

# Miami Herald

## Cornwell's corpses & Rice's vampires make for fun evening at Miami book fair

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DRESSED TO KILL: Kayla Easton and Andrea VanDerPlaats won the vampire costume contest and took a photo with the author Anne Rice, who spoke Monday at the Miami Book Fair International. CHARLES TRAINOR JR / MIAMI HERALD STAFF

On this warm fall evening, Oscar Fuentes, The Biscayne Poet, toiled away at his typewriter outside The Swamp, the new pop-up lounge at Miami Book Fair International. He was writing poems for fairgoers, asking only for a suggestion of three words to get started.

Had he requested three words to describe Monday night at the fair, you might have chosen these: Stories. Dead. Undead. Or you could have gone with: Corpses. Black. Lipstick. Either choice would succinctly describe the fair's entertaining second night, which featured two bestselling, groundbreaking authors and several events at The Swamp, including 10-minute play readings from City Theatre and the reminder that there is always something going on this week at Miami Dade College's Wolfson campus.

Monday was a homecoming of sorts for both authors featured in "Evenings With..." programs. Suspense novelist Patricia Cornwell, a Miami native, told her audience, "I have happy memories of being a kid in South Florida," and gave a shout-out to beloved barbecue spot Shorty's, which, she says, was "worth the trip from Boston," where she lives.

Cornwell, who had to cut her appearance short to catch a plane, let the audience dive right in, asking for questions so she could talk about her forensic crime novels and medical examiner Kay Scarpetta, the latest of which is *Flesh and Blood*. She described her research (which included blasting objects with high-tech firearms on a remote Texas range) and had a creepy story about why workers in a crematorium keep a baseball bat in the corner, but I'm not going to tell you what it was, because it'll keep you up all night.

She also discussed Scarpetta and the other characters from her series, including Scarpetta's prickly but brilliant niece Lucy and perpetually gruff cop Pete Marino, all of whom have taken on a life of their own by now.

"I've tried to improve Marino's eating habits and hygiene," she said, but admitted she has so far failed.

Anne Rice – who has a Miami connection in that she was present at the first Miami book fair 31 years ago – also has a connection to the character most closely associated with her: the vampire Lestat.

"He's real to me," she told the boisterous crowd, which wore more dark lipstick than is usually seen at the fair and shrieked at the author's appearance like they were at a One Direction concert. "I was amazed how much I had missed him."



In her latest book, *Prince Lestat*, Rice reunites characters from *Queen of the Damned*.

"It feels like you're channeling something from the astral plane," she said of finding their voices.

She told the audience Lestat was based on her husband Stan, while she finds herself to be more like the moody vampire Louis.

"I was Louis; Louis was me," she said, adding "I'm the only woman to be played by Brad Pitt in a movie," referring to the film version of her first Lestat novel, *Interview With the Vampire*.

Fittingly, two fans, Kayla Easton and Andrea VanDerPlaats, dressed as Lestat and Louis won the fair's costume contest and got to take a photo with the author. One suspects their three words would be: Best. Night. Ever.