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“You Think, in All These Spools, You’ve Arrived at Some Ineffable Truth?”: The Constructedness of Truth in AMC+’s Interview with the Vampire

Nietveld, Fiebie

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**“You Think, in All These Spools, You’ve Arrived at Some
Ineffable Truth?”: The Constructedness of Truth in AMC+’s**

Interview with the Vampire

Fiebie Nietveld

S3099539

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Supervisor: Dr. K. Rolfe Ph.D.

Second Reader: Dr. M.S. Newton

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Introduction

The Americanisation and domestication of the vampire is often attributed to Anne Rice's *Interview with the Vampire* (1976). Rice's work is thought to have had a major influence on the portrayal of vampires in contemporary media, which generally portrays vampires as possessing romantic and alluring qualities. These qualities starkly contrast with the ancient vampire in Stoker's nineteenth-century Gothic novel *Dracula* (1897). *Dracula*, even though it is predated by John William Polidori's *The Vampyre* (1819) and Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* (1872), is commonly believed to have laid the foundation for the present-day vampire cult (Nubaumer 1). Rice's novels are credited with turning "the one-sided image of vampires back then upside down", as she constructed a realm in which vampires live among humans undetected and resemble them both in body and in mind, leading to identification rather than horror in the audience (Nubaumer 1-2). *Interview with the Vampire* introduces a sympathetic vampire narrative from the perspective of the vampire (Linkin 1) and was termed as the first vampire novel to show "the moral ambivalence a fledgling vampire might feel" (Rout 473). The novel centres on vampire Louis de Pointe du Lac, a "regretful plantation owner" (Jones 22:19), now living in San Francisco in 1973, who agrees to an interview with a young journalist, Daniel Molloy, and recounts his life story.

The 2022 AMC gothic horror series *Interview with the Vampire* is the most recent adaptation of Anne Rice's *The Vampire Chronicles* and was developed by Rolin Jones. The series chronicles Louis and Daniel's second attempt at an interview in 2022. Starring Jacob Anderson as Louis de Pointe du Lac, Sam Reid as Lestat de Lioncourt, Eric Bogosian as Daniel Molloy, Assad Zaman as Armand, and Bailey Bass and Delainey Hayles as Claudia, the series is queer-forward and racially diverse. Whereas the novel mainly focuses on "the existential despair, the tedium and attractions of immortality, [and] the moral quandaries of the vampire diet" (Niffenegger 1), the series adopts a more critical tone and highlights the

storytelling aspects of Anne Rice's works by focusing on the interview itself. This thesis argues that *Interview with the Vampire* is a work of meta and revisionist adaptation that transforms a story about queer vampires into a work of commentary. The series can be identified as a work of metafiction because of its use of metanarrative, metatextuality, metatheatre, and its general self-reflexivity, which it uses to signal its connection to real-world history and politics. This, in turn, is done to emphasise the theme of misinformation and the challenge of determining 'true' interpretations of events. The series employs metanarrative, specifically, to foster a critical attitude in its audience and make them receptive to the message the show is endeavouring to convey. Thus, *Interview with the Vampire* is a work of metafiction, which uses meta to demonstrate different ways to respond to historical events in order to comment on the difficulty of establishing 'truth' and constructing a truthful narrative.

The question "what is truth" is "a question so philosophical it can seem rhetorical", according to Nathan Kellen (ix). However, Kellen posits, this question has become more important than ever in today's political climate (ix). Defining the truth is beyond the scope of this thesis, as philosophers have historically been divided, and, subsequently, there are many theories on the subject. The most well-known theories on the nature of truth are the theory that posits that a "statement is true when it corresponds to the facts as they are" (ix), the theory that hypothesises that the truth is merely a coherent story, and the approach that postulates that perhaps truth does not have a nature (x). However, according to Kellen, none of these theories is all-encompassing (x). It is therefore difficult to adopt one theory and apply it to *Interview with the Vampire*, as this thesis comments on the fact that the truth is so elusive. This thesis will not define the truth but rather comment on the lack of it: I will explore unreliability and methods that complicate the construction of a truthful narrative.

The first chapter of this thesis will provide theoretical background on narrative unreliability and establish Louis as unreliable in his storytelling, and analyse the transformation of Daniel's character from a nameless boy fumbling through an interview into a competent two-time Pulitzer Prize-winning investigative journalist. This chapter will examine this characterisation as an adaptation choice that serves to underline the show's focus on the critical analysis of the coherence of Louis's story and fosters a critical attitude in the audience. Additionally, this chapter will be working through one way to respond to a historical event, as I will be drawing a parallel between the journalistic interview and the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which the series references through its dialogue, in order to point out how elusive and constructed 'truth' is. This chapter will be the longest out of the three due to the large section on narrative unreliability and the analysis of longer excerpts from the interview.

The second chapter of this thesis will establish *Interview with the Vampire* as a work of metafiction through a brief overview of the concept of meta. This chapter will also examine Daniel and Armand's social commentary, which comments on unethical consumption and the ease with which people are distracted in the digital age. I will also explore the show's framing of social media and the theatre as tools of distraction. This chapter works through another way of responding to a historical event, namely, adapting and performing, and constructing a narrative in this way through the use of metatheatre. I will be analysing the show's use of metatheatre through the Théâtre des Vampires, its references to Kander and Ebb's *Cabaret*, and how the show utilises this to demonstrate that access to a truthful narrative can be limited by its presentation.

The third chapter of this thesis will work through another way to respond to a historical event, but rather than an event from a distant past, this chapter will demonstrate the show's relationship to its present-day context by examining a very recent historical event. I

will argue that *Interview with the Vampire* uses its metafictional structure and references to the COVID-19 pandemic and conspiracy theories to explore the fragility of truth and the spread of misinformation. Drawing parallels between vampiric radicalisation and far-right extremism, I will argue that the series positions the vampires as diametrically opposite to the truth and further examine the construction and control of narratives in the series. Finally, I will analyse the show's intentions while adapting and question why the showrunners reference history in this way.

A brief overview of the concept of narration is necessary because of *Interview with the Vampire*'s use of metanarrative and the show's relationship with truth. Furthermore, the series explores the difficulty of constructing and interpreting supposedly truthful narratives. Therefore, it is relevant to examine how the audience gains access to the narrative through narration. Warren Buckland distinguishes the study of narrative and the study of narration as follows: "Whereas the study of narrative focuses on sequences of actions and events performed by characters, the study of narration focuses on how narrative actions are reorganized, when spectators receive information about those actions, and how those actions are filtered through characters and narrators before reaching readers or spectators. Filmic narration therefore mediates between the narrative and the spectator" (29). Thus, Daniel attempts to gain access to the narrative through Louis's narration. Daniel has access to Louis's narration and various other sources, which the audience is also mostly privy to. Thus, the audience essentially learns the story through Daniel trying to construct a truthful narrative from the information that Louis is giving him. This process is hindered significantly by the fact that Louis narrates unreliably, which underlines the difficulty of determining 'what is' and 'what is not'. Further theoretical background on unreliable narration in film will be provided in the first chapter of this thesis.

Interview with the Vampire is an adaptation, which calls for an overview of the concept of adaptation. According to Linda Hutcheon, adaptation, when seen as a product, is described as an “extensive transposition of a particular work or works” (7). This can involve a shift of medium or genre, or changing the context or the frame. When seen as a process of creation, the act of adaptation “always involves both (re-)interpretation and then (re-)creation” (Hutcheon 8). From the perspective of its process of reception, “adaptation is a form of intertextuality: we experience adaptations (as adaptations) as palimpsest through our memory of other works that resonate through repetition with variation” (Hutcheon 8). An individual audience member may therefore experience an adaptation differently from another audience member, depending on their frame of reference. This thesis will not necessarily focus on comparing the book and the series, but will consider the effects of the changes made in the series and investigate the intention behind these changes. It is worth considering that in order for the show’s meta references to historical events, other media and the Rice novels to succeed in their messaging, they have to be inside the audience’s frame of reference. This touches on the third perspective of adaptation, as viewers who have read the original Anne Rice novels will understand the show differently than those who haven’t. This, then, also applies to the historical events and other media referenced by the show.

Interview with the Vampire can be termed a revisionist adaptation specifically, as the showrunners modernised their source text “through provocative changes in [the] setting, genre, casting, [and] production processes” (Stam 239). Since film and television adaptations are often based on books that were written decades or even centuries ago, they become ideological barometers that show how the social and discursive environment is changing. (Stam 247). By reflecting the changes brought about by shifting genres, formats, technologies, discourses, and writing styles, adaptations give voice to a sort of social unconscious. Yet, there is no set political significance to this process. Adaptations can either

“respond or write back to an informing original from a new or revised political and cultural position, and ... highlight troubling gaps, absences, and silences within the canonical texts to which they refer” (Sanders 98), but also restore longing for patriarchy and empire (Stam 247). Thus, adaptations are often made to respond to the culture of the time of adaptation rather than the cultural context of the original text. It could therefore be argued that *Interview with the Vampire* was adapted with this same intention and delivers a message to its audience through the changes made in the adaptation process.

The first book in Anne Rice's *The Vampire Chronicles* was published in 1976, and the novels continued to be published up until 2018. The books were considered transgressive for their time. According to George Haggerty, Anne Rice's *The Vampire Chronicles* “long managed an uneasy relation with conservative politics and the cult of glamour” (5). The original books, with all the “topical urgency of popular fiction” (Haggerty 5), mesmerise their readership with homoerotic desire, an essential component in Anne Rice's works. Rice's books are transgressive in their queerness while not being overtly homosexual, so as not to prevent the books from getting published in the culture of the seventies. Haggerty specifically argues that Rice's *The Vampire Chronicles* address the anxiety surrounding “the AIDS crisis, the crisis over ‘family values’, and the collapse of the war on drugs with its attendant militarization of civilian life and war on male potency ... in a way that both poses the gay man as the solution to this problem and indicts him as its cause” (10). Writing books about queer men exchanging bodily fluids amid the AIDS crisis was especially provocative, which the show even nods at by showing Daniel having covered the AIDS crisis earlier in his career (“In Throes of Increasing Wonder...” 00:00:43). Thus, Anne Rice's novels were transgressive because she challenged traditional masculinity and provoked the homophobia that was especially prevalent in the seventies, eighties and nineties.

However, the original books are still very much a product of their time and do not

necessarily hold up in the twenty-first century, especially when it comes to the representation of people of colour in her books. Rice's vampires are "utterly white and smooth" and look as if they are "sculpted from bleached bone" (Rice 4). The Louis of the books was a racist plantation owner and owned slaves whose "African appearance and manner" he feared. The slaves are really the only characters of colour and are characterised through Louis's eyes as "very black and totally foreign" (Rice 49) and thus, presented as one-dimensional and only defined by their slavehood because they are presented from the point of view of a racist white man.

One of the biggest changes from the Rice novels and other previous film adaptations of *Interview with the Vampire* is the casting of actors of colour for the roles of Louis, Claudia, Armand, and Daniel. The casting of Louis's character in particular was a big change, as he was notably a slave owner. Showrunner Rolin Jones noted that "nobody at AMC was really interested in seven seasons of the regretful plantation owner" (22:17), but the producers did want to retain some connective tissue to the original novels, which made them give Louis a lineage that did own plantations. Jones especially wanted Louis to be someone who could fight back against Lestat, "who could be a challenge and who would force him to restrain himself" (22:11). Since the show was discarding the 1790s setting of the *Interview* novel, the producers were looking for a period that also had an interesting sense of smell and sound to it, which became the 1910s. In this period, a black man could have his own assets, and in this way, the show could still give Louis a morally grey element to him through owning a brothel (22:51), while his character is also still affected by the Jim Crow laws extant at that time.

In the series, transgression does not stem from queerness, even though it is depicted explicitly and labelled as such. The show's politics are not centred on having explicitly queer characters of colour, but queerness and blackness do not exist in a vacuum and accentuating characters with these identities does contribute to the larger message of the show. Queerness

and race are looked at with a 2022 lens and concepts such as internalised homophobia and racism are addressed and handled with care, making the show more of a product of “here and now” (Jones 23:50). It is worth noting that the far-right ideology that the show references through its meta often veers towards “racist, patriarchal, and homophobic” (Cannon 274). Thus, it could be argued that the show centring black and queer people is a political statement in itself.

