

FROM ANNE RICE: ON THE FILM, INTERVIEW WITH THE VAMPIRE

DEAR READERS AND VIEWERS,

As you may know, while the film IWTV was in production with David Geffen, the author of the book had no legitimate contact with him or with the studio or with anyone connected with the film.

When the announcement was made that Tom Cruise would star as Lestat, I had deep reservations and severe criticisms. So did many many of my readers. I talked openly about this. A curtain thereafter divided me from the entire production, and with reason. Nobody likes to be criticized, and that includes movie people, too.

I understand and accept what happened. But to me, movies and books are not like sports. There is no immediate consensus on whether a player had scored a home run or a touch down. So it was okay to speak my mind on the casting, and I don't have any regrets.

But to continue...

I saw no rough cuts of IWTV; I saw no clips. I went to no screenings. It wasn't until David Geffen, himself took the unusual risk of sending me a VHS tape of the movie, that I saw it. And I approached this tape with a deep fear of being hurt, crushed, disappointed, destroyed by the finished work.

When I saw the film on VHS, I came out at once in favor of it, declaring that I loved it. I bought two pages in VARIETY to talk about it in a frank and unedited announcement. No one controlled what I wrote, or had any opportunity to delete any part of it. I loved the film. I said so. I had no idea at the time that the film would be a huge success. I really hoped it would be, but I didn't know. It was so eccentric, so extreme, so weird. I came out in favor of it, fully prepared to sink with it if it failed, that is, to look stupid in my praise of it. I had no other moral and aesthetic choice. I went by the heart.

What happened on opening weekend is now history as they say. The movie made about \$35 million dollars, and broke all kinds of records to do with seasons and ratings, etc. I don't remember all the details, but it was a luscious American success. And I marveled then and I marvel now.

Whatever, I have not up till this date discussed the film in detail publicly. I didn't want to program anyone's response to it. I made my positive comments very general in order that my recommendation would not shape the public's acceptance or rejection of any particular aspects of the film.

Well, over a month has passed. I have had a listed number -- 1-504-522-8634 -- in New Orleans for weeks; to receive by answering machine peoples' responses to the film. The film is now open all over the world.

Therefore, I think it's okay now to go into detail about how I saw this film. The film has established itself in the public consciousness. It's okay to talk about details.

I want to do it. That's why I'm writing this. This essay or commentary or whatever it is -- is shaped entirely by personal feeling and preference. It doesn't conform to anyone's standards as a piece of writing. It is simply

my point by point discussion of the film. I wrote it for myself and anyone else who wants to know how the author responded to INTERVIEW WITH THE VAMPIRE, THE FILM.

If this personal statement seems arrogant, please reconsider. I am striving to make my remarks in full, and not to trust them to an editor or journalist who might for valid reasons cut them, or quote them out of context.

Look upon this gesture, if you will, as an American gesture. I have something to say. I say it. I do not wait to be asked, interviewed, packaged or covered by the news.

What fuels this statement is a passionate love of the film, a marvelous relief that it exists now in a form that can be preserved; that it was what I dreamed it could be, and that I got through the whole experience without being destroyed. A mediocre film would have destroyed me just as much as a bad one. I thought IWTV was exceptional.

So here goes, point by point:

The look of IWTV was for me perfect. Dante Ferretti knew exactly what he was doing with the sets. The costumes were impeccable. And the cinematography of Philippe Rousselot was extraordinary. Stan Winston's makeup achieved an eerie and effective otherworldly look. The score by Elliot Goldenthal I found to be quite wonderful.

Minor note: The hair of the characters in the film was eccentric -- it was not in conformity with the descriptions in the book or my script, or with historical evidence. But it was very interesting, at times more than beautiful, and it worked.

The opening shots of San Francisco caught the grimness of the city, the urban mixture of desperation, poverty and affluent life. Though Brad Pitt did not appear as "beautiful" as I had wanted in the opening scene (the actor is incredibly beautiful actually) he was divinely other worldly -- the Stan Winston make up had its own perfection and appeal with the blue veins beneath the skin, and Brad spoke his lines boldly and well.

As the film plunged into 18th century Louisiana, it had the atmosphere and feel of a pirate film -- rugged, ragged, and full of rats and candles. Superb. This was infinitely better than the fussy Dangerous Liaisons look which worked beautifully for that film but which would never have caught the humid, friable, and doggedly makeshift life of the colony of New Orleans.

The shift to Paris was superb. In a few words and shots, the film caught the unmistakable vitality of a great capitol city, and the contrast to the colony was splendid and thrilling.

The final New Orleans scenes had exactly the right pitch. They caught the shabbiness of New Orleans and the mysterious loveliness of its overgrown and neglected gardens.

