

Claudia: The Forever Child and Vampire Killer in Anne Rice's *Interview with the Vampire*

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“The Ruthless Pursuit of Blood with all of a Child’s Demanding” (Rice 1997: 96)

The vampire, the quintessential gothic character, never ages; he is paradoxically “the living dead.” The allure of the vampiric figure is that he defeats aging and death, a trait most desired by humans. He is playing with evil by attempting to overthrow God’s or the universe’s natural order. Barbara Fray Waxman discusses how vampires simultaneously fascinate and challenge us because, “They are ... vehicles to explore the *Tabula Rasa* condition of twentieth-century human existence, as well as the quest for truths, moral rules, and a purposeful existence” (Waxman 1992: 82). The modern vampire’s popularity has become the symbol of the fears and anxieties of modern-day culture and society.

In the modern age, representations of the vampire have not been old and fearful but young, beautiful, sexy, and dangerous. Youthful depictions of vampires began in earnest with the novels written by Anne Rice, who created a world of male vampires who were young, adventurous, and dangerously attractive. Rice made it a rule that vampires only “turned” those who were youthfully beautiful while introducing this

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risqué but alarmingly alluring depiction of the vampire. Rice revolutionized the vampire genre by giving the vampire a voice and focusing more on him than the vampire victims. Young, sexy, and alluring vampires have been depicted in literature, such as Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* (1872). However, until Anne Rice reinvented the genre by focusing on his youth, little attention was paid to the vampire's age. Pop culture immediately gravitated to this new semblance of that fabled fictional character.

The vampire has fascinated us for ages because of our conflicting feelings towards death. Whether one believes in the hereafter or not, no one has taken that final sojourn of life and returned to present a bird's eye view. In Hamlet's famous "To Be or Not to Be" speech, he says,

But that the dread of something after death
The undiscovere'd country, from whose bourn
No traveller returns, puzzles the will... (William Shakespeare 1603:1)

Undoubtedly, this innate fear of many people cannot be more profoundly expressed than through the words of Shakespeare. Because of this fear, one can easily understand how engaging the promise of eternal life is to humanity. Of all the horror monsters, the one that has mesmerized society the most is the vampire. Why? To society, the vampire defies death and age, allowing people to live within their familiar reality. The vampire that intrigues people the most is aristocratic, young, or youngish, so much so that he can assimilate within human society almost always undistinguishable and undisturbed. No one wants eternity as an old elderly person stuck perpetually in the deficits of the aging body. Instead, people desire everlasting youth enshrined forever. The vampire's life approximates earthly human life while enjoying eternity.

Because of this youthful depiction, Rice's work has known unrivaled popularity. Unfortunately, the female vampire does not share the stage equally with the males in Rice's male-dominated vampire universe. However, within Anne Rice's world, there are female vampires, and of these, the most tragically infamous is Claudia, who appears in the first novel

of the Vampire Chronicles, *Interview with The Vampire*.² The novel centers on Louis de Pointe du Lac, who is being interviewed about his life. He recounts his relationships with Lestat de Lioncourt, who “turned” him into a vampire, woefully describing his dual status in Claudia’s life as father/lover. Claudia, who is “turned” into a vampire at five, was created from Rice’s grief for her daughter, Michelle, who died from leukemia [at age 5]. (Jowett, 2). Grieving beyond measure, Rice developed a fictional character of a child who would not die.

With Claudia’s introduction to the vampire world came critical analysis concerning aging and its effect on the child vampire through issues such as sexuality, adulthood, innocence, and the killer instinct – complex elements that simultaneously complement and threaten her existence. The vampire child ages mentally yet is stymied by a child’s body. How does society process this child-like being with a woman’s appetite yet with a killer’s mind? Childhood is a temporary but essential stage of life that helps us learn skills and mental processes that enable us to move successfully into adulthood. The dichotomy of the vampire child is that it is stuck in this temporary state forever, clashing mentally with its physical body – robbed eternally of the opportunity to blossom in the natural state of childhood. Not only is the problem that others see her as a child, but her mental maturity is at stake as well. Mentally, she vacillates between a child’s tantrums and an adult’s thoughts and wants. This chapter looks at the complexity of Claudia as a literary vampire character and the problems that inevitably arise from dealing with her conflicting physical and mental states as she ages mentally yet remains physically stagnant, especially her depiction in film and television, where the visual is constant.

