

# EDUCACIÓN Y HUMANIDADES EN TRANSFORMACIÓN

Investigación e innovación interdisciplinar

Chiara Gemma  
Vincenzo Cafagna  
Juan Francisco Álvarez Herrero

*(Eds.)*





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## Capítulo 12. Immortality, Identity, and Masculinity: Gothic Temporality and the Quest for Existential Meaning in *Dracula* (1992) and *Interview with the Vampire* (1994)

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**Abstract:** This paper examines Francis Ford Coppola's *Dracula* (1992) and Neil Jordan's *Interview with the Vampire* (1994) as seminal examples of Gothic cinema intertwining aesthetics, temporality, and philosophical inquiry to explore masculinity, power, and identity. By situating the narratives within their historical, cultural, and cinematic contexts, the study investigates the ways in which Gothic tropes – immortality, the uncanny, and the grotesque – interact with representations of male subjectivity, moral ambiguity, and the pursuit of existential meaning. Drawing on interdisciplinary approaches from film studies, memory and trauma theory, and masculinity studies, the paper demonstrates how these films construct temporal and spatial liminality to problematize fixed notions of identity, while emphasizing ethical reflection, vulnerability, and humanist concerns. Through detailed analyses of visual style, narrative structure, and character dynamics, the study elucidates Coppola's and Jordan's deployment of Gothic aesthetics to interrogate hegemonic and counter-hegemonic masculinities, the ethics of power, and the human confrontation with mortality. Ultimately, the paper argues that Gothic cinema of the 1990s offers a critical lens for understanding broader cultural anxieties surrounding gender, temporality, and identity, and highlights the enduring relevance of these films for contemporary discussions on cinematic storytelling, existential inquiry, and the fluidity of human subjectivity.

**Keywords:** gothic cinema, trauma, memory, existentialism, cultural critique

### 1. INTRODUCTION: APPROACHING GOTHIC CINEMA OF LATE 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

Cinema has long served as a mirror and mediator of human experience, translating the complexities of social, psychological, and cultural life into visual and narrative form. From early silent spectacles to contemporary blockbusters, films explore enduring questions of identity, power, morality, and the search for meaning. Particularly within the Gothic and supernatural genres, filmmakers have repeatedly interrogated the boundaries of temporality, mortality, and human desire, using fantastical motifs to reflect on deeply human concerns, as through their capacity to merge aesthetic innovation with philosophical inquiry, films can articulate universal themes while remaining sensitive to their historical and sociocultural contexts. Gothic cinema thus provides a unique vantage point for examining evolving conceptions of masculinity, authority, and existential purpose across time and space.

This paper examines Francis Ford Coppola's *Dracula* (1992) and Neil Jordan's *Interview with the Vampire* (1994) as paradigmatic examples of Gothic cinema which interrogate masculinity, power, identity, and the pursuit of meaning. Both films, adapting seminal literary texts, offer rich visual and narrative landscapes through which the complexities of human existence are explored: on the one hand, Coppola's *Dracula* reimagines Bram Stoker's novel (1897) by framing its eponymous character as both historical figure and mythic archetype, revealing the fragility and performativity of hegemonic masculinity while situating the quest for immortality and love at the center of the narrative; on the other hand, Jordan's *Interview with the Vampire* adapts Anne Rice's novel (1976) to probe the tensions between predatory dominance and introspective vulnerability, presenting male identity as a contested, multifaceted construct while exploring ethical responsibility, relational attachment, and the search for purpose across centuries. Beyond their Gothic imagery and vampiric motifs, both films operate at the intersection of aesthetic innovation and philosophical reflection as they employ cinematographic techniques, production design, and acting to render timeless explorations of identity and power, emphasizing the liminality of their protagonists' existence. Furthermore, by juxtaposing historical specificity with universal human dilemmas, these works interrogate cultural anxieties, the fluidity of selfhood, and the ethical dimensions of immortality, establishing a fertile ground for interdisciplinary inquiry into gender, ontology, and temporality.

