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Lust, Fear and Surrender in *Interview With The Vampire*

This paper aims to analyse homoeroticism in the novel *Interview with the Vampire* (1974) and its filmic version (1994). The novel was written by Anne Rice and the film was directed by Neil Jordan. *Interview with the Vampire* tells the saga of Louis, a vampire who is unwilling to accept his fate. The novel and the film are still very polemic because they portray the stormy relationship of male vampires who show a great attraction towards each other. Homoeroticism is present in great part of the novel and also in some parts of the film. According to Chris Jones: “homoerotic is a text — prose, poem, film, painting, photograph, etc. — conveying an enjoyable sense of the same-sex attraction” (259). The analysis will be carried out taking into consideration this feature of the novel and the film. The beginning of the story will be explained, and a thorough analysis of the scene where Louis, the narrator, receives the “Dark Gift” (the “Dark Gift” is the ritual of transforming an ordinary person into a vampire by giving him/her vampire’s blood) will be discussed with more prominence because it is the springboard for Louis towards the world of darkness. “Darkness” has a double meaning in this context; literally it means the entering into the gothic world, a world where supernatural powers are a constant. This paper claims that for Louis it is not only that, for him it also means to accept his relationship with a person of the same sex, is to surrender to his homosexual impulses.

The novel *Interview with the Vampire* is told in the first person, Louis who is the protagonist, is telling the story of his life to a young reporter he has met in a bar in San Francisco. This is the first clue given to the reader that she/he is about to read a story with a fair amount of homoeroticism. San Francisco is popularly known as one of the

cities with a large population of gay people. As details in films have to be conveyed in different ways, the film starts with a bird's eye view shot, still during the credits, showing the famous San Francisco Bridge from different angles. After that the camera keeps gliding and goes over a big neon sign written *San Francisco*. The showing of the sign suggests that it is the intention of the camera-narrator to inform the viewer that it wants him/her to be aware of where the story takes place. This sequence is shown with a powerful non-diegetic piece of music that prepares the viewer for the supernatural content of the story. The camera keeps gliding over the streets in a sequence of shots: one of them shows a busy street with typical dwellers of modern life. It also shows: ordinary people, beggars, black people and a man talking to himself (by the way he gesticulates it can be assumed that he is probably a lunatic preacher). This shot suggests a contrast between the modern times and old times. The moviemakers might want to show the spectator that material things change but the nature of human beings remains the same. After going over the people on streets the camera shows an establishing shot of the building where the interview is going to take place, the camera moves from the bottom of the building until it reaches the balcony where the vampire is standing contemplating the bustling street.

The vampire starts talking to the boy (the reporter is addressed as "the boy" during the narrative in the novel because he is very young), and tells him that he is eager to tell the story of his life. Here the differences between the novel and the film can be first seen. Louis as homodiegetic voice-over narrator in the film tells the boy that in 1791 he had lost his wife and his child in childbirth, and after that he wanted to die, but in the novel Louis was a single man who had lost a fifteen-year-old brother whom he loved dearly. In the book Louis seemed to have an attraction for his brother beyond a brother's love and for this reason he wanted to die so badly. This is the first choice

made by the filmmakers to disguise the homoeroticism portrayed in the book. In the novel Louis describes his brother in this way:

It happened when he was fifteen. He was very handsome then. He had the smoothest skin and the largest blue eyes. He was robust, not thin as I am now and was then...but his eyes...it was as if when I looked into his eyes I was standing alone on the edge of the world...on a windswept ocean beach. There was nothing but the soft roar of the waves. (Rice 9,10)

The way Louis describes his brother is quite unusual for a sibling's love, the description shows that Louis has a great attraction for the male physique, which is the first sign of his homosexual tendency. The decision of the filmmakers to swap Louis' brother for a wife, might be a way of making the movie more appealing to bigger audiences.