The art direction, costumes, lighting, cinematography and craft of the film were sumptuous and thrillingly successful for me. I was grateful for the uncompromising lushness of the film, for its magnificent interiors and brutal exteriors for its relentless attention to detail throughout in creating an immense and tantalizing and utterly convincing world, all of one fine and infinitely varying fabric. Bravo!

Now I would like to discuss the actors and actresses. I'm using first names not because I know these people really well or anything, but because using last names always sounds cold to me. I don't like it. So....

ON BRAD PITT:

Brad Pitt immediately infused the despairing Louis with understandable feeling. He played it passive and quiet, and for me and for lots of viewers (they call me and tell me) he got what guilt was all about, a guilt sometimes that is unattached to any one death or loss. He captured the despair of some one who has fallen from grace, lost his faith, seen what he cannot abide. Brad's eyes, his manner, his soft voice throughout the film were magical.

Ironically, the Louis whom Brad played on the screen is more passive than the Louis of the novel or of my first draft screenplay (which was of course rewritten and changed and edited and enlarged by Neil Jordan). But Brad Pitt made this passive suffering character totally appealing and sympathetic. His seemed to combine youth and patience, acceptance and conscience.

Favorite Brad Pitt moments for me:

Brad's soft voice saying the single syllable "No" when Lestat prepares to give the Dark Gift to Claudia.

Brad's last real scene with Claudia, their discussion on the balcony outside the hotel room -- another contribution from Jordan which was never in my original script.

Brad's face when he finds the ashes in the airwell, and when he turns to confront those who have hurt him so deeply. Absolutely masterly acting. One of the most painful and exquisite moments in film that I have ever watched. Brad did it without a word. Magnificent.

Brad's soft conversation with Armand, especially the last conversation, which was not written by me, but represented, I thought, a wonderful dramatization of the parting of these two characters. The intimacy of this scene, its delicacy, the restraint and the love -- were all glorious to behold.

Brad's anger with Christian Slater in their final moments. Excellent.

There were many other such moments with Brad Pitt.

I respect and am amused by Brad's recent redneck persona. I've been tempted to write a satire INTERVIEW WITH THE REDNECK VAMPIRE just for him and probably will. (I loved Brad in Kalifornia. I've got the story all worked out and I think the Constitution protects satire. Who knows? Maybe Saturday Night Live will want it. One of my dreams for years has been to write for Saturday Night Live.) The readers calling me really want Brad in the future vampire chronicle films. Well, Brad? Is a burrito really better than immortality? All jokes aside, you were a delicate and heartbreaking Louis; whatever you felt, you swept people off their feet.

ON TOM CRUISE:

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. The sheer beauty of Tom was dazzling, but the polish of his acting, his flawless plunge into the Lestat persona, his ability to speak rather boldly poetic lines, and speak them with seeming ease and conviction were exhilarating and uplifting. The guy is great.

I'm no good at modesty. I like to believe Tom's Lestat will be remembered the way Olivier's Hamlet is remembered. Others may play the role some day but no one will ever forget Tom's version of it.

(Let me say here that anyone who thinks I did an "about face" on Tom just doesn't know the facts. My objections to his casting were based on familiarity with his work, which I loved. Many many great actors have been miscast in films and have failed to make it work. I don't have to mention them here. Why hurt anyone by mentioning the disaster of his career? But we've seen big stars stumble over and over when they attempt something beyond their reach.

That Tom DID make Lestat work was something I could not see in a crystal ball. It's to his credit that he proved me wrong. But the general objections to the casting? They were made on solid ground. Enough on that subject. Tom is a great actor. Tom wants challenges. Tom has now transcended the label of biggest box office star in the world. He's better.)

Favorite moments with Tom:

Tom's initial attack on Louis, taking him up into the air, praised by Caryn James so well in the New York Times. Ah! An incredibly daring scene. The finest romantic scene in any film, and here please read the word romance as an old and venerable word for timeless artistic forms of poetry, novels and film.

Romance is a divine word which has never really been denigrated by the drugstore novels with the swooning ladies on the cover. Romance will be with us for all time, If you want to know more about Romance, put on a video of THE FISHER KING and listen to Robin Williams describe the deeper meaning of romance to his newfound girlfriend. It's worth it, believe me.

Back to Tom: other great moments.

Tom's bedside seduction of the dying Louis, in which he offers Louis the Dark Gift. Once again, Tom gave Lestat the virility and the androgyny that made both him and the offer irresistible. He was near blinding. I would have accepted the Dark Gift from him then and there. Only an actor with complete confidence and conviction could have done that scene or any of the others.

