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Recommended. Here and in each issue of *Slayage* the editors will recommend writing on *BtVS* available on the Internet.

■ Yael Sherman. "Tracing the Carnival Spirit in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer: Feminist Reworkings of the Grotesque*." *thirdspace* 3/2 (March 2004): 89-107 (print): http://www.thirdspace.ca/articles/3_2_sherman.htm.

■ Cynthia Fuchs, "Mopey Season" (review of Season Six DVD of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*). *PopMatters*: <http://popmatters.com/tv/reviews/b/buffy-season-6-dvd.shtml>

■ _____. "Forever" (review of the final episode of *Angel*). *PopMatters*: <http://www.popmatters.com/tv/reviews/a/angel-040518.shtml>



Lorna Jowett

New Men: "Playing the sensitive lad"

This essay is Chapter Five from *Sex and the Slayer* (Wesleyan U P 2004). It is published here with the kind permission of Professor Jowett and Wesleyan. Go here to order the book from Amazon.com.

[1] It follows that in trying to destabilize traditional representations of femininity, especially through role reversal, *Buffy* must offer a concomitant alternative version of masculinity. Producer Fran Rubel Kuzui articulates this when she says, "You can educate your daughters to be Slayers, but you have to educate your sons to be Xanders" (in Golden and Holder 1998: 248). In 1995 Thomas suggested that the British television detective series *Inspector Morse* demonstrated "the extent to which feminist influences are discernible in this example of quality popular culture, particularly in its representations of masculinity" (1997: 184). Television melodrama and soap in particular have addressed masculinity because they are concerned with family and the domestic, traditionally "feminine" areas (Torres 1993: 288). Saxey notes with some surprise that in *Buffy* fan fiction "it is the males who are persistently tortured by doubt" and wonders why "slash readers and writers wish to explore the suffering of these often sensitive, non-traditional male figures, while female characters more often enjoy less emotionally painful treatment" (2001: 201), and I would suggest that it is partly because masculinity is being so visibly renegotiated in pop-cultural forms. As noted in the last chapter, "good" new masculinity contrasts with "bad" tough-guy masculinity by being "feminized," passive, sensitive, weak, and emotional, and this contrast is partly about the separation of gender and behavior in the new men.

[2] Like the young female characters, the new men are very aware of how gender is constructed but are often shown repressing their "real" masculinity (perhaps a recognition of powerful social conditioning). In this way, the new men's identities are shown to be unstable rather than fixed since they too work hard to construct and reconstruct postfeminist gendered identities. In line with the show's heteronormativity, these male characters are depicted as nonhomosocial and were identified early on as heterosexual. Victoria Robinson notes that "[t]he hegemonic model of masculinity" is

heterosexual and that many (male) writers on gender both “problematize masculinity and recognize the social constructed nature of male heterosexuality” (1996: 119, 113), highlighting the contradiction here. In addition to Oz, Giles, and Xander, this chapter will use less central characters such as Owen, Ford, Parker, Ben, and Principal Wood to discuss the representation of new masculinity. The contradictions and ambivalences inherent in these characters demonstrate that what *Buffy's* new men represent is not a successful new masculinity but a detailed portrait of the many anxieties surrounding binary constructions of gender.

Lie to Me

[3] Bill Clinton was elected president in 1992 after presenting himself as “the grandson of a working woman, the son of a single mother, the husband of a working wife” and telling voters, “I have learned that building up women does not diminish men” (in Woloch 2000: 591). This points to the ways feminism has caused changes in the presentation of masculinity, and here I examine three apparently sensitive males who are presented as potential partners for Buffy but prove to be unsuitable because they cling to more traditional masculinities.

Owen

[4] The first, Owen Thurman, is introduced in “Never Kill a Boy on the First Date” (1005) as “sensitive yet manly,” and he shares some characteristics with Angel (“He hardly talks to anyone. He’s solitary, mysterious. He can brood for forty minutes straight,” says Willow). Owen’s “manly” credentials are established both by Cordelia’s pursuit of him and his rejection of her, while his sensitivity is established by his admiration of Emily Dickinson’s poetry.¹ Further, Owen finds “most girls pretty frivolous” and tells Buffy there are “more important things in life than dating,” perhaps indicating that he rejects heterosexual romance, and certainly coding him as different from the typical testosterone-charged male teen. When Angel comes to The Bronze to discuss the latest crisis and discovers that the Slayer is “on a date,” Owen and Angel face off—the first in a long line of such confrontations for Buffy’s potential partners. Although Buffy confesses that she “almost feels like a girl” with Owen (a gendered articulation of how romance exposes her “split personality”), her Slayer duties inevitably intrude. She leaves Owen at The Bronze but, unhappy in a passive role, he follows the Scoobies and attempts to “protect” Buffy from a vampire. This assertion of traditional male heroism is punctured by his lack of awareness and being promptly knocked out but the definitive undermining of Owen comes in the final act. The next day he asks Buffy when he can see her again, saying, “Last night was incredible, I never thought nearly getting killed would make me feel so alive!” and Buffy confesses to Giles, “He wants to be Dangerman. . . . Two days in my world and Owen really would get himself killed.” Buffy is compelled to reject Owen because he displays “masculine” aggression, getting off on the danger of slaying (like Riley and some of the other tough guys) and because he refuses to “be careful” (in contrast with the other Scoobies).

Ford

[5] Another potential new man is Billy Fordham (Ford) from “Lie to Me.” Ford’s sensitivity is based on his closeness to Buffy: they went to school together in L.A., and he tells the

gang that he is now enrolling at Sunnydale High because his father has relocated. This gives Buffy the chance to nostalgically invoke a shared past, as Willow and Xander often do. Ford suggests cheering Buffy up with “a box of Oreos dunked in apple juice but maybe she’s over that phase,” and their bond is highlighted by his nickname for her (“Summers”). Ford’s manly attractions are also clear (Xander complains, “Jeez, doesn’t she know any fat guys?”), Buffy admits that Ford was her “giant fifth grade crush,” and shots frame Buffy and Ford close together (she often holds his arm when they are walking). When Ford tells Buffy, “You can’t touch me, Summers, I know all your darkest secrets,” this seems to indicate that his intimacy has limits—he cannot know about her other life. Yet shortly afterward he is with Buffy when she rescues someone from a vamp attack, and he tells her, “You don’t have to lie. . . . I know you’re the Slayer.” Ford’s sensitivity thus extends to knowing and accepting Buffy’s other role (and her power), and even participating in some of the action, without the fear or excitement that Owen displayed.

[6] This perfect playing of the old friend/new man is punctured when subsequent scenes reveal that Ford is a member of a vampire wannabe club and show him bargaining with Spike and Dru to become a vampire, offering them the Slayer in exchange. He is simply a selfish individualist. It also becomes clear that Ford is willing to sacrifice the other “true believers” to get what he wants. That Ford is terminally ill problematizes things: he offers it as an “excuse” or justification of his behavior. Throughout his conversation with Buffy his face is in shadow, while Buffy’s is in light, polarizing them even as their discussion raises doubts about clear-cut morality. Giles’ frequently quoted closing speech in response to Buffy’s request, “Lie to me,” begins to break down certainties about good and evil in *Buffy*: “Yes, it’s terribly simple. The good guys are always stalwart and true, the bad guys are easily distinguished by their pointy horns or black hats, and we always defeat them and save the day. No one ever dies and everybody lives happily ever after.” The presentation of a villain invested in fantasy foreshadows the character of Warren, the male character most anxious about projecting a tough-guy image, and Ford similarly demonstrates the “badness” and violence of old masculinity.

Parker

[7] The next apparently new man is presented more simply because he only features in the “real world” of Sunnydale and knows nothing about vampires or Slayers. In her first weeks as a freshman at U. C. Sunnydale, Buffy meets Parker Abrams in the lunch queue (“Living Conditions” 4002). Later in the same episode Parker pops round to Buffy’s dorm room, and by the next episode Buffy and Parker have spent “all week” together. Parker makes several emotive speeches, demonstrating his willingness to admit and articulate his feelings. He tells Buffy that his father died recently and that this brush with mortality has changed his outlook; he is now more interested in “living for now.” Naturally, Buffy can relate to this, and Parker tells her very seriously, “It’s cool to find someone else who understands.” Parker maintains that history is really about “regular people trying to make choices” (keying in to the language of contemporary individualism and popular postfeminism) and when the two finally kiss, the concerned “new man” asks Buffy, “Is this OK? Because I can stop if you wanted, it’s your choice.” Buffy makes her “choice,” and she and Parker end up having sex (“The Harsh Light of Day”).

[8] The encounter now replays what happened when Buffy had sex with Angel but

without the allegory. Her time with Parker is loaded with reminders of Angel, from Parker's remark about "dark and brooding" guys to Spike's explicit comment, "Guess you're not worth a second go" ("Seems like someone told me as much. Who was that? Oh yeah, Angel"). The two worlds of *Buffy* conflict in a montage of Buffy pursuing her Slayer duties and checking her messages to find that Parker has not called, while the melancholy soundtrack contrasts the previous upbeat music of their developing intimacy. Eventually Buffy catches up with Parker as he talks with another female student and in this scene she seems uncertain and girlish, the freshman Buffy ("feminine") rather than the strong, independent Slayer ("feminist"). When she asks if she did "something wrong," he replies, "Something wrong? No, of course not. It was fun. Didn't you have fun?" before brushing her off. As in "Family," Spike offers a "feminist" explanation, albeit couched in rather unfeminist language: "Did he play the sensitive lad and get you to seduce him? Good trick if the girl's thick enough to buy it." "Playing the sensitive lad" is a strategy that Parker adopts in order to make his conventionally masculine conquests. The success of this strategy relies on traditional moral and sexual values: if the girl thinks *she* seduced *him*, then she is likely to blame herself, as indeed Buffy does.

[9] Buffy's rejection by Parker is shown again in succeeding episodes, and during "Fear, Itself" Buffy tells her mother: "I'm starting to feel like there's a pattern here. Open your heart to someone and he bails on you." In "Beer Bad," Buffy daydreams about saving Parker from a vamp attack. That this daydream occurs in a lecture on the pleasure principle while Parker is chatting up yet another female student is not lost on the viewer. Willow persists in dissuading Buffy: "He's no good. There are men, better men, where the mind is better than the penis," highlighting the changing priorities of postfeminist young women. Riley, Buffy's future boyfriend, disapprovingly tells Buffy that Parker "sets 'em up and knocks 'em down," and when Willow goes to confront Parker, he attempts to charm her too. This time his performance of "the sensitive lad" is deflated by Willow's awareness: "Just how gullible do you think I am? I mean, with your gentle eyes and your shy smile and your ability to talk openly."

[10] Meanwhile Buffy and some other college students have regressed into Neanderthals and a fire has started, trapping Willow, Parker, and several others. As in her fantasy, Buffy saves Parker from mortal danger, and a pensive piano plays in the background as he tells her, "I'm sorry for how I treated you before, it was wrong of me." This fantasy of romance is undercut when Cave-Buffy merely whacks him with her improvised club, leaving the other Scoobies to look down on him, the camera giving a low shot from Parker's prone body.² Viewers here get the satisfaction of Parker being rejected through a device that frees Buffy from her contradictory "feminine" and "feminist" positions on romance and sexual behavior. Parker is finally dismissed by Riley when Parker tells Forrest that Buffy is "kinda whiny" and "clingy," concluding with a crack about "freshman girls" and "toilet seats." Riley punches him out, apparently establishing his own credentials as a "sensitive lad" ("The Initiative").

Scott

[11] Scott Hope has a brief relationship with Buffy in season 3, but this is complicated by Buffy's Slayer duties and Angel's return from hell, and Scott is not entirely discredited as a new man. Much later the ex-Sunnydale High vampire Webs (Holden Webster) tells Buffy that Scott said she was gay and continues, "He says that about every girl he breaks

up with. And then, last year, big surprise, he comes out" ("Conversations with Dead People"). This is the only instance in *Buffy* where sensitivity and (homo)sexuality are related, possibly resolving the complicity between heterosexuality and patriarchy. Yet Scott himself does not reappear. All of these failed partners contribute to undercutting the myth of romance in *Buffy* and highlight romance relationships as the one area in which changes to masculinity are needed and looked for.

Feminized Males

Oz

[12] Oz is figured primarily as the love interest of one of the main characters (generally a female role) and was seen by some viewers as a successful paradigm of new masculinity, combining both "masculine" and "feminine" characteristics. Oz is often identified by his role as rock guitarist and is described by *The Watcher's Guide Volume 2* as "the definition of cool and composed" (Holder, Mariotte, and Hart 2000: 69), two major factors in his appeal. In one way his habitual silence is part of this cool composure and can be read as a trait of "old masculinity" (the strong silent type), yet simultaneously it can be identified as a passive "feminine" characteristic. From the beginning Oz was presented as sensitive and thoughtful, refusing to allow his relationship with Willow to develop before they were both ready (in contrast to Parker's pretence). Kristine Sutherland, who plays Joyce Summers, remarks on the attractions of this: "It was the scene in the van where she asks him to kiss her and he says, 'I don't want to kiss you until you want to kiss me.' That is the kind of man that every woman is looking for" (in Golden and Holder 1998: 215). Once again a new man is one who appears to be sensitive to young women's anxieties about relationships. The connection between Oz's wolf cycle and the female menstrual cycle is explicitly referred to in "Phases" and further feminizes Oz. Oz also proves that it is possible to be both a nerd and, as Xander puts it, "more or less cool" ("The Zeppo"), or that social success need not be dependent on particular versions of masculinity. Of all the primary male characters in *Buffy*, only Oz is a dissimilar physical type and an atypical male lead in that he is short and slightly built. (Willow's next partner, Tara, is also an atypical lead.) This allows the show to present variants of masculinity even in appearance.

[13] On the whole Oz appears "very much at ease with his masculinity" (Simkin2004b: 5) and seems adaptable and free of the anxieties that plague other characters. Oz is willing to stand in for best friend Willow when the Scoobies are worried about Buffy in "Living Conditions." "If it wasn't for this English paper, I'd be right there, listening, doing the girlie best friend thing," Willow worries. "I can do that," responds Oz, going on, "Well, I'm not saying we'll braid each other's hair, probably, but yeah, I can hang with her." Yet his characteristic stoicism can cause problems, and at times friction in his relationship with Willow is exposed. In "Earshot," when Buffy can read thoughts, Willow panics because Buffy knows what Oz is thinking and Willow believes their intimacy will never stretch that far. Another exchange seems to suggest tension when Oz expresses the hope that Buffy has not been encouraging Willow to practice magic ("Fear, Itself"). By the end of a three-way exchange between Buffy, Oz, and Willow, Oz emerges as "supportive boyfriend guy," his reluctance dispelled as concern for Willow's safety. "Just know that whatever you decide, I'll back your play," he concludes, leaving Buffy and Willow to marvel over his "sweet" nature.

[14] Episodes focusing on Oz tend to be either about his relationship with Willow

or about the werewolf. In "Fear Itself" he tells Willow and Buffy, "I know what it's like to have a power you can't control and every time I start to wolf out I touch something—deep, dark. It's not fun." Later in the episode this fear is played out in the Halloween "haunted house" when he starts to wolf out for no apparent reason. Oz leaves Willow (to "protect" her) and huddles in an empty bathtub telling himself, "You're not going to change." Thus although Simkin suggests that Oz does not suffer from the anxieties about masculinity that other male characters display (2004b), I argue that Oz's anxiety about the wolf is his anxiety about masculinity. Carolyn Korsmeyer notes that Wolf-Oz demonstrates "anger and aggression as brutish elements of the emotional range" and concludes that this "seems especially apt for the male of the species" (2003: 164). Oz's sensitivity is proved by his realization that he needs to restrain this side of himself.

[15] It is no coincidence that his crisis concerns another young woman, Veruca, who comes between Oz and Willow because she too is a werewolf and a musician ("Wild at Heart"). Veruca disturbs Oz's peaceful surface: "You're the wolf all the time, and your human face is just your disguise. Ever think of that?" Veruca's animal/sexual magnetism seems to affect other men (both Xander and Giles are riveted by her stage presence), and physical/sexual desire is highlighted in her liaison with Oz, so that despite the "cuddly" nature of his relationship with Willow he is sexualized. Dyer observes that white sexuality is often seen as "bestial and antithetical to civilization" (1997: 26), and Oz as werewolf literalizes this view. Challenged by Willow, he maintains, "I don't know what Veruca and I have done. When I change, it's like I'm gone and the wolf takes over," but Willow points out, "You wanted her. Like, in an animal way." Significantly, Veruca, not Oz, carries most of the blame for their sexual transgression (and Willow describes Veruca as dressing "like Faith," another sexualized bad girl). Following Veruca's death, Oz leaves Sunnydale to try and control the werewolf. As mentioned in chapter 2, he is an aggressive intruder when he returns to Sunnydale and disrupts Willow's new relationship with Tara, sexual jealousy calling out the wolf he thought he had tamed. After escaping the Initiative, he again leaves Sunnydale, Willow, and the series, establishing a pattern in his behavior.³

[16] Robinson identifies an "ambiguity around male sexuality," noting that seeing it as "simultaneously both vulnerable and powerful" is necessary to changing definitions of masculinity (1996: 115). Oz in particular exemplifies this ambiguity. External factors (actor Seth Green's other commitments) meant that Oz lasted only around two seasons as a *Buffy* regular, but the manner of his departure underlines the tension between competing versions of masculinity. All the Scoobies are presented as flawed in some way, but many male characters' flaws or mistakes are related to gendering or gendered behavior. Although Simkin suggests that Oz's departure "offers only a puzzlingly abrupt, incongruous and unsatisfactory resolution" (2004b: 7), I am more inclined to agree with Mendlesohn, who argues that it signals a reluctance to allow Willow agency (2002: 55)—something I see as fitting an overall tendency. Sayer's observation that "[o]ver the course of the show it is primarily the men (Angel, Oz, Riley and to some extent Spike) who have left" (2001: 112), together with Buffy's comment on men "bailing," point to the frequency of men leaving women. All of the characters Sayer picks out demonstrate a contested masculinity, and I argue that their leaving undermines their apparent sensitivity, highlighting the tension within them.

Giles

[17] Another important male character, Giles, was early described as “a decidedly feminized male” (Owen 1999: 24). As an adult, Giles is exceptional: in a show where almost all adults and authority figures are proved “bad,” he is not only fully aware of the teen characters’ heroism, but supportive of it. This is largely because, as Christine Jarvis has noted, Giles begins as the school librarian and honorary teacher, and “where good teachers are portrayed in popular culture, they usually stand against the system” (2001: 264). Giles stands out against the system of school and of hierarchy. In terms of age, and origin (he is British), Giles is presented as different. Yet he shares certain characteristics with other new men.

[18] Giles’ new-man sensitivity may be difficult to pinpoint, since he is presented as a reserved character and since age separates him from the teens. Although vampires like Angel are effectively older than Giles, he is generally seen as the oldest character in the team, highlighted by his traditional dress and speech (also related to his British-ness). Even in the early seasons, however, when he is at his most tweedy, Giles (and the show) is aware of this. When Jenny Calendar asks him, “Did anyone ever tell you you’re kind of a fuddy duddy?” he responds, “No one ever seems to tell me anything else” (“The Dark Age” 2008). The fact that he has two “first” names (Rupert Giles) allows him to be regularly called “Giles” by the teen characters, without this ever sounding strange (as it might if they called him “Smith”), and suggesting a degree of intimacy while not quite putting them on the same footing. Giles’ position as the only adult in the group offers a different perspective to the viewer but still allows his emotional side to be revealed in a number of ways. First, and perhaps most obviously, his emotions are shown in his fathering of Buffy, as discussed in chapter 7. But he also demonstrates a keen sense of responsibility for the safety of the other teens and displays emotion and affection when they are threatened (as when they think Willow has been killed and turned into a vampire in “Doppelgangland”).

[19] Giles takes his responsibility as part of the team very seriously. When Willow asks him, “How is it you always know this stuff? You always know what’s going on. I never know what’s going on,” Giles replies, “Well, you weren’t here from midnight to six researching it” (“Angel”). Giles is always a key member of the Scoobies and their communal efforts. He is presented as hetero- rather than homosocial, and his few adult friendships or affinities are with both males and females (Angel, Ethan Rayne, Jenny Calendar, Joyce Summers, Olivia). After the school is destroyed and he loses his job as librarian, Giles is allowed to shed his reserve, and the teens unexpectedly find common ground with him. His position in the team is reinforced as he also “grows up,” briefly acquiring a British girlfriend, Olivia, and doing his own thing. He is never set up as the leader, though his knowledge and experience are often useful and are respected by the others. His role as Buffy’s Watcher (trainer and researcher, as well as mentor) means that Giles is inevitably a passive rather than an active character. Despite his “generic roots . . . in the von Helsings [sic] of British horror” (Whedon in Lavery 2002a: 50), like Xander, Giles is rarely involved in the physical aspects of slaying. But this does not negate his heroism. In “The Zeppo” he is a key player in the mostly off-screen attempt to avert another apocalypse, and when Buffy says, “It was the bravest thing I’ve ever seen,” Giles merely responds, “The stupidest.” In this way, Giles’ heroism is presented as team effort and self-sacrifice rather than “masculine” individualist heroics.

[20] Giles also allows the teen Scoobies independence and agency. His positions of authority (as Watcher and as a kind of teacher) are traditional patriarchal roles and encourage him to try and take charge early on, but this is resisted by Buffy and the others. J. P. Williams has argued that Buffy's "knowledge of Slayers and slaying is filtered through" Giles, "who, in his dual roles of Watcher and librarian, controls Buffy's access to knowledge and parcels out information on a 'need-to-know' basis" (2002: 62). I would point out that although it is rarely articulated, the show demonstrates that a Watcher must learn as much as a Slayer, since s/he has only theory and no practice. That Giles lacks practical authority is shown in Buffy's frequent insubordination, and he supports her rejection of the Council. Buffy's relationship with Giles can be problematic, but generally Giles allows female characters active agency. Ms. Calendar takes the lead in their romance, and Giles generally encourages both Buffy and Willow to develop their particular skills and rarely implies that they are not strong enough to face potential challenges.

[21] Thus Giles seems to fit the profile for a new man. Yet Giles' position as adult makes him initially the only member of the Scoobies to work, and he is a protector and provider. This role as provider places others in a dependent position, though this is never spelled out. Giles provides transport and, more important, space: three of the four Scooby meeting places are "his" (the library in early seasons, his home in season 4, and The Magic Box in seasons 5 and 6). That Giles' identity crisis in season 4 focuses on his decline to useless, unemployed drunk (part of the larger disintegration of the Scooby Gang in this season) merely highlights how his identity is tied up with wage earning and providing. The male character Giles has most in common with in early seasons is Angel (also an older male, a displaced European, well traveled and well read), and the two meet often over their concern to protect Buffy. As season 5 develops, Giles acts as protector of Dawn and Buffy and provides financial support when they are in difficulty. (Since viewers know Buffy managed to get Giles reinstated as a Watcher with full back pay in "Checkpoint," it might not be such an invidious position. It is also clearly designed to show Buffy's inexperience in the "real" world and her need to rely on someone else.)

[22] Giles displays other traditionally masculine characteristics—aggressive sexuality and physical violence—though these are often displaced onto his alter ego, Ripper. Ripper is constructed deliberately to contrast the traditional Giles of early seasons,⁴ demonstrating the binary nature of masculinity in *Buffy* and the split personality of many characters. He thus offers similar viewing pleasure to the alternative versions of Willow. In "The Dark Age" viewers and characters discover Giles' past as a university dropout who dabbled in dark magic. Ripper is first hinted at when Buffy discovers Giles at home, neglecting his Watcher responsibilities and apparently drunk. She reports that he was acting "very anti-Giles" and Xander observes, "Nobody can be wound as straight and narrow as Giles without a dark side erupting" (foreshadowing similar comments on Willow and Buffy). Although the Ripper aspect of Giles is more aggressive and assertive (telling Buffy, "Hey, this is not your battle and as your Watcher I am telling you unequivocally to stay out of it"), he remains feminized. "You're like a woman, Ripper," the demon Eyghon tells him, wearing Ms. Calendar's body. "You never had the strength for me."

[23] Ripper surfaces at subsequent points, most notably in "Band Candy" (3006), and is always associated with aggression and violence (I see him as a strategy for the use of violence in an otherwise intellectual character). In general the violence of Ripper is used by Giles as part of his role in protecting Buffy and the Scoobies. His language, like Giles',

signals his difference, but it also signals a difference *from* Giles: the received pronunciation of the privileged and educated Brit is replaced in Ripper by a (rather exaggerated) generic southern English working-class “accent.” I would argue, therefore, that along with Jack O’Toole and Spike, Ripper links a certain type of masculinity with certain types of men: middle-class men may be new men, but working-class men are real men. It is also suggestive that some business with Giles’ glasses often heralds the return of Ripper, and Ripper does not wear glasses, a classic signifier of the wimpy swot. His costuming in “Band Candy” associates him with either a working-class hero (like early Marlon Brando) or, perhaps, a middle-class would-be rebel like James Dean in *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955). This visual presentation of Ripper as a 1950s rebel does not match his actual rebellion in the 1970s, but it does draw on intertexts that are classic representations of masculinity and a period of American cultural history much concerned with asserting masculinity in the face of feminization (books from the 1940s like Philip Wylie’s *Generation of Vipers* and Edward Strecker’s *Their Mother’s Sons* influenced this view).

[24] Ripper first appears in an episode where Giles’ relationship with Ms. Calendar is about to become sexual, though his violence is not directly related to or triggered by sexuality in the narrative (as with Oz and Angel/us, for example). Giles’ position as a forty-something who hangs out with a group of teenagers could be slightly dubious, as Buffy points out: “So, you like to party with the students? Isn’t that kind of skanky?” (“Welcome to the Hellmouth”). Initially, Giles’ role as nurturer defuses any sexual attraction (within the narrative), and age divides him from Buffy and her peers, even when the teen characters themselves become adults (see also Levine and Schneider 2003: 308). Outside the narrative, Anthony Head, the actor who plays Giles, “was surprised by the strong reaction to Giles as a sex symbol” (Golden and Holder 1998: 210), though he had played the romantic lead in a series of successful coffee adverts, and this “sexy” image is subsequently played up.⁵ Indeed, Ms. Calendar’s follow-up to her “fuddy duddy” remark was “Has anybody ever told you’re kind of a sexy fuddy duddy?” Part of Giles’ loosening up in season 4 is about acquiring a kind of “cool,” as when the Scoobies witness his “gig” at the coffee shop and Willow admits that she had a crush on him (“Where the Wild Things Are”). Given the perhaps unexpectedly broad demographic of *Buffy’s* audience, Giles offers viewing pleasure to female and male viewers of the show, in a similar way to characters like Inspector Morse (see Thomas).

[25] Giles’ relationships with Jenny Calendar, and later Olivia, work in several ways: to establish him as heterosexual, to remove him from sexual connections with teen characters, and to further emphasize his age difference (the teens generally see it as “gross” and inappropriate that older people have a sex life). They also show that he is sexually attractive. Ripper has sex with Joyce in “Band Candy,” and when Buffy can read thoughts in “Earshot,” she overhears her mother thinking that Ripper was like a “stevedore” during sex (another reference potentially relating class and sexuality). Edwards also suggests that Giles’ sexual prowess is “proved” by his black girlfriend, Olivia (2002: 95)—he can satisfy an “exotic” lover. (Furthermore, it could be argued that this interracial relationship links new masculinity with liberal values.)⁶ Although Giles is characterized primarily as a new man, he is far from weak and effeminate—he is a desirable heterosexual partner. Again *Buffy* has the best of both worlds. Matching the apparently contradictory combination of “femininity” and “feminism” in the young female

protagonists, Giles is both a sensitive new man and a virile lover whose heterosexuality upholds rather than challenges patriarchal structures and gendering.

[26] Dyer argues that the "divided nature of white masculinity. . . . is expressed in relation not only to sexuality but also to anything that can be characterized as low, dark and irredeemably corporeal" (1997: 28). I would suggest that Ripper's other more traditional masculine qualities such as aggression and physical violence are corporeal (physical) and presented as uncharacteristically "low" or "dark." These emerge at other times, as in the season 4 chainsaw-wielding scene ("Fear, Itself"). Being turned into a Faryl demon ("A New Man"—the title is open to all kinds of interpretations) seemed to imply the return of the dark side for Giles, and this episode features Ethan Rayne, an acquaintance from Giles' Ripper days and a recurring villain. The episode highlights Giles' sense that he is losing his role in the group when Professor Walsh undermines his special relationship as a father figure and mentor to Buffy. This is partially resolved by the fact that Buffy later recognizes Giles within the demon, yet demon-Giles is shown deliberately scaring Professor Walsh, whom he called a "harridan." Here the show articulates debates about changing masculinity, encouraging a "feminist" explanation of Giles' behavior. Walsh clearly evokes anxieties about Giles' masculinity, verbalised in the company of a male friend and while engaging in the "masculine" pursuit of drowning his sorrows. "Twenty years I've been fighting demons," Giles slurs to Ethan, "*Maggie Walsh and her nancy ninja boys* come and six months later the demons are pissing themselves with fear. They never even noticed me." He continues, more explicitly, "She said I was an absent male role model. Absent my arse, *I'm twice the man she is* [my emphasis]." Like the tough guys, Giles uses language to preserve gender distinctions and to shore up his own masculinity.

[27] At the episode's conclusion Buffy tells Riley that she does not want to speculate on what might have happened if demon-Giles had killed Ethan. She means largely that they might not have been able to turn Giles back, but bear in mind the cardinal sin on *Buffy* is to kill a human. This potential violence is always within Giles, though arguably the comic aspects of Giles' transformation here work against a serious view of his behavior. As the pressure to defeat Glory heightens in season 5 and Buffy insists on protecting Dawn at the possible expense of ending the world, Ripper begins to reemerge. In one episode Giles threatens Spike with such vigor that the vampire is for once left speechless ("I Was Made to Love You"), then Giles wreaks unspecified off-screen violence on one of Glory's demon minions in order to get information ("Tough Love"). In the showdown Buffy defeats Glory, who withdraws, leaving Ben, her human host, battered but intact. Buffy makes Ben promise that he/Glory will never again pursue her and Dawn, then lets him live. Giles, however, suffocates Ben, explaining that Buffy "couldn't take a human life. She's a hero, you see. She's not like us" ("The Gift"). Thus the apparently civilized Giles will kill a human when he believes that it is morally justified. Giles' statement also sets up oppositions ("she" and "us"; his use of "hero" might imply "villain"). Certainly his use of violence to protect the female Buffy allows him to take on a conventional masculine role as her protector, and Jacob M. Held even describes Giles as the only one "strong enough" to kill Ben (2003: 237). As I argued in chapter 1, Giles' killing of Ben allows Buffy to preserve her moral purity.

[28] During seasons 6 and 7 Giles is absent for much of the time and generally reverts back to a father figure.⁷ I have already mentioned that Giles clashes with Buffy over Spike (as with his killing of Ben, he sees this as being for the greater good) and she

rejects his advice. Later in "Chosen," however, he supports Buffy's "radical" final solution ("it's bloody brilliant!") and joins the original Scoobies for the last battle. Giles displays some potential as a new man, but his negotiation of gender and gendered relationships is often complicated by his role as a parent figure, as I have indicated. Not until Principal Wood does the show offer a further, more mature version of a new man, this time uncomplicated by parental anxieties. I discuss Wood at the end of this chapter.

Ben

[29] "Gentle Ben," as Glory calls him, implying another "sensitive lad," is a hospital intern who features in season 5. He takes an interest in Buffy and her mother's illness while they are at the hospital. This positions him in a caring profession sometimes associated with women, and he is contrasted with the older male doctor who is presented as a distant professional. He looks after Dawn at various points, further reinforcing his "feminine" nurturing qualities, though his heterosexuality is established by his interest in Buffy. He might even have been a partner for her, but she puts off a date with him after her encounter with Warren and April ("I Was Made to Love You"). Ben is trusted enough to help the Scoobies when Giles is seriously injured as the gang try to escape Glory and the Knights of Byzantium at the end of the season. He betrays them because Glory inhabits his body and takes over at inappropriate times. Ben is thus further feminized, especially by sudden reappearances (from Glory) when he ends up wearing dresses as in "Spiral" (notably, this does not masculinize Glory). Dawn sums up Ben's nature when, abducted as the Key, she tells him that she prefers Glory because she does not pretend to be anything other than a monster ("The Weight of the World"), implying that Ben too is only "playing" the new man.

Make Me Feel Like a Man

[30] Xander demonstrates characteristics of a new man, though at times the implication is that he is a new man because he cannot be a real man. Xander's emotional ties to the group are obvious: his long-lasting friendship with Willow is a core element and his position as the "heart" of the group is emphasized more than once. It is his bond with Willow that saves the world at the end of season 6: despite Dark Willow's sarcastic remark "You're going to stop me by telling me you love me," this is almost exactly what happens. Xander tries to reconcile Buffy and Riley when their relationship becomes distant. He refuses to be caught between Willow and Anya when they vie for his attention, and again his loyalty is proved when he refuses to choose one of "his women" to die at the hands of a troll in "Triangle" (5011). That Xander represents emotion, love, and friendship is part of the project of dissociating gender and behavior: more conventionally the "heart" of the Scooby family would be female. In this way Xander demonstrates typically "feminine" competencies in relationship management (though his romance relationships threaten to disrupt the Scooby family) and a willingness to articulate emotion.

[31] Xander is eager to play a part in the communal efforts of the Scoobies, even if his role tends to be passive and he often has to be rescued by Buffy. He is not physically up to fighting evil, and though keen, he is most often knocked out or incapacitated. Indeed, his high point in fight scenes is the slow-motion slap-fight with Vamp Harmony in "The Initiative" (mentioned in chapter 3). In a less exaggerated but similar way to hapless

male "hero" Joxer from *Xena: Warrior Princess*, Xander's lack of physical prowess affords pleasure to the viewer through role reversal (the opposite of Buffy's strength and action). Despite this apparent lack of "real masculinity," the show makes much of Xander as a soldier, first in "Halloween" when he "becomes" his soldier costume, and later in episodes relating to this. This may simply be a useful plot point, but it also asserts some "real" masculinity in Xander, and Buttsworth suggests that his transformation invokes "the ways in which the military claims to 'make men out of boys' " (2002: 187). Xander initially wants to be a hero, and developments like "The Zeppo" mean that by season 4 he is comfortable telling Buffy, "You're my hero" ("The Freshman" 4001). Notably Xander's version of heroism, like Giles', involves self-sacrifice and a willingness to put others before himself, as well as personal risk, demonstrated in his face-off with Dark Willow (Wendy Love Anderson [2003: 226] points out the potential religious allegory in this scene). This self-sacrifice is further underlined in the fight with Caleb in season 7, where Xander is seriously wounded in the eye ("Dirty Girls"). Relating gendering to Christianity, Dyer suggests that suffering is almost *an assertion of white masculinity* (1997: 17).

[32] Like Giles and Oz, Xander is primarily heterosocial; at high school he seems to avoid the company of other males. He gets along with girls and is accepted by them as an unthreatening, equal companion: "You're not like other guys at all," Buffy tells him. "You're totally one of the girls" ("The Witch" 1003). In the second ever episode he says, "I'm inadequate, that's fine. I'm less than a man" ("The Harvest"). Much of Xander's appeal in early seasons was based on the fact that he is very conscious of being "less than a man," part of what Simkin calls "his endearingly self-deprecating nature" (2004b: 18). When Xander is discovered as a crasher at a frat party, he is forced to dress as a woman and is ridiculed for his lack of "real" masculinity ("Reptile Boy"). Later Anya is attracted to him because he's "not quite as obnoxious as most of the alpha males" ("The Prom"). Thus I would agree with A. Susan Owen that Xander consistently "makes ironic and self-mocking commentary on the perils and challenges of masculine social scripts" (1999: 26), offering a variant of masculinity and perhaps eliciting recognition from the viewer. Simkin argues that Xander "does not fall into the same category as Jonathan, Andrew and Warren" (2004b: 11), but the comparison with the Trio does much to clarify Xander's sense of inadequacy: the way he deals with it differs radically from the way they do. All this may seem to prove that Xander's character is a new representation of masculinity, one that complements the show's strong female protagonists.

[33] Yet Xander is far from the perfect new man. Like Giles, he eventually has paid employment, making him a wage earner and provider. His job in construction establishes a traditional kind of masculinity related to physical work, akin to an earlier American ideal that Michael Kimmel calls "the Heroic Artisan" (1997: 16). This relates to Xander's uncertain class positioning: he is the only teen character in early seasons who is not clearly middle class. In season 3 his brief liaison with Faith ties him to another character who is differentiated in class terms, and I suggested in the last chapter that one of the less obvious undercurrents of "The Zeppo" is that Xander rejects tough-guy masculinity because he is trying to escape the working-class identity represented by Jack and his gang. Similarly, in season 4 Xander's series of minimum-wage jobs and perhaps even the unfounded rumor that he might join the army imply a future as a working-class nobody. His success in the construction industry establishes him in a working-class "trade" (rather than a middle-class "profession"), but his rapid rise through the ranks

shows him moving toward middle-class managerial status. “Lessons” cuts from Giles telling Willow that “we all are who we are, no matter how much we may appear to have changed” to Xander emerging from an apparently new car, wearing a suit and tie. As a kind of self-made man, Xander is another example of shifting identity. He becomes a provider, highlighted through his relationship with Anya, as discussed in chapter 1, and season 7 shows Xander acting as “man of the house” for the Summers women. Initially he wished to be a protector, and now he is cast in this role, though not quite in the heroic way he imagined. Xander is often called upon to protect Dawn, and in the final battle Buffy sends him away to do just that, telling him, “I need someone I can count on, no matter what happens” (“End of Days”). Notably, Dawn asserts her independence and sabotages the plan: Xander is “not man enough” to stop her.

[34] But as I see it the real problem with Xander’s representation as a new man is sexuality, especially given the contradiction already outlined between new masculinities and heterosexuality’s complicity in patriarchal structures. Sexual prowess is again called on to demonstrate that a new man is in fact a real man. Xander’s uninhibited (hetero) sexuality can be read as another trait attributed to the working class by the middle class. Early on he appeared to be sexually innocent, if eager for experience. Xander’s unrequited love for Buffy is emphasized in season 1 by his transformation in “The Pack,” when, possessed by the spirit of a hyena, he attempts to force himself on her. Giles comments, “Testosterone is a great equalizer. It turns all men into morons,” but it is made clear that Xander is only acting this way because of the spirit possession and therefore that he is *not* a typical adolescent male. This sexual naïveté is highlighted again in season 3, when he has a one-nighter with Faith (“Consequences”). Despite complaining about having “bounced back to being a dateless nerd” in “Beneath You,” Xander’s relationships with Cordelia and Anya and Willow’s long-unrequited love for him prove his desirability. Whedon’s admission that Nicholas Brendon (who plays Xander) is “way too hunky” to be a nerd (in Lavery 2002a: 38) underlines this as potentially another source of viewing pleasure, and the show played it up with the “Speedo moment” of “Go Fish” (2020). All of Xander’s relationships are based on physical attraction (Cordelia, Faith, Anya), and he finds them problematic.

[35] Xander’s romances and sexual liaisons almost seem designed to “make up for” his other shortcomings. Early on his fascination with sex was seen as an integral part of his geek teen boy behavior: “I’m seventeen. Looking at linoleum makes me wanna have sex” (“Innocence”). Xander’s (and the show’s) self-awareness thus asserts his typical behavior *and* his difference. Anya’s insistence on discussing their sex life in public has been highlighted as part of her characteristic difference, but it serves another function as well. That Xander is a “Viking in the sack” (“The Yoko Factor”) adds a twist to his apparently new masculinity: just as Giles is able to “satisfy” a black woman, Xander is able to satisfy an ex-demon. Like Giles, Xander is not just desirable—he is virile. And despite the many subtexts of *Buffy*, Larry’s assumption that Xander is gay, and some of Xander’s own more unguarded comments (particularly about Spike), Xander’s liaisons have always been firmly heterosexual. So much so that his “Willow, gay me up” speech in “First Date” is clearly a joke stemming from his disgust at attracting more “demon women.” Saxey suggests that fan fiction often presents Xander as gay because his “problems as they are currently presented—worries about his role in life, struggles with his notions of masculinity, sex and relationships—don’t contain within them a recognizable solution” (2001: 202). That is, fans see heterosexuality, consciously or not,

as a stumbling block to reconciling the “problems” in constructing contemporary masculinity. To Xander his relationship with Anya is a strong affirmation of his masculinity, and Simkin notes that the “real crisis [in “The Replacement”], however, is centred on Anya” (2004b: 21). “You make me feel like I’ve never felt before in my life,” he tells her, “*like a man*” (“Into the Woods,” my emphasis), and before the showdown at the end of season 5, Xander asks Anya to marry him. Xander’s high school fantasies never disappear, and even in season 7 he dreams about young innocent Potentials offering themselves to his sexual experience (“Dirty Girls”). This is presented as comical, and Xander’s function as a comic character tends to play down his flaws; they are laughable foibles that add to his character.

[36] Xander and Willow’s male-female friendship is a core element holding the gang together, but notably Xander is never shown in a nonsexualized relationship with a female character. As Korsmeyer observes, even “Xander’s steadfast friendship for Willow has an early erotic aspect” (2003: 167), and as I mentioned earlier, he is initially attracted to Buffy. In the season 2 finale, Xander chose not to tell Buffy that Willow had a chance of returning Angel’s soul, and Buffy was forced to kill Angel rather than Angelus (this is raised again in “Selfless” but not addressed). Clearly this is motivated by Xander’s jealousy of Angel, and Gregory J. Sakal notes the “hubris of his presumption to know what is best for” Buffy (2003: 246), a removal of agency from the female. Xander also told Riley about Buffy and Angel’s sexual relationship (“The Yoko Factor”). When Xander finds out that Spike and Anya consoled each other sexually after the wedding fiasco, Xander pursues Spike with an axe (“Entropy” 6018). Here sexual jealousy (of Anya and Buffy) is Xander’s downfall (the same jealousy he displayed to all potential partners for Buffy in high school): his condemnation of Anya, “I look at you and I feel sick because you have sex with that,” also includes Buffy, his “hero” and unattainable idol. (Both Sakal 2003: 248 and Levine and Schneider 2003: 306 read Xander as idealizing Buffy, as “femininity” has traditionally been idealized.) Xander’s behavior is consistently motivated by sexual jealousy—a typical “masculine” quality.

[37] Furthermore, despite his attraction to strong women (shared with almost all male characters, regardless of their gender “politics”), Xander has problems allowing his partners equality and agency. Granted, in his early relationship with Cordelia she appeared to be dominant, largely because of her higher status in the high school world, but Xander’s relationship with Anya is a key example of inequality. Xander jilts Anya at the altar after receiving a “nightmare vision” of their future together (“Hells Bells”). His vision is very similar to his version of Angel and Buffy’s future in “Surprise,”⁸ but Xander is now in the position he imagined for Angel, “dreaming of the glory days,” while Anya works to support their family. Xander’s feelings for Buffy are still creating tension, while the mixed heritage of their children also causes friction. Although Xander’s background here is not as ambivalent as in previous seasons (since his family are shown), domestic violence and drinking again imply working-class behavior (as noted in chapter 3, these tend to be attributed to the working class). Xander’s violence and aggression in the vision are clearly modeled on his own father (see chapter 7), but he uses his new-man sensitivity as an “excuse”: although he still appears to love Anya, he runs away, implying that this is to protect her. Once again a new man demonstrates a capacity for violence, cannot cope with the situation, denies the female partner agency, and leaves. And, as with Oz, Xander is not really blamed, in this case because Anya is still an outsider.

[38] Xander’s anxieties throughout *Buffy* have concerned his inability to contribute to the

group with a special talent (superpower): even in season 7 he discusses this with Dawn ("Potential"). In "Checkpoint" Buffy answered this criticism from the Watcher's Council by pointing out, "'The boy' has clocked more field time than any of you put together," countering the belittlement of "the boy" with a military metaphor and underlining Xander's willingness to contribute. I would point out in conclusion that Xander does in fact have a special status: he is, as the show underlines, the normal one. Despite his ambivalent class background and his geek status, he is a white heterosexual male and is thus the *only* Scooby who is also a member of the historically dominant sector of American society. Dyer notes of the character Prendergast in *Falling Down* (1993) that his "very unobtrusiveness . . . allows him to occupy more comfortably the position of ordinariness that is the white man's prerogative" (1997: 221), and this is an apt description of Xander.⁹ This may be exactly *why* Xander has so many problems negotiating a new masculine identity. Although his version of masculinity is not exactly "hegemonic," his position as white American heterosexual male allows him to "benefit without really trying, from a patriarchal dividend" (Johnson 1997: 15).

Principal Man

[39] In season 7 Sunnydale High School opens again, and its new principal is a departure from previous incumbents—he is young and black. Like other nonwhite characters on *Buffy*, Principal Robin Wood is whitewashed, assimilated: he is a middle-class professional who tells Buffy he is from Beverly Hills, not "the 'hood" ("Help" 7004). Wood is an interesting development in *Buffy's* representation of race, but he is also, I would argue, the most uncompromised new man. He is the son of Nikki Wood, the subway Slayer killed by Spike in 1977 New York ("Fool for Love"). This means that Wood is from a matriarchal line; he remembers a strong mother and no father (a typical characterization of black families based on post-World War II demographics and employment patterns [Woloch 2000: 524, 582]). As Spike points out, Wood finds it hard to accept that although Spike may have taken his childhood away by killing his mother, his mother had to balance "the mission" and her responsibility to him ("Lies My Parents Told Me").

[40] Wood is also one of very few "good" adults, and unlike most other adults on *Buffy*, he does not function as a parent figure (except for his role as a teacher), perhaps because he enters when the original teens are themselves adults. Furthermore, because he is Other, Wood is not implicated in white male supremacy: he accepts Buffy as an equal (though he is still her boss) and later a "general" and supports Faith as a leader. Like Xander, he has no superpowers, though he has been trained to fight vampires: "I'm just a guy. Granted, a cool and sexy vampire-fighting guy, but still" ("First Date"). In this way he offers a similar "ordinary" subject position to the viewer, though like other characters of color on *Buffy* he remains a minor character. His scenes do allow him some development apart from the main protagonists, as when the First appears to him as his mother, but he is primarily used to illuminate the role of Slayer and the newly souled Spike. He has little interaction with the other Scoobies; he opposes Spike, the dead white European male, and allies with Giles, the only other "man" in the group and someone also marked by difference.

[41] His vendetta against Spike is related strongly to emotional reactions,¹⁰ and his sensitivity is shown through the articulation of emotion that the show values. In connection with his mother, in his interaction with Faith (he is part of her redemption),

and even in his early conversations with Buffy he is not afraid to admit to being scared (“Beneath You”) or to needing love and reinforcement. When he tells Faith how the First appeared as his mother he says he knew it wasn’t real, “but I still wanted my mother to hold me like a baby,” adding, “In a manly way, of course” (this awareness of gendered constructions further links him to other new men). His connection with Faith reinforces his presentation as a “pretty decent guy.” Furthermore, his assertion that “nobody wants to be alone” (“Touched”) proves that he is not an individualist. Wood shares the communal ethos of the group—he is willing to work beside them, even Spike, to fight evil. [42] Like other new men Wood displays violent aggression and heightened sexuality. In his case these are “justified” by the show’s narrative and can also be related to his representation as a nonwhite character and to age (in “First Date” Xander says he must be at least ten years older than Buffy, but the show’s chronology puts him at around 30, rather young to be a high school principal). His aggression is directed at the “right” targets, and if he initially resents Spike, this is understandable given his history, and it is eventually resolved. Wood’s history allows him more subjectivity than any other character of color and sufficient emotional articulation to qualify as a new man. Like Kendra, Wood is sexualized and presented as a sexual object rather than a sexual threat, though like many other male characters he offers a further source of viewing pleasure to a “female gaze.” There is a sexual tension between him and Buffy from their first meeting. Eventually he asks her out on a date, and in “First Date” Buffy describes him as “a young, hot principal with earrings” (I read his earrings as a signifier of the exotic; see also chapter 6 on Mr. Trick). He becomes even more sexualized through his interaction with Faith, and liberal values are connoted by his interracial relationships (Gill [2003] notes that by season 7 all the main characters are or have been interracial dating). Yet he does not display the sexual jealousy that marks Xander and Oz; he endorses romance relationships between equals and allows Faith to take the lead in their sexual encounter. This may be partly owing to age: he admits that he has grown out of some of his younger, more aggressive behavior (such as an “avenging son phase” in his twenties [“First Date”]).

[43] Gill offers an insight into fan interaction with the show when she describes how a Web site called The Principal Wood Deathwatch was set up by black female viewers after Wood’s first appearance on *Buffy*, in the expectation that, as a character of color, he would shortly be killed (2003). The show also intimates that Wood may be a villain. His early appearances are often accompanied by menacing music, he is shown finding Jonathan’s body in the school basement and then burying it in secret (“Never Leave Me” 7009), and, as Buffy says, “He’s got that whole too-charming-to-be-real thing going on” (“First Date”). These expectations are reversed, as regular viewers might expect, when Wood reveals to Buffy that he is the son of a Slayer.¹¹ Unlike Giles, Wood’s presentation is uncomplicated by a “parental” role, and his late appearance means that he has an openness that allows his character great potential (as with some of the bad girls): he is both a man and a new man, perhaps the first in *Buffy*. Notably, however, he is also still a real man, and he remains Other since he is allied with Others (Giles, foreigner; Faith, working class); again openness is a consequence of marginality.

You Men and Your Man-Ness

[44] Some representations of masculinity in *Buffy* seem able to transcend gender binaries, but on closer examination their masculinity retains traditional elements, and

almost all of the new men display a split personality or tension that reinforces a binary structure. New men try to repress “natural” masculine tendencies in themselves (Korsmeyer [2003: 165] describes Giles as “[h]abitually on guard against the resurgence of his old ‘Ripper’ self”), though this is not always successful. Male characters can either retain their masculinity and be classed as the enemy and be defeated by the Slayer, or they can give up their power and be classed as allies and become feminized (Slayerettes—changed later to Scooby Gang). Many new men relate to Buffy as potential partners, and because of this, just like the tough guys, they are in competition with Buffy and with each other (especially with Angel) and their very heterosexuality marks them as complicit with patriarchal structures. Even Jonathan demonstrates this in “Superstar” when he uses an “augmentation” spell to construct a new-man superstar version of himself but unwittingly creates its antithesis, a monster that violently attacks innocent people (mainly women): the new man cannot exist without the old monster masculinity. All the new men are aware of how masculinity is constructed and therefore of how they differ from its traditional form.

[45] This does not prevent every new man from simultaneously being presented as a real man who has to/is able to prove this, especially through sexual prowess or aggression. Masculinity is further asserted by wage earning: of the males in the group, Giles, Xander, and Wood all have paying jobs. Just as Parker and others did, Xander, Oz and Giles may “play the sensitive lad,” but they are as capable as tough guys and monsters of unbridled sexual appetite, damaging sexual jealousy, unthinking violence, or removing female agency. The presentation of “uncharacteristic” traditional masculine behavior in new men is often deflected by comedy. All of this may be a strategy to show that new men do not have to “lack” the attributes of real men, and therefore to make them more appealing to viewers, but it also closes down some of their potential for a revisioning of masculinity. The audience may laugh at Xander’s difficulties in trying to be a new man, but there is no real indication that he will ever become one; Wood retains his potential only through his limited development. The new men are valorized through their contrast with “bad” tough guys, but they are clearly not a solution. They demonstrate again the difficulty in negotiating a new type of gender identity, in trying to construct a masculinity that fits the postfeminist age.

Notes

1. A certain naïveté is implied by the fact that he does not understand the “bees”—sexual metaphor eludes him.
2. Given subsequent rhetoric about Spike/William being “beneath” Cecily and Buffy, this positioning is interesting.
3. Thanks to the responsive audience to my paper at WisCon 25 (2001) for raising some of these points in discussion.
4. In this respect Giles also plays out the notion of the repressed Brit.
5. Whedon notes “the sexiness and wit Tony Head brought to the role of Giles. . . . As a result, Giles became much more than ‘boring exposition guy’ (“Hellmouth”)” (in Lavery 2002a: 13).
6. The interracial relationship may have seemed edgy in the U.S. (though not in the U.K.), but that both characters are British distances their relationship from American “norms.”
7. Tony Head left the show because he wanted to spend more time with his family

in the U.K., but this also fits the “growing up” narrative arc.

8. “It’s sad. She’s got two jobs: Denny’s waitress by day, Slayer by night, and Angel’s always in front of the TV with a big blood belly. And he’s dreaming of the glory days when Buffy still thought this whole creature of the night routine was a big turn-on.”

9. Tom DiPiero suggests that white masculinity itself can be seen as a lack of identity (in Dyer 1997: 212).

10. In the light of Wood’s cooperation with Giles and Giles’ comment about “personal vengeance,” it is perhaps surprising that Giles’ similar situation with Angelus in season 2 is never mentioned.

11. Of course, there is precedent for a black vampire hunter, and Wood’s hidden cabinet full of bladed weapons may refer to it. The comic book character Blade became widely known via the 1998 movie and its sequel. Blade’s mother is highly important in this film: she is also killed by a vampire.

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Giada Da Ros

When, Where, and How Much is *Buffy* a Soap Opera?

Translated from the Italian and with the editorial assistance of Rhonda Wilcox.

Spike: *Passions* is on! Timmy's down the bloody well, and if you make me miss it I'll —

Giles: Do what? Lick me to death? (Something Blue, 4009)

Joyce: I-I love what you've, um... neglected to do with the place.

Spike: Just don't break anything. And don't make a lotta noise. *Passions* is coming on.

Joyce: *Passions*? Oh, do you think Timmy's really dead?

Spike: Oh, no, no. She can just sew him back together. He's a doll, for God's sake.

