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

■ William P. MacNeil, "'You slay me!' *Buffy* as Jurisprude of Desire." *Cardozo Law Review* 24.6 (2003): 2421-40. [available in PDF only]
■ Martin Tomlinson, "A Question of Faith: Responsibity, Murder and Redemption in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer."* *Chrestomathy: Annual Review of Undergraduate Research at*

Greg Stevenson
The End as Moral Guidepost [in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*]

This is adapted from Chapter Eleven of _Televised Morality: The Case of Buffy the Vampire Slayer_ and is reprinted here with the permission of Hamilton Books and the author. (Order from Amazon.com here.)
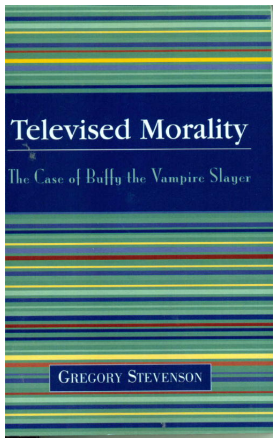
(1) After hearing tales of Buffy's exploits, Riley Finn tells her that he finds himself "needing to know the plural of 'apocalypse'" (4012). During the run of the series, Buffy faces more apocalypses than birthdays. Even Buffy herself loses count, once asking Giles, "This is how many apocalypses for us now?" (5022). The terror inherent in apocalyptic threats to end the world is significantly dampened when those threats are more common than political elections. Why then are there so many apocalypses on *Buffy*, and what is their function? Are they simply narrative devices for heightening suspense and providing the show's protagonists a challenging hurdle to overcome? I contend that they are much more than this. They function as a moral guidepost in that they bring clarity to life and thereby inform moral decisions. In order to establish my case, I must first define some terms and set the ideological context out of which my analysis unfolds.

JUDEO-CHRISTIAN ESCHATOLOGY

(2) "Eschatology" is the study of endings. How something ends, whether it be a piece of music, a novel, or a life, is often as significant (if not more) as how it began. An ending may bring closure to an action or idea or effect a transition to a new one. The most common reference point of eschatology, however, is the end of the world.

(3) In this essay, I examine *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* from the perspective of Judeo-Christian apocalyptic thought, but not because I believe that to be the direct source of *Buffy*'s eschatology. Many of the eschatological ideas in *Buffy* are universal, even if they are given specific renderings in different religious and philosophical traditions. However, all modern fantasy from Tolkien on owes a debt to Judeo-Christian apocalyptic, and *Buffy* is no exception. The show's frequent use of the terms "Armageddon" and "apocalypse" acknowledges this debt. So the Judeo-Christian apocalyptic tradition serves as the lens through which I read *Buffy*'s eschatology, both because of the historical connection

between the fantasy genre and apocalyptic and because this is the tradition that has most extensively shaped my own eschatological perspective.

(4) Speculation on the end of the world actually functions as a comment on the present state of the world. In contemporary parlance, the term "apocalypse" refers to a threat of imminent world destruction. Originally, though, the term meant something very different. "Apocalypse" has entered our vocabulary by way of the New Testament book of Revelation where it is used only one time. In Revelation 1:1 "apocalypse" simply means "a revelation" or "a revealing." An apocalypse, in this sense, is an unveiling of spiritual truth.

(5) P. D. Hanson draws an important distinction between the terms "apocalypse" and "apocalyptic eschatology"(Hanson, 29-30). Due to its usage in Revelation, "apocalypse" comes to represent a Judeo-Christian literary genre where the central focus is the unveiling of spiritual truth through divine intermediaries, heavenly journeys, and transcendent revelations. Because Jewish and Christian apocalypses, particularly Revelation, deal so heavily in end-time speculation, the term "apocalypse" later developed in reference to that specific event. By contrast, "apocalyptic eschatology" is a worldview. It is a means of conceptualizing reality. It is a way of talking about life. Under the purview of apocalyptic eschatology, end-of-the-world speculation functions to organize experience. When Hebrew or Christian prophets talk about the future, it is because they are really interested in the present. Looking ahead to the end offers a perspective on the now that cannot be gained any other way.

(6) It would be wrong to assume, however, that apocalyptic eschatology concerns itself only with the end of the world. Other types of cataclysmic endings —— of a life, for instance —— can be decidedly apocalyptic. After all, what is an apocalypse if not death writ large? Death is a great illuminator of life. That so many significant conversa-tions about life on *Buffy* take place in a cemetery highlights the function of death as a source of enlightenment. In "Conversations With Dead People" (7007), Buffy encounters Holden Webster, a former high school classmate now turned vampire, in a graveyard. Post-poning their inevitable duel to the death, Buffy and Holden reminisce about old times. Holden, who majored in psychology in college, uses the opportunity to psychoanalyze Buffy, offering her counseling on subjects ranging from her work as the Slayer to her relationships. In a take on the classic psychologist's pose, we see Buffy laying down on a stone sarcophagus as Holden sits on a nearby tombstone and encour-ages her to open up by assuring her that "I'm here to kill you, not to judge you." Although initially reluctant to receive "emotional therapy from the evil dead," Buffy experiences an epiphany about her life through this encounter. Buffy's receiving of counseling from a dead psychologist in a graveyard is a clear representation of the power of death to give meaning and clarity to life.

LIVING ESCHATOLOGICALLY

(7) Living eschatologically means living one's life with an eye towards its end. This is not the doom-and-gloom mentality that comes from obsession with death and dying. A doom-and-gloom mentality robs life of its joy, whereas eschatological living is a means of embracing the joy of life. Awareness that an end is coming casts the present into clearer focus. Talk with a cancer survivor and he or she will typically articulate a renewed appreciation for life because he or she has tasted the reality of death. In this section, I analyze *Buffy*'s eschatological landscape by focusing on endings that create an

appreciation for life, a prioritization of values, and a clarification of moral action. These endings include death, world-ending apocalypses, and metaphorical apocalypses.

Appreciation

(8) A Slayer embodies eschatological living. As a rule, Slayers do not live long and this colors their view of life. Buffy makes sure to impress this point upon potential Slayers by informing them that, "Death is what a Slayer breathes, what a Slayer dreams about when she sleeps. Death is what a Slayer lives" (7012). This constant awareness of death does not mean that Buffy ignores the value of life. She says, "I realize that every Slayer comes with an expiration mark on the package. But I want mine to be a long time from now. Like a Cheeto" (5007).

(9) What this acknowledgment of death does bring is a greater appreciation for life and a desire to live it to the fullest. Buffy's dating advice to Willow to "Seize the moment because tomorrow you might be dead" (1001) represents a philosophical outlook on life whereby the future informs present choices. Despite facing death on an almost daily basis and the ever-present prospect of the end of the world, these kids maintain an active social life. Neither death, nor apocalypse, nor rain of toads keeps them from celebrating birthdays (2013), going out on dates (7014), or attending the Prom (3020). If anything, they make the celebration of life more necessary. In "Never Kill A Boy On the First Date" (1005), Giles warns Buffy of impending doom just when she is about to go on a first date with Owen. Refusing to let a little thing like the end of the world get in the way of her social life, she holds up her beeper and tells Giles, "If the Apocalypse comes, beep me" (1005).

(10) This renewed appreciation of life in the face of death affects other characters as well. Spike joins up with Buffy to fight Angel precisely because the very real possibility that the world might end sparks a confession of his fondness for humans ("Happy Meals with legs"), dog racing, and Leicester Square (2022). No character, however, exemplifies the life evaluation that eschatology can provoke better than Anya. After 1100 years of immortality, the newly mortal Anya's rediscovery of what it means to be human serves as a vehicle for commenting on the universal struggle of humanity. Her experiences with death thus cause her to question the meaning of life.

(11) Anya is so thoroughly literal-minded and devoid of nuanced thinking that her observations in light of death form an exaggerated portrait of our own insecurities. After sustaining a mild injury to her shoulder, Anya feels the dark hand of death descending upon her. Her response is to embrace life . . . and quickly.

ANYA: When do we get a car?

XANDER: A car?

ANYA: And a boat. No, wait. I-I don't mean a boat. I mean a puppy. Or a child. I have a list somewhere.

XANDER: What are you talking about?

ANYA: Just . . . we have to get going. I don't have time just to let these things happen.

XANDER: There's no hurry.

ANYA: Yes there is. There's a hurry, Xander. I'm dying . . . I may have as few as fifty years left (5003).

Anya's mortal panic represents the fear of a wasted life that many experience when contemplating death. Time, however, forces the panic to give way to a more sustained eschatological outlook as also represented by Anya, who announces after the healing of her shoulder, "I'm feeling better. And I anticipate many years before my death. Excepting disease or airbag failure" (5003).
(1) Living eschatologically means letting the prospect of death enrich life. An awareness of the end counters the mental sedation that comes from day to day living and creates an appreciation for the joys of life. In the words of Buffy following the averting of an apocalypse: "We saved the world. I say we party" (1012).

Prioritization
(12) Living eschatologically is not only about gaining a greater appreciation for life, but also about learning what is most important in life. Cordelia's involvement with Buffy teaches her something about priorities. When she enters the library and sees Buffy crying, Cordelia announces: "Is the world ending? I have to research a paper on Bosnia for tomorrow, but if the world's ending, I'm not gonna bother." Of course, ever the pragmatist, Cordelia tacks on an addendum, telling Giles, "But if the world doesn't end, I'm gonna need a note" (3012). The experience of death and the threat of world-ending destruction relegates most aspects of life (like research papers) to insignificance and causes the more important values, such as relationships with others and service to humanity, to come into focus. The death of Buffy's mother taught her never to put things off and to spend more time with loved ones (4003; 5018). It likewise encouraged Xander and Willow to ascribe more value to time spent with family, although in Xander's case he prefers to spend more time with Willow's family (5017). Xander proposes to Anya in the midst of an apocalypse, not because he fears the world will end, but because he believes it will not. The mere act of facing the possible end causes him to prioritize their relationship (6003). Personal problems also get minimized in light of the end as Buffy and Angel work together to stop the Mayor's ascension despite a current strain on their relationship (3021). Willow even effects a kind of reconciliation between the always-bickering Xander and Spike by telling them that if they insist on fighting, "do it after the world ends, okay?" (5021). Principal Wood sums it up well when he says, "There's nothing like the end of the world to bring people together" (7015).
(13) In "Help" (7004), eschatology enlightens Buffy on the importance of service. This episode revolves less around Buffy the Vampire Slayer and more around Buffy the High School Counselor. Buffy took a counseling job at Sunnydale High out of a desire to help students. One of these students, Cassie Newton, wanders into Buffy's office and prophetically announces that she will die on Friday. Cassie's fore-knowledge of her own demise merely presents a challenge to Buffy, who is accustomed to fighting and winning against impossible odds. Buffy refuses to accept the inevitable and vows to keep Cassie alive. One of the hardest lessons Buffy has had to learn, though, is that death is an

enemy she cannot fight. Twice Buffy saves Cassie's life from external dangers only to have Cassie drop dead from heart failure.

(14) The title of this episode, "Help," contrasts with the helplessness that Buffy feels at her inability to save Cassie. Despite all her power and experience, she could not save this girl. Buffy asks, "What do you do when you know that? When you know that maybe you can't help?" The scene then immediately cuts to the final shot of the episode, which is Buffy back at work the next day sitting at her desk and going through student files. The death of Cassie gave her the answer to her own question. Even when you know that you cannot help everyone, you never stop trying to help those you can.

Clarification

(15) Eschatology clarifies moral decision-making. The renewed appre-ciation for life and prioritization of values that comes with living eschatologically feeds into the moral choices made. When Buffy is grounded and forbidden to leave the house, she has to make a choice between two right things: obeying her mother or saving the world. This is not easy ethics, but the looming end of the world clarifies her choice (1002). Willow best illustrates the principle when, following a brush with death, she has an epiphany about her purpose in life.

WILLOW: 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 (3019).

(16) Making moral decisions in light of the end is not a guarantee those decisions will be the correct ones. Eschatology does not determine right or wrong, although it can inform moral decisions by revealing what is at stake. What it does is force people to make a deliberate choice, and in that process of choosing they come to grips with what they value most. On *Buffy*, characters sometimes make wrong choices in light of the end. Buffy's friend Ford is terminally ill with a brain tumor. Overwhelmed with the unfairness of his fate, Ford seeks self-preservation at all costs, even to the point of sacrificing the lives of Buffy and others so he can become immortal. When he tries to justify his inequity towards others on the basis that the inequity perpetrated on him has left him without a choice, Buffy corrects him: "You have a choice. You don't have a good choice, but you have a choice. You're opting for mass murder here and nothing you say is gonna make that okay" (2007). Like Ford, Ben faces his own form of terminal illness —— Glory. If she succeeds at activating the Key and returning to her dimension, he will cease to exist. Facing extinction compels him to betray Dawn in an attempt to save himself (5021).

(17) Ford and Ben illustrate another aspect of the clarifying function of eschatology on *Buffy*. If eschatology forces a choice between good and evil, then on what basis do these characters choose one over the other? If the moral choices made in light of the end are the result of a prioritizing of values, then what is the central value on *Buffy* that marks

the dividing line between a right and wrong choice? The moral decision making on *Buffy* is neither the product of adherence to a specific set of religious doctrines nor of a detailed conception of heaven and hell whereby moral choices occur in the context of fear of eternal punishment or hope for eternal reward. Rather, what distinguishes moral choices on *Buffy* is the value placed upon human life. An immoral choice is one that is self-centered with no regard for others. Both Ford and Ben valued their own self-preservation over salvation for others. A moral choice is one that sacrifices self-desire for service to others.

(18) When Buffy first learns of the prophecy that she will die at the hands of the Master, she makes the same choice as Ford and Ben and opts for self-preservation. In her own words, this choice was not "the right thing" (2004). What changes her "wrong" decision of fleeing to the "right" decision of dying is the realization that others will suffer if she takes the selfish path (1012). Likewise when facing an apocalypse, Buffy chose to sacrifice Angel, the man whom she loved, in order to save the world (2022), and she says that she did this because she knew "what was right" (5022).

(19) Anya, who operates on a moral learning curve, also demonstrates the principle that the extent to which one values human life affects moral decisions. In "Graduation Day, Part One" (3021), Anya shows contempt for the lives of others when she flees town before the Mayor's ascension. Xander, who has "friends on the line," stays to fight even though he believes he will die. The next time Anya faces an apocalypse, however, she chooses to stay. Acknowledging that "usually when there's an apocalypse, I skedaddle," Anya now stays because of her love for Xander. She has made a tremendous leap in her valuation of human life, although it has only taken her so far. She stays out of worry for Xander's welfare, but confesses to having guilt that "I'm not more worried about everyone else" (5022). With the final apocalyptic battle of season seven about to break, Anya chooses to stay once again, only this time her decision is based not on romantic love but on a genuine appreciation for human life. She confesses her view of humanity to Andrew.

ANYA: They're incapable of thinking about what they want beyond the moment. They kill each other, which is clearly insane. And yet, here's the thing. When it's something that really matters, they fight. I mean, they're lame morons for fighting, but they do. They never . . . never quit. So I guess I will keep fighting too.

ANDREW (sighs): That was kind of beautiful. (Anya nods) You . . . you love humans.

ANYA (indignant): I do not.

ANDREW: Yes, you do. You loooove them (7021).

The Anya of season three who runs away because she will not be bothered with concern for human life has learned its value, so the Anya of season seven stays and sacrifices her

own life to save Andrew's (7022). Both instances where she confesses her growing appreciation for human life occur in full view of an approaching apocalypse. The end clarifies her values.

(20) The apocalyptic threat of season seven is particularly instructive due to its magnitude. As Anya notes, "Buffy seems to think that this apocalypse is going to actually be, you know, apocalyptic" (7016). Season seven of *Buffy* sets eschatology in the context of warfare. The book of Revelation offers a helpful perspective on this as it also combines eschatology with warfare imagery. Because the worldview of apocalyptic eschatology is predominantly dualistic, it is attracted to warfare imagery, which divides peoples into enemies and allies. In Revelation, this imagery functions to clarify the options before its audience. The author of Revelation insists to his audience that there is a war going on between God and Satan, and they are part of that war. The options are clear: you can be a part of God's army or Satan's army. While warfare imagery clarifies the options, eschatology forces the choice. The author of Revelation symbolically describes the end for his audience as a means of getting them to make a choice in the present. That choice is based upon foreknowledge of God's plan. By opening up the future to them, the author reveals what will ultimately happen to those who fight on God's side and to those who fight on Satan's. The determination of allegiance resides with the audience, but eschatology has clarified the implications of that choice.

(21) Warfare imagery and language permeate season seven of *Buffy* and clarify the choice set before the citizens of Sunnydale. That choice is set in dualistic terms. Xander goes on a disastrous first date with a girl named Lissa who ties him up and intends to sacrifice him in order to open the hellmouth. She explains her reason to him this way: "The end is coming. The final fight, and everyone is hearing the drumbeat. It's telling us to pick our partners, align ourselves with the good or the evil" (7014). The factor that determines the choice of partner in this final apocalyptic battle is the value of human life. One side fights for the preservation of human life and the other for its extinction. Buffy has made her choice. She has declared war on evil, the First Evil that is. As Lissa correctly points out, the necessity of making a choice between good or evil becomes clear when "the end is coming." When the end is coming, the luxury of debating shades of gray ceases and the now becomes the moment of moral decision making.

THE AFTERLIFE AND "AFTER LIFE"

(22) In the preceding section I explored the role of eschatology in moral decision making and in the appreciation of life. In this section, I examine eschatology from a different angle; that is, how an eschatological experience of the spiritual affects the interpretation of the physical. Buffy's experience of heaven following her death at the end of season five and her subsequent return to mortal life at the beginning of season six establishes a contrast between spiritual and physical reality.

(23) Buffy's description of the afterlife comes in an episode titled "After Life" (6003). The depiction or description of heaven in television and film is nothing new, but most such attempts are very superficial. Heaven is a nondescript white light, a celestial family reunion, or a Norman Rockwell-like vision of harps, clouds, and St. Peter at the gate. With few exceptions, these depictions tend to be theologically vacant and sentimental to a fault. By contrast, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* offers a description of heaven that, while not flawless, reveals a theo-logical depth rarely witnessed in televised conceptions of heaven.

(24) While everyone thinks that Buffy's post-resurrection depression is due to time spent in hell, Buffy confesses the truth to Spike.

BUFFY: 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.

This short description of "heaven" is not without problems from a theological standpoint. As with the rest of *Buffy*'s cosmology, God's presence in this heaven is ambiguous at best. The attempt to present a heaven that is palatable across denominational and religious lines has relegated God to the background. Whereas the biblical depiction of heaven is God-centered, *Buffy*'s depiction is self-centered, reflecting American cultural values. It is primarily about *her* peace and happiness. Despite these shortcomings, however, this is a quantum leap forward for media descriptions of heaven. It avoids the sappy and superficial stereotypes in favor of emphasis on the completion of one's purpose, the peace of a life fulfilled, and immersion in true love. With specific reference to *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, this scene transcends the existential secularism that often characterizes the show by asserting a spiritual reward for a life well lived.
(25) The focus of this scene, however, is less on the nature of heaven than on how an experience of heaven affects one's view of earthly life. In the early Judeo-Christian apocalyptic worldview, the unveiling of spiritual reality serves as a means for transforming how one understands the world. Spiritual reality does more than just comment on the physical world; it gets us to see the world through different eyes. Buffy continues her explanation to Spike by describing how her experience of heaven has altered her perception of this world.

BUFFY: I was in heaven. And now I'm not. I was torn out of there. Pulled out . . . by my friends. Everything here is . . . hard, and bright, and violent. Everything I feel, everything I touch . . . this is hell. Just getting through the next moment, and the one after that . . . knowing what I've lost.