However, Louis and Claudia’s blackness adds a layer to my argument about the vampires’ alignment with right-wing thought, as their trial in the second season is loaded with racist imagery and acts. They are dehumanised because they are treated like “props” (“I Could Not Prevent It” 00:03:43) in a trial play that has been scripted and has a predetermined outcome. Louis and Claudia could not flee since the coven had also slashed their Achilles tendons to the bone, which was a common punishment for slaves who tried to flee their masters (Canfijn and Fatah-Black 27). The caricatures projected onto the wall of the theatre are racist and Louis was characterised as a stereotype of a black man: “disreputable, cold, [and] violent” (“I Could Not Prevent It” 00:12:16). Thus, Louis and Claudia’s blackness, the trial’s predetermined outcome, and the trial’s references to slavery and stereotypes add a racist layer to the trial and heighten the sense of injustice that the audience is made to feel. The trial is adapted from the *Interview* novel, but Louis and Claudia being black and the coven’s treatment of them recontextualises the trial and strengthens the show’s portrayal of the vampires as aligning with right-wing thought.

The biggest revision that the show made is its contemporary setting, and specifically, its placement of the narrative frame in 2022 and “openly dealing with COVID-19 in its dialogue and visuals” as well as in its interest in misinformation by commenting on “the corrupted information environment of the present pandemic era” (Wright 3). Wright further states: “Cultural history makes it clear that, in the past, literature that responds to

epidemics and pandemics has been widely read but, as a matter of convention, much of it does not ‘press too nearly’” (Wright 3). The most obvious plague texts are thus temporally displaced, as the series *Interview with the Vampire* is labelled ‘period drama’, but because of its extensive representation of the period 1910–1950 rather than its portrayal of the 2020s (Wright 3). Thus, many shows that deal with plagues do not place themselves in the thick of the epidemic, but comment on it from a distance. The show places itself in the period where COVID-19 was still affecting the world, but the world was not at a standstill anymore. Furthermore, the show does not place its characters in direct danger due to the virus, thus also emotionally distancing itself from the pandemic. Therefore, it could be argued that the show is merely using the pandemic as a framing device for its message.

Chapter 1: “Truth and Reconciliation”: Daniel and Narrative Unreliability

This chapter will examine how the show’s transformation of Daniel’s character serves to underline the show’s focus on the challenges of finding the truth and uncovering truthful interpretations of events. The emphasis on Daniel’s character, his role as a journalist and his interrogation of Louis is meant to make the audience analytical and creates an expectation of dishonesty. Thus, through the interview, the show intends to make the audience suspicious of Louis and careful about taking what they are told at face value. The interview also carries additional meaning through its parallels to the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The show references the TRC not only to convey the futility of redoing the interview, but also to alert the audience to the fact that the truth can be elusive and fabricated. The first section of this chapter will delve into the concept of narratology and specifically unreliable narration and how this applies to *Interview with the Vampire*’s multiple layers of narration, and, specifically, Louis’s character. The second section will examine the relevance of Daniel’s character in the series and how the construction of his character was an adaptation choice that draws attention to the storytelling and truth-seeking in the series. The third section will analyse excerpts of the interview and how Daniel navigates Louis’s inconsistent storytelling and evasive behaviour, and establish Louis as an unreliable storyteller. The third section will also delve into the particulars of Louis’s unreliability and establish the connection between the interview and the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

1.1 Narrative unreliability

The term “unreliable narrator” was introduced into literary theory by Wayne Booth in 1961 and has since been used, further developed and criticised (Alber and Hansen 39). Warren Buckland describes the distinction between reliable and unreliable narration as follows:

“Reliable narration is trustworthy in the sense that it is cooperative and communicates information consistently and efficiently. Crucially, this includes communicating to spectators when access to significant information is restricted or suppressed, or if the information’s status is questionable ... Like reliable narration, unreliable narration also withholds (restricts and suppresses) access and presents questionable information— but with the difference that it does not communicate to spectators that some important information is hidden or concealed” (95). James Phelan conceives of the various kinds of literary unreliable narration as follows: “Narrators perform three main roles, reporting, interpreting, and evaluating..... They may, therefore, deviate from the implied author’s views in one or more of these roles. Unreliable reporting occurs along the axis of characters, facts, and events; unreliable reading (or interpreting) occurs along the axis of knowledge and perception; and unreliable regarding (or evaluating) occurs along the axis of ethics and evaluation” (50). Phelan identifies six types of unreliability: “misreporting, misreading, ... misregarding—and underreporting, underreading, and underregarding” (51). However, not every type of textual narrator can be unreliable in all the ways listed above. Homodiegetic narrators can demonstrate every one of these types, but heterodiegetic narrators are only able to lie by omission and can only misread or misregard if they have a persona (Anderson 83).

However, sometimes characters display unreliability in ways that fall outside of these six neat categories. Vera Nünning approaches the unreliable narrator with more nuance, and while she does mention the obvious inconsistencies on the story and/or discourse level, she also focuses on different behaviours that are displayed by unreliable narrators, such as “exclamations, ... rhetorical questions, any number of repetitions and the tempo of their narration” (10). Unreliable narrators can tend to secretly withhold important information “through misdirection, or by covertly presenting false information as if it were true” (Buckland 94). Nünning also makes it a point to differentiate “between people who set out to

deceive others and try to profit from their misconceptions and people who want to tell the truth but are unable to do so” (11). She posits that this incompetence can be attributed to many things, such as a lack of knowledge of or insight into the facts or emotional involvement that distorts the facts (Nünning 11). Louis oscillates between truthfulness, purposeful deception and lying accidentally because of external factors outside of his control, which is why it is hard to pinpoint how he is being unreliable and if he can be blamed for it. Nevertheless, this unreliability influences the way he transmits the story to Daniel.

Unreliable narration works differently in film than in literature. According to Matthias Brütsch, when film scholars talk about unreliable narration, they are referring to the following construction: “Filmic narration presents the events of the story in such a way so as to prompt the audience to make erroneous inferences about the reality of characters, events, or entire worlds. The real state of affairs is only revealed in the ending. The narrative’s dynamic is thus geared towards a final plot twist” (222). Seymour Chatman defines a film narrator as a combination of cinematography, editing, *mise en scène*, and sound. Chatman’s film narrator cannot be made into a persona and cannot originate from a character within the diegesis, and is therefore an extra-heterodiegetic non-persona and is therefore unable to misreport, misread or misregard (Anderson 83-84).

In practice, however, film narrators can demonstrate unreliability in this way, as Emily Anderson states, “[films] that are unreliable on the level of reporting ... fall into two broad categories: films that mislead the viewer by underreporting the story, and films that lie to the viewer by misreporting the story” (84). Anderson continues to state that every narrator can underreport diegetic events, but unlike literary heterodiegetic narrators, cinematic narrators are also able to misreport by showing the audience events that did not happen as if they happened. Thus, they can lie to the viewer about the diegetic world. This unreliability, which is exclusive to film, emerges in the gap between what the heterodiegetic narrator

reports and what is true (84). In a discussion on Hitchcock's *Stage Fright*, Chatman argues that the responsibility for false narratives in film lies with an unreliable character who narrates a particular section of a film. Robert Burgoyne agrees with him, but Anderson does not and instead favours Gregory Currie and posits that in film, a character narrating would "require that they be ontologically superior to the story, as the cinematic narrator is, and as characters clearly are not" (85). Even though the audience might believe that a flashback originates from a character's point of view, they would not assume that the creation of the clip could be attributed to the character. Louis is not the one who hired a camera crew, wrote a script and recorded his memories for someone to see, and even if he had done so, he would be the clip's author rather than its narrator. "No character can, at will, leap across diegetic boundaries to replace or even to manipulate the narrator, who alone can present events to the viewer" (Anderson 85).

Anderson further posits that in unreliable films, films that lie to their audience, we cannot do without a cinematic narrator, but a character, however unreliable, cannot serve as this narrator. Instead, these characters serve as focalisers. In unreliable films, then, the cinematic narrator would be focalising, filtering the story through the characters whose version of the story the audience is following. In these types of films, one character is usually the explicit focaliser (Anderson 88-89). In *Interview with the Vampire*, Louis relates his version of events to Daniel, while the cinematic narrator focalises through him and presents this narrative to the audience. In this case, then, it is the cinematic narrator who is misreporting by adopting the point of view of an unreliable focaliser (Anderson 89). David Bordwell, referring to *Stage Fright*, adds that "it is not just the character's yarn that is unreliable. The film's narration shows itself to be duplicitous by neglecting to suggest any inadequacies in Johnny's account and by appearing to be highly communicative – not just reporting what the liar said but showing it as if it were indeed objectively true" (61).

However, *Interview with the Vampire* does something interesting here: the cinematic narrator installs an interrogator in the form of Daniel, which encourages the audience to be critical of Louis, who serves as the unreliable focaliser. The audience would have every reason to believe that what Louis is saying is the truth, if it were not for Daniel. Recalling that Buckland stated that reliable narrators communicate to the audience when access to significant information is suppressed or restricted, or if the information's status is questionable (95), it could be argued that the cinematic narrator for *Interview with the Vampire* is a reliable narrator that employs an unreliable focaliser, but communicates to its audience about the accessibility and reliability of important information through Daniel. Furthermore, inside the story, Daniel is writing a book and will be presenting what Louis tells him to an audience of his own. As the presumed narrator of the book, Daniel is also focalising through Louis and presenting his audience with his version of events. Louis, then, is an unreliable focaliser on both an extra-diegetic and diegetic level. Inside the diegesis, however, Louis narrates his life story to Daniel, thus Louis also serves as the homodiegetic narrator that the audience can see.

This chapter focuses on Daniel's function in the series, but this function is hard to categorise. In her book, Nünning mentions that new insights posit that "it is possible for omniscient, heterodiegetic narrators to become visible as personalities. Such overt narrators comment on the story, voice value judgements and generalisations. Their interpretations and evaluations can become suspect to the reader, who may conclude that they are untrustworthy not because of their rendering of the facts but rather on account of their interpretations and evaluations" (12). Throughout the series, Daniel often interjects with such value judgments and comments on Louis's story, both the content and the manner of delivery. However, rather than making the audience suspicious of him, he makes the audience suspicious of Louis, the homodiegetic narrator inside the story. Thus, Daniel fits this specific type of narrator to a

point. This theory does not work when one considers the fact that, as stated above, characters cannot be ontologically superior to a story and leap across diegetic boundaries. If Daniel were merely the interviewer and completely separate and disconnected from the other characters and narrative, this theory could be feasible. However, Daniel plays his own part in Louis's history, and the show contains flashbacks from his perspective, thus solidifying him as a character who cannot leap across diegetic boundaries. Therefore, Daniel's function is decided by the wider cinematic narrator on the level of the show as a medium and thus, on the level of adaptation.

1.2 Daniel's character introduction

The introduction of Daniel's character in the first episode establishes him as an accomplished journalist far removed from the character in Rice's novels. In the first novel in *The Vampire Chronicles*, Daniel does not have a name and is referred to as "the boy" from page 1. In the show, Daniel Molloy's character is introduced through a television commercial for his online class. He tells the audience: "There are stories out there that need to be told" ("In Throes of Increasing Wonder" 00:00:41). The series' version of Daniel Molloy is a two-time Pulitzer Prize winner in his seventies and has enjoyed an illustrious career. Thus, Daniel's character has transformed from a nameless and incompetent boy into a well-known and accomplished investigative journalist. This adaptation choice highlights Daniel's importance, as the series has turned him into a character with a name, skills, and acclaim. This version of Daniel is also exceedingly socially aware, as he makes comments on the privilege of white men who used to decide what the news was and displays awareness of the important role that journalism serves in uncovering injustice. Thus, the commercial establishes Daniel as an accomplished journalist and an expert in his field, but also as a socially aware individual with a strong moral compass. The commercial also shows the audience some of Daniel's views on journalism, as he says: "Your sources are your sherpas" (00:01:16). Daniel follows this

advise himself throughout the series, as he, unlike his literary counterpart, consults multiple sources and documents rather than only relying on Louis's word. The commercial also shows a bullet point list of what Daniel will be teaching the students in this workshop:

- Investigative Research
- Seeking Sources & Documents
- Verifying Information
- Preparing For An Interview
- Journalism's Future (00:01:25)

Thus, it becomes clear that from the novel to the series, Daniel has developed into a competent journalist, which emphasises the important role that investigative journalism will play in the series.