Tom's angry outburst in the face of Louis' repeated questions. His stride, his voice both loud and soft, his frustration, his obvious discomfort, and inner conflict. Once again, Tom took over the screen, the theatre, the mind of the viewer. Immense power.

Tom riding his horse through the slaves' fire, and then turning the horse around so that he could face the suspicious mortals. That was on a par with Errol Flynn and Rudy Valentino. It was on a par with the opera greats who have played Mephistopheles. Only a genuine "star" can make a moment like that, and I'm as confused as to why...just as much as anyone in Hollywood. Let's close this one out with one word: Grand! (No, can't stop talking about it.)

If I had to settle for one picture in this film, it would be that shot of Lestat on horseback looking back at the suspicious mortals.

That was and is my hero. That was and is my man. Lestat just won't be afraid of anybody. He won't stand for it. He hates what he is as much as Louis, but he cannot do anything but move forward, attempt to make existence worth it, attempt to create. He knows the formula for success, and has no patience with the formula

for failure. That's Lestat.

Tom's rage and obvious pain in the scene with the bleeding wench and the coffin, one scene from the book which I did not include in my script. It was probably put in by Neil Jordan. If Tom had not given so much depth to this scene, it might have been unwatchable. His desperation, his vulnerability, made it work, and he made himself in it the worthy object of compassion. No small feat! I found the scene, otherwise, to be disgusting.

The shot of Tom looking through the green shutters, and the falling rain, knowing that Louis is somewhere out in the night. This was a gorgeous and eloquent shot. Again, it was the actor who gave it the depth in all the subtle ways that only he can do.

Tom's making of Claudia, and here I want to praise the entire trio...Tom, Kirsten, Brad... The scene is directed delicately and captures the intimacy, the blasphemy and the undeniable innocence and blundering of the human who has a supernatural gift to give and in his pain and confusion, chooses to give it, come what may. That's a scene for now, for our world of scientific and medical miracles, as much as any scene in Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, and Tom pulled it off right to the last second.

Later, Tom's confusion when after bringing Claudia a doll, he sees Claudia turn on him. About half of what I wrote for this scene in the script, or less, made it into the film, and I liked what I saw very much. I wish they'd gone on with the version of this scene that is in QUEEN OF THE DAMNED (see Jesse's discovery of Claudia's diary, and the entry describing what happened), but alas, what they did was great.

Tom's manner and expression on the dangerous night that Claudia comes to him and offers him her "reconciling gift." Close in on those two at the harpsichord. Tom is seated, I believe. Kirsten is behind him and apparently offers him the acceptance he needs so desperately. Scenes like this, with Tom, make this film work.

Every humorous scene Tom attempted was a complete success. The rat and the glass, I adored it. The humor added apparently by Neil Jordan -- the poodles, the piano teacher hitting the keyboard, the dressmaker biting the dust...well, I didn't adore all that, but Tom carried it off with true wit and style. And yes, it's all right to laugh at those parts. We do every time we go to see the movie.

There are many other great Tom Cruise moments throughout the film. Many. But these are the ones I cherish now.

The readers calling me desperately want Tom to play THE VAMPIRE LESTAT. I hope he does. I hope I get to write the script for the movie. Tom's power, knowledge, skill, magnetism and artistic integrity are part and parcel of the success of IWTV, and there is no doubt that Tom would bring power and magic to TVL.

(Let me digress again. For those of you who haven't read TVL, it is not really a sequel to IWTV. It's a complete full novel on its own, beginning the Vampire Chronicles. IWTV was the truly difficult film to make. TVL will take commitment, money and immense faith as well as talent, but compared to IWTV, it is much, much easier to film. Lestat is the true hero of TVL. He is entirely sympathetic. The trick, I think, will be achieving a texture in that film that includes all of Lestat's adventures...from the snows of the Auvergne, to the boulevards of Paris, through the sands of Egypt, and through the visit to Marius' sanctuary, and on to the twentieth century rock music stage. The tales of Armand and of Marius all also excursions for Lestat essentially. I hope Tom makes the journey.)

One point: I am puzzled by what seems to be a discrepancy between the way Tom played Lestat, and the way my hero, Producer David Geffen, and others have described Lestat as a character. Did Tom on his own make this role a little bigger, brighter and more complex than anyone else realized it could be? I don't know. David Geffen called Lestat "nasty" when he was interviewed by Barbara Walters. Nasty? I don't get it. But David Geffen is my hero for getting this film made. No one else could have done it. So why quibble about what David said?