Scholarship on Gothic cinema and vampire narratives has consistently foregrounded the genre's capacity to interrogate societal norms, psychological tensions, and philosophical questions. Early studies, such as those by Punter and Byron (2004), highlight the Gothic as a lens through which anxieties surrounding modernity, mortality, and the uncanny are articulated: within this framework, vampires operate as metaphors for the Other, embodying both societal fears and suppressed desires, including questions of gendered power, transgression, and moral ambiguity. Scholarship on *Dracula* specifically has examined the interplay between historical adaptation and postmodern reinterpretation, noting how Coppola's rendering negotiates Stoker's Victorian concerns with late 20<sup>th</sup>-century discourses on hegemonic masculinity, eroticism, and existential longing (Connell, 2005; Hutcheon, 2006). Gary Oldman's performance, along with the film's use of chiaroscuro lighting, symbolic costumes, and non-linear narrative, has been analyzed for its dual function in conveying vulnerability and commanding authority, thereby complicating conventional Gothic archetypes. Similarly, analyses of *Interview with the Vampire* situate the film within debates on queer subtext, male intimacy, and the destabilization of traditional gender norms (Butler, 1990; Sedgwick, 2015 [1985]). Critics such as Elsaesser and Hagener (2009) have emphasized the immersive quality of the mise-en-scène, noting its capacity to evoke temporal dislocation and existential reflection. Interdisciplinary studies likewise explore the films' philosophical dimensions, linking vampiric immortality to existentialist and humanistic inquiries on freedom, purpose, and moral responsibility (Camus, 1942; Frankl, 1946; Sartre, 1970). More recent scholarship has expanded these approaches to include postcolonial and global perspectives, interpreting vampiric narratives as sites of negotiation between cultural identity, Otherness, and historical displacement (Bhabha, 1994; Said, 1978). Together, these studies establish a robust foundation for analyzing how Gothic cinema, through its interplay of aesthetics, narrative, and performance, engages audiences in critical reflection on masculinity, identity, power, and the pursuit of meaning.

This paper adopts a multi-layered, interdisciplinary methodology combining film analysis, literary adaptation studies, and gender and identity theory. Thus, close textual

and visual analysis is employed to examine cinematography, production design, costume, lighting, and acting as integrated elements shaping narrative and thematic meaning, with particular attention given to how Gothic aesthetics – including chiaroscuro lighting, Baroque and Art Nouveau-inspired sets, as well as symbolic color schemes – articulate psychological states, temporal dislocation, and ethical dilemmas. In addition, comparative adaptation studies are utilized to situate the films within broader literary and cinematic traditions: by examining the divergences and convergences between Stoker's and Rice's novels and their cinematic counterparts, the paper interrogates the reinterpretation of source material and the films' responses to contemporary cultural and philosophical concerns. Thirdly, theoretical frameworks from gender studies and postmodern identity theory are applied to analyze constructions of masculinity, power, and selfhood: Judith Butler's theories of performativity (1990, 2024) and R. W. Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity (2005) provides a lens for evaluating male identity as enacted, contested, and contextually negotiated, while Stuart Hall's notion of hybrid, performative identity (1996) supports readings of the characters' fluid, liminal existence. Fourthly, philosophical and existential perspectives, drawing on Camus (1942), Frankl (1946) and Sartre (1970), inform interpretations of the films' exploration of mortality, purpose, and ethical responsibility. Last but not least, sociocultural contextualization is applied, situating the films within late 20<sup>th</sup>-century anxieties regarding globalization, technology, disease, and shifting gender norms. By integrating these methods, the paper illuminates the interplay between cinematic form, thematic depth, and historical resonance, offering a holistic understanding of the films' engagement with perennial human questions.