In order to establish that the show's version of Daniel is more competent than his literary counterpart, I will briefly analyse the start of the interview from the original Rice novel, *Interview with the Vampire*. Literary Daniel lets himself be steamrolled by Louis, who easily takes control of the interview by taking advantage of Daniel being high and afraid of him. In the book, Daniel shudders, stammers, recoils from Louis and is soaked in sweat (Rice 4-5). This makes it easy for Louis to dominate the conversation and decide what part of the story he wants to tell at which time. When Daniel asks him how he became a vampire the first time around, Louis says: "There's a simple answer to that. I don't believe I want to give simple answers, ... I think I want to tell the real story" (Rice 5). Daniel lets him take control because he is young, scared and high. In the novel, Louis even keeps pausing as if he expects Daniel to ask him a question. In response, Daniel flounders, "as if he could not find the right words" (Rice 7). As the older version of Daniel says, literary Daniel asks all the wrong questions and lets himself be steamrolled by Louis. Furthermore, young Daniel does not display the scepticism that the older Daniel does, as he is swept up in the story after only a

few pages, and he even asks: “This really happened, didn’t it? ... You’re telling me something ... that’s true” (Rice 10). Younger Daniel does not even ask Louis his name at the beginning of the interview, and he and the reader only learn it when Louis says his own name as a part of his story and then confirms that that is, in fact, his name (Rice 18). Therefore, younger Daniel’s ineptitude is demonstrated in the book, and the Daniel of the show is a major departure from his literary predecessor. The show addresses the original interview through Daniel, who declares his intent not to repeat past mistakes. This deliberate adaptation choice to transform Daniel’s character in this way emphasises his importance in the narrative. The fact that his character is an investigative journalist underlines the show’s focus on the theme of uncovering the truth.

The format of the journalistic interview is adapted from the Rice novel, which allows the show to use this medium to emphasise the theme of truth-seeking, as, according to Paul D’Angelo and Donna Shaw, the journalistic tradition is based on “objectivity, verification, and truth” (221). Furthermore, many journalistic codes of ethics state that the duty of a journalist is to seek the truth and inform the public (Plaisance 89). Daniel’s competence as a journalist allows the series to take the medium of the journalistic interview more seriously than it was taken in the book, underlining the show’s focus on uncovering the truth.

The series shows Daniel opening a letter and a package from ‘Louis de Pointe du Lac’. The package contains the tapes from the original interview from 1973. In the letter, Louis says that he has been following Daniel’s career for some time. Louis goes on to say that “[t]he passage of time and the frailties that accompany it have provided me perspective. And I suspect the same might be [sic] for you as well” (00:04:03) and proposes that they “revisit the project boyish youth prevented us from finishing. Forty-nine years and thousands of miles removed from the room we shared in San Francisco, I offer, for your journalistic pleasures, my full attention and my life story” (00:04:24). The emphasis on the passage of time works to

convey multiple facts to the audience. Firstly, the passage of time influences the social and political background for the interview, which now takes place in the twenty-first century. As placing the interview in 2022 is an adaptation choice, the series intentionally draws attention to the current time and the cultural context of the pandemic. Secondly, time has also changed Daniel, and his age and experience influence the interviewing process significantly. Daniel is a much more competent journalist than he was in 1973. As Louis says in the first episode: “You were not worthy of my story then” (00:07:18), which implies that Daniel, as the professional he is now, is worthy of that story. Thirdly, time has influenced Louis. Explicitly, it has given him perspective and made the events of his story less raw. Implicitly, it could also have influenced the accuracy and therefore the reliability of his recall. Throughout the interview, there are inconsistencies and equivocations in Louis’s narration that complicate “the spectator’s access to narrative information” (Buckland 29), and this makes Louis unreliable as a focaliser. Thus, the introduction of Daniel’s character and his reacquaintance with Louis underline the importance that the show places on the question of reliability and storytelling, and, thus, on the theme of the constructedness of truth.

1.3 The interview

Although Louis technically serves as a focaliser rather than a narrator, the story that the audience witnesses in the show is narrated by Louis. In this regard, he serves as a homodiegetic narrator. As stated above, unlike heterodiegetic narrators, like the cinematic narrator, homodiegetic narrators can be unreliable in all of the manners listed by Phelan; as he is narrating his story, Louis can misreport, misread, misregard and underreport, underread, and underregard. However, Louis is not only unreliable in these six ways, but he also attempts to take control of the interview and questions Daniel in return. Initially, he does this by reading Daniel’s mind and revealing to the audience that Daniel has Parkinson’s disease.

Daniel accedes, then immediately fires back as the two men quip back and forth in an exchange that displays Louis's tendency for evading questions and Daniel's doggedness:

DANIEL. Yeah. And you've got your own hangar at the airport, privileges on the Royal Meydan Bridge, and zero presence online.

LOUIS. Have I hit a nerve?

DANIEL. I know the Emirates are big on privacy, and that's probably important to you, but I gotta ask, what does it cost, this haven't-aged-in-half-a-century, killer-views-in-all-directions anonymity?

LOUIS. Quite a lot. ("In Throes of Increasing Wonder" 00:05:39)

Daniel establishes that he researched Louis before he arrived, as he notes that Louis has no online presence. Daniel is demonstrating the first two points in his online class: "Investigative Research" and "Seeking Sources & Documents", underlining that Daniel utilises the methodology that he teaches, thus illustrating his competence as a journalist. Even though Daniel merely makes a statement and does not ask a question, Louis still refuses to give Daniel the information he clearly wants to know. Interestingly, Daniel also evades Louis's question by asking about money. However, Daniel dodging a question is not nearly as suspicious as Louis dodging a question, as Daniel is not the one being interviewed and is therefore not expected to be transparent. Daniel's evasion could also be the result of Louis reading his mind, since Daniel states that he does not "dig the one-way hack" (00:06:05). Louis's mind-reading abilities are an advantage that he has over Daniel since it is a way of gathering information that Daniel is not capable of employing or defending against. Mind-reading is merely one of how Louis attempts to assert dominance in the interview. Daniel does not submit to Louis, as he attempts to find out why Louis wants to do the interview again. Instead, Louis gets Daniel to admit why *he* was interested in doing it again, which leads to a scathing dissection of younger Daniel's lack of journalistic prowess:

DANIEL. You've got the tapes. Hire a transcriber. I don't do puff portraiture anymore.

LOUIS. And yet, you got on a plane, with an autoimmune disease in the middle of a pandemic.

DANIEL. That's my voice, but I don't remember it. I ask all the wrong questions.

LOUIS. Yes.

DANIEL. There's contradictions in your story I never follow up on.

LOUIS. Yes.

DANIEL. The few good ones I do manage to get out, you steamroll over them. It's not an interview. It's a ... fever dream told to an idiot.

LOUIS. Yes. (00:07:27)

Daniel, now an experienced journalist, is frustrated with his younger self for making the mistakes that he made, and is therefore motivated to do the interview right this time. Through this dialogue, the show criticises the original interview from the *Interview with the Vampire* novel and sets an expectation for the current interview, implying that Louis and Daniel intend to get it right this time. Thus, the show frames this interview as superior to that of the novel. Even though Daniel has displayed willingness to redo the interview, he has to ask why Louis wants to have a “do-over”, as he is the one who was previously in control and, despite the apparent violence that took place and the men's subsequent inability to finish the original interview, got what he wanted. To literary Louis, it was most important that he got to tell his story: “Believe me, I won't hurt you. I want this opportunity. It's more important to me than you can realize now” (Rice 4). According to Daniel, something has to have changed for Louis:

DANIEL. And you? Why again? What's changed?

LOUIS. The world, circumstances. Me, I've changed. And I, too, find the tapes lacking.

DANIEL. So, a do-over.

LOUIS. Truth and reconciliation.

DANIEL. I ask the questions. You answer the questions. Anything that can't be verified, I send to my researcher. (00:08:08)

Louis states that circumstances have changed for him and that he also finds the tapes lacking, but does not elaborate. Daniel dubs it a “do-over”, which suggests that Daniel and Louis will be revising the original interview. However, Louis’s response arouses suspicion, as the specific phrase he uses, “truth and reconciliation”, brings to mind the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, TRC for short, which intended to investigate human rights violations committed during the apartheid regime and attempt to prevent the atrocities from happening again in the future (Verdoolaege 8-9). There have been such commissions in other countries, but South Africa’s is the best-known. The TRC intended to recontextualise historical atrocities by having victims and perpetrators testify and recount the events from their perspectives to establish ‘truth’ (Bystrom 29-30). The aim of establishing truth and constructing 'a truthful', meaningful narrative in a judicial setting corresponds to the goals of a journalistic interview. The order and structure of a courtroom is echoed in Daniel’s response to Louis: he takes control of the interview by enforcing a structure and stating that he will send anything he cannot verify to his researcher, which signifies an attempt at impartiality and professionalism. However, the TRC did not end up succeeding at its goal. Many victims were disillusioned by the commission allowing high-ranking officers to avoid prosecution, and its failure to address the policies that allowed the apartheid regime to occur in the first place. The commission is therefore highly controversial (Verdoolaege 19-20). Thus, the specificity of Louis’s phrasing arouses suspicion because of the connotations of the TRC.

Louis's wording suggests that this "do-over" will not successfully revise the past, perhaps because Louis and Daniel are unable to address the root cause of Louis's inability to tell the complete truth. The show illustrates his lack of credibility through this reference, which will be conveyed to the viewer if they are familiar with the TRC. Through Louis's reference to the TRC, the show draws a parallel between the TRC's aims, process, and supposed failure and Daniel and Louis's interview, suggesting that their interview, as an attempt to construct a truthful narrative, will fail.

Louis's unreliability is further exhibited in Daniel and Louis's quick back and forth during the interview, which demonstrates Louis's unwillingness to cede control of the interview and Daniel's doggedness. Furthermore, Louis manipulates the course of the conversation by attempting to redirect Daniel. At this point in the story, Louis and Lestat have slept together for the first time, which makes Louis accept that he is a homosexual man. Soon after that, Lestat guides Louis through murdering someone as a vampire, which he tells Daniel about:

LOUIS. He rushed me headlong through the encounter as if it were something to put behind us. Death, rebirth, coming out, homicide, too many firsts for one night.

DANIEL. Coming out? You robbed a daughter of her father, maybe a pet pony. How's sexuality play in that?

LOUIS. It's a complicated question, Daniel, and we shouldn't conflate it with the salesman's death.

DANIEL. Humour me.

LOUIS. To satisfy your fixation, being transformed by Lestat, being desired by him, bedding down with him was an overture of sorts to that side of my nature

DANIEL. To the shame of queer theorists everywhere.

LOUIS. I got in that coffin on my own free will. In the quiet dark, we were equals.

DANIEL. White master, Black student, but equal in the quiet dark.

LOUIS. Provocation. Is this the primary tool one walks away with after downloading your internet class? (“After the Phantoms of Your Former Self” 00:12:55)

Louis accuses Daniel of conflating the evolution of his sexuality with the salesman’s death when he is the one who categorised this homicide into the same group of firsts as his coming out. Daniel questions how Louis’s sexuality plays into his first homicide, expressing disbelief at Louis putting them in the same category. Louis bats his question away by projecting a fixation onto Daniel that he likely aroused there in the first place. Louis’s mention of his sexuality successfully distracts Daniel from the salesman’s murder, which, one could posit, was his intention in the first place. Louis’s methods of narrating unreliably do not all fit neatly into Phelan’s categories, which, in this instance, could also be due to the show being in an interview format. The medium of an interview or a conversation brings with it the factor of another human being, which is Daniel in this case. Additionally, Louis can read Daniel’s mind without him noticing, meaning that Louis could very well predict how Daniel is going to respond to the things he says. Thus, it can be argued that Louis phrases that category of firsts in a way that steers Daniel away from the topic he does not want to discuss, effectively distracting him.

Louis’s penchant for manipulating and redirecting the conversation and attempting to distract Daniel from what he wants to know is also demonstrated in an exchange the two men have about Louis’s nephew. In one of the flashbacks, the audience sees Louis holding his nephew, whom he looks at hungrily. As he looks at his nephew, his fangs start to grow as if he is about to bite the baby. The flashback abruptly cuts away to Louis in the present:

LOUIS. I no longer kill. My last victim was in the year 2000.

DANIEL. Some Y2K disagreement?

LOUIS. I want our readers to understand that.

DANIEL. Okay. Did you eat the baby?

LOUIS. I sit here a master of my instincts.

DANIEL. Mm-hmm. And what about the others out there? Have they mastered theirs?

LOUIS. Just the opposite. Most of them are slaves to the blood, exhausted from decades, centuries of hiding, giddy to increase their numbers.

DANIEL. Mm-hmm. Two questions. Did you eat the baby? And is the pandemic the opening they've been waiting for.

LOUIS. Pandemic, the unravelling of geopolitical foundations.