Joyce: Ah, what about the wedding? I mean, there's no way they're gonna go through with that. (Checkpoint, 5012)

Tabitha (talking to Timmy): When will you get it through your fat head? Charity is the enemy. Buffy the Vampire Slayer is the enemy. The busybodies that call themselves the Others are the enemy! One of these days Buffy and the others will be wiped off the face of the earth, but until that time, we don't want to make our friend in the basement mad, do we? (*Passions*)

Stephen/Caleb: And your job is?

Rafe: Vampire slayer. (Port Charles – Naked Eyes)

BUFFY AS A SOAP

(1) Very often, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is referred to as a soap opera. There are many occasions when it has been defined as such, or at least linked to the genre of daytime dramas. This perception is shared by at least three types of viewers. First, it is accepted by members of the general public, who have an almost instinctive awareness of this quality. They don't treat the program as such on the base of an elaborated reasoning process, after pondering over its structural elements, but simply they are drawn to "use" the series in the same way they use soaps. Much public response and fan fiction reflect a definite approach that for a long time has been associated with soaps. It is curious to

note how in a site dedicated to this television genre, "Daytime and Primetime Central" [1], in the section dedicated to prime-time programming, in its menu there are only 3 programs: one of them is openly a soap, *Titans*; the two other shows are *Buffy* and *Angel*. And their presence is even more surprising and significant considering the absence of other prime time series that surely have more right to be enclosed in the soap opera category, such as *Melrose Place*, *Dawson's Creek*, *Felicity*, *Thirtysomething*, or *Six Feet Under*.

(2) Second, critics and scholars are ready to label the series as a soap opera. Boyd Tonkin talks of a "sophisticated blend of teen soap and Gothic fantasia" for example. [2] Karen Sayer says that "Buffy's visual feel and mode of address are drawn from a mix of action, horror and soap, better suited to themes of teen angst." [3]. And Rhonda V. Wilcox and David Lavery explicitly concur with Joyce Millman in this argument too. [4]. Some other times, the labelling is just a implicit.

(3) Third and last, and definitely not least, Joss Whedon himself, owner and creator of *Buffy*, allows this idea to emerge. He is a master of mixing genres depending on circumstances, and the taste of a peculiar genre rises above the others at his will. Describing how the then not-yet-aired *Angel* was supposed to be, compared to *Buffy*, he said that it was going to be "less of a soap opera," [5] therefore saying *a contrario* that *Buffy* was, at least a little, a soap opera. And explicitly he confirms it more than once in various contexts [6].

(4) The variety of origins of the three viewer types who recognize this characteristic is meaningful, because it proves that it is not an isolated perception. The abstract idea that the author has of it or his poetics have not influenced the perception of the final result. And, vice versa, it is not spoiled by the audience appropriation that makes it a personal experience and makes meta-textual inferences beyond the author's intention. It's accessible to everyone, and even where it was not explicitly indicated it is decoded according to the characteristics of a genre.

INTELLECTUAL HONESTY: DISREGARDING THE STIGMA

(5) Traditionally the word "soap opera" does not necessarily have a positive, flattering value. It is most often used with a denigrating, disparaging intent. [7] This stigma is shared by the fantasy/science-fiction label that defines *Buffy* as a whole, and by the program itself. Almost inductively it is assumed that belonging to a specific genre could be the reason of bad quality, without taking into any consideration the actual product, as if it were irrelevant. *Buffy*, as a show that deals with supernatural themes all the time, has to battle constantly this bias that impedes recognition of its quality, at least in an official forum, such as the Emmy Awards. [8] It therefore shares this stigma with the soap genre. Both struggle for approbation.

(6) This negative bias loses strength once we move inside the program. *Buffy*, in its diegetic perspective, succeeds in becoming a true and real political statement on this regard and manages to acknowledge being a soap, mockingly winking to those who snub a book judging solely by its title. It is, in this way, a meta-comment on the genre at the same time. In fact a soap, *Passions*, is used as a means to make the villainous Spike more lovable, mellowed precisely by the fact that he gets hooked on the stories of the characters of this show. And he shares his watching with Joyce (Checkpoint, 5012). The process is very simple. Spike watches what *Buffy*'s mom watches, what "a mom"

watches, "your mom". Therefore he can't be that bad. At the same time a flattering image of the soap is given. It becomes an instrument that creates a link between genres on the base of a shared visual experience.

(7) One has to recognize Joss Whedon's intellectual honesty: he is not scared by definitions. He demonstrates awareness in what he is doing even as he recognizes the genres that he absorbs and then moulds to his own needs. And a genre is not good or bad as such, but becomes one or the other on the basis of its use. A genre is as good as you make it to be in the concreteness of the single experience. It should be devoid of preconceptions that could make it ontologically of positive or negative value solely resulting from the label. Once again Whedon exhibits consciousness and confidence in doing what he wants about *Buffy*, the *scientia* in using particular styles and a specific rhetoric, as well as other desired instruments. He simply uses this genre. And with "this genre" we mean daytime American soap operas. Not Italian nor German nor Hispanic ones, not even those of other Anglophone countries, because, while all these share many aspects, each has specific characteristics that make it different from the other.

(8) It is also useful to remember that *Buffy's* creator is himself a great fan of soap operas. "Did someone mention Finola Hughes? Oh, the love! Anna Devane, deep college experience. *Gen* with my buds, senior year it was religion." [9] *Gen* is naturally *General Hospital* which airs on ABC, and Anna Devane was the character played by Finola Hughes (at the time of my writing she is in *All my children*), a police woman who was a courageous fighter. [10] Whedon's direct knowledge as a viewer is significant because it means that, in addition to his technical competence, he understands what gives pleasure in the watching of this genre, what makes the viewer go back day after day, what makes it an experience: a word that he uses specifically to describe what he means *Buffy* to be, an "emotional experience". [11] He has been both creator and viewer and his maturity as an author allows him to apply the rules he learned making them his, modifying them and bending them to his narrative demands, borrowing only the elements he needs.

(9) And Whedon is not the only one on the *Buffy* team who had contacts with this branch of entertainment. David Fury, one of the writers, was once an actor in soap operas [12], and is thus in a position to recognize those elements that characterize a soap and to translate them to and put them in a different context.

(10) Furthermore, we mustn't forget that *Buffy* is played by Sarah Michelle Gellar, who not only has always been very open in her appreciation for the soap opera genre, but who acted in one of them, *All My Children*. Her participation, and the gossip that surrounded her, is well-known. [13] Gellar won an Emmy for the role of Kendall, Erica Kane's daughter in *All My Children*. Such recognition cannot be anything but a proof of her ability to act in a context that she masters well. Nothing more normal, then, that she can reproduce its conventions in a sure and nuanced . Michelle Trachtenberg (Dawn) also walked her first acting steps on the set of *All My Children*; Emma Caulfield (Anya) is openly a fan of daytime dramas; and Anthony Stewart Head (Giles) looks to be pretty familiar with them too. [14]

THE FORMAT

(11) *Buffy* is decoded as a soap opera almost at first viewing. But if *Buffy* is a soap, the question that now we need to ask ourselves is: when and where and how much is *Buffy* a soap opera? Which are the elements of content and style that make it a soap opera?

Asking ourselves this is not irrelevant. The aesthetic, the rhetoric of the camera that is behind the genre, the relationship between the syntagmatic path and the paradigmatic one, the structural and textual conventions, the dialogic development, the codes that shape it, the genre poetics, the terminology and the narrative syntax are readable in a different, unique perspective. It is useful to investigate this to better understand the *Buffy* phenomenon as a whole; it is even more so if we think of this as an opportunity to better dig into its meanings, to discover new hermeneutic perspectives, to trace its dialogue with other groups of series each with their own construction. [15]

(12) Seli Groves can help us try to answer these questions because she sets a base from which we can move toward further specifications. She says that the basic element to take into consideration is the way a story is built and told. "If it uses a device called 'arc' which carries a storyline over several episodes, it can be considered a soap or soap-like" [16]. *Buffy* fits this definition. Episodes are certainly auto-conclusive, in parts of the story, but the dialogic flux is in other aspects uninterrupted, from episode to episode. One falls back on the other and yet another and so on. Every season is in fact explicitly constructed as real narrative arc: seen in the perspective of the enemy to defeat or the danger to face we have the Mayor arc (3rd season), the Initiative arc (4th season), Glory arc (5th season), etc.

(13) This kind of construction is not foreign to American daytime soaps. The most obvious case is *Port Charles*. This show, looking at *telenovelas* (Hispanic soap operas), has recently experimented with its format and enucleated in an explicit manner its own narrative arcs, generally of 13 weeks' duration. The arcs received different sub-titles: "Port Charles-Fate", "PC- Message in a bottle", "PC- Tainted Love", and, then, Tempted, Miracles Happens, Secrets . . . [17] Each of these, though using the same characters and keeping the continuity, has its own specific identity and a specific characteristic: "Time in a bottle" talks about time travel; "Secrets" about angels; "Tainted Love" "Tempted", "Naked Eyes" and "Surrender", all with a background of vampire stories, have each their own undertone that distinguishes them. For instance, "Tempted" focused its spotlights on the power of slander and insinuation to divide people; "Naked Eyes" was built heavily on the theme of doubles.

(14) Arc and soap, though, are not synonymous, and today a lot of television programs make use of continuing story. What becomes relevant is not so much the question of whether this element is used or not, but how it is used. This way we can go deeper and find a more radical indication to understand if and when we find ourselves facing a soap opera. Horace Newcomb comes to our help specifying how "Soaps focus more on character problems, while arc is more plot [...]. Whether or not a show is a soap becomes a question of how much interest there is in the main character. It may be an audience definition. If they're interested in plot, it's arc. If they're interested in character, it's soap – although that is changing as soaps become more involved with plot" [18]. This allows us another "jump", recognizing in *Buffy* the main value of character development and of the psychology of the characters. Several times it has been variously underlined how the monsters that *Buffy* and the Scoobies (the group of friends around her that participate in and help her in her battles) have to face are nothing else but the mirror of the human problems that they are forced to come to terms with--metaphors that allow us to trace emotional paths, well visible in backlighting. Hermeneutic efforts bring the discovery of a rich sub-text and meta-text built by "character problems": dating, low self-esteem and

social invisibility, growing old, end of childhood, sexual identity, relationship with one's parents... And with this the major interest is put "in character", showing us to be facing a soap opera.

(15) One could argue that, for exactly this reason, what counts in the end, the discriminating factor, is fights. Being the definition of action, they are an expression of plot. The analysis of these confirms our thesis. Let's take a step back. Italian television author Paolo Taggi in a de-construction of soap operas writes that "(...) they are built on a series of invisible omissions: "our heroes don't eat, don't go for walks, don't wash themselves, don't sleep. They are always on the point of... They only do symbolic gestures...only words matter". [19] It is immediately evident how such a phrase, as a whole, cannot be in any way referred to *Buffy*. Our heroes eat, take walks, wash themselves (thanks!), sleep. They are not on the point of. They are action. Their gestures are not prelude and ostensible reason for words; they envelope them. Yet in a micro-analysis, pointing a magnifying glass on Buffy as a slayer, on Buffy as the heroine who fights, we discover that the expression "they only do symbolic gestures" is more true than one thinks. In fact, analyzing the way she fights, Dave West tells us "Buffy's style is a formless mish-mash of wildly thrown punches and kicks." And he notes that "the movements of the fight are slotted in around any dialogue that need to be performed by the actors" [20]. This means that they indeed "only do symbolic gestures", while the real fulcrum is words. What counts, what carries the narration is not action. Action is instrumental to dialogue, not the other way around. From the point of view of the dialogic texture, action is a waiting moment, a moment "on the point of" bringing us to the real apex, the emotional one. What I've just said is reinforced by West's concluding consideration. He declares that fighting is not the peak of the narration, but the emotional aspect is: "the narrative heart of the show is to be found in matters of love, not war" [20]. We are therefore in the most pure soap opera realm. And this is confirmed by John Medlen, *Buffy's* stunt co-ordinator, too, who describes, in the changes of the required combat style, a change in Buffy's feelings. The type of movements are conditioned by the stage of life she's in [21].

CONTENT COMPATIBILITY

(16) At this point we could ask ourselves: what kind of stories does *Buffy* tell, and what does she have to look out for? From a content point of view, are soaps compatible with what is told on *Buffy*? We could start observing how the vocation to the supernatural, *Buffy's specificum*, is strong in daytime. In its annual report on what's in and what's out in soaps, already, in 1995, "*Soap Opera Digest*" [22] considered the supernatural definitely in, and since then the trend has become stronger. At this very moment it is very present, so much so that we could almost say two schools of thought compete in the field. There are the classics – represented by shows like *The Young and the Restless* – against the more campy ones – like *Passions* – in a fight to the last rating in the Nielsen battle. [23]

(17) In the past, this kind of narrative has had questionable fortunes among the critics, but cases are abundant. *Loving*, at the beginning of the 1980s, tried this road, without success. Scared to death by a cross and an exorcism, devil-like Jonathan was eliminated, transforming at his death into a snake--and every intention to follow that supernatural road crawled away with him. In *General Hospital* the storylines of the "Ice

princess" (probably the most successful story of its entire run), of "Casey the alien" (one of the most derided) and of "Stavros, the human popsicle" (the deep bottomless pit in which fell the then-head-writer, Megan McTavish) are even, if possible, too well-known to soap fans. *Another World* immediately cut the oxygen to this temptation after it played with the idea of turning the character of Tomas Rivera into a vampire [24]; *Guiding Light* has seen sour times when it adventured in ghosts and clones (most notably with Reva), and the "travel to the center of the Earth" of *One life to live*, which went to the mythical city of Eterna, is still considered one of Paul Rauch's false moves [25] in his time there as executive producer. And for this soap too, it's not the only venture in the field of gothic and macabre: mind control devices, mad scientists, trips to Heaven have all been part of the soap's canvas. Bad storytelling and having betrayed the identity of the program have mostly been the causes in the instances where this kind of narrative didn't succeed.

(18) This doesn't mean that the soap genre didn't know how to play and insert these elements, in a way that was well-done and very much appreciated-- even in a Buffy-like manner, we could say. *Days of Our lives*, which started a true revolution in this sense, hit it big time with demonic possessed Marlena and its "buried alive" story arc in the 1990s. James Reilly, head writer of the time, brought his distinctive brand of storytelling with him in the soap he went on to create, *Passions*. And in *Passions*, the soap that *Buffy* knows and mentions, there are talking dolls – the Timmy of Spike and Joyce's conversations [26]; Cracker Connie, a demonic living doll; zombies; floating heads; demons; and much more. The aforementioned *Port Charles* has incorporated this kind of story without renouncing its status as being in every aspect a soap. And it's explicit in citing *Buffy* as a source. ABC daytime president Brian Frons programmatically admits a plan: to keep *Port Charles* in a specific tone: "(...) the show is driving forward that sort of "BUFFY" meets Frankenstein' manner" [27]. It's not by chance that the fulcrum of several arcs has been formidable vampire Caleb. And it even introduced a vampire slayer, Rafe. "Rafe would be a good match for Buffy – but he belongs to PC!" has been an actual comment on *Soap Opera Digest* [28]. And besides a trained slayer, one of the historic heroines of the show, Lucy, discovered that she, too, is a slayer. According to the mythology of the soap, this is possible because she comes from a family of slayers. All this underlines how what ontologically defines a soap doesn't get obliterated at contact with other elements, like the supernatural ones, but lives with them.

BUFFY AND DARK SHADOWS

(19) Contamination is a two-way street. At times there are crypto-models. Other times the dialogue between programs is more explicit, especially when this happens with prestigious models, like *Buffy*. We wouldn't be surprised if we learned that the *Port Charles* micro-story of vampire and slayer meeting in the dream of the latter's girlfriend was suggested by "Restless" (4022), or if we discovered it was "Life Serial" (6005) that triggered the *General Hospital* 2002 Thanksgiving, wherein the heroine finds herself repetitively in the same situation that she tries to modify. Similarly, it doesn't surprise us how much *Buffy* goes deep into the roots of the soap opera history incarnated by *Dark Shadows*.

(20) With influences that can be traced back to the most various sources, from the Bible to ancient mythology, from Mary Shelley to the Brontë sisters, from Nathaniel Hawthorne to Henry James, *Dark shadows* was a soap that aired between June 1966 and April 1971

on ABC. In its brief run, it left an indelible print in the public imagination [29]. Vampires, witches, zombies, leviathans, ancient beings that aim at the conquest of the world, even a Phoenix, who every century leads her own children to ghastly deaths, are part of this program's mythology. *Buffy* draws from this *mare magnum* and - it's not clear how consciously - it takes the same route in some of its ground choices. Though the match is, naturally, not perfect, it's fascinating just the same to notice some correspondences.

(21) First and foremost, the vampire Angel. The authors always explicitly said they wanted to portray him as an addict, in a perennial fight with himself. It's an addiction to killing more than to blood, as I understand it, in the episodes in general. The fight with himself is not just caused by the personal demon of having to cope with an addiction, but it's more radical and profound. Cursed with a soul, Angel sees with a newly awakened conscience how much his actions made people suffer. He has the constant awareness of what he is and, even more, of what he isn't, in the continuous comparison with those who are around him. J. Gordon Melton [30], author of the encyclopaedia *The Vampire Book*, is immediately ready to identify as a possible reference of Angel's humanity, the icon vampire of *Dark Shadows*, Barnabas. Barnabas was layered by the writers with conflicting emotions that made him very intense. Macerated by guilt and morally ambivalent, Barnabas was a vampire who constantly craved to become human, mortal. Enriched and coloured by a wry hatred for himself, he soon became the center of the show, and so did the dilemma that tortured him. The main ingredient that made the soap popular was his quest toward humanity, his constant desire for a "cure". [31] This same perennial affliction characterizes Angel, who is in a way Barnabas' son, condemned by the presence of a soul in a vampire body to fight within himself the eternal fight of good and evil, to hate the pleasure and the rush he gets from torturing others, to torment himself for the inflicted pain ("Amends", 3010) and to try to remedy the situation through constant atonement (fulcrum of the *Angel* series itself). It's a witch in *Dark Shadows* who, jealous of the love between Barnabas and Josette, curses him into becoming a vampire. We can find here the same themes of *Buffy*: Angel cursed to have a soul, despite being a vampire, so that he can suffer for the atrocities he has committed. In *Dark Shadows* Barnabas, as noted, was in constant search for a cure to his condition. And although the experiment of Dr. Julia Hoffman (who offered to help him) backfired, for some time Dr. Lang actually succeeded in curing him. But it was just temporary. The "Dream Curse" (Episodes 461-536) is one spell Angelique put in place to turn Barnabas back into a vampire, during a time when he was cured. (Dreams are an integral part of *Buffy's* texture.) The same way, in *Buffy*, Angel oscillates between times in which he appears "cured" (he has a soul and he behaves like a human) and times in which he is not (when he loses his soul and his monster side takes over).

(22) Other episodes and aspects of the show have similarities of recurring themes that directly point to the old soap. Barnabas and Julia, the blood specialist who had attempted to cure him, first helped Dr. Lang, then, after his death, continued the experiment to give life to a brand new man created from human body parts. *Dark Shadows'* Adam came to life (Episode 490). In "The I in Team" (4013) *Buffy's* very own Adam comes to life, created by Dr. Maggie Walsh from demon, human, and electronic parts. In *Dark Shadows* Adam asked for a mate, and Eve was created (Episode 595), but later on Adam killed her (Episode 626). This pattern reminds us of "Some Assembly Required" (2002) in which Frankenstein-like Daryl asks for a life companion and, again, "The I in Team" (4013) in

which Adam kills Dr Walsh, pronouncing the famous “Mommy” line (which also offers an interesting transverse reading if linked to “The Body” [5016]). *Buffy* has in Oz its werewolf. *Dark Shadows* had Quentin, who was a werewolf because of a curse gypsy Magda placed on him for having killed her sister Jenny. Buffy’s curse from gypsies is on Angel, as noted earlier One might note that Jenny was the name of the killed sister in *Dark Shadows*, while Jenny Calendar is discovered to be the descendant of a gypsy clan (“Surprise”, 2013). Just a coincidence, for sure, but nonetheless fun to notice.

(23) The character of Vicki transported into 1795 was tried and condemned as a witch. A similar experience befalls to Willow Buffy and Amy in “Gingerbread” (3011). A monster called Der Kinderstod fed upon children who were “Killed by Death” (2018). Quentin in *Dark Shadows* lost his love, Amanda, in a struggle with Mr Best – Death. The ghosts of Quentin Collins and Beth Chevez appeared and possessed David and Amy. Buffy and Angel themselves get possessed by two ghosts (“I only have eyes for you”, 2019). But to this we’ll return later. [33]

(24) A few more themes can be collected. “The Wish” (3009) first, and “Doppelgängland” (3016) later, go all the way with an alternative universe, showing all the Scooby Gang in parallel characters in a Sunnydale without Buffy. Parallel times (1795-1796; 1840; 1897; 1995) and dimensions were a permanent feature in Collinsport, Maine, the town where *Dark Shadows* took place. There was a room in Collinwood’s east wing, the mansion that was big part of the action, that was the entrance to a parallel time, where people had made different choices and lived different lives (Episodes 980-1060 for instance). At one point, Dr. Julia Hoffman killed her alter ego in a parallel dimension. Willow faces this possibility in the aforementioned “Doppelgängland”. *Dark Shadows* actors said they felt like a repertory company, [32] a thing that could be said for the cast of Buffy too, in some cases.

(25) *Mutatis mutandis*, the relationship between *Dark Shadows* and its public forerun *Buffy*’s. Trading cards and puzzles, board games and records, postcards and books, both novels and comic books, collectibles and even official fan conventions were all part of the fan experience. So it is today for *Buffy* and its fans. And if now this is a relatively common possibility, then it was the first time a daytime program came to acknowledge its following in this form. [34]

WRITING THE EMOTIONAL TRUTH: “INTO THE WOODS”

(26) To go to the heart of the soap opera as a genre, we have to exactly do that: go to the heart, to the emotions. “We have to write the truth, the emotional truth” states Bridget Dobson, *Santa Barbara*’s co-creator and writer for other soaps too [35]. It’s also what *Buffy*’s writers aim at. “Emotional realism is what Joss Whedon is interested in” say Rhonda V. Wilcox and David Lavery in the introduction to “Fighting the Forces” [36]. Both Tracy Forbes and Jane Espenson are adamant in declaring that this is what they do when constructing the single episodes: Start with the emotions. Jane Espenson states Joss Whedon first sets the foundation for the emotional arc the characters go through, and only later maps out the act breaks [37]. He plans ahead not so much events, as “emotional places for the characters to be”. Pointing to a specific episode, she comes up with the time they decided to turn Giles into a demon (“A New Man,” 4012). They marginalized him at the beginning of the season, so that his feeling alienated happens for a reason. The emotional high point is the end of each act. Tracy Forbes agrees. The first

thing that gets discussed while breaking the story is the place the character is emotionally at the given point of the season. Their starting point is the emotions, the themes they want to tackle, and the metaphors they want to use to do that. "And then we work out the emotional arcs for Buffy and the other characters in the episodes." [38]. The personal life of the character becomes the pivotal center, the strength, the invisible engine. The fact of being character-driven instead of plot-driven is the basis of good fiction--in a broad sense, for all fictions. But what makes a soap a soap is how much these personal elements are left showing, how much they shine through and how much they become themselves action. The more of the character is left floating on the surface, the more we have a point of contact with the soap genre. This in *Buffy* happens more in later seasons, a thing that is in part normal because the life of the character has been told for a longer period of time. We have layer upon layer of happenings. The past to come to terms with is more present in the mind of both authors and audience.

(27) Let's take an actual example. There is an episode in season four entirely dedicated to emotional matters – "Into the Woods" (5010) (written and directed by Marti Noxon), where Buffy and Riley leave one another. After Buffy's hospitalized mother seems to be recovering, Buffy and Riley celebrate, dancing cheek to cheek and making love. Riley though - disappointed and hurt by the fact that Buffy doesn't love him enough to have felt free to cry in front of him, and therefore to lean on him, when she was worried and upset because of her mother's health problems - lets himself be bitten by a vampire-prostitute, in exchange for money. Spike discovers it and brings Buffy to the nest-brothel to see for herself the betrayal. Riley, caught in the act, first menaces Spike to stay away from her, later confesses to Buffy what he feels and gives her an ultimatum: he will leave, unless she gives him a reason to stay. Xander convinces Buffy not to let Riley go if she loves him for real. She runs to stop him, but the military helicopter which had been waiting for him has already left the ground and, even though she screams his name, he doesn't hear her. Xander, convinced by conversation with Buffy that he's not been clear enough himself, at home confesses to Anya that he loves her deeply.

(28) Told like this, it's not very different from a soap synopsis. There aren't enemies to defeat here. There isn't the big bad of the episode that the Scooby gang has to discover and eliminate; there aren't a beginning or an end that are not linked to the past or that don't have repercussions into the future; there aren't stories that are not emotional. This installment talks about relationships and about love. This focus starts with Riley's meaningful "we need to talk" ("the emphasis in soap is on talk rather than on action" states Robert Allen [39]), in the main scene of their confrontation. "Let's fight", he soon says. They do it with words here, just words [40], because Riley feels excluded, because he turned someplace else (to a brothel, to drugs, both images that can be linked to the nest of vampires in this episode). We arrive at, "What else do you want from me, Reilly? I've given you everything that I have, I've given you my heart, my body, my soul" (Buffy), and "You say that, but I don't feel it. I just don't feel it" (Riley). Feel. Riley and Spike fight over Buffy, dissect their emotions, and end up sharing a drink over her. "Ain't love grand!" says Spike. Xander forces Buffy to see her relationship with Riley in a new perspective: "If you really think you can love this guy--I'm talking scary, messy, no emotions barred need--if you are ready for that, then think about what you are about to lose". He's the "talk-to" person, not a quiet sounding board, but an active one. Nonetheless he is the place where Buffy can check her emotions. Others have already

proven that Buffy is empowered by her emotions, by the accessibility of them to her, as the comparison to Kendra's character aptly shows. [41] Finally Xander declares to Anya: "I'm in love with you. Powerfully, painfully in love. The things you do, the way you think, the way you move. I get excited every time I'm about to see you. You make me feel like I never felt before in my life: like a man". And, soon after, they share a kiss. We can also see the accent on feelings in minor scenes: when Buffy rallies Willow, Giles and Xander it is because she wants to bring them to the betrayal scene; when she practices against the punching bag it is to work off her rage and pain; with her mother she talks about herself and Riley; Dawn, left with Xander and Anya, is aware that she is at their place because Buffy and Reilly want to be together romantically. If soaps are more "character problems", less plot, then this episode shows best how Buffy can be called a soap. And it's not just content, it's style. It's a style that is appropriate to the content.

(29) At the beginning of "Into the Woods" Buffy and the others are at the hospital waiting to learn from a doctor about Joyce's health condition. The doctor arrives to tell his prognosis. They all stand up. The camera pans on Buffy's face. And on a tight close-up of her, it breaks away and goes to the opening credits. This is a typical use of the camera according to soap opera style. You get closer and closer, until you could swear you couldn't get physically any closer, without getting through the body, entering into the intimate layers of the character, into the soul, into the gut. In soap operas "...we are struck by their use of close ups and extreme close ups. This shooting style is consistent with the kind of world soap opera portrays. As a narrative ritual that centers on intense, concentrated forms of emotion, soap opera requires an intense, intimate camera style." [42]

(30) And that's not all: At the same time in a scene like that one, another convention that's dear to soaps is used, almost a definition of the entire genre: the augmentation of tension and the procrastination of fulfilment. There's a "dramatic movement of suspended crisis", temporary without an outlet. [43]. The answer, the solution and the closure are delayed. In soaps this is done as common procedure, and in the same way it's done here. There's a suspension for the duration of a theme song, that musical breath that rightfully leads you in the world of the program. Until you are outside the gate (the credits), you only have questions. Only when you step over that threshold can you have the answers. The narrative gratification is suspended – that is what the "sexual theory" is about, receiving pleasure from soaps because of the continuous postponement of the narrative climax – and you can have it only after you've passed through specific, known visual and auditory signs (the credits with the theme song to be specific), during which the scene remains frozen in time. This postponing is also, in another version, an apparent, perennial absence of ending, of finale. And in presenting stories that continue from instalment to instalment, this is inevitable.

(31) At one point in "Into the Woods," Buffy meets the "brothel" vampires who want to attack her for having destroyed their nest with fire. Buffy stakes all of them. Only a she-vampire remains, the one who sucked Riley's blood. Buffy recognizes he through a swift flashback. The usage of a targeted flashback of a specific element of that same episode is typical of the soaps. They could have chosen to let Buffy and us know it was that same woman-vampire with a glance, a hint, something else. A flashback was chosen.

(32) There's ample use of back-story here: Riley mentions Angel and Dracula to Buffy. Memory of past happenings is required of the soap audience (*infra sub # 46*).

(33) In this episode moreover it is clear that not only the syntax of the visual phrases follows soap rules, but a similar visual grammar is chosen too. When Buffy and Riley share their reasons, there's a real ping-pong between the respective positions: it's point-counterpoint also in camera movements. And there is an eye-level camera angle that is common to soap operas. That is, we go back and forth between the two characters and the perspective chosen to look at them is the eye level of the other character. There's mostly a shot/reverse shot editing with several portions of shots that are over-the-shoulder. [44] And though directing never truly indulges in it, there is even a slight sketch of a character talking to the back of the other character figure with this facing the screen, which is used in soaps more than in other genres.

(34) Also the closing image, with the two faces--one beside the other, which fades into the other--is very common in soap endings. It's sufficient to take whatever instalment from 1988 of *Days of Our Lives*, for example, to have a good chance of finding a similar directorial choice.

(35) The sex scene, one that easily could have been linked to soaps' style, on the contrary, distances itself from them quite a lot, in my opinion: Buffy is shown too much feeling pleasure, whereas if the soap opera filter had been chosen it would have been more ethereal and dreamlike than carnal.

"SANTA BARBARA" AND "THE BODY"

(36) Let's consider "The Body" now: the episode where, as reality sinks in, Buffy goes from her answer "No, my mom" to the operator that asks her if *the body's* cold, to her own referring to it as "the body" to Giles. As the body went cold so did her feelings. This is the episode wherein she can see the face of the EMT in its entirety only when he says he is sorry. Otherwise it doesn't completely register – it is just a moving mouth. It's an episode that, to me, tastes little like a soap, despite dealing almost only with personal matters.

(37) The scene where Buffy goes to Dawn's school and tells her their mother is dead, though, directed by Joss Whedon, instantly brought to my mind a scene from *Santa Barbara*, directed by the late Michael Gliona, at the beginning of 1989. In it Cruz reveals to his wife Eden that their daughter has disappeared, kidnapped by her rapist. The scenes are different, but for a directorial point of view, they present a strong parallelism. In *Santa Barbara* the scene takes place in a hospital. Eden is looking at a row of cribs with babies in them. Cruz goes to her as he tells her the news. They are behind a glass window, we don't hear anything, we barely see Cruz. What we see is Eden's reaction; her face, from happy, becomes desperate. We can read her lips, while, crying, she asks about her child, denying the reality of what she's been told has happened. In "Buffy" the scene takes place at school. Dawn is called outside the classroom, by her sister, who wants to talk to her. Dawn understands immediately that something's wrong. Buffy tells her that it regards their mother. They are behind a glass window and we don't hear the words Buffy chooses in order to tell her Joyce is dead. We don't even see Buffy say it, because she gives us her shoulders. We see Dawn cry and fall to the floor. And, the sound feebly dampened by the glass, we hear her say no, accuse her sister of lying. We hear something, little. Music is absent from the scene and the entire episode.

(38) Now, the two series' scenes are different. In *Buffy* we are not alone watching the scene. There are the schoolmates, inside and outside the classroom; there's the teacher. With Cruz and Eden the scene is more intimate. The spectator is the only eye. In *Buffy*

the scene is filmed more from a distance, almost as if to avoid getting too close and disturbing such an immense pain. *Santa Barbara* shows a close-up of the face of Eden, whose image is frozen. *Buffy* shifts its shot on an unfinished drawing on which Dawn was working in the class, leaving space for the thousand themes that are entwined in the episode: from incompleteness (of the body, of a broken life, of the bereaved...), to the body (the subject of the drawing and the title of the episode), to the role of art in life and in the face of death... *Santa Barbara* is shaped on silence, re-introduced in other forms, in the several instalments that formed this moment of the storyline. They are framed by the child's Uncle Mason's quote from Shakespeare: "[...]my grief lies all within,/And these external manners of laments/Are merely shadows to the unseen grief/that swells with silence in the tortured soul". [45]

(39) The two scenes have a lot in common: the person who brings the news and the person who receives it are on the same level: two sisters speaking about their mother (*Buffy*), husband and wife speaking about their daughter (*Santa Barbara*); both messengers (*Buffy*, Cruz) give a pain equal to the one they are themselves living; the messenger is partly concealed, hidden, and we don't need to have the news ourselves, because we already know, so as spectators, we are in the same position as those who give the news, and the attention is therefore focused on the person who receives it (Dawn, Eden); a transparent glass separates us, divides us from the action, detached spectators, which is what we are in front of such a personal and lacerating tragedy, as in life. We can be nothing more, the scenes seem to be saying. Silence, deafened by pain. And that silence which is broken by Dawn has weight, intended to maximize the effect, to transmit a pain and a moment. We are close and distant at the same time.

(40) "The Body" has little of the taste of a soap, yet another element makes us think of one. In this episode two characters are missing. Glory, the arch-nemesis, is absent. One of the historic archetypes of the soaps, created by pioneer Irna Phillips, is identified in the "bitch goddess". [46] We could say Glory represents a literal image of this expression. Here, in "The Body," as noted, she is absent. It doesn't matter, it doesn't add or detract anything, because the actress who plays her has always been a "guest star". But Spike too is absent, and this, on the contrary, is quite relevant. James Marsters, who plays him, has a contract with the series and a protagonist role; he is a regular, appearing in the opening credits. The fact that a character present in the opening is then missing within the episode is extremely rare, but it's less and less so the more we get closer to the soap opera format. *thirtysomething*, whose genre definition has been discussed [47], used to omit some of its characters from some shows. This is definitely a choice that orientates the product toward something that can be qualified as a soap opera. The same happens in "Normal Again" (6017). Anya is missing from the entire episode, and this despite her being present in the "previously" segment. The absence doesn't reflect on the episode tone, but allows a wide range of interpretation on the aesthetics of the series as a whole, since it induces the audience to think not in terms of a single segment, but in terms of the totality of the narrative flow.

THE "SOAP TEST"

(41) The aforementioned Seli Groves suggests a true "Soap Test", to be applied to programs, to understand if they are soaps or not. And she cites the criteria offered by Marnie Winston-Macauley, author and, in the past, writer for *As the World turns*. Let's try

indicate some of her statements to make sure if they can be applied to *Buffy*. Firstly, a soap has a “concentration on heightened emotions. Melodrama must be involved”. *Buffy*, which was meant by Joss Whedon to be an “emotional experience”, as we already said, gives abundant and constant proof of this. Buffy decides to kill Angel, the love of her life, to save the world (“Becoming,” part two, 2022); She makes a dying Angel bite her neck, even if this means risking her own life to save his (“Graduation,” part two, 3022); She desperately runs toward Reilly to ask him not to leave and tell him that she loves him, but he flies away in a helicopter without seeing her (“Into the Woods,” 5010); to save her sister and the world, Buffy dies voluntarily falling into an evil chasm that is opening to destroy the Earth (“The Gift,” 5022). High emotions. Melodrama. This last example could perhaps qualify more as a tragedy than melodrama, if it weren’t that Buffy “comes back from the dead”.

(42) Here we can graft another soap *leitmotiv*. As a humorous page from *Soap Opera Digest* [48] says: “Soaps are the place...where you only die twice – unless you are extremely popular”. And “You just can’t keep a good soap character down, or, for that matter, six feet under. The truth is, death on soap is almost never final”. [49] And so it has been for Buffy too, who died twice. It could be argued that deaths on soaps are more apparent than real. Bodies don’t get found or, only later, what looked like a proof of a permanent demise, in reality wasn’t so. Death in *Buffy* is real. Buffy has truly been buried, as she really rose from the dead. Truth be told, the moment soaps accept the supernatural – which is not the most common choice – deaths are just as real. A case in point is *Port Charles*, where the character of Rafe truly died twice. We discover this the first time from a memory. Rafe is an angel and he remembers becoming one after he was killed by the vampire he was trying to defeat. Recalled to Heaven because he had finished his mission on Earth, he sells his soul to the Devil to go back and save the woman he loves. The Devil sends him back without memory. Following several adventures, he re-discovers the love which brought him there and his memory comes back to him just in time to be killed again by a gun shot. He dies in the loved one’s arms. For a second time, he comes back to life, this time sent back among others as a normal human being. Others are granted a second chance at life. Alison briefly dies struck by the falling of a tree, and Rafe, with his angel powers, brings her back. Jack was thought dead when everybody saw him as a semi-vampire. He was bitten, but he himself hadn’t bitten anyone yet, so, according to the mythology of the show, he wasn’t completely transformed into a vampire. Here death is as real as in *Buffy*. What counts is the level at which one decides to play the game. Accepting the supernatural, soaps don’t do anything more than bring to the next level to a more radical level, one of their consolidated narrative rules.

(43) Another criterion is suggested by Winston Macauley: “the show should have what we call in the business a DPU for each character: That stands for Direct Pick-Up”. This means that, in a daytime drama, what happens to a character in the last episode is directly picked up for the next day’s show. If it’s a night-time soap, the pick-up for each character is directly linked to the last week’s episode”. This often happens on *Buffy*, more and more so as the show progresses. Let’s consider two succeeding episodes like “Smashed” (6009) and “Wrecked” (6010). In “Smashed” Buffy and Spike make love, while Dawn and Tara, on the couch, in front of the TV, wait for her and Willow to come home. “Wrecked” picks up the following morning: Buffy wakes up beside Spike after a

night of sex, while Dawn and Tara wake up in front of the tv, which is on, and realize that neither Buffy nor Willow came back for the night. But even more to the point, let's take a look at the passage in the fifth season between "Tough Love" (5019) and "Spiral" (5020). Glory discovers that Dawn is the key and it's her intention to get her into her possession. She destroys the building in which all the gang is, and enters to take her and... the episode ends. The following one resumes at the exact same point where the previous one was stopped. Glory is bent on taking Dawn and... now they can flee. It is a standard mechanism of ending and resuming used by soaps. [Editors' note: See David Lavery on endings in "Apocalyptic Apocalypes."] It underlines the more significant moments, the ones with more tension, the ones that create a bigger suspense. We could think about a normal cliff-hanger, but it's more than that. If it were only that, a program like *24* could be called a soap, since, narrating 24 hours of the same day in real time, it inevitably resumes the action from the immediately previous scene. It's not like that, though. In "Tough love" the scene that gets frozen in time is severed, chopped off in a more radical and soap-like way: the action itself is not closed, but has been blocked, slashed, deprived itself of any closure whatsoever, even a temporary one.

(44) Yet another criterion is that soaps have an ensemble cast. And again Seli Groves tells us: "Relationships should exist among the characters portrayed by the ensemble cast". Relationships that naturally have meaning and weight for the attention that's been accorded to them. In series these can be ignored or put aside, or limited to the bare essentials, like for example the way *Law and Order* or *CSI* do. Or you can, as *Buffy* does, give them much weight: to friendships (Buffy-Xander; Buffy-Willow); to loves (Buffy-Angel; Spike-Dru; Willow-Oz; Cordelia-Xander; Willow-Tara); to family or family-like relations (Buffy-Joyce; Buffy-Dawn; Mayor-Faith); to adversarial relations (Snyder-Buffy; Buffy-Glory; Buffy-Faith) and to the thousand variations, facets and shades that relationships can offer thanks to their intrinsic complexity and, at times, indefinableness. Besides the flowing of the narration, besides a "syntagmatic determinacy," in *Buffy* we participate in a strong meaningfulness of the "paradigmatic complexity" that does not allow the events to be irrelevant in the relationship between characters, but just the opposite, to be heavily felt. And this- the small nuances that can't be perceived by an uninitiated, the waterfall repercussions on a multiplicity of subjects – is one of the biggest pleasures that soap watchers get, giving an ulterior meaning to otherwise negligible details. Events assume meaning for the viewer not so much on the basis of "their place in a syntagmatic chain but rather in terms of the changes in the paradigmatic structure of the community those events might provoke". [50] Linked to this reason is also the fact that rarely, on soaps, are villains an outside threat. They are an integral part of the canvas. Within itself each soap has to find a place to work them and use them and keep them. In Season Six we observe exactly this: villains are chosen within pre-existing characters – Jonathan, Warren – and once defeated, some are still in town (Jonathan, Andrew).

LITURGY, TIME, MEMORY

(45) Let's put Seli Groves aside and go beyond. *Buffy* is near to soaps also in its use of what may be called liturgy. In daytime dramas it's very weak. When we find it, it's in a year span, not in their single instalments. The rituality of the plot is mainly built around specific events, such as Christmas for *Days of our lives*, 4th of July for *Guiding Light*, the Nurses' Ball for *General Hospital* or the Crystal Ball for *All my children*. Not so in regular

evening series. Rituality is structural to each episode. Think of "Murder: She wrote": the discovering of the body, Ms Fletcher called into the investigation, the interrogation of the suspects, the solution. Think of an author like David E. Kelley (*Picket Fences*, *The Practice*, *Ally McBeal*), loaded with rituality. There's a built-in liturgy, enhanced by the trial procedure – arrival of the client, opening arguments, witnesses, closing arguments, verdict – that this author emphasizes with his style. In *Buffy* also there's a liturgy: the demon, the research, the hunt, the defeating of the peril. Sometimes, though, this liturgy is upset, thrown upside down, such as in the case of "Into the Woods". And this brings it near to the soaps. If in the first seasons *Buffy* was more aligned to soaps from a content point of view than a stylistic one, after the third season there were more structural contacts, too. This, taking season six as an example, can be gathered by putting under observation liturgy, reduced to the bare bone. Let's take an episode like "Dead Things" (6013): Buffy believes she has killed a girl. The gang realizes it's not like that, but that there's been a sort of temporal planes interpolation. It does it in the blink of an eye. Research and solution, once a long and fatiguing trail, are here given at the same time, as if to get rid of a duty and to concentrate on what in this moment is more relevant: what Buffy is going through. The research is, as far as *Buffy* is concerned, the basic liturgical element, in which the characters are, with their noses in the books, working for a solution. They are so detached from it at this point that Anya, faking research, is reading a hidden wedding gowns magazine instead. It says everything: liturgy is on the back burner, even in the mind of the protagonists. We get in "Hell's Bells" (6016) to a total absence of the stage of the research. And "Hell's Bell's" is exactly where the soap expedient of a wedding halted at the altar is represented, as much a classic as is the characters who are about to get married who imagine a dreadful future. (46) On the other hand, in parallel, there's a clear sense also, in *Buffy*, of seasonal rituality: Halloween is the holiday when (in this fictional universe) nothing demonic should happen, but when regularly the unthinkable happens (Halloween, 2006; Fear Itself, 4005); and Buffy's birthday (Surprise, 2013; Helpless, 3012; Older and Far Away, 6014) is always a disaster. There's unpredictability within a settled *datum* we expect and we look forward to just the same as in daytime, where otherwise liturgy is linkable only to the behavioural patterns of the characters or, moving to a *preater*-textual dimension, to the repeated patterns of program viewing required from the watcher to an extent incomparable to any other medium. Liturgy, in this sense, is the faithful participation in the everyday function that's enacted on the screen, the partaking in the quotidian ritual. Analyzing "attendance" is not our aim here, but it leads us – being its *conditio sine qua non* – to our next point. "This is a genre, unlike all others, that requires one thing of its audience – its memory, its collective recollection of who you are and what you've done," states Charles Keating (James in *Port Charles*, and most notably Carl Hutchins in *Another World*) [51]

(47) On *General Hospital*, at the end of the 70s, Luke raped Laura. Twenty years later, under head-writer Robert Guza Jr., they take on the story again. The characters find themselves needing to deal with the ghosts of those events in front of their teenage son, who asks for explanations and makes them re-live the meaning, then and now, of those events. The same actors as then, Anthony Geary and Genie Francis, play Luke and Laura; the same director of that time, the late Alan Pultz, directs the scenes, working with his notes on the original script, which he saved. Sure, not all soaps can afford to retrieve

such a past, nor, if they could, would they retrieve it with such precision and carefulness, but one thing is certain: soaps stand on memory and continuity. It is what makes them rich and vital. Here, it is a settled part of their ability to move, enthrall and pleasure the audience. We refer to this genre as continuing dramas. It's true that continuing doesn't mean continuity, but it's also true that, to continue, this genre must necessarily take into account its past, the bits of personal history that remain attached to the characters. We could almost say that time, memory, history and continuity are for soaps the ultimate defining element. In "Words without end – the art and history of the Soap Opera" we read: "Time and memory for both the character and the audience are at the heart of the soap opera [...] the very narrative structure of the soap demands that the viewer bring memories of the pain and joy and subtle emotional nuances to each scene.

(48) When characters with such rich, penetrating histories as Victor Newman and Nikki Reed on *The Young and the Restless* or Alan and Monica on *General Hospital* confront each other, the viewer fills in the sustained silences and piercing reaction shots that characterize the genre with a keen knowledge of their pasts, thus becoming an important partner in the scene. This deep, emotional involvement in a story that is unfolding day by day over years is ultimately the triumph of the soap opera. No other art form can achieve, much less sustain, this kind of connection with an audience for so long in such a deeply satisfying way" [52]. Robert C. Allen echoes it: "The long time viewer can immediately sense when something is "wrong", with his or her soap: a character is behaving in an uncharacteristic manner, for example. The frequent viewer can recognize not only appropriate and inappropriate behaviour in a given character, but appropriate responses of a given character to another, based on the two characters' relationships in the show's past. Characters in soap operas have memories, and relationships might well stretch back for a decade or more." [53]. According to Wilcox and Lavery [54] "On *Buffy* (...) characters remember, and we remember with them." A shared characteristic that not only characterizes quality TV, but that creates, as Horace Newcomb says [55], a "sense of direct involvement" so strongly associated with soaps. Taking about *Buffy*, Wilcox and Lavery cite the two perfect examples of "Restless" (4022) and "Forever" (5017), and handling a copy of *The Watcher's Guide* and reading the sections titled "continuity", it is easy to understand that to continuity is given attention . . . with continuity.

(49) And this also contaminates the way in which long-gone characters remain in the memory of the public and the characters. J.P. Williams [56] reminds us how Jenny Calendar, once gone, remains present in the character's mind through fantasies and dreams. The same happens in daytime where constantly beloved people now absent are brought back to the mind of the remaining protagonists. A significant example is that of young Stone, untimely passed away because of AIDS, in the collective memory of *General Hospital*, or Ryan's death, in *Another World*, or Vicki's trip to Heaven on *One life to live*, where she meets again, in a brief out-of-body experience, characters gone out of the canvas, but not out of the hearts of the characters and the viewers.

DEFINING FAMILY

(50) The sense of family is a good field for comparison. Family in the traditional sense of the term is absent from *Buffy*. Her father is never seen, not even on her birthday (Helpless, 3012), and with her mother she often has a relationship of conflict ("Gingerbread," 3011; "Becoming" part II, 2022, for example). Willow has a mother who

doesn't even know the name of her best friend (Gingerbread, 3011) and Xander's quarrelsome parents are invisible presences that should remain so, considering the relationship they have. Faith also in the end has nobody and Dawn is devoid of parents in the true sense of the word. *Buffy* is a world of orphans, just as Giorgio Bellocci [57] defines *Guiding Light*, a fictional world where characters are marked by their being orphans: "real ones" (for the actual lack of a parent) and "ideal ones", those who have a dysfunctional, ruinous relationship with their parents or in whose life parents have been profoundly absent.

(51) And just the same, one of the most classic soap figures is the single mom, the female parent who raises her children alone. In *Buffy*, Joyce does it for Buffy, but Buffy herself ends up doing it for her sister Dawn. The entrance of Dawn (5004), who had never been heard of before, reflects a standard practise for soaps: they introduce a new character who is tied to pre-existing characters and therefore receives immediate and important status within the program structure. An example, but they could be numerous, is Nikolas Cassadine on *General Hospital*, introduced as the son nobody knew Laura Spencer had had. For Dawn it's the same. The twist to explain her arrival is what makes it original, ingenious, logically believable, and different from soaps.

(52) It's the community of friends that in *Buffy* becomes family (Wilcox and Lavery). Family are the people you love and that you want around yourself. In *Buffy* this is strongly stressed in "Family" (5006), where Tara rejects her natural and legal family, that doesn't give her love and respect, to choose, over them, what she considers her real family, the one of affection and friendship, the Scooby Gang. And in the modern era, the traditional family model, in truth always the fulcrum and the hearth of soaps, is every day less indispensable. Next to blood ties, those that Bellocci calls "symbolic" also make their way. They set an indefinite kindred. An example is the "step-son" one, that in *Buffy* could be the one between slayer and watcher. There are even "hypothetical ones". And, in these past few years, the concept of a group of friends that create among themselves familiar ties elbowed its way through, beside the more traditional family concept. Again, *Port Charles* comes into consideration. The interns of a hospital become a family for one another; their working relationship and their mutual liking make them family for one another. The traditionally formed family (here represented by the Collins, the Scanlons and the Baldwins) is extremely feeble, imperceptible, we could say. And right from the start, from the *incipit* of its stories, the now-cancelled *The City* lacks a matriarchal or patriarchal family. The emotional bond and the consciously opted one between friends and co-owners of a building substitutes for the blood one. [58] A radical choice was made, one that associates itself with the one made on *Buffy*. Villains too stop being perceived as such, once they are accepted in the "family", or at least a crack is open for their redemption – Spike *docet*.

ROMANCE: SUPERCouples

(53) Naturally what soap operas are most well-known and remembered for is romance. [59] "(Daytime) knows how to get a couple together, split them up, and how to start from square one with the same couple and go through the whole thing again – and you're still watching. I think prime time can learn a lot from how daytime develops romance" says Shelly Moore. [60]. Star-crossed lovers, destined to love each other, even when this seems impossible, are everyday bread and butter for soaps: Luke and Laura (*General*

Hospital), Lily and Holden (*As the World Turns*), Joe and Siobhan (*Ryan's Hope*), Josh and Reva (*Guiding Light*), Bo and Hope (*Days of our lives*).... Even without reaching the extremes *Days of our lives* arrived at in the 1980s, when everything could be reduced to this, soaps are stilleasily summarized in terms of couples. Buffy is no different: Buffy-Angel, Xander-Cordelia, Willow-Oz, Giles-Jenny, Spike-Drusilla, Buffy-Spike, Xander-Any, Willow-Tara.

(54) Every soap has its reigning couples that ache to be together and manage to do so in spite of everything. The word "supercouple" was minted for this. Buffy and Angel are a supercouple, a couple that has an intense chemistry on screen and whose union is a bona fide challenge to the world. Angel is a version of the boy "from the wrong side of the track" who tries to better himself and seeks redemption through the love of the woman he loves (like Luke on *General Hospital* or Patch on *Days of our lives*). Lovers face dangers together and this binds them. But it's in the modes in which love between Buffy and Angel is portrayed that the series follows soap's style, first and foremost for the melodramatic tone, as we said before, but for other elements too.

(55) Their brushing up to one another, their getting near each other, their mental, before than physical, caressing: *Buffy*, like soaps, has the courage and the weakness of playing and flirting with allusive elements and with sexuality and sensuality (especially in the case of Angel) for jest and in a very provocative way. The series constantly teases the public, showing sexual tension between the characters through light contact, intense looks and situations that are openly instrumental to this aim: A provocation of sensual tension that cannot and does not mean to be satisfied and released. Characters and public get tickled. Getting or not getting satisfaction is secondary here, because in this case allusiveness is for its own sake. Characters are forced by events, often by micro-happenings, to share space and to come into physical contact in a forced way, so as to make the ashes of desire smoulder, without having them immediately catch fire. It's a progressive approach. The writers put the characters into such a position so that they cannot deny the physical attraction they feel for one another. Like the viewer, the characters see it for themselves but they cannot act on it. The excuse on soaps is often the classic fall from the ladder into the arms of the loved one; in *Buffy* it's the work out, it's Tai-Chi. And this sense of lacerating desire is even more radical in the face of the imperative to not-do, to not consume the relationship on a physical level. In *Buffy*, the problem of the protagonist's being vampire-slayer first and the issue of Angel's risking his soul for that sole moment of happiness later come into play. They are tempted; they have to resist temptation. For soaps this impediment is represented by wedding or religious vows by which the protagonists feel bound. Father Jim, in *Loving*, according to the Catholic Church tenets he abides by, "would lose his soul to sin" if he decided to betray his vows to go to bed with Shana, the woman he's in love with. If he doesn't want to lose his soul, he has to renounce sex, just as Angel does on *Buffy*. And when Buffy and Angel make love for the first time ("Surprise"), before they know what it would mean, the direction almost skirts the event. This also in accordance with the age of the protagonist. Several times we see this on suders. The camera moves away from the couple, to set on flowers or more frequently on burning candles.