Both in the film and in the novel Louis wants to die, but since he is not brave enough to commit suicide, he challenges his luck by going to dangerous places and meeting rough people, but it was a vampire (Lestat) who took advantage of his weak state of mind. The first attack of Lestat does not receive much prominence in the novel, it is just mentioned, but in the film this attack is shown in an outstanding way. The shot starts with Louis walking alongside with a whore while he himself, as voice-over narrator explains that his invitation to be murdered was opened to anyone. The whore is once again used to prove that Louis is a heterosexual man. In the film the attack happens while this whore performs oral sex on him, and this act is interrupted with the sudden arrival of Lestat who kills a pimp who was about to mug Louis. Afterwards Lestat attacks Louis without mercy. They do not speak to each other. A medium shot shows Lestat puncturing Louis' neck with his fangs. Louis grabs Lestat's clothes as a lover would grab his partner's clothes during a sexual intercourse. The scene of the biting is shown together with a non-diegetic sound of a powerful orchestra that rises its accords as Lestat flies towards the mast of a ship draining Louis' blood. During the flight the camera in a close-up shows Louis's face, he seems to be enjoying the pleasure

of having “sex” with a man for the first time (vampires do not have sex as ordinary human beings do, they seem to have their orgasms when they bite a prey’s neck). This scene depicts the narrative power of a close-up. In the book *A Experiência do Cinema* Hugo Munsterberg points out: “*O close-up supre as explicações*” (34). The use of close-up in this scene shows that the viewer has the choice of choosing his/her own understanding of the scene. The homoeroticism shown in this scene is hardly visible for the eye of the unaware viewer.

After Lestat’s attack, Louis is left half-dead. In the novel, a priest is called in order to get Louis’ confession, but Louis goes mad and nearly kills the clergyman. After that Lestat comes with his enigmatic powers and persuades Louis into becoming a vampire. Louis seems to accept it because he feels attracted to Lestat’s beauty. Before becoming a vampire Louis asks Lestat to kill him, but at the same time Louis explains: “I refused to look at him, to be spellbound by the sheer beauty of his appearance” (Rice 20). This sentence is another clue of Louis’ homosexual tendency. Although Louis has tried to avoid, he succumbs to Lestat’s enticement and accepts the “Dark Gift”.

In the novel the scene where Louis receives the “Dark gift” is overwhelming. It happens inside the farmhouse where Louis and his family used to live. Louis describes the sensation before the actual biting like the foreplay before getting laid with someone for the first time, Louis explains: “(...) he lay down beside me now on the steps, his movement so graceful and so personal that at once it made think of a lover” (Rice 22). Louis could not resist Lestat’s charm. After having Lestat’s fangs sank into his neck, the scene is described in a very erotic way. Louis says things like: “I remember that the movement of his lips raised the hair all over my body, sent a shock of sensation through my body that was not unlike the pleasure of passion...” (Rice 23). Louis can be compared to a man who always wanted to have sex with another person from the same

sex but never had the guts to do it, but now has found the opportunity. Louis explains: “(...) and I was waiting in my helplessness as if I’d been waiting for years” (Rice 23). After biting Louis’ neck Lestat slashes one of his wrists and puts it into Louis’ mouth. Louis sucks Lestat’s wrist eagerly, he almost kills Lestat with the vehemence of his thirsty for blood. The whole process can be compared to a sexual intercourse, there’s penetration, there is pain, there is desire and finally there is an “orgasm”, Louis describes the sensation of this supposed orgasm like that:

I saw nothing but that light then as I drew blood. And then this next thing, this next thing was...sound. A dull roar at first and then a pounding like the pounding of a drum, growing louder and louder, as if some enormous creature were coming up on one slowly through a dark and alien forest, pounding as he came, a huge drum. And then there came the pounding of another drum, as if another giant were coming yards behind him, and each giant, intent on his own drum, gave no notice to the rhythm of the other. The sound grew louder and louder until it seemed to fill not just my hearing but all my senses, to be throbbing in my lips and fingers, in the flesh of my temples, in my veins. Above all, in my veins, drum and then the other drum; and then Lestat pulled his wrist free suddenly, and I opened my eyes and checked myself in a moment of reaching for his wrist, grabbing it, forcing it back to my mouth at all costs; I checked myself because I realised that the drum was my heart, and the second drum had been his{Lestat} (Rice 23,24).