DANIEL. And you know this, how? You guys have a thread on 8chan?

LOUIS. I hear them. Our thoughts can travel thousands of miles to one another. I can stand out on my balcony, close my eyes, and their plotting speeds to me. One of them, a brute in Madagascar, called it "the great conversion".

DANIEL. The great conversion? Well, good luck with that, because most people I know like to play a little ball in the afternoon, or maybe go down to the beach, catching a few rays.

LOUIS. Yes. What on earth would a meth-addicted son of a coal miner in West Virginia want with eternal life?

DANIEL. Did you eat the baby?

LOUIS. Or the Arab youth whose family were wiped from existence by a Western drone?

DANIEL. (interrupting) Did you eat the baby?

LOUIS. No, I'm sure you're right.

...

LOUIS. As I said, I no longer kill.

DANIEL. You might have a drinking problem. The baby. (“After the Phantoms of Your Former Self” 00:30:44)

In this scene, Louis is avoiding Daniel’s question about the baby by deflecting and only answering Daniel’s question about the other vampires and the pandemic. Louis is attempting to distract Daniel again by mentioning topics that he thinks Daniel is interested in. Whereas Louis previously succeeded at distracting Daniel more directly, in this scene, he adopts a different method, instead exploiting Daniel’s tenacity. He repeats his question about the baby until he receives an answer that satisfies him, not letting Louis distract him with information about how the vampires exploit the pandemic. Interestingly, the information that Louis gives Daniel in this scene is sensitive, and the other vampires threaten to kill Louis for exposing them and their secrets when Daniel’s book is published (“And That’s the End of It. There’s Nothing Else” 00:53:02). The phenomenon that Louis calls ‘the great conversion’ is of such significance to the narrative that it is revisited in the third episode of the second season, when an agent of a “watchful shop” (“No Pain” 00:02:59) approaches Daniel and confirms that ‘the great conversion’ is real. Thus, in the excerpt above, Daniel zeroes in on the wrong topic, which once more demonstrates Louis’s adeptness at manipulating and distracting Daniel and, through him, the audience. Namely, Louis has sensed that Daniel is like a dog with a bone and uses important information to redirect him. However, in this process, Daniel only fixates more on the baby and, subsequently, ‘the great conversion’ fades into the background, when it is arguably a topic of conversation with more substance. This is the second instance in which Louis distracts Daniel to prevent him from getting the information he wants. As Jennifer Edwards puts it, “distraction is attention”: distraction is not the opposite of attention, but rather the displacement of it (4). Louis distracts Daniel by purposefully pulling attention elsewhere, effectively hindering his ability to establish ‘truth’ and construct a truthful narrative. Thus, Louis manipulates Daniel into focusing on the minutiae in Louis’s story

instead of the purpose of the book: warning people about this ‘great conversion’ (“After the Phantoms of Your Former Self” 00:15:23), which is arguably the ‘real story’.

The way in which Louis is unreliable is not merely relevant to the story in the diegesis but also the audience’s reality. The excerpt above further illustrates the show’s grounding in reality, but also has Louis steer the conversation away from these topics by offering up more sensational stories. As Daniel keeps inquiring about the baby, we see a very brief flashback scene of the baby, alive, on the floor, which implies that Louis left before he could hurt the baby. However, since the flashbacks only reflect what Louis is saying, Daniel and the audience can never know for sure if what Louis is saying is true. Thus, Louis manipulates the conversation by making a half-hearted attempt at distracting Daniel, and therefore the audience, with information that he will not care about in that moment, only to offer up a conclusion to his story that might be falsified. Louis’s management of information and manipulation of Daniel mirrors real-life politics and media, and touches on the theme of the nature of truth in the show and broaches the topic of distraction from it. Louis’s continued unreliability and attempts to distract Daniel hinder both the audience and Daniel from constructing a truthful narrative. Through Daniel’s character and his interview with Louis, the audience is encouraged to adopt a critical attitude and subsequently made aware of the elusiveness and constructedness of ‘truth’.

Daniel finally explicitly addresses Louis’s tendency to focus on the trivial details and the inconsistencies in Louis’s story after Louis tells him a story about him and Lestat in Louis’s club. Lestat starts playing a classical piece, which does not go down well with the club’s patrons, but then starts improvising and plays a song that Louis claims later became the Wolverine Blues, which in real life is a jazz standard written by Jelly Roll Morton. Louis drops this specious claim into the conversation casually:

LOUIS. If I'm not mistaken, he improved the melody for what would later become the "Wolverine Blues".

DANIEL. Wai– wait. Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa. Hold on there. You're saying Lestat wrote the "Wolverine Blues"?

LOUIS. I can't be definitive. So much of that year was a blur. And you can imagine what time's inevitable hammer does to the minute details. ("Is My Very Nature That of a Devil?" 00:08:44)

Louis once more steers the conversation in the direction that he wants it to go, telling Daniel facts that may or may not be fabrications, after which he sidesteps and cites a fallible memory to avoid having to take responsibility in case his statement is proven false. Daniel's response is one of shock and surprise, which one can argue was Louis's intention; if Daniel is surprised and entertained, he is less likely to question other parts of Louis's story. However, Daniel is only briefly distracted and comments on Louis's focus on the trivial details and inconsistency for the first time:

DANIEL. Yeah, you know, I gotta say, it's not so much the minute details, Louis, rather, the total rewrite that's giving me pause here. I mean, 1973:

LOUIS. He was a sow's ear out of which nothing fine could be made. I was his complete superior; and I had been sadly cheated in having him for a teacher
2022:

LOUIS. It was a cold winter that year, and Lestat was my coal fire. And I found myself, for the very first time, to anyone other than Paul, confiding my struggles to another man.

San Francisco:

LOUIS. He appeared frail and stupid to me, a man made of dried twigs with a thin carping voice.

Dubai:

LOUIS. I had never allowed myself to feel emotionally close to anyone, much less a man. I had no room for feelings like this in my life. Lestat had surrounded me.

LOUIS. The version we speak of now is the more nuanced portrait.

DANIEL. Hmm. Or the more rehearsed.

LOUIS. Perhaps I was mistaken about the “Wolverine Blues”

DANIEL. Fuck the “Wolverine Blues”. Ken Burns can choke on the footnotes. It’s the abused-abuser psychological relationship I’m talking about. (00:09:13)

Daniel points out the stark contrast between the original interview and Louis’s latest account by playing recordings from both interviews. Daniel does not ask Louis a question, but Louis answers one anyway: Which version is the truth? Louis claims that this newest version of his story is the more nuanced and truthful account, which is immediately called into question by Daniel. Daniel’s incisiveness tells Louis that his distraction tactic failed, which makes Louis pivot, and he returns to his evasion tactic by mentioning the “Wolverine Blues” again. Daniel does not let himself be diverted that easily and proceeds to interrogate Louis on the nature of his relationship with Lestat and Louis’s inconsistency in his feelings about Lestat. Louis evades his questions once more and counters with an excerpt from Daniel’s memoir:

LOUIS. “I am in my Buick, staring in the rearview mirror at my daughter in the car seat, an hour after I gave Derek, a guy I don’t know, the last 30 bucks I had. My editor reminds me, it’s seven years before car seats are mandatory. My ex-wife reminds me, I never owned a Buick. This is the odyssey of recollection.” The tapes are an admitted performance. This is the premise of our interview. Half a century later, allow me my odyssey. (00:10:45)

Louis cites Daniel's memoir as a deflection but also as an answer; the inconsistencies and falsehoods are irrelevant because the premise of the interview is that it is a performance and a journey. The audience is also introduced to 'the odyssey of recollection', which frames memory as a long, eventful journey characterised by its many detours. It is important to emphasise that this concept was conceived of by Daniel, who serves as the audience's critical lens but has, ironically, also been guilty of telling stories unreliably and inconsistently. Louis is appropriating this concept for his own ends, that is, to justify any falsehoods or inconsistencies in his story, which could be blamed on a flawed memory, deliberate deceit, or a combination of the two. Daniel's presence draws Louis's reliability into question, whereas Daniel's lack of reliability in his memoir is most likely connected to his past drug addiction. Thus, the series emphasises narrative inconsistencies, which could either be attributed to the fallibility of human memory or Louis's duplicity and conceptualises them as 'the odyssey of recollection', highlighting the importance of memory in constructing a truthful and meaningful narrative. Thus, the series demonstrates Louis's unreliability through his evasive behaviour and the fallibility of his memory and shows how Daniel navigates this throughout the interview. This emphasis on Louis's unreliability serves to remind the audience of the challenge of establishing 'what is' and 'what is not' and constructing a truthful narrative.

The concept 'the odyssey of recollection' is also a reference to Homer's *Odyssey*, which is, as Jasper Griffin puts it, "the end product of an oral tradition" (23), deduced from the style in which it was ultimately written down. The pertinence of this reference in *Interview with the Vampire* is that, like Louis's account of his memories, the *Odyssey* has undergone changes in its story every time that it was told (Griffin 25). It is only when the story was written down that a somewhat consistent story emerged. Daniel and Louis's original interview was recorded, but never written down and published, which means that Louis can revise his memories, as they are not written down. Susannah Radstone states that

“the classical association of memory with the wax tablet in Plato’s *Theaetetus* founded an enduring pattern of associations between memory and imprinting, memory and writing” (327). Thus, writing perpetuates memories and turns the abstract into the concrete. Putting a supposedly truthful narrative in writing means one commits to this being a definitive version of events, as it now exists in physical form. Even though the original interview was recorded and Daniel still has the tapes and the digitised version, these only make it into the new narrative via reference. The show explicitly acknowledges the adapted work by addressing the original interview, as the 1973 interview fragments from the excerpt above are quoted verbatim from pages 31 and 34 of the Rice novel. Other episodes of the show also quote verbatim from Rice’s *The Vampire Chronicles*, but the original interview is continually undercut by the characters, and thus, the show. After the exchange in the excerpt above, Daniel throws away the tapes, which are subsequently set on fire by Louis, and deletes the files from his computer, thus erasing and disregarding the original interview.

Earlier in this thesis, I argued that the specificity of Louis’s phrasing in a piece of dialogue between him and Daniel evoked the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. I also stated that this reference implied that Louis was not going to succeed in doing what he set out to do at the beginning of this interview, as this is a common criticism of the TRC. The show’s emphasis on the concept of memory, its fallibility and its role in constructing a narrative brings to mind the role of memory and its management within the TRC, which was also responsible for the public memorialisation of the victims of the South African apartheid regime. Daniel Herwitz questions the particulars of the TRC’s brand of memorialisation: “Public memory is the creation of remembrance largely without actual memory, of remembrance with a different kind and quality of memory” (533). Herwitz speaks of a way of manufacturing memories that is similar to an act of oblivion, which Ross Poole terms the act of commanding courts and sometimes citizens to “forget what happened under the preceding

regime” (149). According to Judith Pollman, acts of oblivion preceded the paradigm of Truth and Reconciliation commissions (141) and were deemed necessary because “memories are subject to constant change. They transform under the influence of retelling and of memories shared by others” (141). Furthermore, memory was seen as too “politically potent for anything to be left to chance” (Pollman 145). However, the TRC still committed an act of oblivion in a sense, as in its aim to establish ‘truth’ and construct a truthful narrative, the TRC recontextualised the apartheid and put forth an official narrative that was to be accepted as the truth. This can be read as a combined act of memorialisation and oblivion, as memory is being manufactured and imposed on the public.

In *Interview with the Vampire*, the erasure and revision of the original narrative and creation of a new one can also be read as Louis committing a combined act of memorialisation and oblivion, as he commands Daniel, and, through him, the audience to disregard anything he may have stated in the past. The preceding regime that Poole refers to would be the original interview from 1973 and, therefore, the original Rice novel. By destroying the tapes and deleting the files, Louis and Daniel disregard the content of and the context surrounding the original interview to forget so they are able to “forgive and move on” (Pollman 141). However, a command to forget is paradoxical, as one needs to remember what to forget to follow the command (Poole 150). Therefore, making a point of disregarding the original interview emphasises it.

Moreover, in the case of the TRC, ‘forgetting’ and amnesty impeded the ability of those responsible to uncover what allowed the atrocities that occurred in the apartheid regime. In Louis’s case, erasing the original interview allows Louis to be unreliable in the same way as in San Francisco and prevents Daniel, and therefore the audience, from receiving an honest account of events. Daniel discovers the consequences of this act of oblivion at the end of the season, when he calls Louis out on the inconsistencies in his story

and realises that he was never going to encounter a changed and honest Louis: “This is the same shit that happened in San Francisco” (“The Thing Lay Still” 00:46:25).