(56) The apex of love, according to the *Weltanschauung* of daytime programming, is its consecration through the wedding ceremony. That is the finishing line. With this yearned-for goal, it's normal for the heroines involved in a romantic dream to become brides to their beloved. Once they put their head on a pillow, the fantasy enters a dream world

with comic, tragic, or simply romantic shades, according to the circumstances, but is always, sooner or later, there. Angel, following the custom (with a male twist), dreams of Buffy in the traditional moment in her white dress (3020, "The Prom"). If in fact that day will never actually come, at least the viewer, who knows what is the final goal we are aiming for, can just the same live the event, even if on a fantasy level. Those who desired to see Buffy and Angel married and happy, for the classic happy end will be satisfied in the instant of releasing of the tension of desire that that fantasy brought. In *Buffy* that scene lends itself to a lot of interpretations of desire for "normalcy" for Buffy. This doesn't take away the fact that the chosen style assimilates it to the soap genre. (57) Another staple is the "fake getting back together". In creating obstacles to the happiness of couples, writers end up separating them for long periods of time. And so, often, it is necessary to find expedients to get the two lovers back together, even if it's only for brief moments. It pleases the viewer and in a sense, anticipates what he will get in the future if he holds on and continues watching as the story unfolds and the couple gets back together for real. It has an mnemo-inducing function, in respect to what diachronically precedes and follows. The more common form is the fantasy. But it's not the only one. In "I only have eyes for you", the spirits of two now-dead lovers, a student named James and his teacher, Miss Newman, possess Buffy and Angel respectively. James had killed Miss Newman and then shot himself in the head in 1955. Now as ghosts they are trying to solve their conflict. They manage to do so by taking possession of Angel and Buffy's bodies and they manage to kiss through the borrowed bodies, allowing at the same time Buffy and Angel, now enemies, to kiss, and recuperate even if just for an instant, the tenderness they shared before. A very similar experience befell Cruz and Eden from *Santa Barbara*, in 1988. The ghosts met by the two of them were the spirits of Amelia and Captain Anderson. We are in a mirror situation here, because Cruz and Eden, thanks to their strong love, succeed in getting the two ghosts back together. Amelia and Captain Anderson had not been able to get married because on the day of the wedding she saw the ship of the groom-to-be sink into the ocean, and threw herself from the cliffs. Since then they haven't been able to be together. Cruz and Eden also get protected by the two ghosts: they vicariously unite themselves in marriage for them too, so that they can finally go back to one another as they wished, and can rest in peace [61]. And like Cruz and Eden have their contrapuntal voices in Keith and Gina, a couple of villains with a twist of humor, so do Buffy and Angel who have just as strong a pair in Spike and Drusilla.

(58) The expedient of nudity and of the wounded hero is part of this same stylistic river-bed. It's the sex of the soaps, and also a staple of romance literature depictions: the wounded naked hero who needs attention and care. One can smile at the ingenuousness of the technique, which succeeds, if carried out with taste and mixed with other elements. It's the veneer over something else. If it can be condoned it is because it titillates while being discreet and appropriate to the age of the characters. Often in *Buffy* they are teen-agers, and to limit the kind of contact to this "sweet torture" is natural and becoming, not merely instrumental. And it's fertile in consequences on the emotional side, as well as the ratings one. It might provoke some smiles, but half-naked hunks in pain are never lacking in daytime. These heroes and anti-heroes suffer spiritually too; they are brooding over the pain they caused and over their personal demons. Their agony can be read on their faces. Sonny Corinthos on *General Hospital* blames himself and never gives himself a break, showing this way he is a "good guy" despite being a

mobster. Every occasion is good to undress good-looking guys and to keep them shirtless. Angel, once back from the hellish dimension, is often shirtless. He's wounded and Buffy nurses him. Jason and Elizabeth on *General Hospital* are another good example. They suffer and they are feverish. On *Days of Our Lives*, Kayla often ended up being a nurse (and she was for real, too) to an injured and bruised Steve, who was regularly beaten up, and who remained half-naked, naturally.

(59) The teen scene becomes more animated during summertime on soaps. It has always been a trend, all the more nowadays when the attention to younger demographics is addressed and taken into consideration all year long. Willow-Xander-Buffy-Cordelia of the first two years happily incarnate that kind of emotional chasing back and forth between the characters, a lack of matching and the frustrated search for the other. Willow wants Xander, who wants Buffy, who wants Angel: unrequited love. Willow runs away at the sight of Xander and Cordelia together; Spike is jealous of Dru's glances at Angel; Giles is embarrassed at asking Jenny out: these are soap opera elements that succeed in not being pure mannerism. They reconstruct the narrative reasoning, subjugating soap styles to the context's needs, cleaning it from excesses, but rather showing a propensity to restructure the elements.

WHEN BAD IS GOOD: ANTI-HEROES AND THE BAD BOY MYSTIQUE

(60) Spike, and his relationship with Buffy, are equally built according to soap rules. We can dissect several critical passages where this can be recognized.

- A) A villain comes to town. He commits a series of heinous acts in the eyes of the community within the narration as well as the public who follows the plot on the screen. In *Buffy*, Spike arrives in Sunnydale and it's clear from the start that he's up to no good and that he is the bad boy of the situation ("School Hard," 2003).
- B) The public loves him and there's the need to redeem him. So writers proceed in that direction. They make us understand what motivates that character; his conflicts, his needs. Executive Producer Laurence Caso points out how "Villains don't perceive themselves to be villains". "They have needs and their villainy results from how they go about trying to fulfill those needs" [62]. So they dig into their past to discover where everything started, what drives them to behave as they do. Writers concur. They "will be inclined to devise buried, significant, understandable reasons why the character turned bad." [63]. Characters like these are another classic of the genre: *Guiding Light's* Roger, *Another World's* Carl, *General Hospital's* Luke.... Spike's motivations are given by the fact that he is a vampire and, in the moment a chip is implanted in his brain, the components that motivate his behaviour become more conscious. The writers build a past that justifies, in hindsight, his present behaviour, showing what made him sour and go against the world ("Fool for Love," 5007). Up to what point the bad boy can be redeemed, and which acts can be forgiven, is a topic that remains burning and open both in the soap discussion arenas and in the *Buffy* ones.
- C) In the present, the character's change is grounded in love. And there are two paths most often followed.

(61) The *first* one is through making the character an anti-hero. How to become one?

Soap Opera Digest offers a humoristic, and true, hand-book. First of all, the characters make a bad impression upon their arrival in town; they conceal their true feelings and apparently are always in control; they have an arrogant and insolent attitude, and operate in shady business, but their true nature takes over and makes new men out of them. They are lonely men, stoic and hurt by a past of atrocities and pain. They have to gain respectability: "Your lady will be put into jeopardy when she endeavours to help, simultaneously incurring the wrath of her many friends and relatives who still don't trust you" (Duke Lavery, *General Hospital*). They have to suffer being separated from the only woman they have ever loved, and they have often to do it for noble reasons (Steve Johnson, *Days of our lives*): "you will have the compelling need to right the wrongs of the world. You may even have to pretend that you have been lured back to the dark side of the force in order to catch a villain." Jesse Hubbard, *All My Children*: "If your troubles and travails have turned you into a wildly popular character, the actor who plays you will probably want to leave the show [...] The writers probably won't kill you off [...] then you can be brought back for guest appearances". *Buffy* has travelled this road, in most of its main stages, with lonely and brooding Angel. When Angel decides to leave Sunnydale, a door is left open for him for a possible return. His exit is naturally due to David Boreanaz's getting his own spin-off. For this reason he has an epiphany – it is better if he and Buffy live separately – that could have been placed at any useful moment. If presumed-death is frequent, and if often the couple walks off together into the sunset, other times there's the awareness that for different reasons love isn't enough and it is best for the characters to go their separate way to live their life. [63]

(62) The *other road* is to keep them bad (within reason), and just the same, bring them into the lives of the heroines. Charles Pratt Jr, *General Hospital's* co-head-writer, deems that the bad boy mystique is the mystery of the "darker, edgier guy" that the viewer vicariously accepts in his/her life in the safeness of fiction, whereas in real life it would be dangerous to do so. And the defining element is, indeed, the sense of danger that these characters offer. His soap offers a good range, from Sonny Corinthos to Jason Morgan, to Zander Smith. It's the "guy who can't be possessed, can't be changed, can't be tamed". And there's sort of a sense of freedom in this' the same freedom Buffy lives with Spike during season Six. And to this another *datum* has to be added. Hogan Sheffer, *As The World Turns* head-writer, points the finger to the fact that to the bad boys a certain amount of sexuality is allowed, whereas to good guy it isn't. And he cites Jessica and Marshall's case. "Our request to the powers-that-be was 'we just want it to be sexual. We want her to be so overwhelmed by this guy's physicality that they just fell into bed.' It's not a romance, they are not doing it because she thinks he's really bright. It's just raw sex. And because Marshall's a bad boy, we were able to do it and not have to apologize for it". Even if, the morning after, Jessica hates herself for having gone to bed with Marshall--a road, again, we can find on *Buffy's* map. These are words that could easily be adapted to her situation with Spike, a mostly sexual relationship, without excuses, with the heroine who lives this experience as a negative one. [64]

(63) Moreover, we could add the phrase which is probably the most famous and quoted of the soaps, the golden rule set by Agnes Nixon: "Make 'em laugh, make 'em cry, make 'em wait". We can apply it to the whole series and specifically to the physical consummation of Spike and Buffy's relationship, who needed more than a season to come to completion, from Spike's awakening from the dream that revealed to him he was in love with Buffy, to the moment he finally gets to have her physically. The wait was

even longer if we take as valid this quote by Sarah Michelle Gellar, at the end of season three, regarding her Fantasy Date for her character: "Spike – though, 'when I mentioned the possibility of Spike and Buffy to Joss', says Gellar 'he was like, "No more vampires!""". [65]

MIRRORS OF THE SELF: CLOTHES, MUSIC, PLACES

(64) If *Buffy* can use clothes as a mirror of the events, as a demarcation of the characters and their role within the dialogic path, with contrasts between whites and blacks and reds or whatever, soaps do this commonly. In *Port Charles*, Rafe, the slayer-angel, in white, and devil-sent James, in black, can be distinguished right away. And where good and evil are in opposition often the chromatic palette has the task to emphasize narration. Let it be enough to mention *Guiding Light* where at the beginning of the 90s, Mindy organized a fashion show. (The protagonists belong to the middle class, to a generic middle class.) They were all in white. Eve, the psycho who wanted to ruin the clothes, was the only one in black. Immediately the villain is identified and by contrast the general sense is reinforced. Clothes colour is often studied also keeping in mind symbolic values, in symbolic occasions *par excellence*, like weddings, but not only then. Symbolism in *Buffy* succeeds in being more incisive where it weaves a transversal thread between the episodes by using clothes. I think about an episode like "Helpless" (3012). It can be read from different angles: as a new awareness of impotence in life, for example, despite coming of age (that Buffy, on her eighteenth birthday, does in this episode); or as a metaphor of the difficulty to react in front of a possible betrayal of one's own parents (here represented by Giles). From another angle, a Chronic Fatigue Syndrome patient could see his/her condition in it, the invisibility of an inner enemy to fight and the inability to understand where the sudden situation comes from, the feeling of being lost in the face of the failing of physical capabilities that one was taking for granted.... But Buffy, who walks on the dark street with a red hood, suggests Little Red Riding Hood and her defenselessness, exposed to the dangers of the world. Later on, watching "Fear, Itself" (4004), where Buffy was Little Red Riding Hood, the viewer could instantly recall that previous episode - and therefore there is a visual link that only thanks to the dress is possible in such a direct way. In this episode (4004), easily, the aggression to Buffy, in the shots the direction chose, hinted to a sexual violence. Thanks to the linking, the fear for rape is suggested even more that it would have been otherwise possible. There's intersection between episodes.

(65) Many more elements here and there within *Buffy* lead us to the soap imaginary. Generally, the musical montages, such as the one offered in "Tabula Rasa" (6008), or even at the end of season Six ("Grave") are pretty conventional. You could take any random *Days of our lives* instalment at the end of the 80s or any soap in times when Jill Farren Phelps was executive producer there (therefore *Santa Barbara*, *Guiding Light*, *Another World*, *One Life to live* and *General Hospital*). Ricky Martin sang on *General Hospital* as Michelle Branch sang for *Buffy* inhabitants. Ricky Martin was an actual member of the cast, but we could just the same remember other "guest" musical apparitions like BB King, Julio Iglesias, 98 Degrees or SheDaisy, to remain on *General Hospital* ground, which has always been a singing soap. And Xander watching Anya, while the music plays, through a glass window while she's working ("Seeing Red," 6019) is even – dare I say it – "soapy". On *General Hospital* characters may stop at "Kelly's" and watch people inside, to music, all the time.

(66) The “mythical town”, the fictional place that could be the condensation of what one wants to tell, the symbolic spot of what the narrative poiesis aims to communicate, is a long tradition in daytime. Instead of Sunnydale we have Oakdale (*As the World Turns*) or Corinth (*Loving*) or or the Genoa City of *The Young and the Restless* or Harmony (*Passions*). The soaps that choose as an environment an existing town are relatively few. For *One Life to Live* head-writer Josh Griffith, , Llanview, where the stories unfold, is the 35th character, true dais of the human condition. [66]

(67) The use of outdoors in “Buffy” though, the entire geography of the program, for the most part strongly separates it from the soaps. Daytime dramas prefer indoors settings, more appropriate to the nature of their storytelling, which constantly depicts emotional intimacy. When this is required, “BtVS” has to go indoors too. Joss Whedon explains the material forced them to make such a choice when shooting “Innocence” (2014). What was originally supposed to be an outdoors scene became a bedroom scene, allowing an intimacy level that couldn’t be reached before and couldn’t have been reached otherwise. [67] As a rule anyway, “Buffy” isn’t confined indoors.

SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS AND SELF-AWARENESS

(68) Self-consciousness. Regarding this aspect I defer to the ample literature about it. On soaps, suffice it to say that the parodies of the genre, references to pop culture and to the niche culture of soaps themselves, inside jokes and the breaking of the fourth wall to address the public directly aren’t lacking. *Santa Barbara* in the 80s and *Sunset Beach* in the 90s were masters in this, toying with the genre peculiarities and taking shots at specific episodes, at times even at scenes. And they can conceal jokes for a sort of “treasure hunt” the same way. *Buffy* for example has written “geek” in the Cyrillic alphabet, Г , on the periscope of the trio of villains, making fun of them, in Season Six (“Flooded”). *All my children* has written “Bobby” on the baseball cap of a skeleton found in the attic near a pair of skis, acknowledging the fact that there was a “legend” running about how the character of Bobby went upstairs to polish his skis and was never heard from or referred to again. [68]

(69) Both sides have to come to terms with the same dialectic within literature, with the same dichotomy between those who maintain that feminist themes and the image of an empowered woman prevail and those who, vice versa, deem the position not radical enough, but lament the return to the old patriarchal model or at least the leaning on it more than it’s desirable.

(71) The sense of un-revealed future development, of anticipation that doesn’t spoil the plot, a sense that Joss Whedon seems to have, goes hand to hand with the “Tune in Tomorrow” principle.

(72) Arcs have their own closure, but *Buffy* relishes cliff-hanger *à la* soap manner, from time to time, and a final kick that leaves viewers wanting more because events change just at the end: Angel comes back from the hellish dimension; Spike asks to build a Buffybot; Spike gets his soul back. Granted, soaps resist closure, while *Buffy* at the end of each season, for explicit will of Joss Whedon, was always given a possible definite end.

(73) Soaps are always *in fieri*, and last for decades; therefore, save for a few exceptions, the viewer arrives *in medias res* of the narration. There’s no way to avoid it. Not so in *Buffy*, where, even not having followed the plots from the beginning it is possible to recuperate them thanks to reruns, to technological media and to the lesser amount of

material (compared to the soaps).

(74) Also, soap operas' diegetic time tends to be dilated, whereas other genres compress it. In this sense *Buffy* is definitely not a soap.

BUFFY IS A SOAP: OR IS IT?

(75) I believe that, despite all of the soap opera qualities, we can rest assured that in many other aspects *Buffy* is not a soap opera. At times it may have indulged in this genre style, but overall it does not go in that direction.

(76) Credits are not built like those of the soaps and the title, in which I see a programmatic stance, goes to a different direction than contemporary soaps. Unlike *Port Charles* or *As the World Turns*, the title is the name of a single person, a heroine strong enough to be alone in the projection of the show to the outside. This doesn't happen anymore in daytime dramas. But we can't deny it for the past. As *telenovelas* still do nowadays, in the past American soap operas, both on television and on the radio, had in their titles the name of a lone female heroine: *Our Gal Sunday*, *Valiant Lady* (1953-1957), *Portia Faces Life* (1954-1955); *Miss Susan* (1951). The Hummerts, pioneers of the genre, were strongly attached to the "dominant heroine archetype" later used by other soaps. In *Buffy* the archetype resists, but it gets filled with new content.

(77) Many elements, however, continue to distinguish it, and not only budgetary ones or the fact that it is recorded on film and not on tape, like soaps. *Sunset Beach* tried to do something different and to jump to film, to try a more modern and original look, more similar to prime time series, but it didn't work out and it went back to the good old way. Continuing dramas, despite alternatives, build the flux of images aiming to create what is called a "realist illusion". The intellectual construction is hidden, or better yet, tries to conceal itself to better create the illusion of reality. In *Buffy* the poesis of the fiction is, on the contrary, visible, nor does it strive not to be.

(77) The use of objects, a symbol, but also a strong narrative element in several soap contexts – picked up again and again in the storyline, by the directions and from an emotional point of view - isn't present in *Buffy*. The computer disk containing the instruction to give Angel back his soul, fallen between desks, is shot by the camera and forgotten until necessary. This would have never happened on a soap where they would have gone back to it again and again, with gusto. The only times something like that happens on a soap is when the object in question signifies the beginning of a new story, but it's rare. The object that in *Buffy* was mostly used in accordance to soap fashion is the ring Angel gives to her. It's the only instance that I recall.

(78) Eavesdropping is a traditional device employed by daytime dramas. It allows characters to discover secrets they shouldn't have known. In *Buffy*, it's not in this way that Dawn discovers she's the key. Moreover, in this instance they even play a trick on the viewer, letting us believe for a moment that Dawn will discover everything by overhearing a conversation, but in the end it doesn't happen that way. She does it in a completely different manner (by reading a journal). Here *Buffy's* writers, with this move, have fun showing that they well know the eavesdropping road, but that they consciously decided not to take it. They explicitly give us a red herring and then surprise us, but they let us know at the same time that they master the genres and they use them as they wish, not necessarily as we would expect them to do.

(79) Another $\tau\pi\omicron\varsigma$ (topos) is the characters who remain locked against their wishes in a room, without any way out. Thus, they are forced to come to know each other and

confront each other, and to bond on a human and personal level. *Buffy* used this expedient in "Where Wild Things are" (4018) when Buffy and Riley remain locked in a room and in "Older and Far Away" (6014), when Dawn expresses the wish that everybody should not leave, but stay home with her. Both cases were built in a far different way than it would have been done on soaps, however. The personal relationship became secondary to their frustrated attempts to get out of that situation.

(80) Social issues are often part of daytime texture--Rape, for instance, to indicate an issue on which daytime literature is abundant and carefully crafted. Every show has its fair share. So, reading *Buffy* as a soap, with the direction it was taking, viewers aware of the conventions could see Spike's attempted rape of *Buffy* coming (Seeing Red, 6019) long before it really happened. Once in the soap frame of mind, it was the most predictable thing to expect. Similarly to be expected was Spike and Anya's having sex and all of the others finding out by watching them in the act – "Entropy" (6018) (a classic). Making it just an attempted rape though, *Buffy* avoids directly facing the issue the way soaps are forced to do. Because of the genre style chosen to tell this tale, *Buffy* would have just the same needed to face the issue directly, if it had taken the road of going ahead with the act. *Buffy* has its own peculiar *modus operandi*, when it comes to issues. The allegories it proposes are crafted so that their reading conveys a point of view on social issues. Take "Hush" (4010) as an example. I have been somewhat disappointed – in an episode that I otherwise think perfect - by the fact that no-one in Sunnydale appeared to be deaf, and therefore un-affected by a situation that was so shocking for all others. It could have been just a hint, a passer-by among others, in the news, who signed, while the Scooby Gang couldn't get each other's gestures straight. On an episode so centered in the theme of communication, it would have been a powerful message. I still believe it should have been there, but somehow I wonder if it was a conscious decision to not be too explicit about a topic, not to make it become an "issue". [Editors' note: Joss Whedon has vowed to eschew heavy-handed treatment of social issues; see Rhonda V. Wilcox, "'There Will Never Be a "Very Special" *Buffy*.'"]

CONCLUSION: DEEPENING THE COMPREHENSION

(82) Joss Whedon and his pool of writers do use soap opera. They grasp, beyond the storylines, the identifying elements, the narrative modes, the structure, the constants that make a genre such, beyond experimentation, tangential choices, the poetics of each author. And using these elements, they make them their own. They do not dodge or avoid choosing the puzzle pieces only because they end up using them in a different context. They recognize the compound the bricks are made of, even when the house they are building - the mental construction they want to build - is different. And they blend them, they integrate them, making them fit in a structure that is different. They are eclectic architects who don't feel constrained in a module. Intimately knowing the materials at their disposal, they use them where they can be useful, even when it has probably never been done before. Thus they reinvent the blueprint and they make it come alive with structures that get themselves renewed in contact with new elements. If we try to understand *Buffy's* aesthetics we have to come to terms with remnants of soap-taste that flavour and colour the narration and that can't be ignored. They give shadows and layers and depth to everything that happens.

(83) Soaps have their own language, a visual and narrative jargon that, unless you are among the initiated, is often hard to appreciate. The surface of the events is understood

easily, but to make viewing a meaningful experience, that surface comprehension is not enough. Soap operas often put people off at first because they are "opaque": apparently easily readable, in truth not instantly read. The required *forma mentis* allows us to discover far more striking points of contact than an un-educated look would suspect. Therefore, the similarities shouldn't be put aside. Soap language is a huge building element to comprehend and decode *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* that can't be ignored in any epistemological search that tries to understand it in its whole complexity. [69]

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- [5] Springer, Matt. "Last Call." *Buffy the Vampire Slayer Official Magazine*, Summer 99, Volume 2, Number 3: p. 22
- [6] Whedon often uses the term "soap opera" in some of his interviews on the DVDs that collect *Buffy's* seasons, for example.
- [7] Agnes Nixon well conveys the attitude soaps are faced with when, desolated, she observes "soap opera became the clichéd denigration of anything ". Her resolution was to change that: "Well, is there anything we can do to make them pay attention?". Her determination was frustrated by the realization that no matter what she did, it still wasn't enough. This in: "On the genre". *Worlds without end: The art and history of the soap opera / the Museum of Television and Radio*. Ed. Robert Morton. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Incorporated, 1997: p. 74.
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- [9] This was one of the comments collected on Little Willow's site. It's dated Fri Jul 16 02:03:39 1999. (http://members.tripod.com/~Little_Willow/)
- [10] Lynn Leahy, *Soap Opera Digest* editor-in-chief, was asked to choose the characters she thought were the best 12 daytime had through the years. This is what she said about

Anna Devane, who was among the ones she selected: " A grown-up – how refreshing! Smart and sophisticated, self sufficient Anna Devane never needed a man to take care of her. Anna was a woman in charge of her life, too confident to settle for less than she deserved. Not that she'd send a man packing at the first sign he wasn't perfect. Anna had made mistakes too and paid for them. She didn't demand perfection, just honesty. But as forthright as she was, Anna came to Port Charles as a woman of mystery and never lost her enigmatic edge." In: Waggett, Gerald J. *The Soap Opera Book of lists*. New York: HarperPaperbacks, 1996: p.156

[11] Wilcox and Lavery (*supra*) tackle this issue, among others.

[12] *Buffy the Vampire Slayer: The Watcher's Guide - Volume 2*. Ed. Nancy Holder with Jeff Mariotte and Maryelizabeth Hart. New York: Pocket Books, 2000: p.327

[13] Sarah Michelle Gellar recently appeared on the cover of *Soap Opera Digest* (September 24, 2002) for its "50 Superstars who started on Soaps" issue. While she was on the show, her not getting along with Susan Lucci was very much publicized. And gossip on their jealousy and rivalry were rampant. The infamous feud makes people talk to this day (April 2003): just check <http://www.soaptownusa.com/> message board for proof.

[14] In *Soap Opera Update*, April 16, 1996 p.72, Emma Caulfield (Anya) says she is, like Whedon, a hopeless *General Hospital* fan, which she has watched since she was nine or ten. At that time, at least, she was very much into Sonny and Brenda, Robin Scorpio and the heartbreaking death of Stone. She also kept tabs on *The Young and the Restless*, *Days of our lives* and *As the World Turns*.

In *Soap Opera Digest*, March 17, 1998 p.63, Anthony Stewart Head declares: "I used to get SANTA BARBARA in England. I adored Robin Wright [Penn, ex-Kelly]. I occasionally watch SUNSET BEACH or YOUNG AND RESTLESS in my trailer. Then, there's some woman with very odd teeth [DAYS OF OUR LIVES's Susan]. What's going on with her?".

[15] The word I really wanted to use here, instead of "group of series" was "formanti". ("Formants" we could probably say). Since it's a neologism only used by Italian comparative jurists though, hardly even found on Italian dictionaries themselves, I opted not to use it. Even if the concept is less rich. In a nutshell, we can think of several sets interacting in the legal system: the scholars, the judges, the legislators, customs... Each of these is a "formant". (Should someone be interested, this text could be checked: Sacco, Rodolfo. "Introduzione al diritto comparato". Torino: Giappichelli Editore, 1998). I truly believe we could trace, in parallel, TV "formants": Tv critics/scholars/reviewers, authors, networks, the public... They interact. These "formants", these "lobbies", at times with different ideas, compete. The richer the one, the more challenged the others. The dynamics that get established inside a Country have particular, individual, unrepeatable histories, which are heavy from the point of view of the cultural legacy they hold. They enter in the cultural DNA of a society. But that's not all: within genres and within the programs themselves, they have all an autonomous development – simply think of the critics-public relationship, or at the critics-authors one, that's intense in both the daytime and prime-time communities, with partially different characteristics. Some "formants" are a true pull for a show, they can support or boycott it, attribute values and meanings to it. Crypto-formants may be traced: soaps often being a "silent" influence, an influence hardly admitted proudly that is (a shame, in my opinion), may be ascribed to this category. *Buffy* and the "formants" having a dialogue with it, and how they interact, are very interesting pieces of studying, for sure.

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- [17] PC arcs have been so far: Fate (12/4/2000 – 02/02/2001); Time in a bottle (03/05/2001 – 06/01/2001); Tainted Love (06/04/2001-08/31/2001); Tempted (09/03/2001-11/29/2001); Miracles Happen (12/02/2001-12/31/2001); Secrets (01/02/2002-03/29/2002); Superstition (04/01/2002-06/28/2002); Torn (07/01/2002-09/27/2002); Naked Eyes (09/30/2002-12/30/2002); Surrender (12/30/2002-04/01/2003); Desire (04/02/03 – 07/02/03); The Gift (07/03/03 - ...)
For more on the single arcs go to: <http://www.portcharlesexplosion.com/>
- [18] Hoke-Kahwaty, Donna. "Is your favorite prime-time show a soap?" *Soap Opera Digest*, Dec 11, 1990: 24-29. The quote is taken from p.28
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- [21] Bernstein, Abbie. "Fight Club: Supervising the slaying". *Buffy the Vampire Slayer Magazine*. Vol. 1. Issue 33, May 2002: p. 18-19
- [22] *Soap Opera Digest*, Aug 1, 1995
- [23] Rice, Lynette. "Bursting Bubbles – Campy vs. classic: Two soap opera styles duke it out for daytime ratings supremacy". <http://www.ew.com/ew/report> , 02 DEC 02
- [24] Wagget, Gerard J. "Another World". *The Soap Opera Encyclopedia*. New York: HarperPaperbacks, 1997. p. 38
- [25] *Soap Opera Digest*, March 26, 2002, p.44
- [26] Timmy could be considered a sort of modern day Pinocchio. In the end *Passions* lets Timmy truly die, following the untimely demise of his portrayer, Josh Ryan Evans, who was only 20. The actor passed away the same day his character died on screen. He had already pre-taped other scenes, in which Timmy was supposed to appear in heaven looking down to Charity, who got his heart in a transplant. The executives, though, decided to edit them out, out of respect toward him.
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- [28] "Port Charles: Looking out for a Hero". *Soap Opera Digest*, November 6, 2001. The article is in the "Thumbs Up! And Down!" section of the magazine. The critique is even juxtaposed to one on *Buffy's* "The Gift".
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- [58] Even if I believe that in soaps there's neither one of the two, rather what we could call a "couple-archal" mentality.
- [59] "'I believe that [daytime] serial drama is all about 'When will they kiss?'" says Leah Laiman. "Give me romance. I don't care about anything else. Action/adventure only works as a backdrop for 'Will they kiss?' If that's absent, it's not interesting." (*infra sub #60*). Though a little extreme, expressed this way, it well conveys the importance of love stories for daytime. And I think putting Spike and Buffy's kiss at the end of "Once more, with feeling" (6007) was a huge statement. They wanted us to wait for it till the last possible chance. They leave us craving for more, asking "What now?".
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Laura Diehl

Why Drusilla's More Interesting than Buffy

Mother's Milk is Red Today.

"Conversations with Dead People"

(1) The Buffyverse makes rich and fascinating use of the literary and scientific histories of Gothic female sexuality, particularly the discursive history of female sexuality as vampiric. While Buffy and other human characters at times seem to reinforce a conservative sexual morality (both Buffy and Cordelia are serially traumatized by their sexual decisions), Drusilla and Darla's sexual power and disruptiveness become attractive alternatives for those viewers who find Buffy's sexual trauma tiresome. In her groundbreaking essay on camp and the queer vampire, Sue-Ellen Case argues that the "queer . . . unlike the polite gay and lesbian, revels in the discourse of the loathsome, the outcast . . . the queer is the taboo-breaker, the monstrous, the uncanny" (383). As Gina Wisker and others have argued, Buffy and Angel are not as subversive in their use of the vampire figure. But vampires like Drusilla and Darla, with their pop-punk Gothic aesthetics, are fascinating character studies; they are obvious pastiches of bizarre literary and historical constructions that enable the viewers to relish their excesses as sources of transgression and disruption, and to dis-identify with the human characters who are disciplined according to a sexual morality. We are allowed—even encouraged—to identify with the female vampires as alternatives to the sometimes puzzling judgments made by Buffy and Angel's treatment of human female sexuality.

(2) Monsters can function to undermine and to break up patterns of identification and desire, exceeding traditionally misogynist discourses or bringing them to a crisis. Subversive feminist and queer rearticulations of monsters highlight the social and psychic violence under which bodies are organized, in effect subverting and recirculating discourses that inscribe transgressive sexualities as monstrous. Eschewing the good, the pure, and the beautiful (i.e. romantic love), feminist and queer rearticulations of the monstrous embrace an anti-aesthetic of subversive excess, using the abject and the grotesque to undermine realism and romantic love. Contemporary vampire fiction, for example, embraces the subversive excesses of the gamut of transgressive sexualities inherent in the figure of the vampire. Rejecting enlightenment configurations of the subject (organically sufficient, coherent, autonomous and unique), the posthuman embraces the appeal of the abject and the monstrous, of pre-symbolic, revolting bodies. The posthuman recognizes the impurity of every available source of self; there is no retrievable authentic self. Because there is no "outside" position from which to critique ideology and representation, however, radical feminist and queer writers of genre fiction

parodically immerse readers in traditional discursive histories of female sexuality in order to break up oppressive patterns and narratives of identification and identity, subjectivity and desire. Identity then becomes overwhelmed by impure, excessive discourses; it becomes a site of revolt and contestation.

(3) Postmodern, feminist and queer writers use monsters to embrace the self as a purely material, textual and intertextual identity, foregrounding the gap between signifier and signified, rejecting origins and depth models of interiority. Monsters such as Drusilla and Darla hold discourse at a distance, turning misogynist narratives into excessive performances that destabilize, disempower and recirculate their meanings. They embody vectors of oppressive constructions of "Woman" and female sexuality, but by foregrounding them as sets of embodied texts we can critique the mortification of women that incited these discourses in the first place. Drusilla and Darla are corrupt texts, hypersimulations of discourses of woman as sexed monster that creatively and affirmatively reduce the subject to a set of discourses that, by re-circulating their meanings, reject the oppressive structures of subjectivation that incited their initial ideological project. The feminist and queer figures that result disrupt patterns of identification (radical monsters don't trick women into femininity or models of morality) and desire—they are "functional dysfunctions" (Halberstam and Livingston 14)¹ that disrupt structured subjects and sexualities. Drusilla and Darla are delicious train wrecks.

Discourses of Degeneration: Women, Vampires and Sex

(4) The Buffy and Angel creators draw upon a rich pool of mythological, religious and sexology discourses in their writing of gothic female sexuality. As palimpsests of society's dreads and obsessions, monsters, especially vampires, can mean anything. The female vampire has functioned in particularly threatening and fascinating ways over the last two centuries. Descriptions of female vampires in literature (by men) include almost verbatim characteristics found in criminal anthropology and sexology discourses from the nineteenth- and twentieth-centuries. The female vampire in these texts is man's sexual nightmare and sexual obsession. Medical and criminology discourses, and older religious and folkloric discourses, explicitly took on vampiric terminology and imagery, reflecting a primal fear and loathing of the sexual instinct in women. In a world where the "ideal" woman as sex object is one with a big mouth and no teeth, the female vampire is an über-threat in a myriad of ways.

(5) Female monstrosity in these discourses is always attached to sexuality. The female vampire (especially the queer vampire) functions as a repository of patriarchal anxieties over female strength and sexuality. She is the aggressively phallic, castrating mother; her mouth is the devouring maw of female sexuality, a nightmarish disturbance, as Christopher Craft argues (1984), of traditional gender characteristics [(169) In "Dirty Girls," Caleb—the murderous, misogynist voice condemning all women as Biblical abomination and Whores of Babylon—echoes these centuries-old anxieties over female sexuality. Before he guts Shannon in his truck, he tells her: "You were born dirty, born without a soul. Born with that gaping maw wants to open up, suck out a man's marrow"]. The vampire's phallic, oral vagina dentata make her a literal man-eater: she engulfs, consumes, absorbs men. All the clichés of women's sexual insatiability and omnivorousness are played out in the female vampire. The hypnotic aggression of the female vampire, her bottomless pit of sexuality, and her predatory siphoning off of masculine (transcendent) energies, are usually neutralized in order for the happy dance

of masculine bourgeois domination to continue.

(6) Folkloric, scientific, criminology and sexology discourses allied themselves during the Victorian period and pathologized female sexuality, relegating it to zones of sickness, madness and death. The medical and criminal literature explicitly yokes female sexuality and vampiric monstrosity. These texts had much to do with the male literary imagination and its writing of monstrous female sexuality. In *The Female Offender* (1893), Caesar Lombroso writes that the active enjoyment of the sexual impulse awakens an inherent criminal instinct in woman. She “becomes excessively erotic [and] weak in maternal feeling...[she] dominates weaker beings sometimes by suggestion, at others by muscular force” (187). Many of these texts equate overindulgence of sexuality in women (including masturbation) with pointed features, sharp teeth, a paleness of the skin, marked anemic constitutions, and erotic languorousness. In his book *Woman: A Treatise on the Normal and Pathological Emotions of Feminine Love* (1904), Bernard Talmey claims that the frequent exercise of the act of copulation in women leads directly to “anemia, malnutrition, asthenia of the muscles and nerves, and mental exhaustion” and elsewhere, paleness and melancholia (79). The “typical” female criminal in these texts has a ferocious physiognomy, enormous lower jaws, receding forehead, forehead bumps, and “gigantic canine teeth” and “gigantic incisors” (Lombroso 90).² The overly sexed woman has an invincible tendency to masturbation, the signs of which (or effects of) are a livid pallor, loss of appetite, nymphomania, hysteria, even night sleeplessness and photophobia (!), and of course death. Again, the cultural demonization of sexed women is explicitly associated with vampirism. Female sexuality is seen as a self-polluting sapping of the vital reproductive functions of woman, a criminal misdirection of her reproductive duties. Sexual excess in a woman is a wasteland of sterility, a criminal instinct that leads to the decline of the race.

(7) These male endeavors embody a hermeneutic quest for degeneracy—they are detectives of degeneration, and their goal is the rooting out of sick, diseased, atavistic bodies. They are the Van Helsing of the medical world. After all, Van Helsing is undoubtedly more important as a doctor (a hematologist, which so many vampire hunters are) than as a Catholic. Featured in the medical detection novel par excellence—*Dracula*—Van Helsing and his Crew of Light are armed with the signs or symptoms of the atavistic, sexed female body. Here, (and in *Carmilla* as well) vampirism—or female desire—is the disease that needs to be detected, diagnosed and cured.

Bloody Women

(8) As the most “important” biological moments in a woman’s life are marked by blood sacrifice (defloration, childbirth), Victorian medical men could thus proclaim woman’s body as a chronic “theatre of bloody manifestations” (Ellis, “Auto-Erotism” 290). Because of women’s periodic blood loss, so it goes, they are innately anemic; their “hunger for seminal substance” is a “bestial bloodlust” precipitated by this periodic blood loss (Dijkstra 334). Monstrous women, then, renourish themselves on the seminal substances and blood of men and children. Aligning them with animals, these discourses claim women are feral and vital during their blood loss, subjecting them, as Bram Dijkstra writes (1986), “to the reproductive function and its attendant sexual cravings” (334). In *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1886), Krafft-Ebing argues “[I]n women the sexual inclination is post-menstrually increased. At this period, especially in neuropathic woman, the excitement may reach a pathological degree” (48). Women supposedly experience a

heightened sexual interest during menstruation; their loss of blood makes their hunger for men more precipitate. Erotic hallucinations and the climax of sexual feelings, Havelock Ellis argues (1899), are more likely to appear just before, during and after a woman's monthly period ("Phenomena of Sexual Periodicity" 101). Ellis refers to specialists who advise women to have sexual intercourse just after or even during menstruation to alleviate their painful periods of "heat" (104). To begin his discussion of the sexual periodicity of women, Ellis equates menstruation with estrus: "We may now regard as purely academic the discussion formerly carried on as to whether menstruation is to be regarded as analogous to heat in female animals" (97). Women's hunger for seminal substance precipitated by this periodic "wounding" renders them both metaphorically and literally vampiric. Female desire becomes an appetite that "consumes" men.

The Hysteric as Vampire

A hysterical girl is a vampire who sucks the blood of the healthy people about her.

Oliver Wendell Holmes

(9) Women's minds, doctors believed, had to be protected from their rebellious, unruly and revolting bodies. Menstruating women were impressionable, suggestible, and diminished—they were hysterical. Women's emotional waxings and wanings (medical men had a penchant for linking women's reproductive cycle to lunar mythologies, which would more logically tie women to werewolves) were generally believed to be tied to their reproductive cycles, making them susceptible to 'moral madnesses' of various kinds, the most frequent being hysteria. Medical misogynists were apparently enlightened as to the sexual etiology of hysteria early on in the nineteenth-century—and they ran with it. However, as Carol Smith-Rosenburg argues (1985), hysterical women were hypertrophied versions of the Victorian icon of femininity—sick, weak, passive and anemic. But at the same time, they often opted out of traditional roles for women, refusing to fulfill their "wifely" or maternal duties, often turning overtly hostile and aggressive (198, 215).

(10) To the male medical imagination, the liminality of the hysteric thwarted her full membership in the reality of the here and now; she was particularly susceptible to semi-conscious states—to mesmerism, hypnosis and somnambulism. The extraordinary emotionalism and excessive excitability of the hysteric made her impressionable and prone to suggestion and hypnotic states (the hysterical disposition was also believed susceptible to imagining itself in the presence of the mystical or the supernatural). The infamous Dr. Charcot believed that "only morbid personalities of hysterical temperament were susceptible to hypnosis" (Leatherdale 152). In light of these scientific observations, Lucy's tendency to sleepwalk and Mina's susceptibility to hypnosis in *Dracula* labels them hysterical. Lucy sleepwalks at least three times in the novel, Van Helsing puts Mina under hypnosis no less than five times (men in *Dracula* get a sexual thrill from paralyzing and immobilizing women).

(11) The hysterical woman, Charles Lockwood wrote in 1895, was "at the mercy" of a

range of “evil and unrestrained passions, appetites and morbid thoughts and impulses” (qtd. in Smith-Rosenburg 205). Most frequently appearing with the onset of menstruation, hysteria was yoked to both the loss of blood and the onset of sexual awakening/maturation. A woman’s “compromised” immune system during this time made her prey to sicknesses and perversions of all kinds, namely sexuality. Hysterical women want to fuck. And the number one symptom of hysteria was anemia, the number one cure, re-sanguination.

(12) The hysteric is an uncanny figure, marked by her precarious straddling of the border between life and death. She is the vampire. Both are clearly liminal figures, straddling life and death, acting out their own irrelevance. While the *Bride of Corinth* in Goethe’s poem by that name (1797) formed the template for the hysterical woman as vampire, many others followed suit, for instance, *Oneiza* in Robert Southey’s ballad “*thalaba the Destroyer*” (1797), *Lucy* in Stoker’s *Dracula*, and several more hysterical female vampires from short stories in the early twentieth-century.³ In many vampire-themed poems and prose works, women come back from the grave to consummate their relationships with their lovers. In these texts, women die upon their betrothal, or, when they’re sexually ripe. Because they have been cheated out of sexual knowledge, female sexuality in these texts figures as the uncanny—that repressed thing that always returns. It wants compensation. The female vampire/hysteric is an insatiable erotomaniac whose bottomless desires extend even beyond the grave. She is a cheated bride, a figure who is more or less dead anyway, literally in a “no-man’s land” between her father’s home and her husband’s. She is sex-starved, and her desires will always return to haunt and horrify men.⁴

(13) Anemia, photophobia (another supposed symptom or effect of hysteria), periodic blood loss, deprivation of the pleasures of love, griefs connected with unfulfilled sexual promises—the female hysteric as vampire literalizes her particular relationship to death in response to her cultural and political irrelevance. In Elisabeth Bronfen’s discussion of the “dead bride as revenant” (xiii) in her encyclopedic book *Over her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic* (1992), she discusses Lacan’s work on the hysteric: because the hysteric’s “unconscious desire motivates her to remain lacking, because it tells her that she is a no-body, her life emerges as an impossible desire to be by not being, always spent in proximity to loss, symptomatisation and annihilation” (qtd. in Bronfen 289). “Beyond hysterization,” Zizek writes, “is the death drive at its purest” (qtd. in Bronfen 278).

The Hysteric as Vampire: Drusilla

(14) In light of these discourses and others I will subsequently discuss, the representation of Drusilla in *Buffy* is inspired. Her character consistently rehearses, relishes and subverts these discourses. Sure, as others have noted, Drusilla (a mixture of *Dracula* and *Carmilla*?) is Nancy to Spike’s Sid (complete with bruised, black and blue track-marked looking arms), but this is just one of the allusions inscribed in her character. Readings of monsters proliferate rather than cohere into a whole. Drusilla is a perfect example. She is a vampire, a witch, a siren and a mesmerist. She reads Tarot cards (“*What’s My Line? Part I*”), she reads minds (as she does with Giles in “*Becoming, Part 2*”), and her hypnotic aggression (not susceptibility) can bring people under her power—she mesmerizes both Giles and Kendra, killing the latter. She is Lilith (mother of

all vampires) and Lucy, both vengeful, monstrously sexed “women in white” who stalk and kill the neighborhood children (more of this below). She is a nun and Gothic heroine/victim, stalked, “raped,” and murdered by the ruthlessly sadistic, Sadean protagonist Angelus who slaughters her family and sires her on the day she takes holy orders (a “betrothal” of a different sort), becoming both her father and her lover (he even poses as a priest in “Becoming, Part I,” typical of the Gothic male villain). She is virginal and innocent, exactly the ingénue victim the Sadean villain delights in ravishing and murdering. She is also the mythological Cassandra, cursed by second-sight, doubly cursed (and driven mad) by the fact that no one will believe her visions. In “Becoming, Part I,” Drusilla confesses to the “priest” Angelus. She tells of a vision she had of men dying in the mine, which of course came true: ‘this morning...they had a cave-in. Two men died. Me Mum says I’m cursed. My seeing things is an affront to the Lord. That only He’s supposed to see anything before it happens. But I don’t mean to Father, I swear! I try to be pure in his sight. I don’t want to be an evil thing.’ Drusilla has prophetic powers that would have made her a ‘spawn of Satan” in the eyes of the church. Significantly, folkloric evidence has it that those cursed by their parents or the church (those excommunicated) became vampires. Drusilla would have been deemed a “devil child” by the church (as Angelus calls her), but even in the diegesis of the Buffyverse, her prophetic powers are often written off as the mad gibberish of an hysterical woman (except by Spike and Angelus).

(15) When Drusilla first makes her appearance on Buffy she is the incarnation of a consumptive tubercular woman, reminiscent of the Victorian woman in white, a divinely docile, virginal, anemic child-bride.⁵ Her body is very thin, her arms black and blue. In the first half of the second season in Buffy, Drusilla always appears in a floor length, white baby doll dress, and she surrounds herself with children’s dolls, a canopy bed, and a caged, dead pet bird. She is at various times called “pet,” “ducks,” “kitten,” “baby” and “princess.” Drusilla is a parody of the fetishized child-woman of Victorian iconography and scientific discourse. Caesar Lombroso was one of many male scientists who fetishized a perceived innate childishness, frivolousness and shortsightedness in women. However, he argued that women’s intellectual kinship with children could pose dangers:

women have many traits in common with children; that their moral sense is deficient; that they are revengeful, jealous, inclined to vengeance of a refined cruelty. In ordinary cases these defects are neutralised by piety, maternity, want of passion, sexual coldness, by weakness and an undeveloped intelligence...[but] when piety and maternal sentiments are wanting, and in their place are strong passions and intensely erotic tendencies, much muscular strength and a superior intelligence for the conception and execution of evil, it is clear that the innocuous semi-criminal present in the normal woman must be transformed into a born criminal more terrible than any man. (151)

In very frank terms, Lombroso argues that motherhood is the institutional civilizing of women—childish defects are “neutralized” by maternity. If women do not constrain their sexuality to marriage and maternity—the central cultural uses of their bodies—they are

marked by deviancy and an evolutionary backslide (a primitive “childishness”). Motherhood is the dam holding back women’s innate animality and bestial passions, and any behavior that vitiates reproduction or disaggregates female sexuality from procreation could result in intellectual infirmities and moral sicknesses. Sexed women are decidedly bad mothers, and their perversities are contagious (especially with the female vampire). And as we will see below, Drusilla is anything but a good mother, and she is no ingénue.

(16) Meanwhile, Drusilla is closer to animals and to children than to men on the evolutionary stage—she growls like the former when sexually ravenous, and she eats the latter. Drusilla’s character rehearses and perverts all of these discourses. For yes, she is the infantilized, fetishized Victorian child-woman, but there is a subterranean menace lurking beneath the surface of these playful roles. Drusilla as vampire represents the “inherent” bestiality of the female sexual instinct. At various times throughout *Buffy and Angel*, she growls, snarls, barks and purrs when sexually aroused. For instance, in “I Only Have Eyes For You,” she growls in pleasure when Angelus makes Spike sexually jealous, and then she digs a hole in the dirt: “maybe I’ll sleep underground, dig myself a little burrow...I’ll sleep naked, like the animals do,” she tells Spike and Angelus. And even more delicious is Drusilla’s “taste” for children, which mocks misogynist discourses that oppressively tie women to motherhood. Both she and Lucy are demonic mother parodies, women in white who stalk the neighborhood at night. Perhaps my favorite line from the *Buffy* oeuvre is when Dru, wearing her white baby doll dress, slowly approaches a little boy on the playground and sings a song: “my mummy used to sing me to sleep at night,” she tells the boy and then sings: “Run and catch / the lamb is caught in the blackberry patch.” She had the sweetest voice. What will your mummy sing, when they find your body?” (“Lie to Me”). Mother’s milk is indeed red today.

(17) Another similarly perverse moment occurs in “I Only Have Eyes For You.” We see Angelus in the courtyard scrubbing his naked torso with water, trying to get the taste of Buffy off of him (a prime example of how the show fetishizes the male body just as much as the female body—the camera lovingly lingers on his buff torso—he’s a walking phallus). “I need a real vile kill before sunup to wipe this crap out of my system,” Angelus tells Spike and Drusilla. Dru snarls and responds: “Of course. We’ll find you a nice toddler.” Female vampires mock repressive discourses that bind women’s sexuality to reproduction and motherhood. A mocking inversion of the mythological moon goddess Diana, the virgin and mother deity, a “goddess of fertility and “guardian of children” (Dijkstra 123), the female vampire inverts all of these associations (even though she too is a ‘moon goddesses”). She is anything but virginal, and she enjoys the occasional toddler for dinner. In Drusilla’s first scene, she mocks the maternal life-giving “essence” of Woman. “Do you like daisies?” Dru asks of the Anointed One, “I plant them, but they always die. Everything I put in the ground withers and dies” (“school Hard”). The female vampire as ‘mother Earth’ is voraciously hungry and threatening. Her “warm,” “receiving womb” (woman as personification of a passive and nurturing nature that is plowed and seeded, see Dijkstra, 83, 87) gives birth only to death and destruction, or, to her own desires, a fascinating (if clichéd) inversion of the fetishization of women’s “life-giving” capacities. Vampires are never daughters, wives or mothers in the traditional sense, and this is a powerful imaginative possibility for many women.⁶

(18) The cult of invalidism, the pathologizing of female sexuality, and the hystericisation of rebellious women often resulted in madness for women, and in psychological, social

and literal death. Both society and Angelus drive Drusilla mad. In literature, two great climactic ends have been prescribed for women—madness and death. Death is woman's apotheosis. Drusilla is both mad and dead, yet she nevertheless rises and wreaks as much vengeance upon the symbolic order as she possibly can. Death and madness won't stop her. Her rage against Angelus (and a cruel society which has cursed her) is palpable during several different episodes. When Angel tells Dru to leave town with Spike, she visibly seethes: "Or you'll hurt me? No—no you can't. Not anymore" ("Lie to Me"). We again see this menacing rage against Angel in "What's My Line, Part I" in the bedroom torture scene, where Drusilla has Angel tied to her girlish little bed and tortures him with holy water. She tells Angel "You've been a very bad daddy," and smacks him across the face. While torturing him she sings the same song as on the playground (this is her playground!), and speaks of her mother and her favorite foods, asking him if he remembers her. She then starts talking about her whole family: "Of course you remember...They used to eat...cake and eggs and honey. Until you came and ripped their throats out." Drusilla's monstrousness is made not born; but she is no longer a victim but a literal hell raiser.

(19) Most interestingly, Drusilla is literally anemic when she first appears in Sunnydale. Like Lucy, she's in desperate need of a blood transfusion, and just as Lucy is infused with the blood of her four patriarchal father/lovers, metaphorically "having" them in a ménage a cinq, Drusilla gets a transfusion from her father/lover Angel. All of Sunnydale will be invited to her "coming out party." She is "born again" (she appears in reds and blacks throughout the rest of the season, into violent desire and a raging death/madness) from the blood of her sire, and like Lucy (when the transfusions don't "take") is ravishing in her monstrous power and sexuality. And both Spike and the fans (at least this one) are thrilled by the train wreck that is Drusilla (see "Crush" for Drusilla as literal train wreck).

(20) Drusilla is also the 'traditional' hysterical woman. As we've seen, the writers draw upon a long tradition of the hysterical woman as vampire in their writing of Drusilla. In her floor-length, white baby doll dress, with her canopy bed and with Miss Edith, Drusilla is childishly hyper-feminine and petulantly infantile, two classic descriptions of the hysterical woman (Smith-Rosenburg 215). Her language is impressionistic, incoherent, libidinal and nonlinear, implying that she is not the subject of her knowledge; she has no "language," only words. But of course this is not at all true—Dru is anything but shortsighted. Her real prophetic powers place her in the presence of the mystical or the supernatural (see paragraph 10 above). Typical of the female hysteric, Drusilla is also womb-driven, but in a shockingly perverse way. Her body is pure spectacle; it is excessive, undomesticated and sexually saturated. I love Juliet Landau's autoerotic snakelike dance where she makes a circular motion over her stomach. She does this when she's sexually excited, as if taking exquisite pleasure in the fact that she will consume men—sexually, and literally for food—and fulfill her dangerous desires (which will not result in a traditional child or birth). In the fifth season episode "Fool for Love," Drusilla comes upon Spike in an alley. She is going to "consume" him, and this is intensely pleasurable for her. She rubs her stomach, knowing she will satisfy her sexual hunger, yet her womb will remain barren. In these bizarre dances of sexual excitement she's taking satisfaction in her new creation. What is born is her son/lover who is at the same time "delivered" to death (womb=tomb). When Spike and Drusilla show up at his mother's house, she asks him who Drusilla is: "I'm the other that gave birth to your son" ("Lies My Parents told Me"), she responds. And while Spike explains to his mother

that he's changed, that he's no longer "bound to this mortal coil" but is a "child of the night," Drusilla is rubbing her stomach. This is a bizarre perversion of a multitude of origin narratives. Oedipus is gone and in its place are monstrous births.

The Prostitute as Vampire: Darla

(21) And this brings us to Darla, the matriarch of our little vampire family. While the reproductive health of Victorian society had to be monitored through women's bodies—the central vessel for the rooting and (re)production of cultural norms—women were also central culprits in the degeneration of society. While women in the home were the most important moral force in the country, women out of the home were prostitutes, vectors of disease, contagion and degeneration. Because civilization depended upon the containing of sex in marriage, civilization was threatened by the prostitute, especially the syphilitic prostitute. As scholars have noted, AIDS was not the first blood disease to find expression in a reactionary rhetoric of vampirism. As David Skal argues, the scourge of syphilis in the late nineteenth-century left its mark on Victorian literature and iconography in connection with vampirism, obsession with "bad blood" and perverse sexuality, and above all else, the "demonization of prostitutes" [(6) and consequently, most "unruly" sexed women]. The syphilitic prostitute as vampire (or vampirism as syphilitic virus) was just one rhetorical maneuver in a series of moral panics that scapegoated sexually or otherwise deviant behavior as the source of social and national decay.