The sensation described by Louis shows how much he enjoyed the ritual of becoming a vampire and shows the amount of lust he felt for Lestat during this macabre “sexual” initiation. It is impossible not to think of homoeroticism while reading these lines. This homoeroticism, clearly shown in the novel, is disguised when transposed to the screen.

The powerful attraction felt by Louis towards Lestat had to be conveyed to the screen, so the filmmakers decided to make a few changes in order to achieve a more dramatic effect. The scene of Louis’ transformation starts with a non-diegetic sound bridge from the previous scene where Louis says farewell to the sunrise. The music sounds like a funeral march that slowly turns into an eerie group of sounds when it reaches the shot where Louis is shown wondering in an old cemetery. The first shot

shows Louis walking slowly towards a tomb where he sits down. In the film it is the tomb where his wife and children are buried. The cemetery looks old and full of dry leaves, which may be representing death. The old tombs are used as prop, probably to represent the decadence Louis is about to engage. The second shot shows a close-up of Louis' beautiful face. As the camera, in a over-the-shoulder shot, travels sideways, the unfocused shape of Lestat is shown on the background. As soon as Lestat speaks, Louis in a sudden movement gets up and Lestat's face is shown clearly. The third shot is very long in duration; it shows Louis puzzled face, because he is not sure what is about to happen. Louis' face is shown very briefly because as soon as it appears on the screen Lestat attacks Louis' neck fiercely. The image of Lestat attacking Louis is like the image of a rapist attacking its prey, the only difference is that in this case there was a consent given beforehand. This shot is very powerful, the focus is given to Louis's face that contorts itself in horror, in pain, and above all things, with pleasure. The camera follows Louis' face while his possessor throws him to the ground of the cemetery. The cemetery was probably chosen because it is one the components of the gothic settings used in films. It is related to death, and what Louis is going through is the process of the death of his mortal body. The next shot in this sequence shows the two supposed lovers lying on the ground with Lestat whispering on Louis' ear if he wants eternal life. Louis, as if in trance of a sexual intercourse, answers with two "yes". His answer is like the moan of a person about to reach the orgasm. The scene is composed of a sequence of shots. In the following shots Lestat is shown slashing his wrist and dripping the blood on Louis's lips, which remind the viewer of the sperm released during an ejaculation. Louis sucks Lestat's wrist eagerly, while a non-diegetic music is played reminding the viewer of the heartbeat described in the novel. The "sexual" pleasure of this bloody intercourse is conveyed through the face of the actors. Lestat played by Tom Cruise and

Louis played by Brad Pitt. The scene was skilfully done and it is able to pass all the passion, fear and tension portrayed in the novel. When the scene is coming to an end the two vampires move away from each other to enjoy the last minute of their “orgasms”. Lestat seems brighter and delighted with the pleasure he has just experienced and Louis crawls towards the tomb of his wife not knowing very well what is going on. He only shows a mixture of pleasure and fear. Finally Lestat tells Louis to look with his “vampire’s eyes”, this is the indication that Louis is now a different being: for ordinary people only a vampire, in my interpretation a man who has finally surrendered to his homosexual impulses.

The book and the film *Interview with the Vampire* are a great source of material for film and novel analysis because they are very rich in themes, and they are especially useful for scholars interested in homoeroticism. This paper analysed only the beginning of the film and the novel, but further analysis will be carried out to trace a deeper understanding of how the homoeroticism is portrayed in these two media (novel/film).

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