In this chapter, I have shown that through the transformation and subsequent spotlighting of Daniel’s character, the show encourages its audience to engage critically with the narrative that is presented to them. This chapter pins Louis down as an unreliable focaliser, who is unreliable in a multitude of ways according to James Phelan’s paradigm, but who also deviates from these categories because of the show’s format and Louis’s abilities. Louis’s unreliability is affirmed and emphasised through references to the TRC, memorialisation and acts of oblivion, foreshadowing the interview’s failure in establishing ‘truth’ and constructing a truthful narrative. Thus, the show likens the journalistic interview to a testimony from the TRC to comment on the difficulty of establishing ‘true’ interpretations of past events. The show criticises its own narrative and references phenomena grounded in the audience’s narrative, presenting a self-reflexivity that is meta in nature. This first chapter serves as a foundation that establishes the tone and the show’s expectation of the audience; the show adopts a critical attitude towards its focaliser and stimulates this same attitude in its audience through Daniel. This critical attitude is not merely meant to be applied to the story that is told inside the diegesis, but also to the political narrative that the show presents in its meta references. In the next chapter, I will further analyse the meta nature of the show and the references to real-world politics that are woven into the narrative throughout the series.

Chapter 2: “You’re at the Height of Wilful Ignorance”: Meta, Distraction, and Metatheatre

The previous chapter analysed how the series emphasises the importance of narrative unreliability and the elusive nature of truth through Daniel’s incisive character. The adapters installed Daniel as an interrogator who serves as a lens for the audience, and through him, the creators tether the show to the audience’s reality by engaging them in the investigative process. Thus, the series displays self-awareness and reflexivity by having a character inside the diegesis deliver criticism on both the adapted work and the adaptation. The first chapter also establishes that the show uses this reflexivity to signal its relationship to real-world history. One way that the series does this is by referencing the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission and drawing a parallel between the TRC and the journalistic interview in their aims to establish ‘truth’ and construct a truthful and meaningful narrative. This chapter will further delve into these displays of self-reflexivity that make the series ‘meta’. Whereas the first chapter analysed the show’s metanarrative and metatextuality and how it generates a more critical audience, the second chapter will explore the show as a metafiction work in general and examine the ways in which the show delivers social commentary while also directing criticism at itself. This second chapter will also work through a different way the show responds to historical events: by adapting and performing, specifically through metatheatre, which involves the audience just as the series does through its use of meta. The first section of the chapter will conceptualise ‘meta’ as it is understood in this thesis. The second section of this chapter will explore the show’s references to social media and contemporary technology and their meaning in the narrative of the series. The third section of this chapter will analyse the show’s use of metatheatre through the *Théâtre des Vampires* and the show’s references to another politically relevant piece of metatheatre, Kander and Ebb’s musical *Cabaret*.

2.1 'Meta'

Robert Scholes describes metafiction as assimilating “all the perspectives of criticism into the fictional process itself. It may emphasize structural, formal, behavioral, or philosophical qualities but most writers of metafiction are thoroughly aware of all these possibilities” (106-107). Thus, the work criticises itself inside the diegesis and displays self-reflexivity, which Garrett Stewart understands as a story reporting on itself (1).

David Roche distinguishes the popular usage of ‘meta’ from the academic use of the concept: “its popular usage has become a sort of umbrella word for academic terms such as ‘reflexivity’ and ‘metafiction’” (6). In academic circles, the word ‘meta’ has specific meanings depending on which field of study it attaches itself to as a prefix. *Interview with the Vampire* displays different kinds of ‘meta’, like metatextuality and metanarrative, and can more broadly be defined as metafilm. Gérard Genette defines “metatextuality” as a mode of intertextuality: “otherwise known as ‘commentary’,” it is “the relationship which unites a text with another text which it talks about without necessarily citing it” (Roche 6). In the show, this appears in the form of commentary on the original Rice novel, which the show does cite, but also comments on more obliquely. Metanarrative is used as a term “to describe any work that comments on its own narrative and/or narration” (Roche 6), which the show does through Daniel, as I explored in the first chapter of this thesis.

Patricia Waugh defines metafiction as “a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality. In providing a critique of their own methods of construction, such writings not only examine the fundamental structures of narrative fiction, they also explore the possible fictionality of the world outside the literary fictional text” (Roche 11). *Interview with the Vampire* identifies itself as metafiction through its references to social media, contemporary technology, and the COVID-19 pandemic. The

series uses these twenty-first-century ideas to critique not only the fictional vampires in the diegesis but also the reality of the world that the audience exists in. The show especially does this through Daniel, who is a journalist who exists in twenty-first-century society and has an insider perspective on contemporary societal phenomena. However, commentary on twenty-first-century concepts also comes from Louis and Armand sometimes, providing a different perspective of these ideas and illuminating how modern technology can be used by those who have a different understanding of it and intend to abuse these systems. The show's use of meta is primarily focused on displaying different ways to respond to historical events.

2.2 Social media, modern technology, and distraction

Throughout the series, Daniel frequently delivers clever one-liners that reference some sort of contemporary concept, but his social commentary is especially blatant when it comes to Claudia. Daniel's commentary on Claudia also touches on the topic of consumption, specifically via social media. Claudia is introduced through her journals, which Louis grants Daniel access to. Claudia documented every single one of her kills and recorded her victims' last words in her journals. When Daniel reads the journals and establishes that they serve as a kill list, he says he is "trying to think of something more fucked up than this" (*A Vile Hunger for Your Hammering Heart* 00:02:37). Even though Daniel is perturbed by Claudia's brutality, he also calls her a "goldmine" (00:20:05) and describes her as the "single-shooter, Xbox, mouth breather shit [modern audiences] crave" (00:20:17). Thus, even though Daniel recognises that Claudia's bloodthirstiness is disturbing and "fucked up", he also acknowledges that this violent and ruthless content is popular among a twenty-first century audience. When Louis protests and states that he wants Daniel to provide the readers with context, Daniel takes it further and says: "Context? Sure. Warn the world about a forthcoming apocalypse or maybe inspire a line of sexy Claudia Halloween costumes. Or a cool dismemberment trend amongst the suburban Sylvia Plath set" (00:20:25). Daniel's comment

serves to paint a picture of the society that not only the show's characters but also the show's audience members live in; the people who read the book will not necessarily read it through the lens that Louis wants them to. Additionally, brands will recognise when popular content becomes a trend and will seek to make a profit off its popularity by turning it into a consumer product, such as "sexy Claudia Halloween costumes". Thus, an audience will not necessarily respond to a work as the author intended them to. Daniel reiterates the inevitability of this happening by stating that "once you put it out there, they decide what it is. It can get away from you" (00:20:42). Daniel's comments are meta because of their implications for the characters inside the diegesis and their grounding in reality, as he provides a commentary on how society consumes content in the digital age and late-stage capitalism. This commentary on the arguably unethical consumption that occurs on social media is especially interesting when considering the fact that the show revolves around vampires, creatures that consume unethically. Thus, the series shows that modern audiences unethically consume content about a girl who consumes unethically by commodifying her, underlining the show's self-reflexive nature, while also delivering commentary on capitalism through Daniel.

Armand further delivers some meta social commentary on the detrimental effects of social media and cell phones and points out how vampires exploit people's addictions, as he states that vampires hide so easily in the modern era because humans have never been so easily distracted. Armand comments that people's "cell phones make [them] slaves to [their] fetishes" ("No Pain" 00:06:02), emphasising the degree to which people are engrossed and constantly distracted by their smartphones. Daniel comments that Armand kills nightly, likely pointing out the irony of someone like Armand criticising other people as harshly as he does. Armand's response drives home the danger of distraction: "And sometimes you've watched that kill on the local news. You've never been easier to distract. You're at the height of wilful ignorance. We exploit it. This is, was... Lestat's prophetic vision" ("No Pain" 00:06:14). This

comment about distraction is especially interesting when recalling Louis distracting Daniel from the information he wanted to prevent him from discovering the truth, which Armand now confirms is also done by vampires at large.

Armand's statement is a criticism of the general public and implies that he feels the public does not have a right to judge vampires for their deeds, when people are distracted and wilfully oblivious and are therefore able to be exploited easily. Thus, the show comments on the ease with which people are distracted in the technological age, people's tendency to see what they want to see, and their refusal to see what is right in front of them. Returning to Jennifer Edwards's definition of distraction: "distraction is attention" (4). Distraction is merely the redirection of attention. Edwards adds that the French word "divertissement" speaks to this as well, as people might be "pleasurably diverted or entertained" (4). This sense of distraction becomes especially important in this chapter, as the masses being entertained by their phones in the twenty-first century is purposefully exploited by the vampires. Therefore, distraction through entertainment is weaponised by the vampires. Armand refers to "Lestat's prophetic vision", directly drawing a parallel between the distraction provided by social media and the coven practices conceived of by Lestat in the sixteenth century, who makes it so that coven rituals can be conducted from the balcony of a theatre. According to Armand, Lestat's prophetic vision includes exploiting humanity's desires through distraction, which the vampires achieve through social media in the twenty-first century and the *Théâtre des Vampires* in both the sixteenth and twentieth centuries. The show, therefore, makes an analogy between social media and the medium of live theatre as powerful distraction tools.

2.3 Metatheatre, bearing witness, and fascism

The concept of ‘meta’ has already been explored in this chapter, but acquires an extra layer in the context of theatre. Metatheatre encourages the audience to “analyse the relationship between text and image, between reality and representation (or illusion)” (Paillard and Milanezi 11). The additional layer that the theatre adds is the possibility for audience feedback and participation. Christopher Bigsby identifies this as an important distinction between theatre and film, as the expectation of audience interaction is not possible in film (188) or literature. Metatheatre is understood as theatricality, reflexivity, auto-referentiality, forms of theatrical illusion, or what is called play-within-the-play (Paillard and Milanezi 1). Thus, metatheatre is self-reflexivity with the added layer of audience response.

The *Interview with the Vampire* audience is introduced to the Théâtre des Vampires in the second episode of the second season. The viewer knows that the Théâtre des Vampires is a coven as well as a theatre company and discovers that the performances are a farce constructed in order to allow the vampires to perform their coven rituals. The audience learns about the theatre from Louis’s point of view. When Louis and Claudia enter the theatre, the vampire taking the tickets from the patrons wears obviously fake vampire teeth to lean into the exaggerated theatrics (“Do You Know What It Means to Be Loved by Death” 00:17:04), further crafting the illusion for the audience, who will only see what they wish to see. The audience is a mix of devotees and tourists, some regulars of the theatre and some only there to engage in intercourse. Armand establishes that the kind of audience does not matter: “They were all the same to us. Cattle for our nightly sabbath” (00:17:42). This is the first instance of the vampires of the theatre referring to the audience as animals. This does not only refer to the vampires’ perception of humans as food and their intention to slaughter them, but also to their view of humans as ignorant group thinkers who are easily distracted and fooled.

Santiago takes the stage and greets the audience: “Welcome! To the displacement of

reason and the excretion of pathetic desires. By that I mean: Good evening!” (00:18:27). The devotees in the audience say these lines with him, demonstrating the audience participation that sets theatre apart as an art form and also aids in presenting the moral dilemma presented by the vampires’ play. The devotees are also dressed the same as the theatre company, underlining the fact that the play is merely a medium for them to consume. The costumes, stage makeup, and the jazzy music are reminiscent of Kander and Ebb’s *Cabaret*, as are Santiago’s introductory lines: Whereas *Cabaret*’s Emcee utters the words “meine damen und herren, mesdames et messieurs, ladies and gentlemen” (Ebb 01:10), Santiago starts his performance with the words “ladies and gentlemen, mesdames et messieurs, offals and offalesses” (00:18:03). The pattern of using multiple languages is similar, but Santiago’s words reveal his bloody intentions, as the word ‘offal’ refers to the internal organs of a butchered animal, which is seen as a delicacy in certain cultures. This uncovering of the vampires’ violent plans is intentionally obvious, as, like the fake teeth, these aspects of the play lure the audience into a false sense of security. Santiago also flies around on a rope, which Claudia notes is limp (00:18:56), therefore showing that Santiago is flying with his vampiric powers. Louis remarks on this as well: “But what was truly confusing that first night were the efforts to make it all appear as farce. The fake vampire teeth, the fake blood, the trick rope” (00:22:30). Armand confirms that “it was all a seduction, to lure the cattle into a willing belief of disbelief. The only play that mattered was the last” (00:22:41). The obviously fake props and stunts lure the audience into a false sense of security and create an expectation of performance, as theatre is inherently deceptive. This expectation allows the vampires to hide in plain sight.