By studying Claudia’s images in the novel, film, and AMC television series, one can see the difficulty in addressing the vampire child within

² When *Interview with the Vampire* was published in 1976, there were still very few female vampires in literature. One of the most important and earliest was *Carmilla* (1872) by Sheridan Le Fanu. Its main importance is that a female vampire is at the center, but there is also a child victim.

the traditional idea of horror and aging – inclusively, the subject of sexuality as it emerges in her relationship with Louis. Focusing on Claudia's two most defining aspects – aging and sexuality – I will analyze and critique her depiction as she evolves in the legendary world of vampire horror. Therefore, this chapter critiques Claudia as she is depicted from the five-year-old in the novel to the ten-year-old in the film and ultimately to the fourteen-year-old in the AMC series, respectively. In discussing her evolution, she will be analyzed first as she develops mentally as a mature woman yet absent of any physical statuette. Secondly, this analysis of Claudia will examine her as a ten-year-old, with particular reference to the impact of the visual medium of film as it reflects on the contrasting elements of her thwarted life as a child vampire – characterized by sexual/mental mutability versus childlike physical inertia. Lastly, Claudia will be assessed at fourteen as the teenage/biracial vampire represented in a continual episodic television series, with no end game – compelling the use of melodramatic tropes, i.e., teenage rebellion, to attract a loyal viewing audience. These depictions of Claudia have positioned her at a different age for the crucially defining and the fatal point in her life – the “turning” – while justifying her creation as one of the most tragically portrayed legends in vampire horror fiction.

Within the Gothic genre, aging is depicted as premature or a supernatural element, and elderly people are seen within the mystic world as victims. The child vampire can be just as disarming as an elderly mask or person because of “The monstrous disjunction of a young body with an old consciousness, or a ‘child usurping adult desires, prerogatives, or power... (McDevitt 2020: 220). The child has always been one of the most unsettling aspects of Gothic fiction because innocence masks evil within this childlike visual image.

The horror child is seemingly an aberration of nature, but the vampire child is different – she is “something else” because she has an adult mind; she can use her child’s innocence to lure her victims. She is more calculating in her evil acts. As she develops mentally, but not physically, she plots, manipulates, and connives; therefore, maximizing the use of her arrested childhood looks to take advantage of the unsuspected.

Furthermore, youth is highly prized within society, especially by women. However, what happens if a woman is too young or looks too young? This, of course, is the case with the vampire child, aging mentally but not physically. Scholars Horner and Zslick stated that the "Othering of the self is partly due to the recognition of inevitable physical change and decay in one's own body and the sense of split subjectivity it can produce and partly to the acceptance of social attitudes which see the old as irrelevant and as an (increasingly heavy) economic burden" (Horner and Zsolick 2016: 184–185). Although the vampire child does not need to fear aging, there is the fear of not having the inevitable change in one's body. Just as the elderly are seen as irrelevant, so is the vampire child. Children can be seen as a nuisance and a problem for working parents; often, they are a source of conflict within a family and must be watched to avoid danger, etc. For most of childhood, children are little people who are dependent upon their elders; they have very little autonomy over what goes on in their environment. This is the crux of the vampire child who will be all the above for eternity. Claudia's physical body will always be an obstacle to becoming a genuine vampire with all the accoutrements, such as complete agency.

Undeniably, the core of the vampire construct since *Dracula* has been sexuality. But when American films seized the vampire, they focused heavily on making the vampire an aristocratic, alluring, and captivating man. The monster aspect was sometimes de-emphasized to entice the audience to connect to the vampire. Consequently, the portrayer of a vampire since Bela Lugosi has usually been a handsome, supernatural sex symbol.