As physical beings, our interpretive matrix for this world is thoroughly colored by our physical experiences. One of the reasons people fear death is because this world is familiar and therefore comfortable, while death is all about uncertainty. An eschatological perspective that includes a conception of heaven, however, suggests that this world cannot begin to compare to the glory to come. That kind of spiritual awakening recasts this world in new terms. Buffy's statement that this world is hell is a metaphorical comment based upon viewing physical reality through new eyes.
(26) Many of the personal difficulties that Buffy encounters in season six are a result of her inability to readjust to life. Loss of interest in the world is a common side effect of

eschatological experiences, including existential encounters with death, near-death experiences, and even the "return to life" that forms part of the mythological hero's journey (Campbell, 36-37; Bowman). The eschatological metaphors of death and rebirth that frame the season provide the framework for Buffy's eventual readjustment to life. At the opening of season six, Buffy is literally resurrected out of her grave (6001-2). Her body is resurrected, but not her spirit. Although physically alive, Buffy shuffles through season six emotionally and spiritually dead. In the final episode of season six titled "Grave" (6022), Buffy experiences a spiritual and emotional resurrection from her existential grave. While trying to stop Willow's rampage, Buffy and Dawn are in a cemetery and fall into a large hole in the ground. Willow then creates monsters out of rock and earth to attack Buffy. Buffy is in a makeshift grave, surrounded by coffins, and attacked by the earth out of which she came. In the midst of all these symbols of death, Buffy experiences a revelation about life. Having regained her desire to live, she crawls up out of the grave, both literal and metaphorical, that confines her.

METAPHORICAL APOCALYPSES

(27) Another way in which eschatology creates insight into life is through the use of apocalyptic language as a metaphor for the travails of life. Who hasn't felt, for instance, that a break-up with a boyfriend or girlfriend is the end of the world?

BUFFY: These things happen. People break up and they move on . . . for a while it feels like the end of the world, you know, but . . . big picture . . .

GILES: Not so huge.

BUFFY: Not so huge? I just said it feels like the end of the world, don't you listen? (5011) Apocalypses on *Buffy* often represent personal crises in life. The real problems teenagers face are blown up to apocalyptic proportions as a way of illustrating their emotional impact. While grounded, Buffy tells her mother how important it is that she be allowed to leave the house. Joyce replies, "I know. If you don't go out, it'll be the end of the world. Everything is life or death when you're a sixteen year old girl" (1002). The irony is that in Buffy's case, it may very well be the end of the world if she cannot leave. That emotional dilemma Buffy finds herself in reflects teenage reality where every decision feels like it has ultimate consequences.

(28) In the episode "Doomed" (4011), the end of the world functions as a metaphor for how people imagine things as worse than they really are. An earthquake convinces Buffy that the end is coming. Although Giles thinks she is overreacting, Buffy becomes so obsessed with the prospect of impending doom that she is unable to enjoy life. Her doom and gloom mentality becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Of course, this being *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, her fear turns out to have substance.

GILES: It's the end of the world.

XANDER, WILLOW: Again?

GILES: It's uh, the earthquake —— that symbol —— yes.

BUFFY: I told you. I-I said 'end of the world' and you're like 'poo poo, southern California, poo poo!'

GILES: I'm so very sorry. My contrition completely dwarfs the impending apocalypse.

WILLOW: No. It can't be. We've done this already.

GILES: It's the end of the world, everyone dies. It's rather important really.

Buffy eventually overcomes this apocalyptic crisis, learning in the process that her fear of the end of the world was more powerful than the real thing and that she allowed it to rob her of the joy of living. The human tendency to exaggerate normal crises to apocalyptic proportions is a hindrance to authentic living. When every ache becomes cancer and a huge car repair bill marks the end of financial stability, eschatological thinking gets distorted into a justification for despair. "Doomed" concludes with a scene in which Riley adopts the doom and gloom mentality. When he fails to hide his secret identity as government agent from Buffy's friends, he panics and says, "I'm finished. It's the end of the world." Buffy just smiles, kisses him, and says, "No, it's not." By facing the end of the world, Buffy has learned that eschatology is about allowing the end to put daily crises into proper perspective.

(28) The apocalypses that mark the end of virtually every season of *Buffy* metaphorically mark personal endings as well. Buffy's season one battle against the Master represents the end of her childhood illusions of immortality (Kaveney, 16). Buffy is a teenager whose illusion of invincibility is shattered when she truly faces her own mortality for the first time. Her apocalyptic battle with Angel at the end of season two in which she "kills" him to save the world characterizes both the end of their relationship and the culmination of a lesson reiterated throughout the season that moral decisions are not always easy. Season three concludes with an apocalypse on graduation day. The blowing up of the high school is a metaphor for both the end of their high school careers and the end of adolescence. Oz highlights this connection as he and the gang survey the ruins of the high school. He announces: "Guys, take a moment to deal with this. We survived." When they comment on the fierceness of the battle with the Mayor, he corrects them: "Not the battle . . . high school" (3022).

(29) It is debatable whether the final battle with Adam in season four counts as an apocalypse as such, but it does mark the end of social division between Buffy and her friends. Their illusions of adult independence give way to the realization of how much they need each other. Buffy's climactic battle with Glory in season five brings to fruition

her quest to understand her purpose and destiny, culminating in a noble self-sacrifice. Season six's apocalypse signals the end of Buffy and Willow's immaturity and their full advancement into adult-hood as they overcome their respective descents into darkness and addiction in favor of accountability and dependence within commu-nity. Finally, Buffy's sharing of her power with all potential Slayers during the final apocalypse of the series marks the end of her isolation as the Chosen One.

(30) This chapter demonstrates that the apocalypses on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* are far more than a device for ratcheting up narrative tension. They are a method for commenting upon life. *Buffy*'s eschatological program exposes life and its emotional struggles to the clarifying effects that come from conceiving of the present in light of the end. By giving greater clarity to life, eschatology thus allows for a more informed method of moral decision making

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Bronwen Calvert

Going Through the Motions:
Reading Simulacra in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*

[1] Throughout the seven seasons of *Buffy*, supernatural monsters have become commonplace, and the supernatural explanation for particular events has come to be expected. Technological monsters have been less common. There have been a few examples of robot or cyborg villains: the computer-dwelling demon Moloch in "I Robot You Jane" (1008), and the robot Ted (2011) made brief appearances; the cyborg Adam was an effective adversary for much of Season 4, and, arguably, Spike can be added to this list, once he was "chipped" by the Initiative (Season 4 onwards). Here, however, I intend to focus on the female robots of seasons 5 and 6, which present various versions of female bodies and behaviour. These artificial bodies are not villainous, but can be read as monstrous; their embodiment invites comparison with other bodies, while their evident construction invites readings which follow feminist theories of performative corporeality.

[2] These artificial bodies disrupt notions that embodiment is somehow "natural" and unconstructed.   Just as robots and cyborgs are read as constructed surfaces, as bodies overwritten by technology, so bodies also become "texts" which expose the constructions of gender and embodiment. Donna Haraway describes the cyborg as "a creature of social reality as well as science fiction" which is made up of "both imagination and material reality" (191), and these descriptions also apply to readings of the robotic body. Haraway's "cyborg politics" also makes use of this artificial embodiment to posit new connections between hitherto unconnectable dichotomies, using "affinity" and "coalition" to bridge the gaps (180). Reading the artificial body – cyborg or robot – thus challenges, disrupts and deconstructs binary oppositions, in particular those of male/female, culture/ nature, technology/body, and virtual/real. These readings question the positioning of some bodies as "unconstructed" or "natural" or as somehow representations of "reality" – which are all subject to forms of construction. This is especially ironic in view of the positioning of artificially embodied characters within fictional narratives that emphasise their contrast to the "natural" and "real" individuals around them.

[3] In his essay "The Uncanny" Freud noted that the feeling of the uncanny is present in instances of the "doubling, dividing, and interchanging of the self", and he discussed E.T. A. Hoffmann's "The Sandman", with its deceptive doll-woman, as an example of the uncanny double (Standard Edition 17:219-56). The robot as double is an integration of the monstrous with the machine, and the female robot is often a complex construction of

both female-as-Other and female-as-Ideal, as with the two Marias, angel and devil, in Fritz Lang's film *Metropolis* (1926). The female robot, then, can also be seen as a construction of female perfection, the fulfillment of a fantasy image. Jean Baudrillard also investigates the doubling effects of representations of reality in *Simulacra and Simulations*. Here he considers the "question of substituting signs of the real for the real itself", and formulates the idea of the "simulation", a copy without an original (169). Baudrillard's "successive phases of the image" explores the degrees of separation between versions of "reality", from the first "phase", which "is the reflection of a basic reality" through to the fourth "phase, which "bears no relation to any reality whatever: it is its own pure simulacrum" (173).

[4] In *Buffy,* the robots April and the Buffybot are artificial bodies which, in Haraway's terms, disrupt the boundaries between hitherto unconnectable dichotomies; notably those between "natural" and "artificial", but also "mind and body, animal and human, organism and machine...nature and culture, men and women..." ("Manifesto" 187). The assumption of a "true" or "natural" embodiment is also contested by critics like Elizabeth Grosz and Judith Butler, who draw attention to aspects of "performance" and "inscription" at work on and in particular bodies. Grosz's work on "corporeal feminism" rethinks "the" body as "particular *kinds* of bodies" ("Notes" 5; emphasis original) which are individual, yet have the experience of embodiment in common. The textualised or inscribed body that Grosz envisions (*Space, Time* 35) can be connected to Butler's notion of the body as a performative space. For example, Grosz sees gender as "an open materiality, a set of (possibly infinite) tendencies and potentialities which may be developed" within or upon bodies that are, nevertheless, "neither 'blank' nor programmed" (*Volatile Bodies* 191, 190). Butler describes gender in similar terms as "an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*" (*Gender Trouble* 140; emphasis original). These notions of embodiment as performance have much to offer readings of fictional artificial embodiment in which the constructed "other" frequently stands in opposition to a supposed "natural" self; these theories offer ways to think of bodies as always engaged in some form of performance, and therefore actively involved in their representation.

[5] In the examples of embodiment offered by the robots April and the Buffybot, versions of female behaviour, performance and simulation are apparent which can be read in light of the "corporeal feminism" outlined by Grosz and Butler. Baudrillard's categories of simulacra give a loose framework through which to explore the varying degrees of success in simulation undergone by these female robots in Seasons 5 and 6, and also by Buffy herself in seasons 5 to 7; though it must be noted that in many ways the stages of simulation represented by April and the Buffybot are the reverse of Baudrillard's "phases". These "simulacra" move from poor impersonation to effective replacement throughout Season 5, and continue to complicate notions of "the real" in Season 6 and 7. The two robots embody masculinist fantasies of perfection, and the Buffybot in particular demonstrates both the transgressive nature of the simulacrum, and the uncanny effect of the double. The duplication of Buffy in the mechanical body of the Buffybot reveals assumptions about "real" and "ideal" bodies, and highlights elements of performance and masquerade. Additionally, both mechanical and organic bodies are subject to various forms of programming, which is as relevant for Buffy as for April and the Buffybot, and which is of particular interest in the final episodes of the series.

"I'm only supposed to love him": April and the Ideal Feminine

[6] In "I Was Made to Love You" (5015) Warren Mears constructs a robot girlfriend called "April" whose "reality" is immediately called into question. With her repeated questions to all and sundry about the whereabouts of "Warren", her mechanical ear-to-ear grin and her pretty pink outfit, April seems unthreatening until her monstrous physical strength is revealed. April's creator clearly believes that he has made a thoroughly convincing illusion, since when Buffy goes to see Warren, he confides the great secret of April's manufacture to her, believing that this is information she "couldn't possibly know". However, Warren's belief in his creation is undercut by the Scoobies' assessment of April: within a very short time the group are unanimous that she is "a robot" (and further, "a sexbot"). April's performance is simply unconvincing.

[7] April is created by Warren as a representation of something "real"; as he insists, she is not "a toy" but "a girlfriend". Her embodiment, however, merely serves to underline Warren's warped view of reality. The fact that he thinks April is such a plausible simulacrum that nobody could guess the truth, in the face of the immediate reaction of every other character to April's presence, demonstrates his perverse view of what a girlfriend – and a woman – actually is. In terms of Baudrillard's schema, it might be possible to see April as an example of the first phase of the simulacrum, one that "reflects a basic reality", but only if we accept Warren's notion of a reality in which girlfriends exist, like Stepford wives, only to please and serve. April's embodiment can thus be read as ironic commentary on a masculinist fantasy of female subservience. That April is immediately identified as a robot within the narrative is perhaps a heartening note, indicating how far apart Warren's "reality" is from that of most individuals in the Buffyverse.

[8] April's raison d'être is announced in the episode title; as Warren says, "I made her to love me" and following her rejection April echoes this when she says, "I'm only supposed to love him. If I can't love him what am I for? What do I exist for?" The view of April as a supremely compliant girlfriend, who believes that tears are "blackmail", and who exists to "please", overturns Warren's insistence that she is "not a toy". She is the personification of Warren's notion of an ideal femininity, one without selfhood, completely without agency; in Lorna Jowett's description she is "the ultimate dependent female" ("Good Girls" 4). Her existential crisis, provoked by Warren's rejection, is never really solved, for as her batteries run down and she nears "death", April returns to her programming, saying, "He's going to take me home and things will be all right again". However it has been argued that her deactivation appears to inspire Buffy to reject the idea of refashioning herself in order to appeal to men. This refusal of "reconstruction" follows the pattern of feminist ethics that, as Jessica Prata Miller puts it, "requires rejecting the feminine stereotype of the selfless giver" (40).

[9] In this episode there is also a tension between ideal April and flesh-and-blood Katrina, Warren's current girlfriend. April, created to be perfect, is as Warren discovers, "too easy and predictable…she got boring". However Warren is attracted to Katrina precisely because of her unpredictability. Incidentally, it takes Katrina precisely one second to recognise April's true nature and to declare, "that's a robot". Things appear to have been tidied up at the end of this episode, but in the Season 6 episode "Dead Things" (6008), Katrina briefly takes April's place as Warren's ideal girl. The fact that she is enslaved by a spell, forced to follow Warren's commands – "made to love" him as though she were April – and ultimately murdered, brings into focus the abusive and

misogynistic undercurrents of "I Was Made To Love You".

"She looks a little shiny": Fantasy and Impersonation

[10] The Buffybot, Spike's "commission", comes to life three episodes after April's appearance, in "Intervention"(5018). Once again, this robot is the embodiment of an ideal – though in Spike's case a fairly perverse one – and in a comic aside it appears intended to be seen as an improvement on the Buffy doll Spike has put together over several previous episodes. The outward appearance of this "Buffy" bears distinct similarities to April; she wears a pink skirt and high heels, her hair is loose and she exhibits April's near-permanent grin. Of interest here – among many other things – is the difference between the Scoobies' instant appraisal of April-as-robot and their failure to do so where the Buffybot is concerned. While I could suggest that this is because Warren's robot-building skills have improved since his creation of April, there seems to be more to the peculiar blindness that the Scoobies show towards the Buffybot's various eccentricities. They are all convinced that this *is* Buffy, even when they are having conversations full of non-sequiturs. They are also very easily convinced that Buffy has "gone insane" and is having sex with Spike. This problem of recognition occurs, I argue, because they seize on the notion that Buffy is finally "acting out" after Joyce's death, and the need to "intervene" and "save" Buffy from Spike gives them all the chance to act – here, at last, is something they can do. It is not, therefore, that they, as Buffy accuses, "couldn't tell me apart from a robot", but that they are eager to accept a scenario that demands their active response.

[11] Here, the Buffybot can be seen as a version of the simulacrum that, in Baudrillard's terms, "masks and perverts a basic reality". This is the Buffy of Spike's fantasies; a Buffy who, though she fears him, nevertheless is helpless to resist her sexual feelings. Echoing Freud's "Uncanny", Roz Kaveney describes this episode as a "doppelganger" plot (9), and it is true that the actions and words of the Buffybot can be seen to prefigure Buffy's actions and words in various episodes of Season 6. In "Intervention", the Buffybot calls Spike "evil" but confesses that this "excites me, it terrifies me. I try so hard to resist you, but I can't". It also insists that, "I can't help myself". This is a direct parallel of Buffy's confession to Tara in "Dead Things": "Why do I let Spike do these things to me? ... He's everything I hate. He's everything that I'm supposed to be against. ...Why can't I stop?" Like her doppelganger, Buffy places herself as unwilling participant in Spike's fantasy scenario. However, her situation in Season 6 is rather more ambiguous; she is not helpless, nor unwilling, as the evidence of encounters in "Wrecked" (6010) or "As You Were" (6015) demonstrates. If she takes refuge in language that echoes the Buffybot's programming, it seems more to do with a reluctance to confront her own autonomous choices with regard to Spike.

[12] Artificial embodiment in the form of cyborg, robot or other "monstrous" incarnation marks tension between the "real" and the "artificial", between truth and desire. In the case of the Buffybot, the tension is between the fantasy image of Buffy and the existing Slayer, and it is clear that the fantasy version is compelling. Spike accepts the Buffybot as "better than the real thing" even though at first he complains that "[s]he looks a little shiny"; he becomes caught up in the role play – or, in Butler's terms, "performance" – that he has designed and is horrified when the Buffybot asks if it should "repeat this programme", thus destroying his illusion. For her part, Buffy denies any possible connection between herself and the Buffybot, even questioning their likeness (as in this

exchange towards the end of "Intervention": Buffy: "At least it's not a very good copy. I mean, look at it"; Willow: "Uh...yeah" [with a disbelieving look at Tara]). Yet Buffy also *impersonates* the Buffybot at the end of "Intervention" in order to get information from Spike. In this scene, both Spike and the audience are led to believe that this *is* the Buffybot, and this is reinforced by Buffy's facial expressions, particularly her wide-open, innocent eyes, and by her higher-pitched vocal register. When Buffy assumes her own identity, her expression changes, and her voice drops in pitch. In this scene, while we may suspect that this is not the Buffybot, neither we nor Spike are perfectly certain until after they kiss; and so the unmasking takes place as a result of physical contact. It is also of note that immediately after this, the dialogue returns to the question of what is "real" and what is not, as Buffy makes the distinction between the artificial, "gross and obscene" Buffybot, and the "real" sacrifice Spike has made to protect Buffy and Dawn from Glory.

"The Slayer's a robot": Programming and Performanc

[13] It is notable that the Buffybot is, generally, only present when Buffy is not – it fills the gap left by the Slayer. This is first evident in "Intervention", when Buffy and Giles are in the desert, performing a ritual to find out more about Buffy's future as Slayer. The Buffybot's appearance and participation in patrolling with the gang takes place during this absence. Here, the Buffybot is not just masquerading as, but is actually replacing Buffy. A similar sharing of space occurs in "The Gift" (5022), when the Buffybot is reactivated and used in the climactic fight against Glory. In this short scene, a reversal of the scene with Buffy and Spike at the end of "Intervention", both Glory and the audience are under the impression that this is Buffy. The Buffybot wears the same clothes we saw Buffy wearing in the previous scene, and it demonstrates Buffy's skills in both wordplay and fighting – that is until Glory knocks its head off, to her own astonishment. The "real" Buffy does not appear in this sequence until after the Buffybot has been destroyed. In this example, the artificial body is reclaimed and reinvented; the Buffybot appears in a second "version" reprogrammed by Willow and made part of the group in their climactic battle. This version may still be present to serve the needs of others, but it is not alone in this; each of the gang, in some way, demonstrate a willingness to put others before themselves in this particular situation. Willow's reprogramming appears to lend conviction to the Buffybot's impersonation, and it is evident from the fight with Glory that the Buffybot *can* successfully masquerade as Buffy, with a serious expression, ironic tone of voice, level stare, and effective fighting. Once again, the actions of the Buffybot prefigure Buffy's own: both are killed in their confrontation with Glory and her spell.