(22) The Victorian world got its first taste of the prostitute as literal vampire in Theophile Gautier's *La Morte Amoureuse* (1836). Clarimonde is an evil courtesan vampire who carnally seduces a priest and is later killed by holy water. In most identifiable folkloric traditions, the prostitute was one of several marginalized, outsider figures who were potential vampires after death (along with the godless, suicides, witches, the excommunicated and those cursed by their families). Drawing upon folkloric and "scientific" discourses, the public furor over prostitution and the spread of syphilis coalesced around a rhetoric of female sexuality as vampiric and diseased. Both the vampire and the prostitute, after all, are predatory creatures of the night (Skal 163) who stalk their prey (even Lucy is a "nightwalker"). Both are fallen women and social outcasts. On her deathbed, The Master visits Darla disguised as a priest: "Are you prepared to renounce Satan and beg God his forgiveness?" he mockingly asks her. "God never did anything for me," she responds ("Darla"). Darla has clearly been a victim of sexual hypocrisy, as the show draws upon historical fact that prostitutes were routinely forced to emigrate to the colonies in the seventeenth-century (Darla is a prostitute in the Virginia Colony in 1609). The prostitute's supposed atavistic hunger for man's seminal energies came as no real shock; after all, Lombroso argues, prostitution is woman's "natural" crime: "the natural form of retrogression in women [is] prostitution and not crime. The primitive woman was impure rather than criminal. As a double exception, the criminal woman is consequently a monster" (152). The prototypical characteristics of degeneration in the prostitute are, according to Lombroso, hairiness, large jaws and cheekbones, and "anomalous teeth" (85). With the public rage over prostitution and its consequent cultural demonization of female sexuality, the sexual instinct in woman became both metaphorically and (supposedly) literally vampiric. The most common French term used for a prostitute in the nineteenth-century was a man-eater.

(23) In light of all this, it is certainly no coincidence that Darla is a syphilitic prostitute

when she's sired by The Master. The Buffyverse clearly draws upon historical sources here. Stoker himself probably died of tertiary syphilis in 1912, contracting the disease as a young man (probably from a prostitute). As critics have pointed out, Lucy's symptoms and death suggest the ravages of venereal disease (Senf 67), with her "ghastly, chalkily pale" face, the "bones of her face [standing] out prominently" (Stoker 158), and her white lips and gums which 'seemed to have shrunken back from the teeth, as we sometimes see in a corpse after a prolonged illness" (Stoker 165). In Stoker's subconscious Lucy is a disease, and she may infect pure men. Scholars have interpreted Dracula as an extended melodramatic meditation upon sick, diseased, sexed bodies. Angel plays with these discourses—Darla is dying of syphilis when Wolfram and Hart bring her back to life.

(24) When we first see Darla in the second season of Angel, she is also the classic succubus figure. While in folklore there is the male incubus, the female succubus is the preferred gender of this particular demon, so much so that she gives us the word "nightmare." The succubus is a sexually draining night demon who seduces young men in their sleep, lies heavily on their chests, and violates them, withdrawing their vital fluids. The succubus renders men impotent (they can no longer 'stand up," often seen drained and recumbent). According to Paul Barber (1988) the Slavic succubus, the Mora (cognate of Mare), assumes various shapes and visits men at night and tries to suffocate them. He quotes Jan Machal: "First she sends refreshing slumber to men and then, when they are asleep, she frightens them with terrible dreams, chokes them, and sucks their blood" (187). Having tasted the blood/semen of a man, she returns for nightly visits with him. The bottomless pit of woman's bloodlust and seminal cravings for man is thus the literal "night-mare."

(25) Angel has fun with this traditional folklore. Over a span of several episodes Darla drugs Angel and enters his dreams. After these nightly visits Angel is fatigued and drained, and he is sleeping constantly (see "First Impressions," "Untouched" and "Dear Boy"). Darla is draining him of both blood and semen in a series of episodes inspired as well by Ernest Jones' influential psychoanalytic reading of the vampire myth (1931). In the unconscious mind, Jones argues, blood, semen and milk are indistinguishable:

The explanation of these [vampiric] phantasies is surely not hard. A nightly visit from a beautiful or frightful being, who first exhausts the sleeper with passionate embraces, and then withdraws from him a vital fluid; all this can point only to a natural and common process, namely to nocturnal emissions accompanied with dreams of a more or less erotic nature. In the unconscious mind blood is commonly an equivalent for semen. (119)

Vampirism has everything to do with wet dreams and nocturnal emissions of all sorts. Darla penetrates and drains Angel, inducing a whole body softness/detumescence. He can no longer physically 'stand up." Darla threatens Angel's potency; his crime fighting abilities are severely hampered by the sexually draining embraces of a vampire succubus. 'mmm, I could just eat you up" Darla sexily whispers to a sleeping Angel ("First Impressions").

Buffy and Cordelia, or, 'sex is Bad'

(26) Before discussing the potent sexual transgressions of Darla and Drusilla, I will detour through the shows' treatment of female sexuality for some of the central human characters. The Buffyverse explores the minefield of female sexuality more than any other mainstream television show. Buffy grants a voice to and constructs a narrative of female subjectivity by foregrounding Buffy's psychic, social and sexual desires, her desires for alternative family and community, her desire for power in self-knowledge, and her desire for sexual fulfillment. Buffy is about female desire, and though simple, there is no overestimating the importance of this. Most mainstream media is concerned solely with male desire; women's desires remain absent or subsumed under the male 'story.' The second season Buffy episodes beginning with "Innocence" are gripping in their depiction of female sexuality as traumatic. This is the stunning impact of the show at its best. But eventually, don't we get tired of this trauma? After losing her virginity to Angel, she is terrorized by the monstrous Angelus, turning her loss of virginity into a stultifying traumatic event. Her intense desire for Angel can of course never be fulfilled because of his curse (and because the show would end). Buffy is used and abused despicably by Parker after their one night stand, an all too realistic event for many women (Spike likens it to the aftermath of her night with Angel, "In the Harsh Light of Day"). And the first season Angel episode "I Will Remember You," where Angel and Buffy have one intense day of sex after he is turned human—a day that is wiped out of existence and memory for all of the characters except for Angel—is frightening for many women in several ways. First, the episode is a typical—if not classic—masculinist narrative: the romantic, existentialist male hero who must carry the burden of knowledge, while the female must be protected from knowledge. Secondly, Angel frequently makes decisions for Buffy "in her best interests." This is a typical paternalistic power play, and Angel makes decisions for Buffy's "well-being and benefit" several times in his relationship with her (most poignantly in this episode, and in Buffy when he leaves her at the end of the third season "for her own good," and for his own show). At the beginning of the episode, Buffy complains to Angel that he makes decisions for her without her knowledge or consent (in the previous Buffy episode, Angel comes to Sunnydale and follows her around without her knowledge): "What is it, you can see me, but I can't see you?" she angrily asks him. The show criticizes Angel as a patriarchal voyeur, as a holder of the power of the gaze, but Buffy doesn't even have a chance to be angry in this instance; she has no memory of any of the events. And thirdly, the episode is a typical male fantasy: hot sex with a hot chick with absolutely no consequences. They have sex multiple times, but she doesn't remember because Angel has chosen to have her memories erased. When Angel tells her what he's done and that they will only have another minute with each other, she's beside herself with anger and frustration:

Buffy: (sobbing) "How am I supposed to go on with my life knowing what we had? What we could have had?"

Angel: "You won't. No one will know but me."

Buffy: "Everything we did."

Angel: "It never happened."

Buffy: "It did. It did. I know it did! I felt your heart beat! No. I'll never forget. I'll never forget. I'll never forget. I'll never forget!"

And the next second, her memories are gone. In an über-psychic rape, the show wipes out her memory of having had sex.

(27) Two other episodes in the first season of *Angel* deal specifically with female sexuality. 'she' features Jhiera, a runaway rebel from a deadly misogynist society that destroys female individuality and autonomy by clipping women's spines, rendering them docile automatons and slaves to male interests (an homage to *The Stepford Wives* and to Rider Haggard's famous sci-fi novel *She* which deals with similar themes, such as male dread of women's sexual potency, and female sexuality as a radiating force that kills). This is a powerful criticism of the male fear of female autonomy and sexuality, a fear that takes brutal form in societies that practice genital mutilation. But the episode treads some dangerous ground for women, rehearsing the misogynist story that women are sexuality; they do not have or own their desire, they are not the subjects of their desire; they are desire embodied, and they are always in heat. Here, women's sexuality is an uncontrollably deadly force that emanates from the female body. Cordelia asks Angel if Jhiera "Carrie[d]" him, a fitting reference to the De Palma film that exploits the theme of female sexuality as monstrous if unchecked and uncontrolled. The supernatural "curse" of female sexuality is a deadly force that appears with the onset of menstruation and maturation, similar to the women in Jhiera's dimension: "When the Ko matures the girls can't manage it," Jhiera tells Angel, "We come to your world in a fever"—and burn men to death. While the episode is powerfully radical in some ways, in others it is not: women's desires still kill.

(28) "Expecting," the Rosemary's Baby episode just before 'she,' features Cordelia. She has sex with Wilson and wakes up the next morning hugely pregnant with a demon child, even though she used protection: "Oh God, I'm being punished," Cordelia painfully tells Wesley and Angel. While we know ultimately this isn't true, it still doesn't lessen the overall impact of the episode: if a woman has sex with someone she's known for only a month or so (it isn't even a one-night stand; she's supposedly been dating him for several weeks), she will pay the price. At the end of the episode after Angel and Wesley save her, Cordelia cheekily tells them that she's learned several valuable lessons, one of which is that 'sex is bad.' Indeed it is, especially for women. Cordelia is sexually disciplined in this episode.⁷

(29) "Expecting" is interesting when considered in conjunction with the third season *Angel* episodes featuring the grotesquely swelled, pregnant Darla. These episodes are critiques of and antidotes to the sanitized view of birth and motherhood as embodying all that is good, natural and beautiful. Instead, the episodes foreground (along the lines of *Frankenstein*) that birth can be more violent than death and that reproduction can be a nightmare, a child in the womb an invading parasite that takes over your body and identity (Darla refers to the baby as her "little parasite"). Darla becomes the literal phallic and archaic mother; the latter, Barbara Creed argues, threatens 'to cannibalize, to take back the life forms to which she once gave birth' (83). She is reproduction as both

nurturing and destroying, an agent of procreation and destruction. Women become womb monsters—fascinatingly ambiguous, reproductive nightmares (see Creed, chapter 4). As a side note, both these characters meet unfortunate fates. Darla sacrifices herself so her baby can live (and Angel can have a son), a very depressing moment for me (especially since Connor ends up being so annoying), similar to Cordelia's fate: in the recent fifth season Angel episode "You're Welcome," Cordelia comes back to intercede for Angel's soul. She wakes up out of a coma because she has a vision that Angel is in trouble. "Don't make it hard, Angel," Cordelia tells him as she explains at the end why she's leaving, "I'm just on a different road, and this is my off-ramp. The Powers That Be owed me one, and I didn't waste it. I got my guy back on track." Only when she's satisfied that Angel is "back on track" and that his soul is 'safe," can she, safely, die. Here, Cordelia produces meaning for Angel; she doesn't produce her own meaning. Doesn't Cordelia deserve more than this?

(30) Finally, we come back to Buffy. While at times she seems to enjoy a healthy sexual relationship with Riley, it is more often unhealthy. In one episode their passion is driven by a malignant supernatural force that sexually traumatized innocent children ("Where the Wild Things Are"). In the episode "Who Are You?" Riley has sex with Buffy's body, but not with Buffy. He has sex with Faith in Buffy's body, before which she tells him he wouldn't have liked Faith: 'she's not proper and joyless, like a girl should be. She has a tendency to give in to her animal instincts"—a biting critique of the way young girls are raised to be passive and afraid of their sexuality. But frankly, Buffy is just not satisfied with Riley as a partner—he's too vanilla for her (after having sex in one episode she's not satisfied and has to go out and kill something), and he cannot shake his own feelings of masculine inadequacy. "You can't handle the fact that I'm stronger than you," Buffy yells at Riley after learning of his extracurricular activities with vampire whores ("Into the Woods").

(31) Buffy is certainly no virgin to Drusilla's whore (a patriarchal structure of seeing). In fact, she shares two (Angel and Spike) if not three (The Immortal) lovers with both Drusilla and Darla. While every fan of the show I know loved Buffy's sexual tete a tetes with Spike, the diegesis of the show seems to punish such erotic transgressions as dangerous and unhealthy for women. Buffy and Spike have raucous, hot S&M sex several times in season six. Buffy has fun with her sexuality in these episodes, exploring desire in all of its exciting, violent, role-playing, dominant/submissive possibilities. Such erotic transgressions are powerful antidotes to the totalizing ideology of romantic love which functions so oppressively for women.

(32) In Spike's song "Rest in Peace" in the musical episode, Spike sings to Buffy that she's scared and ashamed of what she feels. When Buffy turns to the door of his crypt to leave, Spike intercepts her and goes down on his knees: "You know / You've got a willing slave / And you just love to play the thought / That you might misbehave." Spike makes it clear that he is willing to be Buffy's sexual plaything. Buffy scoffs at his masochistic desires. In 'smashed," Spike tells her that he loves her: "You're in love with pain," she responds, "Admit it. You like me because you enjoy getting beat down." After their wild, intense night of sex, Buffy rehearses the shame and guilt attendant upon her sex with Spike: 'the only thing that's different is that I'm disgusted with myself. Last night was the most perverse, degrading experience of my life." Spike smiles fondly: "Yeah. Me too" ("Wrecked"). Whereas Riley is ashamed of his masculine inadequacy in the face of Buffy's desires, Spike revels in her domination of him. Phallic culture sexually dominates

women, but male masochism, by confusing traditionally gendered sexual roles, deflates the phallic economy of desire that underwrites gendered sacrifices. Male masochism repudiates phallic hegemony, dismantling the penis's prestige. Riley can't get it up enough because of Buffy's superior physical prowess; Spike gets it up because Buffy cracks her whip.

(33) In the episode "Gone" invisible Buffy goes to Spike's crypt, grabs his ass, slams him up against a wall, rips open his shirt, and has wild sex with him. She later goes down on Spike after he tells her to leave: "Hey, that's cheating," he remarks. "Dead Things" opens up with another round of sex, after which they have an actual conversation: "I was just trying to keep up with you," Spike tells Buffy, "the things you do, the way you make it hurt in all the wrong places. I've never been with such an animal." "I'm not an animal," Buffy responds. "You wanna see the bite marks?" he cattily asks. Buffy and Spike have clearly been into bondage: Buffy later dreams of Spike handcuffed in bed while she ravishes him, and Willow tells Buffy that it's okay she hasn't been around because she's been "all tied up," upon which Buffy blanches and looks guilty.

(34) The narrative progression of the sixth season seemingly leads to the "inevitable" result of such S&M erotics—literal violence (not comic book violence) in Spike's attempted rape of Buffy. This effectively shuts down the erotic possibilities for women explored in Buffy's earlier sexual intrigues with Spike, intrigues which the show and the fans take pleasure in, but apparently cannot condone for Buffy. Her playful sexual escapades come to pathologize her sense of self. She despises herself for her sexual transgressions, becoming a victim of her own desires.

(35) The dream sequence in "Dead Things" solidifies Buffy's intense guilt and horror at her own sexuality as the rapid cuts equate Buffy's pleasure in erotic domination with literal violence in the attempted rape and (actual) murder of Katrina. The sequence is worth reproducing in its entirety:

Creepy Voices: "What did you do, Buffy? What did you do?" []

Spike appears behind her, sliding under the covers, naked. []

Spike: 'shh, it's all right. It'll be our little secret.' []

Cut to: Spike's crypt. Shot of Buffy's head and bare shoulders, sitting up, eyes closed in pleasure, moving rhythmically. She opens her eyes and looks down.

Shot of Spike lying underneath her, on the bed, looking up at her with an expression of pleasure, with his hands stretched up above him. []

She runs her hands up Spike's arms and we see that his wrists are handcuffed together above his head. Buffy slides her hands up to just below where the cuffs are.

Shot of Buffy's face as she throws her head back in pleasure.

Flash-cut to Buffy in the forest throwing a punch.

Cut to Buffy in the forest straddling Katrina, holding Katrina's hands which are cuffed together. Buffy throws Katrina's hands down onto the ground above Katrina's head. Katrina lies underneath Buffy, looking up at her.

Buffy: "Do you trust me?"

Katrina suddenly smiles. Then she makes an expression of pleasure and moans, but in Buffy's voice.

Cut to Buffy and Spike in his crypt, lying on the floor under the rugs, moving fast, with Spike on top. Buffy moans in pleasure.

Cut to Buffy in the graveyard punching Katrina.

Cut to the head-shot of Buffy straddling Spike on his bed. She lifts her hand, holding a stake. Shot of Spike lying underneath her, his eyes closed as if sleeping,

Buffy thrusts down the stake.

Cut to the forest. Buffy is straddling Katrina who lies with her eyes closed and the stake protruding from her stomach.

Katrina's eyes pop open. But they are the bright blue color of Spike's eyes.8

"What did you do, Buffy? What did you do?" While Buffy is obviously not to blame for Katrina's murder, she is apparently guilty of sexual transgression, which in this scene is directly visually linked to rape and murder. Buffy feels she must be punished. (36) Buffy's entire sense of personhood becomes awash in guilt, shame and self-loathing. Her self-hatred climaxes in the truly nauseating scene (nauseating on purpose?) where she confesses her relationship with Spike to Tara. Tara has just told Buffy that there is nothing wrong with her: 'there has to be! This just can't be me, it isn't me. (starting to cry) Why do I feel like this? Why do I let Spike do those things to me?" Buffy pleads for someone to hate her for her deviancy, for someone to punish her erotic transgressions: "It's wrong. I'm wrong," she tells Tara. 'tell me that I'm wrong, please. Please don't forgive me, please! Please don't! Please don't forgive me!" Buffy sobbingly asks of Tara ("Dead Things"). Female sexuality and "alternative" sexual practices become horror. Erotic transgressions become suspicious, "unhealthy," "anti-social" (her sex with Spike alienates her from the Scoobies) and fraught with self-destruction and danger, guilt and shame. Erotic transgressions lead to psychological problems, and vice versa. This is in part why the show ends as it does—destroying the Hellmouth, and cutting down Caleb and the First, but also putting the question of romance to the side for Buffy, at least for

the near future. The series ends by arguing that romance must not be the key to women's sense of selfhood.

(37) When Drusilla is "cured" (a significant reversal of the traditional sense of "cure" for a sexed woman), on the other hand, she once again becomes a devouring, vengeful Sadean menace. She and Darla remain sexually threatening, unrepentant and dangerous (although Darla's dead again). Drusilla's monstrousness becomes a source of menacing power, but also pleasure, especially for those viewers who have tired of Buffy and Cordelia's sexual trauma and self-imposed shame.

(38) Maybe a woman must be two hundred or more years old before she can have a robust, unpathologized sexuality, or maybe she has to be monstrous or psychotic (psychosis is a rejection of the symbolic)? After all, Lacan argued that the subject is predicated upon and constituted by lack—it is the ontological structure motoring subjectivity. If you lack lack then you're either dead or psychotic. And Dru's both.

Drusilla and Darla, or, 'time For Another Pony Ride?'

(39) Vampires are usually thought of as sadistic, penetrating males, and their victims as supine penetrated females. Traditionally, the vampire is the patriarch par excellence: a charming masculine predator and penetrator of young, "ripe," unmarried or betrothed girls, a mesmerizing connoisseur of women's sexuality and blood, not at all unlike the medical men. The male vampire as patented by Polidori is a romantic Byronic hero: a brooding, mysterious, deeply intellectualized social outcast, a man cosmically burdened by his doubt, despair and loneliness. Clearly, Angel is modeled on this species of the male vampire that culminated in Anne Rice's male vampires and Langella's *Dracula* (a movie Angel mentions as a favorite). As I argue above, in the episode "I Will Remember You" Angel purchases his existential knowledge through suffering, and at the high cost of a woman's knowledge. Masculine creative energies never tire of men becoming the subjects of their own knowledge at the expense of a woman. Through her mortification comes his existential knowledge.

(40) While Ruthven, Langella, Louis, Lestat, Angel and others are typical Romantic existential heroes, the subjects of their knowledge and cosmically burdened by the weight of it (and literally learning life from death), female vampires tend to be pure sadistic orality; they are all body and materiality—preying, draining, biting, sucking. In poems like "the Bride of Corinth" and Baudelaire's "metamorphoses of the Vampire" (c. 1852), the female vampire is much closer to the folkloric vampire, an agency-less corpse driven by a deathly desire that extends beyond the grave. And while Carmilla is a crucial exception to this trend, she too shares in the fate of most female vampires before 1984: death at the hands of some kind of Puritan who takes a sexual thrill in her murder. But of course the Romantic, existentialist male vampire is usually able to stick around. Social structures kill off women's monstrous sexuality, the prerequisite for a "civilized" society.

(41) However, in 1984 Jody Scott began the extended project of rewriting and reappropriating the female vampire in her novel *I, Vampire*. Since then, dozens of women and queer writers—from Scott, Tanith Lee, Jewelle Gomez and Anna Livia, to Patrick Califia, Katherine Forrest, Poppy Brite and Gary Bowen—have taken to the figure of the vampire in the project of exploring radical and alternative sexualities, families and communities (in a hilarious opening chapter, the main character in Scott's novel "comes out" as a vampire to her family in sixteenth-century England, spoofing the hermeneutics of secrecy built around queer identity as the "guilty secret"). The feminist or queer

vampire functions as a prodigious, parodic subversion of its traditional associations—sexual degeneration and pestilence, decay and disease. Transgressive sexualities have always been coded as monstrous. As I mention above, what more appropriate association than the vampire for distilling the perversions of queer sexualities? Transgressive sexualities have often been inextricably yoked to the image of plague-like, blood-borne infections that lay waste huge populations. Queers and prostitutes in the nineteenth-century were evil predators who infiltrated, infected and contaminated the public body with their bad blood. They were social outcasts, marginalized nocturnal predators who sexually corrupted and transformed innocents, bringing a new being or species (the “homosexual”) into life. The homophobic cultural agenda of the right in the 1980s used vampiric imagery to stigmatize the queer community in the wake of the AIDS crisis. AIDS was the blood-borne wasting disease, and gay men and lesbians had an “innate” drive to “turn” others to the life. Vampires and queers are sexual predators, vessels of contagion that “reproduce” through contamination. The “vampiric” queer body became an infectious disease, an emissary of impoverished, diseased blood and perverse sexual arrangements.

(42) However, since Scott’s novel feminist and queer writers have embraced the vampire and turned it into camp, parody and radical transgression, dissecting and decoding mythologies, appropriating and cannibalizing the vampire canon for its homophobic and sexist associations. Vampires are pansexual, polymorphously perverse figures who straddle boundaries of life/death, man/woman, heterosexual/homosexual, in/out, healthy/unhealthy. They violate every taboo along the way from incest to S&M queer sex radicalism, exploring the relationships between sexuality and disease, pleasure and pain, death and desire. With their perverse sexual arrangements and promiscuous mixing of bodily fluids, vampires untie the binds between penetrated female bodies and (organically sufficient) penetrating male bodies. The vampire has become a politically perverse figure for exploring transgressive conceptions of family and community, critiques of origins, alternative potentials for selfhood, and the cultural and social inscriptions of sexual and gendered subjects. Female and queer vampires have traditionally embodied the horror of transgressive sexuality. Now they are unspeakably monstrous, threatening, and attractive.

(43) As critics of *Buffy* and *Angel* have argued, the shows pervert normalized conceptions of sexuality and the family in its depiction of the vampire family. Darla, Angelus, Drusilla and Spike enjoy multiple perverse sexual arrangements, either blatant or coded. For example, while sex between Angel and Spike is never textually represented, it is always sub-textually implied by the queer bar culture of leather pants and Goth/punk style donned by the two vampires, and more recently, in a fifth season episode of *Angel* in a flashback: Angelus tells Spike that he looks forward to having a boy around to play with: “Don’t mistake me, I do love the ladies. It’s just lately, I’ve been wondering, what it’d be like to share the slaughter of innocents with another man. Don’t, don’t think that makes me some kind of a deviant, hmm? Do you?” (“Destiny”). Even after they regain their souls, Angel and Spike are both murderous and amorous. In her important essay “Crossing the Final Taboo: Family, Sexuality, and Incest in Buffyverse Fan Fiction,” Kristina Busse distills the multiple textual and subtextual perversions of the vampire family that are foregrounded and developed in even more radical ways in Buffyverse fanfiction. Gina Wisker has also discussed contemporary vampire fiction and its potential for feminist and queer reevaluation and recirculation. Both of these writers argue that

subversive vampire fiction makes the vampire function differently in an empowering, rather than victimizing, framework.⁹ And with all of the torture and bondage scenes in the shows, erotic domination and S&M practices are no longer even sub-textual. (44) The erotic transgressions of Drusilla and Darla in Buffy and Angel counter the ideology of romantic love that oppressively binds women to heterosexual monogamy and procreative sex. In a third season Angel episode flashback, Angelus recounts his escape from Holtz to the young vampire James. After his escape, Angelus later caught up with Darla in Vienna. Grinning with pleasure, Darla tells James that she “had to pay for [her] sins. Again and again” for abandoning Angelus in the barn. “Can you even begin to fathom the things we did?” Angelus asks James, “Of course not—you’re in love” (“Hearthrob”). Drusilla and Darla enjoy multiple sexual arrangements within and without their vampire family, a privilege usually only accorded to men. In a recent flashback of Angel, Drusilla infuriates Spike because she refuses to be monogamous. “You knew she was mine!” Spike yells at Angelus when he walks in on them having sex. Angelus disabuses Spike of the notion that he can “own” Drusilla: “Just don’t get it now, do you? There’s no belonging or deserving anymore. You can take what you want, have what you want, but nothing is yours, not even her” (“Destiny”). The flashback ends with the titillating insinuation of a ménage a trois between Drusilla, Angelus and Spike. Angelus gets up, stands behind Dru and slips his arms around her body: “If you want her, come and take her,” Angelus beckons to Spike, both he and Drusilla holding out their arms for him. In another recent episode, Drusilla and Darla enjoy a ménage a trois with The Immortal, making both Spike and Angelus sexually spiteful. Spike taunts Angelus for being cuckolded by Darla, but he stops dead in his tracks when he sees Drusilla walk out: “time for another pony ride?” she asks Darla:

Spike: (gasps) ‘son of a bitch!’

Angelus: ‘the both of ya?’

Spike: “Drusilla, you, you let him touch you?”

Dru: “He felt like sunshine.”

Angelus: ‘that’s why he had us tossed. So he could violate our women. Violate in succession!’

Darla: (grinning wistfully) “Concurrently.” (“The Girl in Question”)

This flashback also ends with a hint of further pleasure to come. After Angelus whines that they never let them have a ménage a quatre, Darla and Drusilla walk off to take a bath together, but only if Darla promises to push Dru under the water—just a little bit: “Come on, Dru. Let’s have a bath so the boys can weep in private,” Darla touches Dru’s hand and whispers in her ear. “Will you hold me under the water?” Dru asks Darla. “If you wish,” she responds, as they walk out of the room holding each other.

(45) While Drusilla and Darla are phallic mothers (both punishing and disciplining), and aggressively sadistic, penetrating Sadean masters, they also enjoy the erotics of domination, their pleasure laced with a bit of pain. Angry at Angelus and Darla's sexual inattention, Drusilla runs off to turn Spike: "You won't even hurt me just a little bit," she scornfully rebukes them ("Guise will be Guise"). In the second season Angel episode "Reunion," Angel walks into the wine cellar where Darla and Drusilla are holding the lawyers hostage: "Daddy's home," Drusilla says when Angel walks in the door. "Come to punish us?" Darla asks of Angel. Hissing at Angel and doing her erotic dance, holding her arms above her head as if they were handcuffed, Drusilla purrs "Yeah, Yeah. Spank us till Tuesday. We promise to be bad if you do" ("Reunion"). When Angelus and Spike burst into Darla's room and learn of her "violation" by The Immortal, Angelus is afraid he hurt her: "Did he hurt ya?" he asks Darla; smiling naughtily, she responds "Not until I asked him to." ("the Girl in Question").¹⁰

(46) It 's important to mention Angel's dark transition (avec soul) to sadistic killer in the episodes following Drusilla and Darla's slaughtering of the lawyers. In "Redefinition," Angel brutally sets Drusilla and Darla on fire. In these episodes he is a sadistic killer. In "Epiphany," Angel supposedly comes "back" to himself, but only after he has sex with Darla and tells her to get out or he will murder her: "We're done," he tells her, "Let yourself out...Hey, you did me a favor tonight, now I'm gonna do one for you. Get dressed and get out. Because the next time I see you, I will have to kill you." Significantly, the writers make you despise Angel and sympathize with Drusilla and Darla. Angel's treatment of Darla after they have sex is eerily reminiscent of his treatment of Buffy after they have sex (except here he supposedly has a soul): "I don't understand.— Was I, was it, not good?" Darla asks Angel, crushed. In "Offering," Angel whines to Cordelia that it was a very dark time for him, trying to excuse his use and abuse of Darla. Cordelia retorts sarcastically "You used her to make you feel better during your dark time. Well, that makes it all heroic." Angel interjects: "It wasn't like that. It just— happened. It wasn't like I went evil or anything, I just..," "You just went male," Cordelia cuts him off. Later in Lindsey's apartment after Angel's brutal treatment of Darla post coitus, Lindsey asks Darla where she got the ring she's holding: "How did you get this?" he asks her. "It was my payment," she responds. Perhaps for the first time in their centuries-long relationship, Angel has treated Darla like a whore. As they've done before, the writers of Angel argue for the moral and ethical complexity of the world.

(47) Drusilla and Darla's vampire family radicalizes sexuality and threatens sanctioned relationships, foregrounding S&M eroticism and its exchanges of power, punishment and sensation in a ritualized theater of sexual dramas. Such erotics foreground role-playing and theater, deconstructing ideologies of sexuality such as the heterosexual alignment of gender with sex,¹¹ and the belief that women's bodies are to be penetrated by men as the only "healthy" form of civilized sexuality. Queer and feminist sex radicalism emphasizes roles in sexuality that are infinitely exchangeable and never align statically with gender (i.e. male sadism and female masochism). These erotics are embraced by the figure of the vampire, whose desire is ungendered and free-floating, a force that has no sense of man/woman, in/out, top/bottom binarisms. And while the Buffyverse is not as radical as contemporary vampire fiction by Califia or Brite, it does blur traditional distinctions between sex roles for men and women, a powerful source of fantasy (for a time we see this in Buffy and Spike's relationship as well). Drusilla and Darla are phallic,

penetrating mothers (their mouths both suck and bite), subverting the misogynist argument that because women don't possess the phallus they occupy a space of non-being and lack, passivity and masochism. The phallus is anything but a transcendental signifier of sexual and social power; as queer sex radicals have pointed out, how can it be when lesbians can strap on a dildo or crack a whip, or when female to male transsexuals can have one made? The phallus is pure simulation—an ontological joke. Only through psychological props can phallic male sufficiency be purchased by this suturing of woman into a zone of non-being and lack, a place of mutilation, castration, trauma and penis envy. By turning these psychic props into sex toys, as Drusilla and Darla do with their oral phallicism, their fetishes and their use of bondage, torture and role play (such as Darla's Catholic school girl and Drusilla's Victorian child-woman), the phallic economy of desire that underwrites gendered and sexual sacrifices is deflated.

(48) Queer sex radicals reject any notion of desire as sanitized and mystical. Recognizing that culture eroticizes domination and that domination and submission are intrinsic features of sex in general, they argue that "butch/femme role play and S&M scenarios" are vehicles "for channeling and controlling these tendencies" (Palmer 112); since "power and violence are intrinsic features of sexual relations, they are best channeled into forms of play and theater, as this will have the effect of rerouting them away from literal violence" (Palmer 116). Positions of domination and submission are just that—positions. They are "dynamic, determined not by gender but by role" (Gordon 53). A terrific illustration of just such a perversion of traditional gender/sexual roles for women is in the depiction of Drusilla as a frivolous, high-femme child-woman who surrounds herself with dolls. Drusilla as virginal, Victorian child-bride is an aesthetic role that she dons as a sex toy—she turns the persona into a bizarre style of sex play that turns both her and Spike on. S&M sexual dramas are an erotics of process that foreground theater and never calcify into the sum total of a person's being.

49 Finally, in light of the fact that, as Patrick Califia writes, the largest market for S&M pornography is heterosexual submissive males (179), the female vampire as sex radical gives the lie to the belief that the only safe kind of sexed woman is a dead sexed woman.

Notes

1 Halberstam and Livingston are writing in a different context from the vampire. This is from their introduction to the topic of posthuman bodies. Editors' note: For a different view of transgressive sexual relationships in the Buffyverse, see Vivien Burr.

2 This all made sense to evolutionary scientists: the overly sexed woman was an evolutionary throwback to primitive stages of the human—the savage was a cannibal.

3 See stories by Clark Ashton Smith, F.G. Loring, Everil Worrell, F. Marion Crawford, Carl Jacobi and others.

4 An exciting exception to this is the dead bridegroom as revenant in Gottfried August Burger's eighteenth-century poem "Lenore" (1773).

5 This reading of Drusilla is inspired by Bram Dijkstra's book *Idols of Perversity*, a terrific study of this and other topics in Victorian iconography of the sexed woman (as vampire).

6 Darla has a "taste" for children as well. In "Offspring," Darla is in an arcade, and tells another woman that she loves children: "Oh, I love children. I could just—eat them up." In "Five by Five," Darla mentions to Angelus in a flashback that she too enjoys the occasional toddler: "they sound just like little pigs."

7 Cordelia, a la Jasmine, has sex with Connor in the fifth season and has yet another

demon child.

8 This is a verbatim transcription by "Joan the English Chick:" <http://www.buffyworld.com/buffy/season6/transcripts>. Emphasis mine.

9 In this final section I will focus (more or less) on the recent fifth season of *Angel*, adding to articles by Busse, Wisker and others who have already documented the multiple perverse/subversive sexual arrangements of the vampire family in the Buffyverse. Editors' note: for further discussion of the literary forebears of the vampire lovers in *Buffy*, see Diane DeKelb-Rittenhouse.

10 See as well the Buffy episode "Angel," when Angel shoves Darla up against the wall: "You're hurting me" (she tells Angel, smiling seductively), "that's good." And in the Angel episode "Dear Boy," Angel again shoves her up against a concrete pole: "You're hurting me! I like it!" she growls at him.

11 In the Buffy episode "Doppelgangland" the writers comically ridicule the fixity of heterosexist arguments that lesbian desire is inherently narcissistic when lesbian vampire Willow comes on to heterosexual human Willow. The queer person, so it goes, does not successfully navigate the rapids of Oedipus, and when Oedipus fails, monsters are the result (Psycho is the classic example). In psychoanalytic sexual depth models of interiority, the queer exists in a zone of narcissism, excess and non-being: he or she is the vampire.

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Judith L. Tabron

Girl on Girl Politics: Willow/Tara and New Approaches to Media Fandom

A previous version of this essay was presented at the panel "Virtual Literary Communities," at the annual conference of the Modern Language Association, Dec. 2003. My thanks to Susan Hollis Merritt and Christopher Heyn for the experience; my thanks to Roz Kaveney, Stephanie Zacharek, and the members of the Kitten Board for answering my queries.

(1) In case you didn't already know, television's first long-standing lesbian relationship came to an end on May 7, 2002. Willow, the powerful witch and best friend of Buffy on the popular television show *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, had just reconciled with Tara, her girlfriend of over two years, from whom she had been separated for several months. Near the end of season 6, in an episode called "Seeing Red", the next episode after their reconciliation, Tara was hit by a stray bullet shot by a misogynist maniac trying to kill Buffy. The character died. Willow, driven to near-madness by grief, then attempts to destroy the world. (Tune in to see the world saved; season 6 now available on DVD.)

(2) If you *didn't* know, then you might be an occasional watcher of the show but you certainly couldn't be called a fan in either the casual or the academic sense. When I say "fan", I mean fan in the academic sense first recognized over ten years ago in two ground-breaking books, Henry Jenkins' *Textual Poachers* and Camille Bacon-Smith's *Enterprising Women*. Bacon-Smith's work was an ethnographic study of the widespread community of fans revealing a huge subculture of enthusiastic media consumers with their own customs and history. Jenkins' book studied the ways in which those fans repurposed and recycled the materials they consumed for their own cultural purposes, demonstrating that they were about as far from mindless in their consumption of media materials as they could possibly be. Along with the work of Constance Penley, these studies form the basis of academic understanding of fandom, which has not been pursued as vigorously as the topic perhaps deserves. Matt Hills' new book *Fan Cultures* is perhaps the only extensive new book to look at fandom itself, and Hills shows his experience with media studies in a way that previous work, based either on anthropology or on literary studies, does not. Hills' approach keeps the door open on fan studies, and the Internet is

changing the subject of both media studies and fan studies at lightning speed. The instant communication between fans and between fans and creators through the technology of the Internet, and fan culture's reception to, examination of, and even anger toward the popular culture that it consumes requires an equally nimble analysis. (3) Tara's death, for instance, resulted in one of the great fan outcries of recent memory, ranking up there with the defection of Michael Shanks from *Stargate SG-1* and the premature cancellation of *Farscape*.^[1] Several web boards and thousands of fans mounted an organized protest (many fans also protested individually); the creators of the television show responded through several venues; and the debate was covered or at least mentioned in many non-fan news venues such as Salon.com and National Public Radio.

(4) Such a high-profile incident is a great test case of how far the academic studies of fandom have progressed or not progressed over the last decade. Since 1992 and the publication of the two great books on fandom, the world-wide web has become a tremendous medium for communication, synchronous and asynchronous, among fans but also between fans and the producers of the shows they care about, as well as a means of distributing fan-produced materials including bootleg copies of television and movies. Over the same span of years, the entertainment market has become increasingly globalized, with American television dominating the international market like the proverbial Colossus. As I will explain, the case of Tara's death reveals some interesting, perhaps disturbing trends in the academic analysis of fandom, as well as new political opportunities for fandom itself as an institution that is always interacting with media production and not just consuming media product.

(5) Fans are prone to complain about what they don't like. What was curious about this fan uproar was its political nature. The character who had just died her violent, senseless death was one half of the first long-running lesbian relationship on television. Tara had been Willow's girlfriend since the middle of season 4. The relationship had had two years to build a vocal and admiring following. The fans who complained about Tara's death were often part of Internet groups (webboards and the like) organized specifically around the delights of watching a happy lesbian relationship on television: they were Willow/Tara fans.

(6) The convention of indicating a relationship between two media characters with a slash originated with fans who rebuilt the close relationships they saw on television into specifically romantic and/or sexual ones. The classic example, examined in more detail in Bacon-Smith's book, was Kirk/Spock fandom, in which stories or videos or art was produced in which Kirk's and Spock's relationship was taken to a different level.

(7) As such, classic slash fandom (as such fandoms are called) is almost always antithetical to the actual material of the (usually television) media product. Almost every popular television show and many movies which gain significant fan followings develop their own particular slash fandoms, wherein the dramatic impetus of narratives in which characters are placed in intensely emotional situations plays out as specifically romantic or sexual.^[2] As such, the fans are specifically creating materials that the media creators *would not* create. On television, Starsky and Hutch never fell in love or had sex. In slash fandom, such a relationship would be the whole point of the story, video, or art being created. Slash fandom is subversive and media creators tend to hate it, if they are even aware of it.

(8) The storyline of Willow's and Tara's romance on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* started out, as all good romances do, as little more than meaningful looks and pregnant pauses. Such material is the bread & butter of slash fandom. Imagine the fans' delight, then, when series creator Joss Whedon actually brought their imagination to light - when subtext, as they say, became text. In defiance of all television precedent, Willow and Tara got to have their romantic and lesbian relationship on screen.

(9) The term Willow/Tara, then, already encapsulates the peculiarly close relationship between Joss Whedon and the fans of *Buffy*. Rather than loathing what the fans would make of his show, Whedon runs with it. In fact, he doesn't just run with it, he rolls around in it and flings it around. Whedon, a self-proclaimed fan of movies and television himself, knows what fans actually do, and does it himself in his role as a media producer -- an unprecedentedly delightful situation for those of us in the fan community. Willow/Tara, particularly as orthographically indicated, should be an underground fan community. Instead, it's a major plotline on a broadcast television show. What bliss.

(10) Willow/Tara fandom has some other peculiar aspects. While slash fandom regarding male characters is predominantly made up of straight women (see Bacon-Smith and any other article on slash fandom,) a lot of the established Willow/Tara fan groups are just jam-packed with people who are themselves happy lesbians or people who support happy lesbians, one of the largest being the Kittenboard, a web board that is demonstrably supportive of and interested in lesbian romance in general as well as Willow/Tara in specific. These webboards were the source of much of the organized fan outcry against Tara's death in "Seeing Red." Since much of the delight of Willow/Tara fandom lies in seeing a relationship previously verboten by television actually brought to life on the screen for the first time, and because Whedon and *Buffy* producer Marti Noxon had had extensive contact with the fan community for years and worked very hard to bring this openly lesbian relationship to television, one can imagine that the fan protest was very much along the lines of "Hey, you took our happy lesbians away." How could it have been otherwise, given this peculiar and unprecedented situation? It was the first time, perhaps, that an otherwise fringe group of fans got exactly what they wanted on the screen. They not only saw the love story they imagined, the producers assured them that it was real, that they were doing it on purpose. In these circumstances, it's not hard to sympathize with the pain and anger of fans who've just lost what was for many of them the most important thing media producers had ever given them.

(11) However, at the same time, fan protest also did contain large pieces of "Oy, mate, taking away our happy lesbians seems a bit anti-lesbian to us." Because of the peculiar situation given to these fans, where subtext became text, the destruction of the characters - the cessation of the text - was interpreted by some fans as a rather nuclear strike against the text and subtext, against Willow/Tara itself. Perhaps the best summary of this facet of the fan protest can be found in Robert Black's online essay "It's Not Homophobia, But That Doesn't Make It Right."^[3] It might not be homophobia to kill a lesbian character off, Black argues, but to depict a lesbian's death by violence as taking place in the bedroom where she had just been making love to her lover - in, incidentally, the first lesbian love scene permitted by the network - ain't cricket. This *image*, Black argues, can be homophobic, even if the storyline, or even the intent, is not. Tara lying dead, and Willow thus being inspired to run amok and try to destroy the world, are images that reinforce rather than subvert or escape the dead evil lesbian clichés that have run rampant throughout popular media (and at least, I would add, since the

publication of the horrifyingly influential novel *The Well of Loneliness* in 1928). Black's essay appeared at a number of locations online, including the Kittenboard, where it was part of an extensive discussion of the death of Tara and a concerted protest to both Joss Whedon, the show's creator and executive producer, and to his company Mutant Enemy. (12) In other words, along with the kneejerk reactions there was a politically motivated and literarily sophisticated discussion which gave rise to nuanced essays like Black's as well as an organized campaign of protest.

(13) However, both media and academic reporting of the fan protest can unfortunately only be described as universally dismissive. For instance, Stephanie Zacharek's article "Willow, Destroyer of Worlds" for Salon.com[4], summarized the fan reaction thusly:

(14) Some fans in the lesbian community have asserted that by killing off one-half of the show's lesbian couple -- Tara, the girlfriend of the very mild-mannered, very brainy but also, we now know, very powerful Willow -- Whedon destroyed one of the few positive lesbian role models on television. Thus, they argue, it follows that he's most certainly anti-gay. (Zacharek)

(15) Zacharek confirmed to me in a personal email that this was just her general impression from checking in at a few web boards. Okay, I thought, I can see that. Zacharek's article, after all, is really a quick television review, not an in-depth piece, although she intended it as an explanation of the quality of *Buffy* as a television show, even as (she used the word) art, and Zacharek provides an interesting close reading of Dark Willow that is not to be missed by people interested in the show. Nonetheless, Zacharek's reading is not a correct summary of Black's position or the position in general of the webboards, though it may be a correct reading of individual fan reactions.

(16) Zacharek's article was published immediately following the conclusion of season 6, after all. At that time, fan reaction was still coalescing, and anger may have outweighed analysis. We should look to other writers for further investigation of the fan reaction to Tara's death. People who are not writing for the fast-paced world of media commentary have enough time to get the nuances closer to right. And yet, as another for instance, in her essay for the new edition of *Reading the Vampire Slayer: The Unofficial Critical Companion to Buffy and Angel*, Roz Kaveney, a literary scholar, has this to say about the fans' reaction: [5]

(17) Their argument is, briefly, that in a heteronormative society, the default setting in heterosexist writing is to punish lesbianism with suicide and/or madness and that the show compromised with this cliché. But this is nonsense - Tara is murdered by Warren, who is not even shooting at her, and Willow's madness is an excess of legitimate grief. The show references the cliché and subverts it, proving that it is possible for a queer character to die in popular culture without that death being the surrogate vengeance of the straight world. (Kaveney 2003, excerpt from 2004 book)

(18) I want to be sympathetic to Kaveney, who after all brings us a fun book about our beloved show. But I have to question her, again, very quick dismissive gesture here. Why

is Tara's death less violent or senseless simply because Warren isn't aiming at her? How does that make Tara's death *not* "the surrogate vengeance of the straight world"? Why is Willow's madness "okay" because it comes on as an excess of legitimate grief? Grief happens over and over to the characters of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Giles finds his lady love murdered in his bed; Buffy has to *kill* her beloved herself, for goodness' sake, yet neither descends into madness and tries to destroy the world. Only Willow, the lesbian, goes this route. Kaveney might be right, but she provides us with no explanation as to why we should go along with her interpretation, even in the longer excerpt with which she provided me and in the context of which she was eager that her remarks be taken.

(19) Unlike fan studies, Buffy studies are booming. There are three large books of interpretive essays and the online journal *Slayage*. And yet in none of these places do we find any treatment either of Tara's death as a text to be interpreted or of the fan reaction to it. Books take years to publish $\text{\textcircled{D}}$ but even now, more than two years after the broadcast of "Seeing Red", there are no serious analyses of Tara's death available either in books or in journals. In the three popular published books of interpretation on *Buffy*, I can find only one extended treatment of Tara's death, by Kevin Andrew Murphy in his "Unseen Horrors & Shadowy Manipulations." The book in which it is published, *Seven Seasons of Buffy: Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers Discuss Their Favorite Television Show*, does not purport to be an academic treatment, and Murphy's "essay" is comprised largely of dark hints that the fan reaction to Tara's death was and is a far worse form of censorship than any other experienced by Whedon and crew in the course of producing the show. Says Murphy, "Critics and self-proclaimed morality police wield much power, but sometimes the most vehement would-be censors are the fans themselves." (144)[6]

(20) The piece demonstrates a kind of schizophrenia regarding the issue of Tara's death. Yes, says Murphy, we have to take it seriously, it was important. But at the same time, Murphy wants to grind axes in regard to the fan community that disagreed with him. Murphy, who participated himself in the Kittenboard -- though he himself does not reveal his connection to it nor the reason for his rancor towards it -- quotes the Kittenboard's summary of the "Dead/Evil Lesbian Cliché":

(21) What specifically is the "Dead/Evil Lesbian Clichés"?

That all lesbians and, specifically lesbian couples, can never find happiness and always meet tragic ends. One of the most repeated scenarios is that one lesbian dies horribly and her lover goes crazy, killing others or herself. (Sound familiar?)

(22) Murphy immediately says that "The parallels to Tara's death and Willow's subsequent murderous rampage at the end of season six are obvious." Murphy seems to posit as a given the premise that there are a few too many uncomfortable analogies between the dead/evil lesbian cliché and the death of Tara. But his analysis immediately devolves into a tirade against the censorship of the Kittenboard members against "divergent opinions." (147) What could be analysis transmutes into a warning about the evils of censorship in general and about censorship of the people who make the show in particular.

(23) Murphy's anti-censorship warning strikes a chord with most of us. It's not hard to convince most of us - at least left-leaning types like me - that censorship is wrong, and that telling an artist what to do is reprehensible. No ethic, we feel, is worth replacing the basic right of artistic freedom. We feel comfortable dismissing the fans' complaint in this instance because we understand that writers need to do whatever they feel is best for the

art they are creating. And Joss Whedon, creator of the show and its primary creative force, has framed the dispute in those terms. Murphy quotes Whedon's own posting to the Bronze, a web board for general discussion of the show:

(24) I killed Tara. Some of you may have been hurt by that. It is very unlikely it was more painful to you than it was to me. I couldn't even discuss it in story meetings without getting upset, physically. Which is why I knew it was the right thing to do. Because stories, as I have so often said, are not about what we WANT. And I knew some people would be angry with me for destroying the only gay couple on the show; but the idea that I COULDN'T kill Tara because she was gay is as offensive to me as the idea that I DID kill her because she was gay. (Murphy 149)

(25) These words of Whedon's have been reproduced all over the net and form the crux of Whedon's own anti-censorship stance. He's trying to write good stories, that's his point. He can't let political considerations override what he perceives the need of the story to be. He's repeated this in several formats, including an NPR radio interview on November 8, 2002 where, when questioned about the deaths of both Tara and Joyce Summers in season six, he said that if his watchers don't have a strong reaction to a character's death, then he's killed the wrong person. ("Joss Whedon")

(26) Whedon's stance is clear. He's a writer trying to tell a good story. He and his staff have long had positive relationships with the gay community, and he has been upfront about his determination to create a positive lesbian storyline for Willow, as well as about his own gay godfather and the lesbian mothers of Marti Noxon (Noxon was in charge of production on *Buffy* while Whedon managed a television empire that included *Angel* and *Firefly*). (Mangels) Whedon's (and Noxon's) commitment to airing lesbian content has been widely reported in many interviews and on many websites; says Black, "In other interviews and on the Bronze Posting Board, Joss talked about the objections the WB executives had to the Willow/Tara kiss in the episode, "The Body." He boasted that he had threatened to walk out if the WB didn't let him keep the kiss in the episode." Whedon comes off as just this guy, writing a good show, committed to some gay-friendly storylines - in large part because that's what he is: a good guy, writing a good show, committed to some gay-friendly storylines. He represents himself as a creator, and a creator can't be censored and shouldn't be censored. This is hard to disagree with. We, the readers of these brief treatments of the Tara's death sequence, want to identify with Whedon and protect him from the mean fans who are criticizing his creative output. *Even fans* may well be inclined to view the situation from this viewpoint, dividing the fan base along the lines of people who understand and sympathize with the poor producer, and people who just "don't get it", who politicize everything fun and ruin it for those "other" fans.

(27) In this way, the media and academic writers are creating an us/them dichotomy that includes right-thinking fans but excludes the ones silly enough or evil enough to try to actually influence what the producer is doing when he produces popular television. By classifying the show as "art" (Zacharek) and Whedon as the persecuted artist, these writers and viewers create an "us" that is opposed to the bourgeois consumer, the slack-jawed TV viewer who just wants what she wants and who can't understand that her desires or political leanings are getting in the way of great art. Silly people, wanting to see more happy lesbians on television. Can't they see that Whedon is telling a *story*?

(28) This maneuver appropriates for the "us" side a certain cultural power that builds on that described by Matt Hills in his book *Fan Cultures*:

(29) Fans may secure a form of cultural power by opposing themselves to the bad subject of 'the consumer'. Academics may well construct their identities along this same axis of othering, meaning that in this case both fans and academics may, regardless of other cultural differences be linked through their *shared* marginalisation of 'the consumer' as Other. (44)

(30) The fan who "gets" that it's silly to complain about the death of a beloved lesbian character simply because its treatment reflects certain unfortunate similarities with heterosexist depictions of lesbian characters throughout the history of television, movies and literature may be an academic, a media writer, or a "lay" fan, but at least they aren't the slack-jawed consumers who think they can order a "Happy Lesbian" storyline the way they order a Happy Meal. What's interesting in this comparison is that the people who "get it", both fan and academic, here are aligned with the *producer* against the 'consumer' as Other.

(31) It is so easy to identify with this stance, and so simple to agree that censorship or any form of artistic control is bad, that the entire issue of Tara's death and its relationship to the history of lesbian treatments in the popular media has gone completely unaddressed. What's tragic about Murphy's essay is not that it's so bad and it is *shockingly* bad, an unsupported personal diatribe that bears little resemblance to a logical argument but that it's the only full-length treatment about Tara's death, certainly a major plot point, in any of the scholarly collections published as books or in *Slayage: The Online International Journal of Buffy Studies*. Ben Varkentine, who reviewed the book in which Murphy's essay appeared for the online journal *Ink19.com*, actually put on a journalist's hat to explain Murphy's bile toward the Kittenboard and the interpersonal connections that led to the essay - a job of self-reporting Murphy might have done in an ideal world. Yet no other writer, in the popular media or in academia, has come forward to try to discuss the controversy of Tara's death and its interpretation. This dead lesbian deserves more ink, and it is not fascist to say so.

(32) Fortunately, we are not required to frame the argument along the us/them lines discussed above, and the argument could benefit from some re-framing. For instance, politically motivated attempts to influence the content of art are not new nor are they necessarily fascist. Television genre shows have a tradition of fan activism, but so does television in general. When the three broadcast networks provided a political bottleneck controlling the content of television programming,

(33) A landmark U.S. Court of Appeals decision in 1964 gave public interest groups the right to participate directly in FCC policymaking. For the first time since commercial broadcasting began in the 1920s, a legal and organizational support system began to develop that encouraged less powerful groups, particularly minorities and women, to lobby actively on their own behalf to change media content. (Cantor 167)

(34) The American public owns the airwaves over which programs are broadcast. The

finite nature of capital and the structural limitations to access to broadcasting mandate a public interest in what is broadcast. Programming will always be limited, and because it makes use of public assets like the airwaves, the public has a reasonable vested interest in what is broadcast.

(35) This legislation led to many organized efforts to improve the depiction of women and people of color on television. Muriel Goldman Cantor, a social scientist who has been studying audiencemaking for decades, outlines some of these efforts made by public groups. These efforts can include boycotts, lobbies of the FCC (for instance, to deny renewal of stations' licenses), Congress or even the White House, and even plain old conversations.