Additionally, the theme of vampire sexuality continues in the evolution of Claudia. Intrinsically linked to the depiction of Claudia as the child vampire is always the undercurrent of sexuality, which inherently leads to apprehensions about child exploitation. How do you portray adult sexuality within the body of a child? As society has become more aware of the sexual trafficking of children and teenagers, representing the vampire child becomes more problematic. Additionally, society does not want to acknowledge any sexuality with children. Children are innocent, so they should not be spoiled or tainted by sexuality. Because

the child vampire is both prey and predator, dealing with her sexuality is awkwardly challenging.

Interview with the Vampire (novel, 1976)

From Claudia's first appearance in the novel, one senses the combined elements of tragedy and victimization. Claudia is brought into the novel by Louis, who attacks her as an innocent five-year-old child crying over her dead mother. Later, Lestat finds a sick Claudia, which, in a fit of impulse, leads him to give her the dark gift of immortality. The theft of a child's innocence is startling, even in a vampire novel. This is the beginning of Claudia losing her childhood. A stolen childhood can never be retrieved; the basis for forming the child into adulthood has been lost forever. Claudia has no foundation to build upon because she has been turned into the "monster" at an unknowing age. As Lestat makes a self-serving choice, the dye is cast, and this child prey suddenly becomes a child predator.

The reader agonizes as one envisions Claudia's transformation from a small child to an adult woman still within her diminutive frame. Claudia strives futilely to become the woman she desires to be. The ultimate goal of the child is to become an adult. For the child, adulthood is seen as independence to make her own life choices. Unfortunately, because of the conflict between her mental state and her physical being, Claudia can never achieve true independence. On the contrary, the reader is also amazed at how she uses her childish look to lure unknowing victims to their deaths at her hands. Because no matter how frustrated she is because of her static place, she relies on her instincts to survive, as only vampires can – to find and kill her prey, humans.

Initially, the reader visualizes Claudia as a flesh and blood child with her eyes looking imploringly to Louis for help. Louis states, "...I had bent down and driven hard onto her small soft neck and, hearing her tiny cry, whispered even as I felt the hot blood on my lips, 'It's only for a moment, and there will be no more pain'" (Rice 1997: 73). This passage illustrates the vulnerability of the child to a predator. Even though Louis is sympathetic,

his very nature as a vampire and a predator takes precedence over any latent humanistic apprehensions. Because of her age and size, Claudia is prey via a multitude of dimensions.³

After Lestat “turns” Claudia by having her drink his blood, she says in her little girl’s voice, “I want some more...” (Rice 1997: 93). From this moment, she is now the vampire child. Here, the dichotomy between the vampire and the child takes hold because Claudia has rapidly developed a “thirst for blood.” As a child, Claudia characteristically wants more of something that she likes. However, the novelty is that the “something” is blood.

She assumes the role of a vampire immediately. Louis tells the interviewer, “... I couldn’t comprehend her; for little child she was, but also fierce killer now capable of the ruthless pursuit of blood with all a child’s demanding” (Rice 1997: 96). These words convey the irony of the vampire child. Although she still has childish instincts, they are now infused with the evil intent of the vampire to kill. In fact, being a child makes her associate with evil in a more basic way. Children are by nature selfish, do not have a fully developed consciousness, and do not see any other view other than their own. Since becoming a vampire so young, she does not develop human qualities. Louis, who understands what it means to be human, cannot comprehend how quickly Claudia has developed a taste for this morbid life. Unlike Louis, Claudia is not burdened with the human conflicts of right and wrong.

3 The novel *Carmilla* also has a child victim, but her attack is depicted as a dream-like sequence while she sleeps. The main character, Laura, remembers when she was six years old that a woman came and bit her, but she feels it was a dream. Towards the end of the novel, she has another dreamy episode where she is bitten on her chest. In the 19th century, La Fanu was investigating the idea of a child victim and an adult predator. Although not bitten in a dream, Claudia is similar to Laura because her second attack is in bed. There is a clear similarity between Laura and Claudia because the sexual vampire construct frames both victims.