[14] By Season 6, however, the Buffybot is playing Buffy in order to fool everyone. In the opening scene of "Bargaining" (6001-2), as the Scoobies race through the graveyard, the audience faces disorientation and confusion at Buffy's unexpected presence. The confusion here can perhaps best be exemplified by the opening credits of Season 6, where, for the first time, the final shot is *not* Buffy, but the Buffybot masquerading in the fight with Glory. In the graveyard sequence that opens "Bargaining", the camera provides the audience with teasing snapshots: a fist, then a shot of leather-clad legs, and finally a view of "Buffy" in full Slaying mode. Here again is a version of the Buffybot with Willow as programmer, and in the absence of the Slayer, the fact that Willow is in control of Buffy's replacement also comments on the shifts in the power structure of the group

after Buffy's death.

[15] As well as taking her place as Slayer, the Buffybot is also required to stand in for Buffy in more everyday contexts, such as making an appearance at the parent-teacher day. Here, more clearly than ever, the Buffybot is filling the gap that Buffy has left – in Baudrillard's terms, "masking" her "absence". Keeping the robot running becomes a focus for the Scoobies, and for Willow in particular; while for Dawn the Buffybot is a focus of comfort, a parental replacement as well as a sibling one. We can see this in the scene where Dawn climbs into bed with the Buffybot; a scene in which the artificiality of the robot is foregrounded: its inner mechanism is exposed and it has red, flashing recharging devices plugged into its foot and stomach. For Dawn, however, the continued presence of the Buffybot creates a particular tension: for if, according to the illusion, Buffy is still alive, then there is no space for Dawn to grieve over her loss. This seems to be a problem for Giles too, as his attempts to teach the Buffybot about "chi" tell us that he is using it to continue the close emotional relationship he and Buffy have developed. In these cases, the Buffybot seems ever closer to April whose function is to love; here, the Buffybot is the focus of the love that Dawn and Giles, and the others, feel for Buffy; its function is to *be* loved, and to be compliant in fulfilling that function.

[16] The question of whether a simulacrum can in fact replace "the real" is, to a certain extent, answered in the interaction of various characters with the Buffybot. It seems clear that the Buffybot is never really a replacement for Buffy. After a short time, cracks appear in the performance. In the opening fight of "Bargaining", even with the Buffybot's participation it takes the entire gang (and Spike's lighter) to slay just two vampires. Likewise, while the Buffybot seems to possess Buffy's skill in wordplay, this is also faulty and becomes a series of, as Spike puts it, "dadaisms" ("Put that in your pie plate, bingo"). For the individuals who have known her, the identical appearance of the robot only serves to emphasise the fact that it is not Buffy. Spike has already discovered this in "Intervention", when despite the perfection of the Buffybot's appearance, it nevertheless falls short of the "real thing" and he has to insist, "No programs. Don't use that word" (See also Milavec and Kaye, 176). The Buffybot's only real social success is with Anya, who seems genuinely delighted when it enquires after her money ("Intervention"); and with the adults at Sunnydale High's parent-teacher day who read additional meaning into the Buffybot's platitudes ("Bargaining").   The Buffybot's domestic behaviour is a display of "feminine" nurturing that is excessive, as in, for example, its sandwich making; once again, behaviour that is very close to April's. The Buffybot's presence emphasises absence; it fills the space with a corporeal representation, but cannot fulfill the emotional demands made upon it; and it denies the death of the "only really real" Buffy.

[17] The acknowledgement that "the only really real Buffy is really Buffy" ("Bargaining Part 1) is a confirmation of the Buffybot's inability to act as a replacement, while the script's repetition of "real" strongly emphasises the group's belief in a "real" or "ideal" Buffy. At the beginning of this essay I noted that forms of artificial embodiment can work to disrupt the positioning of some bodies as "natural" or "real", and indeed that the notion of "natural" embodiment is also subject to questioning, as in Grosz's "corporeal feminism". Yet the idea of a "really real" persists, even in Baudrillard's description of simulacra which are posited in reference to a "basic reality". What the artificial body can highlight, however, is that "reality" itself is another form of construction, subject to different interpretations. While the characters in and audience of *Buffy* wish for a return

of their version of the Slayer, the possibilities for differing versions should not be forgotten – particularly in the reading of a television series in which the resurrection of the main character is dependent on the willingness of the actress who plays her to commit herself to another season. As Lisa K. Perdigao notes, "Without the 'real' Buffy, the plot falls apart" (7).

[18] Following the opposition of "real" and "fake" Buffy in the opening moments of "Bargaining" the Buffybot and Buffy enact another exchange in Part 2, as Willow resurrects Buffy, while the Buffybot is captured by biker demons and torn apart. There is a reminder here of April, who Warren described as "not a toy", as the leader of the demons scoffs at the Buffybot and calls it "nothing but a toy, a pretty toy". The vicious subtext of "I Was Made to Love You" and "Intervention" is here made overt: there are clear allusions to rape in the abduction and dismemberment of the Buffybot. Links between Buffy and the Buffybot persist throughout these scenes. The dismemberment of the Buffybot is almost contemporaneous with Buffy's resurrection, during which the reconstruction of Buffy's decaying physical body marks her return to "real" life, and the Buffybot's "death" is viewed through Buffy's blurred vision, so that it becomes part of the "hell" in which Buffy now believes herself to be.

"I say my power should be our power": Rewriting the Programme

[19] The last connection to be made here is between notions of an "ideal" Slayer and the extent to which Buffy herself could be described as a kind of programmed, perfect embodiment. The Slayer is summed up in Mary Alice Money's description as "an imperfect killing machine" ("Undemonization" 102); "built" or "constructed" to fulfill a specific purpose, and "called" to carry out her function, whether she wishes to do so or not. Zoe-Jane Playdon similarly notes that Buffy, in some theoretical lights, can mistakenly be read as "a woman who is objectified as a function -- 'The Slayer' -- and controlled to serve ends which are not her own. She is a constructed woman, a kind of 'cyborg'" (121). We return to the disruptive artificial bodies of cyborgs and robots, of monsters.

[20] Throughout Season 6, the notion of Buffy *as* construction is highlighted. Buffy does, in a sense, fulfill Baudrillard's fourth phase of the image and becomes "[her] own pure simulacrum". Buffy resurrected is and is not "Buffy". Quite soon after her resurrection, she comes to recognise her own "programming" and the extent to which she is "going through the motions" of her own life – her recognition, in fact, of the performance of slaying ("Once More with Feeling" [6007]). For a large part of Season 6, Buffy is also masquerading as herself: she fulfills the expectations of her friends by acting the Buffy they expect; while her encounters with Spike reveal the gulf between Buffy before this death, and after. This crisis is not resolved until after her second resurrection at the end of Season 6, when she and Dawn climb out of a grave and walk through what appears to be a sunlit paradise garden ("Grave"[6022]).

[21] Both April and the Buffybot (in its original version) are robot women created by men in order to fulfill specific purposes or fantasies. Buffy's own "creation" by men has been explored throughout the series. In earlier seasons there is a tension between Buffy's heritage as Slayer and her knowledge or understanding of that heritage, which is, in J. P. Williams' terms, "filtered through her father figure Giles" (62). The presence of Giles and of the Watcher's Council lurking in the background is a reminder of the patriarchal laws underpinning the existence of the Slayer. As Williams notes, "Buffy cannot rely on the

'matrilineal tradition' of slaying to guide her. Most of what she knows about that tradition is male dominated, and what she learns firsthand makes her view herself as unique" (63). After Season 4, she rejects the patriarchal authority of the Watchers' Council, as discussed by Frances Early ("Staking Her Claim", para 26). Season 5 sees Buffy searching for a meaning for her existence, and wanting to know more about her origins as she explores her own personal Genesis story. In doing so she is drawn back to Sineya, the First Slayer, who first appeared in "Restless" (4022).

[22] In Season 7 another masculinist creation is revealed, as Buffy is drawn back to her "heritage" through Nikki Wood's "emergency kit" and another vision of the First Slayer, Sineya, in "Get it Done" (7015). Buffy is confronted with her masculinist programming when she passes through a mystical doorway and comes face to face with the "shadow men" who created the first Slayer. Here is enacted another monstrous construction as they reveal that the Slayer came into being after Sineya was possessed, or raped, by a demon. Thus, Buffy's "perfection" as Slayer, her skills at fighting and killing and her supernatural powers stem from this ancient coupling of woman and demon which has, in a sense, "given birth" to the Slayer (Buffy's reference to being "knocked up" by a demon does seem accurate here). This revelation undoes Buffy's insistence, emphasised throughout Season 6, that she is not a demon, for according to the shadow men, she has always been one. In this, Buffy is shown to have more in common with April and the Buffybot than anyone might have expected.

[23] Yet Buffy's refusal of the additional power that embodying the demon could give her can be seen as an indication that she is also refusing the possibilities of construction or simulation. Indeed, following the revelation of Buffy's "programming" or construction comes the empowering of the cohort of potential Slayers, a rewriting of the programming of the "body" of Slayers to come. As with the second version of the Buffybot, Willow takes on the role of programmer/creator, replacing the male creators who preceded her, and rewrites the history of the Slayer, using the "archaic matrilineal power of the scythe" (Pender 170). Buffy is now no longer unique, a representation of an ideal Slayer, but part of a community of similar individuals with an equal share in their "ancestral" demon power. It is perhaps tempting to use the series' finale as evidence for a more overtly "feminist" agenda, as Patricia Pender notes in her reading of reworked racial and sexual politics in "Chosen" (170-2); nevertheless, this rewriting of the very fabric of the series opens the way for some more convincing feminist interpretations of *Buffy* in light of these final revelations. In line with the "cyborg" embodiment I have been reading here, the reprogramming of Slayer mythology chimes with the idea of the constructed cyborg body which has the ability to transgress and confuse boundaries, and to admit and include difference – as Playdon notes, "the solution of *Buffy* is inclusivity" (144). Recalling Haraway, the plural, empowered Slayers replace the lone fighter who, refusing the positioning imposed upon her, crosses the boundary that was hitherto impermeable, and creates for herself a new embodied future.

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Michele Paule
"You're on My Campus, Buddy!"
Sovereign and Disciplinary Power at Sunnydale High

[1] In exploring models of power articulated via the three principals at Sunnydale High, I consider the portrayal of school authority in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* to be not only symptomatic in its reflection of cultural anxieties, but also diagnostic in its exposure of the ways in which school authority fails, and ultimately pedagogic in the alternative educational practices signalled on the show.

[2] Those looking at representations of educators in popular culture tend to have adopted a cultural studies model in examining the interaction between such representations and public perceptions, and have therefore focussed on their role in the shaping of perceptions of teachers (Farber & Holm 1994 Weber 1995; Dalton 1999; McCullick et al 2003) and on their contribution to the lore of both practicing and qualifying teachers (Farhi 1999; Grant 2002; Dollof 2003). A study of images of principals in popular culture (Glanz, 1997) identifies three basic models – the Numskull, the Bureaucrat and the Authoritarian - and examines the contribution of these models to conceptions of the role within and beyond the profession. Such a study of educators in a cult high-school based show might therefore yield productive, if predictable, results; the representation of at least two of the three principals in *Buffy* can be seen to fit within these identified stereotypes, and the third relies on shared cultural models in order to confound our expectations. Thus far, the show conforms to audience expectations in its representations of school life, and uses them to cue our responses to and sympathies with the teenage protagonists in a world where high school is literally built on hellish foundations. These observations might seem to contradict the show's much vaunted originality and depth of characterisation. However, I would argue that *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* goes beyond using stereotypical representations in order to trigger responses on cue, to invite our recognition of the ideologies embodied within the stereotypes and of why we dislike and deride them. In inviting such recognition, the show can be read as offering a critique not only of bad principals, but of the conceptions of authority that make them so.

[3] In the field of *Buffy* studies the nature of school authority structures has been considered as a part of a broader consideration of power in the show, by Buinicki & Enns (2001) and by Wall and Zyrd (2001). Focusing on the Buffy's college experience, Daspit (2003) discusses problems in modernity and post-modernity in education. While considering the three portrayals of school headship in *Buffy*, my concern is to explore authority within the school institution itself as constructed through role of the Principal,

using Foucault's theories of sovereign and disciplinary authority.

[4] Foucault traces constructions of authority from pre-modern hierarchically ordered or sovereign systems, in which power is expressed through individuals and their agents, through to disciplinary systems in which authority is universally diffused, operating constantly via inter- and self-surveillance among subjects in a process of coercion and normalisation. In *Discipline and Punish* in particular, Foucault examines the ways in which the explicit methods of control relying on fear used in pre-modern times in Western cultures have been superseded by more covert controls or disciplinary constructions, in which power is dispersed through social networks and institutions. (Foucault 1979)

[5] The usefulness of Foucault's models for defining and understanding the contemporary nature of authority in schools is the subject of some academic debate (see, for example, Covaleskie 2004 and McDonough 2004) and gives rise to examination of the ways in which such authority is constructed between students, faculty and society. This is mirrored in more popular debate not only among practitioners, but also in the wider world, where the nature and efficacy of authority in schools appears as a burgeoning moral panic.

[6] In the UK school discipline makes frequent appearances in news headlines; Internet news searches suggest that this is the case across Western cultures.[1] The proposed solutions to this crisis fall into two clear camps: either the advocation of what are commonly called positive behaviour programmes, which in their attempts to make student behaviour self-regulated could be described as disciplinary, or calls for hard sanctions and zero tolerance led and enforced by a strong head, which could be described as sovereign. Recent trends towards stringent discipline policies can be characterised as reactionary in that they reverse not only liberal-humanistic approaches developed in schools in the latter half of the 20th Century, but also the historical development in the nature of authority and punishment observed by Foucault. Such trends in themselves suggest an illogically pre-modern response to perceived post-modern threats to schools, which are, in their construction of social and curricular knowledge, modernist. In other words, in an age of growing uncertainty the response is to insist ever more strongly yet ever more vainly, on the certainties of the past.

[7] These same trends are mirrored at Sunnydale High in the roles of Principal Flutie and his successor, Snyder. The first model I consider is that adopted by Principal Flutie. His leadership style seems at first to reflect some features of disciplinary authority: On first meeting Buffy, he tells her that 'the kids here are free to call me Bob' (Buffy 1001). His use of the pronoun 'we' characterises almost all his exchanges with students, and suggests equality, shared priorities. But this initial encounter is telling in that it exposes as a myth the notion of communication between faculty and students on a basis of equality: Flutie appears less than comfortable with the idea of being called by his first name when Buffy tries it, and reveals that, in fact, students do not do so anyway. This indicates understanding on both parts that the principal holds the power. Furthermore, when he tells Buffy: 'We want to service your needs, and help you to respect our needs. And if your needs and our needs don't mesh...' his use of the word 'needs' is euphemistic, the threat at the end implicit: If she doesn't conform to the rules, she'll be expelled. Although more sympathetically portrayed than Snyder, who openly threatens: 'Just give me a reason to kick you out, Summers' (*Buffy* 2021), from the outset we can see that Flutie's wielding of authority is less than self-aware. Buffy's subsequent encounter with Flutie in the same episode (when she tries to leave the premises on an apocalypse-

averting mission) repeats many of these features –his use of the first person plural pronoun, a veiled threat of expulsion – and here they are underlined by the symbolic locking of the gate, imprisoning Buffy within school codes which actively work against her more informed priorities.

[8] In all this we see a central difficulty in characterising schools in themselves as institutions in which power is disciplinary: students tend to perceive school authority as sovereign, and with good reason. Such strategies ultimately depend on the enforcing power of the staff. As educationalists such as Covaleskie (2004) have pointed out, students do not set the agenda or make the rules, and can be punished for failing to adhere to them. Studies of positive behaviour policies and programmes, in which teachers are exhorted to maintain strict and rigorous application of school codes and rules while exhorting students to take responsibility for their own behaviour, reveal the same underlying tension[2]

[9] Through Flutie, the ultimate effect of adhering to such a model without the underlying sovereign authority to enforce it is demonstrated in 'The Pack' (*Buffy*1006). In this episode an enraged Flutie attempts to remonstrate with a hyena-possessed group of students who have just eaten the school mascot – a piglet – alive. When he tells them: 'You're busted! Yeah! You're goin' down!' we can see that having developed no discourse of authority himself, he borrows that of the cop show. 'That's it! My office, right now… Now!' shows a rare use of the imperative in his attempt to be an enforcer, but his lack of authority and the impotence of his sanctions are revealed: in the face of outrage, he can only threaten detention, then a phone call home, and finally a visit to the school counsellor. His hysterical question – 'Are you insane?' - as they turn on him suggests his lack of understanding not only of their behaviour, but also of the overturning of the hierarchy of which he has been such a compromised representative. The symbolism of his being devoured by the pack echoes a common descriptor among teachers for those seen as too weak to control a class - 'she/he will be eaten alive.'

[10] However, ineffective leadership such as Flutie's does not mean that no students will participate in the conventions of disciplinary structures, but rather that such participation is conditioned by the validity for them of the truths and imperatives propounded within the school. Foucault observes, "In discipline, punishment is only one element of a double system: gratification-punishment" (Foucault, 1979, p.180). Students in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and in the world will self-regulate when they either anticipate rewards or fear sanctions, on both an institutional and a larger social scale. Thus we see Willow and Cordelia as both compliant and productive. They work hard because the rewards accruing hold value for them; they will pass exams in order to succeed later in life. Willow in particular frequently prioritises homework over other more enjoyable activities – a classic example of the deferred gratification habitually practised by able, middle class students. Even Oz, the master of work avoidance and rejector of the career path, succumbs and ends up repeating his senior year rather than dropping out. But for students of lesser ability such as Xander, hard work brings few rewards – a D- rather than a fail. (*Buffy* 2016) He is driven by fear of future consequences, rather than deferred gratification. Even Buffy, with her knowledge of other conditions and imperatives, and her frequent questioning of the usefulness of her studies for life beyond school, struggles to balance this fear with that of impending apocalypses.

[11] The driver here, the knowledge, propagated in schools and participated in by students, is that failure in school results in failure in life. Foucault characterises this

phenomenon in schools as an element of a hierarchizing penalty system which 'distributes students according to the use that can be made of them later in life.' (Foucault 1970 p.182) Evidence of this system is manifested early in season one when Willow tells Xander:

> You remember, you fail math, you flunk out of school, you end up being the guy at the pizza place that sweeps the floor and says, 'Hey, kids, where's the cool parties this weekend?' We've been through this. (*Buffy* 1006)

Here we see the normalising process at work. A poignant reflection on the theme exists in the comment below from Matt Stone, co-creator of South Park, interviewed in Moore's (2002) documentary film *Bowling for Columbine*:

> I remember being in sixth grade, and I had to take the test to get into honors math in seventh grade, and they were like, 'Don't screw this up, because if you screw this up you won't get into honors math in seventh grade, and of course if you don't get into honors math in seventh grade you won't get into honors math in eighth grade, and then not ninth grade and not 10th grade or 11th grade, and then you'll just die poor and lonely ...the teachers, the counsellors... scare you into conforming in school.

The central thesis of Moore's film is the potential for extreme damage in creating a culture of fear. Such a culture is actively propagated at Sunnydale High not only by Snyder, for example in his taunting of Buffy with the prospect of a career in Hot-Dog-on-a-Stick (*Buffy* 3002), but also reinforced by students in what could be described as an inter-surveillance, for example Cordelia in her frequent predictions that Xander will be a 'loser'.

[12] Such examples would tend to characterise aspects of authority in the school as disciplinary, in that they foster normalisation through the propagation of socially constructed truths. And, as McDonough (2004) points out, schools operate within a larger social framework which 'tracks working class kids into working class jobs.'

[13] With the demise of Flutie the notion of student self-regulation, however illusory, dies too. It is replaced by a more clearly sovereign model in Principal Snyder. The nature of Snyder's rule and the contrast with his predecessor is made clear in our first encounter with him in 'The Puppet Show' (1009):

> SNYDER: My predecessor, Mr. Flutie, may have gone in for all that touchy-feely relating nonsense, but he was eaten. You're in my world now. And Sunnydale has touched and felt for the last time.