There is one problem created by the compelling charm of Tom's performance, obviously. Since he isn't all that nasty, why does Louis hate Lestat? How can he? Well, I'll take that problem any day over a more shallow solution. Tom hit the right note. And Louis was Louis. Nothing could comfort Louis. The film got it.

ON KIRSTEN DUNST:

Magnificent and flawless as Claudia, shocking in her soft, perfectly paced shifts between adulthood and childish innocence. The role as she played it is far less sinister than the Claudia of the book, and perhaps even a little more innocent than my first draft script. But the change seemed to work wondrously to deliver the heartbreak of Claudia's dilemma to the audience. She was a woman, but she was in a child's body. The actress showed incredible intelligence and cunning, and yet a child's tragic vulnerability and heartrending capacity to be disappointed.

Anybody who doesn't see what this is about -- all women are locked in the bodies of dolls; all self-contemplating human souls are locked in mortal and often confounding bodies -- isn't perhaps asking enough of himself or herself as a viewer. To say this film contained only one idea or no ideas as Janet Maslin said in the New York Times, is, I think to severely underrate it.

The better part of the ideas of this film revolve around Claudia, and her dilemma is truly one shared by everyone. That the film arouses and sustains sympathy for her so that her inevitable fate is tragic is a great cinematic accomplishment.

What Kirsten did in this film has dealt a body blow to the rigid, stupid cliché of the demonic child. Kirsten blew THE BAD SEED out of the water. She is utterly beyond the evil puppetlike child vampires of other movies. She drew us into her motives for violence and offered us a deeper understanding of all the moral rules given us, or created by us. That none of her gestures, words, or actions was prurient was a major achievement.

Favorite moments with Kirsten:

The entire transformation scene in the bed from suffering waif to glorious child killer.

When she looks down from the balcony in the Rue Royale and says, "It means...I shall never grow up."

Her quiet voice in the scene where Lestat brings her the doll (again, about half of what I wrote survived there, maybe less, but I liked Jordan's changes except for one minor point which I'll make below.)

Her seduction of Lestat and subsequent attack on him, especially the moment when she tumbles back on the couch next to the young boys and smiles up at Lestat. Perfection.

Her loving and intimate scenes with Louis in which she becomes a woman, remaining both a daughter and a

mother.

The perfect pitch of prepubescent innocence throughout. The movie isn't about peephole sex, and nobody exemplifies that better than Claudia. It isn't about perversion at all. It never was. It is about the attempt of all of us to live in the light and with grace. Kirsten got the whole thing.

Her final scene.

Again, there are many, many other moments throughout the film with Kirsten.

ON ANTONIO BANDERAS:

As Armand, he gave the role an original interpretation, quite different from mine in the book or the script, but it worked for me as an interpretation of unique and spectacular charm. Antonio had the magnetism of a master vampire. He had the quiet confidence and the obvious power to spellbind. He redeemed the Theatre of the Vampires scene I think, with his sheer authority. He embodied the mystery of Armand and Armand's particular brand of utterly pragmatic evil. We know why he did what he did; we know it was bad; but in a way we can understand him.

I would have preferred to see his beautiful curly hair as it appears in *HOUSE OF THE SPIRITS*, or *PHILADELPHIA*. But he was overwhelmingly successful as Armand, "the oldest surviving vampire in the world." The readers have totally embraced him in this part. I hope he will move into the next film and maybe without the black wig? But he can come on any terms as far as I'm concerned.

He was in the film so briefly that I can truly say my favorite moments with Antonio were all of his moments. But to those who have flipped over this actor, let me recommend again *HOUSE OF THE SPIRITS* and *PHILADELPHIA*. There you will see more of our Armand than in *IWTV*.

ON STEPHEN REA:

This actor was quite marvelous as Santiago, which is not a sympathetic role at all, and in one scene Stephen makes cinema history. This is the scene where Brad Pitt steps out of the airwell, having seen the ashes collapse. Brad looks at Stephen. Stephen smiles. Who will ever forget the malice of that smile? (Or the pain in Brad's face.) Incredible.

Truly one of the staggering moments of the film.

ON CHRISTIAN SLATER:

He is utterly convincing as the interviewer and he made the story all the more powerful by his entirely understandable reactions to the tale. For me, he was plenty young enough to be Daniel Molloy, and I hope we'll see him in *TVL* too, but again, I don't know. Like Antonio, Christian is in the film so briefly that I can truly say my favorite moments with him are all of his moments.

MINOR PLAYERS:

All flawless as far as I'm concerned. There was never a false word from anybody. Quite a back up for the stars. The quadron, Yvette, seemed real Louisiana. No simple thing. They were all good, really.

In sum, the cast of this film contained actors of undeniable talent, charisma and near enchanting manner. The performances alone are worth the price of admission as far as I'm concerned.