Although not planned, Louis, Lestat, and now Claudia form an unconventional vampire family.⁴ This family stability is endangered when Claudia learns the truth about her creation. She takes her vengeance out on the man she considers the culprit, Lestat, the robber of her mortal self. Nevertheless, this structure also becomes problematized as Claudia grows up mentally and realizes that she will never be independent of her “fathers”. Anne Rice says, “The child vampire Claudia was physically inspired by Michelle, but she ultimately became something else – a woman trapped in a child’s body, robbed of power, never knowing what it’s like to really be a woman and make love. She became a metaphor for a raging mind trapped in a powerless body....” (Qtd in Jowett 2002: 59). Claudia cannot exist as she is, and she knows it. She will not have immortality because the dichotomy between her mental maturity and her child body cannot co-exist forever.

Another problematic area of Claudia’s identity that will become more of an issue once she is depicted in the film is her sexuality. Sexuality has been the primary focus of the vampire model in film since Bela Lugosi’s version of *Dracula* in 1931. When Louis first sees her, he says, “But the question pounded in me: Am I damned? If so, why do I feel such pity for her, for her gaunt face? Why do I wish to touch her tiny, soft arms, hold her now on my knee as I am doing, feel her bend her head to my chest as I gently touch the satin hair” (Rice 1997: 73)? This passage vacillates between Louie feeling pity for the child, wanting to attack her, and having a latent sexual interest.

4 The construct of a family created out of victimization relates to the Netflix movie *May December* (2023). Gracie Atherton-Yoo seduces a 12-year-old, Joe Yoo, and becomes pregnant. Years later, they marry when Joe becomes an adult. This is an unconventional family with sexually inappropriate overtones. Even though Claudia is in a vampire family, she is in the same position as Joe in many ways. She was victimized at a young age when consent was not possible. She creates a family with the men who are, in one way, her predators, and eventually, like Joe, she will become involved romantically with one of them, Louis. How can Claudia or Joe process the role of a victim who creates a relationship with his/her predator?

Although she is still in the body of a five-year-old, as Claudia matures mentally, Louis envisions her as the woman she becomes as they eventually become lovers. When reading the novel, it is less awkward to view Claudia as a maturing vampire than it is in a screen adaptation. As one reads the work, one hears Claudia's voice as she matures (without the visual of the face) so the reader can access the imagination without the intrusion of the physical as is shown in the film. The image of the five-year-old is kept at bay. As stated earlier, when the novel was written, the sexualization of minors within pop culture was not an issue that was critiqued. As time has progressed and cultural changes have evolved, filmmakers and television producers have been confronted with this undeniably relevant yet highly controversial aspect. Claudia cannot ever grow up – "suspended" forever in childhood." Even though she develops mentally, she can never assume her adult role. Not assuming her adult role will eclipse Claudia's life until her untimely death. Claudia can never truly know what she wants. Her suspension in childhood challenges her love for Louie. She will never have the choice to see if she wants someone else or if her choice is truly to be with Louis.

Interview With the Vampire (1994)

In 1994, Neil Jordan was pegged to direct a film version of the widely popular novel, casting Tom Cruise as Lestat, Brad Pitt as Louis, and Kirsten Dunst as Claudia. For the character of Claudia, Jordan aged her to 10, and Dunst was 12 when she played the part. In the DVD commentary, Neil Jordan said he needed to ensure he had a true actress for the role. (*Interview with the Vampire film*) However, even the 12-year-old Dunst had problems with the latent sexuality of the part. Vicki Fenn states, "Dunst clearly had issues with being required to act like a woman when she herself was no such thing," (Fenn 2021:64).

Of course, confronted with these sensitive and possibly volatile possibilities, the film industry has increasingly sought a means to depict the issue of sexuality without seemingly promoting child exploitation. As in the novel and "In the film, the strongest erotic bonding is between Louis

and Claudia." (Pintillie 2015:129). The latent sexuality appears early in the film when Claudia is "turned" by Lestat. Although Claudia is depicted as an object in both the book and the movie, visual imagery, of course, takes precedence in the movie. Her transition in the film occurs when Lestat brings Louis to their place and sees Claudia sleeping in the bed. Thinking he killed her, Louis is stunned to see her there. Immediately, Lestat talks about how wonderful she looks and what it would be like to "take" her. Lestat presents Claudia to Louis as a delectable food. The whole setup reeks of an undercurrent of sexuality. Lestat takes the bull by the horns when Louis refuses to relieve her of her suffering and "turns" her into a vampire. Watching the vulnerable child turn into a monster is where the absolute horror of the movie begins.