Snyder's use of 'my', in contrast with Flutie's 'we', is the first of many. There is no pretence at a democratic rule; it is his world, his campus. The larger political ramifications of such a rule are slyly suggested through Giles, in the first reference we ever have to Snyder as 'Our new Führer, Mr. Snyder.'(*Buffy* 1009) then later through Cordelia who calls him 'a tiny, impotent Nazi' (*Buffy* 2001) and Ms Barton, who refers to him as 'Commandant Snyder' (*Buffy* 3006).

[14] That Snyder's model is reactionary in educational terms is clear in his beliefs about students. He sees them as driven by the basest of urges and appetites, describing them as 'Crawling around, mindlessly bent on feeding and mating. Destroying everything in sight in their relentless, pointless desire to exist ... just a bunch of hormonal time bombs' which it is the faculty's duty to control. (*Buffy* 2001) These views on the nature of childhood resemble those of early Victorian educationalists.[3]

[15] The central tenets of his model of leadership are particularly revealed in 'School Hard' (*Buffy* 2003). He tells Buffy and the recalcitrant Sheila: "A lot of educators tell students, 'Think of your principal as your pal'.... I say, 'Think of me as your judge, jury, and executioner.'" This puts the school fairly within an archaic judicial framework in which his authority is total and unmediated, and flags Snyder's educational philosophy and practices as likely to be regressive.

[16] Later in the episode, Snyder's responses during the attack on the school by Spike and a vampire gang reveals how his authority is invested in a traditional conception of principal/student roles. He insists, 'This is my school. What I say goes!'; power is located in the person rather than the institution, so a challenge to authority is a direct challenge to the person. Buffy asserts her authority in this crisis, instructing the trapped group, 'They will kill everybody in this room. Nobody goes out, nobody comes in until I say so. Do you hear me?' She is the one with the knowledge that is valid ('I'm the one that knows how to stop them'). Snyder's responses - to Buffy's mother Joyce, 'She's a student. What does she know? and 'I say this is not happening!' and to Buffy: 'You don't tell me! I tell you!' - are illuminating, firstly because of his denial of the validity of Buffy's knowledge and of the invasion of her reality into his, and secondly because he rejects knowledge coming from a student as unacceptable because it reverses the traditional one-way transmission in schools.

[17] Snyder's sovereign approach is also interesting in that it exposes the compulsion underlying more disciplinary styles such as Flutie's – this is evident in what Xander describes as 'his interesting take on the volunteer concept' (*Buffy* 2006]; he compels students into participating in activities such as the school talent show (*Buffy* 1009) or selling candy for the band (*Buffy* 3006), the volunteer safety program for Halloween (*Buffy* 2006), and cleaning graffiti (*Buffy* 3006).

[18] His punishments are qualitatively different from Flutie's in other ways too: Snyder's sanctions expose individuals and make a public demonstration of his power; he makes Buffy, Willow and Xander participate in the talent show as a punishment for mocking the institution (*Buffy* 2006); he forces Buffy and Sheila to set up and front the parent teacher night as a demonstration of their commitment to the school (*Buffy* 2003). This is a further way in which authority at Sunnydale High from Flutie to Snyder reverses the social trends observed by Foucault: historically, standard punishments changed from pain and public humiliation to imprisonment. Xander's observation draws our attention to this when he reminds Snyder: 'Can I just mention, that detention is a time-honored form of punishment?'(*Buffy* 1009) - detention being a school's approximation of imprisonment. Furthermore, in considering Snyder as a representative of the principal-as-sovereign, we can note that as Foucault considered the point of making punishment both uniform and hidden was to avoid provoking rebellion, Snyder's conviction in his right and ability to exert control is clear in his choice of public punishment over private penance.

[19] The shortcomings of the sovereign model for as a basis for school leadership are also dramatised through Snyder. Unlike in the disciplinary model, surveillance cannot be

total. Although Snyder tries to operate as a one-man panopticon, his failure in surveillance is illustrated not only in Giles and the Scoobies' success in prosecuting their own agenda despite him, but also more directly in 'Choices' (*Buffy* 3019): He makes himself ridiculous in his attempts to discover drug dealing on campus, first through mistaking a lunch bag and then a box of demon spiders as contraband.

[20] However, as Season 2 progresses into Season 3, it becomes apparent that Snyder's power derives not only from his autocratic take on the principal's role, but also from the more powerful figure of the Mayor. While apparently operating as sovereign on campus, Snyder, it transpires, is merely the agent rather than the source of power. In the hierarchical and dependent relationship between principal and city council here, one can read a representation of real world schools' relationships with the police and the judiciary. The loss of traditional respect for teachers and headteachers is a phenomenon frequently observed and mourned in educational settings. There is a wealth of documentation of the resultant necessity for schools to involve external forces in maintaining discipline – in the UK from an on-campus police presence to the prosecution of parents whose children persistently truant.

[21] Moreover, in *Buffy* we can see an illustration of not only the nature but also the dangers of such dependency. While the Mayor's backing does appear to increase Snyder's power, particularly in the complicity of other agencies such as the police, the pitfalls inherent in hierarchically derived power are dramatised in his battle to keep the expelled Buffy out of Sunnydale High. In 'Dead Man's Party' (*Buffy* 3002) he smirks and observes, 'Wouldn't that be interesting?' to Buffy's mother when she threatens to go to the Mayor. Later in the episode he advises Giles to 'take it up with the city council', secure in the Mayor's support. However, Giles counters with a threat to go to the State Supreme Court, telling Snyder: 'You're powerful in local circles, but I believe I can make life very difficult for you, professionally speaking. And Buffy will be allowed back in.' Buffy's pleasure in observing 'I'm really back in school because the school board overruled you. Wow. That's like having your whole ability to do this job called into question, when you think about it.'(*Buffy* 3003) demonstrates her understanding of the nature of Snyder's power as an agent within a sovereign system. He derives his authority from an external hierarchy, and such hierarchies can be accessible to those with conflicting interests; unless you have privileged access to the ultimate authority, your card can be trumped. This area is a particularly sensitive one for some UK schools, where in recent years pupil expulsions, enforced by the school and local education authorities, have been overturned by appeals panels and have even been the subject of ministerial intervention.[4]

[22] And there are further dangers within such hierarchical structures; Snyder is eventually literally devoured by the greater power, as Mayor Wilkins transforms into a giant demon snake and swallows him. His final cries still reinforce the characteristic nature of his rule – 'This is not orderly! This is not discipline! … You're on my campus buddy!' (*Buffy* 3022). As with Flutie, we can observe a desperate insistence on his authority in the face of contradictory evidence. Also like Flutie, he fails to understand the nature and importance of the foundations of power on which his authority is constructed. Snyder's death provides a dramatic metaphor for contemporary vulnerability of schools, in that they can be attacked by the very systems of power that they exist to serve and depend on for their authority. As Richard Arums observes, "adversarial legalism (leads to) the intimidation of school personnel … and an undermining of the school's moral authority". (Arums 2003 cited in Taylor Jr. S 2003)

[23] It is interesting to note that, like the nature of power in schools, neither Flutie's nor Snyder's leadership styles can be described as wholly disciplinary nor sovereign; Flutie fails to recognise the need for some sovereign-style back-up in his positive policies, and Snyder, while he achieves a measure of control though intimidatory measures, fails to achieve complete rule over his limited domain when his subjects are neither compliant nor participatory. Each model can be seen to depend on the incorporation of some aspects of the other. However, the failure of either should not be attributed to its characteristic nature. As Giroux observes,

'The language of lesson plans and upward mobility and the forms of teacher authority on which it was based has been radically delegitimated by the recognition that culture and power are central to the authority/knowledge relationship. Modernism's faith in the past has given way to a future for which traditional markers no longer make sense.' (Giroux 1994)

Schools have lost authority because students, who are navigating a world of dangers and possibilities undreamed of by previous generations, recognize the certainties they offer or threaten as redundant. It is a lack of recognition of student realities and experiences that renders an overlaid model of discipline delegitimised and ineffectual. The refusal of educators to allow for a student construction of knowledge, or for the possibility of their agency within such a construction, is an epistemic failure of which the consequences on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* – the destruction of the institution and the endangerment of the world – could be read as metaphors for the social consequences of pursuing a reactionary educational agenda[5].

[24] If schools as essentially modernist institutions must respond effectively to the conditions of post-modern society, then it is unlikely that reactionary measures will work. Logic alone would suggest that an effective response would be characterised by an appreciation of post-modern conditions. As Giroux suggests, 'there is a need for cultural workers to address the emergence of a new generation of youth who are increasingly constructed within postmodern economic and cultural conditions that are almost entirely ignored by the schools' (Giroux 1994). He argues that schools must not only themselves understand such conditions, but must equip students to understand socialising forces if they are to have any hope of agency at all. While Giroux's focus is the advocacy of popular culture within a transformed curriculum, his advice is as apt for Sunnydale High; one of the many ways in which the High-School-on-a-Hellmouth metaphor works is as a dramatisation of the ways in which we must either attain informed agency or risk being devoured by the powers at work in a transformed world we only dimly apprehend.

[25] Flutie's failure to realise the existence of the students' world leads to his end; Snyder's insistence on archaic models, his refusal to recognise Buffy's power and the importance of her role, lead to his. The school is destroyed, in the end, because its leaders do not allow for alternatives.

[26] In Robin Wood we see such an alternative. He is the only principal to survive, and he achieves this because he wields authority in a way which takes account of and responds to a differently constructed knowledge. The contrast with the previous models is underlined from the outset: His words in our first encounter with him 'Gotta start deadening young minds'. (*Buffy* 7001) show a recognition of the limited nature of education/ knowledge offered by schools. This reminds us of Spike's analysis of schools

as 'Just factories, spewing out mindless little automatons'. (*Buffy* 6001)

[27] Unlike his predecessors, Wood realises that schools must demonstrate some understanding of conditions of adolescence: He tells Buffy 'They need to feel like there's someone around here who actually understands them.' (*Buffy* 7002) Indeed, this is his initial rationale for employing her. When he advises her:

> A little authority can be a wonderful thing. Just remember that while you are here to help, you're not here to be their friend. Trust me, you open that door, and these students will eat you alive. (*Buffy* 7002)

we see he also has a pragmatic awareness of the need for some disciplinary framework within the teacher/student relationship: Here implicit criticism of Flutie's model emerges, while the bullying archaism of Snyder's approach is equally mocked when he observes: 'There's only three things these kids understand: the boot, the bat, and the bastinada'. (*Buffy* 7002)

[28] In the episode 'Him' (*Buffy* 7006) we see a direct contrast with Snyder's techniques; where Snyder bullies Willow into changing the failing grade of a member of the swim team and into undertaking basketballer Percy's work so these sports stars can earn the school glory, Wood reprimands the footballer RJ for 'getting these young, impressionable women to do [his] homework'. For Wood, the moral welfare of the individual is placed above the status of the institution.

[29] Which is not to say that we cannot see any similarity in their methods: In 'Never Leave Me' (*Buffy* 7009) he threatens two students responsible for graffiti with an adverse entry on their permanent records. When they show no concern, he realises his bluff has been called and tells them:

> This whole permanent record thing is such a myth anyway. Colleges never ask for anything past your SAT scores, and it's not like employers are gonna be calling up to check to see how many days you missed back in high school.

He then cheerfully offers to involve the police instead. Although, unlike Flutie, he acknowledges his lack of real authority where students are not compliant, like Snyder, he is willing to derive the power he needs from outside agencies. This is also an interesting exchange because it exposes the fear imperative discussed earlier as fraudulent; Wood supplants false with real knowledge; in doing so he inspires respect in the students, and makes his claim not to be bluffing more credible, having just exposed one school shibboleth.

[30] It is in the nature of his knowledge, however, rather than in the way he wears his authority, that we see the real point of contrast between Wood and the former incumbents. Wood is the son of a Slayer, raised by a Watcher. Unlike Flutie, he understands the conditions and imperatives of this world, and privileges them. Unlike Snyder, he recognises Buffy for what she is and can do; he takes orders from her and puts himself at her disposal. He joins with helping the group of potential slayers - a group of young women developing the skills and building the power necessary for their survival in dramatically changed conditions of reality. He has learned from experience that the

mission is more important than he is, even to the point of turning away from his goal of avenging his mother's death at Spike's hands. He recognises that the source of evil must be attacked rather than its individual manifestations.

[31] Wood understands the nature of the limitations of his role in the face of greater global issues (and how much more global an issue is there than the end of the world?). This is shown, for example when he sacks Buffy, telling her,

> there's nothing here for you. I mean, people are leaving town, half the kids don't even bother showing up anymore. You've got things to deal with that are much worse than anything here. Look at the big picture.' (*Buffy* 7015),

and later when he tells Faith 'Yeah, well I'm the principal of a school where nobody finished, and I am completely out of my league in this.' (*Buffy* 7018) His ultimate comment on the school, in the season and the show's finale, mocks the obsolescence of many school disciplinary concerns in the face of greater imperatives:

> Welcome to Sunnydale High…There's no running in the halls, no yelling, no gum chewing. Apart from that, there's only one rule. If they move, kill them.' (*Buffy* 7022)

[32] Although in his leadership one can, inevitably, recognise features of institutional power described by Foucault, one could argue that these are transformed to serve an agenda which begins to look like critical pedagogy in its foregrounding of this other world of youth. Wood privileges the knowledge and skills necessary not only to survive in it, but also to recognise and fight against its more malevolent and harmful manifestations of power. Ultimately therefore I suggest that the show does not so much critique models of discipline in schools themselves, as suggest that any such model is doomed to fail if the school does not address the dichotomy between the knowledge or ideologies propounded within its walls, and those experienced by students in their lives beyond the institution.

[33] As well as through Robin Wood, through the responses and experiences of the Scoobies and in the pedagogic relationship between Buffy and Giles we see alternative ways forward: Willow is all compliance and productivity for most of Seasons 1-3, a participator in the school's ideologies and disciplinary structures. However, she eventually jumps off the track that takes her from study to high grades to offers from top UK as well as US Universities: instead she opts for UC Sunnydale, because it will give her both the autonomy to design her own curriculum and the opportunity to engage in the fight against evil. (*Buffy* 3019) Here it could be suggested that Willow has achieved the Foucauldian ideal of acquiring informed moral agency.

[34] Xander's experiences beyond school too suggest a resistance to the message of 'fail in school, fail in life' – it is not until he has left school that he finds he has worthwhile skills, and realises the value of his contributions to the Scooby Gang. It is a depressing comment on the nature of schools that we see Xander as having nothing that is valued by them, and how this experience shapes his perceptions of himself.

[35] Although there is not space here to explore fully the pedagogic model constructed between Buffy and Giles, it is worth observing that the development from his initial and largely fruitless attempts to enforce an institutional, Council-derived authority in Seasons

1 & 2, through to Buffy's request that he resume the Watcher's role in Season 5, offer an alternative to more conventional constructs of the teacher/student relationship, one which again appears to embrace some of the principles of critical pedagogy.***** After her encounter with Dracula, Buffy realises that he understood the nature of her power better than she herself does. She tells Giles:

> I need to know more. About where I come from, about the other
> slayers. I mean, maybe … maybe if I could learn to control this
> thing, I could be stronger, I could be better. But I'm scared. I know
> it's gonna be hard. And I can't do it without you. I need your help. I
> need you to be my Watcher again. (*Buffy* 5001)

Buffy asks Giles to resume his pedagogic role because she values his knowledge; she knows it will help to understand the nature of her power and its sources, and thus become more powerful.

[36] Her later defeat of the Council is possible not though her power, which she always had, but her realisation of it– this knowledge enables her to take control. She tells Travers and his entourage of Watchers: 'I've had a lot of people talking at me the last few days. Everyone just lining up to tell me how unimportant I am. And I've finally figured out why. Power. I have it. They don't. This bothers them.'(*Buffy* 5012) The resonance with critical pedagogy is underscored.

[37] Through the central metaphor of the High School as Hell, the show exposes and explores the anxieties and alienation experienced by students. The source of some of these anxieties can be traced through to the authority and pedagogies embodied in school. In the alternative models offered in Principal Wood and Rupert Giles, one can read a plea for a radical rethinking of the school as institution. In considering a critical theory of education, Kellner (2004) states that 'A reconstruction of education could help create subjects better able to negotiate the complexities of emergent forms of everyday life, labor, and culture, as contemporary life becomes more complex and dangerous.'; my consideration of school authority in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* reads an advocacy of such a reconstruction in the show, though like Buinicki and Enns (2001) I acknowledge that textual analysis alone cannot determine its potential to effect such change.

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Notes

[1] The following sample is taken from a search conducted on 21.05.2004:

- Rethinking Discipline: What are we teaching our students when discipline policies are reduced to punitive measures grounded in coercion, control and compliance?: *Rethinking Schools Online* http://www.rethinkingschools.org/archive/14_01/dis141. shtml
- It is time to restore respect for authority to its rightful place. That in turn must

mean a sustained drive to strengthen school discipline *Secretary of State for Education; December 2002* http://education.guardian.co.uk/classroomviolence/story/0,12388,859290,00.html

- Lack of Morals and Discipline: A Huge Problem – *The Massachusetts News* http://www.massnews.com/past_issues/other/10_Oct/kilpat.htm
- School discipline ranks as one of the major concerns voiced by the public about schools and the school system *Australian Journal of Social Issues*: February 01, 2000 http://static.highbeam.com/a/australianjournalofsocialissues/february012000/
- Only four out of 10 members of the NAS/UWT believe that their school's discipline policies work *Times Educational Supplement* 21/05/2004; http://www.tes.co.uk/
- Let school authority be firm, not fuzzy http://www.theteacherspot.com/maxwell.html
- Weak school discipline disrupts learning *United Press International* . http://www.safeyouth.org/scripts/display/NewsDisplay.asp?NewsNbr=1466

[2] For example Joan Gaustad (1992) reviews studies of school discipline in order to make broad recommendations for practice, and Joan Mowat (1997) studies the impact of such a scheme in a Scottish secondary school identifies successful components. Both these and similar studies reveal the high level of compunction and teacher enforcement underlying such strategies, even if this aspect is not the focus of the study.

[3] A famous example is the Rev. Carus Wilson of Cowan Bridge School, satirised by Charlotte Brontë in her thinly disguised portrait, Mr Brocklehurst in *Jane Eyre*. Brocklehurst asserts: "my mission is to mortify in these girls the lusts of the flesh; to teach them to clothe themselves with shame-facedness and sobriety" (Bronte, (1978) Ch 7 P.3 first published 1847)

[4] For example, in 2002 two national teacher unions identified nearly 140 cases where headteachers felt they were undermined by expulsions being overturned. One teaching union alone, the Association of Teachers and Lecturers, had 70 ongoing cases during the month of July. Source: Guardian Unlimited;
http://education.guardian.co.uk/schools/story/0,5500,811077,00.html

[5] That the type of knowledge propagated at Sunnydale High is not that which is necessary for survival on the Hellmouth has also been noted by Davis (2001) and Daspit (2003), and the broader political consequences discussed by Wall and Zryd (2001).
Editors' note: see <u>Zoe-Jane Playden's essay in *Slayage* 5</u> on training vs. education.

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Jenny Alexander

A Vampire is Being Beaten:
DeSade Through the Looking Glass in Buffy and Angel

[1] This paper is about the relationship between the BDSM (bondage, discipline, dominance, submission, sadism, masochism) inflected text/subtext of both Buffy and Angel and the proliferation of associated online fan-fiction in a "kinky" register. I would like at this point to add the customary WARNING: CONTAINS GRAPHIC MATERIAL, and stipulate that no vampires or victims were actually harmed during its production. My intention is to explore the Buffyverse as the active progenitor of the internet's largest emergent post-phallocratic pornographic space.