The paper is organized into two principal segments, each devoted to one of the films under study: the first segment provides an in-depth analysis of Coppola's *Dracula* (1992), examining the representation of masculinity and power, the existential and ethical dimensions of immortality, and the construction of identity beyond historical and geographical constraints while interrogating the interplay between aesthetic techniques – cinematography, set design, costume, and performance – and thematic concerns. The second segment focuses on Jordan's *Interview with the Vampire* (1994), highlighting similar motifs of masculinity, ethical responsibility, and identity formation, in parallel with an emphasis on temporal and spatial dislocation and the interplay between Gothic visuality and philosophical inquiry. Both chapters adopt a comparative lens, drawing connections between the films while highlighting the distinct approaches of Coppola and Jordan to shared thematic concerns. The conclusion delivers an analytical synthesis while outlining directions for further research based on the findings and limitations of the present study.

## **2. DRACULA (1992): MASCULINITY, POWER, AND IDENTITY BEYOND TIME AND SPACE**

Francis Ford Coppola's *Dracula* (1992), a bold reimagining of Bram Stoker's 1897 novel, demonstrates the distinctive capacity of live-action cinema to construct, interrogate, and dismantle aesthetic and ideological frameworks. Far more than a lavish Gothic spectacle, the film functions as a complex meditation on masculinity, power, desire, meaning, and the formation of identity beyond historical and geographical boundaries. Through its meticulous visual design, stylized performances, and thematic density, Coppola's *Dracula* invites sustained reflection on the human condition within shifting socioeconomic and political-cultural contexts. While firmly grounded in its literary source, the film transcends adaptation to articulate late 20<sup>th</sup>-century concerns through a timeless exploration of vulnerability, longing, and moral responsibility.

At its core, *Dracula* is a Gothic inquiry into masculinity and power, exposing them as paradoxical and performative rather than stable or innate. Gary Oldman's portrayal of Count Dracula oscillates between monstrosity and tragedy, between commanding virility and emotional fragility, capturing the dual nature of masculine power: its seductive force and its destructive excess. Dracula's vampirism manifests as an insatiable hunger for control, immortality, and domination, yet his yearning for his lost wife Elisabeta profoundly humanizes him. His obsession with Mina (Winona Ryder), whom he believes to be Elisabeta's reincarnation, undermines his authority by revealing an irreducible need for intimacy and meaning. Thus, power in *Dracula* is shown to be inherently unstable, continually undermined by emotional dependency and existential vulnerability. Moreover, Coppola's decision to foreground Dracula's origin as Vlad the Impaler – an embittered warrior who renounces God following the death of his beloved – introduces a historical and psychological dimension to masculinity. Vlad's transformation into Dracula is framed not simply as a supernatural curse but as an existential rupture – such a reinterpretation aligns with postmodern critiques of hegemonic masculinity, which emphasize the emotional, social, and ethical costs of male dominance. As R. W. Connell notes, hegemonic masculinity is not a fixed identity but a configuration of practices which sustains male dominance while remaining perpetually fragile (2005). Dracula's descent into monstrosity illustrates this instability: his pursuit of absolute power isolates him from human connection and ultimately erodes his sense of self.

The film further complicates masculinity by presenting competing male archetypes: Jonathan Harker (Keanu Reeves) embodies Victorian ideals of rationality, propriety, and emotional restraint, yet his masculinity proves ineffectual in the face of Dracula's transgressive force as his helplessness exposes the limitations of a masculinity grounded solely in social conformity and moral discipline. Van Helsing (Anthony Hopkins), by contrast, represents a hybrid masculinity which fuses scientific rationality with spiritual conviction: as mentor, protector, and strategist, he wields authority in service of collective survival rather than domination. Nevertheless, his obsessive zeal mirrors Dracula's own fixation, blurring distinctions between savior and monster and suggesting that the exercise of power – even in the name of good – remains ethically fraught. This dialectical portrayal of masculinities resonates with Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity (1990), which conceives gender as an unstable set of enacted behaviors shaped by social norms rather than an essential identity: in *Dracula*, masculinity emerges as a contested site where power, desire, and vulnerability intersect, at the same time as existential yearning permeates it, as its characters grapple with mortality, love, and purpose. Dracula's immortality, initially framed as omnipotence, is gradually revealed as a profound curse: eternal life devoid of meaning becomes a form of existential imprisonment. His obsessive pursuit of Mina represents a misguided attempt to reclaim lost purpose, echoing Viktor Frankl's assertion that suffering becomes unbearable only in the absence of meaning (1946): thus, the more Dracula seeks control, the further he retreats from humanity. Mina, likewise, navigates her own existential conflict, torn between marital duty to Harker and her intense attraction to Dracula, with her eventual refusal of immortality foregrounding agency and moral choice as prerequisites for a meaningful life.