In time, Louis and Claudia become lovers in the book and movie, i.e., Dunst's kissing scene with Brad Pitt. Scholar Violet Fenn states, "...It is the very presence of Claudia that gives *Interview* its uneasy tone. In modern culture, vampires are generally depicted as being inherently sexual. The juxtaposition of an immortal mind in a prepubescent body is an uncomfortable one. But regardless of ethics, the fact remains that Claudia, as a character, is an adult woman who simply has an outward appearance of a child" (Fenn 202:64). It is understood that she is mentally an adult by the time Claudia and Louis become lovers.⁵ But as depicted in the film, when Lestat "turns" her, there is a sexualization of Claudia, the child. Of course, within the visual development of the love story between Louis and Claudia and the intimate sexuality, the audience is cinematically directed to focus on her implied mature adult status in lieu of Claudia's visual childlike persona.⁶

5 The contradictory relationship that is seen with Claudia and Louis can also be seen with Carmilla and Laura in *Carmilla*. When Laura is bitten the first time she does not know who did it or even if it happened because she thinks it was a dream, but when Carmilla, the vampire predator, comes to her family in the body of a woman, she and Laura develop an uneasy yet close relationship.

6 This connects strongly to the movie *May December* because Claudia is now in a relationship with her predator, just as Joe was in a relationship with Grace, his predator. He was sexualized as a child, just as Claudia is sexualized. Joe

The other central theme of the film is the construction of a child killer. One scene that emphasizes the dichotomy of her internal growth as a killer and her child-like visage and body occurs when she is having her dress made by her dressmaker. The dressmaker accidentally cuts her finger, and Claudia is immediately drawn to the blood. When the scene shifts back to her, the dressmaker is dead, and Claudia has a coyly innocent look that could easily rival Shirley Temple.

Claudia is a killer in the mold of Lestat, not Louis. Since her transformation as a vampire occurs as a child, she quickly masters her required “killing skills,” disdainfully rejecting all remorse for her actions. Her child’s temperament, combined with her deadly instinct, is fascinating to watch. Claudia’s physical embodiment of the white, cute, blonde-curled little girl belies the fact that these physical traits walk in tandem with the internal blood-sucking characteristics of a vampire. Claudia’s curly blonde hair conjures up a dark image of the Shirley Temple look. It is a crucial portrait because it aids in subverting the true Claudia: a bona fide vampire killer. Aided and abetted by this visual image of whiteness, society is waylaid when confronted with the real Claudia. A black child of the same age and circumstances would not be seen this innocently. Claudia’s evilness is wrapped in whiteness.

As Claudia matures, she realizes what she will never be. This is first seen during a nighttime outing. Claudia spots a naked Creole young woman by her bedroom window. For the first time, there is a recognition of the difference between her and an adult-looking woman. Lestat notices that Claudia is studying the woman and asks her:

“Do you want her?”

Claudia states, “No, I want to be her. Can I, Louis, be her someday?”
(*Interview With the Vampire*, film)

As mutual culprits, Louis and Lestat bear responsibility for Claudia’s fragmented and double identity and are fully aware that she will never

was trapped once Grace was pregnant with his child, and Claudia was trapped when she was turned into a vampire.

realize her dream. Although this scene in the film is not in the book, it is critical to understanding Claudia's conflicting situations.⁷ The film better illustrates her eternal conflict and frustration: the Creole woman represents what Claudia can never be – a physically mature woman. Conforming to her body size, Lestat continues to dress her as a little girl or a China doll. She is never even allowed to look the part of her physical maturity. Rebell ing against Lestat's form of subjugation, seething with rage, Claudia angrily denounces Lestat for his insistence on keeping her as the little girl.⁸ Unabated, Lestat continually gives her dolls because that is what she is – the "eternal doll." (Jordan DVD Commentary). She will never experience the human existence of growing up or the vampire coming of age.