[2] Something about the Buffyverse in particular incites fan-fiction of all varieties, kinky and vanilla, explicit and non-explicit. For audience viewing figures on average half the size of Enterprise, there are four times as many fan-fiction hits on the internet. In March 2004, I found eight hundred and thirty thousand for Angel and Buffy combined. In large part this is because, as Linda Rust writes, 'from the outset the producers and writers of Buffy were determined to always make sure that fans played an active role in the show's development.' [1] Loose ends are often deliberately left in the script, acting as proverbial carrots for fan-fiction writers.[2]

[3] Most people involved in writing about popular television are now familiar, to some extent, with fan-fiction and its codes. Slash fiction, involving the emotional or sexual pairing of male characters, in particular has been publicised by a number of academic treatments. Kinky fan-fiction however is perhaps still somewhat closeted. "Kink-fic" borrows its staging and its equipment from real-world BDSM practices. It commonly involves ingredients such as chains, whips, paddles, strap-ons, gags and restraints, and invariably belongs to the more pornographic end of the fan-fiction register, although stories may vary in intensity and focus. A typical Buffyverse kink-fic scene might involve, for example, Wesley in a small lace apron being dominated by Cordelia with the assistance of a riding crop and a dildo.[3] This scene could either comprise the entire focus of the narrative, a type of sexually explicit fan-fiction known as "Plot, What Plot?" or appear as an episode in a broader story arc.

[4] Kink-fic comes in all flavours – het (heterosexual), slash, femme-slash (girl on girl) and indiscriminate, with websites specialising in various combinations. Some Buffyverse fan-fiction sites with a kink include Spanking the Slayerettes (femme-slash), Xander Xtreme (slash) and Buffy's X Adventures (het and slash). [4] Kink-fic is also that genre of

pornographic fan-fiction which most strongly disrupts eroticism as dyadic, as coupling. Threesomes, foursomes and othersomes abound in the kink-fic universe. This is particularly illustrated by the femme-slash Buffyverse kink-fic site Triality: A Wuffara Archive, which is entirely devoted to Willow/Buffy/Tara BDSM threesomes. [5]

[5] Whilst kink-fic is not exclusive to the Buffyverse, it is far more prevalent than in other fan-fiction universes (the Xenaverse comes in second place). It also ventures into more extreme territory, including snuff stories, "non con" (non-consensual), graphic torture, incest, blood play and rape. There are a number of reasons for this. Vampire narratives "have always been used as a vehicle for more or less encoded articulations of sexuality and desire." [6] In particular those ancestral kinks, active female sexuality and homosexuality, have traditionally been staged within the vampire genres as objects of simultaneous horror and fascination. The Buffyverse plays with this history, making these "kinks" major lynchpins of the eroto-politics of the show. Its cognizant and inflected sense of kink, which includes the "permission to play" afforded by the preternatural resilience of vampire and slayer bodies, has provided fertile ground and encouragement for inciting the imaginations of fan-fiction writers in explicit and kinky directions.

[6] There appears up to now to have been a certain reluctance on the part of academics to address the explicitly pornographic imagination of fan-fiction. In his seminal study of fan-fiction, *Textual Poachers*, Henry Jenkins proposes that slash "…is not so much a genre about sex as it is a genre about the limitations of traditional masculinity." [7] Camille Bacon-Smith comes to a similar conclusion in her book *Enterprising Women: Television Fandom and the Creation of Popular Myth* (1992). [8] Although these analyses have much to recommend them, I doubt (in putting the sexual under erasure) if they were ever entirely valid propositions. Similarly Esther Saxey, in her discussion of Buffyverse slash, elides the established genre of "hurt-comfort" fan-fiction (which is indeed produced by Buffyverse fan-fic writers) with Buffy and Angelverse kink-fic. [9] In fact hurt-comfort and kink-fic are generically distinct. In hurt-comfort one of two protagonists is generally injured either physically or emotionally by a third party and then comforted by the other protagonist. This comforting usually leads to the revelation of emotional connection and/or to sex. In "kink-fic" on the other hand the injury to the protagonist always contains a physical element, from spanking to torture, and is carried out in the context of an erotically charged scene staged between protagonists (not necessarily only two of them). The "injury" is also often (but not always) consensual. By not picking up on this distinction between sexual angst and sexual play in the story-telling, Saxey, like Jenkins and Bacon-Smith, chooses to focus her attention on the emotional nexus of sexualised fan-fiction rather than on its visceral erotogenics – its pornographic imagination.

[7] Porn of course has a long history of being associated with "bad art" by those with cultural capital, so it is unsurprising that attempts to "elevate" fan-fiction as an object worthy of serious study have fought shy of its more orgasmically oriented realms. A recent pro-fan-fiction article in The Daily Telegraph illustrates this:

> Fan-fiction has millions of people in its grip… some [pieces] are barely literate. A fair few are pornographic. Others are impassioned well-written slow-wrought works of the imagination. [10]

In fact pornographic fan-fiction is as committed to detailed characterization as its non-masturbatory counterpart, and has its own narrative and imaginative structures. Not all sexually graphic fan-fiction is kinky of course. What kink-fic does, in parallel with BDSM real world practices, is to explicitly enact sexual and emotional power dynamics.

[8] BDSM is positioned in the Buffyverse canon as morally wrong yet illicitly delicious, through the knowing humour of a semiotic tension between ostensible (verbal) condemnation and latent (visual) celebration. All the best clothes in Buffy and Angel (that is, those with a fetish-wear twist) belong to the wicked. 'Well, judging by the outfit I guess it's safe to come in. Evil Angel never would have worn those pants,' says Cordelia, with a sartorial sniff, in "Eternity" (Angel 1014), proving that our vampire-with-a-soul hero's wicked half is indeed the one with the better catwalk swagger. Black leather and a penchant for torture and bondage sweep, leash in glove, down the demon-infested streets of the shows' sets in Sunnydale and Los Angeles. But, unlike that earlier dungeon master John Milton, Joss Whedon is clearly and deliciously aware of being of the devil's party. Whedon himself has mischieviously commented:

> Censors. Don't love 'em. But I did want to clear something up. I may push the envelope a tad, I may make fun of the Standards and Practices guys, but I'm not actually out to stick it to them. We've actually had a pretty good relationship over the years, and I like that. They have a family audience to think about and I have a commitment to porn, and between the two – oh god. I didn't just say porn did I? I don't know where that came from. I meant art, of course. That's so weird. [11]

[9] Whedon's "commitment to porn" is informed by a particular (culturally and historically situated) set of sexual ethics and politics. In the kinky register of the Buffyverse canon the show's queer and feminist sensibilities stage and eroticise the bodies of the tortured and dominated as almost exclusively male, whilst positioning participating women almost exclusively on top. Beautiful bloodied male torso is frequently served up in conjunction with aggressive female power (although not all torture scenes are heterosexualised). This produces a curious (and deliberated) Sadeian through-the-looking-glass world, since the two most frequently tortured bodies are those of the shows' male vampire stars, Angel and Spike, whose bodies, like those endlessly plastic women in *Justine*, are able to sustain impossible amounts of damage and then heal up again just in time for more. Over the course of the shows, our vampire heroes have been, between them, in deliberated torture scenes; chained up, staked, amputated, run through with iron bars, cut with knives, turned inside out, beaten to bloody pulps, stabbed with scissors, and burnt with matches, holy water and crosses. This canonical subtext, which plays with the eroticism of the dominatrix and her male submissive at the juncture of a shifting late twentieth-century gender, sex and sexuality matrix, provides the psycho-geographical ground on which the edifice of Buffyverse kink-fic is erected.

[10] Kink-fic appears most frequently to springboard from canonical character relationships organised around power differentials which contain a recurrent element of conflict. For example, Captain Janeway and Seven-of-Nine from Star Trek's *Voyager* and

Skinner and Mulder from *The X-Files*, are the paired subjects of recurrent kink-fic. Their canonical relationships lend themselves to this not simply by being those of superiors and subordinates but also because on-screen interactions between them involve obedience and disobedience, affection and disaffection. Kink-fic production, in other words, is erotically attracted to the canonical disruption of conventional power hierarchies. More than most serial sci-fi/fantasy, the Buffyverse champions anarchistic rather than hierarchical power relations. Thus the disruption of established power structures is particularly strong, leading accordingly to the proliferation of associated kink-fic. Relationships between the heroic characters Buffy, Faith, Angel and Spike, in various combinations, are characterised by struggles for dominance and love/hate attachments. Such struggles also occur amongst regular supporting characters, as between Wesley and Gunn or Willow and Giles, spawning innumerable kink-fics in het, slash and femme-slash combinations.

[11] Unlike other fanfic'd shows, the Buffyverse has an overt BDSM subtext, and a fetish flavour recurrent over the story arcs. This is enacted on a number of levels. I have already discussed the visual level of dress code. Black leather is sported by Angelus, and also by Spike and Faith in their evil phases. It is worn by Buffy's first major vampire adversary the Master and by her last, the uber-vamps of Season Seven. In the alternate universe of "The Wish" (Buffy 3009), Buffy's vamped friends Willow and Xander come bedecked in very fetching leather corset and pants. Buffy herself is often seen clad in leather when her calling takes her into dangerous emotional territory, and increasingly so in Season Five and Season Six as she wrestles with her dark side.

[12] In more recent Buffyverse episodes on *Angel*, BDSM has surfaced at the level of knowing comedy. In "Life of the Party" (Angel 5005) the demon aristocrat Archduke Sebassis and his minion Artode (Antonin Artaud being well-known as the author of The Theatre of Cruelty—editors' note)come complete with a chained and collared slave demon, who uncorks his wrist to provide drinking blood and becomes inordinately excited by the smell of urine (known to fans as Mr. Pee Pee). In "Conviction" (Angel 5001) Angel visits a dubious mystic named Spanky whose home is adorned with a wall-full of paddles and whips. Spanky proves to be a little homophobic as well as uncooperative, and is duly dispatched by our hero who declares he has "no problem spanking men."

[13] Most directly, there have been a number of explicit torture, bondage and domination scenes in episodes from both shows. Some characters, Angel and Faith in particular, display unequivocal familiarity with BDSM etiquette. In "Consequences" (Buffy 3004) Faith in her evil phase initiates some aggressive foreplay with Xander, and demands to know whether he would prefer "kinks or vanilla." Later, after Angel has rescued Xander in the nick of time, the pvc-clad Slayer and our vampire hero have a sharp exchange about the proper use of "safety words." In "Enemies" (Buffy 3017) Angel, in a double bluff intended to make off-the-rails Faith reveal her plans, pretends to be his evil self, and in a spot of character acting remarks to Buffy; "You know what I just can't believe? All of our time together and we never tried chains."

[14] "Sadism," writes Foucault in Madness and Civilization "is not a name finally given to a practice as old as Eros, but a massive cultural fact which appeared precisely at the end of the eighteenth century and which constitutes one of the greatest conversions of Western imagination." [12] It was in this period of course that the vampire was also was born into European literature. It is no Buffyverse accident that the most sadistic character, Angelus, who delights openly in torture and whom Doyle describes in "City

Of…" (Angel 1001) as "The meanest vampire in all the land," was also born ("sired") in the eighteenth century. In a correspondence too perfect to be coincidence, our other vampire hero Spike proves to be the most masochistic character in the Buffyverse. Masochism was engendered in the nineteenth century, which saw the publication of Leopold Von Sacher Masoch's classic masculine fantasy of the dominant woman, Venus in Furs (1869). Spike is a vampire child of the nineteenth century, sired in 1880. Thus critics such as Thomas Hibbs are missing the point when they bemoan 'Buffy's sado-masochistic sexual relationship with Spike… as the most demoralising subplot in the sixth season.' [13] Clearly, kink is written into the deep structure of the show and the Buffy/Spike 'subplot' is an essential part of the eroto-politics of the Buffyverse.

[15] Buffyverse kink-fic, like its parent text, is highly conversant in BDSM codes. Stories such as "Safe Word" by Chris Lee [14] and the Lilah/Faith "Plot, What Plot?" story "Switch" by Amy attest to this [15] . Ozmandayus's "Ferocious Intent", an Angel/Faith consensual switch story, is actually set in the "Puffy Kitten Playhouse – a Demon S/M Sex Club" [16] . Kink-fic associated with the shows runs the gamut from light to extreme and from consensual to non-consensual (no necessary correspondence here). In "Chocolate and Chains" by Atara, Spike chains up Giles and tortures him by forcing him to watch Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure. [17] This torture (the tweedy Giles is not a fan of popular culture) is offset by a rather delicious chocolate and fruitcake fondue, which somehow ends up covering most of the chained librarian's body, and must of course be licked off by the wicked vampire torturer. The show's self-aware tongue-in-cheek sense of humour here happily migrates into the kink-fic universe.

[16] Whilst in the shows' associated kink-fic, many "scenes" are consensual and good-humoured, the canonical uber-text has to contend with Standards and Practices; thus all torture and bondage scenes are written in absolutes. By which I mean, that they are non-consensual, with characters "topping" coded as evil, and characters "bottoming" coded as good. Some characters (continuing the text's covert celebration of BDSM themes) "switch", being torturers when evil and torturees when good. Whilst ostensibly condemned, however, these torture scenes are, in fact, designed as pleasurable viewing experiences. They are eroticised visually, as we have mentioned, through motifs such as the heaving naked torso of the tortured hero and the stylish leather garb of the torturer, and through the sexualised intensity of the "top", who invariably appears to derive some form of kinky pleasure from the proceedings. The torture scene from "The Wish" (Buffy 3009), in which vampire Willow tortures Angel, is a perfect example. She does so purely for pleasure, whilst her lover, vampire Xander, participates as voyeur. She refers to the torture as "play" and to Angel as "the puppy." "Puppy play", in which one person takes the role of a puppy and others the role of trainer, is an established form of BDSM role-play.

[17] The relationship between ur-text and kink-fic is a complex one, charged with the fort/daback-and-forth of the parent/child relationship. In a canonical nod to fan-fiction, "The Wish" is set in an alternate universe, "AU" being a specific fan-fic genre. This AU, which encompasses two episodes from Season Three, "The Wish" and "Dopplegangland", has become known amongst fans as "The Wishverse". The Wishverse in turn has spawned a particular kink-fic universe, known as "The Puppyverse", which incorporates stories in which puppy Angel is "played with" BDSM style by any combination of other characters. As the "Puppyverse" illustrates, canonical erotics, ethics and power

relationships are very clearly reproduced in Buffyverse kink-fic – Angel always bottoms in the Puppyverse. However they are also frequently overturned, displaced and played out in infinite explicit variation.

[18] The canon is, as I have mentioned, "kinked" in particular, ethically specific ways. It is only in the historical flashbacks, what we might call the Sadeian patriarchal past, that major male characters (in particular Angelus, the Sadeian libertine) are seen dominating bound or tortured women. Indeed, it is clearly implied at a number of points in the Buffyverse that during their evil vampire pasts both Spike and Angel were rapists, something the attempted rape of Buffy by Spike in "Seeing Red" (Buffy 6019) actualises. In "Never Leave Me" (Buffy 7009) soul-having Spike, chained up in the basement after being reanimated as a controlled killing machine by the First, tries to convince Buffy to kill him by referring to this past; 'Do you know what I have done to girls Dawn's age?' In "Hearthrob" (Angel 3001) we see Angelus in historical flashback taunting Holtz about the murder of his family, again with the implication of rape. "Tasty lot, especially the little ones... Your wife, she kept repeating on us. Of course, you know, I repeated on her a few times myself." In "Five by Five" (Angel 1015) we are shown the historical moment when Darla gives Angelus the gypsy girl who is to result in his curse and the restoration of his soul. Angelus pushes up the skirt of the bound and gagged young woman, and leans in to bite her on her upper thigh in a manner which gives us every reason to think she will not simply be drained but also "played with", i.e. raped and tortured. This historical, patriarchal past, which the canon condemns and (almost) does not eroticise, provides the broader ethical context for the depiction of both Faith's and Buffy's sexual violence.

[19] Faith's behaviour is condemned by the story arc, and yet the camera loves her. The strangulation scene in "Consequences" (Buffy 3015) is shot in intense close-up, a reversal of every eroticised horror movie shot of woman-as-victim, from the shower scene in Psycho onwards. In "Five by Five" (Angel 1015) Faith tortures Wesley. Tying him to a chair, she spends hours working on his body with a shard of broken glass and a flamethrower in order to provoke Angel into killing her. This scene too is eroticised. Faith straddles her bleeding ex-watcher and accuses him of desiring her. The camera (in characteristic early Angel cut-up style) makes this torture scene cinematically gorgeous. Furthermore, whilst the popular filmic representation of the dominatrix as evil is drawn on in the depiction of Faith, (Basic Instinct and Body of Evidence spring to mind), it is overturned by the completed narrative. Faith gets to live, to be redeemed, and most importantly to keep her preference for being on top. In "Dirty Girls" (Buffy 7018) Faith, now rehabilitated in terms of the epic battle between good and evil, firmly describes herself, during a moment of sexual banter with Spike, as willing to play games with the boys "just as long as they don't forget who's on top."

[20] There has been much discussion of the violent relationship between Buffy and Spike. She regularly beats the crap out of him, yet he is often seen to enjoy it. "Crush" (Buffy 5014) anticipates this dynamic. "Honey," says Joyce on hearing that Spike has declared love for her daughter "... did you... somehow unintentionally lead him on in any way? Uh, send him signals?" "Well," Buffy replies, "I…I do beat him up a lot. For Spike that's like, third base." The camera regularly grants their violent sexual encounters a certain visual eroticism. The first of these in "Smashed" (Buffy 6009) begins during a fight, in which Buffy and Spike tear apart a warehouse as well as each other. Since slayers are stronger than vampires, this puts Buffy firmly "on top" [18] . She has the upper hand in this fight scene and the last shot is of her on top. In the following episode, "Wrecked" (Buffy

6010), we see them lying in the rubble the morning after. Spike, who is naked of torso, is in particular covered in welts, cuts and bruises. Their relationship is depicted as "unhealthy" by the story arc. Buffy is portrayed as continually ashamed and disgusted with herself for enjoying these assignations. However, the camera tells a different story. It continually lingers on the unzipping and re-buckling of black leather. The superhero/supervillain kick-fight of "Smashed" is shot in the deep mood creation of blue light, a light which subsequently stands for the conflicted intensity of the Buffy/Spike bond in the crucifix scene in "Beneath You" (Buffy 7002) and at the beginning of the "cookie dough" scene in "Chosen" (Buffy 7022) when Angel quizzes Buffy about her relationship with his vampire rival. There is no doubt that the erotics of the camera are bound up with the show's ethics. In "Seeing Red" (Buffy 6015) the scene in which Spike tries to rape Buffy is shot in bright white light, depicting this encounter (in which no one wears leather) as entirely outside the show's BDSM imaginary.

[21] It is at the specific post-feminist late twentieth-century cultural moment of the Buffyverse's production that it becomes permissible to show women violently dominating men, in the way Buffy and Faith do, in a television show for teens. As we have seen, the show itself attempts to contextualise this depiction historically as part of its feminist ethics. Indeed in a broader context it continues to remain far more common to see on-screen eroticised sexual violence directed towards women. Gaspar Noe's "art house" film Irreversible (2003) with its nine minute rape scene of actress Monica Bellucci and its attendant homophobia (the rapist is a gay man) is simply one, albeit especially unpleasant, example.