(36) Conservative groups employ the same methods to put pressure on creators and broadcasters regarding the content of their shows, but we audiences may forget that the same tactics can be and have been deployed by the left. There is no natural tendency of media to evolve towards a more liberated point of view. The success of consumer advocate lobbying of any sort is still in debate, and Cantor concludes that audiences as market segments have more effect on producers than audiences as cultural politicians. The primary concern of broadcasters is money. Both right and left consumer advocate groups can try to influence programming by pointing out the benefits of their point of view in regards to the broadcasters' pocketbook. Gay and African-American groups, Cantor says, are most likely to "gain the attention of producers when their demands were not incompatible with the television industry's pursuit of its markets." (Cantor 168)

(37) The gay audience segment has been a topic for discussion among advertisers for at least ten years.^[7] It is identifiable and marketable. Whedon's own remarks, published in magazines like *Advocate*, serve in one way as goodwill advertising to this desirable market segment.

(38) So both as a group interested in the cultural products of its own nation and a potential audience segment for advertisers, gays and lesbians may expect to be marketed to, and more importantly, have a right to agitate for programming that they feel represents them, as an underrepresented minority, in a better light. There is nothing particularly sinister in the public taking a hand in determining what gets put on television; they are only one voice, after all, among the voices of all the production companies (who control all the investment capital), the broadcasters (who control all the means of distribution), and the creative staff (who control the creation of all the content).

(39) In his book *Emancipation, the Media, and Modernity*, Nicholas Garnham argues from the intersection of the fields of media studies, philosophy, and history that the media are, after all, social institutions and our interpretation of them must necessarily be tied to our beliefs about what society is for. If we believe in the freedom of individuals, we must necessarily be interested in whether the functioning of the media contributes to that freedom or not. The ways in which freedom may be helped or hindered by the media are far from simple and far from clear. We tend to frame the questions in terms of our own underlying assumptions about history and the way the world works.

(40) Let's remember for the moment that public activism concerning television content is not inherently evil censorship, but rather a public right. We can believe in individual freedom, and still believe that individuals and groups may wish to exert control over media production and broadcast in order to increase the freedom of society, not reduce it. To start from this simple premise opens up new interpretive possibilities in regard to the question of Tara's death. From the standpoint of the politically motivated consumer

who is also a citizen with legal interest in content of broadcast media, we can analyze the business aspects of Tara's death as a turn in the creative storyline, as well as its artistic representation in the show.

(41) Joss Whedon, for instance, is a businessman, a producer, as well as a creative writer. He was clever enough to sell three different shows to three different networks at various times. And he is no virgin when it comes to outside pressure to change the content of his shows; he has indicated in several interviews that the writers removed the Doublemeat Palace, a terrifying fast food place where Buffy had a job during part of season six, because of pressure from fast food advertisers. [8]

(42) Well, okay. That's the reality of television production; it's a business, and if Joss gave up on Doublemeat, he did keep working on showing the world a lesbian kiss. Whedon, after all, is simply claiming artistic freedom: he has the right to show a lesbian kiss, he has the right to show a lesbian death. No one can blame him for giving in to advertiser pressure on an essentially unimportant issue as long as he stuck to his guns on the important ones, right? Yes, he had his lesbian plotline, and his lesbian kiss. If he deemed Tara's death, and the particular manner of that death, to be an artistically necessary followup to that lesbian love story, how can we question it?

(43) Well, let's look at the money. While it may be true in some unprovable aesthetic sense that Tara's death was necessary - even that this version of her death was necessary - from a purely business perspective, it is also true that the death of Tara and the storyline it launched - Willow attempting to destroy the world - improved ratings. Fans tend to think of "ratings" as scatological topics not to be discussed at the dinner table and not without washing your hands afterwards, but again, television broadcasting is a business, and Whedon is very successful at it. He clearly planned the sixth season arc to involve a long exploration of Willow's "addiction" to magic (Kaveney's article deals with this in more depth) capped by the Tara death/ Willow madness story. Between fifth and sixth seasons, the show switched from the WB to UPN - and the fifth season ended with the death of Buffy, the title character. Whedon, who like all good television producers airs his most earth-shattering dramatic episodes during sweeps months and season's ends and beginnings, was certainly aware that UPN was giving him an awful lot of money in order to establish a beachhead in the 18-34 demographic that UPN wanted to be known for among advertisers. UPN was fronting 2.2 million dollars per episode, more than twice the 1 million that the WB was paying per episode. (Fitzgerald) Whedon also needed to bring over as many viewers as possible from the WB and find new ones.

(44) "Seeing Red", the episode in which Tara was shot, was not the season finale. Rather, there were three hours following it - broadcast May 14, and a two-hour finale broadcast May 21 - in which Willow's story was presented. The ratings history looks like this: [9]

(45)

Title	Airdate	Number in top 100	Neilsen Share
"Seeing Red"	May 7, 2002	93	2.7
"Villains"	May 14, 2002	75	3.2
"Two to Go"	May 21, 2002	75	3.3

"Grave"	May 21, 2002	75	3.3
"Lessons"	September 24, 2002	83	3.1

(46) In fact, the ratings over the two-part season finale ranged from 3.1 from the first half hour to 3.4 for the second, third, and fourth half hours.

(47) In other words, while *Herizons* reported that *Buffy's* viewership had dropped over the summer between season 6 and season 7, reflecting fans' displeasure with the death of Tara (Mitchell), in fact viewership picked up for the final three hours of season 6, from dismal 1.8 and 1.3 ratings for April reruns[10] to 3.3, actually 3.4 for the last hour of the season, an improvement with a significant carryover into "Lessons", the season premiere of season 7. Moreover, while for "Seeing Red" *Buffy* was far from the top-rated UPN show in the top Nielsen 100, the only UPN show that outrated it for the season 7 premiere was the *WWE Smackdown!*, the wrestling juggernaut that forms the cornerstone of the UPN audience.

(48) Ratings are never just ratings. The producers and broadcasters ask not just how many people are watching, but how many in which desirable market segments are watching. This can lead to endless wrangling over whether a show's viewership is up or down if the object of the conversation is not predefined. The writers at www.dykesvision.com, for instance, quote an interview with producer Jane Espenson from The Succubus Club[11] webboard, in their comparison of quotes from writers and producers regarding Tara's death:

(49) C: People want to know, the backlash, they are going to be tuning out.

J: People always say they are not going to watch anymore and our numbers stay the same.

C: But the numbers are down this year.

J: Yeah, but our boy numbers are up. [12]

(50) Whether or not Tara's death was a successful dramatic product is only definable, then, when one takes into account the market segment one is trying to reach.

(51) It's dramatic to see a character central to the show die. Highly-rated shows tease audiences with this possibility all the time. A closer examination of Whedon's self-reported reasoning for choosing *this* character to die is below. But for the moment, let's just recognize that complete stagnancy produces no drama, and that without drama there is no reason for any audience of any sort to tune in to the show.

(52) Whedon needed something as dramatic as the death of a major character to drive his transition from the end of season 6 to the beginning of season 7. He decided that Tara had to die because no other reason would be powerful enough to drive Willow to the extreme where she would try to destroy the world and we would realize once and for all how very powerful a witch Willow is - and how very much she loved Tara. The business decisions and the artistic decisions are very much intertwined here. But nothing in this scenario, from either a business or an artistic point of view, mandates exactly that Tara's death had to be played out in exactly the way that it was. Fans might have had to put up

with the death of a popular character, maybe even Tara, for the good of the show both as a business and as an art form. It doesn't necessarily follow that they had to put up with this particular death for this particular lesbian presented in this particular way.

(53) The tension between what fans want (in our sense here of "fans") and what the larger audience wants (with all the connotations of "wider advertising market" that "larger audience" should imply) is, and perhaps must necessarily be, constant. As Matt Hills points out in *Fan Cultures*,

(54) In short, capitulating to the fans' agenda as a target market ('empowering' the fans) potentially spells the end of the text which has inspired their very fandom, since the isolation of the fan audience from any wider coalition audience effectively terminates any economic viability for the text beyond its fan-ghetto of 'preaching to the converted'. (38)

(55) What Whedon doesn't articulate, possibly because it is simply second nature to him as a working television producer, is that the "demands of the story" are very closely related to the demands of a mass audience. The death of Tara was not just *artistically* necessary; it drove a ratings spike that his show needed. The relationship of advertising - sales - to art is usually beneath academics, since, as Garnham describes, we tend to think of media as either always already emancipatory or always already tools of oppression. But in this situation we have a tangible example of the interrelationship of art to sales that seems to beg for further study.

(56) It seems clear that Whedon's decision to kill Tara off was not *simply* mandated by his artistic conviction that it was what the story required. It removed an actor whose storyline was, for all intents and purposes, finished. It spiked the show's ratings. It capped a lesbian plotline that he clearly felt strongly about, and freed up screen time to spend on other plotlines, newer plotlines, of potentially great interest to new viewers and to the *wider audience*. These are all concerns related to the business of television creation that may have previously overshadowed the specific artistic interpretation of Tara's death as a dramatic plot point for the series' creators even as they were creating.

(57) And external interpreters must provide a more specific artistic interpretation. Whedon, while gay friendly, is neither a political activist nor a literary scholar. He has told *Advocate* that Willow is definitely gay now, no going back to men at all, but did not correct the Fresh Air interviewer on NPR when "bisexual" Willow is mentioned. He knows, better than anyone, what a controversy he has created, but for public purposes he frames it always as a dramatic demand of the text:

(58) "I killed her because I wanted to explore the dark side of Willow, and I needed to justify that," he says. "It may be fine on another show for people just to break up, but we're dealing with heavier, more iconic, scarier storybook stuff. The downside of that is, when you kill a character like Tara, statistically speaking, [lesbians] are underrepresented, and so people have a legitimate reason to say, 'It's not the same.' (Mangels)

(59) But Whedon doesn't have the distance from his own shows to analyze what exactly isn't the same, or why it isn't the same. Let's take him at his word: that he wanted to explore the dark side of Willow, that his is a show where people die, that to *not* kill Tara just because she was half of broadcast television's only lesbian couple would be discriminatory in its own right.

(60) Perhaps Whedon didn't notice that Tara was the only extended significant other he has ever killed on any of his shows. Miss Calendar in season 2 came closest; but while she was a love interest for Giles, they had dated only briefly (making her death all the

more tragic, for what was lost and never realized,) and Miss Calendar appeared, at any rate, only over about a season (late season 1 into the first two-thirds of season 2).^[13] On *Angel*, Fred was recently killed by a demon taking over her body after apparently a few happy dates with Wesley, though Wesley had loved her unrequited for years ("A Hole in the World"). Tara was Willow's love interest for almost two and a half seasons - even if one takes into account that Tara and Willow were separated for part of season 6, this is a significant investment into a character. Miss Calendar also dies with her neck broken and is found by Giles, arranged on his bed, covered with roses - very Gothic, very dramatic, also very clean. Tara's blood spatters over Willow's shirt and face as they are standing in the bedroom they shared for months, next to the bed where they had very recently made love. Tara dies in Willow's arms. Willow beseeches the unseen powers that she can call upon to return Tara - they will not. There is no return for Tara. Riley, Anya, Oz -- all other boyfriends or girlfriends of the Scooby Gang (the show's central characters) are allowed to walk away from their relationships. While Anya ultimately dies in the series' finale, there's very little dramatic payoff from this - its implications cannot be explored, nor can they drive ratings, as it's the last show of the series. The "death" of Fred in *Angel* may prove to be another exception to this rule ("A Hole in the World", aired Feb. 25, 2004) but doesn't change the fact that in the vast majority of cases, lovers persist. Fred dies but Amy Acker remains on the show; in an interesting way, something of Fred also remains. Angel is killed but he is returned to the show. Angel even receives his own spinoff show to which *Spike* is returned after *he* dies on *Buffy*. Even most one-time dates, such as Buffy's in "Never Kill a Boy on the First Date" and Giles' in "Hush", tend to escape alive. **[Editors' note: See the section titled "The Little Joe Phenomenon" in Wilcox, "'Who Died and Made Her the Boss?' Patterns of Morality in *Buffy*" in *Fighting the Forces*.]**

(61) This seems to take some of the bite out of Marti Noxon's self-defense wherein she, like Whedon, said that it was offensive to think they should treat some characters differently from the way they would treat other characters simply because they were gay. Says Noxon,

(62) We never thought about the fact that these characters were gay when we were deciding what their fate was going to be. They've been happy and together for longer than almost any couple on our show. In some ways I think it's kind of insulting to the gay community to suggest that we can't do to the gay characters on the show what we would do to anybody else.

(Mangels)

In fact, they did to the gay characters what they had never done to anybody else.

(63) Tara was also the only character portrayed by an actor who appeared over several seasons and yet never appeared in the credits. Whedon has said this was due to simple business, hinting that Benson's agent never managed to successfully negotiate her into the credit sequence. But this seems disingenuous, given that Benson *was* included in the credits - once, for "Seeing Red", the episode where her character was shot and killed. If this was meant to be a friendly salute to the exiting actress, it was a peculiar and unfunny one; a number of fans felt it to be simply cruel.

(64) It's clear to any long-term fan of the show that Joss as a writer gets attached to certain actors and not to others. Alexis Denisof, who was meant to be a short-term addition for part of third season, returned as a headliner (in the credits) on the spinoff *Angel*, and Whedon admitted frequently that this was primarily because he likes Denisof - Denisof makes him laugh. James Marsters, who departed at the end of season 2, returns in season 4 also because Whedon simply likes Marsters -- and the expansion of Marsters' character Spike into Buffy's love interest in seasons 6 and 7 provide a great deal of the fodder academics apparently *do* like to discuss: articles on the S&M aspects of their relationship, among others, proliferate.

(65) From an artistic standpoint, Whedon and Noxon's need to tell lesbian love stories, it appears, was also over. While Willow previously enjoyed lengthy courtships from both Oz and Tara, Kennedy, her love interest for seventh season, represented at best a truncated storyline. It could be said that time demands caused at least part of this, but the treatment of Kennedy was also very odd given Willow's history as a character - and Whedon prides himself on giving his characters memories and having them grow through experience. In Willow's relationships with both Oz and Tara, Willow did some pursuing but was also pursued - in fact, courted. In season 2, Oz delivers possibly the world's most romantic speech ever purported to come out of the mouth of a teenager, explaining how time stops when he dreams of kissing her. In season 4, Tara, a woman of few words, turned innuendo into plotline with a simple but also romantic speech: "I am, you know." Willow: "What?" Tara: "Yours."

(66) Kennedy, on the other hand, gets Willow's attention by asking her how long she, Willow, has been gay, or rather how long she's known that she enjoys having sex with women. Kennedy has *no* courting technique - she announces at one point that she's "pretty much a brat", used to "getting what she wants" - and this appears peculiar in a storyline that supposedly includes a now more-adult Willow. If this is what grown-up romance entails, give me the teenage kind.

(67) Meanwhile, nothing written or said by any of the producers actually addresses the primary complaint of the organized politicized protest: that the death of Tara represented yet another example of the tired dead/crazed lesbian cliché. In fact, in hindsight, one of the producers has even admitted that, looking back on it, the specific representation of Tara's death - killed by a stray bullet, her blood graphically spattered onto her lover just before she dies in Willow's arms, inches from the bed where they had very recently been making love, thus causing Willow to go almost instantly insane and pursue a plot of immediate revenge and ultimately to destroy the world (the connection between the revenge and the world-destruction is tenuous at best) - the similarity between this plot and the repeated clichés is unfortunate. Even the producers may admit this, glancingly, and very much in retrospect. Espenson said in her May 22, 2002 Succubus Club interview, "It is very possible that we did a bad thing. And I don't want to completely exonerate us . . . it is possible." And producer David Fury's quote, also from the Succubus Club (interview May 15, 2002) is preserved at www.dykesvision.com.

(69) Not about killing Tara, but pushing Willow over the edge. In retrospect, I can see the cliché. That was not our intent, we wanted to show them together and happy. We dramatized them being back together, it created the impression in a lot of people's minds that the event of her death was linked to them having sex. I do understand it, I say, oh yeah. It was not intended, we make mistakes.

(70) Even the producers, in other words, recognize that while the death of a major

character may have been required, while even Tara's death may have been required, for both business and artistic reasons, this particular implementation of it, dramatically presented, was unfortunately in line with the "evil/dead lesbian cliché" fans complained about. Again, I don't wish to recap Black's essay here, but his points have validity, and when connected through the larger realm of twentieth-century representations of lesbianism - like *The Well of Loneliness* or Djuna Barnes' *Nightwood* - they simply gain in strength. It isn't a math equation where Whedon and company's commitment to the positive portrayal of a lesbian relationship on television is cancelled out or overshadowed by the lapse of that portrayal into negative clichés at its conclusion. It is a more complex relationship but one that deserves attention. As Robert Black so aptly put it, "It's not homophobia, but that doesn't make it right."

(71) It is peculiar, then, that this situation, which seems to call so clearly for a closer reading by practitioners of literary or media studies has gone so ignored. The willingness of media analysis, both popular and academic, to skim past these questions demonstrates a tremendous blind spot that appears to be aided by the alignment of academics and commentators with media producers in the sort of "us/them" dichotomy described by Hills - exactly the sort of "us/them" dichotomy that, in other contexts, Whedon and Mutant Enemy are so good at overcoming. The very existence of Willow/Tara, as previously discussed, melts the "us/them" boundary between producers and consumer-fans. No wonder the fans had such a negative reaction to the re-construction of that us/them boundary.

(72) One positive aspect of the controversy demonstrates the way in which fandom, now connected through the Internet to itself and to the show's creators, has truly created a new form of politicized involvement in broadcast television to try to transcend that us/them boundary. At every step of the way, Buffy's creative staff saw and responded to fan reaction online in a number of forums. In many instances, quotes presented here from more official media channels (news and radio interviews) were developed from or expanded upon in discussions the creative staff had with fans in many online locations.

(73) This type of community interaction significantly changes previously accepted producer/fan dynamics. It is specifically against the type of fan reinvention represented by the slash tradition in the first place, and a reversal of the type of re-purposing of cultural materials that Henry Jenkins discussed in his 1992 book and continues to correctly describe as the primary machinery of fan-produced art. (2000) In effect, giving fans to some extent what they wanted - changing subtext into text - Whedon and his crew admitted their own fannishness, and in continuing to discuss what they created, to the extent that they were willing to discuss what they created, they blurred the line between creator and consumer in a way that was unprecedented. The truly revolutionary acts of the production staff were not in those moments when they insisted on their artistic freedom to do what they wanted; they were in the moments when they understood the desire of the fan communities and purposefully fueled their fires while maintaining an economically viable, indeed a good, product. In these moments they proved that Hills' observation need not always be true, that to 'empower' the fans need not collapse the general market for good drama.

(74) This type of interaction characterizes Whedon and his crew as the type of producers who do not look down on the consumers of their work. Statistically, these types of producers are rare. In Cantor's research, she says that for her book *The Hollywood TV Producer (1971/1987)* she wanted "to learn how much creative autonomy producers and

other creators have within the organizational, economic, and political contexts of their work and, second, to describe what [she has] called elsewhere the "negotiated struggle"É, the process that producers and writers go through to get "their" content to an audience." (160)

(75) Through interviews of 59 producers, Cantor discovered them to be largely divided between the (larger) group that had a "low opinion of their audiences' intelligence and taste." This group feels that they are designing for a lowbrow mass audience that would not appreciate the kinds of materials that they themselves appreciate. But a few other producers felt the opposite. "They thought that they were the audience and, if the program appealed to them, it would appeal to others as well." (160)

(76) This smaller group of producers was comprised of the type of people who read letters, who were interested in the opinions of engaged viewers. Typically, says Cantor, producers are interested in engaged viewers' opinions when the show is in trouble. This makes sense, as those are the moments when the producers are floundering and eager for outside guidance. The interested viewership forms a sort of counterbalance to ratings. When ratings are low, producers become invested in the interested viewership; when ratings are high, individual or group direct voices tend to be ignored.

(77) Joss Whedon and his production group demonstrate that they are interested in both. While they would be foolish to ignore ratings, the existence of all the articles quoted here indicate that Whedon, Noxon, and other producers/writers were willing, even eager, to discuss the controversy of Tara's death, not just in broadcast media, but on web boards and with the fans, and not because the show was floundering, but because they were sincerely interested. Whedon is very clearly a producer in the smaller group, the guy who thinks of himself as the audience. He has said in various interviews that he is in love with all his characters ("Joss Whedon"), and his shows demonstrate time and time again that essentially, he is us. All fans of his work have had the experience of shouting at the television, to have, in the next second, one of the characters say exactly what we had shouted at them to say. He is on the same wavelength as his audience; he does not intend to dumb things down for them. This makes the treatment of lesbians on his show (s) even more interesting and ought to cause us to subject them to even more study; we know he really wants us to have meaty material to chew on, but not all of it expresses his conscious goals.

(78) But even more importantly, the actions of Whedon and his team have led to the development of a genuinely new form of virtual literary community. By engaging with fans and the media, Whedon's actions as much as his work provide a new and rich arena for the consumption and digestion of his product, enabled by the electronic communications tools of television (one to many) as well as the Internet (many to many, or sometimes one to one). The controversy over Tara's death, the reaction of the fans and the reaction of Whedon and his crew represent a cycle of communication that is perhaps unprecedented. [14]

(79) What is sad is that these truly new developments have been largely ignored by the press, both popular and academic. A too-ready reaction to any fan activism as silly, or worse, fascist, destroys our opportunity to investigate the really new relationships between producers, fans, and consumers that await us. If Tara had to die, surely her death is worth serious attention.

NOTES

- [1] I say "recent" to distinguish it from fan uprisings of the more distant past, as in the reaction to the cancellation of the original Star Trek.
- [2] Fandom, and slash fandom, is not limited only to so-called "genre" shows or movies these days; the popular television shows 24 and the various incarnations of Law & Order, for instance, have their own fandoms - and indeed their own slash fandoms.
- [3] <http://www.xtreme-gaming.com/theotherside/homophobia.html>
- [4] <http://www.salon.com/ent/tv/feature/2002/05/22/buffy/index.html>
- [5] In fall 2003 Roz Kaveney was kind enough to share an excerpt from her essay in the second edition of the book, which was released in March of 2004.
- [6] The third major book on Buffy, besides Kaveney's and this one, is *Fighting the Forces: What's at Stake in Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, edited by Rhonda V. Wilcox and David Lavery, editors of the online journal Slayage.
- [7] See, for instance, articles such as Gunn, Eileen P. "Merchandising arrives at new comfort level." *Advertising Age*, 71.26 (June 19, 2000): 60; Benezra, Karen; Ebenkamp, Becky. "Advertisees Anonymous." *Brandweek*, 41.11 (March 13, 2000): 24; Webster, Nancy Coltun. "Playing to gay segments opens door to marketers." *Advertising Age*, 65.23 (May 30, 1994): 5-6; Hudis, Mark. "Major advertisers devise new products for gay consumers." *MediaWeek*, 4.1 (Jan 2, 1994): 2.
- [8] This is mentioned in the May 16, 2003 "Readers' Opinions" column of the *New York Times*, but has been repeated in any number of other articles with Joss (such as *Sci Fi Wire*, June 30, 2002. <http://www.scifi.com/sfw/issue270/news.html>), and is no secret.
- [9] Nielsen ratings and top 100 numbers culled from *Slayernews.com* but confirmed in *Daily Variety* in Rick Kissell's articles, listed in bibliography (except for the Sept. rating).
- [10] Rick Kissell, "NBC, CBS sweep into victories," *Daily Variety*; 4/24/2002, 275:39, p13.
- [11] They misattribute this to the "Succumbus Club", but it is in fact a webboard called the Succubus Club, at <http://www.thesuccubusclub.com>.
- [12] An audio recording of Espenson's VIP interview is available at http://www.kitis.net/thesuccubusclub/SuccubusClub_020522_JaneEspenson.mp3
- [13] Recently, *Mutant Enemy* has topped itself in this annoying fashion: after seasons of Wesley's unrequited love for Fred on the ME show *Angel*, Wesley and Fred get a happy couple of days together, then Fred is killed by an ancient demon who takes over her body, theoretically annihilating her soul in the process. Wesley and Fred get an agonizing death scene, even more protracted than Willow's and Tara's, with the dramatic followup that the actress who played Fred, Amy Acker, now gets to play a demon, and the actor who plays Wesley, Alexis Denisof, gets the dramatic payoff of playing the lover left to face it.
- [14] Except that Susan Merritt and Christopher Heyn have now demonstrated to me that similar sorts of interactive discussions also happened during the course of the television show *La Femme Nikita*. Clearly, there is plenty of material here for fan studies to tackle, particularly in the area of the effect of the Internet on producer/fan dynamics.

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David Lavery

"I wrote my thesis on you!": *Buffy* Studies as an Academic Cult

Spike, my boy, you really don't get it! Do you? You tried to kill her, but you couldn't. Look at you. You're a wreck! She's stronger than any Slayer you've ever faced. Force won't get it done. You gotta work from the inside. To kill this girl . . . you have to love her.

Angelus in "Innocence" (2004)

I have spoken of a university, with its commitment to rational discourse toward some public goal, as if it too is an agent of the destruction of cults; but I have also admitted its own propensity to cultism. And I have spoken as if, for example, Wittgenstein and Heidegger . . . were clear candidates for a university curriculum, yet I know that each . . . is mainly the object of a cult. None of them is the common possession of our intellectual culture at large, let alone our public discourse. It is possible that nothing is such a possession, that nothing valuable and comprehensible to each of us is valuable and comprehensible to all. And it is possible that every idea of value, like every object of value, must still arise as the possession of a cult, and that one must accordingly hope that some are more benign and useful than others.

Stanley Cavell, "Film in the University" (273)

I

(1) In "Checkpoint," a fifth season episode of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, the Watchers Council sends a delegation to Sunnydale to investigate the suspect status of slayage in southern California. Although Giles had been sacked as a Watcher long ago (in "Helpless," episode twelve of Season Three) and Buffy herself had resigned from the Council (late in the same season during the Scooby Gang's final battle with the Mayor), the Scoobies have nevertheless sought in desperation the Council's assistance in their looming confrontation with Glory. Before the Council will share its information (the flabbergasting knowledge that Glory is not a demon but a God), it demands, however, a high price: the WC insists upon (and threatens Giles with deportation as the price for lack of cooperation) a complete review of the policies and procedures of their American

renegades. Quentin Travers and his officious minions then proceed to interview (with humorous results) not only the core Scoobies but all of their fellow travelers as well, including Anya, Tara, and, of course, Spike.

(2) At Spike's crypt a female Watcher named Lydia presses Spike in order to understand why it is that he sometimes cooperates with the current Slayer when, in his own bloody past, he has killed two of Buffy's forebears. A clearly flattered Spike replies, "Heard of me, have you?" While two male Watchers ready their weapons in fear of the legendary vampire, Lydia herself, embarrassed as only an academic can be embarrassed, replies, "I . . . wrote my thesis on you!"

(3) When I chose these words for my title, I did so because they represented, in a series both intertextual and self-referential, a wonderful moment in which the Buffyverse seemed almost to acknowledge and even to anticipate the extraordinary field of *Buffy Studies* then just beginning to bud. January 2001—the month in which "Checkpoint" first aired—also saw the debut of *Slayage: The Online International Journal of Buffy Studies*, a venue for serious consideration of *Buffy* originally inspired by the gross of submissions the editors of *Fighting the Forces: What's at Stake in Buffy the Vampire Slayer* received from *BtVS* scholars around the world hoping to become players in this new academic playing field.

(4) Now, a year and a half after *BtVS* came to its end after seven seasons, *Buffy Studies* is in full bloom. As Emily Nussbaum noted in an article entitled "Sick of 'Buffy' Cultists? You Ain't Seen Nothing Yet" in the *New York Times* in June 2003, the demise of the show could well result in more rather than less posthumous interest in the show, positively encouraging devotees, both fans and scholars, to "live in the past." "If it's sad to have one's favorite show go off the air," writes Nussbaum,

the secret truth is, it's also a relief. A television cult can't really start in earnest until the show has ended. . . . For all its pleasures, appointment TV is also a lot of pressure. There's the anxiety of raised expectations, the friendship-threatening debates over the proper plot arc, the misfiring VCR's, the leaked plot spoilers. Now everything is spoiled, and we can settle in and enjoy—treat the story as one big, satisfying narrative. Few shows reward rewatching as much as "Buffy," a series which might appear campy at first sight, but over time reveals as many layers as Tony Soprano's Oedipal complex.

(5) Thanks to Lydia's academic confession, the international interpretive community of *Buffy* scholars, well-settled in The Slayer's native land, as well as in Canada, the UK, and Down Under, in both Australia and New Zealand; less prominent but nevertheless alive in Germany, Austria, France, Sweden, Italy, Singapore . . . could claim to include among its members a minor

character in the text itself. Even in the diegesis of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* was being carefully, systematically studied. "Why," Borges writes in "Partial Enchantments of the Quixote," "does it make us uneasy to know that the map is within the map and the thousand and one nights are within the book of *A Thousand and One Nights*? Why does it disquiet us to know that Don Quixote is a reader of the *Quixote*, and Hamlet is a spectator of *Hamlet*? I believe I have found the answer: those inversions suggest that if the characters in a story can be readers or spectators, then we, their readers or spectators, can be fictitious" (46). Disquieted, we all felt that January evening in 2001, when we learned of the existence of a thesis on Spike, just a bit more fictitious.

(6) But little did I know then that we would soon be able to read that thesis [<http://www.channelingboards.com/SpikeThesis>]. A group of Spike fans, led by "Prime Mover" Taramisu and "Managing Editor" Klytaimnestra and with the assistance of Alcibiades have collaborated to produce it. Almost ninety pages of pitch-perfect abstracts, acknowledgements, appendices, annotated bibliographies, and imaginative pedantry, the actual existence of this extraordinary parody/paratext only confirms my original intent in speaking to you today. Primarily the work of fans, *Lydia Chalmers' Thesis on William the Bloody* will not earn anyone an advanced degree or pad a *vita* in the pursuit of a teaching position or securing tenure. The painstaking scholarship of the late Miss Chalmers (you will recall that she died in the demolition—by Caleb—of the Watchers Council Headquarters in "Never Leave Me" [7009]) draws on a wide variety of source books including "Angel/us Un/Souled: Monster, Man, Metaphor" published by "Postmodern Pansy Press," "Changing with the Times" by one "C. Lee," published by "Hammer Press," and another on Drusilla issued by Antwerp's "Morbid Press." A variety of articles in *Vampire Quarterly* have been consulted. A phone interview with F.B.I. Special Agent Fox Mulder provides significant information. Access to the diaries of both Rupert Giles and Buffy Summers was granted. Chalmers' research—conducted, by the way, with the help of the "Wyndham-Price Fellowship"—offers much to learn. Who knew, for example, that it was Spike in Forrest Gump mode and not Hells Angels who killed that fan at Altamont while The Rolling Stones rocked on or that William the Bloody once bent it with his pal David Beckham? *Lydia Chalmers' Thesis on William the Bloody* might well be included in *Teleparody: Predicting/Preventing the TV Discourse of Tomorrow*, a collection, published in 2002 by Wallflower Press in London, sending up the serious study of television, full of metatexts, including reviews, scholarly references to, and a "faux bibliography" of over one hundred non-existent essays and books.

(7) I said this faux treatise is the work of fans. But it would, no doubt, be more accurate to deem its ingenious authors "fan-scholars," implementing a distinction Matt Hills insists upon in his consistently brilliant *Fan Cultures*, a book which ends with "a call for *impassioned thought* rather than the

parroting of academic discursive mantras," a summons to "'affective reflexivity' which admits its own neoreligiosities, its own fandoms, and its own 'reflexive pre-reflexivities' or self-absences" and for "academic commitment . . . modeled on fan commitment" (184). *Buffy Studies* at the beginning of the 21st century, concerned as it is with perhaps the one text in all the world with the requisite strength and skill, the subtext, metatext, and intertext, the diegesis and the "hyperdiegesis" (Hills 134), to engage in battle with the forces of the academy, seems to this observer at least, a "scholar-fan" (in Hillsian parlance) so obsessively immersed in the Buffyverse that he has succeeded in annoying both his colleagues and his wife in the same way, may well be perfectly positioned—would "chosen" be too strong a word? —to answer Matt's call.

(8) In a much-quoted exchange in the *Onion AV Club* interview, *Buffy's* creator Joss Whedon, asked to comment on the passion the series inspired in its followers, openly admitted his intentions towards his creation. Allow me to quote it again.

I designed the show to create that strong reaction. I designed *Buffy* to be an icon, to be an emotional experience, to be loved in a way that other shows can't be loved. Because it's about adolescence, which is the most important thing people go through in their development, becoming an adult. And it mythologizes it in such a way, such a romantic way—it basically says, "Everybody who made it through adolescence is a hero." And I think that's very personal, that people get something from that that's very real. And I don't think I could be more pompous. But I mean every word of it. I wanted her to be a cultural phenomenon. I wanted there to be dolls, Barbie with kung-fu grip. I wanted people to embrace it in a way that exists beyond, "Oh, that was a wonderful show about lawyers, let's have dinner." I wanted people to internalize it, and make up fantasies where they were in the story, to take it home with them, for it to exist beyond the TV show. And we've done exactly that. ("Joss Whedon." *The Tenacity of the Cockroach* 375)

Now, as Hills (and others) have noted, the conscious creation of a cult is not without its metaphysical pitfalls. It is possible, even likely for a given program to be "too pre-programmed," to "not leave enough space for [the] subjective 'creation'" so essential to the formation of a cult" (Hills 136). But time does not permit full exploration of that issue here. I want to ask a different but related question: did Whedon imagine that academic "scholar-fans" would be part of *Buffy's* cult audience, imagining themselves, quite unprofessionally, in the story?

(9) We know from a Q and A with the *New York Times* just before the US airing of the series finale, what Whedon thinks of the interest of scholars in his show. "*What are your thoughts, the Times wanted to know, on the academic community's use of the show, from the humanities to the sciences,*

to debate and analyze everything?" "I think it's great that the academic community has taken an interest in the show," Whedon replied.

I think it's always important for academics to study popular culture, even if the thing they are studying is idiotic. If it's successful or made a dent in culture, then it is worthy of study to find out why.

"Buffy," on the other hand is, I hope, not idiotic. We think very carefully about what we're trying to say emotionally, politically, and even philosophically while we're writing it. The process of breaking a story involves the writers and myself, so a lot of different influences, prejudices, and ideas get rolled up into it. So it really is, apart from being a big pop culture phenom, something that is deeply layered textually episode by episode. I do believe that there is plenty to study and there are plenty of things going on in it, as there are in me that I am completely unaware of. People used to laugh that academics would study Disney movies. There's nothing more important for academics to study, because they shape the minds of our children possibly more than any single thing. So, like that, I think "Buffy" should be analyzed, broken down, and possibly banned. ("10 Questions for Joss Whedon." *New York Times*: <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/05/16/readersopinions/16WHED.html>)

Whedon's receptiveness to *Buffy* Studies should not surprise. As I have elsewhere suggested, Whedon may represent the advent of "the film studies auteur, just as likely to be familiar with critical schools and narratological theory as with lenses and filters and aspect ratios. Perhaps this is why *Buffy* scholars feel so strong an attraction to the show" (<http://www.slayage.tv/essays/slayage7/Lavery.htm>). But is having the sanction of the creator enough to justify the existence of all this BS—*Buffy* Studies, that is.

II

(10) In *White Noise* (1984) Don DeLillo introduces us to the College-on-the-Hill, a quintessentially mediocre American institution of higher learning, and home to Jack Gladney, a professor of "Hitler Studies," a division within "the popular culture department, known officially as American environments." Gladney finds his department "a curious group . . . composed almost solely of New York émigrés, smart, thuggish, movie-mad, trivia-crazed." Gathered together in order "to decipher the natural language of the culture," the faculty's specialities include such diversely arcane subjects as bubble gum wrappers, detergent jingles, and soda pop bottles, but they present a uniform appearance: all "are male, wear rumpled clothes, need haircuts, cough into their armpits. Together they look like teamster officials assembled to identify the body of a mutilated colleague. The impression is one of pervasive bitterness, suspicion and intrigue." As one who once attended a popular culture conference that actually shared a hotel with a

Teamsters convention and found it difficult to pick my colleagues out of the crowd, I can attest to the accuracy of DeLillo's characterization of PCers. But BSers? I will not be drawn into such ad hominem considerations.

(11) *White Noise's* erstwhile hero Gladney has distinguished himself from this motley crew by building a reputation for his own curious specialty. As a colleague who aspires to do the same for The King that Gladney has done for Der Fuhrer tells him:

You've established a wonderful thing here with Hitler. You created it, you nurtured it, you made it your own. Nobody on the faculty of any college or university in this part of the country can so much as utter the word Hitler without a nod in your direction, literally or metaphorically. This is the center, the unquestioned source. He is now your Hitler, Gladney's Hitler. It must be deeply satisfying for you. *The college is internationally known as a result of Hitler studies.* It has an identity, a sense of achievement. You've evolved an entire system around this figure, a structure with countless substructures and interrelated fields of study, a history within history. I marvel at the effort. It was masterful, shrewd and stunningly preemptive. It's what I want to do with Elvis. (11-12; my italics)

At this point you are no doubt wondering why I have bothered to take you on this side journey to DeLillo-Land. Because the always prescient postmodernist had identified a trend in *White Noise*. By the end of the 1980s Hitler Studies and Elvis Studies had begun to metamorphose. We had begun to hear, in the real world, not in a novel, talk of Madonna Studies.

(12) And now we have Buffy Studies. Now we have a regional institution of higher education, in an American state with a second rate university system, a state better known for the spawn of Graceland and as the home of country music, *internationally known as a result of [Buffy] studies.*

(13) What exactly is Buffy Studies? If we set out to categorize existing scholarly writing on *BtVS*, as I have done in a bibliography now available on the *Slayage* website [http://www.slayage.tv/EBS/buffy_studies/buffystudiesbibliography.htm], we discover that *Buffy* Studies currently comprises at least fifty (**fifty!!**) disciplines, methods, and/or approaches:

Aesthetics	Genre Studies	Political Science
American Studies	Humor	Postcolonial

Auteurist	Intercultural Communication	Postmodernism
Body Studies	Lacanian/Zizekian	Psychology / Psychiatry / Psychoanalytic
British / English Studies	Legal Studies	Queer Studies
Business Ethics	Library Science	Religious Studies / Theology
Classical Studies	Linguistics / Lexicography Literary Studies	Science Studies
Computer Science/ Information Systems	Marxist / Foucauldian / Ideological	Sex/Sexuality
Cosmology	Media / Television Studies	Slavic Studies
Criminal Justice	Media Ecology	Spike Studies
Cultural Studies	Military Science	Structuralist/ Poststructuralist
Ecological	Musicology	Textual Criticism
Education/Pedagogy	Mythic/Jungian	Time Studies
Family Studies	Narratological/Character Studies	Vampirology
Fandom	Pedagogy	Xander Studies
Feminist	Performance Studies	
Folklore	Phenomenological	
Food Studies	Philosophy/Ethics	
Gender Studies	Physics	

(14) This under-construction and admittedly arbitrary classification scheme

includes published essays in print and online journals and published and forthcoming collections, essays submitted for consideration to *Slayage*, a few theses and dissertations, books on *BtVS*, and papers given at conferences such as Blood, Text and Fears, Staking a Claim, and last May's *Slayage* Conference. (In a few cases titles are included under more than one category.)

(15) No serious, media literate viewer of *BtVS* is likely to be surprised by many of the territories *Buffy* Studies has colonized. Of course *Buffy* would attract the attention of those interested in vampirology, music, fandom, philosophy and ethics. And any acute observer of the contemporary critical scene would find the marriage of *Buffy* with a wide variety of disciplines/ approaches if not made-in-heaven, at least predictable conjoinings.

(16) Of course American Studies, not to mention British/English Studies, would find the series full of significance for two nations "separated by a common language."

(17) Of course auteurists would want to revisit the question of authorship in a rich television text with a strong, identifiable creator like Whedon (and a score of important collaborators as well).

(18) Of course folklorists would find themselves attracted to a series rich in fairy tale monsters and ripe with legend.

(19) Of course cultural studies investigators and gender critics and postcolonials would find *Buffy's* problematic depictions of race, male and female relations, and the body controversial and provocative.

(20) Of course library scientists would find themselves agog with a series that offered not only a library as its primal scene (at least for the first three seasons) but a sexy librarian as well.

(21) Of course, given *BtVS's* complex plotting and attenuated story arcs, narratologists and mythic/Jungian critics would find the series a powerfully attractive test case.

(22) Of course linguists and lexicographers would be drawn to *Buffy's* verbally rich text and ingenious use of language.

(23) Of course queer studies would find a home in Sunnydale, as would the postmodernists who would likewise find it their kind of town.

(24) But who would have predicted that *Buffy* would attract the attention of a

Stanford University population ecologist, applying mathematical formulae to a consideration of vampire demographics in Sunnydale?

(25) Who could have foreseen that classicists would find enough material in the series' "little Latin and less Greek" to bring their splendid erudition into play?

(26) That a series only seven years old would generate debates about the validity of the existing text among TV "textual" scholars?

(27) That investigators into legal studies or criminal justice would take *Buffy* to court?

(28) That a prominent military expert would name a new "paradigm" in biological warfare after *Buffy* in a paper written for a think-tank?

(29) That computer scientists, cosmologists, professors of education, information systems, business ethics, physicists, and adolescent psychologists, Foucauldians, Marxists, and Zizekians, would find a television program on a minor netlet (make that two minor netlets) worthy of their professional interest?

(30) Who knew that *Buffy* would provoke so much serious consideration by scholars of religion and theologians?

(31) By next year at this time, at least thirteen book length studies of *Buffy* will be in print. In addition to Roz Kaveney's new edition of *Reading the Vampire Slayer and Angel* and Wilcox and Lavery's *Fighting the Forces*, James South's *Buffy the Vampire Slayer and Philosophy*, Michael Adams' *Slayer Slang: A Buffy the Vampire Slayer Lexicon*, Glenn Yeffeth's *Seven Seasons of Buffy*, and Jana Riess' *What Would Buffy Do? The Vampire Slayer as Spiritual Guide* and Greg Stephenson's *Televised Morality: The Case of Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, already in print, we will need to be reading Paul Attinello and Vanessa Knights' *Sounds of the Slayer: Music and Silence in Buffy and Angel*, Lisa Parks and Elana Levine's forever forthcoming *Red Noise: Buffy the Vampire Slayer and Critical Television Studies*, Claire Thomson, et al's selection of the best from 2002's University of East Anglia conference *Blood, Text, and Fears: Reading Around Buffy The Vampire Slayer*, Lorna Jowett's *Sex and the Slayer* (to be published by Wesleyan University Press at Joss Whedon's alma mater), Rhonda Wilcox's *The Art of Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (to be published by I. B. Tauris), monographs by Matthew Pateman and Jes Battis

(32) No doubt there will be others, and I am not even listing all the "paratexts," official and unofficial Watcher Guides, *The Monster Book*, script

books. The afterlife of a television series which did for librarians what the Indiana Jones films did for archaeologists will transpire not just on DVD and in syndication but on bookshelves.

III

(33) Though growing by leaps and bounds, *Buffy Studies* has not been without its detractors; the "brainy bloodsuckers" (as *Entertainment Weekly* once referred to them in what was presumed to be a compliment) who engage in BS have come under attack from a variety of angles. At the final plenary session of the Blood, Text and Fears Conference in Norwich, England, one of its organizers (Prof. Scott MacKenzie) and a member of the panel (Prof. Peter Kramer) both voiced their surprise at a certain lack of objectivity in the conference presentations, almost all of which were given by academics. The *Buffy* scholars gathered there, they suggested, seemed hesitant to ask the same kind of hard questions—about the industry, narrative structure, television flow, merchandizing, demographics, advertising, influences—that have come to be expected in media studies.

(34) Closer to home, since Rhonda Wilcox and I were singled out as culpable, Levine and Schneider, in an essay in James South's *Buffy the Vampire Slayer and Philosophy* collection, accuse *Buffy* critics in general and us in particular of grossly overestimating the series' significance, suggesting that "*BtVS* scholars are, in psychoanalytic parlance, repressing, projecting, and 'acting out' their own fantasies in relation to the program. They love *BtVS*" (299). In "attempting to bring scholarship or serious discussion to bear on *BtVS*," scholars "evinced their own lack of understanding of, and insight into, the show, and perhaps more importantly, into the kinds of tasks, purposes, and methods that cultural theorists and others who engage with popular culture set for themselves and employ (299). "It is *BtVS* scholarship that warrants study at this point, not *BtVS* itself" (301).

(35) And then there's the letter Rhonda Wilcox and I received recently—the one that insists that "academic wasteland that is Slayage" and the "treatise-cum-doorstop that is Fighting the Forces" are "Full of sound and fury and signifying nothing." *Buffy Studies*, claims the letter's author, who did not have the courage to provide a return address, "pretend[s] to elevate the medium of television to some higher plane." But the task is doomed from the outset, because "academia . . . only appeals to academics." Academics "don't honestly create anything; they merely analyze, ad nauseam, the creative efforts of others." Mixing metaphors right and left but with unmistakable disdain, the author continues to fulminate:

Much like pulling the wings off of flies, this is hardly a worthwhile use of one's time, let alone the meaningful contribution to society that you would have it be. You take the best, most creative and inspired concepts on television and analyze them to death. Similar to vultures, or perhaps to the

vampires you write about, you tear apart and devour vibrancy and creativity until all that is left is the pile of bleached and useless bones you call your work. Must you 'scholars' siphon the life force out of brilliant television by putting it under the microscope of so-called higher learning until it is reduced to yet another unwieldy and arduous thesis? In doing this, you are trying to stake an academic claim to something you were never meant to call your own.

But even then the author is not finished upbraiding us.

Art, regardless of whether or not its medium is television, is meant for the masses. There's a reason that famous paintings are now housed in public museums rather than in the mansions of the elite: art is proletarian by its very nature. It was never meant to be governed by the narrow little world of academia. Art is the life blood of the people, full of inspiration and meaning, and you are reducing it to mere fodder for graduate seminars in which, no doubt, the word 'paradigm' will be used to the point of madness. You dissect art, suck it dry and dress up its corpse as academic achievement. Your work is appreciated by our limited scholarly population but the idea that it has importance in the real and much larger world outside of university classrooms, is made all the more laughable by the fact that you and those at Slayage take yourselves so very seriously. Fortunately a creative and cultural phenomenon like Buffy the Vampire Slayer cannot truly be defined by scholars, well versed in abstracts and proposals while lacking both passion and originality, nor can it be confined to stuffy lecture halls neither physical nor virtual, In ignoring these facts you have, as Buffy the Vampire Slayer would undoubtedly put it, *so missed the point*.

If Mr. Krye had gone on record, we would have invited him to Nashville last May so he could have seen those 390 joyless, blood-sucking Buffy scholar/fans and fan/scholars having the time of their lives talking about, dissecting, and singing about a show they loved beyond the possibility to describe.

(36) "[S]cholar-fans," Matt Hills comments in *Fan Cultures*, "are typically looked down on as not being 'proper' academics, while fan-scholars are typically viewed within fandom as 'pretentious' or not 'real' fans" (Hills 21), In the complaints of the Blood, Text and Fears respondents, Levine and Schneider, and "Kenian Krye," the author of the letter I just quoted, *Buffy Studiers* come under attack from both directions. We are, it seems, not serious enough, not sufficiently aware of the modes of production of *BtVS*. Our objectivity is so deficient we cannot take back our projections from a series which has inexplicably mesmerized us, "Bewitched, Bothered, and Bewildered," infatuated with a

phenomenon that is in fact nothing special. But we are as well vampires, "brainy bloodsuckers" (now definitely not a complement), draining our prey of its life and imagination. We lack "both passion and originality," "taking [ourselves] far too seriously."

(37) Those of us who have put television studies on our intellectual agendas are accustomed to having to defend ourselves. The ugly e-mails and voice-mails of Italian-American defamation zealots ready to have me whacked just for doing a book on *The Sopranos*, the snickers of English Department colleagues who considered me a profession-ruining sellout even when I was primarily doing far-more prestigious film studies—even before I had achieved my current status of a "high-functioning schizophrenic" (to quote Amanda in "Potential) who has totally lost my mind (and his soul) to TV—should not go unchallenged.

(38) Buffy in Love. "The proper model for the relation of the critic to the work he studies," the esteemed American literary critic J. Hillis Miller wrote over thirty years ago, back before he caught the French disease and became a deconstructionist,

is not that of scientist to physical objects but that of one man to another in charity. I may love another person and know him as only love can know without in the least abnegating my own beliefs. Love wants the other person as he is, in all his recalcitrant particularity. As St. Augustine puts it, the love says to the loved one, "*Volo ut sis.*" "I wish you to be."

When Levine and Schneider accused scholars-fans of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* of having fallen for *Buffy* they were thinking eros when they should have been thinking agape. Loving *Buffy* need not be a swoon. It may be the means to really know the show, know it as only love can know. And if I can be allowed a moment of counter condescension, rival ad-hominem, Levine and Schneider's essay demonstrates in nearly every paragraph a near total lack of knowledge and or understanding of the very series they pretentiously claim to understand better, and more rightly, than hundreds of others.

(39) "Spike, my boy," Angelus lectures his rival vampire in "Innocence," "you really don't get it! Do you? You tried to kill her, but you couldn't. Look at you. You're a wreck! She's stronger than any Slayer you've ever faced. Force won't get it done. You gotta work from the inside. To kill this girl . . . you have to love her." Recognizing, of course, that it may be dangerous to take our cue from an evil monster, do we not find in Angelus' method the model for our own. *Buffy* Studies gotta work from the inside. We will understand (not kill) *Buffy* best when we love her, without shame.

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James South

On the Philosophical Consistency of Season Seven: or, 'It's not about right, not about wrong...'

Broken like a window I see my blindness now.
Sam Phillips, "I Need Love"

I was a fine idea at the time. Now I'm a brilliant mistake.
Elvis Costello, "King of America"

But fictive things/Wink as they will. Wink most when widows wince.
Wallace Stevens

[1] I'm sure that we all have favorite scenes from *BtVS*. I'm actually going to start this essay with my favorite scene. Although it's not from Season 7, it sets my essay up nicely. It's from "Choices" (3019):

Willow: Deep thoughts?

Buffy: Deep and meaningful.

Willow: As in?

Buffy: As in, I'm never getting out of here. I kept thinking if I stopped the Mayor or . . . but I was kidding myself. I mean, there is always going to be something. I'm a Sunnydale girl, no other choice.

Willow: Must be tough. I mean, here I am, I can do anything I want. I can go to any college in the country, four or five in Europe if I want.

Buffy: Please tell me you're going somewhere with this?

Willow: No. (hands Buffy a letter) I'm not going anywhere.

Buffy: UC Sunnydale?

Willow: I will be matriculating with Class of 2003.

Buffy: Are you serious?

Willow: Say, isn't that where you're going?

Buffy: I can't believe it! Are you serious? Ah, wait, what am I saying? You can't.

Willow: What do you mean, I can't?

Buffy: I won't let you.

Willow: Of the two people here, which is the boss of me?

Buffy: There are better schools.

Willow: Sunnydale's not bad. A-And I can design my own curriculum.

Buffy: Okay, well, there are safer schools. There are safer prisons. I can't let you stay because of me.

Willow: Actually, this isn't about you. Although I'm fond, don't get me wrong, of you. The other night, you know, being captured and all, facing off with Faith. Things just, kind of, got clear. I mean, you've been fighting evil here for three years, and I've helped some, and now we're supposed to decide what we want to do with our lives. And I just realized that that's what I want to do. Fight evil, help people. I mean, I-I think it's worth doing. And I don't think you do it because you have to. It's a good fight, Buffy, and I want in.

Buffy: I kind of love you.

Willow: And, besides, I have a shot at being a bad ass Wiccan, and what better place to learn?

Buffy: I feel the need for more sugar than the human body can handle.

Willow: Mochas?

Buffy: Yes, please. It's weird. You look at something and you think you know exactly what you're seeing, and then you find out it's something else entirely.

Willow: Neat, huh?

Buffy: Sometimes it is.

[2] There's much I could talk about in that exchange, but for the purposes of this essay, I'm going to focus on two issues that emerge from this scene. One is Buffy's realization that one can think one knows exactly what one's seeing only to find out it's something else entirely. That, it strikes me, is an important theme of Season 7—indeed the theme that ties the season together. The second theme is foundational for the story I'm going to tell: Buffy seems forever bound to be "Sunnydale Girl." There is no apparent escape. And yet *we* know, in retrospect, that's not the case. I want us to think about how it is that Buffy did escape Sunnydale.

[3] Let me do a little set-up work. Elizabeth L. Rambo, in an excellent *Slayage* article, makes two points in relation to the Season 7 "Big Bad," The First Evil. She alludes to the "Augustinian" nature of the confrontation between Buffy and The First: the idea that evil has no positive existence of its own; that evil is parasitic on good. Second, she notes that precisely because of its parasitic nature, evil is banal—boring and unoriginal—and she extends this point to explain why, ultimately, The First was such a bore as a "Big Bad." Now, I'm less concerned with the televisual sufficiency of The First as villain, than the cluster of ideas that I can extract from its presence, since from a philosophical perspective, I think the boring aspect is very important. In fact, I don't even think The First is all that boring—at least not when compared to Buffy during the middle parts of the season. Those speeches! Who can blame Andrew when he decides not to videotape those? But, as we'll find out soon enough, Buffy's boring speeches have a philosophical pay-

off as well, one we can begin to appreciate by wondering about the significance of having a hero more boring than the Big Bad. To foreshadow a bit, before this talk is finished, I will argue that Buffy was perhaps the *real* Big Bad—at least for most of the season.