One of the critical scenes in the film occurs when Claudia first confronts Lestat. Screaming at him, she furiously takes all the dolls off her bed to reveal the dead Creole woman; Claudia, who has been drawing pictures of the woman, craves to be her. In many ways, Claudia likens the woman's decaying corpse in her bed to her dream of becoming an adult woman. However, her dream has become decayed, twisted, and grotesque, just like the Creole woman's body. It is a dream not just deferred but forever denied. In her fury over the realization of her state, she "cuts her childish curls off, but her hair grows back in an instant as the film demonstrates to the audience that Claudia can never change from

7 This recognition scene with Claudia is similar to the one in the movie *May December*. Joe is sitting on the roof of his house and having a talk with his son, Charlie, before he goes to college. Charlie offers his father a joint and is surprised that he has never smoked one. At that moment, Joe realizes what he has lost, accepting he will never return to his adolescence. He is forever in between childhood and adulthood. He realizes for the first time how Grace's manipulations irrevocably changed his life, just as Claudia realizes what she will never be and who is responsible.

8 Claudia rages at Lestat for turning her into a vampire and is hurt to realize Louis was a part of her "turning." Claudia confronts both men, and Joe confronts Grace in *May December*. Grace deflects the criticism, blaming him for the situation. She, in fact, says that Joe seduced her. Unlike Lestat, who owns what he did, Grace refuses to take responsibility.

the physical shape she had when Lestat turned her into a vampire" (Reep, etc. !996:130). From the point that she becomes a vampire, Claudia's life tragically worsens.

As Louis and Claudia sit in the New Orleans night air, people watching, they see an old woman. Believing he is casting away any of Claudia's anxiety about aging, Louis tells her that she will never grow old. Refutably, she responds that she will never grow up. (*Interview with the Vampire film*) Claudia's issues with being unable to grow up seem antithetical to understanding the vampire, age, and aging in society. When discussing the *Twilight* books, one of the significant issues for "... feminist readers, [is] Bella Swan's reasons for wishing to be transformed into a vampire herself include not only the desire to be with her vampire hero, Edward, forever but also a terrible fear of aging: her worst nightmare..." (Horner and Zlosnik 2016:188). When Louis directs Claudia's attention to the old woman, he sees the old woman in the mode of the Gothic and society as irrelevant. He believes that Claudia should revel in always being young and should be relieved that she will not have the fate of being seen as a burden or as serviceably futile in society. Taking no pleasure or satisfaction from Louis's promise of eternal youth, Claudia feels that as the woman in the child's body, she is just as useless as the old woman.

Eventually, Louis and Claudia move to Paris, which, of course, is where complicated issues develop because "the film, in using an eleven-year-old actress instead of a five-year-old, strengthens the pedophilia implications that appear in the novel and, at the same time, creates the image of a tragic love affair" (Pintilie 2015:130). If she has Louis to herself, Claudia believes he is content with her, never fearing that she will lose him. However, after he meets with a community of vampires in Paris, she realizes that she does not belong in this select world, meaning her hold on to Louis is tenuous, at best. As a vampire, she still needs Louis's protection from the Paris vampires, who see her as a threat. Because he senses Claudia is in danger, Louis goes to see Armand, the leader of the vampires in Paris, the man who wants to be Louis's lover. Substantiating Louis' fears, Armand states, "I will give you reasons, her silence, her youth. It is forbidden to make one so young, so helpless that it cannot survive on its own". (*Interview with the Vampire*) With the

mind and heart of a woman in love, Claudia knows that her time with Louis is now over. Simultaneously, Claudia realizes the finality of her relationship with Louis, accepting that she cannot exist without him. It is more than a matter of the heart; it is also practicality. She needs Louis to survive physically. This is the tragedy of Claudia; her body is her prison, which is why she cannot live. Claudia's tragic death at the hands of the Paris vampires is heartbreakingly horrific yet, most of all, unfortunately inevitable.

Interview with the Vampire (2023) AMC Networks

The most current iteration of Rice's work is the new *Interview with the Vampire* series on AMC Networks. Although this version of Rice's work has been controversial, it is not about casting but instead about deviations from the novel. The series is set in New Orleans, but the time period has been moved up to the early twentieth century, with Louis as a black brothel owner. Additionally, the series does not just make one bold move but two by turning Claudia into a biracial character. Again, this changes the whole image of Claudia, giving her another dimension.

