in the last 20-25 years that the film industry, and even more recently in the last 10 years for the mainstream television industry, that queer characters and plot lines emerge as central elements in movies and tv programs. For more, see Vito Russo, *The Celluloid Closet: Homosexuality in the Movies*. (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1981).

[110] Janet Staiger, *Perverse Spectators: The Practices of Film Reception*, (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 3.

[111] Rodger Streitmatter, *From Perverts to Fab Five: The Media's Changing Depiction of Gay Men and Lesbians*, (New York, NY: Routledge, 2009)

[112] For more on the reaction to the AIDS outbreak see Johnson, Dirk, "Fear Of AIDS Stirs New Attacks on Homosexuals," *The New York Times Online,* published April 24, 1987, accessed March 5, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/1987/04/24/us/fear-of-aids-stirs-new-attacks-on-homosexuals.html.

[113] Due to the synonymous relationship this thesis illustrates between gays and vampires, the transformative nature of vampires is not an attempt to assert or argue that a person is ether born gay or is made gay by culture, society, or by any other means. The "transformative nature" comment is more an echo of how gay persons may or may not experience a transformation in learning about their own sexual orientation or when sharing it with others.

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