The tension between desire and responsibility, autonomy and obligation, resonates strongly with modern audiences confronting similar dilemmas in increasingly fragmented societies. While Dracula's longing for eternal love reflects humanity's enduring desire for transcendence, the film insists that immortality exacts an unbearable cost. Isolated from human temporality, Dracula's existence becomes cyclical and predatory, underscoring that meaning arises not from power or pleasure but from ethical relation.

The film's climactic moment – Dracula's acceptance of death through Mina's act of mercy – articulates a redemptive logic grounded in renunciation rather than domination: meaning, the film suggests, is found not in conquering time but in embracing vulnerability and accountability. One of *Dracula's* most compelling achievements lies in its construction of identity beyond fixed historical and geographical coordinates. Although situated in Victorian England and Eastern Europe, the narrative transcends its setting through symbolic imagery and non-linear temporality. Dracula's dual identity as both Vlad the Impaler and the Count collapses distinctions between history and myth, aligning with postmodern theories that reject essentialist notions of selfhood. As Butler (2024) argues, identity is constituted performatively through repeated acts rather than originating from a stable essence: Dracula's shifting roles – warrior, lover, monster – exemplify this performativity, challenging viewers to reconsider the coherence of identity itself. The film further situates identity within global flows of power and difference: Dracula's migration from Eastern Europe to England mirrors anxieties surrounding globalization, cultural hybridity, and the destabilization of national boundaries. Scholars such as Edward Said (1978) and Arjun Appadurai (1996) have examined the ways in which the figure of the foreign Other functions as both threat and mirror within Western imaginaries. Dracula embodies this duality: exoticized and feared, yet reflective of Western repressed desires, his shapeshifting abilities underscoring the fluidity of identity, aligning with Zygmunt Bauman's (2000) concept of "liquid modernity", in which identity is unstable, multiple, and continuously renegotiated.

Visually, *Dracula* is a tour de force of cinematic craftsmanship, combining traditional and experimental techniques to produce a richly immersive aesthetic. Coppola's deliberate reliance on practical, in-camera effects – shadow play, forced perspective, superimposition – recalls early cinematic magic, particularly the work of Georges Méliès, lending the film a meta-cinematic dimension. This aesthetic choice grounds the supernatural in material reality while enhancing the film's dreamlike quality. The production design, drawing on Symbolist and Art Nouveau influences, dissolves boundaries between reality and fantasy, with Eiko Ishioka's Oscar-winning costumes functioning as extensions of character psychology, and Dracula's elaborate garments and Mina's ethereal attire visually encoding inner conflict and transformation. Cinematographer Michael Ballhaus's use of chiaroscuro lighting intensifies the film's Gothic sensibility, emphasizing moral ambiguity and emotional tension. Color symbolism plays a crucial role, with red dominating the palette to signify passion, violence, and immortality. This visual excess situates the narrative in a timeless, otherworldly realm, while reinforcing psychological depth. As Linda Hutcheon (2006) observes, postmodern adaptation thrives on intertextual layering, allowing works to operate as "textual mosaics" which transcend their historical: *Dracula* exemplifies this process, blending literary heritage, cinematic history, and contemporary theory into a cohesive aesthetic statement.