[4] So, without taking anything away from Rambo's paper, which I take to be a kind of platonic form of *BtVS* criticism, I nonetheless want to build my paper around a questioning of her claim about Augustinianism and its role in the show—not because I think she is wrong about Augustinianism and its presence in Season 7, but because I think her analysis is incomplete. And, in keeping with the spirit of Season 7, I want to question this claim by going back to a beginning—the philosophical origin of the kind of position enunciated by Augustine. In particular, I want us to think about that most potent of philosophical metaphors: Plato's metaphor of the cave. The reason should be obvious enough: what's a Hellmouth if not a cave-like structure? And what better way to think about the Hellmouth than to think about the metaphor of the cave? Or so I hope to show in what follows.

[5] Let me refresh your memory about Plato's cave:

Picture human beings living in some sort of underground cave dwelling, with an entrance which is long, as wide as the cave, and open to the light. Here they live from earliest childhood, with their legs and necks in chains so that they have to stay where they are, looking only ahead of them prevented by the chains from turning their heads. They have light from a distant fire, which is burning behind them and above them. Between the fire and the prisoners, at a higher level than them, is a path along which you must picture a low wall that has been built, like the screen which hides people when they are giving a puppet show, and above which they make the puppets appear.

'Yes, I can picture all that,' he said.

Picture also, along the length of the wall, people carrying all sorts of implements which project above it, and statues of people, and animals made of stone and wood and all kinds of material. As you'd expect, some of the people carrying objects are speaking, while others are silent.

'A strange picture. And strange prisoners.'

'No more strange than us,' I said.

One lesson of the metaphor of the cave is exactly the one Buffy mentioned near the end of the scene from "Choices:" "You look at something and you think you know exactly what you're seeing, and then you find out it's something else entirely." But let's worry about that just a bit by highlighting the sort of mis-seeing that the Cave metaphor

identifies. First, for Plato, the issue about appearance and reality, or knowledge and illusion, is not a “Matrix-like” skepticism—in philosophical terms, the issue isn’t how do we know that we aren’t brains in vats. Instead, the big issue for Plato is the problem of what I’ll call, following Plato scholars, ‘desire-induced fantasy.’ In the words of one commentator on the *Republic*, “...desire distorts our vision so that we see what we want to see, rather than what is in fact there.” In this sense, the worry at its extreme might be more like an insane girl who imagines an entire world in which she alone stands between her fantasized world and its destruction.

[6] Yet while that might be one way of exemplifying Plato’s metaphor, it doesn’t quite do justice to the fact that Plato has Socrates state that the bound inhabitants of the cave are “no more strange than us.” *We* are all in the cave, and even within the cave I think we have resources to distinguish between an internal traumatically induced fantasy world and the world in which we go about our daily business.

[7] However, in addition, I want to stress that the cave metaphor itself is a kind of desire-induced fantasy. And the end of Season 7 with its destruction of the Hellmouth represents, I think, a destruction of precisely the kind of thinking represented by the image of the cave. More about that later, though. For now, I want to illustrate how the cave metaphor in the first sense—the desire-induced fantasy sense—illuminates and ties together many events in Season 7. I do this for two reasons. First, I tend to think that desire-induced fantasy does, in fact, play a large role in human life. Thus, if the only lesson we get from Season seven is the place of such fantasy in human life, that’s an important one. Second, though, I think we can only get to the really big lesson of the season by working our way through a desire-induced fantasy. So, by appreciating the strategies the characters use in overcoming such fantasies, we might be in a better position to understand the big desire-induced fantasy that the season as a whole addresses. That, would, as it were, end the lesson. Now, necessarily, I must be selective, though, I hope, representative enough. If there’s a bias in my example selection, it’s not likely to be a surprise to anyone who knows me, nor will it skew the data—the character driven trajectory that I take could be taken with any of the opening credit characters.

[8] Let me start with Willow. Between the Willow of “Lessons” (7001) and the Willow of “Chosen” (7022) an entire route out of the cave gets charted—a way through an interconnected set of desire-induced fantasies. The Willow of “Lessons” wants to be Willow, is connected to a great power, and is, of course, being Willow, full of self-doubt. In other words, over the first two episodes, Willow’s plight neatly encapsulates the key themes of the season: issues of power, issues of connectedness (or the lack thereof), and issues of self-identity. So, I want to trace out how Willow’s issues in the first two episodes of the season cash out over the next several episodes. However, I want to remind you of a very nice bit of foreshadowing that’s especially

relevant to the second half of my paper. In one of her moments of self-doubt, Willow poses the following question: "Does that mean I have to be a bigger, badder badass than the source of all badness?" ("Beneath You," 7002) Other than the nice Willow-y alliteration, what makes this question so important is that, as we shall see, it asks **the** big philosophical question of the season by explicitly raising the issue of the source of badness and by flagging the kind of power that I think gets called into question. Bracket that thought for now, but keep it in mind.

[9] Moving on, then, in "Same Time, Same Place" (7003) we see Willow a victim of her own desire-induced fantasy. Her fantasy in this case is generated internally and manifests itself through who Willow is—the magic that's part of her. Note that, by the time the episode is through, we'll have seen Willow in a cave, paralyzed, helpless, and alone except for a particularly repulsive skin-eating demon—all a result of her self-induced, subconscious magic spell:

Willow: No. Please stay. I missed you so much when I couldn't find you.

Buffy: We missed you too. I missed you. Dawn's, uh, working on what caused the mutual no-see-ums, but so far we haven't—

Willow: I did it.

Buffy: You did a spell?

Willow: I didn't mean to. I-I just remember thinking I wasn't ready to see you guys yet. I was afraid we wouldn't, you know, connect.

Buffy: So, you made it happen just by thinking it?

Willow: Guess I have a ways to go before I master my powers, huh?

"Making it happen just by thinking it": a perfect way of describing internal desire-induced fantasy. Willow's both metaphorically and literally cave-bound because of her desires, and survives only because of the connection she has with Buffy, Xander, and, somewhat surprisingly, Anya.

[10] Despite Willow's slight boost of self-confidence at the end of the episode that allows her to use magic to restore her flesh, she is hardly out of the cave. She recognizes that she hasn't mastered her powers, and she has literally discovered the truth of the claim made in "Lessons": "From beneath you, it devours." The identification of her insecurities and self-doubt, as well as the concretely realized instantiation of them in the cave, with the "it" seems obvious enough.

[11] Moving on, consider "Conversations with Dead People" (7007). In this episode, Willow is confronted by an external source of fantasy that exploits her internal doubts—The First Evil manifesting as Cassie who claims to be able to communicate with Tara. While Willow manages to avoid the too direct suggestion that she kill herself, the seed for more self-doubt has been planted. That is, she has internalized an external source of fantasy. In this

case, the 'it' doing the devouring is analogous to the way that Plato thinks social illusions shape the way we think about the world. The concrete result is that when Willow next needs to use her magic, in "Bring on the Night," she fails miserably and allows The First Evil to manipulate her. The result is that she totally distrusts her ability to use magic effectively: the very thing that she will have to do to play her part in defeating The First.

[12] One more example: in the "Killer in Me" (7013) we see a mixture of external and internal fantasy. The external takes the form of a "hex" (or more technically, a "penance malediction") targeted at Willow by her nemesis in magic, Amy. The result of the hex is that Willow takes on the appearance of the dreaded Warren Mears, Tara's murderer and the proximate cause of Willow's attempt to destroy the world in Season 6. Why this punishment? Amy explains that the hex allows the hexee's subconscious to pick the punishment. The point is to play on Willow's weakness, by using power, but we discover that the *real* power is within Willow's subconscious—the power that, first, makes her punish herself for kissing Kennedy, and that holds herself responsible for Tara's death; but also the power that, by connecting with Kennedy at the end of the episode, takes responsibility for her power, and, as it were, takes her back to the beginning. This beginning is the foundation on which she will re-connect with herself so that she will be able to do magic again, especially when called on in "Chosen." The first step forward occurs in the aptly named "Get It Done" (7015) when she uses her skills to bring Buffy back from the land of the shadowmen. Note the striking visual echo in the way she sits in the circle with the way she was sitting when she made her reconnection with Buffy in "Same Time, Same Place."

[13] Enough about Willow until I talk about "Chosen." Let me turn to another character who exemplifies the various ways in which desire-induced fantasy can take over: Anya. Consider the song she sings in "Selfless" (7005)—a flashback to her state of mind in Season 6:

Mr. Xander Harris.
That's what he is to the world outside.
That's the name he carries with pride.
I'm just lately Anya.
Not very much to the world, I know.
All these years with nothing to show.
I've boned a troll,
I've wreaked some wrath,
But on the whole,
I've had no path.
I like to bowl,
I'm good with math,
But who am I?
Now I reply that

I'm the Mrs.
I will be his Mrs.
Mrs. Anya Christina Emanuella Jenkins Harris.
What's the point of loving . . .
I mean except for the sweaty part.
What's the point of losing your heart?
Maybe if you're lucky
Being a pair makes you twice as tall.
Maybe you're not losing at all.
No need to cover up my heart,
Plus see above RE: sweaty part.
So maybe love is pretty smart
And so am I
I found my guy!
And I'll be Mrs.
I will be his Mrs.
Mrs. Anya Lame-Ass-Made-Up-Maiden-Name Harris.
We'll never part
Not if we can
And if we start
Then here's my plan
I'll show him what bliss is
Welcome him with kisses
'Cause this is a Mrs. who misses her man
He's my Xander
And he's awfully swell
It makes financial sense as well,
Although he can be—I'll never tell—
Just stand aside
Here comes the bride
I'll be Mrs.
I will be his Mrs.
I will be—

Of course, there's then a very abrupt cut to Anya with a sword through her chest.

[14] This song is a wonderful example of desire-induced fantasy, though it's rather difficult to tell just where the boundaries between internal and external are. And look where it ends up—Anya with a sword through her chest. "I will be," indeed. Where to start? There's an entire retro feel to the song, to the look (e.g., Anya's dress), to the lyrics. And nostalgia is an obvious form of desire-induced fantasy. In part, it's Anya having internalized (perhaps not wholly successfully) an old-fashioned paradigm about wifely identity, but more broadly, her desire-induced fantasy can be neatly encapsulated in the complaint she makes about the song she and Xander sang in "Once More, with Feeling": it's a retro pastiche identity and has little

coherent unity. Her problem is that she's let her self be controlled by an image—a desire-induced image—one of vengeance being who she is, fed by D'Hoffryn, Halfrek, and her disconnection with Buffy and the gang. Now, let's follow Anya's progress. Again, having gone back to the beginning in "Selfless,"—note her assertion that there may not even be a me to save—over the course of the season she reconnects with the Scoobies.

[15] Buffy, to her credit, refuses to let Anya take herself out of the loop, stating that she wants her friends around. Anya immediately recognizes that she possesses strategizing skills and accepts their need for help from her. Perhaps not quite what Buffy had in mind, but it reconnects her. By "Bring on the Night," she's back to her old truth-telling self, having previously connected with Xander (their good cop/bad cop routine in "Never Leave Me" (7009)) and now Dawn—and being quite clear on the realities of their situation in relation to Spike: "Yeah, he'll help. You know, if he's not crazy or off killing people or dead. Or, you know, all of the above."

[16] Whatever fantasies Anya still harbors, they don't stop her from perceiving the rest of the world clearly. Watch her lecture in "Empty Places" (7019) and contrast that with the flat-footedness of Buffy in the same episode:

Anya: OK . . . I know you're all upset . . . and I, myself, would much rather be sitting at the bedside of my one-eyed ex-fiancé than killing time here with you people in this over-crowded and might I add increasingly ripe-smelling basement. And I would be, too, if not for a certain awkward discussion he and I recently had right over there on that cot immediately following some exciting and unexpected breakup sex. But . . . I need to give him some space . . . so I'm doing what I can do, contributing any way I can . . . and so will all of you. You still need to know this information. We can't stop just because something else is trying to kill you, too.

Buffy: Look, I wish this could be a democracy. I really do. Democracies don't win battles. It's a hard truth, but there has to be a single voice. You need someone to issue orders and be reckless sometimes and not take your feelings into account. You need someone to lead you.

For Buffy, it's not about what others want to do, it's about what she orders them to do. By contrast, Anya is perfectly clear that, as it were, she wants to empower the potential slayers. By "End of Days" (7021) we have Anya declaring, indirectly, her love for humans and her need, as a lame human, to do what's right. There's no role-playing anymore, just Anya being human and seeing the world for what it is. It's noteworthy that her insight brings her the ability to sleep on the eve of an apocalypse—indeed, she's the only one who can.

[17] That's two characters we've seen who started out the season suffering from desire-induced fantasies and, by the end of their season-long journeys,

both have managed to climb out of the cave, as it were, into the bright light of the Good. That is, they've come to see through their desire-induced illusions. Anya has taken on the Cassandra-Like role of truth-teller (not storyteller), while we know that Willow will be central to taking down The First.

[18] Now, here's where it gets tricky. Remember that I said at the beginning of the essay that I thought that there were two important points to the cave metaphor. We have seen one point nicely represented in the cases of Willow and Anya—the fact that desire-induced fantasy plays a huge role in human life. And we have been introduced to some of its sources, as well as the need to wipe the slate clean, as it were, in order to make progress. The second point I want to make today is a more radical one: to put it bluntly, the metaphor of the cave is itself a desire-induced fantasy. Think about why Plato constructed the metaphor in the first place. One function of this metaphor is to provide an explanation for Socrates's execution. That's one of the reasons why we're told that the philosopher who returns to the cave will meet with a certain death. But there's a more important fantasy element in the metaphor: the cave explains why people behave badly by situating bad behavior within an overarching framework of the good. That is, by providing us with a metaphor in which one can progress from inside to outside, Plato also has provided a metaphor in which the outside is co-terminous with the good. Outside the cave we find the good, and everything inside the cave is a distorted image of that very good. I must admit that this image supplies us with a *comforting* story: people who do bad do so because they think they're trying to do good, but because of desire-induced fantasies of various sorts, they have a mistaken view about what is good. In short, Plato's fantasy is that all badness is contained within goodness.

[19] Now, as Elizabeth Rambo has so clearly shown, that's a standpoint that is readily applicable to Season 7: "Thus, Buffy, the guiding light of the Buffyverse, more than any other "good" character, is the First Evil's "mommy" ("Chosen," 7022), not because Buffy is evil—though she certainly is not perfect—but because evil cannot be self-existent, though it likes to think it is." This parasitic, or as I'll call it, dialectical, relation between good and evil is abundantly chronicled in Season 7. But—and here's the thing—I want to argue that the series ends up repudiating this dialectical relationship. More precisely, only by repudiating the relationship can Buffy escape the Hellmouth, and by extension, escape the fate of being "Sunnydale Girl."

[20] Central to Rambo's argument, and importantly for me, The First is portrayed as committed to this Platonic fantasy. It is envious of Buffy and her friends, or, perhaps more generally, humanity (cf. "Touched" (7020)). Even more troubling, though, is that I think Buffy and company see things "Platonically" for most of the season. They envy the power of The First, of his minion the uber-Vamp, and even of Caleb. It's *that* sort of power they want.

This commitment on the part of Buffy to the Platonic/Augustinian conception of evil provides some evidence that Buffy, in fact, is the “big bad” of Season 7—the mother of all evil. Luckily (and mark that term!), things don't *end* that way, and in seeing how things change, I think we see the ultimate philosophical lesson of Season Seven.

[21] To gain some perspective on what I'm trying to argue here, think about Caleb. He talks a lot, and his talk is filled with the language of good and evil, clean and dirty. He's the one with power on his side, with a mission to purify the world. That is, evil is trapped within the second level of the cave metaphor. It sees itself as the other side of good—indeed, as really good, especially as exemplified by the slayer and her potentials—the dirty girls.

Caleb: Well, that was, uh . . . Are you all right?

Shannon: Thank you. Thank God you were there.

Caleb: Well, let's not give him credit for everything. (smiles) No, I'm funning you. I don't believe it was a coincidence. I also don't believe young girls should be out in the woods late at night—should be tucked in bed.

Shannon: Wish I was.

Caleb: I expect you do at that. Look, I don't mean to pry, but those boys . . . they looked like— Well, you didn't happen to fall in with devil worshipers, did you? Na, I'm—I'm sorry. You, uh, you look like you've been traveling a while. I didn't think that— Is there some place you'd like me to drop you? You heading some place?

Shannon: Sunnydale.

Caleb: I'm going there myself. I ain't never been, but I expect we could find a police station or a—

Shannon: I just need to get to Revello Drive. Um, thanks, Father . . .

Caleb: Call me Caleb. Never was nobody's daddy.

Shannon: I'm Shannon.

Caleb: Well, Shannon, you feel like telling me why those Freaky Joe's were after you?

Shannon: I'm not sure.

Caleb: Well, do you ever think that maybe they were chasing you because you're a whore?

Shannon: What?

Caleb: Now, I know what you're thinking. Crazy preacher man spoutin' off at the mouth about the whore of Babylon or some-such. That ain't me. I'm not here to lecture you. I mean, what's the point? My words just curdle in your ears. Wouldn't take in a thing. Head's filled with so much filth that ain't no room for words of truth. Well, you know what you are, Shannon? Dirty.

Shannon: What? I'm not! What're—

Caleb: Now, now, now. There's no blame here. You were born dirty, born without a soul. Born with that gaping maw wants to open up, suck out a man's marrow. Makes me puke to think too hard on it. [Shannon tries for the door] Yeah, that there door's problematical. I don't know as I could

recommend steppin' out at this speed anyway. You're like as not to tumble some. But, of course, there's my boys back there—Ooh, they hate to miss a mark.

Shannon: Your boys?

Caleb: Well, they ain't exactly my "blue eyed boys" but they're hard workers. And they don't truck with Satan—that was just me having fun. Satan is a little man. (Shannon reaches for the steering wheel) I don't like back-seat drivers.

Shannon: Please . . . don't hurt me.

Caleb: Well, now, is this the part where you offer to do anything? Because I tried to make it clear—you got nothin' I want to explore. [Caleb presses his ring, which he's heated with the cigarette lighter, into Shannon's neck.] Oh yeah. That's it! That's a cleansing fire. Hallelujah! Now, if I'm not mistaken, there's a car a little ways behind us, and I do believe there's some folk in it goin' the same place you are. Now, I want you to deliver a message for me, but it's not for them. It's for the other one—the one and only, the original, accept-no-substitute slayer. Would you tell her something for me?

Shannon: Yes.

Caleb: Thank you, Shannon. [Caleb proceeds to stab Shannon and toss her from the pick-up truck.]

There's simply too much in this clip. Besides the obvious "Caleb has a message for Buffy" point, which is pretty obviously an evil parody of the good news of the gospel, here's what I want to emphasize: a) There's the claim that Satan is a little man; b) There's all the language of dirtiness, whorishness, soullessness, etc.; c) There's the claim that "I don't believe in coincidence;" d) There's talk of the one, original, accept-no-substitute slayer.

[22] The Satan is a little man claim clearly references the Platonic view of the derivative nature of evil—The First Evil and its minions cannot really consider themselves evil—they're after the *real* good, and all those pale imitations are just trying to be like them. In the same way, the language of dirtiness endorses a perspective in which evil is really good and good really evil. That's a pretty clear analogy to the way things can be deceptive in the cave, but even more it suggests that you can't think of things as bad without relating them to good. Caleb is simply the mirror image of those (the Scoobies) who think of The First as "evil." That's straightforward enough and rehashes ground I've gone over. The next two points force us forward. First, Caleb is insistent that that there's one, original slayer. I'm going to want us to think about the word "original" there. Second, the issue of coincidence is crucial. Caleb doesn't believe in it, and from within the perspective of the cave story, that makes perfect sense. Let me expand on these two latter points a bit.

[23] One thing that the Cave metaphor does is provide us with a view of the world and human agents that is teleological. In fact, there are two senses of teleology present in the metaphor. First, it allows us to explain why people

do what they do—they seek the good, even when they do evil. Moreover, by making the distinction between inside the cave and outside the cave, Plato explains why people are, on the whole, no good. It's because they can't get to the good directly due to desire-induced fantasies. That latter point seems about right, really. It's hard to imagine a critical theory getting off the ground without acknowledging such a fact. We simply are, in the words of Anya, "really, really screwed up in a monumental fashion." ("End of Days," 7021)

[24] However, the cave myth also points to a way out of the shadows of desire-induced fantasies. While we are, by and large, constrained by the cave, it's possible to escape the cave and achieve true happiness, to be really good. After all, presumably Socrates escaped the confines of the cave. One way to think about that possibility is to think that such a person is superior to everyone else. And who do we know who is committed to a view that one person is superior to everyone else? Caleb, certainly—Buffy is the original, accept-no-substitute slayer—but Buffy, too, views herself as superior (see, "Conversations with Dead People"). No matter how conflicted she feels about her superiority, no matter how much her believing herself to be superior makes her feel inferior, she accepts that *she* is the original, accept-no-substitute *slayer*. The one girl, blah, blah, blah.

[25] But there's a second, more worrisome, way in which the cave metaphor is teleological. In the very way that Plato crafts the metaphor, it is obvious that the cave can't be destroyed. The cave metaphor as a whole exhausts reality: there's the cave where most humans live out their lives pursuing various distorted images of the good, and there's outside the cave where the lucky few, philosophers, get to see the good in an undistorted way. The metaphor represents a self-enclosed whole. How do you destroy something that you can't escape? Now, you can escape the cave itself by recognizing your desire-induced fantasies (the way Willow and Anya do), but you can't escape once you're outside the cave—there's nowhere else to go.

[26] Now, extend this line of reasoning to Buffy and you can see the looming problem. Buffy must destroy the cave, The Hellmouth—that's where The First is hanging out and it's where The First is assembling the army he's going to use to take over the world. But as long as she accepts the cave story, the dialectical relation between good and evil, she can't destroy The First or The Hellmouth. What she needs to do is think outside the cave, not in the sense of getting outside and seeing the Good, but outside the whole inside/outside the cave dichotomy. She needs to think outside The Hellmouth, and that's something she has a very hard time doing throughout the season—after all, she's "Sunnydale Girl," and that self-description is connected to both The Hellmouth story and the slayer story. For Plato, destroying the cave would be tantamount to admitting that there's no ultimate good in the sense of a teleological principle—something for the sake of which everything is done, no matter how distorted. For Buffy, destroying the cave would be tantamount to destroying herself—at least from her perspective within the slayer story.

[27] Think for a minute about what it would mean to live without the cave. It

would be to give up a fantasy of ultimate meaning: things don't happen for the sake of some grand design. It would be to live with the notion of chance and fortune, since if everything is for the sake of the good, neither chance nor fortune has a place. In a teleological world, nothing just happens, but instead everything happens for a reason. The strongest statement of such a view that I know belongs to Hegel: "The sole aim of philosophical inquiry is to eliminate the contingent." Plato is a little more nuanced, but the point is the same. People who successfully escape the cave "would work out that it was the sun which caused the seasons and the years, which governed everything in the visible realm, and which was in one way or another responsible for everything they used to see." That is, they would see that their desire-induced fantasies within the cave were just distorted images of the Good.

[28] Now, if teleology implies a world in which nothing is fortuitous, in which everything is for the sake of an end, it makes perfect sense that Caleb wouldn't hold with coincidence. That would be a world in which he couldn't see himself as dialectically related to the good. Once again, Anya points us in the direction I want to go:

Buffy: Look, I wish this could be a democracy. I really do. Democracies don't win battles. It's a hard truth, but there has to be a single voice. You need someone to issue orders and be reckless sometimes and not take your feelings into account. You need someone to lead you.

Anya: And it's automatically you. You really do think you're better than we are.

Buffy: No, I—

Anya: But we don't know. We don't know if you're actually better. I mean, you came into the world with certain advantages, sure. I mean, that's the legacy.

Buffy: I—

Anya: But you didn't earn it. You didn't work for it. You've never had anybody come up to you and say you deserve these things more than anyone else. They were just handed to you. So that doesn't make you better than us. It makes you luckier than us. ("Empty Places" (7019))

Anya's talk about the "legacy" Buffy inherited is particularly on topic: it's not a necessary inheritance, but a chosen one. It didn't have to go the way it went. But then that also means we need not be bound by the way it went. This issue of the slayer "legacy" returns us to the last of the topics included in Caleb's little talk: Buffy is the original, accept-no-substitutes, slayer. Here, I want to focus on the term "original" because it points us to slayer origins, and, origin stories are notoriously teleological stories—things are instituted for the sake of something.

[29] In "Lessons" (7001) The First, performing its morphing act, tells Spike that they're going back to the "true beginning" and, significantly, The First

connects that remark with the remark that "It's about power." Thus, it would seem that there's a very close connection between beginnings and power. As the season progresses, we get acknowledgement of this connection in two ways—ways that neatly parallel the two senses of the cave metaphor. Think about the brilliant "Lies My Parents Told Me" (7017). I venture to say that much of this episode could be read as providing support for the way in which our desire-induced fantasies originate and the ways in which they exert their power, but that's not a path taken in this paper, mostly because of considerations of length. Still, let's consider, briefly, the Spike story in the episode. We're told that the power of Spike's trigger (the song that makes him kill) can be found in its origin. In Spike's case, understanding the source of the power his trigger possesses manages to defuse the power. The song no longer triggers his murderous, vampiric desires. I take the Spike story in "Lies My Parents Told Me" to be a straightforward example of how to escape the cave in the first sense of the cave story: returning to the origin of the fantasy releases him from a powerful desire-induced fantasy. Nonetheless, it's not clear to me that Spike's release from the cave constitutes more than a release from the cave in the first sense. After all, he returns to the cave, but doesn't survive the cave's destruction. Think for a minute about his motivation in returning to the cave. It's to prove that he's a champion—to himself and to Buffy. But thinking oneself a champion is itself a desire-induced fantasy in that being a champion only makes sense if one accepts the cave story: that some people just are superior to others. One really must think one is superior, and not luckier, than others. Spike may not be as neurotic as Buffy is when she feels inferior for being superior, but he's definitely neurotic in thinking he's a champion.

[30] Let me contrast that kind of origin story, that is, the kind that releases one from the cave while allowing one to remain within the ambit of the good, with another kind of origin story. The origin story most relevant for my argument is the one that Giles has told Buffy—for seven seasons. Of all the lies told by parents (and is there a more parental figure on the show than Giles?) that's the one with the most serious consequences. It's bound Buffy in the cave, The Hellmouth, but it's been the source of her power as well. And while the Slayer's power may come from having been chosen, nonetheless—and this is crucial—it's a peculiar sense of power; one bound up with the teleology of the cave story. In Season 7, one word comes to be shorthand for this teleology: "mission." Whatever Buffy does for the sake of the mission she does because a) she was chosen to do it and b) because the action she does preserves or promotes the mission.

[31] Think about "Get It Done" (7015). In that episode, we see the dialectical relation between good and evil made perfectly clear in the account of the formation of the first slayer. Indeed, the cave imagery is of almost anvil-like proportions, especially in the way Buffy is bound underground in a cave wearing black and white clothes. Metaphorically, the very thing that keeps

her bound to the cave, unable to break out of the second cave story, is both what has led her to succeed up to now, but is also pretty obviously what's leading her to fail now. Having seen the origin of her power, Buffy's at something of a loss. She thinks she understands its lesson, the lesson she communicates to Wood at the end of "Lies My Parents Told Me:" "The Mission Is What Matters." That understanding is a cover-up job, though, a kind of desire-induced fantasy much like Plato's attempt to explain Socrates' death. Buffy may think she understands what it is to be a slayer when she admits that she would sacrifice Dawn for the mission, but reality has a surprise for her: this understanding of the mission is going to mean she'll lose.

[32] In "Dirty Girls," (7018) she goes after Caleb, and she does lose—badly, and with disastrous consequences for some potentials, for Xander, and for herself. In the next episode, "Empty Spaces," (7019) she's shown that if the mission is paramount, she's expendable too. A nifty little lesson, that is. It's in "Touched," (7020) that Spike shows her the beginnings of a way through the impasse, but not perhaps in quite the way he meant to. Buffy may be, in Spike's terms, "a helluva woman," (though given all I've said, I think we can read that adjective in multiple, and not necessarily flattering, ways), but the way to victory against the cave story isn't going to go through his additional descriptor: her unique status as "the one." After her good night's sleep with Spike at her side, she proves that she's a woman when she goes against Caleb. Caleb says that when he lays a hand on her she'll be "just a dead little girl," but Buffy shows him that she's more than a girl, and in doing so claims the scythe. However, while she may no longer be "Sunnydale Girl," she remains, as it were, "Sunnydale Woman." What she needs to do is escape from the "Sunnydale" moniker, her second level cave-like, desire-induced fantasy.

[33] To see how that remaining breakthrough arises, let's think a bit about the scythe. Notice how it falls outside the standard slayer story—Giles is flummoxed that such an item can exist without him having heard of it. And, of course, as many fans complained, the introduction of the scythe seemed pretty lamely ad hoc, or even a kind of *deus ex machina*. It probably won't surprise you when I say that it's precisely the ad hoc status of the scythe that makes it so important. After all, think what sort of thing could disturb a cave story like the one Giles has told Buffy over 142 episodes. It couldn't be anything internal to the story, since anything internal would be subsumable under the overarching teleology of the cave/slayer story. So, we get a counter-story. The counter-story is about a pre-Christian artifact, the scythe, or, as its guardian calls it, "a last surprise," forged for the slayer. **[Editors note: See Zoe-Jane Playen on pre-Christian feminist themes in *BtVS*.]**

[34] Just before Caleb snaps her neck, the guardian explains that Buffy's arrival to claim the scythe means that "an end is truly near." The surprising word here is "an" and not the anticipated "the." Of course, Caleb

immediately, and necessarily given the cave he's trapped within, supplies the "the." But here's what's interesting: the guardian's message comes from within the system (the guardians were watching the watchers after all) but it's not part of the teleological cave story of watchers and slayers, good and evil. It's both inside and outside the inside/outside of the hellmouth/slayer story. It is, as it were, the system self-disrupting, but not for a reason—not for "the end," but for "an end." Such self-disruption is intolerable in a cave-like story and would have to be subsumable under the inside/outside of the cave—perhaps as some clearer access to the Sun. But that way of understanding the scythe *would* make it a *deus ex machina* in the pejorative sense of the term. By re-thinking the kind of power Buffy finds in the scythe, though, I think we can see that it's not a *deus ex machina*, but instead a lucky event, a surprise. And certainly it can't be God-like in any way, since that would imply teleology.

[35] That brings us, at last, to the final point I want to make. It concerns the meaning of "power." All season we've heard the word used, but, really, when it comes right down to it, what is power? There's one thing we find out in "Chosen" (7022)—power is not force, or brute strength, or anything that we're accustomed to associate with the term. Instead, we learn at the end that power is really just potentiality. From the Latin *potere* to be able, in this sense "power" involves possibilities. And, need I say, being trapped in a desire-induced fantasy is a condition that closes off possibilities. The somewhat unfortunate cookie dough speech illustrates that Buffy herself realizes that the worst thing she can do is close off possibilities. The point is not to think too far ahead, she tells Angel, and that makes perfect sense inasmuch as thinking too far ahead clearly forecloses possibilities. For Buffy, the crucial moment is when she realizes that she'd been, in Dawn's apt phrase, a "dumbass." It's exactly when Buffy confronts her "big bad" self—The First spouting the slayer mythology, that Buffy sees her desire-induced fantasy reflected back at her. The disconnect between the slayer story (she alone, blah, blah, blah) and the litany of "weapons" that she has at her disposal (her dead lover, Faith, her friends, her wanna-slay brigade) hits home and it "occurs" to her that they're going to win.

[36] Note the word "occurs"—it's intransitive. Like the scythe, there's no explanation for her realization available from within the slayer story. She doesn't infer it, she doesn't deduce it, she doesn't even "realize" it. It's not part of the slayer story at all. It just occurs. And when Buffy presents her plan to everyone, Faith gets it—the plan is "pretty radical." Here again, etymology makes my point: "radical" is derived from the Latin "radix," which means "root." Buffy's gone back to the beginning, to the source of her power as slayer with all the cave-like structure that entails. In striking at the root of her power, she opens up new possibilities.

[37] Consider Willow one last time. She tells us that using her power will go

“beyond” anything she’s ever done—striking at the root of her own desire-induced fantasies—and that “it’s a total loss of control.” But what is “control” if not the dialectical partner of cave-supported power? Thus, it’s through the renunciation of control that Willow can transform the power of the scythe, just as it’s Buffy’s renunciation of the slayer story that allows her to go beyond *The First* in power.

[38] At the end of “Chosen,” we see Buffy in full possession of her newly recognized power, and she’s breaking out in a genuine smile. She can do whatever she wants—well, except shop at the Sunnydale Mall. She’s destroyed the slayer story she’s been trapped in for years by undoing its source, and she’s destroyed the cave—with its teleological constraints. She’s “scrunched” *The First Evil*. Dare I say that for the first time, Buffy is really happy—not because she has fulfilled her destiny as a slayer, but because she has chosen to reject that destiny.

[39] Of course, this is hardly the end of Buffy’s story—much more could be said. However, I want to end by discussing a potential objection. It might be thought that I have placed Buffy and company in a world in which good and evil no longer exist. That’s only partly correct. While I think the ultimate lesson of the season is a destruction of Buffy’s slayer story and, by extension, a recognition that teleological stories can be more destructive in their own way than the kind of evil they try to contain, I don’t think the world as reconfigured by Buffy is one in which anything goes. In describing the lessons learned from Darwin and Freud, Adam Phillips has written:

Indeed, for both of them we are the animals who seem to suffer, above all, from our ideals. Indeed, it is part of the moral gist of their work not merely that we use our ideals to deny, to over-protect ourselves from, reality; but that these ideals—of redemption, of cure, of progress, of absolute knowledge, of pure goodness—are refuges that stop us living in the world as it is and finding out what it is like, and therefore what we could be like in it.

[40] As Willow states, Buffy and company have changed the world. But it would be a mistake to think that the change is for the better, just as it would be a mistake to think it’s a change for the worse. It’s *a* change; there’s a world filled with new possibilities. In short, I take it that the ending of the series is not a happy one, in any ordinary sense of the word “happy.” Happiness in that sense would imply an orientation to yet another teleological story, and, hence, a betrayal of the ultimate “lesson” of the season. I think the most we can infer about Buffy’s world after “Chosen” is that it’s no longer a Buffyverse. She’s inaugurated a momentous shift, a reconfiguration of options. But that doesn’t mean that “good” and “evil” have been destroyed, just one possible way of understanding, and being trapped by, these terms. For Buffy, it’s still the case that it’s all about choices, and

it's time for her, and by extension the rest of us, to go to work.

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Sue Turnbull

**“Not just another *Buffy* paper’:
Towards an Aesthetics of Television’**

The author wishes to thank Katy Stevens for generous support and advice during the writing of this paper--not to mention her technological wizardry and profound Buffy scholarship. ST

Teaser: Why I sometimes wish I was studying orthodonture

(1) There’s only one place to buy coffee on my University campus and it’s called *Caffeine*. Once in a health crisis, I asked for decaffeinated. They pretended not to hear me, it’s that kind of a joint. It is, therefore, the only place on campus to meet anyone who has time these days to step out of their office, and it’s where two months ago I ran into a distinguished colleague who asked me ‘what I was up to’. I told him I was writing a paper on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* for an international conference on *Buffy* in Nashville. He looked aghast. ‘Did you know’, I continued in what I already knew was a doomed attempt at self-justification, ‘that there are at least twelve serious academic books already published on *Buffy*?’ He opened his mouth to speak. ‘AND a very serious International Journal of *Buffy* studies?’ He shook his head. ‘What are you up to?’ I beamed. ‘A biography of Gore Vidal’ he responded dryly, ‘one of the most important intellectual figures of the twentieth century about whom very little has been written thus far.’ I knew I should be crushed, I can detect an implied put down when I hear one. ‘Ah well, this is not just another *Buffy* paper’, I rallied, ‘I intend to discuss the history of popular culture in the curriculum and argue for a new approach to studying television’. Awed by my hubris and momentarily daunted by the magnitude of the task, I paused. ‘Read any good books lately?’ he said.

(2) Reflecting on this encounter later, I realised how it typified most of my adult experience as a teacher of media, popular culture and television (just as I suspect it probably typifies the experience of many people here from across the academy and other walks of life). When people ask me what I do, or what I am studying, I almost always have to explain myself in ways which I would not have to if I were researching the works of William Faulkner, particle physics or orthodonture. Studying popular culture simply isn’t taken seriously, even, it would seem, by *Buffy*.

Act 1: 'Taking Popular Culture Seriously: But Not in a Good Way'

(3) In Episode One Season Four, Buffy and Willow are discovered in a graveyard, discussing Buffy's subject choice for college while waiting for a recently buried vampire to rise. Willow runs through Buffy's options. Buffy, reverting to airhead mode, rejects the idea of studying the modern novel (too many words, not enough time), in favour of the short story – although her preference for the modern blurb is clear. Discovering that the short

story class conflicts with their Psychology 105 class, Willow suggests instead 'Images of Pop Culture' in which, she announces, 'they watch movies, TV shows and even commercials.' 'For credit?' asks Buffy incredulously. It would seem that even she cannot imagine how popular culture might be taken seriously.

(4) Having decided to take the class, she turns up, only to discover that the lecturer in charge is a complete ass-hole who takes delight in public humiliation. He expels Buffy for asking a question of her neighbour while he is pompously making his opening pronouncements. As an image of popular culture, he's not a good look. Crestfallen, Buffy heads off to join Willow in Psych conducted by the 'renowned' Professor Walsh who oozes academic credibility as she outlines her expectations of her students:

Make no mistake. I run a hard class. I assign a lot of work, I talk fast, and I expect you to keep up.

Walsh means business, although her real business is extremely dodgy and will constitute the major story arc of Season 4., which all goes to show that one should never trust anyone in academia, but I digress.

(5) Back to the Images of Pop Culture moment. Is Joss Whedon, who wrote this episode, really suggesting that the study of popular culture shouldn't be taken seriously? Or is he simply rehearsing the general prejudice in order to make fun of it? Or is Whedon (as usual) having it both ways, mischievously mocking the notion of an academy which would dare to take popular culture (and therefore his creation *Buffy*) seriously, while having a dig at those who don't? In any case, by Season Four of *Buffy* he must already have been aware of the ways in which the series had already been picked up and picked over by academia.

(6) In her account of Whedon's own undergraduate experience of academia at Wesleyan University in Connecticut, Candace Havens places considerable emphasis on Joss's dedication to Film Studies. This emphasis is confirmed by his mentor, Professor Jeanine Basinger, Professor of Film, who goes on to describe Whedon thus:

Act One

'Taking Popular Culture Seriously: But Not in a Good Way'



Season 4 Episode 1 *The Freshman*

Written and Directed by
Joss Whedon

Willow: They watch movies, TV shows and even commercials

Buffy: For *credit*?

He's incredibly smart. He is deeply, widely read. He's not one of those people who falls into show business because he taps the popular culture and nothing else. He has read the classics. He knows history (Havens 2003: 14).

There's a suggestion here that 'tapping into' popular culture is an activity of a very different order from studying the classics and history, and that the secret to Whedon's success lies in his devotion to the latter not the former. From Basinger's account, it therefore emerges that what Whedon's college education gave him was the classics and history, and, of course the academic study of film which unlike popular culture and television studies, gained academic credibility and a firm foothold in the Humanities curriculum in the sixties and seventies (Jancovitch and Lyons 2003: 3).¹ I can't help thinking there's an underlying cultural hierarchy at work here, which is reflected in Whedon's own comments about his career plans after graduation in 1987:

I was sure I was too good for television....That's what my family did and I couldn't be bothered. I was a total snob. I never watched American TV, I only watched, like, *Masterpiece Theatre*. I was going to be a great independent filmmaker. The problem was, after school, I had no idea how I was going to make this happen (havens 2003: 17).


(7) The desire not to enter the family business (it is well known that both Whedon's father and grandfather were successful TV scriptwriters) is hardly surprising. It's all part of growing up and rejecting the parental culture in a probably futile attempt to stave off the worst case scenario, that one might turn into one's parents. What IS surprising is that the man who so loves popular culture that it infiltrates every concept he creates, can honestly reveal that he himself has been a victim of the high culture/low culture prejudice which has dominated most western thinking about popular culture since the rise of the popular novel.

(8) Let me flip back to a putative point of origin for this prejudice against the popular with the publication of arguably the first blockbuster novel of its time, Ann Radcliffe's gothic novel of sensation, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. First published in Britain in 1794, *Udolpho* went into five reprints before being mercilessly sent up by Jane Austen in *Northanger Abbey* published twenty four years later in 1818 (although originally written in 1798)². *Udolpho* was, of course, but one ripple in a wave of gothic novels published in the second half of the eighteenth century which popularised the gothic imagery, symbolism and even the

Act One | 'Taking Popular Culture Seriously: But Not in a Good Way'

Popular Culture before Popular Culture

Ann Radcliffe's gothic novel of sensation, *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, 1794



Udolpho went into five reprints before being mercilessly sent up by Jane Austen in *Northanger Abbey* published twenty-four years later (although originally written in 1798).

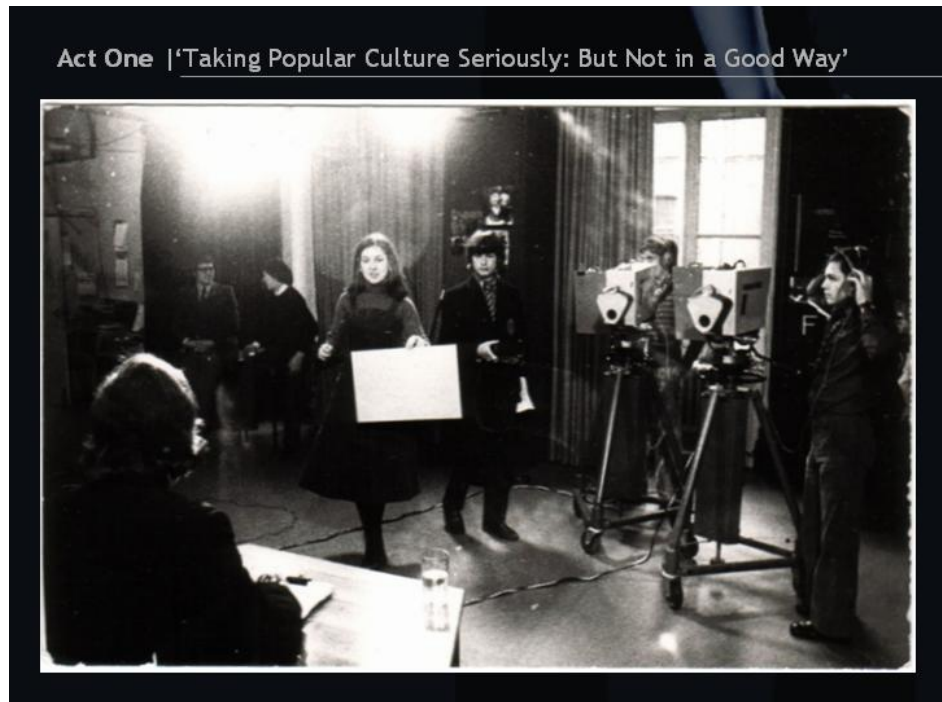
trope of the fair-haired virtuous heroine on which Whedon himself clearly draws (Callander).

(9) Austen's comic critique of *Udolpho*, however, reveals that even at the height of its popularity, the gothic novel as a form of popular culture (before popular culture was invented) was hardly taken seriously, or at least only seriously enough to be made fun of. Over the course of the nineteenth century, however, cultural anxiety about the emergence of a new mass media created to entertain a new mass audience created by an industrial revolution which provided the technology to make the new mass media possible, grew exponentially. Popular culture, including the sensational broadsheet featuring gruesome murder, romantic novels of sensation, melodrama including the gothic, and other forms of supposedly debased culture, began to be taken very seriously indeed, but not in a good way.

(10) In 1869, Mathew Arnold, a former school inspector and Headmaster of the famous British public (which means private) school, Rugby, published his influential book *Culture and Anarchy* in which he forecast the end of civilization if the corrupting effects of popular culture and a devotion to the machine were not held in check and taught against. Almost sixty years later, Frank Leavis and Dennis Thompson published *Culture and Environment* (1933), another highly influential book which emphasised the need for teachers to teach good taste, discrimination, and moral values as a way of mitigating the effects of an increasingly powerful and therefore increasingly suspect popular mass media. I would argue that the legacy of these interventions is still with us in the curriculum of the school and the university which remains dedicated to the classics and the canon (as a form of moral and aesthetic education), only dealing with the popular in terms of its (negative) power and affect, but rarely in terms of its (positive) aesthetic or cultural value.

(11) Back in the sixties and early seventies when I started teaching, there were three main justifications for dealing with popular culture and television. Option One: You had to teach students to deconstruct it, to see through it, in order to demystify it and limit its impact. What David Buckingham calls the prophylactic approach (Buckingham 1998). Option Two, you taught students how to make the media themselves in order to enable them to become the producers of a better, more democratic, more politically active media which would inevitably bring about the next glorious socialist revolution.

(12) Cue photograph – here I am in 1975 with a group of fourteen year old potential revolutionaries who are learning how to operate TV cameras and how to make the news broadcast which will announce the coming revolution. As you are no doubt aware, this failed to eventuate in England. We got Margaret Thatcher instead, and the redeployment of the left wing university not as a place of social critique and scholarship, but as a place of right wing education and training. By the late eighties, in England and in Australia, the new vocationalism had taken hold to such an extent that almost all of our students studying the media wanted to work in the media. So much for the prophylactic approach.



(14) The Third Option had to do with education by stealth. You could use popular culture in the classroom to seduce students into paying attention in order to get your message across about whatever it was you were trying to teach – which probably wasn't anything to do with the media in the first place.³ However, as a teacher one was warned very strongly about the dangers of being 'sucked in' or duped into simply giving the students what they wanted. In other words, if it all got to be too much fun then the students couldn't possibly be learning anything useful. Off with the TV and out with the worksheets.

(15) What was largely missing from the above approaches to studying popular culture was any notion of its cultural or aesthetic value, except in entirely negative terms. Appreciating popular culture, such as the comic book, or watching television, except when the television in question was 'quality' television (about which much more shortly) were cultural pursuits frowned on by the school curriculum and the teaching profession. Indeed, poor levels of literacy in schools are still blamed on a television culture which feeds kids supposedly 'mindless' cartoons such as *The Roadrunner*.

Act Two: 'In Bed with Television'

(16) In the Season Four episode 'Goodbye Iowa', Giles, Buffy, Anya and Willow are in hiding in Xander's basement: the women delicately cordoned off from the men by a curtain much like the one in the 1934 romantic comedy "*It Happened One Night*" (a carefully placed intertextual reference for all the film buffs out there). Giles is rudely awakened by the sounds of a Warner Brothers *Roadrunner* cartoon as we discover Willow, Anya and Buffy in bed watching a very small TV on which a giant wrecking ball swings in a destructive arc towards Wile E Coyote, who contemplates its looming shadow with doomed resignation. 'That would never happen' says Buffy, the woman to whom the impossible always happens. Willow offers her a brief lesson in genre theory, 'Well, no Buff, that's why they call them cartoons, not documentaries'.

Act Two

'In Bed with Television'



Season 4 Episode 14 *Goodbye Iowa*

Written by **Marti Noxon**
Directed by **David Solomon**

Buffy: That would never happen!

Willow: Well, no Buff, that's why they call them cartoons, not documentaries.

Act Two | 'In Bed with Television'

'More absolutely than zombies, vampires and the undead are cartoon characters denied the solace of eternal rest' (Thompson 1976: 135).



(17) What Willow doesn't say, is that cartoons as texts have been taken very seriously indeed within Film Studies. Indeed, Richard Thompson's seminal appreciation and critique of the Roadrunner cartoons entitled 'Meep Meep!' originally published in 1969 has been frequently cited and republished, most pertinently here in Bill Nichols' edited collection, *Movies and Methods* (1976), a standard text in America Film Studies courses and one with which Whedon himself would no doubt have been familiar in college. Although Whedon did not

write or direct this episode, I would like to make a case for his status as the 'author' of the series as a whole, given his role in over-seeing both content and stylistics. This scene is thus yet another ambiguous moment in the complex discourse of the popular which emerges in *Buffy* since while it presents us with the all too familiar image of kids watching cartoons on TV, the cartoon reference in question is by no means as simple as it seems.

(18) The Thompson article begins with a quote attributed to Pete Burness on the topic of violence in cartoons which might have been written about the violence in *Buffy*:

In the American cartoon, death, human defeat, is never presented without being followed by resurrection, transfiguration. A cartoon character can very well be crushed into a plate by a steam roller, may be fragmented, cut up by a biscuit cutting machine, but he arises immediately, intact and full of life in the next shot. So it seems evident to me that the American cartoon, rather than glorifying death, is a permanent illustration of the theme of rebirth (Burness quoted in Thompson 1990: 217)

(19) Thompson's gloss on this comment is to add that while this may well be true, in the case of the cartoon character, rebirth only leads to the next debacle, 'More absolutely than zombies, vampires and the un-dead are cartoon characters denied the solace of eternal rest' (Thompson 1976: 135). Given the forthcoming ending Season Five, Buffy and Wile E. Coyote might have much more in common than she imagines. The major point to be made here, however, is that despite the serious treatment of the Warner Brothers cartoon in Film Studies where it has long been recognised as a 'subversive and surreal' art form never intended for children (Thompson 1976: 129), cartoons on TV are still usually cited as a marker of mindless entertainment for a childlike audience, such as the power of the negative discourse about the role of television in the home since its arrival in the 1950s.

(20) Initially hailed with both utopian pronouncements of its potential for cultural enlightenment accompanied by dystopian prognoses of its negative effects, television has almost always been considered largely in terms of its social context of reception, the home. Such an approach is in direct contrast to the study of film which largely got over its social anxiety during the thirties (with the conduct of the Payne Fund Studies), developing a much stronger tradition of auteurist and aesthetic commentary which guaranteed it a secure niche within the Humanities tradition of textual analysis. Television Studies, on the other hand, has wandered about the curriculum over the last fifty years, frequently waking up with such promiscuous bedfellows as Education, Communication, or more recently, Cultural Studies and wondering how it got there.

(21) It got there, of course, because, unlike the cinema, television has rarely been imagined in terms of its discrete texts, but rather in terms of its social role as a technology. While I am well aware, as Lyn Spiegel (1998) points out, that the US and the UK initially embraced the study of television in very different ways⁴, I would like to argue that there has been a subsequent convergence of these traditions drawing largely on a Cultural Studies approach which emphasises the political implications of the text in terms of the technologies of reception. Such an approach might be traced to the moment when British cultural theorist Raymond Williams woke up in Miami after a transatlantic sea voyage around 1974, turned on the TV and found it almost impossible to work out what he was watching because of the 'flow' of images, the constant interruptions of ad breaks and the trailers for up-coming programmes (Williams 1974: 91-92).

(22) Revisiting Williams' concept of flow some eight years later, John Ellis (1982) fractured the flow into a sequence of segments (within the drama, the news, and of course the TV commercial as the segment par excellence), and once again the text was 'disappeared'. Ellis also distinguished the scopic regime of television from that of cinema by arguing that while we may gaze at a film (projected on a large screen in a darkened auditorium which simulates the dream experience and opens the flood gates to

psychoanalytic interpretations of the text), we only glance at TV (because it is a small screen in a well lit social space which has to compete with all the irruptions of family life, frequently relying on urgent aural cues (the jingle, the title music) to direct our attention back to the box. Writing in 1999, John Corner goes so far as to suggest that television production is entirely bound by the domestic context of reception and primacy of talk over the spectacular:

With the exception of films designed initially or concurrently for cinema release, television images are framed and composed with the factors of reduced screen size and domestic contexts of reception in mind. [...] Studio programmes of all kinds are often anchored in speech, in vision or in voice-over. The result is often a visualisation which serves primarily to indicate the space and place of talk. [...] In popular television and series drama, the extensive use of close-up and medium close-ups provides for the special kinds of character familiarity, proximity, and everydayness which these fictions seek to generate in exploring dimensions of the domestic and the social (Corner 199: 30-31).

(23) While all that Williams, Ellis and Corner suggest about the television experience may well be true, I want to argue that these descriptions do not account for either the kind of television text which is *Buffy* nor the ways in which it is watched. I would argue that *Buffy* is watched differently not only because of changes in the technology of delivery, but also because the text itself demands a different sort of engagement.

(24) Let's start with technology and the ways in which the video recorder has changed our relationship to television, allowing us to record programmes for repeat viewing and enabling us to 'edit out' the commercials which might interrupt our attention to the text. Unlike Williams or Ellis, we are able to interrupt the flow, and to rearrange the segments into a discrete text which can be experienced as intensely as a film.

(25) Then along came the DVD with all its extras, its 'making-of' documentaries, directorial commentary and television started doing television studies for itself, enacting the kinds of critical and aesthetic analysis that film studies had been doing for some time, but with a different problematic. While the text of a film may be of limited and bounded duration, what constitutes the text in Television Studies when that text is a seven season series comprising over a hundred episodes narratively linked by episodic story arcs, seasonal story arcs and whole series story arcs?

(27) And then there was the internet. Although the debate about whether the internet was invented in order to serve the purposes of the US military or a legion of Star Trek fans (who might well have been the same group) may never be resolved, what is clear is that right from its inception, the internet has been used for the kinds of fannish activity which largely prefigure the new aesthetics of television study which I want to argue for here.

(28) Let me therefore go out on a limb and suggest that *Buffy* fans (or *Angel* fans, or *Firefly* would-be fans if they got a chance) don't watch *Buffy* as part of television's flow of images or segments, nor do they simply glance at the screen. It is far more likely they watch *Buffy* on a big screen TV (if they can afford one) in the dark, either in silence or with trusted viewing companions who might be in the room or on-line in a participatory viewing experience which is all about intense engagement with the text. Fans interrogate the text and each other, rehearsing not only close forms of textual analysis and

commentary, but a knowledge of authorship, genre and style as well as the conditions of production which impinge both on the creation and the delivery of the televisual product. Conditions which might include the use of particular televisual technologies, the exigencies of the televisual form, the contribution of specific production or acting personnel, or the machinations of a network, a production company or the television programmers who make the decisions about how, what and when the television product will be delivered – or not – as in the case of the intense fan speculation and attempted intervention in the axing of *Angel*.