ANOTHER DIGRESSION: BEAUTY.

Over and over again, I've said these stars were beautiful. I've talked about their physical gifts, but surely their beauty is the result of something infinitely deeper. These actors and actresses shape their own physical appearance with their educated brains and hearts. Beauty surrounds them and emanates from them. They walk in it, to quote Byron. If they had not expressed depth of soul in every word or gesture, their "beauty" would have been brittle, and not beautiful at all. I want to make this clear, because beauty is such a misused word.

I would also like to say that the beauty of the players seems to work for the audience nationwide, regardless of gender or age. The men calling my machine to voice their opinions are straight as well as gay. They are young and old. They were captivated by the spectacle. Lestat has fans among truck drivers as well as brain surgeons. They don't relate Lestat to gender or to sex necessarily.

Same with the women. They have responded wholeheartedly to what they have seen on the screen.

And even if I speak for this woman alone, allow me to say that a feast of gorgeous men is much appreciated, and rather long overdue. Women are starved for the sight of beautiful men. They are hungry for stylish and profound scenes with beautiful men. Before IWTV, I had seen precious little of the male beauty I craved. Two examples are Tom Berenger in *LAST RITES* when he takes off his Roman collar and makes love to the girl in the sacristy of St. Patrick's. Another would be the scene where Madeline Stowe caresses Daniel Day Lewis in *THE LAST OF THE MOHICANS*, a scene largely focusing on her and her feelings about the man in her arms.

Let me add again that straight men are in no way turned off by such scenes. Why should they be? They watch Kurt Russell, Tom Cruise, Tom Berenger, Brad Pitt, Antonio Banderas, Jeremy Irons, Aiden Quinn and all the other beautiful men for their own reasons. And why not?

But it's a relief to have lived long enough to see movies begin to seriously consider the erotic taste of the female audience as well as the male. Men are highly romantic, and they crave romance and they always have. What could be more romantic than a Ludlum novel or a James Bond thriller or a film like *BACKDRAFT*? Now Hollywood seems to get it -- that this kind of romance and *JANE EYRE* are really the same. Maybe we're seeing the whole concept of the romantic film reexamined. We are seeing a renewed commitment to emotion, to heroism, a new abandonment to passion. Again, it's about time!

ON THE GENERAL DIRECTION BY NEIL JORDAN, THE CINEMATOGRAPHY, AND THE EDITING OF THIS FILM.

I'm lumping all this together because I truly don't know how to separate a director's contribution from that of the cinematographer and the editor. I don't know enough about film making. I don't know how much David

Geffen influenced the film scene by scene. I wasn't there, and I don't have that experience on any film.

So, let's talk about the film as a film: Once again, the entire look of the film was perfection. It caught the dimness, the filth, the fragile handmade luxury and ornate aspirations of the 18th and 19th centuries; it caught the mud on the hem of the garment.

Over and over again, the viewer was brought in close to the faces of the characters, to hear them speak softly, to watch their eyes, their mouths. This was superbly and fearlessly intimate. Yet the camera moved back to Lestat the room to be magnificent; Brad Pitt was mercilessly pursued by the camera in prepubescent beauty and appeal were utterly respected. The handling of all players was masterly.

The pace of the film for me (and most readers calling in) was terrific. The film is genuinely thrilling. It is entertaining! You walk out exhilarated. You feel good and you want to go back. Many, many readers call me to say that they have seen the film over and over again. There is no lag for us in the second half of this film, and there is no conspicuous absence of anything. It was an extraordinarily satisfying film.

The film achieved the Dickensian goal of being meaningful and fun; of being deep and interesting and fun. No small feat in an age in which "realism" has become synonymous with "serious" and we are told that films about everyday life should command our respect over everything else.

The film's moral themes came across to me as clearly realized: we can conceive of immortality, but we're mortal. Inside each of us, regardless of outward grace, there is a misfit. That misfit at times feels like a monster. That misfit may at times behave like a monster.

Whatever Neil Jordan's comments to the press, he seemed to believe in that and to make it work on the screen. The film is one which the audience starts talking about, discussing, arguing before they ever leave the theatre. The film invites analysis. It invites a return viewing. It makes a difference to the people who see it.

The boldness of the scene with the whore and coffin is deeply disturbing in an excellent way. It makes you think about what you might do if you were Lestat. It makes you think about things you've done for entirely personal reasons. But it is disgusting.

The two panoramic scenes in Paris -- Claudia dancing with Louis at a ball; Claudia twirling in her new adult dress before the dressmakers -- both were appropriately immense and unstinting. (Again, the hair of the characters is eccentric. Louis with that long flowing hair in a 19th century Parisian ballroom? It makes me think of the wild west. But I loved it!)