In the series, Louis finds Claudia in a burning building after a race riot. She is 14, portrayed by 19-year-old Bailey Bass. Again, the difficulty of filming this story lies within the apparent contradictions in depicting a mentally maturing Claudia evolving over the years as an adult while dealing with her never-changing adolescent appearance. Acknowledging that Claudia is a teenager who will never physically evolve into an adult woman, this series aims to illustrate her as the "average teenager" who happens to be a vampire. She has a diary, a first love, and goes on a sojourn to college, but everything is complicated by being a vampire. Yet, this version of Claudia is unlike the others because she is "turned" at 14 and thinks about her identity from the perspective of who she was and what she has become. However, similar to the other versions of Claudia, her acquiescence of her vampire nature is immediate. So much so that Louis and Lestat must teach her that she cannot pursue her every whim. Emphatically, Lestat instructs her on the art of killing.

Claudia's realization of her stunted growth comes to fruition when Lestat takes her to lovers' lane, his favorite hunting ground. Lestat urges her to go in for the kill as they watch the kids making out. Reminiscent of Claudia's recognition scene with the Creole woman in the film, in the series, before Claudia jumps on the couple, she is somewhat hypnotized by the view of the naked girl. She is mesmerized by the girl as she sees what she is not. Even though Claudia is now 18, she is fully aware of the striking difference between the girl's look and her appearance. She does not ask questions but pounces on the girl with the ardency of a killer, probably because she wants to destroy what she cannot be. Claudia can never be what she was (human) because, as scholar Winnbust points out, "the vampire pollutes all systems of kinship, pollutes all systems of blood, pollutes all systems of race and sex and desire that must be straight. He infects the body and thereby *alters the spirit*—nobody can transcend the metamorphoses of his bite..." (Winnbust 2003:8). Lestat's bite has changed forever the world Claudia previously knew because now she has been transformed into the killer. Regardless, Claudia cannot hold onto her old life. She cannot transcend the change; she must submit.

The television series made another significant change to Claudia's character, and that was to tone down the sexuality issue. They aged her to 14, but at least during the first season, they make it clear that her relationship with Louis is one of father/daughter. To a significant degree, that deviation halts some of the issues that have plagued her character since its creation. Specifically, Claudia's sexuality is limited to outside her created vampire family. The new iteration of Claudia has neutered one of the most controversial aspects of her character. Of course, the show did this because it must continue on a series renewal basis so the character cannot crash and burn.

In conclusion, from the beginning of her literary debut in *Interview with the Vampire*, Claudia presented a duality that transcended while transforming the mythical/legendary world of horror inhabited by vampires. Caught between the raging conflicts of existing as a child vampire, physical immutability versus psychological growth, Claudia becomes the object of a latent ambiguous depiction of sexuality in a child. Whether Claudia is five, ten, or fourteen, she is constrained by

having to live eternally in a childhood/teenage space. Anne Rice created a character who shifts boundaries of age, mental maturity, and agency. When discussing vampires and aging, one must deal with the fact that many people would love immortality because it would mean they would never have to grow old. The construct of immortality must include youth, or it is not wanted. Most people would not want immortality if they had to deal with being an elderly person for eternity. But the reverse is true for Claudia. For Claudia, youth and immortality are her problems. Imprisoned by her eternal youth, her endowment of immortality lacks agency or empowerment. Her tragedy is not just that she will never grow up but that she first had her mortal life taken without her consent. Secondly, she cannot exist without other vampires – dependent forever on them for survival. Additionally, in her visual depictions, dealing with her sexuality is still very controversial because of her childlike image. Claudia can never be fully a woman because vampires and human society will always see her as a child. She was not meant to stay in the vampire world, especially Rice's; it is a challenge for a woman to survive in Anne Rice's masculine universe. Under the spell of Rice's masterful literary skills, the reader travels along obligingly in the path of Claudia's fierce determination to overcome the obstacles of her stunted physicality and her lack of the defining element: the vampire's ability to defy death.

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