Santiago proceeds to deliver a monologue in which he directly addresses the audience and invites them to participate in the play:

SANTIAGO. What you are about to see is, for you, an outrage that masks a birth and

a rebirth of what is considered normal. Instead of mere human drama, we here at Théâtre des Vampires, delve into the underbelly of the human soul, to present to you the highest form of art in the lowest of ways! Have you repressions that need airing? Oh, you've come to the right place. Phobias towards your next of kin? Amis, we assist in turning down the sheets! Bloodlust? Fear of the insane? I salute your honesty, right after I take my boot from your arse. But seriously, mes amis, being vampires and by nature superior to you mortals, we can replicate the level of bilge necessary to disrupt your tiny ship called human decency. In fact, we capsize it. So, if you don't leave here tonight seeing the world upside down and liking very much what you see, and feel, then we here at Théâtre des Vampires, have failed in our jobs, which is, at the heart of it, to laugh alongside your misery, while you cry and scream for more. (00:18:47)

Santiago presents the theatre as a place where the audience does not need to adhere to moral standards and frames it as a safe space for the audience to air their grievances. Santiago's monologue includes the audience in the play by making them a part of the moral depravity that they will bear witness to. Santiago preemptively placates the audience by accepting their harsher emotions, allowing the audience to let down their guard, which makes it easier for the vampires to capsize the audience's "tiny ship called human decency". The audience also walks into the theatre with expectations of a performance, which means that they do not take anything Santiago says at face value. The vampires exploit the medium of the theatre, breeding the wilful ignorance that allows the audience to witness the atrocities that entertain them without guilt. Santiago reinforces this message when he looks straight into the camera and says: "Everything you're about to see is real. Remember that when you leave here tonight. You are all complicit, repugnant, and appalling! And I love you for it. And I

welcome you even as you disgust me” (00:20:34). By looking into the camera, Santiago addresses the audience at home as much as the audience physically in the theatre. This direct focus on the audience outside of the diegesis is another example of ‘meta’ that conveys the importance of the message being delivered; the complicity is expressly not limited to the audience in the theatre. The degree to which the audience is complicit in the coven’s rituals becomes apparent in the last play.

The last play that Armand mentions features a human who was kidnapped by the vampires, so their terror is genuine as they try to convince an already entranced audience to help them. Santiago says in his monologue that the vampires intend to capsize the audience’s “ship of human decency”, thus underlining that they are testing their morals through their play. The seduction of the audience is revealed to have worked well when the vampires’ human victim, a Belgian woman named Annika Rooman, screams about the actors being real vampires and begs the audience to believe her. The audience does not believe her, and they merely laugh, as if her suffering is another play for them to consume and enjoy, which to them, it is. This audience response also touches on the unethical consumption I mentioned in the previous section, as the audience is entertaining themselves by consuming a play about a woman being unethically consumed, which, in turn, underlines the show’s self-reflexivity. The audience has been seduced into complicity, and the vampires have therefore successfully capsized their ship of human decency. The vampires not only test the audience but also the victim by making her choose someone to replace her, demonstrating that humans will sacrifice others to save their own skin. By directing the coven rituals in a theatre and exploiting the audience’s expectations of performance and make-believe, the vampires hide in plain sight and make the audience unknowingly complicit. Through Armand’s memories, Lestat explains why this works:

LESTAT. They enter with companions. Seduced into a collective. They laugh

together. Weep together.

ARMAND. What is that to a vampire?

LESTAT. An opportunity. Hamlet dies by a poisoned blade, but the actor lies before them still breathing. In this temple, belief is protection. Announce you are a vampire. Drink the blood in plain sight. Direct your coven rituals, not in the sewer, but from the balcony rail. (“No Pain” 00:17:34)

The vampires are protected by the temple of theatre. This echoes Armand’s words about humans being wilfully ignorant: “humans have never been easier to distract. You’re at the height of wilful ignorance. We exploit it” (“No Pain” 00:06:19). This parallel implies that in the twenty-first century the vampires are protected by the so-called temple of technology and social media. Thus, the vampires have merely found another form of theatre to exploit. The theatre and social media have in common that they touch on the human desire to consume and the ease with which humans are distracted. In making the vampires’ audience unknowingly complicit in the slaughters, the show combines the audience’s wilful ignorance with their desire to consume to emphasise the theme of unethical consumption. The *Interview with the Vampire* audience is included in this, as the show chooses to let the camera be sprayed with blood when showing the slaughter from Armand’s memories (“No Pain” 00:18:35), thus making the audience at home into voyeurs and figuratively causing them to have blood on their hands. Therefore, the show drives home the damage that wilful ignorance and unethical consumption can do through references to contemporary social media and the story about the Théâtre des Vampires. The way the show touches on the constructedness of truth through metatheatre is especially interesting, because the vampires are relying on the audience not believing what they say and show, rather than directly lying. The vampires construct a narrative that is more or less truthful, but it is concealed by the veil of theatre, which means the audience consumes the play as a commodity rather than as a truthful

message or warning. The vampires present a truth that is wrapped in falsity, thus manipulating the audience into willful ignorance. In this way, the show illustrates that a narrative can be truthfully constructed, but access to this narrative can still be prevented by the context in which it is presented.

The way in which the theatre is framed like a transformative vacuum is reminiscent of Kander and Ebb's musical *Cabaret*. "Wilkommen", the opening number of this musical, also invites the audience to only be present in the space that they are currently occupying:

Leave your troubles outside!

So - life is disappointing? Forget it!

We have no troubles here!

Here life is beautiful...

The girls are beautiful...

Even the orchestra is beautiful! (Ebb 01:43)

Both excerpts present a master of ceremonies who invites the audience into their space and offers this space and experience to the audience as an outlet for their own issues. These practices qualify both the *Théâtre des Vampires* and *Cabaret* as examples of immersive theatre. According to Adam Alston, "audiences in immersive theatre are often asked to do something more than watch, think and feel so that they can feel more of the work and feel more intensely" (9). Alston further posits that as involvement increases, so does audience productivity (9), which he terms as anything an audience does in a theatre performance when they are "not sleeping, daydreaming or procrastinating" (6). Immersive theatre as an art form is inherently political (Alston 11), and is therefore perfectly suited to deliver a political message; luring the audience into a seemingly apolitical bubble (Alston 4) to get them to lower their guard will drive home a political message much more effectively. For example, in *Cabaret*, the character of Sally Bowles has been rewritten to represent each decade's version

of a historical dilemma, a haunting of conscience in the years since World War Two” (Mizejewski 4-5). Hence, the Kit Kat Klub serves as a microcosm of society, inviting the audience into the seemingly apolitical vacuum and stealthily presenting political messaging relevant at the time of performance.

The 1966 Masteroff, Kander, and Ebb musical *Cabaret* is an adaptation of John van Druten’s 1951 play *I Am a Camera*, which in turn is based on Christopher Isherwood’s 1939 novel *Goodbye to Berlin* (Mizejewski 4). The musical is set in Weimar Berlin during the Great Depression as the Nazis rise to power. It follows American writer Clifford Bradshaw as he travels to Berlin and encounters the elusive figures in the so-called “Kit Kat Klub”. Clifford engages in an affair with the English cabaret performer Sally Bowles, who works in the Kit Kat Klub, which serves as a metaphor for German society at the time.

Although the vampires’ goal was never to deliver a political message but to exploit the humans’ desire to be entertained, there are still similarities between the theatre in *Interview with the Vampire* and *Cabaret*. The first of which is the overarching narrative of the second season, which bears a strong resemblance to the narrative of *Cabaret*, which Linda Mizejewski describes as that of “the innocent American in Europe, the project of entertainment (producing the Big Show, which turns out to be Nazism)” (162). In the case of *Interview*, the “innocent” American is Louis, who encounters the Théâtre des Vampires, who are, then, responsible for the Big Show, which is most obviously murder, corruption and unethical consumption. However, this parallel aligns the vampires with fascist ideas. The similarities between the show’s vampires and fascist ideas will be examined in the third chapter of this thesis.

The show chose to set this part of the story in post-war Paris, when *Cabaret* is set in Weimar Berlin during the Great Depression, thus both depicting decimated European capitals. This is a revisionist adaptation choice on the showrunners’ part, as Louis’s encounter with the

theatre originally takes place in the 1870s. Thus, this choice emphasises the imprint that fascism left behind on society and highlights fascism in general. As Louis notes: “Paris was Nazi scar tissue at the time” (“Do You Know What It Means to Be Loved by Death” 00:02:38). *Cabaret*’s Berlin and *Interview*’s Paris are experiencing extreme financial strife, making its inhabitants long for an escape, which, in *Cabaret*, means going to a shady nightclub and letting yourself be swept up in the Big Show. *Interview*’s Paris does not have any milk or butter, but Louis did see a woman in an old dress “putting on a brand new lipstick” (“Do You Know What It Means to Be Loved by Death” 00:03:34), conveying that people are indulging in luxuries rather than buying new clothes. Therefore, the state of the cities makes its inhabitants more desperate for an outlet and thus more vulnerable to the Théâtre des Vampires’ agenda.

The most important parallel between *Cabaret* and the Théâtre des Vampires that has been highlighted through Armand’s references to social media and the story of the vampire theatre in *Interview with the Vampire* is the theme of the harm of passive spectatorship. The importance of *Cabaret* in this equation is specifically because of references to fascism and the way the vampires mirror the concept of “the world encompassed into a good show”, in which “fascism has been seamlessly encompassed” (Mizejewski 170). However, rather than having a didactic purpose that is decidedly anti-fascist like in *Cabaret* (Mizejewski 171), the vampires are akin to a fascist body themselves: they hide in plain sight and exploit the audience members, which seem to mirror the staunchly apolitical and wilfully ignorant character of Sally Bowles, who claims that politics have nothing to do with her (Mizejewski 193). At the end of *Cabaret*, the audience is meant to sit in horrified realisation, as they have been shown what happens when people see evil happen in front of them and do nothing. Conversely, at the end of the vampires’ play, the audience leaves none the wiser, because the purpose of their play is deception. By letting the blood splatter onto the camera during a

slaughter in the theatre, the series also involves the audience, willing them to pay attention instead of being wilfully ignorant like the theatre audience and the society described by Armand during the interview. Due to the show's meta nature, it can be posited that humanity as described by Armand is meant to mirror our own society; the show wants its audience to take something away from the viewing experience. It is almost as if the show is addressing the audience like Cliff addresses Sally: "If you're not against all this, you're for it" (Mizejewski 5). Thus, the show references *Cabaret* through the Théâtre des Vampires, indirectly responding to the rise of fascism through this reference and the construction of a narrative through a performance. The show's use of metatheatre draws attention to theatre's deceptive nature and the fact that it responds to draws attention to major sociopolitical shifts, which, in turn, allows the series to emphasise the constructedness of truth.

This chapter has explored *Interview with the Vampire* as a meta work, explored the self-reflexive references to social media and contemporary technology, and has drawn a line between distraction and consumption in the twenty-first century and the post-war Parisian Théâtre des Vampires. Additionally, this chapter has examined how the show warns its audience about the harm of passive spectatorship and wilful ignorance. Through its use of metatheatre, the series demonstrates that even though a narrative can be truthfully constructed, the environment in which it is presented can still restrict access to it. The show intends to send the audience a message through its use of metanarrative, metatextuality, metatheatre and its more general instances of self-reflexivity. The use of metanarrative is meant to foster a critical attitude in the audience, which the show then utilises to weave political messaging into the narrative, thus communicating what the audience's critical mindset should be used for. Namely, to infer the political messaging that is constructed by the series, in which the vampires represent a collective representative of right-wing thought. As the narrative frame plays out at the end of a worldwide pandemic, the cultural and political

context of the COVID-19 pandemic also comes into play in the narrative as merely another stage for the vampires to take and use to execute their 'great conversion'. The next chapter will delve into the meaning of 'the great conversion' in the context of real-world politics and its relevance to the theme of establishing 'truth' and constructing a truthful narrative.