Neil Jordan's humorous scenes were a true comic relief. Though I would never have recommended them or written them -- killing poodles, letting the piano teacher fall dead on the keyboard -- I liked them and felt they were handled cleverly. They worked. And the shift between seriousness and humor worked.

The last scene involving Lestat: I was glad to see him, glad to have him back. When he said, "I feel better already," I loved it. When he pulled the lace out from under his sleeves, I was overjoyed. So all that worked for me. It was enough in keeping with the ending of my script and the book for me to be happy, for me to see the possibilities of a sequel. But I didn't write it.

(I see no problem in moving from this Jordan created scene into TVL. None whatsoever. There are all kinds of ways to do it and be true to TVL, the book.)

FILM CHOICES

made by Jordan and others, perhaps. This movie obviously did not go into the heads of the vampires. It really didn't go into the swoon as they experience it in my novel or script. It didn't really show the distortion of the senses of the vampires. It made, however, a very interesting substitution.

In victimization scenes, the camera focused tightly on the eye of the attacking vampire; it gave us a portrait of the attack which had tremendous visual power. Jordan seemed utterly unintimidated by the plethora of bad vampire movies and vampire scenes that came before him. Perhaps this close up on the eye of the vampire, this attention to the choreography of the victimization scene, was trying to make us feel the swoon. I don't know. The film very successfully used a levitating scene as a substitute for the swoon in the first instance. Whatever the reason, over and over again, the film presented the moment of attack and submission as potent and worthy of serious treatment. I found these choices extremely satisfying.

There's no doubt in my mind that vampires are a metaphor for the predator in all of us, and that Louis and Lestat and Claudia speak directly to the ruthless part of us...especially to those of us who live in affluent twentieth century America, surrounded by luxury and miracles, and yet painfully aware of what goes on in other parts of the world. The film never shied away from this. Again, I am confused by some of Jordan's statements about it. But I found these ideas to be eloquently embodied in the film.

I have only just begun to think about some of the questions the film posed: how far will we go not to be alone; how much will we sacrifice morally in order to attain our definition of magnificence, greatness or independence; the nature of dependency and love. The film isn't talking about mere survival; it's talking about the possibility of grand achievement as well as endurance-- it's talking about reaching for the sublime.

These camera shots of killing over and over were rooted in these elements. I liked them.

THE FILM'S POINT OF VIEW.

As far as I can tell, this film is shot from our point of view, the point of view of the reader of the book or the viewer of the movie. This is not a criticism. It is a comment on something I find very intriguing. What I mean is this: We are being told the tale by Louis, but the camera doesn't show us what Louis sees or how he sees it. The camera stays at the footlights of the stage, as though this were all a play -- an acting out of the book.

Over and over the camera lets characters enter from left and from right as they would on a real stage; it brings them together for medium shots in which they speak their crucial lines. It draws back on panoramic scenes, well beyond the tactile sensations being experienced and described by Louis. There are scenes in which Louis isn't present: Claudia's attack on Lestat, for instance.

There is as far as I can tell only one point of view shot in the whole film. This occurs when Claudia and Madeline are being carried down a passageway. You get one shot of the faces of those carrying them. I'm not sure whether it's from Claudia's point of view, or Madeline's. If there are other such shots I missed them.

Again, this isn't a criticism. I find this an interesting approach on the part of the film makers. Perhaps it is most effective as showing the scope of the story, which is essentially small and gigantic simultaneously. It's several people talking about salvation and damnation amid spectacle that rivals the most high tech modern extravagance.

Whatever, I'm delightedly puzzled over it. It worked well, but why was it that way? What would have happened if we had seen things more consistently from Louis' point of view? For example, when Louis first comes upon Claudia, what would the scene have been like if we had drawn in close on her as he sees her, rather than in close on both of them? What if we had heard her heart the way Louis hears it? What if we had gone into his head for the swoon? What if the sudden entrance of Lestat had been hazy?

I'm not suggesting any of this. The film is immensely effective the way it is. I am simply pointing out that this was a choice that the film made, and one that worked, though I never expected it and can't fully explain it.

I suspect that the full impact of this "stage footlights point of view" was to make the contents of the film appear highly significant, which of course I believe it is. I liked it. There is something classical about making a film this way. The story is supposed to be subjective, but the drama is presented as though it has important meaning for us all.

QUIBBLES.

Loving this film as I do, I hesitate to say anything critical really. But there are a few things that struck me as not so good. Mostly they had to do with editing, or with the unfolding of the story. They are the kinds of things that can be fixed.