The film's thematic richness invites interdisciplinary engagement across psychology, sociology, and cultural studies: psychologically, Dracula functions as an embodiment of the Jungian shadow, externalizing repressed fears and desires. His predatory intimacy and Mina's conflicted attraction can be examined through attachment theory (Dworkin, 1988; Erikson, 1980) and trauma studies (Conti, 2021; Herman, 1992). Vampirism itself operates as a metaphor for addiction and compulsion, resonating with sociological analyses of stigma, dependency, and autonomy (Goffman, 1956; Friedman, 2003). Sociopolitically, *Dracula* reflects late 20<sup>th</sup>-century anxieties surrounding globalization, technological acceleration, and the erosion of traditional structures. Dracula's invasion of

England can be read as a metaphor for imperial anxiety, cultural contamination, and fears of hybridity, echoing Said's critique of Orientalism (1978), as the film's juxtaposition of industrial modernity with primal nature further gestures towards ecological concerns and ethical debates about scientific progress.

Coppola's *Dracula* exemplifies the transformative potential of auteur cinema: by re-envisioning a canonical text through a distinctive artistic lens, Coppola demonstrates the ways in which cinema can challenge inherited narratives and expand cultural imagination. His insistence on practical effects and collaboration with artists such as Ishioka and Ballhaus highlight the value of creative risk in an increasingly digital cinematic landscape. Gary Oldman's performance anchors the film's emotional complexity, eliciting both terror and empathy, while Winona Ryder's Mina emerges as an agentive figure rather than a passive victim. For contemporary audiences, *Dracula* continues to resonate as a reflection on love, power, and identity amid uncertainty. Released in the 1990s, the film engaged viewers navigating post-Cold War realignments, neoliberal transformations, and technological upheaval. Its thematic focus on alienation and longing speaks to enduring human concerns, while its aesthetic synthesis bridges classical and modern cinematic traditions. As Pauline Kael observed, the most powerful works of art compel audiences to see familiar realities anew (1996). In this sense, *Dracula* remains a vital cultural text – one that illuminates the complexities of human desire and the evolving role of cinema as both mirror and catalyst for critical reflection.

### **3. INTERVIEW WITH THE VAMPIRE (1994): IMMORTALITY AND THE PURSUIT OF MEANING**

Neil Jordan's *Interview with the Vampire* (1994) occupies a pivotal position in late 20<sup>th</sup>-century cinema, intertwining Gothic aesthetics with sustained philosophical reflections on masculinity, power, and identity. Adapted from Anne Rice's (1976) seminal novel, the film transcends genre conventions and its specific historical and geographical settings to engage broader questions of human existence and the universal search for meaning. Through its layered performances and meticulous visual design, *Interview with the Vampire* offers a rich case study for examining the cultural and philosophical capacities of live-action cinema in the mid-1990s.

The film's visual and narrative architecture is firmly grounded in Gothic traditions marked by elegance, excess, and an obsessive engagement with death and immortality. Cinematographer Philippe Rousselot's use of chiaroscuro lighting, combined with opulent period costumes and a *mise-en-scène* inspired by Baroque and Romantic visual cultures, constructs a haunting yet seductive world. Candlelit interiors in 18<sup>th</sup>-century New Orleans and the decaying grandeur of European palaces evoke timelessness and entrapment, mirroring the existential stasis of the immortal protagonists. The subdued color palette generates a sense of uncanny nostalgia that aligns with the vampires' eternal lives and emotional alienation. As Punter and Byron (2004) observe, Gothic narratives frequently operate as metaphors for social anxieties, particularly fears of fragmentation and loss of individuality in periods of transition. In *Interview with the Vampire*, these anxieties are refracted through immortality itself, as the characters confront the existential emptiness produced by their severance from human temporality. Thus, if Gothic aesthetics externalize psychological and societal tensions, the film's production design further intensifies themes of alienation and transgression. The juxtaposition of decadence and decay – splendor entwined with the grotesque – reflects the vampires' paradoxical existence: immortality saturated with suffering and moral conflict. This approach aligns with theories of cinematic immersion, whereby carefully constructed environments draw audiences into worlds that feel simultaneously foreign and familiar (Elsaesser and

Hagener, 2009). The visual excess of *Interview with the Vampire* thus serves not merely decorative purposes but functions as an epistemological framework through which ethical ambiguity and existential dread are rendered palpable.