[22} What does the kink-fic universe do with the eroto-politics of the canon? How does the sexual violence of our two slayer heroines play out in cyberspace? Kink-fic which adopts canonical power dynamics does seem to be more prevalent than kink-fic reversing them. There is an entire Buffyverse kink-fic site, Whips and Chains, devoted to heterosexual kink where the girls are on top, and no equivalent site in which Buffy, Willow, Faith and o. play submissives. [19] Faith stars as a "top" in innumerable stories, paired with Buffy, Angelus/Angel, Spike, Willow, Wesley, Lilah, Xander and others. However, there are a significant number of BDSM flavoured stories out there in which Angelus ties up, rapes and humiliates Buffy and/or Faith, but particularly Buffy. The Sadeian torturer whom, in present time, the canon never allows to successfully (ultimately) dominate women is, in the kink-fic universe, unleashed once more. "Common Enemy" by Harpy, for example, re-writes the scene in "Enemies" (Buffy 3017) in which Faith and Angel (pretending to be Angelus) prepare to torture a chained Buffy. [20] Harpy's narrative plays out as if it truly were Angelus who was involved. Inevitably (in keeping with his canonical character) he tortures Faith and rapes Buffy. Buffyverse het kink-fic such as this story, which puts the boys back on top, engages with the Sadeian patriarchal past of the historical flashbacks, but does not simply represent a return to it. Angelus may be loose, but ultimately he serves the pleasure of the largely female kink-fic mistresses who write his het and slash misdeeds.

[23] Like many other stories "Tooth and Nail", a Buffy/Spike kink-fic by K. J. Draft, is canonical in that Buffy mostly tops, referring to Spike as "my cute little masochist." [21] "No Angel," however, by Mint Witch, has Spike returning to Sunnydale with his soul to complete the unfinished rape of "Seeing Red" (Buffy 6019). In this story Buffy submits to Spike with an abject mixture of self-loathing and desire. It is notable that in stories like

"No Angel," which play out the rape of Buffy by Spike, kink-fic writers often preface their work with a discussion of the issues. Mint Witch writes:

> I wish I hadn't written this. I really do. Apparently I am far angrier with ME than previously suspected. The only reason I'm posting this is because misery loves company. Flame me, I deserve it. This fic is foul. [22]

"Angelus as rapist" stories (het or slash) tend not to involve this level of disclaimer. This is because by splitting our Irish vampire hero into Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde (Angelus and Angel) the canon "permits" Angelus, as the personification of the evil past and a version of masculinity incapable of true love or friendship, to be a rapist. Spike's character is not so bifurcated, but straddles the grey area of our more ordinary experiences of ethics. The soulless version of Spike not only evidences a very human tenderness towards Drusilla but falls in love with Buffy. "Spike as the successful rapist of Buffy" stories therefore deal less in fantasy rape and more in actualised trauma. Thus fan-fiction containing sexual violence, which reverses the gender/power dynamics of the Buffyverse canon, continues to be framed by the feminist politics of the parent text. The Buffyverse provides an ultimately "female positive" space for the safe expression of female subjection as well as female dominance, in the associated BDSM fan-fiction; whether as sexual exploration and empowerment, or as therapy.

[24] In addition to the feminist erotogenics of Buffyverse torture scenes, the BDSM subtext in Buffy and Angel is sometimes also used to subvert the heterosexual imperative of heroism (heroes must be straight) by becoming a coded way for the show to stage boy on boy and girl on girl action involving central heroic characters. [23] This is, of course achievable only though a number of displacements (the creation of heroes with good and evil halves being the most obvious of these). The sexual subtext in same-sex torture and bondage scenes is more subterranean than it is in like-flavoured heterosexual scenes; nevertheless, it is apparent. In "In the Dark" (Angel 1003) Spike hires vampire pedophile Marcus to torture Angel into revealing the whereabouts of the gem of Amarra. Spike watches with obvious satisfaction as his grandsire's chained and naked torso is run repeatedly through with red hot iron bars by a minion for whom Angel's intended mental breakdown is clearly erotic. In "Just Rewards" (Angel 5002) the evil necromancer Hainsley pushes his hand mystically into the exposed navel of a pinned and helpless Angel and attempts to funnel Spike's soul into the opening. Both these torture scenes enable the effective penetration of Angel by Spike (at one remove). Kink-fic has taken this undercurrent of sexual tension and run with it. Legions of Spike/Angel and Spike/Angelus kink stories inhabit cyberspace. In a nice example of canon/fan-fiction reciprocity, Season Five of Angel has itself had increasingly overt fun developing the Angel/Spike homoerotic subtext. Often it achieves this BDSM style, by using physical duress to represent intense connection, for example during the fight scene between our heroes in "Destiny" (Angel 5008), where blow after bloody blow is shot in emotive and leather clad slow motion.

[25] A further illustration of the interplay between BDSM text/subtext and kink-fic in the Buffyverse is provided by the slash kink-fic site Xander Xtreme. In the canon, Xander is involved in two explicit bondage/torture scenes over the course of the show. The first,

"Consequences" (Buffy 3015), in which he is sexually assaulted by Faith, we have already mentioned. In the second, "First Date" (Buffy 7014) Xander is tied up, carved up and prepared for sacrifice by Lissa, the demon woman he picked up in a hardware store. Both of these episodes are clearly coded as kink scenes in a number of ways – ropes, leather, BDSM language, sexual desire and female domination. Apart from these incidents Xander is positioned as a submissive by the story arc in other ways, notably via his status as "most rescued" Scooby. Xander Xtreme is a slash site containing two portals, "Submissive – For the Xander Who is at the Mercy of Others" and "Dominant – For the Xander Who is in Complete Control". Hence the kink-fic archived here plays with the canon in a number of ways. Xander's on screen "scenes" are heterosexual, whereas on this site he is mostly paired with Spike or Angelus. Furthermore, uncanonically, in the stories through the "Dominant" portal, he gets to be on top. Nonetheless, as elsewhere, the canon continues to provide an enduring frame. Homoerotic undercurrents, as I have illustrated, are already in place in the Buffyverse, and the power dynamics of the text are played with but never discounted. There are many more stories on the "Submissive" part of Xander Xtreme than on the "Dominant", and on the "Dominant" side Xander-as-top is always represented as a surprise, as the overturning of a natural order, involving the delightful and reluctant submission of a usually dominant Spike or Angelus.

[26] To conclude, the kink-fic universe which the BDSM-inflected text/subtext of the Buffyverse has engendered is a pornographic space unlike other pornographies. It is non-commercial and female-dominated. The distinction between producers and consumers is elided. It is polymorphously perverse. To some extent, it degenitalises eroticism by focusing on a range of body parts and sensations. Deep emotional attachment (of writers and readers to the characters and, in the fics themselves, between characters) is a prerequisite for its erotogenics. It engages with itself ethically, through associated discussions in writers' prefaces and beta-readers' commentaries (fan-fiction reviews). This last characteristic is apparent in the show's kink-fic far more than in its vanilla-fic because BDSM brings an explicit awareness of power dynamics into the realm of desire.

[27] Deleuze has warned us of the emptiness of essentialising and romanticising perverse and transgressive identities as a revolutionary project. [24] Rather, it is important to be aware of the situated and contingent nature of identities and desires, and to commit to the process of their ethical becoming. The world of Buffyverse kink-fic is not in any sense a utopia. Its value lies in the fact that it exists in conversation with culturally and historically dominant pornographic imaginations. Nonetheless, underpinned by the queer and feminist eroto-politics of the canon, Buffyverse kink-fic is an emergent post-phallocratic space.

[28] Chris Woods' kink-fic site Mistress Kitten Fantastico is an example of its emergent possibilities. Devoted to Willow and Tara B/D (bondage and domination) stories, the web page is prefaced with the following remarks:

> D/S in no way involves the submissive partner being demeaned… The stories on this site should depict a mutually loving, mutually empowering relationship. [25]

The entry of young male writers like Chris into the femme-slash genre is very new

(femme-slash itself is relatively recent) and has been pioneered in particular in the Buffyverse. The configuration of interaction and desire present in this context is entirely different from the straight male market's conditioned consumption of girl on girl magazine spreads and porn movies. As with most femme-slash, Mistress Kitten Fantastico's fan-fiction writers are largely women. Their stories and comments happily interact with Chris's. Shared identification with and attraction to lesbian BDSM, in an intimate, respectful and erotic frame, across gender boundaries, is a definitively post-patriarchal kind of pornography, and a small but significant manifestation of the broader effects of the show.

[29] In the world De Sade railed against and masturbated over in his writings, two things (which he and his era consequently feared and desired) were not permitted – female sexual power without prostitution and condemnation (whether in the brothel or the marriage bed), and homosexuality without shame and corruption. The Buffyverse, with the help of a little sub-textual smoke and mirrors for the benefit of the Standards and Practices guys, manages to stage both. Furthermore it incites and invites a body of kinky fan-fiction not only to come out and play, but to think ethically about its erotics. De Sade through the looking glass for popular "youth" television? I think Buffy and Angel have, just as De Sade did, made a significant intervention into the collective sexual imaginary – gesturing with substance towards the proliferation of post-phallocratic desiring subjects.

Notes

[1] Linda Rust. "Welcome to the House of Fun: Buffy Fanfiction as a Hall of Mirrors." *Refractory: A Journal of Entertainment Media* March. Vol 2, 2003. www.refractory. unimelb.edu.au/journalissues/vol2/lindarust.htm (paragraph 4).

[2] Spike's intriguing remark in "Buffy vs. Dracula" (Buffy 5001) for example, to the effect that the Count owes him eleven pounds, clearly invites stories about the circumstances surrounding the debt. This challenge has been duly taken up by fan-fiction writers in stories such as Caro's "Sound and Fury" and Karenbear's "Eleven Pound." Angel's demand that Spike hold his hand whilst fighting the guardians of the Deeper Well in "A Hole in the World" (Angel 5015), to which Spike replies 'St. Petersburg', would be another example. It obviously begs the question – what happened in St. Petersburg? Tania's story "St. Petersburg" is one of the many fan-fics which attempts to fill in the blanks. Caro. "Sound and Fury." Character Pairings: Spike/Drusilla. Published: 2004. Rated: PG- 13. Archived: The Bloody Awful Sandlot (a Spike site) http://www.the-sandlot. com; Karenbear "Eleven Pound." Character Pairings: Spike/Xander, Spike/Dracula. Published: 2004. Rated: R. Archived: Biteable (a Xander/Spike slash site) http://www. biteable.co.uk; Tania. "St. Petersburg." Character Pairings: Angelus/Spike. Published: 2004. Rated: NC-17 (British18). Archived: The Adventures of Captain Peroxide and Deadboy (a Spike and Angel/Angelus site with a lot of slash) http://www.fangedfour.com/deadboy.

[3] Lady Angel the Part-time Succubus (Angelia Sparrow). "Scary Visual Places." Character Pairings: Giles/Joyce, Cordelia/Wesley, Willow/Oz, Angelus/Xander/Faith. Published: 2002. Rated: NC-17, BDSM. Archived: http://www.geocities.com/lady_aethelynde.

[4] Spanking the Slayerettes: http://www.spankingtheslayerettes.com; Xander Xtreme:

http://www.xanderxtreme.com; Buffy's X Adventures: http://rosie.buffysmut,com.

[5] Triality: A Wuffara Archive http://papa-bear.com/Wuffara.

[6] Darryl Jones, *Horror: A Thematic History in Fiction and Film*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002. p 85.

[7] Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*. London and New York: Routledge, 1992. p188.

[8] Camille Bacon-Smith, *Enterprising Women: Television Fandom and the Creation of Popular Myth*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1992.

[9] Esther Saxey, "Staking a Claim – The Series and Its Slash Fiction." Roz Kaveney, Ed. R*eading the Vampire Slayer: An Unofficial Critical Companion to Buffy and Angel*. London and New York: Tauris Parke, 2001.

[10] Sam Leith, "How I Wreaked Havoc in the Elf Kingdom." *The Daily Telegraph*, 03/01/04.

[11] Joss Whedon, The Bronze VIP Posting Board May 6th, 2000. Archived: BuffyGuide. com http://www.buffyguide.com/extras/josswt.shtml.

[12] Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilisation: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*. 1961. Trans. Richard Howard. London and New York: Vintage Books, 1988. p 210.

[13] Thomas Hibbs, "Buffy the Vampire Slayer as Feminist Noir." James B. South. Ed. *Buffy the Vampire Slayer and Philosophy: Fear and Trembling in Sunnydale*. Chicago and La Salle, Illinois: Open Court, 2003. p 57.

[14] Chris Lee, "Safe Word." Character Pairings: Buffy/Angel. Published: 10/01/04. Rated: NC-17, BDSM. Archived: the "Hardcore" section of Morbid Love – The Darker Side of Buffy and Angel http://www.euphoriq.org/love/archive.

[15] Amy, "Switch." Character Pairings: Lilah/Faith. Published: no date. Rated: NC-17, BDSM. Archived: Innergeekdom.net (a general fan-fic site) http://innergeekdom.net/Fic/Angel.htm.

[16] Ozmandayus, "Ferocious Intent." Character Pairings: Faith/Angel. Published: 2003. Rated: NC-17, BDSM. Archived: The Mystic Muse (a general BtVS and AtS fan-fiction site) http://mysticmuse.net.

[17] Atara, "Chocolate and Chains." Character Pairings: Spike/Giles. Published: September 2000. Rated: NC-17, mild BDSM. Archived: the "Buffy the Vampire Slayer" section of Powerplays – Fanfic With a Kinky Edge (a general kink-fic site) http://atarastein.tripod.com/index.htm.

[18] This is clearly established in "Sanctuary" (Angel 1019), when Angel and Buffy face off over Faith and Angel says, "... in case you've forgotten, you're a little bit stronger than I am."

[19] Whips and Chains (a women-on-top Buffyverse het site, with some slash) http://www.geocities.com/whipsandchainsbtvs.

[20] Harpy, "Common Enemy." Character Pairings: Angelus/Buffy/Faith. Published: no date. Rated: NC-17, BDSM. Archived: All Angelus (an Angelus site) under "Buffy: Angsty" http://www.geocities.com/allangelusfic.

[21] K. J (Katherine Jay) Draft, "Tooth and Nail." Character Pairings Buffy/Spike. Published: January 2002. Rated: NC-17, BDSM. Archived: Nautibitz.com (a personal Buffyverse fan- fic site, mostly NC-17) http://www.nautibitz.com/kj/fiction.html.

[22] Mint Witch, "No Angel." Character Pairings: Spike/Buffy. Published: no date. Rated:

NC- 17, Non-Con. Archived: Mint Witch's BtVS Fan-Fiction www.the-sandlot.com/mintwitch/mwfic.html.

[23] The show's "out" gay relationships, between Willow and Tara and later Willow and Kennedy, are not situated within the BDSM canonical imaginary. Lesbians are traditionally coded as "deviant" in the horror genre, so this omission, subversive in its own way, is clearly a deliberate stratagem.

[24] "I share Michel [Foucault]'s horror of those who call themselves marginal: the romanticism of madness, of delinquency, of perversion, of drugs... But lines of flight, which is to say assemblages of desire, are not created by marginal elements for me." Giles Deleuze, *Desire and Pleasure*. 1977. Trans Melissa McMahon. 1997 http://www.arts.monash.edu.au/visarts/globe/issue5/delfou.html (Paragraph F).

[25] Mistress Kitten Fantastico, http://www.alia.customer.netspace.net/au/kitten.htm.

This site is maintained by Chris Cook. It is on the basis of discussions amongst beta readers on other related Buffyverse websites, such as Mystic Muse, where Chris is referred to as "he," that I assign Chris a male gender in this paper.

Arwen Spicer

"It's Bloody Brilliant!"
The Undermining of Metanarrative Feminism
in the Season Seven Arc Narrative of *Buffy*

[1] "Chosen" (7022), the final episode of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, disturbs me more than any other *Buffy* episode. Though "Chosen" has generally been highly acclaimed, I see it as exemplifying elements about the Season Seven plot arc which provoke concern. Joss Whedon has described the message of Season Seven as "almost didactic in its clarity" (*Angel* News). I agree that the show's endorsement of spreading a communal female empowerment from Buffy to the symbolic "Slayers" everywhere is hard to miss. It is also an important and valid message. What troubles me is that this "didactically clear" metanarrative we are told to accept is at odds with crucial aspects of the narrative we see enacted. In this essay, I use the term "metanarrative" to denote the show's metaphorical message and the term "narrative" to describe the story performed on-screen, including not only the basic plot but rhetorical choices such as camera angles or the specific wording of lines. I argue that, ultimately, the metanarrative's feminist discourse of participatory, multivocal empowerment is undermined by the narrative's depiction of a hierarchical, largely univocal community that characterizes Buffy's strategy for fighting the First Evil as "brilliant" though, in fact, it is tactically absurd. This characterization is only made possible by the final episode's rejection of an open exchange of perspectives. Ultimately, Season Seven sabotages its own claims to a feminist deconstruction of patriarchal authority by refusing the feminist multivocality it supposedly supports.

[2] From its inception, *Buffy*'s relationship to patriarchal structures of hierarchy has been ambivalent. On the one hand, the show challenges such structures by enacting a non-hierarchical model of community in which all participants are viewed as uniquely valuable, producing what Zeo-Jane Playdon aptly calls a "contingent, contextualized, functional form of participative management" (138). In such a model, each individual subjectivity has worth. Even in "Chosen," this theme is evident. Rhonda Wilcox observes, for instance, that in the episode's (and series's) final scene, Buffy does not answer Faith's question about how it feels to share her Slayer power. "Buffy's lack of an answer," Wilcox argues, "means that *we* get to answer the question" (Par. 31). Just as all the Scoobies' viewpoints matter, so do ours.

[3] At the same time, the show places Buffy herself in the traditionally masculine role of superior hero, the Chosen One. "In Warrior Heroes: Buffy the Vampire Slayer and Beowulf," David Fritts offers a fine redaction of scholarly criticism that has situated Buffy in the heroic

tradition, citing in particular the work of Laurel Bowman, Rhonda Wilcox, and Nancy Holder in placing Buffy within Joseph Campbell's paradigm of the hero's journey (2-3). The placement of a woman in this role inverts the image of the patriarchal hero without substantially challenging the legitimacy of this paradigm of heroism per se. These two modes of feminist discourse--one which deconstructs patriarchal hierarchy, one which retains but inverts it--need not be fully reconcilable or mutually exclusive to do valuable feminist work. Typically, Buffy is presented as the superior hero who is, nonetheless, most heroic when her actions are supported by the individual talents of her companions. Consider just a few examples from the climactic battles of various seasons. In Season One, Buffy single-handedly slays the Master only after being restored to life by Xander's CPR ("Prophecy Girl" 1012). In Season Four, she defeats the cyborg Adam in single combat--but strengthened by the power of the First Slayer and the Scoobies, conferred upon her by a spell ("Primeval" 4021). In Season Five, Buffy saves the world at the cost of her life, after all her companions have materially contributed their special skills and knowledge to defeating the god, Glory ("The Gift" 5022). In these cases, as in many others, the tension between the discourse of solitary heroism and the discourse of participatory community is skillfully negotiated if not finally resolved.

[4] The Season Seven finale seems to continue this negotiation. Here, Buffy heroically leads an army whose warriors all contribute to saving the world from the First Evil. But while the narrative superficially follows the typical *Buffy* paradigm, its negotiation between heroic leadership and communal empowerment is inadequate. Indeed, in the Season Seven arc, the tension between these two discursive modes escalates into open contradiction. While the metanarrative announces that it is deconstructing the discourse of hierarchical superiority via the sharing of power among multiple Slayers, the narrative brings about this announced deconstruction by erasing legitimate challenges to Buffy's leadership. Far from sharing power with other characters, this erasure silences them, presuming that they have few to no significant insights to contribute. This silencing is enacted through a refusal of dialogic communication.