The film watcher in me really wanted to know:

Why didn't the vampires, Louis and Lestat, smell the decaying human body under Claudia's dolls? If I lived in that apartment, I would have smelled it. Certainly they would have. Why and how did the human body remain undiscovered? Do these characters have powerful senses or not? I'm puzzled.

Why would dead blood affect a vampire? Why did Lestat get so hurt by drinking "dead blood?" I don't get it.

Did Lestat receive enough wounds from Claudia to really disable him? I don't think so. It should have been a much more violent attack with much more rents in the flesh. Lestat is a very strong guy. I don't get it.

How the hell did Lestat survive the fire in New Orleans?

Why wasn't Lestat in Paris? Shouldn't he have been there to show us 1) that he had survived and 2) to climax the dreadful kangaroo court trial of those who had attacked him? I missed him in Paris. I don't think the film lagged -- I cherish the discussion between Brad and Antonio in this portion of the film -- but Lestat's appearance would have been highly effective for me. This doesn't mar my enjoyment of the film. I just wish it had been different.

I thought the shot of Superman on the theatre screen, as seen by Louis, and the shot of the theatre marquee saying TEQUILA SUNRISE as Louis walks off were unforgivably indelicate and stupid. To throw up the words TEQUILA SUNRISE at that moment blew the mood utterly. I winced. When I watch the film now, I close my eyes at that part!

Why did the vampires break so many necks and spill so much blood? Aren't they too powerful to be so unskilled? Why were we treated to the scene of the prostitute with her legs sprawled apart with blood gushing down her dress? In the context of the film, does Lestat really go for that sort of thing? I know, I know, Janet

Maslin thought this was the central image of the film. I didn't.

Why did the vampires so brutally bully the girl on the stage of the Theatre of the Vampires? I don't get it. Why did they push her and shove her? They are immortals. They are very strong, and she is very weak. Why the indignity, the vulgarity? Why wasn't she thoroughly and mercifully enchanted at the end the way she was in the book? Why was the scene so gratuitously nasty?

Why was the final exchange between Louis and Lestat so brief? Good grief! Didn't Louis have a few questions? Didn't he have more to say to Lestat after all that time? I don't get it. How could he just walk out of there? I couldn't have. Again, it was beautifully done, but I wish it had been different.

How did Lestat get to his position at the very end of the film? How? Couldn't there have been some indication of how he managed to be where he was in his last scene? The overall effect would have been stronger for me if there had been some clues. Again, I love the film, it worked. But I wonder...

Once again, why didn't the vampires cry blood tears!

My last question: why was this film an R rated film? Couldn't it have been just as significant and just as thrilling without being an R rated film? I am assuming of course that the R rating had to do with the nudity and the misogyny in the film, the sadism towards women with heavy sexual overtones. If I'm right, then why was that necessary?

Vampires don't have sex. They transcend gender. Vampire gore appears in comic books, cartoons, and PG movies, doesn't it? what's with the rating system? And what's with the gratuitous cruelty to women in this film? Why? I think the film could have kept all of his philosophical and psychological complexity and been PG or PG-13.

I'm raising this point because the Vampire Chronicles have thousands of very young readers. For them, the books are extremely accessible. They read the books in school. They talk about them with their teachers. They write papers on the books. They call me with questions and write me wonderful letters. I've been asked to speak at schools about these books, and I have.

I have spoken at an elementary school. I have spoken at a college. I have been interviewed in school newspapers as well.

Couldn't the film have been just as accessible to the young as the books are?

I hope kids and their families disregarded the R rating. I hope the young readers got to see the film or that they will when it comes out on videotape. I think it says important moral things, and it is enchanting and spectacular. It's a banquet of images and words and colors and movement. I hope kids overlooked the vulgarity and the brutality of some of the scenes. If they can overlook prime time TV and cable, why can't they see this film?

These nasty and mean scenes didn't ruin the movie for me, and I would let any child go to see it. The film has a redeeming moral context and undeniable splendor that kids are entitled to enjoy. But I don't like the handling of those anti-female sadistic parts. And I would have softened them, tried to transmute them with style, or -- to put it bluntly -- done them in such a way as to achieve a wider audience rating.

We cannot make only that art which is acceptable to children, but we must remember that *MOBY DICK* and *THE OLD MAN AND THE SEA*, and *HAMLET* can all be read or viewed by children without risk. Consider the appeal of *THE RED SHOES* and *TALES OF HOFFMAN*. Consider perhaps that the kids who did get to see *IWTV* may remember it in the way my generation remembers *THE RED SHOES* and *TALES OF HOFFMAN*.