Chapter 3: “The Great Conversion”: Adaptation, Covid-19 and Right-Wing Extremism

This thesis establishes in its first chapter that the show endeavours to prompt critical thinking in its audience, and spends its second chapter establishing the prevalence of social commentary and real-world politics in the series’ narrative. This begs the question: why? What message is the series trying to deliver by putting a book generally renowned as a cult classic in a contemporary context? This thesis argues that *Interview with the Vampire* further reveals its agenda through its references to social media, contemporary technology, and the COVID-19 pandemic. Namely, it challenges its audience to be critical of any narrative that is presented by demonstrating that any narrative can be altered at any given time, thus exposing the elusive nature of the truth and how susceptible people are to engaging with and believing misinformation. It is through its references to and framing of the pandemic that the show establishes its relation to its present-day context. Contrary to the previous chapters, which primarily focused on the interpretation of past events, this chapter focuses on interpreting ongoing and future events. The first section of this chapter will delve into some general background information on the COVID-19 pandemic, its ramifications for left-wing and right-wing politics, and the correlation between the pandemic and the spread of conspiracy theories and misinformation. The second section will analyse *Interview with the Vampire*’s incorporation of the COVID-19 pandemic and explore the similarities between the vampires’ ‘great conversion’ and right-wing extremist ideas.

3.1 COVID-19, politics, and conspiracy

The COVID-19 pandemic started in Wuhan, China, in January, and the virus had infected millions of people and killed hundreds of thousands of people by July of that same year. In an effort to stop the spread of the virus and safeguard overburdened health systems, the crisis also resulted in the near-complete worldwide suspension of the majority of

non-essential business and social activities. Consequently, tens of millions of people experience unemployment, poverty, and hunger, and millions of enterprises globally face insolvency (Cannon 270).

Apart from merely causing an economic downfall, the pandemic also advanced the emergence of far-right movements. According to Barry Cannon, “the crisis arrived in the midst of a much longer running ‘crisis of democracy’, which is seen as the originating context for the emergence of the radical right” (271). According to one view of this crisis, the West has seen a deterioration in existing democratic institutions, “whereby elections ... are failing to accurately express the popular will and that the freedoms associated with democracy are increasingly under threat” (Cannon 271). Another reading of this crisis listed by Cannon is that the existing institutions are exhausted, which has been caused “particularly by a growing crisis of inequalities, primarily socio-economic and class based, emerging since the onset of neoliberalism and globalisation in the 1980s, but accentuated further in the aftermath of the [Global Financial Crisis of 2008]. This crisis, traversed by race, gender and sexual inequalities, creates, or is accompanied by, a crisis in political inequalities, both mutually reinforcing each other (271). The basis of a post-Cold War consensus between centre-left and centre-right in much of the developed world was marked by “a neoliberal political economy privileging finance, and a progressive politics of recognition, it used policies of “inclusion” to help co-opt liberal currents within social movements, such as feminism, anti-racism, multiculturalism and LGBTQ+, to the neoliberal project” (Cannon 273). This consensus was challenged by “reactionary neoliberalism or what others term “right-wing populism”, characterised by “an exclusionary vision of a just status order: ethnonationalist, anti-immigrant, and pro-Christian, if not overtly racist, patriarchal, and homophobic”, which is being promoted by US President Donald J. Trump (Cannon 274).

Before Covid-19 was even designated as a pandemic, the World Health Organisation

(WHO) cautioned that the globe was facing a so-called ‘infodemic’: an outbreak of false information, misinformation, and conspiracy theories that might be as harmful as the SARS-CoV-2 virus itself (Butter and Knight 3). According to Michael Butter and Peter Knight, the aforementioned rise of right-wing extremism in the pandemic corresponded with the proliferation of conspiracy theories, which was bolstered even more due to the fact that COVID-19 is the first worldwide pandemic to take place in the era of social media (4). One of the most prevalent COVID-19 conspiracy theories is the theory that the pandemic is a “malicious hoax” (Madisson and Ventsel 188). Conspiracy theories surrounding the COVID-19 vaccines were also widely disseminated, primarily on Facebook. Estonian partners of Facebook fact-checkers noted that posts from US anti-vaxxer influencers, like Robert F. Kennedy Jr., started to spread through anti-vaccine groups. These posts connected “the Covid vaccines with Big Pharma and the dastardly plans of the so-called top globalists” (Madisson and Ventsel 192). Therefore, the pandemic and the spread of misinformation are linked.

Throughout 2021, numerous conspiracy theories began to focus on the “Great Reset”, an “alleged plan” by Klaus Schwab, chairman of the World Economic Forum (WEF), and “other business leaders to radically transform the economy and people’s way of life (Butter 216). In the book of the same name, Schwab and his team define the “Great Reset” as a means of addressing the weaknesses of capitalism exposed by the pandemic (Rectenwald 12). However, conspiracy theorists deemed the “Great Reset” a “vast left-wing plot to establish a totalitarian one-world government” (Rectenwald 12). The specific phrasing of “the Great Blank” is also reflected in the “Great Replacement” theory, which is the idea “that ethnically homogeneous populations in European nations are being demographically ‘replaced’ by people of non-European origin”, which, according to far-right actors, was specifically “orchestrated by liberal and/or left-wing elites” (Ekman 1127). It is common for conspiracy

theorists' to "claim full certainty about what brought about [an] event" (Imhoff 16), and they are not threatened by conflicting evidence, which they explain away by claiming that these conspiracies are well-guarded. This evidence is also easily "dismissed as being part of a distraction maneuver, a smokescreen to hide the incredible truth" (Imhoff 16). These conspiracy theories seem to primarily originate from right-wing populists, often white and male, who "position themselves as the victims of a vast plot by the 'ruling elite' to deprive them of their liberty" (Butter and Knight 9). It is important to note that conspiracy theories come from above as well as from below, as President Trump was "the most significant 'super-spreader' of misinformation and conspiracy rumors relating to Covid" (Butter and Knight 9). Thus, generally, conspiracy theories come from right-wing individuals who posit that the official narratives cannot be trusted.

3.2 Vampiric extremism and the question of the truth

Conspiracy theories like the "Great Reset" and the "Great Replacement" are relevant to this thesis because of *Interview with the Vampire's* reference to them: Louis claims to have heard other vampires talk about 'the great conversion', which is described as vampires taking advantage of the pandemic to increase their numbers, which is comparable to right-wing extremists "opportunistically using the pandemic and the confusion it has sown to drive support for their usually marginal politics" (Butter and Knight 9). The specificity of the phrase 'the great conversion' and its placement within the context of the pandemic heavily suggests a connection to the "Great Reset", paranoid right-wing interpretations of official narratives and the subsequent spread of misinformation.

The show briefly introduces the audience to 'the great conversion' in its second episode. The excerpt below is also included in the first chapter of this thesis, where I analysed it in terms of Louis's adeptness at evading questions and distracting Daniel. In this chapter, I

will be analysing the content of this excerpt regarding what Louis is saying about ‘the great conversion’. Louis gives Daniel a surprising amount of information about the other vampires’ plans:

LOUIS. I sit here a master of my instincts.

DANIEL. Mm-hmm. And what about the others out there? Have they mastered theirs?

LOUIS. Just the opposite. Most of them are slaves to the blood, exhausted from decades, centuries of hiding, giddy to increase their numbers.

DANIEL. Mm-hmm. Two questions. Did you eat the baby? And is the pandemic the opening they’ve been waiting for.

LOUIS. Pandemic, the unravelling of geopolitical foundations.

DANIEL. And you know this, how? You guys have a thread on 8chan?

LOUIS. I hear them. Our thoughts can travel thousands of miles to one another. I can stand out on my balcony, close my eyes, and their plotting speeds to me. One of them, a brute in Madagascar, called it “the great conversion”.

DANIEL. The great conversion? Well, good luck with that, because most people I know like to play a little ball in the afternoon, or maybe go down to the beach, catching a few rays.

LOUIS. Yes. What on earth would a meth-addicted son of a coal miner in West Virginia want with eternal life?

DANIEL. Did you eat the baby?

LOUIS. Or the Arab youth whose family were wiped from existence by a Western drone?

DANIEL. (interrupting) Did you eat the baby?

LOUIS. No, I’m sure you’re right. (“After the Phantoms of

Your Former Self' 00:30:56)

Firstly, Louis reveals his fellow vampires' agenda to "increase their numbers", which he proceeds to describe as 'the great conversion'. Daniel asks if the pandemic is the opening that the vampires have been waiting for, which Louis indirectly confirms by characterising the pandemic as "the unravelling of geopolitical foundations". By stating that the pandemic has made society vulnerable, Louis implies that the vampires are exploiting it by turning people into vampires all over the globe.

Louis's response to Daniel's criticism of the idea of 'the great conversion' reveals another layer of metaphor that the show has incorporated. Daniel does not think people will want eternal life if it disrupts their regular life, which Louis rebuts by sarcastically claiming that the disadvantaged youth he describes could not possibly have any interest in eternal life. These disadvantaged youth are examples of people vulnerable to being radicalised, as, according to Kumar Ramakrishna, "far-right ideology works best when individuals are facing 'moments of weakness'" (74). When considering radicalisation, the ideology itself is not the only relevant factor, as other important factors range from "socioeconomic grievances to the lure of adventure to the primary human need for survival" (Ramakrishna 74). A "meth-addicted son of a coal miner in West Virginia" and an "Arab youth whose family were wiped from existence by a Western drone" are socioeconomically and emotionally disadvantaged, as they are poor and have experienced loss due to their circumstances. As Louis mentions these kinds of people, specifically when rebutting Daniel's claim that no one wants eternal life, he reveals that these are the kinds of people that the vampires are targeting. He implies that because of their circumstances, these youth have something to be gained from eternal life, and by mentioning these specific circumstances and even referring to a "Western drone", he politicises the act of granting someone eternal life. Thus, through this dialogue, the show uses the act of turning someone into a vampire as a metaphor for radicalisation, casting

the vampires as a right-wing collective and underlining ‘the great conversion’ as a reference to real-world politics. This metaphor is another way for the show to signal its connection to right-wing ideas. Even though this scene contains some of the most politically potent dialogue in the show, its message is, rather fittingly, lost on Daniel because of Louis’s proficiency at redirecting Daniel.

The framing of the vampires as an extremist collective is reinforced by the show’s involvement of the Talamasca, which is depicted as an intelligence agency that is tracking the vampires and their activity. When Daniel meets Raglan James at a restaurant, Raglan reveals that he knows details of the interview session from the day before, which leads Daniel to speculate on who Raglan works for: “A little pale for Mossad. Although that could be very Mossad” (00:02:51). Raglan denies this, as he’d be better funded and states that he works for “another watchful shop” (“No Pain” 00:02:58). The Talamasca is confirmed to be performing surveillance on the vampires when Raglan discloses that his organisation was “tracking nine hundred a month ago. We’re tracking sixteen hundred now. The ‘great conversion’. It’s real. It’s happening” (“No Pain” 00:03:11). The Talamasca also have access to almost any kind of historical documents and primary sources and even hack Daniel’s laptop: “Files have been placed, with proper encryption, on your comically vulnerable laptop. Most are primary sources” (00:03:45). Daniel proceeds to out Raglan as an intelligence officer to the entire restaurant, after which he writes down “MI6?” on his page of notes (00:03:57). The show references Mossad and MI6 when introducing the audience to the Talamasca. Mossad and MI6 are both organisations well-known to be responsible for intelligence collection and counterterrorism (“Mossad | About”; Whitehead), which frames the Talamasca as an organisation of this same kind. This, in turn, frames supernatural activity as terrorist activity, especially when considering the show’s depiction of the act of turning someone into a vampire.

There is irony to the show's references to theories like the 'great reset' and the 'great replacement', as the show prompts the audience to be critical of the narratives with which they are presented from the first episode and subsequently references these neo-fascist ideas that arise out of the mindset that official narratives cannot be trusted. The audience is being told to be critical of 'official narratives', which in this case is the story that Louis is telling, but is then also lured in by the narrative frame setting outside of the interview, because that is not something that the show has cautioned the audience about. The audience suspends its disbelief to watch a show about vampires and assumes they are real throughout the viewing experience. The show then frames the vampires' movements and actions both as those of a right-wing collective and specifically phrases the name of a vampire plot to mirror the names of real-world conspiracy theories of right-wing extremists. This begs the question: Does the show label the people in the critical audience as conspiracy theorists for questioning the narratives with which they are presented, or is it calling out a potential response to people speaking out about extremist groups? The show's politics are never explicitly stated, but considering the queerness and racial diversity in the show and its centring of a journalist who seems very socially aware, the series seems to place itself more on the left side of the political spectrum.

