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AML 2410

February 11<sup>th</sup>, 2025

*Interview with the Vampire* Semiotic Analysis: Claudia's Dolls

The film *Interview with the Vampire* explores the unique facets of identity, power, and the passage of time using the supernatural. Main characters Louie and Lestat force the life of a vampire on eleven-year-old Claudia, who is too young to truly understand the curse that was placed upon her. As the film progresses, she faces the horror of being frozen in time, fighting a futile battle against her condition. Claudia's growing collection of dolls clearly symbolism her constructed role within her created-family and the complex nature of her growing desires trapped within a static figure.

In *Interview with the Vampire*, Louie finds eleven-year-old Claudia weeping beside the body of her deceased mother. While attempting to comfort her, he cannot resist the urge to feed on Claudia and accidentally kills her. Aiming to absolve Louie's sin, Lestat turns Claudia into a vampire. She thus becomes a new member of their unnatural family, encouraging Louie and Lestat to coalesce as they assimilate into their new roles as parents. Just like the dolls that Claudia accumulates throughout the film, she's a pretty possession that they dress up, teach piano, and play house with. Lestat refers to her as a "gift" when he originally presents her to Louie, introducing the role she would play in their relationship. She is used as a device to repress the underlying faults within Louie and Lestat's relationship, similarly to how dolls are used to placate crying children. She even sleeps in Louie's coffin with him, mirroring how her own dolls

all reside in her bed. Although Louie may love Claudia, she is still used as a tool by Lestat, forcing her to play a decorative role in their relationship.

However, the dolls also represent Claudia's plight as a child-turned-vampire. She's trapped in the body of an eleven-year-old, unable to change or mature. In the film, it's even established that her appearance can't be altered when Claudia cuts her hair in a fit of rage. It grows back almost immediately, demonstrating the frozen state of her appearance. Just like her dolls, Claudia is a preserved image of a little girl, practically plastic with her lack of aging. Over time, her collection of dolls grows, each one a reminder of the years that pass without bringing her closer to adulthood. She maintains an illusion of innocence in the eyes of others, despite her growing intellect and growing bodycount. Eventually, Claudia grows frustrated with her situation, desiring the experience of womanhood. Her first encounter with womanhood is when Claudia spots a naked woman while hunting with Lestat and voices her awe for her beauty. She longs for the romance and sensuality associated with maturing, although clearly unsure of what it means. Through the years, she yearns to understand the experiences that adulthood offers. Claudia wants for everything but must confront the limits created by her immature physical form. Her desire for womanhood is futile, as her body will never develop into that of the women she once admired. Additionally, Claudia's desire to mature is combatted by her inability to grow up mentally. Her disposition and actions throughout the film display the immature nature of a petulant child. She consistently throws temper tantrums and disobeys the rules created by her fathers, despite how many years she accumulates in age. She even hides the naked woman's body beneath the dolls in her bed, unable to let go of the maturity she desires. To Claudia, the woman represented something she wanted and could never have; and because of her immature mentality and morality, Claudia's logical reaction to her frustration is to hoard the corpse. It's

also very purposeful that Claudia never collects any other type of doll, like a baby doll. She only amasses dolls that model little girls, representing an inability to change as well as role-play as a mother or an older woman. Unlike most children, who outgrow dolls as they mature, Claudia continues to surround herself with them, not out of comfort but as an unconscious acknowledgment of her own stagnation.

The film reaffirms Claudia's immature mentality with the introduction of the doll maker. Early on in the film, Claudia's character is introduced mourning the death of her mother. While navigating her condition as a vampire, she clings to Louie as a replacement mother. However, their relationship becomes more complicated as Claudia desires a romantic relationship that she cannot attain. She occasionally refers to Louie as "my love," kills his lover, and runs away to Europe with him. While Louie continues loving Claudia in place of his deceased daughter, her perception of their relationship shifts as he becomes her protector and a husband figure. When Claudia meets the doll maker, Madeleine, she triggers Claudia's primal desire for her mother. With her frozen maturity, Claudia demands that Louie give Madeleine to her, commanding him to turn her into a vampire. Madeleine's role in Claudia's life mirrors that of the dolls she has long collected. She is not just a maternal figure but a possession, a creation that Claudia seeks to mold into her own ideal image. By compelling Louie to transform Madeleine, Claudia attempts to reverse her own loss—both the loss of her biological mother and the loss of the life she could've lived. The tragedy of Madeleine's fate, executed alongside Claudia, reinforces the futility of Claudia's quest to break free from her stasis. Her desperate attempts to replace relationships, to construct a reality in which she can find fulfillment, are always in vain, mirroring the way a child plays with dolls to create imagined scenarios that can never come to life.

Claudia's story is ultimately defined by its inevitability, as her fate was decided when Lestat turned her into a vampire. Her dolls reveal how she is both cherished and infantilized, as well as the contradiction of her unchanging maturity and her evolving awareness. They demonstrate how the inability to change can prevent experiencing and understanding the desire to be alive. In the end, Claudia's dolls are not just reminders of her youth, but of everything she was denied when Louie killed her—love, growth, and ultimately, the ability to truly live.

Works Cited

“Interview with the Vampire.” Geffen Pictures: Warner Bros, 1994.