(29) In other words, fans understand and are already in command of what John Thornton Caldwell calls the whole 'aesthetic economy of televisuality' which encompasses not only an understanding of the text in all its stylistic, referential and narrative complexity but also an understanding of the conditions of production which determine its form and style. Furthermore, *Buffy* as a TV series not only recognises that fans have this knowledge but also lets them know it knows by inviting them to exercise their advanced televisual skills over and over again and again. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the Season Seven episode 'Storyteller' which as a *Buffy* fan, I read thus.

Act Three: 'Oh, Hello There Gentle Viewer'

(30) The opening shot of the teaser to 'Storyteller' begins with a close-up on two leatherbound volumes in a bookcase. The names on the spines are Nietzsche and Shakespeare. There are no titles, perhaps because the names are intended to be sufficient clues for the viewer to tease out; perhaps in terms of Nietzsche's concept of the 'ubermensch' which might be relevant to this episode, the season or *Buffy* as a whole; 5 perhaps in terms of how Shakespeare's status as both a

canonical auteur and popular dramatist problematises the too easy distinction between high and low culture, the classics and the popular. Whatever the final reading of this gesture towards the classics, (which the *Buffy* scholar knows Joss Whedon has read) the seasoned viewer also knows that these signs matter within the inter-textual treasure trove which is *Buffy*.

(31) The camera gracefully pans across an elegant study, taking in an open comic book, a Star Wars poster with action figures in front, an anime poster and tribal masks (more significant signs carefully placed for the viewer to decode) until we discover Andrew, in silk smoking jacket, sitting in a leather armchair before an elaborate fireplace in which an open fire burns. He is reading from an ancient tome, pipe in hand as the classical music fades and he welcome us with the courtesy of a nineteenth century novelist, 'Oh, hello there gentle viewer'. 6

Act Three

'Oh, Hello There Gentle Viewers'



Season 7 Episode 17
Storyteller

Written by **Jane Espenson**
Directed by **Marita Grabiak**

Andrew: Join me on a new voyage of the mind. A little tale I like to call *Buffy, Slayer of the Vampyrs*

(32) This opening shot, accompanied by classical music on the soundtrack, thus visually and aurally brackets the classical and the popular, high and low culture, the comic and the serious. But how are we to read it in the context of the series as a whole? What are the stylistics of this shot which tell us something strange is going on? And just what is the nerdish Andrew doing in this chair?

(33) In interpreting this scene, the Buffy scholar already has to hand Andrew's narrative baggage, including the knowledge that he is an ardent *Star Trek* fan, and the only remaining member of the Season 6 failed trio of 'arch nemesises' including Warren and Jonathon. At this point in the narrative, which we also know is heading towards a season and series finale, we are also aware that Andrew is the 'guestage/hostage' of Buffy and of vital importance to the Season 7 story arc involving the latest Nietzschean 'ubermensch' to threaten the Buffyverse, the First. However, the fact that Andrew the TV fan is routinely portrayed as comic provokes the niggling possibility that the creators of this series can't help but construct fandom for popular culture as somehow inherently 'funny'. Is the portrayal of Andrew therefore yet another moment of ambiguity about the status of the popular in this series which both reveres and mocks those who take it seriously?

(33) In 'Storyteller', Andrew is performing the fannish endeavour of making a documentary about Buffy, Slayer of the *Vampyrs*, as he pronounces it with the emphasis on the final syllable, thus recalling to my mind Louis Feuillade's original film *Les Vampires*, a serial in ten episodes made between 1915-16⁷, yet another inter-textual reference for fans to play with: a reference which raises the diverting question, just when did *Les Vampires* stop being popular culture and become a film classic? Or is it both? Does the distinction even matter? Andrew is, however, portrayed primarily as a TV fan whose fantasy is to imagine himself as the host of the PBS TV series *Masterpiece Theatre* originally hosted by Alistair Cooke from 1971-1992,⁸ although I couldn't help thinking the more pertinent and comic reference might be to *Monsterpiece Theatre* with Alistair Cookie. This is hardly accidental, since the allusion to *Masterpiece Theatre* recalls not only Joss Whedon's own admitted undergraduate snobbery about television, but also a concept of 'quality' television which involves a restaging of the literary classics and British costume drama as a marker of high culture.⁹

(34) So what is going on here? Is *Buffy* having a go at fans whilst also having a go at the high culture pundits? Is Whedon mocking his former television snobbery?¹⁰ And just what kinds of televisual knowledge do we need to make sense of this teaser?

(35) Consider the stylistics of this scene which is lit and shot as if it were film. The filmic effect involves not only a masterfully executed pan, but also the kinds of saturated colour only made possible by the technological advances of the 80s, as described by Caldwell, when television began to look like film not only because it began to be shot on film, but because of the visual aesthetic of such television producers and directors as Michael Mann (*Miami Vice* 1984-1989), Steven Spielberg (*Amazing Stories* 1985-1987) and David Lynch (*Twin Peaks* 1990-1991).¹¹ In other words, the stylistic premise of this opening scene of mock-*Masterpiece Theatre* is that 'quality' television not only restages the classics, but also looks like film. While this may be true, it is surely significant that this filmic look is the stylistic of Andrew's other fantasy sequences which include; the breakfast scene when Buffy, a half-naked Spike and Anya all appear in sensuous slow motion in a sequence somewhere between a shampoo commercial and a soft porn moment; and the scene in which Andrew imagines himself, Jonathon and Warren as Gods.¹² In other

words, the filmic look of the 'quality TV' a la *Masterpiece Theatre* is also being used for comic purposes here.

(36) In the final scene of this teaser, Andrew's fantasy of himself as quality TV host is rudely interrupted by Anya banging on the bathroom door and we discover that he is actually sitting on the toilet talking into a camcorder. When asked what he is up to, Andrew replies 'Entertaining and educating', a phrase which echoes the mission of a public service model of quality TV. Anya's interruption, however, returns us to the 'real world' of *Buffy*, or rather the televisual aesthetic of *Buffy* which is the 'standard' for the series, the 'standard' which we take for granted, but to which the variations in televisual style in this episode draw attention because of the nature of their difference.

(37) Take for example, the third televisual aesthetic at work in this episode, Andrew's vision through the cam-corder. In this televisual style there is an explicit foregrounding of the video technology through the on-screen framing markers, the record sign and the simulation of the kinds of jerky and unplanned hand-held camera work which marks the aesthetic of the home-made. We also get the self-conscious and amateurish direct to camera address, whether the person being addressed is figured as Andrew – holding the camera – or Andrew addressing an imagined audience of *Buffy* fans as he performs his fannish act of devotion, retelling the story *his way* with the aid of a whiteboard.¹³

(38) The televisual aesthetics of *Storyteller* thus shifts between three stylistic modes: the explicitly filmic look (which is Andrew's fantasy vision), the video look which mimics home made television, and the '*Buffy* standard' – the TV aesthetic of the series as a whole. What is interesting is that the '*Buffy* standard' can contain, mock and mimic both the filmic and the video, using each style quite precisely in order to say important things about character and plot. In other words, in *Buffy*, as we have learned over the seasons, televisual style is intrinsic to the art of storytelling. Form and content, story and discourse, production and narrative elements are all wedded in a complex television text which clearly provides a model for how television *should* be studied.

(39) Here's the plan. Firstly, as so much fan discussion has clearly demonstrated, in order to understand *Buffy*, it helps to know about the production context in which it occurs, the constraints of the networks, the economics of production, the limitations of format. Let's call this the industry and production context. Secondly, in order to grasp the complexity of *Buffy* as a text, it helps to know as much as possible about its creators, specifically Joss Whedon, but also the ways in which other writers and directors make specific creative contributions to the series as a whole. Let's call this auteurism. Thirdly, the series requires a complex understanding of how a series' narrative might work in terms of story arcs and the logic of the narrative premise. Let's call this genre and narratology. Fourthly, the series is deeply allusive in terms of high and low culture, the classical and the popular, whilst, I would argue, being nicely ambiguous about its allegiance to either. Let's call this the postmodern cultural turn. Fifthly the series demands an understanding of different televisual styles and what these might mean in specific contexts. Let's call this the televisual aesthetic and note that it has a long and complex history which deserves to be studied carefully, largely because this is where it all begins, when the viewer encounters the text, which brings me to the sixth and most overlooked of all approaches in the study of television, the aesthetics of performance.¹⁴ The moment when the performance on screen 'moves' us in ways which we experience emotionally and viscerally in and through our bodies but find hard to put into words. And

it is here that I return to the return to the original meaning of the term *aesthesis*, which as Eagleton suggests in its Greek formulation comprised 'the whole region of human perception and sensation' (Eagleton 1990: 13). In other words, the moment when aesthetics becomes not just a discourse of the intellect, but also a discourse of the heart. (40) And yet it would seem that the aesthetics of the television text, which matters so much in this moment of encounter with the viewer, hardly seems to figure in Television Studies. Perhaps because the concept of the aesthetic has had a bad rap in recent times, having been largely erased by what Caldwell identifies as the Cultural Studies approach which treats the text symptomatically in terms of its ideology and audience whilst largely ignoring the role of the industry and technology in shaping the moment of encounter between viewer and text.¹⁵

(41) This, I would argue is *the* critical moment in Television Studies: the moment when the history of the text and the experience of the viewer come together in a potentially productive intellectual and emotional encounter. I want to call this moment the aesthetic moment, and to suggest that as teachers and fans we can share this moment, explore it, and extend it through an exchange of knowledge and experience in which there should be no hierarchies of cultural value since all forms of knowledge (including knowledge of the classics, history and the popular) are of equal importance in the quest for understanding how meaning is produced and how texts are experienced. And it is with this moment, with this quest, that a revised notion of Television Studies should begin, since as the myriad fans of *Buffy* have already demonstrated, it's in this moment of shared understandings, shared knowledge and shared aesthetic experience that we all stand to learn from each other.

(42) It's time to take television and popular culture *seriously* seriously – and in a good way.

¹ While *The Journal of Popular Culture* although edited by Ray Browne of Bowling Green University commenced publication in 1967, as David Branculli points out in his book *Teletliteracy* (1992), the academic study of film was well under way in the fifties in France with the publication of *Cahiers du Cinema*. It might also be noted that the influential British film theory journal *Screen* commenced publication in 1960 in the UK.

² These dates are taken from the Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Literature, originally published in 1939.

³ I am well aware that this is still one of the major ways in which Popular Culture, including *Buffy*, creeps into the curriculum in subjects as diverse as Linguistics and Religion in which *Buffy* stages the example from which the lesson will derive, as David Lavery has demonstrated in his paper presented at Sonic Synergies conference in Adelaide 2003.

⁴ Spigel reveals how the early academic study of television in the US was closely linked to the industry and that it was CBS which initially commissioned the first quarterly magazine of television criticism *The Journal of Broadcasting* in 1960,

⁵ Karl Schudt (2003) discusses the concept of the *ubermensch* in *Buffy* in relation to the Mayor in Season 4 of *Buffy* in James B South's edited collection of essays, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer and Philosophy*.

⁶ The patrician TV host, clad in a smoking jacket and sitting in an arm chair by an open

fire is a television trope denoting high seriousness and more which goes back to the early days of American TV – well before *Masterpiece Theatre* in 1971 (note from Robert J. Thompson)

7 It might be noted that Feuillade was the creator of one of the great screen vampires of all time – the mysterious Irma Vep as played by the actress Musidora (Thomson 1994: 238-240).

8 The host from 1992 to the present is apparently Russell Baker about whom as an Australian resident I have no knowledge whatsoever.

9 *Masterpiece Theatre* first aired on PBS in January 1971 with a 12 part series imported from the UK entitled *The First Churchills*. In the first year of broadcast it also screened, *The Spoils of Poynton*, *Pere Goriot*, *Jude the Obscure*, *The Gambler* and *Ressurrection*. Hosted by Alister Cooke from 1971-1992 and Russell Baker from 1992 to the present at time of writing. Source www.dmoz.org

10 Although the writer of this episode is Jane Espenson, I am assuming Whedon as the author of the series as a whole – who would have input into the scripts. At the very least, one could say that the writers he gathered around him for this series were like minded and like educated others who probably shared the same cultural values and tastes.

11 I have chosen only three figures here from Caldwell's list of creators which also included Steve Bochco and Stephen J. Cannell, largely because I want to emphasise those creators who have also made significant names for themselves as creators of film.

12 Another fantasy moment occurs in flashback when Andrew recalls a moment when he imagined himself, Jonathon and Warren as gods, cavorting in togas on an Elysian Field.

13 The Ancient Greeks had a name for this kind of aesthetic endeavour, *ekphrasis*, which Lesley Stern and George Kouvaris (1999) gloss as a desire to transform the lived experience of a work of art into a description couched in words.

14 I have endeavoured to write about the aesthetics of performance elsewhere in an essay on James Marsters as Spike (Turnbull 2004)

15 Which was why I was so amused by the article in *The Irish Times* reporting on the recent Quality Television conference in Dublin. While the academics at the conference appeared keen to focus on issues of aesthetics, this was not what the press though they ought to be doing: 'What was perhaps most troubling about the conference to me was the emphasis in many papers on the aesthetic and formal qualities of the programmes discussed, often at the expense of any consideration of their content, and the ways they might play into real-life relations of power and politics'.

Credit Sequence

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Brett Rogers and Walter Scheidel

**Driving Stakes, Driving Cars:
Californian Car Culture, Sex, and Identity in *BtVS***

1. Introduction: Sex, Cars, and California

"Why am I even listening to you to begin with – *you are a virgin who can't drive!*"

[1] With this damning verdict, Tai finally forces Cher to face up to the true extent of her cluelessness. If there is anything Cher, Alicia Silverstone's character in the 1995 movie *Clueless*, has no clue about, it's boys and cars. She fails to read not one but two straight guys who want her, or a gay guy who doesn't – small wonder that she has been so successful in preserving her virginity. Equipped with a learner's permit, she also has a hard time keeping her father's jeep on the road. Car scenes unflinching land her in trouble while at the same time nudging her towards Mr. Right. A traffic ticket forces her to engage the services of her 'ex-stepbrother' Josh to accompany her on her next outing. When the wrong guy *du jour* comes on to her in his car, she leaps out at a lonely gas station in the middle of the night, only to be abandoned by her date and subsequently robbed by a pathetic crook; it is up to Josh to pick her up and drive her back to safety. A later date with a gay guy (in his flashy yellow convertible) ends with him ignoring her and Josh driving her home once again. When her best friend Dionne accidentally hits the highway and freaks out in heavy traffic, Dionne's boyfriend Murray calms her down and saves the day; Dionne's virginity does not survive the following night. This display of how a good driver makes a good boyfriend and lover makes Cher admit to herself for the first time that she too wants a guy for herself. Yet it still takes a disastrous driving test and Tai's vitriol for her to realize that Josh is in fact the one. Clueless and innocent, Cher has to negotiate a gauntlet of sexual and vehicular near-collisions before she is finally united with a dependable driver.

[2] One might be driven to conclude that Cher's cluelessness about boys and cars is an unnecessary and unmotivated conflation of human and machine, a clever manipulation of symbols and themes by writer/director Amy Heckerling in order to explore teenagers

living on the cusp of romantic and vehicular maturity. Heckerling, however, taps into a much broader cultural phenomenon. In American culture (among others), cars repeatedly come to serve as emblems of and surrogates for romantic relationships, individual potency, or sexual intercourse.[1] In some cases, the automobile works to enhance and epitomize the driver's sexual potency, often making boys look more virile and casting biker chicks as sexually voracious. Moreover, there are repeated instances when the automobile becomes a sexualized object, acting as the object of a driver's desires and affections, supplanting an actual human being. Even French feminist Simone de Beauvoir, upon breaking up with her long-time lover Nelson Algren, is said to have decided to devote her energy to a new "love" – her new car – blurring the line between man and machine as one's beloved.[2] An extreme version of this same conflation of sex and lover might be Stephen King's *Christine* (1983), a twisted parody of the way high school males lavish attention upon their cars; in the story, Christine (a 1958 Plymouth Fury) not only becomes the object of 'her' owner Arnie's affection, but in turn 'she' becomes jealous of Arnie's girlfriend Leigh and tries to bump Leigh off. While Cher's ongoing cluelessness about boys and cars might be a unique and very Californian treatment of licensed driving and virginity, it is clear that one doesn't have to be a flaxen-haired, stylish Californian teen to find sex and cars an appropriate pairing.

[3] No less flaxen-haired and stylish than Cher, Buffy Summers appears as another contender for the role of prototypical Californian teenager. A true product of the Californian lifestyle, Buffy hangs out at the beach with swimmers, shops 'til she drops, and drinks down lattes at the open-air coffee shop in downtown Sunnydale. Buffy, however, also repeatedly runs into problems with driving. To some extent, Buffy's failure to drive is even stranger than Cher's; her duties as the "Chosen One," her run-ins with the undead, and her motorcade of vampiric romances are somehow not inhibited by her inability to drive, and in fact remain more commonplace activities in her life.[3] The slaying lifestyle does less damage to Buffy's credibility as a real Californian teen than her failure to drive does – especially given that she not only does not drive, but also does not drive throughout the entire seven-season run of *BtVS*, with one exception (in "Band Candy" [3.06], in the midst of adults mentally incapacitated by "chocolate-y goodness").

[4] Anyone who has ever lived in the concrete jungle of Southern California knows the vital role that automobiles play,[5] and it's hard to figure out how Buffy manages to reach age twenty-three and still gets everywhere she needs to go. Moreover, anyone who has been a teenager understands what an important rite of passage driving constitutes, how highly prized is that singular plastic rectangle of liberation, the driver's license. Yet, when she makes her final exit from Sunnydale, Buffy remains *sans* license. As Buffy herself admits to Riley, "Cars and Buffy are, like, unmixy things" (4.09). But why?

[4] We can rule out location as a factor as cars are far from absent from life in Sunnydale. In fact, not only does Sunnydale really look like a real Californian town – complete with cars, traffic, and suburban sprawl – but the show's location is a subtle yet continuous reminder that Buffy should be driving.[6] Moreover, car scenes serve as bookends – or bumpers – for the whole series. Buffy steps onto the Hellmouth for the first time when her mother drops her off at school (1.01), within sixty seconds of her first appearance. As the Hellmouth collapses in the show's finale, the slayer leaves Sunnydale for the last time riding on top of a school bus (7.22). In between, she may have saved

the world a lot, but in the end Buffy still remains a passenger.

2. "Actually, no-wheeling is more my specialty:" Why Buffy doesn't drive

2.1. "In the car, now!" Cars as sites of adult power and the contestation of responsibility

[5] Two separate issues are at stake. In Buffy's case, throughout the first three seasons, cars feature as the – literal as well as metaphorical – site of power and responsibility, and the contestation of a teenager's maturity by an adult. Maturity comes in two flavors, general and sexual. In the one episode where Buffy does get to drive (3.06), Joyce initially refuses to let her use the car, ostensibly because her daughter 'doesn't test well,' and more tellingly because she does not want her to be able to 'just take off.' Buffy's retort that she can 'just take the bus' falls flat, at any rate until Joyce, high on candy, is happy to hand Buffy her car keys. When Willow asks her why her mother gave her the keys, she replies: "I told my mom I wanted to be treated like a grown-up and, voila, driviness." Driving is seen as a symbol of maturity; the irony is that only a mother out of her mind surrenders this responsibility to her daughter. Compos mentis, Joyce uses her car as a stage of her adult responsibility (and responsibilities): right at the beginning, when Joyce drops off her daughter, she reminds her warily, "Try not get kicked out?" (1.01). After their unpleasant meeting with Principal Snyder in 2.03, she asserts her authority with the curt order "In the car, now!" while in 2.12, she grounds Buffy in the car.

[6] But it is more than parental authority that is at stake. When on her seventeenth birthday, Buffy raises the issue of getting her driver's license (2.13), Joyce's concern – "Do you really think you are ready, Buffy?" – while ostensibly directed at her ability to drive, simultaneously foreshadows the climax of the episode, Buffy's imminent loss of her virginity to Angel, with disastrous results. Buffy's lack of preparation to handle sexual relationships compares poorly with that of the more seasoned Cordelia: at the beginning of 1.12, Buffy is shown doing "the usual," i.e., fighting a vampire, interspersed with scenes of Cordelia making out with a boy in a car – cars and boys are better left to those who have at least some idea how to handle them.

2.2. "Unmixy things:" Cars, superpowers, and relationships

[7] For Buffy, driving is no picnic. She makes this perfectly clear in her picnic scene with Riley (4.09).

Buffy: Driving?

Riley: Yeah.

Buffy: You seriously drive for fun?

Riley: Well, not four-wheeling or anything, but yeah. Don't you?

Buffy: Actually, no-wheeling is more my specialty. I'm an avid pedestrian.

Riley: You're kidding, right? I mean, you know how to drive?

Buffy: Well, I took the class. Cars and Buffy are, like, unmixy things.

Riley: It's just because you haven't had a good experience yet. You can have the best time in a car. It's not about getting somewhere. You have to take your time. Forget about everything. Just relax. Let it wash over you. The air, the motion. Just let it roll.

Buffy: We are talking about driving, right?

[8] For both of them, driving features as a metaphor for sex – recreational for Riley, portentous for Buffy. Their exchange is also about control – surrendering it in his case, struggling to maintain it in hers. On the face of it, bad luck might be to blame for Buffy's understandable reluctance – Riley thinks he has figured this out when he reminds her "It's just because you haven't had a good experience yet." Although this is true, more potent forces impede Buffy's success in driving/relationships. In this episode, Buffy's concern with maintaining control is juxtaposed with Willow's failure to control her magicks in the wake of her breakup with Oz. More generally, throughout the show driving is portrayed as inherently fraught with perils for the most supernaturally gifted female characters. For these heroines, special powers and cars (and their metaphorical equivalent of sexual relationships) do not mesh – they are the true "unmixy things."

[9] Supernaturally endowed females do well to steer clear of cars and driving. On the one occasion Buffy gets to drive, she does so poorly; she leaves the parking brake on and peels out of the parking lot of the Bronze so as to prompt 'teen' Snyder's geeky exclamation "Whoa, Summers, you drive like a spazz!" (3.06). Other slayers never drive at all. When Kendra needs to get from Sunnydale High School to the airport, she takes a cab (2.10). Faith not only emulates Buffy in relying mostly on her slayer-strength legs and the occasional lift (most recently on her return to Sunnydale in 7.18), but repeatedly has bad experiences with vehicles, finding herself bundled up in the back of vans or most spectacularly falling onto the bed of a passing truck after being stabbed by Buffy – "Shoulda been there, B. It was quite a ride." (3.21).

[10] The nexus between cars, magic and relationships is brought into sharp focus in Willow's case. All of her accidents involving cars and magic in Season 6 stem from her failure to control her relationship with Tara (either because of her magic addiction or Tara's death), and serve as foil for her lack of control over sexual relationships. The incident in "Wrecked" (6.10) where Willow and Dawn flee from a demon and Willow, high on black magic, seizes a car, commands it to "drive!" only to crash it into a wall, is a classic example of the incompatibility of female supernatural powers and driving.

After Tara's death, as Willow, Xander and Buffy chase Warren's bus in Xander's car, Willow uses magic to seize control from Xander, make it drive "Faster!" and subsequently stops Warren's bus with magic too (6.20). Here, as also in 6.21, where Willow controls a huge truck by floating above it and makes it ram a stolen police car carrying her targets Andrew and Jonathan, human-style driving is out of the question. Magical steering, death and destruction go hand in hand. In fact, Willow is only able to drive 'normally' when she doesn't practice magicks, or has her powers (as well as her love life) firmly under control. This may account for the one time she is seen driving, chauffeuring Faith back to Sunnydale in 7.18: she has abstained from magicks for some time, and things are going fine with her new flame Kennedy.

[11] The ex-demon Anya belongs in the same category of car-challenged female characters with a supernatural background. When, in the dream sequence in "Restless" (4.22), she volunteers to take over the ice cream truck from Xander (to allow him to make out with Willow and Tara in the back of the truck – a scene that can be read to suggest lack of control over her emergent relationship with Xander) once she has figured out how to "steer by gesturing emphatically." Even when awake, she can hardly drive without magic. When the unwitting release of the troll Olaf in the Magic Shop compels her to chase him in Giles' BMW convertible, she drives very poorly – as she explains to Willow, it is because she has never tried it before (5.11).^[7] As shown by the title of episode, "Triangle," this incident fits our template very well: the accidental release of Olaf (her ex-boyfriend from over 1,000 years ago, turned into a troll because of his putative cheating on her [cf. 7.05]) threatens to destabilize her relationship with her current partner Xander. In this context, poor driving is an apt symbol of this temporary loss of control over her relationships past and present. We may suspect that Willow doesn't attempt to take over from her not just because a better show of driving from her would (within the logic of the show) be hard to reconcile with her Wicca status,^[8] but also because the troubles are Anya's and it is therefore her turn to prove the driving/relationship trouble nexus.

[12] Given her supernatural origins as The Key, Dawn might be expected to fit the same profile. However, her lack of driving should perhaps more prosaically be explained as a function of her age. When she finally gets to drive a car (7.21), it is in an emergency (having taken control of Xander's car after being drugged by him to get her out of town), and only after her identity as a perfectly normal (if somewhat clichéd) human teenager – as well as her lack of slayer potential (7.12) – has been firmly established.^[9]

[13] As shown in our preliminary matrix in Table 1, as far as women are concerned, supernatural powers and youth are the critical variables that determine vehicular success or failure. This matrix places mature and fully 'human' women at the opposite end of the spectrum. Joyce Summers is the

best example – a member of the parental generation, and largely bereft of personal relationships, she drives frictionlessly. It is only when she is under a spell that she abdicates the adult responsibility of driving to her unprepared daughter (see above, on 3.06) and contrives to have sex – where else? – on the hood of a *police car*; just as the mature adult polices her daughter in her car, and polices her relationship with cars, the juvenilized Joyce picks the perfect spot to perform her new role – a source of horror for her daughter when she finally finds out (3.18).^[10] Jenny Calendar, though younger, belongs in the same category; her involvement with the supernatural beyond techno-paganism (2.13-2.17), reportedly an afterthought of the writers,^[11] is revealed too late to interfere with her driving abilities.

[14] Table 1: Driving and personal attributes in BtVS: Female characters

<u>S</u> (upernatural)	H(uman)	
<u>Y</u> (oung)	A(dult)	
<u>SY</u>	Buffy, Willow, Anya, Tara	can't (normally) drive
<u>HY</u>	Cordelia, (Dawn)	drive (with difficulty)
<u>HA</u>	Joyce, Jenny	drive (safely)

[15] The logic of this matrix dictates that Cordelia occupies an intermediate position between super-charged and immature non-drivers on the one hand and ordinary and mature motorists on the other.^[12] In the same age bracket as Buffy, Willow and Faith (or Anya's human persona) but devoid of comparable superpowers, she is happy to drive (witness her vanity license plate "Queen C" in 2.05) – but usually poorly. Sometimes she runs into trouble on her own account, as when she smacks into a parked car on her way to the Delta Zeta Kappa party (2.05), or when she pesters cops with the plea, "Can you help me with a ticket? It was a one-way street. I was going one way" (2.08). Cars can cause her embarrassment, as in 2.02, when Cordelia, followed into the parking lot, drops her keys under her car and hides in a dumpster. In keeping with the standard pattern of female driving observed above, magical interference only makes matters worse: blinded by magic, Cordelia crashes the driver's ed car through a fence and into the road (1.03), and recklessly tears down the street from Buffy's house when she is attacked by Worm Man (2.10). Even her bravery in 1.12, when she crashes through Sunndydale High School to save Jenny and Willow, involves reckless driving.^[13]

3. "Wheel Men: " Vehicular constructions of masculinity

[16] In contrast to the frustrated and disastrous driving episodes of Buffy, Willow, and company, we find a more complex series of roads taken with boys and cars on *BtVS*. Driving often is thought to offer an opportunity to enhance one's masculinity, to become a 'real man' who contributes to the battle against evil. On a few occasions, driving actually does allow a male character to construct an image of enhanced masculinity. However, in typical *Buffy*-fashion, the idea that 'cars make a man manlier' also gets turned on its head, leading to attacks on traditional notions of masculinity, leaving the boys with less than a full tank of confidence.^[14]

3.1 "Is this a penis metaphor?" Xander Harris, borrowed cars, borrowed masculinity

[17] Xander – always at the nexus of the interesting problems on *BtVS* – exemplifies the various and contested roles cars play in the articulation of masculinity (or, perhaps better, masculinities). The first explicit reference to Xander driving occurs in "Inca Mummy Girl" (2.04), when he excitedly shares with the Scoobies the prospect of borrowing his mother's car to drive to the cultural exchange dance; in Xander's eyes, driving the gang to the dance will transform him into the pseudo-superheroic "Wheel Man." The appellation reveals two interesting points. First of all, the car shows Xander's desire to see himself as a "man," maturing from teenager to adult faster than a speeding bullet. Moreover, the superhero-style name in Xander's wisecracking hints that he sees the car as a kind of enhancement, giving him a superpower to contribute to the Scoobies. It may only be a coincidence that this episode also involves Xander's first real date – with the 500-year-old mummified princess Ampata – although the success of this date, like Xander's access to the car and "Wheel Man" status, is brief.^[15]

[18] Xander's focus on the car as a superheroic Cialis appears again and more clearly in "The Zeppo" (3.13). During a brutal verbal attack after their break-up, Cordelia questions Xander's value as anything more than a liability to the Scoobies, striking all of Xander's deep-seated feelings of inadequacy:

Cordelia: It must be really hard when all your friends have, like, superpowers: slayer, werewolf, witches, vampires, and you're like this little nothing. You must feel like Jimmy Olsen.

Xander: I was just talking to... hey! Mind your own business!

Cordelia: Ooh, I struck a nerve. The boy that had no cool.

Xander: I happen to be an integral part of that group. I happen to have a lot to offer.

Cordelia: Oh, please.

Xander: I do!

Cordelia: Integral part of the group? Xander, you're the useless part of the group.

You're the Zeppo.

[19] Xander strikes back by finding a "thing that makes [him] cool;" he again borrows a

car and becomes “Car Guy. Guy with the car.” The car (this time on loan from Uncle Rory) is a 1957 Chevy Bel Air, a sleek convertible that brilliantly evokes American car culture and cinema in the late 1950’s and early 1960’s, an era when cult heroes like James Dean were making movies about tough teenage rebels and dangerous chicken fights of masculine bravado – as well as making headlines by dying in gruesome car wrecks.[16] In fact, imagery of the 1950’s appears repeatedly in “the Zeppo,” reinforcing the connection between the Chevy and a specific brand of rebellious American machismo. Xander’s antagonist in the episode, Jack O’Toole, is a 50’s-style bully, clad in white undershirt and dark jacket – the uniform of a true rebel without a cause. When Xander keeps O’Toole out of trouble with the law, O’Toole decides to make Xander his “wheel man” and brings him to meet his buddies, a gang of zombies, including Bob, who has been buried in his letterman’s jacket and jeans – another bold icon of American machismo. If O’Toole and gang fail to convince as the reanimated cast of *Stand By Me*, the climax of the episode draws on another image familiar from American cinema of the 1950’s. Xander and O’Toole face off in the ultimate display of machismo, a chicken fight as a time bomb interminably ticks away in the basement of Sunnydale High School; whoever flinches first loses. Despite the near omnipresence of the Chevy throughout “the Zeppo,” the chicken fight is notably *sans* automobile (and, for the record, *sans* Xander’s trademark nervous repartee – as opposed to the verbal wit essential to Buffy’s own “clever banter portion[s] of the fight”).

[20] Against this backdrop of hot rod hypermasculinity, Xander finds himself undergoing a simultaneous sexual rite of passage, which is repeatedly tied to the borrowed car. When he initially shows off the Chevy to the Scoobies, Buffy deftly describes the situation: “Is this a penis metaphor?” The Chevy quickly leads to Xander picking up an anonymous blonde girl at the donut shop (in front of a bewildered Cordelia). When the blonde, an auto aficionado, asks Xander how the car handles, Xander replies “Like a dream about warm, sticky things,” reifying the connection of car to his sexual libido, although suggesting that driving at this point is no more than masturbation. The relationship with the blonde, however, goes nowhere, and Xander moves on to another woman, saving Faith from a horde of female demons, the Sisterhood of Jhe; immediately afterwards, he loses his virginity in her motel room. Not only does the car facilitate Xander’s ability to save Faith and have sex with her, but Faith too equates sex and driving; as she straddles the virgin Xander in bed, she assures him “Don’t worry, I’ll steer you around the curves.” Xander’s virility and automobile have become virtually interchangeable.

[21] Such a seemingly simple connection of driving and sexual maturation should arouse our suspicions, especially given that Xander’s masculinity is far from traditional throughout *BtVS* and often tempered by a comic flaccidity (such as Xander’s skateboard crash while scoping out new student Buffy in 1.01). Indeed, “the Zeppo” does not present the automobile as a totem that merely reinforces masculinity, but also as a continual threat of failed masculine performance. When “Car Guy” Xander asks how he can help to avert another apocalypse, Buffy and Willow use his driving power to fetch donuts (a skill Xander has already well-honed). When Xander boasts to the blonde that he’s not “a klutz,” he immediately rear-ends O’Toole’s (stolen) car. Bumping O’Toole’s backside precipitates a knife fight on the hood of the Chevy which Xander explains to an intervening police officer as just “two guys wrestlin’ – but not in a gay way;” [17] his

comment slyly suggests that the Chevy might also become a site for a homosexual masculinity.[18] When Xander and Faith have sex, it is Faith who acts as the aggressor, who does the seducing and the “steer[ing] around the curves.” The superheroic Chevy, then, not only announces Xander’s enhanced masculinity, but also threatens at every curve to undermine that sought-after masculinity.

3.2 “My Barbie dream car had nicer seats!” Cars and the failure of masculine performance

[22] Let us set “The Zeppo” aside for a moment to follow up this ambivalent role cars play in the contestation of stereotypically male prowess. In a large number of cases on *BtVS*, inadequacies of cars or driving are taken to reflect poorly on the male car-owner or driver. Cars and driving are a favorite arena for the inadequacy of male performance, and female criticism thereof. In a farcical way, this is already foreshadowed early in the opening episode when Xander is introduced to the show via the aforementioned skateboard crash (1.01).

[23] Inadequacy and failure manifest themselves in various forms. Car breakdowns provide the most straightforward metaphor. When Xander plans to spend the summer after graduation driving to all fifty states, his car’s engine falls out in Oxnard, CA: unsuccessful as a male stripper, he ends up washing dishes (4.01). Thanks to his ramshackle equipment, the fifty states remain impervious to Xander’s attempted penetration; a summerly promise of promiscuity ends in dismal failure. This handicap is mirrored in Oz and Willow’s final good-bye scene in Oz’s van (4.19): when Willow compliments him on his vehicle (“This thing looks great.”), Oz admits that “It broke down in Mexico.” For all the spirit of (sexual) self-discovery heralded by his previous departure (4.06), the narrow limits of his quest become painfully apparent.

[24] Crappy cars diminish maleness: while Buffy challenges Giles’ quasi-paternal authority by poking fun at his creaky vehicle (“One of these days you’re going to get a grown-up car”) (2.04),[19] Cordelia puts down a high school guy in a similar fashion (“So I told Devon: you call that leather interior? My Barbie dream car had nicer seats.”) (2.06). Thanks to their performative aspect, male driving abilities are an even more rewarding target for diminution. The most telling scene involves Riley driving Buffy in Giles’ BMW to confront the two split Xanders (5.03). This rare occasion of male chauffeuring of the Slayer unsurprisingly requires the immediate undercutting of Riley’s assumption of a traditional male role. The opening shots between Buffy – “Can’t you go faster? Ultimate driving machine, my ass” – and the defensive Riley – “We are going 70” (in an urban setting) – sets the scene for a lengthy exchange on whether Riley would prefer two split Buffys, or in other words just the fully human variant without the superpowers. Her insinuation that his conventional human male nature/sexuality may be insufficient – “not fast enough” – to keep up with a superhuman heroine may prompt an (unconvincing) rejoinder – that he loves everything about her – but in truth foreshadows his patent inability to cope with their asymmetrical qualities in subsequent episodes, as well as his inability to overcome this problem even with contrived ‘bad-boy’ behavior; even after Riley has sought out female vampires (5.06), Spike still tells him that he is simply “not dark enough” for Buffy (5.08). Incidentally, Riley and Buffy’s roles seem briefly reversed when during his mission to Sunnydale in 6.15, a newly self-assured Riley drives Buffy in a black Hummer-like vehicle. Buffy’s shy compliment – “Nice wheels” –

now merely elicits a cool retort: "Came with the car." Just as the wheels are part of the car, Riley has always been the way he is now, only her perception of him – and his perception of his standing vis-a-vis hers – has changed. Yet now that his vehicular identity is finally good enough for a regretful Buffy, it is far too late to undo her earlier reservations about a putatively speed-challenged boyfriend.

[25] Carelessness degrades male characters in the eyes of women or of male competitors, most notably when Cordelia complains about having to drive Xander: "What am I? Mass transportation?" (2.09), or when she responds to his query "What can I do?" with "You can go out into the parking lot and practice running like a man" (2.20). Jenny Calendar's offer to pick up Giles for a date at a football game (2.02) inverts conventional dating protocol. A whole line of cruel jokes about Spike's incapacitation in the later stages of Season 2 plays on the identification of the male driver with his vehicle. According to Angelus, the wheelchair-bound Spike is only useful for getting a good parking space (2.17). Reduced to "spinning his wheels" (2.17), Spike is made to endure Angelus' taunts of impotence and his brazen flirting with Drusilla.

[26] Appropriately, more comical versions of female attacks on the 'male driver' revolve around Xander. Driving Anya and Dawn, both get in his face about his poor performance, Anya in her usual literal way – "You drive like a snail. Or like a snail driving a car very slowly" –, with Dawn delivering the coup de grace – "I can drive faster and I can't drive." (6.03). A more explicit linking of car and sexual inadequacy can be observed in 4.18, when Xander operates his ice cream truck (his job of the week) while Anya suspects erectile dysfunction behind the fact that they have not had sex for two consecutive nights. Infuriated by this challenge to his virility, Xander loudly offers her to have wild sex right there in the truck – to the consternation of a gaggle of small kids who had meanwhile lined up outside the vehicle – heaping new embarrassment on hapless Xander. Ice cream trucks are particularly good at reminding Xander of his sexual limitations: when the dream sequence in 4.22 likewise finds Xander and Anya riding in a (different) ice cream truck, he not only manages to get (somewhat futilely) aroused by the sight of the two lesbians Willow and Tara making out in the back of the truck but subsequently abandons his heterosexual real-life partner (with her casually granted permission) to join them (for what exactly?) only to end up in the familiar sex-less environment of his basement. It is unflatteringly clear that Anya has no reason to worry about letting him off the leash, although his willingness to leave her for a fantasy bodes ill for his ultimate commitment to their relationship (cf. 6.16). The engine doesn't always have to fall out for Xander's cars to showcase his inadequacy.[20]

3.3 "Oh, they haven't seen my new car!" Successful vehicular displays of masculinity

[27] Automobiles hold out the hope of attaining a kind of traditional masculinity for the males of the Buffyverse, yet simultaneously threaten to run the men off the road of achieving any traditional form of masculine prowess. Nevertheless, several instances can be found in *BtVS* when males successfully use cars to construct a form of masculinity by which they invigorate themselves.

[28] "The Zeppo" offers a rather innovative solution to the vehicular threat of traditional masculine prowess by ultimately removing the car altogether. In the donut shop scene early in the episode, Cordelia responds to Xander's newly-borrowed superpower by pointing out that a car does not change anything about Xander's character, does not

make him any cooler or any more of a man. Cordelia is far more accurate than she could realize. Ironically, when Xander wins the chicken fight against Jack O'Toole and saves Sunnydale High, the Scoobies, and (by extension) the world, he does it without the use of the Chevy Bel Air, but by standing firmly on his own feet. Xander beats O'Toole because he no longer needs a car as a tool, as a borrowed enhancement, but because he has internalized the masculine, death-defying bravado that the car stereotypically represents but can never actually grant him. In essence, Xander doesn't need to be "car guy" to be "extraordinary" (to steal from his tear-jerking speech to Dawn in "Potential," 7.12), although the car certainly facilitates his journey of self-discovery. Where the rite of passage of driving fails for Buffy and Willow, Xander is able to take his first truly confident steps towards maturation.

[29] In other instances on *BtVS*, cars really do make the man. Cordelia's comments in the donut shop in "the Zeppo" are also ironic given that, throughout the first two seasons of the show, she repeatedly equates the possession of cars with male attractiveness. This principle is most clearly spelled out very early on in the second episode, when Cordelia muses "But senior boys – they have mystery. They have – what's the word I'm searching for? – Cars!" (1.02). Other examples focus specifically on the *quality* of the car: in 2.05, Cordelia has a crush on frat boy Richard, acknowledges his "nice car;" in 2.16, when Harmony reveals her crush on Cody Weinberg, Cordelia identifies him as the guy who drives a 350 SLT.[21] It is not just that nice cars make guys attractive; or that cars appear nicer if driven by desirable guys – as in Buffy's comment on the returning Riley's "nice wheels" (6.15); it is rather that the identities of driver and vehicle are fully balanced by exhibiting the same qualities.[22] This is what lends extra venom to Harmony's sarcastic recommendation to Cordelia (right after her break-up with Xander) that she should go out with nerdy Jonathan, who, after all, has "got a kill mo-ped" (3.09).

[30] Supernatural characters experience a similarly unproblematic link between the quality of their driving and their personal qualities. Spike's experience is a case in point. In his first appearance on the show, he drives his car into the "Welcome to Sunnydale" sign, in a deliberate act that signals his determination to violate the town (2.03). This scene is parodied in the following season when, having lost Drusilla to an antlered chaos demon and bereft of all self-confidence, a drunken Spike accidentally fells the sign again, only to tumble out of his car and drop his liquor bottle (3.08). Conversely, at the end of the same episode, with his spirits restored, he vigorously drives out of town to get Drusilla back, listening to and singing Gary Oldman's version of Sid Vicious' classic rendition of "My Way." In view of this, it need not be coincidental that he regains a vehicle (a motorbike snatched from the biker demons in 6.02) after a long chip-induced slump in Seasons 4 and 5 shortly before he finally manages to strike up a sexual relationship with Buffy. In the series *Angel* (2.13), Lorne prefaces his doubts about Angel's continuing commitment to his mission – even to saving the world – with a disparaging comment about Angel's convertible ("So is there another gear after that #2 thingy?"). Cars and personal attributes become interchangeable: this may be the closest the show comes to re-iterating conventional tropes without immediately undermining them by some twist or irony.

[31] In contrast to Xander's problematic borrowed masculinity in "The Zeppo," cars do on occasion enhance masculinity, although not without attempts at subversion. The best-developed instance is Giles' classic reaction to a mid-life crisis situation. Side-lined by

the Scoobies and largely cooped up at home in a state of increasingly frequent inebriation during much of Season 4 and finally ready to throw in the towel in the opening episode of Season 5, Buffy's plea to be her Watcher again instantly reinvigorates Giles. Within days, he acquires a potent visual symbol of this event in the form of a cherry-red BMW convertible. The context is quite complex: the car is not obtained to cope with a mid-life crisis – i.e., in lieu of something better; rather, it is the manifestation of an antecedent re-enhancement of his traditional role of quasi-paternal Watcher. As so often in the series, irony and genuine appreciation are closely intertwined. First shown riding his new trophy car with Buffy and Dawn in 5.02, Giles proves inept at handling the automatic transmission, complaining:

Giles: (to Buffy) "I loathe just sitting here, not contributing." (to the car) "It's not working out."

Buffy: "Giles, are you breaking up with your car?"

Giles: "Well, it did seduce me, all red and sporty."

Buffy: "Little two-door tramp!"

[32] Giles goes on to explain that getting this car seemed appropriate once he had resumed his role as Watcher. Yet Buffy repeatedly undermines his newly restored authority not only by quipping about the 'tramp' but also by mock-innocently questioning his assumption that she ought to show him more respect. The whole scene is further set in context by Dawn's noting Giles' old age in her diary. More subtle elements include the fact that (given that the BMW looks significantly older than a 2000 model) the car is not new but second-hand, just as Giles merely seeks to reprise an earlier role instead of attempting something new, and that the sportiness of his new vehicle is somewhat undermined by its automatic transmission, arguably not the most common feature of red mid-life crisis convertibles.^[23] When Giles spots Willow and Tara, his childish pride in his new vehicle – "Oh, they haven't seen my new car!" – at first sight appears reciprocated when they show themselves to be appropriately impressed. Then again, coming from a pair of Lesbians, their compliments may not be entirely what Giles is really looking for.

[33] It is clear that for him, although he is aware of his underlying motivations, the car genuinely fulfills a role in making him feel better about himself – after all, as he echoes Xander's words in "The Zeppo", the new convertible "drives like a dream." At the same time, his all-female audience – from Buffy and Dawn to Tara and Willow – reacts with overt or implicit irony that undercuts much of this enhancement. However, the most direct assault on Giles' vehicular upgrade is reserved for a much later episode. When in the memory-erased environment of "Tabula Rasa," 'Randy' Spike suspects Giles to be his father and Anya to be his soon-to-be tartly step-mother, he responds to the group's suggestion to drive to a hospital with the acerbic comment "Dad can drive. He is bound to have some classic mid-life crisis transport – something red, shiny, shaped like a penis" (6.08). The real joke lies in the fact that while Giles had in fact precisely fulfilled this prediction, he had not done so in the stereotypical context of a mid-life crisis-driven by a sexual liaison with a much younger woman, but merely in an attempt to reclaim a

sex-less paternal position. Giles' male identity appears to be defined primarily by loco parentis authority instead of sexual relationships.

[34] In its complexity, the Giles case stands out against a background of more straightforward examples of a positive relationship between driving and 'maleness.' While "The Zeppo" establishes that Xander doesn't need a car to perform like a 'man' and to be special in his own way, later seasons grant him a more conventional and generally unquestioned nexus between growing maturity and vehicular status. Thus, Xander first appears to own a car when he drives Anya to pick up Willow and Tara on their way to the hospital after Joyce's death (5.16). We are led to assume that he acquired it with the help of his income from his construction job soon after finally moving out of his parents' basement and renting a proper apartment for Anya and himself (5.03). Both acquisitions can be seen as convergent symbols of traditional male role-playing. The same trend is visible in 7.01, when Xander's promotion in the construction business has him sport a business suit as well as a shiny new car.

[35] Male vampires and other demons regularly drive. As Buffy observes as early as 1.02, "They [i.e., vampires] coulda just ... foom!" Xander: "They can fly?" Buffy: "They can drive." The Hellions – a motorcycle gang of demons from out of town – that attack Sunnydale and disrupt Buffy's resurrection ritual profess to be interested in sex with human women despite certain "anatomical incompatibilities" (6.02), upholding the common association of bikers and male sexual appetite. Teen vampire Justin tries to make out with Dawn in his car, and is afterwards joined by other teen vamps in their cars when Giles tries to free her. One of these cars gets demolished as Buffy fights a vamp, smashing him into the car several times – in defense of her sister's virginity (6.06).

[36] In fact, the trope of vehicular-enhanced masculinity is so well established in the show that it also supports open travesty. Thus, the opening scene of 6.18 features the members of the Trio riding buggies in an attempt to chase down two vampires in the cemetery. Huge phallic pointy wooden stakes protrude from the handlebars of their vehicles – ostensibly to scare the vampires but likewise in a laughably crude display of surrogate male potency. Inevitably, the real-life shortcomings of the Trio invite pathetic failure: unable to control their well-endowed vehicles, they soon crash into each other and into a headstone. In this case, personal qualities and vehicular image do not match at all, inverting the conventional benefits of male driving.

[37] The material presented in this section reveals a fundamental divide between female and male characters in terms of how they relate to cars and driving. Whereas female driving ability is mediated by immaturity and supernatural powers, males of all ages and qualities tend to share the same feature: cars reflect their masculinity. Table 2 shows that the two variables that are of critical significance for women don't matter at all when it comes to men: male gender fully predetermines a character's relationship to cars.

[38] Table 2: Driving and personal attributes in BtVS: female and male characters

S (upernatural)	H(uman)
Y (oung)	A(dult)
F (emale)	M (ale)

SYF	Buffy, Willow, Anya	can't (normally) drive
HYF	Cordelia, (Dawn)	drive (with difficulty)
HAF	Joyce, Jenny	drive (safely)
SYM	Oz, (Spike, Angel)	can drive; vehicle ~ persona ~ sex
SAM	N/A, unless Spike, Angel	can drive; vehicle ~ persona ~ sex
HYM	Xander, Riley, Trio	can drive; vehicle ~ persona ~ sex
HAM	Giles	can drive; vehicle ~ persona ~ sex

[39] This inflexible linkage of cars, sex, and male identity is further complemented by several logical corollaries. Hence, cars per se can be used to symbolize sex and relationships. When Willow discovers Oz and Veruca in the nude locked together in a cage, she wanders off in a daze, only to be almost run over by a speeding silver-metallic sports car that metaphorically replicates her encounter with out-of-control, 'animalistic' sexual energy that can wreck romantic relationships (4.06). In "Hush," Buffy passes a car that crashed into a fire hydrant that now ejects a geyser of water, before she runs into Riley and their first-ever passionate kiss (4.10). (A comparable fluid squirting motif – this time sans car – is less subtly employed in 4.03 when Anya takes off her clothes in Xander's basement.) Faith's reference to Willow's not "driving stick anymore" falls in the same category (4.16).

[40] In a further intensification of this linkage, cars themselves can be defined as female. We have already discussed Giles and Buffy's exchange about the "little two-door tramp," "all red and sporty," that "did seduce" Giles and might face an early break-up (5.02). Later on, the Trio's van is likewise identified as female when Warren announces that "she is ready" (6.05). It is hardly a coincidence that Warren, apparently the only Trio member who has had a girlfriend, is also the only one who ever gets to drive this van. This is also consistent with the fact that vans are regularly portrayed as locus of male power and control. Assorted villains from Kane (2.05) and the Slayerfest bounty hunters (3.05) to the Trio of Season 6 use vans as roving headquarters. The sinister

operatives of the Watcher's Council crash their van into the ambulance transporting Buffy (in Faith's body) to seize her (4.16). Caleb (7.18) also uses a larger vehicle, a pick-up truck, to enter Sunnydale and stab his first onscreen female victim – another (potential) Slayer with car problems. Yet the use of large vehicles to exert control over others is not limited to villains alone; when for the first time in 98 episodes Buffy finally despairs of confronting the current 'Big Bad' (5.20), Spike and subsequently Giles immediately assert control by evacuating the Scoobies in a Winnebago. Only men drive; the tinfoil-covered windows of the vehicle enable Spike to reprise Jesse's role in Kathryn Bigelow's 1987 iconic vampire movie "Near Dark" by boldly steering a car in broad daylight. The Slayer's uncharacteristic loss of nerve equally uncharacteristically compels the female members of the group to rely on male chauffeurs to save the day. By contrast, Oz's van – apart from representing a conventional attribute of his membership in a band – serves as a site of male *self*-control (rather than attempts to control others): when Willow propositions him to make out with her while they are waiting in his van (2.14), he refuses (unlike in 3.22, when the time is right); he also uses the van after making the hard choice to leave Sunnydale not just once but twice (4.06, 4.19).

[41] These various strands allow us to sketch out a tentative typology of cars. While Joyce's "geek machine" (3.06) embodies adult maturity and parental authority, vans support men's drive to be in control (as in Oz's van) or, more typically, to control others. By contrast, convertibles and other sports cars as well as motorbikes are primarily employed as props for conventional masculine performance. Thoughtfully contested and subverted in a few key scenes (3.13 and 5.02), the latter motif occurs more often in a fairly straightforward topical fashion.

4. Conclusion

[42] To sum up, we derive four main points from this motorcade of evidence:

1. The automobile is used in *BtVS* to thematize the issue of female maturity and responsibility. The theme of motor vehicular responsibility is additionally tied to sexual maturity, such as Buffy's ability to deal with sex (and its aftermath) with Angel.
2. The automobile works throughout *BtVS* to demarcate magical and supernatural females from males (of all kinds). It works to limit Buffy and Willow's abilities – to make them heroines who are not omnipotent, but have real areas of weakness – but it also reminds the audience that they are different from normal females. This is not necessarily a negative attribute; Buffy and Willow are incredibly powerful – they just move differently.
3. The automobile also poses a threat to masculinity. Since cars can act as a sexual surrogate, although they offer the opportunity to affirm a male's masculine potency, they also represent the threat of a (sexual) relationship gone awry, of males losing control.

4. On the other hand, unlike the case of the females of *BtVS*, automobiles enable males to attain 'peak performance'. In Xander's case, he loses his virginity, saves the world, and most importantly, finds a more secure role for himself with the Scoobies. In Giles' case, the car helps him on his road to renewed virility, coinciding with his resumption of official (albeit, unpaid) Watcher duties. Similarly, Spike's regained confidence is encapsulated in his return to the Sid Vicious aesthetic.

(43) In essence, *BtVS* takes a rather obvious trope vrooming around in American culture – boys and their cars – and destabilizes it; and yet, to some extent, the show redeploys it (somewhat intact) as a means for the male characters to find their own roles in the heroics of the Buffyverse. Are the makers of *BtVS* truly manipulating the motifs of American mechanical machismo, or are they merely trapped by the trope of the two-door tramp?

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[1] E.g., Heining 1988, on cars and masculinity in pop music; Zurbrugg 1988:16-17, on auto-eroticism in pop literature.

[2] Ross 1995:65.