The argument for the show having left-leaning politics is strengthened by the show framing the vampires as an adversarial collective, as the vampires who are not main characters are presented as fanatical and aggressive. The vampires live by the 'Great Laws', and any vampires who break them are branded heretics and their lives are considered forfeit. Louis is breaking the third and fourth laws by writing the book with Daniel: "No vampire must commit to writing the history of the vampires" and "no vampire shall ever reveal his or her true nature to a mortal and let the mortal live" ("No Pain" 00:46:52; 00:47:04). The vampires' aggression is emphasised in the second season's final episode, when the book is

published and the vampires threaten Louis's life on the vampiric psychic channel:

Turned against his own. Page after page of heresy. A breach like a chasm. He killed his kind in Paris. Run him down, all of us. He broke the great laws! A heretic. Lop off his head. Pull out his guts... Rip out him fangs and cut out him tongue¹. Peel off his skin. From cranium to coccyx. We'll come take you. ("And That's the End of It. There's Nothing Else" 00:53:02)

This aggression is aimed at Louis, who, despite making numerous questionable choices, the audience is meant to grow to love as a protagonist. Showrunner Rolin Jones stated that he specifically cast Jacob Anderson as Louis because his "genuine warmth, kindness, [and] humanity" could balance out these questionable choices (25:10). Therefore, by having the vampires threaten the protagonist, the show pushes the other vampires further into an adversarial role. Thus, the show negatively frames far-right movements by presenting the vampires unfavourably and then aligning them with these far-right movements. This brings me back to my question: Does the show label the people in the critical audience as conspiracy theorists for questioning the narratives with which they are presented, or is it calling out a potential response to people speaking out about extremist groups? After closer examination, the second option seems more likely, especially considering the framing of the Talamasca as an intelligence and counterterrorist organisation. By portraying the Talamasca as an organised entity that has access to many resources, including primary sources and historical documents, the show acknowledges the 'great conversion' and the validity of believing in its existence.

The relevance of the show's framing of the vampires and the Talamasca all comes back to the show's relationship with the constructedness of truth. As established, the vampires do not want the truth about their existence and activity to be revealed at all, which places truth and the vampires, and by extension, far-right groups, diametrically opposite one

¹ The vampire saying this is likely speaking an English-based creole language, which is why I kept it as it is in the show. Some of these lines are translated from other languages.

another. The show also puts the vampires opposite to the truth by aligning them with neo-fascist conspiracy theories and the spread of misinformation. The Talamasca's relationship with truth is more nuanced and relates to the construction of the narrative. The Talamasca wants the truth to come out in a way that they can control, as Raglan tells Daniel:

Your publisher will get a phone call before you turn it in. They will pay you handsomely for your manuscript and bury it. You won't even see a galley proof. It's all going to come out soon enough and there's a number of us in the order who think better it happens with Daniel Molloy in paperback than the bumbling governments of the world. ("I Want You More Than Anything in the World" 00:04:51)

Raglan acknowledges that regular publishers will bury Daniel's manuscript, which the Talamasca intends to prevent by taking control of the publishing process. Raglan expresses that the Talamasca wants the truth to come out via a book written by a renowned investigative journalist, rather than via "the bumbling governments of the world", thus also creating a dichotomy between investigative journalism and governments. Raglan also provides Daniel with a list of questions that he wants him to include: "My superiors have a list, a few hundred questions they'd like you to weave into your interview and I'm professionally charged to press you to include them" ("I Want You More Than Anything in the World" 00:05:14). Thus, the Talamasca also wants to control the narrative, which Daniel confirms when he tells Louis that the Talamasca made him redact the book ("And That's the End of It. There's Nothing Else" 00:53:43). Thus, the Talamasca plays a role in constructing and editing a supposedly truthful narrative.

The series investigates the notion of truth by presenting both the audience and the characters with a mix of truth and lies, primarily provided by Louis and Armand, which disorients both Daniel and the audience and muddles their sense of truth and falsity. As philosopher Hannah Arendt suggests:

The result of a consistent and total substitution of lies for factual truth is not that the lies will now be accepted as truth, and the truth be defamed as lies, but that the sense by which we take our bearings in the real world—and the category of truth vs falsehood is among the mental means to this end—is being destroyed (252–53).

This disorientation is reflected in the show's diegesis and also in its narrative as a whole. Armand states that Lestat blends truth and lies “until you're left with no sense of what is or what is not” (“Like The Light” 00:34:41). This also applies to what the show is doing with its narrative at large, which means this is another little meta-ly playful nudge by the show. Through presenting truth and falsehood in this manner, the show reinforces its interest in misinformation and offers historical documents and primary sources as a path back to the truth (Wright 3). The series shows Louis and Daniel attempting to construct some sort of truthful narrative using diaries, photographs, newspaper clippings and copies of scripts from the theatre. In this way, Louis and Daniel, and through their characters, the audience restore their understanding of ‘what is’ and ‘what is not’.

The season concludes with yet another discussion over ‘what is’ and ‘what is not’, as Daniel is interviewed about his bestseller by a journalist who does not believe that vampires are real and brands Daniel's book a “current bestselling fictional memoir” (“And That's the End of It. There's Nothing Else” 00:51:12). The journalist proceeds to establish that Daniel's book, of course meta-ly named *Interview with the Vampire*, has sparked a debate: “Is it true or is it a joke?” (00:51:21), thus demonstrating that Daniel and his book are not taken seriously by the general public. Daniel exclaims that his book is “supported by a mountain of historical documentation” (00:52:28), which must make it more reliable. Consulting historical documentation has been the show's approach to truth-seeking, but the journalist completely disregards Daniel's words and claims that Daniel put his career in the shredder with his book and proceeds to call him a conspiracy theorist by calling him a “Bigfoot hunter chasing

Jesus's bloodline" (00:52:38). This response from a journalist and the general audience brings to mind my question about the show's references to conspiracy theories and thinking critically: Does the show label the people in the critical audience as conspiracy theorists for questioning the narratives with which they are presented, or is it calling out a potential response to people speaking out about extremist groups? Daniel has acted as the audience's vehicle of criticism and analysis since the beginning of the interview, but is now being called a conspiracy theorist. What muddles the audience's sense of true or false even more is the fact that Daniel is revealed to have been turned into a vampire by Armand. Thus, Daniel, now being a vampire himself but not aligning himself with the others, causes confusion about his stance. "As Arendt warned, there is no clarity—just disorientation" (Wright 3).

The show sets its narrative frame during the pandemic, fosters an analytical mindset in its audience and then delivers social commentary using references to real-life historical events that all come back to the theme of the constructedness of truth and misinformation. This begs another question: Why? In an attempt to provide an answer to this question, I briefly return to Patricia Waugh's definition of meta: "a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality. In providing a critique of their own methods of construction, such writings not only examine the fundamental structures of narrative fiction, they also explore the possible fictionality of the world outside the literary fictional text" (Roche 11). The show draws attention to its status as a show, breaking the audience's immersion, and uses that moment to ask a question about the real world that it grounds itself in through its references. Thus, metafiction invites analysis from the audience about the work's relationship to reality. The fact that the showrunners chose to make a work of metafiction set within the sociopolitical context of the pandemic, which has seen a rise in neofascist ideas and the spread of misinformation, leads me to posit that the show is issuing a

warning to the audience. This is supported by the fact that the show chose to transform Daniel's character into a highly competent investigative journalist and therefore chose to highlight the discipline of investigative journalism itself, underlining once again the theme of truth-seeking. The analysis I have done for this thesis leads me to believe that the show's warning is in regards to the real-world events referenced in the show and their relationship to the truth: Do not believe everything you read, do not let yourself be distracted from what is happening and do not stand idly by while evil happens around you.

In the world in which the show grounds itself, during Trump's first term, the White House's chief strategist, Steve Bannon, declared the media the "opposition party ... in what is a long-standing technique of fascist and neofascist 'radicals'" (Foster 17). Because the Trump administration could not control what the left-wing news outlet reported, the goal became to scare and control the media to the point where it would silence itself (Foster 17), which corresponds to the vampires threatening Louis for telling the world the truth. As Kellen states: "The idea that truth doesn't matter has always been useful to tyrants, who wish that truth would be what ever they say it is" (xi). Thus, the rise of right-wing ideologies and their pervasiveness in governments is making it harder to construct a truthful narrative. Due to our current sociopolitical climate, multiple scholars have posited that we seem to be living "in a 'post-truth' society where lies are tolerated and facts are ignored" (Kellen ix). Therefore, it could be postulated that the truth is under attack. "As Arendt warned, there is no clarity—just disorientation" (Wright 3).

Conclusion

At this point, I have established that the show uses metanarrative to make its audience adopt a critical attitude towards the narrative with which they are being presented, as well as that the show includes metatheatre and metatextuality along with meta references to historical events to ground itself in the real world. I worked through three ways in which the show signals its relationship to real-world historical events, through which the show comments on the challenge of determining accurate interpretations of events and the constructed nature of truth. In the first chapter, I established Louis as an unreliable narrator and focaliser, and I analysed the importance of Daniel's character, specifically as a journalist and how his character functions to encourage the audience to adopt a critical attitude. Additionally, I pointed out the show's reference to the South African TRC in order to show the futility of Daniel and Louis's interview and establish the difficulty of establishing a truthful narrative. In the second chapter, I demonstrate the show's meta nature, the way it uses meta to deliver commentary on social media and modern technology and how the show draws a parallel between social media and theatre as powerful distraction tools. I also show how the show's use of metatheatre and its reference to *Cabaret* comments on the audience's role in the perception of the truth and how the presentation of a truthful narrative can affect whether it is properly grasped. Finally, in the third chapter, I argue that the series explores the elusive nature of truth and the dissemination of misinformation and its allusions to the COVID-19 pandemic, and conspiracy theories. By comparing vampire radicalisation to far-right extremism, I argue that the show portrays vampires as completely at odds with the truth. Finally, I posit that the show's use of meta and its focus on interpreting current and future events particularly combined with the showrunners choice to create a metafiction piece that is situated in the pandemic's social backdrop, which has witnessed an increase in neofascist ideologies, suggest an intention to send a message to its audience.

Interview with the Vampire exists in the sociopolitical environment of the 2020s, as the show premiered in 2022, the show's second season aired as recently as August of 2024, and the third season is currently in production. I am finishing this thesis in June of 2025. On June 14th, President Trump threw a military parade to celebrate the 250th anniversary of the U.S. Army. The Parade is also marking Flag Day, and his 79th birthday. This parade has been criticised for its "distinctly authoritarian flavour" (Manfredini and Acquistapace). On that same day, 400 scholars, including 28 Nobel laureates, signed a letter warning the world that "the signs of authoritarianism, and its more militaristic sibling fascism, are here" (Manfredini and Acquistapace). These scholars signed this letter on the 100th anniversary of the *Letter of the Anti-Fascist Intellectuals*, which was published after Benito Mussolini seized power in Italy. The scholars agree that the "world is lurching toward autocracy, with alarming speed" and that "we are sleepwalking towards the collapse of democracy" (Manfredini and Acquistapace). Therefore, it is more important than ever to have media that warn their audience about the elusive nature of truth, the ease with which people are distracted by entertainment, and the harm that wilful ignorance can inflict.

Filmography

- “After the Phantoms of Your Former Self.” *Interview with the Vampire*, created by Rolin Jones, Season 1, Episode 2, AMC, 2022.
- “A Vile Hunger for Your Hammering Heart.” *Interview with the Vampire*, created by Rolin Jones, Season 1, Episode 5, AMC, 2022.
- “And That’s the End of It. There’s Nothing Else.” *Interview with the Vampire*, created by Rolin Jones, Season 2, Episode 8, AMC, 2024.
- “Do You Know What It Means to Be Loved by Death.” *Interview with the Vampire*, created by Rolin Jones, Season 2, Episode 2, AMC, 2024.
- “I Want You More Than Anything in the World.” *Interview with the Vampire*, created by Rolin Jones, Season 2, Episode 4, AMC, 2024.
- “In Throes of Increasing Wonder.” *Interview with the Vampire*, created by Rolin Jones, Season 1, Episode 1, AMC, 2022.
- “Is My Very Nature That of a Devil?” *Interview with the Vampire*, created by Rolin Jones, Season 1, Episode 3, AMC, 2022.
- “Like the Light by Which God Made the World Before He Made Light.” *Interview with the Vampire*, created by Rolin Jones, Season 2, Episode 6, AMC, 2024.
- “No Pain.” *Interview with the Vampire*, created by Rolin Jones, Season 2, Episode 3, AMC, 2024.
- “The Thing Lay Still.” *Interview with the Vampire*, created by Rolin Jones, Season 1, Episode 7, AMC, 2022.

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