[5] In "Discourse in the Novel," Mikhail Bakhtin argues that multivocality "represents that co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions between present and past, between differing epochs of the past, between different socio-ideological groups in the present, between tendencies, schools, circles, and so forth [. . .]" (291). Granting expression to multiple discourses through the dialogic interaction of different voices highlights the complexity and ambiguity inherent in human culture and, in so doing, works against the consolidation of power around a single dominant discourse endorsed as "correct." Now, to the extent that *Buffy* is a series that has a precise ideological mission--the empowerment of women-- ideological ambiguity has never been its aim (Whedon, *Interview* 6). Yet much of the model of feminist empowerment *Buffy* espouses emphasizes the complex, heteroglot nature of human society. The first episode of the series, for instance, shows Buffy and Giles debating whether Buffy has a duty to continue as the Slayer: Giles argues that the world needs her; Buffy argues that she deserves a normal life ("Welcome to the Hellmouth" 1001). These views are, to some extent, incommensurate, yet each has validity.

[6] While such multivocality occasions conflict, it is, nonetheless, a source of positive power. Numerous critical essays have highlighted the show's rejection of a univocal, authoritarian model of society. Brian Wall and Michael Zryd contend that in *Buffy*, "Heroism and the powers of 'good' are consistently presented in non-monumental and anti-hierarchical forms" (59). The dialogic dimension of this anti-hierarchal discourse is evident, for example, in the Season Seven episode "Get It Done" (7015), in which a conflicted conversation among

Willow, Xander, Anya, Dawn, Principal Wood, and Kennedy grows into a problem-solving session that generates a strategy for rescuing Buffy from the alternate dimension where she is trapped. Because the scene is an excellent example of dialogism in action, I will quote it at length. Xander starts by suggesting that they look for help from the spell book they used to open the interdimensional portal through which Buffy has vanished:

XANDER. Dawnie, what's the book say?

DAWN. Not much. Once Buffy left, it got a little tougher to read. (holds up the book to show that it is now blank)

WILLOW. Oh. (walks out of the room to the kitchen; the others follow)

KENNEDY. It's okay. We'll just start with what we know, and take it from there.

XANDER. Great, so far we know Jack about squat. Let's go from there.

KENNEDY. You've got the magic, use it.

WILLOW. I-I-I don't even know what magic to use.

KENNEDY. Why not just try all thirty-two flavors. Worst thing that happens is you go brunette.

WILLOW. (grabs first-aid kit from kitchen cabinet) That's not the worst thing that can happen. (attends to Kennedy's wounded hand)

ANYA. She's right. And you know we have a choice. We can risk Willow's life and the rest of our lives to get Buffy back, or we leave her out there.

PRINCIPAL WOOD. If we play it safe back here, Buffy could stay lost.

ANYA. You missed her "everyone sucks but me" speech. If she's so superior, let her find her own way back.

XANDER. Anya, the First [Evil] is already up and running. Every second that Buffy's not here is an opportunity for it to show up and rip us to pieces.

DAWN. Willow, how would you get Buffy back?

WILLOW. That's what I'm saying--I don't even know.

DAWN. Okay, but if another witch was to do it, where would she start?

WILLOW. Uh, physics, principles, basic laws…

DAWN. Such as?

WILLOW. Uh, conservation of energies. You can't really create or destroy anything, only transfer.

(Anya scoffs.)

DAWN. I'm sorry, are you helping?

ANYA. No, but at least I'm not galloping off in the wrong direction.

WILLOW. Magic works off physics.

ANYA. Not without a catalyst. If you're talking about transferring energies, you need some kind of conduit.

WILLOW. Like a-a Kraken's tooth.

ANYA. Yeah, skin of Draconis, um, ground up Baltic stones, something…

DAWN. Okay. Good.

No single person in this discussion has all the answers. Indeed, some suggestions are counter-productive. Anya is petulant, almost ready to leave Buffy to her fate; Kennedy is dangerously naive in her belief that throwing "all thirty-two flavors" of magic at the problem will solve it; Willow is initially self-defeatist, emphasizing the difficulties involved in using her magic. Other members of the group seem to have little to contribute: Dawn, Xander, and Principal Wood know next to nothing about magic. But in an openly dialogic forum, even the group's contrasting failings turn into strengths. Kennedy's over-enthusiasm for Willow's power helps to counteract Willow's self-doubt, just as Willow's doubt brings necessary caution to Kennedy's enthusiasm. Even Anya's anger proves productive insofar as it prompts her to assert that Willow is "galloping off in the wrong direction" and offer her own expertise. By pooling their magical knowledge, Willow and Anya are able to lay the basis for a plan to rescue Buffy. Even the participants who have little expert knowledge contribute productively. Wood and Xander are voices of common sense, Wood observing that "playing it safe" will not get Buffy back and Xander adding that they must get Buffy back--Anya's anger not withstanding--because they need her to help fight the First Evil. Dawn and Kennedy serve as motivating optimists, Kennedy voicing her faith in Willow's power, Dawn using a series of questions to prompt the more knowledgeable members of the group to push their thinking further. In the space of a minute or two, the group has gone from knowing "Jack about squat" to developing a systematic and sensible plan for retrieving

Buffy. The diversity of their voices has led them to a course of action more confident, careful, and precise than any of them could have achieved alone.

[7] Despite such strong dialogic moments, however, Season Seven's central arc implicitly advocates a community in which univocality is suffcient. Buffy is the inspired leader at the head of an army of potential Slayers assembled to defeat First Evil's army of Uber-vampires and save the Slayer line from extermination. Buffy's final plan of attack requires Willow to work a spell that will transform all of the Potentials into activated Slayers. This Slayer army will, then, attack the Uber-vamps in the Hellmouth while the other Scoobies form a back-up force. Two advantages will aid in the struggle: a powerful scythe designed as a weapon for Slayers and an amulet, presented to Buffy by Angel on the eve of the apocalyptic battle, which will confer great power on a superhuman, ensouled being, in this case, Spike. [1]

[8] During the battle, the activated Slayers fight the Uber-vamps with some success until the amulet activates, ultimately incinerating all the Uber-vamps as well as Spike. [2] The survivors flee, barely outracing the collapse of the Hellmouth and Sunnydale. We are left with the Scoobies ranged around the front-and-center figure of Buffy, Dawn asking her, "What are we gonna do now?" ("Chosen"). The implication of this final scene is that Buffy's epiphanous realization that all the potential Slayers must be activated has saved the world.

[9] Dennis Showalter succinctly encapsulates this view: "In 'Chosen,' the success of Willow's empowering spell makes the difference. Spike's charm may have more spectacular results, but at the end he tells Buffy the new slayers have won and he is just cleaning up" (14). Significantly, however, Showalter adds, "If [Spike's avowal] is a lie, then it is a 'noble lie' in Plato's sense, and we may let it so stand!" (14). This amendment suggests that Showalter has spotted the problem with this scenario. There is no visual evidence that Spike's sacrifice constitutes "just cleaning up." The Uber-vamp hoards still appear active and innumerable right up to the activation of the amulet. [3] If the "clean-up" argument is a "noble lie," however, either on the part of Spike or Whedon, it is one we must not let stand. To do so runs the risk of tacitly sanctioning an undermining of the very power-sharing Whedon advocates.

[10] In fact, it is significant that Buffy's strategy has not saved the world. Buffy herself acknowledges that it is Spike who has collapsed the Hellmouth, eliminating the Uber-vamps ("Chosen"). Certainly, Buffy's leadership enables his triumph insofar as she consistently advocates his inclusion in her "army." Even in her most isolated moments, Buffy never imagines that she can defeat the First Evil alone. To her credit, it is fundamental to her thought processes that everyone willing to fight by her side must be allowed to do so. Anyone may have a vital role to play. She recognizes that Spike is one of the strongest fighters under her command, and for this reason, she defends his presence over the protests of Giles and Wood, among others.

[11] But though Buffy considers a Spike a powerful fighter, she never presents him as the cornerstone of her strategy. The amulet makes Spike's presence more important but not central to the plan. Consider that just as the amulet activates, Spike starts to say, "Whatever this thing does, I think it's--" and is cut off ("Chosen"). The line indicates that none of them knows exactly what the amulet will do; therefore, they have no reason to base the plan definitively around it. One could argue that the plan itself involves enabling all fighters to participate with the understanding that any one of them may end up playing a pivotal role. Buffy should, indeed, be lauded for her awareness of the potential importance of all participants. Many commentators have pointed out, for example, that though Spike and the amulet ultimately close the Hellmouth, it is the Slayers and their companions who fend off the Uber-vamps long enough for the amulet to activate. Even though Buffy never

characterizes the use of the Slayers as a tactic for "buying time" for the amulet, she does deserve credit for her adherence to the premise that all fighters can be significant. But to say that a basic understanding that any individual may contribute in unexpected ways constitutes a strategy for defeating the First Evil is generous, to say the least. In the plot line of Season Three, for instance, such a "strategy" would entail doing nothing more than sending all of Sunnydale High into hand-to-hand combat with the Mayor and his minions in the hopes something will happen that will enable Buffy and her companions to defeat him. While in Season Seven, Buffy's initial strategy does, indeed, amount to little more than hurling her army at the First Evil's hoards in just this manner, her definitive solution is more specific. As Showalter suggests, her strategy is not to wait for Spike's amulet to activate but to rely on the activation of the potential Slayers itself to defeat the First Evil's army.

[12] If the amulet were not pivotal--if it were, for example, simply another powerful weapon as the scythe is for Buffy--Buffy's plan would likely have failed. In the vision that warns her of the approaching Uber-vamp hoards, their numbers are incalculable, blurring into the distance ("Get It Done"). Buffy is ordering her thirty-odd Slayers to fight a force which, though it might merely consist of a few thousands, might just as easily be a million strong, a possibility which a responsible leader has an obligation to prepare for. If the First Evil's army did consist of only several thousand, Buffy's dedicated Slayers might, with courage, strength, and luck, defeat it. If the First Evil's army consisted of millions, they almost certainly could not. Buffy's strategy for defeating the Uber-vamps, therefore, is based on nothing more than hope that their numbers will be relatively small, a hope that persists, if anything, against evidence to the contrary.

[13] Some contend that while Buffy's plan is highly problematic, it is the only strategy available to deploy against the First Evil, a being about whom there is little extant information on the basis of which to form a better plan. It is not clear, however, that better alternatives have been exhausted. In the episode "Show Time" (7011), for instance, Beljoxa's Eye hints that the Slayer is the root cause of the First Evil's rampage. Yet this plot line is dropped without any sign that Giles and Anya even report this information to the other Scoobies, to say nothing of the Scoobies exploring its implications for understanding, and thus productively combating, the First. Moreover, the "war on Evil" idea is not presented as a poor strategy that is, nonetheless, the only one available. No one strongly questions this strategy. Nor does anyone ask if other possibilities exist, even if only to be told that they do not. Instead, Buffy's final plan is presented as not only viable but, in Giles's words, "brilliant" ("Chosen"), a point to which I will return.

[14] A question crucial to evaluating the narrative's treatment of this strategy as "brilliant" is the discursive status of tactical logic in the series as a whole. How concerned should we be with rational planning in a universe as fantastic as the Buffyverse? If Buffy's plan is absurd, isn't the core idea of a Vampire Slayer equally absurd? Certainly, to appreciate *Buffy*, we must accept the premises of the show, including Vampire Slayers, demons, and magic. Yet these premises carry their own internal consistency, by which the show typically abides. Buffy, for instance, cannot fly--unless some sort of spell is involved. Just as we must accept *Buffy*'s premises, we have some obligation to judge the show according to its own underlying philosophy. There is no doubt that this philosophy prizes intuitive understanding above logical reasoning. Buffy's instinctive sense of the "right thing to do" almost always triumphs over conventional explanations of why her idea is "crazy." At the same time, the series does not--and should not--value intuition *to the exclusion* of logical reasoning. Such a position would argue that an inspired person's hunch will always be correct regardless of external evidence to the contrary. *Buffy* does not espouse such a view. If it did, it would not

emphasize the importance of research, the accumulation of information, in fighting evil. Yet the library--a symbolic and literal bastion of research--is a central location for strategizing throughout the first three seasons of the show.

[15] Moreover, cogent reasoning is a vital element in the climactic world-saving strategies of every season except Season Seven. In Season One, Buffy fights the Master. This makes sense: he is a vampire, she a Vampire Slayer, and even though she must confront a prophecy that foretells her death, she remains the most qualified person in Sunnydale to face this battle. In Season Two, the Whistler reveals that Angel(us)'s blood must be used to close Acathla's vortex into Hell. Again, Buffy the Vampire Slayer is the logical choice to slay the vampire whose blood must be shed. Season Three's finale is superficially the most like Season Seven's: in Season Three, Buffy leads an "army" of Sunnydale High graduates into battle against the demonic Mayor and his minions. The crucial difference between Season Seven's strategy and Season Three's, however, is that Season Three's is basically reasonable. Research reveals that the heretofore indestructible Mayor will become mortal after he ascends to full demon form. The question, then, is how to slay the demon. The answer is to use his "weakness," his affection for Faith, to lure him into a trap in which a bomb will kill him. The "army," meanwhile, occupies the Mayor's minions long enough for the core plan to be put into effect. The strategy is feasible and its success believable. In Season Four, Buffy is faced with the demon-robot hybrid, Adam, an adversary stronger than she is. Buffy and her friends overcome this disadvantage by casting a spell that allows her to absorb the power of the Scoobies and the First Slayer. As this super-entity, she is stronger than Adam and can defeat him. Again, within the premises of the Buffyverse, this plan is plausible. Season Five once again pits Buffy against a foe physically more powerful than she is, this time, the god, Glory. The Scoobies defeat Glory by pooling all of their available assets, ranging from the Buffybot to Xander's wrecking ball. The world, however, cannot be saved until the interdimensional portal opened by Dawn's blood is closed. Here is a prime example of Buffy's intuition at work. Unable to accept that she must either kill Dawn or let the world end, Buffy sacrifices herself to close the portal instead. She dies; the world is saved. Buffy assuredly makes an inuitive leap when she conjectures that because Dawn was made from her, her blood can close the portal as effectively as Dawn's. And yet, this leap of intuition, too, is reasonable: since Dawn *was* made from Buffy, it seems plausible that their blood has similar qualities. And even if Buffy's supposition had been wrong, nothing would be lost but her own life. The remaining Scoobies would presumably have to sacrifice Dawn; the world could still be saved. All in all, Buffy's gamble leaves relatively little to lose and plausibly much to gain. Season Six is the only season in which averting the apocalypse is not intended to illustrate Buffy's heroism. In this season, it is not Buffy but Xander whose love convinces Willow to abandon her scheme to destroy the world. Here again, Xander's strategy is plausible. He is Willow's best friend, the most apt individual to appeal to her better nature. In all of these cases, one could uncover logical inconsistencies or omissions. Just as surely, in all these cases, the core strategies for defeating the Big Bads are reasonable within the internal logic of the Buffyverse.

[16] Season Seven's strategy is not. We are given no reason to believe that the activated Slayers could plausibly defeat a large army of Uber-vamps. Though we accept that a Slayer has super-strength, we also know that Slayers have limits. Buffy cannot, for instance, defeat Adam or Glory solely using her own physical strength. It is true that we cannot quantify Buffy's limits. She has never yet been driven to exhaustion, but she has never had to fight non-stop for more than several hours at a time. Within the established logic of the Buffyverse, Buffy's depending on a strategy that might require her army to fight non-stop

for days--when we are given no indication that she has even tested the limits of her own endurance--seems almost suicidal.

[17] It may be countered that a Slayer's strength is linked to her confidence; therefore, when the Slayers feel assured of victory, victory is assured. That power through confidence is a theme of "Chosen" is indicated in Buffy's revelation that "We're gonna win" and Vi's pronouncement as she first feels her Slayer power: "These guys are dust." Nonetheless, there remain internal difficulties with this explanation. Taken to its extreme, it suggests that a fully confident Slayer is all-powerful, assuming a sort of Godhood against which any other force becomes negligible. The deification of Slayers, however, is not an intended theme. Empowerment can never be total in a world in which power is to be shared. But if confidence does not yield invincibility, then physical limitations still pertain. Confidence may improve one's odds of victory, but it cannot guarantee it. And since there appears to be no way of quantifying how much a certain level of confidence increases a Slayer's fighting ability, it would remain absurd for Buffy to assume that a confident fighting force of about thirty has a good chance of defeating an army minimally of thousands. It requires blind faith to conclude that such a gamble constitutes a well-developed strategy.

[18] The Mutant Enemy writers did not intend to advocate such blind faith in Buffy. On the contrary, they leave her pointedly open to criticism. By "Empty Places" (7019), her army has become so disenchanted with her self-righteous, autocratic attitude that they expel her from her own house. Buffy's ousting is part of the writers' attempt to address what Whedon calls her "separateness from the other characters" (*Angel* News), her self-imposed alienation from the people around her. In this episode, Anya criticizes Buffy on the grounds that she has illegitimately claimed the role of leader just because she is the Slayer. Anya argues that Buffy thinks she is "better" than the rest of them when really she is not ("Empty Places"). The contention that Buffy's leadership role has been assigned purely on the basis of her Slayer strength is not wholly fair: Buffy has led several successful efforts to save the world. In defeating Big Bads, her credentials are unmatched. Nonetheless, there is truth to this criticism: Buffy herself implicitly admits to a superiority complex in "Conversations with Dead People" (7007). Throughout most of Season Seven, Buffy allows this sense of her own superiority to shut her off from other people, to turn her into an autocratic "general." Her explicitly dull and preachy speeches, her avowal in "Selfless" (7005) that "I am the law," and her inability to express emotion over the loss of Xander's eye are just a few symptoms of this unhealthy isolation. Being rejected by her companions alerts Buffy to this problem. Having to listen to their divergent voices gives her an impetus to reconnect with the people around her. As a crisis that motivates her to reevaluate her attitude, Buffy's ousting serves its metanarrative purpose: it "addresses her separateness from the other characters." It does so by re-endorsing the show's long-standing commitment to dialogic multivocality.

[19] Indeed, a complex discourse about multivocality begins to unfold as Faith temporarily takes over Buffy's leadership role. In contrast to Buffy's univocal rule, Faith's leadership begins in dialogue. Voices, such as Amanda's, Caridad's, and Vi's, that have hitherto been completely excluded from the strategizing, are suddenly freed to participate. Their participation, however, does not accomplish much. The initial dialogue of Faith's army is chaotic and inconclusive, and soon, Faith reasserts the dominance of the general's voice: "I'm your leader, which means I go first, and I make the rules, and the rest of you follow after me." ("Touched" 7020). Nonetheless, Faith remains at least marginally more open than Buffy to a participatory community structure. The chief difference between Faith's leadership and Buffy's is that Faith is more personable; she takes others' feelings into account. As she observes, she is "not the one who's been on your asses all this time" ("Touched"). Because

she appears friendlier and somewhat more open to suggestions than Buffy, she re-energizes the Potentials; they do not resent following her as they did Buffy. Nonetheless, in "Touched," it is Faith's plan to assault the First's minions that leads the Potentials into a trap. Conversely, Buffy's supposition that Caleb is protecting something is correct: she successfully claims the scythe. Flushed with this success, Buffy is soon restored to her position as leader.

[20] What is the metanarrative behind Faith's failed tenure as leader? Is the message that Buffy is superior to Faith? No, it is not. When Buffy returns, Amanda voices a fear that Faith's followers have been "punished" for rejecting Buffy ("End of Days" 7021). Buffy refuses this reasoning, telling the Potentials, "You guys, it was a trap. It's not her fault. That could've just as easily happened to me" ("End of Days"). She reiterates this view to Faith herself: "People die. You lead them into battle, they're gonna die. It doesn't matter how ready you are or how smart you are. War is about death. Needless, stupid death" ("End of Days"). Buffy herself asserts that she is not categorically a better person or even a better leader than Faith. Both have made tactical mistakes. Both have led innocents to their deaths. Speaking with Faith, Buffy asks semi-rhetorically whether it matters which of them is "in charge" ("End of Days"). What does matter, the metanarrative suggests, is accomplishing the task at hand, not setting one absolute leader over another. When Buffy leads the army in "Chosen," she leads because she has--supposedly--developed an inspired plan. If Faith had developed it, Faith would lead. Leadership should be based on what one can do and how one does it, not on an abstract evaluation of whether or not one is "superior."