There is a venerable tradition to making the most serious statement in a form that can be understood by an eight year old. I respect that tradition. That kids read my books gives me joy. I'm proud of all my readers, the very young, the very old, the seemingly mainstream, the eccentric, the cerebral, the whole crowd. I ought to be. I'd be a fool not to be proud of being a "popular" and "mainstream" writer. It feels great.

ON OTHER CRITICS AND THE CRITICAL RESPONSE TO THIS FILM.

To echo the offhand remarks of Saturday Night Live's Brooklyn characters, "Forget about it!"

As for *TIME* and *NEWSWEEK*, I think we as readers and film lovers have to reconcile ourselves to the fact that these publications have become virtually worthless in covering books and film. The magazines are obviously fighting a losing battle with television and computer networks, but they aren't putting up much of a fight. Their reviewers seem shallow, stupid, and unforgivably uninformed. Let's kiss them good-bye.

TIME and *NEWSWEEK*, you no longer play a significant role in covering the news surrounding the arts, or in covering the arts themselves. You could turn this around. You could start writing reviews which are actually intelligent essays; you could return to commentary with perspective and validity; you could do your homework on the context of the films and books you review. Eh. I've given up on you.

The success of *INTERVIEW WITH THE VAMPIRE* is only one of many, many proofs that these magazines are no longer major cultural players. It is sad.

On the *NEW YORKER*, Pauline Kael, I miss you. Tina Brown, why don't you open up the *NEW YORKER* to teams of reviewers of films and movies? Give us a real controversy of criticism -- review more books, more films and publish more reviewers. I'd love it, but I read the magazine every week no matter what.

On Janet Maslin in the *New York Times*, though I cherish her great praise of the film, I disagree, as already stated, with the dismissal of the ideas of the film and her dismissal of the richest, most complex and most thought provoking films I've ever seen. People will be viewing it and talking about it when we are no longer here.

On Caryn James, I treasure what you wrote in the *New York Times*.

On *LIZ SMITH* and her very frank and brave questions as to whether or not *IWTV* was a gay allegory, and her question as to why people just don't make a gay film, and why do gays have to be disguised as vampires -- Here's my answer. Ms. Smith, the gays are us. That's all there is to it. There is no disguise. Gay allegory doesn't exist apart from moral allegory for everyone. This is now evident.

PHILADELPHIA made the statement in a very direct way. Tom Hanks in that film played a man that could be any one of us for any number of reasons! Years and years ago, a gay allegory was made called *BRIDE OF*

FRANKENSTEIN. For most of its artistic life, people have been totally unaware that this film is a gay allegory, and with reason. IT DOESN'T MATTER. If it's about gays, it's about all of us, the secrets we carry, the traits which set us apart individually from others, the burdens we bear, the rage we feel, and the common condition that binds us.

The characters of IWTV aren't gays disguised as vampires. They are us. They are us in our loneliness, in our fear, in our spiritual and moral isolation. They are us in our ruthlessness, and in our desperate quest for companionship, warmth, love and reassurance in a world full of gorgeous temptations and very real horrors. They are fallible beings with the power of gods; and that is exactly what we are, all of us.

In sum, INTERVIEW WITH THE VAMPIRE is bigger than a gay allegory, and so is almost any gay allegory.

Gender influences everything but determines nothing! Vampires transcend gender. We as a modern people transcend gender, though we can never escape it. Ours is a time for which there are no precedents with regard to gender and freedom. Look in vain to ancient Rome. Look in vain to the Middle Ages. There has never been so much affluence, scientific knowledge and so much common awareness of violence and injustice. There has never been so much real wealth for so many, combined with instantaneous media confrontation of poverty and suffering. Some of us see life as a horror story, but a horror story with great, great meaning.

ON THE HORROR GENRE:

If we learn anything from this period in film history, let us learn this: that fantasy and horror can speak to the ordinary and the most eccentric; fantasy and horror can embody and reflect the most common and the most dreaded pain we all share; fantasy and horror can speak to the addict, to the celebrity, to the gay man, to the gay woman, to the housewife, to the working man or woman, to me to you, to the truck driver, to the brain surgeon, to the monk, to the nun, and to the child. Poetry thrives in fantasy and horror books and films; so do great visions of truth. The ambition and the potential of these genres is limitless.

Finally, let me describe another aspect of this unique time. Today, what we share is more important than what sets us apart from one another. What we have in common is infinitely more important than what divides us. It has never been that way before, and the possibilities as well as the responsibilities are endless.

This is the full meaning of INTERVIEW WITH THE VAMPIRE. Kinked? Yeah. Weird? You got it. Universal? Most certainly.

With love,

Anne Rice
New Orleans, Louisiana
1994

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