At its thematic core, the film interrogates dominant models of masculinity through its central male figures: Lestat (Tom Cruise), Louis (Brad Pitt), and later Armand (Antonio Banderas). Lestat embodies a predatory, hedonistic masculinity grounded in domination, spectacle, and control. His unapologetic embrace of vampirism and his charismatic cruelty exemplify what R. W. Connell terms “hegemonic masculinity,” defined by aggression, authority, and the subordination of others (2005). Cruise’s performance amplifies this archetype through flamboyance and theatrical excess, rendering Lestat both alluring and terrifying. In contrast, Louis emerges as a counter-hegemonic figure whose introspection, moral anguish, and refusal to kill challenge traditional masculine stoicism: his empathy and ethical hesitation signal a rejection of toxic masculinity and anticipate more contemporary models of male identity that value vulnerability and accountability. This tension between Lestat and Louis reflects broader late-20<sup>th</sup>-century cultural debates, as feminist and queer critiques increasingly destabilized rigid gender norms. Louis’s suffering, far from being framed as weakness, becomes a site of ethical resistance. In his turn, Armand complicates this binary by occupying an intermediate position: neither purely predatory nor overtly remorseful, he represents a seductive and philosophical masculinity grounded in subtle authority and manipulation. As a leader who governs through persuasion rather than brute force, Armand offers an alternative model of power that blurs the boundaries between dominance and submission. Together, these three figures form a triangulated critique of masculine identity, exposing the instability and performativity of gendered power.

The relationships among these men further subvert traditional hierarchies, as Lestat’s dominance over Louis ultimately erodes as Louis gains autonomy and questions his maker’s authority – a narrative shift that parallels changing social attitudes towards masculinity in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, when introspection and emotional openness became increasingly legible as masculine traits (Connell, 2005; Kimmel, 2018). The homoerotic undertones of Lestat and Louis’s bond complicate this dynamic even more profoundly. Drawing on Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s concept of “homosocial desire” (2015 [1985]), their relationship can be read as a space where intimacy, power, and rivalry converge, transcending heteronormative categorizations. Vampirism itself becomes a metaphor for queer relationality, positioning *Interview with the Vampire* as a precursor to more explicit cinematic engagements with queer identities.

Beyond gender, the film probes existential questions surrounding meaning, freedom, and despair. Immortality functions as both gift and curse: liberated from death, the vampires are nevertheless trapped in an eternal present devoid of developmental milestones. This temporal dislocation intensifies their alienation and raises philosophical questions about fulfillment and purpose. Louis’s existential struggle closely parallels Albert Camus’s notion of the “absurd hero”, who confronts a meaningless universe without illusion (1942): unlike Lestat, who seeks refuge in pleasure and power, Louis yearns for a moral framework capable of anchoring his existence. His quest resonates with Jean-Paul Sartre’s emphasis on freedom and responsibility (1970), as Louis refuses to surrender ethical agency despite the nihilistic implications of vampirism. Claudia (Kirsten Dunst), transformed into a vampire as a child, introduces a further layer of complexity. Condemned to perpetual physical immaturity while her intellect and emotions evolve, Claudia embodies the tragedy of arrested development: her rebellion against Lestat and Louis – culminating in her attempt to murder Lestat – symbolizes a rejection of imposed

identities and a demand for self-determination: this narrative arc echoes feminist critiques of patriarchal authority, as articulated by Judith Butler (1990; 2024), while also foregrounding the violence inherent in enforced dependency.