[21] It seems ironic that this journey toward a less hierarchical conception of leadership is illustrated via a breakdown, rather than a restoration, of multivocal communication. Buffy is ousted for her intransigent univocality. Yet Faith's abortive attempt to allow more dialogue fails. But it would be reading too much into Faith's dialogues with the Potentials to interpret them as a metanarrative rejection of dialogism as a paradigm for an empowered community. It is the dialogic communication of conflicting views that causes Buffy to be unseated as general. It is this rejection, in turn, that spurs one of Buffy's most profound revelations: that she cannot be an autocratic leader; she must interact with others as equals. In this sense, dialogue is Buffy's salvation. What, then, is the significance of the failure of dialogic communication for Faith's leadership? Perhaps it is an illustration that there are no facile answers to the threat posed by the First Evil. If autocracy is unacceptable, dialogue is no panacea: it is convoluted, messy, far from foolproof as a means of strategizing. Diverse voices can become a cacophony. The dialogic confusion Faith faces dramatically enacts the difficulty of achieving consensus in any complex issue.

[22] This is precisely why dialogic communication cannot be used to discuss Buffy's Slayer activation strategy. Just as open dialogue exposes the error in Buffy's autocratic isolation, so would it expose the tactical absurdity of her final plan. Season Seven, unlike any other Buffy season, is ultimately forced to reject a dialogic rhetoric in order to stay "on message." It is true that not every apocalypse in *Buffy* is addressed dialogically. In Season One, for example, Buffy knocks Giles unconscious rather than waste time explaining to him why she must face the Master. In this case, however, Buffy's strategy demands no dialogic critique to highlight its unfeasibility. Buffy can refuse to debate with Giles in Season One because it is plain that she is correct: she is the plausible choice to fight the Master. I have already argued that Seasons One through Six depict basically reasonable strategies for averting the apocalypse. In Seasons Three, Four and Five, these plans emerge directly out of group discussions in which diverse voices materially participate. In Season Three, it is Wesley, the

inept and craven representative of the Watchers' suspect power, who tells Buffy that Faith is the weakness she must exploit in the Mayor. In Season Four, Everyman Xander's flippant remark that they need a combination of Buffy, Giles, and Willow sparks Giles's idea to literally unite their powers. In Season Five, though Buffy herself refuses to discuss the possibility that Dawn must be killed, her intransigence is immediately--and appropriately--challenged by Giles, who proclaims that "we bloody well are" going to discuss sacrificing Dawn ("The Gift"). Here, it is misfit Anya who, then, steps in to steer the Scoobies away from bickering over Dawn and toward a sensible plan to assail Glory before she can hurt Dawn. While this plan fails to preempt the use of Dawn's blood, it is instrumental in defeating Glory herself. In Season Seven alone, the basic reasoning that would make the climactic plan plausible within the Buffyverse is missing. But since the metanarrative requires the Slayer activation, open dialogue that would engage with this lack must be thwarted.

[23] Instead, the Scoobies' only round-table discussion of Buffy's plan endorses her insight by suggesting that her core companions, whose courage and good sense we generally respect, can find little to say against it. The discussion, in its entirety, runs as follows:

BUFFY. What do you think?

XANDER. That depends. Are you in any way kidding?

BUFFY. You don't think it's a good idea?

FAITH. It's pretty radical, B.

GILES. It's a lot more than that. Buffy, what you said--it flies in the face of everything we've ever. . . of what every generation has done in the fight against evil. (beat) I think it's bloody brilliant.

BUFFY. (smiles) You mean that.

GILES. If you want my opinion.

BUFFY. Really do.

WILLOW. Whoa, hey! Not to poop on the party here, but I'm the guy who's going to have to pull this thing off.

FAITH. It's beaucoup d'mojo.

WILLOW. This goes beyond anything I've ever done. It's a total loss of control and not in a nice, wholesome, "my girlfriend has a pierced tongue" kind of way.

BUFFY. I wouldn't ask if I didn't think you could do it.

WILLOW. I'm not sure I'm stable enough.

GILES. You can do this, Willow. We'll get the coven on the line and we'll find out how they can help.

DAWN. (realizes) Oh! Pierced tongue.

BUFFY. (urgent to Giles) Dawn needs to do a research thing.

GILES. (to Dawn) Yes, you do.

(Dawn stands up and heads for the door)

DAWN. It's cool. Watcher Junior to the library.

GILES. (to Buffy) I'll go dig up my sources. Quite literally, actually. There are one or two people I have to speak to who are dead.

ANYA. (to Xander) Come on. Let's go assemble the cannon fodder.

XANDER. That's not what we're calling them, sweetie.

ANYA. Not to their faces. What am I--insensitive? ("Chosen")

This scene offers almost no dialogic exchange of ideas. To her credit, Buffy attempts to prompt dialogue. She "really does want to know" what her friends think of her Slayer activation plan, so much so that her first four lines do nothing but solicit their feedback. That feedback, however, is meager. Xander only asks whether she is serious. Once it has been established that she is, we never hear what he thinks but can assume that his silence indicates approval. Faith does nothing but state twice that the plan is rather extreme: a radical idea requiring powerful magic. Whether or not she thinks this is a good thing is not specified, though there is no suggestion in her tone or bearing that she is opposed. Dawn has nothing of value to contribute beyond the silence of her implied agreement; her two lines relate only to Kennedy's erotically pierced tongue. Her research task is presented as a joke about protecting her sexual innocence, not as an activity of use to the group. In the only example of genuine dialogism in the scene, Willow raises understandable concerns about whether using a spell as powerful as the Slayer activation will release her "dark side." Buffy and Giles quickly address these concerns. Whether or not they do so adequately is a subject for another essay; at least, it is clear that the episode attempts to deal with this question. Anya, Buffy's most outspoken detractor throughout Season Seven, is notably silent during the discussion, speaking up only at the end, after the plan has been adopted, to call the Potentials "cannon fodder," an expression that implies that she has reservations about the plan. Why she fails to voice them is not clear.

[24] It is Giles who is left to speak on behalf of Xander, Faith, and Dawn, whose failure to voice an overt opinion must be read as tacit support. Giles hails Buffy's plan as "bloody brilliant" apparently because "it flies in the face of everything [. . .] every generation has done in the fight against evil." He does not explain why this equates with brilliance. There is no necessary connection between transgression and brilliance: to build a moon rocket without concern for Newtonian physics would fly in the face of everything every space program has ever done. This doesn't make it brilliant. In fact, the text offers no concrete explanation for why we should consider this plan brilliant or even adequate.

[25] Whedon has commented that in "Chosen" he did not have enough airtime to render the story in depth (Wilcox Par. 27). If he had not been working under these time constraints, it is entirely possible that the episode would have included more discussion of the Slayer activation. It is not, however, time constraints alone that prevent productive dialogue. If sharing contrasting viewpoints had been a significant aim, it would have been possible, for instance, to omit the banter about Kennedy's pierced tongue in favor of deeper discussion of Buffy's plan, even if this dialogue could only briefly suggest that more discussion must occur behind the scenes. Instead, the narrative's refusal of dialogue continues persistently throughout the episode. In the next scene, Buffy begins a lengthy speech to the Potentials, which ends with her telling them, "So here's the part where you make a choice" ("Chosen"). Ironically, we never see or hear them make a choice. As Buffy speaks, the Potentials watch her attentively like children in a schoolroom. Their visual representation suggests that they are receiving wisdom, not participating in its construction. At intervals throughout the episode, Buffy's speech on the virtues of the Slayer activation continues as a voice over. There is no sign of any Potential offering an opinion during any part of this exposition. The nominal dialogue of the Scoobies' discussion gives way to the literal monologue of Buffy's oratory.

[26] The only Potential to comment on the plan before it has been put into action is Kennedy. Assuring Willow that Buffy's faith in her is well-placed, Kennedy asserts, "Hey, I'm the first one to call [Buffy] out when she's not making sense" ("Chosen"). This statement has the effect of circumventing any rigorous examination Buffy's plan. The implication is that if Kennedy thinks Buffy is right, Buffy must be right because if Buffy were wrong, surely Kennedy of all people would say so. It is true that Kennedy is willing to question Buffy. In fact, she is the only one to mention any of the fundamental flaws in the overarching "war on Evil" strategy. She does so in "Bring on the Night" (7010), voicing a concern that hiding the Potentials under the proverbial nose of the being that is trying to kill them is a suspect strategy:

KENNEDY. And if this thing is the root of all evil, isn't the Hellmouth its number one vacation spot? I mean, don't you think we should be hiding our asses on the other side of the globe?

ANNABELLE. Kennedy!

BUFFY. No, she's not wrong. We need more muscle. That's why we need to find Spike.

Kennedy makes an excellent point, which is never addressed. For while having Spike's "muscle" to protect the Potentials may be better than not having it, this is hardly an answer

to Kennedy's objection that bringing the Potentials to the First Evil's doorstep does not make self-evident sense. Buffy concedes that Kennedy is "not wrong" but then ignores her concern. Kennedy herself never voices it again. Yet this abortive attempt at dialogic discussion of the core strategy to defeat the First Evil is perhaps the most cogent the season offers.

[27] It does not take a great deal of investigation to expose questionable assumptions in Buffy's strategy. Is incorporeal evil best opposed by a physical army? Can that army-- however strong and courageous its soldiers--be expected to defeat an enemy force whose maximum possible number they cannot even guesstimate? These are obvious questions. But such questions are never asked. This omission devalues the individuality of the various Scoobies. In order to achieve consensus on Buffy's plan, most of the Scoobies must be behave in manner that is, at least to some extent, out of character. One could argue that all the participants in the discussion of the Slayer activation, including Buffy, are acting out of character simply in their inability to see the flaws in the plan: usually, they are all more perceptive than this. In addition to this basic lapse in characterization, other, more specific problems are evident. Some of these problems are relatively minor. Dawn's silence is not in keeping with the talkative teenager who spurs the action in "Get It Done." Xander's essentially unquestioning approval is peculiar in a man who recently lost an eye while following Buffy into battle and who, only three episodes before in "Empty Places," shows himself quite willing to challenge her tactics. Faith, who questions authority by instinct, also resists Buffy's plan in "Empty Places" but has no concerns to forward in "Chosen." If these responses seem somewhat unlikely, however, the reactions of Willow, Giles, and Anya are radically implausible. In "Lessons" (7001), Willow and Giles are unwilling to let a single flower remain in England by magic when its natural place is on the other side of the world. The post-Season Six magic training that Giles helps to give Willow is principally oriented around working within the natural balance of the Earth. It defies credibility for these characters that neither of them raises any question about how loosing the tremendous magic required to activate all the Potentials might affect the balance of nature. Yet Willow questions only whether she herself can safely wield such magic, and Giles's response is unambivalently enthusiastic. Finally, it is impossible to credit that Anya, who by her own admission in "Empty Places" is not Buffy's friend and who has never been known for restraining her criticism, should offer no critique at all of Buffy's strategy. Indeed, the only major characters whose unquestioning acceptance of this plan is entirely in character are Spike and Andrew. Since Season Five, Spike has considered it a sign of his love for Buffy to stand by side her without unduly examining the wisdom of her choices. In Season Seven, Andrew largely allows Buffy to replace Warren as the leader whom he, too, will follow without question. Buffy's plan to "share the power" is enabled by an effacement of the individual personhood of all but these two of her close companions. When the Scoobies' natural predispositions would challenge the metanarrative's need to attain the Slayer activation, their natural predispositions must be suppressed.

[28] Whedon himself addresses this de-emphasis on characterization in response to a question from IGN Filmforce on fan discontent with the Potentials:

IGNFF INTERVIEWER. It seemed the introduction of the potentials--and here's a dozen potentials and new characters accompanying them--that it diluted the core group that we care about.

WHEDON. Yeah, I think it did, and I had to get to that ending. (9)

For Whedon, the final theme of the Slayer activation was the goal that could not be sacrificed even though retaining it had a negative impact on other aspects of the season. Ironically, the means the writers adopted to attain their final message contradict that message. In order to achieve the metaphor of "sharing power," the participatory power of every voice but Buffy's is gutted. The problem is that being denied the free expression of one's individual identity is not empowering. Being silenced is not empowering.

[29] Some object that this disjunction between the metaphor of power-sharing and a rhetoric that largely denies the sharing of power is no more than an oversight. Of the numerous fan responses I have encountered, not one failed to grasp Season Seven's metanarrative message of feminist empowerment. Isn't *Buffy*, then, fulfilling its ideological purpose? If no character notices that Buffy's plan is questionable, isn't that just a plot loophole of the kind we learn to expect and forgive in fantasy and science fiction TV? On the contrary, the absurdity of Buffy's plan cannot be excused as a mere plot oversight because it is only by the refusal of the most basic, critical discussion among the characters that such an unfeasible plan can go unchallenged. And yet regard for such basic multivocality is central to the dissemination of power the metanarrative advocates.

[30] Writing at the beginning of Season Seven, David Lavery observes that "Buffy's power source is narrative" (Par. 1). Few *Buffy* fans or scholars would disagree. Throughout its seven seasons, *Buffy* has made an astounding contribution to the dissemination of a sophisticated feminist ideology through a commitment to morally complicated, multivocal storytelling. It has done, indeed, precisely what its Season Seven metanarrative claims. But as soon as the show demands that we listen to its message at the expense of its story, it begins to lose this claim to cultural edification. A story of feminist empowerment that is not supported by a plausible narrative does not make a plausible case for feminist empowerment. As Buffy and Faith discover, a leader must be judged by the quality of her leadership. A narrative that endorses a feminist dissemination of power via a plot that undermines this message begins to move in the direction of a dogmatic feminism that requires the ideological support of female power regardless of how that power is used.

[31] The aim of "Chosen" is not to valorize Buffy at the expense of other characters. Indeed, in his DVD commentary on "Chosen," Whedon describes his message to *Buffy* fans as a shift away from Buffy as the central hero: "Okay, great that you've worshipped this one iconic character, but find it in yourself, everybody" ("Chosen" commentary). The Slayer activation idea, however, is so inept as a strategy that it can only be pursued by erasing other voices that would question it. Since Buffy, the protagonist, is voicing the plan, this refusal of questioning inadvertently reinscribes her in the role of unchallengeable hero. The manner of the message's delivery reflects upon both the message and the messenger. By foregrounding Buffy's voice as correct while denying other voices the right to contribute, "Chosen" subverts its own metanarrative intent, presenting Buffy as the Chosen One who must be followed without question. In her analysis of the politics of race and culture surrounding the Slayer activation, Patricia Pender invokes cultural critic Gayle Ward, who "has warned that feminist scholarship must be wary of uncritically reproducing simplistically celebratory readings of popular culture that focus on gender performance 'as a privileged site and source of political oppositionality'" (Par. 15). Buffy is deservedly a feminist icon; that should not exempt her or the series that bears her name from the same type of critical questioning Whedon's feminism persistently advocates.

[32] As I close this essay, I must state clearly what I do *not* object to. I do not object to Season Seven's message of feminist empowerment through power sharing; this message is a good one. [4] I do not object to the handling of Buffy's unhealthy separateness from other characters; the season addresses this well. I do not object that Buffy's final plan cannot be justified; given the possibilities of the Buffyverse, it probably could have been explained plausibly. I do not even object that Buffy's plan should have been presented without logical inconsistencies; fantasy TV can legitimately require a measure of suspension of disbelief even with regard to its own internal rules. What I do object to is the adherence to a univocality so persistent that the inadequacy of Buffy's tactics can pass almost completely unremarked. What I object to is the implicit--if unintentional--suggestion that when Buffy is representing the "right message," she must be correct no matter what she actually says or does. Discussing the first five seasons of the show, Wall and Zryd observe, "Buffy's relation to authority remains questioning and critical. She challenges all of the authority figures in the show [. . .]" (61). Season Seven, however, closes by presenting Buffy herself as an authority who cannot be challenged. This is a double standard. It suggests that anyone marked as a "subversive feminist" deserves unreflective allegiance. We know that this is not the message the Mutant Enemy writers were intending to convey. It is doubly unfortunate, therefore, that the Season Seven arc narrative finally subverts the show's intended message of a disseminated, multivocal, and critical female empowerment.

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Notes

[1] James South offers a powerful answer to the common criticism that, as he explains it, "the introduction of the scythe seemed pretty lamely ad hoc, or even a kind of *deus ex machina*" (19). On the contrary, South contends, "[I]t's precisely the ad hoc status of the scythe that makes it so important" (19). (The same could be said of the amulet.) For South, the scythe as an unexpected surprise exemplifies the power of the antiteleological discourse he sees at work in Season Seven. Buffy's openness to the unexpected, her ability to make use of whatever resources come her way, signifies that she is more capable, and wiser, than beings like the First Evil or Caleb who expect the world to follow a preordained system. Buffy's ability to take up the scythe--a last minute introduction--and make it fundamental to her plan is evidence of her power to think outside of the proverbial box, the same power that enables her to imagine a world with multiple Slayers.

South's reading of the antiteleological worldview of Season Seven is insightful, and on a metanarrative level, the scythe can, indeed, function exactly as he suggests. On a narrative level, however, the introduction of the scythe illustrates a weakness in Buffy's leadership. While we may certainly applaud her for making full use of the scythe when it appears, the fact that her entire plan hinges on this last-minute discovery, essential to the Slayer activation, does not speak well for her tactical skills. The rejection of teleology in the Buffyverse suggests that the advent of the scythe was not a foregone conclusion. On the contrary, to assume that some object or insight must appear at the last minute to enable victory is, in fact, to embrace a teleological worldview in which victory is assured irrespective of one's individual actions. Buffy does not assume this, but without this assumption, she remains without a feasible plan just days before the apocalyptic battle despite having had months to strategize. Certainly, the writers explicitly mark Buffy's initial leadership as inadequate. This does not explain, however, why her companions so seldom comment on her obvious tactical inadequacies. This lack of commentary exemplifies Season Seven's de-emphasis on multivocal dialogue.

[2] Spike's heroic, mystical death is essential to the plot line of Season Five of *Angel*, in which Spike returns from the dead to challenge Angel's status as the only world-saving, ensouled vampire. To an extent, therefore, the amulet in *Buffy* may be more a convenience for *Angel* than significant part of *Buffy*'s metanarrative. This would explain Spike's pointed contention that his role is merely "clean-up": in *Buffy*, the Slayers are supposed to be the principal saviors. If the disproportionate power of the amulet is largely incidental to *Buffy*'s core theme of communal empowerment, it is a dramatic illustration of the needs of the narrative conflicting with the needs of the metanarrative.

[3] Even if the staging of the scene had portrayed the Uber-vamps as being almost overrun by the time the amulet activates, this would not have validated Buffy's plan. The defeat of the Uber-vamps, in that case, would have been largely due to happenstance: their numbers would luckily have been small enough for the Slayers to defeat them. Buffy, however, has no reason to base her plan on this assumption. In fact, her vision of innumerable Uber-vamp hoards in "Get It Done" gives her ample reason to suspect that their numbers will be massive. Giles once remarked of Willow's resurrection of Buffy, "I wouldn't congratulate you if you jumped off a cliff and happened to survive" ("Flooded" 6004). The same could be said of the defeat of the First Evil.

[4] The body of excellent scholarly criticism on the themes of Season Seven provides ample evidence that the power-sharing metanarrative can, in itself, be read as highly sophisticated. James South, for instance, argues that Season Seven projects an antiteleological worldview in which power is contingent upon openness to the unexpected.

Rhonda Wilcox argues that *Buffy* in general and Season Seven in particular advocate a type of power-sharing that is explicitly engaged with the politics of globalization. It is not my intent to invalidate the depth that such readings have uncovered in the Season Seven metanarrative. I argue only that monologic structures in the narrative diminish the power of these sophisticated metanarratives.

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