[3] Nor has this inability gone unobserved by other *BtVS* critics, such as Justine Larbalestier 2002:233 ("There is, of course, a good deal Buffy cannot do, like driving") and Rhonda Wilcox, who noted the problem in an advertisement for an academic conference on the role of vehicles in popular culture in 2002.

[4] Miles, Pearson and Dickson 2003:193 claim that Buffy drives a car in 5.09 when she takes her mother and Dawn home from the hospital before her brain surgery. However, the actual scene is ambiguous at best – no driving is shown; Buffy merely enters the home and (off-camera) drops what sounds like keys on a table next to the door. Even allowing for the fact that Joyce was probably unfit to drive that night, there is no way of telling whether these are car keys or house keys. Since it is generally left open how any of the Scoobies manage to get to the hospital, there is no reason to attribute particular significance to this scene.

[5] Cf. Bottles 1987 for an academic perspective.

[6] Contrast Tonkin 2001:37-52, who discusses how Sunnydale's location in Southern California ("somewhere close to Santa Barbara") is both essential to the kinds of monsters and cataclysmic events that take place and is necessary for the successful admixture of cinematic genres used on the show.

[7] Miles, Pearson and Dickson 2003:198, ever eager to improve the driving record of our heroines, point out that Anya's claim contradicts 3.21. However, that episode merely features a scene in which she tells Xander that she has a car waiting outside (to flee Sunnydale before the Ascension of the Mayor) but as the vehicle is never seen, the veracity of this claim, as well as her ability to drive it herself (instead of having Xander do it), remain very much in doubt.

[8] It is unclear when Willow learns to drive (cf. above, on her driving in 7.18). In her high school days, she appears to have used a bicycle to get around, shown once in 3.21. In "Tabula Rasa" (6.08), she seems to carry only a student ID, as does Tara, who is never seen driving either.

[9] Despite her ongoing crush on Xander she is also free of intimate relationships. It is not

clear when she would have learned how to drive – perhaps in the summer after 6.22? For cars as bad news even for her in the context of boys/sex, see below, on 6.06.

[10] Buffy, hearing Joyce's thoughts in "Earshot:" "You had sex with Giles? On the hood of a police car?? Twice???"

[11] Miles, Pearson and Dickson 2003:64.

[12] In terms of age and actual access to supernatural powers, Dawn belongs in the same rubric. However, as observed above, her meager driving record of one event and the fact that unlike Cordelia, she does not normally get involved in relationships at all, spares her comparable vehicular mishaps.

[13] It is only in the vamp-dominated parallel universe of "The Wish" (3.09) that Cordelia and her peers at SHS are not allowed to drive at all, a premise that highlights the contrapuntal character of that version of Sunnydale.

[14] It is not our intention to work out a specific or totalizing definition of masculinity; scholars of gender in *BtVS* have already pointed out that, in the Buffyverse, there is no such thing as 'masculinity,' i.e. a singular masculinity, but there are several notions of masculinity or masculinities that are constantly in play and that are being negotiated and renegotiated; see, for example, Pender 2002: 35-44. On the other hand, there are certain tropes which inevitably bring along with them their own set of gendered stereotypes. We have previously discussed some of the ways in which the relationship between sex and automobiles has been explored in American culture, and, as we will argue specifically in our discussion of "the Zeppo" (3.13) in section 3.1, it is not unreasonable to say that a lingering "boys and their cars" motif has persisted since the 1950's and 1960's; whether we agree with or approve of this gendered take on the figure of the automobile, we must remain cognizant of this connection (one that stretches from James Dean to *Grease* to Dale Earnhardt, Jr.), although we can and must interrogate and re-examine the form of masculinity (or masculinities) that seem to appear at each of these twists in the road.

[15] Miles, Pearson, and Dickson 2003: 43 point out another famous automobile-related first in this episode: "We also see Giles drive his car full-throttle for the first time. It's not very fast." For more on Giles and comic driving, see below.

[16] Ross 1995: 46 offers some discussion on James Dean and the impact of the "mutinous but self-reliant teenager" on American, French, and Japanese culture.

[17] The homosexual undertones of this scene are actually somewhat

muddled by the curious fact that O'Toole has named his knife "Katie." Is O'Toole (whose name is already suggestive) attempting to penetrate another man with his phallic female implement?

[18] In a paper delivered in May 2004 at Stanford University, Judith Halberstam argued that the classic buddy film *Dude, Where's My Car?* (2000) similarly works to use the automobile as a space for heterosexual boys to engage in homosexual relations. In the scene, dudes Jesse & Chester (deftly played by Ashton Kutcher and Seann William Scott) pull up to a stop light, only to see male model and romance novelist Fabio sitting with his girlfriend in a car in the next lane. Fabio wraps an arm around his girlfriend, Jesse wraps his around Chester; Fabio makes out with his girlfriend, Jesse and Chester engage in a long, intense French kiss, disgusting Fabio and his special ladyfriend while Jesse and Chester celebrate their victory. Halberstam reads the scene in a positive light, claiming that the car (traditionally a locus of heterosexual masculinity) has been transformed in *Dude* into a space that allows for new paradigms of masculinity that are not necessarily staunchly heterosexual but nevertheless acceptable to young, white, heterosexual males. There is a fundamental difference between the scene in *Dude* and "the Zeppo" in that Jesse and Chester's heterosexuality is otherwise never called into question in the film (after all, they do have rather hot girlfriends), while the scene in "the Zeppo" offers the possibility that Xander is not as heterosexually masculine as he has spent the first three seasons of *BtVS* trying to prove.

[19] Giles himself is aware of this deficiency: when he loses his car keys in 3.02 and has to hotwire his car, he complains that it is "Like riding a bloody bicycle."

[20] It is also striking that in 7.21, Xander quips about having to re-take his driving test after losing an eye not long before the weakest female character, Dawn, overpowers him and drives their car back to Sunnydale. Physical and metaphorical diminution go hand in hand.

[21] Cf. also Sheila in 2.03, to biker guys: "You guys weren't lying about having a Cadillac, were you?"

[22] When Angel is shown in a flashback down and out, his condition is aptly symbolized by his crappy car with painted windows (2.21).

[23] The fact that he can't handle it most likely refers to his British background, as automatic transmissions are rare in Europe, and thus belongs in the long line of jokes about his foreignness.



Greg Erickson "Religion Freaky" or a "Bunch of Men Who Died?" The (A) theology of *Buffy*

Introduction: "Nothing Solid"

(1) Early in the final season of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer (BtVS)*, a vampire, who as a human knew Buffy in high school, interrupts their fight to the death to ask her a question. After first claiming to "defy" God and "all of his works," he then asks Buffy: "Does He exist? Is there word on that, by the way?" Buffy responds with a characteristic shrug, "nothing solid" ("Conversations with Dead People," 7007). *Nothing solid*. The answer resembles Buffy's other responses to issues of religious sincerity—she uses irony and humor to sidestep a topic that is implicitly related to her own existence and purpose. In Season Three, as Buffy and Giles search for evidence in a mausoleum, Giles explains to Buffy, "it's a reliquary. Used to house items of religious significance. Most commonly a finger or some other body part from a saint." Buffy's oft-quoted reply is "note to self: religion creepy" ("What's My Line" part 1, 2010). In Season Four she responds to an evangelizing college student that she "always meant" to accept Jesus Christ as her personal savior but then just "got really busy" ("The Freshman," 4001). Within the show itself, although ethical decisions and even religious rituals are presented seriously, the presence of traditional Christian symbols, churches, and divinity is generally lightly mocked.

(2) Buffy's vague response to this ultimate question of God's existence is more revealing than it might appear, and a closer reading of this scene opens up some complex questions about the role of God, religion, and theology in the show. By asking Buffy about the existence of God, this vampire/ex-classmate assumes that her position perhaps gives her some insight into the question of God's existence. Although he locates himself in *opposition* to God, it is the Slayer that he hopes might have a determinate answer. Her response, in turn, assumes that there is a possibility of an answer, that it is a question that *can* be solved. But the nature of the idea of God can be seen inhabiting the impossibility of an answer to that very question. Buffy's words, "nothing solid," express not only the show's ambivalence towards religion, but also the importance of iconic objectivity—the need for something *solid* that occupies space and can be located and framed by both character and viewers. This need for solidity in an answer to questions of indeterminate nature is characteristic of traditional interpretation—readings that presume stable meanings, origins, and autonomous existence. What I will attempt to demonstrate

in this essay is that it is in the very tension between the two opposing words—"nothing" and "solid"—that the "theology" of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* is located.

"Does He Exist?"

"Solid"

(3) Critics writing about religious themes in *BtVS* cite a by now familiar set of touchstones: the use of holy water and crosses, the demons' reverence for relics, the battle between good and evil, and various mystical rituals that echo Judeo-Christian traditions. In the recent wave of criticism attempting to associate *BtVS* with fields of philosophy and critical theory, there has emerged a subset of *Buffy Studies* that has tried to contain, categorize, or totalize the show as a work of religious art, or as a work that demonstrates a determinate religion or religious-ethical content. Fans and scholars have found in *Buffy* analogies with diverse strands of Christianity^[1] or models for ethical behavior, a "practical theology," or a "domestic church."^[2] The characters of Buffy and Angel are often seen as figures of Christ who descend to hell and back and sacrifice themselves for the greater good.^[3] A more skeptical interpretation, although still oriented towards deterministic religious traditions, is offered by Lynn Schofield Clark in her book *From Angels to Aliens*, where she points to how much media in general and *Buffy* in particular capture and encourage the tendency of many young people to accept religious figures and themes while distrusting traditional institutions. In his lecture "God, New Religious Movements and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*," Massimo Introvigne, like Clark, sees *Buffy* as appealing to a generation of "non-belonging believers." He quotes the beer drinking college students from "Beer Bad" (4005) who pretentiously claim "there will be no Thomas Aquinas at this table" as speaking more truly than they know of the distance between traditional theology and the supernatural world of *Buffy*.

(4) But however one reads these aspects of *BtVS*, there is no disputing that the show distances itself from traditional religious practices and beliefs. Although its emphasis on complex ethical issues necessarily connects to our culture's association of ethics with religion, it rarely if ever proposes a divine solution to these issues. And if its demons, monsters, and hell dimensions suggest both reflection and parody of Judeo-Christian mythology, the absence of divine presence and the characters' general indifference to religion is a common theme throughout the series. While *Buffy* may use, refer to, and suggest religious systems, ideas, rituals, and symbols, it rarely endorses them, explicitly or implicitly. There is never any statement of absolute meaning or divinity (good or bad) that is not ultimately made open to questioning and subversion. Theologically and otherwise, the show resists categorization and static meaning throughout, and, especially in the later years, introduces subversive elements onto the conceptual universe of the earlier seasons.

"Nothing"

(5) Other critics exploring the religious side of the show have concluded that it is definitively "not religious" at all and is indeed "atheistic." Gregory Sakal points out that despite the importance of "sacrifice," "salvation," and "redemption," and despite a few "arguably Christian overtones," the show is "decidedly" not Christian (239). Creator Joss Whedon has described himself as an "angry atheist," a comment that has also drawn a

lot of attention, both critical and popular. On the DVD commentary to the episode "The Body" (5016), Whedon cites as one of the main themes his view that the "Sky Bully" does not exist and will not come down to make things better.

(6) Of course many critics have realized that *BtVS* presents neither an absolute position of belief or disbelief. Wendy Anderson, for example writes that, while for the characters on *Buffy*, religion is "not necessary," the show is ultimately "far from secularized but also far from sacralized" (226). Her essay is one of several that point to the tension in the show between its religious themes and images and its resistance to acknowledging any divine authority. I would like to take her point even further by suggesting that it is this very tension, and in fact this very resistance, that can be seen as theological, or, as I will propose, (a)theological.

"It's About Power"

(7) The importance as well as ambiguity of religions, religious symbols and myths is established in the very first episode ("Welcome to the Hellmouth," 1001). Buffy's first major battle finds her fighting the vampire Luke in a mausoleum in a cemetery. As he fights Buffy, and as the scene shifts back to Giles viewing images of a Devil-like figure in a book, Luke grandly soliloquizes in the style of the King James Bible:

But on the third day of the newest light will come the Harvest.
When the blood of men will flow as wine.
When the master will walk among them once more.
The earth will belong to the old ones.
And Hell itself will come to town.

Luke throws Buffy into a coffin and, as she lies terrified, the episode ends on the word "Amen" spoken by the vampire as he leaps in to kill her. Buffy is only saved from death by the crucifix around her neck as Luke pulls back in anger.

(8) This scene raises issues that will be explored throughout the series. What keeps the show fresh and interesting are the ways in which the reoccurring battle scenes are drawn to represent shifting psychological and conceptual conflicts. An older and wiser Buffy, teaching Dawn to fight, will make the critical interpretation that, "it's about power." This comment, appropriately, is as complex and paradoxical as any statement of power analysis should be. First articulated in Season Five when she realizes that the Watcher's Council has no control over her—"Power. I have it. You want it." ("Checkpoint," 5012)—the phrase is most obviously presented as thematic material in the first episode of the final season, when it is spoken by both Buffy herself and then the First Evil in the guise of Buffy ("Lessons," 7001). But where does the power lie in her initial confrontation with Luke? Luke is powerful because he is a vampire, a hybrid species that is part human and part demon, and because he is connected to the "Master," an ancient vampire entombed beneath a church with connections deep in a mythical past before humans swarmed the earth "like a plague of boils." Buffy is powerful because she is the "slayer," a seemingly human creature imbued with a mysterious power and responsibility given to her through an ancient and apostolic process.

(9) Yet each of these powers comes with subversive questions. Buffy's power, as Anya will suggest in the final season, is acquired only through "luck." The cross around her neck is a powerful repellent of vampires seemingly because it is connected to ancient

traditions. But this very cross has just been given to her by a vampire who was evil until a Gypsy "curse" gave him a soul, and whether one sees these as Christian traditions or a folkloric vampire tradition is also ambiguous. The word "Amen," a cross, conflicting mythical and mystical forces, pagan, folkloric, and Christian each embody some sort of power. But what are the sources of their power? To put this question in philosophical or theological terms: do any of these powers have a true *essence*? Each of these elements on their own represents not an essence or even an autonomous object but simulacra. They can only be read as they relate to each other. (A crucifix means nothing until it repels a vampire. A soul is meaningless until it is absent.) How are we to read this web of forces?

(10) My first point is that these intertwined forces indeed must be read *as a web* and not as essential or autonomous powers, a reading that mirrors many current perceptions of contemporary culture. For theologian and cultural critic Mark Taylor, there "is a religious dimension to *all* culture" and its "multiple threads have been intricately interwoven to create the complex webs now entangling us" (*Moment 6*). Within *BtVS*, if we take any of these elements out of context, it is easy to overstate the connections and the coherence of the show's relationship to traditional or determinate theology. Instead of stating that Buffy's cross *is* a Christian based power, or that a vampire *is* a symbol of Satanic evil, we see that it is the intertwined complexity of competing powers which produce meaning. Each force (iconic, mythical, and mystical) depends on the other and supports the other. In the scene from "Welcome to the Hellmouth," for example, if we take only Buffy's cross without the vampire's "amen," we misrepresent the complexity with which religion exists in the show, and by extension, in our culture. As Taylor insists, "we are living in a moment of unprecedented complexity," and the "task we now face is . . . to learn to live with it creatively" (*Moment 3-4*). The most interesting modern literary representations of religion—in Nietzsche, Borges, Proust, Bataille—present religion in a way that does not allow it to be totalized or explained and avoids the either/or logic of traditional criticism: they force us to be creative. *BtVS* neither has nor gives an answer. Like other texts, sacred or secular, the importance of *BtVS*'s relationship to religion lies in the difficulty of the *act* of its interpretation.

(11) The attempt to find *BtVS* as *either* a religious text *or* an atheistic one is analogous to efforts in Shakespeare criticism that argue for his life and works as either Catholic or Protestant. Although this is a longstanding debate among Shakespeareans, the more important point is that in writing plays that penetrate the complexities of the human condition, Shakespeare necessarily created texts that can be read both for and against Protestant and Catholic worldviews. In the same way *BtVS* can be read, not as an expression or repudiation of any religious tradition or as a reflection of Whedon's professed atheism, but as a text that is both religious and atheistic.

(12) What invites and frustrates religious and theological interpretation of *Buffy* is that it both is and is not religious. It is both of these things because it presents religion not only as traditional trappings and as simulacra, but because sometimes these trappings do seem to carry some power. It is dismissive of all of the central issues of religion (the creator, free will, good and evil) and yet is obsessed with these very issues. It is at once play and the real desire for meaning; it relishes its irony and yet seeks some kind of center.

(13) The concept of "atheology" (or "a/theology") as drawn by Georges Bataille and Mark Taylor probably represents my approach most accurately. While it means something

different to Bataille and Taylor (hence the slash in Taylor's spelling), atheology always stands for a position between atheism and theology, between or outside of faith or disbelief. It is not opposed to theology, but opposed to traditional and deterministic quests; it denies a theology that insists on perceiving God as something "solid." Reading *BtVS* through theories of atheology and postmodern theology gives us an approach that permits and relies upon the contradictions and paradoxes that necessarily exist on *Buffy* and in our own culture.

"Where is the thing I was so afraid of? You know, the Lord?"[4][4]

To define God as the supreme evil is as much an act of homage and belief as to define him as the supreme good.

J. Hillis Miller (354)

(14) Essays and thought on *BtVS*'s relationship to religion can be organized into four general categories: 1) action (ethical decisions, sacrifices), 2) symbols and rituals, 3) Good and Evil, and 4) mythology (vampires, demons, the slayer). Yet each of these four categories also demonstrates ways that, while echoes of traditional religious elements are common within each of these categories, ideas of a confessional religion or a determinate God are consistently subverted, good and evil are never stable categories, and even "ethical" actions and selfless sacrifice are continually questioned. By reading through each of these categories we can see the transgressive atheology that accompanies more traditional interpretations.

Actions: Buffy's Killing of Angel

(15) In the finale of Season Two when Buffy must kill Angel in order to save the world, she is faced with a classical ethical dilemma ("Becoming," part two, 2022). Although she performs what appears to be a selfless ethical act of goodness, the scene is further complicated by its echoes of the staking of Lucy Westenra in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. The striking parallels between *BtVS* and the most famous vampire staking in literature reveal subversive and destabilizing resonance in the *Buffy* scene. In *Dracula*, Lucy Westenra's fiancé is allowed to drive the stake through her heart to allow her eternal soul to go to paradise. Buffy, far from putting Angel's soul to rest, must kill him just after his soul has been restored, and he has reverted to the "good" Angel. In an exact reversal of the staking of Lucy in *Dracula*—where only after Lucy has been staked is her fiancé permitted to kiss her—Buffy *first* kisses Angel and *then* ("close your eyes") thrusts the sword into him, sending him not to eternal salvation, but to suffer in a hell dimension. In this scene revenge and salvation and good and evil are subverted and not clearly defined. If there is a suggestion of divine presence here (and if not, where does Angel's soul originate and who creates the hell he is sent to?), it appears Buffy acts *against* (or a least outside of) any divine order.[5] Although ethically Buffy has chosen the good of the many over the few, theologically she has sent a recently redeemed soul to hell.[6] While Buffy appears to have made a "good" choice, the contrast to the good versus evil world of *Dracula* is revealing.

(16) These issues are brought to the surface in the episode "Buffy vs. Dracula" where Dracula essentially forces Buffy to confront Nietzsche's warning that "whoever fights

monsters should see to it that in the process he does not become a monster" (*Beyond*, 89: section 146). Buffy, despite her occasional resistance to her slayer calling, has rarely questioned the roots of her power, or the assumed goodness of the struggle. Buffy's statement after defeating Dracula, that she is now "chock full of free will," is typical of the series' ironic view towards traditional religion. Her claim of free will points not so much to a theological position, but to an existential crisis in believing in even the *possibility* of an individual and free will. What the episode has confirmed, of course, is that Buffy *cannot* rely on having free will, nor can she ever again be sure of herself as an unmitigated force for Good. The irony is that she claims free will just after she has been forced to question her own sense of even choosing between good and evil. Is a slayer, as Buffy will ask, "just a killer after all?" By determining which monsters live and die, by determining who *is* a monster, is Buffy going too far, playing God?[7]

(17) Buffy's questions are the same questions of theology and theodicy that Frankenstein's monster asks his creator scientist and creator God: Why did you make me? Why did you put me here? What kind of world is this? These are also the questions Milton's Adam asks of his God in *Paradise Lost*, lines that Mary Shelley used as an epigraph to *Frankenstein*:

Did I request thee, Maker, from my clay
To mould me man? Did I solicit thee
From darkness to promote me? (X. 743-745)

The crucial difference between the *Frankenstein* monster (or Adam) and Buffy is that there is no obvious "Creator" presence for Buffy to question. This absence is the very lack Dracula forces her to realize. As much as she and we desire it, there is not, and will never be, a stable presence to address these questions to.

(18) While Buffy herself has no creator to appeal to, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* in its totality—for all the deserved credit Joss Whedon gets for his "genius"—has no creator either. The fan and critical attention directed toward Whedon reveals a characteristic and traditional need for origin; a desire for a creator to the show and a framed-ness to its existence: a need for it to be an object; to be solid, to be a text they can locate, surround, and analyze. Yet, as Taylor maintains, "from the viewpoint of a/theology, there never was a pure origin" (*Erring* 155). It is this traditional and theological desire for a creator that drives the need for absolute positions of determinate religious interpretations of *BtVS*. And by transferring the attributes of the divine Creator to the human creature, atheistic interpretations also demand a deterministic and metaphysical reading that *Buffy's* atheology resists. The show epitomizes the postmodern, digital, media, and internet-created text and therefore has a certain ontological slipperiness that places the text between the show's actual episodes, DVD extras, *Buffy* novels, essays, conferences, internet chat rooms, junior high school Wicca clubs, fan fiction, and comics.[8] It is only through a complex web such as this one that the multiple and paradoxical roles of religion in the show and in our postmodern culture can be understood.

(19) Without a stable creator presence, questions of meaning and truth become difficult. "The secret to defeating Dracula," says Giles, is in "separating the fact from the fiction," and the difficulty of this separation is one of many gray areas the show explores. This gray area between fact and fiction is, by implication, a theological area as well, and a

space that vampires and monster stories continually occupy. "My thesis is this," *Dracula's* Dr. Van Helsing says, "I want you to believe To believe in things that you cannot" (*Dracula* XIV). This impossible belief points to the shifting and ultimately unlocatable line between fact and fiction that Elaine Graham finds so essential to the cultural work that monsters currently do. "If the boundaries between humans, animals, and machines . . . are clearly under pressure in the digital and biotechnological age, then the relationship between another supposed binary pair, 'fact' and 'fiction' is also central" (13). In our virtual world where fact and fiction are no longer seen as clear opposites, Graham finds monsters crucial in continuing to define ourselves and our relationship to the divine. It is the role of the monster of neither fact nor fiction to explore the spaces of unity and fragmentation, belief and disbelief, and to allow us to see what it means to be on the dividing line of the in-between.

(20) Traditional religious texts—written or otherwise—are spaces where fact and fiction almost by definition cease to have separate meaning. "Buffy vs. Dracula" is a comment on the control old narratives and mythologies have over us and our perceptions of reality. In her encounter with Dracula, Buffy has been tamed by the power of a legend and in the process been forced to begin questioning her own narrative, therefore embarking a quest to determine the fact and fiction of not only Dracula but her role, her vocation, and ultimately herself. [9]

Symbols and Rituals: Demons at Play

We have lost our way. We have lost the night. But despair is for the living. Where they are weak, we will be strong. . . . Within three days a new hope will arise. We will put our faith in him. He will show us the way.

("When She Was Bad," 2001)

(21) The symbols and rituals of *BtVS* are perhaps the clearest pointers to traditional religions and have been a focus of both fans and scholars looking for religious significance in the show. Yet over the course of the show, these echoes of traditional religion consistently exist outside of any determinate religious, theological, ethical, or social institutions. Although crosses and holy water seem to be on the side of "good," the religious aspects of ritual belong to the monsters. Crucifixes, crosses, holy water, all lessen in importance throughout the run of the show, as vampires come to see them as merely annoying irritants. Buffy, who is buried wearing her crucifix, ironically and without comment appears to do away with it after *her* resurrection. While they seem to "contain" power, the mystical objects on *Buffy*, from the crucifix around her neck to the mysterious scythe in Season Seven ultimately suggest instability. In the same way that God and evil are not *things* but *actions*, the objects are defined by what they do rather than what they are, and ultimately their effect and affect is one of destabilization. They are not connected in any way to an absolute power, but only to physical power. Nor do they appear to be linked to any possible transcendent good or evil. They are interruptions of the real empirical world, and yet part of it. A crucifix has unexplainable power, and yet is just another weapon from Buffy's trunk. The scythe appears be the primary talisman of Season Seven and an important connection to Slayer legend, but basically it is just an ax that slices Caleb in two. **[Editors' note: The scythe is also, of course, used by Willow in "Chosen" to disperse the power of the Slayer.]**

(22) Actual references to religion tend to come from the demons and vampires themselves, such as a vampire commenting "I haven't had this much fun since the crucifixion." ("School Hard," 2003). One of the few references in the show to the actual Bible casts a line from Isaiah, "and a child shall lead them," as a prophecy about a vampire, the Master's anointed one ("Prophecy Girl," 1012). Although it would seem out of place to have Buffy, Giles, or Willow refer to the Christian origins of the cross, vampires joke about it. While demons and vampires seem to be drawn to the rituals, languages, symbols, and epistemology of traditional religion, Buffy and her friends are not. Vampires adapt the language and style of evangelical preachers (note the epigram to this section), they follow a "Master," an "anointed" one, and a "vessel," and they facilitate Eucharistic resurrections. Just as the Master and Luke get to affect Biblical and Miltonic language in the show's opening episode, the most religiously influenced moments of ritual and speech tend to come from monsters and demons. Despite Spike's urging for "less ritual and more fun," vampires and demons are more connected and accepting of concepts of essence and transcendence that are the roots of traditional religious ritual. Vampires also express a weakness for charismatic religious leaders, yearn for a return to a legendary golden age, and they trust the power of ancient texts and prophecies.

(23) We see these elements of confessional religion when Spike must perform a ritual to restore Drusilla to health ("What's My Line," part 2, 2010). He performs it in the front of a church, and the emphasis on blood and resurrection echoes a Christian ceremony. The blood transfusion—a staple of vampire narrative from *Dracula* to *Near Dark*—in this scene is from vampire to vampire and is performed with all the ritual of a holy communion. Complete with stained glass images, Gregorian chant, and incense, Spike intones "from the blood of the sire she is risen. From the blood of the sire she shall rise again."

(24) Wendy Anderson is correct in pointing out that the "religions of the Buffyverse are overwhelmingly demonic" (214). What does it do when traditional religious symbols and ritual are diminished, found powerless, or are connected to evil? The Buffyverse points to some central questions being asked in contemporary philosophy and theology.^[10] Can we make a separation between good and evil? Are they necessarily inter-reliant? Are we fated to keep thinking through the same patterns of religion even if we believe they are empty? Is to think the divine also to think the monstrous?

Good and Evil: After Theodicy

"In every generation there is a Chosen One. She alone will stand against the vampires, the demons and the forces of darkness. She is the Slayer."

(25) These words, the canonical text of what a slayer is, set up a worldview where there is a battle between good and evil, between the "forces of darkness" and what would have to by implication be the forces of light. Does this mean there is therefore a Good with a capital "G"? Does the existence of evil necessitate a Good? This Foucauldian interpretation is a common contemporary reading of monster narrative. Veronica Hollinger, for example, says of *Dracula*: "however threatening [a] vampire is, it serves a crucial function . . . in its role as evil Other, it necessarily guarantees the *presence* of the Good." As the paradigmatic vampire narrative, *Dracula* is often read as a conflict between Good and Evil, a battle between Christian warriors and a monster who is, in Van Helsing's words, "an arrow in the side of He who died." Although *Dracula*, as well, presents an

ambiguous world of religion,[11] any discussion of religion in *Buffy* has in the background the religion of *Dracula*, and the polarized good versus evil that it suggests.

(26) The vampire, at least since Stoker's *Dracula*, has been generally perceived as evil, opposed to order and the Christian religion. Although the figure of "Dracula" as perceived by the turn of the 21st century is no longer Stoker's *Dracula*, but one continually reinvented and re-envisioned by films and popular culture, he still represents an opposition to the pillars of culture and civilization. More recent depictions of vampires have moved away from the racially exotic foreign aristocrat, replaced by criminals, drifters, outsiders, and unsupervised children,[12] yet they still represent an opposition to "good and "normal" people. What makes *Buffy's* vampires unique is that they are random, formed outside of any single determining moral, religious, or social system.[13] Other than their superficial revulsion to the Christian cross and holy water they do not seem particularly opposed to any religious essence. The vampires on *Buffy* are not participants in a cosmic war, not "arrows in the side of Christ," not chosen or damned, they just *are*.

(27) In *Buffy's* earlier episodes vampires are described as being "pure evil," and, while having the memories and personality of the person who had lived in the body, as now either having the "soul of a demon" or no soul at all. The obvious difficulty with this definition—are memory and personality completely separate from "soul?"—is a boundary that is explored as a primary theme of the series. The initially defined separation between vampire and the previous human reveals itself to be never stable or absolute. In "Doppelgangland" (3016), an episode that features the return of Willow's dark vampire double (a figure that foreshadowed more than any *Buffy* watcher could have predicted), Buffy reassures Willow and the others that "a vampire's personality has nothing to do with the person it was." Angel responds "well, actually. . ." and then stops. Much of the rest of the series is devoted to exploring that unfinished and ambiguous "well, actually." Angel, who stands for both, demonstrates that there is no way to define a boundary between vampire and human and there *is* no pure evil or pure good. Ultimately, the vampire is demon and person, and is therefore not unquestionably evil. The vampire's very existence, like that of a god, is deeply unsettling. Like a divine being, the vampire belongs to forces beyond and outside of our understanding, and does not allow us to maintain a certainty in our own perceptions and beliefs.

(28) Although the ambiguity of good and evil is a theme throughout the series, it is through the character of Spike that issues of good and evil are most directly addressed. Spike, beginning as a powerful evil vampire, goes through complex transformations, and his character is used to explore the gray areas between good and evil and human and other. In Season Four, after the Initiative installs the chip in his brain that prevents him from harming humans, the neutered Spike at first continues to insist on his essentially evil nature. Ultimately, however, he expresses compassion, kindness, and love, all without the presence of a soul. Spike is a variation on the cyborg fantasy in postmodern science fiction, with the ironic twist that the microchip makes him *more* "human." The show, which constantly privileges the irrationality of magic and mysticism over the rationality of the scientific, here blurs these polarities.

(29) Speaking in defense of Spike, Buffy's sister Dawn (herself existing without a true origin), encapsulates the theological issues involved in the field of cyborgs and the "posthuman" with her profoundly postmodern statement: "Chip . . . soul, same diff."

Although Spike will occasionally remind us that—"Hey, I'm evil, remember"—he begins to show and inspire compassion, and begins to be accepted by other characters and by viewers. Trying to console Dawn, who has just learned that as "the Key" she may be used as a force for evil, Spike says, "I'm a vampire. I know a lot about evil," and then concludes that, "I'm not good. And I'm OK" ("Tough Love," 5019). His statement ascribes to his being four determinate definitions: vampire, Evil, not Good, and "OK," all in an act of kindness. Again, the essence of each characteristic exists in a web of inseparable complexity.

(30) To simply call something evil is to remove it from our responsibility, to keep it at arm's length.[14] As philosopher Susan Neiman says, "We are horrified . . . not when beasts and devils behave like beasts and devils but when human beings do" (3). In this context, we can learn from our reactions to Spike. We are most horrified, not by all the previous murders he has committed as an active vampire, but by his attempted rape of Buffy that occurs after we come to accept him as human. Spike can only be truly horrific *outside* of the boundaries of essentialist evil. Because we can no longer dismiss him as a monster he is only now a true threat to us.

(31) On *Buffy*, it is not the presence of a soul that separate humans from vampires (Angel, a vampire *with* a soul, is still not human), but it *is* the lack of a soul that seems to make vampires evil. The soul, like Buffy's crucifix, is a symbol of good without a source. Where do souls come from? Angel receives his soul in the form of a gypsy curse intended to make him suffer for the whole of his immortal existence. When Spike is ultimately "ensouled" at the end of the sixth season, it is through a process of bloody combat tests put to him by a demon. The soul, then, while it appears to be opposed to evil, does not come from a place of any transcendent good, but is just a mystical commodity. Just as a non-Catholic can throw holy water on a vampire, a demon can dispense a "soul." Like the cross, the soul acts as just a thing, yet its "thingness," its solidity, paradoxically makes us questions its existence. What is a soul if it can be stored in an urn, or conjured and implanted by a gypsy curse, a demon, or a beginning Wicca? If a soul is just a thing, is it a soul? On *BtVS* religious symbols are pure simulacra; faith and the "real presence" of God are beside the point. Good and evil are not opposing forces, and they have no essence or power of their own.

(32) Western literature historically creates competing sets of supernatural personalities—Baal and YHWH, Beowulf and Grendel, Mina and Dracula, Buffy and Spike—whose courses of battle both define and complicate the grounds of good and evil and sacred and profane. Our culture of monotheism encourages us to associate God with ourselves; evil, then, becomes other. But as we instill our anthropomorphic God with our own prejudices, weaknesses, and fears, ethical opposites blur together. God becomes monstrous; evil becomes a fluid concept. The two opposing forces need each other and often merge together in identity. Buffy and Spike make their messy, chaotic, destructive, and creative merging literal.

(33) Vampires are often seen as representing forces of chaos that are antagonistic to religious, theological, and divine presence. Yet theology comes with its negative, disruptive, and chaotic side as well. It is as forces of discontinuity and intervention that monsters and gods are *not* opposite, but necessary partners that illuminate each other. The vampires on *BtVS* function as "supplemental" figures in that they are always/already supplementing the construction of the idea of what is Good (and quite literally within the context of the show since evil precedes good.) The supplement, in Jacques Derrida's

famous conception, complicates from the very ground any seemingly simple or metaphysical conceptualization such as the binary understanding of good and evil. The vampires on *Buffy* force us to abandon our either/or logic and accept a logic of *and*. A being is not evil or good, not human or vampire, but good and evil, human and monster. The world of *Buffy* is a world where evil and good cannot be defined, cannot even exist in a pure form, and yet it is a world where we need to desire such absolute concepts to carry on. *Buffy*, like philosopher Emanuel Levinas, portrays the modern world as now existing “after the end of theodicy.” In other words, evil and suffering have become something we cannot integrate into any category of understanding or reason; they are beyond classification

Mythology: From Hell to Heaven to Nothing

“This world is older than any of you know. Contrary to popular mythology, it did not begin as a paradise. For untold eons, demons walked the Earth, and made it their home -- their Hell. But in time they lost their purchase on this reality, and the way was made for mortal animals, for Man. All that remains of the Old Ones are vestiges, certain magicks, certain creatures”

(“Welcome to the Hellmouth,” 1001)

(34) Like the show’s often cited reversal of the horror cliché of a helpless blonde girl being chased into an alley, the mythical ground of the show involves an obvious reversal of the Judeo-Christian Garden of Eden myth. As Giles explains, “contrary to popular mythology,” in the beginning the earth was inhabited by “pure” demons. Many of the Judeo-Christian resonances of *Buffy* reflect the vampire’s connections to this primal time of pure evil. I don’t believe that within a larger cultural context there is much to be gained delving into and analyzing *BtVS*’s mythology as a mythology. Myth is revealing when it is myth; it can have no author—and that takes thousands of years. What *is* revealing is how fictional and fabricated myth is perceived and received by the viewing audience, how we react to created myth.

(35) For example, when Angel is returned to Sunnydale after Buffy kills him, we can try to explain it through an analysis of the mythical cosmos of the show. But the most we can discern is that Angel may or may not have been returned from Hell by the First Evil to kill Buffy (or perhaps for some other reason).^[15] Mythically what is important is not how it happened, but whether we find it convincing. Does the “Buffyverse” seem like a world where this event can happen? Had Angel been lifted out of Hell by angelic creatures from heaven, it would have seemed ridiculous to a regular viewer of the show. But to be hurled naked onto the earth, shivering and feral, returned perhaps by forces of good and perhaps by forces of evil, seems, within the context of the series, an authentic action.

(36) Although Angel is not returned by obvious heavenly forces, the mythology of a “heaven” shockingly appears in Season Six. After Buffy has returned from the dead, she reveals to Spike that she thinks she has been in “heaven” and feels torn away by her friends.

I was happy. Wherever I . . . was . . . I was happy. At peace. I knew that everyone I cared about was all right. I knew it. Time . . . didn’t mean anything . . . nothing

had form but I was still me, you know? And I was warm and I was loved and I was finished. Complete. I don't understand about theology or dimensions, or any of it really, but I think I was in heaven. ("After Life," 6003)

Buffy's heaven, in ways that are hard to define, does not feel like part of an "authentic" *BtVS* mythology. Although Tara tells us that there are millions of heavenly dimensions and although Buffy's is not a classic definition of a Christian heaven, she does present a heaven that many Christian believers could recognize. The statement "I was in heaven" rests uncomfortably within the context of the supernatural world of the show. Like Buffy, we can accept that we don't understand the different "dimensions," but we weren't expecting Buffy to ponder "theology." But as the season progresses we have reason to doubt the existence of her "heaven" as a theologically and divinely created paradise. Throughout the season, connections are drawn between this hovering vaguely present idea of heaven and other more negative and less angelic states of being. Buffy herself, who spends most of the season depressed and "going through the motions," seems to associate extreme moments of negativity with her heaven. In fact, in Season Six the few flashes we get of the old happy, joking Buffy are when she is invisible ("Gone" 6011) or when she is unaware of who she is ("Tabula Rasa" 6008). These two glimpses of a joyful Buffy both relate to a suggestion of the nothingness of a heaven where she was "happy." Anya's question, "do you think she was walking on clouds, wearing Birkenstocks and playing a harp?" ridicules the thought of a traditional Christian heaven. But what is Buffy's heaven? It comes to seem not a Christian heaven at all, but an absence, an almost nothingness. Buffy is happy when she is *not*.

(37) Buffy first reveals to her friends that she feels ripped away from true happiness in song: "I think I was in Hea-ven." Her words, immortalized in the musical episode "Once More with Feeling" (6007) by the eerie chromatic movement from a minor to a diminished chord and by Sarah Michelle Gellar's micro-tonal slide down on the second syllable of "hea-ven," suggests various levels of darkness that will be associated with heaven. A deeper musical analysis of this musical moment reveals how the voice descends alone while the instrumental background remains in stasis, stressing the separation Buffy feels from any grounding principles, at the same time the idea of heaven prevents her from making any connections. Spike echoes the same melodic line, descending on the word "living," which connects Buffy's singing of a heaven where she is not and Spike singing of a state of living where he is not. The negation and disassociation blend the two characters, the words heaven and living, and the music into a dark negative emblem for the entire series. The music emphasizes absence and death, and the scene in which Buffy sings these lines also features what could be read as a suicide attempt, as she is saved from dancing into flames by Spike.

(38) Buffy's heavenly escape from a life of violence and fear is given darker resonance by its implied connection to her imagined existence in the insane asylum in a later episode ("Normal Again," 6017). These associations are further conflated by dark Willow, who, in her most memorable speech, tells Buffy that insane asylums were her "comfy alternative" to the real world and that she was happiest when she was "in the ground" ("Two to Go," 6021). Willow's cruel but honest speech links the escapist fantasy of negation with the alternate world of both death and an imagined asylum. In "Normal Again," the psychiatrist treating Buffy remarks that "last summer when you had a momentary awakening" which suggests that Buffy's death and "Heaven" had been just another visit

to an asylum when her mom and dad were still together and where monsters never existed. The asylum—Buffy's escape—is located at an uneasy place in the middle of Season Six. While few viewers were willing to accept that the show would employ the "it was all a dream" cliché, the suggestions of this possibility and its links to Buffy's idea of heaven present discomfiting and irresolvable paradoxes to an attempt to establish moral or narrative continuity to the season. Buffy's heaven and her asylum influence how we read the entire season, yet both are unstable and self-effacing spaces.

(39) In Buffy's insane asylum, her doctor informs her that her "fantasy world" (the one of slayers and vampires) is coming apart—a meta-critical and postmodern comment on the discontinuities of the show itself in Season Six. The very premise of the series' mythology, especially in the later seasons, is that it can always subvert itself. Episodes like "Buffy vs. Dracula," "Restless," "Normal Again," and "Superstar" (4017) are examples of the process by which the ground of the show's very mythology and narrative are threatened from within. The mythology of *Buffy* is more accurately anti-myth—not an affirmation of older systems of thought—but a continual challenging of them. While this anti-myth can be subversive to religious belief, it is not un-theological. Even the legacy of the Hebrew Bible, according to scholars such as Herbert Schneidau, is an example of anti-myth more than myth—an attack on sacred institutions rather than a creation of them.

(40) For Schneidau, Biblical thought does not use myth but uses it up, subverts and destroy it. The Judeo-Christian tradition contains "no inherent sacredness and can always be ultimately questioned" (Schneidau 4). Myth is an attempt to understand, to contain and explain the mysteries and paradoxes of life. While myth shows the world as a "system of correspondences," a world that, like a language, we can "learn to read" (Schneidau 99), the Judeo-Christian tradition, especially in the Hebrew Prophets and in the letters of Paul, subverts this view. In this sense, Biblical tradition and its legacy, from *Paradise Lost* and *Hamlet* to *Finnegans Wake* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, is about the subversion of myth. We can especially see this in the tendency of the Buffyverse to focus on "mythical" elements that don't and can't make sense, where the correspondences don't match up: Slayer lore, the First Evil, and, in *Angel*, Wolfram and Hart.

(41) Each of the four categories of religious analysis I have described—actions, symbols and rituals, good and evil, and mythology—reveals some similarities to traditional religious and theological systems, but more significantly do not allow these analogies to remain stable. But rather than point to this resistance as evidence of a form of atheism, it seems that it is more philosophically satisfying to see it as the show's (and our) atheology—an atheology that admits of the power of established religious narratives, while at the same time denies the ground on which they stand.

(42) Season Six, centered on Buffy's struggle to accept being alive, and Willow's continued slide into dark magic is, to me, the philosophical and theological core of the series. In reviewing the earlier seasons, I can't avoid thinking that they inevitably aim towards the darkness and nihilism of Season Six. From almost the beginning of the show we know that Buffy must die young, that there is no apparent transcendent Good, and that Good and Evil are slippery terms. But it isn't until Season Six that the show and its viewers truly faced the darkness they had created. And although the end of the season and Season Seven offer a sort of redemption, it is one that doesn't deny any of the emptiness and pessimism.[16] Like its opening episode that brought Buffy out of the grave, the end of the sixth season may find Buffy climbing out of the ground again, this

time into daylight and to the strains of Sarah McLachlan singing the "Prayer of St. Francis," but there is still no going back to the relative happy innocence of earlier seasons. Buffy and her friends find that they *can* go on, but only with the realization that life has no point, that there is no transcendent good, no ruling hand of providence, and no promised end. Like Schopenhauer, Buffy realizes that life is essentially irrational, painful, and meaningless, but that there are reasons to go on living, there are things in the world to be appreciated and enjoyed.

Absolute Interruption: "The negative space around the object" [17]

Nihilism stands at the door: whence comes this strangest of guests?

Nietzsche

(43) Critics writing about the relationship of religion to a literary text often do the disservice of writing about religion within the limited confines of the traditional definition given by Mircea Eliade as being a sacred cosmic order *against* the chaos. Based on this definition, the most "religious" figure in *BtVS* is perhaps Whistler—a "demon" in charge of balancing good and evil. But this is not the religion and theology of *BtVS* or of our postmodern world. We may desire balance, order, a definition of good and evil, but these things are denied us. For us as well, like the final season of *Buffy*, there is no going back.

(44) That which we chose to call "God," whether we profess to "believe" or not, is not necessarily an absolute ground of stable meaning. Instead, as many thinkers, ancient, medieval, and postmodern have attested, "God" is conversely that which makes meaning slippery, makes communication inadequate, and makes a stable ground on which to stand impossible. It is possible, following the thought of many postmodern philosophers and theologians, to see God and religion *not* as forces against chaos, but as disruptive and chaotic forces themselves. What we choose to call God is defined as an "absolute other" or "a God who may be," pointing to the role of God as a force of incomprehensibility. [18] For Derrida, religious belief "is to be found in the experience itself of non-relationship or of absolute *interruption*." This experience comes about through "desacralization," "atheism," and by the "radical experience" of "going beyond" even negative theology (*Religion* 64-65). [19]

(45) If God and religion, then, are *not* that which makes all things possible or comprehensible, but that which is beyond understanding and partakes of the impossible, they occupy and create spaces of extreme instability. Thinking of a god on the fringes of comprehensibility also suggests God's monstrous nature and the impossibility of separating gods and monsters. This type of theological interpretation blurs the distinctions between gods and monsters and both monsters and Gods end up standing for uncertainty.

(46) If God is an "absolute interruption," the most God-like force on *Buffy* is the First Evil. [20] The First Evil, or just the First, is the main adversary in Season Seven, but initially appears in Season Three. In "Amends" (3010), Buffy encounters the First in the guise of Giles' dead girlfriend Jenny Calendar. When the First confronts Buffy it describes itself as "beyond sin," something she "can't even conceive," "beyond understanding" and "the thing the darkness fears." Although Buffy is characteristically dismissive, "yeah, I get it, you're evil," the First's self-definition also echoes the postmodern divine—a definition

maintained throughout Season Seven, as the First is positioned outside of any comprehensible psychological or corporeal interpretation. (The usual identification of this force as “The First” establishes a connection between the Slayer mythology which also begins with “the First,” and expresses the need for the original, the “something solid,” yet at the same time the unstable and indefinable presence of both “Firsts” denies the literal existence that is desired.)

(47) The space of the First—unimaginable, unreachable—is the postmodern, post-Einsteinian version of the margins of medieval sailing maps where the monsters resided. It is the postmodern god of “absolute other,” and a return to a version of Plato’s *Khora*, the non-space that functions as the primordial origin of the world; a nothingness before anything that, Plato suggested, can only be imagined through a sort of dream state (71). *Khora*, translated as “receptacle” or “space,” is described by Plato as “invisible and formless, all-embracing, possessed in a most puzzling way of intelligibility, yet very hard to grasp” (70). Plato’s *khora* is a paradigm for the empty space that both is and isn’t a God, a void that undermines and challenges our ground of being—the absolute emptiness of the vampire’s undead body, Buffy’s heaven, the First, and the abyss of Season Six.

(48) The episode that introduced the First Evil, “Amends” drew considerable attention and controversy by viewers who saw it as a Christian episode. Angel, after encountering the First, who almost wills him to feed from and kill Buffy and forces him to re-experience his murderous past, walks out into the morning to commit suicide by sunrise. As Buffy desperately tries to convince him of the worthiness of his “life,” he is greeted by what appears to be a Christmas miracle—clouds and a southern California snowfall—that save him by blocking the sun. As he and Buffy walk hand in hand in the snow, the final shot—the one that really got fans going, although Joss Whedon claimed the shot was accidental—pans across a billboard revealing the word “pray.” But, although the word pray drew all the attention, what was actually shown was not just the word “pray” but “pray for. . . .” It is the word “for” that I find most interesting. Pray *for* what? *For* whom? What *for*?[21]

(49) Prayer, as contemporary philosophers have pointed to, is not an act performed in the *presence* of a divine figure, but in the absence of one. One does not pray to a present God—Moses does not “pray” to the burning bush. The closest thing *BtVS* ever has to real prayer is Buffy’s plea in the musical episode to “give me something to sing about,” an unanswered cry to an invisible creator to give her life meaning. This scene, the final one of the episode, also features the musical disclosure that she was in heaven, her aborted suicide dance, and finally, her first kiss with Spike, all quests for “meaning.” This moment, a central moment in the season that resonates throughout the whole series, captures the theology of *BtVS*: one of absence and one of *a*-theology—a simultaneous belief and disbelief, neither atheistic nor theistic, and a desire for meaning and transcendence.

(50) The ending episode of the series finishes constructing the mythology of the slayer and then also destroys it. In “Chosen,” (7022) Willow performs a ritual that destroys the line of power passed on from slayer to slayer, therefore giving every potential slayer the power of the chosen one. In this final act, Buffy attacks the socially constructed roots and apostolic succession of her own mythology and religion and rids her power of any sense of absolute essence. In their final act together, confronting one more apocalypse and the First Evil, Buffy and Willow defy the rule of a “bunch of men who died thousands of years ago,” an act of anti-myth which can be read as a dismissal of traditional religion, and a releasing of chaos upon a cosmic order.

(51) As James South points out, while Buffy and Willow have indeed “changed the world,” it cannot be said to be better or worse, nor is it a “happy” ending. Instead it is an ending “filled with new possibilities” (“Philosophical Consistency”). South’s brilliant argument that Buffy must transcend teleology, that she must break out of the dialectical relationship of good and evil before she can destroy the First and escape Sunnydale (i.e. Plato’s cave), also applies to the show’s ultimate anti-mythical stance of atheology. By breaking free of traditional forms of theodicy, mythology, and theology *BtVS* creates a world view that, while it may not be Christian, also is not un-Christian (although it may occasionally be anti-Christian). If we return to Buffy’s answer to the existence of God (“nothing solid”), we can read it as unanswerable questions that lead to an atheology: Can nothing be solid? Can solid be nothing? What is solid? What is nothing? For traditional believers, God is solid; God is the absolute ground on which meaning is constructed. For Christian or Jewish mystics, God was indeed often characterized as “nothing.” Ultimately, the world of *BtVS* points to neither solid nor nothing, but embraces the ambiguity in between. The final episode ends—as Buffy smiles, almost squints, into a brightly lit future—appropriately on a question: “What are we going to do now?” No longer featuring a Chosen One, having defeated the god-like disruption of the First and destroyed the Hellmouth, the show neither denies nor affirms any religion. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* expresses neither an absolute certainty nor a total abyss, but, as a postmodern atheology, finds in the death of its gods not despair but opportunity.

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- [1] Papers presented at the recent Slayage Conference on *BtVS* included papers on *Buffy* as Gnostic, Buddhist, and as Thomist.
- [2] Sources including Janet Reiss's book *What would Buffy Do* and Reid B. Locklin's "*Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and the Domestic Church" in, *Slayage* 6.
- [3] As Wendy Anderson points out, Xander, as well, has his Christ-like moment, when he identifies himself as just a "carpenter" and, in the final episode of Season Six, saves the world through the power of love.
- [4] "Who Are You?" (4016).
- [5] Another related example is Buffy's death leap from the tower, perhaps the most discussed ethical decision of the whole series. While it has been seen as an act related to Kierkegaard's Abraham, a "Knight of Faith," who is willing to sacrifice his son in an act

that even transcends ethics, Buffy's leap from the tower, can also be seen as the opposite: breaking from an oppressive authority figure (God or the Watcher's Council) and refusing to sacrifice Isaac or Dawn—the opposite of Kierkegaard's Knight of Faith. [6] Although, of course, the existence of a soul does not seem to change Angel's essential nature as a (perhaps damned) vampire. Note especially Darla's line in *Angel* when he recoils from a crucifix: "No matter how good a boy you are, God doesn't want you. But I still do" ("Dear Boy," 2005).

[7] As has often been pointed out, Dracula speaks words that hauntingly recall those of Buffy's dream encounter with the first slayer speaking through Tara in "Restless," the final episode of Season Four. "You think you know. What's to come. What you are. You haven't even begun." In the final episode of Season Five, of course, Buffy chooses to die, ending a year-long struggle with the issue of choice by making the ultimate assertion of free will and of her individuality by giving her life, perhaps the only truly individual choice and gift a person has.

[8] One very basic example of this intersection of the "canonical" and the "non-canonical" exists in Joss Whedon's DVD commentary to "Restless" where he interprets his own written text of the episode based on commentary he read on the internet.

[9] In the Season Six episode "Normal Again" she will have moments of wanting to see *all* this as a fiction.

[10] For example, see works by Timothy Beal, Richard Kearney, and Emmanuel Levinas.

[11] For an essay on the subversive Christianity in *Dracula*, see "Vampire Religion," by Christopher Herbert (*Representations* 79, Summer 2002).

[12] See, for example, the films *From Dusk Until Dawn*, *Near Dark*, *The Lost Boys*.

[13] I have written about this elsewhere. See my essay "Sometime you Need a Story" in *Fighting the Forces*.

[14] The common characterization of the September 11 terrorists as "evil" or "evil-doers" allowed us to not let them threaten our idea of humanity. If they were "evil" they are essentially different than us and can then be categorized as monsters, as "other" than human. By thus keeping evil in the closet and under our bed we don't allay our fears, but we position evil in a way that does not require us to accept any responsibility.

[15] The actual reason *why* Angel is returned is an easier answer: The show's ratings had much to gain from having more scenes of David Boreanaz taking his shirt off to be tortured and the possibility of a spin off series was already being considered.

[16] Despite repeated promises to viewers that Season Seven would be lighter in tone, and despite attempts in this direction such as "Buffy the guidance counselor" the season swiftly veered into pessimism. By the end of season, most of the high school students Buffy forges bonds with will be dead.

[17] "The Body" (5016).

[18] See Emmanuel Levinas for "absolute other," and Richard Kearney for the "God who may be."

[19] Joss Whedon, like Derrida, is a professed atheist, whose fascination with religious and theological thought has prompted much theological interpretation within the field of religious studies itself.

[20] Not Glory, who is a "God," in the sense of the Greek *Theos* and not a God as we see it in Western religions. Her divinity (like that of Illyria in the final season of *Angel*) like

the Greek gods is contained primarily in a perceived immortality.

[21] Prayer on *Buffy* is always presented ironically; Cordelia praying for shoes or Xander offering up Christian, Jewish, and Buddhist prayers simultaneously.