The film's protagonists exist in a liminal, transhistorical space, largely severed from familial, national, and cultural anchors. Identity, in this context, becomes relational and performative rather than fixed: Claudia's struggle for recognition underscores the fragility of selfhood in the absence of temporal continuity. The film's transcontinental and transhistorical structure – spanning 18<sup>th</sup>-century Louisiana to 19<sup>th</sup>-century Europe – destabilizes essentialist notions of identity. As Homi K. Bhabha argues, identity is inherently hybrid, produced through negotiation with alterity (1994) – the vampires' interactions with human and non-human others expose identity as fluid and contingent, aligning with Stuart Hall's postmodern conception of identity as historically situated and continuously rearticulated (1996). Thus, performance and directorial vision are central to the film's philosophical impact: Cruise's portrayal of Lestat, initially met with skepticism, redefined his star persona and demonstrated the transformative potential of immersive acting; Pitt's restrained performance renders Louis's internal conflict legible, while Dunst's portrayal of Claudia remains one of the film's most unsettling achievements. Neil Jordan's direction synthesizes Gothic horror with philosophical inquiry, privileging atmosphere and character over spectacle. In doing so, he exemplifies the filmmaker's role as cultural commentator, crafting narratives that interrogate societal norms while resonating across temporal boundaries.

An interdisciplinary lens further enriches readings of *Interview with the Vampire*. From the perspective of existential psychology, the characters' suffering aligns with Viktor Frankl's assertion that meaning can emerge through confrontation with despair (1946). Claudia's crisis, in particular, resonates with Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, highlighting the necessity of temporal progression and social recognition for identity formation (1980). Sociopolitically, the film's depiction of consumption and domination invites postcolonial readings: vampirism parallels histories of colonial extraction and exploitation, especially within the 18<sup>th</sup>-century plantation economy, echoing Edward Said's insights into power and otherness (1978), while its engagement with immortality equally intersects with contemporary scientific discourses on aging and longevity, anticipating ethical debates raised by biotechnological advances. Technological innovation within cinema itself plays a crucial role in the film's affective power: the integration of practical effects with early digital techniques lends the supernatural a sense of material presence, reinforcing audience immersion and underscoring cinema's capacity to visualize abstract philosophical concerns.

Released in 1994, *Interview with the Vampire* emerged amid profound cultural shifts: the aftermath of the Cold War, accelerating globalization, and the rise of digital media reshaped conceptions of identity and power so that its themes of alienation and moral ambiguity resonated with audiences navigating these transformations. The lingering shadow of the AIDS crisis further informs the film's subtext, as vampirism evokes fears of contagion, stigma, and marginalized desire, embedding the narrative within contemporary anxieties about otherness and embodiment. As a live-action film, *Interview with the Vampire* exemplifies cinema's dual function as cultural archive and philosophical medium. Jordan's adaptation combines literary fidelity with cinematic innovation, producing a work that reflects late-20<sup>th</sup>-century concerns with mortality, legacy, and ethical responsibility. The casting of A-list actors ensured commercial success while enabling artistic ambition, and the film's technological sophistication contributed to its lasting appeal. Kirsten Dunst's performance, in particular, demonstrates

how embodied acting can transcend age and gender to leave a durable imprint on cultural memory. Ultimately, *Interview with the Vampire* functions as both mirror and catalyst: by articulating universal concerns through specific aesthetic and narrative strategies, the film invites audiences to reflect on their own values and assumptions, with its collaborative synthesis of performance, direction, and technology underscoring cinema's capacity to bridge disciplines and historical moments. More than a tale of immortals, *Interview with the Vampire* is a meditation on what it means to be human – our identities, our choices, and our search for meaning. In weaving together Gothic aesthetics, existential philosophy, and cultural critique, the film affirms cinema's enduring potential as a medium of reflection, challenge, and transformation.

#### **4. CONCLUSION: GOTHIC CINEMA AS MIRROR OF SELF AND ENGINE FOR PROGRESS**

On the one hand, Coppola's *Dracula* (1992) emerges as a complex exploration of masculinity, power, and identity, bridging historical specificity and timeless human concerns while presenting Count Dracula as a figure whose virility and dominance are inseparable from vulnerability and longing, embodying the duality of hegemonic masculinity and its ethical and emotional costs. By foregrounding Dracula's backstory as Vlad the Impaler, Coppola situates his descent into vampirism within an existential framework, emphasizing the tension between personal desire, societal expectation, and moral responsibility. The film's Gothic aesthetic – encompassing chiaroscuro lighting, symbolic color schemes, and opulent costume and set design – amplifies these thematic concerns, creating a sensory and emotional immersion which reinforces the narrative's philosophical depth. Performances, particularly by Gary Oldman and Winona Ryder, further articulate the interplay of power, desire, and ethical reflection. Dracula's pursuit of immortality and love, set against the constraints of history and geography, underscores the fragility of identity, revealing that human connection, vulnerability, and moral engagement are central to constructing meaning across time.

On the other hand, Jordan's *Interview with the Vampire* (1994) similarly interrogates masculinity, power, and the quest for existential meaning, albeit through a more temporally and geographically fluid narrative, positioning Lestat and Louis as embodiments of contrasting masculinities, ethical orientations, and approaches to immortality: Lestat's predatory dominance juxtaposed with Louis's introspective sensitivity reveals the performative and contested nature of male identity, while Claudia's perpetual childhood complicates conventional understandings of agency and selfhood. The Gothic *mise-en-scène*, with its interplay of light, shadow, and extravagant decay, mirrors the characters' moral ambiguities and existential dilemmas, situating the audience within a liminal space between historical specificity and universal human concerns. The narrative's emphasis on relationality and ethical responsibility highlights the humanistic dimensions of vampiric immortality, while the philosophical subtext – drawing on existentialist and humanistic thought – foregrounds the struggle for purpose, autonomy, and ethical integrity. Together, these elements demonstrate how Jordan's adaptation leverages aesthetics, performance, and narrative to investigate identity, temporality, and power in a manner resonating across cultural and temporal boundaries.

Despite its interdisciplinary scope, this study has several limitations: firstly, the analysis focuses primarily on Coppola's and Jordan's directorial choices and lead performances, without extensively addressing secondary characters, audience reception, or cross-cultural interpretations, which may yield additional insights into societal responses to gender, power, and identity; secondly, while theoretical frameworks from gender studies, postmodern identity theory, and existential philosophy are employed, the study does not

systematically engage with emerging digital media adaptations, fan cultures, or interactive storytelling, which increasingly shape contemporary Gothic narratives; thirdly, temporal constraints limited the comparative analysis to two films from the early to mid-1990s, excluding later cinematic reinterpretations which might illuminate evolving aesthetic, philosophical, or sociopolitical trends. Acknowledging these limitations underscores the need for broader empirical and interdisciplinary research to contextualize Gothic cinema within ongoing cultural, technological, and philosophical developments.

Thus, future research could expand the comparative lens to include later adaptations of vampire narratives across film, television, and digital media, examining how contemporary audiences interpret themes of masculinity, power, and existential inquiry, integrating reception analysis, considering cross-cultural, gendered, and queer perspectives to explore the socio-political resonance of Gothic tropes. Additionally, incorporating neuroscientific or cognitive approaches to aesthetic immersion could provide empirical insights into the impact of visual and narrative techniques on emotional engagement and ethical reflection. Comparative analyses of literature-to-screen adaptations may further elucidate the evolving negotiation between source material and contemporary cultural concerns: such research would deepen understanding of Gothic cinema's role as a dynamic site for interrogating human identity, moral responsibility, and the search for meaning across temporal and spatial contexts.

Eventually, Coppola's *Dracula* (1992) and Jordan's *Interview with the Vampire* (1994) exemplify the capacity of Gothic cinema to interrogate enduring questions of masculinity, power, identity, and the human quest for meaning: by merging aesthetic innovation with philosophical inquiry, these films construct immersive narratives which transcend historical and geographical boundaries while engaging with culturally and temporally specific concerns. Their visual, narrative, and performative strategies illuminate the fluidity of selfhood and individual agency, the ethical dimensions of power, and the existential dilemmas inherent in immortality, inviting audiences to reflect critically on human nature. As both mirrors and catalysts, these works unveil cinema's enduring potential to bridge disciplines, stimulate intellectual engagement, and foster empathy, underlining its relevance as a medium for understanding and contemplating the complexities of the human condition across generations.

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